

## Comparison of Three of the Most Prominent Types of Music Encountered in Italian High Baroque and Classical Era Opera

*Does not include instrumental numbers (overtures, marches, etc.), choruses, or vocal ensembles (duets, trios, quartets, etc.). Choruses and vocal ensembles were rare in High Baroque opera but became more frequent through the Classical period.*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>DRY RECITATIVE</b> <i>(recitativo secco)</i>	<b>ACCOMPANIED RECITATIVE</b> <i>(recitativo accompagnato)</i>	<b>ARIA</b>
<b>Function</b>	Advancing plot development quickly and efficiently. Equivalent to spoken dialogue in Singspiel, operetta or musical comedy.	Dramatic monologue that sets up and creates anticipation for aria. (Can sometimes be used on its own without aria following.)	Opportunity for lyrical expansion, exploring inner psychology of character.
<b>Temporal Sense</b>	Simulates normal time. Equivalent to dialogue in spoken play.	Sense of time slowing down, moving towards inner psychological time.	“Normal time” has stopped. Suspension of plot development. Entirely inner psychological time.
<b>Text</b>	Prose dialogue as in spoken play.	Still prose, but heightened diction and dramatic intensity. Pace of words slows down.	Written in verse with regular metrical scheme and rhymes. Few words over relatively long period of time. Same words are repeated, often over and over.
<b>Dramatic Context</b>	Usually dialogue between two or more characters. Use for soliloquies more rare, but possible.	Typically an impassioned soliloquy made up of disjointed exclamations generating the emotional heat that spills over into aria. Can, however, be used in dialogue with another character when heightened emotional resonance desired. Occasionally may be addressed to an audience of one or more characters (a king addressing his people). Accompanied recitative was traditionally reserved for gods, royals, or persons of noble birth. Emphasizes their grand status. This distinction, however, broke down more as the Classical era proceeded.	Typically sung by a character alone on stage, though sometimes addressed to others as a plea, narrative, etc.
<b>Melodic Character</b>	Flexibly follows normal speech	Still declamatory in style with free speech	Speech rhythm subordinated to

	patterns of Italian. Melodic profile is low and not particularly memorable. Much declamation on repeated notes and use of stereotyped melodic formulas.	rhythms, but somewhat more memorable melodic profile and moments of lyrical expansion. At times, can sound almost like aria, but melodies are always cut short and not allowed to flower.	song-like melodic patterns. Memorable melodies made up of repeated melodic motives, and whole stretches of melody will typically repeat.
<b>Tempo</b>	Tempo freely fluctuates in simulation of normal speech. Performer has great latitude to speed up or slow down for dramatic point.	Less free than dry recitative but not as regular as aria. Singer still has much interpretive latitude, but orchestral interjections are more strictly in tempo. Frequently a start-and-stop feeling as opposed to continuous flow.	Strict tempo mostly observed, especially at first to contrast with preceding recitative, but singer still has opportunity to slow down for held notes and expressive points. However, these fluctuations are now the exceptions rather than the rule.
<b>Instrumental Accompaniment</b>	Called dry recitative partly because of spareness of accompaniment which is limited to <i>basso continuo</i> (harpsichord or other keyboard instrument and cello playing baseline). Keyboard part is partly improvised. Most of actual singing is <i>a cappella</i> with widely spaced, simple chords punctuating. This provides singer maximum freedom for interpretation and also allows maximum audibility of rapidly delivered words.	Orchestral strings now accompany, and maybe other instruments add extra color. Addition of orchestral instruments lends new warmth and intensity of expression. Singer's lines tend to alternate with orchestral motives so that most of singing is still <i>a cappella</i> or, at most, over sustained string harmony. Orchestra can have fairly elaborate and memorable musical material that repeats through the monologue.	Fully accompanied throughout by at least strings and often other instruments, up to full orchestra. Creates a continuous bed of musical support to the lyrical, vocal line. Emphasizes sense of regular pulse and forward movement. Lends psychological comment to words and melody of singer. May anticipate or echo vocal lines and may double portions of vocal line for strategic emphasis. May also provide introductory material and postlude to sung content of aria.
<b>Harmonic Scheme</b>	Freely modulates from key to key. Clear, closed cadences withheld to maintain sense of momentum. End of recitative thus signaled by V- I cadence in key of ensuing number. Modulations and withheld cadences create pleasurable sense of suspense that is finally satisfied by start of	Still freely modulates and never comes to real sense of rest. Generates suspense and anticipation which are satisfied by clear sense of sustained home key when aria takes over. Somewhat similar in effect to slow introduction leading to <i>allegro</i> first movement of Classical era symphony that is a series of fragmentary suggestive	Aria is clearly set in a home key established at the outset. It may modulate to other keys following typical schemes depending on its formal design, but these all relate to the home key, and the aria will end with a clear, emphatic series of

	number.	gestures that create anticipation without ever really gelling into something that could stand on its own.	cadences in that key.
<b>Formal Musical Design</b>	Very free and dictated by plot development.	Still mostly free, but more sense of repeating elements and motives. More compelling sense of progress toward resolution at start of aria.	Clear, formal musical structure. A variety of schemes can be used, but they tend to follow well-known patterns. In the High Baroque era, <i>da capo</i> arias predominate. In the Classical era, a two-part <i>cavatina</i> becomes typical, closely related to the sonata form of instrumental music. This two-part <i>cavatina</i> design (frequently slower, more lyrical, and introspective) will often be followed by new, closing material that is faster, more extroverted, action-oriented, and gives greater scope for vocal display.

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