

The Ideal Orpheus:
An Analysis of Virtuoso Self-Accompanied Singing
as a Historical Vocal Performance Practice

Volume One of Two

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Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2013

Abstract

The Ideal Orpheus: An Analysis of Virtuositic Self-Accompanied Singing as a Historical Vocal Performance Practice

Evidence of self-accompanied singing in western music permeates elite music making from classical antiquity to the early twentieth century. Originating in the mythology and culture of Ancient Greece, self-accompanied singing became an idiomatic component of medieval song and early Christian depictions of musicians. Self-accompaniment was central to the identity of sixteenth-century musicians like Tarquinia Molza, whose performances transformed a ubiquitous practice amongst the amateur gentry into a unique vehicle for virtuosity and *sprezzatura*. Self-accompaniment played a prominent role in the foundations of modern vocal pedagogy, presented in the treatises of Bacilly, Tosi and others as part of the skillset of the professional singer. Self-accompanied singing reached artistic decadence on the nineteenth-century concert stage in the performances of prima donnas like Maria Malibran, Pauline Viardot-Garcia and Jenny Lind, who fascinated audiences with their dual personification of Orphic siren and domestic angel in self-accompanied encores, *entr'actes* and *arie de baule*. Late nineteenth-century song recitalists like George Henschel brought self-accompaniment to new heights of technical complexity, contributing to the development of the modern song recital as a concert form and the establishment of German *lieder* as a repertoire of international importance. Evidence of this tradition is preserved on early recordings and radio broadcasts from the early twentieth century, and these recordings reveal that self-accompaniment enabled unique nuances of expression and ensemble. Throughout this history, the construct of self-accompanied singer as a symbol of ideal musicianship yields insight into the origins, persistence, and eventual disappearance of self-accompaniment from classical vocal performance practice. This thesis undertakes to explore the technical feasibility and artistic potential of self-accompaniment, and to provide singers with the contextual evidence and practical tools to reconstruct self-accompanied singing as a historical vocal performance practice.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Nicky Losseff, whose time, advice and encouragement has been invaluable. I would also like to thank Professor Peter Seymour and Dr. Susan Rutherford for their insights and advice through the examination process. I gratefully acknowledge the Sir Jack Lyons Scholarship fund, which made the pursuit of this degree possible.

I am grateful to many who generously gave their expertise and time during the researching and writing of this dissertation. In particular I would like to thank Rachell Nicholls, Yvonne Seymour, Richard Jackson, Sally Bruce-Payne, Evelyn Tubb, Stephen Varcoe, Jason Darnell, Lynne Dawson and John Potter for their insightful coaching and discussion, Professor William Brooks, Professor Jonathan Wainwright, Professor Tim Howell and Professor Charles McGuire for their advice, Sinead Faherty for allowing me to co-opt a portion of her MA recital, Jamie Oliver for his excellent accompanying, Andrew Passmore for the use of his harpsichord, Larry Lustig for supplying discographies, Catherine Duncan, Gilly Howe and Helen Gillie for answering many logistical questions, and Richard Wistreich for putting me on to the phrase 'The Ideal Orpheus'.

The friends and family who supported me through this process are too many to name, but in particular I would like to thank Blair Wallace and Philip Ashton for making it easier to write during a cold winter, Alex Taylor and Naomi Leveton for printing, the Hollingworths and the Waggles for hosting, Sarah Burdick for raising me as a versatile musician, Jerome R. Hok for instilling in me a love of writing and research, and Graham Bier for unflagging support, encouragement and help of every possible kind.

Author's Declaration

The material presented in this thesis is solely the work of the author, and has not appeared in any publication, nor has it been submitted for any other qualification. Appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin T. Bier".

Robin T. Bier

Introduction

Self-accompanied singing – the act of performing vocal music while simultaneously playing one’s own accompaniment upon a separate instrument – is a significant and largely unexplored aspect of historical vocal performance practice. Although evidence of self-accompanied singing in western art music exists in a wide variety of sources, this material has yet to be assembled into a deliberate narrative. The need for such a narrative becomes apparent with only a brief examination of the data and existing scholarship; contrary to modern assumption, the scope of self-accompanied singing extends far beyond amateur music making in domestic settings. While domestic and amateur examples abound, an equal or greater proportion of the evidence demonstrates that self-accompaniment played a prominent role in the foundations of modern vocal pedagogy and in the often virtuosic performances of some of the most celebrated musicians in Europe in the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. These performances took place on the public concert stage, in the salon and in the home, in both sacred and secular contexts, transcending the conventional delineation of private versus public space by virtue of factors like the size of the audience, the complexity of the repertoire, and the elite performers and listeners involved.

Some evidence of self-accompanied singing is remarkable for the extent to which it is visible and taken for granted, such as the mythological figure Orpheus, who is depicted in centuries of art and literature as a self-accompanied singer, though we do not consciously label him as such. Other evidence is remarkable because of the virtuosity implied by the circumstances of the performance. Tarquinia Molza (1542-1617) impressed nobility and composers passing through the court at Ferrara in the 1580s with her ability to flawlessly sing at sight while accompanying herself on the viol, reading from two separate part books simultaneously. Other evidence is surprising because it contradicts the conventions of modern vocal pedagogy; Mozart not only permitted but encouraged his students to sing self-accompanied in their lessons, including when performing his own music, while the castrato and singing teacher Pier Francesco Tosi, in his treatise *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi e moderni* (1723), listed the ability to accompany oneself at the keyboard alongside expressivity, good intonation, and clean ornaments and divisions as necessary qualities in a singer.¹

Evidence of self-accompanied singing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries becomes even more intriguing, as repertoire, instruments, venues and singing

¹ Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de’ Cantori Antichi, e moderni o sieno Osservazioni Sopra il Canto Figurato, Di Pierfrancesco Tosi, Accademico Filarmonico, dedicate a sua eccellenza Mylord Peterborough Generale di Sbarco Dell’ Armie Reali della Gran Brettagna* (Bologna: Fr. P. Ant. Bagioni Vic. Gen. S. Officii Bononiae, 1723), 62.

technique grow increasingly modern even as the contexts in which self-accompanied singing occurs continue to contradict modern vocal performance practice and audience expectations. Some of the most celebrated opera and concert stars of this time period were regular self-accompanists, including Jenny Lind, Maria Malibran, George Henschel, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, John Braham, Giovanni Battista Velluti, Richard Tauber, Laure Cinti-Damoreau, Adelina Patti, Nellie Melba, and many others. Examples like Jenny Lind singing self-accompanied in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall to an audience of 'upwards of three-thousand people',² George Henschel singing self-accompanied at Clarence House for the Duke of Edinburgh and Queen Isabella of Spain,³ and Maria Malibran inserting self-accompanied French airs into Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*,⁴ all demonstrate that self-accompaniment permeated the most visible and fashionable classical music platforms of the time.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries we also encounter the phenomenon of self-accompanied art song: Henschel made a career late in his life of self-accompanied German *lieder* recitals which were often broadcast on the radio, while Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) recorded an extensive discography of French *mélodies* in which he is almost exclusively his own accompanist. These examples of self-accompaniment demonstrate the discipline at its most specialized and complex, add an entirely new perspective to the interpretation of art song performance, and challenge modern assumptions of how this repertoire can and should be performed.

Though such examples of virtuosic self-accompanied singing are of obvious interest and relevance to the field of historical vocal performance practice, explicit treatment in modern academic literature is extremely limited. Scholarly mentions of self-accompanied singing are almost always in reference to another topic, and are too interdisciplinary to facilitate the study of self-accompaniment as an independent subject. Evidence currently identified with different disciplines and different historical periods has not yet been examined as a whole, neither with respect to comprehensive collection and presentation, nor to the implications of that evidence for our understanding of the history of singing. Academic documentation of a performance practice that spans a millennium of western art music history is currently represented by a limited amount of data embedded in isolated fragments of analysis of other material. A great deal more evidence has yet to be examined from an academic perspective at all.

² 'Multiple News Items', *Standard* [London, England], August 19, 1850.

³ George Henschel, *Musings and Memories of a Musician* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1918), 216-218.

⁴ 'Theatre', *Morning Post* [London, England], April 29, 1829.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to document and analyse the long and complex history of self-accompanied singing in western classical music, through a broad, multimedia, and interdisciplinary compilation of primary sources. Particular emphasis is placed on contexts in which this performance practice reached to a virtuosic level, especially the decadent phase of this performance practice on the nineteenth-century concert stage. It is expected that subsequent analysis of this evidence in the context of existing scholarship in related fields will generate new insights in the realms of historical vocal pedagogy, singing technique, historical audiences, the careers of prominent singers, the relationship between domestic music making and trends on the concert stage, the social significance of female performers, and the politics of repertoire and performance practice. Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will provide the necessary evidence and contextual information for singers who wish to explore self-accompanied singing in the present day as a component of historically informed vocal performance practice.

Rationale for Approach

Because the history of self-accompanied singing has not yet been documented in any comprehensive way, this study necessarily took an archival approach as its point of departure; its first and most valuable task was to identify and catalogue a large volume of primary source material, organizing it in a manner that would eventually permit the evidence contained therein to be examined and analysed on a more abstract level. This approach is reflected in the particular research questions driving this thesis:

1. What source material contains evidence of self-accompanied singing?
2. What areas of the history of singing does this evidence inform?
3. Under what circumstances did self-accompanied singing take place?
 - a. When: eras of music history
 - b. What music: genres of repertoire and specific repertoire
 - c. Where: performance venues and social circumstances
 - d. Who: genres of performer and individual performers
 - e. How: instruments, techniques, practice, pedagogical approaches, interpretation and presentation
4. What was the artistic significance of self-accompanied singing?
 - a. Why it developed as a performance technique
 - b. Why performers, pedagogues and composers advocated it

- c. How contemporary audiences perceived and responded to it
5. Why did self-accompaniment decline in popularity in the 20th century?

Self-accompanied singing as a performance practice can be observed in sister traditions to western classical music, including musical entertainers, vaudeville and similar 'low-brow' genres, modern jazz, western popular and folk music, as well as many world musics. This thesis does not attempt to document or examine these parallel and non-western traditions, which represent an enormous and hugely interdisciplinary body of material and performance practice. This thesis does attempt to document a continuous chronology of occurrences and contexts for self-accompanied singing in the history of classical western art music, from its origins in ancient Greek mythology until its almost complete disappearance from classical vocal performance practice in the early twentieth century.

Out of this chronology of evidence, the material chosen for in-depth analysis are those occurrences of overtly virtuosic self-accompanied singing, particularly on the nineteenth-century concert stage. This decision was determined by two factors: abundance and detail of evidence, and opportunity for original analysis. While surviving evidence of self-accompanied singing in western art music history spans a millennium, and there is no indication that self-accompaniment was less common in earlier centuries, the sheer number of personal accounts and published precise descriptions of performances available from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries far exceeds earlier surviving material. The specific singers central to each case study were chosen because they demonstrate that virtuosity in both unique and representative ways for the period, and because of the abundance of evidence of their performances. The second factor is of opportunity for original analysis: it is in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that self-accompanied singing is the most virtuosic and high profile with respect to repertoire, venue and performer, representing the greatest departure from modern scholarship and popular awareness and therefore the greatest potential to contribute to the field of historical performance practice. Toward this end, the pre-nineteenth-century case studies and background material presented in this thesis have been selected and organized to help to establish the social and technical context for virtuosic self-accompanied singing on the concert stage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Thesis Structure and Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1. Literature Review

This chapter attempts to identify and summarize the existing academic literature relevant to the study of self-accompaniment. This is accomplished by first identifying explicit academic treatment of self-accompaniment as a performance practice, and then by examining a sampling of works from related fields in an attempt to illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of self-accompaniment as a concept in the academic sphere.

Chapter 2. Overview of Primary Source Materials

This chapter establishes the academic scope of the primary source material on which this thesis is based, by identifying the types of evidence, identifying the areas of singing history they have the potential to inform and how, and discussing the implications of using those types of evidence as sources.

Chapter 3. Origins: Establishing the Self-Accompanied Singer as Ideal Musician

This chapter identifies the origins of the image of the self-accompanied singer in western music and culture, and briefly explores the variety of manifestations and lasting influence of that imagery and significance in later history. Emphasis is placed on the myths of Orpheus and Apollo, parallel examples in Ancient Greek oratory and culture, early Christian depictions of Christ as Orpheus, troubadours and other secular medieval song traditions, and selected examples of the invocation of Orpheus, orphic characteristics and orphic instruments from the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Chapter 4. Tarquinia Molza: Self-Accompaniment as a Vehicle for Virtuosity and Sprezzatura in Sixteenth-Century Italy

This case study examines self-accompanied singing in the late Italian Renaissance, where it was a common feature of courtly and domestic music making, but also reached extraordinary levels of virtuosity, particularly in the performances of Tarquinia Molza (1542-1617). Molza was renowned for her virtuoso self-accompanied singing, and unusually detailed sources survive which describe her skills. Molza's performances are situated in the context of other virtuoso performers including Laura Peverara and the

concerto delle donne, as well as male musicians including Alfonso Ferrabosco, Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, and Giulio Caccini.

Chapter 5. Early Vocal Pedagogy: Self-Accompaniment in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Singing Treatises

This case study examines self-accompanied singing through the lens of the singing treatises, teachers and performers associated with the height of *bel canto* and the great castrato singers, and attempts to clarify how the social goals of self-accompanied singing at the time translated into the practical goals of the singing teacher and student. Emphasis is placed on treatises from approximately 1600 to 1800, particularly the work of Bénigne Bacilly, Pier Francesco Tosi and his subsequent translators; later pedagogical treatment of self-accompaniment is considered in Chapter 8. The primary instruments are the theorbo and the keyboard, and both practice and performance are considered; performance settings are semi-private.

Chapter 6. The Diva's Drawing Room: self-accompanied singing by Maria Malibran, Jenny Lind and Pauline Viardot-Garcia on the Nineteenth-Century Concert Stage

This case study examines self-accompanied singing as manifested in the international, public performances of highly celebrated operatic prima donnas in the nineteenth century, with emphasis placed on the singing of Maria Malibran, Jenny Lind and Pauline Viardot-García. The primary instrument of interest is piano; the performances of these three singers are situated within the context of performances by other professional singers and occasional highly-skilled amateurs, male and female, from the late eighteenth century through to the early twentieth century; domestic, private and salon performance settings are also analysed to illuminate their relationship to the reception of public performances. Relevant repertoire includes Spanish and Swedish folksong arrangements, English art song and ballad repertoire, and Italian opera arias.

Chapter 7. George Henschel and Reynaldo Hahn: specialization, art song and recording

This case study examines self-accompanied singing as a specialized, independent art in which both singing and accompaniment are equally virtuosic, represented by the careers of George Henschel and Reynaldo Hahn in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The primary instrument is piano, and the primary repertoire is art song: German *lieder*,

French *mélodies*, and English song, as well as some opera arias. All performance venues are considered, from private setting, salon and public stage to recording and broadcasting studio. Self-accompanied recordings by Hahn, Henschel and a variety of other performers are analysed to explore the sounding impact of self-accompaniment upon the performer's technique, communication, interpretation and ensemble.

Chapter 8. Transition: the Decline of Self-Accompanied Singing in the Twentieth Century

This chapter examines the evidence of and reasons behind the decline in virtuosic self-accompanied singing that takes place in the early to mid twentieth century. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century pedagogical works demonstrate a shift in the training and professional expectations for classical singers, while changes in the salon and piano culture gradually eliminate the social contexts that helped to define and give meaning to self-accompanied singing in previous generations. The careers of the final generation of specialised self-accompanied singers, including Helen Henschel, Michael Head and Richard Tauber, illustrate these shifts and demonstrate how and why self-accompaniment ceases to be associated with classical music whilst flourishing in other genres.

Conclusion

The conclusion summarizes the trajectory of the self-accompanied singer as Ideal Orpheus, from its origins, manifestations in each case study, through the transformation and breakdown of the Ideal Orpheus construct in the twentieth century, demonstrating how self-accompanied singing in classical music today has become disconnected from the symbolism that reinforced its artistic impact in previous centuries. The problems and solutions for redefining how self-accompaniment is applied and evaluated according to the principles of historical performance practice are explored, and areas for further research are discussed.

Appendix I: Documentation of Historical Self-Accompanied Singing

This appendix attempts to systematically catalogue all the primary evidence collected to date of self-accompanied singing in western art music, allowing the performer to access broader documentation than could be explored in depth in this thesis. It is organized by source material, with each section further organized by author and work (where applicable) in chronological order.

Appendix 2. Singers

This index provides a complete alphabetized list of self-accompanying singers documented in this thesis. Voice type and identifying information are given wherever possible. Fictional and mythological singers are not included.

Appendix 3. Repertoire

This index provides a list of identifiable individual works documented in this thesis as having been performed self-accompanied on the public concert stage (including radio broadcasts and recordings) or in an elite semi-private setting where virtuosic performance was expected. Works are alphabetised by composer and title, and where possible contextual information is given for theatrical works. Existing works performed by fictional singers are included.

Appendix 4. Discography

This discography presents, as completely as possible, the self-accompanied recordings by singers whose recordings were examined during this thesis, or which are considered highly relevant because of the performer and the repertoire recorded. The goal is to demonstrate the range of self-accompanied repertoire recorded by each singer; details about recording equipment and methods are not given. This appendix is not a complete record of self-accompanied vocal recordings of classical music.

Appendix 5. Developing a recital performance of Paisiello's 'Nel cor più non mi sento'

This appendix presents the author's own practical explorations in preparing repertoire for self-accompanied performance in conjunction with this research: specifically, the preparation of the aria 'Nel cor più non mi sento' from Paisiello's opera *L'amor contrastato* for performance at the Aylesbury Music Centre, 24 November 2011.

Chapter One

Literature Review

References to self-accompanied singing occur in an extensive and interdisciplinary body of academic literature. Within this material, few works address self-accompaniment directly as an applied performance practice, and a survey of these works alone does not provide the reader with an adequate understanding of the representation of self-accompanied singing in academic literature. This chapter first synthesizes the existing treatment of self-accompaniment as a performance practice, and then provides examples of the diverse instances where and how self-accompanied singing is treated as a secondary, incidental or unarticulated topic.

Perspectives on self-accompaniment as an applied performance practice

Treatment of self-accompaniment as an applied performance practice occurs in works pertaining to the history and art of accompaniment, vocal technique and pedagogy, studies of certain vocal repertoire, and studies of early recordings. The most explicit of these is Kurt Adler's *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching* (1965). Adler's work, though not recent, is significant as one of the few academic works that attempts to document the history of the art of accompaniment without attachment to a specific performer or repertoire.

Adler first mentions self-accompaniment as a component of the origins of musical accompaniment in general in prehistoric cultures. He also acknowledges the roots of self-accompanied singing in ancient Greek music and mythology, and as a performance practice of the troubadours, trouvères and minnesingers. In the section titled 'Self Accompanying', Adler specifically considers the feasibility and artistic merit of self-accompaniment in modern singing, identifies challenges of coordination and presentation. Here, Adler evaluates the technical and artistic merits of self-accompaniment according to twentieth-century criteria for singing technique and stage presentation, and concludes that self-accompaniment has a place in domestic contexts and lowbrow musical entertainment but is unsuited to serious repertoire and public venues:

On the amateur level, in homes, self-accompanying has its very definite place. The performer will find it extremely difficult, however, to find the right balance between singing and accompanying; usually, one will dominate at the expense of the other. Balancing pianistic ability against vocal gifts will take a great deal of judgment. Still, a great deal of

pleasure may be derived from accompanying oneself on piano or harmonium or small home organ.

On the professional level, self-accompaniment is useful in entertainment. Your facial expression is very important for this purpose; your profile will not do the trick. In order to have your personality reach the audience, you will have to use a spinet piano. If you try to use a concert grand, and turn away from it to face the audience, your accompaniment will suffer. At this level, I have only known two or three self-accompanying singers. In these words – self-accompanying singers – lies one of the reasons for the shortcomings of self-accompaniment. In all these cases the singing was much superior to the accompanying; the balance was shifted toward the vocal part. Self-accompanying in a concert hall may have some value as a curiosity, but I think art will always be the loser.⁵

Adler's point about the difficulties of coordinating pianistic and vocal quality is corroborated by passages in several early twentieth-century singing treatises concerning the use of piano accompaniments in vocal practice, which advocate the importance of good singing posture and strongly discourage singing while sitting or playing. These treatises have been treated in this research as primary rather than academic sources, and are examined in Chapter Eight as evidence of the changing reception of self-accompanied singing in the twentieth century.

Further evaluations of self-accompaniment as an applied performance practice are found within reviews and analyses of historical recordings. These works include the liner notes to modern reissues of recordings by self-accompanied singers like George Henschel and Reynaldo Hahn; articles and essays on the discographies of self-accompanied singers, such as Harold Bruder's 2002 article in *The Record Collector* on Henschel and Ronald Russell's article in *The Record Collector* on Ernst Wolff; articles on the recorded history of particular musical works, such as Lord Harewood's article 'Les Pêcheurs de Perles' in Alan Blyth's *Opera on Record 2* (1983) which discusses Hahn's self-accompanied performance of the aria 'De mon amie fleur endormie', Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (2009) which evaluates Henschel's self-accompanied *lieder* recordings; and larger histories of recorded music such as Michael Scott's *The Record of Singing, Volume 1: to 1914* (1977). These reviews and analysis of historical recordings offer both positive and negative assessments of self-

⁵ Kurt Adler, *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 224.

accompaniment. They share the observation that self-accompaniment should yield perfect ensemble between voice and piano. They also share a tendency to attribute any perceived vocal, breath or balance problems in the given recording to the fact that the singer is self-accompanied. Most noticeably, these works tend to view the self-accompaniment as a unique choice by the individual performer, particularly when the performer is also a composer, setting the recordings in a category apart from those of other singers and causing any evaluation of the singing to be presented from that perspective, under the qualifier of self-accompaniment. The one exception to this is Rebecca Plack, who in her thesis *The Substance of Style: How singing creates sound in lieder recordings, 1902-1939* (2008) analyses Henschel's self-accompanied recordings at length while also acknowledging that he was not unique in performing this way and providing a short list of other singers who recorded similar repertoire self-accompanied.⁶ These audio recording-related academic works are examined in greater detail in Chapters Two and Seven.

Perspectives on self-accompaniment as a historical performance practice

The next academic works to be considered address the existence and relevance of self-accompaniment as a historical phenomenon, without taking an evaluative stance on its relevance as an applied performance practice for the modern classical singer. Within this category, some works simply identify the existence of self-accompaniment in relation to a particular genre of repertoire or time period, without analysis of the function or significance of the practice itself. Despite the existence of early music specialists who have or are currently exploring self-accompanied singing in performance, there is as yet no academic literature documenting or evaluating these kinds of explorations as a component of the field of historical performance practice.

Self-accompaniment is identified as a performance practice in a variety of general music history and performance practice reference materials. The term 'self-accompaniment' does not appear in the indexes of works, so the process of discovering relevant references without cross-referencing or a consistent vocabulary for the topic is challenging. The following examples were discovered through the process of scanning entries for potentially relevant individuals, instruments, musical genres and historical eras or regions. Jeremy Yudukin in his *Music in Medieval Europe* (1989), suggests that vernacular song from 1000-1300 was often heard in conjunction with improvised instrumental accompaniments, which may have been performed by the singer, 'accompanying himself on

⁶ Rebecca Plack, *The Substance of Style: How singing creates sound in lieder recordings, 1902-1939* (PhD diss., Cornell University Graduate School, 2008).

a plucked or bowed instrument'.⁷ The entry for *Troubadour* in Roland Jackson's encyclopaedic *Performance Practice – a dictionary-guide for musicians* (2005) likewise offers evidence that instruments may have been used to simultaneously duplicate the melodies being sung, though the vocabulary 'self-accompaniment' is not used.⁸ A number of other entries in Jackson's *Performance Practice* mention or quote evidence of self-accompaniment. These include the entry for 'Binchois, Giles de Bins', where Jackson notes that Binchois was pictured in contemporary art holding a small six-string harp, and concludes that 'he presumably played the instrument and may have accompanied his own chansons with it'.⁹ Self-accompaniment is also referenced in the entries for 'Chittarone' and 'Intermedii', based on evidence that Peri accompanied his own singing with a chitarrone in intermedii in 1589.¹⁰ The Oxford Music Online entry for 'Lyra Viol' states that this instrument could approximate the same polyphonic textures, and therefore the same self-accompaniment capabilities as lute and harpsichord, which helped to make them popular continuo instruments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹¹ The Oxford Music Online entry for 'Sweden' mentions self-accompaniment under the heading 'Vocal Traditions', suggesting that a nineteenth-century trend toward self-accompaniment on the guitar and similar instruments resulted in a shift from a chiefly melodic to a more harmonic conceptualisation of Swedish traditional song.¹²

References to self-accompaniment as a historical performance practice also occur in non-reference works pertaining to continuo and accompanimental style in renaissance and baroque music. Robert Spencer, a lutenist and singer who occasionally accompanied his own singing while performing with the Julian Bream Consort, reflects on his research into the accompaniments of Monteverdi's songs in his article, 'Approaches to Performances: The Lutenist's View':

I was surprised at the extent to which self-accompaniment was taken for granted. I knew that Caccini and Peri were notable self-accompanists; but Monteverdi's references to singers who also played, and the fact that St. Mark's engaged theorbists who also sang, give some idea of how widespread was this custom. Bacilly in 1668 said that the best way to perform a song was to accompany yourself on the theorbo.¹³

⁷ Jeremy Yudukin, *Music in Medieval Europe* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1989), 131-132.

⁸ Roland Jackson, *Performance Practice – a dictionary-guide for musicians* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 412.

⁹ *Ibid*, 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

¹¹ Frank Traficante, 'Lyra viol', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

¹² Folke Bohlin et al, 'Sweden', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

¹³ Robert Spencer, Anthony Rooley and Peter Phillips, 'Approaches to Performances: The Lutenist's

This is one of the few passages in academic literature acknowledging that self-accompaniment may have been common practice amongst professional musicians in the past. In the liner notes to the CD *Monteverdi, C.: Madrigals, Book 7, 'Concerto' (Il Settimo Libro de Madrigali, 1619)*, Marco Longhini quotes a letter from Monteverdi which contains a suggestion that the title characters in his ballo *Tirsi e Clori* should each have their own theorbo to play on stage while they sing.¹⁴ Longhini seems to have used this letter primarily as a source of information about appropriate continuo instruments; there is no evidence that the element of self-accompaniment was also applied to the recording. Giulia Nuti quotes this same letter in her book, *The Performance of Italian Basso Continuo: Style in Keyboard Accompaniment in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2007), to further her discussion of continuo played by diverse forces of instruments, though not with the intent to examine the element of self-accompaniment.¹⁵ Edward Foreman, in his *A bel canto Method or How to Sing Italian Baroque Music Correctly Based on Primary Sources* (2006), states that self-accompaniment was included in the bel canto conservatory curriculum: 'Conservatory students (mostly castrati) were also taught counterpoint, keyboard for accompanying themselves, and classical literature, the sources for many of the opera plots'.¹⁶

Non-analytical treatment of self-accompaniment also occurs in biographies of famous singers. In these works, quotes, reviews and photographs reveal the protagonist or secondary characters accompanying their own singing, without analysis or the specific intent to document self-accompaniment. An example biography where such evidence appears is James Radomski's biography *Manuel García (1775-1832) Chronicle of the Life of a bel canto Tenor at the Dawn of Romanticism* (2000). García himself is documented accompanying himself on the guitar on the Spanish operatic stage in performances of Spanish-language operettas (*tonadillas*), as well as traditional Spanish songs throughout his later career in Paris, and the book also contains a few examples of García's daughter Maria Malibran accompanying herself on the piano in New York.¹⁷ Another example is April Fitzlyon's biography of Maria Malibran, *Maria Malibran: Diva of the Romantic Age*. This work examines Malibran's life through the interpretive lens of nineteenth-century romanticism and presents several examples of self-accompaniment. Fitzlyon does analyse

View', *Early Music* 7/2 (1979): 225-235.

¹⁴ Marco Longhini, liner notes to *Claudio Monteverdi Madrigals Book 7 'Concerto'*, Naxos 8.555314-16, 2008.

¹⁵ Giulia Nuti, *The Performance of Italian Basso Continuo: Style in Keyboard Accompaniment in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 44.

¹⁶ Edward Foreman, *A bel canto Method or How to Sing Italian Baroque Music Correctly Based on Primary Sources* (Minneapolis: Pro musica press, 2006), v.

¹⁷ James Radomski, *Manuel García (1775-1832) Chronicle of the Life of a bel canto Tenor at the Dawn of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6, 17, 41, 44, 149, 199.

the romantic significance of Malibran's singing to the harp, but she does so from the perspective of the harp's association with mythological and poetic ideals, rather than from the perspective of the harp's self-accompanimental properties.¹⁸ Additional biographical contexts in which self-accompaniment is presented without analysis include Kenneth Whitton's *Lieder: An Introduction to German Song* (1984), in which Whitton refers to Schubert singing and accompanying his own songs at *Schubertiads*,¹⁹ and the liner notes to the CD recording *Reynaldo Hahn Composer, Conductor, Singer and Accompanist Recordings* which state that Hahn accompanied his own singing in private houses and salon concerts as well as in his extensive recording career.²⁰ There are doubtless more sources like these, which collectively hint at a continuous and multi-faceted performance practice.

The remaining works in this category reference self-accompaniment as a secondary topic within the analysis of a different performance practice or musical genre. Some of these sources do assess the positive or negative artistic implications of self-accompaniment, but not with the intent to evaluate its relevance or application to the modern classical singer. Anthony Newcomb includes evidence of self-accompanied singing in his discussion of the expectations for professional male solo singers in Italy in the late sixteenth century in his *The Madrigal at Ferrara 1579-1597* (1980),²¹ and also cites a self-accompanied source in his overview of the growing popularity of the accompanied solo singing style.²² Newcomb later discusses self-accompaniment within the context of his analysis of the origins of *concertato* style, which he defines in its most basic form as a solo voice and an independent instrument part (based on Monteverdi's own example in designating his 'Una donna fra l'altre' as a 'concertato nel clavicembalo'), proposing that 'whenever a singer sang, accompanying himself on the lute, his performance was in this sense concertato nel liuto'.²³

Laurie Stras and Joanne Riley both provide more detailed coverage of self-accompanied singing in reference to female courtly musicians in sixteenth-century Italy, specifically the singing and playing of Tarquinia Molza and other virtuoso female performers associated with the *musica secreta* and the *concerto delle donne*, which will be examined in depth in Chapter Four (Case Study 1 Tarquinia Molza). Riley's article 'Tarquinia Molza (1542-1617): A Case Study Of Women, Music and Society in the

¹⁸ April Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran Diva of the Romantic Age* (London: Souvenir Press, 1987), 81-82.

¹⁹ Kenneth Whitton, *Lieder: An Introduction to German Song* (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1984), 39, 47.

²⁰ Patrick O'Connor, liner notes to *Reynaldo Hahn Composer, Conductor, Singer and Accompanist Recordings 1908-35* (CD reissue, Pearl GEM 0003, Pavilion Records LTD., 1997).

²¹ Anthony Newcomb, *The Madrigal at Ferrara 1579-1597, vol. I. Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 47. Newcomb quotes a description of the musicianship of a Roman by the name of Pitio, which suggests he sang while playing the lute.

²² *Ibid.*, 56. Newcomb refers to a description by Cardinal Madruzzo of Laura Peverara singing to her own accompaniment.

²³ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

Renaissance' (1988) asserts that self-accompaniment was widespread amongst educated women, and would have encompassed players of all skill levels.²⁴ Riley furthermore presents self-accompaniment as an element of polyphonic style in sixteenth-century Italian secular song forms, and identifies a specific vocabulary related to self-accompaniment in contemporary documents.²⁵ Stras's essay 'Musical Portraits of Female Musicians at the Northern Italian Courts in the 1570s' examines the social connotations of self-accompanied song as an artistic genre in sixteenth-century Italy. Stras identifies self-accompanied song as one of the few socially acceptable outlets for female singing at the time, and makes the further distinction that the skill of the self-accompanied singer might be inversely related to class.²⁶ Elsewhere both Stras and Riley examine specific descriptions of Molza's performances, using evidence of self-accompaniment in order to draw conclusions about her theatrical mannerisms in singing.

The potential for references to self-accompanied singing in academic literature on the nineteenth-century music making (particularly within the realm women's studies and aspects of romanticism) is huge, but the number of sources that actually identify self-accompaniment as a performance practice remain limited. Susan Rutherford, in her book *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (2006), provides a detailed analysis of the role of self-accompaniment in nineteenth century-society, identifying self-accompaniment as a crucial determining factor in the assessment of which instruments were best suited to female music making.²⁷ Laura Vorachek, in her essay 'Female performances: Melodramatic music conventions and *The Woman in White*', briefly evaluates self-accompaniment in the context of nineteenth-century melodramatic stage plays, observing that when responsibility for accompaniment fell upon the characters themselves, the characters' entrances and exits could not be punctuated by music, because the music relied upon their presence at the keyboard.²⁸ Hilary Poriss, in her book *Changing the Score* (2009), presents evidence of prima donnas accompanying themselves in arias inserted into the lesson scene in Rossini's

²⁴ Joanne M. Riley, Joanne M, 'Tarquinia Molza (1542-1617): A Case Study Of Women, Music And Society In The Renaissance', in *The Musical Woman*, ed. Judith Zaimont et al. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 3.

²⁵ Ibid, 7.

²⁶ Laurie Stras, 'Musical Portraits of Female Musicians at the Northern Italian Courts in the 1570s', in *Art and Music in the Early Modern Period Essays in honor of Franca Trinchieri Camiz*, ed. Katherine A. McIver (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 160-161. Stras notes that while all noblewomen were likely to be able to perform simple accompaniments, artisan musicians Tarquinia Molza and Laura Peverara were more likely to be specifically celebrated for their ability to self-accompany.

²⁷ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 49.

²⁸ Laura Vorachek, 'Female performances: Melodramatic music conventions and *The Woman in White*', in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 108, 112.

Il barbiere di Siviglia, noting: ‘The decades roughly between 1880 and 1920 might be characterized as the gold age of the mini-concert tradition when prima donnas took fullest advantage of the lesson scene, accompanying themselves at the piano if they were able.’²⁹ Poriss cites examples of such self-accompanied performances by Nellie Melba, Adelina Patti and Marcella Sembrich, and also refers to precedent set by Pauline Viardot-Garcia performing Chopin Mazurkas and Anna de la Grange self-accompanied in Rode’s variations.³⁰

Evidence of self-accompaniment in other disciplines

Some treatment of self-accompaniment appears in works from fields outside of music, such as studies in mythology, linguistics, art, iconography, and history. These works address self-accompaniment indirectly or mention it in passing, providing useful contextual evidence and demonstrating the interdisciplinary scope of the topic. References to self-accompaniment are particularly frequent in academic literature on topics related to ancient Greek mythology and culture. These works frequently identify the lyre and its relatives as significant because of those instruments’ association with Orpheus and Apollo, and because those instruments could be used to simultaneously accompany the voice. As a result, these works imply that self-accompaniment was a valued practice in ancient Greek society. Rodney Merrill, in his introduction to his translation of Homer’s *Iliad*, explicitly identifies self-accompaniment as a performance practice in Greek epic singing, suggesting that singing characters in both the *Odyssey* (Phemios and Demóködos) and the *Iliad* (Achilles) were evidence of a living tradition of self-accompanied singing upon the lyre.³¹ Another example is Edith Wyss’s article ‘The myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the art of the Italian Renaissance: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images’, in which she examines the iconography of artworks depicting the musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas. Perhaps the most interesting example is Gregory Nagy’s exploration of the vocabulary of ancient Greek music and oratory. Nagy defines *kitharôidoi*, or *kitharodes*, one of three variations of orator whose art was included in the all-encompassing *mousikê* (the art of the Muses), as ‘singers self-accompanied by the cithara’.³² These works will be examined in more detail in Chapter Three.

²⁹ Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 162.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fn, 162.

³¹ Robert Merrill, ‘Singing the Iliad’, in *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Merrill (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2007), 3-4.

³² Gregory Nagy, *Plato’s Rhapsody and Homer’s Music: The Poetics of the Panathenaic Festival in Classical Athens* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 36.

Examples of self-accompaniment as an unarticulated concept

So far, the works surveyed have provided a broad sampling of types of self-accompaniment that occurred in western classical music throughout history. Most of the examples have been specialized and specific, examining self-accompaniment in relation to a particular instrument, era, or performer in isolation. These references are not accompanied by more general treatment of the topic, which would serve to link those specialized examples as facets of a general and wide-reaching practice. The collective effect of this diffuse academic treatment of self-accompanied singing has thus far resulted in two overarching perspectives on the practice. The first of these perspectives is that self-accompaniment was and is associated with untrained singing, amateur musicians (particularly women), domestic performance contexts, and simple, folk-derived or lowbrow repertoire. The second perspective is that the application of self-accompaniment to virtuosic repertoire by skilled musicians was confined to unusual or special circumstances that don't translate to a broader tradition.

Therefore, it is useful to be aware that self-accompanied singing and self-accompaniment remain an unarticulated concept in academia. Reference works on performance practice and on music history in general do not contain stand-alone entries for self-accompaniment as a concept. The term 'self-accompaniment' or variations thereupon can largely not be found in the indexes of works on performance practice, music history, relevant singers and instruments, even when those works do in fact contain evidence or even discussions of self-accompaniment. Biographies of famous singers who are publicly documented as self-accompanists may not contain any mention of this aspect of the protagonist's music making. Works on the history, context and performance practice for a particular repertoire, such as Victorian and Edwardian ballads, similarly may not discuss self-accompaniment though there is much evidence that this repertoire was closely associated with it. On a more practical side, modern recordings and concerts commemorating the repertoire and artistry of historic singers who were documented self-accompanists contain no self-accompanied performances.

In some cases, self-accompanied singing is observed and represented in academic material without being identified as such or treated as a source of performance practice information. An example of this is Mariagrazia Carlone's essay 'Portrait of a Lutenist at the Museo Civico of Como: An Inquiry', in which she analyses the style and content of a painting in order to determine its date and subject. Carlone initially describes the subject of the painting thus: 'The lutenist is portrayed frontally, playing the instrument and looking

towards the viewer with his mouth partially open as if he were singing'.³³ This observation is followed by a detailed analysis of the subject's hand positions as evidence of highly skilled playing technique, supporting the theory that the sitter was one of a few sixteenth-century lute virtuosi, possibly Francesco da Milano (1497-1543).³⁴ The possibility that the subject is also singing is observed but never revisited, even though it is also a potential source of historical performance practice information that could inform the identification of the painting's subject and analysis of the painting's symbolism.

Another example of self-accompaniment as an unarticulated concept can be found in Phyllis Weliver's book *The Musical Crowd in English Fiction, 1840-1910 Class, Culture and Nation* (2006). In the section titled 'Interpreting the Figure of the Female Harpist', Weliver quotes several passages from nineteenth-century novels featuring female characters who sing to their own accompaniment upon the harp (or in one case, a lyre). Like Fitzlyon in her analysis of Malibran's playing, Weliver articulates the significance of woman as harp-player, not as self-accompanied singer, though the visual and sounding result is the same.³⁵ Suzanne Fagence Cooper introduces similar examples of unarticulated self-accompanied singing in her book *St Cecilia's Halo: Music, Sex & Death in Victorian Painting, 2012*, which explores the role of musical symbolism in Victorian art, identifying the tensions between sacred and secular, mythological and mundane, chaste and sensual, and how those tensions played out in Victorian society. Many of her points of discussion revolve around paintings, literary examples or concepts in which self-accompaniment is explicit or implied, from the trope of 'woman and piano', to St Cecilia and the symbolism of the portative organ, to sirens and mermaids, to the Orpheus myth. Cooper does not identify the self-accompanied singer as a character, but her analyses of the settings, props and symbolism of the contexts in which such singing took place contribute directly to an understanding of the significance and effect of the self-accompanied singer (particular when also female) upon Victorian audiences.

It would be remiss to criticise such works for failing to delve into the topic of self-accompaniment, or to frame an argument in terms of self-accompaniment, particularly when the focus of the work in question is something other than singing or performance practice. It is important to take note of these 'omissions', however, because they demonstrate the extent to which self-accompanied singing and the act of self-accompaniment remain an unarticulated concept in academic musical vocabulary and discourse on performance

³³ Mariagrazia Carlone, 'Portrait of a Lutenist at the Museo Civico of Como: An Inquiry', in *Art and Music in the Early Modern Period Essays in honor of Franca Trinchieri Camiz*, edited by Katherine A. McIver (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 91.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁵ Phyllis Weliver, *The Musical Crowd in English Fiction, 1840-1910: Class, Culture and Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 94.

practice. Evidence for self-accompaniment is known in isolated and specialized contexts, but much more of the evidence is either unknown, or not yet recognized as significant.

Conclusion

All of the academic literature surveyed here, from those sources that present unarticulated evidence of historical self-accompanied singing to Adler's very specific assessment of the artistic validity of self-accompaniment as a performance practice for the concert stage, still leave a significant gap in knowledge about this topic. There is virtually no documentation of self-accompanied singing by professional singers, of highbrow repertoire, or performances in major public concert venues. Meanwhile, the instances of self-accompanied singing that *are* documented in academic literature are under-represented in terms of sheer quantity and frequency. A thorough examination is needed of the origins of self-accompaniment, the cultural and artistic reasons for why it persisted in so many different forms and contexts, how it came to be so idealized, and why it fell out of fashion in classical music in the early twentieth century while maintaining its relevance and popularity in jazz, folk and popular traditions. Where such analysis already appears in isolated contexts, it has yet to be applied to the task of understanding and reconstructing a historical vocal performance practice. Meanwhile, those sources that do evaluate the artistic merit and practicality of self-accompaniment do not take historical context into account when doing so.

In summary, the majority of academic literature that addresses self-accompanied singing does so by acknowledging its historical context in relation to other musical and social topics, rather than with the intent to document and evaluate the performance practice itself. An additional broad selection of academic work contains evidence of self-accompanied singing, making this evidence available to the academic community even though there may be no relationship between the topic of the work and issues of vocal performance practice. Because of the abundance of evidence in certain bodies of accessible historical material (such as nineteenth-century novels) that are the focus of specific academic fields, particularly women's studies, these works together create the cumulative impression that self-accompanied singing was confined to amateur domestic music-making, even though in fact they represent only some of the evidence. The small amount of modern academic work that deliberately evaluates self-accompaniment as a performance practice is unanimous in its negative assessment of its artistic merit, an assessment that is based on twentieth-century artistic criteria. These disparate approaches to the topic demonstrate a clear opportunity for extensive study of self-accompanied singing as a historical performance practice, taking as a point of departure the assumption that a performance

practice so widely employed is worth documenting and reproducing in the interest of academic and artistic insight, and that any assessment of artistic merit must begin from an understanding of the historical artistic criteria to which self accompanied singing was originally subject.

Chapter Two

Overview of Primary Source Materials

General overview

While most archival studies deal with a contained body of evidence (defined by location, institution, individual or collection), self-accompanied singing was not confined to a particular social context, group of individuals, location or even historical era, and furthermore does not lend itself to preservation in musical notation. As a result, the primary sources for this research encompass a broad range of interdisciplinary materials, and any materials that represent or describe actual, fictional or theoretical music making have the potential to contain evidence of self-accompanied singing. Locating relevant sources is further complicated by the fact that historical audiences often did not conceive of self-accompaniment as a marked phenomenon requiring explicit documentation; self-accompaniment may be implied but not denoted using modern vocabulary. Because the phrase ‘self-accompaniment’ largely doesn’t appear in historical sources, a variety of search terms were needed for electronic, text-searchable archives, particularly of historical newspapers and literature. Self-accompaniment in English language sources may be indicated by phrases like ‘accompanied by herself on the pianoforte’, or ‘sung to his own accompaniment’, or ‘sung and played by’, or by descriptions like ‘...it was encored, and so the singer again sat down at the piano’, or ‘she sat down and gave us a song’, to name a few possibilities. In Italian the phrases ‘cantando al liuto’ and ‘accompanandosi’ can be found, and in French ‘accompagner lui-même’, but in these languages too the practice is described in a variety of ways. As a result, it has not been possible to exhaustively search online databases with certainty.

The primary sources consulted for this research include personal accounts (published and unpublished), literature (popular and academic, fiction and non-fiction), newspapers and periodicals, audio-visual materials, and musical and theatrical works. These categories can be further broken down into the types of sources listed below:

Personal Accounts:

- Published eyewitness biographies, autobiographies and memoirs
- Letters and other personal correspondence
- Journals and diaries

Literature

Published works of fiction: novels, short stories, poetry, *encomia*

Published works of non-fiction

Singing treatises and other academic writings on music

Playbills, concert programmes and programme notes (not published in a newspaper)

Myths and legends

Newspapers and Periodicals

Concert advertisements and reviews

Letters to the editor

Obituaries and other articles featuring prominent musical figures

Radio broadcast listings and archives

Audio and Visual Materials

Commercial studio recordings

Unpublished test pressings of studio recordings

Film

Photographs

Paintings, drawings, sculpture, illuminations, other fine art

Musical and Theatrical Works

Song texts

Libretti, scripts and stage directions

Some of these source materials carry certain implications for research based on the subjectivity, reliability or dated nature of their content. The most significant of those issues will be briefly discussed here to establish the context in which they have been consulted for this study.

Personal accounts

A great variety of personal accounts contain evidence of self-accompanied singing, and some of these carry more musical authority than others. Potentially relevant sources include not only the writings of established singers, but also those of any individual who associated with those singers or heard or saw them perform, or engaged in music making to any degree. These might be other singers, instrumentalists, composers, significant social figures (artists, authors, nobility, patrons, hosts/hostesses) and their acquaintances or family, and of course, audience members. While all such sources have been catalogued when they give evidence of a performance, priority in the research process was given to those with some

level of musical authority or a close professional or personal connection to the performer or the music, such as composers, other musicians and the singers themselves. Personal accounts by patrons, artists and other social figures are treated as potentially less reliable when it comes to the assessment of the technical or artistic quality of a performer, but of great value as evidence of the social expectations and tastes of the time. A good example of this is Marcel Proust's descriptions of Reynaldo Hahn singing in Parisian salons, which reveal a great deal about the performance context and the audience's perspective through the subjective lens of Proust's writing style, cultural tastes and personal attachments.³⁶ At the same time, accounts by elite social figures and amateur musicians from prior to the twentieth century cannot be assumed to lack all musical authority; for many centuries the most elite and educated audiences were comprised of nobility and highly trained amateur musicians performing in private settings, and such individuals often possessed high levels of musical skill and education.

Newspapers - concert reviews

Concert reviews printed in public newspapers form a major resource for evidence of self-accompanied singing on the public concert stage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They provide documentation of the identities of primary and supporting performers, repertoire, instruments, venue, audience size, and often, additional details of how the performance took place, such as the configuration of the audience and stage, the order of the programme, the occurrence of encores, and particular actions and gestures by the performer. Concert reviews also provide assessments of the technical and artistic quality of the performance, and how author and audience responded to it. In this respect published concert reviews are an invaluable source of information about performances and performers that predate recording technology, especially because a published review is often the only surviving evidence of a given performance, but these sources are also subjective to varying degrees. The reviewer may or may not be a voice of musical authority (most reviews printed in nineteenth-century newspapers do not provide the name or any details about the credentials of the author), and his or her assessment is necessarily shaped by the aesthetic and social expectations of the time. For this research, concert reviews were consulted as reliable evidence of how self-accompanied singers were perceived and appreciated by contemporary audiences, both on a case-by-case basis and as an overarching performance practice. They have also been used as a reliable source of information about the structure,

³⁶ For example, Proust's article 'La cour aux lilas et l'atelier des roses. Le salon de Madame Lemaire', *Le Figaro* (11 May 1903), reprinted in *Chroniques*, Librairie Gallimard, 1927.

content and logistics of a given performance. When attempting to draw conclusions about the technical and artistic quality of a reviewed performance, other sources with greater musical authority (such as accounts by prominent musicians, or in the case of singers active at the turn of the twentieth century, studio recordings) have been consulted wherever possible to corroborate the opinions expressed in the review.

Early recordings

Early recordings pose a variety of challenges when used as source material about singers and vocal performance practice. Sound quality is a basic issue: the earliest recording techniques inevitably obscure what one can hear of the nuances of the vocal timbre, dynamics and articulation. Fortunately, poor sound quality does not obscure rhythmic information, so elements of ensemble and interpretation such tempo and *rubato* may still be evaluated accurately. Ambiguous documentation presents another challenge. Even when the singer is a highly prominent musician, the accompanist for a given recording may not be documented. Discographies and liner notes to early recordings frequently cite ‘studio pianist’ in place of the name of the accompanist, or no pianist is listed at all. Some recordings explicitly indicate self-accompaniment by listing the singer’s name and voice type, followed by ‘piano, self’, while others omit the word ‘self’. By consulting other sources, it has been possible to confirm that some of these ambiguously documented recordings are in fact self-accompanied, including some of which have since been labelled as accompanied by ‘studio pianist’. This suggests that the labelling in these catalogues may use stock terminology when the necessary detail is missing, and raises the question of how more early recordings by prominent singers are in fact self-accompanied.

