The Voice of the Century

The Culture of Italian Bel Canto in Luisa Tetrazzini's Recorded Interpretations

Massimo Zicari

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

© 2022 Massimo Zicari

This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Massimo Zicari, *The Voice of the Century: The Culture of Italian Bel Canto in Luisa Tetrazzini's Recorded Interpretations*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022. https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0277

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0277#copyright

Further details about Creative Commons licenses are available at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at https://archive.org/web

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0277#resources

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

The Open Access version of this publication was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (10BP12_209286/1).

ISBN Paperback: 9781800643321

ISBN Hardback: 9781800643338

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800643345

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 9781800643352

ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 9781800643369

ISBN Digital ebook (XML): 9781800643376

ISBN Digital ebook (HTML): 9781800646797

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0277

Cover image: Photograph of Luisa Tetrazzini on the front page of *The San Francisco Call*, 25 December 1910.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

5. Verdi's Style: The End of Bel Canto?

If it was Bellini who pushed singers towards a more dramatic, declamato-like singing style, it was with Verdi that this transformation was carried to its completion. Although soon celebrated as the most talented Italian composer in a moment in which Italian opera was said, again and again, to lie in a sad state of decadence, Verdi became the object of harsh criticism and was especially condemned for the manner in which he abused the voice.

According to music critic and composer Alberto Mazzucato, in 1842 Verdi had put himself at the head of a group of composers who, regardless of the bad taste then prevailing, were committed to interpreting the dramatic content of the libretto and breaking away from the hackneyed operatic conventions consisting of the unavoidable cabalette, finali, strette and rondo.[1] In 1847, on reflecting on the change that occurred in the 1840s, Mazzucato went back to Eugenia Tadolini's creation of Odabella in Verdi's *Attila* in Milan. In his opinion, Verdi's new vocal style favoured energy and passion over virtuosity and the sheer beauty of vocal sounds. As suggested by Claudio Vellutini, these latter qualities, in which Tadolini excelled, were no longer sufficient: a passionate, vigorous and brilliant spirit was now required in what Mazzucato called the *cantante di slancio*.[2] By the 1850s the notion that Verdi pursued dramatic effect at the expense of proper singing had spread among a number of music critics and commentators all over Europe.[3] In 1854 Carlo Lorenzini referred to two claques then operating in Italy, Verdists and anti-Verdists, and suggested that, according to the second, Verdi had killed Italian singing, the most distinctive feature of Italian music ever.[4] Abramo Basevi, who wrote the first extensive critical account of Verdi's life and operas as early as 1859, also objected to the treatment Verdi reserved for the voice: 'Considering the human larynx as an instrument, for such it is, Bellini treated it like a wind instrument while Verdi, one may occasionally say, like percussion'.[5] Basevi was among those contemporary commentators who first detected an evolution in Verdi's compositional style, with *Luisa Miller* (1849) and *La traviata* (1853) representing two fundamental turning points in his compositional trajectory. However, the tropes concerning the composer's arguable preference for strong dramatic effect and the manner in which he sacrificed proper vocalisation to dramatic singing continued in the columns of many periodicals. Lung-power was said to be more essential than ever since Verdi's operas featured an exceedingly noisy orchestration. The accumulation of loud instrumental effects had become intolerably frequent, brass and percussion instruments were taken full advantage of and, as a consequence, the poor singers had to struggle to make themselves audible in the middle of the orchestral clamour. Some critics even sympathised with those unfortunate interpreters who had to bear with the composer and endure the repeated strains he put on their voice.

1 Alberto Mazzucato, 'I. R. Teatro alla Scala. *Nabucodonosor*, Dramma Lirico di T. Solera, Musica del Maestro Verdi', *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, 13 March 1842, p. 43. See also Massimo Zicari, *Verdi in Victorian London* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), p. 6, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0090.

2 See Claudio Vellutini, 'Adina Par Excellence: Eugenia Tadolini and the Performing Tradition of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* in Vienna', *19th Century Music*, 38.1 (2014), 3–29.

3 For a discussion on the reception of Verdi's operas in Victorian London see Zicari, *Verdi in Victorian London*, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0090; for France see Hervé Gartioux, *La reception de Verdi en France* (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2001); for the Italian press see Marco Capra, *Verdi in prima pagina* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2014); for Germany see Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

4 Carlo Lorenzini, 'I verdisti e gli antiverdisti', *Lo Scaramuccia*, I/14, 19 December 1854, pp. [2–3]. See Marco Capra, *Verdi in prima pagina* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2014), p. 121. Although Lorenzini did not use the expression bel canto he seems to refer to that glorious tradition that was then generally defined in those terms.

5 Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence: Tipografia Tofani, 1859), p. 162. See also Marco Capra, '"Effekt, nicht als Effekt". Aspekte der Rezeption der Opern Verdis in Italien des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Giuseppe Verdi und seine Zeit*, ed. by Markus Engelhardt (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2001), pp. 117–42.

© 2022 Massimo Zicari, CC BY-NC 4.0
https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0277.05

In France, after the generally favourable reception of *Nabucco* in 1845, with *Ernani*, which was premiered in Paris on 6 January 1846 at the Théâtre Italien as *Il proscritto*, music critics turned against the emerging Italian composer and, similarly to what had happened in Italy, warned him against the temptation of favouring dramatic effect at the expense of proper singing: by doing so he was turning singing into shouting. The repertoire of complaints in the contemporary French press includes the use of trivial rhythmic formulas in the accompaniment, a noisy orchestration, especially when the frequent use of unisons was given to the brass instruments, the lack of dramatic and melodic consistency.[6] The response of the Austro-German press was not that different: many critics hailed *Nabucco* as typical of the 'new Italian school' and 'rehearsed the latest clichés' on this new type of opera: the noisy and unrefined orchestration, the trivial rhythmical formulas, the much-too-frequent use of unisons, and so forth.[7] The same can be said of the reception of Verdi's operas in Victorian London. While the first reviews were hesitant, if not benevolent, with *Nabucco* critics like Henry F. Chorley and James W. Davison soon became Verdi's most acrimonious enemies. Chorley, a conservative critic, was willing to acknowledge in Verdi only an occasional burst of brilliance:

> Signor Verdi's *forte* is declamatory music of the highest passion. In this, never hesitating to force the effect, or to drive the singers to the 'most hazardous passes'—he is justified for some extravagance, by an occasional burst of brilliancy, surpassing that of most modern composers […] But Signor Verdi 'is nothing if not noisy;' and, by perpetually putting forth his energies in one and the same direction, tempts us, out of contradiction, to long for the sweetest piece of sickliness which Paisiello put forth long ere the notion of an orchestra had reached Italy, or the singer's art was thought to mean a superhuman force of lungs.[8]

Likewise, when reviewing *Nabucco* in 1846, Davison was particularly aggressive: a complete lack of melody and rhythm, an exaggerated preference for choruses singing in unison and a deplorable use of wind and brass instruments in the orchestra were his main concerns.

> *Ernani* led us to suspect, and *Nabucco* has certified our suspicion, that of all the modern Italian composers Verdi is the most thoroughly insignificant. We listen, vainly, as the work proceeds, for the semblance of a melody. There is positively nothing, not even a feeling of rhythm—but rather indeed, a very unpleasant disregard for that important element of musical art. The choruses are nothing but the commonest tunes, arranged almost invariably in unison—perhaps because the composer knows not how to write in parts. The concerted music is patchy, rambling and unconnected. The cantabiles are always unrhythmical—and the absence of design is everywhere observable. The harmonies are either the tritest common-places, or something peculiarly odd and unpleasant. Nothing can possibly be more feeble than the orchestration. The employment of the wind instruments is remarkably infelicitous, and all the experiments are failures. The overture is the poorest stuff imaginable, and yet the only glimpses of tune in the opera are comprised within its limits—and these are subsequently employed throughout the work *ad nauseam*.[9]

What Chorley and Davison had in common with their Italian, French and German counterparts was that they conceptualised Verdi's first compositional and dramatic achievements having in mind the operas of Rossini and even Paisiello and Cimarosa, who were now considered as imperishable classics. They both expressed regret for the palmy days of Italian opera and reproached the manner in which modern composers were progressing. Even though it was consistent with the bloody plots so dear to romantic dramatists, librettists and composers, Victorian music critics showed aversion to the new declamato-like singing and longed for the beauty and freshness of genuine melody.[10] In the following years, when denying the increasing popularity of Verdi had become impossible, those critics who could not admit that the composer had some merits credited the singers with the popular success of his operas. It was thanks to interpreters like Pauline Viardot (the first Azucena in 1855 London), Marietta Piccolomini (the first Violetta in 1856 London) and Adelina Patti (the first Aida in

6 Hervé Gartioux, *La réception de Verdi en France, Anthologie de la presse 1845–1894* (Weinsberg: Galland, 2001), p. 16.
7 Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans*, pp. 31–32.
8 *The Athenaeum*, 7 March 1846, p. 250. See Zicari, *Verdi in Victorian London*, p. 46, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0090.
9 *The Musical World*, 7 March 1846, p. 105.
10 See Zicari, *Verdi in Victorian London*, pp. 54–55, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0090.

1870 London) that works like *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, and *Aida*, Victorian critics argued, had won international audiences despite the limited talent of the composer. Even in the United States the reception of Verdi's operas was often accompanied by a sense of distress, with the more conservative critics grudgingly objecting to his poor melodic invention, his trivial choruses, his guitar-like orchestral accompaniments and the exaggerated use of wind and brass instruments.[11]

But if, as many contemporary critics argued, Verdi's compositions led to a new and more dramatic style, how did singers accommodate themselves to that change? Did bel canto soon turn into a different way of singing? As has been suggested by David Lawton, we should not forget that Verdi worked within a powerful operatic tradition and vocal performance practice changed more gradually than compositional conventions. For years to come, conventions of performance prevailed over those of composition and singers continued to enjoy a high degree of interpretative liberty, however strenuously composers like Verdi, and Donizetti and Bellini before him, defended their own sovereignty over their compositions.[12]

If, as noted before, vocal performance practice changed only gradually, how should we understand the relationship between a composer like Verdi and the performance conventions in which singers were still trained? Is it correct to assume that singers continued to refer to the style described in contemporary singing methods even when approaching Verdi's new operas? For obvious chronological reasons García's *Scuola* does not refer to Verdi's operas; still, how long did his precepts remain valid, and when did singers start modifying their singing style and vocal technique because of the new repertoire? Signs of the tension between the composer's demands and contemporary performance conventions—not to mention the talents and inclinations of individual interpreters—emerge occasionally from the folds of a scarcely documented discussion. As has been suggested by Claudio Vellutini, Eugenia Tadolini is, again, a case in point. When she interpreted the character of Elvira in *Ernani* at the Kärntnertortheater on 30 May 1844 in Vienna she replaced the original cabaletta 'Tutto sprezzo che d'Ernani' with Giselda's 'Non fu sogno' from *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*. On learning about this change Verdi expressed his frustration and his resentful words are preserved in a letter to Leo Herz, written on the 7 June 1844.[13] Tadolini is also remembered for Verdi's claim that her voice was 'far too good' to sing Lady Macbeth: as he wrote in a letter to librettist Salvatore Cammarano on 23 November 1848, 'Tadolini sings to perfection; and I would like the Lady not to sing. Tadolini has a stupendous voice, clear, limpid, powerful; and I would like the Lady to have a harsh, stifled, and hollow voice'.[14] While the letter to Leo Herz reflects the composer's aversion to those textual manipulations that were typical of contemporary performance practice, the opinion on Tadolini reflects the manner in which Verdi, although appreciative of her vocal skills, was pushing towards a new vocal aesthetic, one that valued energy and passion over virtuosity and the pure beauty of vocal sounds. In this regard Verdi shared with Bellini a preference for strong situations: if Verdi was criticised for pursuing the 'Effect, nothing but effect',[15] Bellini, as we have seen testified by an undated letter, insisted that the 'dramma per musica' [i.e., opera] must draw tears, terrify people, make them die, through song'.[16] However, and notwithstanding Verdi's protestations, episodes like that of Tadolini substituting a new piece for the written aria should not be taken at face value; Verdi himself regularly endorsed alterations of his scores, changed the music, or allowed it to be changed for the sake of the dramatic effect.[17] Such was the case when *Nabucco*, which was premiered in Milan on 9 March 1842 with Giovannina Bellinzaghi as Fenena, was put on again in Milan later that year with Amalia Zecchini in the role. Since Zecchini's voice compass was lower than Bellinzaghi's, Verdi revised the part in order to accommodate

11 See George W. Martin, *Verdi in America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

12 David Lawton 'Ornamenting Verdi's Arias: The Continuity of a Tradition', in *Verdi in Performance*, edited by Alison Latham and Roger Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 49–78.

13 Claudio Vellutini, 'Adina Par Excellence', 3–29.

14 Ibid., p. 8.

15 Capra, 'Effekt, nicht als Effekt', pp. 117–42.

16 Undated letter to Pepoli (but from May 1834); see Bellini, *Epistolario*, p. 400, cited in Pierluigi Petrobelli and Roger Parker, 'Notes on Bellini's Poetics', in *Music in the Theater, Essays on Verdi and Other Composers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 162–75.

17 Roger Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing: Emancipation from Modern Orthodoxy', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 127.2 (2002), 226–57.

not only the different pitch range, but also a more delicate voice quality.[18] When the same opera was mounted in Venice in December 1842, this time with Almerinda Granchi as Fenena, Verdi composed a new version of the same aria, again adapting the music to the voice of the new singer.[19] Similar changes are documented for other operas, like, for instance, *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* and *Ernani* (Verdi composed an aria for the tenor Nicola Ivanoff to substitute for 'Odi il voto'). We can consider also the case of *I due Foscari*, which was premiered in Rome in 1844: for the Paris premiere in December 1846 Giovanni Matteo De Candia (also known as Mario) asked Verdi to prepare some puntature and compose a new cabaletta to conclude the 'Cavatina di Jacopo' in the first act.[20] When preparing *Il Trovatore* for the Théâtre Italien in Paris (1854 and 1855) Verdi made some modifications for Erminia Frezzolini, who would appear as Leonora; of the French version (1857) Verdi's fioriture for the 'Aria del Conte' have been preserved, together with four new versions (two of them are autographs) of the cadenza for the 'Cavatina di Leonora'. More changes were endorsed by Verdi when Pauline Viardot, who had to sing it in London, asked him.[21] Other examples reinforce the notion that Verdi was much more lenient towards his interpreters than we are sometimes inclined to think.[22] In this regard, the connection between Verdi and the tradition he was said to be threatening is very strong and changes of the kind Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini were forced to accept were not exceptional especially in Verdi's early career.

In spite of his reputation as the arch-enemy of bel canto, Verdi seems to have preferred singers trained in the traditional style: 'In the teaching of singing, I would like the old-fashioned studies, combined with modern declamation'.[23] Verdi praised unreservedly Adelina Patti, who was acknowledged as a bel canto diva throughout a lifelong career: 'but Patti is more complete: marvellous voice, purest style of singing, stupendous actress with a charm and naturalness that no one else has'.[24] Verdi's position with regard to ornamentation has been also the object of scholarly discussion and, again, the notion that he was 'content to hear simply and exactly what is written'[25] should not be taken at face value. Numerous signs indicate how open he was when it came to negotiating interpretative solutions, on condition that the interpreter understood his dramatic intentions.[26]

Sometimes, precise markings in Verdi's score help us to better understand the relationship between the performance conventions of the time and the composer's demands and expectations. For instance, the indication 'Questo Recitativo dovrà essere detto senza le solite appoggiature' (this recitativo must be said without the usual appoggiaturas) which appears at the beginning of the 'Scena, terzetto e tempesta' in Act III of *Rigoletto*, should be understood as an exception to an interpretative convention widely shared among contemporary interpreters and endorsed by Verdi himself. Likewise, Verdi prescribes 'senza appoggiatura' in the last act of *Otello*, when Emilia pronounces the words 'Stolto! E tu il credesti?' It is clear that the composer warned against its use in those specific passages where the tradition of the insertion of the appoggiatura would be incompatible with the desired dramatic expression. This tradition, we may presume, was otherwise considered by Verdi as a common trait of the Italian operatic tradition, the very same tradition to which he belonged.

