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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Voice as a Technology of Selfhood:
Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Nina Sun Eidsheim

Committee in charge:

Professor Jann Pasler, Co-Chair
Professor George E. Lewis, Co-Chair
Professor Adriene Jenik
Professor David Pellow
Professor Miller Puckette
Professor John Shepherd

2008

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is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego
2008

*I dedicate this dissertation to the first of many who have
taught me how to live and work with dedication and high spirit: my
ninety-year-old maternal grandmother
Ingrid Nordeide.*

To mi esposo, Luis, I also dedicate this work.

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At the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) I was privileged to work with many people with brilliant minds and generous hearts. I first came to San Diego to work with Professor George Lewis. The ways in which George challenges and triggers my imagination as a musician and a thinker have been essential to the path I have taken: his perceptive qualifying exam prompt (in response to my topic on African-American opera singers) is in fact the genesis of the direction this dissertation has taken. My first year seminar with Professor Jann Pasler was as mind opening as her questions are today. Her inquiry into the ways we might think about history as women and as post-modernists continues to offer crucial lessons. My numerous independent studies with Professor Adriene Jenik (Visual Arts Department) have been a steady source of support, and have been especially helpful in terms of getting my head around some theoretical corners—specifically French poststructuralism, gender and queer theory, and issues regarding human interactions with and through technological media. Professor Miller Puckette provided much guidance in my early project on interfaces for musicians.

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Ever since I first read "The Asian American Body in Performance" Professor Deborah Wong's (UC Riverside) work has been a guiding, yet challenging voice regarding questions of the performative in and through music cultures. A special thanks goes to her for making time for an independent study with me during my last quarter at UCSD, and for so diligently reading drafts and giving extensive comments.

Thanks go to California Cultures in Comparative Perspectives for the Summer Fellowship which allowed me to complete my ethnography of voice teachers in Southern California. And special thanks is due to director David Pellow, who has been very supportive from the first monetary assistance he generously gave to the international festival and conference Powering Up/Powering Down to conversations about my work, and finally to joining my dissertation committee.

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At UCSD I shared frustrations and epiphanies with my incoming class: Alex Khalil, Bill Bahng Boyer, Gascia Ouzounian, and Guy Obrecht. To UCSD colleagues Jason Stanyek, Jason Robinson, Juliana Snapper, Alan Lechusza, Chris Tonelli, Tracy McMullen, Kariann Goldschmitt, Zeynep Bulut, William Brent, Joe Bigham, Jonathan Piper, and Fabio Fonseca de Oliveira I am also grateful for times playing and sharing ideas. I owe so much in terms of friendship and lessons shared in writing and in life to Alex, with whom I have clocked hundreds of hours of dissertation writing, and Tildy Bayar, my dear friend and colleague.

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Last summer my husband Luis and I packed up and drove across the country, following the I-40 from California to Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. There we have made a new home, and we have many people to thank for the smooth transition including Interim Director of the Hubbard Center Kathleen Brinko, Dean Bill Harbinson and Associate Vice Chancellor Linda Robinson.

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And, finally, to my husband Luis, who changed my life, and who consistently helps me to keep the big picture in mind.

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- 2009 "Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of the Performativity of Vocal Timbre." *TRANS-Transcultural Music Review* 13. Special issue on Music and Performance Studies. Alejandro Madrid. Ed. (Peer-reviewed, accepted).

Recordings and Multimedia

- 2008 *John Cage's "Song Books."* Multimedia, interactive DVD. With Jacqueline Bobak and Paul Berkolds. Produced by the California Institute of the Arts and University of York, UK. Forthcoming.
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- 2007 Gustavo Aguilar with soNu. *unsettled on an old sense of place*. San Diego: Henceforth Records.

- 2006 “Amazing” by Wadada Leo Smith. Composition written for Nina Sun Eidsheim and Tom Buckner. Forthcoming on Mutable Records, New York, NY.
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“The Sonic Color Line: The Taxonomy of Race and Vocal Timbre in the United States.” National Meeting of the Society of Ethnomusicology, Columbus, OH. October 2007

“Synthesizing Race: An Ethnography of *Vocaloid*.” National meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Honolulu, HI. November 2006.

“Mapping the Space Between Musical Sound and Listener: Understanding Vocal Timbre.” National meeting of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory, Los Angeles, CA. November 2006.

“Constructing Race: Pedagogy and Vocal Timbre.” National meeting of The Society for American Music Conference, Chicago, IL. March 2006

“Your Stages of Change.” *Stages of Change: Theater and Politics*. (Invited speaker). 2-day international seminar. Norwegian Theater Academy, Fredrikstad, Norway. March 2006

“The Development and Implementation of *Mapping the Beat*.” (Invited speaker). The Center for Learning Through the Arts, University of California, Irvine. March 2006.

“The Taxonomy of Vocal Timbre and the Construction of Race.” Music Performance and Racial Imagination Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference, New York University, New York City, NY. February 2005.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Voice as a Technology of Selfhood:
Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance

by

Nina Sun Eidsheim

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2008

Professor Jann Pasler, Co-Chair

Professor George E. Lewis, Co-Chair

In this dissertation I examine the production of race through sound in general and vocal timbre in particular, and investigate how the construction of the black voice—against the backdrop of the normative white—in opera, spirituals, and popular music reflects deeply-held American ideas about race. Which processes have contributed to the racialized perception and reification of timbre? What are some of the social and political processes embedded in the cultural capital possessed by certain vocal timbres in specific cultural contexts and various historical periods?

I trace modern vocal pedagogy to its origin in colonial ideology, and the concept of a classical African-American vocal timbre from Marian Anderson to the spiritual in the abolitionist era. Investigating the vocal synthesis software Vocaloid, I uncover the macro politics of race and gender as they are materialized in the micro politics of sound: dominant race and gender relations are reproduced through electronic music products and tools. My study of the ways in which producers have framed the African-American jazz and ballad singer Jimmy Scott—as, most saliently, a woman, and as symbolizing death—offers insights into how nonconforming African-American masculinities are desired and consumed.

This dissertation ultimately investigates the performative and corporeal aspects of the singing voice, considering these phenomena in terms which involve both performers and audiences. As a consequence, I have shifted the focus of inquiry from the *sound* of singing—which I term *timbre sonic*—to the *physical act* of forming that sound—*timbre corporeal*—and proposed an investigation of the *choreography* of vocal timbre.

Introductory Chapter

Mr. Darden: “The second voice that you heard sounded like the voice of a Black man; is that correct?”

*California v. Orenthal James Simpson*¹

We came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us what we can't have and divert us from the monotony of sameness.

Trinh T. Minh-ha²

Introduction

Vocal timbre is commonly thought of as a given material with which words are formed or pitches are sung. It is assumed, of which the first epigraph is only one example, that the composite sound of a person's voice—the timbre—reveals something essential about the person's body, something that could not but be revealed through the timbre of the voice. In other words, vocal timbre is thought of as something indelible like a fingerprint.³

In this dissertation I examine the assumption that vocal timbre is an unmediated reality of the body and observe how this has played out historically in the cognitive reception of the African-American voice in the United States. Using case studies, I reveal the tie that binds specific vocal timbres and the nature and significance of those meanings thereof. And, using performance theory I take issue with the premise that the body with

¹ *California v. Orenthal James Simpson* (1995) (Quoted in Baugh 2003: 155).

² Quoted in Hisama (1993: 99). Her emphasis.

³ It is, however, interesting to note that despite the credence vocal timbre has as an identifier of a person, a voice cannot be secured under copyright laws. In effect, vocal timbre is not viewed, legally or commercially, as unique.

which we sing is unmediated. I argue that, unlike a fingerprint, vocal timbre is the sound of a habitual performance that has shaped the physical body. In other words, I claim that vocal timbre is not an elementary sound of an essential body, but rather that both timbre and body are shaped by unconscious and conscious training that are cultural artifacts of attitudes towards gender, class, race and sexuality. Therefore, I investigate racialized vocal timbre in order to assess both the creation of vocal timbre and the construction of individualized meaning and personal affectation through vocal timbre. As such, this work examines the modalities implicated and vested through the production of vocal timbre.

Driving all the discussions in this work is the goal of enhancing the understanding of the interlocking relationship between the body, the act of singing and the medium of vocal timbre through mapping the interaction between the discursive and corporeal, thereby distangling the process of the construction of meaning through vocal timbre and distilling its individual elements thereof. The desired course of study is grounded in my conviction that by locating the mechanisms involved in the production, reception, and naming of vocal timbre we will also identify and thereby denaturalize the devices used in the construction and maintenance of race.

“The somatic realization of race,” in the words of Deborah Wong, “is one of the great performative, destructive accomplishments of any society (2000: 87).” One powerful antidote informing this discourse is awareness of technologies of the “somatic realization of race” as a system that re-fashions perceptual tools assisting us in the decolonization of vocal timbre and recovery of the singer’s agency.

Lessons

This work is interdisciplinary through and through. However, interdisciplinarity on these pages refers not only to the academic fields from which I gathered knowledge about the voice but also to the avenues of questioning that have been raised. *Inter* is used in reference to the manner in which I have allowed knowledge of one area to feed over into another, or, perhaps more accurately, the ways material and experience have combined to force me to consider discipline in a larger context.

One situation in which I had to face my own obstinacy to controlling the cross-feeding of knowledge took place at my last independent study meeting with Deborah Wong. At the time of the meeting we had worked together for a quarter, and Deborah had read about half of the dissertation chapters, along with some more poetically written stories I had not yet decided what to do with. Each time I was elaborating one of the theoretical points I had made in the concluding chapter, I drew on examples from my experience as a singer and teacher of voice, examples that had not been included in the chapters themselves. Halfway through the meeting, Deborah looked at me and simply asked: “Where will you fit in these narratives?”

“I don’t think they’ll be in the dissertation,” I said, although I was quick to point out that it would have been impossible for me to arrive at my conclusions without what I’d learned and experimented with through my own practice as a singer and teacher.

“I dropped that idea long time ago, when I was afraid people would think the dissertation was about vocal method and pedagogy,” I explained.

“Well, think about it...” Deborah replied patiently.

During the one and a half hour drive back to San Diego from Riverside and throughout the next two days I did think about it. The word “voice lesson” was at the same time present in my thoughts. A voice lesson is something I myself have taken and given for decades. My own participation in voice lessons (as a teacher) is something so familiar to me that it is, if I was to make a comparison, as fundamental a level to my existence as eating: something I do every day, so routinized to me that I am barely conscious of it as an active process, and certainly not something worthy of secondary consideration in an “important” forum such as this dissertation. Yet, when trying in conversation to explain some of the most important theoretical concepts that have been developed through this work, I always tend to revert to stories from voice lessons.

Deborah’s questions broadened the inquiry of where in the dissertation I can find room for these stories. The context broadened to a consideration of what narratives I deemed worthy of learning from. And subsequently, what narratives do I deem worthy of drawing upon in forming this story? Did I weed out material sufficient and faithful to the goal of creating a proper, worthy, and official lesson?

Until the moment Deborah’s question prompted me to reexamine my own assumption of what belonged or didn’t belong in the dissertation, my own singing and teaching narratives had simply been devoted to filling the role of that hidden voice that dubs the official singer shown on the screen. The functional implication of the plural *voice lessons* then encompasses more than the lessons I teach or the lessons in which I am being instructed. *Voice lessons* came to indicate a means of questioning what lessons I as an individual perceiver had been willing to listen to, and which lessons are collectivized to become part of the “official” story of socio-perceptual development. Therefore when I

integrate different sections of “voice lesson” throughout the body of this dissertation, they are not *inserted* so much as *saved from being omitted*.

In my experience with my own practice as a so-called interdisciplinary scholar or performer, interdisciplinarity is sometimes delayed simply by my fear of not being “scholarly” enough. Through this study, I have learned that I myself had set stark limitations for my own interdisciplinarity. Without being aware of it, I had been conditioned to be taught by semiotics, critical theory, cultural studies, race studies and so on, as opposed to my own experience as a singer. For this study, I deemed improper and chose not to include the discoveries upon which most of my theoretical work rests, discoveries I had made as a voice teacher and singer.

I therefore use the term *voice lessons* to describe the lessons taught us in the moments when we are not ready, when we think we can censor...when we may not be at our best behavior and when we are off guard about our own reactions. Voice lessons are the pictures being taken when we do not know and do not pose. Voice lessons are the lessons taught when we are not consciously monitoring whether or not we are the kind of student that conforms to pre-conceived images. Voice lessons are the lessons that expose us, or in the words of Ruth Behar, they are the spaces in which we are “vulnerable observers (1996).” Vulnerability allows us to be affected by the studies we are exposed to and to be studied ourselves, in a process referred to by Behar as the “rethinking of objectivity (Behar 1996: 28).” The self-conscious presence of the researcher and author’s body is contained within her process.⁴ For Behar, being a vulnerable observer might

⁴ As in Jane Tompkin (1993: 23-40).

mean observations geared to identify the cognitive relationship between scholars and their subjects, revealing the interconnectedness between so-called research and so-called “real lives,” giving rise to further question as to who is the observer and who is the observed. For me, to be a vulnerable observer means full disclosure of all sources and modes of musical action that inform my research in seeking to fully reveal how the process of singing has been instructing and guiding this study. In the interests of fully revealing the “self who observes,” I include the moments in which I, in the role as a teacher who was taught, attempt to in the words of Clifford Geertz, “articulate what takes place when we in fact are at work (Geertz 1995: 44).”

Situating This Work In Scholarship

To some minds, the sources on which I draw might seem too sprawling and my focus—timbre—strangely narrow. But in positioning my study within the root of vocal timbre, I am providing anchor for questions of musical embodiment and social articulation and an inquisitive logic leading outward to multiple lines of inquiry without allowing too much deviation.⁵ Material valuable to the study of vocal timbre and the construction of affect and meaning, and specifically the construction of race through timbre, is not isolated to musical scholarship. This dissertation draws upon a range of sources, critical modalities and musical experiences in an attempt to understand the

⁵ Timbre is a parameter that never ceases to intrigue me as a singer and composer as it has constantly challenged and fed my musical praxis.

intersections between voice, culture and body, and the phenomenon of perception of vocal timbre.

Race and Vocal Timbre

From a diverse cross-section of fields, media and research approaches, work on race and vocal timbre falls into three broad areas: 1) construction of certain voices and bodies; 2) the issues of listeners' perspective influencing individual perception, and 3) the artists' negotiation of categorization and audience perception.

With a journalistic approach, Rosalyn Story's *And So I Sing: African-American Divas in Opera and Concert* (1993) is one of the most thorough works on issues of race and voice in opera to date.⁶ Basing her work on archival research and original interviews with singers and others active within opera and classical music, Story brings up issues of racialized type-casting and poses questions in regards to whether or not ethnicity plays a role in the vocal timbre of African-American opera and classical singers. Story's important study also writes several influential but nearly forgotten singers into the history of American classical music.

⁶ A professional violinist in the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra Story might have known many of these issues from personal experience as a musician. In a professional symphony orchestra it is not uncommon that only one to two members of an 85 to 105 member orchestra are African-American—about one percent. Not only is the symphonic environment unfriendly towards non-white players, but also potentially in the practice of inviting women into their lines. Trombonist Abbie Conant fought well and long for her solo trombone chair in the Munich Philharmonic. See <http://www.osbornconant.org/articles.htm#women> and Tracy McMullen (2006: 61-80).

The approach of the documentary *Aida's Brother and Sister* (2000) by directors Jan Schmidt-Garre and Marieke Schroeder is similar to that of Story's.⁷ However, the format of audio and video allows interplay of multiple layers of sensory communication that inform the narrative. Excerpts from beautiful performances by Reri Grist, Barbara Hendrix, Jessye Norman and others let the viewer and listener herself hold that information up against any narrative lines. In one extraordinary interview, tenor George Shirley accuses Berlin Opera director Götz Friedrich of taking advantage on stage of racial tensions from the real world. Does Götz project his own racial fears or desires into the drama when he casts Reri Grist in the pageboy role in the *Der Rosenkavalier*, by casting a black person in the role of a villain?

The main discussion within the opera world regarding race and voice takes place in the terms of the question of racialized type casting. This issue is discussed by both the team of Story and Schmidt-Garre and Schroeder. Also African-American tenor Jason Oby takes these issues on fully in a series of interviews and a survey of African-American male opera singers. His findings reveal how African-American male opera singers experience racial type casting, indicating that works such as *Porgy and Bess* are mixed blessings (Oby 1989).