Another challenge of using early recordings to assess self-accompanied singing is the fact that many of the earliest recordings feature older singers. The singing voice was logistically one of the most recordable instruments and the singers who were chosen to record were chosen because of their already-established celebrity.³⁷ George Henschel, whose recordings will be examined in Chapter Seven, is one of the oldest singers on record; he made his recordings at the end of his life, coming out of retirement to do so, and so there is no choice but to evaluate his singing and playing by listening to a performer who is physically long past his prime. Can such recordings made at the end of his career give us any idea of how the voice sounded in its prime? A related issue is the question of whether early recordings can be used to gain a possible understanding of how previous generations

³⁷ Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (London: CHARM, 2009), chapter 4 paragraph 7.

of musicians performed. Can the stylistic information heard in a recording be reliably extrapolated backward to singers that predate recording technology? According to Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, singers like Henschel were ‘trained earliest in the nineteenth century, and for anyone trying, as many do, to extend the evidence of recordings back into a time before recording was invented, this is particularly tantalising evidence’.³⁸ There are inevitable problems with this approach, because a musician’s performing style develops over time as the musician matures and the artistic tastes of society change.³⁹ Rebecca Plack, in her thesis *The Substance of Style: How singing creates sound in lieder recordings, 1902-1939*, attempts to address these very questions by analysing the recordings of singers who recorded the same song multiple times, allowing for comparison of their interpretations and the deterioration of their vocal quality and technique over time. She concluded that while ageing has an undeniable affect on the singing voice, in particular with respect to range and breath control, technical deficiencies heard in an old voice were likely already present to a lesser degree, in the younger singer, and that recordings by singers like Henschel demonstrate the ability of an older singer to maintain a high degree of vocal consistency.⁴⁰ She drew similar conclusions about the consistency of style over a singer’s lifetime, observing that while singers tend to sing ‘more consistently in their youth, it is also true that when an older performer’s singing sounds mannered, the roots of those mannerisms are in fact present on their youthful recordings’,⁴¹ further noting that in recordings of older singers like Henschel one can expect their stylistic choices to be well-entrenched and reasonably consistent.⁴²

A final challenge with using early recordings is the fact that they represent the artistic tastes of their own time, which may differ greatly from the tastes of later generations of academics and audiences who evaluate those recordings. Leech-Wilkinson gives the example of Elena Gerhardt’s 1911 recording of ‘An die Musik’ by Schubert, accompanied by Arthur Nikisch, which was glowingly reviewed in 1951 as a masterpiece of interpretation and vocalism, but reviewed as ‘appalling’ in 2000.⁴³ Contemporary and modern reviews of the self-accompanied recordings consulted in this research reveal similar differences of opinion over time. With regard to self-accompaniment specifically, modern reviewers are far more likely than contemporary reviewers to present self-accompaniment as a qualifier in positive assessments of the performer’s singing (praising the singing *in spite of* rather than because of or irrespective of the performance practice), and to attribute

³⁸ Ibid, chapter 4 paragraph 8.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Plack, *The Substance of Style*, 147-154.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 19.

⁴³ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 4 paragraph 1.

any technical problems to the fact that the singer is self-accompanied. Such differences of opinion over time can be better understood through comparing contemporary recording reviews to contemporary assessments of live performances by the same performer, and by attempting to evaluate early recordings by the artistic criteria of when they were made as well as from a modern perspective.

Visual art

The reliability of works of art as source material for performance practice information depends entirely on how the source is being used. Portraiture and naturalistic pieces may be of great of interest to scholars concerned with instruments and performance practice, but visual art is designed to present an interpretation of reality rather than reality itself, and therefore any use of these materials as a source of concrete performance practice information must be cautious. Richard Leppert provides a useful illustration of how this can be done in his essay ‘Concert in a house: Musical Iconography and Musical Thought’, where he examines a painting titled *Concert in a house* from the Franco-Flemish seventeenth-century school. The painting appears naturalistic and straightforward on first glance, but Leppert points out a variety of musical anomalies, such as the fact that two groups of musicians appear to be playing simultaneously from two different pieces of music. As documentation of performance practice, ‘the painting is not trustworthy at all, even though its naturalism is compelling’.⁴⁴ Old films and photographs are similarly tantalizing because of their increased realism, but they too are likely to have been planned or posed to communicate a particular reality rather than a candid moment in time.

On the other hand, visual art *can* often be trusted to represent the prevailing aesthetic and ideals of society, offering useful insight into what Leppert calls ‘the history of musical thought’.⁴⁵ Art imitates art, and communicates its ideas through a constructed world of symbolic images that represent the worldview of the artist. According to Leppert, in a painting of a musician or musical scene ‘not only do we see images of that past as in a photograph, but we grasp the ideas that governed that past and which are fundamental to historical understanding’, and are able to ‘absorb some of the social attitudes, the moralistic and religious prescriptions which affected musical practices’.⁴⁶ Art, understood in this way, becomes an invaluable resource toward understanding the social context and reception of the self-accompanied singer through history. In this study, visual art has largely been

⁴⁴ Richard Leppert, ‘Concert in a House: Musical Iconography and Musical Thought’, *Early Music* 7/1 (1979), 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

consulted to illustrate how western society has idealised the image of the self-accompanied singer through depictions of Orpheus and similar mythological and fictional characters, and through the depiction of self-accompanied singers with Orphic attributes and other evidence of romanticisation. In the later case studies some film and photographic sources have also been consulted, and in these cases steps have been taken to ensure that the sources are either corroborated by other forms of evidence, or that the analysis takes into account the circumstances under which those works were created.

Literature – novels, encomia and mythology

Novels, short stories, poetry and mythology all share a similar subjectivity and cultural relevance with visual art as discussed above, and pose the same difficulties as source materials. A number of the self-accompanied singers documented in the course of this research are fictional characters (a few of them based upon living musicians) from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. As such, everything about how they perform is both subjective and a reflection of the goals and ideas of the author, from choice of instrument, repertoire and setting to the motivations of the singer and the emotions and responses evoked in his or her audience. Self-accompanied singing in these contexts is usually highly romanticized and symbolic, and these sources have been collected first and foremost as evidence of the prevalence and significance of self-accompaniment in society at the time.

Encomia (flattery and celebration of an individual's abilities in the context of a poem or song text) are a major source of information about performances by self-accompanied singers, particularly women, during the Renaissance, and several such sources are cited in Chapter Four. Though these works describe real individuals, they are also highly subjective and idealized representations of reality. They tend to employ superlative language to describe the skill, beauty and effect of their subjects, from which some technical details can be gleaned about what the performer sang, what instruments were played, and what mannerisms were employed such as posture and gesture. Like so many of the other source materials listed here, they are tenuous material with which to reconstruct a realistic picture of the lives and accomplishments of their subjects, but are accurate depictions of the sensibilities and fashions of the time, as well as evidence of the personal ideals of the author. Mythology, which encompasses elements of both literature and art and precedes them both, shares the same purpose of codifying and giving form to the ideals, tastes and ideas of society.

Literature – musical treatises

Historical music treatises, particularly those about singing, present an interpretive challenge on several fronts. One of these is how to categorize them for research that spans such a long time period: at what point should these works cease to be treated as historical primary sources and consulted as modern academic literature instead? In this research, only those twentieth- and twenty-first-century works which explicitly addressed and evaluated self-accompaniment as an applied performance practice were included in the Literature Review, while a variety of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century works on singing were consulted as primary sources evidencing the changing perspective toward self-accompanied singing in that time period, even if they did not discuss the performance practice directly. A related issue is the variety of perspectives and forms of these treatises: some, such as Bénigne de Bacilly's *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter* (1668) and Pier Francesco Tosi's *Opinioni de' cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (1723) are lengthy, detailed and prose-based pedagogical works, while others such as Giulio Caccini's *Le nuove musiche* (1602) are essentially collections of repertoire which have nonetheless been categorized by modern scholarship as significant academic works of their time. For the sake of presenting as broad a sampling of historical academic treatment of self-accompanied singing as possible in this initial study, treatises of both types were consulted freely in Chapter Five. Another issue is the potential ambiguity of the author's perspective: if a singing treatise advises singers or teachers toward a particular action, should this be interpreted as a codification of common and expected practice, or incitement to change? In the case of the treatises consulted which give advice regarding self-accompaniment in performance and pedagogy, there are enough parallel pieces of evidence in other contemporary sources to confirm that the authors of these treatises were referencing a living practice.

Chapter Three

Origins:

Establishing the Self-Accompanied Singer as Ideal Musician

As a foundation for the case studies of this thesis, it is necessary to first identify the origins of the image of the self-accompanied singer and its symbolic significance in western culture. Self-accompanying in its most basic form can be traced back many thousands of years through primitive human history, in the playing of simple percussion instruments to accompany story-telling or song.⁴⁷ In more recent history, however, the idea of the self-accompanied singer as a specific and recognizable character emerged, and though this character would develop and change over time, it retained its significance to society almost to the present day. Because this research has been necessarily limited to western classical music, the same limitations have been applied to this examination of the background of the self-accompanied singer character.

Ancient Greece

Numerous mythological, literary and historical figures in ancient Greek society are depicted as self-accompanied singers. The most important of these is the mythological character of Orpheus. A legendary poet and prophet as well as a musician at a time when the term *mousikē* encompassed the broader liberal arts and sciences that were the domain of the muses, Orpheus' central fame was as 'an unequalled singer to the lyre who possessed magical power to move all living things'.⁴⁸ He is connected to music in all the literary references and incidents that together make up the Orpheus myth, with an emphasis on his ability to enchant nature, animate and inanimate, through his singing and playing. Kurt Adler identified Orpheus as one of the 'first Greek composers, singers and self-accompanists combined in one'.⁴⁹

It is significant that the most iconic of the earliest codified self-accompanists was a musician of transcendent power. Signifying 'the supreme embodiment of music's affective power' to classical Greeks,⁵⁰ Orpheus has since become the archetype of the inspired singer in western culture in a much broader way. The name of Orpheus has entered into the English language as a synonym for musicianship in its most ideal form, while the derived

⁴⁷ Adler, *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching*, 7.

⁴⁸ Warren Anderson et al., 'Orpheus (i)', in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

⁴⁹ Adler, *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching*, 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

term ‘Orphic’ carries connotations of mysticism, fascination and enchantment.

Other ancient Greek mythological figures were depicted as self-accompanied singers. Amphion, a son of Zeus by Antiope, was another: he was given a golden lyre by Hermes (or in some tellings, by Apollo or by the Muses), and became a great singer and musician, later going on to build the city walls of Thebes by charming blocks of stone with his lyre.⁵¹ A more significant example is the god Apollo, who, like Orpheus, was constantly depicted in art and literature with a kithara or a lyre. The examples where Apollo is also depicted as a singer provide insight into the significance of the self-accompanied singer and his instruments. The most useful of these is the legend of Apollo and Marsyas, a satyr who played the *aulos* (flute) and challenged Apollo to a musical contest on their respective instruments. In the version of the myth recorded by Diodorus Siculus (60-30 B.C.), Apollo wins the contest by singing to his own accompaniment on the lyre, which Marsyas cannot imitate with his pipe.⁵² Apollo’s importance as a musician in Greek thought was further cemented by symbolic references to the lyre in poetry and philosophy, while to the Romans Apollo eventually came to embody ‘the supreme values of music as a performing art’ and an ‘ideal model of the professional musician’.⁵³

The mythological self-accompanists were mirrored in ancient Greek literature. In Homer’s *The Iliad*, the hero Achilles sings to his own accompaniment upon the lyre:

- 185 Then when they had arrived at the Myrmidons’ cabins and galleys,
there they found him pleasing his heart by playing a clear-toned
lyre of elaborate beauty, upon it a bridge made of silver,
which he took from the spoil when he ruined Eêtion’s city;
pleasing his spirit with this he sang of men’s glorious actions.
- 190 Opposite him was Patrôklos alone there, sitting in silence,
waiting for Aíakos’ scion, until he should leave off singing.
Both of the men came forward, and noble Odysseus was leading,
then they stood before him; in astonishment leapt up Achilles
holding the lyre still, leaving the seat where he had been sitting.⁵⁴

According to Rodney Merrill, while we don’t know exactly how such epic ‘songs’ like the *Iliad* were actually performed, it is likely that Achilles and other singers in these epics like Phemios (the *Odyssey*, book one), Demókodos (the *Odyssey*, book eight) ‘represent a living tradition of singers accompanying themselves on the lyre’.⁵⁵ Ancient Greek oratory gives

⁵¹ ‘Amphion and Zethus’, in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*.

⁵² Wyss, *The myth of Apollo and Marsyas*, 20.

⁵³ Anderson, ‘Apollo (i)’, in *Grove Music Online* (accessed 12 September 2013).

⁵⁴ Homer, *The Iliad*, 163-164.

⁵⁵ Merrill, ‘Singing the *Iliad*’, 3-4.

further evidence of such a living tradition through specific vocabulary for referring to self-accompaniment and self-accompanied singers. The word *kitharodia* referred to the act of singing to kithara accompaniment, which was the ‘oldest and most respected kind of musical composition and performance’ in part because it ‘needed only one executant, the singer and player of the kithara’.⁵⁶ The related word *kitharodos* referred to ‘a musician who sang and accompanied himself on the kithara’, playing instrumental preludes and interludes in between the self-accompanied verses.⁵⁷ Perhaps most interesting is the word *kitharisis*, which itself is a verb meaning to play the kithara or related stringed instrument, but which has a variation, *psile kitharisis*, which was used to refer to solo playing on the kithara without singing.⁵⁸ The existence of this term indicates that in ancient Greece, self-accompanied singing was an unmarked phenomenon: the act of playing a stringed instrument implied simultaneous singing, and additional words were required to indicate otherwise.

Collectively, these mythological, literary and living examples of self-accompanied singers reveal a particular set of musical values in ancient Greek society. The idea of self-accompaniment as a superior performance practice as presented in the myth of Apollo and Marsyas was a reflection of the real-life antagonism between the stringed, plucked lyre or kithara and the *aulos* or pipes. The lyre was considered to be harmonious while the flute was shrill; the lyre was Greek while the flute was perceived to be of foreign, Asian origin; most importantly, Plato and Aristotle both observed that the flute ‘robs the master of his voice and speech’.⁵⁹ This preference for the instruments which could support the voice of the player is also reflected in early compositional forms; the school of Lesbos lyric composers, which included Alcaeus, Anacreon and Sappho, developed a specifically self-accompanied song form called the *skolion*, ‘a tune which was sung in turn at table by the guests, each accompanying himself on the kithara’.⁶⁰

Lasting influence of Orpheus and Orphic imagery

Once established, Orpheus and the other ancient Greek iterations of the idealized self-accompanied singer reappear as powerful symbols in different periods and contexts through western history. According to Dorothy M. Kosinski, different aspects of the Orpheus myth

⁵⁶ Solon Michaelides, *The Music of Ancient Greece: an encyclopedia* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1978), 171.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 172.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 170.

⁵⁹ Edith Wyss, *The myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the art of the Italian Renaissance: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1996). 26.

⁶⁰ Adler, *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching*, 8.

resonated with different audiences over time: these various aspects include his role as a priest, keeper of the sacred mysteries, tamer of animals, sacrificing lover, and symbol of the chance to triumph of love and music over death⁶¹, each of which reinforce the image of the self-accompanied singer as mystical, influential, inspired and idealised musician.

In early Christian art, iconographical cross-over can be seen in depictions of Orpheus and Christ, in which Christ is depicted with a lyre and surrounded by tamed wild animals; a musical good shepherd image which takes the pagan musical energy of Orpheus and renders it divine. According to Wilfred Mellers, this Christian adaptation of the Orpheus myth is evidence of the lasting impact of the psychological power of Orpheus and Apollo alike.⁶² The Bible also reinforces the imagery of self-accompanied singing. Many verses contain direct and implied references to self-accompaniment upon harps, lyres, lutes and other stringed instruments by characters in the stories. It is generally believed that the Psalms were intended to be sung, and some of the psalms offer potential evidence of self-accompanied singing in the form of ancient super and postscripts that indicate how they were to be sung or played.⁶³ The word ‘psalm’ originates from the Greek *psalmos*, which refers to songs or singing to a harp or plucked instrument, and the postscripts to several psalms specify instruments that could be played while singing. It is unclear to what extent these titles refer to literal performance practice information, but even if they are not intended as concrete instruction, they recall the iconography of the spiritually powerful self-accompanied singer.

The medieval tradition of vernacular song presents another early iteration of the self-accompanied singer layered with Orphic symbolism. According to Kosinski, ‘In the hands of the medieval poets, Orpheus was the archetype of a noble lover who was prepared to face any danger to rescue his lady’,⁶⁴ in essence, the embodiment of courtly love. There is evidence in song texts, literature and art that the troubadours played instruments while singing their songs: one example is the final couplet of a lyric by the troubadour Albertet de Sestaro, which reads ‘Peirol, violatz et chantatz cointamen de ma chanzon los motz e.l son leugier’ (Peirol, fiddle and sing together the words and the light melody of my song).⁶⁵ Gotfrid von Strassburg said of the *minnesänger* Tristan that it was impossible to decided

⁶¹ Dorothy M. Kosinski, *Orpheus in Nineteenth Century Symbolism* (London: UMI Research Press, 1989), referenced in Suzanne Fagence Cooper, *St Cecilia’s Halo: Music, Sex & Death in Victorian Painting* (Crabapple Publishing, 2012), Kindle edition, 476.

⁶² Wilfrid Mellers, *The masks of Orpheus: Seven stages in the story of European music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) 6.

⁶³ Bruce K. Waltke, ‘Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110/4 (1991): 583-596.

⁶⁴ Kosinski, *Orpheus in Nineteenth Century Symbolism*, paraphrased in Cooper, *St Cecilia’s Halo*, 476.

⁶⁵ Jackson, *Performance Practice*, 412. Peirol was an Auvergnat troubadour active in the late 12th and early 13th centuries.

which was ‘sweeter and more praiseworthy, his harp playing or his singing’.⁶⁶ The troubadours themselves remembered the mythological and biblical self-accompanied singers: according to Mellers, troubadour Alfonso X ‘specifically compared himself to Orpheus and to the harping King David, healing the pain of duality through music’.⁶⁷ These connections would become more significant in later centuries as artists in the Renaissance, Baroque and even Romantic eras reimagined troubadours and minstrels as romanticised, idealized musicians, playing the lyre of Orpheus and Apollo or the harp of David and angels (or the lute that came to substitute for either), mouths open in apparent song. Angels throughout history have been depicted as self-accompanied singers, often with mouths open and with lyres and harps in their hands. St Cecilia, another idealised musician, is almost always depicted in art with instruments that can be played while singing.

In the Renaissance there is much evidence of self-accompanied singing by courtiers and professional musicians, both male and female, which will be explored in depth in Chapter Four. The symbolic significance of Orpheus and all the Greek self-accompanied singers remains strong in this period: Baldassare Castiglione, who advocated self-accompanied singing in his influential book *Il Cortegiano*, rested his justification for arguing that the ideal courtier must learn music upon the evidence of Achilles, a warrior to whom music brought grace and learning, and whose aggression could be soothed by the Orphic ability of music to tame the wild beast.⁶⁸ William Shakespeare and John Fletcher immortalized the image of Orpheus as a self-accompanied singer to the lute in act III, scene I of *Henry VIII*. John Dowland, as the most celebrated of English composers who himself accompanied his singing to the lute, was honoured with the title of ‘the English Orpheus’. Henry Purcell would later be crowned as ‘Orpheus Britannicus’, and it would become popular to bestow the title of ‘Orpheus’ more informally upon great singers, particularly the great castrati, after a triumph in the salon or on the stage, as a way to describe their sublime skill.⁶⁹

It was a common device in the Renaissance and Baroque periods for composers and theorists to cite Orphic powers as proof of the value of music, and thus as justification for their present work. As just one example, Giambattista Mancini invoked the symbolism of Orpheus in the introductory essay, ‘The Excellence and Sterling Worth of Music,’ to his

⁶⁶ Ibid, 246.

⁶⁷ Mellers, *The masks of Orpheus*, 8.

⁶⁸ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), ed. Edgar Mayhew, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002), 56.

⁶⁹ Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1956), 84-85. Heriot quotes a passage in the *Mémoires secrets* of Gorani as an example: ‘Mengs was one day at a house where there was a concert. A famous *musico* sang so exquisitely that this man, hard to the point of ferocity, was moved. He went up to the new Orpheus, who saw with pleasure the results of his talent, and asked him to begin again’.

1774 singing treatise *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing*. These passages, which promote the idea of music as the most ancient art and a crucial part of the learned Renaissance man, feature self-accompanied singing in their imagery:

Lo! How many great and saintly men, versed and involved deeply in the study of military life, politics, philosophy and theology, were attracted by the suavity and sweetness of song, and stole many hours from their grave occupations to study this art! They conquered it, not as a profession but for fancy and delight. They adorned themselves with science and the lyre, as well as with the toga and sword, and thus honoured art also. David sung his songs with the harp; Jeremiah sung his ‘Mottettos’ with the zyther; Saint Cecilia sung her meditations ‘Soliloqui’ on the organ; [...] Homer assures us that Chirone taught music to Achilles, and Homer himself used to sing his own poems, accompanying himself with the lyre and zither.⁷⁰

In the same essay Mancini also tells a story with clear parallels to the Orpheus myth: the story of Persian musician Schac-culi, who when his city was sacked by Amuratte IV, begged for permission to keep his life so that he could perfect his music. When Schac-culi was given permission to demonstrate his art, ‘he took in his hands a ‘Scheschadar’ (a kind of harp) and accompanying himself, he sang the ‘Conquest of Bagdad’ and the ‘Triumph of Amuratte’ with such sweetness and feeling, that the Prince felt so enraptured he not only stopped the butchery at once, but returned liberty to those people’.⁷¹

Over time, the instruments played by Orpheus and other self-accompanied singers of antiquity developed a symbolic influence in their own right, conferring upon the player the same elevated qualities. An example of the attraction of these associated instruments appears in Flemish society in the seventeenth century, where secular music had gained an unsavoury reputation with the church as a sinful and vain pastime. To escape this reputation and justify their preferred entertainment, upper-class amateur musicians sought ways to associate their art with that of Apollo, the muses, and other chaste mythological figures who played the same instruments favoured in amateur music-making at the time. Concerts of the muses with Apollo became a particularly popular subject in paintings from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, because they ‘offered the musical amateurs who commissioned these paintings comforting reassurance that their music-making was imitative of the activities of the gods’.⁷²

⁷⁰ Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing*, trans. Pietro Buzzi (Boston: The Gorham press, 1912), 19-20.

⁷¹ Ibid, 24-25.

⁷² Richard Leppert, ‘The Prodigal Song: Teniers and Ghezza’, in *Sound Judgement. Selected Essays*

In Victorian society in the nineteenth century, the Orpheus legend and imagery carried particular resonance as a symbol of the chance to triumph over death through music. According to Suzanne Fagence Cooper, to the Victorians ‘The Orpheus legend...represents a direct connection between music and the personal past’ and was used in Victorian art to show how ‘musical performance is a conduit that allows the past to be regained’, while the archaic lyre was understood to represent the ‘lost unity of the arts’ and ‘nostalgia for a golden age’.⁷³ As such, Orphic imagery played a major role in the artistic portrayal of women in general and in the reception of self-accompanied female singers on the public stage.

Conclusion

The prevalence and lasting influence of Orphic imagery in art and music translates through unspoken connection to the prevalence and lasting influence of the image of the self-accompanied singer. The significance and power of this imagery and its effect upon the perception of living self-accompanied singers by their audiences varies over the centuries, according to the contemporary values of society and the contexts in which self-accompanied singing takes place. These relationships will be examined in each of the case studies that form the core of this thesis, tracing the transformations of the self-accompanied singer as Ideal Orpheus from antiquity to the present day.

(Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 69.

⁷³ Cooper, *St Cecilia's Halo*, 477.

Chapter Four

Tarquinia Molza: Self-Accompaniment as a Vehicle for Virtuosity and *Sprezzatura* in Sixteenth-Century Italy

This chapter examines self-accompanied singing in the late Italian Renaissance when it was a common feature of courtly and domestic music making, but also reached extraordinary levels of virtuosity in certain cases, particularly in the performances of Italian musician and poet Tarquinia Molza (1542-1617), who was ‘one of the most extraordinary female courtier/intellectuals of the late sixteenth century’.⁷⁴ An unusually rich variety of sources about Molza survive, which contain information not just about her life but also details about her musicianship and exactly what and how she performed. Many of these sources describe her accompanying her own singing on the lute, the bass viol, and the harpsichord, and provide glimpses of other important contemporary performers doing the same. These materials have given scholars many insights into music-making in sixteenth-century Italy already, and their detailed content enable analysis of self-accompanied singing not just as an aesthetic ideal, but as a working performance practice. Molza’s performances occur in the context of her female colleagues at Ferrara, many of whom were similarly accomplished if to a lesser degree, as well as a variety of professional male singers active at the time such as Alfonso Ferrabosco, Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, Giulio Caccini and others. Contemporary accounts of some of these singers’ performances reveal the extent to which such music making was intertwined with courtly social life and behaviour, while writings on Renaissance social conduct such as Baldassare Castiglione’s pivotal work *Il cortegiano* (1528) reinforce those ideas, collectively illuminating how self-accompaniment served as a vehicle for the display of the musical and social ideals of the time.

Evidence of self-accompaniment by Molza and her contemporaries

Tarquinia Molza’s musical talent was discovered by accident when she was young, and after marrying she was established as a lady in waiting at court of Ferrara where she became known as one of the three singing ladies of Ferrara alongside Lucrezia Bendidio and Laura Peverara. There she became famous for her stellar musicianship in all arenas, from solo

⁷⁴ Anthony Newcomb, ‘Molza, Tarquinia’, in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

singing and instrumental playing to sight-reading and ensemble singing. She was later associated with the celebrated *concerto delle donne*, though as a coach and mentor rather than an active member. Unusually well-educated for a woman at this time, Molza was also known for her intellectual accomplishments outside of music, in particular her translations of two of Plato's dialogues.⁷⁵ When she was honoured with Roman citizenship in 1610, she was formally christened with the title *L'unica*, 'the only'.

There is ample evidence that Molza and her musical colleagues at Ferrara accompanied their own singing, and that self-accompaniment may have even been a qualification for being a part of the *concerto delle donne*. According to Laurie Stras, singers from the original group of singing ladies, such as Lucrezia Bendidio, were gradually supplanted by new generations of singers at Ferrara who were 'either already skilled or young enough to be trained in the arts of self-accompaniment and spontaneous ornamentation'.⁷⁶ These younger singers included Livia d'Arco, a skilled singer and viol player; Anna Guarini, who sang and played the lute; Laura Peverara, whose simultaneous singing and harp-playing is celebrated in many madrigals,⁷⁷ and Leonora Sanvitale, who was immortalized in the work and correspondence of numerous writers and poets of the day, such as Tomaso Machiavelli, who wrote that 'when she accompanies her singing with playing, she could inspire verse and enslave the heart, not only of M. Leone..., but also the Apollo of Belvedere'.⁷⁸ Collectively, the *concerto delle donne* and Molza were a formidably accomplished group of women who could accompany their own singing. Composer Alessandro Striggio wrote of them to his patron in 1589: 'This concerto delle donne is truly exceptional. These ladies sing excellently both with instruments and from partbooks, and they are sure in improvisation...'.⁷⁹

The primary source of information about Tarquinia Molza's musical career and performances is Francesco Patrizi's manuscript treatise *L'amorosa filosofia* (1577). This treatise takes the form of four dialogues, the first of which is devoted to extolling Molza's virtues and accomplishments. Nine different speakers present their accounts in turn, in which they describe her as a 'musica singularissima' and the unique and divine 'glory of

⁷⁵ Anna Maria Crinò, 'Review: *L'Amorosa filosofia* by Francesco Patrizi', *Renaissance News* 19/3 (1966): 240-242.

⁷⁶ Laurie Stras, 'Dangerous Graces: Female musicians at the courts of Ferrara and Parma, 1565-1589'. Last modified October 4, 2002. <http://www.soton.ac.uk/~lastras/secreta/dangerous-graces.htm>

⁷⁷ Anthony Newcomb, 'The three anthologies for Laura Peverara, 1580-1583', *Revista italiana di musicologia* 10 (1975): 329-45, paraphrased in Laurie Stras, 'Recording Tarquinia: imitation, parody and reportage in Ingegneri's 'Hor che 'l ciel e la terra e'l vento tace'', *Early Music* 27/3 (1999), 375.

⁷⁸ Machiavelli, quoted in Stras, 'Dangerous Graces'.

⁷⁹ E. Durante and A. Martellotti, *Cronistoria del Concerto delle Donne Principalissime di Margherita Gonzaga d'Este* (Firenze: Studio per edizioni scelte, 1979), 164-165, quoted in Riley, 'Tarquinia Molza', 8.

Italy', and provide detailed descriptions of some of her performances.⁸⁰ These passages demonstrate that Tarquinia accompanied her own singing upon the lute, viol and harpsichord with extraordinary skill, as in this account by Carlo Segonio:

Ne haverà voce così soave e rotonda al canto; o non dispositione così felice ad ogni maniera di trillo, di moto e di diminutione, o non così sicura ad ogni difficile compositione, o non canterà a liuto angelicamente, o non sonerà il basso della viuola et canterà il soprano ad un tempo medesimo, o non intenderà contrapunto, nè così interamente tutta l'arte.

No woman has a voice so sweet and round in singing, nor such pleasing display of every manner of trills, runs, and diminutions. Neither is any woman so secure in any difficult composition, nor able to sing so angelically to the lute, to play the bass on the viola and sing the soprano at the same time, nor to so understand counterpoint and the art in its entirety.⁸¹

The viola mentioned in this passage refers to the *viola bastarda*, a virtuoso style of playing the bass viol that became popular in Italy in the latter part of the sixteenth century. In essence, the style 'condensed a polyphonic composition (madrigal, chanson or motet) to a single line, whilst retaining the original range, and with the addition of elaborate diminutions, embellishments and new counterpoint'.⁸² For Molza to play in this style already marked her as a virtuoso; to sing at the same time placed her in a more elite circle of performers. The following passage is an excerpt from the account within Patrizi's treatise by Fabrizio Dentice, a Neapolitan musician who was resident at the Farnese court in the late 1560s. Dentice compares Molza's skills to those of Alfonso Ferrabosco the elder (1543-1588):

Et appresso cosa che non fu fatta mai da alcuno huomo che professione di musica per principale che sia stato, di sonare a viuola un basso et cantare il soprano obligandosi a tutte le note et a tutte le parole, sì come stanno. In che certo avanza il Ferabosco, il quale quantunque paia di fare lo stesso, con minore fatica però, a' passi difficili sciogliendosi dall'obbligo di osservare la musica et le parole come si trovano, si vale del contrapunto.

And also [she does] another thing which could not ever be done by any

⁸⁰ Crinò, 'Review: *L'Amorosa filosofia*', 240-242.

⁸¹ Francesco Patrizi, *L'amorosa filosofia* (1577), ed. John Charles Nelson (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1963), 40, translated in Riley, 'Tarquinia Molza'.

⁸² Lucy Robinson, 'Viola bastarda', in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

man for whom music is his principal profession, to play a bass line on the viol and sing the soprano, committing herself to all the notes and all the words as they are [written]. To which [skill] certainly Ferrabosco lays claim, in which though he seems to do the same, with minor struggles however, in difficult passages releasing himself from the obligation to observe the music and the words as they are found [written], he takes advantage of counterpoint.⁸³

Another passage makes this same comparison in greater detail, clarifying what was meant by ‘take advantage of counterpoint’: Ferrabosco was able to extemporize while self-accompanying, simplifying the music or improvising as needed. Though Ferrabosco’s abilities are presented as inferior to Molza’s, this passage expands our understanding of the skills of both performers:

Con ciò sia che il Ferrabosco nelle difficoltà e ne’ passi stretti ove l’occhio non può supplire al bisogno di vedere tutte le note ad una ad una, ci ricorre al contrapunto et riempie que’ vacui che l’occhio converrebbe di lasciare non tocche. Ma la signora obligandosi a tutte le note ad una ad una per minime o semiminime che sieno, et a tutte le parole, supera anco questa difficoltà sì grande, con grande stupore di chiunque la vede a ciò fare et ode.⁸⁴

Ferrabosco, in the difficult parts and in the fast passages where the eye could no longer fulfil the need to see each of the notes individually, would have recourse to counterpoint and would fill the spaces that the eye would wish to leave untouched. But the lady, committing herself to all the notes individually whether they be minims or semiminims, and to all the words, conquers also this so great difficulty, to the amazement of whomever sees and hears her do it.⁸⁵

Molza also accompanied her own singing with the lute and the harpsichord, though another passage from Dentice’s account in *L’amorosa filosofia* indicates that she disliked the mechanical noises of the harpsichord: ‘Ho già detto ... del quando ella accompagna il canto col suono di liuto, e di vivuola, perciò che quello del graviciembalo, per lo rumore che de’ tasti si trappone al musicale, le è venuto a schifo e ne l’ha abbandonato’.⁸⁶ (‘I have already spoken...of how she accompanies [her own] singing with the sound of the lute and the viol,

⁸³ Francesco Patrizi, *L’amorosa filosofia (1577) a cura di John Charles Nelson, Le Monnier, Firenze 1963*. Edizione digitale, ed. Maria Rosaria Macchia (Biblioteca Virtuale, 2006), 23-24, translated by Robin Bier.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 42.

⁸⁵ Patrizi, *L’amorosa filosofia*, translated in Stras, ‘Recording Tarquinia’, 361.

⁸⁶ Patrizi, *L’amorosa filosofia*, edizione digitale, 41, translated by Robin Bier.

because that of the harpsichord, given the noise that the keys made over the music, caused her distaste, and she abandoned it'.⁸⁷ Singing to the lute did not present this problem and seems to have been preferred by her audiences:

Ma niuna cosa si può sentire sopra tutta la Terra universa, nè più leggiadra nè più dolce nè più soave nè più mirabile nè più divina, che il sentirla cantare a liuto, al quale atto non è niuno di sì rozzo animo o sì freddo che non si senta commovere e riscaldare tutte le vene e i polsi, empire l'anima sifattamente che le paia di certo di stare tra gli angeli di Dio in paradiso.

But there is nothing to be heard in the whole world that is more wonderful, sweet, graceful, admirable or divine, than to hear her sing to the lute, at which act there is no one with so rude or cold a mood that they do not feel a movement and warming in their veins, making the soul completely sure that it and she stand among the angels of God in heaven.⁸⁸

L'amorosa filosofia contains detailed descriptions of Molza's singing technique and her mannerisms in performance. Patrizi compares her taste, phrasing, and the subtle nuances of her tuning and manipulation of semitones to the singing of one of the greatest castrato sopranos of the day, Hernando, 'eunuco della duca di Ferrara'.⁸⁹ Regarding the physicality of her singing and playing, Patrizi writes:

Et in sua vece ha preso la viuola, et vi suona il basso et il soprano in compagnia sicurissimamente, accompagnando questo suono con bellissimi movimenti delle braccia, delle mani e delle dita, senza sforzo et senza distorcimento alcuno del capo o della persona. E nel soprano nelle diminutioni è cosa si leggiadra a vederle muovere le dita della mano sinistra in su' tasti che cosa più gratiosa non si può vedere con gli occhi.

And in its stead she took the viol, and there played the bass and soprano together with complete assurance, accompanying this sound with beautiful movements of the arms, hands and fingers, without effort and without distortion of the head or of the body. And in the soprano diminutions it is something so delightful to see the fingers of the left hand move upon the frets in a way more graceful than your eyes have

⁸⁷ Patrizi, *L'amorosa filosofia*, translated in Stras, 'Recording Tarquinia', 376.

⁸⁸ Patrizi, *L'amorosa filosofia*, edizione digitale, 42, translated by Robin Bier.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 39.

ever seen.⁹⁰

From these and other sources it is possible to conclude that Molza's singing and playing was highly expressive and theatrical, and that she was able to deliver a performance that was both technically flawless and unaffectedly elegant in its physicality, though it is difficult to know what that actually looked like. Her physical ease in playing suggests that she was well equipped to negotiate the challenge of singing with equal ease even when her body was engaged in playing an instrument. Laurie Stras, analyzing several descriptions of a sung performance by Molza of the Petrarch sonnet 'Hor che 'l ciel', points out that 'her performance must necessarily have been ungestured if she was playing an instrument. The affective representation would then have been solely in her vocal production, the manner of her ornamentation and in her facial expressions'.⁹¹ Stras is presumably referring to deliberate, rhetorical gestures of the hands and arms, such as would be described by John Bulwer in his 1644 treatise *Chirolgia, or the Natural Language of the Hand, and Chironomia, or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*. It is true that the playing of an instrument would prevent the singer from executing gestures of this kind, but this does not mean that the performance would be lacking in expressive motion. Studies by Jane Davidson and F. Delalande have examined the nature of gesture displayed by instrumentalists in performance and identified the presence not only of movements directly connected to the production of sound but also figurative gestures, which are 'symbolic rather than physical in nature, and envisaged to be perceived by the observer'.⁹² Whether Molza developed particular methods of circumventing any restrictions placed on her voice by the process of self-accompaniment, or the different expectations of her contemporary audience rendered it a non-issue, it is clear that her accompaniments enhanced rather than inhibited her singing.

Molza and the ladies of the *musica secreta* and the *concerto delle donne* were not the only professional self-accompanied singers in Italy during this period. Evidence survives of a variety of professional male singers as well, many of whom were connected to Ferrara in some way. We have already seen mentions of Alfonso Ferrabosco (1543-1588), whose singing to the viol nearly rivalled Molza's. The acclaimed singer Giovanni Domenico Puliaschi (d.1622) accompanied himself on the chitarrone'.⁹³ Giulio Caccini

⁹⁰ Ibid, 41.

⁹¹ Stras, 'Recording Tarquinia', 373.

⁹² Jane Davidson, 'Bodily movement and facial actions in expressive musical performance by solo and duo instrumentalists: Two distinctive case studies', *Psychology of Music* 40/5 (2012): 595-633. Also F. Delalande, 'Human movement and the interpretation of music' (paper presented at the Second International Colloquium on the Psychology of Music, Ravello, Italy, 1990), referenced in Davidson, 'Bodily movement.'

⁹³ Nuti, *The Performance of Italian Basso Continuo*, 20.

(1551-1618), praised by contemporaries for the ‘*dolcezza* and *soavità* of his tenor voice’,⁹⁴ also played the chitarrone, and refers to self-accompaniment in the preface of his *Le nuove musiche* (1602). Jacopo Peri (1561-1633) was yet another such composer and singer: we know he was a self-accompanist from descriptive commentary published with the music of an *intermedio* to Girolamo Bargagli’s comedy *La pellegrina*, during which Peri sang the aria *Dunque fra torbid’onde* (during which his character was to illustrate the miraculous powers of music) whilst accompanying himself with great skill on the chitarrone.⁹⁵ From a 1584 dispatch from Este resident Giulio Masetti we know of a Roman singer by the name of Pitio, who had ‘sung and played the lute’ in Masetti’s home, and who ‘by profession...sings bass to the accompaniment of the lute’, and who performed *napolitane* and improvised with great skill.⁹⁶ Another known self-accompanied singer connected to Ferrara is Melchior Palantrotti (d.1614), who was a famous professional bass singer in Italy toward the end of the sixteenth century. Palantrotti began his career as a singer at S. Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, and was later recruited to the court of Ferrara as a chamber musician where he remained from 1589-1597.⁹⁷ Archival entries from Ferrara reveal that ‘special lutes were ordered for him, implying that he accompanied himself as a solo singer’.⁹⁸

Giulio Cesare Brancaccio (1515-1586), a soldier, courtier and celebrated bass singer who, though a generation before Tarquinia Molza, was active in Ferrara toward the end of his life. Richard Wistreich in his book *Warrior, Courtier, Singer: Giulio Cesare Brancaccio and the Performance of Identity in the Late Renaissance*, notes ‘the performance of *villanelle alla napolitana* by virtuosos in Rome and other cities such as Ferrara, where Brancaccio was active later in the century, appears to have been exclusively solo, to self-accompaniment...’,⁹⁹ and that self-accompanied solo singing to the lute was ‘at least one of the modes in which [Brancaccio] was known to perform in the circle of Cardinal Luigi d’Este’.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, archival records from Ferrara reveal that in 1581 Cardinal Luigi d’Este ordered a lute with two bass *bourdons* that would have been suitable for Brancaccio to accompany himself.¹⁰¹ There is evidence that Brancaccio performed at Ferrara alongside members of the *concerto delle donne* on multiple occasions: in December 1577 he sang ‘concerted in company’ with Lucrezia Bendidio, Leonora Sanvitale and

⁹⁴ H. Wiley Hitchcock, H. Wiley, introduction to *Le nuove musiche*, by Giulio Caccini (Madison: A-R Editions, 1970), vii.

⁹⁵ William V. Porter and Tim Carter, ‘Peri, Jacopo’, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*.

⁹⁶ Newcomb, *The Madrigal at Ferrara*, 47. The document is presented in the original language in Newcomb’s Appendix V, Document 52.

⁹⁷ Tim Carter, ‘Palantrotti, Melchior’, *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*.

⁹⁸ Richard Wistreich, *Warrior, Courtier, Singer: Giulio Cesare Brancaccio and the Performance of Identity in the Late Renaissance* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 202.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 137.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 203.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 133.

Vittoria [Bendidio] Bentivoglio, and in 1580 he sang with Laura Peverara and Anna Guarini.¹⁰²

Self-Accompaniment as a vehicle for virtuosity, *sprezzatura* and Orphic symbolism

Virtuosity

Self-accompanied singing itself was not a rare occurrence in Molza's time. According to Stras, self-accompanied song was one of the 'few acceptable outlets for polite female vocality in the Renaissance'.¹⁰³ Early Italian secular song forms like *frottole* and *canzonette* were homophonic with simple accompaniments designed to be supplied by the singer,¹⁰⁴ and the singing of such songs fell most often to noblewomen, whose responsibility it was to maintain 'standards of cultural sensibility' in the private, inner world of the aristocratic courts.¹⁰⁵ Some of them excelled at it, even outside of the elite circle of the *concerto delle donne*, as is implied in this excerpt of a letter from Annibal Guasco to his daughter describing the musicianship of an accomplished lady:

As to what Signora Irene [Spilimbergo] learned in playing, and in singing to the lute, the harpsichord, and the viol, and how on each of these instruments, far beyond the usual custom and intellect of women, she approximated the very best in these arts, I say nothing, for it would take too long.¹⁰⁶

It can be inferred from this and a variety of other historical accounts, which never discuss *whether* women should perform, but only *when* and *how*, that self-accompanied female singing was extremely common, if of varying quality. According to Riley, 'many, many women sang and played; some were spectacular, like Irene Spilimbergo, some were terrible, and the majority were most likely mediocre, but all were necessary to give substance to the musical style'.¹⁰⁷ In the context of this widespread tradition, Molza and her female colleagues at Ferrara, as well as male contemporaries Ferrabosco and others such as Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, Giulio Caccini and Domenico Puliaschi, were remarkable for the skill with which they sang and played rather than for the act of self-accompaniment itself. Molza and other artisan musicians (whose careers depended upon their talent and education) were

¹⁰² Ibid, 131.

¹⁰³ Stras, 'Musical Portraits', 154.

¹⁰⁴ Riley, 'Tarquinia Molza', 3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, vol. 1 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), 50, quoted in Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Riley, 'Tarquinia Molza', 3.

further singled out amongst other musicians who were also members of the nobility like Bendidio and Sanvitale; though the noblewomen did also accompany themselves, they were not specifically celebrated for their skill at self-accompaniment,¹⁰⁸ implying that the artisan musicians took their skill in self-accompaniment to a much higher level.

Molza and the other female musicians at Ferrara rehearsed for several hours a day and also performed for as many as four hours a day to satisfy the demands of their patron. Under these circumstances, self-accompaniment may have functioned to some extent as a professional necessity. As previously noted, there is some evidence that Bendidio eventually lost favour at court because she could not keep up with these demands; the skills of Molza and Peverara, particularly the spontaneity afforded by Molza's ability to sight-read and to improvise ornamentation over her own accompaniment 'would have allowed them to learn new music at a rate appropriate for the demand, and to vary their performances from night to night, even hour to hour'.¹⁰⁹

Technical virtuosity in self-accompanied singing enabled Molza to experiment with musical style and repertoire in unique ways. Initially, the Italian secular song forms to which self-accompaniment was so closely connected were entirely the domain of women because men were expected to concern themselves with the affairs of church and state. This gradually changed in the early 1500s, as men began to take an interest first in poetry, then in the composition and performance of music in the newly developing polyphonic madrigal style. The element of ensemble interaction in this new style rendered early madrigal singing an elegant and intellectual pastime suitable for aristocratic male performers; it was meant to entertain the performer as much or more than the audience, whereas in female performances of solo song the woman herself was an object to be observed and admired alongside the sound of her music making.¹¹⁰

Molza, however, was well versed in the full gamut of musical art and mastered both male performance practice as well as female, making her a creative point where two separate traditions – horizontal secular song and the vertical counterpoint of the early polyphonic madrigal – converged.¹¹¹ She was an accomplished player of the *viola bastarda*, the essence of which was to condense and perform a polyphonic work upon a single instrument. Evidence of this can be found in Domenico Vandelli's 'Vita di Tarquinia Molza detta L'Unica':

She acquired control of her voice according to the true rules from books, not by memorizing the words of masters in the art, some of whom had

¹⁰⁸ Stras, 'Musical Portraits', 160-161.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 161.

¹¹⁰ Riley, 'Tarquinia Molza', 6.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 10.

the laudable desire to be able to show her something unusual in this profession. These were, among others, Giaches Wert, Luzzascho Luzzaschi and Orazio [della Viola] on which instrument (viola bastarda) she used to musically play one part, uniting to it another part with her voice. She did this with such skill and knowledge that one could not hope for better.¹¹²

Riley notes that because a particular vocabulary was used in the sixteenth century to refer to the art of self-accompaniment in solo song (cantando al liuto ‘singing to the lute’ or accompanandosi ‘accompanying oneself’), Vandelli’s choice of words to specify that Molza played ‘one part, uniting it to another part with her voice’ was a specific reference to her performance of music in the polyphonic style, reinforced by the fact that the composers he listed were all associated with that style.¹¹³

When Molza accompanied her own singing with the bass viola in the viola bastarda style, she was experimenting with ‘improvised diminution in a contrapuntal context’,¹¹⁴ effectively combining two styles that had previously been isolated from each other. Under Molza’s guidance, the *concerto delle donne* further developed these musical ideas through their own public improvisations, and composers who heard them were in turn inspired to begin composing pieces for the *concerto* in the new style, contributing to ‘the synthesis of ornamented solo and contrapuntal song that became known as the “luxuriant madrigal”’.¹¹⁵

Sprezzatura

Sprezzatura was defined by Baldassare Castiglione in his book *Il cortegiano* (1528) as ‘questa virtù adunque contraria alla affettazione, la qual noi per ora chiamiamo sprezzatura...il vero fonte donde deriva la grazia’, (this virtue which is opposite to affectation [...] the true fountain from whence grace is derived.)¹¹⁶ In greater detail, *sprezzatura* is the art of studied nonchalance and of concealing effort, ‘because everyone knows the difficulty of things that are rare and well done; wherefore facility in such things causes the greatest wonder’.¹¹⁷ This could also be taken too far: when someone puts so much effort into being nonchalant that it ‘exceeds certain limits of moderation, such

¹¹² Vandelli, *Vita di Tarquinia Molza detta L’Unica* (Bergamo: Lancellotti, 1750), 7, quoted and translated in Ibid, 7.

¹¹³ Riley, ‘Tarquinia Molza’, 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro del cortegiano* (1528), ed. Carlo Cordié (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1960), 27-28, translation by Robin Bier.

¹¹⁷ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 32.

nonchalance is affected, is unbecoming, and results in the opposite of the desired effect, which is to conceal the art'.¹¹⁸ The skill of Molza and other elite self-accompanied singers of this time assumed mastery of more than just the technical challenges of coordinating good singing with good playing. Contemporary literature suggests these singers played multiple social roles at court: their audiences were the most elite and educated of the day, and they were expected to engage in all the same courtly social requirements as their patrons. This included manners and style, in particular the quality of *sprezzatura* as it applied to music.

In *Il cortegiano* Castiglione discusses how the principles of *sprezzatura* are applicable to all aspects of courtly life, from attire and conversation to sport, dance and music, both composition and performance. Castiglione considered music to be 'not only an ornament but a necessity to the Courtier', who should not only be able to understand and to read music but also be able to play a variety of instruments.¹¹⁹ He justified this claim by observing that many great men of antiquity had excelled at both arms and music ('where, then, is the soldier who would be ashamed to imitate Achilles, not to speak of many another famous commander that I could cite?') and that furthermore music 'not only makes gentle the soul of man, but often tames wild beasts; and he who does not take pleasure in it can be sure that his spirit lacks harmony among its parts'.¹²⁰

According to Castiglione, *sprezzatura* applied to music in a variety of ways. With respect to audience and timing, the courtier must avoid performing in the presence of 'persons of low birth or where there is a crowd', and he must treat music as a pastime rather than as a profession, turning to it 'as though forced'.¹²¹ This advice is given to lady courtiers as well: 'Hence, when [a Lady] starts to dance or to make music of any kind, she ought to begin by letting herself be begged a little, and with a certain shyness bespeaking a noble shame that is the opposite of brazenness'.¹²² With respect to manner, the courtier must show no pride in his performance, appearing to 'esteem but little this accomplishment of his, yet by performing it excellently well, make others esteem it highly'.¹²³ With respect to style in performance, Castiglione offers an illustration of *sprezzatura* in a musical example of ornamentation: 'A singer who utters a single word ending in a group of four notes with a sweet cadence, and with such facility that he appears to do it quite by chance, shows with that touch alone that he can do more than he is doing'.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 33.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 55-57.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 56.

¹²¹ Ibid, 76.

¹²² Ibid, 154.

¹²³ Ibid, 76.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 35.

Castiglione furthermore wrote at length about the performer's choice of repertoire, instrument and performance practice, and it is in this that it becomes apparent that the idea of *sprezzatura* was linked to self-accompaniment. The most beautiful music is identified as the act of singing to the accompaniment of the viola, because this arrangement features the solo voice and allows the listener to 'follow the fine style and the melody with greater attention in that our ears are not occupied with more than a single voice, and every little fault is the more clearly noticed'.¹²⁵ Several subsequent examples provide evidence that by 'singing to the accompaniment of the viola' Castiglione meant self-accompanied singing. In a passage discussing the importance of good judgement in musical performance, he observes that it is 'unbecoming and most unsightly for a man of any station, who is old, gray, toothless, and wrinkled, to be seen viola in hand, playing and singing in a company of ladies, even though he may do this tolerable well'.¹²⁶ In another passage singing to the viol is mentioned again when one speaker marvels at another's bravery in daring to perform this way in front of Giacomo Sansecondo, a highly celebrated early sixteenth-century musician.¹²⁷

Castiglione also discusses the best instruments for the courtier, praising all keyboard instruments and viols and noting that 'the human voice gives ornament and much grace' to them.¹²⁸ Following the classical example of Minerva and Alcibiades, however, he scorns wind instruments because they 'have something unpleasant about them' and distort the face of the musician.¹²⁹ Choice of instrument is even more important for the Lady, whom Castiglione urges to avoid robust and strenuous gestures and instruments in music: 'Consider what an ungainly thing it would be to see a woman playing drums, fifes, trumpets, or other like instruments; and this because their harshness hides and removes that suave gentleness which so adorns a woman in her every act'.¹³⁰

Based on these examples, it is clear that for Castiglione's courtiers, self-accompanied singing would have been a highly effective way to promote the grace and accomplishment, i.e. *sprezzatura*, of the performer. The kind of music conducive to self-accompanied singing was held to be the most beautiful. Because solo singing to instrumental accompaniment was more exposed, it was therefore more impressive and pleasing when the performance was flawless, making solo singing of this kind an ideal context in which to display one's *sprezzatura* in performance. Self-accompanied singing permitted the display of multiple accomplishments, which educated audiences would know

¹²⁵ Ibid, 76.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 77.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 105.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 77.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 77.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 154.

required lengthy study, the perfect example of a musical task wherein facility would ‘cause the greatest wonder’.¹³¹ Because self-accompaniment could also be presented under the guise of necessity or as a naturally-derived pastime thanks to its common practice at lower levels of skill amongst the nobility, and because it enabled spontaneity and flexibility (requiring no prearranged rehearsal with another musician), it was also a good vehicle through which to satisfy social demands for music while also remaining unassuming and nonchalant about displaying one’s skill. Finally, self-accompanied singing displayed the singer in the most graceful and flattering manner: the instruments Castiglione approved for ladies were only those that could be played while singing.