Even with regard to tempo modifications, the old trope according to which the composer wanted singers to sing *a tempo* needs further consideration. On reviewing *Ernani* in 1850 London (its London premiere dates back to 1845) Henry Fothergill Chorley, the authoritative critic of *The Athenaeum,* referred to the tenor John Sims Reeves and commented that 'Verdi's music, in its solo passages and closes, gives him [Sims Reeves] scope for that

18 See Ott, *Handbuch*, pp. 456–59.
19 See ibid., pp. 459–63.
20 See ibid., p. 482.
21 Marco Beghelli, 'Per fedeltà a una nota', *Il Saggiatore Musicale*, 8.2 (2001), 295–316 (p. 298).
22 See again Ott, *Handbuch*, pp. 447–564.
23 From a letter of 20 February 1871 to Giuseppe Piroli; as translated in Osborne, *Letters*, p. 75. Quoted in Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing', p. 231.
24 From a letter to Count Opprandino Arrivabene, December 1877, as reproduced in Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 1963), IV, p. 38, quoted in Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing', p. 231.
25 Letter to Giulio Ricordi of 11 April 1871: 'm'accontento che si eseguisca semplicemente ed esattamente quello che è scritto'. Gaetano Cesari, Alessandro Luzio and Michele Scherillo (eds.), *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Commissione, 1913), p. 256, https://archive.org/details/icopialettere00verd.
26 Will Crutchfield, 'Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi: The Phonographic Evidence', *19th Century Music*, 7.1 (1983), 3–54.

slackening of tempo and elongation of favourite notes which are considered by 'Young Italy' as the style dramatic'.[27] When *Rigoletto* was premiered in London in 1853 Chorley made a similar comment, this time with regard to Angiolina Bosio: 'By him [Verdi] singers are invited, not forbidden, to slacken tempo'.[28] Although contemporary interpreters and commentators seem to have understood Verdi's dramatic style as an encouragement to tempo flexibility, it is not as clear whether the composer was in favour of such fluctuations. In December 1883, when *Don Carlos* was in rehearsal, Verdi wrote to Giulio Ricordi insisting that the conductor, Franco Faccio, should make sure that the singer pronounce the lyrics correctly and keep the tempo.[29] Ten years later, in February 1893, when *Falstaff* was in preparation in Milan, Giulio Ricordi published a special issue of *L'Illustrazione italiana* which included an article on 'how Verdi writes and rehearses' ('Come scrive e come prova Giuseppe Verdi'). According to this article, 'Verdi desires that no phrase or rhythm be changed by useless tenuti or rallentando'.[30] However, contemporary eyewitnesses sometimes testified to the opposite. For instance, according to Marianna Barberini Nini, when rehearsing *Macbeth* in 1847 in Florence, Verdi, unable to explain his musical intentions to the conductor Pietro Romani, helped himself with gestures, banging on the score, slackening or speeding up the tempo with his hand'.[31] Again, when Verdi conducted his *Messa* in Köln in 1877, music critic August Guckeisen noted how Verdi allowed himself some rubato.[32] During the preparation of his *Pezzi sacri* in Turin in 1898, Arturo Toscanini, still a young conductor, met the composer, who approved of his decision to insert an allargando which was not written in the score. Verdi seems to have confessed to Toscanini that he had decided not to write it to avoid the exaggerated expression of that effect.[33] Or again, when Toscanini conducted Verdi's *Falstaff* in 1899 Verdi declared his aversion to metronomes.[34] Although the composer started to regularly insert metronome marks in 1846, it seems that he did it especially for those orchestral passages where the voice was not involved.[35]

As already observed with regard to *Ernani* in 1844, Verdi was convinced that a singer would take the right tempo if he or she adhered to the dramatic situation and paid careful attention to the meaning of the words: 'Basta badare alla posizione drammatica ed alla parola difficilmente si può sbagliare un tempo' (it would suffice to observe the dramatic situation and the lyrics and it is unlikely that you choose the wrong tempo).[36] Further confirmation of this can be found in a letter Verdi wrote to Pietro Romani in 1845, where the composer gave him instructions on how to conduct his *Giovanna d'Arco*.[37]

> The Adagio from the Tenor's Aria as it suits the voice: the chorus in C minor very lively. The cabaletta slow and cantabile. I do not speak of Giovanna's cavatina, which goes without saying. [...] I recommend you the Duet between Tenor and Donna... Let the orchestral movements be lively, and the Cantabili be slow: the Adagio in G minor should be slow, and Giovanna should be very agitated, especially when she joins in at the words 'Son maledetto' (I am cursed). Let there be a great contrast between the two songs.[38]

27 *The Athenaeum*, 23 March 1850, p. 320.
28 *The Athenaeum*, 21 May 1853.
29 *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. by Charles Osborne (New York: Gollancz, 1971), p. 221.
30 'Egli [Verdi] desidera che nessuna frase o ritmo vengano cambiati da inutili tenuti o rallentando.' See James Hepokoski, 'Under the Eye of the Verdian Bear: Notes on the Rehearsals and Première of Falstaff', *Musical Quarterly*, 71.2 (1985), 135–56.
31 '...si aiutava con gesti, con grandi percosse sul libro, rallentando con la mano o rafforzando i tempi.' Marcello Conati, *Interviste e incontri con Verdi* (Milan: Emme Edizioni, 1980), p. 24.
32 Ibid., p. 121.
33 Ibid., p. 292.
34 Rodolfo Celletti, *Il canto* ([Milan]: Vallardi, 1989), p. 160.
35 Roberta Montemorra Marvin, 'Verdi's Tempo Assignments in "I masnadieri"', *Revista de Musicología*, XV Congreso de la Sociedad Internacional de Musicología: culturas musicales del mediterráneo y sus ramificaciones, 16.6 (1993), 3179–195.
36 G. Morazzoni and G. M. Ciampelli, *Verdi: lettere inedite: le opere verdiane al Teatro alla Scala (1839–1929)* (Milan: Libreria editrice milanese, 1929), p. 26.
37 Martin Chusid, 'A Letter by the Composer about "Giovanna d'Arco" and Some Remarks on the Division of Musical Direction in Verdi's Day', *Performance Practice Review*, 3.1 (1990), 7–57, https://doi.org/10.5642/perfpr.199003.01.10.
38 Ibid., pp. 8–9. 'L'Adagio dell'Aria del Tenore come starà bene alla voce: il Coro in Do minore vivo assai. La cabaletta Larga e cantabile. Non ti parlo della cavatina di Giovanna che va da se. [...] Ti raccomando il Duetto fra tenore e Donna... Siano vivace i movimenti d'orchestra, larghi i Cantabili: l'Adagio in sol minore sia largo, agit[at]o assai da Giovanna specialmente quando s'unisce a due alle parole 'Son maledetto' siavi gran contrasto fra i due canti.' My translation.

Verdi made a clear distinction between those vocal sections where the voice should 'go by itself', and those orchestral passages where the tempo, whether slow or vivacious, should be decided by the conductor.

All in all, given the evidence discussed so far, it is fair to assume that Verdi was not against the use of tempo modifications, on condition that these found their justification in the meaning of the words and in the dramatic situation. Verdi endorsed those changes that were consistent with the expressive quality of the lyrics and the music and opposed those that originated from the whim of the singer.[39] The composer's authority should be reinscribed in the tradition and context in which he operated, along with its conventions and performative habits. Instead, it is not easy to reconstruct the manner in which coloraturas and ornaments were applied by late nineteenth-century singers in Verdi's operas and whether his compositional style soon prevented those modifications in the melodic line that traditionally involved small graces, ornaments and roulades. As has been suggested, at the simplest level, towards the end of the nineteenth century we observe a shift from a highly-nuanced style, with some remaining link to the age of florid vocalism, to a more straight-forward, louder one with only incidental interest in coloratura.[40] Hints of this change can be found also in sources like Mathilde Marchesi's *Variantes et Points d'orgue*, and Ricci's *Variazioni,* where the presence of Verdi is limited to five works, in which melodic modifications are confined to the final cadenzas of the main arias. Marchesi includes only short cadenzas for *Ernani*, *La traviata*, *Il trovatore* (she uses the French reading, *Le trouvère*), and *Les vêpres siciliennes*. In Ricci, the comparatively marginal position occupied by Verdi's operas is suggested by the few short cadential passages he reproduced, as opposed, for instance, to the more numerous, richly flourished cadenzas and passages that accompany the works of Rossini and Donizetti. There we find a single cadenza for Elvira in *Ernani*,[41] a small change in a single bar to Elvira in *La forza del destino*,[42] some suggestions for the cadenza of Gilda's aria, belonging to Virginia Boccabadati,[43] Nellie Melba and Fanny Toresella, a few passages belonging to Patti and Claudia Muzio for Violetta in *La traviata*, and some more for the character of Leonora in *Il trovatore*, this time belonging to Muzio and Marchisio.[44] The same can be said of the volume edited by Estelle Liebling, where we find reported a few cadential passages from *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, *Un ballo in maschera* and *I vespri siciliani*. Of all Verdi's operas, only these four, together with *Ernani*, came to be associated with the tradition of bel canto; for them a body of textual modifications soon developed, to which singers of the younger generation continued to adhere: among them Luisa Tetrazzini. These modifications, unlike those in works of earlier composers, tended to remain confined to the final cadenza of the main aria, or, less often, to the central semicadenza. In documenting the vocal style connected with Verdi's late operas a pivotal role has been played by those male singers who were close to the composer and became involved in the burgeoning discographic industry at the beginning of the century. Among them, Victor Maurel and Francesco Tamagno occupy a prominent position, since they created the roles of Otello and Iago in Milan on 5 February 1887, and eventually recorded select sections of the opera.[45] A similar position is held by Antonio Pini-Corsi, Edoardo Garbin and Adelina Stehle who created the characters of Ford, Fenton and Nannetta in *Falstaff* in 1893 and left a few recordings which attest to their vocal style and technique.

On the value of early recordings as evidence of a tradition that lived on in the performance practice of the early twentieth century much has been said, and reference to the interpretation of Verdi's music as documented

39 See again Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing', pp. 226–57.

40 Will Crutchfield, 'Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi: The Phonographic Evidence', *19th-Century Music*, 7.1 (1983), 3–54.

41 Ricci, *Variazioni*, vol. I, p. 27

42 Ibid., p. 37.

43 Verdi mentions Virginia Boccabadati, Marietta Piccolomini and Maria Spezia in a letter to Vincenzo Torelli written in Paris on 11 November 1856. In the letter he is considering these three singers for the role of Cordelia in *King Lear*, an operatic project he was then planning. 'Per questa parte non conosco che tre artiste: Piccolomini, Spezia, e Virginia Boccabadati. Tutte tre hanno voce debole ma talento grande, anima e sentimento di scena. Eccellenti tutte nella Traviata'. Verdi, *I copialettere*, p. 197.

44 Ricci, *Variazioni*, vol. I, pp. 83–84.

45 A collection of historical recordings of these two roles, interpreted by singers like Victor Maurel, Titta Ruffo, Mario Sammarco, Enrcio Caruso, Aureliano Pertile, Francesco Tamagno and many others, was published in 2010 by the Istituzione Casa della Musica di Parma, under the supervision of Professor Marco Capra and is distributed by EMI. The recordings included in the CD-set chart the period from 1902 to 1951 and follow the evolution that the singing style underwent over the first half of the twentieth century.

in early recordings can be found both in scholarly writings and music methods and manuals.[46] Suffice it here to say that what early recordings show, at least as far as Verdi's operas are concerned, is a gradual shift towards a less flourished, more declamato-like interpretative approach. If a more nuanced style and a stronger presence of florid vocalisation can be observed in the earlier generations, younger singers were more inclined to a louder, straight-forward reading of the text with 'only incidental interest in coloratura'.[47] However, as recent scholarly investigation into early recordings suggests, individual differences often prevail over a more broadly shared interpretative style.[48] In the case of Tetrazzini, her proverbial vocal talent and dramatic skills, combined with a careful choice of repertoire, resulted in a well-defined musical personality. The distance between her distinctive interpretative style and that of other divas of the time is sometimes remarkable.

Verdi in Tetrazzini's Interpretations

Of all Verdi's operas only two hold a prominent position in Tetrazzini's repertoire, *Rigoletto* with sixty-seven productions and *La traviata*, with sixty, while *Un ballo in maschera*, which she sang in nine productions, occupies a more marginal position. Her first appearances in the roles of Gilda and Violetta date back to 1892 and 1893 but it was not until the first decade of the new century that Tetrazzini's popular success reached its apex thanks to her impersonation of Violetta in 1905 in San Francisco and then in 1907 in London.

As we have seen, at the beginning of the century the so-called bel canto repertoire was often described as trite and hackneyed, and those more progressive music critics who had come to appreciate the works of Wagner and Strauss looked down upon Italian composers. Moreover, operas like *La traviata* and *Il trovatore*, together with Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia* were often considered trifles and were tolerated for the sake of those ignorant opera-goers who rejoiced in a few old tunes sung in costume: popular success had nothing to do with musical quality, as the vast popularity of these operas demonstrated. These operatic trifles were also often criticised for the poor quality of the performances, which were entrusted to insufficiently experienced conductors and singers of little or no talent. To some extent, it was thanks to interpreters like Luisa Tetrazzini and conductors like Giorgio Polacco and Cleofonte Campanini that at the outset of the century this prejudice could be combatted. Contemporary critics credited these artists with the quality and the careful preparation that, after decades of poor productions, could revitalise a repertoire that had long been undervalued.

Such was the case of *La traviata* when it was given in 1905 at the Tivoli in San Francisco with Tetrazzini in the title role, which drew enthusiastic responses also among those music critics who considered the bel canto repertoire as trite and Verdi's *La traviata* hackneyed.

> *La Traviata*, that one has been accustomed to regard as a hackneyed, thin enough vehicle for the human lark, with Tetrazzini, crammed the theatre. Practically the season has divided itself into Tetrazzini nights and other nights. When Tetrazzini sings the people will go whether Mr. Verdi, Mr. Bizet or anyone else made the opera, and no matter how he made it. The attitude is not artistic but perfectly natural. One can very fully excuse it while Tetrazzini sings, for her every appearance only makes it more apparent that here indeed is an extraordinary singer, a rare vocal preciousness.[49]

It was thanks to the extraordinary talent of Tetrazzini and her colleagues—who all deserved the critic's appreciative words—if an inartistic opera like *La traviata* could score such an enthusiastic success. And it was thanks to the conductor, Giorgio Polacco, and his refined interpretation that 'the careless old "tum-tum" took on astonishing

46 See Crutchfield, 'Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi: The Phonographic Evidence', *19th Century Music*, 7.1 (1983), 3–54, Zicari 'Expressive Tempo Modifications in Early 20th-Century Recorded Performances of Operatic Arias', *Music&Practice*, 5 (2019), https://doi.org/10.32063/0507, Ott, *Handbuch*, pp. 447–564.

47 Crutchfield, 'Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi', p. 13.

48 Dorottya Fabian, 'Commercial Sound Recordings and Trends in Expressive Music Performance', in *Expressiveness in Music Performance*, ed. by Dorottya Fabian, Renee Timmers, and Emery Schubert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 58–79, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199659647.003.0004.

49 Blanche Partington, 'Traviata at the Tivoli a Great Hit', *The San Francisco Call*, 20 January 1905, p. 4

grace and distinction. It sparkled; it thrilled'.[50] The critic valued the manner in which the interpretation conveyed to the audience the sense of the drama.

> Every phrase, every note of the opera was charged with meaning, the whole thing gathering significance, picturesqueness, dramatic intensity, as with no other *Traviata* of my experience… Tetrazzini contributed tremendously to the dramatic illusion. The woes of Violetta became actually human in her interpretation. All the vocal embroidery was most deftly fitted to the dramatic need.[51]

Tetrazzini showed herself an admirable and accomplished resource, not just as a singer, however talented, but also as an exceptional actress. In September that year *La traviata* was produced again with Polacco conducting and Tetrazzini in the title role, and again Blanche Partington uttered words of appreciation: Polacco had the merit of ennobling the music of Verdi and lifting it up to the level of Mozart, after decades of poor conducting and inadequate interpretations:

> The trivial old tum-tum of the orchestra—in the careless readings to which one has been so haplessly accustomed, becomes a thing of infinite gayety and sparkle in Polacco's hands. Its every note glitters. Almost Mozartean in its freshness the opera becomes. One would give a good deal to hear a *Don Giovanni* from Signor Polacco[52]

The star of the evening was, of course, Luisa Tetrazzini, whose Violetta was a masterpiece of dramatic realism.

> To me Tetrazzini is a little at her best here. Her Lucia is a wonderful performance; and a pretty trick of comedy makes Tetrazzini's Rosina a thing wholly delightful. But as Violetta the little diva wheedles the quite unusual tear from the grand operatic eye. She brings a pathos as rare as it is effective to the acting of the role. *La Traviata* is conspicuously more human throughout as Polacco has set it before us; but as in the scene between Violetta and Armand's [sic] father one forgets that it is opera in the realism that both bring to the scene.[53]

Two years later Tetrazzini made her début in London as Violetta and the response of the critics was similar. When first mounted at Covent Garden on 2 November, *La traviata* did not draw a large audience, a circumstance that made the critic of *The Times* hope 'that not many evenings of the season will be wasted upon *La Traviata*, despite the presence of a young and talented interpreter'.[54] The interpretation of Madame Tetrazzini made the opera worth attending and changed the initial situation, attracting larger crowds of opera-goers. Her understanding of the part was simply complete:

> Not only has her voice the flexibility and clearness which enable her to make great effect with 'Sempre libera degg'io' and other airs of the kind, but she has a definite and consistent conception of the character, which gives it a genuine dramatic significance. It followed that her scene with Signor Sammarco in the second act was finely expressed, and the last difficult scene was a success, whether looked at from a dramatic point of view or as a piece of refined singing.[55]

If Mario Sammarco, in the role of Giorgio Germont, Alfredo's father, was a valid companion both in terms of singing and acting, the same could not be said of Fernando Carpi, whose rendition of Alfredo, the critic continued, was just conventional. A few days later, *The Times* reviewed Tetrazzini as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, with Sammarco in the title role and John McCormack as the Duke; Ettore Panizza conducted. Tetrazzini, who had caught a cold, had recovered completely and her success could not be greater.

