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**THE SINGING SELF:
AN EXPLORATION OF VOCALITY AND SELFHOOD
IN CONTEMPORARY VOCAL PRACTICE**

by

EMILY C. EAGEN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

2021

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Emily C. Eagen

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Musical Arts.

Date

Johanna Devaney

Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Norman Carey

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Norman Carey, Advisor

Eliot Bates, First Reader

Thomas Bogdan

Johanna Devaney

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

The Singing Self:

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by

Emily C. Eagen

Advisor: Norman Carey

Every vocal training technique relies on understandings of how a singer's "voice," both literal and metaphorical, participates in the act of interpreting the works of composers. Western classical singing, as codified by the early twentieth century, typically puts the singer in the role of the "medium" or "channel" for the composer. Later twentieth-century reactions promised liberation from the composer's "voice" with a validation of the singer's "authentic" or "natural" voice. This dissertation questions both sides of this binary and asks: what alternative models are possible? This work is in three parts. The first section provides an overview of pedagogical constructions of the singer's "self" and "voice." Next, an in-depth examination of singer and composer Cathy Berberian, whose collaborations with avant garde composers and use of expanded vocal techniques brought about new models for the relationships between composer and singer, singer and self. The final section of this work envisions new practices that draw upon the work of Berberian and others, seeking to offer contemporary singers tools for expanding artistic capacity and agency by exploring different understandings of the relationship between voice and self.

*I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Thomas Sherwood, my first voice teacher,
who passed away in November 2020.*

*Tom was a deeply creative and wonderfully alive artist, who recognized in my tortured teenage
self a love of music, poetry, and deep thought, and he nurtured these interests as he taught me
the fundamentals of singing. I feel so lucky to have been introduced to the field by such a
brilliant teacher and kindred spirit. To this day, I think of his words of wisdom and the twinkle in
his eye. He talked about singing as one of the great human acts, transmitting beauty, sorrow,
humor, mystery, and spiritual truth through the magical conversion of breath to song.*

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PREFACE

This thesis begins with a personal dilemma. As a teacher of singing, and as a singer, I am always looking for ways to instill confidence in my students and in myself. I search for ways to make a singer feel comfortable using his/her voice, gain ownership of the material and of the singing moment, and feel bolstered by a sense of purpose when he or she stands in front of an audience and endeavors to sing. My personal struggle has always been to feel confident being “expressive” (the meaning of which often eluded me) and resist feeling dominated by self-doubt, and I see this struggle in my students as well. I have come to understand how deeply entangled this struggle is with my personal history as a musician and artist. It was rooted in my early training as an instrumentalist learning to be expressive, and reinforced much later by voice teachers who, though they sought to help me, gave me mental frameworks for understanding the “self” in relation to singing that were often unsettling and estranging.

As a voice student, I recall two common practices of conservatory pedagogy that were used to encourage me and my peers to stand and deliver with confidence. The first of these is via the composition, and ultimately the composer. Singers were instructed to establish a deep connection with the material, know the song inside and out, along with all the stylistically-appropriate details that go with it, and somehow bond myself to the composer and his or her creation in such a way that when I finally got up to sing I would be channeling the original compositional voice. This approach involves a range of imaginative strategies: what did the composer intend? How did the composer bring the poetry to life? How is the composer using music to characterize the persona who is narrating the song? Voice pedagogy of this kind often involves phrases of the following sort: “Get out of your own way.” “Let the song speak for itself.” “You don’t need to

add anything.” “You disappear and we hear the voice of Bach.” These approaches and mantras are intended to be helpful. They are predicated on the assumption that the piece is my source of strength, imagination, and energy, and I need not overdo it. Yes, as a student singer, I must feel intimidated by the hallowed greats, but if I just “get out of the way” and let the composer speak, I have done my job.

When I attempted this approach, I remember, as young singer, feeling frustrated that there was no room for “me,” because the composer and poet had taken up 100% of the voice. Being this kind of medium or channel was, I believe, supposed to fill me with a sense of security and purpose. In fact, as a student, I usually found this approach to drain me of agency. The act of emptying out and waiting for the compositional voice to fill me with its power left me feeling passive and uninspired, unable to make expressive choices on my own, always waiting for an outside spirit to inhabit and animate me. Like a limp marionette, I waited for the composer to lift my strings, with no forward momentum of my own.

If I did feel a sense of a “me” as I sang in this mode, it was a kind of idealized, imagined version of the person who would feel comfortable singing in such a way. Donning a gown and stepping onto a recital stage, I remember thinking of the historical recitalists I knew who felt at home in this clothing, and who wrote about their inspired collaborations with Romantic-era composers where the singer served as muse. Through this kind of historical role-play I could imagine a singer for whom this role as channel would feel fulfilling, and I could animate myself with her graceful gestures, pleasing smiles, and elegant way of posing beside a piano to gaze reverently into the distance. I am not trying to belittle or delegitimize these imagined singers (and it is

important to note that this was based on only a gloss of historical information), only to say that in order to feel comfortable co-existing with the composer's voice on stage, I habitually took refuge in becoming my idealization of a classical singer. This gave me some sense of "being there" on stage, but in a way that is already costumed, already an altered self. I could find a degree of confidence and even freedom in this persona, but it was alienating. The inquisitive liberal arts student, the women's studies minor, the folk singer, the Midwesterner in me did not have a place on stage, and could not be reconciled with the practice of channeling a composer's voice. I found that I was increasingly plagued by the questions these other parts of me had about the music I was singing and the way I was being taught to experience it. This part of my "self" had no explicit place in my studies as a classical singer. The politics of identity could not seem to pry open and help me transform my experience as a vocal practitioner. Had I said to my teachers, "Can today's vocalises incorporate a feminist perspective?" for example, I believe this would have been met with bewilderment and led nowhere.

I want to stress that all of my teachers were well-intentioned, caring, and strong pedagogues. I don't consider this dynamic to be a result of either their individual intentions or my own, but more a product of the larger tradition of classical vocal training. I was often very connected to my teachers and felt a kinship with them, and I didn't want to raise uncomfortable issues with them. A wish to be an obedient and good student, coupled with an internalized sense that a teacher is always correct, exacerbated self-doubt on my part, and made it difficult for me to communicate with my teachers about my experiences as a student. I couldn't speak openly with them about what I might do to feel more integrated and fully present as a classical singer.

My struggles with these constraints of traditional classical pedagogy led me to seek out both teachers and genres that incorporated other approaches. It is here that I experienced the second category of strategies used by teachers to nurture self-confidence in their students: the “real self” ideology of singing. In broad historical terms, this approach was largely a mid-twentieth century reaction to the experience of self-erasure I describe above, and is prevalent in pedagogical methods that purport to be part of a contemporary attempt to move beyond what is constraining and outdated about an earlier approach to singing. (As I will detail later, this is somewhat of a fictional narrative of the history of singing, told in hindsight. Throughout the history of western singing, multiple approaches to singing and the “self” have existed, although it is true at various times certain ideologies have prevailed.) This “real self” approach to vocal pedagogy involves images of uncovering, unlocking, excavating the “real” voice that has been hidden, even imprisoned, behind classical training. The effort of a teacher in this approach is usually to help a student slough off the things the student has acquired in his or her singing that are “artificial” and get to the voice “inside” that, as affirmed by the teacher, sounds like the student’s “true” voice. Sometimes, particularly with a younger student, this “real voice” approach comes with helping a student emerge from a nascent stage, finding a way of singing that is more powerful, more assertive, more fully activated than before, as he or she overcomes psychological and physical blocks and makes the transition from youth to adult, or student to pre-professional. This style of pedagogy often makes use of the mind/body split, with the body as the locus of “truth.” Common phrases I remember hearing from pedagogues using this approach include, “Now, that’s the real you!” and, “You have much more voice in you than you think you do.” I was often told, “Put it in your body” and “I want to hear Emily in there!” and, perhaps the most perplexing to me, “Get out of your own way.”

As a young singer I was very drawn to this approach, and, at least temporarily, I benefited from the power it gave me. I felt buoyed by a sense of purpose as I searched for my real voice. This approach makes powerful promises for both the voice and the self. When I teach, I find that the stock phrases of this style of pedagogy are on the tip of my tongue, especially when a student suddenly sings a phrase with more resonance, relaxation, and forward motion. If he or she suddenly finds more capacity through a combination of muscular and vocal coordination adjustments, I want to applaud and validate this by saying, “Now that’s the real you!” and have to stop myself from turning a moment of expansion into a moment of re-imprisonment.

Because, although well-intentioned, this “real voice” narrative is highly problematic for two reasons: 1) It leads to psychologically invasive, authority-oriented pedagogy, 2) it is, simply, not true. The scientific reality of the voice is that any one voice possesses sonic possibilities that are incredibly vast, and it is difficult to prove that any one timbral aspect of a voice is something someone is born with and remains untouched by culture. If there is a part of the voice that is somehow organically, naturally, unalterably “you,” it is so minute in comparison with what the voice can do that it is rendered meaningless. To focus on a vocal “core” or “center” is a romantic notion of the voice-self connection that has limited use in helping a singer move forward, because it will actually be ever-changing, a slippery act of self-performance rather than a fixed marker of identity. And to receive outside confirmation from a teacher as to what this core or center is re-establishes an authority-oriented approach to singing, even in genres and schools of thoughts that seek to avoid this.

A colleague and I were discussing these issues as we rehearsed for a vocal improvisation performance, and she said she feels that every person's voice has a "sonic thumbprint" that is unique, and no matter what they did they would not be able to entirely rid themselves of this. As she put it, it's the part of your voice "your mother would always recognize," because it has been with you since you were in your mother's womb. I found myself longing for that sense of "self" in my singing. How it would help me to believe that this were true! And, yet, since I do not, my struggle as a singer, and ultimately my path as a singer has largely been shaped by what I now realize is a quest for an alternative model to those described above. As a singer who divides my time between four broad areas of singing—classical, early, contemporary, and American folk—I have experienced the limits of these prior models, and— most importantly— it is constantly revealed to me that there is great variance in the way a singer can be taught to perceive his or herself in relation to the composer and the music. This denaturalizes any one model as reality, and exposes the cultural narratives at work when a singer stands up and performs a song. It also makes it very apparent that the narratives we, as singers and teachers, use to describe the singing experience are extremely influential. These narratives shape a singer's understanding of his or her voice and body. If a singer's relationship to body, voice, and self are not investigated and deconstructed, unarticulated assumptions can dramatically limit both technical progress and artistry. A singer's range, vocal timbral choices, vowel and consonant production, sense of musical gesture, and stylistic choices are all inflected by culture and, in my view, benefit from being mindful of various social and political aspects of identity, not removed from them.

To find support for my thoughts and questions as a young student, I was drawn to critical theory in the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology that investigated the experience of

performance. If I was, as some teachers suggested, too much “in my head,” it seemed to me that my head could also become a source of liberation. I remember being moved to tears by passages in feminist musicological writings where the authors described their own formative experiences as young musicians. These first encounters with critical theory spoke to my heart as a young singer just as deeply as the text of any art song. This launched a personal journey that, ultimately, became a professional one. My desire to inspire students (and myself!) became fused with a quest to have an open dialogue about important issues of identity, authority, creativity, and expression that constantly arise in pedagogy and performance today. I maintain a belief that greater artistry and renewed joy can come from having these conversations. This dissertation seeks to meld the worlds of performance and theory in such a way that feels pressing and relevant to anyone who sings. My hope is that the issues raised feel contemporary and meaningful for practitioners across genres, and can begin conversations that will deepen our connections to the art of singing.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Quest for a New Vocality

In the past seventy years, the study of “voice” as a category of academic inquiry has blossomed, both within and outside the field of music, incorporating explorations of embodiment, identity, performativity, and other philosophical and theoretical concepts. Sometimes termed “vocality” or “vocality studies,” these explorations have expanded the ways scholars think about the relationship of the voice to the body, the voice to music, and the voice to the self. Meanwhile, the practice of classical voice lessons has continued its long, hallowed tradition, as new generations of singers rise from amateur to professional and receive training from teachers and coaches to refine and expand their singing capacities.

How much do the fields of voice studies and vocal practice intersect? Less than one might think. For example, a singer enrolled in serious vocal study in a degree program in the United States would likely find that the theoretical topics covered in a performance theory course have little or no place in the actual experience of singing scales and preparing a concert of Schubert songs for a degree recital. While I and many other students have yearned for some overlap, there remains a significant divide between voice studies and vocal practice. Applications may vary from studio to studio, but the perspective shifts that come from encountering new intellectual ideas about voice and vocality seem, by and large, not to be given their full weight in the practical experience of training the voice.

Of course, any student can seek to make such connections herself, but what if instead these connections were made explicit in the lesson? What if it were the voice teacher’s mission to

incorporate vocality studies directly into the practice of teaching singing? What if it were the singer's job to reflect upon the shifting discourses on voice that take place in our culture and allow these understandings to affect her singing and her role as an artist? And, most centrally, how might it alter and expand artistic possibilities for singers to denaturalize the inherited understandings of the relationship between the "voice" and the "self," and imagine new relationships between these categories?

Contemporary music singers might particularly benefit from such explorations, moving in step with composers who are also responding to the cultural and intellectual concerns of the present. In particular, notions of the "self" in relationship to performance, artistry, and expression have expanded dramatically in the last century, notably in other performance fields such as theatre. Contemporary music often reveals opportunities for re-envisioning the relationship of the voice to the self in ways that might be useful to singers in any genre. However, to believe that these explorations are worth pursuing, we must first take seriously the premise that singing contemporary music differs from classical music not only in technique, but in mindset. We must also be curious about how performing classical music from a contemporary perspective inspires a new, distinct set of training and performance practices that might challenge and even contradict those of the *bel canto* tradition.

Cathy Berberian's "New Vocality"

One singer who felt very strongly that these differences were worth investigating was the renowned twentieth-century avant garde singer Cathy Berberian. Berberian's performance career, when viewed in conjunction with her writings and recorded interviews, offers a powerful example of the potential for singers to be transformed to the core by a new way of approaching

the act of singing. In 1966, Berberian published a brief, powerful manifesto called “The New Vocality in Contemporary Music” in the Italian music journal *Discoteca*.¹ The essay, written in a revolutionary tone that typified the 1960s, was a rousing call-to-action for contemporary singers: Berberian urged singers to break from tradition and engage in the radical act of redefining and expanding what it means to use the voice. Berberian felt that it was the responsibility of the contemporary singer to adopt this “New Vocality” as a response to the technological and creative innovations that had shaped music in the first half of the twentieth century. At the time she wrote this, Berberian was at the height of her international career as a performer of contemporary vocal music and believed herself to have expert, first-hand knowledge of what this expanded “New Vocality” should be. She wrote with a sense of urgency and passion about the aesthetic and cultural developments that she felt should be influencing singers in this new era, as well as the potential for singers to not just respond, but actually lead the way in innovation. She called upon singers to reimagine not only the practice of singing, but also their potential agency as artists through an expanded role in the creative process.

Of essential significance to my exploration are the implications of the “New Vocality” for the interior, psychological, physical, and even metaphysical experience of the singer. Berberian believed that taking to heart the innovations of the era would redefine our understanding of “voice” and “vocality” in a fundamental way, and her essay is filled with intimations of what these changes might be. Berberian’s shift from the word “voice” to the word “vocality” was a critical move and an intentional choice in order to expand the reader’s understanding of the role and identity of the singer. For Berberian, “voice” implied a self-contained, fixed, and stable

¹ Cathy Berberian, “La Nuova Vocalità Nell’Opera Contemporanea,” *Discoteca* 62 (1966): 34-35.

entity. Alternately, “vocality” indicated that the voice is always in flux, and the vocal act is a nexus of transmission between multiple points of meaning in a continuously shifting process. She described this fluid, action-oriented aspect of vocality as operating in three ways: the voice captures and reproduces the extra-musical sounds of the physical world; it communicates the pre-verbal, meaning-filled qualities of vocal production itself; and it incorporates the experience and expression of the body.

Berberian’s shift from “voice” to “vocality” is a shift away from two traditional understandings of the voice. First, this shift requires moving beyond thinking of the voice as an object or an entity to thinking of voice, or vocality, as a performative act. This leads Berberian to a highly elastic approach to the voice, playing with a wide variety of sounds, including the extended vocal techniques that were part of her signature style. It also led her to play freely with the concept of meaning, sometimes shifting away from commonly held associations of sounds with specific feelings or intentions. For example, does a cry really indicate sadness? If so, on the part of whom? The singer? The composer? Or is it just a cry without necessary meaning? These kinds of questions are constantly provoked by Berberian’s performance choices and will be explored in greater depth in subsequent sections.

Second, Berberian’s shift to “vocality” is a shift away from voice-as-self. At the beginning of her essay she states, “the voice is something more than an instrument, precisely because it is inseparable from its interpreter.”² Although this implies a close entanglement between voice and self, I feel the word “interpreter” is critical here in revealing Berberian’s point of view. Although the voice is housed in the body and is entangled with the singer using it, the singer is still an

² Berberian, 35.

“interpreter” of the voice, one step removed from being synonymous with the self. The “voice,” or, perhaps more accurately, “vocal process,” is an act that the singer engages with, making use of the mechanism rather than being synonymous with it. This distinction will become critical later when I explore held concepts about the voice being the sonic equivalent of the self and the aural proxy for the body.

By redefining the voice as a performative act, and by disentangling the concepts of “voice” and “self,” Berberian’s approach provokes questions of self-examination for contemporary singers. Who am I when I sing? What is the relationship between my voice and my body? Is there a “me” in my voice? Does this “me” shift? Am I singing from a “self” of some kind? From my body? From anything at all? Simply by denaturalizing the category of “voice” Berberian opens up new possibilities for singers as musicians and as artists, which is her overall intention in “The New Vocality.” She begins a conversation about the different ways the voice can function in tandem with both the body and the concept of “self,” yielding unforeseen creative results in doing so.

Using Berberian’s writing as a point of inspiration, my objective in this dissertation is to further examine perceptions of the categories of “voice” and “self” and to ask how these perceptions affect singing, both for a singer engaged in the act of singing and for a teacher transmitting ideas about singing to others. I will seek to create links between the worlds of practical performance and critical theory on issues that arise when investigating the relationship between voice and self: this includes topics such as embodiment, identity, and self-expression. Ultimately, my goal is to offer ideas for practical and pedagogical use by exploring concepts of critical theory and how they can become pressing and relevant to practitioners and teachers of singing.

Voice as metaphor

As Berberian's article demonstrates, one of the richest ways to investigate this topic is to destabilize "voice" as a category. The complexity of discussing and working with concepts of "voice" and "vocality" is comprehensively laid out by Amanda Weidman in her article "Anthropology and Voice."³ Weidman traces metaphorical and symbolic notions embedded in the seemingly literal uses of the word "voice" in Western culture. Her article surveys recent work in a range of fields that illustrate how, far from being a simple mechanical concept, "voice" as a category is complex, metaphorical, and ideological. Weidman employs, investigates, and deconstructs the category of "voice" as it is culturally used, exploring "where and when 'voice' becomes a salient metaphor and what is at stake in it. [The study of 'voice'] should inquire into how practices involving the voice...support these metaphorical elaborations."⁴ Similar to Berberian, Weidman outlines the possibilities that open up by deconstructing conventional concepts about the voice. She discusses three "metaphorical elaborations" of the concept of voice that are particularly useful in furthering an understanding of the complexities of vocal training: voice as the revelation of an inner self, voice as a conveyor of truth, and voice as evidence of authenticity.

According to Weidman, Western metaphysical and linguistic traditions often link the voice to the concept of an inner self. In modern Euro-Western culture, Weidman observes that conceptions of what she terms the "speaking subject," meaning the combination of self and voice, "rely not only on the idealization of rationality, but also on the notion of an inner voice that stands for instinct

³ Amanda Weidman, "Anthropology and Voice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 37-51.

⁴ Weidman, 38.

and emotional life.”⁵ A “voice” is often assumed to be synonymous with the “self,” or to serve as evidence and confirmation of the existence of a “self” inside a body—what Weidman terms a “guarantor of truth and self-presence.”⁶ The “self-presence” component is evidenced by the fact that we use phrases such as “giving voice” or “having a voice” to express identity, either individual or collective. In fact, Weidman claims that “the voice expresses self and identity and that agency consists in having a voice.”⁷ Thus, it is nearly impossible to separate “voice” from “self” and each concept relies on the other to be understood. With singing, this observation helps to illuminate the particular weight we assume when we perform: one is not merely tasked with singing a song, but in the act of singing one can “speak out” or “express” the self. Perhaps this is such an obvious connection that it seems strange to think it could be otherwise, for in both performative and non-performative realms we are taught that there is a “self” entwined with the “voice.”

Some teachers and music therapists go a step further and treat the act of singing as a form of self-expression that has therapeutic benefits, whereby using the voice we heal the self. Whether or not this is true, one of the intentions of this dissertation is to draw attention to these associations as constructions, not foregone conclusions. What happens if we release the voice from a notion of “inner life” and the sanctity of interiority, challenging what Weidman calls the “notion of an inner voice that stands for instinct and emotional life?”⁸ To some extent, as will be addressed in

⁵ Weidman, 39.

⁶ Weidman, 39.

⁷ Weidman, 39.

⁸ Weidman, 39.

later chapters, our conceptualization of the “voice” is tied to the debate about whether the voice is an interior organ, like a lung or kidney, or an exterior part of the body, like a limb or brow, which bear the marks of cultural influence through the ways in which we have learned to hold and use them. According to Weidman, discourses on “voice” rest on dichotomous thinking about the inner and outer selves, in which the inner is the “true” self, struggling against external forces. “Finding your voice” serves as a stand-in for a struggle between self and society, as a “central vehicle for this modern interiorized self.”⁹

As a “guarantor of truth” the voice is intertwined with notions of truth in complex ways.

Weidman points out that Western traditions tend to distinguish the physical aspects of the voice from the content the voice is producing, so that the timbre, texture, and other sonic properties of the voice can be perceived as disconnected from, and subordinate to, the more rational and pure transmission of speech. Weidman refers to this as a “decoupling of voice and vocality”¹⁰ and an “opposition between music and language.”¹¹ In Weidman’s analysis, both the physical properties of the voice and the content conveyed through the voice are thought to represent “truths,” but of two different kinds. A voice which sounds less “muddied” by vernacular idioms, rough timbres, or markers of wear and work, is considered to be more rational, “purified of unnecessary associations and suited to expressing ‘universal’ concepts.”¹² Such a voice might be thought, for example, to be ideal for perfectly conveying a poetic text through song. This style of vocal

⁹ Weidman, 39.

¹⁰ Weidman, 40.

¹¹ Weidman, 39.

¹² Weidman, 39.

production is highly valued, especially when coupled with markers of high culture and training that elevate a sense that it is conveying authoritative truth. On the other hand, Weidman notes that Western culture has an ongoing fascination with the voice “inside” or the voice that seems to have a body attached to it. We think we hear the body in the sound when we hear qualities we describe as roughness, texture, or coarseness, or when we think a voice has a specific, unmistakable sound that is uniquely produced by a particular body. These qualities of embodiment and specificity are also seen as carrying a level of “truth” in that we think we are hearing an intimate, innate, and specific self. Operating on various axes, the effort in a voice lesson is often about working with this culturally-constructed tension between inner and outer, between different versions of the “truth” and “voice.”

Finally, “voice” is often a site for exploring ideas of what is “authentic” versus “artificial” in a person’s voice and, by association, in the person themselves. Often, the study of voice is framed as an act of struggle in which a singer wrestles with competing identities in search of the one that is most authentic. The idea that the voice should come from within and that it conveys our “self” or our “truth” makes it difficult to work on the craft of singing without continuously monitoring the ways in which learned skills might conceal or obstruct what is “real.” Weidman describes the process of learning physical habits that often accompany singing, such as the gesture of closing the eyes to convey sincerity.¹³ Akin to an acting tool, a teacher might propose this option to a singer as a way to trigger a dramatic association for his/her singing or for the audience. However, in the training process, closing the eyes is often posed as something that should only happen if one is moved to do it and the singer must determine if his/her impulse to use the gesture is an

¹³ Weidman, 41.

authentic one. The singer is caught in a struggle to figure out what is “real” versus what is manufactured. When the idea of skill-building is suspect and considered artificial it becomes paradoxical to try to train to sing and yet also somehow feel “pure” and able to express authentically. Weidman makes it clear that the loaded nature of the vocabulary used to teach and talk about voice makes it challenging, and ultimately in some cases prohibitive, to be playful with concepts of artificiality and authenticity. Furthermore, the entanglement of “voice” with “self” makes it difficult for a teacher to keep vocal training separate from a wish to help their students in the development of authentic personhood. Sometimes it is appropriate and highly meaningful to combine personal and vocal development. However, there are also times when “depersonalizing” the study of singing can open up great realms of growth. Not only might this process of depersonalization help to decouple the voice from “self” or “truth,” but it would help challenge any assumptions that the art of singing must necessarily be an act of personal struggle between competing identities and competing selves. If a teacher does want to co-mingle vocal and personal development of a student, it should be done with intention and involve the creation of respectful boundaries and an awareness of the sensitive nature of the interaction. This dissertation asserts that one way to further the practice of singing for both teacher and student is to investigate any presumed connections between “voice” and “self” at work in the process of learning how to sing.