Orphic symbolism

There is ample evidence that contemporary audiences responded to the self-accompanied singing of Molza and her most accomplished colleagues not only as feats of virtuosity and *sprezzatura*, but also of Orphic inspiration and power. *L’amorosa filosofia* ascribes Orphic powers to Molza in the first dialogue, in which Patrizi invokes Apollo, as the god of music and healing, asking for his weak tongue to be healed so that he can sufficiently praise the ‘excellence of her utterly sweet and superhuman voice which, when she sings, causes the perfection of music to enter into the ears and souls of all who hear it’.¹³² Patrizi furthermore claims that just as Apollo can stir the heavens and the elements so that it rains upon the earth, Molza’s singing stirs virtue to rain down in the hearts of men and produce a sweet and lovely spring.¹³³ Molza and the *concerto delle donne* were the frequent subjects of musical encomia, which vividly convey the emotional impact of the musicians and the artistic fantasies of the audiences. Many of these encomia painted their subjects in an almost mythological status through comparisons to legends, angels, gods and saints, including the two most influential self-accompanists from classical times, Orpheus and Apollo, while other encomia attributed Orphic powers to their subjects’ voices and instruments. The following madrigal text by David Sacerdote from his *Il primo libro de madrigali a sei voci* (Venice, 1575) is a good general example of this kind of poetic attribution:

N’ardir egl’ha senza il bel vostro viso;
com’all contrario don’ogni cor si spetra,
voi d’Aragne seconda vincitrice

¹³¹ Ibid, 32.

¹³² Patrizi, *L’amorosa filosofia*, edizione digitale, 36, translated by Robin Bier.

¹³³ Ibid.

voi divina e d'apollo immitatrice
 col cembalo col plectro e con la cetra
 formate in terra un novo Paradiso.
 None may burn with desire without your beautiful face;
 on the contrary thus every heart will melt from stone,
 you the second [female] victor of Arachne,
 you who are divine and a [female] imitator of Apollo,
 with harpsichord, with plectrum and with cythara,
 you make a new paradise on Earth.¹³⁴

Torquato Tasso attributed such Orphic powers to Lucrezia Bendidio's singing when he wrote 'l'aria addolcisce co' soavi accenti e queta i venti col suo vago stile' (the air sweetened at her soft notes and the winds quieted at her lovely style),¹³⁵ and elsewhere wrote that her song possessed the 'gift of healing melancholy'.¹³⁶ Marc'Antonio Ingegneri did the same toward Molza in his poem 'Hor che'l ciel et la terra e'l vento tace', which portrays Molza singing and playing a setting of the Petrarch sonnet from whence the song's title was taken, and describes her performance as so angelic that hearing it again in person would open the heavens. The poem's mention of the movements of the singer's fingers (presumably upon the keys or strings of an instrument) would not stand on its own as proof that Molza accompanied herself. In light of the other sources which detail how often and how skilfully she self-accompanied, however, this text becomes more trustworthy as evidence of the artistic effect she exerted on her audience, coloured as it is by the ideals of the time and of the poet:

'Hor che 'l ciel et la terra e 'l vento tace',
 incominciò colei che l'aria molce
 con angelici accenti, e in lingua dolce
 rischiara Secchia con la toska face.
 Sentian gli spirti altrui beata pace;
 tutto l'amar si trammutava in dolce.
 E giva al ciel (che più l'alma soffolge)
 mio cor, che via da lei morendo giace.
 Che poi se I moti de suoi tersi avori,
 de' vaghi lumi e del leggiadro viso,

¹³⁴ Sacerdote, *Il primo libro de madrigali a sei voci* (Venezia, 1575), translated in Stras, 'Musical Portraits', 154. This text does not specifically describe Molza or a member of the *concerto delle donne*.

¹³⁵ Torquato Tasso, *Le rime di Torquato Tasso, Vol II: Rime d'amore*, ed. Angelo Solerti, Edizione Critica I Manoscritti e le Antiche Stampe (Bologna: Presso Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1898), 206.

¹³⁶ Stras, 'Musical Portraits', 156.

l'occhio vedea ch'or vana vista intrica;
 che poi s'un dì mi spiega be tesori,
 o del nome Tiran degn'et nemica,
 o qua giù cieli aperti, o paradiso.
 'Hor che 'l ciel et la terra e 'l vento tace',
 began she who soothes the air
 with angelic accents, and in a sweet tongue
 illuminates the Secchia with the Tuscan torch [i.e. the words of Petrarch].
 The others' souls felt a blessed peace;
 all bitterness transformed into sweetness.
 And my heart, which [now] parted from her lies dying,
 rose to Heaven (that comforts the soul still more).
 What then, if the movements of her polished ivory [fingers],
 of her beautiful eyes and charming face,
 the eye could see, which is now snared by empty visions;
 what then, if one day she reveals her beautiful treasures to me,
 oh she who is worthy of the tyrant's name and foe,
 oh the heavens opened to us below on earth, oh paradise.¹³⁷

Conclusion

In this case study, self-accompaniment takes shape as both an ordinary and extraordinary performance practice. As a natural continuation of the social contexts for self-accompaniment in troubadour song in previous centuries, self-accompanied singing in early Italian secular song was a familiar part of courtly and domestic music making, practiced by many musicians to a basic level of competency. At the same time, self-accompanied singing was a cornerstone of the identity of accomplished musicians, both female and male, enabling them to meet the demands of noble patrons and to display *sprezzatura* at court. Molza's singing and playing indicate that her self-accompanied performances were technically and interpretively sound, as well as graceful, elegant and unaffected, that she was equally accomplished as a singer and a player, and that she applied a high level of artistic discernment to her choice of what instruments with which to accompany her voice. The ability to sing self-accompanied enabled Molza and the *concerto delle donne* to explore the conjunction of previously isolated musical styles (solo and polyphonic song),

¹³⁷ Translated in Stras, 'Musical Portraits', 162-163. This text may be by Pigna: according to Patrizi, he was ordered by Alfonso to write 4 sonnets about Molza's performance.

contributing to the development of the madrigal compositional style in the middle and late sixteenth century. When taken to the highest levels of virtuosity by artisan musicians like Molza, self-accompanied singing afforded the performer the reputation of Orphic and angelic powers, which were celebrated and idealized in art, literature and song.

Chapter Five

Early Vocal Pedagogy:

Self-Accompaniment in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Singing Treatises

Introduction

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, evidence of self-accompanied singing begins to appear in a practical and analytical context, in treatises on vocal pedagogy and performance practice. In contrast to the previous and following case studies, these sources evaluate self-accompaniment from the perspective of the logistical concerns of the musician rather than the artistic experience of the audience. Giulio Caccini's *Le nuove musiche* (1602) introduces the idea that self-accompaniment might afford the singer certain practical advantages, while later works like Bénigne de Bacilly's *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter* (1668) and Pier Francesco Tosi *Opinioni de' cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (1723) offer explicit commentary on how self-accompaniment should be studied and executed.

These historical singing teachers and treatises, some of which are still recognized today as the foundation of modern vocal pedagogy, demonstrate that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries self-accompaniment was part of the skill set of the ambitious and discerning professional singer, who was now being trained for the public as well as private stage. Because these works were each directed toward a relatively specific body of singers and repertoire, and in many cases were written by performers, they enable a broad understanding of the types of vocal music that were being performed and studied self-accompanied and by whom. Evidence of specific self-accompanied performances demonstrate that the most elite singers of this period, such as castrato Caffarelli (Gaetano Majorano, 1710-1783), employed self-accompaniment in court and salon settings similar to the previous case study. By examining how self-accompaniment was treated in survey of these early pedagogical works ranging from approximately 1600 to 1800, it becomes possible to see how a performance practice rooted in artistic symbolism and aesthetic display became codified in vocal pedagogy as a practical teaching and learning tool connected to specific repertoires and schools of singing.

References to self-accompaniment in singing treatises 1600-1800

Le nuove musiche (1602)

Giulio Caccini's *Le nuove musiche*, previously quoted for its commentary on *sprezzatura* in singing, is a treatise on performance practice and compositional style rather than vocal pedagogy in the modern sense. In his introduction to the work, 'A i lettori', however, Caccini offers specific advice to the aspiring professional singer regarding the requirements of early seventeenth-century Italian solo song, and the kind of practice and dedication necessary to master it, and this links this work to the more explicitly pedagogical treatises to come. Caccini discusses self-accompaniment in order to illustrate the practice and skill necessary for the performance of his music:

Questi arte non patisce la mediocrità, e quanto più squisitezze per l'eccellenza sua sono in lei, con tanta più fatica, e diligenza la dovemo noi professori dei essa ritrovare con ogni studio, et amore, il quale amore ha mosso me (vendendo io, che dalli scritti habbiamo lume d'ogni scienza, e d'ogni arte) à lasciarne questo poco di spiraglio nelle note appresso, e discorsi, intendendo io di mostrare quanto appartiene à chi fa professione di cantar solo sopra l'armonia di Chitarrone, ò di alto strumento di corde pur che già sia in[?]o dotto nella teorica di essa musica, e suoni à bastanza; Non già, che ella non si acquisti in qualche parte anco per lunga pratica, come si vede, che hanno fatto molti, e huomini, e donne sino à un certo segno però; ma perche la teorica di questi scritti sino al segno sopraddetto fa di mestieri.

These arts will not endure mediocrity, and when there are many exquisite details to perfect, with more labour and diligence must we who profess the art rediscover every work – and also with love, which has moved me (for I see that writings shed light on every science and every art) to leave this little glimmer of light in these present notes and comments, intending to show how much is involved for those who make a profession of singing solo over the harmony of the Chitarrone, or another stringed instrument, even if one already knows the basics of the theory of music and plays adequately; not that it cannot also be acquired by long practical experience, as many men and women have been seen to do, if only to a certain degree; but because the theory of these writings

will lead to mastery to the aforementioned degree.¹³⁸

The art to which Caccini refers is the art of his ‘nuove musiche’, by which he encompasses not just the technique of singing or playing but also the understanding of the repertoire: its structure and the ornaments and effects required to interpret it. By applying his next statement of intent so specifically to the task of singing self-accompanied to the chitarrone, Caccini implies that this performance practice is also a part of his new ‘art’, or at least conducive to it. He further indicates that self-accompanied solo singing is an established profession that requires significant study, even if the musician already sings and plays well in isolation. It is unclear what prompts Caccini to explain this; perhaps he hoped to dispel a perception that the singing of these songs was a simple because the texture had been reduced from polyphony to monody, or perhaps he was suggesting that the coordination of solo voice and instrumental accompaniment equals more than the sum of its technical components.

Caccini takes this possibility a step further when he again mentions self-accompaniment toward the end of his introduction. In the context of a series of vocal technique and style suggestions, he gives the following advice on choice of key and timbre:

Sarà perciò utile avvertimento, che il professore di quest’arte poi che egli deve cantar solo sopra Chitarrone, ò altro strumento di corde senza essere forzato accomodarsi ad altri, che à se stesso si elegga un tuono, nel quale possa cantare in voce piena, e naturale per isfuggire le voci finte.

It will be useful to note however, that he who professes this art of singing alone to the Chitarrone or some other stringed instrument without being constrained to accommodate himself to others should choose a key in which he can sing with a full, natural voice, to escape the falsetto.¹³⁹

This observation that the singer may wish to perform without having to ‘accommodate himself to others’ may be the earliest acknowledgement of the idea that self-accompaniment offers a logistical or artistic advantage with respect to ensemble and the relationship between voice and accompaniment.

Musiche varie a una voce con il suo basso continuo per sonare (1618)

Like *Le nuove musiche*, this publication by Giovanni Domenico Puliaschi is a collection of

¹³⁸ Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (Firenze: Marescotti, 1602), ‘A i lettori’, translation by Robin Bier.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

compositions (by Puliaschi and also by G. F. Anerio) to which Puliaschi attached a commentary on singing and his own performance techniques. Puliaschi mentions self-accompaniment in a discussion of the appropriate accompaniment for his songs, writing: ‘When I accompany my voice with different sorts of consonances, sometimes full and sometimes light according to the passage; in particular when the part that I sing descends beneath the played Bass, I use just a few consonances, those that best accompany the passage’.¹⁴⁰ Puliaschi was an Italian composer, singer and chitarrone player, active in Rome and widely praised as one of the best singers of his time; it is believed that Caccini composed the two *arie particolari* in *Le nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle* (1614) for Puliaschi.¹⁴¹ Puliaschi’s contributions to the *Musiche varie* (romanesque songs and madrigals which are structurally typical of the time) are extremely virtuosic with many wide leaps, divisions and wide vocal ranges, and their clefs further suggest that they were composed for his own voice.¹⁴² Presumably, Puliaschi was an example of a singer who had mastered the art of singing to the theorbo to the degree advocated by Caccini, and this treatise, though also not a treatise on vocal pedagogy in a modern sense, endorses self-accompaniment by example as a performance practice suited to this song repertoire on the most professional level.

Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter (1668)

Bénigne de Bacilly’s 1668 treatise contains more explicit pedagogical endorsement of self-accompanied solo singing than the two previous works. Bacilly was a published composer, poet and singing teacher prominent in Parisian musical circles after 1655, and contemporary sources indicate that of these various musical identities it was as a vocal pedagogue that he was most highly regarded.¹⁴³ He is widely considered today to be the most important writer on French vocal style for music from 1650-1750, and this treatise, which would be reprinted in four consecutive editions, was a staple resource for singers and teachers for a full century after its publication.¹⁴⁴

Bacilly addresses self-accompaniment in Part I, Chapter IV, ‘The Necessity of Instrumental Accompaniment in Vocal Music’. This section is entirely devoted to the

¹⁴⁰ Giovanni Domenico Puliaschi, *Musiche varie a una voce con il suo basso continuo per sonare* (Rome, 1618), translated in Nuti, *The Performance of Italian Basso Continuo*, 20.

¹⁴¹ Nigel Fortune and John Walter Hill, ‘Puliaschi, Giovanni Domenico’, *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Bénigne de Bacilly, *A Commentary upon The Art of Proper Singing. Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter* (1668), *Musical Theorists in Translation, Volume VII*, trans. Austin B. Caswell (New York: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, Ltd., 1968), ix.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vii.

accompaniment of solo songs with basso continuo, particularly the *air du cour*, or courtly love song.¹⁴⁵ He begins by discussing the primary instruments used to sustain the voice at this time, which are the harpsichord, viol, and theorbo. Of these, he prefers the theorbo because it is the most graceful and accommodating, and most capable of outlining the necessary harmonies without taxing a delicate voice or obscuring its ornamentation.¹⁴⁶ This would have been of particular relevance to the *air de cour*, the second stanza of which was usually a florid version of the first with many ornaments and written-out diminutions that would have been easily overshadowed by a thick accompaniment.¹⁴⁷ Bacilly further notes that even the theorbo, played by an insensitive accompanist, can cause problems for the music and the singer. For this reason Bacilly introduces the idea of self-accompaniment:

However, it is necessary to establish the fact that if the theorbo isn't played with moderation – if the player adds too much confusing figuration (as do most accompanists, more to demonstrate the dexterity of their fingers than to aid the person they are accompanying) it then becomes an accompaniment of the theorbo by the voice rather than the reverse. Be careful to recognize this, so that in this marriage the theorbo does not become an overpowering, chiding spouse, instead of one who flatters, cajoles, and covers up one's faults.

For this reason I have found it very appropriate for students who wish to perfect themselves in singing to apply themselves to the theorbo just as studiously, provided that they have enough patience and work hard enough to reach a degree of proficiency comparable to the average theorbo player. But since the majority of them wish to reach this goal without taking the trouble to conceive of the means by which to get there, they always rest along the road and never take advantage of the trip, because of the shame of having undertaken something which doesn't reflect any glory upon them.

When the accompaniment is performed by a person other than the singer, the situation is not so advantageous as one might hope for, and I find that priding oneself on never singing without theorbo accompaniment (as a majority of singers do) smacks a little too much of the behaviour of a prima donna. It is obvious that a thousand occasions will present themselves in which there is neither a theorbo at hand, nor

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, viii.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 18.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, ix.

anyone to play it.¹⁴⁸

In this passage Bacilly makes several important and unprecedented assertions about accompaniment. First, he notes that accompanists are prone to overpowering their singer through volume and displays of virtuosity. While other theorists have written about good accompaniment and how to tastefully realize basso continuo in solo songs, Bacilly writes from the perspective of a teacher advising his student how to deal with a problematic accompanist, shifting the attention from concern about the repertoire itself to concern about the relationship between voice and accompaniment and its effect of upon the developing singer.

Second, Bacilly states that the ideal solution to the problem of an insensitive or overly demonstrative accompanist is for the singer to learn to play the accompanimental instrument. He directs this recommendation toward ‘students who wish to *perfect* themselves in singing’, acknowledging that it will take patience and effort to reach the necessary proficiency on the instrument. This suggests that Bacilly sees self-accompaniment as an advanced pedagogical tool, which poses significant challenges most students are too lazy or prideful to overcome, but leads to greater mastery over the art of singing as a whole if the necessary effort is made. Bacilly clearly conceives of self-accompaniment as an aid to the singer, stating that the student need only reach the proficiency of the average theorbo player. The student is not expected to become both a singer and a theorbo player to equal levels of virtuosity; rather the goal of self-accompaniment is to facilitate the development of the voice by enabling the student to avoid working with difficult accompanists.

Third, Bacilly identifies clearly for the first time the idea that self-accompaniment affords self-sufficiency to the singer in performance situations. Singers who are determined only to sing with accompaniment will inevitably find themselves in situations where there is either no one available to play the instrument for them, or no instrument at all. By learning to play the theorbo, the singer ensures access to an accompanist and instrument. The self-sufficiency argument would be echoed by several other sources, and become the foremost justification for self-accompaniment until the nineteenth century.

It is interesting that while Bacilly makes the self-sufficiency argument, he also clearly implies that self-accompaniment leads to better singing. An insensitive accompanist not only mars the clarity of the composition, but also taxes the singer vocally and inhibits stylistic development, and Bacilly seems to think these issues outweigh the perceived advantages of having an accompanist: ‘When the accompaniment is performed by a person

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 18-20.

other than the singer, the situation is not so advantageous as one might hope for.¹⁴⁹ He doesn't clarify what those perceived advantages might be; the obvious modern reasoning for this would be to avoid dividing the student's attention between singing and playing.

Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni (1723); *Observations on the Florid Song* (1743); *Anleitung zur Singkunst* (1757)

The most pivotal early pedagogical source to discuss self-accompanied singing is Pier Francesco Tosi's treatise *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*, first published in 1723. Tosi (1654-1732) was an Italian castrato, teacher, composer and writer who taught at one of the famous conservatories in Bologna. His treatise, which codifies past teaching as well as his own ideas, is considered by many to be the foundational document of modern singing teaching. It exerted lasting influence on contemporary singers, teachers and theorists, and is still relevant as a source of baroque performance practice information today.¹⁵⁰ The work was translated into English by Johann Ernest Galliard as *Observations on the Florid Song; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers* (1743), and into German by Johann Friedrich Agricola as *Anleitung zur Singkunst* (1757). Both Galliard and Agricola quoted Tosi's text in full while adding their own explanatory annotations, examples and anecdotes, and their translations significantly extended the reach of Tosi's opinions on self-accompaniment while also expanding upon them.

Tosi addresses self-accompaniment directly on four separate occasions in the *Opinioni*. The first occurs in the section titled 'Osservazioni per chi studia' (Observations for he who studies):

Let him learn to accompany himself if he aspires to sing well. The harpsichord urges one so strongly to study, that it triumphs over the most stubborn neglectfulness, and continually deepens one's knowledge; the obvious advantage the singer derives from this lovely instrument makes further examples and efforts to persuade unnecessary; Furthermore, it often happens to one who doesn't know how to play, that without the help of another he cannot be heard, nor at times can obey the commands of Sovereigns to great damage and greater confusion.¹⁵¹

Agricola's translation of this passage takes several small liberties of wording which make

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 18-20.

¹⁵⁰ Malcolm Boyd and John Rosselli, 'Tosi, Pier Francesco', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

¹⁵¹ Tosi, *Opinioni de' Cantori Antichi*, 53, translation by Robin Bier.

the meaning more explicit, noting that ‘the harpsichord invites the student, with such great attraction, to diligence that with it negligence may be overcome, and insight into the music becomes ever deeper’, and calling the singer’s inability to obey the command from a nobleman to sing a ‘disadvantage’ and an ‘embarrassment’.¹⁵² Agricola further reinforces the self-sufficiency argument in his annotations to Tosi’s chapter ‘Observations for the Singing Teacher’.¹⁵³ Galliard’s translation adds nothing new to the Tosi, but omits the point that the attraction of the harpsichord helps to overcome a student’s laziness. In all versions the meaning of the final statement is clear: knowing how to self-accompany enables the singer to perform on command regardless of who else is present, and this was necessary in order to satisfy the nobility. The beginning of the passage is less straightforward: Tosi says the student must learn to self-accompany in order to ‘sing well’ (*cantar bene*), but the rest of the passage is concerned with motivation to practice, development of general musicianship, and flexibility as a performer. In this case ‘sing well’ implies ‘become an accomplished singer’, and self-accompaniment is a means toward achieving that and a vehicle for displaying it.

Tosi’s next mention of self-accompaniment comes in the section ‘Dell’ Arie’ (‘About arias’), during discussion of the importance of skilled improvisation and ornamentation in the performance of arias:

He who studies despite a lack of natural talent should remember for his consolation that intonation, expression, *messa di voce*, appoggiaturas, trills, divisions, and accompanying oneself are the principle qualities, and are not insurmountable difficulties. I know that they alone do not suffice for good singing, and that one would need to be crazy to content oneself with merely not singing badly, but one is wont to call on the help of artifice, which seldom ignores the call, and sometimes comes of its own accord. It is enough to study.¹⁵⁴

Here, Tosi groups self-accompaniment together with the range of vocal effects and skills taught in his treatise. His intent is to distil the many elements of professional singing of the highest level into the bare technical essentials, so that even the student with no innate talent for improvisation may systematically build the skills required for performance. The techniques listed, which are both technical and interpretive, are the foundation of bel canto vocal technique.

Agricola’s translation of this passage adds small qualifying details to each item on

¹⁵² Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing (1757)*, trans. Julianne C. Baird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 185.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁵⁴ Tosi, *Opinioni de’ Cantori Antichi*, 62, translation by Robin Bier.

Tosi's list, which further emphasize that this is an endorsement of the development of solid vocal technique. While Tosi lists 'intonation, expression, *messa di voce*, appoggiaturas, trills, divisions, and accompanying oneself', Agricola specifies 'pure intonation; expression appropriate to the words; crisp trills; clear divisions; and, finally, the ability to accompany oneself at the keyboard are indeed very necessary qualities of a singer'.¹⁵⁵ Agricola also states more clearly than Tosi that if all of these techniques are mastered, even in the absence of real talent, good music-making should follow: 'the matters noted above tend to invite art to come to the rescue most accommodatingly: it is seldom completely absent, but often appears of its own accord and uncalled'.¹⁵⁶

Tosi's choice to list self-accompaniment amongst these other qualities befitting the professional singer is a significant pedagogical endorsement, and also seems anachronistic at first glance. Self-accompaniment is the item on the list that doesn't fit: though it is an element of performance practice and a specific technique that can be learned, it is not an ornament nor an act of producing and controlling the voice. Several of Agricola's annotations from an earlier part of the treatise shed some light on this, however. In 'Observations for the Singing Teacher', Agricola noted:

Because it is very advantageous for the singer to be able to play the keyboard and to understand the rules of figured bass – not only so that he can accompany himself and thus sing whenever he wants to, without needing an accompanist, but also so that he can fashion the extempore variations with absolute accuracy and certainty – for all who would excel in singing it is thus advisable to try to study the keyboard and the figured bass.¹⁵⁷

Agricola further reinforces this observation in 'Concerning Appoggiaturas', where he discusses the value of working out ornamentation in advance of performance or even having the composer notate the desired ornamentation to guard against uninspired singers:

Some of us German singers on the other side of the mountains [i.e. the Alps] would prefer, in the event of not being able to invent something clever ourselves, to be guided by the composer or, at least, by the accompanist (if the piece is too difficult or too uncomfortable for us to accompany ourselves while practicing at the keyboard).¹⁵⁸

From this we can see that according to Agricola, self-accompaniment was advantageous not just because of self-sufficiency in performance, but also in practice because it improved the

¹⁵⁵ Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, 191.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 191.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 86.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 92.

singer's ability to improvise and ornament. Self-accompaniment and knowledge of figured bass were clearly linked in this respect: a theoretical knowledge of figured bass alone, without the ability to realize it on the keyboard skilfully enough to allow for singing in real time to the accompaniment, would not afford much practical advantage to the process of working out and practicing ornamentation. In the light of Agricola's commentary, it is clear that Tosi's choice to include self-accompaniment in the list of essential *bel canto* vocal techniques was a reminder to the reader that self-accompaniment both served as a display for their accomplishments, and as a tool to develop them.

Tosi refers to self-accompaniment twice more in the course of the treatise, both in the section titled 'Osservazioni Per chi canta' ('Observations for the singer'). These passages introduce a more artistic and interpretive element to the role of self-accompaniment, which until this point has been presented as entirely practical:

Whoever knows not how to steal time in singing, knows not how to compose, nor how to accompany himself, and stands deprived of the best taste and of the greatest intelligence.¹⁵⁹.... One marvels at the singer who, having a thorough understanding of time, does not then make use of it because of never having applied himself to the study of composition nor accompanying himself. This mistake makes him believe that to be a leading man it is enough to sing confidently, and he does not realize that the greatest difficulty and all the beauty of the profession consists in that which he has neglected; he lacks that art which teaches the winning of time through knowing how to lose it, which is a result of Counterpoint, but not so delightful as knowing how to lose [time] in order to recover it: these are the ingenious creations of those who understand composition and have the best taste.¹⁶⁰

In these passages Tosi presents self-accompaniment as an element of interpretive finesse rather than technical skill. The first statement lists self-accompaniment alongside knowledge of *rubato* and composition as a mark of intelligence and good taste. Tosi's second statement reveals why: self-accompaniment is a performance construct that enables stylish *rubato*. Tosi states that a singer who understands the concept of *rubato* nonetheless fails to apply it if he has not studied composition or cannot accompany himself. Tosi does not explain how either of these elements was conducive to *rubato* singing, but it follows that the role of compositional knowledge was theoretical: a good understanding of the style and construction of the music would help the singer to recognize where and how *rubato* should

¹⁵⁹ Tosi, *Opinioni de' Cantori Antichi*, 99, translation by Robin Bier.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 105.

be applied. The role of self-accompaniment was therefore practical; the means by which the singer acted on his knowledge.

It is problematic that Tosi does not actually explain how self-accompaniment enabled the singer to successfully use tempo rubato, because of how broadly the concept of rubato has been interpreted through history. Both Galliard and Agricola offered explanatory notes to clarify what Tosi meant by *rubare il tempo*, which provide more context for understanding the role of self-accompaniment. Galliard offers the following explanation of what kind of rubato could occur in solo accompanied vocal music, and how it should be performed:

Our author has often mentioned Time; the Regard to it, the Strictness of it, and how much it is neglected and unobserv'd. In this Place speaking of stealing the Time, it regards particularly the Vocal, or the Performance on a single Instrument in the *Pathetick* and *Tender*; when the Bass goes an exactly regular Pace, the other Part retards or anticipates in a singular Manner, for the Sake of Expression, but after That returns to its Exactness, to be guided by the Bass. Experience and Taste must teach it. A mechanical Method of going on with the Bass will easily distinguish the Merit of the other Manner.¹⁶¹

Agricola explains even more precisely that ‘Distorting the note values [*rubare il tempo*] actually means to take away from a prescribed note some of its value and add it to the next one, or vice versa’.¹⁶² Julianne Baird affirms that in Tosi’s time the correct use of *tempo rubato* was widely held to be ‘a critical aspect of the singer’s good taste and expressivity’, and defines Tosi’s rubato as ‘a rhythmic displacement that does not disturb the underlying tempo and that consists in the borrowing of time rather than the stealing of it’.¹⁶³ This device was often applied as an element of ornamentation in da capo arias and at cadences, and Baird links the application of it in performance to self-accompaniment:

A singer’s improvisatory skill might be measured by his use of the *rubato* in the rhythmic alterations of his da capo divisions and by his ability to keep steady rhythm in the bass while accompanying himself at the keyboard. Self-accompaniment was required to satisfy the nobility

¹⁶¹ Johann Ernst Galliard, commentary in Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, trans. Johann Ernst Galliard (London: 1743), 2nd edition (London: William Reeves Bookseller Ltd., 1967), 156.

¹⁶² Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, 222.

¹⁶³ Julianne Baird, ‘Introduction: Agricola’s Treatise’, in Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, 32. Contemporary definitions of *tempo rubato* included note distortion over a steady bass, stealing time, and anticipation.

and the singer was measured against other singers by his skill in this.¹⁶⁴

In the context of these definitions, the most likely explanation for how self-accompaniment enabled good rubato singing is the nature of the ensemble between voice and accompaniment. The self-accompanied singer, exercising simultaneous control over the timing of both bass line and melody, was able to direct exactly when and to what extent the melody gained or lost time while ensuring that the accompaniment proceeded steadily.

Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange (1780)

Johann Adam Hiller (1728-1804) was a German composer, writer and dedicated singing teacher who wrote several treatises on singing, teaching and vocal ornamentation in the second half of the eighteenth century. He founded a long-lived and successful school of music and singing in Leipzig, and also held posts as Kapellmeister to the Duke of Courland, Musikdirektor in Breslau, and Kantor of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. His 1780 treatise on vocal performance and ornamentation, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange*, contains two brief mentions of self-accompaniment which affirm that Hiller, himself a well-rounded musician who was a fine singer and could play a variety of instruments to a competent standard, considered the ability to play the piano integral to the development of a skilled singer. Early in the treatise he states, ‘it is a necessary aid for the singer to play the piano’.¹⁶⁵ Later he expands upon the idea of why keyboard skills are important: ‘If the singer were able, as he studied, to support himself harmonically on a keyboard instrument, he would be in a position to test the value of his ideas with his own ears’.¹⁶⁶

The Singer’s Preceptor, or Corri’s Treatise on Vocal Music (1810)

Domenico Corri (1746-1825) was a composer, music publisher and teacher who studied with castrato pedagogue Nicola Porpora in Naples from 1763-1767 before later establishing himself in Edinburgh and London. His treatise *The Singer’s Preceptor* presents his autobiography followed by an extensive essay on the origins of vocal music and approaches to mastering the art of singing, supplemented by *solfeggi* and vocalizes. Though it published in the early nineteenth century, Corri’s commentary is relevant through his connection to the castrato singing schools, Porpora and his time in Naples and Rome. Corri explicitly addresses the practice of self-accompaniment in his concluding section,

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Johann Adam Hiller, *Treatise on Vocal Performance and Ornamentation* (1780), ed. and trans. Suzanne J. Beicken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 48.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 137.

‘Recapitulation and Remarks’, where he offers advice to the singer who chooses to self-accompany in performance:

13. If you accompany yourself, remember that the voice is principal, the accompaniment should only be subservient, and instead of playing Octaves or Chords with the left hand (as some persons frequently do) content yourself with what Handel, Haydn, or other eminent Composers may have assigned; the most pardonable fault is the playing less than is written, rather than the adding to a Composition.¹⁶⁷

In this passage, Corri indicates that self-accompanied singer’s goal was to support and promote the voice, and to that end, a plain bass line in the left hand and simple realization or melodic doubling with the right hand would be sufficient. In the context of this passage, the subsequent two numbers can be taken as further advice to the self-accompanist:

14. In any passage where the notes of the Melody are in Unison with the Bass, if you possess knowledge of Thorough Bass, do not use it here by putting Chords – for it must be supposed it was the intention of the Composer to have the Unison, and it would be presuming to make any alteration.

15. It is not judicious to play accompaniments to Songs which differ widely from the Melody, unless you are perfect in Intonation; many Singers are led into this error by the desire of appearing possessed of greater skill, but it may sometimes betray defects.¹⁶⁸

Earlier in the *Preceptor*, Corri offers some instructions to the singer at the start of the *solfeggi*, which are presented with accompaniments of varying difficulty. He writes: ‘He should not therefore go farther than his abilities will allow, but advance gradually on from one to the other, omitting those of too complicated accompaniments, taking the Bass only, and practice those Gamuts which are within the natural compass of the Voice’.¹⁶⁹ This advice implies that the singer is playing his own accompaniments during practice, and that Corri expected and accepted this provided the singer did not overreach his own abilities to focus on the voice. This concern foreshadows the gradual trend in nineteenth- and twentieth-century works on vocal pedagogy, which cease to address self-accompaniment directly but increasingly discourage any activity that may impede the singer’s focus, posture or support mechanisms. The changing treatment of self-accompaniment in later pedagogical writings and teaching systems will be considered in Chapter Eight.

¹⁶⁷ Domenico Corri, *The Singer’s Preceptor; or Corri’s Treatise on Vocal Music* (London: Chappell & Co., 1810), 72.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

In this initial study, emphasis was placed on major works perpetrated by teachers from or connected to the castrato singing schools (Tosi and translators Agricola and Hiller; Corri), alongside a variety of other examples chosen for their explicit content (Bacilly) and transitional nature from earlier repertoire (Caccini, Puliaschi). The same ambiguity of vocabulary exists here as with all other types of source material, in that the act of self-accompaniment is often not labelled using those terms; the treatises by Bacilly, Tosi and translators and Corri are all notable exceptions. It is expected that further research will discover additional early pedagogical works in which self-accompaniment is discussed.

The role of self-accompaniment in early vocal pedagogy

Practical rationale

In the sources for this case study, the role of self-accompaniment is overall a practical one. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century singing treatises that refer to self-accompaniment do so positively, presenting it as a vehicle for the singer's professional success. Considered as a unity, the commentary by Caccini, Puliaschi, Bacilly, Tosi, Galliard, Agricola, Hiller, Corri and their contemporaries reveals two overarching rationales for incorporating self-accompaniment into the core curriculum of aspiring professional singers, particularly castrati, during this period. The first of these rationales was technical: self-accompaniment was seen to promote the singer's voice, musicianship and ability to study. This was accomplished in a variety of ways, some of which related to the development of a well-rounded musician, others more specifically to developing good vocal production and technique, and others to the development of interpretive understanding and taste. Because all of these points are presented and argued from the perspective of the teacher's and student's goal of delivering a technically and musically sound performance, they can all be understood as components of a technique-related rationale for self-accompaniment, and are further broken down as follows:

1. *Incitement to diligent practice.* Self-accompaniment inspires the singer to study more frequently and with more determination, because of the attraction of the keyboard instrument and the mastery of technique and coordination required in order to self-accompany professionally.
2. *Route to harmonic understanding.* Self-accompaniment enables the singer to study the harmony of the music being sung, and to test the accuracy and validity of

ornamental ideas in the appropriate harmonic context during practice, without the assistance of another musician. This leads to more informed interpretations and in the end, greater musical intelligence and taste in performance.

3. *Focus on the needs of the developing voice.* By eliminating the need to work with an accompanist, self-accompaniment allows the singer to practice and perform with appropriate instrumental support while avoiding two common struggles which can hinder vocal progress: vocal fatigue as a result of forcing the voice to compete with an accompaniment that is too thick, loud or insensitive, and tension and irregular support and breath flow as a result of attempting to coordinate tempo and timing with an accompanist who does not perfectly anticipate the singer's needs.

4. *Interpretive freedom.* Self-accompaniment allows the singer to apply his own interpretive ideas at will, particularly in the practice and performance of *tempo rubato*, which required independent control and pacing of vocal part and accompaniment (specifically, bass line) as well as adequate knowledge of harmony, figured bass and compositional style to determine where and how much to manipulate time. *Tempo rubato* was a crucial mark of good musical taste in Tosi's time, making this aspect of self-accompaniment perhaps its foremost artistic value during the height of the castrato singing schools.

Social and political rationale

The other rationale for incorporating self-accompaniment into early vocal pedagogy was a social and political one. We saw earlier that Baird, interpreting Tosi and Agricola's explanations about the importance of self-accompaniment to the performance of *tempo rubato*, wrote somewhat ambiguously: 'Self-accompaniment was required to satisfy the nobility and the singer was measured against other singers by his skill in this'.¹⁷⁰ Tosi and all of his subsequent translators offered a clear explanation: self-accompaniment made the singer self-sufficient and therefore able to perform on demand, no matter the situation. The employment of self-accompaniment in this context was an act of efficiency and economy rather than artistic ideals, as can be gleaned from the following description by Charles de Brosses, in his letter 'On Spectacles and Music' in which he discusses the merits of Italian music in comparison to the French:

The defect of their [the Italians'] music, which they admit themselves, is

¹⁷⁰ Baird, 'Introduction: Agricola's Treatise', in Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, 32.

that it is only suitable for the stage and for concerts, being unable to avoid accompaniment. A singer of whom you request an air in a salon will not sing without going to the harpsichord to accompany herself, playing the bass with the left hand, and the melody, not the chords, with the right; they all know enough for that.¹⁷¹

This statement was written less than two decades after the first publication of Tosi's treatise, and his technical advice to the teacher, student and professional singer in a social context. Though Tosi taught primarily male singers, de Brosses refers to female singers; from this we can infer that Tosi's performance practices and study techniques were being applied more broadly across the spectrum of professional singers, with varying degrees of skill (De Brosses describes a more skeletal accompaniment than Tosi and his translators, who advocated that singers learn figured bass). Corri, writing in 1810, recommended an approach that agrees with De Brosses' observations. De Brosses's assertion that *all* Italian singers possessed adequate keyboard skills to give a vocal performance whilst playing the bass line and melody gives us a glimpse of a more diversified approach to vocal pedagogy and performance than what is expected today.

Another explanation for why self-accompaniment was necessary to please the nobility may have been the association of the performance practice with other aspects of musical accomplishment and taste (such as *tempo rubato*). If self-accompaniment was understood as an element of the successful performance of the fashionable expressive devices of the time, it may have in turn been fashionable to be entertained by a self-accompanied singer. This would have been supported by lingering associations between self-accompaniment and the elite courtly music making of previous generations of musicians and aristocracy. Caccini's advice for the self-accompanied singer in *Le nuove musiche*, for instance, forms a close artistic link to the performance practices of Molza and the *concerto delle donne*, as well as Brancaccio, Ferrabosco and their contemporaries.

Contemporary accounts of performances in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries affirm that self-accompaniment was actively practiced by professional singers in salon situations, and that self-accompaniment was a skill valued by employers of singers. For example, in his capacity as a proprietor of the Pantheon in Rome in 1778, Charles Burney requested recommendations from colleague Francesco Roncaglia of singers to employ for the Pantheon's subscription concerts. Among Roncaglia's recommendations was castrato Michele Benedetti, whom he described as 'an excellent singer....He sings soprano and plays

¹⁷¹ Charles de Brosses, 'Spectacles et Musique', in *Le Président de Brosses en Italie. Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740. Deuxième édition authentique revue sur les manuscrits, annotée et précédée d'un Essai sur la vie et les écrits de l'auteur par M. R. Colomb. Tome II* (Paris: Didier et C., Libraires-Éditeurs, 1858), 381.

the harpsichord well; in summary, I think he would be suitable for the Pantheon'.¹⁷² We can assume that Benedetti was trained in one of the Italian conservatories according to the basic principles notated by Tosi, and Roncaglia's endorsement illustrates that keyboard skills were highly valued in a professional singer.

The majority of the repertoire connected to this case study, particularly the earlier treatises (Caccini, Puliaschi, Bacilly, Tosi) falls into the general category of solo song with basso continuo. In this repertoire the accompaniment is largely subservient to the singing, supporting and enhancing the voice, and assisting the singer harmonically and stylistically. We see this accompanimental relationship reflected in the pedagogical application of self-accompaniment: the student is encouraged to study compositional style and figured bass, and to learn how to tastefully coordinate and oppose the timing of melody over bass line. In some cases, the student is encouraged to learn to play an accompanying instrument in order to ensure an unobtrusive accompaniment. While self-accompaniment was considered a challenging art to master, it wasn't necessary to become a virtuoso on the accompanying instrument in order to take advantage of it.

At the same time, there is evidence of scope for greater virtuosity and artistic accomplishment. Though the first goal was to aid the development and promotion of the singer, the treatises themselves indicate an awareness of the artistic potential in the self-accompanied singer's coordination of voice and accompaniment. Caccini incorporated self-accompaniment into his explanation of *sprezzatura* in music; he and Bacilly both asserted that self-accompaniment was the best way to perform specific repertoire, in part because the singer would be unencumbered by the artistic whims of another musician, and they both also noted that self-accompanied singing was a challenging skill which required diligent study but was worth the effort. Tosi argued that self-accompaniment was ideal, even necessary, for performing *tempo rubato*; his translators, particularly Agricola, supported this argument while implying that the qualities of self-accompaniment which made it conducive to *tempo rubato* might be more broadly applied and retain their value even as *tempo rubato* by Tosi's definition fell out of fashion.

These early singing treatises and teachers set a precedent for future vocal pedagogy and performance in their advocacy of self-accompaniment, by establishing it as a variable context in which to train a singer's voice and demonstrate a singer's vocal ability. This influence extended beyond the original castrato singing schools; and evidence of self-accompaniment in singing lessons and auditions can be found as extending into the late nineteenth century, well after written works on vocal pedagogy ceased to explicitly

¹⁷² Letter from Francesco Roncaglia to Charles Burney, in Alvero Ribiero, *The Letters of Dr. Charles Burney, Volume I, 1751-1784* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 255 fn, translation by Robin Bier.

advocate self-accompaniment. For example, on 12 April, 1776, Charles Burney wrote to a Mrs. Raper, offering advice regarding the sequencing of the musical education of a young lady in Mrs. Raper's charge. He advised a detailed series of finger and keyboard studies, working toward the goal of being able to accompany her voice in vocalises and ear training exercises: 'In the mean Time I would recommend to her slow practice both with her Fingers & Voice, a true & open shake – & when she can play such Hexachords as are in her Compass, she will be able to accompany herself in singing them to the well-known Syllables Do, re, mi, fa, sol, La'.¹⁷³ This basic approach to training the ear and voice by anchoring it to the keyboard instrument would still be echoed by some twentieth-century teachers who otherwise discouraged any form of self-accompaniment. Accompanying one's vocalises bears little relationship to artistic performance of self-accompanied solos, but does assist in establishing the idea of singing student seated at the keyboard and playing while practising.

Another example of self-accompaniment in a singing teaching context comes from the letters of W. A. Mozart, who took students in singing, keyboard playing and composition off and on throughout his adult life, and encouraged his singing students to perform self-accompanied in their lessons on multiple occasions. In January and February of 1778 in Mannheim, Mozart taught some lessons to the daughter of a Herr Weber. He praised her singing and her playing, and encouraged her to study and perform his own compositions in her lessons to good results:

[...] she sings indeed most admirably and has a lovely, pure voice. [...] She sings most excellently my aria for De Amicis with those horribly difficult passages and she is to sing it at Kirchheim-Bolanden. [...] She accompanies herself very well and she also plays galanterie quite respectably.¹⁷⁴

Later, Mozart composed an aria specifically for Mlle Weber, and described the process to his father thus:

It's an Andante sostenuto (preceded by a short recitative); then follows the second part, *Nel seno a destarmi*, and then the sostenuto again. When it was finished, I said to Mlle. Weber: learn the aria yourself. Sing it as you think it ought to go; then let me hear it and afterwards I will tell you candidly what pleases and what displeases me. After a

¹⁷³ Ribiero, *The Letters of Dr. Charles Burney*, 208.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from W.A. Mozart to Leopold Mozart, Mannheim, 17 January 1778, in Emily Anderson, *The Letters of Mozart and his Family* (London: Macmillan Press, 1985), 447-448. 'De Amicis' is Italian soprano Anna de Amicis, who was a favourite of both Mozart and his father, and who created the role of Giunia in Mozart's *Lucio Silla* (Milan 1772).

couple of days I went to the Webers and she sang it for me, accompanying herself. I was obliged to confess that she had sung it exactly as I wished and as I should have taught it to her myself.¹⁷⁵

These lessons presumably focused on musicianship, interpretation and keyboard technique rather than vocal technique. We know that Mozart could have played any accompaniment required, particularly his own compositions. The fact that he chose not to do so and was pleased with his student's performance musically attests both to the normalcy of self-accompaniment in vocal study at the time and to the technical success of his student, even with virtuosic concert and operatic repertoire.

In this case study self-accompaniment is practiced and advocated for singers and repertoire for the public and sacred as well as private platforms. The castrati were stars on the operatic stage and in church, and while their self-accompanied performances seem to have been mostly designed for the salon, anything they did in the private sphere influenced their reputation on the public stage, and vice versa. The association of self-accompaniment with the castrati's legendary vocal powers and reputations reinforced the image of the self-accompanied singer as ideal, even celestial musician. According to historian Patrick Barbier, this imagery was powerful and tangible at the time:

In popular imagery everything brought the castrati close to angels....objects of contemplation, even veneration, they merged with the traditional figures of angel musicians and were the simultaneous incarnation...of purity and virginity. In churches, thanks to voices that seemed to defy earthly laws, they constituted a privileged and unique link between God, music and mankind.¹⁷⁶

The treatises were focused on training and technique – the nuts and bolts behind the mystique – rather than the effect of that technique upon the audience. Contemporary accounts of self-accompanied performances by castrati, on the other hand, do give a glimpse of the audience's perspective. The following account by Charles Burney of encountering Caffarelli at a private party in Naples in 1770 is clearly shaded by Burney's awareness of the singer's former glory:

The whole company had given Caffarelli over when, behold! he arrived in great good humor; and contrary to all expectations, was, with little entreaty, prevailed upon to sing. Many notes in his voice are now thin, but there are still traits in his performance sufficient to convince

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 497. The aria is concert aria 'Alcandro, lo confesso – Nel seno a destarmi', K. 294.

¹⁷⁶ Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati. The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon* (London: Souvenir Press, Ltd., 1996), 17.

those who hear him of his having been an amazingly fine singer; he accompanied himself, and sang without any other instrument than the harpsichord; expression and grace, with great neatness in all he attempts, are his characteristics. Caffarelli was then probably sixty.¹⁷⁷

Burney's account demonstrates the skill, control and taste Caffarelli (presumably any of the great castrati) was able to exercise, and the effect he could make upon the listener, even at the end of his vocal career.

Conclusion

The teaching of self-accompaniment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a part of a larger approach to early vocal pedagogy which advocated the cultivation of a diversity of skills in the professional singer, also including the study of composition, figured bass and keyboard skills in addition to rigorous study of vocal technique, diction, expression and ornamentation. Evidence of the teaching and application of self-accompaniment appears in Italy, France, England and Germany throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after which treatises cease to explicitly advocate the practice though there is ample evidence that self-accompaniment continued to play a role in performance and the study of singing.

The technical and socio-political advantages of self-accompaniment to the professional singers who were a product of the pedagogical approach outlined in this case study may well have applied to the singers of the previous case study as well, but the sources do not make this explicit, focusing instead on the aesthetic effects of the performance practice. Caccini provided a transition in written treatment of self-accompaniment in *Le nuove musiche* when he linked self-accompaniment to the concept of *sprezzatura*, while also introducing the idea of self-accompaniment as a route to self-sufficiency in interpretation and performance. In this way, the practical incorporation of self-accompaniment into historical writings on vocal pedagogy could be seen as a logical continuation and codification of renaissance courtly expectations for elite singers.

It would be a simplification of the sources to conclude that in the Baroque and Classical Periods self-accompaniment transformed from an aesthetic tool to a practical one. The codification of self-accompaniment as a practical tool occurred in parallel with on-going private performances, confirming the extent to which self-accompaniment was already recognized and valued in musical society by the time the authors were writing. By formalizing these values and breaking them down into specific skills which could be taught

¹⁷⁷ Charles Burney, quoted in Henry Pleasants, *The Great Singers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 81.

and justified in practical and technical ways, the treatises, teachers and students examined here normalised self-accompaniment as part of a professional singer's training, setting a significant precedent for the future.

Chapter Six

The Diva's Drawing Room: Self-Accompanied Singing by Maria Malibran, Pauline Viardot-García, and Jenny Lind on the Nineteenth-Century Concert Stage

Introduction

In the nineteenth century, self-accompaniment became a highly visible and prominent performance practice. Whereas previously, self-accompanied singing had largely been confined to the court and salon, now it was employed by a broad range of performers in diverse public settings, from the theatre to the concert stage. This increase in public performances, combined with an increase in the frequency and detail of concert advertisements and reviews (particularly in public newspapers in the United Kingdom), creates the impression that many more singers were performing this way, though this may be partly due to changes in the source material. At the time of writing, over three hundred and fifty public performances have been documented in British newspapers alone between the years 1761-1930. This abundance of material enables a clear picture of the performance practice with respect to performance spaces, instruments, presentation, repertoire, and performers.

At the same time as the sheer number of public self-accompanied performances increased, the act of self-accompaniment itself became increasingly high profile through the performances of celebrated opera and concert singers, notably international prima donnas Maria Malibran, Pauline Viardot-García and Jenny Lind. These singers were household names who drew capacity audiences, and whose artistic choices had the power to ignite and reinforce social trends. While the practical justifications for self-accompaniment (particularly independence) taught by Tosi and his contemporaries were still relevant for many singers in salon settings, they no longer applied to public performances by singers like Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind, for whom self-accompaniment was a clear artistic choice. In this case study, we see the role of self-accompaniment develop a two-fold symbolism for nineteenth-century audiences when it was presented on the concert stage: on one hand evoking the domesticity of the home and the intimacy of the elite salon, and on the other, evoking the image of the ideal musician.