> The highest expectations must have been gratified long before the opera was over, for it was quite clear from the opening phrases 'Oh quanto dolor' in the duet in the first act that she had thrown off all traces of her cold and was singing unhampered by any obstacles. The notes came pouring out with absolute certainty and ease, and, apart from a tendency to harden the very last note of a phrase when it was taken *forte*, her tone retained its beauty even in the most ornate passages. For Mme. Tetrazzini, in spite of her brilliant technique, is not one of those singers who sacrifice

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Blanche Partington, 'Tetrazzini's Art Ascends', *The San Francisco Call*, 27 September 1905, p. 9
53 Ibid.
54 'La Traviata' (Royal Opera), *The Times*, 4 November 1907, p. 9.
55 Ibid.

> beauty of tone to neatness of execution; she is an artist with the real singing traditions in the sense that she uses *coloratura* as a means of expression, and not simply as so much decoration. She showed herself an artist, too, in the duet and in the great quartet by the way she kept her place in the *ensemble*, and in the scene with Rigoletto in the third act she made the situation really poignant by the sincerity of her acting. She had the advantage of playing with that great artist Signor Sammarco, who seemed fired to surpass himself by the unusual event of finding himself the father of a Gilda who took her part seriously; at any rate, he has seldom acted with such conviction or sung the familiar airs so magnificently as he did on Saturday. The honours of the evening were not, however, confined to these two artists, for Mr. John McCormack took the part of the Duke and made quite a *furore* by his beautiful singing of 'La donna è mobile.' Throughout the evening he sang with ease and with something of the real Italian *abandon* in the lilt with which he took the lighter passages, although his voice still sounds a little cold in the more passionate moments. With Miss Maud Santley as Maddalena and Signor Luppi as Sparafucile, the last act lost none of its impressiveness through want of care in the smaller parts, and the great quartet has seldom been better sung. The whole performance, from the point of view of an already excited public, was in fact a *succèss fou*.[56]

The critic paid careful attention to the voice quality of Tetrazzini, and his remark on how she used coloratura as a means of expression rather than a form of decoration is of particular interest. The critic's value judgement was not biased by the notion that coloratura as such was wrong and tasteless; instead, he showed he was knowledgeable about a performance practice that had often been judged against criteria that were foreign to that tradition.

Of the same opinion was the critic of *The Musical Times*, who reported on the enormous success Tetrazzini scored as Violetta, Lucia and Gilda, and observed that it was thanks to Tetrazzini that a tradition long misunderstood and often ill-treated could be successfully revived and fully appreciated.

> The striking success of Madame Tetrazzini in *La Traviata* and *Lucia* at Covent Garden is a reminder that *il bel canto* is not as dead as many of the younger generation of opera-goers had supposed. Nothing in art that has ever been really alive—alive, that is, with true human feeling—can die; and the application of this truism to the present case is that the old and honourable art of *il bel canto* has been, and to all appearances will be again, the vitalising factor in opera. It has been charged with being a weakness and a snare; performances of the old Italian masterpieces have been sneered at as 'concerts in costume,' and such mistresses of *agilità* as Jenny Lind and Patti have been disparaged as mere vocal gymnasts; but their triumphs have demonstrated, as Madame Tetrazzini's are doing, that even *foriture* are more than decorative—that they have an essential place in the dramatic scheme of which they are part.[57]

One month later, the same journal published a description of her vocal skills and a short summary of her career in South America.

> Madame Tetrazzini, who made her first appearance in England at Covent Garden as Violetta in *Traviata*, on November 2, is one of those rarely-gifted artists who combine a soprano voice of rare quality and exceptional compass with a keen dramatic intuition and an artistic and sensitive temperament that endow her singing and gestures with fascinating significance. The gifted lady, who is a native of Florence, has had eleven years' operatic experience, the last four of which have been spent in the Argentine. She therefore came to us a matured artist, and her success was immediate and so great that the house was completely sold out for her second appearance in the same opera on November 7. A still greater success was achieved by her impersonation of the heroine of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, on November 15, her rendering of the 'mad scene' calling forth an extraordinary demonstration of enthusiastic appreciation. In both these operas it was her command of tone-colour quite as much as the perfection of her vocalization which so distinguished her performances, and one must go back to the time when Madame Adelina Patti was in her prime to find such perfect renderings of old Italian opera numbers.[58]

Besides the remarks on her rare vocal skills combined with a keen dramatic intuition, of special relevance are, for us, the comments on the line of continuity that connected Tetrazzini to Adelina Patti, the epitome of bel canto. Still, one may wonder whether the journalist ever had the chance to hear Patti singing in her prime.

Upon the conclusion of the Covent Garden autumn season in 1907, in which Luisa Tetrazzini made her appearance in *La traviata* (2 November), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (15 November) and *Rigoletto* (23 November), the

56 'Rigoletto' (Royal Opera), *The Times*, 25 November 1907, p. 7.
57 'Occasional Notes', *The Musical Times*, 1 December 1907, vol. 48, no. 778, p. 787.
58 'The Opera', *The Musical Times*, 1 December 1907, vol. 48, no. 778, pp. 807–08.

celebrated soprano gave four gala concerts on 3, 7, 10 and 12 December. Initially only two concerts had been scheduled, but the audience thronged the theatre to such an extent that it was impossible not to add two more performances. Tetrazzini made a *furore* but *The Times* could not spare its readers a negative comment on the arguable musical taste of the British public: thronging the theatre to listen to Tetrazzini singing an Italian bel canto aria was something the country should have been ashamed of.

> The concert given in Covent Garden Theatre last night [Dec. 3] reflected rather unfavourably upon the musical taste of the British public; for long before any detailed programme was published there was the certainty of a crowded audience, the truth being, of course, that the bulk of the nation is still ready to rush after special singers quite without regard to what they sing; and the mere announcement of Mme. Tetrazzini's appearance is just now enough to fill Covent Garden to the ceiling.[59]

Despite the concerns expressed by *The Times* the success was enormous, and the response of the public boundlessly enthusiastic. The journalist of the *New York Daily Tribune*, reporting on this almost unprecedented furore, defined 'Tet nights' as those nights when large crowds of enthusiasts rushed for seats at Covent Garden. This phenomenal response was not new to London, and similar reviews had appeared also when Jenny Lind and Marietta Piccolomini had made their appearances there, the former in Verdi's *I masnadieri* in 1847, and the latter in the London premiere of *La traviata* in 1856.[60]

> Mme. Tetrazzini is a soprano with remarkable purity of tone and refinement of method. Her voice is not powerful, and in the lower register may even be described as having ordinary quality; but her high notes are marvellously clear and sweet and her command of all the resources of vocalization is complete. She sings with simplicity and masterful facility, and the effort required for the highest passages is minimized by the art that conceals art. She has the birdlike purity of tone for which Mme. Melba was famous in her best days; and she has also an exquisite sensibility which reminds oldtime music lovers of the emotional thrills experienced when Mme. Christine Nilsson used to sing in *Faust*, *The Magic Flute*, *Martha* and *Mignon*. Without having beauty of feature or graceful figure, she has the charm of a gracious manner and unaffected simplicity in giving pleasure to audiences. The enthusiasm at her closing concerts this week has been intense and uncontrollable. She has been recalled a dozen times after each number and has been forced to respond to encores even when she had a slight cold and there was every reason for saving her voice. She seems destined to become the favorite interpreter of Verdi and the oldtime school of opera at Covent Garden, and to make the Italian nights, so far as wealth and fashion are concerned, as popular as the Wagner nights.[61]

The critic's words shed new light on three issues of paramount importance. First, in describing Tetrazzini's vocal technique he provides us with valuable information on the extent to which her live performances were consistent with what we hear in her recordings; second, he connects Tetrazzini to Nellie Melba and, more oddly, to Christine Nilsson, whom he recalls for a repertoire so different from that for which Tetrazzini came to be appreciated. Third, he refers to the different manner in which Verdi and the so-called 'oldtime school of opera' were understood in opposition to the popularity of Wagner. But while the comparison between Tetrazzini and her colleagues, as well as the reference to the old-timers, linger in the background of this analysis, the remarks on Tetrazzini's voice are of far greater interest: besides her proverbial agility in the high register the critic mentions the uneven quality of her voice in the passage register. This characteristic would draw the attention of other critics in the following years and is audible also in her recordings; as has already been suggested, this had to do with an expressive method called voce bianca, 'white voice' used by high sopranos.[62] The unevenness in the voice resulted in a particularly expressive contrast that, as Tetrazzini would reveal, she adopted in passages where the dramatic situation called for such a richness of shades.[63]

59 'Concerts', *The Times*, 4 December 1907, p. 12.
60 Marietta Piccolomini's *Traviata* was her London début, while Jenny Lind first appeared there in *Roberto il diavolo* in 1847.
61 '"Tet" Nights and other Social Recreations' (London Notes), *New York Daily Tribune*, 22 December 1907, p. 5.
62 Nicholas Limansky, 'Luisa Tetrazzini: Coloratura Secrets', *Opera Quarterly*, 20.4 (2004), 540–69. Marco Beghelli, 'A ritroso: indizi nella divulgazione extrateatrale per il recupero della prassi esecutiva verdiana', in *Fuori Dal Teatro. Modi e Percorsi Della Divulgazione Di Verdi*, ed. by Antonio Carlini (Venice: Marsilio, 2015), pp. 247–64.
63 Tetrazzini, *My Life of Song* (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Cassell, 1921), p. 316. See Chapter One.

Reviews that were published in the more mature phase of Tetrazzini's career suggest that she had come to master a more even transition between low and high notes. Other critics drew attention to the fact that although Tetrazzini had been called the new Patti, not every commentator agreed on this comparison. For instance, on 11 January 1908, when Tetrazzini was expected to make her appearance as Violetta in New York, the critic of *The Evening World* stirred up the audience's expectation by presenting her as the singer of the century:

> Her phenomenal success, which has been heralded the world over, did not come to her, however, until the local autumn season of grand opera at Covent Garden, where she had never sung before. Her first audience went wild over her. She was cheered again and again and the critics exhausted their vocabulary in sounding her praises. She was Patti and Jenny Lind and Melba all in one, they declared. Hers was the voice of the century.[64]

On the other hand, one week later, Sylvester Rowling commented on the furore that had accompanied her brilliant début at the Manhattan Opera House as Violetta, and expressed his reservations on the possibility that a comparison could really be drawn between her and her illustrious predecessors. Even those who had had the privilege to hear Patti could hardly trust their memory.

> There are few people living who have an intelligent remembrance of the voice of the 'Swedish Nightingale.' Even of Patti, in her prime, there are not so many who can speak with authority as to how well she sang. Most of us were privileged to hear her when her warmest admirers admitted that some of the bloom of her voice had departed. Then Memory, at best—especially of sounds—is scarcely to be trusted, and most of us develop taste with years, and the judgment of youth is not always final.[65]

Tetrazzini's voice was of wondrous flexibility and great range but, Rowling continued, it presented a childlike quality in the lower register: 'her middle register is luscious. She takes her upper notes with bird-like sweetness. Her lower tones are clean cut even when she falls into an odd utterance that savors somewhat of a child's'.[66] This last reference is in line with the notion of white voice as we have seen described by the singer herself. However, Tetrazzini never showed a sign of effort: 'Her singing seems to be the easiest and most natural thing in the world. Whether it be to breathe or to whisper a sound, or to give it with all her might, makes no difference'.[67] More interestingly, the critic addresses a question that helps us to understand how bel canto came to be understood as a means for dramatic expression:

> Tetrazzini's voice is not only full of color—it is a marvel of dramatic expression. She is not content with giving an artistic rendition of the melodies. She makes the notes significant. They almost speak sentences. It this particular [sic] she is easily the superior of any coloratura soprano and has few equals among dramatic sopranos...[68]

Tetrazzini was well aware of this particular quality, as she would admit a few years later in her *How to Sing:*

> They were all more especially struck by the manner in which I managed, while singing Verdi's florid music brilliantly and effectively in the purely vocal sense, at the same time to make it expressive; and this I took as the greatest possible compliment which could be bestowed on me. For that I think is what coloratura properly sung should be. It should please the ear by its brilliance, but at the same time it should not, and need not, obscure the dramatic significance of what is sung.[69]

Finally, Sylvester Rowling provides us with some details on the changes he could notice in Verdi's music as the diva sang it: 'It may be recorded that in the "Ah, fors'è lui" Tetrazzini took a high C, and in the "Sempre libera" an E flat. Both were emitted with the easy grace that distinguishes all of this great artist's singing'.[70] Similar remarks

64 'New Patti Here, Ready for Debut at Hammerstein's', *The Evening World* (NY), 11 January 1908, front page.
65 Sylvester Rowling, 'Her Voice Has Wonderful Flexibility and Charm', *The Evening World* (NY), 16 January 1908, p. 3.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Tetrazzini, *How to Sing*, p. 78.
70 Sylvester Rowling, 'Her Voice Has Wonderful Flexibility and Charm', *The Evening World* (NY), 16 January 1908, p. 3.

appeared in the reviews published by *The New York Sun* and *The New York Times*, which we find reproduced at the end of Rowling's article. Similarly, *The New York Times* expressed words of appreciation and referred to the same changes in the score, this time adding a description of the remarkable messa di voce with which Tetrazzini embellished the high C at the end of 'Ah, fors'è lui'.

> Her voice is an exceptional one in the firmness and clearness and apparent ease with which she takes and prolongs these tones. Thus at the end of the air 'Ah, fors'è lui,' she took a high C and swelled and diminished it with evenness and precision, and at the end of the succeeding 'Sempre libera' she sustained a strong and clear E flat. Of course, whatever the artistic value of this may be, it is in the highest degree impressive and it set the audience in an uproar.—*New York Times*.[71]

As we will see, the reference to high C and E flat is consistent with what we hear in her recordings, and the description of the messa di voce fits perfectly her recorded renditions of the same aria, thus strongly suggesting that her interpretations did not follow the whim of the moment, nor did they change when it came to making a disc in a recording studio. On the same day, the *New York Daily Tribune* published a lengthy article on 'the advent of Tetrazzini' at the Manhattan Opera House:

> Signorina Tetrazzini appeared. A most disappointing figure with a most disappointing walk and a manner that savoured of everything but distinction. The opera was *La Traviata*, one long ago set aside for the barrel organ repertory. Grievously disappointing were, her voice and vocal manner. Connoisseurs looked into each other's faces with quizzical amazement. Then came the drinking song and expressions began to change. After the 'Ah fors'è lui' and its brilliant cabaletta the audience went wild with excitement. It seemed as if the glad shoutings would never cease. A dozen times the curtain went up to permit the lady to bow her thanks-alone, repeatedly with Bassi, the tenor, with Mr. Hammerstein, with Signor Campanini, whom an opening in the scenery had shown in the act of embracing and kissing his sister-in-law, and then again and still again.
>
> And what caused this extraordinary demonstration? Not the singer's voice. That has charms, but save in the volume and brilliancy of its upper renter, it is not especially noteworthy. Not the technical execution of the florid music alone, for the present generation, with memories of Patti, Nilsson, Gerster and Sembrich in the role, could recall many more finished performances. Not the person of the singer, for that was in crass contradiction of the ideal picture of the heroine. The secret lay in the combination of beautiful singing as such, and acting. Not acting in the sense of attitude, motion and facial expression, although these were all admirable, but in the dramatic feeling which imbued the singing—the dramatic color which shifted with kaleidoscopic swiftness from phrase to phrase, filling it with the blood of the play. The voice, weak and pallid in its lower register, had a dozen shades of meaning nevertheless, and as it soared upward it took on strength and glitter, though it lost in emotional force as it gained in sensual charm.
>
> Judged by such standards as this public is familiar with, Mme. Tetrazzini is neither a voice of consistent beauty throughout its several rather sharply marked registers, nor an organ consummately educated, in the strict sense. There were notes whose true pitch was reached only when the singer put added force into their utterance, and there was something left to be desired in her adjustment of vocal values when sustaining part of a dialogue or trio. But in spite of these obvious flaws in her art, the newcomer made a genuinely fine impression, and it is likely that her star will be in the ascendant for some time to come.[72]

In addition to some unkind remarks on Tetrazzini's unattractive figure, the critic reiterates the tropes we have already discussed: the reference to the barrel organ repertory to which operas like *La traviata* belonged, the necessary distinction between true artistic value and popularity, the connection, whether blurred or not, with her more illustrious predecessors, the uneven quality of her voice, the dramatic feeling which imbued her singing, which was the real strength of the young diva.