These works illuminate the fact that the issue regarding race and casting plays out differently for male and female performers. African-American male opera singers face issues regarding their role's relation to the female roles in the same opera, and the "character type" of their *fach*.

⁷ Story is interviewed in the documentary and her book is credited for being one of the main sources.

Other considerations to the question of racialized voices in opera include the requirement of all-black casting in certain operas. Jason Oby and Lisa Barg (2000) discuss the ambiguous standing of all-black performer works such as *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) by which the control and positioning of black bodies and voices is at stake. What bodies and voices should sing particular repertoires and roles? What bodies and voices are being chosen to represent certain characters?

Both movies and film studies raise the question of what bodies are being paired with what vocal sounds. Jeff Smith's "Black Faces, White Voices: The Politics of Dubbing in *Carmen Jones*" (2003: 29-42) suggests that the arias of Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte, as respectively Carmen and Joe, were dubbed by white opera singers (Marilyn Horne and Levern Hutcherson), while Pearl Bailey in her role as Frankie was not. Smith suggests that Dandridge and Belafonte's music numbers were close to Bizet's original score while Bailey's number, "Beat that Rhythm," added by Oscar Hammerstein, exhibited clichéd notions regarding African-Americans and rhythm. In *Illusions* (1983), a short film that deals with the issue of racial passings, writer and director Julia Dash shows this dilemma in the reverse situation.⁸ The movie is set in 1942 Hollywood and tells the story of a movie executive who passes as white. In a pivotal moment a glance is exchanged between the main character—the movie executive named Mignon Dupree—

⁸ Although her work does not necessarily focus on vocal passing, Anna Deavere Smith's (1997) staged solo work (which also is adapted for television), illustrates that that one body may perform multiple corporeal-vocal identities. In the research process, Smith spends time in a location such as a neighborhood to interview various community members. Her plays are directly based on quotations from these interviews. Smith embodies each of the figures included in the play and moves fluidly between embodying the many and often strikingly contrasting characters.

and a young African-American singer hired to dub a vocal number already played by the white actress: the look of recognition between the two as one walks out the front door and the other the back door subtly calls attention to questions of vocal timbre as a marker of racial identity that supports social coherence.

Observing vocality in film lets us examine how visual perception of a character formulates, shapes or affects the way we hear their voices. Beyond the narrative and situational elements staged for film, everyday measures such as age, gender, and nationality or geographic locality determine our perception of the voice. A number of studies from social linguistics confirm this phenomenon. Nancy Niedzielski's experiment (1999: 62-85) concluded that listeners tend to hear a dialectical stereotype suggested. Forty-one Detroit residents were asked to choose from a set of different synthesized vowels the token they felt best matched the vowel presented to them on a recording. All the recordings were of a fellow Detroiters, but half of the subjects were told that the speaker was from Canada, while the other half that the speaker was from Detroit. The subjects that were told the speaker was from Canada chose the raised-diphthong token while the subjects that were told the speaker was from Detroit chose the unraised-diphthong token. The only difference between the two groups of respondents was the perceived nationality of the speaker. The "listener," Niedzielski concludes, "uses social information in speech perception (1999: 62)." Niedzielski's experiment suggests that people are informed more by what they *believe* they hear than what they actually hear.

Studies from the fields of acoustic phonetics, sociolinguistics, and social psychology suggest that listeners use a number of factors when they perceive and interpret a speaker's dialect. Visual information such as lip movement also affects how

the listener perceives the spoken segment (McGurk and MacDonald 1976: 746-748); in addition, studies in the field of sociolinguistics and social psychology suggest that stereotypes about the social group of which a speaker is believed to be a member influence how the speaker's speech is perceived (e.g. Beebe 1981; Thakarar and Giles 1981; Williams 1976). Niedzielski suggests that perception is "much more than mere phonetic processing of the speech signal and that other information is used by listeners to process speech signals (1999: 62-63)." Linguist John Edwards has written, "We do not react to the world on the basis of sensory input alone but, rather, in terms of what we perceive that input to mean (1999: 102)." Edwards continues that this is the basis of our personal relationships with individuals and groups and that it reflects our "accumulated social knowledge (102)." Perception is the filter through which sensory data is sorted out. Our particular filter, or perception, is culturally specific and situationally dependent.

The extent to which voice functions as a primary marker of social identity (as the first epigraph illustrates) is revealed in the work of social justice advocates analyzing discriminatory housing practices in which applicants are rejected based on their vocal timbre and accent alone. In studying speech, factors such as word choice and other syntactical issues play a greater indicatory role than in singing where the vocalist usually interprets a fixed text such as the opera libretto. Despite such differences, studies from social linguistics are useful for understanding the perceptual frameworks listeners bring with them to the act of listening.

Examining listening practices—finding that such practices and what is heard are not stable but rather change over time—reveal the non-fixity of sound and their seemingly inherent meanings. Historical studies that deal with blackness and vocal

timbre, such as Ronald Radano's *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (2003), John Cruz's *Culture on the Margins: Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (1999), and Laurie Stras' *White Face, Black Voices: Race, Gender and Region in the Music of the Boswell Sisters* (2007: 207-256) have been particularly helpful in broaching the gap between spoken and musical syntax and the perception of race. Radano questions the grounds on which certain music is identified as "black music." Through textual analysis, he maintains that "black music" cannot be easily separated from "white music." Radano argues that "black music" instead should be understood "as a form constituted within and against racial discourse (4)." Cruz's work is concerned with the songs of slaves, but more specifically, how the *voices* of slaves and newly freed people were heard. He argues that the ability to hear these sounds as *vocal* sounds—"songs of sorrow" rather than "alien noise"—was a pivotal moment in the recognition that slaves were human beings, or conversely, that the recognition that slaves were human beings enabled people to hear (Cruz 1999: 3 quoting Frederick Douglass). As Cruz examines cultural tropes in listening, Stras investigates the notion of "sounding black" as a cultural trope, something that for the New Orleans hot jazz vocal trio the Boswell sisters and their contemporary 1930s audiences was filtered through older minstrelsy traditions and new entertainment media. Stras examines what it meant for the white Boswell sisters to sound black, and how gender and their Southerness "colored" their music and audience perceptions of their performances.

The Singing Voice

Scholarship concerned with the singing voice, with the voice as a medium in-and-of-itself, rather than only the carrier of external information (melody and words), seems to fall into the following categories: vocal pedagogy, medical science, acoustics, gender studies, musicology, ethnomusicology, and philosophy.⁹

The focus of Western vocal pedagogical texts¹⁰ is to question how to produce a desired sound, develop range, speed and agility,¹¹ and grow as an interpreter while maintaining vocal health. Tenor and voice teacher Richard Miller's many pedagogical texts are much used. While Miller's approach might differ from other teachers in its language and the particulars of certain technical issues—for example, how to pass through the *passaggio*—they tend to share the assumption that classical vocal technique is the normative technique and that other ways of using the voice are damaging and a kind of deviation from universal standards of healthy and beautiful voices.

My goal has been to develop a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and functions of the voice in order to map out the process of *racialization of vocal timbre*. To this end, medical texts on voice and the opportunity to interview Hans von Leden, the leading laryngologist for singers in California and beyond and the foremost medical researcher on voice, has been crucial. This interview, alongside pedagogical texts and voice researcher Johan Sundberg's *The Science of the Singing Voice* (1989) and in light

⁹ I do not address psychoanalytical studies in this dissertation; however, some of the most imaginative work on voice and subjectivity (Lacan, Zizek, and Dolar) is to be found in this field. The focus of this dissertation is the mapping of the vocal apparatus, vocal timbre and the construction of meaning and affect through vocal timbre. It is my belief that my finding will also be useful for the field of psychoanalysis. Placing my work in relation to the work of Lacan and Dolar is one of my next projects.

¹⁰ I have not reviewed vocal pedagogical texts from vocal styles outside of Western classical and popular music.

¹¹ The word agile is used by singers to describe the level of evenness and flexibility of the voice.

of similar assumptions within the vocal pedagogical texts, has proven invaluable as a resource for my understanding of the vocal apparatus function and mechanism.

Contemporary studies on acoustics and the voice (for example, Childers and Hicks 1990, Clark and Yallo 1995, and Laver 1990) provided a quantifiable perspective for voice and timbre, providing valuable background for dealing with historical accounts of timbre and interpretation of audience perception of timbre.¹²

Questions of gender, sexuality and voice have (to my mind) spurred some of the most productive areas for exploring vocality, body, and their intersections with culture. In these areas, some of the questions asked might seem to be “given:” What is voice? How do we experience voice? How does voice “work” on us? What is the relationship between voice, body, and desire? Suzanne Cusick engages some of these questions in “On Musical Performance of Gender and Sex” (1999). In this essay, Cusick treats questions of how culture is written into the body, or how we can refuse culture’s hand on our bodies and voices: it foregrounds the negotiation of corporeality as foundational to the art and skill of singing. John Shepherd also addresses issues of voice, body and sexuality in “Music and Male Hegemony” (1989). Although less productive in its specific thesis and argument, it does open up for consideration valuable ways of considering the voice: we as listeners do not only consider and interact with pitch as pitch, but also as a vibration in the body.

The historical phenomena of the castrato—perhaps because of its violent, evocative, and elusive nature—has brought forward productive discussions on voice,

¹² Studies such as Milton Metfessel’s (1928) represent a heroic attempt of quantifying the voice of the African-American. While working out detailed parameters of the “Negro” voice, the assumptions upon which the entire study rests, that this voice is quantifiably different from the white voice, does not allow this work to be objective.

sexuality, identity and body. Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (1993) is equally imaginative in the move from the singer as an object of study to the audience and fans of singers and their fantastic relationship to singers as the object of study.¹³ For this dissertation, Koestenbaum's work on the intense relationship the audience can develop with and from the singer's voice has been influential. Elizabeth Wood's essay "Sapponics" (1994: 27-66) serves a similar function in developing the position for including the audience in the analysis of vocal timbre.

Telia U. Anderson (2001: 114-131) turns the production to the performer. In her piece "'Calling on the Spirit:' The Performativity of Black Women's Faith in the Baptist Church Spiritual Traditions and Its Radical Possibility for Resistance," she theorizes the vocal space of glossolalia to be a sanctioned performative moment and tool for women, traditionally repressed in Baptist services. Through this vocal and spiritual practice they, through this particular vocality and, Anderson argues, an Africanist performance strategy (115), take charge of the sermon and reverse gender hierarchies.

Plato's writing on the hiccup (1997: 185c-e) was instrumental to my thinking through of the issues of the outer boundaries of the voice. Is it, for instance, the same voice when the vocal apparatus is used to execute a hiccup as a note sung *sotto voce*? What is the relationship between the pre-linguistic (infant's babble) and the post-linguistic voice (laughter, crying, singing)? Mladen Dolar, in thinking through Plato's dilemma of the hiccup, voices in very clear terms the position the singing voice and vocal timbre (versus voice when delivered words) as given in these words: "Singing represents

¹³ See also Poizat (1992).

a different stage: it brings the voice energetically to the forefront on purpose, at the expense of meaning (30),” that is, at the expense of meaning-delivery as the conventionality that the voice is asked to serve. And this other place, the sound of the voice itself as opposed to the words it has the capacity to carry, is the focus of my investigation. Jacques Derrida’s concept of phonocentrism, a favoring of the spoken over the written word because the voice is the “unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously from within itself... (1976: 20; 1967a: 33),” hints at the magnitude of the voice’s role as a conductor of meaning in our daily lives. It is this puzzle I am pursuing from a more corpo-mechanical angle.

Roland Barthes’s seminal essay *The Grain of the Voice* (1977) is one of the most quoted in scholarship on the voice. With debt to Julia Kristeva, Barthes outlines two types of song: 1) *Pheno-song*, composers’ musical language, rules of genre, style of interpretation--that is, all the formal educated ways of delivering a song, and 2) *Geno-song*, the singer’s work with text that has nothing to do with interpretation, but rather is in the “*diction* of the language (183).” It is here the grain of the voice is to be found. Writes Barthes, “The ‘grain’ of the voice is not—or is not merely—its timbre (185),” but that the *grain* is the “dual production—of language and music (181).” The ‘grain’ is the friction between the body and the language in the act of singing. This essay is quite problematic in many aspects but we are hugely indebted to this work for putting the tactility of voice—of timbre— on the agenda.

Steven Feld's ethnography of the recording studio,¹⁴ a place where people are forced to develop tools to communicate about timbre, brings a careful study of the different strategies of *naming* vocal timbre in order to effectively communicate timbral nuances to the conversation.¹⁵ Documenting five common discursive strategies (Spoken/sung 'vocables,' Lexical onomatopoeic metaphors, 'Pure' metaphor, Association, and Evaluation), Feld offers a model towards understanding how people exchange ideas about sound quality (2003: 321-346). Spoken/sung *vocables* are iconic vocalizations of the timbral feature. For example /dz:::/ to minimize the sound of the beads under the snare drum. Lexical onomatopoeic metaphors are "lexical items that bear a phonological resemblance to the sound they are describing based on acoustic properties," like *hiss* or *click*. 'Pure' metaphor describes when the timbral feature is not invoked, but the word invokes other sensorial domains like *wet*, or *bright*. In Feld's terms, Association involves citing other musicians, time periods, technology etc. Whereas Evaluation is a strategy of merit assessment, as opposed to sound description. While Feld's investigation is principally grounded in exploring relations between music and language, his strategies may offer modal suggestions for my own study in terms of cataloguing and categorizing the words used to describe vocal timbre.

¹⁴ Serge Lacasse (2000) writes about the phonographic staging of the voice in popular music. That staging, among others, is in terms of effects such as for example reverb added in the recording studio.

¹⁵ John D. Puterbaugh (1999: 29-31) also discusses "verbal attributes:" the study of the perceptual dimension of timbre using verbal, connotative attributes. The most prominent researchers in this field are Berger (1963) and G. von Bismark (1976), L. Wedin and G. Gouder (1972) and William M. Hartman (1997), Samuel Pellman (1994), and Juan Roederer (1972).

Discourse on the Quality of Vocal Timbre

Carolyn Abbate (1991) is concerned with the act of singing, operatic voice as “a realm beyond narrative plot, in which women exist as a sonority and sheer physical volume (254).” The integration and employment of these elements gives the female composer the power to “speak” a different text than the one written by her male counterpart. Given that operatic performance thus offers a polyphony of meanings, the listener is always (inter)active, then it may be inferred that the female listener is systematically making cognitive choices about which textual layers chooses to perceive aurally on an ongoing basis.

In her ethnography of Finnish Karelian women refugees singing *itkuvirsi* (laments), ethnomusicologist Elizabeth Tolbert (1994) found that the deepest enunciated “text” of the vocal line was found in the vocal quality of the female voice. Tolbert writes, “It is the very quality of the female crying voice, a voice that ‘cries with words,’ that is elaborated in performance to symbolize affect and to set this genre apart from others to accomplish cultural work grounded in the experience of grief (1994: 180).”

Anthropologist David Samuel identifies another site of resistance through vocal performativity music, mapping Apache Indians’ avoidance of diphthongizing when singing country repertoire. Samuel theorizes that this is a tool that aids them in marking their difference from “White trash, ” and that in “their refusal to twang, people in San Carlos insist that their love of country music grows out of an Apache, not a ‘white trash’ history of exploitation and marginalization (Feld 2003: 339).” Each vowel has a very specific timbre, so the decision to not twang, thus singing a particular set of vowels while avoiding others, determines the timbre. “Different vowels are like different instruments,”

Linguist Peter Ladefoged puts it (2000: 118). Thus, Apache Indians' consequential vowel use is an example of, as Ronald Randano has pointed out, the formation of certain music shaped through a process of "interracial expressions of race (2001: xiii)"— in this case, the refusal of being mixed up or associated with "White trash."

Perspectives

This dissertation is conceived from diverse modes of inquiries, drawing upon four different kinds of sources: 1) Primary sources in the form of my own interviews with voice teachers and students and as a long time participant-observer in vocal communities; interviews with the producers of the synthesis software Vocaloid; 2) published interviews and reviews; 3) my own practice as a singer and teacher; 4) and secondary sources such as public media sources (i.e. newspapers, documentaries, movies etc.), historical, critical and theoretical work.