Weidman explores how popular singers throughout history have worked with these various metaphors for voice to great effect. She weaves in another metaphorical function of “voice” within the public sphere, where a particularly well-known voice can function as “the voice” of a community. She describes how singers as different from one another as Jenny Lind in the 1850s in the US and Umm Kulthum in Egypt in the twentieth century gained popularity and affection

from audiences by being viewed as representatives of their social and cultural backgrounds. Popular singers, she claims, “are felt to embody, and sonically manifest, particular values” and can “channel public affect and structure feeling.”¹⁴ Singers such as Lind and Kulthum achieved great success by maximizing the power of this dual understanding of voice as both an apparatus for individual expression and a channeling of collective sentiment. Weidman points to the fact that, despite the fact that these singers were working very consciously with constructed notions of “voice” and “self,” the result was that they successfully projected “authentic,” seemingly unconstructed identities that allowed them to create sincere and meaningful connections with audiences. Rather than experiencing the metaphors and paradoxes of singing as constraints, they were able to manipulate these constructions and make use of them. In the cases of these superstar singers, as was true with Cathy Berberian, the freedom to play with both their identities and their voices opened up realms of performance that had great cultural power.

Voice and self

What can singers learn from investigating the relationship between the “voice” and the “self?” What are inherited models of the singing “self” that run throughout classical vocal pedagogy? How do these models affect a singer’s capacity to interpret, express, and perform? What are some contemporary models for thinking about the “self” and “voice” or “vocality” that might be applied to vocal practice and pedagogy? How would these models complement and enhance earlier understandings of the way “voice” and “self” relate to one another? These are the central inquiries of this dissertation. By beginning a conversation with performers and pedagogues, I

¹⁴ Weidman, 45.

hope to investigate aspects of our singing identities that might go unchallenged and open up new realms of thought and perspective that might lead to expansions in practice.

This chapter has set the stage for what it might mean to seek a “New Vocality” for the contemporary singer. The second chapter is an investigation of a series of ideological constructions of the categories of “voice” and “self” that emerge in classical pedagogy. This includes models of two orientations: other-oriented models, in which the composer, teacher, or some other cultural authority is thought to be given voice through the person singing, and self-oriented models, in which the singer focuses on bringing his or her “self” forward through the act of singing.

The third and fourth chapters offer a deeper investigation into the vocal practices of singer Cathy Berberian and how she deployed some alternative models for conceiving of the relationship between “voice” (or “voices”) and “self” (or “selves”). In particular, I examine the ways in which she detaches the voice from the self and challenges assumptions about how the voice is a “natural” expression of a body or a self. A closer read of “The New Vocality” helps to illustrate the transformative potential of these alternative models. Then, through a discussion of Berberian’s performance choices in “Folk Songs” by Luciano Berio, I will demonstrate how Berberian was able to expand her performative choices through an alternative sense of “voice” in relation to the self. Her use of vocal timbres, in particular, demonstrates what is possible when a singer is not married to the idea of a singular vocal identity and can play with vocal production without ever offering a vocal color that seems to be her singular, “true” voice.

In concluding, I will suggest additional ways these expanded understandings of the “voice” and “self” can enrich our approach to singing as a whole. I will draw from examples in my own

practice as a performer and teacher. I will imagine ways that the investigation of the voice and self can be useful in thorny areas of pedagogy, such as power dynamics between teacher and student, struggles with stage fright, and the act of genre-crossing. In this final section, I hope to articulate concepts and practices that I can use in my own teaching and share with others in the field.

CHAPTER TWO

Models of Singer Selfhood

Before moving to a vision of a “New Vocality” in practice, it is important to trace the inherited traditions of classical vocal pedagogy and to identify the ideologies of the self that are embedded in these practices. First, I will consider three “outer” models of the singing self, prevalent in late-nineteenth century pedagogy and continuing in classical vocal practice today. In these models, the self is conceived of in one of two ways: as sharing a space with another “voice,” such as a composer or poet, or as a representative of a more generalized identity associated with race, gender, and/or class. Then I will consider three “inner” models of the singing self, which originated in the twentieth century largely out of impulses to slough off outer-directed models in the search for something “authentic” or personal. I will discuss how these narratives prescribe relationships to authority, rely on key metaphors for singing and the self, and are encoded with concepts of race, gender, the body, and the voice. Such concepts pervade Western culture and are constructed and solidified through the act of performance. Rather than functioning as fixed positions, these models of selfhood are strategically deployed by both singers and teachers to inspire a variety of connections with a piece of music or an expressive or communicative concept. However, though predicated on the promise of a certain degree of agency, the ideologies embedded in these models often limit the creative possibilities for a person assuming the role of singer. Furthermore, sometimes pedagogical approaches set these ideas of selfhood in conflict with one other, so that a singer’s path is obstructed by conflicting notions of the “self” and what is either real or artificial, binding or liberating, original or derivative when he or she sings. In teaching, this practice relies on a tired set of binaries, rather than allowing for a more nuanced and curiosity-based approach to creativity. In discussing these models, I will reveal both

their origins and functions as social constructs and envision ways to move beyond them in both singing practice and pedagogy.

The obedient voice

I turn first to a text that has been foundational for me for the past twenty years: an article written in 1994 by musicologist Suzanne Cusick entitled “Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance.”¹⁵ Cusick’s premise is that a classical singer is trained with an orientation to the composer’s intentions in a way that seems to go without saying, enacting “the hidden assumption of faithful performance...the ideology of faithful performance.”¹⁶ The assumption is that the composition is a fixed text with undisputed meaning and it is the singer’s job to faithfully render this meaning in performance. This is problematic, Cusick asserts, for two reasons: it is a reenactment of a (frequently gendered) power relationship of obedience, and it can prevent modern listeners and performers from relating to, and even accepting, works that have problematic meanings on a textual or musical level. In an analysis of Schumann’s song cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Cusick wonders if there is a way to reclaim troubling, anachronistic compositions by allowing the performer to alter the meaning through performance choices, asking if “it is possible to imagine resisting performers as well as resisting listeners.”¹⁷

Cusick explores the authority-oriented ideology of classical music training that begins in childhood when students are taught to play written notation with accuracy. She describes how a

¹⁵ Suzanne G. Cusick, “Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance,” *Repercussions* 3, No.1 (1994): 77.

¹⁶ Cusick, 80.

¹⁷ Cusick, 80.

student might ultimately be encouraged to play “with feeling” and “interpret” music, but how such liberties are permitted only after the student has been so thoroughly trained in a style that the expression of what might be considered a “foundational Self” is actually a cultural construction, the sum of what he or she has been trained to do. Because the urgings to play “with feeling” (ostensibly engaging the “self”) and yet also “musically” (ostensibly engaging our trained sensibilities) are “elided and left ill-defined,”¹⁸ Cusick argues that a student is often left with no true ability to distinguish between what comes from their own feelings and what comes from “feelings that had originated somewhere else, in someone else.”¹⁹ This kind of pedagogy, nested within a musical culture that is predicated on authority and obedience, makes it particularly difficult for a singer to perform in a way that is neither reverent nor rebellious, but something beyond. Performance, Cusick claims, is where this training culminates in a “ritual of obedience”²⁰ enacted through both musical and social rules with consent from both performer and audience, who mutually share in and create meaning by enacting this ritual.

To explore the ways in which the voice of the composer interacts with the voice of the singer Cusick draws upon the work of Edward T. Cone. Cone theorized that a “vocal persona” exists in a song, which is found in the vocal line.²¹ According to Cone, the composer speaks through a combination of the vocal persona and the musical accompaniment:

Cone tells me in *The Composer's Voice* that pieces have personae, personae that are not to be confused with the composer's actual Self but that nonetheless are understood to

¹⁸ Cusick, 86.

¹⁹ Cusick, 87.

²⁰ Cusick, 81.

²¹ Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (University of California Press, 1974).

speak with the composer's voice. Thus, Cone would not have me "become" Brahms. Instead, I am to interpret the persona created by the composer as his voice, and I am to do it by making choices.²²

Cusick notes that Cone offers some agency to singers by viewing them as the interpreters of the vocal line, but she also recognizes the subordinate language in his writings. "While Cone seems to grant me agency to make choices about what is significant and what is not, he very strongly believes that my choices should result in a sound structure, a persona, that seems to be a unified whole."²³ According to Cusick, Cone allows for choices, but strongly favors those that help faithfully transmit the ideas of the composer and that subsume the vocal line into a performance that benefits the whole, ultimately conveying the most important "voices" of the work: the composer and the composition.

Notions of servitude pervade both the practice of voice pedagogy and writings about pedagogy. It is a common trope to hear a teacher speak of erasing the self to become "in service" to the music. This approach is supposed to eliminate the anxieties of the ego by making performing "not about you" but about delivering the composer's message or serving the work. In my own experience, and in discussing and observing this strain of thought as it is deployed in pedagogy, I have found that this approach at its most extreme will paralyze the singer. At minimum, it is confusing. What does it actually mean to "serve" the composer through a performance? What is the artistic or creative role for a singer who attempts to do this? As Cusick points out, the options for expression become extremely limited by the time one has been granted permission to "interpret" a song. As a consequence, the difference between one singer's performance and the

²² Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work," 93.

²³ Cusick, 95.

next appear minimal to an outside observer. The imperative to give a faithful performance of both the score and the composer's presumed intentions is so strong that any individual impulses are not conceived of as the free creative terrain of the singer, but rather are immediately measured on a spectrum of rebellion: if the performer is not rendering a completely predictable version of a song, he or she is potentially doing something outlandish. How different would it be if this notion of a "faithful" version did not exist in the first place and singers were given more latitude (or even saw it as their role) to put a personal stamp on the work from the beginning? One only has to look to other genres, such as pop or folk music, to see the breadth of interpretations that derive from any one song. The expectations within these genres are so different from classical expectations that it is almost seen as embarrassing or unimaginative to simply reproduce a melody without any significant changes to the notes or phrasing.

In "Beyond the Interpretation of Music," Lawrence Dreyfus examines historical notions of performance and interpretation, providing a genealogy of modern-day concepts of these terms.²⁴ Dreyfus offers a number of examples, beginning in the nineteenth century when the word "interpretation" was used to create an elevated notion of what it meant to give a "serious" performance of classical music. The word "interpretation" imbued performance with the mark of being divinely inspired, perhaps even directly channeling the original "voice" of the composer, or at least graced with dignity and profundity that separated it from a banal rendering. Dreyfus denaturalizes the term "interpret" by showing that it was not always the primary model for performance. For example, in the Middle Ages, performers were thought of as fulfilling a

²⁴ Lawrence Dreyfus, "Beyond the Interpretation of Music," *Dutch Journal of Music Theory*, Volume 12, Number 3 (2007): 253-272.

promise through performance, and in the Baroque era performers were considered to be executors of proper taste. A performer who “interpreted” according to nineteenth-century conventions was charged with the task of both conveying a poetic, even spiritual reading of the work, while also upholding the composer’s supposed intentions. Whereas the Baroque musician was given a certain liberty to let his or her good taste allow for “intentional errors of the most beautiful kind to be made,”²⁵ by the mid-nineteenth century the dominant concept of *werktreue*—loyalty to the original work—had taken on an ethical weight that imposed complete “textual fidelity”²⁶ to the hallowed composer.

Dreyfus explains how, in its various guises, the discourse of “interpretation” comes with a system of interlocking power relations among composers, teachers, musical predecessors, and scholars that puts performers in a creative bind. The pressure to yield to the influence of all these authorities makes performance a burdensome task. Dreyfus focuses on instrumentalists, whose job of “interpreting all those passionate voices”²⁷ of the past is perhaps even less layered than the task of the singer. In addition to the voices of composers and teachers, the singer must also pay homage to the voice of the poet and then reconcile all of these with his or her own “voice,” which cannot help but be present in the performance. The presence of the singer’s specific voice adds another competing “voice of authority” that, as I will discuss in later sections, often results in highly-charged debates surrounding issues of vocal timbre, such as what specific sonic qualities are appropriate in various genres and/or specific repertoires.

²⁵ Dreyfus, 259.

²⁶ Dreyfus, 261.

²⁷ Dreyfus, 258.

Early music performers have attempted to seek alternatives to this servile/obedient approach by pointing to the prevalence of extemporaneous ornamentation in Baroque vocal repertoire. Examining embellishment options encourages contemporary singers to imagine the original singers, who were believed to have modified and elaborated on the repertoire to suit their particular voices and expressive impulses. Early music performers, borrowing from contemporary approaches in jazz or folk styles, view improvisation as an antidote to the composer-centric score, one that empowers and liberates singers. Of course, sometimes the orientation to authority is simply a substitution. Instead of a reliance on the specific composer's intentions or voice, the practice becomes about adherence to an "authenticity" of style, in which the excavating of songs as they might have been before modern practice leads to a new and onerous orthopraxy of historical performance practice. In such ways, early music practices remain in tension with authority models. However, as I will explore in subsequent sections, engaging with early music can also afford a singer great freedom and agency, particularly when treated as a contemporary, creative practice for which there are few definitive answers and where an authority-oriented model is circumvented.

The mystical voice

Cusick introduces the idea of a "channel" as the central metaphor for the singer's self and how he/she serves as a connection between composer and audience. The singer is a channel, or medium, for a message from the composer, the poet, or a higher power: he or she is also a mystic, able to communicate with and channel spirits of the past. Although this model has similarities to the authority-oriented model described above, the emphasis here is more on a kind of magical transformation of the singer, as if he or she becomes possessed by a voice from the

past. Cusick references Jessye Norman as she describes a series of intimacies that give the audience access to the composer:

[The singer] will be intimate—emotionally, intellectually, and physically—with her accompanist, with the dead Schumann, and with me; I will be intimate with her, and through that intimacy I will know a vicarious intimacy with the dead Schumann’s thoughts, feelings, and imaginings about the lives of women. . . our respective performance roles, then, are clear from the start: Norman is a medium, and I am her client; we are both interested in messages from the dead.²⁸

This model is prevalent in classical *bel canto* training, but also predominates in two other genres: early music and American folk music. Early music lutenist Anthony Rooley, in *Performance: Revealing the Orpheus Within*,²⁹ offers a series of diagrams that draw upon Renaissance concepts of performance to illustrate how a singer should prepare for performance. The way to avoid ego, he purports, is to find a state of *grazia*, or what might be thought of as “sublime tranquility” or a state of divinely-inspired bliss.³⁰ In order for a performer to tap into state, he or she must abandon an oppositional approach where the audience and performer are locked into a stance of judgement of the performer’s abilities. Rather, both should be attuned to what Rooley calls the “source of creative energy,” and through this shift in focus the performer is able to “empty himself, to let go of his own petty restrictions. To cease to think we are entirely responsible and the prime mover is a great relief. We become at once more able to respond, to be a better servant.”³¹ In keeping with the ideology of mid-twentieth century early music performance practice, Rooley works with concepts and imagery from antiquity to provide a performance

²⁸ Cusick, “Gender and the Cultural Work,” 82.

²⁹ Anthony Rooley. *Performance: Revealing the Orpheus Within* (Ann Arbor: Element Books Limited, 1990).

³⁰ Rooley, 13.

³¹ Rooley, 25.

model that relies on the medium/channel modality. He believes that this approach brings the performer closer to not only the music itself, but also to the mindset of the divinely-inspired sixteenth-century musical performer.

The “channel” or “medium” role also features heavily in the early research into traditional American music, particularly that of Appalachia as transcribed and recorded in the early twentieth century. Ballad collector Olive Dame Campbell, who worked in tandem with the English musicologist Cecil Sharp, described the vocal performances of the musicians she encountered in Kentucky. In 1907, Campbell observed a young girl singing the ballad “Barbara Allen, a traditional British ballad that continued to be sung, in many variant forms, by descendants of British settlers in Appalachia”:

I was lost almost from the first note, and the pleasant room faded from sight; the singer only a voice. I saw again the long road over which we had come, the dark hills, the rocky streams bordered by tall hemlocks and hollies, the lonely cabins distinguishable at night only by the firelight flaring from their chimneys. Then these, too, faded, and I seemed to be borne along into a still more dim and distant past, of which I myself was a part.³²

Campbell’s description captures the romance embedded in twentieth-century discourse on Appalachian folk music and how folk music allowed musicians from other traditions the opportunity to escape and fantasize about a lost, more authentic past. As the twentieth century progressed, American folk musicians themselves further developed performance traditions based on this idea of “emptying out.” For example, singer Bill Monroe, considered to be the founder of modern bluegrass, performed with a far-off gaze and a still, expressionless face (sometimes casually referred to as the “bluegrass deadpan”). Monroe’s physicality typifies this aesthetic,

³² Olive Dame Campbell. *The Life and Work of John Charles Campbell, September 15, 1868–May 2, 1919* (Madison: Wisconsin College Printing, 1968), 140.

predicated on the idea that the singer is a channel not for a single composer, but for historical voices, unsung voices of the people, or even for the natural world, which Monroe referred to as the earth's "ancient tones."³³

As mentioned earlier, these models of "self" are not fixed positions and are variably deployed to access different notions of performance, often in tandem or in rapid succession. Teachers tend to call upon concepts of servitude/obedience and medium/channel in ways that are intertwined. The extension into actual magical thinking with the medium/channel model is what I find compelling and what makes this model somewhat more insidious than the servitude/obedience model. Rather than functioning as a playful or inspiring idea, I am surprised by the number of singers I know, both in classical singing and in other genres, who seem to feel that they are actually conjuring voices from the dead. Perhaps if pressed they might acknowledge that this is metaphorical, a feeling rather than reality, but the reliance on the notion of channeling remains intact at a deep level and seems to help them garner strength. I have also observed a use of this medium/channel model as a way singers cope with their own ego-investment in the work: "I'm giving voice to those of the past who didn't have one," or "It's not about me—I'm representing others." I am interested in why this kind of thinking is necessary and what metaphors for selfhood are emerging as singers speak this way. What does "channeling" say about our discomfort with unmitigated self-expression? What does it reveal about the ways in which artists need to justify taking center stage? What mythology does it contain about how authorship and testimonials function for a performer? In seeking alternatives that do not rest on a binary, I am interested in

³³ Robert Cantwell and Oscar Wilde. "Mimesis in Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Music," in *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*, ed. George Lewis (Popular Press, 1993), 20.

finding models that are not set up as an opposition between the singer and the character, or between the prideful entertainer and the selfless artist. If we recognize that “medium” and “channel” are powerful beliefs, as opposed to truths, we can begin to see how they address anxieties about the musical ego.

The idealized voice

Another prevalent voice/self model is one in which a singer shares both the self and voice with an idealized identity, or “persona.” The performer’s persona is the cultivated, often larger-than-life, public self that a singer inhabits as part of his/her professional guise. In all musical genres, as in all presentations of identity in public view, people inhabit personas that are not the same as the “self” as expressed in other spheres, particularly private ones. What is significant in classical singing is just how codified the singer’s persona became over the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and how this persona became territory for teachers to shape and a way to constrain students. Vocal training served as cultivation of the self on multiple levels, both musically and otherwise, and led to proscriptive ways of being for singers, both on and off-stage.

In “(Homo)Sexuality and The Art of Singing,”³⁴ Wayne Koestenbaum analyzes late nineteenth-century singing manuals and details the many ways in which the voice became a site for discipline of the body and mind. Becoming a classical singer did not simply mean cultivating the voice. Vocal training incorporated guidelines for a very specific way of living daily life. In these manuals, the voice is often described as an accurate indicator of sexual and physical health, akin to the way nineteenth-century health and hygiene manuals would prescribe the mores of

³⁴ Wayne Koestenbaum, “(Homo)Sexuality and The Art of Singing,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991).

respectable conduct. The association between vocal production and overall health permitted voice pedagogues to maintain control over their students' bodies, giving teachers a say in their students' diet, sleep, exercise, and even sexual habits. Noting that the terms "bel canto" and "homosexual" were both coined in the 1860s, Koestenbaum claims that these categories "became embedded in pseudo-scientific, medicalizing, admonitory discourses,"³⁵ reflecting a Victorian preoccupation with classification and creating an opportunity for scholars, doctors, and teachers to exercise control. Paralleling discourses on sexuality, the voice became a site for both self-discipline and discipline by others, as something to be shaped, corrected, and kept in line, reflecting "a culture's wish to enforce some and not other channelings of energy through the body."³⁶

As with the ideologies of obedience discussed above, Koestenbaum emphasizes the power that *bel canto* technique acquired because it expanded from being the national style of Italy to becoming synonymous with "good" singing, as a technique that was the healthiest, most powerful, and most effective in enhancing the natural capacities of the body and voice. This allowed *bel canto* practitioners and teachers to assume a level of status that became virtually unchallengeable, gatekeepers of "a cultural myth as compelling, as naturalized, as hard to obtain distance from, as the myth of the sexual self."³⁷

Vocal training, as accompanied by a highly-regimented set of expectations for daily life and self-care, also came with highly gendered and class-specific determinations for a singer's sense of

³⁵ Koestenbaum, 209.

³⁶ Koestenbaum, 210.

³⁷ Koestenbaum, 233.

“self.” What we might describe as Victorian femininity was the ideal persona for a woman to inhabit as a singer, determining her walk, speech, dress, and overall comportment. To turn it around, singing was an opportunity for a woman to express her concordance with norms of femininity, naturalizing a set of behaviors as *de facto* for singing in this particular style. In performance, she could combine this persona with a presentation of the repertoire that further reproduced relationships of Europeans to education, privilege and colonialism. We see the singer as a sophisticate, mastering the language and mannerisms of another European culture, or the singer as a tourist, sampling music from a foreign, perhaps colonized culture. I will revisit this last trope when I examine folk songs as arranged for the classical stage.

The counterpart to these approaches to persona is a tendency to teach towards “type,” either by funneling a singer towards strict vocal categories, such as through the *fach* system, or towards archetypes and stereotypes based on race and gender. Nina Sun Eidsheim makes numerous observations about how concepts of race and gender are delimited through vocal practice and metaphors of self. Her 2008 dissertation “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance”³⁸ investigates the ways in which the cultural construction of race through vocal timbre is applied in singing. Eidsheim introduces the term “vocal body” to describe the way in which the voice, either in speech or song, is perceived to represent a person’s body. “Vocal body” implies that, sight unseen, a listener can perceive someone to be of a given racial or ethnic identity, and, to go a step further, might assume that this is the person’s essential, immutable vocal sound, as unalterable as any physical attribute.

³⁸ Nina Sun Eidsheim, “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008).

Often unconsciously, we think we “hear” a body via sound. Furthermore, as Eidsheim points out, we think we should hear a certain sound from a particular body. “Because of ingrained notions of corporeal differences along racial and ethnic lines, voice teachers expect to hear these differences in students’ voices, and consequently *construct difference* through vocal training.”³⁹ For example, Eidsheim observed one teacher who expected her Latin American students’ voices to sound more “connected to their bodies,”⁴⁰ and another teacher cultivated her students’ sounds to reflect various national singing styles, such as an “Italian sound” or an “Armenian” sound.”⁴¹ Students who sang in a way that fit a racial or ethnic stereotype were praised for singing with their “real” or “true” timbres. This approach to pedagogy affirms racial/ethnic assignments as real, and also goes hand in hand with an issue I will revisit later: the belief that singers have a true, immutable, personalized timbre.

If we combine Koestenbaum’s analysis of self-cultivation with Eidsheim’s analysis of racialized stereotypes, we see that one potential result of such training is that a singer might struggle with a feeling of having multiple identities, including some potentially estranging ones. For the contemporary singer, it can be a highly dissonant and confusing experience to be taught to sing via methods that either a) lean on archaic notions of gender and class, or b) funnel students towards racialized stereotypes. At worst, performance might be an act of alienation. As described by Suzanne Cusick, submitting to both a composer’s wishes and an idealized persona is

³⁹ Eidsheim, 30.

⁴⁰ Eidsheim, 43.