The critic of *The Sun* made similar remarks and, in a more nuanced language, started by uttering his doubts as to the figure of Tetrazzini and her credibility as a young lady dying of consumption.

> Like the traditional Violettas of old time Mme Tetrazzini does not appear to be in any immediate danger of wasting away with consumption. Her figure is well nourished and her face is as round as the silver moon. But she is a woman of pleasing appearance for all that, and her smile is both generous and frequent. Her countenance cannot fairly be

71 Ibid.

72 'Manhattan Opera House: The Advent of Tetrazzini' (Music), *New York Daily Tribune*, 16 January 1908, p. 7.

> called mobile or sensitive, but for the workaday conventions of opera world it will suffice. And after all the singing is the thing.[73]

The description of Tetrazzini's voice quality is not dissimilar from what we have already seen, and the references to the high pitches are again consistent with the recordings she has left.

> Mme Tetrazzini has a fresh, clear voice of pure soprano quality and of sufficient range, though other roles must perhaps disclose its furthest flights above the staff. The perfectly unworn condition and youthful timbre of this voice are its largest charms, and to these must be added a splendid richness in the upper range. Indeed, the best part of the voice as heard last evening was from the G above the staff to the high C. The B flat in 'Sempre libera' was a tone of which any singer might have been proud. The high D in the same number was by no means so good, and the high E flat which the singer took in ending the scene was a head tone of thin quality and refused to stay on the pitch. In colorature Mme Tetrazzini quite justified much that had been written about her. She sang staccato with consummate ease, though not with the approved method of breathing. Her method is merely to check the flow between notes instead of rightly attacking each note separately. But the effect which she produces, that of detached notes rather than of strict staccato, is charming. Of her shake less can be said in praise. It was neither clear in emission nor steady, and the interval was surely at least open to question. Descending scales she sang beautifully, with perfect smoothness and clean articulation. Her transformation of the plain scale in the opening cadenza of 'Sempre libera' into a chromatic scale, though a departure from the letter of the score, was not at all out of taste, and its execution fully obtained its right to existence.[74]

As we will see, the transformation of the scale in the opening cadenza of 'Sempre libera' can also be found in her recordings. Nevertheless, the critic showed himself particularly fastidious when it came to judging the quality of her voice and technique: in his opinion, the ascending scales were sung in a manner that would not be tolerated in a first year student: 'they began with a tremulous and throaty voce bianca and ended in a sweep into a full medium, with the chest resonance carried up to a preposterous height'.[75] The uneven quality of her lower medium notes was particularly noticeable, since 'these were all sung with a pinched glottis and with a colour so pallid and a tremolo so pronounced that they were often not a bad imitation of the wailing of a cross infant'.[76] The cantabile, the critic continued, was not only uneven in tone quality, with many breaks between her medium and her upper notes, but also replete with the breaths taken capriciously and without consideration of either text or music.

> For example, in beginning 'Ah, fors'è lui', she deliberately made a phrase after the U, and, taking a leisurely breath, introduced the I as if it belonged to the next word. The continued employment of cold colour in cantabile quite removed the possibility of pathos from 'Non sapete', while a pitiless description of her infantile delivery of 'Dite alla giovane' would read like cruelty. One of the neatest pieces of singing she did was her 'Ah, se ciò è ver', in which the staccato effect previously mentioned and some crisply executed diminutions in short phrases were excellent.[77]

Possibly in response to this criticism, a few days later Reginald De Koven published an article in the columns of *The San Francisco Call*, where he took it upon himself to defend Tetrazzini's lyric art against her few detractors.

> One fact must always be borne in mind to appreciate justly the finished art of this great singer, and that is she acts with her voice. Her phrasing of vocal passages which some—and I think wrongly—have called in question is governed and inspired by the dramatic meaning of the text rather than solely by the vocal aspect of the phrase. In this way she may at times violate the tradition, but is justified by the greater clarity of the expression of emotion and feeling gained thereby. Comparisons with other great singers of her class are valueless and misleading, for as an artist she is so distinctively individual and sui generis that she is practically in a class by herself.[78]

73 'Mme Tetrazzini Welcomed', *The Sun*, 16 January 1908, p. 7.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Reginald De Koven, 'Tetrazzini's Big Triumph is Repeated', *The San Francisco Call*, 19 January 1908, pp. 17–18.

In the same issue of the journal, Sylvester Rowling took up his pen to plead for her unique vocal skills and the effortless manner in which she could sing the most difficult and, for many, impossible passages in the highest register, even when bending over to pick up the train of her fancy costume.

> Tetrazzini's high E flat, taken nonchalantly while she stooped to pick up her skirts, is the talk of the town. Expectation is on tiptoe for her impersonation of Lucia at the Manhattan opera-house next Monday night. Meanwhile her debut as Violetta in *La Traviata* last Wednesday is eagerly discussed everywhere. Although there was some carping criticism of the new star's methods by one or two of the reviewers, none denied that her voice was of remarkable range and quality. In this particular, at least, the verdict of the great audience that acclaimed her was confirmed by the experts. Making allowances for the natural nervousness [with] which even a singer of experience such as Tetrazzini must have been affected in facing a new audience, known to be the most critical and exacting, the writer believes the new prima donna has qualities yet to be disclosed. The marvellous ease with which she sings—apparently with no effort—has not been adequately exploited. In the hurry of a first review, for instance, the manner in which she took that E flat in the 'Sempre libera' was overlooked. There was something of contemptuousness about it. She bent over, picked up her skirts and walked off most indifferently, carrying the note with the utmost ease. What other artist could have done it?[79]

In March the journalist of *The Sun* interviewed Tetrazzini, who confirmed how easy it was for her to sing even the most difficult passages; this was a characteristic she shared with the great Patti.

> The conversation, duly interpreted, begins with an interrogation in regard to the high note that Mme. Tetrazzini takes so nonchalantly in *La traviata*, the vocal height being emphasized, not as usual, by a step forward toward the orchestra, a raising of the head so as to give the throat full expansion and an uplift of the eyes to the fly gallery. When Mme. Tetrazzini accomplishes it she leans over and picks up her long train as coolly as if she were asking in an ordinary conversational tone what the weather was. 'It is no effort for me to take a note in any position', is the quick answer. 'I can sing lying down, walking about, sitting, leaning over, whatever pose suggests itself. The resonant cavities in the head of the born singer are so formed that she does not have to find out the best position of the mouth for every vowel tone and practice in that position until the movements become automatic. To an audience it is perhaps a wonderful thing to see this done, especially if they have been trained by singers who make considerable effort of it and emphasize the difficulty of the high note by giving the impression of a tremendous physical strain, but I do not think any more of taking that note leaning over than of those that precede it. Patti could sing in any position'.[80]

In the same interview Tetrazzini confessed also that her time for rehearsal was limited and her very demanding travelling schedule and performing routine did not allow for much practicing. 'I do not practice at all during the season, except, of course, when I am going over a new role. When I go on the stage, the orchestra says "la-la" and I respond "la-la", and the conductor nods that it is all right and I sing away. That is all the rehearsing I have'.[81] This, as we will see, is consistent with the idea that once she had developed her interpretation of a role, it was unlikely that she made changes, also for practical reasons.

Talking of *La traviata*, Tetrazzini made explicit reference to the manner in which she used coloratura to be more expressive and clarified how her interpretative intentions translated into specific expressive devices.

> I try to phrase my part according to the meaning of the words, not with the idea of musical display, the run expressive, the high note a natural dramatic climax. At the end of 'Ah! Fors'è lui' which is so much admired by the New York people, the upward trill I endeavour to make express the hysterical feeling of Violetta. My range? It is said to be extraordinarily elastic, going from B below the stave to E in alt.[82]

As already discussed, in the same interview Tetrazzini answered a question that illustrates, at least in part, her relationship with her senior colleagues and the limited extent of their influence. In May that year Tetrazzini was in London singing Violetta again and *The Times* reported how 'the audience made the most of her last night, especially when, in the coda to the air at the end of the first act, she soared up to a high E flat'.[83] A few days later,

79 Ibid.
80 'Making of a Great Singer', *The Sun*, 8 March 1908, p. 6.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 'Royal Opera', *The Times*, 1 May 1908, p. 14.

the same journal commented on the inconsistency of the costumes she wore: 'Mme. Tetrazzini's admirers had another opportunity for observing the incongruity between her costume—which, like her handshake, is of the 20th century—and the quaint Victorian dresses of the rest of the performers, which afford a strong argument for a return to that style of dress'.[84]

Tetrazzini's rendition of Gilda drew much less interest. When she was Gilda in New York on 29 January 1908, the critic of the *New York Press* detailed her rendition of 'Caro nome':

> She produced a few beautiful *messa di voce* effects; she gave a scintillant chromatic scale; she seized with astonishing precision purity and clearness of tone two or three high notes in mezza voce; she obtained a pretty trill on middle D sharp and E; she sang what might be called a slow trill [...] on high B and C sharp.[85]

Both the messa di voce and the staccato passages in the upper register can be considered distinctive traits of her vocal style: the slow trill on high B and C sharp can be found in her recordings, in the final cadenza, which also features the descending chromatic scale described by the critic (see the section on Gilda in Tetrazzini's recordings).

On 5 December 1908 Tetrazzini sang Gilda again in New York; the critic of the *Global and Commercial Advertiser*, enchanted by her singing, remarked that 'she had an entire new set of vocal ornaments for the close',[86] probably referring to the cadenza. In London in May 1909 *The Times* recorded briefly her success and the flawless performance of Gilda's most famous aria: 'In the second act she sang with wonderful cleanness and perfection of tone, and "Caro nome" was received with such an uproar of enthusiasm from the upper parts of the house that it had to be repeated, thereby entirely spoiling the effect of the exit'.[87] Of the same opinion was *The Musical Times*, whose critic observed that the success of *Rigoletto* on 14 May was Tetrazzini's success: 'Great enthusiasm characterized the performance of Verdi's melodious opera *Rigoletto* on May 14, due in no small measure to the superb singing of Madame Tetrazzini, whose vocal achievements recalled the palmiest days of Italian opera. Signor Campanini conducted'.[88] One year later *Rigoletto* was performed again in London, this time framed by the performance of some sections of Wagner's *The Ring*: compared to Wagner, Verdi's work represented a moment of relaxation. Tetrazzini had not yet recovered from an indisposition and her notes, especially those in the high register, were hard and not all in tune; '[h]owever she delighted a large audience by her singing of "Caro nome" and answered expectations by going to the E in alt at the end of it'.[89]

Needless to say, Tetrazzini's Violetta and Gilda became regulars at Covent Garden and music critics continued to report on her successes, sometimes elaborating further on the value of the repertoire and the enthusiastic, and therefore tasteless, response of the public. Such was the case when *La traviata* and *Rigoletto* were staged in 1910.

> In succession to *La Traviata* the same composer's *Rigoletto* was mounted, when Madame Tetrazzini made her postponed appearance and soon showed that her E flat in alt was unaffected by her indisposition. A growing tendency to wait for Madame Tetrazzini's high notes is to be regretted, for there is much that is truly admirable in her interpretation of the old Italian music a little lower in the scale, as she clearly demonstrated in the *Barber of Seville* which followed.[90]

A few years later *The Musical Times* commented on the short bravura pieces that Tetrazzini had included in a recital at the Albert Hall. Similarly to what Melba and Patti had often done in the past decades, she sang a few songs in English, which were not, and could not, the critic said, be tolerated any more.

> At the Albert Hall, yesterday, Madame Tetrazzini gave a concert to a huge audience. She was in brilliant form, but is apparently unaware that a fine voice cannot transmute rubbish into good music [...] Madame Tetrazzini has kindly returned to England, after five years' absence. Since her last appearance here she has apparently learned nothing, and

84 'Royal Opera', *The Times*, 9 May 1908, p. 11.
85 *New York Press*, 30 January 1908, p. 5 (see Martin, *Verdi in America*, p. 212).
86 Martin, *Verdi in America*, pp. 211–12.
87 'Royal Opera', *The Times*, 15 May 1909, p. 10.
88 'Royal Opera', *The Musical Times*, 1 June 1909, vol. 50, no. 796, pp. 385–86.
89 'Royal Opera', *The Times*, 28 April, 1910.
90 *The Musical Times*, 1 June 1910, vol. 51, no. 808, pp. 377–78.

> forgotten nothing. Either her own musical taste is deplorable or (what is worse still) she thinks ours is. On no other grounds can we account for her choice of songs, especially of such a thing as 'Somewhere a voice is calling'—an all-too-successful ballad that even our own tenth-rate singers dare no longer inflict on us. We must frankly express our resentment at a choice which is an insult to English music.[91]

Despite Tetrazzini's incontestable success, the bel canto repertoire continued to represent, at least in the eyes of some critics, a trifle and a nuisance, not only when compared to the Wagnerian repertoire, but also to the works of the younger generation of Italian composers: Giacomo Puccini, Pietro Mascagni, Ruggero Leoncavallo.[92]

Violetta: 'Ah! Fors'è lui'

'Ah! Fors'è lui' is the 'Scena ed Aria [di] Violetta—Finale Atto I' of Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata*.[93] This is the moment in the first act when Violetta remains alone after the ball, and reflects on the unexpected turn her life has taken. Hesitant and, perhaps, confused as she is, Violetta wonders whether Alfredo, who has kindled in her the burning flame of love, is the man her heart has been longing for and dreaming of. Mysterious and unattainable, love is now the torment and delight of her heart. Francesco Maria Piave's lyrics revolve around the expression of three main emotions, Violetta's longing for a man to love (first stanza), the sense of unrest that follows Alfredo's words (second stanza), and the thrilling hesitation that accompanies what seems a turning point in her entire life.[94] These three emotional states are presented again in the second group of stanzas to form a large two-section structure (A-A'). In each section, we find two main melodic ideas, the first in F minor, the second in F major, each being segmented following the so-called lyric form: first stanza (a_{4+4} $a_{4+4'}$) in F minor; second stanza (b_{4+4}) featuring a modulation; third stanza (c_{4+4}) in F major.[95] While the first melodic idea in F minor presents a sobbing quality and features a minor sixth interval that provides a strong sense of melancholy, the second opens lyrically toward the high register to express Violetta's sudden, unrestrained abandon. A similar connection between the lyrics and the music characterises the repeat (A').

		Andantino		
Ah, fors'è lui che l'anima	Ah, perhaps it is he who the soul	a_{4+4}	**A (F min.)**	
Solinga ne' tumulti	Lonely in tumults			
Godea sovente pingere	Often enjoyed painting	a_{4+4}		
De' suoi colori occulti!...	With his hidden colours!...			
Lui che modesto e vigile	He who modest and vigilant	b_{4+4}	modulation	
All'egre soglie ascese,	Ascended to the high thresholds,			**A**
E nuova febbre accese,	and ignited a new fever,			
Destandomi all'amor.	Arousing me to love.			
A quell'amor ch'è palpito	To that love which is the throb	c_{4+4}	**B (F maj.)**	
Dell'universo intero,	Of the whole universe,			
Misterioso, altero,	Mysterious, proud,	d_{4+4}		
Croce e delizia al cor.	Cross and delight to the heart.			

91 *The Musical Times*, 1 November 1919, vol. 60, no. 921, pp. 600–03.
92 See Massimo Zicari, *The Land of Song* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).
93 For the musical examples I refer to the edition originally published by G. Ricordi and republished by Dover: Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata* (New York: Dover, 1990, M1500.V48T5, 89-755862) pp. 80–107. Of course, one can only speculate about the edition Sembrich, Melba and Tetrazzini may have used, given the number of reprints circulating at the end of the nineteenth century.
94 *Tutti i libretti di Verdi*, ed. by Luigi Baldacci (Turin: UTET, 1996), p. 276.
95 Steven Huebner, 'Lyric Form in "Ottocento" Opera', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 117.1 (1992), 123–47.

A me fanciulla, un candido	To me maiden, a candid	a $_{4+4}$	**A (F min.)**	
E trepido desire	And anxious desire			
Questi effigiò dolcissimo	He sweetest moulded	a $_{4+4}$		
Signor dell'avvenire,	Lord of the future,			
Quando nè cieli il raggio	When in the heavens the ray	b $_{4+4}$	modulation	
Di sua beltà vedea,	Of his beauty I saw,			**A**^{1}
E tutta me pascea	And all of me fed			
Di quel divino error.	With that divine error.			
Sentìa che amore è palpito	I felt that love is the throb	c $_{4+4}$	**B (F maj.)**	
Dell'universo intero,	Of the whole universe,			
Misterioso, altero,	Mysterious, proud,	d $_{4+4}$		
Croce e delizia al cor![96]	Cross and delight to the heart!			

Francesco Maria Piave's choice of wording offers a broad palette of emotions; a richly nuanced vocabulary leads up to the image of love seen as a mysterious combination of joyful bliss and sorrowful grief. Verdi's music underpins the expression of these feelings with skilled ability, and the different melodic ideas offer a large choice of interpretative solutions involving changes in vocal colour, tempo, and dynamics.