I have had the privilege of being part of various classical vocal communities¹⁶ as a singer since 1991 and also as a teacher since 1996. My first experience as a classical singer was in Norway and Denmark in a music high school and in two national music conservatory.¹⁷ When I relocated to Southern California in 1999, I began to expand my musical studies beyond performance in the classical "bel canto" tradition but remained a participant-observer within various classical as well as jazz and experimental singing

¹⁶ Before I started my formal vocal training, I had sung in a local gospel choir for two years and conducted that same choir for one year. I'd also formed a voice/piano jazz duo that worked out arrangements for jazz standards.

¹⁷ In terms of questions of race, there were no marked differences between Norway and Denmark.

communities through 2007. Many crucial observations came out of a series of interviews with voice teachers and students I conducted during 2005-2006.¹⁸

I was fortunate to be in e-mail contact with Director Dom Keefe and chief programmer of the vocal synthesis software Vocaloid, Anders Sodergren, and to interview Sodergren in person in late summer 2006.¹⁹

Studying the perception of the African-American voice in opera, I drew upon public discourse as well as historical and contemporary analysis. Biographical works on the careers of Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield, Sissiretta Jones, and Marian Anderson were also invaluable sources. Because the stories of some of the less known African-American classical singers are seldom recorded, Rosalyn Story's (1993) one of a kind work on African-American divas has been particularly helpful. Jon Cruz's 1999 historical sociological perspective on the role of the spiritual in the rise of a new mode of cultural interpretation has been crucial in developing an understanding of the particular nature of the construction of a so-called African-American vocal timbre. Ronald Radano's (2003) monumental study of the interactions between the so-called *black* and *white music cultures* not only led me to other valuable sources, but also confirmed for me the notion that, while a particular timbre or performance style may seem to be the product of a body of difference or an isolated music-making, vocalism in fact takes form *in relation* to multiple streams of multiple traditions and cultures. Mendi Obadike's 2005 work on "stereotyped blackness in the field of sound" was crucial in theorizing, in the words of

¹⁸ This study was made possible with a California Cultures in Comparative Perspectives Summer Fellowship.

¹⁹ This study was made possible with the Ethnic Studies/Latino(a) Studies Summer Fellowship.

Obadike, “acousmatic blackness,” the presence of sonic blackness or African-American vocal timbre in classical vocalities.

Through the presentation of the three case studies opening this dissertation, the mistaken belief that racialized vocal timbre is a result of phenotype and sensibilities essential to a racial group was revealed. In order to expose the “injuries of race,” to use the words of Deborah Wong, I set out to understand how meaning is infused into sound (specifically timbre) of music and how these meanings are performed by both performers, music management and audiences. Cornelia Fales’ (1995, 2002, 2005) exceptional rare work on timbre and perception of timbre provided a framework for understanding how timbre is historically and socially contingent. And John Puterbaugh’s (1999) dissertation on timbre provided much needed lessons on the mechanics of timbre. The works of John Shepherd and Peter Wicke (1997), Richard Middleton (1990), and Tia DeNora (2000, 2003) were crucial in developing an understanding of the relationship between the material reality offered up by sound and the meaning and affect invested in that sound thereof. To understand the performativity of timbre, the works of Irving Goffman (1959), J.L. Austin (1962), Judith Butler (1990), Suzanne Cusick (1999), Jacques Derrida (1976), and Jose Muños (1999) were all crucial.

In formulating a framework for approaching vocal timbre especially the work of Muños and Stuart Hall (1985) and their theoretical concepts of disidentification and articulation were critical.

Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation is organized in three parts. Part One (chapters 1-3) consists of two case studies and one prologue that pose questions regarding the relationship between race and vocal timbre. Part Two (Chapters 4-6) provides a theoretical, historical and critical background and foundation from which to start answering the questions posed in Part One. In Part Three (Chapters 7-8), I offer an analysis considering the performativity of vocal timbre developed in Part Two. By suggesting that the performativity of vocal timbre ultimately is determined by the listener, this chapter points out that a deeper analysis of vocal timbre must include the listener. As such it provides a bridge to the concluding chapter in which I develop the notions of *timbre sonic* and *timbre corporeal*. I suggest that present day work on timbre is *timbre sonic* and *timbre corporeal*, and that the sense of how timbre is corporeally produced as an essential sound of an essential body must be developed.

In the first chapter I investigate teachers' perceptions of the students' race and/or ethnicity and the subsequent vocal timbre expected from their students. My research suggests that teachers expect students' vocal timbres to correlate with what they imagine to be the vocal timbre typical of that race/ethnicity. And these imaginings are often grounded in a mind-set developed in colonial times. There are grounds to speculate that some teachers' expectations or a racialized sound influence firstly what they hear and secondly how they shape students' voices. Therefore, a particular vocal timbre that may seem to confirm categories of racialized vocal timbre might in fact be the imprint of teacher and classical vocal community beliefs in difference as manifested through sound.

Difference as manifested through sound and colonial perspectives of difference being caused by innate racial disparities are indeed both an integral part of modern classical vocal pedagogy. I trace modern classical vocal pedagogy to Manuel Garcia II, the first singing teacher to draw on scientific data (1840), ([1847] 1972), drawing connections between Garcia's training with François-Joseph Fétis (notable most saliently for his fundamental theory of the differences between human races, and the presumption of proportionately divergent music comprehension capacities across race thereof), the data Garcia collected in military hospitals in colonial Algeria (Potter 1998: 55), and the ways in which classically trained voices are perceived and shaped in racialized terms. As participant-observer and through a series of interviews collecting in-depth data on the activities of singing and listening to the voice, I surmised that voice teachers in Southern California exhibited a connection between timbre and race or ethnicity that may be traced back to the colonial heritage of modern vocal pedagogy.

Chapter Two looks at not only the innate dimension of colonial attitudes in vocal pedagogy, but the particular geographical, historical, and cultural dimensions of the presence of a so-called African-American vocal timbre. I examine the necessity for early African-American classical performers to integrate minstrel, spiritual and classical repertoire in their programs. I examine the relation between Italian opera burlesque sequences as they were presented in minstrel shows and often performed by African-Americans and later audiences association between African-American's singing opera and minstrelsy. I trace the origins of the so-called African-American vocal timbre to Marian Anderson. The first African-American singer to receive national and international recognition and influence, she was trained by one of Garcia's disciples.

And lastly, I look at the use of black bodies and voices by white composers, such as Virgil Thomson, in American opera.

Acousmatic blackness, to use Obadike's phrase, refers to the existence of the black body through sonic nuances designated as *African-American vocal timbre*. I argue that acousmatic blackness is devised to evidence physiological differences between races—differences that do not exist in the material, measurable world. However, African-American vocal timbre and acousmatic blackness do exist due to the belief in racial difference and due to collectivized subjective perceptions of difference through sound.

Chapter Three is a prologue to Chapters One and Two, examining the nature of pre-existing beliefs in race as sonic difference. Not only are young singers acculturated by the instructional process to perform racialized timbre, but timbral and vocal differences along categories of race are actualized through music technology. The vocal synthesis software Vocaloid created vocal fonts—"singers" whose profiles were defined alongside assumed racial categories. The packaging of Lola and Leon—Vocaloid's "generic soul singers"—is reminiscent of blackface imagery. The project traces connections between racialized bodies, musical genres and vocal sound.

Chapter Four, the first chapter of Part Two, provides a theoretical foundation from which to start addressing the first of multiple questions posed by the case studies in Part One. How are sounds in music infused with meaning? Drawing on works of Shepherd and Wicke and Richard Middleton, I provide a framework from which to conceptualize: 1) how signification in sounds of language and sound of music differ; 2) how sound in music is a medium through which meaning is articulated; and 3) how affect and meaning is constructed through vocal timbre. I provide a distinction between meaning and affect

through vocal timbre versus sounds of music created by musical instruments. I intend to demonstrate that sounds of musical instruments are in fact understood through that initial corporeal experience of the sound of the singing voice. I claim that both the body of the performer and the body of the listener are imperative to any experience of sound and propose that signification through the sound in music is an interactive performative articulation of both the singer and audience.

After having established that audiences are elemental in articulating meaning through sound in music, in Chapter 5 I turn to the means by which overtones and timbre have been conceived differently since the Enlightenment period. By examining timbre from a historical and scientific perspective, I conclude that meaning of timbre is historically and socially contingent. As a consequence, the part of the timbre on which we choose to focus in our listening is affected, as well as the values. Affect and meaning invested in timbre at any given time are historically contingent. I argue that any investigation of timbre, including this dissertation, is historically contingent. This claim reveals the importance of considering the context that determines which aspects of sound in music are perceived aurally and how the historical and social contingencies implicated in meaning and value are constructed from that sound thereof. As such, this chapter sets up the necessary foundation for theorizing how timbre impacts identity formation.

With the perspectives suggested by Chapters 4 and 5 in mind, in Chapter 6 I investigate timbre not as static but a *dynamic articulation*. Through this perspective I aim to discern how racial identity is articulated through vocal timbre as aspects of performance. I turn to performance studies and affirm that racialized vocal timbre is indeed performed. I introduce the term *vocal body* and suggest that through repeated

performances, the vocal body—the muscles, ligaments, and membranes—are shaped according to the racialized timbral performance. The performance is ultimately executed in the vocal body as the vocal body itself becomes a manifestation of race. Such theoretical framework needs to be placed in perspective in order to conceptualize how and when meaning and affect are read into vocal timbre, as subjective individual identities such as race are constructed through performance both on the part of the listener and the singer. Hence, in Part Two I problematize the notion forwarded by the actors in the case studies presented in Part One, namely the injuries that result from instances when the meaning of timbre is erroneously assumed to be fixed or reconciled.

With Chapter 7 opening Part Three of this dissertation, I examine the career of African-American jazz and ballad singer Jimmy Scott. I address theoretical considerations of the corporeal consequence of the performance of race through timbre, and raise questions regarding performative agency. Specifically I investigate the relationship between the discursive and the corporeal and the role of the audience in this dynamic.

Scott was born with the hormonal illness Kallman's syndrome and therefore never entered puberty. Audiences' expectations in regards to a black male singer are challenged and acted out in unexpected ways. Examining the ways in which Scott has been presented and perceived—as a female and symbolizing death—I propose that in fact audiences in their minds by imagining him in such forms perform drag performances for Scott, a kind of drag reception.

In Chapter 8 I investigate vocal timbre as a cultural artifact. I coin the term *performative articulation* to address the cognitive processes by which audiences connect

specific vocal sounds with particular ideas such as race and gender; these categories are consequently reified. Thus, reification of notions of race through the performance of vocal timbre is circular: audiences join sounds with concepts; (live or digital) performers respond to these sound/concept compounds, and in turn confirm the listeners' linkages. This dissertation suggests that under a paradigm in which vocal timbre is considered as merely a sonic component, racialized timbre remains naturalized. I therefore propose an analysis of the performativity of timbre—performance as 'material creation of timbre' and 'reception as performance'—in order to begin to map and denaturalize the connection between vocal timbre and race.

Thus, I conclude Chapter 8 and this dissertation by proposing that any responsible and truly comprehensive analysis of the voice must consider the voice itself—that organ that creates the sound. If timbre is performed, that microscopic performance must be mapped. I therefore propose to move the focus from the sonic to the corporeal, and urge an analysis of the voice that considers the movements of the vocal organ that births sound.

Voice lesson One

Flashback to: the beginning of the new millennium. Southern California.

At the end of the fifteen minute warm-up preceding a voice lesson:

“You have such a lovely timbre,” a voice teacher tells me.

“Thank you,” I reply, feeling very happy about the compliment.

“The timbre is really quite characteristically Korean. That full sound,” the teacher continues.

“Oh...?”

“Yes, yes. Your Korean cheek bones give you that timbre,” the teacher explains.

I was confused. In Norway, where I grew up and received my foundational training as a singer, I had participated in master classes offered by well-known American voice teachers. They had been puzzled by this Asian-looking girl who spoke Norwegian and who, to their surprise, possessed a signature Nordic²⁰ classical timbre.²¹ Now, only a few months later, I was being complimented for my Korean timbre.

How could the same vocal timbre be interpreted so differently? The master class was held in the town of Bergen on the west coast of Norway, a nation where five thousand Korean children had been adopted by Norwegian families and had grown up in

²⁰ “Nordic” refers to the national vocal school comprised by the Nordic countries. The phenomenon of national schools of singing is elaborated later in this chapter.

²¹ The term *classical timbre* in this chapter (and in the entire dissertation) refers to timbre in European classical vocal style (opera and art music) and repertoire.

typically monocultural Norwegian homes. But I was now in southern California, an area where the Korean population numbered over one million and the Asian population over ten million.²²

In California not only was my classical vocal timbre read as Korean, *I* was, for the first time in my life, perceived as Asian. This notion might present an imaginative challenge for readers in Southern California: it might be difficult to believe and to truly understand. It might be impossible for those readers to imagine the circumstances under which I came to vocal practice.

I grew up in a small village on the west coast of Norway. The population was so homogeneous and the villagers had been so underexposed to people from other continents that some of them, because of my black hair, believed I originated from Africa. In my experience, when a Norwegian family with a little girl who looks different moves to a village where the population has had little or no exposure to people from the outside, but there are no new customs, foods, beliefs or threats to Norwegian identity associated with this child, her neighbors and fellow villagers soon forget that she is from somewhere else. In this cultural context, she is fully Norwegian.

Several years earlier I had visited Seoul. There people did not attempt to talk to me in their language: somehow they knew I was not Korean. My first experience of being read as Korean took place in California.

²² As a comparison, Norway's entire population is 4.5 million people.

Part One

Chapter 1

Constructing Difference: Teaching Vocal Timbre

Facts don't exist. The sole truth lies in a tone
of voice

Ned Rorem²³

Introduction

This chapter will demonstrate that vocal timbre, an attribute that has traditionally been viewed as an unmediated manifestation of the body, is indeed mediated. Through an ethnography of classical vocal pedagogues I investigate the notion of so-called “ethnic” vocal timbre. I argue that 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. Tracing modern vocal pedagogy’s incorporation of science-based data regarding the body, I further argue that assumptions regarding the influence of corporeal-structural differences on timbre, based in scientific notions originating in the nineteenth century, are still present in contemporary vocal pedagogy. As a result of formal training and of singers’ willing adjustment to culturally based timbral expectations, racialized timbral categories are not only imagined, but also materialized. As a consequence, vocal timbre as a manifestation

²³ Quoted in Wood (1994: 40).

of race is naturalized. A systematic unveiling of the process whereby vocal timbre is racialized is a necessary first step toward denaturalization.

Physiological Premise

Before we can proceed, we must develop an understanding that voices have timbral capacities greater than the variations we attribute to race. And knowledge regarding the vocal apparatus, vocal technique, and the consequent ranges of vocal timbres must be established. Three main factors are significant for personal vocal timbre:

1. Physical characteristics of the vocal folds (length, thickness, and viscosity)
2. *Morphological differences*: differences between individuals' pharynges and mouth cavities
3. Voice training

Although vocal production depends on the entire body, the structures that are specifically mobilized when we use our voices consist of three different parts which together constitute the voice organ: 1) the activators (the breathing apparatus that consists mainly of the lungs and diaphragm); 2) the vibrators (the vocal folds); 3) the resonators (the vocal and nasal tracts).

Physical Characteristics of the Vocal Folds

The vocal folds are muscles covered with mucous membranes.²⁴ There is a significant correlation between the length of the vocal folds²⁵ and the pitch range of the voice: longer the vocal folds correspond with the possibility for a deeper pitch. However, the same study showed that there is no direct correlation between the length of the vocal folds and the length (height) of their owner's body. Together, the pharynx and the mouth constitute the vocal tract. Air enclosed within the vocal tract acts as resonating material. Any particular resonator will allow certain sounds to pass easily through it, increasing the amplitude of these frequencies while dampening others.²⁶ The size and shape of the lungs, however, have no direct influence on the timbre of the voice.²⁷

Morphological Differences

Morphological factors influence the formant frequencies;²⁸ the physical characteristics of the vocal folds determine the voice source; and the manner in which the singer is formally or informally trained to use her instrument informs her manipulation of variables such as the length of the vocal tract and the thickness with which the vocal folds will come together. Is there, therefore, an underlying physical cause behind different vocal timbres? And, if so, are there correlations between race or/ethnicity and vocal

²⁴ The vocal folds are popularly termed vocal *chords* (probably a corruption of 'cords'), but as their shape is actually a fold, scientific literature on the voice refers to them as such.