⁴¹ Eidsheim, 45.

“performing my own abjection.”⁴² While this might sound dramatic, this experience of alienation was and is common enough to spark movements in the twentieth century that react to such pedagogical approaches. The search for alternative methods that counter ideas of obedience, submission, and alienation led to certain trajectories in pedagogy that I explore in the following section.

The vernacular voice

In the early twentieth century, nationalism and political consciousness affected the reception of *bel canto* singing and European opera in America, shaping popular taste in ways that helped make room for new stylistic approaches to singing. In “Vernacular Music: A Naming Compass”⁴³ Archie Green traces the rise of the term “vernacular” as it was used to describe both a style of music and a way of singing. Marc Blitzstein, in his music-theater work *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), depicted the struggle of workers to fight corruption in a steel labor dispute. The music itself does not reflect a folkloric influence, unlike other music-theater works which drew on or imitated traditional music. Rather, according to Green, Blitzstein evoked the vernacular by experimenting with “the blurring of plain talk/heightened speech/regular singing...he wished to avoid the continuous musical line of grand opera.”⁴⁴ Blitzstein used the word “vernacular” to connote a singing style that was in direct contrast, both sonically and ideologically, with “operatic tone,” which he felt was inappropriate in depicting the working class. He directed his

⁴² Cusick, “Gender and the Cultural Work,” 92.

⁴³ Archie Green, “Vernacular music: a naming compass,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 35-46.

⁴⁴ Green, 38.

singer to use “vernacularized diction”⁴⁵ and abandon the characteristic operatic attributes of legato, rounded vowels, and elevated diction that did not resemble vernacular speech.

Aaron Copland lauded Blitzstein for his effort to find a vernacular vocal idiom, which Copland thought would lead the way to a new, hybridized approach to a particularly American form of opera. Copland was critical of the predominance of new American works which did not, in his view, succeed at establishing a new, native form of opera because the music was not suited to the English language and the works did not succeed in conveying colloquial speech in a way that connected with audiences.⁴⁶ However, Blitzstein did not have the influence Copland had hoped. This was because, in Green's view, Blitzstein's musical compositions “did not encompass esthetic norms within American folk music”⁴⁷ and without echoes of folk music style in the melodic and harmonic writing, Blitzstein’s music did not truly succeed in connecting with diverse audiences at that time. While many composers took up the challenge of incorporating folk music into their composition practices, Green makes the point that a truly vernacular singing style, separate from the compositional style, did not successfully find its way into American art music, i.e. opera and classical song. In musical theater and in other popular genres, various styles of singing flourished, representing, at least to some extent, the diverse traditions of the United States at that time. However, in classical art music, even when folk idioms were referenced, the *bel canto* technique continued to predominate. This left an unresolved set of technical challenges in training that remain areas of tension today, such as how to make sung English understandable

⁴⁵ Green, 38.

⁴⁶ Green, 39.

⁴⁷ Green, 40.

in higher registers and how to treat the diphthongs that are a signature feature of American vernacular speech but disturb a pure legato line. Blitzstein's efforts highlighted an ideological crisis that continues today: European-derived *bel canto* singing felt artificial, representing high culture and borrowed culture. It stood in contrast to vernacular singing, with links to folk music or to colloquial speech, that was sought after for being more culturally appropriate and "authentic" to the American people.

The wide reach of Blitzstein's ideas is reflected by the way that many contemporary opera singers describe their vocal identities. In a 2002 interview with Frank Oteri, Dawn Upshaw offers a narrative of her early childhood encounters with singing, which centered on folk music rather than classical music: "My parents were quite involved in the neighborhood politics and the civil rights movement, so it was Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger. That was the music that was not only played a lot in my house on recordings but we also sang as a family when I was very young and sang songs by those groups often."⁴⁸ Similarly, Renée Fleming begins her 2007 autobiography *The Inner Voice: The Making of a Singer*⁴⁹ with a description of her childhood home as filled with strains of Gershwin and Irish airs alongside operatic arias and German lieder her parents sang. These two American singers tell their musical autobiographies in a way that is described again and again in printed programs at contemporary music concerts: "Equally at home in the worlds of folk music, jazz, and Italian opera. . ." (or something along these lines) is a frequent biography opener for a singer, and I have used phrases like this myself. The narrative is of a childhood inflected with home-grown American music,

⁴⁸ Frank Oteri. "A Cup of Tea with Dawn Upshaw," *New Music Box: The Web Magazine for the American Music Center* (February 1, 2002): 8.

⁴⁹ Renee Fleming, *The Inner Voice: The Making of a Singer* (Penguin, 2005).

a gradual acquisition of classical music, yet a reliance on tropes of Americana in order to feel at home and return to one's roots. This reflects a reality of contemporary culture for many Americans. Most of us grew up with recordings in the home, and by and large these recordings are not of operatic singing. It also represents a way of narrating a musical background that puts the vernacular music in the home, the root of one's musical experience, and somehow seems to legitimize the singer. Having this vernacular core seems to be a stand-in for having something “real” both in the singer’s history and in the self. From this core, the singer can develop and adopt various styles of singing, but this primary encounter with American popular music is an important cue, signifying to the audience that the singer is still real, still simple, still one of us. Tinged with sentimentality, it is hard not to read these narratives as insistence that there is some “real” voice inside a singer. Regardless of how elaborate the music is that they sing professionally, this “real” voice legitimizes the “cultivated” voice and singers hope that we hear it.

The natural voice

Given the context described above, it makes sense that we would arrive at a kind of pedagogy that attempts to release the shackles of the old, the high-brow, the artificial, and helps the singer find the true, “natural” voice inside. Kristen Linklater's book *Freeing the Natural Voice*⁵⁰ is a seminal text in helping actors find more capacity and variety in their voices. Although initially designed to be applied to the spoken voice, it is a central text for many singers and voice teachers, especially those who seek an alternative to *bel canto* training. I have always wondered

⁵⁰ Karen Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1976).

why Linklater did not simply call her book “Freeing the Voice” and find it significant that the word “natural” is part of the title and the overarching concept. In her introduction, Linklater writes, “This approach to singing is designed to liberate the natural voice and thereby develop a vocal technique that serves the freedom of human expression.”⁵¹ This connection between words like “liberty” and “freedom” to the idea of “natural” is a rhetorical strategy I have heard often in my training. But what does “natural” actually mean in this context? In working through the exercises in Linklater’s book, as well as thinking about my own training, there is no moment when the less loaded words “comfortable,” “relaxed,” or “flexible” could not serve as substitutes. Linklater offers detailed, physical strategies for releasing held tension, exploring brain and muscle coordination, and developing vocal capacity. But the choice of the word “natural” comes, I believe, with an additional intention: it suggests that the true problem at hand for most singers/speakers is the influence of culture. Culture, as the menacing opposite of natural, has burdened them with tensions, struggles, and blocks that prevent the discovery of the natural voice. Linklater states, “in our perception of our own voices there is a vital difference to be observed between what is ‘natural’ and what is ‘familiar.’”⁵² Learning, then, is unlearning, washing clean, with the promise that this process will somehow lead to vocal production that is “in direct contact with emotional impulses, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it. . .transparent, it reveals, not describes, inner impulses of emotion and thought.”⁵³ While this might be well-intentioned, I have seen this rhetoric misused in pedagogical settings. How does a teacher know what is inner versus outer? How does a teacher recognize a singer’s inner

⁵¹ Linklater, 7.

⁵² Linklater, 7.

⁵³ Linklater, 8.

impulses? How, as a teacher, do I feel I have the authority to identify a student's "natural" voice, whatever that may mean? The word "natural," in these cases, gives gravitas, an *a priori* sense of rightness to what is only one set of performance habits. Furthermore, it equates three concepts: "freedom," "emotional expression," and "natural," an equation that should by no means go unquestioned. Oddly, Linklater's book, as with so many other attempts to revise and expand classical vocal pedagogy, has no need for the word "natural." The reliance on this category indicates an ideology that is thought to be liberating, yet it carries oppressive and often hidden constraints.

Accompanying the quest for the "natural" voice in the second half of the twentieth century is the pursuit of an embodied voice. The directive "Put it in your body!" reverberates in training from teachers, coaches, and music directors in contemporary music realms. Relying on an old trope of the mind/body split, "Put it in your body!" separates the head from the rest of the body and implies that the function of the head is to think, and that thinking is an impediment to the physical act of singing. I have come to understand that "putting it in your body" is a gloss, an inexact shortcut for something that is, in actuality, technically specific: the release of throat tension, increased use of the musculature of the torso, improved breath-to-sound coordination, and additional release of excess tension in the pelvis and knees. Rather than use specific terminology, the command to "put it in your body" is a generalization that seems less aimed at properly using the body and more intended to discourage analysis and intellectual engagement, as though thinking is not possible when the body is engaged. It is also an indictment of other more "repressed" vocal practices where there is thought to be a disassociation from the body, and even an imperative not to use it. In reality, singing "on the body" or "in the body" is not at all antithetical to the *bel canto* approach. On a functional level, the teachings of a "natural" voice

approach are actually quite akin to classical technique, which in its detailed practice is very much about engagement and coordination of musculature from head to toe and about achieving a synthesis (or, in contemporary parlance, “flow”) of the many components.

The equating of embodiment with liberation is a discourse that parallels a common understanding of twentieth-century advances in the field of modern dance. Anna Paskevka describes the twentieth-century history of dance as moving from what is taught from the “outside” to what is discovered on the “inside.” Twentieth-century innovators of dance perceived classical ballet as an example of an artificial, externally-imposed way of using the body, with the shoulders and neck as the body’s center of energy. Isadora Duncan, one of the primary pioneers of modern dance, shifted the understanding of the body’s center as being the solar plexus.⁵⁴ Martha Graham then claimed this center was even lower in the body, in the pelvis.⁵⁵ Accompanying this downward trajectory was a sense that truth was being uncovered: the lower the center the more “natural” and embodied the dancer would become, and that this lower center would not only make the dancer more physically comfortable but would also allow for a deeper emotional connection. Paskevka notes that, for Duncan, these developments were “more spiritual than physical, as she had little interest in kinesiology or physiology.”⁵⁶ Along the way, there are entanglements between two concepts: “inner” and “lower.” The lower in your body a connection is thought to be made, the more “internal” it is thought to be. For example, feeling something “inside” your head is not as deeply, internally experienced as something “inside” your

⁵⁴ Anna Paskevka, *Ballet Beyond Tradition* (Routledge, 2005), 25.

⁵⁵ Paskevka, 26.

⁵⁶ Paskevka, 25.

pelvis. This is just one example of how imprecise, though evocative, language can be surrounding ideas of physicality and authenticity. What should we make of this? Little in the way of actual function, but much in terms of how entangled narratives about the body, voice, and personal truth become.

The notion that the interior and the lower center represent what is more “real” is particularly intriguing, especially as it connects to ideas put forth by Roland Barthes in his oft-cited essay “The Grain of the Voice.”⁵⁷ In this article, Barthes claims that there is a difference between a voice that has “grain” and a voice that does not. “Grain,” in Barthes’ definition, is “the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue.”⁵⁸ Barthes compares two singers, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Charles Panzéra, claiming that the former sings without “grain” and the latter with “grain.” Barthes’ essay is a seminal work that explores semiotic meaning as applied to the voice and to the way that a singer conveys meaning. But what does his essay mean for singers? How does it apply to a voice lesson? Barthes refers to a voice with “grain” as melding the emotional and linguistic elements of singing, as capable of moving the listener, and as doing so by conveying “the body in the voice as it sings.”⁵⁹

How a singer is meant to activate “grain” remains a mystery in Barthes’s essay. Anatomically, mechanistically, what is the distinction? In Fischer-Dieskau’s “grain”-less singing, Barthes claims to hear “the lungs, never the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the

⁵⁷ Roland Barthes. “The Grain of the Voice” in *Image-music-text* (Macmillan, 1978).

⁵⁸ Barthes, 182.

⁵⁹ Barthes, 188.

nose.”⁶⁰ In Panzéra’s singing, Barthes hears more of the “body” somehow and seems to attribute this to a “deep-rootedness in the action of the throat.”⁶¹ Barthes refers to “grain” as coming from “deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages and from deep down in the [sung] language as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings.”⁶² What, exactly, does a singer make of this? How does he or she produce this sound? Barthes only names resonant cavities, never any organs that can actually activate a singing sound. (Even the throat is considered to have responsive, indirect functionality rather than direct activation.) The mystery of this “single skin” that gives a singer his or her grain and fills Barthes with *jouissance* is basically unachievable through technical means, it seems, and yet Barthes knows when it is there. What do we make of the fact that vocal embodiment is both prized and elusive? And are we sure that what Barthes describes is truly “the body in the voice” and not just a particular aesthetic, perhaps influenced by a fascination with popular music or recording technology, innovations of the day that made voices seem more embodied simply because new sounds were being heard?

As with the other ideologies of vocal self that I have discussed thus far, the power seems to remain in the hands of the teacher or theorist, who offers vague, ideologically-laden, subjective recommendations to the singer. The singer, whose powers are said to be both enormous yet almost unattainable, never truly knows if he or she is achieving vocal success without outside affirmation. While this slipperiness of awareness might be endemic to any process of learning, I

⁶⁰ Barthes, 183.

⁶¹ Barthes, 184.

⁶² Barthes, 181-82.

am interested in ways that give a singer more security and recognition of success than might be found in pedagogical approaches that keep the powers of discernment predominantly with the teacher.

The one, true voice

Nina Sun Eidsheim offers a seemingly inevitable conclusion of the above. She recognizes a commonly held and disseminated belief in the following two, entangled claims:

- 1) I have one voice
- 2) My voice is me

The critical concept that makes these two claims feel true and unassailable is, according to Eidsheim, what she calls the “reification of vocal timbre.”⁶³ In our [American] culture, she claims, vocal timbre is synonymous with one’s identity and is held to be fixed, mysterious, and immutable. This is a powerful, pervasive set of beliefs, so woven into our language and perceptions that it is almost hard for us to see it as a construct. What is so potent about the notion of the “true” voice? As discussed in the first chapter, multiple uses of the word “voice” to mean an emergent inner self abound, both in and out of musical practice. We are habituated to think of the voice *as* the self, and as the source of great personal power. One reason we attach such fixed, biological primacy to the voice is a long-standing perception that the voice is similar to the internal organs of the body, such as the liver or kidney. Susanne Cusick, in an article entitled “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” explores the consequences of seeing the voice

⁶³ Nina Eidsheim. "Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of the Performativity of Vocal Timbre," *Trans: Transcultural Music Review= Revista Transcultural de Música* 13 (2009): 1-7.

as one of the internal organs “for which there seem not to be choices.”⁶⁴ She counters this view with a discussion of how culture very much shapes the voice, thus making the voice both an internal organ and an aspect of the body that receives strong cultural imprints. This is particularly true in puberty, when the change that a voice undergoes becomes a matter of public discourse and adolescents learn to control and present their voices to conform to gender ideologies.

Women, she claims, are more likely to allow their voices to be shaped by culture, and it is considered part of an acceptable performance of femininity to allow the voice to be shaped by external influences (i.e. the social and sexual rules as described by Koestenbaum). Conversely, Cusick claims that boys and young men learn that it is important to resist influence on their voices after they experience puberty, allowing their voices to transition during puberty to an adult timbre that is then toughened, fixed, and immutable. According to Cusick, our “relationship both to the body’s interior and to the exterior world [is] gendered in terms of the borders’ relative penetrability.”⁶⁵ Because of the way ideologies of the voice and gender intersect, there is a lot at stake in protecting the idea that there is an innate “self” and “voice.” To think of the voice as culturally constructed might be considered either a failure to resist or a violation of the notion of self.

The potency of the concept of an “inner, true voice” increases when it is put in opposition to the concept of an “outer, artificial voice.” Both nineteenth-century and contemporary discourses rely on this dialectic in various ways. In contemporary, *anti-bel canto* singing, the inner voice must

⁶⁴ Susanne Cusick. “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, eds. E. Barkin and L. Hamessley. (Los Angeles: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 29.

⁶⁵ Cusick, “On Musical Performances,” 29.

break free of the outer voice, or somehow ring out louder and truer in a quest for authenticity. In nineteenth-century discourse, the inner voice is a voice we catch secret, tantalizing bits of, and this, according to both Koestenbaum and Cusick, is part of the erotic pleasure of witnessing a live performance. Both Koestenbaum and Cusick offer historical descriptions that feminize the voice, describing it as an internal organ “hidden from view”⁶⁶ with the means of its production shrouded in mystique. The act of singing becomes a confessional experience in which the inner self, conveyed through a voice that is thought to be the true “self,” spills forth in an intimate moment that ends when the performance concludes.

Wideman, Cusick, and Eidsheim reveal that the voice is constructed through our perception and our notions of culture; furthermore, our understanding of how “voice” and “identity” come together is also a cultural construction. Discussions of vocal timbre are often where debate and confusion as to how voice overlaps with identity emerge. As a way out of binary discussions along the lines of nature versus nurture, Eidsheim suggests, “the relationship between timbre and the construction of identity may be understood more accurately through notions of performativity.”⁶⁷ In her view, everything about the voice is a cultural construction and there is no value placed on what might be biologically fixed. Whether or not there is a single and “real” voice becomes irrelevant, and the voice is not given any special status in carrying or conveying any kind of truth. The unique aspects of an individual voice—biological or constructed—are minute compared to the immense timbral potential of that voice. A person might choose among timbres at his or her disposal, and experiences a connection to identity in all, some, or none of them. A performative frame allows

⁶⁶ Koestenbaum, 212.

⁶⁷ Eidsheim, “Synthesizing Race,” 2.

us to focus on the vast possibilities of the voice, and these, I argue, become the most interesting and most affirming of the artistry a singer possesses.

Eidsheim suggests that we may only think that the voice has a fixed and delimited identity because it is such a virtuosic act to go beyond daily acts of vocal disguise (code-switching, accent imitation, other forms of mimicry) to the full concealment and even substitution of vocal timbre. But this does not mean it is not possible, as exhibited by vocal virtuosos such as actors Meryl Streep, Kevin Spacey, and Robin Williams. What is possible in singing? What is gained, both vocally and psychologically, by allowing one's vocal timbre to be limitlessly performative? When one lets go of an identification of a particular timbre with the self, where else might one experience self-expression? In other words, if a prior notion of "voice" is lost, is another gained? Or might a singer do without a fixed notion of his or her "voice" altogether?

Voice/self models and the singer

How do these models work in real time to affect a singer's choices? How do they all work together? I am interested in the ways that these models work together, because, as I mentioned earlier, they are not fixed positions, but are rather deployed at various times in training and performance, often with the intention of helping a student connect to a piece or to help him or her feel empowered in the act of singing. Sometimes older ideologies remain intact, such as the notion of "serving" the composer or the perpetuation of unchecked affinities to attributes of high culture. Other ideologies have morphed to fit our current cultural climate, such as the idea of channeling God or divinity becoming discourse on feeling imbued with "spirit" or "an energy greater than us." Table 1 shows the six models and what I perceive to be the summation of the instructive for the singer, i.e. "When you sing, you. . ."

Table 1: Voice/Self Models

Servant	When you sing you are using your voice in the service of a master
Medium	When you sing you are channeling the actual voice of another
Persona	When you sing you are representing your breeding and paying tribute to your training
Vernacular	When you sing you are representing your ancestors and origins
Natural	When you sing your biological, natural self breaks through cultural trappings
One, true	When you sing you bring forth a pure, cohesive, true expression of <i>you</i>

What I find to be a common way these self/voice ideologies are used is to heighten a sense of struggle for the young singer who seeks to become a fully-realized artist. This occurs when education is characterized as a fight, built into an obedience model of training. In order to prevail, according to this paradigm, the student must break free from the master and become one's own master. This aligns with other narratives of self-actualization that dominated much of twentieth-century pedagogy and are based on binary oppositions: reliance on authority vs. trust in self, rigor vs. freedom, establishment vs. counterculture. A singer must confront the self, tussle with the self, challenge and expand the self. While retaining an abstract notion of development as blooming, blossoming, expressing freely, the pedagogy does little to support this in actual practice. I recall moments in voice lessons where I felt I was being asked to do something completely paradoxical, such as simultaneously sing in a way that perfectly conformed to the style, yet did not radiate docility and obedience. Not all paradoxical instructions are ineffective, but in many cases I felt limited by the lack of tools I had been given to find an imaginative solution. Nestled in a system that is fundamentally about competition, about homogenization,

and about the notion of scarcity, how might a singer actually individuate? And where is the imperative to be an artist? Where is the play? Where is the community? Where is the artistry? Is struggle necessary to the singer's discovery of self?

What are some possible alternatives to these strains of thought and training? I propose that if we address it at the level of metaphor, we can rework our understanding of both "voice" and "self" in order to expand our mindsets. The very fact that the voice is perceived to be linked to identity might mean that there is a rich potential for change. In revisioning and reworking concepts of the voice, we can enhance understandings of identity. By investigating a singer's understanding of his or her voice, we can see how he or she views the body and self and potentially change or augment these perceptions.

My study of singer Cathy Berberian is an effort to address these issues and envision a way out of the binary paradigms set up in the ideologies I have described: inner/outer vocal self, true/false vocal self, trained/natural vocal self, subjugated/dominant vocal self, effaced/present vocal self. By analyzing Berberian's words on the subject, and by analyzing her vocal performance of Luciano Berio's *Folk Songs*, I will explore how vocal practices might be re-thought to allow singers to experience a similar loosening of constricting ideologies and an expansion of possibilities.

CHAPTER THREE

Cathy Berberian and the Expansion of the Singer's "Self"

Mezzo-soprano, composer, and theatrical performer, Cathy Berberian (1925-1983), is widely recognized as a pioneer of contemporary music. In her collaborations with composers, she dramatically expanded the possibilities for use of the human voice in performance. In her genre-crossings from avant garde to classical to folk to early music, she challenged expectations for style and timbral limitations. As an outspoken critic of the classical music establishment, she sought a contemporary approach to both the performance and the study of singing. Berberian influenced areas beyond that of vocal production: she helped shape the direction of contemporary vocal composition itself; re-envisioned solo recital performance; and opened doors for others in the areas of performance art and experimental opera.

With the exception of *Stripsody* (1966), where she was the sole composer, Berberian primarily worked in tandem with others, most notably John Cage, Luciano Berio, and Igor Stravinsky. Although Berberian was often described as the "inspiration" or "muse" for the works, she often functioned as a key collaborator, frequently providing vocal material that found its way whole-cloth into the compositions. The advent of feminist musicology, vocality studies, and performance studies beginning in the 1990s prompted revised perspectives on Berberian's role in modern composition and on her influence as a performer. Scholars in these fields have gone back to investigate Berberian as a creative artist in her own right, whose contributions were not limited to her collaborations with composers or solely limited to the avant garde. The 2014 edited volume *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* showcases these investigations, with contributions from researchers, colleagues, performers, and writings and

interviews with Berberian herself. The volume's editors make an effort to include analyses of Berberian that are less composition-centric and more performer-centric, attempting to get closer to understanding Berberian's particular vocality in tandem with her persona and embodied presence as an artist. A number of the volume's articles investigate the complex nature of Berberian's explorations of extended vocal techniques and variation of timbre. These hallmarks of her singing style greatly influenced composers and significantly impacted subsequent singers who specialized in contemporary music.

Francesca Placanica, one of the volume's editors, believes that scholars could further explore Berberian's interviews and writings and achieve greater understanding of Berberian as an artist by analyzing first-hand accounts of singers who worked directly with her. Through what Placanica calls "a return to the study of Berberian as an individual and as an historical personal and pioneering artist,"⁶⁸ this section reveals how Berberian approached the art of singing and how her encounters with and opinions of contemporary culture factored into her use of technique, her interpretation of song, and her theatrical and vocal choices in performance.

Central to the ideology of classical vocal training are the concepts of the singer's identity in performance, as discussed earlier. The classical singer was historically given a very restricted set of hierarchical modalities, which proscribed his or her relationship to the self, the composer, and the audience. Twentieth-century reactions to these nineteenth-century performance modalities often worked in binary opposition to inherited self-concepts, but retained some of the problematic aspects of the earlier models and replaced others with new ones. For example, the

⁶⁸ Francesca Placanica, "La Nuova Vocalità Nell'Opera Contemporanea" (1966): Cathy Berberian's Legacy," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 63.

reaction to the perceived artifice of classical singing sparked use of the term “natural voice,” which comes with its own set of strictures and problematic assumptions. The concept of the “inner” voice was seen earlier in the Victorian era as a secretive self beneath the surface, a concept that parallels the twentieth-century quest for the “true” self. These models of interiority from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presume an intact inner self and voice as physical realities rather than as metaphors.