The Andantino ('Ah fors'è lui') is followed by a short kinetic section that leads to the final cabaletta, the Allegro brillante, 'Sempre libera'. Violetta does not want to renounce the pleasures she has been enjoying so far; every new day will offer her new delights. Here a sense of frenzied determination prevails over the dilemma. She has made up her mind, perhaps, and so be it. The text involves two stanzas, which are repeated after Alfredo's short intervention (pertichini), thus forming the two-section structure which was typical of a cabaletta.

		Allegro brillante		
Sempre libera degg'io	I must always be free	a_4		
Folleggiare di gioia in gioia,	To romp from joy to joy,		A flat Major	
Vo' che scorra il viver mio	I want my life to flow	a_4		
Pei sentieri del piacer.	Along the paths of pleasure.			
				A
Nasca il giorno, o il giorno muoia,	Let the day dawn, or let the day die,	b_{4+2}	F min.	
sempre lieta ne' ritrovi;	ever happy in hangouts;		(suspended)	
a diletti sempre nuovi	To delights ever new	a_3	A flat Major	
dee volare il mio pensier.	My thoughts must fly.	c_{4+6}		
		Andantino		
Alfredo: Amor, amor è palpito...	Alfredo: Love, love is throb	(Pertichini)		
Violetta: Follie, follie	Violetta: Madness, madness			
		Tempo I		
Sempre libera degg'io	I must always be free	a_4	A flat Major	
Folleggiare di gioia in gioia,	To romp from joy to joy,			
Vo' che scorra il viver mio	I want my life to flow	a_4		
Pei sentieri del piacer.	Along the paths of pleasure.			
				A^{1}
Nasca il giorno, o il giorno muoia,	Let the day dawn, or let the day die,	b_{4+2}	F min.	
sempre lieta ne' ritrovi;	ever happy in hangouts;		(suspended)	
a diletti sempre nuovi	To delights ever new	a_3	A flat Major	
dee volare il mio pensier.[97]	My thoughts must fly.	c_{4+6}		
		stretta with pertichin*i*		

96 *Tutti i libretti di Verdi*, ed. by Baldacci, p. 276.
97 Ibid.

If we now look at the overarching structure, we see that the scene adheres to the formal segmentation conventionally defined as solita forma (the usual form), as was described by Abramo Basevi in 1859 when talking of vocal duets in Verdi's works. This consists of an initial kinetic section followed by a cantabile, then a second kinetic section leading to the final cabaletta: tempo d'attacco, adagio, tempo di mezzo, cabaletta.[98] In Violetta's first aria, a cavatina, the tempo d'attacco is missing; instead, after a short recitativo 'È strano! È strano!... ' (Allegro), we have a cantabile 'Ah fors'è lui' (Andantino), a second recitativo 'Follie!... follie...' (Allegro), and the final cabaletta 'Sempre libera' (Allegro brillante).

Violetta in Tetrazzini's Recordings

Luisa Tetrazzini recorded the 'Scena ed Aria finale' from the first act of *La traviata* four times in the years between 1907 and 1911. A first partial recording was made in London in December 1907 for the Gramophone Company, on which occasion the tempo di mezzo and the cut version of the cabaletta 'Sempre libera' were recorded (matrix 2179f, Gramophone 053147). One year later Tetrazzini recorded the opening recitativo and the cut version of the Andantino ('Ah, fors'è lui') again for the Gramophone Company (matrix 2573f, Gramophone 053196). These two different takes are now to be found merged in one single track in the first CD of the set *Luisa Tetrazzini, the London Recordings*, which EMI Classics released in 1992. In the same set, again merged in a single track, we find two recordings made on the 11 July 1911: 'Ah! Fors'è lui' including 'Follie!...' (matrix ac5164f, HMV 2-053059, DB 531) and 'Sempre libera' (matrix ac5169f, HMV 2-053062, DB 531). These two takes together make an almost complete recording of the 'Scena e aria' despite some of the customary cuts.[99] On 16 March 1911, Tetrazzini recorded for Victor the complete 'Scena e aria' in a single take; the recording presents the usual cuts and includes neither recitativo (matrix C10065-1, Victor 88293, 6344)[100] (Table 1).

Table 1 shows the recordings of 'Ah! Fors'è lui' from 'Scena ed Aria [di] Violetta—Finale Atto I' of Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata* that Tetrazzini realised in the years 1907−1911.

Title	Date	Matrix	Catalogue
'Sempre libera'	December 1907	2179f	Gramophone 053147
'È strano!... Ah, fors'è lui'	August 1908	2573f	Gramophone 053196
'Ah! Fors'è lui... Sempre libera'	16 March 1911	C10065-1	Victor 88293
'Ah, fors'è lui... Follie!...'	11 July 1911	ac 5164f/2	HMV 053059
'Sempre libera'	11 July 1911	ac 5169f/2	HMV 053062

The cuts present in the recordings cannot be ascribed uniquely to the constraints imposed by the still rudimentary audio technologies; in fact, a performance tradition lay in the background that already featured cuts of single sections, especially if a repeat presented itself. This seems to suggest that despite a long-lasting tradition, at the beginning of the twentieth century, repeats no longer presented an opportunity to add new coloratura and substitute them for the written bravura passages. Instead, they were generally avoided, perhaps because they were considered redundant and musically uninteresting.[101] In this regard Hermann Klein, comparing various recordings and commenting on Tetrazzini's disc DB 531, says:

> the Tetrazzini [record] is in two parts, on a double disc; but commits the error of omitting the preliminary recit. 'È strano' (for which there was plenty of room), and then on the other side, strangely enough, provides an entire

98 Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence: Tofani, 1859) p. 191. For a discussion on the use of this conventional formal segmentation see also Harold S. Powers, 'La solita forma and the Uses of Conventions', *Acta Musicologica*, 59.1 (1987), 65–90.

99 *Luisa Tetrazzini, the London Recordings* (EMI Classics, CHS 7 63802 2, 1992).

100 *Tetrazzini* (Nimbus Records, NI 7808, 1990).

101 Massimo Zicari, 'Expressive Tempo Modifications in Early 20th-Century Recorded Performances of Operatic Arias', *Music&Practice*, 5 (2019), https://doi.org/10.32063/0507.

'repeat' of 'Sempre libera,' which I cannot remember to have heard done more than once or twice on the stage in all my experience.[102]

If we now consider Tetrazzini's interpretation, we see that the opening section of the 'Scena e aria' shows small alterations, all suggesting a certain degree of dramatic freedom, but with no significant modifications of the melodic line. The elongation of the penultimate syllable is often present, although without the additional ornamental passages that were common, for instance, in Rossini's works. The small modifications of the written rhythm, sometimes involving over-dotting the dotted figures, emphasise the sense of agitation that pervades the entire section (Figure 74).

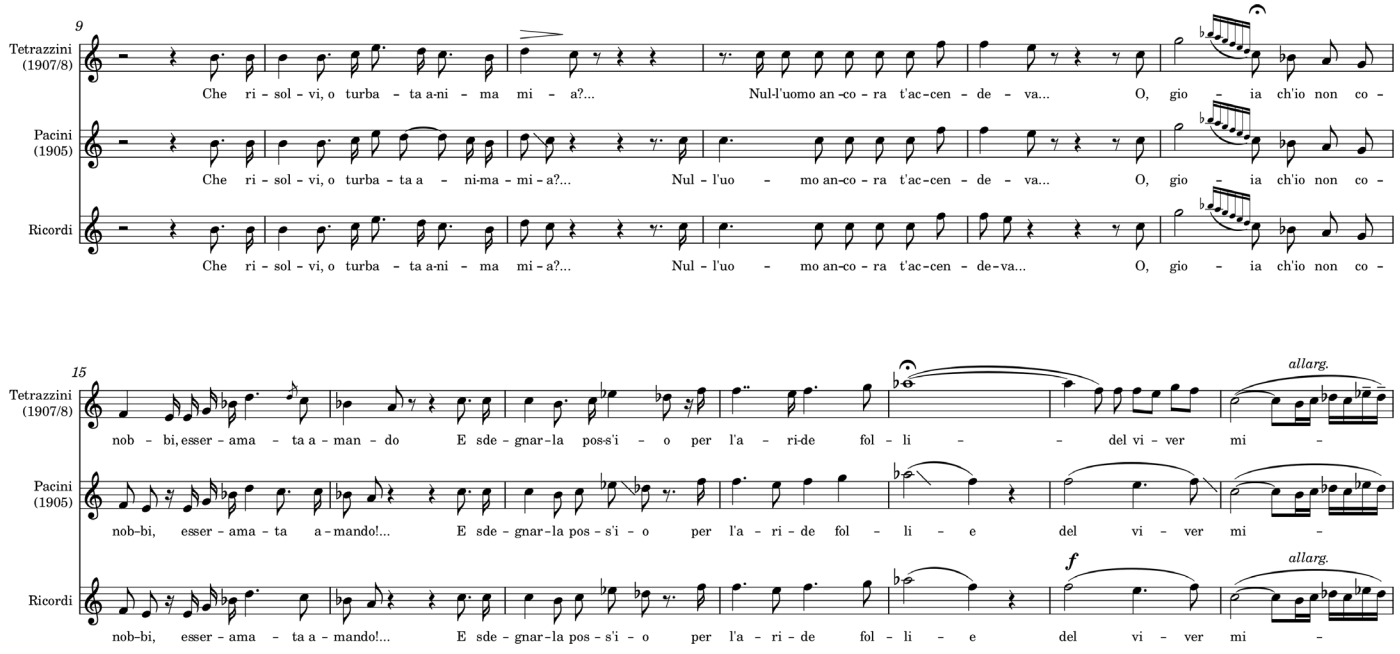

Figure 74 shows Tetrazzini's rendition of 'È strano…' compared to Regina Pacini's.

In the Andantino, Tetrazzini's interpretation is characterised by a conspicuous use of the portamento which, together with a number of expressive ritardandos, conveys a strong sense of languishing hesitation. While her use of portamentos is consistent with that of most of her contemporary colleagues, thus suggesting that this was still a commonly used expressive device, the small rhythmic modifications used to convey a stronger dramatic sense appear to be a more individual feature. For instance, the interpretation left by Marcella Sembrich conveys a strong sense of agitation by a clearly perceivable rhythmic displacement of the notes in the first eight bars, which sound 'molto rubato' and push the tempo towards an audible shortening of the figure in the passage 'solinga ne' tumulti' (lonely in the turmoil). Instead, Nellie Melba's recording shows her proverbial aplomb: she remains in tempo and even the rhythmic modification of the ascending sixth (C-A) remains unaltered (Figure 75).

In Tetrazzini's recordings the presence of melodic modifications involving the addition of or substitution for ornamentation figures is reduced to a minimum. Even when she adds her own melodic ornaments, these consist mainly of small graces that remain almost completely unaltered throughout the different recordings.

102 William R. Moran (ed.), *Herman Klein and The Gramophone* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1990). According to Michael Aspinall, since Klein had heard all the famous Violetta performers at Covent Garden from 1869 to 1901, we must assume that it was traditional among the divas to sing only one stanza of 'Sempre libera' (as in the case of 'Ah, fors è lui'). In 1901 Klein moved to New York where he lived until 1909. Actually, at the Metropolitan Marcella Sembrich sang both stanzas, as heard in a Mapleson Cylinder. 'In the 1960s, when I was living in London', Aspinall told me, 'I met the record collector Vivian Catchpole, who had been present at Tetrazzini's Covent Garden début in 1907, and he assured me that "Tet" had sung both stanzas not only of "Sempre libera" but also of "Addio del passato"'.

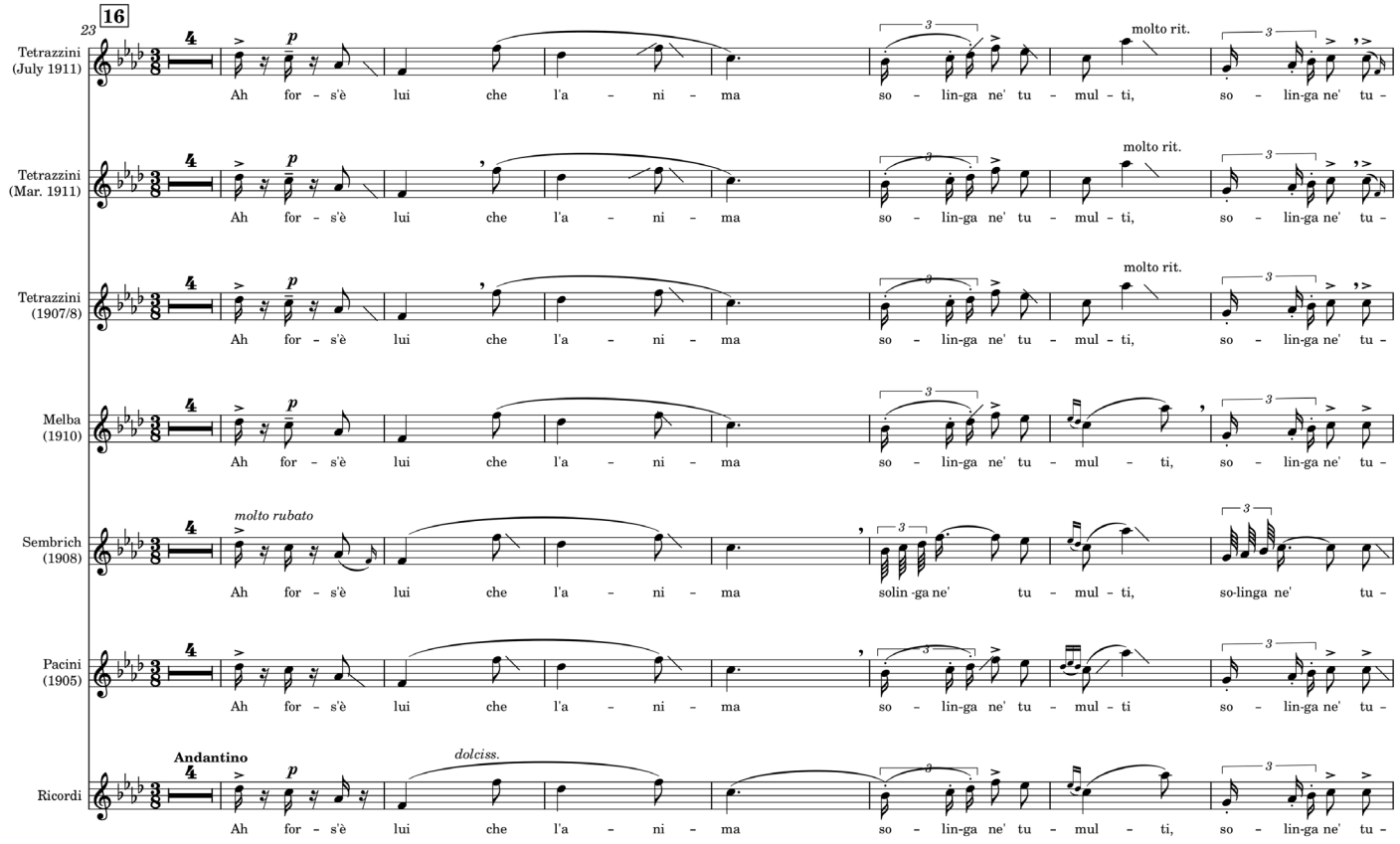

Figure 75 shows the first measures of 'Ah! Fors'è lui' in Tetrazzini's recordings compared to those of Melba, Sembrich and Pacini.

However, again with the only exception of Nellie Melba, interventions of the same kind can also be observed in the recordings of other interpreters (Figure 76).

The first important changes appear in the cadenza which, however elaborated, remains mostly unaltered in all the recordings (Figure 77). If we compare Tetrazzini's renditions to those of some of her contemporary colleagues, we see differences that are consistent with what we have observed so far. While Melba's cadenza looks (and sounds) inconspicuous, Sembrich and Pacini show a stronger personality with Tetrazzini being the only one featuring the top C and a magnificent messa di voce.

Most crucially, the textual modifications we observe in Tetrazzini's recordings are consistent with what was reported in some contemporary reviews of live performances of *La traviata*. As already illustrated, when Tetrazzini was Violetta in 1908 in New York, on 16 January *The Evening World* wrote that 'at the end of the air "Ah, fors'è lui", she took a high C and swelled and diminished it with evenness and precision'.[103] This very passage can be found in her recordings, as can be seen in Figure 77.

One last change can be observed in the last bar of the cantabile, where a descending chromatic passage substitutes in part for the written diatonic scale (Figure 78).

103 'Two critics and Tetrazzini's high E flat', *The Evening World*, 16 January 1908, p. 3.