²⁵ The vocal folds of a newborn baby measure around 3mm. In an adult they are about 9-20 mm.

²⁶ Frequencies that fit the resonator optimally are called resonance frequencies, or formant frequencies if the resonator is the human vocal tract. Most resonators have several resonance frequencies. For the vocal tract, the four to five lowest resonance frequencies are the most important ones.

²⁷ But the way in which the air is portioned out to pass over the vocal folds (for example as a big burst versus a measured flow) do influence the resulting timbre. It is the muscles in the torso that control the airflow, not the lungs themselves.

²⁸ Around 2800 Hz.

timbre? These speculations are answered by laryngologist Dr. Eugen Grabscheid, who concludes that “there is no physical difference whatsoever.” Dr. Wilburn J. Gould, who has conducted ultraspeed motion pictures to analyze vocal fold vibration, concurs: “The ratio of the Oriental larynx to the body is no different from that of other races” (New York Times, November 30, 1989).” Correspondingly, vocal pedagogy authority and scientist Richard Miller asserts that “fibroptic/stroboscopic observations reveal no racially classifiable features of uniform laryngeal construction (Miller 2004: 220).”²⁹ Miller adds,

The height or breadth of the forehead, the size of the cranium, the prominence of the occipital bone, the dimensions of the mandible, and the length and height of the nose bridge do not determine resonance. Contemporary speculations that a large nose ought to give an indication of greater resonance is not surprising, inasmuch as that notion was generally held by some teachers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who refused to accept singers who lacked large noses (105).

Contemporary vocal scientists agree there are no morphological differences that indicate race. Therefore, there should be no timbral differences based on race. However, as my opening example illustrated, and as we will see in greater detail later in this chapter, people do hear racially-based timbral differences. I argue that such differences are based on the flexibility and possibility of the instrument, and the choices made as to which aspects of an individual vocal timbre to bring forward. Thus expressive limitations are the results of choice of use rather than of physical premises.

Vocal sound is shaped by the size and shape of the vocal tract and the mouth cavity—both modified by the singer’s *manipulation*. Depending on the length and width

²⁹ There are no differences observed with regard to “vocal tract proportions, dimensions of the pharyngeal wall, shapes of the pyriform sinuses, or epiglottic activity (Miller 2004: 220).”

of the vocal tract, both of which may be changed by the singer, different frequencies are favored and, as a result, the resultant timbre changes. The opening or closing of the lips, the positioning of the tongue and the roof of the mouth together determine the overall sound as well its expressiveness. We hear various shapes and positions of the mouth, lips and tongue as different vowels. To test this idea, you can perform an experiment: without thinking about any particular vowel, simply putting your lips together in a “kissing position” and make a sound. The vowel sounded should be [o].³⁰ If you loosen your lips to a completely relaxed and relatively open position, the sound should be an [a]. If, from that position, you lift the middle of your tongue to touch the roof of your mouth, the sound will change to an [i]. Depending on how tight or relaxed your muscles are in any of these positions, different frequencies will be favored and your [o], [a], or [i] will change timbre accordingly.

Each vocal apparatus offers a vast range of sonic possibilities, of which we normally exploit only a limited range. Particular vocal timbres, which through their particularity might suggest physical limits to their timbral possibilities, rather embody the range of timbres that voice is asked to *perform*. Therefore, in addressing the question of whether we can “hear race” in vocal timbre, we may answer that we instead hear the results of vocal *usage choices*. Although the physical stature of the person constitutes his or her vocal limits, these limits fall substantially beyond the range within which each individual utilizes her instrument. The timbral differences we perceive are differences in style rather than in corporeally-determined timbral destiny. In other words, the timbral

³⁰ The brackets indicate the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

capacity of the human voice reaches far beyond the physical differences we attribute to race.

Voice Training

The ways we use our bodies and our voices physically shape the vocal apparatus. The characteristics of a singer's vocal timbre are formed by vocal training. Learning to use the vocal apparatus in a particular way not only contributes to the shaping of vocal timbre, but the behaviors learned in this training are also "written into" the texture of the body. Thus singing is a practice manifested in the physical entity, the body, as are other physical practices or activities. The way the voice is daily used, as any everyday physical activity, is discernable in the body. The patterns of our physical activities as female and male, as racially, nationally, and socioeconomically categorized people, shape our bodies, and thus shape the voice. And it is this *shaped voice* that we hear. There are therefore two bodies: first, there is the body with which we are born, which does not possess any inherent timbral limitations. Second, there is the body that is shaped over time, a body that most likely has been asked to take a form which expresses categories that matter in a given society.

The Vocal Body (i)

I term the process through which the material identified as an individual body is shaped the *vocal body*, whether it is shaped as a cultural artifact or by conscious training. Because the vocal body and the human body are housed together, it is difficult to discern that we listen to the vocal body, or even that the vocal body exists. I argue that because we cannot easily distinguish the vocal body, the altered body, we are led to believe that vocal timbre is the unmediated sound of an unaltered body. I also argue that it is imperative to recover this distinction in order to gain knowledge about the mechanisms involved in the process of racializing vocal timbre.

The Influence of Pedagogy

Before we go on to the ethnography of vocal pedagogues, it is necessary to explore the general consensus that the particular training a singer receives dramatically shapes the voice. I will offer two examples from vocal pedagogy, each illustrating a way in which the learning environment shapes voices.

During my sixteen years as a participant-observer in classical voice environments I have found that it is impossible to move in this milieu without hearing stories about voice teachers. Many of the most heated discussions surface when singers must choose a voice teacher. The debates regarding the pros and cons of joining a particular teacher's studio are intense and involved. If you were to listen in, you would hear that one teacher has a reputation for making students sound too dark and heavy; while another focuses so

much on the upper register that her students will not be able to bridge into the deeper part of their voices; yet a third teacher will somehow make the student's breathing so stiff that the resulting voice will sound inflexible. The students' conversations may focus on a given teacher's incorrect or unproductive technique, but students also acknowledge that the teacher is teaching to the best of her ability in order to achieve her timbral ideal. Students know from first-hand experience that these minute differences between pedagogical approaches have great impact.

Another major example of the ways different timbral and pedagogical approaches shape the voice may be found by comparing the national schools of singing. Perhaps the most well-known national schools of singing are the English, French, German and Italian. However, there are also the Nordic and Slavic schools of singing.³¹ The phrase *national school of singing* refers to a preferred tone quality and its related technique, which function symbiotically on a national and regional scale and result in differing pedagogical schemes and a corresponding shaping of the voice according to the national tone ideal (Miller 1997).

The preferred national tone is not a casual matter. The French Ministry of Culture, for example, employed official inspectors to observe regional conservatories of music in order to evaluate the vocal pedagogy. Richard Miller reports that in the post-World War II decades, some inspectors were especially adamant that their concept of proper onset³²

³¹ What is now referred to as the international style of singing is based in the Italian bel canto school, but is also flexible enough to sing in different regions without too much clash. The international school of singing, indeed, generally refers to the style practiced by singers who travel between the largest stages around the world.

³² A vocal onset is the way in which the beginning of a sound phrase is performed. This may be accomplished with an attack, or by "easing" more softly into the note. To those unconcerned with vocal technique this might not seem like such radical difference, but for vocal pedagogues and singers it is a very

be taught in French conservatories. The preferred onset among these inspectors was an “attack,” a very strong beginning that is created by a powerful inward thrust of the abdomen. As a result the vocal folds were forced to deal with a high level of airflow, and in response the larynx resisted the excess airflow by fixing the vocal folds in a single position. The result is a “held” sound that is slightly above pitch, with a pushed and sharp-sounding phonation. This sound is now characteristic of the French onset and—because the attack set up a tense position of the vocal folds—the French line (Miller 1997: xx).³³

We know that the sounds of these various schools are the results of aesthetic preference and vocal technique which accommodates this preference.³⁴ We know that they are not the unmediated expression of a people.³⁵ A national school of singing simply refers to the preferred tonal quality of a region (and the vocal technique which accommodates it), and of course does not necessarily indicate the nationality of the singer. A Norwegian singer may be educated in a conservatory in Germany and thus develop a German tone. Or, an Italian teacher might teach in Paris and pass on his or her Italian technique and tone ideal.

important matter. Lay listeners might not consciously register these different onset philosophies, but attentive listeners could potentially articulate an awareness of overall difference in the sound.

³³ In contrast, there is the Nordic “soft” onset wherein airflow precedes sound, the German *weicher Einsatz* (whisper onset), a reaction against the earlier *Sprenginsatz* (hard onset), and so on.

³⁴ Richard Miller notes that although there are recognizable national tonal preferences and techniques, no nation exhibits monolithic conformity. Miller estimates that over half of the teachers within a given national school adhere to the national tonal preference, while the remaining group of singers and teachers are devoted to international concepts (Miller 1997: xix). Tone preference is also influenced by teachers’ migrations and relocations. We may see, for example, that many German teachers associate themselves with the historic international Italianate School as a result of the legacy of the vocal pedagogy master G.B. Lamperti, who taught in Munich.

³⁵ In addition, a preference for a particular repertoire can affect the sound. The repertoire’s particular method of setting, and demanding certain technical things from, the voice will shape the voice.

It is also important for this discussion to note that within the geographical area of one national school there will be many different spoken dialects. In some areas, the dialects are so different that they are close to separate languages. In countries such as Switzerland, students at a single conservatory might have four different mother tongues. However, phonation and, as a result, pronunciation are different in song than they are in speech, and singers learn very carefully how to pronounce words in singing, even in their first language. Even singers with different mother tongues or dialects are unified under one national school, or a single teacher's tonal ideal. In summary, both of these examples from the world of classical vocal practice exemplify the malleability of the human voice and the enormous impact a teacher's tonal ideal and pedagogy generally produce on the ultimate sound of a classical singer's voice.

Having established some essential facts about the vocal apparatus (that its expressive and timbral ranges are larger than are the variations we ascribe to physical differences), and having provided some background regarding the profound role of pedagogy in forming students' vocal timbre, it becomes possible to introduce my ethnography of vocal teachers, conducted in 2005-2006 in southern California.

Conversations Based on Scenes From the Vocal Studio

During the aforementioned year I conducted thirteen interviews with vocal pedagogues and students, from Bachelor's degree through Doctor of Musical Arts

(DMA) candidates.³⁶ In our conversations we discussed what constitutes vocal timbre, how vocal timbre is developed, and what kinds of information vocal timbre conveys about the singer. When we discussed correct singing in terms of vocal weight and color, crucial problems in vocal pedagogy, issues of race, ethnicity and vocal timbre arose. In this part of the interview all but two teachers told me that they can always tell the ethnicity of the singer by his or her vocal timbre.

I will offer some general examples of how race, ethnicity and vocal timbre are viewed among some people in the vocal pedagogical community.³⁷ Despite confirmation that there is no direct correlation between race, ethnicity, and vocal timbre, strong general sentiments regarding the corporeal reality of race and ethnicity are played out in vocal pedagogical practice. I will focus first on two interviews with teachers, and then on interviews with students who have chosen different strategies for relating to racialized vocal timbre.

Throughout the interviews with teachers two main topics related to guiding the development of vocal timbre surfaced: 1) the question of what constitutes healthy and natural singing for the student, and 2) the need to avoid homogenizing students in favor of allowing each singer's true timbre to arise. It is interesting to observe, though, that the practices considered by teachers to be "healthy" and "honest" ultimately fell along lines of race and ethnicity. That is, what I describe as racialized vocal timbre is conceived by

³⁶ Most of the interviews took place in teachers' private studios. In one case the interview was conducted in a coffee shop, and on a few occasions interviews took place by telephone.

³⁷ Kristyn R. Moon's (2005; 23-48) work on the Chinese American Vaudevillian Lee Tung Foo and his relationship with voice teacher Margaret Blake Alverson in early twentieth century California is a unique study of the dynamic between the teacher's imagination of her student in terms of Alverson's conception of Chinese American's musical abilities and the ways in which Foo developed as a singer. Moon describes it as a relationship that "broke racial barriers but never transcended their limits (23)." See also Alverson's own account of the story in Alverson (1913: 161-166).

voice teachers as simply a healthy way of singing that promotes a non-homogenized sound.

Dorothy,³⁸ a soprano and professor of voice for seventeen years, told me that she can invariably identify whether a student is, for example, Armenian, Russian or Korean from the student's vocal timbre, but she frames her classification of students as a concern about *vocal health*:

There are principles of what is healthy, a balanced sound and all of that, and if [voice teachers] observe that rule, then, how can they not hear an Armenian sound or Korean sound and cultivate it? (Interview with voice teacher, June 20, 2005).

With this statement Dorothy reasons that if the voice is trained along principles designed to promote a healthy, balanced sound, it will logically display its ethnicity. Rather than considering this strategy as a race- or ethnicity-based categorization of voices, Allison, another long time teacher, views the sounds she associates with what she calls "ethnic timbre" simply as "the unique color" and the vocal "fingerprint" of the student. Pedagogy then becomes a matter of bringing out the "true sound" of the student's voice, and that true sound happens to be connected to his or her perceived race or ethnicity. Allison regards this pedagogical philosophy as a means to allow each student to maintain an element of individuality within the highly cultivated and stylized world of classical singing. During the interview process I frequently heard such statements regarding the individuality of a voice, by which my interviewees meant, I believe, the opposite: "an ethnic vocal timbre." Vocal coach Ann goes so far as to criticize ignorant

³⁸ The voice teachers and students are not mentioned by their legal names. The names used in this text are pseudonyms.

teachers who have not been exposed to a variety of “ethnic timbres” for “homogenizing” their students’ sounds.

This criticism of underexposed teachers who cannot properly develop students’ individual or ethnic timbres suggests that there exists a necessary education process which teaches how different ethnicities are supposed to sound. The celebrated African-American tenor Vinson Cole tells the story of how he heard Martina Arroyo’s voice—considered by many to be the quintessential representative of African-American timbre—on the radio for many years before he learned from a picture that she was black (Hampton 2005). “You come into this world like a blank page,” says Cole. “You don’t know what you like or don’t like. You don’t come into the world with prejudices. They depend on what you’re taught and brought up with.” Cole learned at the age of eighteen that Arroyo was African-American. This suggests that there are no inherent, universally read categories of vocal timbre, but rather that we are socialized to understand a constructed vocal-timbral code. Because Cole was not yet socialized to read timbre as a racial marker within opera he was not able to discriminate between racialized timbres, and at first was unable to distinguish the sound of constructed blackness.

Most of the voice teachers I spoke with stressed the importance of being literate readers of “ethnic” vocal timbres. One wonders, however, what is being read. When we began to discuss what might “cause” the varied timbres of different ethnicities, Allison explained that the South American timbre is influenced by Latin people’s connection to their bodies; in her view Latin cultures operate from the body while North American cultures operate from the mind. She explained that singers’ connections to their bodies affect their sound.

The Mexican culture, for example, is, to me, a very visceral culture. It's not a super heady culture. I think we in the United States of America tend to be more cognitive. You know the whole puritan ethics where sex is bad and you just disallow that you have anything below your waist. You know, that is a primary drive in people. (Interview with voice teacher, June 20, 2005).

I asked Ann whether she believed that some cultures come by that body-voice connection more naturally, so that even if a singer from one of those cultures studies with an American teacher, or a teacher who is not particularly focused on its development, his voice would still sound the connection that was "in" him from the beginning, and thus would differ from the voice of an Anglo-American growing up in the U.S. Ann responded:

Yes. I think [Latin Americans] naturally have that connection [...] They're [] connected to their bodies [...] and their guts (said with throaty, "gut sound") and they make music from their hearts. In European repertoire they talk about that "she broke my heart, I will just lay down and die now," (said with a very proper voice) and in Hispanic music, the Latino music: "She broke my heart, she ripped it out of my chest and stomped it on the floor!" (nearly screaming) And that's how their music sounds. It's very gut. Americans—we don't operate on that level, we tend to be a visual or cognitive society. (Interview with voice teacher, June 20, 2005)

It is worth noting that the categories outlined above are closely connected to binaries and classification systems developed by European colonists in an "observer-imposed" or "top down" mode, reflecting the hierarchy through which the categories were devised. How do such assumptions affect pedagogy?