The prevalence of these tropes raises the question, what other possibilities are there? Cathy Berberian offers numerous possibilities, three of which I will discuss at length below: the singer as artist, the singer as a machine, and the singer as artifice. In different ways, these three models allowed Berberian to inhabit something other than a cohesive “self” when singing: multiple selves, a fractured self, or no discernable “self” at all. I will illustrate not only how she expanded the possibilities, but what each possibility afforded her in terms of artistry, autonomy, and fulfillment in her work as a singer.

The creative voice

According to Pamela Karantonis, “Despite what many would argue as her co-authorship of key projects in music history, Cathy Berberian remains in the shadow of these male maestros when it comes to that history.”⁶⁹ Scholars and composers are both responsible for propagating this dismissal of Berberian’s role as a creative force. For example, Luciano Berio, Berberian’s life-long collaborator and husband from 1950 to 1964, barely mentions Berberian in his liner notes for *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* (1959), a piece in which Berberian’s vocal experiments are

⁶⁹ Pamela Karantonis and Pieter Verstraete, “Introduction/Overture,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 7.

essential. Instead, Berio focuses on the Joyce texts that he claims form the basis of work. As described by Hannah Bosma, “The authorship model in this work is clear: a male composer, working with and writing about compositional and electroacoustic technology, using a text by, and paying homage to, a male writer.”⁷⁰ What Berio fails to take into account are both Berberian’s rendering of the text and, more significantly, the un-texted vocal utterings that permeate the piece. By not recognizing the vocal-oriented creative output of Berberian, Berio perpetuates a binary in the Western metaphysical tradition in which, again in Bosma’s words, “the split between language and voice is gendered: the voice and the body became feminine, while language and mind are gendered as masculine.”⁷¹ What Berberian contributed in terms of extra-musical sounds goes unrecognized by Berio, even though her contributions largely shaped the final version of the composition and are, arguably, the most recognizable feature of the work. In hindsight, *Thema* stands as an early landmark for the ways it showcases non-traditional uses of the voice and integrates Extended Vocal Techniques (EVT) into musical composition. Far beyond the legacy of the piece itself, Berberian’s explorations associated with it helped reshape the field of vocal performance and redefine the terms of collaboration between composers and singers in the second half of the twentieth century.

Berberian’s collaborations with composers began with Luciano Berio in the 1950s, but took more definite shape with John Cage’s *Aria with Fontana Mix* in 1958. For this work, Cage was inspired by Berberian’s ability to sing in a variety of vocal styles, and he devised a graphic score

⁷⁰ Hannah Bosma, “*Thema (Omaggio a Joyce): A Listening Experience as Homage to Cathy Berberian*,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 103.

⁷¹ Bosma, 103.

made up of a series of shapes and lyric fragments, in which each shape was one of ten colors. The singer was instructed to pick a different vocal timbre or style for each color. The result was a tour-de-force for Berberian, whose abilities were suddenly given free range and an opportunity to shine. Berberian often referred to John Cage as “unwrapping” her voice, recognizing and creating a platform for her particular virtuosity and inspiring other composers to do the same.

The significance of *Aria* is not only in the relationship between Cage and Berberian, but also in the way that this relationship established criteria for effective collaboration throughout Berberian’s subsequent career. She was critical of composers who didn’t write for her with the same attention to her specific abilities. For example, when asked by Karlheinz Stockhausen to whistle, she was indignant that he had not first checked with her to see if she was able to do so. On a deeper level, her connection to Cage involved a reciprocal flow of creativity and decision-making that she continued to seek. Berberian’s role in many of the compositions created for and with her was often to expand the capacities of the composers she worked with, who found her to be a strong presence and demanding of a particular aesthetic they may or may not have chosen if operating independently. According to Susan McClary, “When chance composers engaged with her, they risked losing the abstract, cerebral dimension of their experiments. In short, taking a chance with Cathy meant relinquishing control.”⁷²

Berberian’s collaborations with her husband Luciano Berio were particularly fraught with power struggles and artistic differences which, at best, produced rich and complex works, and, at worst, led to artistic estrangement and contributed to their ultimate divorce. Their process for *Visage*

⁷² Susan McClary, “Foreword: Cathy Berberian—Modernism’s Bette Midler” in *Cathy Berberian: pioneer of contemporary vocality*, eds. Francesca Placanica, Pamela Karantonis, Anne Sivuojala, and Peter Verstraete (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014), xxvi.

(1961) was, according to David Osmond-Smith, “the product of a ferocious game of cat-and-mouse...[Berio] cajoled, suggested, explored new directions, and Berberian ‘invented vocal situations’ in response...he provoked Berberian into action, waited until she produced something irresistible, then pounced.”⁷³ Berberian was clear that this was not a passive process for her. According to Berberian, this kind of collaboration was “not based on the inventory of more or less unedited vocal effects which the composer may devise and the singer regurgitates, but rather on the singer’s ability to use the voice in all aspects of the vocal process; a process which can be integrated as flexibly as the lines and expressions on a face.”⁷⁴ The term “vocal process” indicates Berberian’s understanding of a dynamic relationship between voice and personal experience. She freely allowed her own perspective, taste, and curiosities to come out through the vocal apparatus. Rather than generate material at random, Berberian was constantly shaping and pre-selecting for Berio and other composers, challenging them to grapple with her as an artist exercising her own sensibilities. In Berberian’s writings and interviews, she expressed enjoyment of her role as *provocateur* for Berio, generating raw material that, as he worked with it, pushed him beyond the familiar. Ultimately, Berberian became interested in moving in a more explicitly theatrical direction, which unsettled Berio. The emotional and psychological elements of vocality, which Berio preferred to downplay in his compositions, were of great appeal to Berberian, and she became interested in making these more explicit. This interest led her to work

⁷³ David Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator: The Work of Cathy Berberian 1958–1966 From *Tempo* Number 58,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 26.

⁷⁴ Berberian, “La Nuova Vocalità Nell’Opera Contemporanea,” 34.

with other composers who Berio often disdained for lack of subtlety, but whose works thrilled Berberian because they enabled her to expand as a performer.

After her early experiences with Cage, Berio, and other composers in the 1950s and 1960s, Berberian ultimately moved away from the avant garde (though never fully) and into more conventional song genres. After her divorce from Berio, Berberian began singing more art song, musical theater, folk song, and early music. However, she infused those repertoires with the sensibility she had gained from working in avant garde realms and developed concert programs with a signature combination of repertoire and theatricality that would come to define her style and led to international stardom. In retrospect, what seemed in the 1950s and 1960s to have been creative input into the compositions of others was actually creative output, as Berberian had been developing her own artistry all along.

The second half of Berberian's career calls for an expanded description of her artistry. Far beyond working just as a singer, Berberian was a composer, performance artist, curator, critic, and philosopher. She was outspoken off-stage about her views on performance, and she infused her concerts with direct address to audiences and theatrical parody, combining the art of singing with her presence as a dynamic and highly-opinioned persona who was not only singing the repertoire but commenting and critiquing both the music and the performative act. Audiences with knowledge of Berberian's views could experience her performances as demonstrations of the techniques and viewpoints she expressed in writings and interviews, thereby hearing not only what the composer was saying, but also what Berberian herself might be saying in singing their works. One of Berberian's most passionate topics of discussion was the cultural and artistic importance of contemporary music, and she was particularly vocal about works she felt should

become canonical. For example, as she continued to perform Berio's *Sequenza III* throughout her life, Berberian said "you're really doing a mission when you're doing this piece because it's an important piece. I think it's—with *Circles*—a milestone in vocal music."⁷⁵

This kind of artistry also led Berberian to put a particular stamp on the field of early music, which was flourishing in the mid-twentieth century. Berberian became acquainted with early music in 1967, when she was invited by Nikolaus Harnoncourt to sing on a recording of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607). Placanica stresses the significance of the fact that Harnoncourt was drawn to Berberian not only because she was a virtuosic and expressive performer, but "*because she was a composer.*"⁷⁶ He believed she was able to convey the works of Monteverdi because she could understand the way they were constructed, particularly in the use of recitative to capture the essence of vernacular speech patterns in song. Berberian recognized the parallels between Monteverdi's *seconda prattica* and her own views on singers as creators: she lauded seventeenth-century singers for fashioning their own vocal embellishments and gained inspiration for her own New Vocality manifesto. She claimed that, in Monteverdi's time, "most of the composers were singers and most of the singers were composers, and that kind of creativity is necessary today in the interpretation of the New Vocality."⁷⁷ Berberian was galvanized by singing early music and saw early music practice as proof of the great creativity that comes when a singer's input is valued. Her goal was not only to further the field of early

⁷⁵ Pamela Karantonis, transcriber, "Cathy's Solo Talk Show," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 42.

⁷⁶ Placanica, "La Nuova Vocalità Nell'Opera Contemporanea," 60.

⁷⁷ Placanica, 59.

music, but also to fuel her personal critique of conventional classical singers for their lack of creativity.

Although many have applied the term “muse” to Cathy Berberian, what I hope to have illustrated above is that “muse” is imprecise and only begins to describe Berberian’s effect on a creative work. The term “muse” implies someone who is a source of inspiration for a work and is perhaps the first, or most signature interpreter. This is a much more passive role than Berberian regularly assumed. Carolyn Abbate discusses the role of the muse at length in her article “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?”⁷⁸ She notes that it is often in the locus of vocal virtuosity that the singer seems to outshine the composer, as, for example, in bursts of operatic coloratura. Berberian rarely took this route to showcase her voice: her vocal signature was primarily in the realm of timbral flexibility. Timbre, as I will assert in the next chapter, is a sonic category so filled with cultural significance that, by playing with timbre, Berberian moved beyond the role of muse to having a foundational creative role in many works. Berberian made sonic contributions at the earliest stages of many compositions, at the moment where one might say that the overall scope and meaning of a piece is first framed. Both the timing of her involvement in these collaborations and the specific sonic content were important in allowing her to make indelible contributions to compositions. For example, in *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)*, Bosma makes the case that, despite Berio’s tendency to treat Berberian’s recordings as found sound out of which he made meaning, it is more accurate to locate both creativity and meaning (signification) at the level of Berberian’s vocal utterings themselves, as “a creative act. . .with consequences for the

⁷⁸ Carolyn Abbate. “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505-536.

composition. Berberian not only was passively revealed by her voice: she actively created vocal art.”⁷⁹ A similar comment can be made about Cage’s *Aria*, locating the work’s power and significance not only in Cage’s structural ideas, but in the qualities of timbre and the vocal flexibility that Berberian contributed. Moreover, the work would not have existed if she hadn’t been able to demonstrate timbral shifts to Cage in a compelling way, making them evocative and imaginative as well as technically virtuosic. Berberian’s voice was not simply a means by which Cage made meaning in such works; she offered material of such richness and content that the material itself offered meaning.

Berberian presents an enlarged sense of the singer “self,” both as an artistic force and as an opinioned critic and thinker. She actively cultivated a high-profile presence off-stage, embraced notoriety, and possessed what is often referred to as “star quality” in performing genres. She was also, by classical singing standards, openly rebellious and even gleefully controversial. In some ways, she aligned herself with the way rock stars of the mid-1960s presented themselves, wearing elaborate, colorful outfits, relishing her role as an iconoclast, and using vernacular language such as “groovy” and “far out” to describe her performances. She consciously designed an elaborate persona from melded styles, which included Marilyn Monroe’s dyed blonde hair, swept up in classic diva fashion, and long gowns that evoked both traditional recital wear and the colorful patterns of the hippie counterculture. Her willingness to speak rebelliously and critically about the classical tradition led to controversy: she condemned singers Renata Tebaldi and Montserrat Caballé for being more preoccupied with the beauty of their tone than the meaning of

⁷⁹ Bosma, “*Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)*,” 106.

the lyrics, saying that they “sing like cows” and that “they have the mentality of cows. . .they just want the sound to come out.”⁸⁰

Berberian’s outspokenness illustrates her flamboyance, but it also speaks to her self-perception: she saw her role as a singer to be that of a cultural critic and meaning-maker. As exemplified in her writings, interviews, and in performance itself, Berberian was conscious of the layered meanings of “voice,” moving through various uses of the word in a way similar to those laid out by Amanda Weidman. Berberian made a point of commenting on the social and political climate of the late 1960s, and through the act of both singing and speech, she, like other “voices” of her day, was participating in cultural transformation. While making social commentary is relatively commonplace among popular singers, it is very uncommon among classical singers, who are relatively silent on cultural issues and generally occupy non-political, neutral spaces both on and off the stage. Berberian offered a strong alternative to her contemporaries in this regard. Because she was such a prolific performer, her presence on stage magnified and made tangible her views. Audiences could witness her viewpoints on singers’ commitment to the text, for example, by listening to the overemphasized diction she used in a work by Berio or witnessing her comedic, nuanced rendering of a turn-of-the-century parlor song. Finally, by having such a large voice off-stage as well as on-stage, Berberian’s performances could not exist in a vacuum, in the sacred intimate, channeling space that was the province of the nineteenth-century recital as discussed in the second chapter. Audiences knew too much about her and understood that she might be saying something on multiple levels, even in singing a song not usually considered to be charged with

⁸⁰ Carrie De Swaan, dir., *Music is the air I breathe: A Documentary on Singer Cathy Berberian (1925-1983)*, VPRO, 1994. DVD.

social meaning. Berberian's creative presence redefined not only her sense of vocal possibilities, but also expanded receptive possibilities for audience members who witnessed her creative energy.

The mechanical voice

In listening to Berberian's many interviews, I am struck by her use of the term "the voice" rather than the term "my voice." When she does use the term "my voice," it is usually to note something technical about it, such as that her voice was too small for grand opera, or that her voice was lower than the voice of Maria Callas. Berberian speaks in a way that depersonalizes "the" voice, approaching it with curiosity and detachment, removed from the idea that the voice is the inner "self" or the source of a personal truth. For Berberian, the voice was akin to an electronic instrument with a series of knobs and buttons, a metaphor that makes sense given her roots in the European avant garde. Her interest in the voice as a mechanism reflects the actual experiences she had working in the mid to late 1950s with Berio and other composers at the Studio di Fonologia in Milan. According to David Osmond-Smith, the limited capacity of re-recording facilities prompted the equipment constructor Alfredo Lietti to build a bank of nine oscillators so that multiple sounds could be generated simultaneously. When Berberian began recording with the composers in the Studio, she was affectionately nicknamed the "tenth oscillator," both a term of affection and a reflection of the time she spent in the studio generating material to go with the material produced by the machines.⁸¹ Her recordings would often be fragmented and re-ordered in tape montages and led to groundbreaking combinations of vocal and electronic sounds, both in pre-recorded mixes and in live performances.

⁸¹ Osmond-Smith, "The Tenth Oscillator," 21.

While Berberian worked closely with mechanical and electronic instruments, she did not lose a central focus on the voice, nor did she simply try to turn her voice into another machine. Her focus remained the expressiveness and functionality of the voice. Rather than effacing the human side of vocal production as she worked alongside electronic machines, she examined and exploited the idiosyncratic elements of the voice, often taking advantage of the intimate qualities of recording to bring the aspects of vocal production closer to the listener's ears. From the tactile, bodily quality of her recordings, we can hear how she continued to delight in what was particularly possible with the voice itself, continuing to make audible the apparatus that includes lips, teeth, tongue, never removing the "grain," never allowing it to fade into the sonic landscape. If anything, Berberian's explorations emphasized what is distinct, uncomfortable, psychological, and even confrontational about the voice as entangled in a human body and with a human experience—in her own words, what is "inseparable from its interpreter."⁸² In the words of Umberto Eco (as translated by Francesca Placanica), Berberian "did not start from experiences and technological premises. She would start from an almost religious trust (masked by a playful instinct) in the possibilities of the human voice."⁸³ It was Berberian's insistence on plunging deep into the evocative qualities of the voice, in all its voicey-ness, that was often most unsettling for her collaborators.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that, rather than liken the voice to a machine, Berberian illustrates and exploits the ways in which the voice already is a machine. Her practices can be

⁸² Berberian, "La Nuova Vocalità Nell'Opera Contemporanea," 35.

⁸³ Umberto Eco, "Il laboratorio Cathy," *Symphonia. Tesori Musicali della Radio Svizzera Italiana* 30 (1993): 9.

compared to earlier explorations of the mechanistic. For example, Elisabeth Le Guin, in her article, “One Says that One Weeps, But One Does Not Weep,”⁸⁴ discusses the eighteenth-century fascination with the automaton-like aspects of performance, wherein skillful musicians seem almost machine-like in their production of sound. According to Le Guin, one interest composers had in invoking the mechanistic was to denaturalize performance, offering the audience surprising or odd visual/aural experiences that insist on taking the physical body of the performer into account. For example, Le Guin studies Boccherini’s scores in which he often asks for odd timbres (such as the cello in an unusually high range) or seemingly-awkward bowing patterns (such as extreme string-crossings at fast rates.) By demanding that the performer play in such a way that is “unnatural,” Boccherini eschews the illusion of ease, perhaps calling into question contemporary notions of elegance and confinement, even implying that nothing can be assumed to be “natural” about performance. The mechanistic aspects underscore the fact that performance is both highly studied and requires great work. In these ways as well as others, Le Guin states, “it is utterly characteristic of this composer that cultural tensions were played out, quite literally, in exquisitely calibrated physical tension in the performing individual.”⁸⁵

Certain aspects of Berberian’s vocal production draw attention to various cultural perceptions regarding the voice. In “The New Vocality,” Berberian states, “I believe that a modern singer should be both sensitive and open, albeit in an empirical way, to these diverse aspects of vocality, isolating them from the context of linguistic conditioning and developing them instead

⁸⁴ Elisabeth Le Guin, ““One Says That One Weeps, but One Does Not Weep”: Sensible, Grotesque, and Mechanical Embodiments in Boccherini's Chamber Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55, no. 2 (2002): 250.

⁸⁵ Le Guin, 250.

as “ways of being” for the voice.”⁸⁶ This quote speaks to a specific focus shared by both Berberian and Berio: the border between the inner and outer, and the border between sound and speech. (*Sequenza III* is the seminal example of this.) Berberian’s focus is on being curious and objective. The phrase “ways of being” is enigmatic (as is much of Berberian’s writing), but perhaps intentionally so. It hearkens to the idea of an essentialized, “Ur” voice, as though beneath language is a more primal, shared vocality. However, the plural is important: by saying “ways” of being rather than “way” of being, Berberian implies a continued openness to possibilities, rather than a focus on finding a unity or “truth” in the voice itself. Delighting in the notion of “voice as machine,” Berberian’s priority is a quest for function and execution and the objective, yet fully-engaged delight this can provide.

Berberian’s mechanistic approach stands in sharp contrast to approaches to singing that rely on a concept of an interior self that is sonically imprinted on a voice. Instead of making references to the “self,” Berberian constantly redirects our attention to the outer, culturally-acquired reasons that our voices are as they are. We use our voices in daily life, and our voices are constantly inputting and outputting data from the culture that surrounds us. By this theory, the voice is constantly changing, differing from day-to-day and from moment-to-moment. Whether or not Berberian did believe in some innate vocal identity, what really interested her was variety and ever-changing imprints from the outside world, as well as her own ability to, in touch-pad fashion, manipulate and master the human vocal machine.

My larger inquiry concerns how Berberian’s approach to singing offers alternative ways for a singer to understand the voice in relation to the elusive concept of “self.” Berberian is the closest

⁸⁶ Karantonis, “Cathy’s Solo Talk Show,” 35.

example I can find to help answer a question that has been on my mind for a long time: What is it like to sing if you don't think of your voice as signifying a stable, singular "self?" Perhaps this modality would release some of the strictures created by the need for cohesion, either a cohesion of the singer herself, or cohesion in the interpretation of a given song. It might allow singers to have a less replicative, more in-the-moment approach to singing, whereby they could respond to environmental and cultural factors affecting them on that particular day, in that particular moment. Simply put, it would afford singers more freedom. According to Placanica, one of Berberian's most significant contributions to singers was to offer "a freedom from text and score. . . a statement of their mode of being." What exactly is this "mode of being" and what is it like to sing when one is fully in touch with it? I will explore these possibilities further in subsequent chapters and turn now to another singer modality that also challenges the concept of "self."

The artificial voice

Cathy Berberian's early experiences singing and studying helped put her on an alternate path as a performer and afforded her opportunities to draw from unconventional modalities of learning and develop unique perspectives on singing. Berberian was born in 1925 Massachusetts to first-generation Armenian parents and moved to New York City with her family at age twelve. There, she began studying traditional Armenian music. She became a skilled dancer as well as a singer and directed an Armenian Folk Group while still in high school. She loved classical singing and learned through imitation, listening to the operatic recordings in her parents' collection of both male and female singers and copying them verbatim. Imitation was a tool she used throughout her career, and she was much more comfortable learning in this way than through a traditional teacher-student relationship. Even as a Fulbright student and young performer in Paris and Milan, Berberian was wary of voice teachers, breaking with them frequently, and immersing

herself instead in collaborations with composers. Her talent for mimicry became central to her work, and the direct imitation of styles became one of her artistic signatures.

What is noteworthy is not just that Berberian learned to sing in a way that was not sanctioned by contemporary pedagogy, but that she was outspoken about it and spoke frequently about how she learned music by copying other voices. In a radio broadcast produced by the Dutch radio station KRO in 1979, she shared a recording of herself from 1950 singing a Rossini aria: “Goddamn,” she remarks, “...the coloratura technique I’d learned by myself basically...by imitating it, by studying, just making the patterns and then trying to make them faster and faster so that it just ran and seemed like a natural flow of the music...I could equate it a little bit with what happens with aerial acrobats in circuses. It’s an exercise in acrobatics—in vocal acrobatics that we admire.”⁸⁷

Here Berberian admits to breaking a taboo: bel canto technique generally eschews singers’ learning directly from other singers and their recordings and instead asks singers to learn either through their teachers or directly through score study. Privately, many singers do learn from recordings, but it is not, however, considered a legitimate pillar of pedagogy. One paradoxical challenge of classical singing is that there is great emphasis on learning a style precisely, yet imitation of another singer is discouraged. This strain of pedagogy is intertwined with the reification of “the voice” as the sonic representation of a singer’s unique, inimitable identity, not to be copied or stolen from. Berberian’s open use of mimicry challenges both the hierarchical

⁸⁷ Karantonis, 35.

structures of training (singers learning on a lateral level, from one another) and the notion that copying is somehow a lower form of artistry.

In many instances, Berberian seems to deliberately use language that evokes lowbrow performance modalities. She is aware of her role as an entertainer, calculating how to manipulate an audience through her use of showmanship, wanting to please by wooing, seducing, and coddling a crowd. What emerges as Berberian discusses her creative and technical process is a playful, even affectionate irreverence for her craft, even in the midst of work that she takes very seriously. For example, in the same radio interview, she describes the virtuosity of Berio's *Sequenza III*, which is at once a rich, psychologically-complicated work about the sources of human speech and utterance, and also, "...almost a trick piece. Without the bad connotation of a trick there...It's kind of a contemporary version of coloratura, you know. Except that you're really doing a mission when you're doing this piece because it's an important piece."⁸⁸

Berberian delighted in revealing the crafted elements of the work, which aligns with her use of the trope of mechanism, through which she revealed the crafted elements of the voice. These exhibit her comfort with a blurred boundary between the real and the artificial. Berberian's approach disrupts conventional notions of the singer "self" in two ways: first, it reveals a detachment of the voice from the self, and second, it challenges the notion that the "self" is something that can even be identified. In interviews and public programs, Berberian intentionally avoided providing answers on questions related to "self" and singing, further contributing to her mystique. Her collaborators and colleagues supported her in her cultivation of an enigmatic

⁸⁸ Karantonis, 42.

public persona. In her own Talk Show, for which she curated and designed the audio, Berio speaks over an audio recording of Berberian singing “Seguidilla” from Bizet’s *Carmen*, saying, “What is the voice, actually? If you ask me—one who has worked with that exceptional personality called Cathy Berberian for such a long time, I can only best say: I don’t know.”⁸⁹

Even when Berberian pontificates at length, her speeches often end with questions, as if she is still musing and does not see it as her role to clarify everything completely for the listener. This elusive quality is also a strong trait of John Cage, who was foundational for Berberian both in his artistry and in his way of thinking. She frequently retold a story about John Cage’s response to an audience member disapproving of the “obscene” vocalisms he asked Berberian to do in her performance of *Aria*. Cage’s reply was, “There was a village where there was an absolutely beautiful young girl and she was *so* beautiful that every male from the age of six to sixty desired her. Everywhere she went they followed her with their eyes. And one day this beautiful young girl took off her clothes and walked into a deep lake. And the fish were frightened.”⁹⁰ This indirect, though fitting answer, is rich and multi-layered. She communicates Cage’s response, but we are left to interpret it ourselves, a very Cage-ian way to reply. It reflects her ability to shape-shift, not only in her voice, but in her persona, as someone who simultaneously makes strong proclamations and still side-steps giving clear answers.