Maria Malibran (1808-1836)

Maria Malibran, born Maria-Felicia García, was the elder daughter of Manuel García (father, 1775-1832). García was himself an internationally renowned tenor, teacher, and self-accompanist. He frequently appeared upon the Spanish operatic stage as a self-accompanied singer upon the guitar in *tonadillas*, some of which incorporated self-accompaniment directly into the plot. He continued to perform these and other Spanish folk songs until the end of his career, managing, according to James Radomski, to ‘simultaneously [maintain] a reputation of Italian composer, French composer, Italian singer, Spanish guitarist and singer, and singing master’.¹⁷⁸ In fact it may have been in his performances of his native music that he had the most long-lived success: ‘His fiery, passionate acting, his fine tenor voice and his virtuoso technique enchanted the public.... On stage, singing his own music and accompanying himself on the guitar, he was always sure of applause’.¹⁷⁹

García taught singing to both his daughters and their brother Manuel, who would later become one of the foremost singing teachers of the century. García père was a demanding teacher, and the intensity of his training would inspire critics to hail Maria Malibran as a throw-back to the greatest singers of the previous century; on 21 June 1828, an article in *Le Globe* compared her training to the daily regime undergone by the great castrati and suggested that in her the public was hearing the best trained singer since those days.¹⁸⁰ Malibran took after her father both in her captivating stage presence and her choice and ability to perform self-accompanied, though she did so in a greater variety of contexts than her father. Not in chronological order, the majority of her self-accompanied performances fall into one of the following categories: entr’acte performances in theatres (opera or straight theatre), character performances within an opera, an isolated performance on a variety concert, or private performances in the salon or drawing room. We will consider examples of her performances in each of these contexts in turn.

Entr’acte performances in theatres

In August of 1833, Maria Malibran was engaged by the Theatre-Royal, Haymarket in London to enhance their evening performances. From August 13 to 24, Malibran appeared either between acts or at the end of the evening’s drama (or dramas) to sing a few songs.

¹⁷⁸ Radomski, *Manuel García*, 149.

¹⁷⁹ Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran*, 24.

¹⁸⁰ Radomski, *Manuel García*, 236.

Her repertoire for each of these performances consisted of one Italian aria and one or two popular songs. The theatre's advertisements for each of these performances all resemble the following advertisement, from *The Morning Post*, London, 24 August 1833:

This evening, positively the Last Night of Madame Malibran, who will sing on this occasion three of her most popular Songs, 'The deep, deep Sea' accompanied by herself on the Pianoforte, 'Una voce poco fa', and the celebrated Song of 'Through the Wood, through the Wood' accompanied by herself on the Pianoforte.¹⁸¹

The repertoire she performed throughout this run at Haymarket included the following pieces:

'The Deep, Deep Sea', from *Honest Frauds* (1830), by Charles Edward Horn
 'Through the Wood' (1842), cavatina by Charles Edward Horne
 'Una voce poco fa', cavatina from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Giacomo Rossini
 'Vincesti iniqua Sorte', recitative and aria from *Sigismondo* by Rossini
 'Ah! S'estinto ancor mi vuoi', from *Caritea, regina di Spagna*, by Mercadante
 'Nacqui all'affanno e al pianto', from *La Cenerentola* by Rossini
 'The Light Guitar', composer and source unknown
 'Le Petit Tambour', French air, composer unknown

This 1833 Haymarket Theatre season was not the only time Malibran performed this way. She previously gave an entr'acte self-accompanied performance in Liverpool in 1829, where she sang a set of Tyrolese airs between the acts of a play. The *Liverpool Mercury etc.* issued a detailed review of the evening:

Madame Garcia – On Saturday evening this charming warbler gratified the Liverpool audience by several pleasing recitatives and songs, introduced between the acts of the play, and after the curtain had dropped. She was most rapturously applauded, and her Tyrolese airs, accompanied by herself, quite enchanted the audience. When the first was loudly encored she immediately obeyed the summons, but substituted another air, equally pleasing; and she was so much gratified by the enthusiasm of her reception, that she volunteered a third air, to the undiminished delight of the company, who accompanied her exit with showers of applause. Her voice and manner are equally pleasing, and she can command a most unusual compass, with a perfect unity of tone throughout all her extraordinary range. We hope to hear this lady

¹⁸¹ 'Theatre Royal, Haymarket', *Morning Post* [London, England], 24 August 1833.

again ere long.¹⁸²

This article gives us a better idea of how Malibran's contribution unfolded, as well as demonstrating that Malibran's choice to self-accompany did not hinder her listeners from forming a positive impression of both the quality of her voice and her technique.

The wordings of some of the 1833 Haymarket Theatre advertisements imply that when Malibran sang both an opera aria and a popular song, the song was self-accompanied while the aria was not. Other advertisements for the same run of performances do not make this clear. In the case of the performance quoted above, both possibilities are intriguing. If all her selections were self-accompanied, then we must consider the possibility that not only popular songs and ballads, but also virtuosic opera arias (in this case, Rossini's cavatina 'Una voce poco fa') could successfully be performed this way. If only the popular songs were self-accompanied, and this seems more likely, this implies a distinct artistic choice to abandon the service of the accompanist or accompanying ensemble used for the aria. All of these advertisements for Malibran's entr'acte performances give impression that the self-accompanied entr'acte song is a particular highlight of the entire evening, and is expected to draw audiences to the theatre.

Malibran was not the only prima donna who was engaged for such entr'acte performances. Soprano Miss Turpin was engaged to do precisely the same thing as Malibran at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in October of 1834, also singing Horn's 'The deep, deep sea!'.¹⁸³ Henry Pleasants, in his *The Great Singers*, tells us that Nellie Melba, almost a century later, was often called upon to sing additional songs after an opera in which she starred was over: 'When the show was over, a piano would be pushed through the curtain, and she would sing Home, Sweet Home and Comin' thro' the Rye and Tosti's Mattinata, just as Patti had done'.¹⁸⁴

Character performances in operas

In April of 1829 Malibran played the role of Rosina in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, produced at the King's Theatre in London. Malibran's self-accompaniment occurred during the Lesson Scene (act II scene III), when Malibran replaced Rossini's aria 'Vincesti iniqua sorte', with a French air which she sang while accompanying herself on the pianoforte. It was well-received and encored:

¹⁸² 'Madame Garcia', *Liverpool Mercury etc* [Liverpool, England], 18 September 1829.

¹⁸³ 'Public Amusements', *Morning Chronicle* [London, England], 10 October 1834.

¹⁸⁴ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 275-276. Melba was in the opera whereas Malibran and Turpin were not, but the context is musically similar.

Instead of her song, ‘Vincesti iniqua sorte’, a very pretty French air was substituted, in which she accompanied herself on the pianoforte. This air was executed in the happiest manner, and also received an encore; however, Madame M. Garcia again sat down to the pianoforte, and with much naiveté sang another French air instead of it.¹⁸⁵

Malibran repeated this same performance on another occasion in Rome, to very different reception. The Countess de Merlin described the occasion thus in her memoir of Malibran’s life:

She did not, however, stay long in Lombardy, but hastened on to Rome, where she made an engagement for four nights. She was, however, but indifferently received; she had the bad taste to sing *two French romances* in the scene of the music lesson in the ‘Barbieri’, which the Romans looked upon as an ill-timed pleasantry, and they showed their sense of it.¹⁸⁶

These two accounts of the same context for self-accompaniment indicate that it was a pattern for Malibran to accompany herself in character on the operatic stage. In fact, she was far from the first (or last) singer to embellish Rossini’s music lesson scene in this manner. Since the seventeenth century it had been common practice for singers to bring a selection of preferred arias (*arie de baule*, or ‘trunk arias’) with them from engagement to engagement, which they would insert into the opera at hand. Hilary Poriss calls the lesson scene in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* ‘the most vibrant example in the entire *bel canto* repertory’, in which context a vast range of arias were substituted by many different prima donnas over almost a two hundred year history.¹⁸⁷ Of the many Rosinas to substitute arias, many of those are known to have performed at least some of their lesson scene insertions self-accompanied. According to Poriss, Malibran’s younger sister Viardot-García was known for inserting Spanish songs and Chopin mazurkas into Rossini’s lesson scene,¹⁸⁸ and there is ample evidence that Viardot-García habitually performed this repertoire self-accompanied in other contexts. Adelina Patti as Rosina expanded the lesson scene into a mini concert, offering multiple insertions amongst which Bishop’s ‘Home, Sweet Home’, ‘Comin’ thro the Rye’ and Tosti’s song *Mattinata* are asserted to have been self-accompanied on at least some occasions.¹⁸⁹ French soprano Anna de la Grange’s insertions included Rode’s

¹⁸⁵ ‘Theatre’, *Morning Post* [London, England], 29 April 1829.

¹⁸⁶ Countess de Merlin, *Memoires of Madame Malibran by the Countess de Merlin, and other intimate friends. With a selection from her correspondence, and notices of the progress of the musical drama in England. vol 1* (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 161.

¹⁸⁷ Poriss, *Changing the Score*, 11.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 158, 162.

¹⁸⁹ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 275-276.

Variations (a vocal adaptation of Pierre Rode's *Air varié* in G major for violin and piano, Op. 10 (1808) self-accompanied.¹⁹⁰ Nellie Melba's self-accompanied insertions included Tosti's song *Mattinata*, Bishop's '*Home, Sweet Home*', Arditi's '*Se seran rose*', and traditional songs 'Old Folks at Home' and 'Comin' thro the Rye'.¹⁹¹ Polish soprano Marcella Sembrich, whom Poriss notes was 'an exceptional pianist as well as singer', sometimes performed Chopin's song '*Zyczenie*' self-accompanied,¹⁹² and also on occasion improvised scales, arpeggios and other exercises at the piano during the lesson scene.¹⁹³ Melba and Sembrich both recorded some of this self-accompanied repertoire in the early twentieth century, and these recordings will be examined in Chapter Seven. An early twentieth-century Rosina, Amelita Galli-Curci, offered self-accompanied performances of 'The Last Rose of Summer' and 'Home! Sweet Home' in 1917.¹⁹⁴ Many lesser singers did the same throughout the nineteenth century; English Rosinas who self-accompanied during the lesson scene closer to Malibran's time included a Miss Noel at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh in 1825 and 1827,¹⁹⁵ and Mary Ann Paton at the Theatre Royal in Dublin in 1838.¹⁹⁶

There are many other documented examples of leading ladies self-accompanying in character outside of Rossini's *Il barbiere* on the English theatrical stage both before and after Malibran. Dorothea Jordan, the celebrated Irish actress and mistress to King William IV, gave at least 35 self-accompanied performances in prominent public theatres in the UK between May of 1800 and May of 1805. Her songs were given in the context of straight theatre rather than opera, but otherwise the context was analogous to Malibran's: several of her self-accompanied songs were presented in multiple plays, while some plays were performed multiple times with different self-accompanied songs each time. The song 'The Willow', by Hook appeared in at least four different plays and was therefore performed by at least four different characters, while the song 'The Blue Bells of Scotland' appeared in two different plays. As the character of Roxelana in the farce *The Sultan, or, A Peep into*

¹⁹⁰ *Teatri arti e letteratura* 1154 (March 21, 1846): 20, and *Teatri arti e letteratura* 1255 (February 24, 1848): 203, referenced in Poriss, *Changing the Score*, 162.

¹⁹¹ 'Royal Opera, Covent-Garden'. *Era* [London, England], 9 July 1898. Also 'Mme. Melba as Rosina.: Sings at the Auditorium in "The Barber of Seville"', *Chicago Daily Tribune* [Chicago, IL], March 17, 1898, 8.

¹⁹² 'MME. SEMBRICH SINGS ROSINI.: "The Barber of Seville"' Produced in the Italian at the Auditorium', *Chicago Daily Tribune* [Chicago, IL], 11 November 1898, 5. 'Music'. *Chicago Daily Tribune* [Chicago, IL], 24 February 1901, 40.

¹⁹³ Poriss, *Changing the Score*, 164.

¹⁹⁴ Frederick Donaghey, 'Galli-Curci Top-Notch as a Soubrette in Bully Revival of "The Barber"', *Chicago Daily Tribune* [Chicago, IL], 2 January 1917, 13. Also Ring W. Lardner, 'In the Wake of the News: THE BARBER OF SEVILLE', *Chicago Daily Tribune* [Chicago, IL], 16 January 1917, 16.

¹⁹⁵ 'Advertisements & Notices', *Caledonian Mercury* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 19 March 1825. Also 'Advertisements & Notices', *Caledonian Mercury* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 5 November 1827.

¹⁹⁶ 'Advertisements & Notices', *Belfast News-Letter* [Belfast, Ireland], 18 May 1838.

the Seraglio, Jordan introduced two different songs on different occasions: in May and August of 1800 she sang ‘The Blue Bells of Scotland’, but from 1802 she sang Hook’s ‘The Willow’. All the performances of ‘The Blue Bells of Scotland’ occurred in May and August 1800; ‘The Willow’ was first introduced at the end of August 1800, was performed for several months in 1802, and appeared again in a run of performances in January 1803-5. As with Malibran, advertisements for these performances drew attention to the self-accompanied song as a highlight of Jordan’s performance. An advertisement for Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in which Jordan played the part of Viola, suggested that Hook’s ‘The Willow’ was being included particularly for its popularity: ‘Viola, Mrs. Jordan, who will introduce (by particular desire), the popular Song, called ‘The Willow;’ accompanied by herself on the lute’.¹⁹⁷ Several other songs did appear in association with only one play and character, but these are in the minority. Thus the choice of song was clearly not important to the artistic integrity of the piece, and the primary goal must have been the entertainment and character development afforded by the song’s presentation. Some of these songs probably also became associated with Jordan herself, and were subsequently presented according to popularity and shifts in her repertoire over time. People wanted to hear her sing Hook’s ‘The Willow’ just as later audiences would want to hear Malibran sing Horn’s ‘The Deep Deep Sea’.

Another example of self-accompaniment on the operatic stage which may have set a precedent for Malibran was a series of performances by internationally-renowned British opera singer Elizabeth Billington while she sang at the King’s Theatre in London in summer of 1806. On that occasion Billington starred in a run of at least five performances of Mayer’s opera buffa *Il Fanatico per la Musica* (originally titled *Che Originali!*), in which she performed one of the numbers self-accompanied on the pianoforte. The newspaper advertisements for these performances emphasized the fact that she would sing self-accompanied during the evening:

KING’S THEATRE. The last night’s Performance for this Season. This Evening will be presented the new Comic Opera IL FANATICO PER LA MUSICA. Composed by Mayer. In which Mrs. Billington and Mr. Naldi, will perform, and in the course of the Opera Mrs. Billington will sing an air accompanied by herself on the Piano Forte.¹⁹⁸

Billington’s performances of this opera were also documented by two essays published in 1813 and 1830, which reveal that the self-accompanied number was a duet sung with Naldi,

¹⁹⁷ ‘Multiple Advertisements and Notices’, *Morning Post and Gazetteer* [London, England], 26 May 1802, 1.

¹⁹⁸ ‘The Mirror of Fashion’, *Morning Chronicle* [London, England], 2 August 1806.

and comment upon her abilities as both a vocal performer and as an instrumentalist.¹⁹⁹ One of the essays noted: ‘In 1806 she accompanied herself in a bravura song on the Opera stage, in a style which left the cognoscenti in doubt whether to adjudge the palm to her voice or her fingers’.²⁰⁰ Billington was obviously a skilled self-accompanist, and she too may have been an inspiration for Malibran. Unlike Jordan and Malibran, however, she does not seem to have performed this way very often; this run of *Il Fanatico per la Musica* is the only documented occasion found thus far of Billington accompanying herself on the public stage.

Malibran was also known for her portrayal of Desdemona in Rossini’s *Otello*, in which she accompanied herself on the harp during the famous ‘Willow’ aria. Most prima donnas mimed the accompaniment in this scene with the assistance of an off-stage instrumentalist, and April Fitzlyon suggests that the fact that Malibran could actually play the harp herself ‘greatly heightened the excitement of her performances’ for her audiences.²⁰¹ This habit appears to have originated early in Malibran’s career and has an intriguing back-story, according to the Countess de Merlin:

Madame Malibran expressed a desire to learn the harp, and on the following morning De Beriot sent her a splendid one. Touched by this mark of his attention, she studied the instrument, and in a very short time was enabled to accompany herself in Desdemona’s romance. She was afterwards induced to give it up, mainly through fear that it might injure her voice.²⁰²

It is enigmatic that Malibran was urged to give up the harp for fear of vocal harm. Who urged Malibran to do this, and why did they do so? It doesn’t follow, given that Malibran was taught by her father who was a self-accompanist and who emulated the training of the castrati in his teaching. Did they believe the study of the harp would distract from her vocal practice, or did they believe that singing while playing would be somehow injurious? In any case, Malibran clearly did not abandon harp or self-accompaniment for long. Felix Mendelssohn described seeing her perform the ‘Willow’ scene self-accompanied in 1829:

Mme. Malibran is a young woman, beautiful and splendidly made, bewigged, full of fire and power, and at the same time coquettish; setting off her performance partly with very clever embellishments of her own invention, partly with imitations of Pasta (it seemed very strange to see her take the harp and sing the whole scene exactly like Pasta and finally

¹⁹⁹ ‘Memories of Mrs. Billington’, *Lady’s Monthly Museum* [London, England], 1 April 1813.

²⁰⁰ William Ayrton, ‘Memoir of Mrs. Billington’, in *The Harmonicon, 1830. Part the First, containing a collection of instrumental and vocal music; and essays, criticisms, biography, &c. &c.* (London: Samuel Leigh, 18, Strand, 1839), 93-97.

²⁰¹ Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran*, 81.

²⁰² Merlin, *Memoires of Maria Malibran*, 96-97.

even in that very rambling passage at the end which I am sure you, dear father, must remember).²⁰³

Chopin, in a letter to his friend Titus Woyciechowksi in 1830, also mentioned Malibran's performance practice by way of comparing another singer to her, noting that this singer sang a romance to the harp in Paer's opera *Angela*, but unlike Malibran, mimed the playing.²⁰⁴

Variety concerts

Malibran also appeared as a self-accompanied singer in the context of large, non-theatrical variety concerts, as one of many different performers including singers, solo instrumentalists and larger ensembles. This is the most common context for public self-accompanied singing documented in nineteenth-century newspapers. There are several accounts of such concert performances by Malibran, the earliest of which comes from 1825 when the García family was in New York City. The young Malibran performed two songs self-accompanied in the second half of a concert, and *The New-York literary Gazette's* review described the young Malibran's performance in highly romanticized terms:

Signorina Garcia is a favourite of ours; and, judging by her enthusiastic reception, she is equally so with all who have witnessed her performance. With great science and execution, she is modest and unostentatious; with an elegant figure and fine face, she is delicate and unassuming. On Saturday evening last, in the second half, she sung a favourite Scotch song with great feeling and effect; and such was the stillness and attention of the audience, that the gentlest sigh would have been heard. When she finished, she rose from the piano amid the plaudits of all; and 'encore' was sounded from every part of the house: cheerfully and gracefully seated herself again, and sung 'Home, sweet home', with more science and effect than we ever heard it before. These two songs made us deeply lament that the other parts of her performance were both in song and language so unintelligible to us.²⁰⁵

In 1836 Malibran performed a self-accompanied song in a context somewhere between variety concert and theatrical entr'acte. Malibran was one of 12 principle singers at a Grand

²⁰³ Letter from Felix Mendelssohn to Abraham Mendelssohn, 25 April 1829, in Seldon-Goth, G., ed., *Felix Mendelssohn: Letters*, 2nd edition (New York: Vienna House, 1973), 46.

²⁰⁴ Arthur Hedley, ed. and trans., *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin. Abridged from Fryderyk Chopin's Correspondence Collected and Annotated by Bronislaw Edward Sydow* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962), 49.

²⁰⁵ Untitled article from *The New-York literary Gazette, And Phi Beta Kappa Repository*, 1/15 (17 Dec. 1825), 239, quoted in Radomski, *Manuel Garcia*, 199.

Musical Festival at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. The entire evening concert featured an array of vocal and instrumental soloists as well as a chorus, orchestra, and conductor, and Malibran's contribution to the programme was a performance of Horne's 'Through the Wood', self-accompanied at the pianoforte, between the first and second halves of the concert. This invites the conclusion that self-accompanied singing was seen as a kind of refreshment, or musical palette cleanser, light entertainment between the main events. On the other hand, Malibran's celebrity at the time was such that placing her performance between acts like this could not have been intended to present her as background or an opening act before the main event. Rather, it must have been a way of delineating her performance as a stand-alone highlight of the evening. While this particular concert was not reviewed in detail, another variety concert in 1835 at which Malibran performed the same song was described by an audience member:

I think I had better begin by telling you about Tuesday. Charles and I were in a box with Lady Smart and Miss Bacon at Stockhausen's Concert; the first act was delightful. Malibran sang twice *alone*; she looked more lovely than ever, for she had such a soft, gentle look.... she sang a song of her own, accompanying herself on the piano.... Sir George then came forward and said in consequence of the *real* illness of Madame Garcia, Madame Malibran had kindly offered to sing in her stead; she came forward amidst shouts of applause, and sang 'Through the Wood', a ballad by Horne. I am thankful to say she was much more clapped than Grisi.²⁰⁶

From this description we can again glean that Malibran performed several times throughout the concert, sometimes self-accompanied and sometimes not, that her co-stars were formidable, and that her self-accompanied ballad by Horne was particularly well-received.

Salons

The final context in which Malibran regularly accompanied her own singing was the semi-private sphere of the salon. A singer of the celebrity and renown of the great castrati in her own time, Malibran could be prevailed upon to sing in any social occasion. She commented upon this herself, somewhat sarcastically, in a personal letter to a Monsieur le Baron D.:

You go doubtlessly to-morrow (or rather I should say to-day) to the

²⁰⁶ Letter from Sophie Horsley to Lucy (no surname), June 1835, in Rosamund Brunel Gotch, ed., *Mendelssohn and his Friends in Kensington. Letters from Fanny and Sophy Horsley written 1833-36* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 200.

concert?...Who, I wonder, will come and ask me to have the goodness to sing?...Upon my word, if no one does me that favour, I shall coolly get up and go and.....place myself at the piano, and consent to sing, in order to please the unanimous desire of...myself! What do you think of this plan? I think it's something new.²⁰⁷

An example of such a formal salon occasion was reported in the *Morning Post* in London, 1829. The event was a musical soirée hosted by music patron Sir Geo. Warrender. The performers were Malibran, Camporese, Stockhausen, Pellegrini, de Begnis and Torri. Almost the entirety of the published review is devoted to listing the distinguished guests (national and foreign royalty, government dignitaries, lords and ladies) and to describing Malibran's self-accompanied song.

By the desire of some of the company, Madame Malibran, in the kindest manner possible, accompanied herself on the Pianoforte in a Spanish Air, 'San Anton'. The humour and effect with which she sang this characteristic morceau of national melody elicited the warmest applause from the company;.... Monsieur FETIS presided at the Pianoforte, assisted by Messrs PUZZI, STOCKHAUSEN, OURY, ELLA and BROOKS, on their respective instruments.²⁰⁸

It is worth noting that the event had an official pianist, who nonetheless did not accompany Malibran. This event, with its powerful guest list and the manner in which Malibran was asked to sing this particular song, is precisely the kind of context for which the castrato singing teachers prepared their students by teaching them self-accompaniment, with the exception that in Malibran's case, there was an accompanist present. We can thus see a transition in the role of self-accompaniment between the previous case study and this one, from practical necessity to an artistic preference with vestiges of its practical origins.

Other accounts of Malibran's self-accompanied salon performances give a more personal glimpse into the character of her self-accompanied singing. Abraham Mendelssohn, father of Felix Mendelssohn described hearing her at a private party as follows:

Madame Malibran sat down and gave us a Spanish song, then at Felix's request two others, then an English sea song, and finally a French tambour-ditty... with what flowing, glowing, and effervescing power and expression, what caprice and boldness, passion and *esprit*, which what assurance and consciousness of her means this woman, whom I now *do*

²⁰⁷ Merlin, *Memoires of Madame Malibran*, 172.

²⁰⁸ 'Sir Geo. Warrender's Musical Soiree', *Morning Post* [London, England], 2 June 1829.

appreciate, sang these...one may truly say she sang songs without words....Felix, justly, or at any rate wisely refused to perform after her, was fetched her from the adjoining room and forced to the piano. He extemporized to my delight and satisfaction on the airs she had just sung.²⁰⁹

Composer and pianist Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), visiting the de Beriots in London, heard Malibran singing and playing one of her own compositions in an even more informal setting. His description takes little notice of her self-accompaniment but notes her expressivity, reinforcing the newspapers' claim that Malibran could deliver a fully engaging and unimpaired performance in this manner.

We found her at the piano, and Costa standing by her. She sang us a comic song that she had just composed: A sick man weary of life invokes death; but when death, personified as a doctor, knocks at his door, he dismisses him with scorn. She had set the subject so cleverly, and sang the music so humorously, that we could scarcely refrain from laughing; and yet we couldn't endure to lose a single note.²¹⁰

Pauline Viardot-García (1821-1910)

Maria Malibran's younger sister Pauline Viardot-García began her career as a pianist, studying piano with Mysenberg and Liszt, and composition with Reicha, acquiring the ideal skill set from a young age to become an accomplished self-accompanied singer. After her sister's death in 1836, Viardot-García's father directed her to concentrate on singing. Viardot-García made her concert debut as a singer in 1837, and her stage debut (as Desdemona in Rossini's *Otello*) in 1839.²¹¹ Viardot-García's career was of equal success to her sister's, though much longer and more balanced; many roles were written for her and she became famous in Mozart roles and as Orpheus in Gluck's *Orphée*, while also becoming celebrated as a composer and a teacher during her lifetime. She taught singing at the Paris Conservatoire from 1871-1875.

Viardot-García performed self-accompanied throughout her career. The earliest record of such performances dates to her first concert tour in 1838, during which she

²⁰⁹ Letter from Abraham Mendelssohn to Felix Mendelssohn, no date, in Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran*, 171.

²¹⁰ Letter from Ignaz Moscheles to unknown recipient, in *Ibid*, 213.

²¹¹ 'Viardot-García, Pauline', *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Kennedy (Oxford University Press).

performed some of her own songs to her own accompaniment.²¹² Though her repertoire on the concert stage was as or more diverse as Malibran's, surviving documentation of her self-accompanied performances indicates that her self-accompanied repertoire was more specialized. She became particularly known for singing 'Spanish songs' to her own accompaniment: these songs were never labelled in more detail, so little is known about them beyond their positive reception.

Sometimes these Spanish songs were officially listed on the programme, as in the inaugural concert of the Norwich Musical Festival, St Andrews Hall, 23 September 1852. This concert included a chorus and orchestra with conductor, a double bass soloist, and eight featured singers including Viardot-García, performing for an audience of 1,023 people. The programme listing described Viardot-García's contribution as 'Spanish Songs (accompanied by herself on the pianoforte)-- Madame Viardot-García', and the review noted: 'The honour of an *encore* was awarded to Formes' 'Ha! Wie will ich triumphiren', Bottesini's astonishing solo on the double bass, and one of Madame Viardot's Spanish songs'.²¹³ Sometimes Viardot-García presented her self-accompanied Spanish songs as encores, as in a concert at Exeter Hall in December of 1853. This concert featured several other singers and three woodwind soloists, and its finale was the aria 'Non più mesta' from Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, sung by Viardot-García. The review stated, 'the last piece received a unanimous encore, but instead of it was substituted a Spanish air, in which Madame Garcia accompanied herself on the piano'.²¹⁴ Finally, on at least one occasion Viardot-García performed her Spanish songs on the theatrical stage, as an entr'acte or an encore during a performance of Bellini's *Norma*. Reynaldo Hahn, who visited Viardot-García in her home when she was an old woman, reported: 'She told me that in Grenada, where she sang *Norma*, the enthusiastic public, after the show, demanded Spanish songs with loud cries, until there was no option but for her and one of her co-stars to cause a piano to be brought on stage so she could sing, in druid costume, *vitos* and *peteneras!*'²¹⁵ Newspaper reviews affirm that Viardot-García's 'Spanish songs' were nearly always encored, and that they seemed to exert a similar kind of charm upon audiences as Malibran's rendition of Bishop's 'Home, sweet home', and Jenny Lind's Swedish folk songs, which will be examined shortly.

Viardot-García was as accomplished a pianist as she was a singer (at the age of

²¹² Beatrix Borchard, 'Viardot, Pauline', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

²¹³ 'Norwich Musical Festival', *Morning Post* [London, England], 23 September 1852.

²¹⁴ 'Wednesday Evening Concerts, Exeter Hall'. *Era* [London, England], 4 December 1853.

²¹⁵ Reynaldo Hahn, 'Première Partie "Juvenilia"', in *Notes (Journal d'un musicien)* (Paris: Librairie Plon Les Petits-Fils de Plon et Nourrit, 1933), 4, translated by Robin Bier.

thirty she was nearly appointed to head the piano department at Cologne Conservatory)²¹⁶ and while the technical challenges of her ‘Spanish songs’ are unknown, her other repertoire choices for self-accompanied performance demonstrate that she put her added virtuosity at the piano to good use. Viardot-García was well acquainted with the music of Frédéric Chopin – they were friends and she frequently visited and sang for him – and she arranged a set of twelve of his Mazurkas as French songs for solo voice and soprano. The wide compass and virtuosity of the vocal parts across the set, extending from Bb below middle C to a high soprano C and decorated with extensive cadenzas and embellishments, strongly suggest that Viardot-García composed them for her own voice and abilities. Meanwhile, the piano introductions are true to Chopin and are complex and soloistic. The accompaniments tend to thin when the voice enters, perhaps to permit the singer to focus on the voice, but the solo piano interludes are highly virtuosic, and throughout the songs passages occur in which piano and voice act with melodic independence.

In May of 1848, Pauline Viardot-García sang in a series of eight performances at the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden, in London. The concerts occurred in pairs: on one day she sang the role of Amina in Rossini’s *La Sonnambula*, and on the previous or following morning she sang in a grand concert with a glittering array of supporting colleagues, including soprano Giulia Grisi, tenor Giovanni Mario, contralto Marietta Alboni and baritone Antonio Tamburini. On each of these concerts Viardot-García performed two of her arranged mazurkas. They were advertised in the published programme listing: ‘Mazourka, Two Mazourkas by Chopin, arranged and sung by Madame Pauline Viardot-García, and accompanied by herself on the pianoforte, Chopin’.²¹⁷ The published review in *The Daily News* was brief and revealed little about the audience response to how Viardot-García performed:

Madame Pauline Viardot-Garcia sang an air of Handel with great beauty; and two of Chopin’s mazurkas, arranged for the voice and accompanied by herself on the pianoforte. They were quaint and pretty, and would be effective in the drawing-room, but are not calculated for public performance. The remainder of the concert consisted of things well known to the public.²¹⁸

Chopin himself wrote to a friend about this same performance, however, saying that the mazurkas were encored: ‘People are writing fine articles about me in the papers. And yesterday at a Covent Garden concert Mme Viardot sang my mazurkas and had to repeat

²¹⁶ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 216.

²¹⁷ ‘Advertisements & Notices’, *Era* [London, England], 7 May 1848.

²¹⁸ ‘Music. Royal Italian Opera’, *Daily News* [London, England], 13 May 1848.

them'.²¹⁹ From Chopin's letters we also know that Viardot-García performed these mazurkas in salon contexts.²²⁰

Jenny Lind (1821-1910)

Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, nicknamed 'The Swedish Nightingale', performed internationally and was a darling of the English concert and operatic stage in particular the middle of the nineteenth century. Also a student of Manuel García père, Lind was at times a rival of both Malibran and Viardot-García. She eventually made her mark as a teacher, teaching singing at the Royal College of Music in London from 1882. While she sang opera and concert repertoire across Europe and America, she particularly became known for singing arrangements of Swedish songs, or, as it was sometimes described in the newspapers, 'her own native music'. Lind appears to have performed this repertoire exclusively to her own accompaniment, both on the public concert stage and in private.

Lind's manner of performing her Swedish songs was frequently compared to how Viardot-García presented her Spanish songs, but with more detailed descriptions of the music and the performances themselves, which provide a clearer picture of the vocal and pianistic demands of this repertoire and how it was received. Accounts of Lind's performances blur logistical facts with aesthetic and social significance: the language used to describe her self-accompanied repertoire and performance practice indicates that her performances were deeply symbolic of certain social and artistic ideals of the time. These accounts do also provide useful information about the music and presentation itself, however, and this material will be considered first.

Between 1847 and 1850 Lind appeared in multiple concerts in the United Kingdom. These concerts generally took place in large concert halls before large audiences (in some cases as many as 3,000 people), often with supporting vocal and instrumental soloists, an orchestra and an official piano accompanist. During these concerts, Lind performed operatic and concert solos with orchestra, and occasionally collaborated with other singers in duets or trios. Her self-accompanied Swedish songs appeared on the programmes directly, or were offered as encores. The songs themselves were described as pastoral and folk-like, but with ample scope for displays of vocal virtuosity. The reviewer of a concert at the Music Hall in Edinburgh in 1847, during which Lind also performed 'Casta Diva' from

²¹⁹ Letter from Frédéric Chopin to Wojciech Grzymala, 13 May 1848, in Henryk Opieński, Henryk, *Chopin's Letters*, 2nd edition, ed. and trans. E. L/Voynich (New York: Vienna House, 1973), 354-355.

²²⁰ Letter from Chopin to Grzymala, 8-17 July 1848, in Opieński, *Chopin's Letters*, 360. This letter reveals that Viardot-García's performed some of the mazurkas at a musical matinee at the home of Lord Falmut in London, July 1848.

Bellini's *Norma* and 'Quando lascia la normandia' from Meyerbeer's *Roberto il diavolo*, compared Lind's ornamentation and dynamic effects to Paganini's artistry on the violin, writing:

She sat down to the piano forte, and sung these melodies, which simple as they were, became the vehicles of displaying some of the most extraordinary effects of vocalisation that we ever heard. Some persons that these effects are produced by trick, by mere mechanical juggling – we have heard the same thing said of Paganini's violin playing, and with about equal truth. We only wish that such 'jugglers' were a little less rare.²²¹

A review from a similar concert the following year, again in the Music Hall in Edinburgh, identified two of Lind's Swedish songs by title and described their vocal effects in greater detail. This concert featured an array of supporting performers, including Mr. Balie (composer, conductor, piano forte accompanist), Mr. Roger (tenor from Grand Opera, Paris), Signori F. Lablache and Belletti (basses from her Majesty's Theatre), and the twenty instrumentalists of Her Majesty's Theatre, London, and was given to a capacity audience which, according to the Music Hall's structure at the time, would have exceeded 1,600 people. The reviewer described the songs thus:

The first of the Swedish melodies Mdlle. Lind gave, and in which she accompanied herself on the piano forte, was a lively air, 'Kom du Lilla fluka', which abounds in becoming ornament. The next was 'Kom kjyra, kom kjyra', a merry pastoral effusion, ornate with sparkling cadences, runs, shakes, and echoes. In this the vocalist gives the call of the shepherdess with the responsive echoes of her companions, with a distinctness and rapidity perfectly amazing, and so close on each other that it actually seems like two voices heard at the same moment. This surpasses the ventriloquial art, because it is beautiful and natural.²²²

The review of a concert given at the Hall of the Philharmonic Society in Liverpool in 1850, to an audience of over 3,000 people, during which Lind performed a song which may have been the same as the above-mentioned 'Kom kjyra', further noted the folk-like nature of the song and its combination of simplicity and difficulty:

The last effort of Mdlle Jenny Lind, and, because the last, perhaps the most captivating, was one of those delicious Swedish melodies which,

²²¹ 'Mademoiselle Jenny Lind's Concert', *Caledonian Mercury* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 20 September 1847.

²²² 'Mademoiselle Jenny Lind's Concert', *Caledonian Mercury* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 25 September 1848.

from the lips of the ‘Nightingale’, may vie in characteristic beauty with the national melodies of Scotland and Ireland. The Song of the Shepherds, in which, by a single melodic interval, frequently repeated, the peculiar call by means of which the flocks are brought together is felicitously imitated, gives Mdlle. Lind scope for indulging in certain caprices of execution that, amidst an apparent simplicity, present more than usual vocal difficulty. The exquisite intonation with which the quaint interval alluded to was taken, and the rich expression of humour and archness, thoroughly enchanted the audience. Mdlle. Lind accompanied herself; and, on quitting the pianoforte, the uproar was absolutely deafening.²²³

Lind also sang her Swedish songs in private contexts. Chopin reported meeting Lind and making music with her in several letters in 1848, in which he described Lind singing to him for hours: ‘Yesterday I was at dinner with J. Lind, who afterwards sang me Swedish things til midnight’.²²⁴ Chopin implied that the character of these songs was distinctive and nationalistic, and compared them to his own native folk music: ‘We have something Slavonic, they something Scandinavian, which are totally different; and yet we are nearer to each other than the Italian to the Spaniard’.²²⁵ Finally, he implied that Lind’s performance of them resembled how Viardot-García sang her Spanish songs to him: ‘she sang me some Swedish songs most delightfully, just as Mme Viardot sings her Spanish ones’.²²⁶ It can be assumed that the similarity to which Chopin referred encompassed both interpretive flavour and Lind’s self-accompaniment.

Self-accompaniment as a nineteenth-century performance practice

This case study provides the first real opportunity for a practical reconstruction of self-accompaniment as a performance practice. The logistical circumstances and artistic characteristics of the self-accompanied performances by the high profile and closely-connected prima donnas Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind were in fact duplicated and supplemented by over two hundred other documented public performances by other singers of both genders, ranging from highly-trained amateur to internationally-known professional. This high volume of surviving accounts of individual performances make it possible to distil

²²³ ‘Multiple News Items’, *Standard* [London, England], 19 August 1850.

²²⁴ Letter from Chopin to Grzymala, 13 May 1848, in Opieński, *Chopin’s Letters*, 354-355.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Letter from Chopin to Grzymala, 8-17 July 1848, in Hedley, *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 334-335.

a general summary of how self-accompaniment was practiced that is not too closely defined by a single or small group of individuals who may have been influenced by each other or uniquely skilled. By tabulating the descriptions of Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind's self-accompanied singing and considering those observations alongside the rest of the evidence, it becomes possible to build a distinct picture of how self-accompanied singing was executed in the first half of the nineteenth century on the British concert stage.

Performers

This chapter has emphasized the performances by the most high-profile international singers because of the 'diva factor': the fact that even if it can be proven that virtuosic self-accompanied singing was rare in the total sum of nineteenth-century performance practice, the performances of singers like Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind are significant because of their high profile nature and influence. However, the many documented performances by highly skilled amateurs in this period, particularly women, should not be dismissed either. Many factors might keep a female singer from the nineteenth-century public stage, and only one of these was a lack of talent. Susan Rutherford coined the term 'drawing room prima donna' to refer to those female singers who might possess considerable talent and invest a great deal of time and money in vocal training of the highest quality, but for social or political reasons would choose not pursue a professional career.²²⁷ Such singers nonetheless might perform at an extremely high level, associating with and performing alongside the best professional singers in salon settings. Furthermore, they were highly respected: according to Rutherford, 'there was even a whiff of superiority in the notion of amateur music making; its freedom from the taint of money was, according to some perspectives, a sign of its status as a more thoroughly "artistic" enterprise than professional activity'.²²⁸ The identification of these singers, and the evaluation of their significance and the skill with which they performed is an on going part of this research. Nineteenth-century newspapers often listed singers by their surname only, and spelling errors and married names add additional variables. Most famous singers are still immediately recognizable, as are skilled amateurs from amongst the nobility, but it is much more difficult to identify the second string opera singers and concert singers who may have been well-respected and well-known during their lifetimes, but failed to leave a lasting legacy. A complete list of all self-accompanying singers documented in the primary sources examined for this thesis, who are identified by name in the source or who are identifiable by context, is given in Appendix 2.

²²⁷ Rutherford, 'Superdivas and superwomen' in *The Prima Donna and Opera*, 68-83.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

The following list is a representative sampling of professional, amateur and fictional self-accompanied singers from this period:

Opera and concert singers with international careers:

John Braham (1774-1856)
 Giovanni Battista Velluti (1780-1861)
 Elizabeth Féron (1797-1853)
 Rosalbina Caradori-Allan (1800-1865)
 Laure Cinti-Damoreau (1801-1863)
 Maria Malibran (1808-1836)
 Michael William Balfe (1808-1870)
 Jenny Lind (1820-1887)
 Pauline Viardot-García (1821-1910)
 Anna de la Grange (1825–1905)
 Adelina Patti (1843-1919)
 Marcella Sembrich (1858-1935)
 Nellie Melba (1861-1931)

Professional singers with national and local careers:

Emma Albertazzi (1814-1847)
 Rosemond Wilkinson (1768-1841)
 Mademoiselle Beer (mid nineteenth century)
 Madame Castaglioni (mid nineteenth century)
 Georgina Burns (late nineteenth century)
 Dorothea Jordan (1761-1816)
 Mary Ann Paton (1802-1864)
 Jane Shirreff (1811-1883)
 Miss Turpin (d. 1860)
 Antonio Sapio (1792–1851)
 Mr. Bennet (mid nineteenth century)
 Charles Horn (1786-1849)
 James Dodsley Humphreys (1811-1877)
 Mr. A Lee (nineteenth century)
 Edward Mageniz (nineteenth century)

Highly skilled amateurs:

- Miss Carnaby (early nineteenth century)
- Countess Delphine Potocka (1807-1877)
- Georgina Weldon (1837-1914)

Fictional singers:

- Marianne Dashwood (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811)
- Corinne (Staël, *Corinne*, 1833)
- Count Fosco (Collins, *The Woman in White*, 1859)
- Emilia (Meredith, *Emilia in England*, 1864)
- Rosamond Vincy (Elliot, *Middlemarch*, 1874)

Performance space

In the time frame of this case study, self-accompanied singing permeates the private, semi-private and public spheres but with a significant increase in public performances over the previous case studies. Many performances took place in the major concert halls, opera houses, theatres and assembly rooms, before general audiences ranging from a few hundred to several thousand people. Notable representative performance spaces where Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind performed included the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (1812), capacity of 2,190; the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, reopened as the Royal Italian Opera/Royal Opera House (1847), capacity 2,256; the Music Hall (part of the Assembly Rooms), Edinburgh, modern capacity 750 though concerts in the mid nineteenth century report audiences of over 1,600; the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, capacity 2,100 with space for an orchestra of 250; and Exeter Hall, London, small hall capacity of 1,000 and main hall capacity of 4,000.

Other performances took place in private salons and other exclusive performance spaces before invited audiences. These venues were not necessarily small: a salon hosted by the Rothschilds in Paris in 1843, at which Viardot-García performed alongside Chopin and opera singers Lablache, Grisi and Mario, was said to have been attended by an ‘assembly of about five hundred persons’.²²⁹ Such salons were peopled with national and foreign royalty, nobility, ambassadors, government officials and other prominent members of society. At the opposite end of the private spectrum, some noteworthy self-accompanied performances took place in fully private homes, as in the case of Jenny Lind singing her

²²⁹ Letter from Joseph Filtsch to his parents, 20 January 1843, in Hedley, *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 227.

Swedish songs to Chopin after dinner at the home of a patroness in Scotland.

Instruments

The most common instruments for self-accompanied singing during the nineteenth century were keyboard instruments, with further preference given to the piano, or pianoforte. Most concert reviews did not specify the type of piano, but the few documents that did specify show that both grand and spinet models were used on the concert stage. Other instruments employed for self-accompanied singing were the harp, lute, guitar, and in one late eighteenth-century example from the *Public Advertiser* in 1761, the archlute.²³⁰ The lute was most frequently used in the early nineteenth century; Dorothea Jordan self-accompanied on the lute in both in theatrical and concert contexts, and a few other singers (mostly female) did as well. By the end of the century, self-accompaniment upon the lute was no longer common, as can be seen in the review of a concert in 1898 at the Bury Theatre in Bury Saint Edmunds featuring contralto Miss Hamilton Smith, who accompanied herself upon the lute in ‘Stars of the Night’ and ‘Annie Laurie’. The review called the effect ‘charming’ and ‘novel’, ‘Miss Smith being said to be the only lady vocalist on the stage who makes feature of this accomplishment’.²³¹ As self-accompaniment was still common at this time upon other instruments, it must be assumed that the reviewer was referring specifically to her use of the lute. The guitar and harp enjoyed longer popularity: many singing actresses advertised their abilities to sing self-accompanied upon both the pedal and dital harp. These instruments seem to have been popular among theatre companies due to the versatility they afforded the singer; as late as 1890 theatres were still advertising for female singers who could self-accompany.

Repertoire

The repertoire presented self-accompanied on the public stage during the nineteenth century included opera arias, concert arias, musical theatre songs, occasional larger scale works theatrical works, folk songs of various nationalities, English ballads, and French and English salon and parlour songs. German *lieder* and French *mélodies* also began to feature in the second half of the century, and these will be discussed in Chapter Seven. Of the other

²³⁰ ‘Classified ads’, *Public Advertiser* [London, England], 22 January 1761. The performance was a concert given by a Miss Ford at the Little Theatre, Haymarket, in London in 1761, in which she sang the 104th psalm ‘accompanied by herself on the Arch Lute’.

²³¹ ‘Muriel Mustard, the Child Pianist, at the Bury Theatre’, *Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Standard* [Bury Saint Edmunds, England], 3 May 1898.

genres listed, folk songs, ballads and parlour songs, and in general, songs in the vernacular of either the audience or the performer (in the case of foreign singers like Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind) were the most common. There is furthermore evidence that audiences actually may have preferred self-accompaniment for this repertoire, as can be seen in the following review of a concert given by a pupil of the Royal Academy of Music in Kensington, 1835:

Mr. Humphreys especially pleased us in Weber's ballad, 'We never meet again!' one of the most interesting of that composer's productions, though it is not quite free from that appearance of effort and painful elaboration which pervades everything he did. The singer accompanied himself on the piano-forte, the only way such pieces should be done, and his playing is worthy of the great taste and feeling with which he uses a voice not powerful, but cultivated, sweet, and expressive.²³²

The statement 'the only way such pieces should be done' is both remarkably specific and frustratingly incomplete; it declares that self-accompaniment was expected, appropriate and even superior for a particular repertoire, without explaining why. Was self-accompaniment seen as culturally or historically suitable, because of the folk origin of English ballad repertoire and a perceived link between self-accompaniment and folk music-making traditions? Or was it because English ballads and self-accompaniment were both seen as products of private, intimate spaces, making self-accompaniment the best way to the right atmosphere in concert? Or was self-accompaniment somehow considered conducive to the musical interpretation of ballads, making it the best way to produce an artistically and technically superior performance?

In this case study, the repertoire begins to involve more complex accompanimental relationships, though not to the level of art song. Malibran's popular entr'acte 'Through the wood' by Horn is representative: the piano introduction, interludes and postlude are complex with embellished right hand melodies, small note values, large chords and octaves, and detailed articulation, though this texture simplifies to arpeggiated chords and other repetitive rhythmic patterns once the voice enters. Some repertoire is more virtuosic: as previously noted, the piano introductions, interludes and postludes to Viardot-García's Chopin mazurka arrangements are playable only by an accomplished pianist, and keyboard reductions of orchestral accompaniments to opera arias are often technically challenging.

²³² 'Fine Arts', *Examiner* (10 May 1835), accessed at Gale News Vault (on 31 Aug 2013).

Programmatic context

Self-accompanied performances occurred most often as a single number or set of songs on a concert featuring many performers and a variety of repertoire, whether in the salon or concert hall. Sometimes the singer only performed self-accompanied, while at other times a single performer made both self-accompanied and standard appearances within the course of a concert. In such variety concerts, the self-accompaniment offered a change in texture and style, just like switching performers, instruments and ensembles. These variety concerts occurred at every level of skill and prominence: while Viardot-García sang self-accompanied mazurkas in major concerts amongst an array of world-class performers, many more such concerts featured singers who were nationally-known professionals, small-scale local professionals, students, or highly skilled amateurs.

Self-accompanied singing also occurred as an encore or special number in concerts featuring one celebrated singer. Many prima donnas offered self-accompanied encores; noteworthy singers who did so (in addition to Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind) include Madame Ruddersdorf, Catherine Hayes, Rosa de Ruda, Minnie Hank, Georgina Burns, Miss Paton, and Maria Caradori-Allan. The evidence further suggests that self-accompanied songs were the most likely repertoire to be encoered in a given performance, though it is unclear whether this was due to the merits of the song or the popularity of how it was performed.

Self-accompanied singing also occurred as an entr'acte or after an opera or other staged work. The examples given of this so far have all featured female singers, but male singers performed self-accompanied entr'actes as well. Charles Edward Horn (1786-1849), an English singer and composer who enjoyed a successful career in America and England and served as director of the Handel and Haydn Society, sang the title role in a performance of the opera *Masaniello* (now better known as *La muette de Portici*) by Auber at the Theatre Royal in Bristol in 1831. The opera was followed by another staged work, *The Lottery Ticket*, and between these two works Horn gave a self-accompanied performance of his own composition 'The Deep, Deep Sea', just as Malibran would do two years later in London.²³³ Michael William Balfe (1808-1870), an internationally-known opera singer who was also a violinist and conductor and one of the foremost Victorian composers of songs and operas, gave a similar performance at the Theatre Royal in Dublin in December of 1838. On the bill for the evening was Weber's *Der Freischütz*, followed by a melodrama, *The Tale of Mystery*, and Balfe was not cast in either of the staged works, only singing solos in between them. His additional performances featured in the advertisements for the opera, which read:

²³³ 'Advertisements & Notices', *Bristol Mercury* [Bristol, England], 8 March 1831.

‘After the Opera, Mr. Balfe will sing the Ballad ‘The Peace of the Valley’, from his own Opera of Joan of Arc, and the celebrated Aria Buffa, ‘Travellers all’, from his own Opera of the Siege of Rochelle, accompanied by himself on the Pianoforte’.²³⁴

Self-accompanied singing also occurred in character in the context of a theatrical work. The most documented example of this is the Lesson Scene from Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, but self-accompanied songs and arias were introduced into other roles as well. Donizetti’s *La fille du regiment* is one example: in Act II Scene III, the leading lady Marie is required to sing for Sergeant Sulpice. In the original French libretto, Marie sings to the accompaniment of the Marquise while Sulpice listens. However it appears that the English version manipulated this part of the opera to contemporary English tastes. During a performance at the Adelphi Theatre in Edinburgh in October of 1848, the leading lady (renamed Madeleine) sang and accompanied herself while both Sergeant and Marchionesse listened.²³⁵

Self-accompanied also occurred in the context of an entire self-accompanied concert or theatrical piece. Documented performances of this kind fall loosely into three categories: theatrical monologues, concert entertainments featuring a single performer, and song recitals. Self-accompanied song recitals in the modern sense began to appear in the final third of the nineteenth century and will be explored in depth in Chapter Seven.