The exceptionally close relationship between voice student and teacher complicates the ways the teacher's attitudes regarding race and vocal timbre might affect

the student. It is generally estimated that it takes at least ten years for a singer to master the fundamentals of vocal technique. During this time, the student must trust the teacher unreservedly, as the teacher is truly *building* the student's voice. Together teacher and student go through more and less successful times—times in which the student is asked to practice certain exercises that might not make sense in the moment, or to be patient “because the voice will sound like this for a while.”

It is generally acknowledged that to choose a teacher is to choose a set of ears that the student must trust unconditionally. As we know, the sound of the voice never sounds the same way to the person who sings as it does to those who listen. Because the sound is produced in the singer's body it is transferred to her ears not only through the ear channels as external sound entering the body, but also through internal bones and flesh; it is transferred to the listener's ears only as external sound. The singer is thus in a unique position: she is not necessarily the best judge of what constitutes the sound of her voice. The teacher is an expert listener, chosen to provide the most trustworthy information about the sound of the student's voice, and about how, and in which direction, it needs to be developed. With this description I attempt to convey an extreme relationship, the premise of which is that the student fully trusts, and commits her voice to the teacher.

African-American soprano Shana is a singer who has struggled in her relationship with voice teachers, and has been forced to set limits as to what kinds of ears she can truly trust (Interview with voice student March 25, 2006). Now in the process of pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree, Shana described her experiences with her four main voice teachers. The first and third teachers were white and the second and fourth, her current teacher, are African American. Shana told me that the white teachers' general

pedagogical schemes required that she model sound in order to change her voice to conform to their ideals. The African-American teachers were not concerned with sound, but rather with vocal function: how to use the voice.

For singers like Shana, there are problems inherent in the relationship between the idea of the “typical” African-American timbre and her voice type, a soubrette soprano. The stereotypical African-American classical voice is a full, heavy, broad and dark sound. This is the opposite of the soubrette soprano, which is a light, lyrical, and slender voice type. Shana found that non-African-American teachers did not hear her voice as it was, but attempted to direct it according to preconceived notions of African-American vocal timbre and thereby caused vocal damage. Shana reports that this is not an uncommon experience for aspiring African-American classical singers. As a consequence, an informal network for recommending teachers sympathetic to the particularities of each voice has developed among African-American singers.

Marina, a very successful young Armenian-American singer,³⁹ has a very clear sense of what it means to sound Armenian, and has gone to great lengths to preserve this timbre. She told me that the Armenian sound is on the “darker side,” and explained that it originated in the Armenian people’s history as victims of genocide. Marina says that her voice automatically picks up the truest timbre “the real, real timbre that I have” when singing Armenian repertoire. And she feels an obligation to “always remember that timbre in everything I do (Interview with voice student, July 20, 2005).”

Before trusting a teacher with her voice, Marina makes sure the teacher understands her view of Armenian vocal timbre and is willing to work with her to

³⁹ Marina has been very successful in national opera competitions.

preserve that sound. She told me: “First and foremost, I feel Armenian. There are a lot of influences I have as an American, for example, being mentally a lot more modernized, and I think differently than a lot of Armenians do, but in my actual music, it has not really changed.” She feels that she doesn’t understand American music, but Armenian music is what she “feels inside,” and that whenever she approaches music she does so as a “darker person” (Interview with voice student, July 20, 2005).

Marina talks about vocal *darkness* as an essentially Armenian component. As recent studies by Johanne Blank (1997) and Elizabeth Wood (1994) have indicated, darker ranges and timbres are drawn upon in the operatic world to signify Otherness. In Marina’s experience, “dark [timbral] quality scares [American] teachers because they want everything bright and forward.” In opera literature mezzos and altos have been liminal and transgressive figures. Born and brought up in Southern California, Marina is fluent in most aspects of Armenian and American cultures. Switching between them, she chooses the Armenian for her artistic, expressive mode; she chose the American when she rebelled against a marriage her parents wished her to enter in her late teens. The Armenian community around Los Angeles is very supportive of Marina. She often performs at their cultural events and gets constant feedback about how Armenian her voice sounds. Guarding and developing what she considers the Armenian component in her vocal timbre—the peculiar darkness—gives her certain cultural capital and Armenian authenticity within her own community, and an exotic tint in the broader musical environment with which she is involved.

We have seen that the development of a singer’s vocal timbre is a contested site—a site wherein bodies are marked as racial, and upon which colonial ideas are re-

inscribed. It is also a site where singers themselves, by their choice of a teacher, are able to take charge and shape their vocal timbres according to their own ideals.

Sonic Perceptual Framework

Growing up in Scandinavia, where most people are of Scandinavian descent, I was surprised to discover how often a classical singer's vocal timbre was explained or simply referred to in racial or ethnic terms in the United States. This was always framed in the most positive terms, usually complimenting singers on their "interesting" timbre. Yet it was quite surprising that these timbral "fingerprints" fell along "Othered" racial and ethnic lines, and that I was now placed in that category.

My story illustrates the instability of the evaluation of timbre. Allison addressed this issue when she pointed out that it is teachers' responsibility to familiarize themselves with "ethnic" timbres. Teachers in homogeneous Norway had not had the opportunity to become literate in "ethnic" timbres, and thus my voice had not, before my move to the United States, been heard as Korean. I had had no intimate contact with Korean culture or language. My mother tongue is Norwegian, I was trained in the Nordic school of singing, and we have already seen that physical structure does not cause so-called "ethnic" timbre. Regardless, teachers in the United States heard my vocal timbre as Korean.

The only factor that could offer clues to my (lost) Koreanness was visual. D.L. Rubin (1992) addresses the impact of the visual aspect of a listening experience. In an experiment by Rubin, a person with American English as a mother tongue recorded a

lecture. This single recording was paired with either a picture of what appeared to be an Asian lecturer, or a picture of what appeared to be an Anglo-American lecturer. Subjects (American college undergraduates) were asked to listen to the tape paired with, by random selection, either picture. Questions were asked regarding the clarity of speech, level of accent, and coherence of the lecture. Although the speech (the recorded lecture) was identical for each picture, the recording paired with the picture of what appeared to be an Asian lecturer rated much lower in all three categories. This study speaks to the issue exposed by my ethnography, namely that listeners *hear what they see*, and frame the listening using a pre-established network of knowledge about, for example, the stereotypical Latin singer. As a consequence, the sonic component of a vocal performance is only one aspect of the listening experience.

Knowledge About the Influence of Geographical location on perception

Although this sociolinguistic study dealt with speech, the aspect of the study I find compelling and relevant to this work is the manner in which it was concluded that any preconceived notions regarding the speaker (or singer) frame the listening experience. In Rubin's study, the visual aspect framed the opinion formed by the listener by tapping into a set of preconceived ideas regarding what an Asian versus an Anglo person might sound like, and even how coherent their lectures were likely to be. And in the Nancy Niedzielski study (1999), prior knowledge framing the listening led people to hear certain accent traits associated with the person to whom they thought they were

listening. I suggest that voice teachers, by the same token, assume an entire set of ideas regarding the student's vocal timbre based on visual cues, as, for instance in my case, there are no sonic cues that could suggest Koreanness.⁴⁰

The Modern Western Classical Vocal Ideal

Why is difference read as a non-normative classical vocal timbre? Why might vocal pedagogy reproduce such colonial ideas so heavily?

The so-called modern western voice developed in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴¹ The new singing was a formalization of vocal pedagogy, in terms of both technique and ideology, and it was grounded in scientific principles. John Potter has observed that the same ideologies are still present in current vocal practices (Potter 1998: 47). Until the nineteenth century discussions about singing were concerned with rules of ornamentation and proper pronunciation—vocal production was hardly ever publicly debated (Castallengo 2005).⁴² Although a few treatises on singing were written in the eighteenth century (such as, for example, Italian Pier Francesco Tosi's (1723),⁴³ the nineteenth

⁴⁰ One might argue that what my voice teachers detected was a generic sense of difference due to my Nordic sound and Norwegian accent in speech. If this is the case, it nonetheless addresses the same issue: the visual aspect cued listeners to interpret my sound as Korean. I suggest that when highly skilled listeners such as voice teachers interpret my sound as Korean, their interpretations are due to visual rather than sonic cues.

⁴¹ I argue that the European environment in which the modern vocal ideal and pedagogy was formulated has substantively shaped contemporary American vocal pedagogy not only because there has been such a constant flow of singers and teachers between the United States and various European countries, but also because American classical vocal pedagogy finds its roots in the teachings of European vocal pedagogues such as Garcia II, discussed later in this chapter.

⁴² Logopedics Phoniatics Vocology (2005: 163–170).

⁴³ The most well known was Italian Pier Francesco Tosi (c1646-1732), who wrote *Opinioni de' cantori*

century saw an abundance of vocal manuals and singers' autobiographies in which technique and ideology were discussed extensively. Vocal technique was becoming an object of public debate. This interest in improved singing technique may be explained musically: performance spaces were becoming larger, thus the instrumental forces which accompanied singers became louder due to increased numbers of players and technical improvements in instrument design. Hector Berlioz, for instance, wrote in 1832 about his problems in performing *A travers chants* in a large hall within which only a few singers could project proficiently (Berlioz 1862 quoted in MacClintock 1994: 420-432). New repertoire also called for vocal-technical improvements. However, despite an increasing amount of challenging repertoire from the mid-eighteenth century, there seem to have been no major historical changes in vocal technique (Potter 51) before the advent of the scientific investigation of the voice.

Post-Garcian Voice: The Application of Science in Vocal Pedagogy

According to Potter the change from “natural” to “modern” was prompted and implemented by a new school of “scientifically oriented singing teachers (1998: 54).” In *The Art of Singing* (1978), a survey of vocal pedagogical literature from the period 1771-1927, author Brent Jeffrey Monohan concludes that the practice of drawing on scientific data began with Manuel Garcia II (1805-1906),⁴⁴ an author of numerous treatises on

antichi e moderni, o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato. Bologna, ([1723] 1968).

⁴⁴ Garcia II was born into a family highly invested in classical singing. His father, Manuel Garcia I, was a lauded singer,⁴⁴ a voice teacher and the author of a voice manual.⁴⁴ His daughters Maria Malibran (1808-1836) and Pauline Viardot⁴⁴ (1821-1910) became two of the most celebrated singers of their generation and

voice, a teacher of many celebrated singers,⁴⁵ and (in 1854) the inventor of the laryngoscope,⁴⁶ which marks this shift toward a scientific attitude. Garcia II's impact on vocal pedagogy was so profound that the vocal technique before him is generally referred to as the pre-Garcian voice.⁴⁷ By 1861 scientific and empirical data were equally represented in the literature, and by 1891 almost every major work, Mohanan observes, contained references to breathing, phonation and resonance from an anatomical and physiological perspective. Physicians and scientists, as well as musicians, authored some of these pedagogical works. Treatises on singing before 1840 were penned exclusively by singers and voice teachers, so the contributions of these additional disciplines to the literature on singing represents a radical shift in which the *scientist* who knew the human build became an authority on vocal matters.

It is perhaps not mere coincidence that the so-called modern classical voice, described by pedagogical treatises based for the first time on scientific research, was initiated in the early nineteenth century. This was a time that saw numerous public exhibitions of and research on the human body—often enabled by (and used to rationalize) colonial pursuits and expansion (see Figure 1 for one example of this). Garcia II himself had the unique opportunity to study human anatomy when he enlisted in the French army during its 1830 invasion of Algeria. In military hospitals he had access to research subjects, allowing him to map the anatomy of the human vocal mechanism. The

Garcia II, who never felt he was fit for the singing career set out for him by his father, pursued the pedagogical aspects of singing after Garcia I's death.

⁴⁵ Today the best-known of his students are probably Jenny Lind, Mathilde Marchesi, Julius Stockhausen, and Mathilda Wagner.

⁴⁶ The laryngoscope, devised around a series of mirrors, is a system still in use by physicians.

⁴⁷ The pre-Garcian voice is thought to be closer to speech because of the way the larynx was held close to the position used in speech (while Garcian and current technique asks for a lowered larynx) and the preference of forward jaw position, a practice that would prove effective in making vowels sound more speech-like (Potter 1998: 54).

scientific anatomical knowledge of the vocal apparatus⁴⁸ along with studies by Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894), the leading physicist and acoustician at the time, served as the basis for his vocal pedagogy (Donald V. Paschke 1975: vi). Garcia II's work, *Mémoire sur la voix humaine* (1840), received an acknowledgement from the French Academy of Sciences in 1840 after he demonstrated his theory of the formation of vocal registers and timbres and their application in vocal classifications (viii). From this we may conclude that Garcia II's work was both influenced by and relevant to vocal pedagogy as well as the areas of anatomy and acoustics.

Garcia II's application of science in order to forward vocal technique conformed to a general mid-eighteenth century zeitgeist represented by the systematic classification of plants, animals and people. It is interesting to note that Garcia II was trained in music theory and history by François-Joseph Fétis, notable most saliently for his stark theory of the differences between human races and their (assumed) consequently differing abilities to comprehend music. It is not unlikely that Fétis's philosophy of race and music influenced Garcia's work on mapping the human voice. By measuring, weighing, and classifying—in short, by taxonomizing—the world, it was believed that man could master his environment. These constructed taxonomies served as the basis for a new world order. For example, assumptions about the cognitive effects of skull size and shape served to rationalize the connection between race, musical understanding and aesthetics. French musicologist and educator François-Joseph Fétis wrote in the preface to his general history of music:

⁴⁸ Donald V. Paschke's Introduction to the 1975 translation of Garcia II's *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing: Part Two* (editions of 1847 and 1872).

The history of music is inseparable from appreciation of the special properties belonging to the races that have cultivated it. This essentially ideal art owes its existences to the humans who create it...it is the product of human faculties which are distributed unequally among peoples as well as individuals. (Quoted in Pasler 2004: 26).

The belief that human anatomical structure determines human capacity of being affected by sound is, in the words of Fétis, that “a feeling for music, for nations as well as individuals is related to the shape of the brain” (quoted in Pasler 26), combined with the establishment of knowledge that the shape of the head and trachea affect the timbre of the voice has profoundly, if indirectly, conditioned the ways in which there is a perceived timbral connection between race and voice. And Garcia, we will see, begins to conceptualize how singers’ differing skull shapes and sizes would result in timbral differences.

Time and Social Power

Anne McClintock (1995) writes that the sense of time promoted by the imperial science hovered around two centralizing tropes: the invention of *panoptical time*, “global history consumed – at a glance – in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility,” and *anachronistic space*, the simultaneous existence of different temporal zones and with different levels of progress (see Figure 1) (McClintock 1995: 36-37).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ McClintock points out that G.W.F. Hegel was one of the most influential philosophers to promote this notion, imagining Africa as not only a different geographical space, but also a different temporal zone. Africa, writes Hegel, “us no Historical part of the world...it has no movement or development to exhibit” (quoted in McClintock 1995: 40-41).

The larger scope of the project, following Charles Darwin and Carl Linneus, was, in the words of McClintock, the “collect[ion], assembl[ing] and map[ing]” (36) not only of natural spaces, but also of historical time. The taxonomizing project that at first had been applied to nature was later, with social Darwinism, applied to cultural history (37).

The invention of the archaic and its conception as coterminous with Western progress, McClintock suggests, was central to the discourse of racial science (as well as to urban surveillance of women and the working class). So-called archaic spaces were viewed as “living archives” of the primitive (41). McClintock has pointed out that in order to meet the empirical standards of the natural scientists, visible stigmata that would prove the “historical anachronism of the degenerate classes”⁵⁰ was necessary (41). One answer, as Sander Gilman (1985) has observed, was found in the body of the African woman.⁵¹

Drawing on findings from his own anatomical research, Garcia II was one of the first to understand that the lower larynx position had to do with vocal timbre rather than with register. His formulation resulted in what was termed *voix sombrée*⁵² (as opposed to the traditional *voix blanche*),⁵³ which is the foundation of modern operatic sound. The previous technique of singing with the high larynx position, *voix blanche*, was described

⁵⁰ Georges Curvier measured Saartjie Baartman’s skeleton and compared her skeleton as the “lowest” human species with the orangutan’s, the “highest ape.”