If Berberian’s voice and personality are aligned in any way, it is in the willingness to play. Who is the real Cathy Berberian? From Berberian’s perspective, the persona on stage may be more truly herself than the person she is off-stage. “On stage, I’m more *me*. I’m bigger than life—my

⁸⁹ Karantonis, 33.

⁹⁰ Karantonis, 40.

nature is bigger than life. I'm exaggerated in everything."⁹¹ Both on and off-stage, Berberian engaged with a kind of "camp," a feature that is central to her radical approach to singing. Anne Sivuoja-Kaupala discusses this topic at length in "Cathy Berberian's Notes on Camp," drawing on Susan Sontag's list of characteristics of camp, which include features such as self-reflexiveness, theatricality, extravagance, incongruity, and artificiality.⁹² Sivuoja-Kaupala concentrates on Berberian's salon recitals, in which Berberian sang a more conventional repertoire, such as art song and parlor song, but still brought her unique perspective of having spent years collaborating in the avant garde. In these recitals, Berberian would repurpose sentimental historical songs into a satirical work of theater, largely for comedic effect, but with poignant and sincere moments along the way, as if to suggest that not only might the "real" be artificial, but the artificial might actually be real. Even Berberian's official website is headlined with a quote about her ability to make the unnatural natural. However, I find it to be just as true that she also makes the natural unnatural, questioning those performance practices we hold to be foregone conclusions. Perhaps, in making the "natural" unnatural, Berberian offers even greater insights for singers of successive generations who confront the questions of pedagogy, training, and identity that I am concerned with here.

One way to apply Berberian's use of camp to performative choices is to link her to another framework for discussing artificiality: that of *grotesquerie*, another concept put forth by Elisabeth Le Guin in "One Says that One Weeps, but One Does Not Weep." Le Guin theorizes

⁹¹ Karantonis, 33.

⁹² Anne Sivuoja-Kaupala, "Cathy Berberian's Notes on Camp," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 126.

that Boccherini intentionally played with *grotesquerie* to balance a tendency of eighteenth-century performance to favor *sensibilité*, or the notion of emotional connection and empathy between performer and viewer. Grotesquerie exaggerated virtuosity and involved a distancing of the performer's body from the audience's bodies, allowing the observers to contemplate the extreme, almost superhuman spectacles before them as "a kind of alienation."⁹³ Alongside moments of extreme musical drama, Boccherini often provided the performer with instructions to make facial expressions, such as a grimace that seems to ironically comment on the musical gesture. When applied, Le Guin claims, this leads to a performance "that emphasizes the disjuncture between visual and aural modes."⁹⁴ Thus, performances of these pieces become commentaries on contemporary questions raised about artificiality and authenticity.

Such juxtapositions are a hallmark of Berberian's performance style, a style she first cultivated through collaborations with Cage and Berio at the beginning of her career. In such works the structure and musical content functioned in tandem with Berberian's vocal contributions, leading to compositions and/or performance works that denaturalized music-making to great effect. Both Berio and Cage worked with decontextualizing and recontextualizing sound in order to open ears. According to Berberian, Berio used recorded sounds to allow the audience to "listen in ways different from reality and from all the sounds that normally escape our attention because they are absorbed and masked by the action which produces them and the experience which provokes them."⁹⁵

⁹³ Le Guin, "One Says That One Weeps," 226.

⁹⁴ Le Guin, 234.

⁹⁵ Berberian, "La Nuova Vocalità Nell'Opera Contemporanea," 35.

The juxtapositions of vocal styles in Cage's *Aria* come at a rapid pace, and yet in each gesture Berberian is able to stay fully committed and expressive. The switches have the effect of cutting off what had seemed to be a genuine musical moment in a manner similar to the alienation of grotesquerie. Sivuoja-Kauppara notes that, unlike Marie Callas, who also switched "voices" frequently but with less ease, Berberian was able to switch between vocal styles with such ease that it almost seemed as if no trace of the former style was left behind. "Despite her apparent plurivocality, her several distinctive registers and singing styles gave Berberian no problems in bridging or rather binding them together."⁹⁶ A similar moment occurs in "Ticket To Ride," which she sings in high-baroque style with the exception of a single line near the end when she sings the phrase "He's got a ticket to ride" in a low, sultry voice, an octave down from the range she uses for the rest of the piece. Because Berberian could truly turn on a dime, the effect was to denaturalize any assumption of an innate vocal personality. In the next chapter, I deepen my investigation of the voice and its properties, returning to my central question: What is it like to sing if we don't think of the voice as signifying a stable, singular self? By looking at Berberian's choices with vocal timbre and through my assessment of her singing with a destabilized or even non-existent sense of vocal "self," I hope to show how her approach opened up radically creative possibilities.

To conclude this discussion, I would like to consider an example of Berberian's singing that links together the three approaches to the voice and self I have discussed in this chapter: artist, machine, and artifice. At one moment in her recital *À la Recherche de la Musique Perdue*, Berberian announces in a deadpan voice that she will sing a song "exactly as I heard it," and then

⁹⁶ Sivuoja-Kauppara, "Cathy Berberian's Notes on Camp," 143.

performs an out-of-tune version of Purcell's "Nymphs and Shepherds." This is Berberian the artist, known to her audience as an avant garde performer who makes unpredictable and meaningful choices, crafting a theatrical moment and putting her own stamp on the song (as well as on the entire recital.) This is also Berberian revealing the mechanism of singing, through the great virtuosity required to sing just slightly off-key. Finally, this exemplifies the artifice of the performing persona in two ways: first, there is the grotesquerie of the earnest singer in formal concert attire singing poorly but with great aplomb; and second, attention is drawn to the constructed nature of the performance, with Berberian playing one character, a salon singer, imitating a poor amateur singer. The disjuncture between the persona and the singer, the disjuncture between the intention of the persona and the outcome of her singing, and the formal trappings combined with amateurism, all work together to make this moment not only a comedic parody, but a larger commentary on the recital form itself. Berberian uses this setting to call into question the inherited notions of who a classical singer should be, challenge how we view and understand the person before us singing, and compel us to deconstruct our perceptions of the "voice" or "voices" a singer offers to the audience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Vocality, Timbre, and Style in Berio's *Folk Songs*

It is crucial to take a more in-depth look at exactly how a playful and varied approach to vocal identity can offer a singer a wider range of vocal techniques, a multiplicity of vocal timbres, and expanded creativity. Although the text I analyze is, nominally, a composition by Luciano Berio, my interest in this work is the fact that it was co-created and performed by Cathy Berberian. To frame this performer-centric analysis, I draw on the work of Carolyn Abbate, who begins her article "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" with a simple question: "What does it mean to write about performance?"⁹⁷ Abbate refers to a claim made by Vladimir Jankélévitch that music should not exclusively be understood as "gnostic," that is, as texts to be considered in static, written form. Rather, music is also "drastic," meaning that it is about doing, specifically through the acts of composing, playing, and singing. Thus, it is necessary to consider experiential aspects of music, not simply technical or representational ones. Recent areas of study, most notably hermeneutics (the theory and practice of critical interpretation), have continued to lead the field of musicology towards the study of musical works as texts and away from the study of performances. Even when scholars contemplate performances or the general notion of "the performative," Abbate notes, their studies often serve to further a perception of the score as the fundamental text to be engaged with and performances as merely incidental renderings that come in second to the textual work and are "summoned for an endorsement"⁹⁸ or as resistive readings of the musical

⁹⁷ Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505-536.

⁹⁸ Abbate, 509.

work. The musical work itself remains “the true object of interest and acclaim.”⁹⁹ Abbate’s proposed antidote to this tendency is to shift the focus to live musical events, which, in a radical step for musicology, would lead to a consideration of what is physical, fleeting, and even, in her view, “wild” in the art of literally *making* music in real time.¹⁰⁰

Abbate reflects upon her own experience as a pianist to highlight the difference between performed experience and scholarly contemplation. In remembering a particular performance, Abbate claims that, although her scholarly mind might have understood the accompaniment of the aria one way, her performer mind was thinking such practical, physically-oriented things as “here comes a big jump.”¹⁰¹ Rather than treating the “protected half-hour”¹⁰² of performance as too trivial for analysis, Abbate speculates that taking into account this way of engaging with music—more physical than interpretive—might lead to deeper understandings of works themselves. What is the risk of turning towards, as Abbate puts it, “the labor and carnality of performance?”¹⁰³ In her view, two cultural taboos come into play: hedonism and closeness. Contemplating performance brings the scholar into contact with what is sensual, pleasurable, intimate, and physically stimulating about music. This fosters a perceived physical proximity between viewer and performer, removing the “critical distance from the performance

⁹⁹ Abbate, 509.

¹⁰⁰ Abbate, 509.

¹⁰¹ Abbate, 511.

¹⁰² Abbate, 513.

¹⁰³ Abbate, 514.

experience”¹⁰⁴ that has been essential to critics in the twentieth century. For a critic to fully embrace the drastic as well as gnostic point of view means overcoming this distance and experiencing the embodied performance. Abbate, along with other theorists, including Elisabeth LeGuin discussed in the previous chapter, proposes that performer-centered criticism will not only lead us to a deeper understanding of musical culture, but will allow us to more fully understand musical texts themselves.

A performer-centered analysis will also offer a greater understanding of the art of singing itself, speaking particularly to the readers of this work who are also practitioners and predicated on the notion that the melding of critical and pragmatic analysis is of value to the thinking musician. On both a technical and psychological level, what is Berberian doing as she performs *Folk Songs*? What needed to happen in her brain and body in order to execute this performance? How is she using her voice? How is she constructing her sense of “self” as she sings? How is she constructing us as listeners? In this chapter, I will first discuss Berberian’s vocal choices, drawing on a few examples of songs within the *Folk Song* cycle and concentrating on the “carnality” of Berberian’s rich and complex uses of vocal timbre. I then broaden the focus to discuss the assemblage of the cycle as a whole and consider how Berberian’s timbral choices function in tandem with Berio’s decisions about structure. Finally, I investigate Berberian’s performative choices and how they connect to concepts of voice and self as outlined in the previous chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Abbate, 532.

Berio's *Folk Songs*

Folk Songs was developed in 1963 and first performed in 1964 at Mills College in California.

The chamber work was written for voice, flute (doubling on piccolo), clarinet, harp, viola, cello, and percussion. It consists of eleven songs from the following countries: The United States, Armenia, France, Italy (Sardinia, Sicily, and mainland Italy), France (the Auvergne region), and Azerbaijan.

Each song is a different interpretation of what a “folk song is understood to be. Of the eleven songs, four were written by individual composers. “Black is the Color (of my true love's hair)” and “I Wonder as I Wander” were written by John Jacob Niles, though he infused them with lyrics and melodies found in Appalachian folk songs.¹⁰⁵ By the time Berio set these two songs, Niles’ versions were very popular in folk music circles. Similarly, the two Italian songs had specific authorship: Berio himself wrote “La Donna Ideale” and “Ballo” in 1947, which were part of a group of songs for voice and piano called *Tre canzoni popolari*. (Although often cited as being written for Berberian, they preceded Berio and Berberian’s first meeting in 1949.) “Malurous qu'o uno fenno” and “Lo fiolairé” are a kind of “second-hand” folk song: they are traditional songs of Auvergne in the Occitan language, but Berio learned of them through composer Joseph Canteloube's cycle *Chants d'Auvergne* and re-set Canteloube's specific versions of these songs. Berberian found “Azerbaijan love song” on a record and transcribed it, and it is presumed to be a folkloric song of Azerbaijan with a phrase in Russian, though little about it is

¹⁰⁵ Gerald Larner, Program Notes for *Folk Songs* by Luciano Berio, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Mariss Jansons, London: Barbican Hall, February 10, 2007.

known. The remaining songs are “folk” songs of common definition: songs with no known composer, existing in multiple versions in a culture, and held up as a repository for a collective or common experience of a people or culture. For reference, below is a list of the eleven songs that comprise *Folk Songs*, listed, as is typical in concert programming, by title and country of origin:

Black is the Color (USA)
 I Wonder as I Wander (USA)
 Loosin Yelav (Armenia)
 Rossignolet du Bois (France)
 A la Femminisca (Sicily)
 La Donna Ideale (Italy)
 Ballo (Italy)
 Motettu de Tristura (Sardinia)
 Malurous qu’o uno Fenno (Auvergne)
 Lo Fiolairé (Auvergne)
 Azerbaijan Love Song (Azerbaijan)

Folk Songs came about at a time in Berberian's career when she was branching out from the avant garde and into more diverse styles of concert performance. This shift seems, in part, to have been prompted by her divorce from Berio in 1964, the same year that *Folk Songs* premiered. This was a pivotal moment in her career, occurring after Berberian’s experimental and electronic-focused work in the 1950s, but before she went in more diverse directions to explore Italian Baroque opera, theatrical recitals, art songs, and faux-classical settings of Beatles songs. In some ways, *Folk Songs* represents the most “traditional” concert repertoire ever composed for Berberian, following in the tradition of folk song settings for chamber ensembles and orchestras that had flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. As opposed to her theatrical recital performances, such as the comedic one-woman act *A La Recherche de la Musique Perdue*, *Folk Songs* does not seem to have been intended as tongue-in-cheek, and the

songs are both set and performed in ways that seem, at least on first listen, to be positioned as “sincere” renderings of the songs. (I will argue later, however, that this level of sincerity is complicated by Berberian's identity as an avant garde singer and by her virtuosic use of different vocal timbres.)

Folk Songs continues to be one of the more popular concert works by Luciano Berio. It is a favorite Berio work among singers and one of only a few pieces written specifically for Berberian, alongside Cage's *Aria* and Berio's *Sequenza III*, that are frequently performed today. There are a variety of reasons why many works written for Berberian are no longer performed. Some of the works, although they had strong premieres and were central to Berberian as concert repertoire, simply were never taken up by other singers. In the case of a number of electronic compositions, the recordings themselves were designed as discrete works of art, often with Berberian generating original material that became manipulated. Such pieces were not scored and were never intended to be replicated by other singers. Finally, a number of the works she performed were responses to contemporaneous culture, as is the case with the classical adaptations of Beatles settings she performed. These songs offered incisive, humorous commentary on the state-of-the-art at the time, but are less impactful for today's audiences. By contrast, *Folk Songs* is a favorite of both contemporary and more classically-oriented singers, and composers such as Osvaldo Golijov have paid homage to it by writing subsequent folk song cycles. Golijov's *Ayre* was written for soprano Dawn Upshaw as a kind of sequel to *Folk Songs*, incorporating folk songs from other traditions and adding electronics. Some performances of *Folk Songs* have used multiple singers, a reinforcement of the idea of that Berberian's talents were so great that it would take three singers to do what she had done. However, it is more often the case that *Folk Songs* is performed by a single singer, typically one who shares a similar

virtuosic ability to shift between vocal styles, such as soprano Dawn Upshaw who recorded *Folk Songs* in 2005.¹⁰⁶

Despite the popularity and longevity of *Folk Songs*, an analysis of Berberian's performance of these songs is lacking, even in the recent outpouring of scholarship about her. *Folk Songs* seem to fall between the cracks: it is not wild enough to be considered avant garde music, not overtly sophisticated enough to be treated as serious art music, and not, on the surface, complex enough to inspire the same kind of curiosity as other songs written for Berberian that more explicitly serve as commentaries on contemporary musical idioms. I argue that *Folk Songs* does, in fact, explore the diverse musics and vocalities of contemporary music (both in 1964 and today) in rich and masterful ways, certainly through Berio's unique and beautiful settings, but, more importantly, through Berberian's singing of them. In particular, her use of multiple vocal timbres and her mingling of vocal styles assert her creative contributions at the center of the work and open the door for an exploration of new ways of understanding the relationships between performer, composer, and text.

Folk Songs arrived at a pivotal moment in the United States when there were many challenges to the longstanding divide between highbrow and lowbrow cultures and when folk and vernacular music played a significant role shaping an alternative vocal aesthetic in the mid-twentieth century. When *Folk Songs* was first performed, Berberian was already well-known as the reigning diva of contemporary music (referred to in the press as the "Callas of the avant

¹⁰⁶ Osvaldo Golijov, Dawn Upshaw, and Luciano Berio, *Ayre*, No. AV00068787, 2005.

garde”¹⁰⁷) and had developed an alternate approach to singing by fusing three disparate but aesthetically-linked areas: experimental singing, such as she had done throughout the decade prior, which includes extended vocal techniques and non-sung vocal gestures (with origins in Schoenberg's *sprechstimme*); vernacular singing (including ideas of folk singing, popular or “pop” singing, national identity, and authenticity); and the vocal techniques explored in the early music movement.

The example from Berberian's career that best demonstrates the melding and mixing of these styles is her circuitous and surprising path to early music. Nikolaus Harnoncourt was drawn to Berberian's singing and invited her to work on Monteverdi's operas with him, which led to a new path in Berberian's career and allowed her to put a stamp on early music performance practice that is still felt today. Her work in early music inspired her to write her manifesto “The New Vocality in Contemporary Music” in 1966, a commentary on contemporary music inspired by Monteverdi’s own commentary in his time. Although Berberian’s singing evoked qualities of *seconda prattica* in the use of speech-like song or attention to character development (which formed part of her substantial contribution to the current tradition of Baroque performance), it was not these qualities that initially caught Harnoncourt’s attention. Harnoncourt was exposed to Berberian through her performance of the Beatles' song “Ticket to Ride,” which had been set in a faux-Baroque way, complete with grand arpeggios and baroque trills, by composer and arranger Joshua Rifkin. It was after hearing this high parody that Harnoncourt thought Berberian would

¹⁰⁷ Pamela Karantonis and Pieter Verstraete, “Introduction/Overture,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 9.

lend something to early music; he was inspired as much by her openness to bucking the system and using irony and humor as by her singing style itself.

Throughout her career, Berberian had already shown great expressive range through her renderings of pieces by avant garde composers, and was well-established as a singer who had masterful control of dynamics, phrasing, emotional contour, rhetoric, and other tools that a singer uses to make a song come to life off the page. In *Folk Songs*, Berberian might have used such tools to render the songs beautifully and expressively, but still maintained a relatively similar vocal timbre throughout. This approach would have aligned with conventional practices of performing classically-arranged folk songs at the time. However, Berberian relished *Folk Songs* as an opportunity to further explore her virtuosic ability to use a wide variety of vocal timbres and to shift quickly and seamlessly between vocal styles (as she had done at 5-10 second intervals in Cage's *Aria*.) This radical choice allowed Berio and Berberian to upend audience expectations, challenging and unsettling listeners' preconceived notions of folk and classical genres. Simply taking on the traits of different styles would not have achieved the radical disruption of audience expectations that Berberian and Berio were seeking. Berio and Berberian wanted to go as far as possible with the idea that Cathy truly could do *anything* with her voice, including making it virtually unrecognizable from song to song. Embedded in Berberian's singing of this cycle is a critique of the homogenizing effect of classical vocal training, as well as a critique of the sentimentality of folk singing. Berberian seems to ask listeners to go beyond expectations and habits of both singing and listening. As in her avant garde work, in *Folk Songs* Berberian opens paths for trained singers to explore new aesthetics and new aesthetic combinations of singing styles. How exactly—physically and vocally—did she do it? I investigate Berberian's vocal choices in two ways: first, by looking at some of her shifts between

vocal timbres in *Folk Songs*, then by looking at *Folk Songs* as a whole, considering Berberian's collaboration with Berio and how *Folk Songs* served as a comment on genre and style.

Vocal timbre: exploration and application

Vocal timbre is a thorny and complicated topic. Defining exactly what “timbre” refers to is the subject of much debate. One definition of timbre is that it is synonymous with the “quality” of sound, or “tone color.” Timbre is also often described as all of the characteristics that are not easily defined in a sound by other parameters: as famously (if cynically) put by Stephen McAdams and Albert Bregman, timbre is “...the psychoacoustician's multidimensional waste-basket category for everything that cannot be labeled pitch or loudness.”¹⁰⁸ The Merriam-Webster definition of “timbre” is as follows:

The quality given to a sound by its overtones: such as
a: the resonance by which the ear recognizes and identifies a voiced speech sound
b: the quality of tone distinctive of a particular singing voice or musical instrument¹⁰⁹

Timbre refers to the field of sonic qualities that enables listeners to differentiate kinds of sound sources from each other. With instruments, it is the category by which we know the difference between, for example, a flute and a violin. With singing, timbre can either relate to the recognition of voice types we have been trained to distinguish, such as “that is a soubrette;” individual recognition, such as “that is the voice of (x) singer;” or to a perceived recognition of the sonic markers of various racial, ethnic, and gender identities. Nina Sun Eidsheim, in “The

¹⁰⁸ Stephen McAdams and Albert Bregman, “Hearing musical streams,” *Computer Music Journal* (1979): 34.

¹⁰⁹ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2006, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> (accessed May 25, 2019)

Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre,”¹¹⁰ explores this third way of distinguishing timbres at length. She asserts that not only do people believe they can definitively assess someone's racial identity through hearing that person's voice, but that people also believe there is an inherent and unalterable essential sound that a person of a given race will produce. This belies a continued cultural belief in race as a biological phenomenon with clearly-defined categories, rather than a social construct with many grey areas of definition and signification. Further, commonly held understandings of timbre divide what the listener hears into essential versus acquired traits and reveal a belief that somehow underneath the “learned” aspects of timbre (vocal style, or the aesthetics of a national school of singing, for example) is the person's “true” vocal color or personality. Eidsheim says this inner voice has “historically been aligned with and metaphorized as interiority and truth,”¹¹¹ and as listeners we often have an unchecked assumption that when we hear a person's voice we are somehow hearing something intimate, emotional, and personal. We believe we can “know” someone by his or her sound, both on a categorical level (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, class) and on a personal level. Too often, we assume these qualities are biologically determined truths about a voice, as indelible as a person's fingerprints, saturated with deep significance about not only the person's voice, but the person herself.

These beliefs pervade classical vocal pedagogy, where the path to true expression is frequently equated with letting the “real” voice emerge both in balance with, and somehow in spite of, the

¹¹⁰ Nina Sun Eidsheim, “The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre,” *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (2014).

¹¹¹ Eidsheim, “The Micropolitics of Listening to Vocal Timbre,” 9.

learned behavior. Pedagogical language surrounding these issues often elides concepts of vocal health with those of free expression, wherein a healthy voice is a free voice is a true voice. To quote Eidsheim, “A healthy-sounding voice is assumed to be a voice freed from blockages, and thus is assumed to be an unmediated sonorous conduit for the subject.”¹¹² Not only does this set of beliefs rely on an unchecked assumption of an authentic “inner” voice, but it imposes a limited set of parameters for the listener and allows the listener to project his or her own beliefs about the sonic properties of the voice back onto the singer. Eidsheim terms this the “Figure of Sound,” defined as the constellation of beliefs in a stable, knowable sound, which is predicated on a “circular logic” of believing that a listener can know a person via his or her vocal timbre. A listening position that assumes that sound is “stable and knowable... causes us to fail to attend to the many ways in which timbre is learned and performed.”¹¹³

In *Folk Songs*, Cathy Berberian digs deeply into the complexities of timbre, using her voice in a myriad of ways that caused listeners to confront her performance with both awe and confusion.. Berberian demonstrated the ways in which vocal timbre is *unstable* and leaves the performer’s vocal and personal identity *unknowable*. On a theoretical level, Berberian's use of the voice challenges the idea that a person possesses a “true” voice, which has important performative and pedagogical ramifications. The kind of timbral play that Berberian achieves is fundamentally linked to concepts of “self” and “voice” that I have outlined in the previous chapter and will discuss on subsequent pages. On a practical level, there is much to be learned by analyzing Berberian's use of various vocal timbres through the eleven songs in the cycle. The nuance,

¹¹² Eidsheim, 4.

¹¹³ Eidsheim, 9.

variety, and surprise of Berberian's choices provide insight to a classical singer who wishes to explore an expansion of color and tone in his or her classical singing. These choices also represent an important set of options for classically-trained singers who wish to expand into other genres. Because “timbre” is often so vaguely addressed in pedagogy and poorly understood as a category, I offer my specific study of Berberian's use of timbre as a practicum for future use.