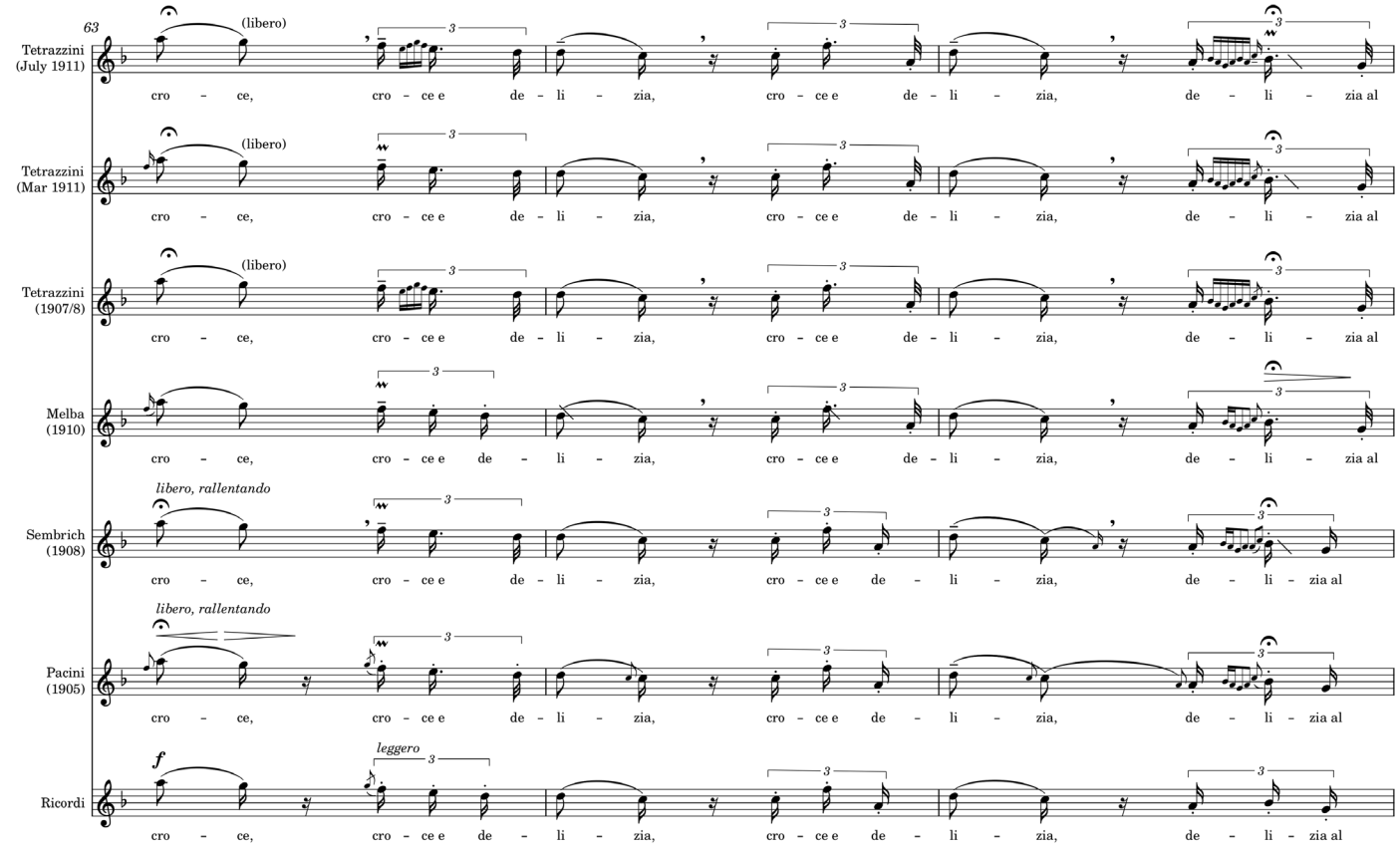

Figure 76 shows the small interventions in Tetrazzini's rendition of 'Ah! Fors'è lui' compared to those of Melba, Pacini and Sembrich.

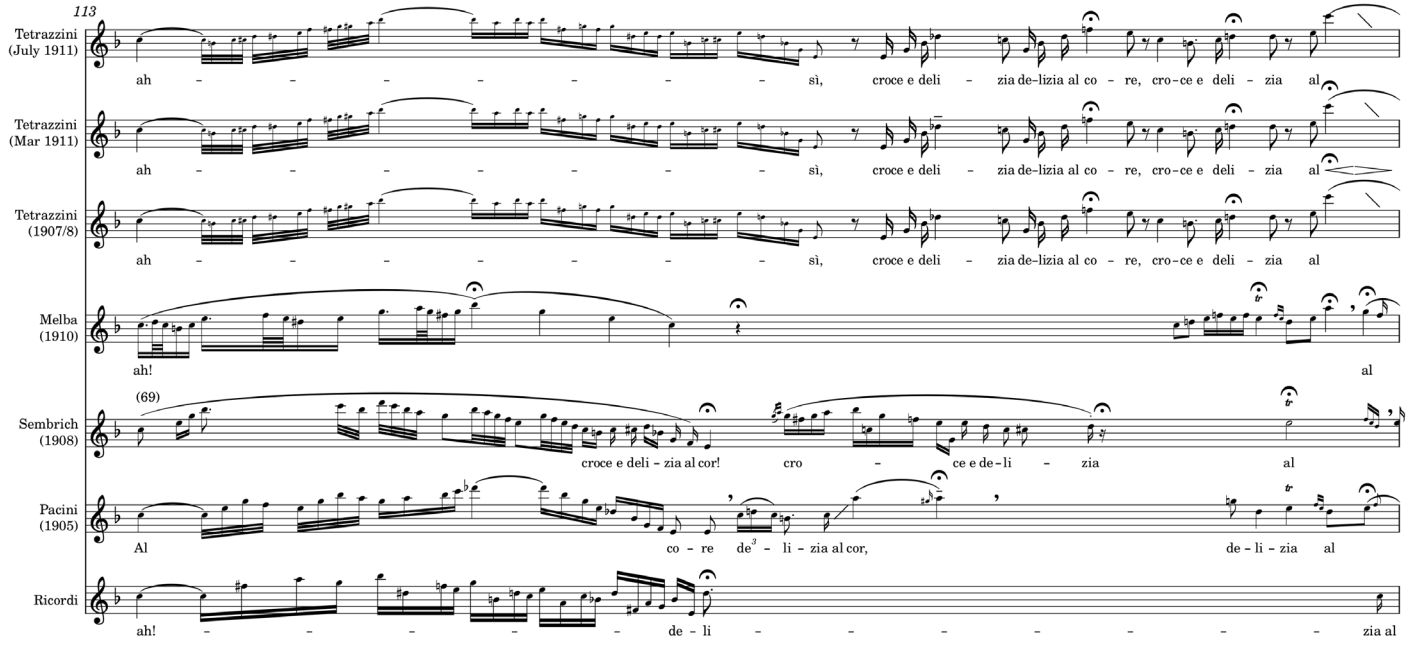

Figure 77 shows the different cadenzas sung by Tetrazzini, Melba, Sembrich and Pacini to 'Ah! Fors'è lui'.

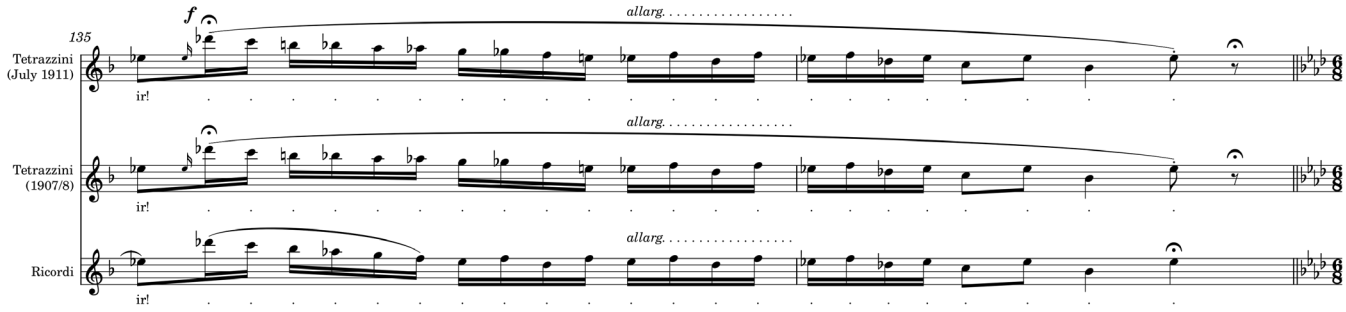

Figure 78 shows the descending chromatic passage before the reprise, that Tetrazzini used to sing in 'Ah! Fors'è lui'.

A similar change can be found at the end of the first section, in the bar leading to the reprise. Here, Tetrazzini sings the same chromatic scale, but in the recording made in July 1911 she shows off her pearly staccato. Similar alterations of the same passage can also be found in other contemporary recordings (Figure 79).

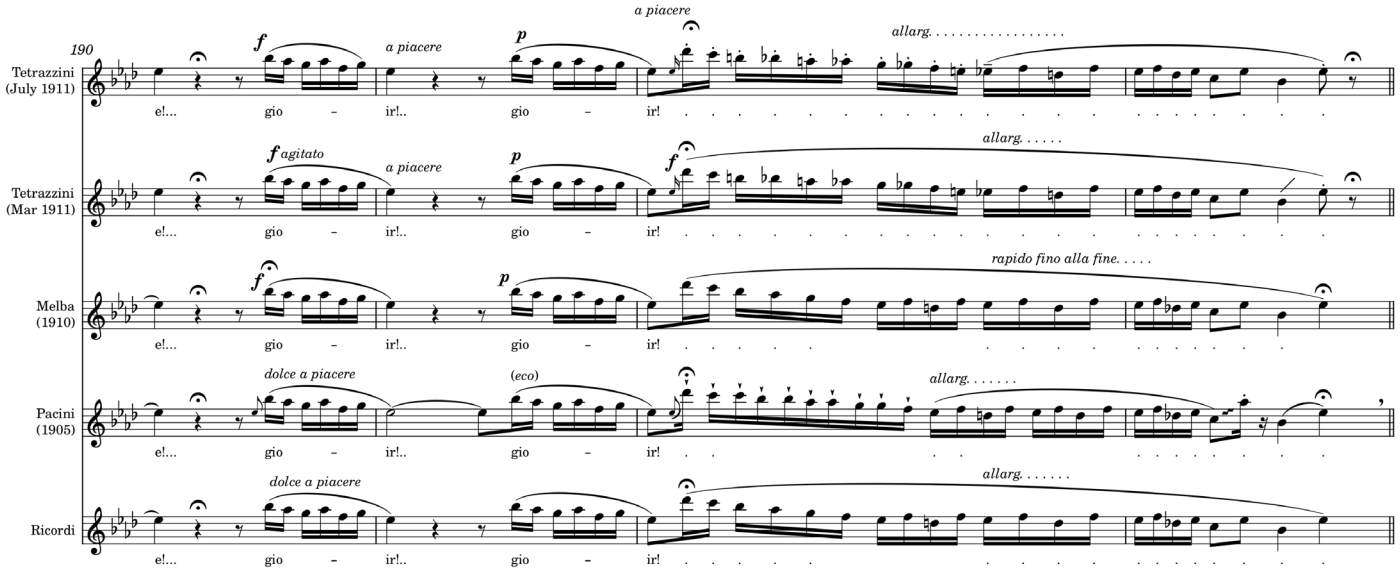

Figure 79 shows the second descending chromatic passage typical of Tetrazzini, compared to those of Melba and Pacini.

This change was noted by the critic of *The Sun* who, on 16 January 1908, wrote that 'her transformation of the plain scale in the opening cadenza of "Sempre libera" into a chromatic scale, though a departure from the letter of the score, was not at all out of taste and its execution fully obtained its right to existence'.[104] A similar solution can be heard in Regina Pacini's recording, where she sings a staccato passage consisting of double notes, and glides up to the A before concluding. Tetrazzini added another chromatic passage in the suspension before the last appearance of the main motif, this time in the form of a cadential close of the written fermata (Figure 80). Pacini did the same in 1905.

Towards the end of the cabaletta Tetrazzini indulges in a number of high Cs, clearly to show off her impressive facility in the highest register while emphasising Violetta's sense of hysteria (Figure 81).
As the critic of *The Evening World* noticed in his review of 16 January 1908, 'at the end of the succeeding "Sempre libera" she sustained a strong and clear E flat'.[105] Again, this passage can be found in her recordings, as shown in Figure 82.

104 'Mme. Tetrazzini welcomed', *The Sun*, 16 January 1908, p. 7.
105 'Two critics and Tetrazzini's high E flat', *The Evening World*, 16 January 1908, p. 3.

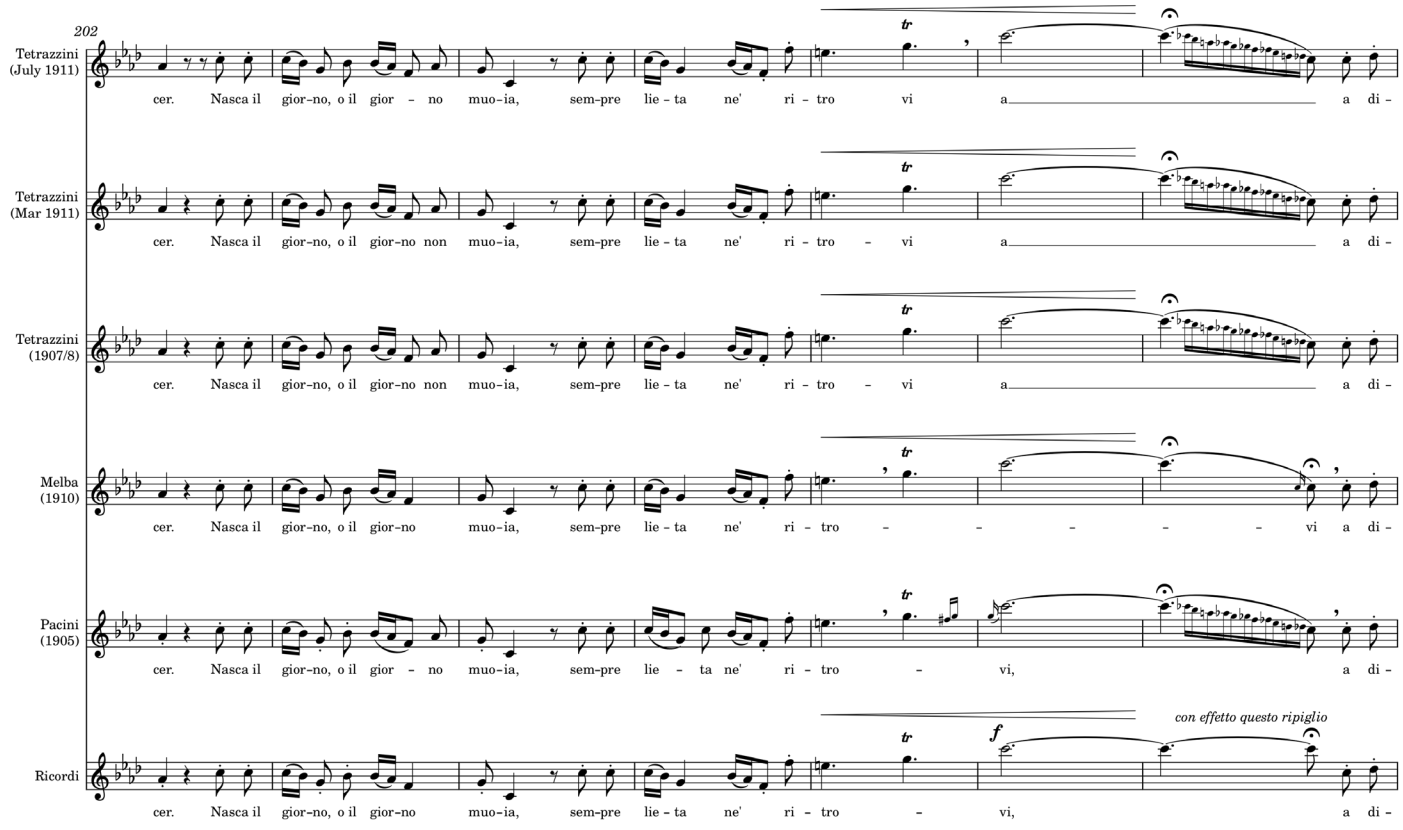

Figure 80 shows the last chromatic passage Tetrazzini used to sing in 'Ah! Fors'è lui'.