⁵¹ McClintock has noted that the Victorian view of the African woman’s body became the prototype of “the invention of primitive atavism (1995: 41).”

⁵² Tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez, performing at the Paris Opéra in 1837, is the first singer known to have sung using the *voix sombrée*. He had developed the upper part of his chest voice to “contre-ut”, maintaining ease and volume as well as the timbre “somber.” Doctores Diday and Pétrequin wrote first about the *voix sombrée* as a “fundamental revolution” (Castellengo 165). *Contra* Diday and Pétrequin, who imagined that this sound was caused by an entirely new vocal mechanism, Garcia II understood that it was a timbral distinction.

⁵³ *Voix blanche* is a singing voice closer to speech, referred to earlier. *Voix sombrée*, a product of the lower larynx position, is what Johan Sundberg implies is the definition of an operatic voice, a voice with the singer’s formant.

by G. Oscar Russell (1931)⁵⁴ as failing to promote a “musical” vowel. Rather, the vowels produced by this position are, according to Russell “flat,” “metallic” (145) “piercing” and “barbaric” (151). In his discussion of the role of the vocal tract and tongue for “good tone production” ([1949] 1967: 110), William Vennard, a leading twentieth century American voice teacher and researcher, draws on Russell’s estimation of the different vowels’ “desirability” (111). *Voix blanche*, the timbral ideal prevalent before the use of science in vocal pedagogy, is conceived as the tone of an untrained voice, as sound before it entered the realm of scientific knowledge.

In the diagrams created in 1914 by esteemed soprano and voice teacher Lili Lehman (Figures 2, 3, 4) we see that a notional connection between skull shape and size lived on into the twentieth century. Even in the very late twentieth century, when I was a vocal student, Lehman’s pedagogical text was recommended by many of my voice teachers. If we juxtapose Lehman’s vocal pedagogical diagrams with charts which served to illustrate the relative intelligence and capacity of different people (Figure 1) on the basis of skull shape and size – a prevalent idea at the time Garcia II developed his pedagogy – it is understandable that from the moment human anatomy became part of the vocal timbral equation, the idea that vocal timbre would sonically reveal racial essence was implied.

With the institutionalization of Garcia II’s *voix sombre*, *voix blanche* became a symbol of a time before progress. In this way an anachronistic space was generated, in

⁵⁴ Russell was an American speech pathologist educated in European universities; he received a Masters Degree from Columbia University. According to Judy Duchan’s short history of speech pathology in America, Russell studied in Berlin and Koenigsberg from 1910-1913 and in Paris, Lyon, Madrid, and Vienna from 1923-1925. http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~duchan/new_history/hist19c/subpages/russell.html (Accessed July 1, 2007).

which timbres from before the advent of scientific research in vocal pedagogy and timbres developed as a result of scientific investigations sounded side by side.⁵⁵ As singers of non-Caucasian origin successfully sing classical and operatic repertoire, we see that this anachronistic timeline is translated into a sense that each singer has her own unique timbre and, as Dorothy put it, “[t] here are principles of what is healthy, a balanced sound.” How can voice teachers, “if they hear an Armenian sound or Korean sound,” not “cultivate it”? As *voix blanche* represented the voice before scientific progress and *voix sombre* represented the voice after it, “ethnic voices” (Armenian, Latin, African-American and so on)⁵⁶ are the new *voix blanche*, while the “non-ethnic” normative voice is the new *voix sombre*. The notion of panoptical time is therefore present in the operatic world. While listeners do not necessarily imagine the voice of the non-Caucasian to be inferior, it is heard as a voice of difference. In opera we may see this idea play out in the music written for characters representing roles of difference, for example in the assignment of liminal characters to darker voice fachs such as bass, baryton, alto and mezzo-soprano; and in the casting of singers of non-Caucasian origin in such liminal roles (Eidsheim 2004, Oby 1998).⁵⁷

The intellectual milieu in which modern vocal ideals and pedagogy were formulated was one in which musical faculties were believed to be connected to the size and shape of the skull. It was an environment in which knowledge of the human voice in

⁵⁵ Grant Olwage has made a similar argument in regards to Victorian singing styles and South-African choral singing existing side by side in South Africa (Olwage 2004: 203-226).

⁵⁶ In my earlier research I found that singers of non-Caucasian origin frequently are cast in any role that is representing a figure of Otherness. For example, Camilla Williams, the first African-American female singer to sing on a major American opera stage, the New York City opera, debuted as Madame Butterfly which depicts a Japanese character, in 195x. The roles frequently given non-Caucasian singers are Madame Butterfly, Carmen, and Aida.

particular and anatomy in general was based on progress in medical research, enabled by colonial force and fueled by the need to justify colonial activities. In such an environment the voice, an instrument intimately tied to the body, an instrument that resonates in the head, in the skull, occupies a very peculiar position. If colonial conceptions of the voice position some humans and societies outside historical time, they also listen to the sound of that temporal constellation. If, as Foucault has stated, new knowledge produces new forms of power, then what kinds of power are produced when knowledge regarding vocal pedagogy is based on research enabled by colonial force and the rationalization of colonial expansion?⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Here I paraphrase Jann Pasler's question regarding the European consumption of photographs of musicians and instruments taken on foreign expeditions (Pasler 2004: 41).

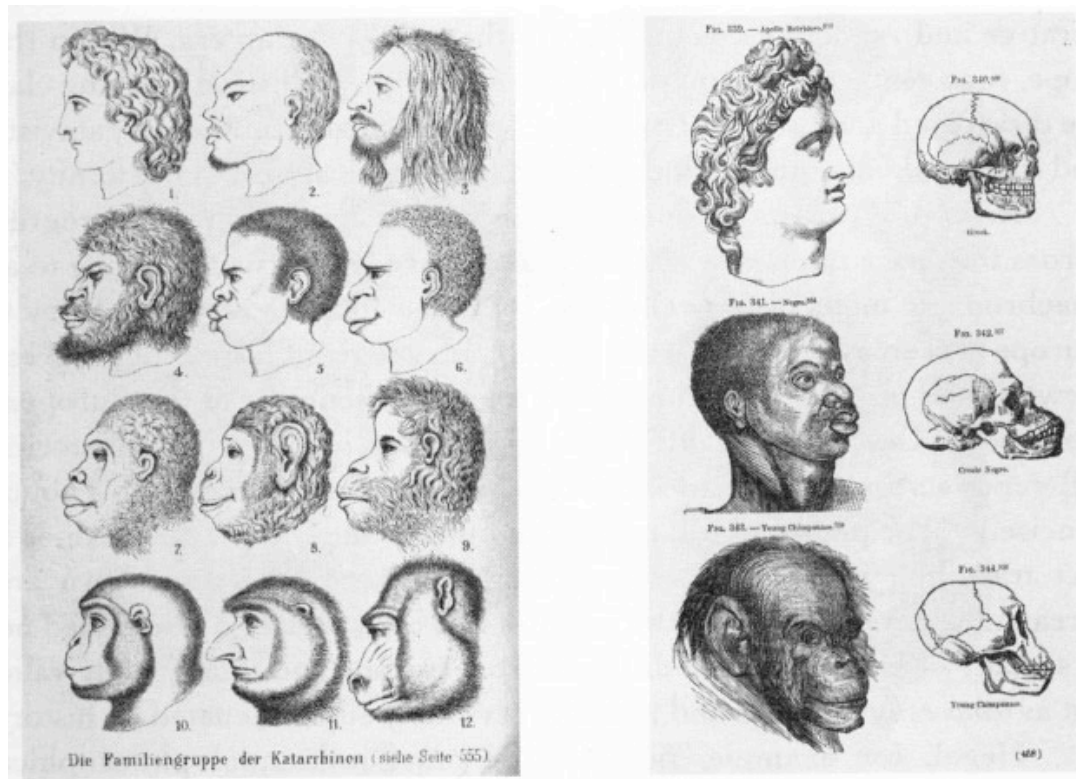
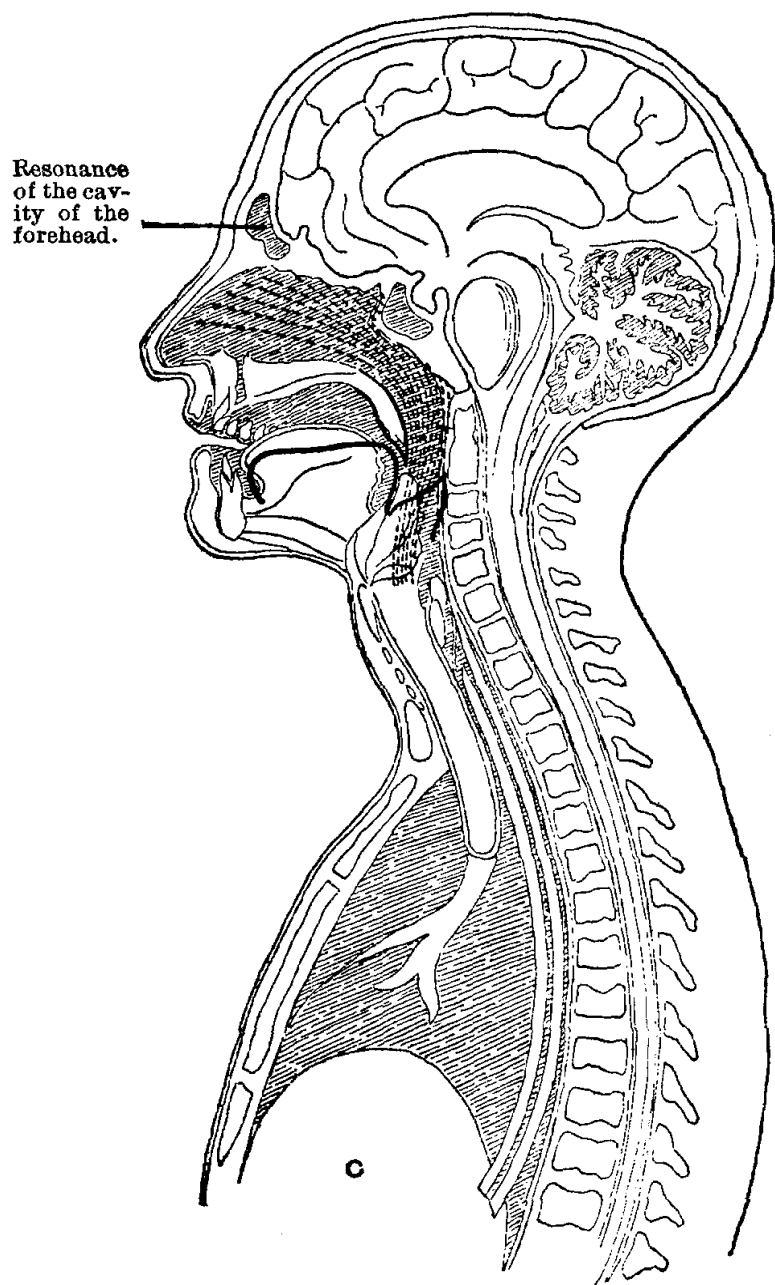


Figure 1

LEFT: “The Family Group of the Katarrhinen”: Inventing the Family of Man

RIGHT: Panoptical Time: Progress Consumed at a Glance (McClintock 1995: 59).



lines denote division of the breath in the resonance of the head cavities, high range

Figure 2 From Lilli Lehmann 1921: 19

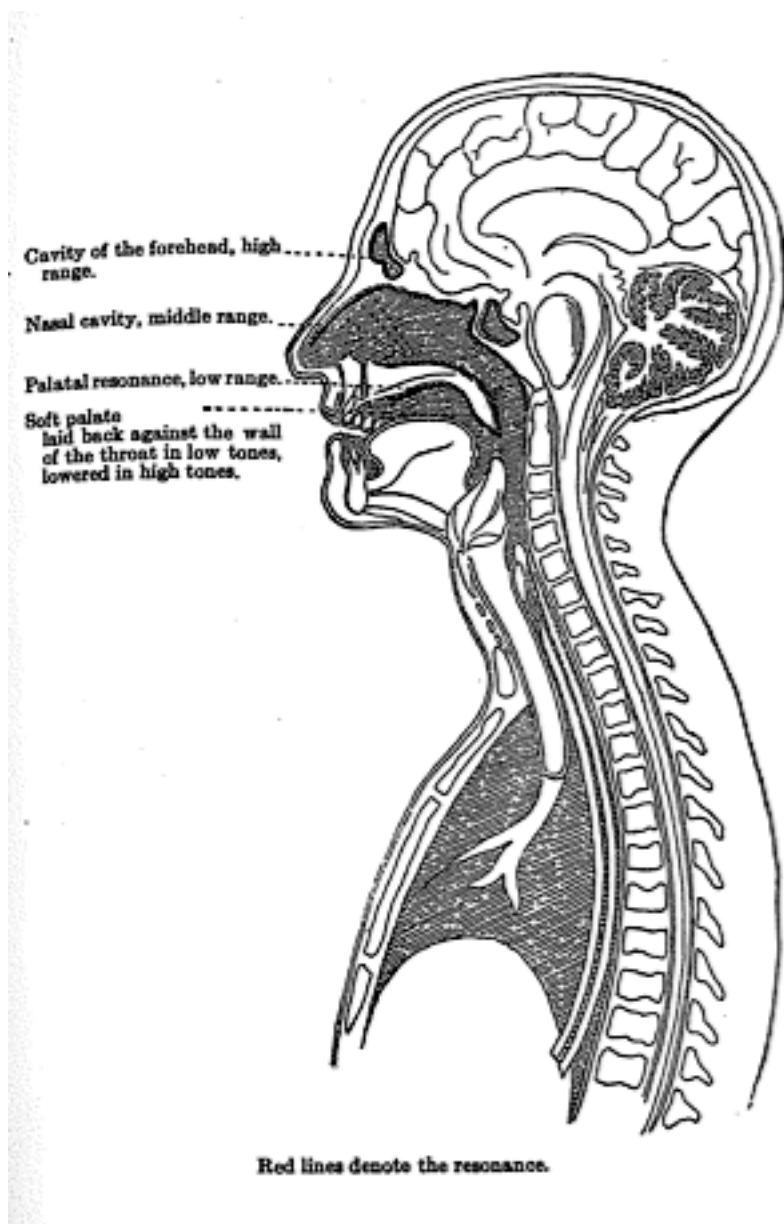
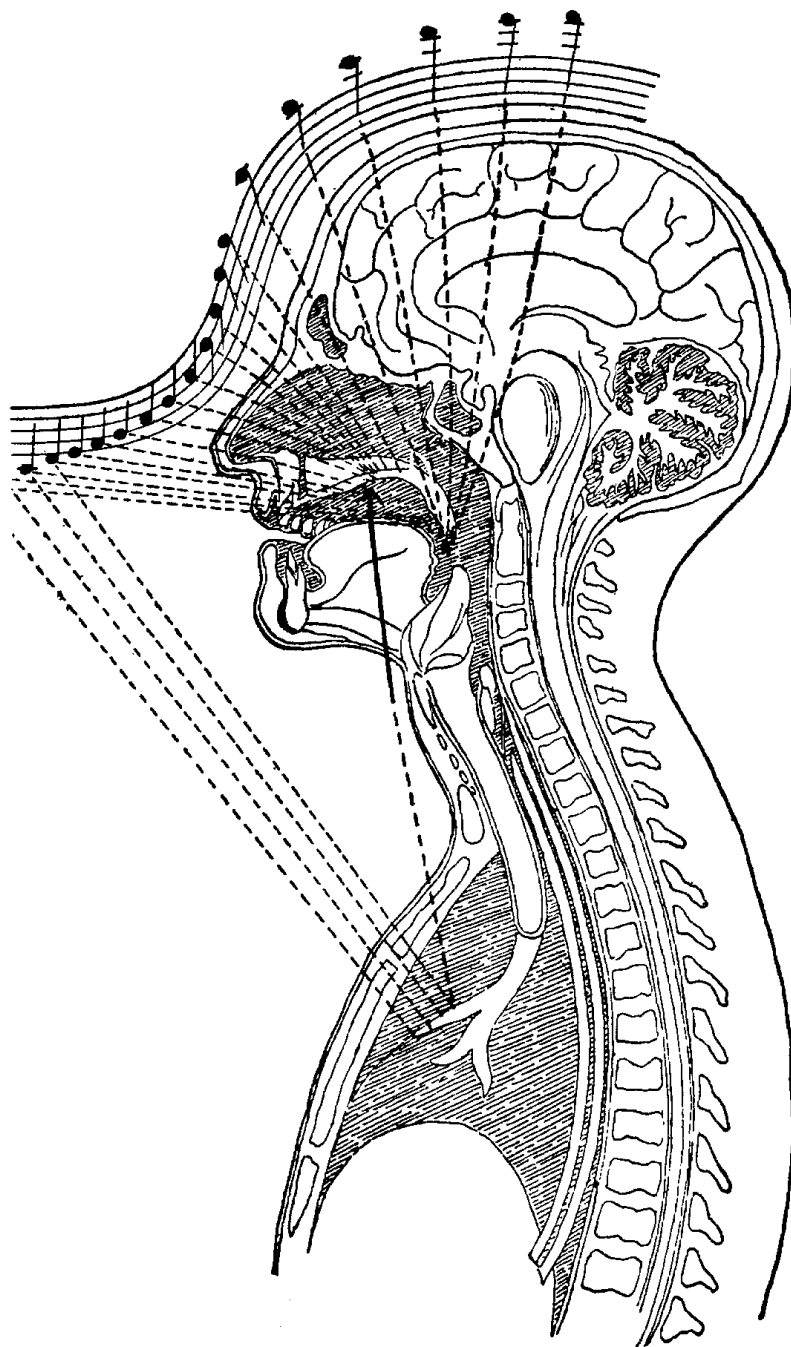


Figure 3 From Lilli Lehmann 1921: 43



lines denote vocal sensations of soprano and tenor singers

Figure 4 From Lilli Lehmann 1921:99

The Pedagogy of Whiteness: Taxonomies of Vocal Timbre

We saw in the interviews that vocal pedagogues today are still invested in the process of uncovering sonic difference between voices based on visual difference between bodies. The curious aspect of this investment is the way in which the “natural,” “healthy,” or “individual” voice is aligned with a particular race or ethnicity according to deep-held notions of essential differences between people based on their physical measurements.