Berberian chooses a different technical approach for each song, using for each a different balance between vocal registrations, commonly called head, chest, or mixed voice. By alternating between registers, Berberian immediately conveys her versatility in using different “voices,” for which she was known throughout her career (in fact, much of her marketing made reference to the “many voices” of Cathy Berberian.). The juxtaposition of “voices” seems to have been designed for maximum contrast. In the first two songs, “Black is the Color” and “I Wonder as I Wander,” Berberian sings exclusively in “head voice” and exaggerates the brighter, lighter colors associated with head voice by flattening her diction and increasing the nasality of her sound. Then, in “Loosin Yelav,” Berberian switches to using her voice in a more “mixed” way, bringing in chest resonance even as she stays in a higher register and using rounded vowels to approach a sound akin to an operatic one, where the tone is placed further back to create chiaroscuro, or a balance of “light” and “dark” colors. She also employs a classical sense of vocal support and projection with unbroken vocal lines, and, it seems, lower muscular support before each breath.

Berberian's timbral choices in the first two songs of *Folk Songs*, as heard on the 1968 recording of *Folk Songs* with the Juilliard Ensemble,¹¹⁴ "Black is the Color" and "I Wonder as I Wander" share some timbral similarities in the use of head voice and *non vibrato*. This seems to be Berberian's way of capturing an American, and specifically, Appalachian quality (akin to folk singer Jean Ritchie who was iconic at that time), and an innocence or purity of character. It is significant that the dramatic arc of *Folk Songs* begins in this way and that Berberian's timbre as much as the composition itself creates the opening atmosphere. Beyond this general timbral approach, there are key differences between the two songs. In "Black Is the Color," Berberian uses a flatter diction than she might in classical singing. For example, the vowel of the word "Black" is rather horizontal and not at all rounded. Occasionally she also uses a very thin version of a given vowel, such as the "i" of "lips." Berberian brings in final consonants quite early, particularly the "r" of "color" and "hair," so that the end of long notes morph from pure vowel to an "r" sound. The ends of the words "hands" and "stands" have a slight taper before the final consonants, so the long notes break earlier than they might in classical technique. I perceive Berberian's approach to long notes in this song as a compromise between wanting to cast a spell via a long, pure note, while also wanting to assert the diction with clarity and specificity. This is a technique that is commonly used in Appalachian ballad singing, which is often sung at a tempo similar to "Black is the Color." While this set of choices might be described as Berberian's use of "phrasing" and "musicianship," they also have a strong effect on the timbral personality of this song. These phrasing choices augment and substantiate the overall vocal color she has chosen, as if to signal that vocal color is, somehow, the point. The listener's ear is drawn to the

¹¹⁴ Luciano Berio and Cathy Berberian. *Recital 1 For Cathy / Folk Songs*, BMG Classics 09026 62540 2, 1995, compact disc.

clear, focused vocal tone without vibrato, right until the very end of the note. Then, at the penultimate micro-second, her switch towards a focus on consonants reasserts the verbal nature of the performance, and, to my ear, asks the listener to connect her singing back to speech, and to hear the timbre she has chosen as linked to a living person, rather than an emission of pure tone.

By contrast, Berberian uses little to no legato in “I Wonder As I Wander” and the same general vocal timbre has a very different effect. The speech-like qualities of Berberian’s singing become the focus as the proportion of consonant to vowel becomes much greater and there is more separation between notes. To further achieve a speech-like or spoken quality in this song, Berberian emphasizes the aspects of vocal production that are found in speech: she exaggerates diphthongs and shadow vowels, uses glottal attacks, and allows for “grain” qualities such as lip and tongue sounds. The letters “l” and “r” receive emphasis, particularly the final “r” of “wander.” Her approach to the text gives her performance a measured quality, perhaps intended to capture the contemplative, questioning state of the singer as she grapples with religious mystery. The harp punctuates the vocal line and enhances this chopped-up effect. Berberian thins out her vocal tone as she moves from “Black is the Color” to “I Wonder as I Wander,” using even more sinuosity and nasal resonance, which almost serve as a caricature of this timbral choice. If one accepts the idea that Berberian was hoping to convey purity in the first song, this more exaggerated version of the same choice might be interpreted as a wish to convey a greater level of innocence, and perhaps even ignorance. Although, on first listen, Berberian’s performance in these two songs seems to occupy the same sonic world, they are actually contrasting ways of deploying *non vibrato* head voice and seem to be coming from different sets of cultural referents for that style of singing: the former draws upon ballad singing and the latter serves as a reference to both devotional singing and children’s song. “Here is one way to hear this vocal color,”

Berberian seems to suggest, “and here is another.” This prismatic approach allows for a rich and nuanced experience on the part of the listener, and in its subtlety, parallels the invitations made by Berberian to the listener in avant garde works that preceded *Folk Songs*, such as *Aria* by John Cage. The other question immediately put to the listener as Berberian makes choices with timbre is: “Who is this person?” This can be asked of both the speakers in each song and of Berberian herself. We are cued to the fact that we cannot hear a cohesive identity via the timbre of the singer, and so if we want to access a sense of “self” in the performer before us, it must be by some other means.

Vocal choices in context

As the cycle continues, Berberian dazzles with her timbral flexibility, making extreme shifts of tone and style: the light, trilling “Rossignolet du Bois,” with sonic referents to early music singing and style, is followed by the guttural, almost shout-like singing of the Sicilian “A la Femminisca.” Then, in the delicate “La Donna Ideale,” Berberian sings in an almost classical style, perhaps as a nod to the fact that it was first composed by Berio himself as an art song set to piano accompaniment. The order of the songs seems to be designed for maximum effect, both to showcase Berberian’s talents and to offer a complicated commentary on the various genres referenced in the work. Both Berio and Berberian were highly concerned with formal structure, and Berio, in particular, was not interested in randomness and arbitrariness. When Berberian worked with composers who were more interested in chance operations and collage, Berio was critical of her choice to do so because he found these approaches to be too loose. Berio disliked the term “collage,” saying that collages, “amuse me only when I’m doing them with my children: then they become an exercise in relativizing and ‘decontextualizing’ images, an elementary

exercise whose healthy cynicism won't do anyone any harm."¹¹⁵ Instead, he preferred the term "transcription" and described his interest in carefully arranging quotations (even those composed by him) so that they simultaneously referred to the context of their origins and gained new meaning by the careful design of his assembly. In other words, he did not simply wish to "decontextualize," but to "recontextualize" by maintaining a strong level of intellectual control.

Berio was interested in tackling questions of how to present and frame folk songs, and he thought of *Folk Songs* as a commentary on the tradition of presenting folk songs on a classical stage. In his introduction to the score of *Folk Songs*, Berio wrote, "I have always sensed a profound uneasiness while listening to popular folk songs performed with piano accompaniment."¹¹⁶ He described *Folk Songs* as an "anthology" in which,

I have given the songs a new rhythmic and harmonic interpretation: in a way, I have recomposed them. The instrumental part has an important function: it is meant to underline and comment on the expressive and cultural roots of each song. Such roots signify not only the ethnic origins of the song but also the history of the authentic uses that have been made of them.¹¹⁷

Berio's instrumental settings offer a great variety of levels of nuance: some are highly intricate and elaborate, with interwoven and very composed-sounding textures, while others are more homogenous, often including only a single percussive chord per measure. In both the vocal and instrumental writing, Berio offers a diverse set of examples of what "folk" music might mean and explores a wide variety of ways to meld "folk" elements with classical compositional

¹¹⁵ David Osmond-Smith, ed., *Luciano Berio: Two Interviews with Rossana Dalmonte and Balint Andras Varga*, M. Boyars, 1984.

¹¹⁶ Luciano Berio, *Folk Songs*, Universal Editions, 1964, Introduction.

¹¹⁷ Berio.

techniques. This topic is discussed at length by Jamison Fritts, who describes ways in which Berio's accompaniments "demonstrate both an awareness of the appropriated music culture and a desire for originality."¹¹⁸ Some accompaniment choices, such as the opening arpeggios of "Loosin Yelav," seem designed to echo traditional elements of a given style. Other accompaniments make free use of an almost avant garde dissonance, particularly that of "Motetu de Tristura." Berio's accompaniments often give the instruments iterations of the sung melody, but Berio alters the melodies through rhythmic variations or by using phasing techniques. This way of bridging from the melody to a more complex texture offers shifts in perception for the listener, where familiar elements become recontextualized (not simply decontextualized). In his settings of the songs by Niles and the songs previously set by Canteloube, Berio's accompaniments are reworkings of these composers' settings of the same songs, as if to comment on both the songs themselves and on prior interpretations. Some accompaniments in *Folk Songs* make use of dissonance and others are very tonal; some are highly complex, and others are very sparse. This diversity of settings seems like a particularly pointed choice on the part of Berio and Berberian in the cultural context of the 1960s, designed not only to show a variety of folk styles, but to highlight the constructed nature of each moment and reach a point of such diversity, as to suggest that no one accompaniment style or timbre can be claimed as more authentic than another. As put by David Osmond-Smith, "In a decade where sentimental

¹¹⁸ Jamison Tyler, "Transforming the Past: Luciano Berio's Appropriation of Folk Materials and Idioms in 'Folk Songs'"(1964)," (Master's Thesis, The University of Louisville, 2010), 57.

identification with ‘folk-culture’ and ‘ethnicity’ was poised to run rampant among urban Western consumers, *Folk Songs* was precise in its balance of artifice and longing for identity.”¹¹⁹

This plurality (or confusion) of approaches to vocal production and arrangement style was not lost on critics, such as Roger Smalley who disliked the cycle for failing to fit his understanding of what folk songs should be. In his 1972 review of the recording of *Folk Songs*, he wrote, “By what criterion they qualify as folksongs I cannot imagine. True folksongs are the spontaneous, artless expression of emotion through music. . . I fail to appreciate the justification for taking such songs out of their natural context and surrounding them with artfully contrived accompaniments, however superficially brilliant and attractive these may sound.”¹²⁰ This critique seems to combine pre-conceived notions of folk songs with pre-conceived notions of folk song settings, such as those by Canteloube, Copeland, and Berio himself. Here we have another genre that *Folk Songs* comments on and plays with. Most early twentieth-century folk song settings for voice and piano or voice and chamber ensemble were settings of a single country’s songs, and they maintained a sound world relatively intact throughout the cycle. The contrasts between different songs were typically those of energy: a fast song, a slow song, a dramatic song. Again, the set order of *Folk Songs* makes reference to this by having three paired moments that share a sound world, as if there are mini song-cycles within the work. In addition to serving as a referent to song cycles, these pairings make for an unevenness in the set. For example, we are in one “world” for two songs, then one song, then one song, then two songs, et cetera, causing an

¹¹⁹ David Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator: The Work of Cathy Berberian 1958–1966,” *Tempo* 58, no. 227 (2004): 10.

¹²⁰ Roger Smalley, Review of Epiphanie; Folksongs. Cathy Berberian/The Juilliard Ensemble/BBC SO/Berio, *The Musical Times* August 1972: 779.

irregularity of pacing. I believe this was part of Berio's wish to avoid collage, never allowing the listener to rest easy in a predictable pattern of touring around the world's musics. Furthermore, as discussed above, these pairings allow for internal timbral shifts, so that we hear Berberian jump from country to country. We also hear her offer different personae within a given genre. Like John Cage, Berberian prompted audiences to ask not only "how" she was shifting styles, but "why." *Folk Songs* is a prime example of the way that Berberian, in tandem with Berio, interwove virtuosic play with social commentary. What is a folk song? What does "folk singing" mean? How can one person sing in all these styles and sound authentic in all of them?

A look at the final song of the cycle reveals how *Folk Songs* also makes reference to the genre(s) of contemporary music. It also leads us to a discussion of Berberian's use of the notion of persona within the work, where we can apply the ideas explored in Chapter Three to this particular work. Berberian herself found "Azerbaijan Love Song" on an old record and copied the text phonetically without any understanding of its meaning. The song contains one phrase of Russian, and at some point, the lyrics compare love to a stove. Set order, again, is very telling here. The final song is the most theatrical and the most bombastically orchestrated. It functions in the manner of a conventional showstopper. In order to fully deliver this song in an entertaining fashion, Berberian danced and used hand gestures in live performance. Both in performance and on recording, she seems to pay very careful attention to the text, over-articulating every syllable, rendering some words *sotto voce* and half singing/half speaking the final phrase with an exclamatory gesture at the end. All this happens in a piece with textual meaning that is virtually imperceptible, yet the performance itself is filled with a sense of meaning, not just at a musical level, but a phonemic level. As in *Sequenza III*, sounds themselves, separated from context, are evocative simply for their sonic and physicalized properties.

How does Berberian's singing of *Folk Songs* hearken back to her use of the voice in earlier collaborations with avant garde composers? In those works, the abandonment of linguistic meaning gave way to a deeper connection with speech on a phonemic level, where both Berberian and the composers she worked with sought to explore the qualities of vowels, consonants, and non-speech-related vocal gestures that might have meaning in and of themselves. They focused on the borders between sound and speech, between the internal and the outwardly communicative, and between silence and utterance. How is this practice embedded in *Folk Songs*? David Osmond-Smith describes Berberian's performance of "Azerbaijan Love Song" as "communicative bravura,"¹²¹ a virtuosic feat in which Berberian breaks apart the linguistic to reveal the aspects of language which, despite the lack of translation, still carry an intensity and urgency that, although unspecified, still carry a sense of import and the wish to communicate. On a technical level, Berberian does this by amplifying her extra-musical vocal skills and her ability to be highly tactile with language, to add dynamic speech-like shapes to musical phrases and weave the guttural, carnal parts of her voice into the singing. In a later era, one might call these "extended vocal techniques," although rarely are those applied to a straightforward folk song. Certainly, it is still a folk song in many ways, but as a found object, converted imprecisely into a transcription and performed with exaggerated vocal techniques, it evokes ties to contemporary music. The placement of this song at the end of the set provides a finale and transports *Folk Songs* to another realm. When we look back to the opening song, "Black is the Color," one way to view the path of the cycle is towards extroversion. Another way to view it is perhaps as Berio wished: an exercise in deconstruction, in which categories of

¹²¹ Osmond-Smith, "The Tenth Oscillator," 11.

artifice and authenticity are confused, and listeners are reached, in the end, not by piety or sentimentality, but by pure bravura.

Along the way, listeners have encountered a great variety of vocal identities, and in this last song they are reminded that one of these is Berberian, the avant garde diva. Cage's *Aria with Fontana Mix* is often described as a montage of performing styles, and Berio's *Sequenza III* is considered to be a montage of "every-day vocal behavior," thought to evoke the plight of a woman trapped by domesticity. (Note that the former reveals Cage's comfort with chance and collage, whereas, in the latter, Berio is invested in making explicit meaning.) As a later work in which Berberian brings the experience of both these former works to bear, *Folk Songs* is also a montage: that of vocal personifications.

In slipping between personifications, Berberian calls to mind Eidsheim's question as to whether or not sonic properties are stable and can be definitively attached to racial or ethnic identities. In the second chapter, I discussed the ways the construction of a vocal persona, particularly in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, had the quality of being "twice removed," first a distancing of the singer from the persona, then a distancing of the persona from the character of the song. The conceit of this system is that the persona singing the song is an idealization and a performance of a certain kind of cultivated singer. Berberian both references and challenges this set of personas in *Folk Songs*. First, there is Berberian the singer, who is a mix of American and Armenian descent, who, as a shape-shifter, we see moving between styles. Then, there is Berberian as the avant garde diva, who we always recognize as herself, both visually and, I argue, audibly. Although she is an extremely skilled shape-shifter, some aspects of her signature sound never fully disappear. (Some might argue that this proves the notion that there is such

thing as a “natural” or ingrained timbre, although, as I argued earlier and return to in the last chapter, I think a signature sound is more accurately understood as a sound developed in the very early years of life.) Given the context of the cycle as comprised of “folk songs,” a listener is also likely to listen with additional pre-conceived notions that the singer is singing songs that are “true” to his or her cultural background. Berberian delighted in the fact that a confluence of expectations about folk song and about singing personas both confused audiences who saw her perform *Folk Songs*. In fact, she relished how many people would come up to her and ask, “But which one is your real voice?” and saw these perplexed reactions as proof of the work’s success.

Berberian could neither have conceived of nor performed the *Folk Songs* had she not already been willing to experiment with alternative, radical notions of both “self” and the “voice.” Her attention to and flexibility with vocal timbre and style brings up three potentially liberating possibilities for singers, which I discuss as an end to this section. These possibilities are invention, detachment, and impersonation. These are three active positions Berberian was able to take, three unique modalities for performance, made possible in dialectic relationships with the three “self” states outlined in the previous chapter:

1. The tool of invention: having a creative “voice” by operating through an expanded sense of the self as an agentive artist.
2. The tool of detachment: playful use of many “voices” by thinking of the voice as a machine and by disconnecting “voice” from “self.”
3. The tool of impersonation: taking on “voices” and “selves” that are pointedly not one’s own.

The singer as creator: the tool of invention

When a singer can truly make choices with his or her voice, he or she is free, if desired, to attach “voice” to self-expression or to separate the voice from “self.” This is an artistic freedom readily afforded to actors. When a singer has this level of agency, he or she makes a greater contribution to the work itself. Many of the articles in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* make the point that Berberian was a true collaborator, if not co-composer with many of the composers she worked with, which is certainly true of *Folk Songs*. Berberian and Berio shared a love of folk songs, a love cultivated in Italy through their interactions with the Studio di Fonologia in 1955, where Berio wanted to do folk song archiving projects inspired by the work of American folk song collector Alan Lomax. Both Berberian and Berio selected the songs for *Folk Songs*, making it, according to David Osmond-Smith, a work that “encoded an assertion of composer and performer’s shared enthusiasms.”¹²² Furthermore, one could make the case that Berio did not so much set these eleven folk songs, but rather, he set Berberian’s singing of them. Every timbral choice Berberian makes is reinforced by an instrumental color: the violin in “Black is the Color,” the flute in “Malurous Qu’o Uno Fenno,” the cymbals in “A La Femminisca.” These colors highlight and reinforce Berberian’s vocal choices.

Kate Meehan describes several instances in which Berberian herself felt she offered more than just a performance to a composer, and was an active collaborator in either composing musical material or in giving unique recorded material that was later manipulated.¹²³ Descriptions of

¹²² Osmond-Smith, 11.

¹²³ Kate Meehan, “Not Just a Pretty Voice: Cathy Berberian as Collaborator, Composer and Creator” (PhD diss., University of St. Louis, 2011), 38-42.

Berberian as Berio's "voice" or muse persist in descriptions of their work together. For example, referring to Berberian's recording of *Folk Songs*, interviewer Bálint András Varga wrote, "Her recordings of both compositions serve as reference, as historic documents of Luciano Berio's intentions as realized by his wife and muse, Cathy Berberian."¹²⁴ I hope to have demonstrated that *Folk Songs* was not just tailor-made by Berio for Berberian, but also worked the other way around: Berberian tailor-made specific material for Berio to assemble and arrange, resulting in a highly successful chamber work that Berberian performed throughout her career and allowed her to keep her creative energy and artistry at the fore.

As a show piece of sorts, *Folk Songs* relies wholly on the capacities of the performer, puts the performer at the heart of the work and is fundamentally collaborative. Meaning is created by the performer and the performance, not just through the text itself, but through the voice, or voices, used. *Folk Songs* would be an entirely different piece if the singer did *not* make radical shifts in vocal timbre. And, as with Cage's *Aria*, it would also be a different piece if the singer made the same number of shifts but made different ones. That so little of this aspect of the piece can be captured on the page is evidence of how complicated it is to teach, imitate, and discuss vocal timbre. In classical vocal pedagogy, a greater emphasis on both oral and aural traditions of learning music would compensate for what is often impossible to capture on the page. It would also expand the tools available to a singer interested in broadening his or her capacities as a performer. As envisioned by Placanica,

The path which Berberian shows to singers here is based on their autonomy and their total awareness of the possibilities of their instrument. If the singer is no longer simply the vehicle of the composer's will but a creative agent in the compositional process, the

¹²⁴ Bálint András Varga, *From Boulanger to Stockhausen: Interviews and a Memoir*, Vol. 104. (Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 166.

possibilities of composition become unlimited. Each “interpretation” in this way could be a totally original work based on the performer’s vocality.¹²⁵

Such a process is dramatically different from the singer-as-channel model, where creativity is unidirectional, from composer to performer. By allowing for a reciprocal relationship between singer and the piece, both the performer and the work of art can grow in the process.

The singer as machine: the tool of detachment

In his introduction to *Folk Songs*, Berio describes the work as, “a tribute to the artistry and the vocal intelligence of Cathy Berberian.”¹²⁶ “Artistry” is Berio’s recognition of Berberian’s creative influence, as discussed above. “Vocal intelligence” is further acknowledgement of her contributions and captures what Berberian was able to understand about the voice and mine from the voice. She was so committed to exploring the capacities of the vocal apparatus and “vocal process” through a deep integration of the personal, cultural, and symbolic aspects of “voice” with its properties as a machine. If we were to pinpoint one of the things that made Berberian so different from her peers at the time, it would be this orientation towards the voice. Berberian’s lifelong explorations of vocal capacities and properties became one of the things she was most proud of when she compared herself to other singers and distinguished her most from them.

It is useful to compare Berberian’s way of individuating herself with Nina Sun Eidsheim observations about how voice teachers typically teach concepts of individuality. She noted that teachers often had the goal of helping their students become more individuated, wanting them to

¹²⁵ Francesca Placanica, “La Nuova Vocalità Nell’Opera Contemporanea” (1966): Cathy Berberian’s Legacy,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 61.

¹²⁶ Berio, *Folk Songs*, Introduction.

sound less like a pre-conceived notion of what a soprano, for example, should sound like.

However, this intention of promoting individuality often had negative results. When working with students of color, Eidsheim describes the ways in which teachers taught their students to cultivate vocal timbres that fit racial stereotypes, all the while believing they were teaching individuality. “A racialized vocal timbre is conceived by voice teachers as simply the result of a healthy way of singing that promotes a non-homogenized sound and that allows students to be “themselves.”¹²⁷ This way of teaching indicates a tremendous lack of social, political, and cultural awareness on the part of the teacher, and yet it is a particularly difficult pedagogical approach to confront because it is meant with the good intention of helping a student blossom. This approach incorporates the pervasive belief that there is a unified “self” that has a cohesive, true “voice,” both literally and metaphorically, yet, paradoxically, is designed to teach towards a voice “type.” A polarity is established between this individuated self and a platonic ideal (i.e. “Emily” versus “soprano”), which implies that artistic uniqueness operates along this spectrum of how unique a singer can sound when compared to an abstract concept, yet (and this is the challenging part) also fit all the requirements of this type.

This approach offers limited way of encouraging a student to seek variety and differentiation in his or her singing. It allows for some uniqueness of identity but is still tethered to an image of perfection. This approach to vocal pedagogy keeps the student in a perpetual state of being evaluated in reference to an ideal, and individuality is defined very narrowly as striking the proper balance between sounding “like” and sounding “different from” one’s fach, style, age,

¹²⁷ Eidsheim, “Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of the Performativity of Vocal Timbre,” *Trans: Transcultural Music Review= Revista Transcultural de Música* 13 (2009): 4.

race, and gender identity. This approach has an “other-directed” quality that, in the end, largely homogenizes the sound among classical singers of a given type, and, in relation to the questions of creative agency discussed above, it does not encourage the singer to go as far as he or she might want to go in the direction of either in terms of individuality or skill-building.

How different from this is Cathy Berberian’s approach? I argue that, although the end result was great distinctiveness, Berberian was more concerned with developing capacity than in differentiating herself from her peers. Instead of juxtaposing herself with an outside ideal and seeking to individuate herself from others, she focuses on differentiation within herself and revels in her ability to be internally non-homogenized, in a slippery, complex way. Her emphasis is on capacity and functionality, rather than on identity. This plays out in *Folk Songs* through her intense commitment to contrast, as she sought to make each song’s vocal personality distinct from the next. Initially, in *Folk Songs*, Berberian seems to do this with broad strokes. She embraces a generalized timbre for each song, almost adopting a stereotypical sound for each. It is almost as though she is offering a formula for each genre presented by assembling the components of a given sound. This hearkens back to the idea of mechanism, where a performer highlights the aspects of singing that can be dialed up or down like knobs on a machine. By taking on each of these vocal choices, she first denaturalizes them, so it would be impossible to say that she is, at any given moment, singing as “herself” because there is no consistent sound to anchor Berberian’s “identity.” These vocal choices can almost be perceived as voices without selves, perhaps even just vocal formulas. As each song unfolds, the emotional and storytelling components add layers to the performance, but within minutes she removes a given voice and adopts another one. No one voice seems to be “more” Berberian than any other and she succeeds in drawing attention to the mechanisms at work to take off one voice and put on another.