Several self-accompanied theatrical monologues were documented, all of them comedic, featuring female performers and consisting of a combination of spoken and sung material. A Miss Scott performed the piece *Rural Visitors, or Singularity*, at least 41 times in London at the Sans Pareil Theatre, the Strand, from 1807-1808. The *Morning Chronicle*’s advertisement in 1808 read: ‘Miss Scott will give, in Song and Recitation, that admired piece, RURAL VISITORS, or SINGULARITY; as received last season upwards of forty nights, with unbounded applause. The whole written, composed, and will be spoken, sung, and accompanied by herself’.²³⁶ A similar example is the monologue piece *Widow Wiggins*, which was performed by singing actress Mrs. Fitzwilliam at least eight times between 1840 and 1849, at the Queen’s Theatre in Manchester, in the Theatre Royal in Hull, the Theatre Royal in Dublin amongst other venues. In this piece Mrs. Fitzwilliam was reported to ‘sustain Six Characters, and sing Six Songs, accompanied by herself on the harp, piano-forte and guitar’.²³⁷ A similar work on a larger scale is *A Trip to Paris*, which was given by a Mrs. Howard Paul in the Concert Hall in Liverpool in 1866. The piece was

²³⁴ ‘Advertisements & Notices’, *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* [Dublin, Ireland], 2 June 1838.

²³⁵ ‘Adelphi Theatre’, *Caledonian Mercury* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 23 Oct. 1848.

²³⁶ ‘Opera House’, *Morning Chronicle* [London, England], 7 March 1808.

²³⁷ ‘Advertisements & Notices’, *Manchester Times and Gazette* [Manchester, England], 12 July 1845.

staged, with spoken and sung components, and the review described the visual aids and the performer's comedic and imitative skills, saying of the music only that 'Mrs. Howard Paul accompanied herself upon the piano-forte, and without the slightest assistance kept the audience interested and delighted fully two hours'.²³⁸

These theatrical monologues demonstrate that self-accompaniment was applicable in a broad continuum of artistic contexts, and was a marketable and desirable skill in the theatre. Theatre casting advertisements like the following were not uncommon: 'Wanted... good Juvenile Leading Lady....Preference given to a Lady who can accompany herself on the Piano, Harp, or Guitar'.²³⁹ Dorothea Jordan's performances appear to be low-brow musical entertainment in comparison to any of the performances given by Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind, but in reality they probably fell somewhere between Mrs. Fitzwilliam's monologues and Malibran's operatic entr'actes. The popularity of self-accompanied singing in the theatre may help to explain why the great prima donnas were engaged to give their highly promoted entr'acte songs in the first place.

Both male and female performers are recorded as having given self-accompanied solo concerts. Such concerts, probably beyond the ability and ambition of amateur singers and unnecessary for the biggest opera stars, seem to have been given mostly by singers in the upper-middle rank of professional success and quality. In 1836 and 1838 Mr. Edward William Magenis, a singer from Philadelphia, USA, gave solo self-accompanied concerts in Belfast, Ireland. The complete programme listing in the *Belfast News-Letter* gives an idea of the complexity and diversity of the programme:

Mr. Edward William Magenis, of Philadelphia, HAS the honour to announce that he intends, on MONDAY evening next, 21st instant, in the ASSEMBLY ROOM, to give an ENTERTAINMENT, consisting of OVERTURES, CAVATINAS, and ENGLISH AIRS, in which he will accompany himself on the Piano Forte. Having studied under several of the most distinguished Performers, of both Britain and America, he hopes that satisfaction will be imparted to his Patrons.

Mr. MAGENIS respectfully states that, in aid of his SON, he will deliver Select Passages from the 5th and 6th book of MILTON, and at intervals speak some of the finest Pieces in the English Language, - concluding the exercises of the evening with *Collins' Ode on the Passions*.

Part I. - *Overtures*, Semiramide and Elisa e Claudio Rule

²³⁸ 'Amusements for the Week', *Liverpool Mercury etc.* [Liverpool, England], 7 May 1866.

²³⁹ 'Advertisements & Notices', *Era* [London, England], 15 November 1890.

Britannia and God Save the Queen – Thalberg. *Scena*, ‘See those looks so fraught with sadness’ – Bellini. *Aria*, ‘Ah! Perche in morte’ – Pacini.

Part II. - *Overtures*, Guy Mannering and L’Italiana in Algieri [sic]. *Cavatina*, ‘Largo al factotum’. *Air*, ‘As I view these scenes so charming’. ‘Tis the Last Rose of Summer’ with variations – Herz.

Mr. Hart’s Grand Piano Forte will be used on this occasion.²⁴⁰

A similar series of self-accompanied solo concerts was given by a Miss Williams, billed as the ‘Welsh Nightingale, or Eos Cymru’, in Bangor, Wales in 1853. Williams’ programming appears to have been more focused than Magenis’ and strictly vocal. The review in the *North Wales Chronicle* described her vocal quality, and noted, ‘she accompanied herself on the piano-forte, and with wonderful spirit and energy went through a more than ordinarily lengthy programme’.²⁴¹ The reviewer only described the English repertoire on the programme, which included which included ‘Aileen Mavourneen’, ‘Dermot Astore’, ‘Will you come?’ ‘Swiss girl’, and ‘Annie Glynne’, by Hulse.

Presentation

Little concrete information survives about how nineteenth-century singers physically oriented themselves on stage during self-accompanied performances. The sources contain conflicting information suggesting that multiple approaches were employed and considered effective or acceptable. In March of 1824 the accomplished English tenor John Braham, was featured in a performance of the oratorio *The Prophecy*, which was followed by miscellaneous other works, including self-accompanied songs:

Amongst the novelties of the evening was a song by Mr. Braham, accompanied upon the patent boudoir pianoforte, the invention and make of the late celebrated musician, Mr. Henry Smart. This little upright instrument, only 37 inches high, produced a richness of tone and strength of effect fully equal to its more cumbrous brethren, with this peculiar advantage, that the entire bust of the performer was visible over the instrument.²⁴²

This review implies that it was more common to see singers self-accompanying upon grand pianos than uprights, and that grand pianos tended to obscure the performer, either by sheer

²⁴⁰ ‘Advertisements & Notices’, *Belfast News-Letter* [Belfast, Ireland], 18 May 1838.

²⁴¹ ‘The Welsh Nightingale’, *North Wales Chronicle* [Bangor, Wales], 8 Apr. 1853.

²⁴² ‘Oratorio’, *Morning Post* [London, England], 25 March 1824.

size or by the orientation of the instrument. By stating that the bust of the performer was visible ‘over the instrument’, the reviewer also implied that at least some of the audience was viewing the singer face to face with the piano between singer and audience. From this it would seem that Braham was sitting facing the front of the stage rather than in profile, and that this was somewhat unusual at the time.

Detailed descriptions of Jenny Lind’s physical arrangement when she sang self-accompanied in Leeds at the Victoria Rooms in 1848 offer a contrast to the previous example of Braham. One audience member recalled how Lind ‘accompanied herself at the piano, whilst singing her favourite Swedish melodies, looking at the audience over her shoulder, that none might lose a single note’.²⁴³ If Lind was looking over her shoulder, she was almost certainly sitting in profile to the audience. This concert took place in a large hall with a grand piano, so the size of the instrument may have necessitated sitting in profile, but there is also evidence that Lind used her physical orientation to good musical effect. Lind’s manager, accompanist and husband Otto Goldschmidt provided a transcription and detailed description of how she performed on the ‘Norwegian Echo Song’, referred to elsewhere as ‘Kom klyra’ and the ‘Norwegian Fjäll Song’:

The version given here is as nearly what she sang, as a wild original piece of National Music, subject to many variations in detail at the humour of the Singer, (who invariably accompanied it herself on the Pianoforte) can be put on paper. The unaccompanied *Coda* at the close, introducing an Echo, was added by the Songstress, and has, it is thought, not hitherto been printed. The Norwegian words only are here inserted, but a translation of the simple sense of the words will be found at the end of the Song. [Here the transcription is printed in full. An * marks the start of the *Coda*.] *At this point Madame Goldschmidt turned from the Pianoforte towards the audience, facing it, and singing straight towards the length of the Room (having in view the production of the Echo) until the final notes, when she *slowly* turned back towards the Pianoforte, and struck the Chord of D to the same note in the voice part.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ ‘Local Notes and Queries’, *Leeds Mercury* [Leeds, England], 12 November 1887. The article contains several responses to a query about Jenny Lind’s past performances in Yorkshire. This letter is from E. Waring, Clifton, a deaf man, describing a concert that took place at the Victoria Rooms, Clifton, Sept., 1848.

²⁴⁴ Otto Goldschmidt, ed., ‘Appendix of Music’, in *Memoir of Madame Jenny Lind-Goldschmidt: Her Early Art-life and Dramatic Career, 1820-1851 from Original Documents, Letters, Ms. Diaries, &c., Collected by Mr. Otto Goldschmidt*, by Henry Scott Holland and W. S. Rockstro (London: John Murray, 1891), 21-24.

A structural feature of this song is the dialogue between unaccompanied voice and unaccompanied piano, which potentially gives the singer the freedom to face the audience during much of the singing even if it was necessary to face the piano during the accompanied sections. From Goldschmidt's description, however, it would appear that Lind's timing of when to face the audience was entirely determined by stage-craft: by facing the audience during the unaccompanied, improvisatory *coda*, she was able to sing the ornamental echoes into the full acoustic of the hall, using the gradual turning away of her body again to reinforce the diminuendo effect already created by the falling tessitura of the passage and the echoes. The physical gesture of returning her body back to its original orientation and her hands to the keyboard on the final note would have increased her audience's sense of arrival and finality, as well as drawn their attention to the perfect conjunction of voice and piano upon a D major chord after a dangerously long unaccompanied passage.

Memorization is another element of presentation with musical, physical and visual implications for both performer and audience. Evidence shows that in the nineteenth-century self-accompanied singers performed both from memory and with music, but that memorization was considered artistically and technically superior. Many self-accompanied performances occurred in the context of theatrical and operatic works, in which the singer was in character, and these performances would have necessarily been from memory unless the character was meant to read from music. One concert review provides specific commentary about the importance of memorization. During a concert in the Manchester Concert Hall in 1837, featuring singers Tamburini, Albertazzi, and Eckerlin, a solo pianist, oboist and supporting orchestra, Madame Albertazzi performed a self-accompanied English ballad whilst using sheet music. The reviewer from the *Manchester Times and Gazette* wrote scathingly of her choice:

Madame Albertazzi again appeared to great disadvantage in an English ballad, 'My fondest, my fairest'; it was a sad failure, and in so large a room as our concert hall, it is impossible to give the audience the words, if the parties singing accompany themselves on the piano-forte, and require a copy before them; the very position prevents the due effect. To accompany and sing at the same time a copy should not be wanted, or the effect is destroyed, which was the case on this occasion'.²⁴⁵

This review indicates that memorization was important to the success of self-accompaniment because it ensured clarity of voice and text, a conclusion corroborated by descriptions of Jenny Lind singing while looking over her shoulder to ensure that every note

²⁴⁵ 'Concert Hall', *Manchester Times and Gazette* [Manchester, England], 26 August 1837.

was heard. Together, these two pieces of evidence suggest that audiences expected facial interaction with the singer, whether sitting in profile at the piano or not, and memorization enabled this. The final statement of Albertazzi's review – that without memorization 'the effect is destroyed' – hints at a more intangible artistic result as well, which may have been a nineteenth-century element of *sprezzatura* in performance.

The artistic and social significance of self-accompaniment

In this case study, self-accompaniment plays a complex and multi-layered role in public performance. Historical singing treatises indicated that self-accompaniment, though not necessarily the ideal with respect to vocal technique and quality of instrumental playing, was expected of all good singers and necessary for the advantages gained by self-sufficiency. In contrast, the public self-accompanied performances by world class singers like Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind cannot be explained by practicality. In public concert halls a supporting orchestra or an official piano accompanist was too often present; in the salons or at private domestic gatherings a superior pianist such as Chopin or Liszt was too often numbered amongst the guests. Performances that took place in ambiguous settings like Malibran's entr'acte performances at a theatre likewise cannot be explained by any need for economy of resources; a theatre company that could afford to engage a singer like Malibran could certainly afford to also engage an accompanist.

There is still evidence that self-accompaniment served a technical purpose in certain contexts. For example, the reviewer of a concert given by a Miss Whitnall in Liverpool in 1842 made special mention of a song by Moore 'in which she accompanied herself, a thing we would recommend her to do oftener when she sings in public, for she not only plays with great taste and expression, but seems to have much more confidence at the piano than when accompanied'.²⁴⁶ There is no evidence that nineteenth-century audiences found self-accompaniment to be an impediment to a singer's vocal success. Therefore, it is clear that self-accompaniment on the public stage in the nineteenth century was serving an artistic role, by contributing to the performance in a theatrical, symbolic or interpretive way.

Private intimacy upon the public stage

There are two overarching explanations for how self-accompaniment was able to enhance the music, the performer and the experience of the audience in a positive way during the nineteenth century. The first of these explanations is that self-accompaniment was symbolic

²⁴⁶ 'Miss Whitnall's Concert', *Liverpool Mercury etc.* [Liverpool, England], 28 January 1842.

of private intimacy. This symbolism developed through a long association with private settings, the most recognizable of which is the private home. It is particularly compelling to conclude that self-accompaniment upon the public stage is rooted in domestic and amateur traditions when we see evidence of female singers engaging in the performance practice.

For centuries, the acts of singing and playing musical instruments have enabled women to enrich the culture of the home and to display their beauty and accomplishments, and this was no less true in the nineteenth century when it could be argued that a performer's visual, physical impact was of equal or greater importance than the sounding effect of the music.²⁴⁷ While self-accompaniment would not have been essential to these goals, it was conducive to them: the instruments that were considered most appropriate for female study because of their social function and advantageous physical arrangement were also that could be played while singing. Rutherford notes that the three most favoured instruments for women – piano, harp and guitar – ‘all had a function of self-accompaniment, thus enabling the nineteenth-century woman to fulfil possibly her most idealised musical occupation – that of a singer’.²⁴⁸ Self-accompanied singing may also have been subconsciously understood as a more modest activity than singing with an accompanist, because the instrument itself served as a shield of sorts for the singer. Whereas singing in public may have been considered improper for a young lady, to do so in private from the piano which displayed her so tantalizingly rendered the same performance ‘an overwhelmingly feminine act’ that transformed the musician into the ‘paragon of Victorian womanhood, the domestic helpmeet who becomes known as the “Angel in the House”’.²⁴⁹

In light of these ideas, the significance of public self-accompanied performances by Malibran and her female contemporaries takes shape. When Malibran and Viardot-García and Lind sang to their own accompaniment, they were essentially transforming themselves, on stage, into the Angel in the House, both through literal presentation and cultural construct. The image presented to their audiences was identical to that of the virtuous and desirable young lady of good breeding displaying her accomplishments. The piano, as the focal point of domestic performance and symbol of (among other things) the ‘domestic ideal of the leisured wife’²⁵⁰, functioned in Victorian society as a ‘highly respectablising piece of

²⁴⁷ Cooper, *St. Cecilia's Halo*, 280. Cooper observes that the ‘tendency to focus on the pleasures of sight rather than sound also framed the Victorian painter’s approach to professional women musicians’.

²⁴⁸ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera*, 49.

²⁴⁹ Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff, *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 85-86.

²⁵⁰ Cooper, *St. Cecilia's Halo*, 255.

furniture'.²⁵¹ From this it follows that the act of self-accompaniment might serve to balance the provocative, public identity of the professional opera and concert singer with the imagery of a proper, well-bred lady.

The popularity of inserting self-accompanied performances into contexts like the lesson scene in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* also makes more sense in light of the domestic connotations of self-accompanied singing. The act of playing and singing from the piano was an emotionally charged construction that communicated appropriately restrained display, romance and pleasure. Fuller and Losseff observed that these ideas permeated art and literature, where the piano was portrayed as 'a site steeped in eroticism' where female singers could assume 'provocative poses and flirt with their instructors'.²⁵² Eugène Delacroix's painting *L'amoureuse au piano*, believed by contemporary audiences to be of Malibran, clearly illustrates this sensuality.²⁵³ Malibran's self-accompanied singing as Rosina on the operatic stage is yet another manifestation of the popular imagery of the piano as a socially permissible environment in which to play out and enjoy erotic, sensual interactions through music. The fact that less than half a century earlier it was an accepted construction of vocal pedagogy for the singing student to sing from the keyboard only strengthens the association.

²⁵¹ F.J. Crowest, *Phases of Musical England* (1881), quoted in Cooper, *St. Cecilia's Halo*, 255.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 85-86.

²⁵³ This work was believed by contemporary audiences to represent Malibran; this is now doubtful.



Figure 1. Eugène Delacroix, *L'amoureuse au piano*, watercolour, c.1830, Collection Vaudoyer, Paris.

The language used by newspaper reviewers and audience members to describe performances by divas like Jenny Lind further demonstrates the potency of the domestic connotations of self-accompaniment. Descriptors like ‘graceful’, ‘simple’, ‘sweet’, ‘touching’, ‘arch’, and ‘gentle’ are all fitting characteristics of the ‘paragon of Victorian womanhood’. An excellent example of this kind of idealized domestic characterization of a self-accompanied singer in a concert review is a review in the *Caledonian Mercury* of a performance by Jenny Lind at the Glasgow City Hall in 1847:

The concert ended with two lovely Sweedish [sic] melodies, in which Jenny accompanied herself on the piano. On taking her seat for the purpose one could not help fancying her doing this in her own quiet home, far, far away in Sweden; and the simplicity and grace with which she touched the piano won all hearts.²⁵⁴

This review illustrates how Lind, during her self-accompanied performance, epitomized a domestic gendered ideal, the Angel in the House. According to Pleasants, Lind deliberately cultivated a stage persona of the innocent, sweet, nostalgic girl who was far from home.²⁵⁵ Contemporary portraits of Lind echoed and reinforced this constructed character, and her

²⁵⁴ ‘Jenny Lind in Glasgow’, *Caledonian Mercury* [Edinburgh, Scotland], 20 September 1847.

²⁵⁵ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 202.

choice to perform Swedish songs self-accompanied was part of her strategy for establishing and maintaining that image.



Figure 2. J.L. Asher, *Portrait of Mlle. Jenny Lind*, 1845.

The domestic home was not the only private, intimate setting applicable to this discussion. As we have seen in the previous two case studies, the intimacy associated with self-accompaniment during the nineteenth century more accurately existed on a continuum of increasingly elite settings, from the home to the drawing room to the salon to the court. Even as self-accompaniment evoked domestic virtue and Victorian female desirability, when executed by the best singers it had the potential to evoke luxury, exclusivity, professionalism and even nobility. This elite end of the private-space continuum was equally applicable to both female and male singers. Regardless of where on the continuum the audience perceived self-accompaniment to belong, when performed upon the public stage self-accompaniment created the illusion of the same imagery, social relationships and artistic values that were popular in those private spaces.

Nineteenth-century self-accompanied singers can be understood to be making a show of private intimacy upon the public stage, a practice that worked to the advantage of the performer, the audience and the music in a variety of ways. For the performer, self-accompaniment communicated that the singer was equipped for and accustomed to

frequenting elite musical and social circles. For the female performer particularly, self-accompaniment helped to define her stage persona, affording the opportunity for sensual display in the guise of accepted domestic demurity. For the audience, self-accompaniment offered the opportunity to feel privy to the performer's private life and emotions. By evoking a private atmosphere, self-accompaniment helped to forge a personal rapport between audience and performer. Self-accompaniment also enabled paying, public audiences to experience an element of the musical luxury historically reserved for the nobility. The music, presented in a positive, special, intimate and luxurious atmosphere, would have been inevitably enhanced by all of these effects.

Evocation of the Orphic Ideal Musician

The second overarching explanation for how self-accompaniment enhanced the music, the performer and the experience of nineteenth-century audiences is also a symbolic one. Classical myths, characters and imagery, particularly the Orpheus legend, held a powerful resonance for Victorian society just as they had for previous generations, though now through a romantic and increasingly nostalgic lens as symbols of an archaic ideal. Victorian artists like Edward John Poynter (1796-1886), John William Waterhouse (1849-1917) and others exploited the tensions between sacred and secular, mythological and mundane, chaste and sensual in music making, particularly involving women. The self-accompanied singer was a recurring subject in these artistic explorations, alternately displayed as a St Cecilia, an Orpheus, a siren, a mermaid, an angel, or other mystical character, with the Orphic props and attributes of the lyre or its various reconfigurations. Famous singers were often painted or photographed in character as their most famous roles, and the props or attributes for these characters were often Orphic; Malibran was portrayed by multiple artists as Desdemona, holding the harp which she so famously played while singing the Willow aria; Patti was also memorialised as Desdemona, holding a lute, while Viardot-García was both painted and photographed with a lyre as Orphée in Berlioz's adaptation of Gluck's Orfeo.



Figure 3. Henri Decaisne, *Maria Malibran as Desdemona in Rossini's 'Otello'*, oil on canvas, 1831, Carnavalet Museum, Paris.

The significance of the lyre to the visual portrayal of the classical/romantic ideal musician character has not gone unnoticed in modern academia, but neither has it been specifically connected to the act of self-accompanied singing. Harp, lute, guitar, organ and piano were all variously substituted for the lyre as the signifier of Orphic or celestial musicianship, all of these instruments could be played while singing, and all were favoured as instruments to display ideal femininity. In her analysis of Malibran as an icon of romanticism, April Fitzlyon wrote at length about the significance of the female harper as a distinct, nineteenth-century romantic character. The harp itself held ‘mythical and poetic significance; it was the instrument of angels, of Ossian, and of beautiful women, ‘the harp which makes the woman who plays it adored...the joy of David and of God’, ‘an instrument which transports one from earth to heaven’.²⁵⁶ Contemporary literature abounded with examples of such beautiful, harp-playing women, who enchanted their listeners with an angelic and mystical power. One example is the character Emilia in George Meredith’s novel *Emilia in England* (later republished as *Sandra Belloni*), who performed Stradella airs

²⁵⁶ Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran*, 81-82.

in the forest with her harp:

Amid this desolation, a dwarfed pine, whose roots were partially bared as they grasped the broken bank that was its perch, threw far out a cedar-like hand. In the shadow of it sat the fair singer. A musing touch of her harp-strings drew the intruders to the charmed circle, though they could discern nothing save the glimmer of the charmed instrument and one set of fingers caressing it.²⁵⁷

In this passage Emilia is a romanticised female harper, but she is also more specifically a self-accompanied singer, and it is likely that this function of self-accompaniment was as instrumental in rendering such angelic significance to the whole construct of woman with harp (or other lyre substitute) as the instrument itself. Another example of such a romanticised self-accompanied harper appears in Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*:

He listened to those strains which spoke once to the heart of the father, the patriot, and the man—breathed from the chords of his country's emblem—breathed in the pathos of his country's music—breathed from the lips of his apparently inspired daughter! The 'white rising of her hands upon the harp;' the half-drawn veil, that imperfectly discovered the countenance of a seraph; the moon-light that played round her fine form, and partially touched her drapery with its silver beam—her attitude! her air!!²⁵⁸

In light of the potency of the self-accompanied singing harpist in novels like these, it is no surprise that Malibran created such a sensation accompanying herself in the *Willow Song* on the harp as Desdemona in Rossini's *Otello*, and no surprise that she was so often painted and drawn in that character: as Desdemona, Malibran brought a whole host of similar, idealized characters to life.

Nineteenth-century fiction is filled with many more characters who are self-accompanied singers, many of them female amateurs who illustrated the domestic model for self-accompaniment. Amongst Jane Austen's various heroines Marianne Dashwood 'spent whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying',²⁵⁹ while Emma 'wanted neither taste nor spirit in the little things which are generally acceptable, and could accompany her own voice well', singing solos and also duets with Frank Churchill,²⁶⁰ and

²⁵⁷ George Meredith, *Emilia in England. In Three Volumes*, London: Chapman & Hall, 193, Piccadilly, 1864, 14-16.

²⁵⁸ Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl; a National Tale* (1806), 6th edition (Boston: Joseph Greenleaf, 1808), quoted in Weliver, *The Musical Crowd in English Fiction*, 92.

²⁵⁹ Jane Austen, *Sense & Sensibility* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1902), 73.

²⁶⁰ Jane Austen, Austen, Jane. *Emma*. London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd, 1896 (first published 1816), 200.

Elizabeth Bennet played and sang pleasingly but was in social agonies over her sister Mary's constant impatience to display despite a 'weak' voice and 'affected manner'.²⁶¹ Rosamond Vincy in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* could play admirably and sing ballads like 'Home, sweet home', Hadyn's canzonettes and Mozart arias.²⁶² Miss Rose in Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* learned to accompany her voice with the harpsichord and 'sung with great taste and feeling;' to name but a few.²⁶³

Certain fictional self-accompanists more potently illustrate the association between self-accompanied singer and romanticised, neoclassical conceptions of the ideal musician. The character Corinne in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne* (1807) was a great singer who, like Meredith's Emilia and Owenson's Irish girl, could entrance her audience with the beauty of her singing and the aesthetic image she presented in performance. Corinne, however, preferred the lyre because it was 'more antique in form and simpler in sound than the harp', and with it accompanied not only her singing but also poetic recitation, not unlike the original classical orators.²⁶⁴ Suzanne Fagence Cooper noted that to Victorian audiences the archaic lyre symbolized not just the musical powers of Orpheus but also a 'lost unity of the arts', nostalgia for a golden age', and the 'attempt to recapture a lost innocence'.²⁶⁵ This neoclassical nostalgia is vividly on display in one of the engravings from the 1833 republication of *Corinne*. The image illustrates Corinne's final performance for her friends and for Oswald, amongst ancient ruins on a hill outside of the city of Rome overlooking the sea and mount Vesuvius. Corinne is depicted as a nymph or goddess-like creature, in Grecian dress, eyes directed heavenward in an angelic pose, her lyre prominently in the foreground.

²⁶¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), 89.

²⁶² George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Doreen Roberts (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 133-134.

²⁶³ Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley, or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1897), 75.

²⁶⁴ Madame de Staël, *Corinne; or, Italy*, trans. Isabel Hill and L.E. Landon (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, (Successor to Henry Colburn), 1833, book 2, chapter 3, 25.

²⁶⁵ Cooper, *St Cecilia's Halo*, 478.



Figure 4. 'Her friends were impatient to hear her. Even the common people knew her fame, and, as imagination rendered them judges of poetry, they closed silently round'. Illustration in *Corinne; or, Italy*, by Madame de Staël, 1833, 12.

Contemporary readers were aware of the correspondence between fictional singing heroines like Corinne and the larger-than-life stage personae of divas like Malibran and her rivals. Malibran biographer the Countess de Merlin claimed that in Malibran, the 'favourite creation of [Staël's] genius' was 'in reality personified', comparing Corinne's crowning with laurels at the capitol after her self-accompanied oratory to Malibran's conquering of the stages of Europe:

It was in the spring of 1832 that Malibran, the Corinne of our modern days, made her appearance in Rome. This city, called eternal, is but the faded monument of past successes, or rather but a solitary mourner over the peopled dead....Amidst this ruin, this desolation, a gentle voice is heard, an immortal spirit breathes, and the melody of song is felt to vibrate on the ear, and the songstress is worthy of the glories of the past!²⁶⁶

In some cases, these fictional characters corresponded directly to a living singer. For example, George Sand based the heroine of her novel *Consuelo* on Pauline Viardot-García. Consuelo, who develops through the course of the novel from unknown gypsy singer to international opera star under the tutelage of castrato singing teacher Nicola Porpora in

²⁶⁶ Staël, *Corinne*, 18-21.

eighteenth-century Venice, is a fascinating romantic character, described as an outwardly plain woman who transformed into a great beauty when she sang, through her spiritual purity and the ‘divine fire’ of the music which burst into life in her eyes.²⁶⁷ Many of the events in Consuelo’s life in the novel correspond to real events in Viardot-García’s life and career, and the novel’s popularity cast a mystique and fascination about the young Viardot-García herself. In the novel Consuelo is occasionally asked to sing an aria at the piano, and she both sings and speaks of her admiration for old Spanish folk songs, the same repertoire which Viardot-García performed for Sand and Chopin in private, in the salon and on the concert stage.

An important aspect of the construction of self-accompanied singer as ideal musician is the idea of power; the ability of the singer to amaze, beguile and even subdue through music. According to Cooper, Victorian audiences were ‘happy to accept that music could open up communication between the natural and supernatural worlds’.²⁶⁸ Contemporary accounts of performances by real self-accompanied singers demonstrate this willingness on the part of audiences to be entranced and transported by the music and the performer, through varying performance contexts and skill levels of singer. An example of this occurred in a concert given in the Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool in 1851, featuring soprano Mlle. Beer. During the course of the concert Beer performed arias and duets from Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*, from Spohr’s *Jessonda*, and an unnamed aria by Donizetti, as well as a self-accompanied Tyrolean folk dance which caught the notice of the reviewer:

But her greatest triumph was in a simple Tyrolienne, in which she accompanied herself on the piano-forte. Like Jenny Lind’s Swedish, and Madame Viardot’s Spanish ballads, it is a gem, of which no description can give a proper conception. These simple productions in the hands of a master spirit seize upon the imagination at once, and carry off an audience captive.²⁶⁹

This example reinforces several patterns: the association of self-accompaniment with nationalistic or folk-derived songs, the conscious grouping of this repertoire and presentation with the native self-accompanied songs sung by Lind and Viardot-García which further delineates a specific category of self-accompanied performance practice, and the apparent fact that this performance was the highlight of the programme. This time the reviewer also briefly attempts to explain why the Tyrolienne was Beer’s biggest hit of the evening: the music’s simplicity has its own intangible charm, but more importantly, this

²⁶⁷ Barbara Kendall-Davies, *The Life and Work of Pauline Viardot Garcia. Vol I: The Years of Fame, 1836-1863* (Amersham: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2003), 152.

²⁶⁸ Cooper, *St Cecilia’s Halo*, 229.

²⁶⁹ ‘Local Intelligence’, *Liverpool Mercury etc.* [Liverpool, England], 5 December 1851.

kind of song, presented as it always is by divas like Lind and Viardot-García, serves as the material for interpretive magic by the singer, the ‘master spirit’ who captures the imagination of the audience.

A contrastingly private example of a self-accompanied performance in which the singer was purported to possess a mystical ability to capture imaginations and channel emotion comes from the scene at Chopin’s deathbed in No. 12, Place Vendôme, Paris, in 1849. According to several sources, the Countess Delphine Potocka (a highly skilled amateur musician and one of Chopin’s favourite singers) was called upon to sing during his final hours. The resulting scene was recounted in an extraordinarily romanticised way by Chopin’s friends and biographers:

But the most affecting incident was the arrival, on Sunday, Oct. 15, of Countess Delphine Potocka....She had scarcely arrived when he asked her to sing, that he might once more hear the beautiful voice he had loved so much. The piano was moved in from the next room, and the Countess, who, with marvellous self-control mastered her feelings, sang in pure and clear but somewhat vibrant tones the ‘Hymn to the Holy Virgin’, by Stradella, with such beauty and devotion that the dying artist immediately begged her to repeat it. As if strengthened and inspired by a higher power, the Countess sat down to the piano again and sang a Psalm by Marcello. Those around the bed felt that Chopin was becoming weaker every moment, and sank noiselessly on their knees. The solemn stillness was broken only by the Countess’s wonderful voice, like the song of an angel summoning the soul of the great master to the realms of the blessed. All suppressed their sobs that they might not disturb the dying man’s last moment of happiness – his joy in his beloved art. But the rattle of death broke in upon the second song. The piano was quickly removed from the side of the bed.²⁷⁰

Though there are disagreements about exactly what Potocka sang for Chopin, other accounts of this scene confirm that she sang self-accompanied. Chopin’s friend and long time correspondent Wojciech Grzymala, who was present at the scene, wrote that ‘A few hours before [Chopin] died he asked Mme Potocka for three airs of Bellini and Rossini. These she sang, accompanying herself and sobbing, while he listened to them with sobs and religious emotion as the last sounds he would hear in this world’.²⁷¹ Pauline Viardot-García

²⁷⁰ Moritz Karasowski, *Chopin: His Life And Letters*, 3rd edition (first published 1879), trans. Emily Hill (London: William Reeves, 1938), 364-365.

²⁷¹ Letter from Wojciech Grzymala to August Leo, October 1849, in Hedley, *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, 375.

wrote in a letter to George Sand that she had heard Chopin died just as Potocka sang him the final note of a psalm by Marcello.²⁷² Franz Liszt, in his 1852 biography of Chopin, also narrated the scene of Chopin's deathbed:

On Sunday, October 15, crises still more painful than earlier ones lasted several hours. [Chopin] bore them patiently and with great spiritual fortitude. The Countess Delphine Potocka, who was then present, was deeply affected and wept. He noticed her standing at the foot of his bed, tall, slender, clothed in white, and resembling the most angelic figures that the most devout painters could envision. Doubtless he thought this was some heavenly apparition, and as the attack left him a moment of relief he asked her to sing. He was thought at first to be delirious, but he earnestly repeated his request. Who would have dared oppose it? The piano was rolled from the salon to the door of the bedroom, and the Countess sang, her voice choked in sobs and with tears streaming down her cheeks. Never before, surely, had this exquisite talent and wondrous voice achieved an expression so filled with pathos. Chopin seemed to suffer less while he listened. She sang the famous Hymn to the Virgin which, it is said, had saved the life of Stradella. 'How beautiful it is! My God, how beautiful!' he exclaimed, 'Again – again!' Although overcome with emotion, the Countess had the noble courage to grant this final wish of a friend and compatriot. She reseated herself at the piano and sang a Psalm of Marcello. Chopin was worse, everyone was frightened. Spontaneously the entire company knelt, no one ventured to speak, and only the voice of the Countess was heard, soaring like a celestial melody above the sighs and sobs that served as its muffled and mournful accompaniment. Night was falling. A semi-darkness lent its mysterious shadows to this sad scene. Chopin's sister, prostrate near his bed, wept and prayed, and she scarcely changed this position as long as her cherished brother remained alive.²⁷³

These accounts by Moritz, Grzymala, Viardot-García and Liszt each portray Potocka's singing as the pivotal moment and source of transcendence in the final moments of Chopin's life. A final, non-verbal account by painter Felix-Joseph Barrias brings this imagery to life. His painting, titled *The Death of Fryderyk Chopin* (1885), depicts Chopin

²⁷² Letter from Pauline Viardot-García to George Sand, October 1849.

²⁷³ Franz Liszt, *Frederic Chopin* (1852), ed. and trans. Edward N. Waters (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1963), 178-179.

upon his deathbed with friends and clergymen and women around him. Chopin himself is positioned to the side; the focal point of the painting is Delfina Potocka as she stands, not sits, at the piano (an unmistakably nineteenth-century parlour upright) to sing. Like the illustration of Staël's *Corinne*, the Countess is coiffed and garbed like a Greek goddess, and as Moritz and Liszt described, she is has an angelic aspect, gazing spiritually upward and bathed in a white light which also encompasses the dying Chopin. In this painting, it is the self-accompanied singer, embodying the Orphic triumph of music over death, and not the priest, who soothes and releases the soul of the dying artist.



Figure 5. Felix-Joseph Barrias, *La mort de Chopin*, 1885, oil on canvas, National Museum Krakow.

The nineteenth century's deliberate romanticisation of the self-accompanied singer was linked not just specifically to interest in classical mythology, but to a more general tendency to idealize the past. George Sand's *Consuelo* played upon this, placing the heroine in the golden age of bel canto where she sang and played alongside the greatest of the castrati. Charles de Flandre Petit's manuscript, *The Heroine of the Sixteenth Century – History of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots* presented a romantic picture of its protagonist whose life was a tapestry of 'wild and passionate melodies', and who was 'first, for her age,

in every learned art and accomplishment; singing, while she accompanied herself on the lute, songs of her native land'.²⁷⁴ Like the seventeenth-century singing treatises that grouped self-accompaniment amongst the essentials of vocal techniques and artistry, in this passage we see self-accompaniment woven into the total cultural landscape that defined Mary Queen of Scots to nineteenth-century readers as a historical heroine. It demonstrates that self-accompaniment was understood to be a regular part of historical musical life, and furthermore that it was appreciated as something that would lend additional colour and appeal to her character.

Orpheus was a popular symbol in the nineteenth century, and a natural extension of this was to attribute his powers to famous singers of the present day, as can be seen in the following passage by one of Malibran's biographers. According to the Countess de Merlin, Malibran and her company ignored a no-trespassing notice during an outing in Castellamare, Naples, and intruded upon the private lands of the Prince of Capua. They were caught and threatened by armed guards who refused to listen to the party's excuses, whereupon Malibran stepped forward:

In this terrific dilemma, Maria bethought herself of an expedient likely to extricate herself and her friends; namely, to try the power of that voice to whose enchanting spell thousands had bowed. She instantly began to sing one of her finest morceaux. The abirri appeared transfixed with amazement. In another moment their caps were doffed, and the party were respectfully allowed to depart. Like the head of Cerberus, which bowed to the lyre of Orpheus, these men were moved by the power of Malibran's captivating talents, and owned a sway as yet unknown to their rough natures.²⁷⁵

This story, true or not, closely parallels the myth of Orpheus taming the guardians of Hades to retrieve Eurydice, attributing to Malibran the Orphic power to control man and nature through music. Elsewhere, Malibran's vocal powers were described in Orphic terms even though the name of Orpheus was not specifically invoked:

She could, like the singers of ancient days, transport the mind into sublimity, infuse the spirit of benevolence, inspire divine energy, arouse the slumbering conscience, restore social sympathies, regulate moral feelings, restrain the fury of ambition, unlock the iron grasp of avarice, expand the liberal palm to deeds of charity, breathe the sacred love of peace into the bosom of the turbulent, and the mild spirit of forbearance

²⁷⁴ 'The Heroine of the Sixteenth Century', *Examiner* [London, England], 9 May 1874.

²⁷⁵ Merlin, *Memoires of Madame Malibran*, 198-200.

and toleration into persecuting bigotry and prejudice.²⁷⁶

Neither of these examples describes Malibran actually singing to her own accompaniment, yet the Orphic ideation is explicit. The romanticisation of great singers as incarnations of past ideals of musicianship ran deep, and the act of self-accompaniment encouraged and reinforced this on a conscious and subconscious level.

Conclusion

Public, virtuosic self-accompanied performances by singers like Lind, Malibran, Viardot-García and their contemporaries were the decadent, refined, professional distillation of a much bigger tradition which encompassed public and private settings, professional and amateur performers, educated and uneducated audiences, high-brow and low-brow repertoire. They were the culmination of centuries of elite music making, in which self-accompaniment helped to define a romanticized image of the ideal artist musician, a sort of Romantic Orpheus. On the nineteenth-century concert stage, practiced by the most celebrated singers, self-accompaniment played a unique artistic and theatrical role. It allowed the public to glimpse the elegant and intimate artistic inner world of elite society: a window into the diva's drawing room. At the same time, through a combination of neoclassical imagery and romanticisation of the beauty of the female performer, self-accompaniment encouraged audiences to indulge in the fantasy of the singer as an Orphic creature who possessed the power to entrance and mystify through music, but who was also intimately knowable. This relationship between audience and performer reflected the nineteenth-century approach to theatre as a stylized art form which 'sought through the actor's portrayal of emotion to evoke similar feelings within the spectator', and in which the performing artist concentrated on conveying a generally recognised 'idea' of either a character or an 'affective situation'.²⁷⁷

The imagery and fantasy of the self-accompanied singer on the concert stage was echoed and reinforced in nineteenth-century art and literature. In art, classical images of self-accompanied singers – sirens, angels, gods and demigods – from Greek mythology were romanticised to suit nineteenth-century tastes, and artistic portrayals of the most famous self-accompanied singers often resembled these stylized depictions. In literature, characters like Corinne and Emilia and Flora sang to their own accompaniment at the harp, lyre, piano and harpsichord; sometimes they sang folk tunes with the simplicity of a country girl, and sometimes arias with the virtuosity of a singer destined for an international career,

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 3-4.

²⁷⁷ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera*, 209.

but always with the same romanticised femininity and beauty. Some of these characters were based on living singers, reinforcing the connection between fantasy and reality.

Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind all achieved the ultimate balance between skill and display in their self-accompanied performances. Some of their self-accompanied repertoire was highly virtuosic for both voice and accompanying instrument, and contemporary accounts of these performances insist that both singing and playing were technically secure. Some of their repertoire was extremely simple, intended to charm rather than impress, and contemporary accounts of these performances indicate that the singer exercised complete control over the artistic delivery of the piece. In this way Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind employed the skills advocated by the great *bel canto* singing teachers in the previous case study, while also entering a phase of decadence in the theatrical and aesthetic effects of their self-accompaniment eclipsed the practical ones, helping to construct their identities as performers. The symbolic significance of their self-accompanied performances was a marriage of the nineteenth-century ideal of the woman as the ‘angel in the house’, who brings culture and refinement to those around her, and the classical ideal of the mystical, powerful, Orphic musician whose singing and playing surpassed all others in skill and could entrance and subdue all who listened.

Chapter Seven

George Henschel and Reynaldo Hahn: Specialization, art song and recording

Introduction

The careers of George Henschel (1850-1934) and Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) represent a unique and significant period in the history of self-accompanied singing. In the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, through the performances of Henschel, Hahn and a small number of others, self-accompanied singing was redefined as a specialized and sustainable independent art, in which the repertoire was recognized as art music, the vocal part and accompaniment were equally virtuosic and demanding, and self-accompanied performances constituted the bulk of the singer's career. Even more importantly, in the first decades of the twentieth century the sounding results of this unique intersection of skills were captured for posterity in the recording studio.

By any definition Henschel and Hahn were influential figures in music history. Both had long careers in which they distinguished themselves as singers, pianists, composers, conductors, teachers and writers. Like the prima donnas of the previous case study, both men frequented the highest levels of society, interacting with the greatest musicians, writers, artists and thinkers of their generation. Between them, their performances encompassed every possible sphere of audience and venue at the time: public concert hall, royal palace, private salon, middle class home, live radio, and recording studio. As champions of early recording and radio broadcasting, they each left behind a large discography that captured their work as singers, accompanists, conductors and composers.

In contrast to the previous case study in which self-accompanied singing took place in specific contexts for special effect, Henschel and Hahn were by choice almost exclusively their own accompanists. Both men performed primarily art song, and were recognized at the time as major influences in the development of the art song recital as a new and novel concert form. Through their performances and recordings, self-accompaniment would become a naturalized part of their audiences' experience of this repertoire. This chapter thus addresses a fascinating intersection between two kinds of specialization: Hahn and Henschel's exclusive practice of self-accompaniment, and the rise of art song as a specialized genre with its own expectations for composition and performance practice.

George Henschel (1850-1934)

Background

George Henschel, born Isidor Georg Henschel, was equally a pianist and singer from an early age. Born in Breslau in 1850, he attended the Leipzig Conservatorium from the age of sixteen where he studied piano with Ignaz Moscheles, theory with Carl Reinecke and Erns Friedrich Richter, and singing with Franz Goetze. Later he would continue his studies of singing and composition in Berlin with Adolf Schulze and Friedrich Kiel. Henschel first made a name for himself as a singer in Germany; he made his *début* as a bass at the age of sixteen and quickly rose to prominence as a bass soloist. Johannes Brahms first heard him sing in the Lower Rhine Festival in 1874, and was so struck by Henschel's singing and personality that a lasting artistic collaboration and friendship began; in 1875 Brahms invited Henschel to sing the part of Christus in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, and the title role in Max Bruch's oratorio *Odysseus*, both conducted by Brahms with the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.

Henschel's career in England began shortly thereafter, when he made his *début* in February of 1877 at a Monday Popular Concert in St. James's Hall in London. Edith J. Hipkins said of Henschel's London *début* that he 'swept all before him' and 'burst upon us all like a great wind, with his glorious voice, his flashing eyes and his splendid vitality'.²⁷⁸ It is unclear exactly what Henschel sang in his *début* – some articles list an aria from Handel's *Rinaldo*²⁷⁹ while others cite arias by Carissimi and Pergolesi,²⁸⁰ though all agree he also sang 'Der Neugierige' and 'Ganymied' by Schubert, accompanied by a Mr. Zerbini. It is useful that Henschel did not accompany his own singing in this performance, because it allows the reviews from the performance to attest how London audiences received him as a concert singer, uninfluenced by any novelties of performance practice. *The Athenaeum* described the success of his performance as follows:

It is not often that there is much temptation to call attention to the vocalists at these concerts; but there was a *début* last Monday, the importance of which cannot be over-rated. Since the passing away of Pischek and Staudigl, the advent of a baritone-bass, equal or approaching to either of these great artists, has been long looked for....In the person of

²⁷⁸ Helen Henschel, *When Soft Voices Die. A musical biography* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1949), 14.

²⁷⁹ 'Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts', *The Monthly musical record* [London, England], 1 March 1877, 48.

²⁸⁰ 'The 'Popular' Concerts', *The Orchestra* 3/32 [London, England], March 1877, 244.

Herr Henschel, the musical world can be congratulated on having a well-trained artist with a magnificent voice. He is very young, yet he has already made his mark in Germany....The auditory was taken by surprise by the sympathetic quality and expressive style of Herr Henschel, who was twice recalled after Handel's air, and equally applauded after Schubert's songs. There will be curiosity to hear the new vocalist in oratorio, for in the works of Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, &c., he is thoroughly versed.²⁸¹

London's curiosity was satisfied a few months later when Henschel appeared one of the soloists in the sixth triennial Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace before 20,000 people. On this occasion he was one among an array of famous soloists both foreign and English, and the reviews indicate that compared favourably with his more familiar co-stars: 'Another novelty was Herr Georg Henschel, the new German bass, who only arrived this season in London, and at once stepped into the first rank among concert singers'.²⁸² From this point forward Henschel built his career in England as a singer, conductor and teacher, succeeding Jenny Lind as professor of singing at the Royal College of Music in 1886 and conducting the London Symphony Concerts from 1886 to 1896 and the Scottish Orchestra from 1891 to 1895. He spent several sojourns in the United States as well, as the first conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1881 to 1884, and as a teacher at the Institute of Musical Art in New York City.²⁸³

By the time of his retirement Henschel was widely recognized as one of the great musicians of the nineteenth century, and one of the most versatile. In the words of *The Advertiser*: 'There are few more versatile musicians than Mr. George Henschel.... At one time he was best known, perhaps, as a conductor, and then, of course, he is a world-famous singer. As a composer he has produced a quantity of excellent work. He enjoys a high reputation as a teacher, while he is further a fine pianist, having studied the instrument to good purpose under Moscheles'.²⁸⁴ When introducing Henschel to their readership, contemporary writers were divided as to which of his skills came first, emphasizing conducting, singing, composition, teaching and playing in turn. Henschel's listeners seem to have felt that his versatility only strengthened his performances, as can be seen in the following article published on the occasion of Henschel's jubilee in 1914:

Indeed, in the comprehensive roles of singer, conductor, composer, and

²⁸¹ 'Concerts', *The Athenaeum*, 2574, (24 February 1877).

²⁸² 'London Gossip. *South Australian Register* 6, 20 August 1877.

²⁸³ The Institute was the United States' first premier music school and would later merge with the Juilliard Foundation to become the Juilliard School of Music.

²⁸⁴ 'Music', *The Advertiser* [Australia], 11 Apr 1914.

pianist he has achieved fame. By his efforts he has raised the standard of Lieder-singing in England very considerably, and his symphony concerts and recitals have afforded great pleasure to the musical public. For an artist in his 60th year to resume, and with success, his career as a vocalist was a remarkable event, but he did this three years since, and in spite of his age, continued to delight audiences, and at the same time afford an example to aspiring artists by the beauty of his method.²⁸⁵

Henschel maintained his health, energy and vocal quality into old age, conducting the opening concert of Boston Symphony Orchestra's 50th anniversary season in 1931 at the age 81, and giving his last public performance as a singer on live radio on his 84th birthday, months before his death.

Specialization in self-accompanied art song

Despite his versatility, Henschel's career embodied several kinds of interconnected specialization that defined his influence and identity as a musician. First, he was (almost) always his own accompanist. While previously it has been unclear whether self-accompaniment should be assumed if it was not specified in the source, in the case of Henschel, it is possible and necessary to make this assumption. Henschel's own published memoirs, *Musings and Memories of a Musician* (1918) contain descriptions of many of his performances, particularly from *soirées* and private occasions. Only occasionally did he specify that he was playing his own accompaniments, but he did so using language that urged broader application. Describing a private evening *soirée* at a residence in Belgrave Square in 1877, Henschel wrote: 'Soon my turn came: a recitative and air from a Handel opera. As usual I was my own accompanist. After striking a few forte chords by way of prelude I began to sing'.²⁸⁶ Describing a concert under the direction of Paolo Tosti at an evening party given for the German Emperor and Empress by Lord and Lady Salisbury at Hatfield House, 1891, Henschel wrote: 'When 'my turn' came – I accompanied myself as usual – the Kaiser happened to stand not far off from the piano, his maimed arm hidden behind his back, whilst not far from the tail-end of the piano were seated the Princess of Wales, the Empress of Germany, and the Duchess of Portland'.²⁸⁷ And finally, describing an impromptu performance while conducting the London Symphony when the hired vocal soloist cancelled on short notice, Henschel wrote: 'His solo was to have been Beethoven's

²⁸⁵ 'Musical Miscellanies', *The Daily News*, 11 Jul 1914.