This alignment may be seen in social evolutionists’ charts of man⁵⁹ in which, in the words of McClintock, “progress [is] consumed at a glance (1995: 39).” Modern classical vocal pedagogy was founded on scientific principles that sought to map measurable difference between people, and it was shaped at a time when the musics of different peoples were also mapped along the timeline of pre-history and progress. Formal singing is thus placed in a double bind. According to this worldview singing is not only sound emitted from a racialized body, but also the expression defined by Fétis as “the product of human faculties which are distributed unequally among people as well as individuals (quoted in Pasler 2004: 26).”

Voice science was established during a time when the human body was measured in order to provide information regarding differences that could justify colonial demand for domination and subordination. The voice occupies the body and therefore, according to the new scientific discoveries, it was possible to measure and taxonomize. The assumed supremacy of Western repertoire, thought, and culture was the ideological

⁵⁹ Women were disregarded in the theorizing of historical progress and left to the realm of nature (McClintock 1995: 39).

environment in which modern vocal science and techniques were established. I suggest that the theory of the superiority of the Aryan race based on measures of skull size has in subtle and immeasurable ways affected our modern approach, perception, development and desire for voices within the classical repertoire.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire cautions that pedagogical models reflect structures of power which education seeks to uphold:

If we accept education in this richer and more dynamic sense of acquiring a critical capacity and intervention in reality, we immediately know that there is no such thing as neutral education. All education has an intention, a goal, which can only be political (quoted in hooks 1989: 101).

Or, it can, through its system, seek to destroy current structures of power:

Either it mystifies reality by rendering it impenetrable and obscure—which leads people to a blind march through incomprehensible labyrinths or it unmasks the economic and social structures which are determining the relationships of exploitation and oppression among persons, knocking down labyrinths and allowing people to walk their own road. So we find ourselves confronted with a clear option: to educate for liberation or to educate for domination (Ibid.).

Although I will not attempt to compare the circumstances and lives of underprivileged farm workers in Brazil to young North American classical singers, there are some significant similarities. The foundation on which pedagogy is grounded reflects and perpetuates the ideological lens through which the educator views the student. That lens is not neutral, but defines within it the possibilities and results that can be imagined for the students. For Freire, education contains the possibility to destroy or maintain a system of power. Classical vocal pedagogy *maintains* a system—by labeling and

physically and sonically shaping “ethnic” timbres within their own timbral classification system—that strengthens and perpetuates a center and defines its borders.

In the introduction to the second translation of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Richard Schull described Freire’s unveiling of the seemingly innocent practice of passing down “merely facts” in clear terms:

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Richard Schull in the introduction on Freire 16).

In order to understand the dynamic of the construction of race in classical vocal timbre, it is imperative to study the *pedagogy* through which these notions are transmitted. When we hear a singer who possesses what we recognize as a “typical African-American” vocal timbre, we hear the sound of a mediated voice, the singer’s body shaped by the logic of a social system. Because the voice is situated in the internal spaces of the body, it is difficult to discern the physical shaping that has taken place during the training process. The transformation of the instrument is manifest in the muscles, ligaments and habits of the body. When the singer graduates to the professional stage her vocal body is already formed, and at that point comfortably reproduces constructed categories of race. Ironically, as a consequence, although the vocal body and its sound are products of ideology and pedagogy, the vocal sound itself actually seems to confirm a logic of race and ethnicity.

The Pedagogy of Whiteness: Constructing the Vocal Body

In order to begin to draw attention to the distinction between an unmarked and a marked vocal body, it is crucial to look at this body's formative processes. Laurie Stras, quoting Fisher (1999: 62), asserts that canonical blues singers "acquired that throaty roughness which is so frequent among blues singers, and which, though admired as characteristically African, is as a matter of fact nothing but a form of chronic laryngitis" (Stras 2006: 179).⁶⁰ We believe that a voice we hear confirms a difference based on race, but what we actually hear is, to recall Deborah Wong, the "somatic realization of race" (2000: 87).

Scenes from the vocal studio beg the following questions: What does it mean to discover one's "individual," "healthy," and "natural" voice? And what does Western demand for a "true" and "authentic" voice imply for people considered its margin? In order to investigate Ned Rorem's assertion stated in my opening epigraph, "[f]acts don't exist. The sole truth lies in a tone of voice," I would like to position his statement alongside an account by bell hooks:

When I became a student in college creative writing classes, I learned a notion of "voice" as embodying the distinctive expression of an individual

⁶⁰ The demands of a vocal style such as the blues, or the training of voices to sound in particular ways, are mistaken for the sounds of race. That is, we have come to confuse *style* with *inherent* sound necessitated by race. A study was conducted in which sample recordings of both popular and classical singing were played for a panel of voice teachers, including African-Americans. The entire group of listeners identified all of the singers in the musical samples as African-American in heritage—but none of them were. Richard Miller, in his concluding comment on this study, writes that "'Black' sound is culturally, not racially, generated (2005: 221)."

writer. Our efforts to become poets were to be realized in this coming into awareness and expression of one's voice. In all my writing classes, I was the only black student. Whenever I read a poem written in a particular dialect of southern black speech, the teacher and fellow students would praise me for using my "true," authentic voice, and encouraged me to develop this "voice," to write more of these poems. From the onset this troubled me. Such comments seemed to mask racial biases about what my authentic voice would or should be (1989: 11).

Slavoj Zizek offers a story about a reason for singing:

At the very beginning of his *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin presents the scene of women singing while picking strawberries on a field—with the acerbic explanation that they are ordered to sing by their mistress so that they cannot eat strawberries while picking them (Zizek 2002: 105).

The voice in Zizek's account is a site through which control over the body's will, desire and choice is carried out. Demanding constant singing to ensure that mouths are occupied is one chosen mode of management. Another tactic for monitoring and managing the body, evidenced by Rorem, is the iconization of the voice as the source of raw, unmediated truth. With that myth alive and kicking, young students will be repeatedly subjected to experiences such as hooks's. If the timbre of the voice is upheld as a medium through which truths about the identity of the singer are communicated directly, *sans* mediation, we must carefully examine the ideologies and perspectives through which the voice is heard.

To this end, this chapter has mapped the ways in which certain perspectives on the body and on the relative humanity of human beings have generated a logic within which classical vocal pedagogy seeks to allow the body it *sees* to resonate difference.

Chapter 2

The Construction of Acousmatic Blackness in American Opera

Setting the Stage

Scene One

“The Saints were supposed to be Spaniards,” a *Times* critic wrote about the composer’s casting choice for *Three Saints in Four Acts*, “but Virgil Thomson had chosen Harlem Negroes because of their diction. White singers, he feared, would act foolish and self-conscious chanting such lines as ‘Let Lucy Lily Lily Lucy Lucy Let Lucy (*Times* review. February 19).”

Scene Two

A great diva with a long career behind her was singing Tosca at the Met in 1961. Her dresser asked her whether she had yet heard Leontyne Price who has just made her unmatched debut as Leonora in *Il Trovatore*. As the story goes, the great diva, once a performer of the same role “quivered a few chins in lofty disapproval. ‘Ah, yes’, she purred. ‘Price. A lovely voice. But the poor thing is singing the wrong repertory!’ The dresser registered surprise. ‘What repertory,’ he asked, ‘should Price be singing?’ The great diva smiled a knowing smile. ‘Bess’, she purred. ‘Just Bess (Bernheimer 1985:755).”

Lights on...

Introduction

I now re-focus the lens from examination of one-to-one micro-corporeal disciplining of vocal timbre through vocal pedagogy to racialization of vocal timbre from a different perspective. I consider how a nation-wide Abolitionist sentiment gave ear to a particular reception of African-American classical vocality. In the past chapter I examined how classical European vocal pedagogy is grounded in knowledge that warranted colonialism; in this chapter I examine how the African-American voice in classical vocal practice in the United States has been framed by and thereby perceived aurally through historically rooted ideas of blackness.

This chapter is organized in two parts. In the first part, I trace the sonic idea of blackness in opera in the United States back to the trope of the spiritual. I also look at the influence of minstrel repertoire on the reception of classical repertoire through advance billing and associative perceptions of the performers therein. In the second part I argue that a particular idea of African-American classical vocality evolved to collectivize and conventionalize audience reception of blackness. I address and cite examples of the catalysts of a dynamic of racialized reception such as the casting of opera singers. Finally I consider the effect of isolating the African-American voice through *racialization of timbre* as a distinct border—one that starkly distinguishes the sonic idea of an African-American voice from the sonic idea of a white voice envisioned only as mute witness as opposed to *activator creating* the normative white voice of opera.

“Acousmatic Blackness”

The two “scenes” above from American opera illustrate the question I will discuss in the first part of this chapter: what are some of the origins of American opera culture’s engagement with tropes of romantic racialist discourse on black sound?

Mendi Obadike’s discussion of “acousmatic blackness” (2005: 138) is helpful in theorizing the ways in which the black voice is heard, perceived and constructed. In her discussion of the movie *Boiler Room* (2000), Obadike calls the presence of blackness represented only through sound and music the *acousmatic presence of blackness* (135-177). The *Boiler Room* is set in Wall Street, the characters being white, middle class stockbrokers. In the movie black men as stockbrokers are absent.⁶¹ Drawing mainly on hip-hop, the presentation of blackness solely through *sonic* references is what Obadike coins *acousmatic blackness*. Without inserting black bodies into the visual sphere, but by using music as the white characters’ *sonic skin*, Obadike argues that the notions of “poor black men as the standard of crass, ruthless, violent wastefulness” are integral plot aspects (138).

The black body is not physically present in the *Boiler Room*, but the marginality of the black body has come to represent through its sonic presence an active element of the movie’s narrative. In the same way, the presence of a black body in an African-American classical singer’s voice singing music historically associated with Europe manifests through the construction of pre-conceived notions of African-American vocal timbre. It is to the construction of that acousmatic blackness I now turn.

⁶¹ The irony, Obadike points out (2005: 137), is that the main character Chris Varick is played by Italian and Black Vin Diesel. However in the work environment in which the characters constantly delivers racial slurs to one another, Varick only receives comments about his Italian identity. Yet, no comments are heard about his black identity.

Early African-American Classical Opera Singers

Gaining fame in the both the United States and Europe, Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield (1820s-1876) and Sissiretta Jones (1869-1933) were two of the first African-American singers to perform classical repertoire for large audiences. Both singers were invited to give high profile recitals such as Greenfield's command performance before the Queen of England⁶² in 1854 and Jones' performance before President Benjamin Harrison in 1892. Both singers also encountered segregation, often having to sing for an all-white audience, or with black audience members being relegated to separate balconies.

Born about 50 years apart, both Taylor-Greenfield and Jones were born with large and expansive voices that could handle multiple repertoires and genres. Contemporary reports also evidence the regularity with which both singers' performances were received and appreciated as minstrel shows. In effect, audiences tended to prefer a black person singing classical repertoire through reception patterns established by minstrel practices.

Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield

Known as the Black Swan,⁶³ Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield's⁶⁴ self-taught voice seems to have rivaled that of her contemporary, the world-renowned singer Jenny Lind,

⁶² Marie Selika Williams (ca. 1849-1937) was another African-American singer who sang before Queen Victoria during this time. See a short biography about Williams in Rosalyn Story (1993: 28-32).

⁶³ A discussion of the various derogatory names given to African-American performers is beyond the scope of this project. Taylor-Greenfield's nickname likely stems from that of contemporary performer Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale.

⁶⁴ Because no reputable voice teacher would risk a career to teach her, Greenfield was largely an autodidact. About fifty years later, Jones on the other hand had several teachers.

aka the Swedish Nightingale. Greenfield is reported to have matched the top range of her era's most famous singers. In 1852 a *Toronto Globe* writer rhapsodized not only about "the amazing power of [Greenfield's] voice, the flexibility and the ease of execution," but also reported that the "higher passages were given with clearness and fullness, indicating a soprano of great power. She can, in fact, go as low as Lablanche and as high as Jenny Lind, a power of voice perfectly astonishing...(quoted in Story 21)." Both Lind's celebrated three and a half octaves and the lower bass register were, according to this report, matched by Greenfield. However, the famed Italian bass Luigi Lablanche's voice reached the low E flat, while Greenfield's range extended from a low G in the bass clef to a high E above high C. Although many praised her "baritone" register, The *Toronto Globe* critic's praise was also indicative of the way in which she was received as an anomaly. A *New York Daily Tribute* critic wrote this about Greenfield's low register:

The idea of a woman's voice is a feminine tone; anything below that is disgusting. It is as bad as a bride with a beard on her chin and an oath in her mouth. We hear a great deal about woman's sphere. That sphere exists in music and it is the soprano region of the voice (quoted in Story 22).

We read that by defying the boundaries of the music monopolized by whites, Greenfield was also perceived (and castigated) as a gender deviation.

Reviews often applied additional racial epithets: A *Cincinnati Enquirer* critic referred to Greenfield as the "African Crow," while other critics scrutinized her ample figure. One estimated her weight to be between 275 and 300 points, adding that "her voice is more refined than her person," while a *Detroit Daily Advertiser* reported that the "Swan is [a] plain looking, medium sized, woolly headed, flat nose[d] negro woman, and

no one would suppose there was any more enchantment...in her than a side of leather (quoted in Story 23).” As evidenced by the weight guessing game, her physique was disproportionately emphasized by would-be music critics. Yet another report opined:

The Swan is of good figure and form, with a full bust, containing organs more completely adapted to the development of the vocal powers and qualities, than those of any other human being whose voice we ever listened to, or tested...her complexion not exactly ebony, but approaching it as nearly as the brownest black can possibly do; her features, but slightly modified from the pure African lineaments—retaining the low forehead, the depressed nose, and the expansive mouth, without the bulbous labia (quoted in Story 23).

Also the sight of the white usher accompanying Greenfield to the stage was so unusual for the audience that their reactions were more akin to a “carnival freak show (Story 21).” The *New York Herald* described one such escort who “seemed afraid to touch her with even the tips of his white kids, and kept the Swan at a respectable distance (quoted in Story 26).”

The audience fascination with the “Black Swan” bordered on unabashed disdain. A New York audience member wrote that Greenfield’s singing inspired the minstrel “wench” character Lucy Neel (Lott 1993: 235). In fact, amongst audiences there was not much of a distinction between the blackface performer of an Italian burlesque opera and an African-American singer performing classical repertoire.