It would be hard to deduce any information about Berberian's inner essence from a performance of *Folk Songs*. Another way to describe the effect of this switching of styles is that Berberian remains "unintegrated" vocally and it is never clear how the parts add up to a whole voice. Paradoxically, this makes Berberian hard to specify as a vocal personality (or as a sonic representation of a body) and yet very easy to specify and recognize as an artist, who an audience can witness is in great command of her capacities to control the machine. The notion of detaching in the act of singing might seem to some singers or teachers to be an act of disempowerment, because it is so counter to prevailing concepts of self-expression. Depersonalizing the act of singing might also seem antithetical to concepts we hold about growth and exploring and expressing one's "voice," literally or metaphorically. How can it, in fact, be empowering to annihilate a sense of self when singing? John Cage's famous quote, "I have nothing to say and I am saying it,"¹²⁸ applies here. Described by Morgan Meis as a "self-devouring paradox,"¹²⁹ this quote highlights that it is, in fact, impossible to say nothing once you are in the act of saying and that nothingness itself will speak. What is conveyed by the action of speech, sound, and performance might say something in and of itself, without an overt intention on the part of either the singer or composer to communicate a message. Although the actuality of offering a completely neutral conveyance of material is debatable, both as a possibility and as a goal, thinking of transmission in this way is an eye-opening option for a performer. The effort to share material without making a cohesive statement or point is something that Berberian

¹²⁸ John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Wesleyan University Press, 2011.

¹²⁹ Morgan Meis, "I Have Nothing to Say and I am Saying I," *3 Quarks Daily* (blog), September 7, 2012, www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2012/09/i-have-nothing-to-say-and-i-am-saying-it.html.

explored throughout her career, as seen in the phonemic explorations of *Sequenza* and the timbral snapshots in *Aria*. When Berberian uses her voice to portray the eleven characters in *Folk Songs*, she might be saying little about her feelings or identity in each song, but the vividness of the portrayals she can achieve using her virtuosic skills still offers something that feels engaging, human, and revealing about the vocal process.

The singer as artifice: the tool of impersonation

What happens when a singer goes a step further, not only playing with multiple voices and vocal properties, but intentionally taking on voices and selves which are never intended to be integrated into the “self”? In *Cathy Berberian and the Performative Art of Voice*, Pamela Karantonis states that impersonation “is a mode of achieving an unlikely authenticity through deconstruction. Impersonation does not dissimulate its actions. Nor does it achieve unity with its originating text/authorial voice in order to achieve an “authentic” voice, but actively seeks to reveal its own powers of simulation.”¹³⁰ Cathy Berberian’s performance of *Folk Songs* is a delightfully confusing example of how impersonation can simultaneously combine a recognition of the artificial while also giving the audience joy in something that is very real. Berberian’s success in impersonating eleven different singers is a thrilling journey. Within each song, the attention to detail, the emotional commitment, and the dramatic effect are so successful that Berberian is able to conjure vivid and complex characters who seem “real” and may even evoke, in the listener, specific referents in real life and culture. I argue that the reason Berberian

¹³⁰ Pamela Karantonis, “Cathy Berberian and the Performative Art of Voice” in *Cathy Berberian: pioneer of contemporary vocality*, eds. Francesca Placanica, Pamela Karantonis, Anne Sivuoja, and Peter Verstraete (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014), 158.

manages to create, as Karantonis theorizes, “an unlikely authenticity through deconstruction”¹³¹ is not that she portrayed each of the eleven characters in a way that authentically channeled the folk singers of a given region. Would a listener from a given culture mistake Berberian for a local folk singer? I find that there is something that sounds overdone or perhaps too mannered in her American singing, for example, when compared to life-long practitioners of Appalachian singing. Singers from Azerbaijan have claimed that they cannot understand her words in the final song of the cycle, which Berberian learned from a scratchy recording, obviously not an ideal source for linguistic precision. It does not seem to be the point that Cathy Berberian “fools” us into thinking she is eleven different people. For me, the “authenticity” of *Folk Songs* is that she is generous enough to her audience to deconstruct the art of trying on these different voices. We can hear her do it and can even glimpse how she does it. Karantonis describes the way in which operatic impersonations, where characters within an opera dress up as others, “remind us of the frailty of the negotiated realism of operatic characterization.”¹³² Seeing this kind of play within a performance helps disrupt a sense of unity by drawing attention to the constructed nature of the work as a whole. It has the potential to fragment an authorial voice into a series of voices on stage who offer invitations for the audience to connect. Impersonation is different from disguise because the performer never completely disappears, and so we can revel in their virtuosity the entire time and still enjoy the transformation. Berberian’s use of multiple voices in a recital or concert context lets the audience enjoy the constructed aspects of the performer, potentially doing two things: drawing the audience in closer by highlighting the creative process before

¹³¹ Karantonis, “*Cathy Berberian and the Performative Art of Voice*,” 158.

¹³² Karantonis, 158.

them, as well as drawing the audience closer to Berberian herself, the master craftsperson responsible for generating the characters and voices along the way.

Although Cathy Berberian is lauded in contemporary music circles to this day, she is relatively “unsung,” as it were, as a creative model for singing outside new music. Drawing on both her contributions and the ideas I have explored through examining notions of “voice” and “self,” my final chapter offers ideas for future directions that could help contemporary vocal practice and pedagogy more appropriately reflect both the needs of singers and the demands of the ever-changing field.

CHAPTER FIVE

New Visions for Vocal Performance and Pedagogy

An integration of critical theory with voice practice has become essential in my growth as a singer. I find that not only am I awakened and inspired by the theoretical concepts, but on a fundamental level, I am not the same performer I was before I began this study. My exploration of the artistry of Cathy Berberian has served as a focal point for me throughout because she exemplifies so much of what I believe is possible through expanded critical thought. Her curiosity and enthusiasm for new and radical perspectives, her conversations and collaborations with other artists, and her engagement with both historical and contemporary writings all contributed to her alternative approach to classical singing. Through my own practice, and through collaborations with other singers, I have sought out ways that my research might inform new directions for performance and pedagogy.

One of the primary results of this course of study has been a personal reworking of the concept of “pedagogy.” Coming from a background in voice training, where there is a distinct line between teachers and performers, it has been a radical shift for me to embrace the act of continuously crossing between the roles of teacher and performer and to feel legitimate in both positions. I am heavily influenced by my recent training in the field of “teaching artistry,” which is a term that was developed to describe teachers who have followed an alternative path to traditional music pedagogy. Teaching artists are typically trained through arts institutions rather than academic programs, and they remain active as performers and creators while also working as teachers. In my training as a teaching artist at Carnegie Hall, I was trained primarily to work in group settings and in contexts of explicitly creative work, such as songwriting or composition.

Over the course of the years spent working on this dissertation, I have applied the ideas I have learned in these settings to my work as a voice teacher. As I explore below, this has afforded me a broader perspective on what might constitute a fruitful voice lesson than I might have had if I had pursued a more traditional path in both singing and teaching. The term “practitioner” comes to mind often for me as I think about this integration. In the following pages, I use the term “practitioner” to describe singers who both teach and perform, as was true of Cathy Berberian, whose “practice” also expanded into other forms of artistry, such as composition and critical writing.

One of the current challenges in the field of singing is to bridge the knowledge gained in academic musicology and the knowledge gained through the act of performance. It is particularly challenging to articulate the knowledge so that it can be heard, valued, and incorporated. I find Annette Schlichter’s comments on this process to be highly useful. Schlichter is herself both a scholar and singer, and she recognizes the sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory understandings that arise in intellectual versus experiential discourses on voice. She observes that conversations among academics may have little overlap with discussions among dancers, singers, and actors, even when the two groups share a common goal. For example, “the discourse-practices of voice work share with critical theory, cultural studies, and queer and feminist discourses a critique of body/mind dualism, and yet they might remain ultimately foreign to academic practices of knowing.”¹³³ This is a two-way street, Schlichter claims. Not

¹³³ Annette Schlichter, “Un/Voicing the Self: Vocal Pedagogy and the Discourse-Practices of Subjectivation” in *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (2014): 2

only do practitioners seem to draw very little from critical discourse, but scholars often fail to incorporate knowledge drawn from practice.

However, this is not necessarily due to a lack of respect. Drawing on the work of dance scholar Isabelle Ginot, Schlichter posits that these fields remain separate, in part, because they are “incompatible forms of knowledge production.”¹³⁴ Schlichter uses the term “ways of knowing”¹³⁵ to explore the fact that there are multiple ways to engage with information and that academic practices are only one such form. I have found the phrase “ways of knowing” to be invaluable when organizing my thoughts around the practical applications of critical theory. In order to create methods and tools for practitioners, the information must be shared in a way that allows for somatic knowing. Schlichter points out that voice work is a performative discourse, “not exactly compatible with the more universal truth claims we often find in humanities disciplines.”¹³⁶ In the performative act of singing, or, in Berberian’s words, the “vocal process,” knowledge can be slippery. “Aha” moments, images, metaphors, and embodied knowledge are often the way knowledge translates into action and these can be difficult to express with words. When teachers attempt to express these forms of knowledge through words, it can feel overly simplistic or reductive, until a singer incorporates them and the knowledge becomes integrated, personal, and nuanced again. This is a very different process than academic knowledge production. However, as Schlichter claims, tremendous growth is possible by allowing two “ways of knowing” to integrate: for scholars to be singers, and for singers to be scholars.

¹³⁴ Schlichter, 2

¹³⁵ Schlichter, 2

¹³⁶ Schlichter, 2

Schlichter references an oft-quoted insight by Michel Foucault: Foucault proposes that in the study of Philosophy, “it is right to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it.”¹³⁷ The same may be said about the lifelong pursuit of an art.

To conclude this dissertation, I share specific recommendations for the practice and pedagogy of classical singing that have come out of my research. I share new avenues of exploration that I integrate into my practice and that I believe could be beneficial to other performers and pedagogues. These recommendations are structured according to three primary relationships: the singer’s relationship to the self, the singer’s relationship to others, and the singer’s relationship to artistry. My recommendations for singers are as follows:

- 1) To investigate the many ways that concepts of “self” and “voice” can relate;
- 2) To expand thinking about voice/self relationships by using new methods and tools;
- 3) To develop a critical approach to metaphor and terminology;
- 4) To examine and reframe relationships between teachers, students, and colleagues; and
- 5) To deepen an approach to artistry and fully explore singing as a creative act.

Examining “voice/self” constructs

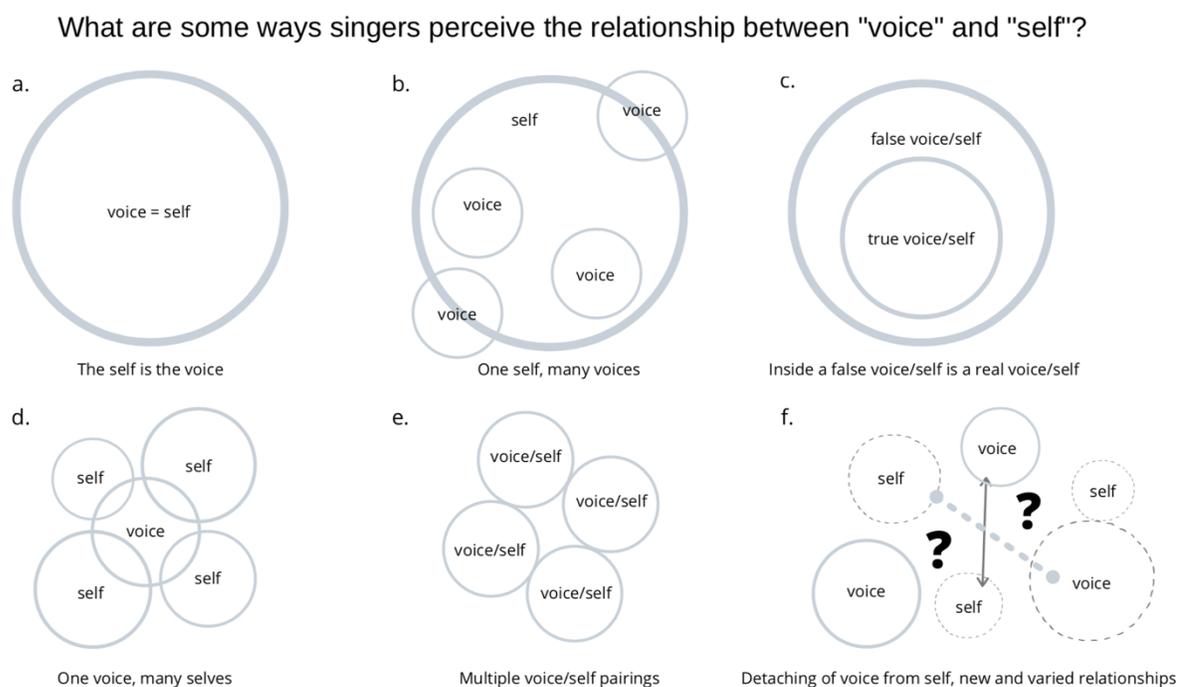
Not only do a variety of constructed models of “the self” exist, but the models matter. Discussing the construction of “self” with my students and colleagues has led to rich discussions and useful explorations in the act of singing. Here, the term “selfhood” is particularly useful. “Selfhood” is

¹³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The history of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (Vintage, 2012): 9.

an achieved status, wherein one develops a conscious sense of the self. “Selfhood” implies the state of awareness of having a “self,” or an aggregate of “selves,” and using the term “selfhood” can prompt nuanced reflection when asking a person to examine the specific way that his or her “self” operates in the world. Asking singers to pay attention to their held concepts of “self,” and to be particularly aware of their “selfhood” in relationship to singing can be transformative.

In order to distill held concepts of “self” and “selfhood,” and to tap into visual as well as verbal “ways of knowing,” I offer Figure 1 below: a collection of images that visually represent the relationships between “voice” and “self” that most frequently come up in my conversations with singers. This diagram also incorporates relationships implied by the different voice/self models discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

Figure 1: Voice/Self Relationships



The six subfigures of Figure 1 are intended as imaginative sparks to prompt discussion. Each can fit a variety of contexts, both positive and negative as experienced by a singer. They are not fixed positions, but different modalities that singers might use at different times. Subfigure (a) captures the idea, discussed by Eidsheim and others, of the reification of vocal timbre in which the voice is perceived as the sonic representation of the self. Subfigure (b) reflects a notion of the self as a stable entity in possession of multiple voices that can be deployed at various times. The voice circles that are partially outside the self may be viewed positively by a singer who feels strengthened by the belief that he or she is channeling multiple voices and is “giving voice” to others through the act of singing. Those same voice circles might resonate negatively with a singer who feels as though he or she is being taught to adopt a voice that feels borrowed, even alien to his or her sense of self. Subfigure (c) represents a state that most singers feel negatively about. It represents the idea of struggle for a real or natural voice to emerge from within. This image might reflect the way a singer feels when he or she experiences imposter syndrome, feels highly judged, or experiences stage fright. Image c is also a reflection of the commonly held notion that an “inner” or “true” voice is a sonic representation of “soul” or “truth.”

Subfigure (d) is in many ways the converse of (b). In (d) a person has a dynamic sense of self, but a fixed sense of his or her voice. Subfigure (d) might reflect the amateur singer who has not yet explored variety and flexibility in his or her vocal production and therefore does not perceive his or her voice to be affected by a sense of self. This image might also reflect a very experienced professional singer, whose use of his or her voice is very codified and stable and who doesn't shape-shift vocally in response to various self-states. Subfigure (e) represents another way of pairing selves with voices, reflecting a fixed sense of which “voice” goes with which “self.” This subfigure might speak to singers who feel they do a great deal of code-

switching as they move through different genres and musical environments. Subfigure (e) also aligns with training methods that actively encourage singers to be versatile and to adopt different vocal timbres. Such a method, either intentionally or unintentionally, also encourages singers to develop different personas for different genres in order to be believable or marketable.

Subfigure (f) reflects a detaching of “voice” from “self,” and this diagram best reflects the way Cathy Berberian thought of her “self” and “voice” states. As discussed earlier, Berberian seemed unconcerned with aligning “voice” and “self,” and she used numerous voices that did not always seem rooted in a self. What this image offers, with a pinball-style series of “voice” and “selves” in communication, is a relationship between “voice” and “self” that is dynamic. A connection between a “voice” and a “self” might feel very stable (here represented by a solid line), or it might feel inconsistent and disrupted (here represented a broken line), or it might feel ambiguous and undefined (here represented by question marks.) Not only do these relationships constantly change, but in changing a voice, or a facet of the voice, one might also experience a change in self. Ultimately, having a variety of selves is an asset, which is an idea that has been explored in depth by psychologist Philip M. Bromberg.¹³⁸ According to Bromberg, the goal of having a variety of selves is an integrated way of being, in which a person can move freely between these multiple “selves” without feeling that they are in conflict or that only one is “authentic.” Bromberg asserts, “There is no such thing as an integrated self—a ‘real you.’”¹³⁹ Integration, according to Bromberg, is “the ability to stand in the spaces between realities without losing any

¹³⁸ Philip M. Bromberg, *Standing in the Spaces: Essays on Clinical Process Trauma and Dissociation* (Routledge, 2014).

¹³⁹ Bromberg, 195.

of them—the capacity to feel like one self while being many.”¹⁴⁰ If we expand this idea of self-states to incorporate “voice,” we can see how having multiple voices can be an asset to creativity, and the reciprocal, ever-changing interplay between voices and selves can be an area of growth and deepening artistry.

I intend Figure 1 to be useful in two ways that speak to the different “ways of knowing” in academic and practical discourses. First, it is a tool designed to provide a distillation of ideas covered in prior chapters. Though Figure 1 does not offer one-to-one correlations to the nine different voice/self-states described in earlier chapters, it visually represents the relationships between “voice” and “self” that these voice/self-states imply and is a complementary way of looking at the way self and voice relate. Second, Figure 1 is an imaginative tool, which can spark conversation and open up new ideas for singers about selfhood. Ideally, it would lead to singers developing their own images for how voice/self relationships work for them. It is meant to serve as a dynamic and interactive tool, not a static one. It should be clarified that, in all likelihood, few singers would feel fully represented by a single image, and some, perhaps, will not find resonance with any of the images. There could be as many variations to this chart as there are singers in the world. In fact, a singer who does not feel represented by this chart should be encouraged to seek alternatives, which could be a process that is equally empowering and fruitful.

I will offer one example as to how Figure 1 can prompt discussion: a colleague of mine immediately asked about the relationship between the speaking and the singing voice and how it might be represented in these images. Would each “voice” circle be divided in half, part spoken

¹⁴⁰ Bromberg, 195.

and part sung? Would “spoken voice” circles reside inside “sung voice” circles, implying, for example, a “true” speaking voice inside a false singing one? Thinking about these questions led my colleague and I to have a rich discussion about the relationship between speaking and singing, and between the spoken voice and the self. In my own experience as a singer, I move through several of these images on a daily basis, and different images resonate at different times when I am sparked by both successful and unsuccessful moments in practicing or performing. Rather than viewing this series of images as an endpoint, I find this chart to be most useful as a way to present the sheer fact that there are, indeed, different ways we perceive the relationship between voice and self, as well as a way to encourage singers to look at what preconceptions they may hold without even realizing it.

Tools for expansion

Of the held concepts about voice and self that I have discussed in this dissertation, the one that seems most pervasive and also most limiting is the concept that Eidsheim discusses at length: the idea that the voice is the sonic representation of the body that is fixed and defined by physiology. Eidsheim recognizes that the “vocal apparatus” comes with some aspects that might predispose it to a particular set of sounds, but also says, “the singer’s body performs just a single subset of *a range of timbres it is possible to produce given her vocal apparatus.*”¹⁴¹ In other words, what a singer experiences as his or her innate sound is really just a small sample of what he or she could ultimately produce. Furthermore, Eidsheim considers the way that the sounds of voices are treated as “manifestations of essential physical states,”¹⁴² and she asks how differently we might

¹⁴¹ Eidsheim, “Synthesizing Race,” 61.

¹⁴² Eidsheim, 7.

perceive our voices if we thought of them instead as “a set of *inner choreographies*.”¹⁴³ She sets out a vision for the flexibility and range that might be possible if we did this:

Considering timbre instead as the sound that results from the *vocal body—the vocal apparatus as it is fashioned through repetition of particular sounds, rather than the inner structure of an essential phenotype*—we may come to the realization that timbre is actively shaped, rather than passively projected. In essence, each part of the body that participates in the creation of vocal sounds (vocal tract, torso, tongue, mouth cavities and so on) has been actively fashioned.¹⁴⁴

Because the concept of the voice as a personal source of self-expression is so pervasive in Euro-Western culture, it stands to reason that this concept would predominate in voice studies as well. There are many benefits to exploring the way that the voice is an expression of self, and it is possible for this idea to coexist with an understanding that timbre is constructed. Eidsheim herself is careful to recognize that, although timbre is a culturally mediated process, “in the sound of the voice there is also the expression of the uniqueness and singularity of a human being.”¹⁴⁵ However, given a prevailing understanding of voice-as-self, we might seek to complement this way of thinking with one that explores the voice as an apparatus, or, as was the case with Berberian, a machine. Practically and pedagogically, the question becomes: what specific tools can we offer singers to have not only conceptual, but also embodied access to this set of thoughts as they perform the act of singing?

One approach I have found to be very useful is to break down the category of timbre into small, pliable parameters for sound production that a singer can readily use. Rather than generalizing about timbre, or framing it as being immutable, we can investigate the idea that timbre is, “the

¹⁴³ Eidsheim, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Eidsheim, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Eidsheim, 10.

waste-basket category for everything that cannot be labeled pitch or loudness,” and explore exactly what this category contains. Timbre is a complicated topic, so laden with issues of interpretation, taste, identity, and culture, that it is virtually impossible to fully “excavate” the wastebasket. However, by dissecting timbre into micro-choices with the intention of offering some agency to singers to explore the thorny category of timbre, I hope to help clarify some of the confusion surrounding timbre as both a functional and an interpretive category.

I propose that a singer’s exploration of vocal timbre can be helped by Table 2 shown below, which is a taxonomy of timbral choices. One way to achieve a variety of timbres is to imagine and imitate sound color without a focus on the mechanisms of singing. Another way, in which I am particularly interested, is to begin with the physical actions that lead to a change in timbre. In an effort to list the aspects of singing that are truly achievable, I made choices as to which terms to include based on which are most responsive to a verbal or mental command. In order to apply these ideas in ways that are more immediately useful for singers and teachers, I decided that everything in Table 2 below must be able to be preceded by the phrase, “What happens if you change your ____?” It is critical that the parameters can be played with and that they lead to direct, audible results.

Table 2: Manipulable Parameters Affecting Vocal Timbre

Registration	Resonance on a vertical axis: head voice, chest voice, mixed voice
Placement	Resonance on a horizontal axis: nasal, sinal, palatal, concept of a “dial” of placement from front of skull to back, <i>chiaroscuro</i>

Breath support	Engagement of intercostal muscles, Engagement of pelvic muscles, <i>appoggia</i> or state of suspension to resist collapse, use of support to amplify sound, ways of releasing air and muscles at the ends of phrases, concepts of “putting it in your body”
Phonation	Breath speed and breath pressure affect the sound (i.e. “breathy” sound, vocal fry)
Vowels (including pure vowels, diphthongs, and shadow vowels)	A change in formant frequencies, manipulated by tongue position, lip position, and jaw position
Consonants	Degree of articulation of consonants, proportion of vowel to consonant on any given note, separation before final consonant
Initiating a note	Soft or hard onset, glottal engagement
Moving between notes	Legato vs. non-legato, <i>portamenti</i>
Envelope	Consistency of sound at beginning, middle, and end
Vibrato	Period modulation of pitch. Varies by degree of modulation and consistency of use
“Grain”	Term used by Roland Barthes to describe the “materiality” of the voice, which can mean many things, but is often considered to describe the sound of the vocal apparatus at work, as distinct from tone: the tongue clicking, the wet and snapping sounds of vocal tissue, click of the teeth, sonic effects of phlegm or saliva

This table does not include features that are audible to the listener but cannot be consciously manipulated by the singer. For example, the “singer’s formant” (frequency density that allows a singer to be heard above an orchestra) is a result of a combination of choices using the parameters below, but you cannot make an isolated choice about the use of formant. It is also important to note that some of the items in Table 2 could be approached in a variety of ways. For

example, I included “Vowels” as a category. A change in tongue position results in a change in vowel, which is a result of a change in formant bands. You can “ideate” or think of a specific vowel using your tongue, in combination with your lips and jaw, to form the vowel you have in mind. You can choose to move your tongue around without having a specific vowel in mind, thereby separating the function of the tongue from an intention to produce a particular phoneme and instead seeing what sounds result when you execute an action such as “move tongue forward.” Thus, in some cases, it would be useful to think of tongue position as part of vowel formation, and in other cases to think of it as a separate category and another means of making choices (i.e. you can think “change the vowel” or “move the tongue” and get results either way).