²⁸⁶ Henschel, *Musings and Memories of a Musician*, 169-170.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 360-361.

beautiful ‘Buss-Lied’ (Song of Penitence), also one of my own favourites, and on going back to the platform and announcing the disappointment to the audience, I added that, if they didn’t mind, I would sing the song myself, which I promptly did, accompanying myself, as usual, on the piano’.²⁸⁸

Contemporary sources from the end of Henschel’s career describe Henschel’s self-accompaniment with the same telling language. Examples include ‘[he] accompanied himself, as his custom has always been’;²⁸⁹ ‘George Henschel, after he had sung a group of songs and accompanied them himself, *more suo*, as beautifully as ever’;²⁹⁰ and ‘he was always his own accompanist’.²⁹¹ Of course, Henschel also appeared frequently on the concert stage accompanied by orchestra in oratorio and operatic works, and there were also occasions where politics or pleasure called for a separate accompanist. For example, in 1885 Brahms invited Henschel to participate in a concert at Krefeld. The program included Brahms’s third symphony, the first chorus of his *Triumphlied*, the first five of his *Lieder und Romanzen* op 93a, and several of his solo songs in which Brahms himself accompanied Henschel. According to Peter Clive, when Henschel suggested they offer one of Brahms’s *Magelone-Lieder* as an encore, Brahms insisted he wasn’t capable of playing the accompaniment by memory, but that August Grütters (the director of several local choral and instrumental ensembles) could, and so Henschel and Grütters performed the song together instead.²⁹² A more private example comes from Henschel’s daughter Helen, who wrote about meeting Tchaikovsky: ‘Sometimes [Tchaikovsky] accompanied my father in songs, surprising me, incidentally, by his rather crude playing, for I had expected something wonderful from such a great composer. I remember, too, how strange I thought it to see my father standing beside the piano while he sang, because his habit was invariably to accompany himself’.²⁹³ From evidence like this, it is clear that Henschel accompanied himself given the choice and appropriate repertoire, and self-accompaniment should be assumed in the case of ambiguous sources.

The other major dimension of Henschel’s specialisation as a musician was his chosen repertoire. ‘He may truly be said to have permanently established Lieder in this

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 373.

²⁸⁹ ‘Mostly Personal’, *Western Mail*, 17 May 1928. A review of a recital given by Henschel at the Arts Theatre Club in London in 1928.

²⁹⁰ ‘Ave atque Vale!’ [no publication details], 25 January 1930.

²⁹¹ ‘Sir George Henschel, 1850-1934’, Obituary. *The Musical Times*, 75/1100 (October 1934), 894-895.

²⁹² Peter Clive, *Brahms and his world: a Biographical Dictionary* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), 189.

²⁹³ Helen Henschel, ‘Famous Musicians I Have Met’, *Music Masterpieces: Gems from the World’s Famous Operas & Musical Plays*, vol. 6., ed. Percy Pitt (London: Educational Book Company, Ltd., n.d.), 55.

country’,²⁹⁴ wrote Robert Potter in *Gramophone* magazine, marking the occasion of Henschel’s last broadcast vocal recital from the London Studio, 22nd January, 1930. Potter’s sentiment was widely shared at the time by professional musicians, scholars and amateurs alike, and has been echoed by scholars and music critics throughout the 20th century, though today few singers have heard of Henschel.

Henschel’s lengthy career, which spanned sixty-eight years from his début in 1866 to his final public broadcast in 1934, formed a direct link between the greatest song composers of the nineteenth century and the advent of recording in the twentieth. By the end of his life, Henschel had come to be treasured, in the words of *The Montreal Gazette*, 1930, as one of the ‘last living representatives of one of the greatest epochs of music’.²⁹⁵ At the time of his public début, ‘Wagner had not finished composing “The Ring of the Nibelungs”, Brahms was still a young man: Thackeray was still living, so was Rossini.... Beethoven and Schubert had been dead only just over thirty years and their music could still be called modern’.²⁹⁶ American actress and salon hostess Mary Anderson de Navarro called Henschel a link ‘in the now almost vanished chain which bound to-day to the great musical world of the later nineteenth century’ and ‘the last of the Olympians’.²⁹⁷

Henschel enjoyed close personal connections to many of the great songwriters of the nineteenth century, and this helped established him in the minds of the public as an authority on that repertoire. The best example of this was his relationship with Johannes Brahms; having the opportunity to become a close friend and collaborator early in his career with one of the great *lieder* composers of the century inevitably had a significant influence on Henschel’s development as a *lieder* singer. J.A. Fuller-Maitland, writing about Brahms in 1911, noted that Henschel was ‘one of the singers who interpreted Brahms most successfully in the early days’, and indicated that Henschel had premiered a number of Brahms’ songs.²⁹⁸ Concerts conducted by Brahms in the 1870s and 1880s often featured Henschel performing a set of Brahms’ solo songs alongside symphonies and larger choral works. Though on these occasions the composer accompanied Henschel, Henschel would continue to programme Brahms *lieder* on his self-accompanied recitals and broadcasts until the end of his career.

In 1934 *The Musical Times*’ obituary of Henschel noted that in England he ‘enjoyed a uniformly successful and distinguished career, both in oratorio and in the then novel fashion

²⁹⁴ Robert W. F. Potter, ‘Sir George Henschel’, *Gramophone* (May 1930): 12-13.

²⁹⁵ ‘Sir George Henschel. News of Stage, Screen and Music’, *The Montreal Gazette*, 1 February 1930.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Mary Anderson, ‘Sir George Henschel’, *Times* [London, England], 14 September 1934, 14.

²⁹⁸ J.A. Fuller-Maitland, *Brahms*, 2nd Edition (London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1911), 63.

of the solo recital'.²⁹⁹ It would be another decade before Gerald Moore would begin his ground-breaking rise to fame as an accompanist, and the publication of his book *The Unashamed Accompanist* (1943), the combination of which is today credited with opening the public's eyes on an international scale to the artistic importance of the accompaniment in art song. In this sense Henschel's entire career predated the advent of the modern song recital, and his contribution to its development has been underestimated. In the words of the *Guardian Weekly*, 29 March 1987, 'The day had not quite arrived when lieder recitals began to attract a musically awakening audience, though pioneer work had been done with distinction by such as Ivor Newton, R. J. Forbes, and George Henschel, a great lieder singer who provided his own accompaniment'.

In the 1870s, Henschel's pioneer work in promoting the song recital had more to do with programming of repertoire than interpretation and execution of the music itself. While still based in Germany, Henschel was one of a few elite singers who are today credited with affecting a new direction in concert culture through their experiments in song programming. Rather than the usual fashion of interspersing solo songs with instrumental and larger scale works, in which context the solo singer was an assisting artist only, Henschel, Julius Stockhausen and Amélie Joachim began to present *lieder*, particularly by Johannes Brahms, in deliberate sets, sometimes even multiple sets at a time.³⁰⁰ It is unclear whether Henschel was already performing *lieder* self-accompanied at this early stage. As already noted, Brahms accompanied Henschel on several occasions during this time, and Henschel specifically did not accompany himself in his England début in 1877. That début was one of only two instances, however, where British newspapers documented that Henschel was accompanied by another pianist: the other was a radio broadcast on 3 April, 1928, where Henschel sang Schubert songs accompanied on the piano by Ethel Hobday. Henschel's own published memoir provides the earliest evidence of his self-accompanied singing in England, when he recollects singing a Handel recitative and aria to his own accompaniment at a private *soirée* at a residence in Belgrave Square during his first year in England.³⁰¹ At no point in his own writings did Henschel describe a first or pivotal self-accompanied performance, or a specific decision to become a self-accompanied *lieder* singer; rather he always referred to self-accompaniment as a part of his identity. The technical challenges of performing art song self-accompanied also suggest that he did not suddenly adopt the performance practice upon coming to England; it is more plausible that self-accompaniment

²⁹⁹ 'Sir George Henschel, 1850-1934', 895.

³⁰⁰ Imogen Fellingner, 'Cyclic Tendencies in Brahms' Song Collections' in *Brahms Studies. Analytical and Historical Perspectives. Papers delivered at the International Brahms Conference. Washington, DC, 5-8 May 1983*, ed. George S. Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 381.

³⁰¹ Henschel, *Musings and Memories of a Musician*, 169.

became a part of his practice regime when he was still a young singer, as the natural result of training as both singer and pianist.

Henschel's singing career in England was dominated by song 'recitals', a term which was applied during his lifetime to programs as varied as a fifteen-minute solo broadcast, a full evening solo concert, and a joint concert where sets of songs were heard alongside string quartets or piano solos. Henschel's full-length solo concerts, which most closely resemble the modern concept of the song recital, usually included opera arias and represented a wide range of time periods, and contemporary sources used the term 'vocal recital' interchangeably with 'song recital' to refer to such concerts. Despite the ambiguity of labelling, however, all of these concert forms featured significant numbers of songs presented in deliberately programmed sets, and were perceived by contemporary audiences as specifically song-centric occasions. Contemporary sources make it clear that Henschel's recitals firmly established an association between self-accompaniment and this kind of concert. Henschel's English audiences were struck by the novelty of a full-length concert of only one performer and/or one type of music, and remarked frequently on the importance of skilful programming in the success of such a concert; they were struck by the newness, variety and quality of the art song repertoire Henschel introduced to them (including the importance of hearing these songs in their native language); finally, they were struck by Henschel's self-accompaniment as a uniquely successful method of delivery of this repertoire. For the remainder of this case study all of the above types of concerts given by Henschel – short broadcast, full solo recital and sets of songs on a joint recital – will be referred to as 'song recitals'.

Joint song recitals with Lillian Henschel, 1883-1899

The years 1883-1899 were dominated by song recitals given jointly by Henschel and his wife, the American soprano Lillian Henschel. These were commonly referred to as the 'Henschel Vocal Recitals', and judging by contemporary commentary on the reach and impact of these concerts, they were the single greatest force in introducing art song and the song recital to the UK in the nineteenth century. These recitals were full length concerts presented without the assistance of any other artists, in which Lillian and George each performed an equal number of solo songs, solo arias and duets, accompanied throughout by George. Newspaper advertisements indicate that the Henschels gave a regular series of anywhere from two to five vocal recitals during the London season every year, which were supplemented by an unknown number of recitals in other cities around the country, and prolonged recital tours in Italy, Germany, and the USA. To date, thirty-nine of these joint

recitals have been documented through advertisements, programme listings and reviews for individual concerts. Concerts not included in this number because they are documented too generally (via materials like tour announcements and repertoire listings for an entire year which don't clarify the number of concerts) are the recitals given during a residency in Boston in 1883-1884, a recital tour in Italy during the Christmas holidays in 1889, a recital tour of Germany in 1891, a recital tour of the UK 'provinces' in autumn and winter of 1891, and a five-week, eighteen-town recital tour of the United States in 1896. Further examination of contemporary newspapers and concert programme archives is needed to determine the full scope of the Henschels' recital schedule, but their daughter Helen shed some additional light on the subject when she published an excerpt from her father's diary in her book, *When Soft Voices Die, A musical biography* (1949). The excerpt, from 1891, listed seven recitals in seven different German cities in eleven days, 'and so on, for weeks at a time', to which Helen added her own explanation that a typical recital by her father involved 'the singing of about fifteen songs and duets, and the accompanying of at least twenty'.³⁰² This description exactly matches the structure of her parents' joint recitals, making it likely that this excerpt was from one of the Germany tours mentioned above. If this was representative of the Henschels' schedule during such recital tours, the 39 individual recitals during this period documented thus far constitute a small percentage of what the Henschels actually performed. A sample programme listing and newspaper review from this period are given below as an example of the content, presentation and reception of these recitals.

Reconstructed programme from a recital at the Masonic Hall in Birmingham, 20 February 1893:

Duet: 'Che bel piacere' from <i>Giannina e Bernadone</i>	Cimarosa
aria (L): 'There in Myrtle Shades reclining' from <i>Hercules</i>	Handel
song (L): 'Nymphs and Shepherds'	Purcell
song (L): 'Die Loreley'	Liszt
song (L): 'Serenade de Zanetto'	Massenet
song (L): 'Shoughie, shou, my bairnie'	Henschel
song (L): 'The Little Red Lark'	Irish traditional
song (L): 'Oh whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad'	Scottish traditional
Duet: 'Gondoliera'	Henschel

³⁰² Henschel, *When Soft Voices Die*, 51.

aria (G): 'Vergiss mein nicht'	Bach
song (G): 'Mit Mädeln sich vertragen'	Beethoven
song (G): 'An die Leyer'	Schubert
song (G): 'Erlkönig'	Loewe
song (G): 'Es blinkt der Thau'	Rubinstein
song (G): 'The Grenadiers'	Schumann

Duet: 'Pronta son io, purch'io non manchi' from *Don Pasquale* Donizetti
 characters: Norina and Malatesta

Review of the above programme by the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 February, 1893:

A musical performance of quite a novel character was afforded local amateurs in the vocal recital given by Mr. and Mrs. Henschel in the Masonic Hall last night. Mr. Henschel is, of course, no stranger to us, but his accomplished wife appeared last night for the first time before a Birmingham audience. The lady comes from that land of song, America, and was not unknown to fame as Miss Lillian Bailey, before her marriage in 1881. Mr. Henschel, both as a vocalist and as conductor of the Boston Symphony Concerts, passed some years in the United States, where he met with his artistic partner. We have had many concerts where vocal music greatly predominated, but the vocal recital, pure and simple, was unknown here until last night. We are inclined to think that it owes its origin to the two artists who introduced it here, for Mr. and Mrs. Henschel have, in London and in many Continental cities, been giving this form of art exposition for the last ten years. It is necessary to explain that everything is sung from memory. Mr. Henschel acts as accompanist, and the pianoforte is so placed that the player faces the audience. With such a thorough artist at the instrument, and all the accompaniments played by heart, it may be imagined that the unity of expression is something not otherwise attainable. Indeed, the whole went more with the effect of an artistic improvisation than that of studied expression, so spontaneous was the spirit throughout, and so

appropriate in every case was the feeling. The programme began with a duet from Cimarosa's opera 'Giannina e Bernadone', in which Mrs. Henschel's brilliant soprano voice at once arrested attention. Although the opera – one of seventy-six – was produced at Naples more than a century ago, the music of the duet, 'Che bel piacere', is still very attractive, especially so perfectly sung as it was last night. A 'Gondoliera' for soprano and baritone, by Mr. Henschel, proved a charming production, and it was given with the utmost delicacy and finish. The recital closed with another duet, 'Pronta io son purch'io non manchi', [sic] from Donizetti's 'Don Pasquale'. This has something of the *buffo* character, and it was given with such animation and dramatic force that the effect was magical. So far from being hampered by his work at the pianoforte, Mr. Henschel seems to derive inspiration from the instrument, which, for the moment, becomes part of himself. Mrs. Henschel, besides taking part in the duets, sang seven songs, and proved herself capable of dealing with music of diverse schools. An air from Handel's 'Hercules' was succeeded by Purcell's 'Nymphs and Shepherds', and each was equally well given. In Liszt's 'Loreley' Mrs. Henschel was both pathetic and dramatic; and in the dainty 'Serenade de Zanetto', by Massenet, she was refinement itself, while her vocalisation was perfect in all. In a trio of songs – 'Shoughie, shou, my bairnie' (Henschel), 'The Little Red Lark' (Irish), and 'Oh whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad' – Mrs. Henschel demonstrated her powers in what may be termed people's songs. The first is a tasteful cradle song, but too polished in the musical setting to be quite true to the text. Altogether Mrs. Henschel made a triumphant début here, being recalled after every performance. The only fault that could possibly be found with her singing was that she employs the *tremolo* too much. Of this there is not the slightest trace in the singing of Mr. Henschel. His voice may be somewhat hard and wanting in sympathetic quality, but he is so consummate an artist as to triumph completely over a natural disadvantage. His first song, 'Vergiss mein nicht', we fancy from one of Bach's church cantatas, was sung with devotional expression. It was followed by a *buffo* song by Beethoven, one of two for bass voice and small orchestra, to words from Goethe's 'Claudine von Villa Bella'. These were written at Bonn in 1790, but not published until the issue of

the supplement to Beethoven's works, and the close of the year 1888. The juxtaposition of these two pieces jarred upon one, but the Beethoven selection was so full of humour – the composer being evidently in a merry mood – and was given with such graphic power that the audience would fain have heard it again. Schubert's 'An die Leyer' was another striking performance, and the setting of the 'Erl-King' by that great master of the German 'Lied', Johann C. G. Loewe (1796-1859), one of the most dramatic and impressive things of the evening. The climax worked up, and the vocal close on a dissonant chord – resolved after the singer is silent – are touches that show the hand of genius. In the book of words the composers' names were transposed, and possibly some thought they were listening to the music of Loewe while the Schubert song was being sung. Mr. Henschel's last two songs were, 'Es blinkt der Thau', a most poetical composition, by Rubinstein, and 'The Grenadiers', by Schumann. The first was sung with touching expression, and the other in so vivid a manner as to bring the sorrowing Frenchmen visibly before one. His own accompaniments enable Mr. Henschel to heighten his effects, and the listener was thrilled as the words 'So will ich liegen und horchen still' were declaimed to the 'Marseillaise'. A double recall and vociferous redemands ensued, but Mr. Henschel declined the encore, which was well. An evening so artistic would have been spoiled by such concessions. There was a large audience, the reserved seats being filled, and the first vocal recital given in Birmingham was an event to be remembered.³⁰³

Solo song recitals, 1909-1914

When Lillian died in 1901, George Henschel stopped singing in public for almost a decade. He returned to the concert platform on 23 February 1909, giving a solo recital of songs and arias to a full house in London's Bechstein Hall. The years 1909 to 1914 were dominated by such solo recitals, as well as collaborative recitals with solo pianists and occasionally other singers. Thus far nine solo recitals and nineteen collaborative recitals have been documented in London during these years. More research is need to confirm that this list of concerts is complete, but it is more likely to be accurate given that Henschel was now in his

³⁰³ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Recital', *Birmingham Daily Post* [Birmingham, England], 21 February 1893.

sixties and likely travelling and performing less frequently. The content and structure of Henschel's solo recitals during these years was similar to his joint recitals with his wife. A typical programme consisted of four sets, the first of which featured baroque and classical songs and arias, while the remaining sets featured songs by classical, romantic and contemporary composers. The collaborative recitals took two forms: a double-bill wherein one half of the program was solo piano works given by a concert pianist and half of the programme solo songs given by Henschel, and a variety concert where Henschel performed a set of songs (at least six individual songs) alongside several other performers like a string quartet, pianist and vocal quartet. As in the previous period, in all these contexts Henschel exclusively sang self-accompanied. Contemporary reviews and advertisements continued to express generous appreciation and praise for Henschel's performances, but with subtly different language: audiences now referred to his repertoire choices and method of presentation as familiar and beloved. On 28 January 1914, at the age of sixty-four, Henschel ended his live concert career as a singer with a farewell solo recital at Bechstein Hall in London. As an example of the content and reception of Henschel's performances during this period, a sample programme listing and newspaper review are given below.

Complete programme listing as printed in *The Times* for a solo recital in Bechstein Hall, London, on Saturday 28 Oct, 1911:

Song Recital

George Henschel will sing:

Gieb dich zufrieden	J.S. Bach
Air from <i>Siroe</i>	Handel
Air from <i>Orfeo</i>	Haydn
Air from <i>Don Calandrino</i>	Cimarosa

Der Doppelgänger	Schubert
Das Rosenband	
Der Leiermann	
Der Schmetterling	
Der leidige Frieden	Schumann
Husaren-Abzug	

Herbstsore	R. Franz
Nicht mehr zu Dir	Brahms

Verzagen	
Verrath (ballad)	
Der Asra	Rubinstein
Mein müdes Auge	Henschel
Beim Kerzenlicht	
Wanderlied	
Edward (ballad)	Loewe
Bechstein Grand Pianoforte.	

Review of the Henschel's farewell recital (not the above-listed programme) by *The Times*, 30 April, 1914:

A musical career which has been for a whole generation interwoven with the lives of many composers and executants was officially terminated last night at the Bechstein Hall. Mr., or if it can enhance the position he holds in the world of music, Dr. Henschel has been singing and playing to us for 33 years, if we deduct the period 1881-1884 when he was conducting the new Symphony Orchestra in Boston. That is a long time. It has coincided, too, with very real musical progress in this country; and now at 64 he can look back on this and say, without arrogance, *pars magna fui*.

An intimate friend of Brahms, he was the first to introduce to this country (December, 1879) the 'Triumphlied'; and the performances of the 'Zigeuner-lieder' at the 'Monday Pops' by the quartet – Mrs. Lilian Henschel, Miss Agnes Janson, Mr. Shakespeare, and Mr. Henschel – live still in the memory of many, as well as those of his own 'Serbiches Liederspiel', songs from the 'Trompeter von Säkkingen', and others. But still more will think first of the famous 'Henschel Concerts' at which he and his first wife used to attract and keep the attention of all who knew what good music was. At these all the accompaniment was in his own hands; it was that which made them unique. No singer has been heard by those now living who so completely made the song his own; and it is hardly too much to say that until singers become, like him, musicians first and vocalists afterwards, song will never return to its old pre-eminence. One used to feel as if one had never really heard

‘Die beiden Grenadiere’ and Löwe’s ‘Erlking’ [sic] till then, and, indeed, few English people had heard of Löwe at all before he made them aware of his existence.

His repertory was by no means confined to short lyrics. He sang, though not on the stage, the part of Hans Sachs in the year in which the *Meistersinger* was first produced. The part he used to take in the *Elijah* and *St. Paul*, in Stanford’s *Eden* and Parry’s *King Saul* and *Job* will not be forgotten, and he was equally successful with such a song as Mephistopheles’s Serenade in Berlioz’s *Faust*. These were the outcome of a broad-based musicianship, into which not merely singing and playing but composing and conducting entered, and argue a quite exceptional vitality. Mr. Henschel was the pupil of Goetze, of Leipzig, and Schultze, of Berlin. If it is difficult to point to pupils of his own, apart from his own family, of outstanding merit, it can be truly said that there are few serious English singers who have not at some time or other passed through his hands and who would not confess that they owed a great deal to him.

The charm of the concert lay in the reviving of those recollections. It began with the first song he sang before an English public, the Aria from Rinaldo, ‘Sibillar gl’angui d’Aletto’; and this was followed by Mozart’s ‘Wer ein Liebchen hat gefundet’ and Beethoven’s ‘Mit Mädeln sich vertragen’, both most characteristically sung. Then followed two groups of Schubert and Schumann, in which it was interesting to observe, when you have a singer who put before you the inner kernel of every song he sings, how much greater a song writer Schubert is of the two. The beautiful enunciation of the words in ‘Lachen und Weinen’, the utter simplicity of the difficult ‘Der Schmetterling’, and the reserve power of ‘Der Doppelgänger’, eclipsed anything of Schumann’s except ‘Mein Rösslein ich beschlage dich’, which came as an encore. In Löwe’s long ballad, ‘Archibald Douglas’, which concluded the evening, Mr. Henschel’s voice was as fresh as at the beginning; and the one or two weak places in the composition were wonderfully well concealed by the compelling rhythm with which it was

sung. So ended a concert in which the singer's evident delight in giving pleasure was only equalled by that of the audience in receiving it.³⁰⁴

Radio broadcasts, 1928-1930

In 1928-1930, Henschel came out of vocal retirement and returned to the public eye as a song recitalist via live radio broadcast. In the words of *The Musical Times* in 1934: 'He took an active part in broadcasting; so much so that a Henschel recital was looked upon as one of the high-lights of wireless programmes, and his portrait and the sound of his voice became known to the millions'.³⁰⁵ All of Henschel's broadcasts were self-accompanied, with the exception of his first, on 3 April, 1928, which as previously noted was accompanied by Ethel Hobday.³⁰⁶ Assuming that this was not a printing error, it is interesting that the only two documented occasions when Henschel was accompanied by another pianist in public in England were both firsts: his first public performance in England, and his first performance on the radio.

To date eleven live broadcasts have been documented during these three years. These broadcasts were referred to as 'recitals' and 'song recitals' in the newspaper programme listings, and they ranged from two songs to a fifteen-minute set of songs, all self-accompanied except the first. Henschel's most well-known broadcast was a recital of songs given for the Schubert Centenary celebrations in November 1928, which gave rise to one of the more colourful anecdotes from his career:

When he broadcast a *Schubert-Abend* for the centenary celebrations in 1928, the *Kölner Rundfunk* wrote to the British Broadcasting Company asking who the young man was who sang so wonderfully, and could they arrange for him to broadcast at Cologne? On being informed of this, Henschel said, 'Tell them he was the old Henschel who first sang in Cologne 50 years ago'.³⁰⁷

Henschel gave his farewell broadcast recital in 1930, after which his recordings continued to be broadcast though he no longer performed on the public concert platform.

³⁰⁴ 'Mr. G. Henschel's Farewell', *Times* [London, England], 30 April 1914: 10.

³⁰⁵ 'Sir George Henschel, 1850-1934', 894.

³⁰⁶ 'Programmes', *Times* [London, England], 3 April 1928: 10.

³⁰⁷ Anderson, 'Sir George Henschel'.

Significance of self-accompaniment in Henschel's song recitals

Self-accompaniment played a major role in Henschel's identity as a musician, simply through the sheer frequency with which he performed this way. Through the length, diversity, success and international scope of his career, Henschel greatly increased the sphere of influence for this performance practice, introducing virtuosic self-accompanied singing to multiple generations of listeners in conjunction with new repertoire and new methods of concert presentation. What role did self-accompaniment play in Henschel's performances? How was it artistically significant to the music, to the presentation, and to the experience of the audience? To answer these questions from a historical perspective, the Birmingham recital review quoted previously in full will now be examined in detail.

This particular concert, given at the Masonic Hall in Birmingham in 1893, was a relatively early example of a song recital by Henschel. Later recitals featured longer programmes and more unified repertoire (such as a set of five songs from *Winterreise* as opposed to five *lieder* from five different composers), and other concert reviews provide more detailed and knowledgeable evaluations of the performances. This particular review is valuable because of its perspective: the reviewer considers Henschel's concert to be authoritative introduction to a new art form, calling it the first 'vocal recital' to be given in Birmingham, presented by the very musicians who the reviewer credits with having invented that concert form and established it previously in London and Europe. The subsequent details of performance practice and artistic quality must be understood within this framework, presented to the reader as examples of what a vocal recital is and should be.

The opening section of the review gives the following brief description of the logistics of presentation during the recital: 'We have had many concerts where vocal music greatly predominated, but the vocal recital, pure and simple, was unknown here until last night...It is necessary to explain that everything is sung from memory. Mr. Henschel acts as accompanist, and the pianoforte is so placed that the player faces the audience....all the accompaniments played by heart'.³⁰⁸ The words 'It is necessary to explain' indicate that the reviewer feels that performance practices being described are unusual, and the readership will not know what to expect. The self-accompaniment, the programming of entirely solo vocal music, the entirely memorized presentation and the lack of any assisting artists are equally noteworthy. During this early period of pioneering joint recitals many reviews made similar observations about the Henschels' unusual approach, and some of these did focus more specifically on the accompaniment. For example, in 1901 the *Times* wrote: 'The principal attraction of the recitals was the unconventional way in which they were

³⁰⁸ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Recital', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 February 1893.

given, with Mr. Henschel accompanying throughout, whether in duets or solos....³⁰⁹ These performance practices may have been unfamiliar to the first-time audience member, but they were also the status quo for the Henschels' approach to this repertoire. Thus Birmingham reviewer, therefore, was correct in observing that self-accompaniment was unique to the Henschels and also a defining characteristic of the vocal recital as a new art form in England.

There are no video recordings of Henschel performing, so the only opportunity to reconstruct a picture of these recitals and the role self-accompaniment played in their presentation is through analysis of reviews and recollections like this one. A great deal of information about the presentation can be gleaned from these descriptions, though additional questions are inevitably raised in the process. Regarding the physical arrangement on the stage, the Birmingham recital review specifies that the piano was arranged perpendicular to front of the stage 'so placed that the singer faces the audience'. This arrangement was likely a result of Henschel's self-accompaniment, enabling him to sing directly to the audience while also maintaining good balance and communication with Lillian during her solos and the duets.

The review does not address what kind of piano was used, which is significant for the self-accompanied singer. This was the Henschels' first visit to Birmingham and they surely encountered some smaller instruments during recital tours of the provinces, but there is no question that they were accustomed to performing with a grand piano. Four advertisements for Henschel's solo recitals in the 1910s specify the use of Steinway and Bechstein grand pianos. The Henschels had a Broadwood grand built especially for them in their home on which they practised, and they performed regularly in the leading London concert halls including Bechstein Hall (now known as Wigmore Hall), St James Hall, Queen's Hall, Aeolian Hall and the Royal Albert Hall, all of which were equipped with concert grands. For the sake of discussion it will be assumed that the Birmingham instrument was a grand piano, in which case the positioning of the lid was important. Considering sight lines in isolation, if the audience was narrow and only viewing Henschel from directly in front of the stage, it would have been possible for the lid to be fully raised with Henschel visible underneath it, while the use of the short stick would have obstructed the view. If the seating was more in the round, like the Huddersfield Town Hall where the Henschels gave a virtually identical song recital on 3 February, 1892,³¹⁰ a fully open lid would have obstructed the view and blocked the sound of George's singing for audience members

³⁰⁹ 'Obituary. Mrs. Henschel', *Times* [London, England], 7 November 1901: 9.

³¹⁰ 'Huddersfield Subscription Concerts', *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* [West Yorkshire, England], 3 February 1892: 3.

oriented stage left. It seems most likely that Henschel sang with instrument closed or with the lid removed entirely, because this arrangement would have permitted Henschel to deliver his songs normally with respect to the facial interaction audiences would expect from a solo vocalist. Though he would have been sitting down with an instrument in front of him, the audience would still see all of his face and receive the full directionality of his voice without Henschel having to sing over his shoulder.

Given the attention to the positioning of the piano and seated singer, it is surprising that no mention is made of the relative positioning of George and Lillian during their duets. Good balance, ensemble and communication could have been achieved in any number of positions when Henschel was merely accompanying Lillian, but during their duets two-way communication would have been essential. This would not have just been for the sake of balance and ensemble, but also for dramatic success, for many of the duets the Henschels programmed were from operas. These could not have been staged in any conventional sense, but nonetheless would have required some theatricality. Reviews of their duet singing in these recitals, though not detailed, were unanimously positive in this respect, and in some cases directly attempted to dispel the idea that self-accompaniment might hinder the success of these duets. The Birmingham reviewer wrote: ‘The recital closed with another duet, “Pronta io son purch’io non manchi”, [sic] from Donizetti’s “Don Pasquale”. This has something of the *buffo* character, and it was given with such animation and dramatic force that the effect was magical. So far from being hampered by his work at the pianoforte, Mr. Henschel seems to derive inspiration from the instrument, which, for the moment, becomes part of himself’.³¹¹ This opinion was corroborated in a review of a recital given at the Central Hall in Darlington in 1892, which wrote: ‘Their duet singing is notable for its perfect combination, and over all Mr. Henschel throws the magic of his wonderful accompanying, without which half the charm of their performance would be gone’.³¹²

Though a source has not yet been discovered that explicitly describes where Lillian stood to sing the duets, one review from a recital at St. James Hall in London (1891) offers the following impression of their interaction: ‘One great charm of these unassisted vocal recitals is... the way in which he accompanies both himself and his wife, ...looking quite pleased all the time, and smiling approval when she acquits herself specially well, whilst she, too, seems to take encouragement from his kindly and appreciative expression, and his evident enjoyment of their simple artistic dual performance’.³¹³ It is not clear that this description refers to their duet singing, but it does suggest that the two singers are able to

³¹¹ ‘Mr. and Mrs. Henschel’s Recital’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 February 1893.

³¹² ‘Mr. and Mrs. Henschel’s Recital’, *Northern Echo* [Darlington, England], 4 February 1892.

³¹³ ‘Our Ladies’ Column’, *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury* [Leicester, England] 30 May 1891.

interact visually. With the piano oriented as described for the Birmingham recital, the best position to enable this kind of communication would have been for Lillian to stand beside George, approximating how any two singers might stand for a duet with the exception that George was seated. If they ever gave recitals with the piano positioned in profile to the audience, one can also imagine a successful duet with Lillian standing in a more conventional position in the crook of the piano.

The Birmingham reviewer's comments on memorization require some unpacking. In stating 'it is necessary to explain' that everything is sung from memory the reviewer seems to suggest that performing off copy was unusual, but doesn't clarify whether it is the singing from memory, the playing from memory, or the scale of memorization that was remarkable. Performance from memory by solo recitalists had in fact already been fashionable for several decades, so George and Lillian singing from memory should have been in itself unremarkable. Because George accompanied himself, however, singing from memory meant also accompanying from memory. There was also some precedent for memorized self-accompanied singing: reviews from the 1830s observe that performing from music while accompanying one's own singing created logistical difficulties with sight lines, positioning, and balance, for which reason memorization was preferred. Henschel, however, memorized all the accompaniments throughout the recital, not just his own. Another review from a recital in Prince's Hall in London, 1885 corroborates that this was indeed unusual: 'Mr. Henschel, who is a thorough musician, accompanied throughout from memory, which was in itself a *tour de force*'.³¹⁴ By also performing Lillian's accompaniments from memory, Henschel raised the significance of memorization from merely logistical to a mark of artistic intent: he performed all his accompaniments in the manner of a solo pianist, affording them soloistic importance in a visibly prominent way.

This prompts discussion of the remaining element of the Birmingham review: the extent to which self-accompaniment affected how Henschel's audiences experienced the music. The Birmingham reviewer does not delve into detailed musical analysis of the ensemble between Henschel's playing and singing, as many others did. This reviewer's primary observation was general, though significant in light of the perspective that this recital was an authoritative introduction to a new repertoire and concert form:

With such a thorough artist at the instrument, and all the accompaniments played by heart, it may be imagined that the unity of expression is something not otherwise attainable. Indeed the whole went more with the effect of an artistic improvisation than that of studied expression, so spontaneous was the spirit throughout.... So far from being hampered by

³¹⁴ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Recital', *Times* [London, England], 25 November 1885: 12.

his work at the pianoforte, Mr. Henschel seems to derive inspiration from the instrument, which, for the moment, becomes part of himself.... His own accompaniments enable Mr. Henschel to heighten his effects.³¹⁵

Clearly, the reviewer felt that playing his own accompaniments enabled Henschel to be at once more in control of the artistic vision while also being more expressive and spontaneous than would otherwise be possible, thereby enhancing the music and the performance as a whole. This view was expressed quite specifically by Dr. Herbert Thompson, music critic of *The Yorkshire Post* in regard to Henschel's interpretation of Brahms: 'As for Brahms, [Henschel] sang his songs with a complete understanding, and with all the greater freedom of expression since he was his own accompanist, a sympathetic and polished pianist'.³¹⁶

Other reviews asserted more generally that the quality of Henschel's accompanying was a crucial ingredient in the success of their performances. For example, after a recital in Prince's Hall, 1890: 'It is not wonderful that these concerts should be attended as they are, for none given in London are more agreeable from beginning to end, or in their own way more perfect. It cannot be forgotten that Mr. Henschel's matchless powers as an accompanist have much to do with the success of the result'.³¹⁷ After the Henschels' first recital in St. James Hall, London: 'Both artists were in excellent voice, and not a little of the success achieved was again due to Mr. Henschel's masterly accompanists [sic]'.³¹⁸ Finally, from a recital in Darlington, 1892: '...and over all Mr. Henschel throws the magic of his wonderful accompanying, without which half the charm of their performance would be gone'.³¹⁹ These comments are all the more useful because they also refer to George's accompanying of Lillian, demonstrating that audiences found his accompanying remarkable in any context, not just in comparison to other self-accompanists.

The skill of Henschel's accompanying led to reflections upon the art of accompaniment as a distinct discipline, which was perhaps new to audiences at the time. As early as 1885, Henschel's reviewers took note of the fact that Henschel was uniquely distinguished as an accompanist, apart from his other areas of specialisation. After one of his first recitals in London it was remarked: 'To his other qualifications the German *virtuoso* combines that of an excellent accompanist on the pianoforte, and a special charm attaches to these performances from the circumstance that the instrumental support to the voice is always judiciously rendered'.³²⁰ Anticipating a complaint still common today, this

³¹⁵ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Recital', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 February 1893.

³¹⁶ 'Sir George Henschel. Singer, Composer and Conductor. Great Victorian. Exponent in England of German Music', Obituary [12 January 1934].

³¹⁷ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Recital', *Times* [London, England], 25 November 1890: 10.

³¹⁸ 'Music', *Daily News* [London, England], 2 May 1891.

³¹⁹ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Recital', *Northern Echo*, 4 February 1892.

³²⁰ 'Mr. and Mrs. Henschel's Vocal Recitals', *Standard* [London, England], 2 December 1885: 5.

review continued: ‘Accompanying is an art which too many indolent players – to excuse themselves, maybe, from extra study – profess to regard as a gift’, implying that Henschel’s skill in this realm was seen as both unusual and valuable. Henschel’s accompaniments were furthermore expressed to be a musical highlight of his recitals: ‘...the accompaniments, played by Mr. Henschel himself, were so finished as to become in themselves a feature of the performance’,³²¹ and ‘It should be mentioned that the accompaniments throughout were played by Mr. Henschel himself, and played too in a manner that would alone have stamped him as a consummate artist’.³²²

Through the act of self-accompaniment, Henschel drew his audiences’ attention to the importance of the interaction between voice and accompaniment in art song, one of the defining characteristics of the genre. From a solo recital in London in 1912 at which Henschel performed Brahms and Schumann one reviewer noted: ‘The great pleasure to be derived from Dr. Henschel’s art is to hear the accompaniment come by its rights and be by turns dominant and subordinate, as the music as a whole demands, and carry the expression just as surely as the voice’.³²³ Reviewers took note of the coordination between voice and piano: ‘The unanimity, too, between player and singer was as striking as it was at his recital a few weeks ago’.³²⁴ The interplay between piano and voice was also noted: ‘As usual he accompanied himself throughout, and as usual the perfect reciprocity between the vocal and instrumental parts of the lyrics was quite marvellous’.³²⁵ Audiences also noted Henschel’s ability to achieve independence between voice and piano. He became particularly famous for his interpretation of Schubert’s song ‘Das Wandern’ from *Die schöne Müllerin* specifically because of the musical independence he achieved between the piano’s evocation of the steadily turning mill-wheel and the voice’s characterization of the spontaneously wandering miller: ‘While the miller gave voice to his youthful ardour with all imaginable spontaneity of phrase, the mill-wheel figure went on in the accompaniment, without a single semi-quaver receiving less than its full value’.³²⁶

While it would be a mistake to assume that that elements of ensemble such as the alternate unity and independence of voice and accompaniment were unappreciated or commented upon before Henschel’s recitals, it makes sense that self-accompaniment would serve as a vehicle to draw attention to these aspects of a song recital. The self-accompanied singer offered a visual representation of the unity between voice and piano, encouraging the audience to expect perfect coordination between them, and making any independence of

³²¹ ‘Recent Concerts’, *Standard* [London, England], 4 June 1888: 3.

³²² ‘Huddersfield Subscription Concerts’, *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 3 February 1892: 3.

³²³ ‘Pianoforte and song’, *Times* [London, England], 4 June 1912: 10.

³²⁴ ‘Music’, *Times* [London, England], 20 May 1909: 13.

³²⁵ ‘Messrs. Borwick and Henschel’, *Times* [London, England], 21 February 1910: 12.

³²⁶ ‘Mr. Henschel’s Reappearance’, *Times* [London, England], 24 February 1909: 13.

voice and piano more noticeable because it represented a feat of coordination by the performer. Finally, self-accompaniment afforded the opportunity for the accompaniment as well as the vocal part – the entire musical texture – to be infused with the singer’s personality and vision for the song, encouraging the audience to more directly associate the accompaniment with the vocal part and to perceive the importance of each.

Henschel’s self-accompaniment also drew his audiences’ attention to the issue of coordination between performers in art song performance, particularly those elements of the musical interpretation that arise out of logistical necessity rather than artistic intent. Examples of these are pauses inserted to allow the singer to breathe, gestures, glances, audible breaths, even *rubato* – in short, any cue which singer and pianist might use to telegraph their musical intent and achieve good ensemble. Speaking again about Henschel’s delivery of Schubert’s ‘Das Wandern’, it was noted that ‘The accompanist never allowed the singer to take time to breathe, as most accompanists are obliged to do; the reason of this was that the accompanist throughout was Mr. Henschel himself’.³²⁷

This observation introduces a new layer to the possible interaction between voice and piano in art song, which is only achieved through self-accompaniment. Independence of voice and accompaniment is at face value is neither unique nor remarkable; it is the status quo for any singer and pianist duo, just as unification is the logical status quo for the self-accompanied singer. In this sense, it is easy to see the self-accompanist’s achievement of independence between voice and fingers as a party trick, impressive because it is difficult but not representative of artistry that cannot be equally or better executed by a duo. It can also be argued, however, that the independence of parts and interplay of phrasing, dynamics and tempo achieved by Henschel in his self-accompanied performances differed from the kind of independence represented by a duo, regardless of skill. In Henschel’s performances, the separate actions of voice and piano were directed by a single artistic vision, and able to anticipate and respond to each other without the need for any external communication which could take time or require cues that are noticeable to the audience. This simultaneous independence and coordination was identified by *The Musical Times* in 1934: ‘Those who used to attend his recitals assure us that the duality was complete, the technique of voice and finger being singularly independent, and the interpretation being unified and vitalised by the inspiration of one mind’.³²⁸

In this sense, the self-accompanied *lieder* singer is to a singer-pianist duo what an un-conducted ensemble is to an orchestra with a conductor. For those who enjoy art song in part for the experience of watching the interaction between two performers, this is a reason

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ ‘Sir George Henschel, 1850-1934’, 894.

to prefer a duo performance to a self-accompanied one. One must wonder, however, whether the enjoyment of the interaction between two performers actually stems from enjoyment of the interaction between voice and piano itself. The Birmingham reviewer observed that Henschel's own accompaniments enabled him to 'heighten his effects'. At face value this suggests that Henschel was a very good accompanist, but it also suggests more specifically that through exercising control over both voice and piano simultaneously he was able to more effectively express his interpretive ideas to his audience. In other words, self-accompaniment potentially enables a more direct communication of the interaction between voice and piano, delivering the song in a distilled form without the visible and audible element of the interacting performers.

One element of Henschel's song recitals not addressed by the Birmingham reviewer is how the audience perceived the artistic quality of the programming itself, though other reviews did address this in some detail. The Henschels were praised for their ability to keep an audience engaged for the duration of a concert despite a continuous musical texture. This was attributed in part to the novelty and quality of the programming: 'It might be urged that like a pianoforte recital there is something of a sameness about the programme supplied by two performers only, but the recital was altogether novel in form, broke so much new ground to most people in the matter of music, and was so artistic that the general effect was to make it attractive in the extreme'.³²⁹ Reviewers also praised the variety of the Henschels' programmes, which covered a wide range of time periods and languages and, even after a decade of recitals in England, continued to offer new and lesser-known songs from within their specialist genre of German *lieder*. In praising this variety, the reviews further credited the Henschels with programming only *good* music – by which was meant German *lieder*, French and Italian songs, opera arias and duets – to the complete exclusion of the popular English ballad repertoire, which was referred to variously as 'the drawing-room song of the period', 'the objectionable type of ballad that is yearly perpetuated hundredfold in our midst',³³⁰ and 'trashy modern ballads'.³³¹ Several different documents commented upon the Henschels' educational influence upon musical audiences in this respect. The following passage from a review of a recital at Middlesborough effectively summarizes them all.³³²

It is mainly through [Henschel's] untiring advocacy and persistent exertions that artistic as distinguished from mere popular music has obtained a firm footing in England. On the occasion of his first visit to Middlesborough...it was said that the concert was the opening of a new

³²⁹ 'Huddersfield Subscription Concerts', *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 3 February 1892: 3.

³³⁰ 'The Henschel Recitals', *Morning Post* [London, England], 12 February 1892: 3.

³³¹ 'Huddersfield Subscription Concerts', *Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 3 February 1892: 3

³³² 'The Henschel Vocal Recitals', *Daily News* [London, England], 2 May 1891.

page in music to many of the audience. The beauty of the music, when rendered with that purity and truth which it has been Mr. and Mrs Henschel's life work to uphold, was a revelation to a large portion of those present, who probably heard really good songs well sung for the first time. The best music was shown to be the most enjoyable, even by those who laid no claim to musical knowledge. It is for this work of familiarizing us with the best vocal music of our own and other countries, and especially with the songs of the great German composers, that the thanks of all true lovers of music are due to Mr. Henschel. With him there has been no pandering to popularity, no playing with the sickly sentimentality of our modern English drawing-room music.³³³

This kind of reaction to the Henschels' programming was clearly indicative of a larger issue, concerned not merely with interest in a new and pleasing repertoire but also with a desire to improve the musical tastes of English audiences and performers. The Henschels' repertoire was perceived as artistic and intellectual vocal music, in contrast to the popular music genres most often in domestic and amateur settings at the time. This demonstrates a shift in audience perception from the previous case study, in which audiences seemed to greatly appreciate such ballads, especially when self-accompanied by divas like Malibran. These examples provide an invaluable additional layer to the social context in which Henschel's self-accompanied singing exerted influence: at the height of his career, Henschel's performances represented not only the ideal in artistic interpretation and presentation, but also of what constituted the best music. Through Henschel, self-accompaniment thus became directly associated with the introduction and authoritative presentation of art song at the highest artistic level. In the words of the *Standard* (1888): 'Amateurs who wish to know what songs to sing, and to learn how best to render them, should not forget these recitals'.³³⁴

³³³ 'Mr. and Mrs Henschel at Middlesborough', *North-Eastern Daily Gazette* [Middlesbrough, England], 6 March 1893.

³³⁴ 'Recent Concerts', *Standard*, 4 June 1888: 3.

Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947)

Background

Born in Venezuela, Reynaldo Hahn moved to France with his family when he was three years old, and became a naturalized French citizen in 1909. He was a child prodigy pianist, beginning his formal music education at the Paris Conservatoire in 1885 at the age of eleven. There Hahn studied with Massenet, becoming acquainted with composers like Ravel and Cortot and beginning to make a name for himself as a composer while still a student. His first compositional success was the *mélodie* ‘Si mes vers avaient des ailes’, composed when he was still an adolescent. Through the course of his life Hahn would compose an additional nine song cycles and over 50 additional individual *mélodies* for solo voice and piano, as well as orchestral, piano, chamber and operatic works.

Though Hahn was a conservatory-trained pianist, composer and conductor, and took to the public stage often as an orchestral conductor, theatre director, and on occasion as a public lecturer, he was neither a professional nor trained singer by modern standards, and almost never sang in public. He made his vocal ‘début’ at the age of six in the salon of the Princess Mathilde, cousin of Napoleon I, on which occasion he sang ‘romantic excerpts from the comic operas of Offenbach [and] accompanied himself at the piano, holding his audience with charm and singing all the music which he had in his head’.³³⁵ This was the start of a singing career that would unroll almost entirely behind private doors, in the salon and the recording studio.

Today Hahn is remembered less as a singer in his own right than as a well-connected musical figure. He left behind him a substantial discography, and he does appear in studies of early recordings and historical singers, but mostly as an anecdote to the work of other artists who recorded his music, whom he conducted, whom he reviewed in his capacity as music critic for *La Presse* and *La Flèche* and *Le Figaro*. His own vocal recordings have been most often examined as a novelty in comparison to more famous renditions of a given song or aria. This treatment is not so mysterious given that he was not a professional singer; he did not sing on the operatic stage or even the concert stage; his voice was light and of an indeterminate *Fach*, and like Henschel, his musical talents – as a composer, pianist, conductor, and singer – were suspiciously diverse. During his lifetime, however, Hahn was considered a very fine singer and artist by many who through their own art, music, words and reputation defined the aesthetic of an era. Jonathan Woolf, reviewing

³³⁵ Bernard Gavoty, *Reynaldo Hahn: Le musicien de la belle époque* (Paris: Éditions Buchet/Chastel, 1976), 26-27.

a modern release of a selection of Hahn's recordings, observed that through listening to his recordings one can hear and trace 'the tradition he came to embody, though himself not French born...'³³⁶ The tradition to which Woolf refers is both that of late nineteenth-century French song and of the culture of the *fin de siècle* Parisian salon, and it is in this context that Hahn's specialization in self-accompanied singing serves as the ideal counterbalance to George Henschel in this case study.

Specialization in self-accompanied art song

Like George Henschel, Reynaldo Hahn's singing career was specialised with respect to self-accompaniment, choice of repertoire, and performance platform. Hahn's own writings and the memoirs and recollections of those who heard him perform indicate that he remained his own accompanist throughout his salon career. On rare occasions he would sing to the accompaniment of another pianist-composer: at one *soirée*, Hahn described being accompanied by Fauré while singing some of the composer's own songs, including 'Lydia', 'Nell', 'Les Roses d'Ispahan', 'Soir', 'Le Secret', and 'Le Parfum impérissable'.³³⁷ When there was no such social reason to work with an accompanist, however, self-accompaniment was Hahn's personal status quo. As a pianist his status was similar to that of singer – while he never gave public concerts as a solo pianist he was recognized to possess extraordinary technique from a young age and became particularly admired by his contemporaries for his mastery of the pedal, touch and range of colour.³³⁸ Concert pianist and long-time friend and collaborator Magdalena Maria Yvonne Tagliaferro, observed that as a pianist Hahn 'much preferred playing four hands, accompanying a singer or an instrumentalist, or even better singing himself while accompanying himself'.³³⁹

Hahn's own writings, both personal and public, further reveal that self-accompaniment permeated every aspect of how he thought about singing. This is illustrated most tellingly in his writings on vocal pedagogy, in particular a set of nine lectures and an essay, *On Singers and Singing*, which he first delivered publicly, providing his own live musical examples, in 1913 and 14. Despite not being a professional singer, Hahn nonetheless thought critically about singing, diction, performance, and pedagogy, and was respected and sought after as a singing teacher. Self-accompaniment is mentioned in

³³⁶ Jonathan Woolf, review, *Reynaldo Hahn Composer, Conductor, Singer and Accompanist Recordings 1908-35* (CD reissue, Pearl GEM 0003. Pavilion Records LTD., 1997), MusicWeb International.

³³⁷ Reynaldo Hahn, *Thèmes varies* (Paris: Janin, 1946), 137.

