

9. How I portray madness

As stated in the introduction, my motivation for writing this research is a personal one. When I started singing “From Rosy Bowers” I found a lot of solutions for issues with my technique. For example, my breath lines were more even, intonation was clearer and my vibrato was more stable. I quickly realised that this came from the expression and the feelings I had to portray to sing this piece properly. This is now six years ago, and I think it was the first time I really realised how much of an importance text and knowledge of the piece in general means for a good performance. But, even with the work I put in at that time, I always felt there was something missing in my performance. I believe what was missing was the historical context.

I used the research on the 17th century madness and the 21st century madness to put together a performance of “From Rosy Bowers” that did both the historical way of performing and the modern audience justice. I decided to sing it in a historically informed way, but try to perform it in a way that made it so that the audience of today instantly would understand that this is about madness. In my recording I have tried to make a general portrayal that I think people of today could understand as madness, by using the movies previously mentioned, my training as a baroque style singer and the history of madness.

The first recording (2016) is from before I started to read about the genre of “Mad songs”, Purcell and d’Urfey or anything related to this theme. Here I am just singing the piece as it is written on the paper, without being informed about the style. I think it is a nice way of performing it, but that the madness is more or less undetectable in the performance. It is recorded as a nice concert piece with some variations, but not as a mad song. It should be stated that this recording was not intended for this research, but as an audition tape, so this of course plays a part in the way I performed the piece in this particular recording.

As you can see in the new recording (2018) I chose to cut the video for every section of the piece, as described in the analysis of the text and music, sullenly mad, mirthfully mad, melancholy madness, fantastically mad and stark mad. This was something I chose to do both so it is easy to follow the analysis while watching the recording, and so that I managed to properly show the different aspects of the madness in the piece. In a live performance it

would of course be performed as one continuous piece. In the old recording the whole piece is in one take. I will now give examples of the madness for every part in the piece.

Part 1 – Sullenly mad

The introduction of this piece is, as previously mentioned, in the style of a recitative. In my new recording of the piece I tried to keep the madness to come a secret in this part. You can see and hear hints of it in the quick changes and the lack of focus, but it is not necessarily perceived as a mad song for anyone listening. This is something I feel works very well, since it gives the piece even more depth.

Part 2 – Mirthfully mad

A joyous and cheerful part where Altisidora is asking the higher powers how she can charm like beauties goddess. Since she is asking the celestial beings for advice, I decided stand a bit further from the camera to get the feeling of more space and freedom. I also find it worth mentioning that I chose to go against my own analysis of the music and text. In the analysis I wrote: “The high tessitura, the downwards going intervals and the large upwards going leaps in the melody also contributes to this part having a more desperate, nervous and hysterical feel to it.” I still believe this might have been the intention behind the piece, but I chose to show Altisidora in a lighter more forward-thinking and positive way so that I could show different aspects of the madness in the piece.

Part 3 – Melancholy madness

This is where the madness is truly introduced. I placed this part of the song on the floor, to accentuate the feeling of resignation, hopelessness and incarceration. Personally I felt it was easier to play the madness in this position then when I was right in front of the camera. Something else I was trying to show was Purcell’s use of small and unprepared breaks and intervals. In this recording I interpreted them as something deeply uncomfortable, which I tried to show by not sitting too still in the same place, and not having the same focus point with my eyes for too long.

Part 4 – Fantastically mad

Altisidora has now given up on life. Still on the floor she is asking the Gods how she should die. What I tried to do in this section was to introduce a bit more of a scared feeling, that would lead her to eventually tear lose from the situation she is in. I also feel this made the part

more personal and private, at the same time as she is communicating with someone that is not really there. I think I managed to portray the feeling of incarceration both physical and psychological, in a convincing manner in this part. Another advantage with staging this part on the floor is that she is singing of laying in great discomfort on a bed of mud and on a cushion made of crystals. I think it is easier to relate to this while on the floor than if I would have been standing.

Part 5 – Stark mad

This part also starts in the style of a recitative, but quickly turns to a more arioso style. Here Altisidora has finally decided that love has no power over her anymore, and therefore she has also taken a stand against her madness. I chose to do this part standing to make it easier to portray a feeling of victory and freedom. What this does is maybe to tone down the madness a bit. It could have been interesting to record this part in a room that was a bit bigger, so that it would have been possible to move around more. I think it would have shown madness even more convincingly if I could have moved more.

I feel I succeed in showing the madness in this piece. It would of course have been easier had I had the opportunity to make the recording in a bigger room with more freedom to move, but I feel I made the recording work quite well with the space that I had.