Each of these parameters dramatically affects sound, both in terms of use and—significantly—in terms of duration. For example, the use of vibrato significantly affects timbre. However, it is important to distinguish between momentary use of vibrato and consistent use of vibrato. Jazz and pop singing styles are often characterized by a slight use of vibrato at the end of long notes. Classical singing styles often involve vibrato throughout the entire vocal line. When and for how long a parameter is applied is as important as whether or not it happens at all.

Eidsheim considers the role of training in demystifying both timbre and style for a singer. She claims that, if approached consciously, voice training can actually enhance a singer’s understanding of the constructed nature of sound. “When a singer deliberately learns a vocal style and timbre, the creation of that timbre becomes transparent. For example, in the case of a classical vocal sound, most singers are aware that the throat is, in general terms, more open than in most other vocal styles.”¹⁴⁶ I remember reaching a similar awareness in my own training. I

¹⁴⁶ Eidsheim, 6.

was having trouble grasping a directive from one of my teachers to “sing like speech” because all of the elongated, vertical vowels she was asking me to sing felt as though they had no analogue to spoken English. After a long, frustrated pause, she finally communicated to me that what she meant by “sing like speech” was to draw upon a sonic reference point of elevated, Shakespearean-style speech, projected from a stage. Her transparency about the rarified nature of “speech” in this instance afforded me a true breakthrough. Because of this open admission of the costumed quality of my training, I became both more capable and more comfortable in my studies as a classical singer. I also strengthened my ability to switch into to an American folk music style, having acquired a greater understanding of how to make adjustments in diction. Because I could objectively compare the two styles and what the trade-offs were in using rarified versus vernacular diction, I was able to assess my personal tastes and artistic commitment to each, which ultimately led to my choice to focus more on folk and contemporary styles. Seeing the constructed nature of my training enabled me to stand between genres and allowed me to make professional choices from a place of knowledge and depth, and perhaps even from a strengthened sense of “self.”

The effect of studying timbre in a conscious way has two significant results. First, it offers a singer a greater capacity to make creative, expressive choices, as exemplified by Cathy Berberian in *Folk Songs* and throughout her career. Second, it gives singers a more realistic understanding of how the vocal apparatus functions independently of concepts such as “essence” or “soul,” offering a more flexible understanding of the relationship between voice and self.

A critical approach to metaphor and terminology

There are long-standing and wide-ranging debates among voice teachers about the use of imagery and abstraction in the practice of singing. At its most extreme, there are teaching styles that form polar opposites, with those in one camp using imagery of all manner, those in the other the language of physiology. In one school we might hear, “Sing as though you are making rainbows,” while in the other, “Lower your larynx and raise your soft palate.” Teachers debate which approach is more useful to students and how much students and teachers need to know about the scientific basis of singing in order to sing well. The either/or question of this debate is less interesting than the question of what is considered an image or metaphor and what is considered scientific fact. Aside from the more obvious uses of imagery and metaphors, there are terms and concepts that are often not examined as critically, and I find these concepts to be the most telling in regard to the presumptions we make about how singing works, not only mechanistically but psychologically. One of the most pervasive concepts that goes unexamined is the mind/body split, which has been highly problematized in many other fields and is a way of perceiving the self that often goes unchecked in a voice lesson. As explored in the work of Nina Sun Eidsheim and others, use of this split is connected to essentialist thinking where the body is believed to be the locus of a person’s true identity; the voice is believed to be most “authentic” when it seems to be coming from the body (typically the lower torso); and where concepts of voice are tied to pre-conceived notions of race and ethnicity. Furthermore, as seen in the voice work of Kristin Linklater, the search for a “true” voice in a singer’s body can become very potent in conjunction with an authority-driven pedagogy. When the ability to distinguish good singing from bad singing is in the control of the teacher, it can disempower the practitioner from serving as his or her own critic. In this kind of practice, a student is encouraged to feel and emit, but not

to (healthfully) evaluate and listen. Not only is it limiting and vague to look for the “truth” in singing in the first place, but it is limiting for a singer to be told that the mind is a problematic force at work, parasitically interfering with the body, and in need of being shut down. Integrated, rather than oppositional, thinking about the mind and body would be a first step towards combating these limitations, and reducing the use of such vaguely anatomical terminology would be another.

As discussed in Chapter Two, another problematic arena of largely unexamined metaphorical terms is related to the idea of the “natural.” Drawing on the power and authenticity of one’s “natural” voice is perhaps even more of a trope today in American vocal pedagogy than it was prior to the twentieth century, as the field of classical singing attempts to reconcile the specificity of the *bel canto* style with the predominance of popular recorded music. Holding to any notion of an essential, inborn voice is not only perplexing and vague for the practitioner, but it also conceals an important moment in vocal development that does not receive its due: when young children learn vocal and linguistic qualities, most frequently from primary caregivers, and most often the mother. Amanda Weidman notes that French feminists in the 1980s theorized the importance of the role of the “maternal voice” in constructing pre-verbal subjectivity.¹⁴⁷ My own work singing and writing lullabies with new mothers through Carnegie Hall has allowed me to observe the way that encouraging maternal singing can offer parents a space to connect with and influence their children through song and through the specific sonic properties of their own voices. Many of the discussions we have at Carnegie about lullaby have to do with the lack of societal support for the essential learning that happens in the first year of life through the primary

¹⁴⁷ Amanda Weidman, “Anthropology and Voice,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 40.

caregivers. I connect this to the prevailing conception of the binary split between the natural and the learned: we fail to recognize that there is a period early in life where we learn so much and so deeply, that when we are older it feels as though it is so much a part of us that we presume it to be innate. The “maternal voice” and the influence of it is rendered vague and largely invisible and goes unrecognized for its great power to transmit fundamental information. If we were to take this “third space” of early learning into account, we might tell our students, for example, to “sing in a lullaby voice,” or “sing the way you remember music sounding when you were a child.” This would prompt a series of responses, perhaps emotional, connective, and personal, that would draw on the positive associations of learned culture and could potentially take singers to a creative place without reliance on a singular, cohesive pre-determined voice.

Vocal pedagogue Ian Howell suggests that an effective alternative to the word “natural” is the word “habituated.” He claims that it more precisely describes the learning that goes into singing. “Anyone who has trained a voice, or has themselves been trained, understands that a great deal of work goes into releasing constrictions, inhibiting reflexes, toning and coordinating muscles, and balancing a myriad of resonance tuning choices. If the result of this appears natural, it is so by the careful selection and implementation of habits over time”¹⁴⁸ Howell notes that this substitution speaks to the purpose of studying singing in the first place. “If natural means, ‘what my body already does when moving efficiently through motions I can already execute,’ I would ask whether we expect to change at all when we take lessons.”¹⁴⁹ He also finds it to lead to better

¹⁴⁸ Ian Howell, “What is Natural?” *The Unfiltered Source: An E-Zine for the Communal Voice Lover* 1/1 (October 2016): 7.

¹⁴⁹ Howell, 7.

results: “At least for the serious vocational classical singer, I far prefer the term “habituated” over “natural” because it ultimately places few restrictions on the singer.”¹⁵⁰ Similarly, I have found there to be very few instances where a teacher could not substitute the word “relaxed” for the word “natural” when working with a student. Recognizing that there are, of course, semantic limits to every word, the word “relaxed” conjures an entirely different set of responses for a student. Instead of contemplating the core self, the student is asked to scan his or her body for tension, prompting a physical response that encourages the gathering of sensory data in the present and gives the student something he or she can truly *do*.

What are other metaphorical terms we might seek to avoid using? Uses of the terms “heart” and “head,” for example, or the words “open” and “closed” (particularly when applied to posture) are stand-ins for more accurate and specific descriptions of the singing mechanism and are packed with emotional and psychological associations. “Voice” itself is an imprecise term, woven in with the other loaded notions of “voice” and “self” as discussed in previous chapters. In the pursuit of giving singers an expanded arsenal of tools, these terms must be explored and demystified within the context of actual voice lessons.

Examining teacher/student relationships and envisioning resistive performance

Recently, scholars have discussed the authority orientation of classical music training, particularly feminist music scholars such as Susan McClary, Suzanne Cusick, Carolyn Abbate, and Elisabeth Le Guin. Included in their writings are strategies for converting or resisting obedience models. For example, Suzanne Cusick has written about early piano pedagogy and

¹⁵⁰ Howell, 7.

resistive performance.¹⁵¹ Elisabeth LeGuin has envisioned performer-centric musicology as a way to explore what it would be like for performers to have an expanded sense of agency in interpretation.¹⁵² Adrienne Rich discusses more general strategies for students to engage with educational models without entirely losing a sense of critique or a sense of one's own interests and ideas.¹⁵³ I am interested in the practical ways singers and teachers might make use of these writings as we work in the field of classical singing. For example, I have always wondered if Cusick's specific descriptions of what she perceives to be Jessye Norman's "resistive" strategies in a performance of Robert Schumann's song cycle *Frauenliebe und Leben* could be applied to the study of vocal technique. Cusick describes Norman, in her singing of the passionate love song "Er, der Herrlichste" as making use of "clear, exaggerated diction" and a "lumbering, somber tempo" with "amateurish execution of the vocal turns that end phrases."¹⁵⁴ According to Cusick, these choices represent Norman's resistance to both the piece itself and to the norms of classical singing. The lack of legato contributes to a lack of cohesion in the performance, which Cusick, citing the work of Edward T. Cone, believes disrupts the classical aesthetic in which the parts need to coalesce and even be suppressed in the service of the whole. Norman's emphasis on details, such as a stressed consonant or an accented vocal gesture, calls attention to the moment

¹⁵¹ Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance," *Repercussions* 3, No.1 (1994): 77-110.

¹⁵² Elisabeth Le Guin, "'One Says that One Weeps, but One does not Weep': *Sensible, Grotesque, and Mechanical Embodiments in Boccherini's Chamber Music*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55, 2 (2002): 207-254.

¹⁵³ Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education (1977)," in *On lies, secrets, and silence: Selected prose 1978* (1966).

¹⁵⁴ Cusick, 105.

as a performance and lets the listener separate her from the work of art she engages with. This more readily allows the listener to hear that there are three different “voices” operating throughout the song: the character of the song, the persona of a classical singer, and the individual identity of Norman herself. Furthermore, Cusick notes Norman’s “peculiar sound, wavering between a voice placed far back in her throat and one placed where a woman’s voice should be, in her head.”¹⁵⁵ As with Cathy Berberian, timbral adjustments call attention to the mechanics of singing and underscore the fact that choices are being made.

Whether or not we agree with Cusick’s specific interpretations of Norman’s performance, she provides a valuable example of how strong vocal choices can contribute to, and even alter, the meaning of a song. Could we encourage our students to use their voices in these ways? By playing with the conventions of classical singing, how can singers insert their opinions into a song? A vast set of performative options exist in the worlds of theater and performance art that are only minimally put to use in the world of classical singing. One could broadly term these options as having been derived from “postmodernism” because they play with sincerity and artificiality, disrupt cohesive narrative and presentation, and recontextualize elements in order to challenge and reframe pre-existing notions of reality.

An example of this kind of exploration occurring in theater is the work conducted at the Wesley Balk Institute, a performance-training program for singers in the methodology used by director and coach Wesley Balk (1932-2003). Balk was the artistic director of the Minnesota Opera for almost twenty years and authored several books on stage training for singers.¹⁵⁶ I have

¹⁵⁵ Cusick, 105.

¹⁵⁶ Wesley H. Balk, *The Complete Singer-Actor: Training for Music Theater* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

participated in several of these workshops and the tools offered through the training greatly expanded my capacities as a performer. The Institute works with complementarity paradigms to ask singers to explore a spectrum of options. For example, stillness versus motion, perfect versus unusual singing, vowels versus consonants, or inner versus outer motivation. A longer discussion of the Balk Institute and its methods is warranted, but for my purposes here I will only note a striking feature of the workshop. Although vocal technique is never directly addressed, many students end up having significant vocal breakthroughs and find that they sing with greater ease and expression at the end of the three-week workshop. This may point to the ways that singing can be enhanced when paired with theatricality and how dramatic impulses can increase range, improve stamina, and conjure nuance by increasing a singer's sense of intention and energy. I also believe it points to the fact that, when singers are more explicitly treated as creative artists as opposed to as merely recreative artists, they are able to access many more options both technically and musically. Additionally, because the focus in the Balk workshops is about taking risks and often involves going against musical conventions and reverence for the composer's intentions, an anti-authoritarian stance is built into the training. The Institute seeks to reframe the singer's self-concept so that he or she perceives singing as a brave and creative act. This has powerful results for the participants, and the Balk Institute is often cited as one of the operatic workshops that most improves a singer's audition success. My goal is to create a parallel learning environment in a private voice lesson, so that, regardless of whether theatrical or musical elements are being addressed, a singer can feel a similar sense of agency in his or her singing.

Teachers who wish to empower their students to sing outside of an authority model will be concerned about students acquiring their own “ways of knowing,” as Schlichter puts it. Schlichter’s most incisive critique of the Linklater method is that the students are kept from understanding the criteria through which they are being evaluated, and the teachers tell them when they are singing with their “natural” voices. It is also a commonly held belief among teachers of *bel canto* technique that the student cannot properly perceive his or her singing. I was taught repeatedly, “I (the teacher) get the sound out here, and you (the student) only get the feedback.” To whatever extent this may be true, it is certainly possible for students to mitigate this through recording themselves in lessons and using recording in practice. It is also possible, through listening exercises, to give students physical experiences of when they are singing with consistency or singing in tune. These exercises are at the core of the chamber music training that a singer might encounter in an early music setting, where it is essential to blend with historical instruments in a variety of tuning systems. In these exercises singers are given tools to judge tuning and adjust based on their listening. This is one example of how agency can be given to a voice student in a similar way that it is given to an instrumentalist. Surely, more exercises and rehearsal techniques are possible to equip a student singer with a stronger understanding of his or her voice and how it functions with others.

Fundamentally, it is the teacher’s choice to teach in a way that replicates pre-existing authority models or breaks with them. How are we offering “ways of knowing” to our students? What are we telling them is the end point of their studies? Is it agency and artistry? Or is it simply more lessons? I have many preliminary ideas as to how less hierarchical teaching can be practiced, and I work to use these strategies in my lessons, balancing out these concerns with the recognition that it is also my job to provide knowledge, expertise, and a discerning ear. I am surprised by

how few voice teachers are interested in engaging in dialogue about this issue, and it is my hope to be able to raise these questions on a wider scale so that I can explore them further. One significant issue at hand is that voice training is something desired by many different kinds of students, and although only some will become professional singers, all of them can become enhanced artists through the process. For professional and amateurs alike, a level of autonomy is the goal. If, as Adrienne Rich puts it, it is a student's job to "claim an education," it is also a voice teacher's job to be conscious of his or her position of power as a gatekeeper of taste and talent and to "cede an education" to a student who wants one. The politically-sensitive frameworks, as laid out by feminist musicologists and other cultural critics, are key tools for enhancing this level of examination and opening channels for a student to (and I use this term both literally and metaphorically) have a greater "voice" in his or her educational experience. This would allow for a greater and more fluid transmission of different "ways of knowing," with many more practical applications within voice pedagogy, which are currently considered not possible.

In my work as a teacher and performer, I consistently exploring the ways in which alternative formats for learning can lead to growth and expansion for singers. As an alternative to the one-on-one setting, I offer group technique classes, which share the information and exercises of a private lesson in a communal context. I offer time for one-on-one work, witnessed by the group, but the primary experiment is to see if it can be helpful for students to learn about their voices in a group setting. I also experiment with alternative structures for learning through a weekly vocal improvisation group at Carnegie Hall called Moving Star, which I co-founded in 2015, and functions as a "collaborative vocal lab." In our lab sessions, our stated goal is to improvise and co-create, but we also work on aspects of vocal technique, collectively drawing on what we have

learned from either solo or choral experiences. The group's intention is to remain a collective, with rotating leadership in short (30-45 minute) segments, so that no one person's aesthetic or vision dominates the group. We expand our vocal skills through the act of improvisation itself, which includes imitating one another, spontaneous harmonizing and blending, working with concepts of deep listening, trying to draw a direct line between a feeling in the moment and the singing that might result from this feeling, and openness to extended vocal techniques. There is strong group consensus that we have expanded our vocal capacities through this experience. Ultimately, I hope to document the findings from this process and what might be termed "collective vocal pedagogy." In both the group classes and this group improvisation experience, it is not only the content, but the group setting, that has led to each person's sense of vocal expansion.

One outcome of exploring vocal technique in a group is that the singer has an opportunity to observe how singing in front of others, and with others, changes his or her singing. Group singing allows for a middle space between private practice or lessons and public performing. In a group setting a singer shares his or her voice with others but is not always being directly observed. These settings differ from a choral context because they offer a greater variety of singing experiences, moving from solo to small group to large group singing, and involve both the absorption of pre-existing musical material and the invention of new material. As a participant, a singer can pay attention to minute physical and mental shifts he or she makes when singing with others, as opposed to singing alone, and can also observe what it feels like to sing *for* others as opposed to singing for one's self. A singer can also experiment with different intentions when singing with others: the intention to share, the intention to impress, or the

intention to support, all cause dramatic shifts in a singer's behavior, and in a group setting singers can experiment with these intentions at low-stakes.

It is useful to identify and explore the difference between two different kinds of singing: performative and experiential. Performative singing is done explicitly with an audience in mind. Experiential singing is the kind of singing that might be done alone, singing in the car or shower, for example. Singers refer to this kind of singing as uninhibited, relaxed, and perhaps even slightly distracted. This is also the type of singing one uses when singing to a child, where the internal resonances of the body become a point of awareness, where the "audience" is someone close to the singer, and where the goal is for the singer to soothe not only the child but herself through the act of singing. Particularly in an age when there is so much recorded music, I have found it eye-opening and empowering to distinguish between these two types of singing. Experiential singing is outside the realm of professional singing, yet it is the kind of singing that happens most often in daily life. How can we bring elements of experiential singing into a performance context? It is tremendously helpful for a singer to maintain an awareness of the experiential (i.e. their own physical experience of singing) even when singing in the presence of others. Finding opportunities to blend an interior focus with the exterior can have a tremendously opening effect, which can afford a singer increased agency over where he or she chooses to focus while singing.

Towards greater artistry: classical singing, contemporary thought

Many of the ideas and issues posed by Cathy Berberian in "The New Vocality in Contemporary Music" are just as relevant today as they were in 1966. The institutions that preserve and carry on classical pedagogy often place a high value on nineteenth-century pedagogical traditions, an

aesthetic preference that becomes particularly vivid stark compared to programs or departments that explicitly focus on musical theater or contemporary singing styles. Berberian's ideas necessitate a learning environment where genre lines are both crossed and blurred, and many institutions do not have the structures in place to readily allow for this. Berberian's thoughts are still relevant because they remain relatively radical in comparison to the way most institutions view the practice of singing. Her vision for a New Vocality has yet to be realized.

There is another reason Berberian's writings remain relevant: she articulates something profound about the way that singing is perceived, culturally, that was true in 1966 that is still relevant today. She identified the ways that Euro-Western culture held tightly, and restrictively, to the notion of the voice as the audible representation of a true, unmitigated self. In gleeful opposition, Berberian saw the creative possibilities of treating the voice as a product of cultural experience. However, she did not fully abandon the idea of an expressive, personalized voice. Berberian was comfortable thinking of the voice as many things at once: simultaneously real and false, simultaneously full of meaning and meaningless, simultaneously representative of the self and entirely not of the self. Berberian saw that the institutions of classical singing were out of step with the radically changing, technologically-advancing environment of the 1960s, and her words continue to speak to many of the issues that musicians and other artists engage with today.

Berberian's manifesto ends with the claim that the singer today needs additional skills, such as dance, improvisation, and acting. She concludes, "recitals and concerts will have so many theatrical elements ingrained in the musical context that these elements will function like a gestural alternative—and this is something that music will endow to the intrusive and disordered

stimuli of a culture predicated upon seeing and doing.”¹⁵⁷ One way to understand this concluding statement is as a concrete recommendation for multi-disciplinary training, which Berberian sees as necessary in contemporary Euro-Western culture, and which she believes relies more on visual stimuli than in eras past. However, another way to interpret this statement is one offered by Francesca Placanica, who claims that Berberian wanted modern singers, through this multi-disciplinary training, to have “a fully artistic experience on stage” and to “set an example to other artists and a new generation of interpreters to look at their performance as ‘an open work.’”¹⁵⁸ By using the phrase “open work,” Placanica claims, Berberian was recognizing “philosophical dimensions inasmuch as the voice is a way of being in the world.”¹⁵⁹ Placanica draws out the deeper vision Berberian believed was possible: first, the recognition of the rich, meaningful capacity of “voice” to both reflect and transmit culture, and, second, the recognition of the singer, possessing and using this voice, to function as an independent artist. Placanica believes that Berberian wanted to elevate, and even do away with, the concept of interpretation as it was understood, releasing the singer from a dynamic with a composer that made the singer the transmitter of a creative work. Berberian believed that the singer, in using his or her voice, is so creatively important that he or she creates, on stage, a new piece every time he or she sings a pre-existing composition. According to Placanica, “Each ‘interpretation’ in this way could be a totally original work based on the performer’s vocality. Set free from text and score, it is a

¹⁵⁷ Cathy Berberian, “La Nuova Vocalità Nell’Opera Contemporanea” *Discoteca* 62 (1966): 35.

¹⁵⁸ Francesca Placanica, “La Nuova Vocalità Nell’Opera Contemporanea (1966): Cathy Berberian’s Legacy,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 61.

¹⁵⁹ Placanica, 61.

statement of their mode of being, and with an attendant multi-arts platform, of saying different things in different ways.”¹⁶⁰

Placanica and her co-editors of *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* explore the ways in which Berberian’s perspective helped inspire a generation of musicians to be composers as well as singers. A number of these musicians are interviewed in the book, including Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, and Theo Bleckmann.¹⁶¹ These musicians identify Berberian as a galvanizing force for them as composers and creators at various points in their careers. They describe the ways that Berberian’s career paved the way for their work and how her thoughts on singing helped them envision their art in a more full and expressive way. They also repeatedly reference her tremendous vocal capacity, imagination, and sense of humor. These are all singers who self-identify as composers and create pieces that grapple with many of the “self” questions that have arisen in this dissertation, and they would be fascinating to study in greater depth.

These interviews with singer-composers inspire me to ask a final question to conclude this work. What are the ways in which Berberian can similarly influence singers who, although they do not identify as composers, still want to experience the full range of creative and artistic possibilities that Berberian believed were available to anyone using a voice? How can a contemporary singer take up a piece by Brahms or Barber and feel the same agency and range of expression that Berberian felt, whether she was singing a work by Monteverdi, a work by Berio, or a work she

¹⁶⁰ Placanica, 61.

¹⁶¹ La Barbara, et al., “What We Owe to Cathy: Reflections from Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, Rinde Eckert, Susan Botti, Theo Bleckmann and Pamela Z,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis, Pamela, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete (Routledge, 2016), 185-203.

had written herself? The answers to these questions—which, of course, are many—will come from encouraging singers to deploy multiple self-states in their practice, setting them free to explore a variety of relationships to the self and the voice, and to compositions and composers.

Considering the question of a singer’s artistry via self-voice expansion should fuel and inspire teachers to work with students in new and exploratory ways. I hope it will also allow listeners to stay open to the numerous possibilities present in a performance, engaging with the “intrusive and disordered stimuli”¹⁶² of a performance in the rich and multi-faceted ways that are possible. The performance of both classical and contemporary vocal music would greatly benefit from a greater proliferation of creative disorder, pedagogical freedom, and a New Vocality.

¹⁶² Berberian, 35.

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