³³⁸ Jean-Christophe Etienne, 'L'oeuvre pour le piano de Reynaldo Hahn', (Maitrise d'éducation musicale, Université de Toulouse – le Mirail, 1981), 8.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

passages from two of his lectures. Neither is expressly about self-accompaniment, and at no point in the entire series of lectures does Hahn address self-accompaniment as its own topic. Both passages demonstrate the extent to which social context (setting and ambiance) are connected to his approach to vocal performance practice, and offer insight into how he as a performer and a listener coped with the various artifices of song performance, including the logistics of self-accompaniment. The first passage, from the lecture, ‘Why do we sing?’ is a discussion of how the singer must be aware of the inspiration and origin of a song’s text – in this case perhaps a pastoral landscape – but must also find a way to recall that imagery inside the performance space:

We cannot replicate this setting when we sing a folk song, accompanying ourselves on a piano, surrounded by *salon* furniture or in a concert hall. In these circumstances, we must resort to some kind of artifice, or, if you will, to art, to compensate for the poetical contribution the peasant singer finds in the world around him.³⁴⁰

This passage demonstrates that to Hahn, to sing is to sing while accompanying oneself. In choosing an example to illustrate the opposite of the song’s origins (that is, the landscape in which it is set and the sensory experiences of the protagonist in that landscape) Hahn only needed to refer to the act of performing the song in a concert setting. The fact that he chose to include self-accompaniment in his list of circumstances the singer must artfully overcome shows that self-accompaniment was a part of his definition of standard performance practice, and that he (at least subconsciously) expected his students to think the same. This passage also shows how Hahn defined the idea of artifice in performance. At the time of spoken delivery audiences receptive to Hahn’s style of vocal performance were still easily found, but by the time these lectures were published posthumously in 1957, tastes had shifted and self-accompanied singing had come to be associated with low-brow musical entertainment and old-fashioned affection. Here, however, Hahn treats self-accompaniment as an inevitable part of vocal performance. The ‘artifice’ instead lies in the imagination, non-verbal facial gestures, phrasing and articulation used by the singer to evoke the essence of the text.

Hahn next mentions self-accompaniment in the lecture ‘What do we mean by Having Style?’ when he explains the imagery that an effectively stylish performance of a Schubert song should evoke. The description is detailed, and illustrates the importance of social context to Hahn’s artistic vision:

If you should sing a beautiful Schubert song—‘Das Zügendlöcklein’,

³⁴⁰ Reynaldo Hahn, *On Singers and Singing. Lectures and an Essay* [1957], ed. Reinhard G. Pauly, trans. Léopold Simoneau (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1990), 41-42.

‘Der Winterabend’ or ‘Der Wanderer’, for example—you must, of course, present the music and the text printed on the pages; but you must do so in a style—a style of pronouncing, singing, expressing oneself in short—that is altogether different from the style one would choose to interpret Lully or Gluck, a style that summons up the era, the atmosphere, of Schubert’s life. As I listen to you, my mind must fill with floating images of a Viennese salon, warmly lit by glowing lamps, in which women wearing light-coloured gowns and men in tight frock-coats with large cravats over starched shirts devote their whole attention to the soft, expressive singing of a stout young blond man who, with his gold-rimmed spectacles beneath his broad forehead and his cap of curly hair, accompanies himself on the piano.³⁴¹

As a piece of evidence about self-accompanied singing, this passage is a word painting: it cannot be trusted to portray reality, but it realistically portrays the impressions and ideas of the painter (Hahn). This is on the one hand a description of an artistic ideal, a romanticised version of the singer-as-artist that Hahn delivers to his students in order to inspire them to shape the song to its greatest effect. On the other hand, it is a description of a historical reality: Hahn describes the *Schubertiad* as the context in which Schubert’s songs were first and best enjoyed, challenging the student to conjure up the same magic in the current performance. One could conclude from Hahn’s description that self-accompaniment is useful to the singer of Schubert’s songs, because it causes them to more closely resemble the original (Schubert) and the ideal (the ultimately expressive artist).

Like Henschel, Hahn specialised in the composition and performance of art song, but while Henschel became known for introducing new repertoire from all eras, and for idiomatic delivery of French, German, Italian and other national styles, Hahn sang mostly French, nineteenth-century repertoire. Both Henschel and Hahn peppered their performances with operatic selections; again, within this Hahn sang mostly French repertoire while Henschel sang a broader range of material. Like Henschel he composed and performed his own songs, and his songs, which have alternatively been written off as ‘salon pieces’, and favourably compared to the works of Fauré and Duparc. A comparison of Hahn and Henschel’s discographies, though of very different sizes, corroborates this core repertoire; Henschel recorded predominately *lieder*, and Hahn predominately *mélodies*.

Like Henschel, Hahn was closely connected to many of the major song composers of his generation, lending him authority in French song repertoire. Hahn was praised as an interpreter of *mélodies*. Gabriel Fauré in particular preferred Hahn as an interpreter of his

³⁴¹ Ibid, 100-101.

songs, writing, ‘I dream of hearing [my songs] performed by perfect singers, but I don’t know if any among the professionals. It’s the amateurs who understand and interpret me best’.³⁴² Contemporary audiences and modern scholars agree that Hahn possessed a limited vocal instrument. Jonathan Woolf noted that Hahn’s voice ‘has occasioned more than a fair share of critical bewilderment over the years. The register is sometimes uncertain – is it a baritone or a low tenor? ... he stands on some curious cusp between voice types even though as Gounod’s ‘Maid of Athens’ shows he had a non-existent top’.³⁴³ Gavoty noted during Hahn’s lifetime that the voice was ‘a fine baritone voice, not very large...’³⁴⁴ Fauré himself greatly resented the intimation that his preference for Hahn’s interpretations of his music meant that one ‘did not need a voice to sing his songs’.³⁴⁵

Lacking operatic power, Hahn’s virtuosity as a singer took the form excellent diction and *parlando* delivery. According to Woolf, Hahn’s recording of Bizet’s ‘Chanson d’avril’ is an exceptional example of text delivery, in which the ‘conversational ease is revelatory, the style superb’.³⁴⁶ Reinhard G. Pauly further asserts that Hahn’s performances were known for their ‘precision of articulation and nuance without any trace of mannerism’.³⁴⁷ Like Henschel, Hahn was an extraordinarily intelligent musician, who completely understood the style he was trying to communicate and possessed complete artistic control over his instruments (both voice and piano), resulting in interpretations compelling enough to overcome any lack of innate vocal quality. Gavoty said Hahn’s voice was ‘flexible as grass, ruled with a marvellous intelligence, a reflective divination’.³⁴⁸ Harewood, analysing Hahn’s self-accompanied recordings of arias from Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs du Perles*, noted how clearly Hahn’s affinity with the repertoire could be heard: ‘words and music are articulated with exemplary clarity if without ordinary operatic weight, but the composer fills the music with a tenderness so rare as to impel the listener to an immediate encore’.³⁴⁹

Hahn had high standards for the performance of art song and for vocalism in general: his academic writings about singing show ‘a merciless impatience with anything but the highest technical accomplishment’, and he refused to accompany any but the

³⁴² Letter from Gabriel Fauré to Elisabeth Greffuhle, in Jean-Michel Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré a musical life*, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 471-472.

³⁴³ Jonathan Woolf, review, *Reynaldo Hahn - Mélodies et airs d’opéra (1909-1937)* (CD reissue, Malibran MR 565), MusicWeb International.

³⁴⁴ Gavoty, *Reynaldo Hahn*, 193.

³⁴⁵ Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré a musical life*, 472.

³⁴⁶ Woolf, review, *Reynaldo Hahn - Mélodies et airs d’opéra*.

³⁴⁷ Hahn, *On Singers and Singing*, 18.

³⁴⁸ Gavoty, *Reynaldo Hahn*, 193.

³⁴⁹ Lord Harewood, ‘Les Pêcheurs de Perles’, in *Opera on Record 2*, ed. Alan Blyth (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1983), 193.

‘handful of singers he admired as correctly schooled’.³⁵⁰ Perhaps the most intriguing testimony to Hahn’s artless delivery is the words of Pauline Viardot-García, whom Hahn visited in her old age:

She said to me with friendly brusqueness: ‘Sing something to me, won’t you?’ I settled myself at the piano – an old and tired piano, where I did not feel at ease, the chair was too high, what do you know? But no fear; my audience understood the situation too well for me to fear the bad effect of a vocal problem. I sang *Nèère* to her, which seemed to please her, then *le Cimetière*, which she requested of me. Her white head with pensive eyes nodded from time to time in approval. ‘I like how you sing’, she said thoughtfully, as if awarding a glowing mark. ‘Yes, yes, it’s simple, it’s good’.³⁵¹

As an individual, Hahn embodied the character of the French song repertoire he sang. Literary critic and contemporary Maurice Baring colourfully described Hahn’s singing thus: ‘When he sang *Maid of Athens*, so exquisitely appropriate were his phrasing and accent that you were transported at once to the world of keepsakes and dandies and Holland House, and Laras and Corsairs, and Lady Blessington, and the Isles of Greece, and all the romance of the Romantics’.³⁵² The total sum of Hahn’s identity as a singer and interpreter of French song included not only his textual delivery and vocal quality but also his mannerisms and theatrical presence on the stage, including self-accompaniment, and all of these elements perpetuated the atmosphere of the context in which his repertoire was conceived.

Salon performances

Hahn’s self-accompanied song performances took place almost exclusively within the realm of the elite European salon, with its carefully crafted atmosphere of elegance, intimacy and spontaneity, not unlike the cultivated environment of the Italian Renaissance courts in which Tarquinia Molza performed. This setting inevitably influenced every aspect of Hahn’s music making, from the character of his compositions to his vocal style and his preference for self-accompaniment. This can be inferred in part from looking at the parallel influence of the salon in Henschel’s career: contemporary audiences remarked on Henschel’s ability to present himself on the public stage as though he were in a private

³⁵⁰ Graham Johnson, liner notes, *Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) Songs* (The Hyperion French Song Edition, CDA67141/2, 1996).

³⁵¹ Hahn, ‘Première Partie “Juvenilia”’, in *Notes (Journal d’un musicien)*, 4-5, translated by Robin Bier.

³⁵² Patrick O’Connor, ‘Hahn, Reynaldo’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

setting, and the positive qualities of the salon atmosphere became positively linked to his self-accompanied performances of *lieder* on the public stage. Hahn was, in his own generation and repertoire, the ultimate embodiment of the very ideal behind that positive association.

Understanding the artistic world of the salon is key to understanding how Hahn was perceived as a self-accompanied singer. Unlike the Henschel recitals, where public advertisements and reviews offer a somewhat official record of what transpired, to build a picture of one of Hahn's performances one must rely upon a collage of personal accounts – the letters, journals, paintings, poetry and prose of Hahn himself and the other individuals who were present, and whose records are also influenced by the style and ethos of the salons. A *soirée* hosted by Madeleine Lemaire (1845–1928) in her studio in Paris on 10 May 1903 is an excellent example of the kind of environment in which Hahn regularly performed. Lemaire was a celebrated painter and one of the great hostesses of the Belle Époque; she entertained the major artistic, literary, aristocratic and political figures of the day on Tuesday evenings in May every year, and invitations to her *soirées* were coveted. The 1903 *soirée* was documented by Marcel Proust (under the pseudonym 'Dominique'), in an article for *Le Figaro*.³⁵³ The article is an artistic society piece, which in this case makes it particularly valuable as evidence of audience perception: Proust's perspective and writing style clearly communicate the atmosphere of the event and the ideals behind it.

Important context for the rest of the article is established at the beginning, when Proust introduces the reader to Lemaire and to the allure of her particular salon. Her salon is unique because it is not really a salon – rather, it is her own art studio, formerly closed to any but her closest friends and fellow artists until certain members of the aristocracy began asking permission to visit and could not be refused. Proust creates an impression of special things happening behind closed doors:

But little by little we learn that some small reunions have taken place in the studio where, with no prior preparations, with no pretensions of a 'soiree', each of the invitees, 'working at his trade', and giving of his talent, the small intimate entertainment had included attractions that the most brilliant 'galas' could never hope to assemble together... All Paris wanted to gain admittance to the studio but never succeeded in gaining entry at the first attempt.³⁵⁴

This passage reveals the ethos of not just this particular salon but all of them, in which the

³⁵³ A French journal first published in 1826 under the reign of Charles X, still in circulation today.

³⁵⁴ Marcel Proust, 'La cour aux lilas et l'atelier des roses. Le salon de Madame Lemaire', *Le Figaro* (11 May 1903), reprinted in *Chroniques*, Librairie Gallimard, 1927. English translation accessed online at <http://www.yorktaylor.free-online.co.uk/lemaire.htm>.

goal was for the best of art to be experienced by the chosen few, in an intimate environment that is inspired yet also artless, without ‘preparations’ or ‘pretensions’. Proust seems to suggest that Lemaire’s salon, set literally in the workshop of a great artist, achieved this goal more perfectly than any other because it was the real thing. Prefaced in this way, Proust’s subsequent descriptions of the events of the evening, in which Hahn’s musical performance comes as the climax, are essentially presented to the reader as an example of what was seen and heard when one was admitted to the most cultured and inspired social environment in Paris.

Proust next describes the physical scene of the salon. Lemaire’s studio itself is not large and is filled with paintings, unfinished canvases and fresh roses (the painter’s primary subject matter). A small stage has been arranged in the back of the studio, presumably around the piano that can be seen in contemporary photographs. Proust chronicles the arriving guests, giving detailed anecdotes about their conversation and their placement in the room, tucked in amongst the trappings of the artist hostess. The guests include writers Anatole France, Robert de Flers, Gaston de Caillavet, and Georges de Porto-Riche, painters Jean Béraud, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Georges Clairin, several foreign ambassadors, General Joseph Brugère, and a variety of nobility, including the baroness Gustave de Rothschild, the grand-duchess Vladimir of Russia, and the Romanian prince Antoine Bibesco. There are not enough chairs to accommodate all the guests within the studio proper, so people spill out into the dining room, antechamber and garden.

Proust mentions Hahn twice by way of a preview before describing the music in full, to the effect that when Hahn begins to sing the reader feels that they have finally arrived at the true commencement of the evening. First, identifying his presence at the piano: ‘Baroness Gustave de Rothschild, who is used to being better seated, despairingly perches herself on a stool which she has had to climb up on to catch sight of Reynaldo Hahn who is sitting at the piano’.³⁵⁵ This comment indicates that the piano and Hahn’s approaching performance is the focal point of the room. Through describing Rothschild and other illustrious guests jockeying for position in the small studio, Proust conveys that the setting and the anticipated entertainment have produced a novel kind of intimacy, in which very grand people are content to tolerate the cramped quarters, uncomfortable furniture and disadvantaged sight lines for the sake of the experience. The next passage pertaining to Hahn describes the hostess trying unsuccessfully to usher one of her guests to a better seat: ‘realizing that she cannot tear him away from his many admirers who are preventing him from taking up the place she has reserved for him, she gives up with a comical gesture of exasperation and returns to her place beside the piano where Reynaldo Hahn is waiting for

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

the tumult to die down before starting to sing'.³⁵⁶ This comment indicates the context in which Hahn will sing. The guests are systematically being seated or seating themselves, and Hahn is waiting for quiet before beginning to sing, which implies a level of formality and clarifies that his singing is not meant to be in the background; at the same time Proust conveys a clear informality in the social interactions of the guests which are allowed to go on unchecked by the hostess.

Proust then describes the ambiance and metaphorical significance of this and past *soirées*, along with more impressions of the conversations and interactions of the other guests. The scene, and Proust's written reverie, are interrupted by the start of Hahn's music:

At the first notes of *Cimetière* the most frivolous public, the most rebellious audience, is completely subdued. Never, since Schumann, has there been a music that portrays sadness, tenderness, assuagement before nature with such genuine humanity and absolute beauty. Every note is a word - or a cry! With his head slightly thrown back, his melancholy mouth, slightly disdainful, letting escape the rhythmical waves of the most beautiful, the saddest, the most passionate voice that ever existed, this 'instrument of musical genius' who is Reynaldo Hahn grips every heart, moistens every eye, in the thrill of admiration which he propagates from afar and which makes us tremble, as we bow our heads one after another like a silent and solemn undulation of wheat in the wind. Next M. Harold Bauer plays some Brahms dances with gusto. Then Mounet-Sully recites verse, followed by M. de Soria who sings. But more than one person is still thinking about the 'roses in the grass' in the Ambérien cemetery, which was evoked so unforgettably.³⁵⁷

The piece Hahn performs is *Cimetière de Campagne*, a *mélodie* of his own composition setting a text by Gabriel Vicaire, the same song Hahn sang to Pauline Viardot-García, and one that he would later record. The setting is simple, with a flowing accompaniment in compound time and a smooth, almost entirely stepwise melody that follows the natural speech rhythms of the poem. The song does not require vocal or pianistic virtuosity, but its simplicity and repetitive rhythm serve as an excellent showcase for a singer who has mastered *parlando* text delivery.

More interesting than the music itself is the way the musician is portrayed. Proust's vocabulary and imagery is distinctly Orphic in the way that it idealizes Hahn and his music. By calling Hahn an 'instrument of musical genius', Proust implies that Hahn is serving a

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

purpose outside himself, acting as the vessel through which artistic inspiration flows. It is unclear whether by the ‘most beautiful, the saddest, the most passionate voice that ever existed’ Proust means Hahn’s actual singing voice, or his rhetorical voice represented by the music he composes and the message it transmits. Either way, it is clear that this voice exerts communicative power over those who hear it, ‘subduing’ the ‘rebellious’ listeners, making them ‘tremble’ and ‘bow their heads,’ and elevating their thoughts from ‘frivolity’ to more solemn reflection. This power exerts itself beyond the end of the actual performance, as the guests continue to remember it while other performers do their part on the stage.

In dwelling on the sadness and tenderness of the music and the perceived melancholy of the singer, Proust casts Hahn in a nostalgic and romantic light that echoes the tone of the complete article and the total experience of the salon. The sadness seems to originate from the idea that a *soirée* like this one offers something magical that can only be experienced in the moment: ‘the charm of things which pass, which pass and which return without being able to yield up with them all that we have loved of their vanished sisters, the charm, and along with the charm also their sadness’.³⁵⁸ Proust leaves the reader with a final image of Hahn as one of the chosen few, remaining in Lemaire’s studio to sing and play some more while ‘little by little the less intimate guests depart’.³⁵⁹

Proust’s account of Hahn’s performance at Mme Lemaire’s is, as has already been noted, artistic and far from objective, but taken as a piece of art in itself this account is useful and informative. The elegant and nostalgically romantic atmosphere of the salon influences and is influenced by the behaviour of the guests and sensibility of the performances presented, and these qualities extend to the written and visual descriptions of them. Proust’s article shows how this kind of imagery becomes self-perpetuating: Proust published this particular article under pseudonym in order to discover, at the following evening’s *soirée*, the reactions of the column’s readership to his piece.³⁶⁰ From this it can be inferred that the habitual readership of this and similar articles was the same portion of society who were attending the salons being described, meaning that the memory of Hahn’s singing and playing was reinforced to the same audiences through Proust’s romantic vignette. There is no question that Proust’s romanticisation of the salon setting and of Hahn was deliberate, and his perspective was almost certainly shared by others who attended the salons, painted or wrote about them. For example, Proust also wrote articles about the Paris cabaret and café concerts. A comparison between this article and an earlier piece, ‘Endroits

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust – A Life* (Yale University Press, 2002), 338.

Publics' (Public Places) from 1891³⁶¹ reveals two completely different writing styles, and while this can partly be explained by the twelve years separating their publication, it would also seem that the comparative coarseness of the music and society under discussion had a direct influence on the coarseness of vocabulary and elegance of sentence structure Proust elected to use to describe it, right down to his choice of pseudonym: 'Dominique' versus 'Bob'.

Evenings like the *soirée* at Mme Lemaire's were a regular occurrence in Hahn's life. Hahn's own personal journal, published under the title *Notes (Journal d'un musicien)* in 1933, contains records of many such occasions: he sang Fauré's songs at the home of the Tolstoï's before an audience that included the Grand-Duchess Anastasie and the Grand-Duke of Mecklembourg;³⁶² he sang his own *mélodies* at a tea-party hosted by Marcel Proust for an entirely aristocratic guest list;³⁶³ he sang Offenbach excerpts for King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra at a *soirée* given by the duchess of Manchester with Paolo Tosti whispering repertoire suggestions in his ear;³⁶⁴ he dined and sang at Coombe, the home of Lady de Grey; for the queen of Yugoslavia at the palace in Bucharest; he sang for architect Frantz Jourdain, journalists Léon Daudet and Caroline Rémy de Guebhard (nom de plume, Séverine), for artist Lucien Daudet, novelist Alphonse Daudet, for Proust and Lemaire, and for poets Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, the latter of whom was so moved when he heard Hahn accompanying himself in his own song cycle *Chansons grises* that he composed a verse to commemorate the musician. Because the records of Hahn's self accompanied performances are couched as personal recollections of private *soirées* in the company of friends and high society, self-accompaniment becomes one of the characteristics associated with those settings, alongside the other characteristics of what could be found at the salons: elegant and witty conversation, fashionable clothing, luxurious décor, money, intelligence, talent, idealism, charm, a willingness on the part of all present to be transported by the beauty and grace of the occasion, a certain artifice, *ennui*, and nostalgia.

Significance of self-accompaniment to the salon setting

Self-accompaniment was a necessary ingredient in Hahn's performances, without which he would not have been the musician and musical figure that he was. In his own journal, Hahn

³⁶¹ Marcel Proust, 'Endroits publics', *Le Mensuel* (10 July 1981), reprinted in *Écrits sur l'art*, GF Flammarion, 1999. English translation accessed online at <http://www.yorktaylor.free-online.co.uk/public.html>.

³⁶² Hahn, *Notes (Journal d'un musicien)*, 171-172.

³⁶³ Three separate articles in *Le Figaro*, *Le Gaulois*, and *L'Écho de Paris*, 7-8 March 1905 reported on this gathering.

³⁶⁴ Hahn, *Notes (Journal d'un musicien)*, 204-210.

indicated that he drew inspiration from the atmosphere of the salons in which he performed, as in this passage about performing for the Tolstoïns in Rome: ‘ – An evening spent with the Russians at the Grand Hotel. The foolish and charming women, and that warm, glowing atmosphere stimulated me; I sang certain things the way I love to sing them’.³⁶⁵ The size and breadth of his entirely self-accompanied discography as a singer further reinforces that, regardless of the inspiration behind self-accompaniment in his live salon performances, as a recording artist self-accompaniment was an artistic choice. Because self-accompaniment was such a constant part of his musical identity, the performance practice figured centrally in all of his music experiences, and therefore also the experiences of those who heard him sing, wrote or read about him singing, or painted his portrait. Self-accompaniment in turn became associated not just with Hahn the individual musician, but also with all the circumstances of his performances – where, how and for whom he sang, and way in which those occasions were recounted to others.

It can also be said that the salon environment influenced Hahn’s artistic preference and choices in a more concrete way. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, self-accompaniment was still logistically advantageous to the singer trying to negotiate the demands of artistic and aristocratic Parisian society. Because Hahn only sang in private and elite settings like Lemaire’s salon and the great houses of Paris and England, the importance of independence first cited by Tosti and his contemporaries remained much more directly relevant to Hahn throughout his life than it would have for a singer like Henschel who was also booked for public engagements. A good example of this is a *soirée* hosted by the Duchess of Manchester for the King and Queen, for which Hahn was engaged to lead a performance of his ballet, *le Bal de Béatrice d’Este* and to sing some *mélodies*:

Tosti, who was seated next to me, advised me under his breath to sing some pages of Offenbach for the king. And so, for over half an hour, we had all the Offenbach you could want. From the enchanted *le Fifre enchanté* to *la Créole* and *Madame l’Archiduc*, thirty years of Paris evoked, during which the king relived perhaps, in thinking of the youth of the Prince of Wales, his own joyous and insouciant youth, the *Café Anglais*, the opera galas, the variety shows, Hortense Schneider... His fat, impassible face barely smiled and gave nothing away, but after the last note of every piece he growled, ‘Again, I beg you’.Finally the king stood: the hour for bridge had arrived.³⁶⁶

In this case, Hahn’s ability to spontaneously satisfy a request for particular music pleased

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 151, translation by Robin Bier.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 208-210, translation by Robin Bier.

the king and cast Hahn in a favourable light. This situation further affords a glimpse of the influences on artistic programming in such a setting; in the salon requests played a role in what music was heard, not unlike the affect of the encore in public concerts but with the added dimension that requests were more likely to be for specific songs, in which case being one's own accompanist increases the singer's ability to respond.

If self-accompaniment was a logistical advantage in the salon, it was also an artistic one; the construct of self-accompaniment both enabled and embodied certain values central to the salon atmosphere, in particular the element of practised spontaneity, not unlike the Renaissance concept of *sprezzatura*. Hahn's journal entries make it clear that he was always ready to sing any repertoire, at any time, and for any length of time. These entries, often perfunctory with regard to descriptions of the music making itself, form a larger pattern in which the apparently spontaneous move from dining table or garden to piano by Hahn was in itself a regular and predictable event. On one such occasion at Coombe, hosted by the Lord and Lady de Grey, Hahn gives more details about the scope of his repertoire:

The queen returns. Muuusic. I sing. What? A little of everything.... No sooner had we left the table when [Lady de Grey] speaks of wishing to again hear music. In the face of her impatience, I finish by repositioning myself at the piano. There I stayed for nearly two hours, singing the most diverse and extravagant things, from seventeenth-century songs to songs from the café-concerts, passing through Lully, Bach, Mozart, Gounod, Schumann, Brahms, Saint-Saëns and still others.³⁶⁷

Hahn continues to say that he gave this two hour impromptu song recital with the ageing Lady de Grey sitting immediately next to him, completely engrossed by virtue of the fact that she could so clearly hear every nuance of what he sang. This example provokes reflection on the technical demands of being a celebrated salon singer. As a self-accompanied singer, Hahn was in one sense always ready to perform. On the other hand, self-accompaniment placed great demands on the memory. Unless Hahn carried sheet music with him or depended upon his host having a music library (the consultation of which would have limited the spontaneity of the performance), Hahn must have had a large core repertoire committed to memory. The technical demands of producing apparently spontaneous self-accompanied performances of such a range of repertoire suggest that Hahn's art was one of habitual spontaneity, in which every aspect of his style, from self-accompaniment to text delivery, was based upon performance gestures that communicate spontaneity.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 214-217, translation by Robin Bier.

Hahn was not an innovator in the realm of self-accompaniment. Henschel also sang in many distinguished salons, and both Hahn and Henschel are a continuation of the traditions of the previous generations of great nineteenth-century singers like Viardot-García, Malibran and Lind, and before them the celebrated castrato singers who entertained the nobility. Furthermore, these virtuosic self-accompanied salon performances by Viardot-García, Malibran and Lind were themselves couched in the context of many similar performances by lesser artists, both aristocratic and professional. Hahn's journal gives evidence that aristocratic amateur musicians were still singing this way in his time: the duchess of Manchester, for example, sang to Hahn American songs from her childhood to her own accompaniment, in private, when he arrived to prepare for her *soirée*.³⁶⁸

The way in which Hahn's audiences respond to his singing make apparent the extent to which self-accompaniment normalized and taken for granted in the salon setting. Whereas reviewers of Henschel's recitals evaluated the skill and effect of his self-accompaniment, Hahn's salon audiences noted his superior musicianship and repertoire without evaluating his method of presentation. This difference can be partly attributed to the different goals of the writers; Henschel's reviewers were reporting to a public readership and were expected to serve a critical and evaluative role, while Hahn's 'reviewers' were individuals with personal bias toward Hahn's music, writing with artistic intent for an equally biased audience or no audience at all. Hahn's influence upon the role of self-accompaniment in the salon was thus one reinforcement and improvement. His skill and repertoire brought self-accompaniment into contact with high intellectual art while retaining its gentle, intimate and accessible qualities. Personal accounts of Hahn's singing show the effects of this marriage of virtuosic musicianship with intimate salon presentation via the authors' absorption and enjoyment of the imagery thus produced: Hahn at the piano in formal dress, handsome, leaning back slightly with his head thrown back, gazing languidly upward, cigarette dangling from his mouth, singing gently and with the natural cadence of speech but playing with the sensitivity and skill of a virtuoso pianist, presenting both the highest quality art songs (Fauré, Schumann, his own songs) and the most accessible and popular tunes of the day (Offenbach and music hall *chansons*); the picture of the inspired artist shaped by the fashions of his time.

Once established as a characteristic of salon music presentation, self-accompanied singing by virtuoso musicians like Hahn (and Henschel) became a vehicle through which the salon atmosphere could be extended to other settings. Some of Hahn's performances fell outside the literal salon, but can be understood as extensions of the salon because they were shaped by the same characteristics and qualities. These situations show how self-

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 204.

accompaniment contributed to the blurring of the boundary between private and public performance, and construct a more complete picture of the romance self-accompaniment still evoked by the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most remarkable example recorded in Hahn's journal occurred in Venice, under the patronage of the Comtesse de Béarn. Having previously joined her party for dinner on her yacht, after which he sang at the piano to the other guests in the vessel's salon, the Comtesse arranged for Hahn to perform in a gondola in the open air of the canals:

Yesterday, better yet; I was given true satisfaction. Mme de Béarn asked me to sing alone with a piano in the 'piccoli canali'. Several lone gondolas: the countess, the Régniers, Abel Bonnard, several other friends hastily called. In an illuminated boat, I was alone with the piano and two oarsmen. The gondolas were grouped about me; we were installed at a crossroads where three canals met, beneath three bridges of charming structure. I sang to all; not a word was lost; the listeners, intelligent, stimulated by the silence, felt the effect of each syllable. Little by little, the passers-by assembled, lining the railings of the bridges; a plebeian public formed, compact, attentive. The Venetian songs had the effect, in that little crowd, of fireworks, causing joy and surprise which gave me great pleasure. 'Again, again', they cried from above...³⁶⁹

The Venetian songs to which Hahn refers are presumably his own *Venezia*, a cycle of six songs in Venetian dialect. Performed at the request of an aristocrat for a small number of intimate guests, gathered around while the singer sings from the piano, in a romantic atmosphere of practised spontaneity (for it took planning to engineer this elegantly informal performance), this was in effect a salon performance that took place in public. The necessity of self-accompaniment in this particular instance is unclear. Two musicians in Hahn's gondola probably would not have capsized the boat. On the other hand, two musicians might have introduced that slight additional measure of formality and difficulty (lighting, juggling of sheet music, physical arrangement and coordination of ensemble, rehearsal?) that would have shifted the scene from spontaneous adventure to contrived recital. Hahn's Venetian song cycle fit the setting perfectly, as did the freedoms enabled by his particular performance practice and style. Perhaps this event could have taken place with another performer or performers, but it is difficult to imagine it being carried off more elegantly and skilfully. The same can be said of Henschel evoking an improvisatory and intimate atmosphere in his public recitals through his unique combination of salon-style

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 191, translation by Robin Bier.

self-accompaniment and text delivery married to world-class technical ability. Virtuosity, therefore, was important factor in self-accompaniment as an extension of the salon setting: Hahn and Henschel's singing and playing was accomplished enough that it could be successfully transported from private to public setting without loss of either musical quality or atmospheric impact.

Recordings

This case study presents the first opportunity in this thesis to use recordings as primary sources for self-accompanied singing. The primary sources that document the live self-accompanied vocal performances of Tarquinia Molza and her colleagues, of Caffarelli, or Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind, tell us a great deal about how and under what circumstances these artists sang, what repertoire they performed, and how their performances were received, but convey nothing concrete about how the music actually sounded when performed other individuals, those written and visual primary sources can finally be supplemented by the sounds themselves. Considering that self-accompanied singing is no longer a living classical music tradition, these recordings are an invaluable source of concrete evidence of the quality of the singing, the quality of the playing, the quality of the ensemble, and the presence of any unique artistic results, even filtered as they are by the limitations of old technology and the conditioning of our modern ears.

Henschel made two sets of recordings as a singer, the first in 1913-1914 for the Gramophone Company when he was sixty-three years old and on the verge of retiring from the recital platform, and the second in 1928-1929 for the Columbia Graphophone Company at the age of seventy-eight, for which he came out of retirement.³⁷⁰ He also recorded in 1891 and 1892 as conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and possibly also as an accompanist to cellist Beatrice Harrison.³⁷¹ For a complete record of Henschel's vocal discography complete with recording equipment specifications, see Harold Bruder's discography published in *The Record Collector*.³⁷² The tracks Henschel recorded self-accompanied are given in Appendix Four. Henschel recorded thirteen individual songs, nine of them multiple times, with the end result of nineteen published recorded songs. All of these, published and unpublished, were recorded self-accompanied. Seeing the complete discography, including unpublished takes, reveals more about his repertoire and abilities. It

³⁷⁰ Harold Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', *The Record Collector* 47/2 (2002): 148.

³⁷¹ [Unsigned], liner notes to *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*, Columbia Graphophone, 1928 (CD reissue by Symposium Records, no. 1362, 2006).

³⁷² Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', 144-153.

is particularly interesting to discover that Schubert's 'Erlkönig', one of the most well-known examples of a German *lied* with a truly virtuosic accompaniment, was in Henschel's repertoire, though a recording of it is not available to the public, especially as Henschel's reviewers often compared the Loewe to Schubert's more famous version. It is significant that Henschel chose this repertoire – all songs, the majority German *lieder* – to preserve in the recording studio as his vocal legacy. In the early days of the recording industry, celebrated singers were sought out to record, so it can be assumed that this repertoire list was both a record of what producers and listeners wanted to hear as well as a record of the repertoire and performance practice for which Henschel wished to be remembered.

Hahn's discography is vastly larger than Henschel's, which is interesting considering that Henschel was the more accomplished and celebrated singer on the concert stage. This is due in part to timing and in part to Hahn's own interests: Patrick O'Connor observed that Hahn's career closely paralleled the onset of the recording industry, with the result that he took a great interest in recording as a performer and writer (he was music critic for *Le Figaro* in the 1930s) throughout his life. Like Henschel, Hahn made recordings in multiple capacities, as a singer to his own accompaniment, as a singer accompanied by others, as an accompanist to others, as a conductor, and even as a speaker.

Hahn recorded a total of 64 individual tracks as a singer, all recorded in Paris from 1909-1932. Of those 64 tracks, 58 are known to be self-accompanied and two are known to be accompanied by another pianist. An additional four may also be accompanied by a separate pianist though the documentation is unclear. Hahn also recorded 16 tracks as an accompanist to Arthur Endrèze (baritone), Guy Ferrant (tenor), and Ninon Vallin (soprano). For a complete record of Hahn's discography see William R. Moran's 'The Recorded Legacy of Reynaldo Hahn'.³⁷³ The known repertoire he recorded as a self-accompanied singer (there are several unidentified tracks) is given in Appendix Four. Hahn's self-accompanied discography was almost entirely French, and within that mostly *mélodies*, but with the interesting addition of several opera and operetta arias.

Henschel and Hahn are far from being the only self-accompanied singers of this kind of repertoire on record, though they do represent the most significant intersection between skill, celebrity, serious repertoire and specialization in self-accompaniment, as well as proximity to the composers of the repertoire they performed. The catalogue of The AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) contains at least 345 individual tracks that appear to be self-accompanied, and ambiguous labelling and search terms suggest that there are almost certainly more. Many of these

³⁷³ William Moran, 'The Recorded Legacy of Reynaldo Hahn', in Hahn, *On Singers and Singing*, 235-244.

tracks are unpublished or tests, dating from approximately 1900 to 1935, and many of them appear to be of lighter, popular repertoire, but there are also examples of serious repertoire (opera arias and art songs) and of singers who were equally or more lauded on the stage than Henschel. One example is the discography of Ernst Wolff (1905-1999), a baritone who studied at the Hoch conservatory and went on to have a career as an opera *répétiteur* in Frankfurt and a self-accompanied *lieder* recitalist in England and Europe. Wolff recorded Schubert's complete *Die schöne Müllerin* for Columbia in 1938, as well as *lieder* by Schumann (both Robert and Clara), Brahms, Liszt, Wolf and Kowaisky, and himself, amounting to a discography of over 70 individual recorded songs. Helen Henschel recorded five songs, by Brahms, Fauré, Keel and her father, in 1924. Marcella Sembrich (1858-1935), operatic soprano and recitalist, recorded Pauline Viardot-García's 'Aimez-moi' (an arrangement of Chopin's D major Mazurka, Op. 33 No. 2) and two separate tracks of Chopin's song *The Maiden's Wish*, to her own accompaniment for the Victor Label in 1907.³⁷⁴ Nellie Melba recorded several self-accompanied tracks of the songs she performed as entr'actes and encores, including a version of Bishop's 'Home, Sweet Home. Richard Tauber also recorded a number of his own popular songs self-accompanied. This is not an exhaustive list, and the search for self-accompanied recordings, especially by singers connected to the living tradition of the nineteenth century, is on going.

There are a variety of challenges involved in using early recordings as source material, which were discussed in Chapter Two. In an attempt to manage those problems, the following steps were taken:

1. Balancing modern assessments of a given recording with contemporary assessments wherever possible. Perspectives included are contemporary reviews and analyses of the recording; contemporary descriptions of the recorded pieces from live performances; modern reviews and analyses of the recording; my own analysis of the recording.
2. Establishing 'controls' to identify what sound results can likely be attributed to self-accompaniment versus to other factors like age, generational artistic differences, and individual style. This is accomplished by comparing the case study recording wherever possible to recordings of the same piece either sung by the same musician but accompanied by another pianist, or by the same musician accompanying another singer.

³⁷⁴ Michael Scott, *The Record of Singing, Volume 1: to 1914* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1977), 26-27.

Research questions

Other scholars have performed extensive studies of historical vocal recordings, with respect to developments in recording technology, developments in singing style and technique, and the history of specific singers. Henschel's recordings have already been closely examined, yielding detailed analysis of his vocal quality, pianism and interpretative style, which will not be replicated here. This analysis focuses specifically on self-accompaniment, attempting to isolate those elements of a sounding performance that are directly related to or caused by it, and attempting to draw conclusions about the effects of self-accompaniment on the singer and the music. This analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. Does self-accompaniment affect vocal or pianistic quality?

This question addresses the technique of the recorded performer on three levels: vocal technique, pianistic technique, and the ability to coordinate the two without a loss in quality. The first two are relatively easy to assess with the available recordings, by comparing the singing and the playing of the self-accompanied performer in isolation to that of other singers and pianists in turn, while attempting as previously noted to control for differences in age, era and individual style. The third aspect of this question is more difficult to assess. Adler asserted that a self-accompanied singer would inevitably favour the virtuosity of one part at the expense of the other, to the detriment of the music as a whole, an assumption that is contradicted by contemporary accounts of Henschel's self-accompanied singing. To examine this, multiple recordings by the same performer in different capacities are needed, ideally of the same piece. Such sets of recordings were only available to a very limited extent, but it was nonetheless possible, with a small sample size, to listen for evidence that either playing or singing was noticeably more secure than the other, and for evidence of technical problems (poor breath control, inconsistencies in vocal timbre, mistakes, sloppy articulation in difficult passages, muddy pedalling, anything that could indicate the performer is struggling to multi task) in the self-accompanied recording that did not appear in recordings by the same artist accompanied by or accompanying someone else.

2. Does self-accompaniment inhibit delivery or communication?

This question addresses the expressivity and musical effectiveness of the recorded performer, as a natural continuation of the assessment of the purely technical aspects of the performance. To answer this question, self-accompanied recordings were compared to non-

self-accompanied recordings by the same performer whilst listening for differences in the clarity of the performer's expressive gestures. Comparisons of self-accompanied recordings to duo recordings were also useful, though the evaluation was necessarily more subjective. In these comparisons the intent was to listen for whether the expressivity of both singing and playing registered as dynamically on the self-accompanied recordings as on duo recordings, listening for scope and clarity of interpretive gestures and phrasing, for clarity and expressivity of diction, range of colour and dynamics, etc., as well as considering the overall impression of interpretive conviction and character. This final consideration is both useful and problematic to apply to an analysis of audio recordings, because it doesn't take into account the visible physical impact of self-accompaniment upon the presentation of the performance, which can be argued has a significant effect on the expressive impact of the performance, and is a major concern for twenty-first-century performers and teachers. However, assessing the sounding performance only lays the groundwork for later consideration of whether self-accompaniment directly affects the music itself, or simply how it is perceived by modern listeners.

3. Does self-accompaniment produce unique interpretive results?

This question addresses the ensemble relationship between voice and piano in a self-accompanied performance. Assuming vocal and pianistic technique and basic expressivity are complete, this relationship – the coordination between voice and accompaniment – is the aspect of self-accompanied singing with the greatest potential to demonstrate measurable artistic differences from duo performances, particularly in recorded performances of art song. To assess this potential it was important to listen not only to recordings by multiple performers, but also recordings of multiple types of composition featuring different kinds of voice-piano interplay. The self-accompanied recordings were examined for patterns in the alignment and independence of voice and piano with respect to *rubato*, *tempo*, dynamics, articulation and phrasing, and whether any such patterns appeared to be consistently different from duo performances of the same pieces.

Recordings analysis

This analysis first examines several pairings of self-accompanied and duo recordings by Hahn, Melba, and Tauber. Then, because Henschel left behind no recordings of himself accompanying another singer or being accompanied by another pianist, three of his recordings are examined on their own merit. To these are added one additional recording by

Hahn being accompanied by another pianist (though without a self-accompanied pairing) in order to build a clearer picture of his singing, two recordings by Marcella Sembrich to provide an example of virtuosic repertoire performed by a female self-accompanist, and one recording by Ernst Wolff to provide a second and later perspective on self-accompanied Schubert alongside the examples by Henschel. The criteria for these recordings, other than self-accompaniment and pairings with duo performances by the same performer, was to encompass a variety of musical textures, so that the effects of self-accompaniment could be observed in music of varying technical difficulty and varying compositional relationships between voice and piano. The availability of contemporary perspectives on the performance was also a factor (such as songs for which there are surviving concert reviews or personal accounts from Hahn and Henschel's live performances of the song, or contemporary record reviews). The final criterion was that, where possible, the song be standard repertoire that is widely recorded, to enable more meaningful evaluation of the communicative and interpretive success of the recordings made by the self-accompanied singers.

1. Reynaldo Hahn:

Rondels No. 5 'La paix', by Reynaldo Hahn

Recorded self-accompanied, 1919³⁷⁵

Recorded as an accompanist to Guy Farrant, 1930s.³⁷⁶

This song by Reynaldo Hahn is unusual in that the entire text is declaimed on a single pedal tone on the fifth scale degree, while the piano accompaniment delivers bell-like chords in a steady rhythm that constantly respell the harmonic function of the singer. In the self-accompanied recording, Hahn's vocal timbre is consistent and resonant, though the pitch occasionally drifts slightly sharp. He delivers the text in a very natural, speech-like manner, with crisp and clear diction. While both voice and piano display steady forward momentum and share equally in the task of driving the music forward, they rarely line up exactly from beat to beat, creating the impression that both parts are strolling in the same direction, but each with their own unique gait. The quality of the playing is difficult to assess: the sound quality of this recording is poor and contains a lot of background noise, and it sounds as though the microphone is closer to the singer than to the piano, all of which obscures the nuances of Hahn's playing. On a macro scale one can hear decisive rhythmic

³⁷⁵ Reynaldo Hahn, *Reynaldo Hahn: The Complete Recordings 1909-34* (Romophone 82015-2, CD reissue, Harmonia Mundi USA, 3 volumes, 2000), vol. 1, track 14.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, track 13.

gestures, deliberate, detailed articulation, and a wide range of touch within what is a fairly monochrome composition, even though the exact voicing and balance of the chords is hard to hear. A wrong note rings in the final chord of the piece.

The later duo recording when Hahn accompanies Guy Ferrant is much clearer and evenly miked, making it easier to analyse the quality of his playing in isolation but also difficult to compare to the earlier self-accompanied recording. From what can be heard, the macro phrasing in the piano is consistent between both recordings; this recording confirms the impressions of articulation, dynamics, and nuances of touch and voicing heard in the older self-accompanied recording. The significant difference between the two performances is primarily one of pacing and mood. The two recordings are in fact only two seconds apart in length from initial to final chord. However when listening to the duo recording, one gets the impression of a faster tempo; the singer's delivery of the text is more true to the written rhythm, which has the effect of making the text sound rushed in places, while Hahn plays the accompaniment with slightly more *rubato* and tempo variation which adds to the impression of a more driving and restless pace. It is possible that Hahn's increased use of *rubato* in the duo recording is the product of his lack of control over the vocal part as sung by Ferrant, whereas in the self-accompanied performance his desire to deliver the text in a natural speech rhythm produced a steadier and more settled interpretation of the accompaniment.

2. Reynaldo Hahn:

'L'énamourée' by Reynaldo Hahn

Recorded self-accompanied, 1919³⁷⁷

Recorded as an accompanist to Arthur Endreze, 1930s³⁷⁸

This song presents a different kind of relationship between piano and voice from 'La paix'; the accompaniment follows and supports the rhythm of the voice, underpinning strong beats and strong syllables with arpeggiated chords, for the most part lacking its own driving rhythm except when the voice stops. Hahn's singing in the self-accompanied recording is sustained and unsentimental, with the same easy language delivery as in the recording of 'La paix' though the vocal writing is much more lyrical. He does not sing with a large dynamic range, but the voice is steady and firm throughout, remaining well supported and vibrant to the ends of long phrases. As with the other 1919 recording, the audio quality is poor enough that it is difficult to assess the nuances of the

³⁷⁷ Ibid, vol. 1, track 18.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, vol. 2, track 22.

playing in terms of touch and voicing. The overall shaping of the piano part is luxuriant and deliberate. Hahn plays the arpeggiated chords with an improvisatory freedom, sometimes independently of the vocal line. For example, Hahn anticipates the first expansive arpeggio in the second verse of the song, dropping half a beat to initiate the pianistic flourish early, while his next vocal breath and sung phrase proceed in time. In places where the bass line in the left hand moves in time with the vocal line, as well as on the placement of final cadences at the ends of lines and verses, there is exact vertical alignment between piano and voice, despite the *rubato* in the singing.

Hahn's duo recording accompanying Arthur Endreze is a faster performance by thirteen seconds. The time difference occurs partly through faster singing and playing and partly through giving less time to the hiatuses between phrases – voice and piano take over from each other more quickly. The faster tempo and shorter pauses creates the impression that the playing is more matter of fact, but upon closer comparison Hahn employs most of the same interpretive gestures in his accompaniment of Endreze as he does with himself; the self-accompanied recording simply allows these gestures to unfold with more breathing space between them. The vertical alignment between piano and voice in the approach to cadences is not exact as it is in the self-accompanied recording; Hahn's left hand often leads or follows the voice by a fraction of a beat. In some places it sounds as if this is the result of the singer taking a longer breath than the accompanist expected, while in others it simply sounds as if the *ritardando* was almost but not perfectly coordinated.

3. Reynaldo Hahn:

'Le parfum impérissable', Op. 76, No. 1 by Gabriel Fauré Recorded accompanied by Giuseppe Benvenuti, 1930.³⁷⁹

This recording is one of several tracks where Hahn is accompanied by another pianist, Giuseppe Benvenuti, though the exact number of these tracks is unclear: the jacket information for the recording collection *Reynaldo Hahn: The Complete Recordings 1909-34* and William R. Moran's discography of Hahn disagree about the accompaniment of several of the tracks, though they do agree that this recording of 'Le parfum impérissable' was not self-accompanied. Though none of the duo tracks of Hahn singing has a self-accompanied pair, it is nonetheless useful to be able to evaluate Hahn's singing and interpretive vocal delivery in the context of a duo performance.

The audio quality is fairly clear with a good balance between the voice and piano so it is easy to hear the nuances of Hahn's vocal production. The timbre and colour of Hahn's

³⁷⁹ Ibid, vol. 2, track 2.

voice in this recording sound identical to his singing on his many self-accompanied tracks. The same occasional slight tuning issues appear that were noted in ‘La paix’; the steadiness of tone and firmness of support through to the end of long notes is also consistent with other recordings. Hahn’s breathing patterns are consistent between this recording and his self-accompanied recordings: he seems to be breathing with similar frequency, and his breath control sounds neither diminished nor improved. A subtle difference is an increase in heaviness of the voice on rhythmic strong beats – the singing sounds slightly more vertical, perhaps the result of more supported singing, or the result of Hahn working to lead with his voice in a way that he doesn’t have to when self-accompanied. The diction and text delivery is equally clear as in his other recordings, and there is a similar improvisatory freedom of rhythm, but within that flexibility the rhythm of the words is more measured. Hahn moves into the beginning of a word or syllable with the same forward-falling freedom, but then sustains the remainder of the syllable longer (waiting for his accompanist) with the result that the words sound more sung, unstressed syllables sound heavier, and the overall rhythm of the vocal part sounds more square.

The simple structure of this song offers little opportunity for the piano to lead or take centre stage; the accompaniment maintains the pulse but never moves independently of the vocal part except for a few very brief transitional moments. It is nonetheless telling that in this performance the piano never leads. The framework of quarter note chords tends to fall fractionally behind Hahn’s singing, following rather than aligning exactly or leading. In a few key moments when it is clear that voice and piano should align exactly, such as the sixteenth notes Ab to Bb for the words ‘que mon’, which is doubled by the right hand of the piano, Hahn’s singing and Benvenuti’s playing are noticeably out of sync. Independent movement of voice and piano is also present when Hahn’s self-accompanies, but there is a balance between vocal leading and piano leading, and moments when the vertical coordination is exact even in the context of rubato.

4. Nellie Melba:

‘Mattinata’ (‘Mary, tremando l’ultima stella’), by Francesco Paolo Tosti

Recorded accompanied by Landon Ronald, 1904³⁸⁰

Recorded self-accompanied, 1907³⁸¹

The audio quality is relatively equal between these two recordings, making them

³⁸⁰ Nellie Melba, *Complete Gramophone Company Recordings, Vol. 1. The 1904 London Recordings* (CD, Naxos Historical 8.110738, 2002), track 1.

³⁸¹ Nellie Melba, *The Complete American Recordings, Vol. 1, 1907* (CD, Naxos Historical 8.110334, 2004), track 20.

easier to compare than the pairings by Hahn. Melba's playing in the 1907 recording is without question inferior to Ronald's on the 1904 version. Her right hand chords are inconsistently voiced, she plays several wrong notes in the left hand, and the pedal work is muddy in places. This pair of recordings confirms that Melba was not, like Hahn and Henschel, equally a pianist and a singer. She nonetheless delivers a convincing performance of the accompaniment with respect to overall shape, rhythmic energy, the lilt of the slurred pairings of bass notes that dominate the left hand, and rolled flourishes in the right hand chords each time the solo piano interlude returns.