Some critics were certainly aware of the larger context and implications of this silent distinction. An Ohio journalist wrote: “We know the natural prejudice that we all have against her color [...] and it is very difficult to divest one’s self entirely of them and criticize fairly and justly in such a case (quoted in Story 25).” In the same spirit, another critic reported that “Upon the suggestion of another [...] we listened to her without

looking toward her during the entire performance of ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ and were at once satisfactorily convinced that her voice is capable of producing sounds right sweet (25).” These two journalists unwittingly acknowledged that the historical narrative lens through which they listened connected the black body in the United States with the way in which they perceived sound.

Although Taylor-Greenfield was noted for her performances of Händel, Bellini and Donizetti, audiences in Europe and America were more enthralled by repertoire such as Steven Foster's *Old Folks at Home* and requested it frequently. A London performance is described by Harriet Beecher Stowe as follows:

Miss Greenfield’s turn for singing now came, and there was profound attention. Her voice, with its keen, searching fire, its penetrating vibrant quality, its “*timbre*,” as the French have it, cuts its way like a Damascus blade to the heart. It was the more touching from occasional rusticities and artistic defects, which showed that she had received no culture from art.

She sang the ballad, “Old folks at home,” giving one verse in the soprano, and another in the tenor voice (*Italics in original*. Quoted in Lott 1993: 235).

According to Stowe, an English lord remarked, in response to Jones’ performance, on the “use of these halls for the encouragement of an outcast race, a *consecration* [*italics in original?*].” Such audience reactions suggested to Stowe that “there really is no natural prejudice against colour in the human mind (both quoted in Lott 1993: 235).”

Thus Taylor-Greenfield performed to an audience and critics whose perception of her ranged from minstrel or bizarre in terms of her vocal abilities to testimony that humans are color blind.

Sissiretta Jones

Sissiretta Jones (1869-1933), with the stage name Black Patti,⁶⁵ enjoyed her career a few decades after Greenfield. Jones also sang a mixture of favorites from the operatic repertoire—arias from *Robert le Diable*, *L'Africaine*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata* and more—mixed with popular ballads such as *Home Sweet Home* and *Swanee River*. As with Greenfield, Jones' appearance was of great general interest. Rosalyn Story writes, "When Sissiretta Jones appeared before the public in the 1890s, everything about her was peculiarly alluring to her white observers—her hair, the tint of her skin, the shape of her head. Her physical attributes were described in the most embarrassing detail. To whites, she fell prey to the same magnifying scrutiny (Story 1993: 185)." A Canadian journalist observed:

Upon the platform, Madame Jones is very attractive. She has a perfect figure, a pretty natural carriage, and a pleasant, girlish face lit with dark, soft eyes. Her dress is the perfection of richness and good taste; a combination of form and color that give the dusky skin effective setting. Her hair, of heavy, dusky black, without ever a kink or curl, is coiled in a Grecian knot at the nape of the neck, showing a prettily shaped head. (quoted in Story 1993: 4).

"Her teeth," another journalist reports, "would be the envy of her fairer sisters and the despair of dentistry. Her rather thin lips are fond of exposing heir [sic] even row of teeth (quoted in Story 4)."

⁶⁵ This was a play on the name of the contemporary diva, the Italian soprano Adelina Patti. It of course implies that Sissiretta Jones was the poorer version, the black version of a singer. "No sooner had the real Adelina Patti departed," *The Berliner Zeitung* wrote, "than a most worthy substitute appeared in the person of Madame Sissiretta Jones, the 'Black Patti' (Story 1993: 12)." *The New York Clipper*, a theatrical journal, dubbed Jones the 'Black Patti' after her New York debut; her managers and others interested in her career promoted the name in an attempt to draw crowds. Jones herself disapproved of this label. She told the *Detroit Tribune*: "I don't think I can begin to sing as Patti can [...] and I have been anxious to drop the name. That is impossible almost, now it has become so identified with me (quoted in Story 8)."

Jones did concertize in the United States, and was one of the main attractions on a World's Fair tour to the West Indies. On her return from that tour, after problems with managers and difficulties being hired by opera companies, Jones finally returned to minstrelsy—where she had begun her musical career. In 1889 Jones had performed with the Georgia Minstrels at Dockstader's Theater in New York. Thus after her attempts at a career as a classical singer, once various promises about operatic contracts had fallen through, Jones turned to a different way of exhibiting her operatic voice. In 1896 she became the lead singer in Black Patti's Troubadours.⁶⁶ The show became very popular with Jones as the main attraction of the act, touring both nationally and internationally for several years.

The show was organized into three parts. One was billed as an "Operatic Kaleidoscope" wherein Jones, with a supporting orchestra, ensemble of singers and chorus, would perform scenes from operas including *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Il Trouvatore*, *La Bohème*, and *Rigoletto*. While it did feature materials from the operatic repertoire, the show ultimately conformed to the minstrel format and many artists solidified their reputation as minstrel performers and writers with the Black Patti Troubadours.⁶⁷

The Troubadours were often seen as more sophisticated than other touring minstrel shows. For example, the *Detroit Free Press* proclaimed: "These 'Troubadours' undoubtedly boast more black talent than any other like enterprise that ever was brought to public notice." The *Daily News* added: "Without exception the Black Patti Troubadours company is the best colored theatrical organization that has visited this city.

⁶⁶ The Black Patti Troubadours were produced by the New York theatrical proprietors Voelckel and Nolan.

⁶⁷ These include minstrel and vaudeville artists like Ernest Hogan, Williams and Walker (a comedy team), and composers Bob Cole and Billy Johnson.

Every member of it seems to be a star (both quotes from Story 1993: 16).” Jones, however, preferred to sing in concert or recital. “There are so many things in vaudeville performance to distract the attention of the audience,” she said, “that they are not in a proper frame of mind to enjoy straight singing (quoted in Story 16).”

Any black body in performance would necessarily perform in close proximity to blackface. And, as we’ve seen from the critics’ reports, given the unfamiliarity of African Americans singing classical repertoire, the reception of their performance was locked into the typical modes of reception for blackface performances. This reception pattern was also promoted by the fact that, as we have seen, the performed material was a mixture of classical repertoire, minstrel songs, and spirituals.

Sissiretta Jones was described in the *Chicago Tribune* as possessing a “peculiar, plaintive quality” that “no amount of training could eradicate. Not that anyone would want to have it eradicated. It is the heritage the singer has received from her race, and it alone tells not only of the sorrows of a single life, but the cruelly sad story of a whole people (quoted in Rosalyn Story 1993: 185).” This description mirrors the ways in which concert performers of the spiritual also were viewed. And, because minstrelsy was so much part of the public image of blacks in performance both classical and spiritual repertoire was folded into minstrel reception patterns.

Spirituals

The Fisk Jubilee Singers, founded in 1871, were among the first to bring the spiritual to a formalized concert setting. In this endeavor they encountered problematic

audience reactions to the image of the black body on stage. When they recontextualized spirituals, or “sorrow songs,” for an art music setting, listeners were taken aback.

As classical African-American singers mixed art song repertoire with minstrel songs and spirituals, the Fisk Jubilee Singers featured both spirituals and minstrel songs on their programs. However, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were associated with minstrelsy not merely because of the presence of minstrel repertoire, but—more significantly—because of the presence of the black performing body. In *Love and theft: blackface minstrelsy and the American* (1993), a work which considers minstrelsy in America in the decades before the Civil War,⁶⁸ Eric Lott writes that the Fisk Singers were often mistaken for a minstrel troupe, and therefore added Jubilee to their name to avoid this confusion. Not long after the advent of the Singers’ public performances, both black and white minstrel groups began to advertise themselves as “jubilee” singing groups mixing minstrel songs with spirituals.

This sea change took place after audiences had become comfortable with the codes of consumption around minstrel shows, in some places, for over forty years. It would not, therefore, involve an improbably large leap to reason that when these former minstrel groups simply added spirituals to their repertoire and changed their rubric to “jubilee” singers, a strong connection was assumed between the minstrel and the spiritual repertoire. When a body (white or black) had been infused with the minstrel performance style and repertoire, audiences viewed this performer in certain ways. It is not unlikely that when that same performer added the spiritual (or classical repertoire, as did Elizabeth

⁶⁸ Minstrel performance is commonly thought to have taken place between (1830s-1950s). However, white performers from Elvis to contemporary hip-hop stars might be seen as modulations of blackface minstrel acts. In fact, Eric Lott has written, “Every time you hear an expansive white man drop into his version of black English, you are in the presence of blackface’s unconscious return (1993: 5).”

Greenfield) to his or her repertoire, the audience would view that performer from the same perspective and with the same set of preconceived notions attached to the minstrel show.

As a consequence, when considering the nationwide public reception of the spiritual we must take into account the ways in which its reception was inseparable from reception patterns already established by minstrel performance. The first nationally known African-American singer also mixed classical repertoire with minstrel songs, framed within a minstrel show format. And, as we have seen, the reception of African-American classical singers has been intimately tied to the reception of the spiritual. In the repertoire of performers such as Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield these three repertoires are presented side by side. An intimate connection thus becomes apparent between the reception of an African-American classical singer and the long reception history of not only the spiritual, but also the minstrel repertoire.

Hence, by bringing the spiritual to the formal concert stage, the Fisk Jubilee Singers solidified the connection between the singing of the spiritual and African-Americans singing classical repertoire. Toni Anderson has elaborated on the ambivalence in white reporting on issues of high art and the Fisk Jubilee singers. Anderson notes that a discussion of the capability of the Jubilee singers to produce “high art” was ongoing among critics. One critic wrote that the troupe’s rendition of “Home, Sweet Home” had never been “more exquisitely rendered.” This praise was, however, quickly qualified with this statement: “We do not mean, of course, in a modern ‘artistic’ sense, but we do say that no rendition we ever heard went deeper into the heart of the audience, or more perfectly conveyed the sentiment of the lines.” Another wrote, “While the singing did not

of course evince what is called high art and the music was simple, it was melodious, was sung in good taste, and evinced rare musical capacity (quoted in Anderson 1997: 98).⁶⁹

Ronald Radano (2003) notes that these performances “enacted a radical hybrid of songs invented in the isolation of slavery and of artistic practices based in the common domain of the concert hall (259).” Through the introduction of a large repertory of slave melodies reworked for concert choir, this radically new kind of American music was broadly disseminated. And by simultaneously challenging conventions of European choral practice and upsetting the standards of European art music, the Fisk performances carried out a curious contradiction. Radano concludes that by adopting the performance practices of the concert stage, a “racial sense of place” which pleased white audiences was affirmed (259).

As an embodiment of Negro authenticity, the Jubilee groups’ performance style was a significant challenge to ongoing efforts to contain racial categories. Radano remarks that the spiritual, which many blacks perhaps regarded, in the words of an unknown Fisk performer, “as signs of their former disgrace[,]...prison clothes of the days of [the slaves’] incarceration,”⁷⁰ had received a new authority, which in some cases rivaled the appraisal of European arts, through the Fisk performances. The Fisk performer noted that these musicians were astonished at the way their music was received: “We did not realize how precious they would be held by those who had prayed for us, and with us till we were delivered from slavery, and how these were the genuine jewels we brought from our bondage (both quotes in Radano 2003: 259).”

⁶⁹ “Fisk Jubilee Singers.” *Folio* 8, no. 5 (May 1873): 134.

⁷⁰ Note from Anderson (1997: 87).

There are commonalities between the first reviews of the “Negros” presenting spirituals as concert music and reviews of African-Americans singing classical repertoire. While there is praise for both, each is explained as a natural “endowment” rather than hard-earned skill. In a concert review of the Fisk Jubilee singers, an anonymous *New York Journal* reporter remarks: “They are all natural musicians, and doubtless have sung from childhood, like mocking birds because they could not help it (Radano 259).” An 1873 article about the Jubilee singers expresses a similar sentiment:

The first thing that strikes us in the singing of the Jubilee Singers is its intense earnestness. The subject of their songs is to them a reality, something they have themselves realized and not a mere sentiment or imagination: they feel the words, and therefore they sing the music...The music is not confined to the usual major or minor forms, as stereotyped in modern music; but it is constructed in such modes as are naturally used by the human voice in speaking, as well as in singing...The character of the music is purely natural as contradistinguished from artistic—hence one great cause of its popular power...The richness and purity of tone, both in melody and harmony, the contrast of light and shade, the varieties of gentleness and grandeur in expression, and the exquisite refinement of the piano, as contrasted with the power of the forte, fill us with delight, and at the same time, make us feel how strange it is that these unpretending singers should come over here to teach us what is the true refinement of music, and make us feel its moral and religion [*sic*] power (quoted in Radano 2003: 260).⁷¹

The troubled veneration conveyed in this passage expresses a general unease about slave songs in their definition against other arts at the time. “If the ‘wild harmonies of a band of gentle savages from Tennessee’⁷² were gaining widespread admiration,” Radano asks, “what could be left of the aesthetic achievements of a putatively superior white race (page)?” If not entirely solved, the dilemma is at least addressed through

⁷¹ “The Jubilee Singers,” *Dwights Journal of Music* 33, no. 17 (November 29, 1873).

⁷² Quoted in Anderson (1997: 99). Originally appeared in *Newark Evening Courier* (ca. January 1872), found in the Fisk scrapbook, Special Collections, Fisk University.

transposition of the power of the song as “intense earnestness” and “purity and richness of tone” emanating from the singers’ “reality.” This is therefore not an art available to whites.

Ethnosympathy

In 1845 Frederick Douglass, emancipated slave, author of the first well-known autobiography of an ex-slave, and one of the foremost leaders of the abolitionist movement, asked his readers to pause and listen to the songs of the slaves. In their “songs of sorrow” we would hear their “tales of woe,” for “every tone was a testimony against slavery (quoted in Cruz 1999: 3).” Douglass’s audience did listen to him, and by the end of the Civil War voices and melodies once considered noise were now heard as song, and used by abolitionists as symbolic weapons against slavery. Sociologist Jon Cruz has described this as a “new mode of hearing,” only possible if one assumed that slaves possessed an inner world (Cruz 1). Cruz terms this mode of reception *ethnosympathy*-- that is, a humanitarian pursuit of classifiable subjects. The spiritual was recognized as a clear cultural form – the black form preferred by “white moral and cultural entrepreneurs (4).” In Cruz’s words, “cultural authenticity was the key to subject authenticity (7).” To be able to hear the cries to God embedded in spirituals was the sign of a mature cultural interpreter, and a reader of what until then had been the secrets of slaves (Cruz 119). This new ethnosympathy through which slaves’ voices were heard allowed seekers to discover an “underlying authenticity of subjects through their cultural practices.” “Cultural authenticity,” in the words of Cruz, “was the key to subject authenticity (Cruz 7).” In

other words, the narratives of Douglass and other freed slaves “opened up the *interior* sensibility of slaves to cultural analysis (Cruz 105).”

The discovery of and interest in slaves’ song making was unprecedented. With this break from previous frameworks in which the sound of black song was considered alien noise, a critical humanistic interest in the music of African Americans was inspired. Slaves were still objects of property, but the combination of “proselytization” and whites’ hearing of slaves singing religious songs, Cruz writes, gradually “granted [slaves] a new subjectivity (Cruz 4).” It also functioned as a vehicle for sympathetic whites, particularly abolitionists, to further their imagination of slaves as culturally expressive subjects.

Therefore, when black and white intellectuals adopted a notion of a new sense of black subjectivity, a connection between “humanitarian reformist redemption politics of abolitionism and a quest for cultural authenticity” was firmly entrenched (Cruz 6). This connection was forged between the spiritual repertoire and classical music not only in song, but in presentation as well. The spiritual connection was edified through the enabling of the white person to imagine the slave and the black person as a human being. Changing perceptions of the spiritual and the change in the sound of the voice of the slave from noise to lament constitute social processes embedded as cultural form.

The persistent “recognition” of the sound of the spiritual in black classical singers’ voices, I suggest, is coupled with a lingering ethnosympathy. The limited subjectivity offered to slaves through their reconceptualization as “culturally expressive subjects” (Cruz 4) is thus maintained – but the subject will only be recognized as long as s/he stays essentially black. In the process of racializing vocal timbre, the spiritual has served as a vehicle to distinguish between the sounds that can supposedly arise from