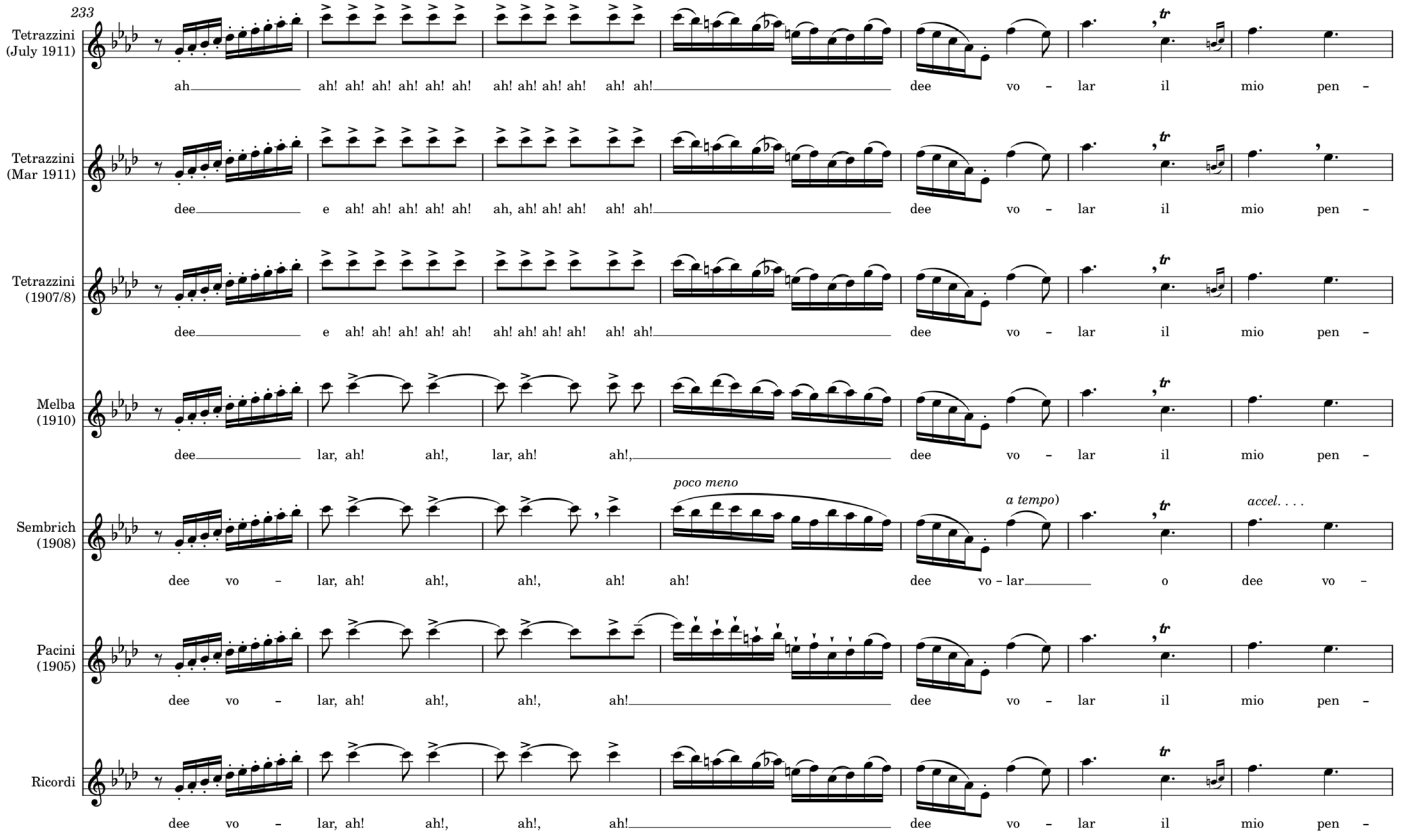

Figure 81 shows how Tetrazzini conveys Violetta's sense of hysteria thanks to the repeated high Cs.

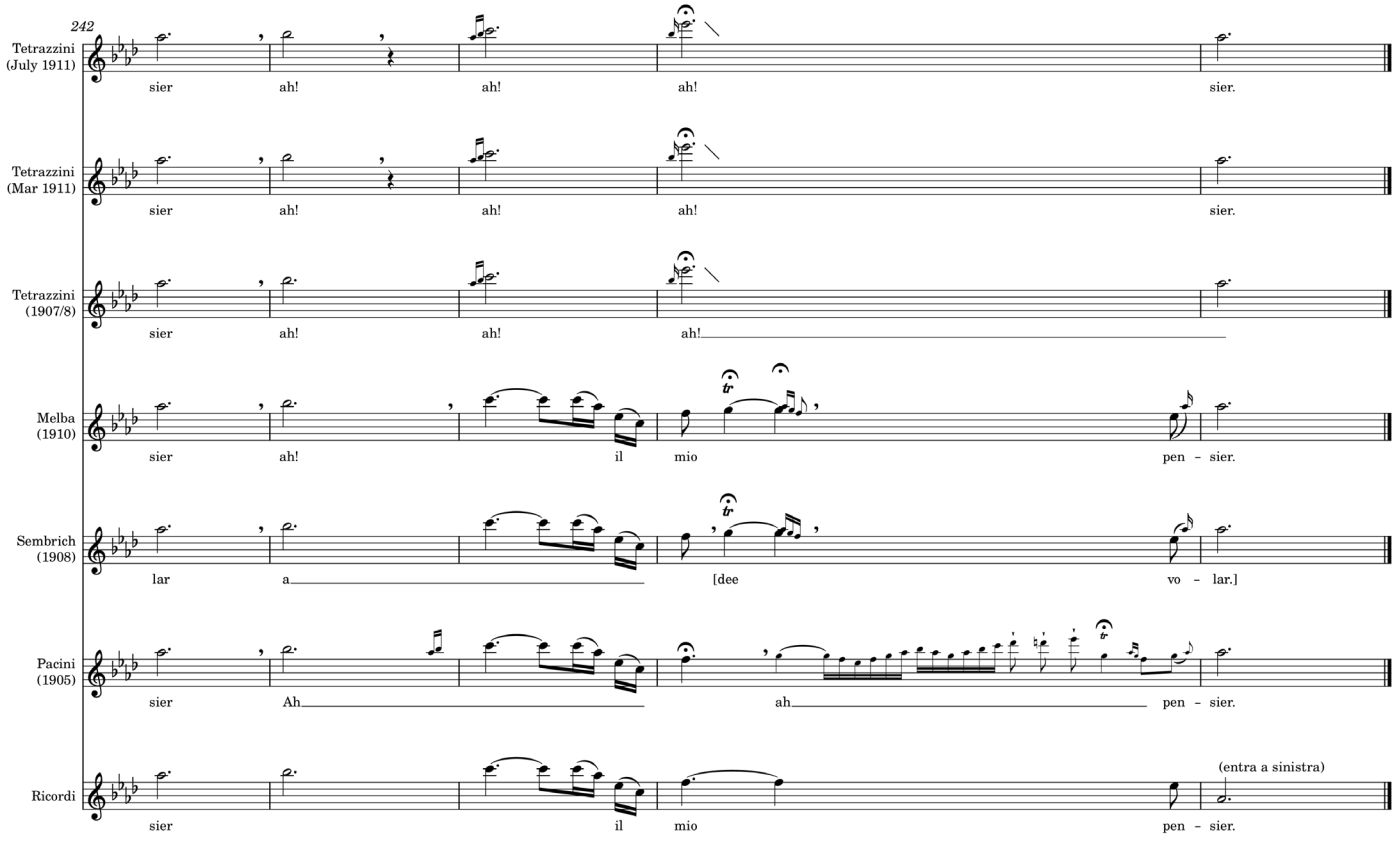

Figure 82 shows the final measures of 'Ah! Fors'è lui' featuring Tetrazzini's top Es.

The comparison between Tetrazzini and her colleagues shows how each diva presents a different musical personality, combined with different vocal skills. These led to changes and the addition of embellishments that, although consistent with regard to position and harmonic-melodic function, changed depending on both the personality and the voice of each prima donna.

Looking at what can be found in Ricci and Marchesi, not much can be added to the discussion thus far. As mentioned before, Ricci reproduces four cadenzas for the cantabile and mentions the name of Claudia Muzio,[106] while Marchesi offers nine solutions for the same passage.[107] Two more cadenzas are to be found in Liebling,[108] while Karin and Eugen Ott report on what can be heard in the recordings of Tetrazzini, Gemma Bellincioni, Sembrich and Melba.

Gilda: 'Caro nome'

In 'Caro nome' from Act I, Scene 13 of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Gilda, Rigoletto's daughter, sings her new-found love. The aria follows the long scene where she and the Duke, who have been seeing each other for a while in church, meet in Rigoletto's house and declare their mutual love in a typical cantabile-stretta form. Gilda, who has been made to believe that the person she is in love with is 'Gualtier Maldè', a poor student, remains alone in her rooms and indulges in the feelings the sweet name of her beloved rouses in her bosom. The text consists of two stanzas, each a quatrain of truncated octosyllables; the music follows the conventional structure of the Italian lyric form,

106 Ricci, *Variazioni*, vol. I, p. 83
107 Marchesi, *Variantes et points d'orgue*, p. 85.
108 Liebling, *Arrangements*, p. 62.

where a first pair of four-bar phrases (a_4 a_4^1) is followed by a contrasting medial four-bar phrase (b_4), which either leads back to the initial melodic material (a_4), as in this case, or to a new closing four-bar phrase (c_4).[109]

		All.o moderato
Caro nome che il mio cor	Dear name that my heart	a_4
Festi primo palpitar,	You first made throb,	
Le delizie dell'amor	The delights of love	a_4^1
Mi dêi sempre rammentar!	You must always remind me!	
Col pensier il mio desir	With my thought my desire	b_4
A te sempre volerà,	Will always fly to you,	
E fin l'ultimo sospir,	And until the last sigh,	a_4^1
Caro nome, tuo sarà.	Dear name, will be yours.	
Col pensier il mio desir	With my thought my desire	b_4^2 (varied)
A te sempre volerà,	Will always fly to you,	(short cadenza)
E fin l'ultimo sospir,	And until the last sigh,	a_4^2 (varied)
Caro nome, tuo sarà.	Dear name, will be yours.	
Col pensier il mio desir	With my thought my desire	b_4^3 (varied)
A te sempre volerà,	Will always fly to you,	(cadenza)
A te volerà,	To you it will fly,	$c_{(3+2)}$ (variations)
Fin l'ultimo sospir,	Until the last sigh,	d_4
Caro nome, tuo sarà.[110]	Dear name, yours it will be.	$e_{(3+3)}$ (final cadenza)

The structure of the melody and that of the two stanzas match perfectly, with each four-bar phrase setting to music a new couple of verses. To this a second section follows where the verses of the second stanza are repeated, and the melodic material is presented in a varied form. The aria concludes with what could be understood as a new set of variations (c, d, e); although the original melodic material is presented in a more freely elaborated manner, we can still recognise the initial descending diatonic phrase in the new syncopated melodic figure. At bars 40–41 Verdi makes use of a descending chromaticism which, in setting to music the words 'fin l'ultimo sospir' (even my last sigh) assumes, although temporarily, a characteristically doleful connotation.[111] Gilda's indulging in the thought of his beloved name translates into a coda-like section leading to the final cadenza. Interestingly, the final cadenza arrives after a first short suspension at bar 28, and a longer internal cadenza at bar 36, a combination that increases the sense of hesitating cheerfulness that Gilda is expressing. This sense of hesitation is emphasised, in the music, by the melodic/harmonic diversion Verdi introduces at bars 46–49, where an abrupt shift to G major is introduced, soon to return to the home key of E major.

Gilda in Tetrazzini's Recordings

Tetrazzini recorded 'Caro nome' three times, first in New York for the Zonophone label on 8 September 1904 (matrix 3511, Zonophone 2502, 10001). Her London recording was conducted by Percy Pitt (matrix 2170f, Gramophone 053141; Victor 92014), and while in Camden on 18 March 1911 her recording was conducted by Walter B. Rogers (matrix C10074-1, Victor 88295, 6344; HMV 2-053050, DB 536). If we listen to Tetrazzini's rendition, we notice that, similarly to what we observed in 'Ah fors'è lui', she introduces a number of portamentos and small rhythmic

109 Steven Huebner, 'Lyric Form in Ottocento Opera', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 117.1 (1992), 123–47. Adamo and Lippmann, *Vincenzo Bellini*, pp. 428–29.

110 *Tutti i libretti di Verdi*, ed. by Baldacci, p. 239.

111 Marco Beghelli, 'L'emblema melodrammatico del lamento: il semitono dolente', in Verdi 2001: atti del Convegno internazionale = proceedings of the international Conference, Parma, New York, New Haven, 24 gennaio–1 febbraio 2001. (Historiae musicae cultores; 96) (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2003).

and melodic modifications, which, we may assume, are meant to convey the sense of amorous languor that the lyrics suggest. For instance, in the initial melodic figure, where each quaver is followed by a pause, Tetrazzini stretches the value of the first and the third note into a crotchet. At bar 17 she anticipates the Cs, creating a syncopated trilled figure, which can be understood as a means to convey a stronger sense of agitation, while at bar 20 she inserts a fermata on the final G (Figure 83).

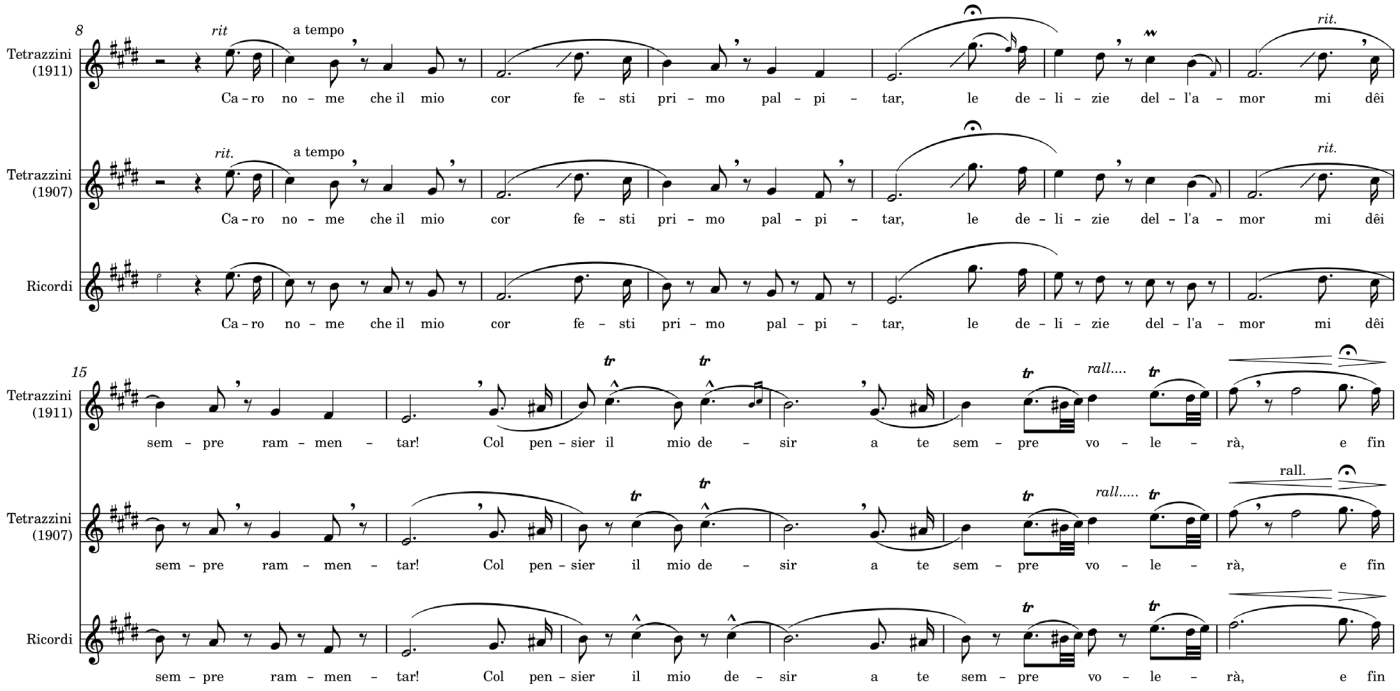

Figure 83 shows Tetrazzini's modifications in the opening measures of 'Caro nome' in Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

The final cadenza is an extended version of the original one, with a staccato, virtuoso passage that reaches the high B with a long messa di voce to conclude on the final E. Although in the 1911 version the semiquaver passage is longer than in 1907, the two cadenzas are virtually the same (Figure 84).

The most recent version of the cadenza can be found transcribed in Ricci,[112] while Marchesi does not include this opera among her *Variantes et points d'orgue*. Karin and Eugen Ott transcribe what can be heard in the recordings of Tetrazzini, Sembrich and Maria Barrientos.[113]

Other Recordings of Verdi's Arias

Not much more can be said of the other arias from Verdi that Tetrazzini recorded during her career, at least not in so far as textual modifications are concerned. Among them we find the 'Canzone di Oscar' from *Un ballo in maschera*, which she recorded on 25 May 1909 (matrix 3076f, Gramophone 053222) with Percy Pitt and on 15 March 1911 with Walter Rogers (matrix C10059-1, Victor 88304, 6341; HMV 2-053048, DB 539). Being a short and vivacious piece where two stanzas are set to music in two main sections A-A^1 each featuring two melodic motives repeated more times, the 'Canzone' lends itself to some melodic variations.

Tetrazzini takes advantage of this possibility only to a limited extent and we do not find the same small variations in both her recordings. In fact, the later one presents some more graces, thus suggesting an evolution

112 Ricci, vol. I, p. 69.
113 Ott, *Handbuch*, p. 509.

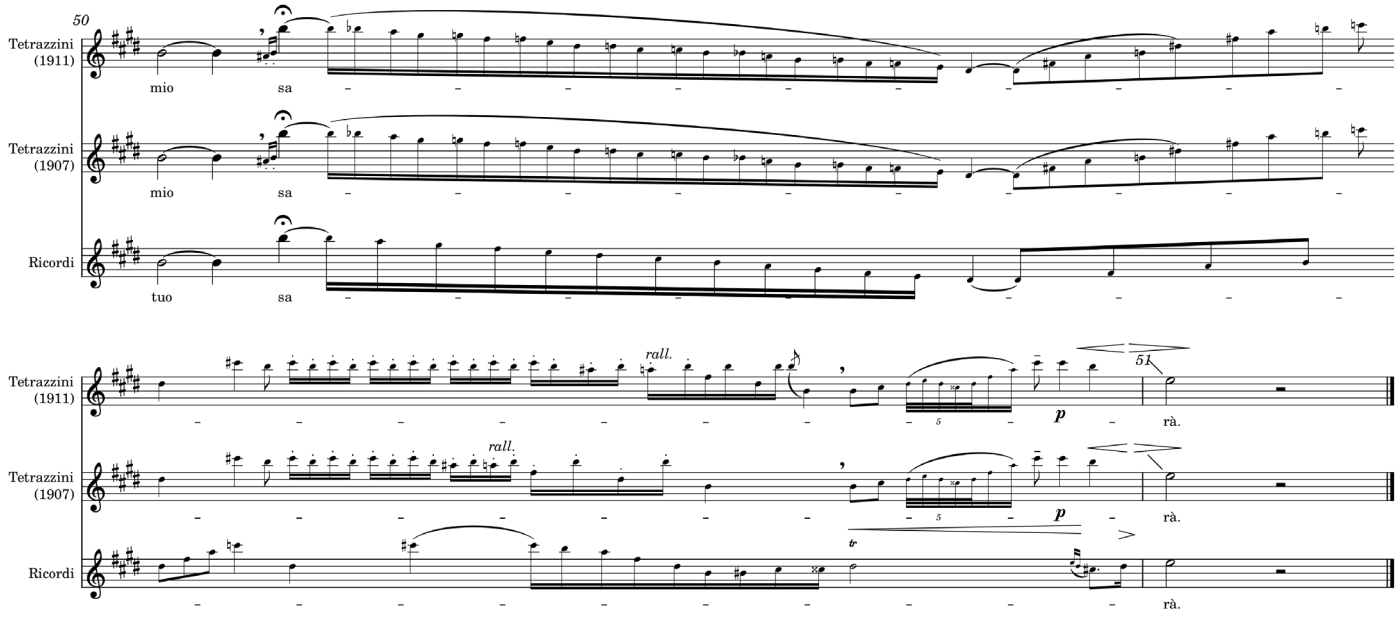

Figure 84 shows Tetrazzini's cadenza to 'Caro nome' in Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

		Allegretto	
Saper vorreste	You would like to know	$a_{(4+4+4)}$	
Di che si veste,	Of what he dresses,		
Quando l'è cosa	When it is a thing		
Ch'ei vuol nascosa.	That he wants hidden.		
Oscar lo sa,	Oscar knows it,		**A**
Ma nol dirà,	But he will not say,		
Là, là, là, là.	Là, là, là, là.	$b_{(2+2+2+2)}$	
Oscar lo sa,	Oscar knows it,	$a_{(4)}$	
Ma nol dirà,	But he will not say,		
Là, là, là, là.	Là, là, là, là.	$b'_{(4+4)}$	
Pieno d'amor	Full of love	$a_{(4+4+4)}$	
Mi balza il cor,	My heart leaps,		
Ma pur discreto	But still discreet		
Serba il secreto.	It keeps the secret.		
Nol rapirà	Neither grade nor beauty		
Grado o beltà,	Will steal it,		$\mathbf{A}^1$
Tra là, là, là,	Tra là, là, là,	$b_{(2+2+2+2)}$	
Là, là, là, là.	Là, là, là, là.	Cadenza	
Oscar lo sa,	Oscar knows it,	$a_{(4)}$	
Ma nol dirà,	But he will not say,		
Là, là, là, là.[114]	Là, là, là, là.	$b'_{(4+4)}$	

in her interpretation of this aria or, one may assume, the intervention of the conductor. The first interventions consist in the addition of some portamentos and small triplets as substitutes for the octave notes (Figure 85).

114 *Tutti i libretti di Verdi*, ed. by Baldacci, p. 358.

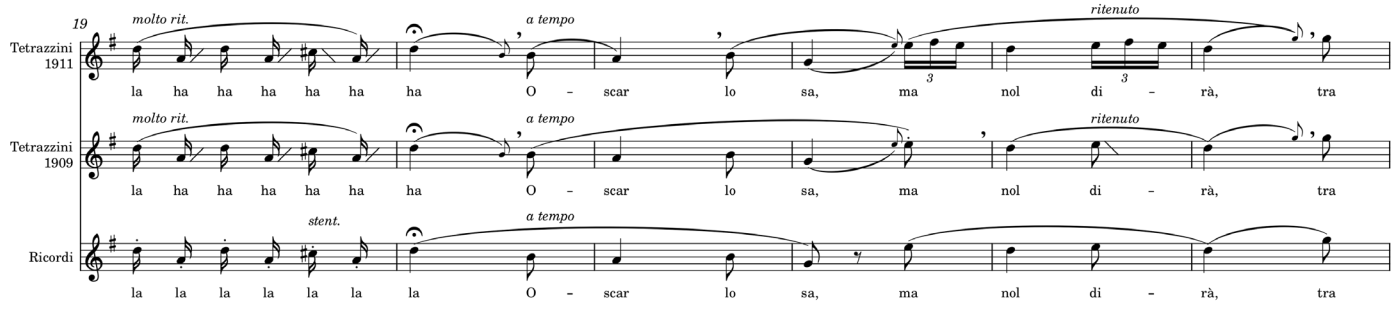

Figure 85 shows Tetrazzini's small modifications in the 'Canzone di Oscar' from Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*.

Similarly, the beginning of the repeat appears to be characterised by a more conspicuous presence of portamentos and small graces (Figure 86).

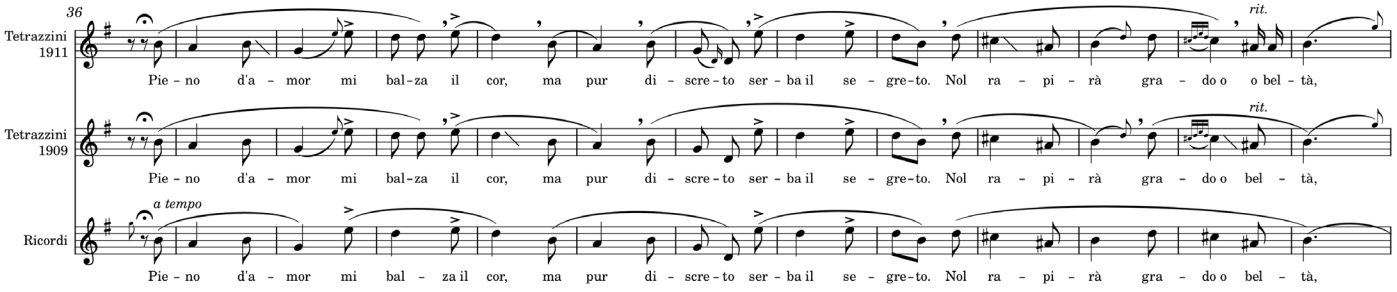

Figure 86 shows modifications sung by Tetrazzini in the repeat of the 'Canzone di Oscar'.

Of greater interest is the final cadenza, which illustrates, once more, the very peculiar vocal qualities and sparkling personality of the diva; it is a combination of high staccato notes leading up to the top D, which then descend and conclude with a chromatic passage (Figure 87).

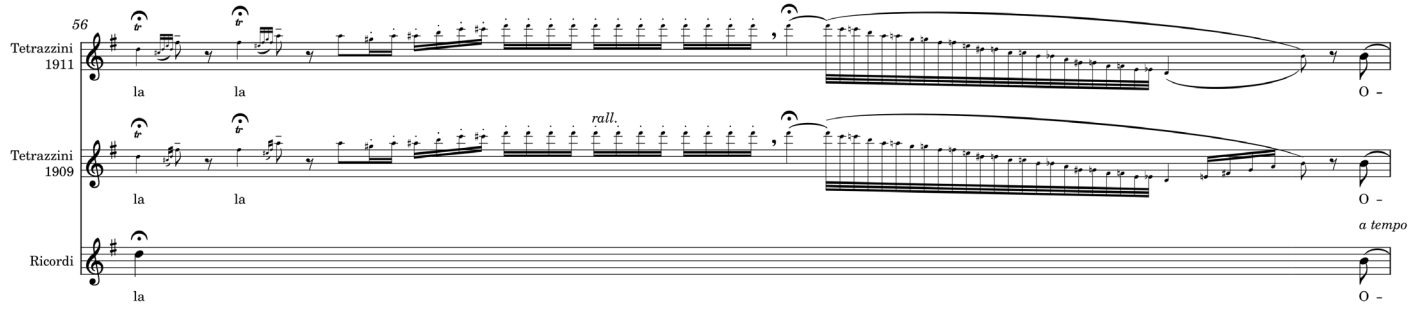

Figure 87 shows the cadenza sung by Tetrazzini in the 'Canzone di Oscar'.

The most striking quality of these interpretations lies in the agogic flexibility associated with the insertion of small nuances and a number of portamentos, which convey a sense of winking maliciousness. Of special interest, in this regard, is the peculiar timbre in the descending passage in measure 43 (G-D). The unevenness that was noted by some contemporary critics in the lower register, perhaps associated with the use of the voce bianca, is clearly audible in this very passage.

One single recording exists of 'Tacea la notte placida' from *Il trovatore*, which Tetrazzini recorded on 18 February 1913 with Walter Rogers (Matix C12918-1, Victor 88420, 6346; HMV 2-053084, DB 540). The 'Scena e Cavatina di Leonora' consists of the four main sections that were typical of the time and to which we commonly refer as solita forma. A first kinetic section 'Che più t'arresti' (Andante Mosso—Allegro) is followed by a lyric section, a so-called cantabile (Andante) whose structure is A-A^1; the first part is repeated to conclude with a short cadenza. This leads to a second kinetic dialogic section (Allegro Vivo) which leads to the final cabaletta (Allegro Giusto). The latter also consists of a main part followed by its repeat (A-A^1), thus inviting singers to show off the voice by adding new and more sparkling ornaments and roulades. In Tetrazzini's recording, not only are both kinetic sections (tempo d'attacco and tempo di mezzo) missing, but also the repeats of the main lyric moments, the Andante and the final cabaletta (Allegro Giusto). These cuts deprive us of what may have been the most interesting parts of her interpretation, that is to say those parts that were generally modified and embellished with ornaments. Tetrazzini adheres to the score and sings as written, the only exception being the final cadenza, where she shows off her voice by adding an ascending scale to reach the top E flat (Figure 88).

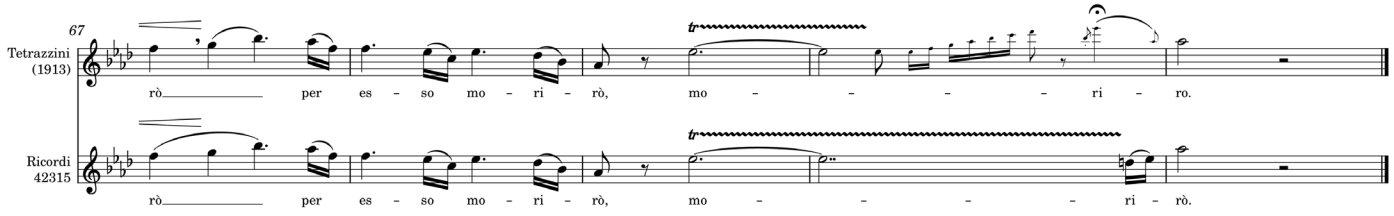

Figure 88 shows the ascending scale which concludes 'Tacea la notte placida' as sung by Tetrazzini.

Interpretative devices consisting of sparkling staccato passages in the high register, trills and messa di voce in the fermata were, we could say, idiomatic in Tetrazzini's style and typical of her very distinctive vocal technique.

One last recording comes from *I vespri siciliani*: Tetrazzini recorded 'Mercé dilette amiche' twice, on 2 November 1910 with Percy Pitt (Matrix 4577f, HMV 2-053033) and on 12 May 1914 with Walter Rogers (Matrix C14822-1, Victor 88504; HMV 2-053118, DB 529). Here Tetrazzini adheres to the text almost strictly and we find only two moments in which she allows herself some changes. The first is in the coda, where she inserts a puntatura in the descending passage from the C# to the A below the stave (beginning with 'D'ignoto amor mi balza'). The change, which allows her to avoid reaching the lowest and most uncomfortable register of the voice, can be heard also in Marcella Sembrich's and Giuseppina Huguet's discs. The second modification is the final candenza (Figure 89).

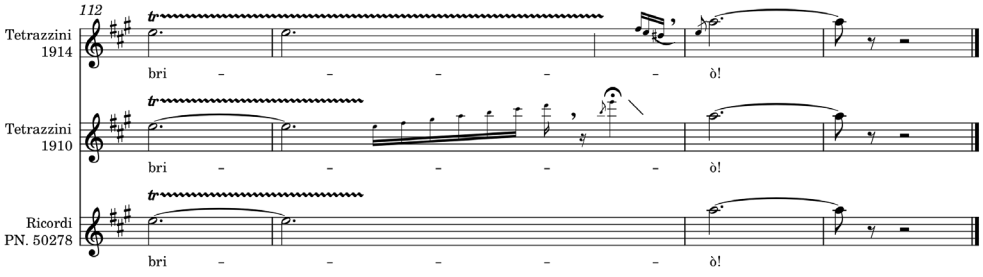

Figure 89 shows Tetrazzini's modifications in the closing measures of 'Mercé dilette amiche' from *I vespri siciliani*.

While in the 1910 rendition we recognise Tetrazzini's vocal hallmark, consisting in an ascending scale leading to the top E that ends with a portamento to the final note, in 1914 she sings the trill as written. In this case we see how much less courageous the later recording is when compared to the earlier one. This sort of regression towards a less acrobatic interpretative approach can be better understood once we consider that Tetrazzini was

now past her prime. Signs of this change were noted by some contemporary critics who, while appreciating the evenness she had developed in the lower register, suggested that her voice had lost some of the original splendour in the high compass.

> Her voice retains its peculiar bird-like quality and pleases by the wealth of vocal splendour and elasticity of expression. It shows some slight changes from the voice of a year or more ago. Her lower tones, once childish and distressingly thin, she has developed to a considerable degree. Last night they were full, vibrant and of definite quality. This gain has been made at some sacrifice of the pure coloratura quality of the upper register but the net gain in her singing is indisputable.[115]

A more precise idea of this change is offered by the critic of the *Boston Evening Transcript*, who reviewed Tetrazzini's impersonation of Gilda in Boston in December 1913 and suggested that she was now avoiding some of the top Es that were typical of her past interpretations.

> It is customary to say nowadays that Tetrazzini's voice is not what it used to be. Such a remark is likely to be made on every occasion, whether at the time it happens to be true or not. Last night it was certain that Gilda did not take her high E in the *Caro nome*. It also seemed that she was not always on the pitch; some said that she was sharp and others that she was flat; perhaps both were right, certainly both were uncomfortable.[116]

In 1914 the forty-three-year-old diva decided to conclude her operatic career and confine herself to solo concert recitals, which she continued to give until the 1930s.

The manner in which Tetrazzini approached Verdi's operas, especially if we consider Violetta and Gilda, seems to confirm the picture drawn when discussing Bellini. Despite the fact that Verdi's new style was understood as a threat to bel canto, these two operas soon came to be associated with the tradition and singers like Tetrazzini included them in their repertoire. What can be observed in her recordings is a gradual shift towards a less flourished vocal technique, combined with a more richly nuanced interpretation. Tetrazzini shows a clear understanding of Verdi's strong sense of drama, which she conveys by means of tempo modifications and by resorting to frequent use of portamento, as can be observed in her interpretations of Violetta's cantabile (Andantino) and Gilda's aria. Even, in a cabaletta like 'Sempre libera degg'io', which offers her the opportunity to show off the voice, Tetrazzini expresses Violetta's inner conflict and the sense of hysteria it conveys. In this regard, the traditional notion of bel canto is forced to its utmost limit in consideration of the character and the drama without trespassing on a more forceful vocal approach. Here, the triumph of free expression of feeling and passion over the canon of bel canto does not defy its principles but, instead, bends them to the needs of a different form of expressiveness.

115 *The Daily Advertiser*, 13 December 1913, quoted in Gattey, *Luisa Tetrazzini*, p. 182.
116 *Boston Evening Transcript*, 30 December 1913, quoted in Gattey, *Luisa Tetrazzini*, p. 184.