Melba's singing between the two recordings is virtually identical. She breathes in precisely the same places in both, from the two bars where she modifies the rhythm to insert a quarter note rest on a downbeat, to the places where she carries through where textual punctuation would suggest a breath, to the tiny catch breath before the final 'Tra poco vanirà'. Vocal timbre and the use of chest versus head voice is also consistent between the two recordings, as is the clarity of Melba's diction. The major difference in her singing between these two interpretations comes from a difference in tempo. Melba's self-accompanied recording is significantly faster than when she sings it accompanied by Ronald (and pitch is consistent between the two recordings, suggesting that the tempo difference is unrelated to speed of playback). Though Melba's breathing and phrasing do not change as a result, the self-accompanied interpretation consequently sounds much more energetic, less sentimental, and sounds as though it is conceived in two instead of four. Melba maintains this rhythmic drive throughout the song with very little rubato in either voice or accompaniment.

Melba's interpretation in both recordings is straightforward and unsentimental so there is little opportunity to analyse coordination between voice and piano until the final phrase. Here, in both versions Melba sings her final phrase 'Tra poco vanirà' with a pronounced *ritardando*, before the piano plays the final three bars a tempo. In the duo performance, this *ritardando* is evenly measured, with Melba taking time on the penultimate syllable of 'vanirà', and Ronald's downbeat does not quite align with hers when she sings the final syllable. In the self-accompanied performance, Melba suspends the first syllable of 'vanirà', moving through the penultimate syllable to arrive on the next downbeat in speech rhythm, and the piano coordinates exactly with the movement of the voice.

5. Nellie Melba: 'Down in the Forest', by Landon Ronald
Recorded, possibly self-accompanied, 1909³⁸²

³⁸² Nellie Melba, *The Complete American Recordings, Vol. 2, 1909-1910* (CD, Naxos Historical, 8.110335, 2005), track 2.

Recorded accompanied by Landon Ronald, 1921-1926³⁸³

Melba's 1909 recording of 'Down in the Forest' is an excellent example of the problems with documentation of supporting artists in early recordings. This track was one of five tracks that Melba recorded for the Victor label on the first of January, 1909: the other four were 'En sourdine' by Claude Debussy, 'White Sea Mist' by Landon Ronald, 'D'une prison' by Reynaldo Hahn, and 'Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms' by Thomas Moore. Of the five, only the Hahn and the Moore were released by Victor, and both of these tracks were labelled by Victor as self-accompanied. However the Naxos Historical reissue labels the Debussy, both Ronald songs and the Hahn as accompanied by an anonymous pianist, and only lists the Moore as self-accompanied, stating: 'It is highly unlikely that Melba would have been skilled enough as an accompanist to be able both to sing and play the tricky piano part of "Down in the Forest" (track 2) or "White Sea Mist" (track 3), let alone the very difficult "En sourdine" track'.³⁸⁴ As further evidence, the editors of the reissue argue that 'D'une prison' is recorded from the same perspective as the two Ronald songs and the Debussy. In listening to the self-accompanied Moore and the other tracks back to back, however, some difference in audio perspective can be heard, but there self-accompaniment is not the only possible explanation for this. Furthermore, the style and comparative difficulty of the accompaniments to the Moore and Ronald's 'Down in the Forest' are in fact quite similar. Knowing the extent to which Melba accompanied herself upon the public operatic stage, it seems equally likely that these five tracks recorded on the same day for Victor label were all self-accompanied, though the fact that only two of the five were commercially released may indicate that varying degrees of success. In the case of 'Down in the Forest', it has been attempted through comparison with the observed qualities of other self-accompanied recordings to determine by analysis whether in fact the earlier recording is in fact self-accompanied by Melba.

'Down in the Forest' is a more involved song than the Tosti discussed above, mostly through composed, with more expression markings and indications of tempo changes by the composer, who dedicated it to Melba. The later recording is a semi-tone higher than the earlier, which raises the question of pitch versus playback speed. The 1909 recording sounds in Eb major, which is the published soprano key. The later duo recording sounds in E major, and this recording is also faster by approximately twenty seconds, though this speed increase is reflected in greater tempo variation as well as overall speed.

The accompanying in these two recordings is significantly different in style and

³⁸³ Nellie Melba, *Complete Gramophone Company Recordings, Vol. 4. The Hayes and London Recordings 1921-26* (CD, Naxos Historical 8.110780, 2004), track 3.

³⁸⁴ Peter Dempsey, liner notes, *The Complete American Recordings, Vol. 2, 1909-1910* (Audio CD, Naxos Historical 8.110335, 2005).

approach. The playing in the earlier, possibly self-accompanied recording is steadier and smoother throughout, both with regard to pacing and to articulation (for example, the accents notated in the left hand arpeggios are omitted). In the later recording, Landon Ronald employs a constant ebb and flow of rubato at the level of the bar, strongly articulating the left hand accents and creating a fluttering effect with the right hand's rocking chords. Both accompanists play with a sensitive touch, but Ronald exercises a much wider range of dynamics and articulation than the earlier player. The increased use of rubato and articulation in the Ronald's recording extends to the whole performance; Melba sings with more rubato, and employs stronger rhetorical gestures in places (such as the length of the hiatus, and subsequent energized rhythm at her second statement of 'something stirred' in bar 14).

The ensemble between voice and piano is quite different in these two recordings. The earlier recording demonstrates close coordination between voice and piano, both on climactic moments and within the context of *stringendi* and *ritardandi*, with the voice taking the lead in places where the coordination is not exact. In the duo recording, Ronald's playing frequently takes the musical initiative, driving the tempo forward and anticipating or leading the singer on certain entries; he plays the bass note on the downbeats of bars five and thirteen before Melba has initiated her word 'Down'. At climactic moments within a phrase, the piano often strikes the downbeat chord enough after the voice to sound late. For example, on the downbeat of Melba's final note 'bird', she stretches the previous two eighth notes, then springs onto her final top E with unexpected energy and speed, and Ronald fails to catch her. In the 1909 recording, Melba employs the same rhetorical gesture but the coordination between voice and piano is exact. A subtler example is the climactic end of the phrase 'we will wait no more'. In the earlier recording, Melba initiates the [m] of 'more' and the piano strikes the supporting chord as she opens to the vowel; in the later recording, Ronald strikes the chord fractionally later after Melba has already reached the vowel.

As with the Tosti, Melba's technical singing between these two recordings is highly consistent. She employs the same rhetorical gestures, though they are more exaggerated in the second recording. Her length and placement of breaths are the same in both recordings, as are her timbre choices, range of dynamics, and clarity of diction. The pacing of her diction and the breakdown of how she measures out rubato over the course of a word in the earlier recording share some similarities with her self-accompanied recording of the Tosti and with some of Hahn's self-accompanied recordings: specifically, there are moments where she initiates a ritard or suspends the first or a middle syllable of a word, but then returns to speech-rhythm for the penultimate as well as final syllables, with the result that

she reaches the next strong or downbeat ahead of where a steady tempo would dictate, and does not pay back that time. In her recording with Ronald, as with Hahn's recording with Benvenuti at the piano, she sings the penultimate syllables at a pace that is proportional to the rest of the word in the context of the ritard. The effect is more predictable, which makes sense for a duo performance, whereas the improvisatory, speech-like quality of the other approach is particularly enabled by self-accompaniment. Based on these stylistic observations of the diction, as well as the marked differences in pianistic style and inventiveness of the playing between these two recordings, it seems extremely likely that the 1909 recording is in fact self-accompanied by Melba.

6. Richard Tauber:

'Ich glaub' nie mehr an eine Frau', by Richard Tauber

Recorded self-accompanied³⁸⁵

Recorded with orchestra³⁸⁶

These two recordings are strikingly different from each other with respect to interpretation, vocal technique and ensemble. The audio quality for both recordings is clear and consistent, so it is easy to hear exactly both vocal and pianistic nuances. In the self-accompanied recording, Tauber both sings and plays with extreme freedom of rhythm and heavy use of rubato. His diction and text delivery is impeccably clear, and he delivers most of the lines with genuine spoken speech rhythm, the words rolling off the tongue at the speed of the spoken language. At one point, he actually does fall into speech at the end of a falling phrase. His vocal production is equally light, speech-like, and heavily shaded toward head mixture, almost to the point of crooning, to very intimate effect. The singing is nonetheless well supported, with a firm core to the sound and complete control of breath and pitch. It is clear to the listener that the timbre and pace of delivery are Tauber's artistic choice. The piano accompaniment to this song is neither plain nor particularly virtuosic, and Tauber's competence at the keyboard is apparent in the agility and clarity with which he articulates the delicate repeated notes in the right hand and the controlled weight of the left hand chords. The most striking aspect of his accompaniment in this performance is the perfect coordination between vocal melody and piano, particularly because the right hand's melodic line and chords exactly doubles the voice through most of the song. Tauber sings with such rhythmic freedom and surges forward through some of the words with such

³⁸⁵ Richard Tauber, *The Richard Tauber Collection, Vol. 2: Tauber sings Tauber (1924-1937)* (CD, Jube Classic, Jube-NML1018), track 4.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, track 5.

lightness and speed that he demands great delicacy and nimbleness from his playing as well. It is also significant that there is no sluggishness in the phrasing of the voice or the piano – the technique of coordinating the two, at least in this piece, is completely mastered. If the listener were not aware that the singer and accompanist were the same person, this recording would sound astonishingly intuitive.

The recording accompanied by orchestra, conducted by Dajos Bela (1897-1978), is so different with respect to pacing, rubato and vocal style that it might as well be a different piece of music. Rubato is still employed, but on a slower, steadier and more predictable scale, revealing a rhythmic structure that almost couldn't be understood in the self-accompanied performance due to Tauber's prioritization of speech rhythms. Tauber's voice is fully produced and projected, the timbre more sung than spoken. This is surely due to a combination of the need to balance the orchestra, and to sustain the longer lines and pace set by the conductor. The overall effect of the two recordings is the impression that the self-accompanied recording is delivered by a master of the salon platform, while the orchestral recording is delivered by an opera singer. Tauber was both of these things, and it is remarkable to hear how completely he could transition between them. It is also worth noting that self-accompanied recordings by Tauber exist in which he sings with his projected, operatic technique, so his choice of pacing and timbre for the self-accompanied version of 'Ich glaub' nie mehr an eine Frau' cannot be attributed solely to the self-accompaniment. It is more likely that his interpretive choices were inspired by the composition itself, and that the process of self-accompaniment enabled Tauber to take those qualities to an extreme not possible with a separate accompanist.

7. Richard Tauber:

Schwanengesang, D. 957: No. 4. 'Ständchen' (Serenade) by Franz Schubert

Recorded and filmed self-accompanied, 1933,³⁸⁷

Recorded accompanied by piano and string ensemble, 1941³⁸⁸

Recorded accompanied by orchestra³⁸⁹

Richard Tauber's self-accompanied recording of 'Ständchen' was filmed as a promotion for a stage production of *Lilac Time*, which opened at the Aldwych Theatre in London on September 22, 1933. This play was later reconceived as the film *Blossom Time*,

³⁸⁷ Richard Tauber, 'Now we present the world famous tenor Richard Tauber from "Lilac Time" at the Aldwych Theatre, London, in the immortal "Serenade" by Schubert', British Pathé studio, 1933.

³⁸⁸ Richard Tauber, *The Richard Tauber Collection, Vol. 14: Winterreise Excerpts and other Songs (1923-1942)* (CD, Jube Classic, Jube-NML1257), track 25.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, track 14.

released in 1934, starring Tauber as Franz Schubert and Jane Baxter as his love interest Vicki Wimpassinger. In the film Tauber performed several self-accompanied songs, some with orchestral backing, portraying Schubert as a self-accompanied singer but unreliable for analysis thanks to uncertainty about the circumstances under which the recordings were made. Tauber's promotional filming of 'Ständchen' for *Lilac Time* is more reliable, however: though it has been speculated that it was something of a tongue-in-cheek performance,³⁹⁰ the musical and physical gestures Tauber makes during the performance can be corroborated by his acting in the actual film *Blossom Time*, as well as by candid video clips of him singing and playing in his own home in which the keyboard can be clearly seen.

Tauber's self-accompanied performance of Schubert's 'Ständchen' displays extremely expressive singing, with liberal application of *rubato* and *portamento* as well as a few ornaments and a wide range of dynamic colours. This song is neither particularly virtuosic nor a character song, but Tauber still delivers the words with clarity and feeling. His performance does of this song presents none of the intimacy of his self-accompanied performance of 'Ich glaub' nie mehr an eine Frau'; here, his musical gestures and vocal production are demonstrative, projected and operatic. He employs *messa di voce* in several places, and introduces an ornament at the final cadence of the song. His playing is less extroverted as his singing, though he still employs an expressive range of articulation and dynamics. Visually, this performance is engaging and expressive. His facial expressions are lively in response to both the words he is singing and the solo moments and figures in the accompaniment. Though Tauber is sitting at the piano and not facing the camera directly, he manages to convey the clear impression that he is giving a formal performance for an audience. This is achieved through the extent to which he looks toward the camera and otherwise keeps his face up out of the keys, and his extroverted vocalism: he is not singing to himself. The way he lifts and suspends his hands in obvious connection to his breath underscores his vocal gestures effectively, though this also adds to the demonstrative quality of his performance. Tauber makes precisely the same gesture during a moment of *rubato* in a 1945 British Pathé film clip of him singing self-accompanied in his own home, in which the camera angle allows a clear view of Tauber's hands upon the keyboard.³⁹¹

In the 1941 recording with strings and piano, recorded in English, Tauber's diction is somewhat muddy: in particular his vowels in English sound less idiomatic. He sings with a narrower dynamic range than in his self-accompanied recording, employing equal forte

³⁹⁰ John Potter, 'Beggars at the Door: The Rise and Fall of Portamento in Singing'. *Music & Letters* 87/4 (Nov 2006), 543.

³⁹¹ Richard Tauber, 'Richard Tauber singing and playing piano at his home', Film, British Pathé, 1945.

but never reaching the same delicate pianissimo. Tauber sings with greater dynamic range in the recording with orchestra, conducted by Hermann Weigert (1890 - 1955), but still with less dynamic variety than when self-accompanied. His diction (once again in German) has resumed its clarity, but there is a noticeable increase of heaviness in the text delivery in the B section of the song. Here, Tauber declaims the words in a manner that indicates a desire to move the tempo forward, but then subtly delays each subsequent syllable when the orchestra does not move with him. This same quality of vocal effort and slightly delayed diction was observed in Reynaldo Hahn's performance of 'Le parfum impérissable' accompanied by Giuseppe Benvenuti, whereas in all the self-accompanied versions, the voice follows the cadence of the words and the piano aligns with it precisely without any sense of following or delay.

With respect to ensemble between voice and accompaniment, Tauber's three recordings of 'Ständchen' display subtle but noticeable differences in interpretive approach that resonate with what has been observed in the other pairings of recordings examined thus far. The chamber ensemble recording takes the same starting tempo as the self-accompanied recording, but there is less freedom and variation within that tempo through the course of the song on a local level; the tempo changes, *ritardandi* and *accelerandi* are clearly defined and communicated, almost telegraphed. In the orchestral recording the tempo is slower throughout, and all rubato gestures are predictable. In comparison, the timing of the self-accompanied recording is highly organic; Tauber also occasionally pre-empted or skips a rest, just as he did in 'Ich glaub' nie mehr an eine Frau', and just as Hahn did in his self-accompanied recording of 'L'énamourée', creating the impression that the song is being made up on the spot. There is one interesting contrast to this overall observation of increased freedom of timing in the self-accompanied recordings: the instrumental interludes in the chamber and orchestral recordings employ slightly more pronounced rubato than Tauber performs in his own piano interludes.

8. Marcella Sembrich:
 'Aimez-moi' by Frederic Chopin, arr. Pauline Viardot-García
 Recorded self-accompanied, 1907³⁹²

This song, an arrangement for voice and piano by Pauline Viardot-García of Chopin's Mazurka Op. 33 No. 2, is highly virtuosic for both voice and piano. The piano accompaniment is largely original to Chopin though the material is re-ordered through the

³⁹² Marcella Sembrich, *Marcella Sembrich: The Victor Recordings (1904-1908)* (CD reissue, by Romophone, 2 vols, Cat No. 81026-2, 1997), disc 2, track 13.

course of the piece. When the voice is singing the accompaniment becomes simpler thanks to the fact that the voice has taken over Chopin's original right hand melody. However Viardot-García's arrangement begins with a virtuosic sixteen bar piano introduction based on one of the motives Chopin's original Mazurka, and there are passages throughout the song where the piano delivers Chopin's original melody whilst the voice performs a secondary melody, to the end result that both voice and piano take turns in the musical spotlight. Viardot-García's arrangement demands great agility and control from the singer, in the form of detailed articulation markings, both short and sustained trills, a vocal compass of B below middle C up to a high soprano C#, and a florid cadenza before the return to the A section.

Sembrich's performance of this song is an interesting combination of technical prowess and sloppiness. She was a well-trained pianist, having studied piano during her childhood and continued that study during her first year at the Vienna Conservatory in 1875, before deciding to devote herself exclusively to voice lessons. Her playing in this self-accompanied recording is secure and is clearly the work of someone who studied the instrument to a high level. She sets a fast tempo and delivers the piano part with soloistic freedom throughout, lingering on the second beat of each bar in true Mazurka style, shaping the piano melodies to cut through the texture, and clearly articulating the trills. At the same time, the opening piano introduction sounds slightly rushed and she seems to underweight some of the internal melodies on the bass staff, and she flubs a few pitches in the final right hand flourish of the introduction. The recording sounds like it was made by a pianist with the ability to prepare and deliver a technically superior performance, but who instead dashed it off without great concern for accuracy.

Sembrich's singing is completely secure. She sings the song in Polish instead of the published French, and the audio quality of the recording is murky enough that it is not possible to assess her diction in a meaningful way. However her tuning, agility, timbre and breath support are exemplary and consistent throughout the song. She breathes with a similar frequency and pattern to modern singers who have recorded the song as a duo, and sustains many of her top notes longer. Acting as the right hand of the original Mazurka, she sings with Chopin-esque *rubato*, moving independently of the piano at the level of the bar whilst clearly creating a sense of mutual momentum and overall arc through surging *accelerandi* and *rallentandi* on a larger scale. She takes some liberties with the score, altering the exact pitches of the cadenza and skipping several passages in the return of the A section.

9. Marcella Sembrich:
17 Songs, Op. 74: No. 1. 'Zyczenie' (The Wish) by Frederic Chopin
Recorded self-accompanied, 1907³⁹³

Sembrich recorded two takes of this song in 1907 for the Victor label, both self-accompanied. The song is strophic, in triple meter, with a narrow vocal compass of B below middle C up to D in the middle of the treble staff. The piano accompaniment features an energetic right hand melody with trills in the introduction, interlude and postlude, but gives way to a simple waltz accompaniment of bass note plus right hand chords underneath the voice. In the first take of the song, Sembrich sings an additional verse, and when she reaches the final solo piano postlude, she sings the right hand melody and trills instead of playing them, essentially creating a vocal cadenza for herself to which she further adds a final flourish to a top B natural, ending the song an octave up from the original melody. In the second take she ends the song in the same way, but without the additional verse.

In both takes of this song, Sembrich's singing is technically equivalent to what was heard in the previous recording of 'Aimez-moi', though 'Zyczenie' is less demanding. Her timbre, firmness of tone, tuning and support are again very consistent, and she sings with creativity and soloistic abandon. Her piano playing in the solo piano passages is cleaner than in 'Aimez-moi', though the melodic playing and trills in the right hand are equally good in both songs. The nature of the ensemble between voice and piano can also be compared with 'Aimez-moi': the voice moves independently at the level of the beat and bar throughout the song, both leading and suspending the rhythmic movement, while the piano also exhibits its own independence in the weighting and placement of the accompanimental waltz time motive. At the same time, there are moments where piano and voice simultaneously anticipate the start of a new phrase, converging from independent timing upon the next downbeat without any sense that one part or the other is leading. Though there are subtle differences between the two tracks, the style of the playing, singing and interaction between voice and piano is consistent between them. The overall effect is a performance that is unpredictable and improvisatory yet intuitive.

10. George Henschel:
Die schöne Müllerin No. 1 'Das Wandern' by Franz Schubert
Recorded self-accompanied, 1928.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Ibid, disc 1, track 1 and disc 2, track 14.

³⁹⁴ George Henschel, *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*, Columbia Graphophone, 1928 (CD reissue by Symposium Records, no. 1362, 2006), track 1.

Henschel recorded ‘Das Wandern’ in 1914 and 1928, and it is the latter recording that is under consideration here. The song is straightforward and does not demand a broad variety of vocal or pianistic colours, and as one of Henschel’s signature pieces it is discussed in numerous contemporary reviews of Henschel’s concert, broadcast and recorded renditions, making it a useful starting point for analysing Henschel’s skill. In this song if in any, Henschel can be expected to sing and play with his core technique.

Henschel’s singing in this recording exhibits precise control over dynamics in the *piano* repeat of the final phrase of each verse. The vocal quality and overall dynamic sounds well modulated for the repertoire: the vocal production is light enough to enable conversational delivery of the text, but the tone is still engaged and supported. Modern listeners have described Henschel’s voice varyingly as light, soft, gentle, warm, and weak, and frequently speculate that Henschel’s lack of a career on the operatic stage is evidence that his voice was never powerful. This recording does not present evidence of a small or weak voice, nor does historical evidence support such a conclusion. The audio quality of this recording diminishes the amount of singer’s formant in the tone, but this is a common characteristic of old recordings, and Henschel’s voice cuts through more clearly than some. It should be remembered that Henschel was not just a *lieder* singer – he was also in demand for oratorio and concert productions, his renditions of *Mephistopheles* and the *Meistersinger* were highly praised, and he was called by one reviewer the best dramatic bass alive; contemporary reviews describe his timbre quite differently from modern reviewers, calling it harsh, biting, edgy, even rustic, but they also comment on his ability to modulate his voice to sing intimate repertoire with his wife in their song recitals. These accounts suggest that Henschel was using his ‘*lieder*’ voice, his ‘recital’ voice on these recordings.

His voice does sound somewhat old, or rather, it sounds old-fashioned. Woolf in 2006 thought it sounded ‘hollow’, ‘dry’, ‘uneven’, and ‘unsteady’.³⁹⁵ The *New York Times* in 1986 disagreed, grouping Henschel amongst many elderly nineteenth-century singers who recorded in old age, but could still sustain a beautiful sound: ‘They don’t often sound young, and in some cases the range is reduced, but they can all sing in a basically attractive and effective way. Not one wobbles, not even a little bit. All sing in tune. All can curl their voices round a melody’.³⁹⁶ Plack observed that though Henschel’s voice ‘shows some of translucency of timbre,... the ease with which he is still singing at 78 years of age testifies to what is basically a solid technique with good *portamento di voce*’.³⁹⁷ Listening without prior

³⁹⁵ Woolf, review of *Ibid*, MusicWeb International.

³⁹⁶ ‘Vocal Burnout at the Opera’, *The New York Times*, 21 September 1986: 51.

³⁹⁷ Plack, *The Substance of Style*, 122.

knowledge one would perhaps think that Henschel was in his 50s, singing in the 1930s due to the old-fashioned timbre and sound quality. There is vibrato present but it is neither wide nor slow. The tuning is excellent throughout with one small exception: the only ‘unsteadiness’ Woolf could have meant is the third in the arpeggios which open each verse. Henschel slightly approximates this note in the first verse, then centres it perfectly in the subsequent three verses, which suggests that the issue was related to the syllable that fell on the note in that verse rather than to a more general lack of vocal control.

Henschel’s breathing technique is solid: the listener does not really notice it, because it never interrupts the flow of the music. When deliberately listening for the breathing, however, one notices that Henschel breathes regularly and frequently. Plack believes this is due to age: ‘The catch breaths Henschel learned to take as he got older are in evidence throughout his recordings’.³⁹⁸ On the other hand, she then notes that between his 1914 and 1928 recording sessions the placement of these breaths varies but their frequency does not. Henschel’s breaths do not sound like the result of a declining instrument, however. Though they are extremely short and regular and correctly called catch breaths, they are also virtually silent: Henschel never sounds like he is running out of air or working hard to replenish the breath. This breathing exactly matches Henschel’s own explanation of breathing technique in his article ‘On Interpretation in Music’, in which he describes ‘instantaneous little breaths’ like those which a woodwind player would take during a long melisma. ‘If you know *how* to breathe, i.e., how to replenish your lungs in the twinkling of an eye and imperceptibly, you cannot really breathe too often, for by such judicious breathing you are far better able to accomplish what you do’.³⁹⁹

Henschel’s accompaniment is cleanly and clearly played, with a consistently even touch in both hands, evidence that he is playing fully into the keys with consistent arm and hand weight. Occasionally the right and left hands sound fractionally out of sync for a moment, which creates a burbling effect that cannot necessarily be written off as unintentional; it adds to the clattering aural depiction of the mill wheel. Woolf believes that he hears vocal technique problems which he attributes to difficulty with the playing: ‘there are times when one feels him struggling with the piano part so that the vocal production can suffer; certainly there are tiny moments when he seems to go ‘off mike’ – maybe he involuntarily moved his head, maybe not’.⁴⁰⁰ There are slight variations in clarity of sound-quality through the course of the recording, but nothing distinct enough to draw attention away from the deliberately terraced dynamics. The vocal timbre sounds no more variable

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ George Henschel, ‘On Interpretation in Music’, in Henschel, *When Soft Voices Die*, 108-109.

⁴⁰⁰ Woolf, review, *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*.

than any old recording. It is possible that Woolf's observation points to difficulty with the recording process, however. The microphone arrangement may have produced awkwardness, if he was required to hold his head and mouth in a more static position than was ever required in live performance.

Henschel's articulation of the words is crystal clear with respect to all consonants and vowels, but never sounds over produced. Henschel was famous for this throughout his career, and this recording demonstrates that he could practice what he preached in his *Articulation in singing; a manual for student and teacher, with practical examples and exercises* (1926). The sentiment of the song is straightforward without a great deal of nuance for the singer to communicate, but Henschel makes the youthful energy and positivity of the character perfectly clear, while his playing depicts the movement of the mill wheel and water with a merry mechanical quality, providing the voice with an appropriately unsentimental platform. Bruder says 'We can immediately discern that Henschel is assuming the character of the young miller and telling a story, not just singing a song. He marks the significant words, accentuating the rhythm at the same time. His approach to the song is open-hearted and hearty'.⁴⁰¹ Capell, writing in 1928, asserted that Henschel's recording captured 'how Schubert intended his songs to be sung. There is no show and no self-consciousness about this singing. The performance strikes the right balance between voice and piano'.⁴⁰² Leech-Wilkinson comments on how Henschel uses a firm attack and staccato articulation to communicate 'top-of-the-world good humour: there are no hidden meanings, no self-deception; the boy is looking forward to a delightful adventure'.⁴⁰³ Henschel makes this fresh characterization sound easy, though as *Gramophone* said in 1930, 'the clarity of the diction is a feat in itself—try verse four—though the song sounds so simple'.⁴⁰⁴

Throughout this performance, voice and piano are very subtly independent. Henschel plays the mill-wheel figure steadily with continuous and uniform articulation while the voice takes slight liberties of timing. At the same time, the articulation of voice and piano are closely aligned in the middle phrases of each verse, where Henschel sings and plays with unanimously precise, marked, staccato descending notes with a slight *accelerando*. This song's relentless rhythm in both the syllabic vocal part and the ostinato accompaniment pose a significant challenge to ensemble, because of the singer's need for breath and the accompanist's obligation to allow time for breath, both without sacrificing rhythmic integrity and flow. In this self-accompanied performance, as previously noted, the

⁴⁰¹ Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', 149.

⁴⁰² Richard Capell, *Schubert's Songs* (London: Benn, 1928), 282.

⁴⁰³ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, section 21, x.

⁴⁰⁴ Potter, 'Sir George Henschel', 12-13.

singer's breathing does not interrupt the flow of the music: the piano never perceptibly waits for the voice. Contemporary reviewers marvelled at this, accustomed to hearing the timing suffer when the pianist gave the singer time to breath. Henschel's breathing, combined with the unpredictable skipping of pauses at the end of each verse or interlude, create an effortless and intuitive effect: there is no audible struggle in either part, and no apparent negotiation between them.

11. Ernst Wolff:

Die schöne Müllerin No. 1 'Das Wandern' by Franz Schubert

Recorded self-accompanied, 1937⁴⁰⁵

Wolff recorded the complete *Die schöne Müllerin* for Columbia in 1937 and 1938. The album met with mixed reviews then and continues to do so today, with some contemporary and modern reviewers calling his interpretations pleasant but unimaginative and lacking in real artistry, while others praise his sensitivity and refinement. Recorded almost a decade later and by a much younger man, Wolff's performance is stylistically very different than Henschel's. Henschel, and indeed all the other self-accompanied singers heard thus far employ much more tempo variation and independence of voice versus piano. In comparison, Wolff's singing, playing, and collective interpretation of the song, though unblemished, is neutral. He sings with smooth legato, clear diction and excellent breath control, breathing less frequently than Henschel (though many of Henschel's breaths were rhetorical and Wolff's interpretation suffers musically through the omission of these lifts). Wolff's tempo is significantly slower and steadier than Henschel's, and the ensemble between voice and piano is predictable and aligned throughout the performance. In listening to the entire song cycle recorded by Wolff, a pattern of ensemble begins to emerge, however: Wolff does employ *rubato* and a certain amount of vocal independence from the piano at times, but this freedom of timing is almost entirely one directional. He delays with his voice, but does not anticipate, and his playing always tends to follow the pacing of the voice, only taking initiative during solo piano passages. Sometimes this simply results in a steady and neutral interpretation, but in some songs in the cycle, such as no. 18 'Trockne Blumen', the effect is amateur; the singer drags, and the accompanist is unable to energize and rescue the situation.

⁴⁰⁵ Ernst Wolff, *Die schöne Müllerin: op. 25*, audio recording, 78 rpm (New York: Columbia Masterworks, 1938).

12. George Henschel:
Winterreise No. 24 'Der Leiermann' by Franz Schubert
 Recorded self-accompanied, 1928⁴⁰⁶

This song was another of Henschel's signature concert pieces. Its recitative-like qualities and the conversational relationship between piano and voice require many interpretive choices, particularly with respect to rhythmic coordination, and allow for exploration of whether self-accompaniment leads to unique habitual choices. It also allows for examination of whether a self-accompanist can generate a dynamic musical 'conversation'.

In 'Der Leiermann' Henschel's voice takes on a different character from 'Das Wandern'; the timbre is darker, straighter and more covered, he sings with more legato, and at a hushed, intimate dynamic. The tuning is still exact, even on those pitches that are produced non-vibrato and pianissimo. There is a tiny upward break in the voice on the release of the final note of the song, at the end of a long diminuendo. *The Guardian* in 1997 wrote that this recording displayed 'a firmness and point for any modern singer to envy', commenting on the 'fresh vocal production' of vintage singers in comparison to today.⁴⁰⁷ *The Independent*, in the same year, commented that Henschel sounded 'half his age'.⁴⁰⁸

As in *Das Wandern*, every word of the text is perfectly clear and articulated. Henschel's delivery is deliberate, and one can hear that he is giving his attention not just to accuracy but also to one of his own teaching principles: that vowels contain enormous expressive potential. According to Leech Wilkinson, Henschel uses covering and vowel modification to 'suggest the stasis of profound depression', in marked contrast to his singing in 'Das Wandern', and Capell calls Henschel in this song 'an unforgettable interpreter'.⁴⁰⁹ *The Gramophone* in 1928 wrote 'Every syllable in the song is as clear as if it were spoken; no sooner is the voice heard than the artist's personality invades the room; and, beyond the doleful words, beyond the pity they evoke for the forlorn, half-frozen organ-grinder, there flows into us the singer's delight in the little masterpiece he is rendering. Here, indeed, is perfect art'.⁴¹⁰

Henschel's rendering of the simple and repetitive piano part of this song is delicate but resonant. Like the accompaniment in 'Das Wandern', not one note is under or over

⁴⁰⁶ Henschel, *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*, track 2.

⁴⁰⁷ 'Classical CD of the Week: Franztastic; In the year of Schubert's bicentenary, Edward Greenfield selects the best new recordings', *The Guardian*, February 28, 1997.

⁴⁰⁸ Robert Cowan, 'How did he do it? Robert Cowan reviews some of the many historical reissues planned for the Schubert bicentenary year', *The Independent*, January 3, 1997: 16.

⁴⁰⁹ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, section 21, accessed online (on 28 June 2013).

⁴¹⁰ 'The Gramophone', *Times* [London, England], 5 June 1928: 14.

played: the left hand fifths are perfectly balanced throughout, and the repeating melodic figure in the right hand is cleanly and evenly articulated. With respect to ensemble, Henschel's singing and playing are entirely independent. The sounding result is improvisatory, but also rhythmically steady: the accompaniment proceeds mechanically (yet with sensitive touch) while the voice alternately speaks early or lingers behind. Henschel's tempo is brisk in comparison to most other recordings of this song, but it sounds expansive. Bruder writes, 'This haunting song is exquisitely sung and played. The voice floats above the deceptively simple, repetitive organ-grinder music, rising and then falling at the climax'.⁴¹¹ The total effect is the impression that the singer is indeed improvising his song at a distance, to the accidental accompaniment of the organ-grinder who is present yet uninvolved.

13. George Henschel:

3 Balladen, Op. 1 No. 3 'Der Erlkönig' by Carl Loewe

Recorded self-accompanied, 1928⁴¹²

This song was yet another of Henschel's signature recital pieces by the end of his career. The song is highly virtuosic; both piano and vocal parts are technically challenging on their own, allowing for critical examination of whether the technique of one component appears to suffer when the other is very difficult, and whether a self-accompanist can successfully execute a truly virtuosic song in which both parts are very complex. It is also a highly theatrical character song, which addresses the issue of how self-accompaniment affects theatrical delivery.

Henschel's pedigree as a pianist is very much in evidence in this recording, though the sound quality of the recording is slightly muddier than the previous two songs and the piano sound somewhat distant. It sounds like Henschel plays a few wrong notes in the left hand. *Gramophone* magazine in 1930 called this recording not only Henschel's best, but 'the best Lieder record that has ever been issued', observing that 'the pianoforte accompaniment is no mean feat even when compared with that by Schubert', but that Henschel's voice was served by an 'immaculate pianoforte technique' which combined with the singing 'in a wonderfully effective way to express the child's dread'.⁴¹³ Henschel's own writings and the recollections of those who knew him demonstrate that he held his playing to a high standard, demanding that even *pianissimo* be played with a controlled, full-bodied

⁴¹¹ Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', 149.

⁴¹² Henschel, *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*, track 6.

⁴¹³ Potter, 'Sir George Henschel', 12-13.

tone, and even *fortissimo* with depth and elasticity',⁴¹⁴ and these qualities can be heard in his playing here.

Henschel's singing takes on yet another dimension in this performance. It is difficult to judge his technique, because his interpretation is so colourful. His delivery is very speech-like and takes many risks, making it the weakest of the three vocally with respect to tuning and fullness of tone. When he sings the voice of the narrator, however, his voice displays a similar consistency of tone to 'Das Wandern', and the opening low notes of the first phrase cut through clearly with a focused tone despite the tessitura. If this recording does not in isolation demonstrate his best technical singing, it does provide the strongest evidence of his ability to deliver a fully theatrical performance while self-accompanied. The vocalization of each character in the song is clear and distinct, more so than any other recording listened to thus far. He changes his vocal placement as well as phrasing and style to illustrate each character, yet manages to draw each sound from within the believable palette of colours for a grown man's voice, so that none of the voices approach caricature. In this respect modern and contemporary reviewers praise the vividness of Henschel's rendition equally. *Gramophone* wrote 'The wood-demon's eerie whisperings (sung to an oft repeated ghostly bugle-call), in which the voice vividly suggests the marsh mist and haunted alders, reach a climax of terror in the last verse. The utterances of all the characters are sharply defined, yet there is nothing spectacular. The last word *tod* is half uttered, half a shudder'.⁴¹⁵ Bruder calls the recording 'a masterpiece of interpretative singing...Henschel paints a vivid voice-picture, at once the tremulous and terrified child, comforting father, then the insinuating Erl-King'.⁴¹⁶ A sense of free, improvisatory rhythm is again prominent in Henschel's interpretation. This freedom manifests itself in the way that both voice and piano push forward at dramatic moments, following the recitative-like drive of the textual rhythm. The *Montreal Gazette* wrote of this recording in 1930, 'The singing is absolute perfection', also commenting on Henschel's use of rubato in the style of Chopin.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Henschel, *When Soft Voices Die*, 27.

⁴¹⁵ Potter, 'Sir George Henschel', 12-13.

⁴¹⁶ Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', 149.

⁴¹⁷ 'Sir George Henschel. News of Stage, Screen and Music', *The Montreal Gazette*, 1 February 1930.

What these recordings reveal about self-accompaniment

Weighed in the context of comparison to other contemporary and more recent recordings, and corroborated by the observations of historical audiences, the self-accompanied recordings analysed above support several conclusions about the practical implications of self-accompaniment upon the performance of virtuosic chamber music for solo voice and piano. By ‘practical’ is meant the direct effects of self-accompaniment upon the sounding performance – vocal delivery, pianism, ensemble and interpretation.

The first of these conclusions is that self-accompaniment is not inherently an impediment to technical skill or communicative success. This is an important and contentious statement to make, because it is the foremost argument against self-accompaniment in classical singing today, and the first conclusion to which performers and teachers leap when the possibility of self-accompaniment is suggested. The intent is not to deny that self-accompaniment poses technical challenges to the performer. In the recordings analysed here, it was observed that several of the performers exhibited problems in their playing technique: examples of this were the unclear articulation and wrong notes in Sembrich’s solo piano introduction to the Chopin/Viardot-García ‘Aimez-moi’, and Melba’s inconsistent voicing, wrong notes and muddy pedalling in Tosti’s ‘Mattinata’. Wolff’s tendency to lose rhythmic momentum in selected songs from *Die schöne Müllerin* was perhaps another manifestation of technical struggle, though with perception of timing and vocal energy rather than execution of notes and rhythms. In the case of Sembrich and Melba, however, the singing was equally secure and controlled when self-accompanied, and there is no evidence that either of them were better pianists in other contexts, or needed to be. Tauber’s and Hahn’s singing likewise remained technically consistent between self-accompanied and duo contexts. The exception to this is the slight tendency toward increased vocal weight and effort that Hahn, Melba and Tauber each displayed in a duo context. This could be taken as evidence that, in a context where the necessary instrumental and vocal skill and coordination is already present, self-accompaniment promotes both healthier and more nuanced vocal production: there is no danger of the singer being drawn into a dynamic battle, and the singer will never be required to hold the breath or suspend forward momentum.

Just as self-accompaniment does not pose insurmountable technical difficulties, it likewise does not fundamentally inhibit the performer’s ability to communicate successfully with the listener. Henschel’s recordings present the most compelling evidence of this. Regardless of what they think of the quality of his vocal instrument, and regardless of which song he is singing, Henschel’s reviewers both contemporary and modern unanimously agree

that he was a master of expression with that instrument.⁴¹⁸ Bruder noted Henschel's 'expressive articulation', writing that Henschel's voice 'was not used in a manner that would draw attention to itself, but as an expressive tool – like that of a fine actor. It was resonant and Henschel used a wide range of dynamics to colour his voice as the mood shifted'.⁴¹⁹ The liner notes to Symposium's re-release of Henschel's recordings draw attention to his diction, vocal colours and emotion: 'The first thing to strike the listener in Henschel's singing is the enunciation; we cannot conceive of any possible improvement. Next we notice the wide range of colours and how emotion lies, as it should, always in the vocal line of the score.'⁴²⁰ Woolf noted that despite being past his vocal best at the time of recording, Henschel still manages to display 'imperishable conversational style.... Henschel's art has its narrative continuity but it also has a remarkable improvisatory quality that elevates it well above the usual run of *lieder* singing. It's this ability to inhabit, to enliven and to convey the narrative essence that makes him so distinguished a practitioner.'⁴²¹ These qualities ring through in his singing on all three of the recordings analysed here.

Hahn, similarly, is highly praised by reviewers for his exquisitely clear and natural text delivery and complete capturing of the style of the French salon and art song repertoire that was his specialty.⁴²² With the exception of Wolff's understated performance of Schubert, all the recordings examined here successfully communicated character even when some element of technical limitation was apparent.

In evaluating self-accompaniment it is important to recognize that in many performance settings, equal technical prowess between voice and instrument may not have been expected or required for the success of the performance, even at the professional level. Melba's self-accompanied recording of 'Home, Sweet Home' by Bishop, reduces the piano accompaniment to simple vertical chords, yet her singing is solid, sustained, sincere and expressive, and delivers every necessary quality to make it an effective encore upon the operatic stage despite the fact that she is making no attempt to demonstrate pianistic skill. Meanwhile Hahn's and Henschel's recordings, in which both the singing and playing each stand up in isolation to conventional performances whilst surpassing them in flexibility of interpretation, offer the final pronouncement that self-accompaniment is challenging feat of coordination and artistic vision that can nonetheless be mastered like any other.

⁴¹⁸ See Capell, *Schubert's Songs*, 282; also Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', 144; also the liner notes to *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*.

⁴¹⁹ Bruder, 'Sir George Henschel', 148.

⁴²⁰ Unsigned liner notes, *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*.

⁴²¹ Woolf, review, *Sir George Henschel 1850-1934*.

⁴²² In particular see Alan Blyth, ed, *Opera on Record 2.*, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, London, 1983, 192-193, and Woolf, review of *Reynaldo Hahn - Mélodies et airs d'opéra*.

The second and more interesting conclusion suggested by this study is that self-accompaniment enables a unique ensemble relationship between voice and piano. A few characteristics of interpretation and ensemble are shared with relative consistency by the self-accompanied recordings analysed here in comparison to those same performers' duo recordings and to a broader sampling of duo recordings over time. One of these characteristics is a tendency toward faster tempi, though this was not a unanimous quality (Wolff's much slower 'Das Wandern', for example). Some scholars have identified Henschel's and Hahn's fast tempi as a component of the *voix du compositeur*, which would seem to be corroborated by Tauber's self-accompanied recordings of his own compositions. However there are too many other factors such as age, era and even play-back speed at play to draw strong conclusions on this point.

A more conclusive characteristic shared by these self-accompanied recordings share (again with the exception of the recordings by Ernst Wolff) is a sense of improvisatory freedom in rhythm, phrasing and text delivery, with the consequent implications for ensemble between voice and accompaniment. This quality has been noticed by both Hahn's and Henschel's reviewers and been attributed to their self-accompaniment as well as their roles as composers (but it is worth noting that Henschel's recordings exhibit this quality in his performances of classic repertoire not of his own composition). Tauber's use of rubato and rhythmic freedom in his self-accompanied recording of 'Ich glaub' nie mehr an eine Frau' is so extreme that it moves beyond the realm of intuitive timing that can be coordinated between a singer and conductor or in a duo – self-accompaniment is the only way the song could be interpreted this way. Leech Wilkinson writes that self-accompaniment gave Henschel's recordings 'a particularly interesting quality, with coherence between voice and piano both in timing and interpretation'.⁴²³ Scott, in *The Record of Singing* (1977) writes 'Henschel's interpretations have an almost improvisatory character, achieved by intensity of utterance and a free though never exaggerated treatment of the rhythm, contrived in part by playing his own accompaniments'.⁴²⁴ Sembrich's recordings likewise exhibited great individuality and spontaneity within both piano and vocal parts, which was nonetheless driven by the same larger musical gestures.

Henschel's rubato in his recording of the Loewe occurs on a large scale: he does pay back the time he has stolen, but sometimes only over a cycle of several bars. This is not necessarily related to his self-accompaniment; Leech Wilkinson notes that in the oldest recorded pianists one is more likely to hear disjunction of melody and bass than in later

⁴²³ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 4 paragraph 7.

⁴²⁴ Scott, *The Record of Singing*, 54-55.

recordings.⁴²⁵ Henschel's recording of Schubert's 'Der Leiermann' provides an interesting demonstration of the theatrical consequences of the ensemble that arises out of self-accompaniment. In most duo recordings of this song, the pianist employs some degree of rubato, both in the solo piano interludes and while accompanying the voice. Furthermore, many accompanists in duo recordings tend to coordinate their playing vertically with the voice, which, assuming the singer is also employing rubato, creates exact vertical ensemble but a lack of steady rhythm. This results in the musical impression that the organ-grinder and the singer are collaborating, or are possibly even the same person. Meanwhile, in Henschel's self-accompanied interpretation, the independence of his singing and playing cause the organ-grinder's motive to unfold at a steady, mechanical pace, unaffected by the vocal melody; this results in the musical impression that the singer is apart and observing the organ-grinder from a distance.

Henschel, Hahn, Sembrich, and Tauber all noticeably deviate from the written rhythmic notation in their self-accompanied recordings. Plack took note of the ways that Henschel did this by 'truncating piano interludes, shortening or eliminating rests as the tension rises'.⁴²⁶ Interestingly, these interpretive choices in Henschel's performance of this song remain consistent between recording sessions, and the same kinds of liberties appear in his other recordings. In other words, Henschel's personal brand of expressivity seems to be 'rooted in a spontaneous style of delivery',⁴²⁷ and the same could certainly be said of Hahn and Tauber and Sembrich based on the evidence at hand. Henschel's contemporary audiences praised these qualities of spontaneity and improvisation, and attributed them in part to his self-accompaniment and memorized performance. Plack's determination that this 'spontaneity' is in fact habitual supports the possibility that it is the result of consistent performance practice, made more likely by the fact that 'certain rhythmic changes are unproblematic for Henschel because he is his own pianist'.⁴²⁸ This kind of spontaneity is not to be confused with loss of control over tempo and rhythmic direction; though self-accompaniment also carries the potential for self-indulgence (Wolff's recordings hint at this, or at a more basic lack of direction stemming from circular following between voice and piano), the improvisatory freedom in the other recordings analysed here contains as part of its definition a strong sense of forward motion, energy and intent that is dynamically shared between voice and accompaniment.

In a duo performance, it is difficult to differentiate between independence of parts resulting from artistic intent, and lack of coordination between parts as a result of sloppy

⁴²⁵ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*.

⁴²⁶ Plack, *The Substance of Style*, 147.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

communication. Consequently, rhythmic and dynamic coordination – physical togetherness – between singer and pianist become an automatic goal of duo performance whether or not it makes theatrical or musical sense. In a self-accompaniment performance, the fact that singer and accompanist are one establishes the assumption that all sounding ensemble between voice and piano, whether coordinated or independent, is the result of artistic intent. This allows for exactitude of interpretation that needn't be manifested in exactitude of *togetherness*. This is new level of ensemble, which encompasses rhythmic and dynamic coordination but is not limited to it.

The unique interpretive gestures observed in these self-accompanied performances can be attributed with confidence to the self-accompanied performance practice. Plack observed that studies of style which attempt to quantify stylistic gestures (such as *rubato* and *portamento*) tend to describe them as choices, but that in fact 'very often, performance gestures have roots in a singer's vocal habits', or 'how a singer customarily approaches his instrument'.⁴²⁹ Self-accompaniment is a performance practice, not a vocal stylistic gesture, but habits of vocalism and singing technique are developed by singers to circumvent specific difficulties and achieve specific artistic goals. In this sense, self-accompaniment can be thought of as an approach to the vocal instrument. It creates specific difficulties/realities for vocalism, leading to the development of specific techniques of vocalism and pianism, which become habits, which become a source of style.

Both of these conclusions about self-accompaniment can be extrapolated backward to earlier generations of self-accompanied singers. It has already been thoroughly acknowledged that the temptation to use early recordings, particularly of old singers, as a window to the singers and singing styles that pre-date recording technology, is flawed. However, the problems with this approach to recording research lies in the type of extrapolation being made: researchers are trying to draw conclusions about earlier approaches to vocalism and interpretation, which are both highly subjective and affected by age of the performer, individuality of the performer, and changes in artistic tastes over time. The two conclusions about self-accompaniment made above, however, are not similarly subjective. Having established that self-accompaniment need not inhibit virtuosity in one repertoire, this can be applied to any repertoire, or even to any performance practice: it is a matter of determination, practice and development of technique, which has lead to the recurring pattern in western music history that when one generation pronounces a piece unplayable or an effect unachievable, the next generation disproves it. The ensemble relationship enabled by self-accompaniment can also be applied to any era and repertoire, because that relationship results from the basic construct of self-accompaniment, not the

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 19.

repertoire or the choices of the performer. The sounding result of this ensemble relationship will change based on the tastes of the individual performer, the style of repertoire being performed, and the artistic tastes of the given generation. The relationship itself, and therefore its potentialities, is independent of those things and can be applied with equal logic to Molza, Caffarelli, Malibran, Henschel, Tauber, and a twenty-first century performer. By studying the individual recorded performances of Henschel and Hahn and comparing them to other recordings, it has been possible to identify specific abstract and generalized qualities of self-accompaniment particularly with respect to the interpretive freedoms it affords the performer, giving us fascinating insight into the experience of virtuosic self-accompanied singers throughout history, regardless of repertoire and culture.

Orphic connotations and the 'voix du compositeur'

This case study reveals the beginnings of a transformation in the symbolic significance of self-accompaniment and the figure of the self-accompanied singer, in which self-accompaniment becomes more associated with the individual and less associated with abstract ideals. This can be seen through subtle shifts in the tone and style of written descriptions and visual art, which seek to portray the character of the individual, rather than portraying the individual as a character. Contemporary portraits of Henschel and Hahn depict them in profile at the piano, leaning back and making eye contact with the viewer (the audience) over the shoulder.



Figure 6. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Sir George Henschel*, oil on canvas, 1879 (private collection).



Figure 7. Lucie Lambert, *Reynaldo Hahn*, oil on canvas, 1907 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

At first glance, the basic structure of these portraits resembles the portraits of Malibran and Lind viewed in Chapter Six. Through examining a larger selection of artistic depictions of Hahn and Henschel, however, it becomes clear that their symbolic content is different: the depictions of Henschel and Hahn are more naturalized and display less Orphic and neoclassical imagery. Those who heard Hahn sing remarked upon his habit of smoking while singing: ‘An interminable cigarette dangled from the line of his lips, not as a ‘pose’ but out of habit. He sang as we breathe, out of necessity’,⁴³⁰ and ‘he sang with a charming voice, his cigarette dangling at the corner of his lip, while moving his head with a sort of half-nervous shudder, although he was usually a very calm young man’.⁴³¹ Malibran was portrayed with the harp of Orpheus to symbolize her identity as ideal romantic songstress; Hahn was portrayed singing with a cigarette in his mouth, to symbolize, first and foremost, himself.



Figure 8. Jean Cocteau, *Reynaldo chant 'l'île heureuse'*, undated sketch.

A significant aspect of Henschel’s and Hahn’s identities was their dual role as composer and performer, the Orphic connotations of which are undeniable. The composer is the inspired source of the music; the composer-performer is both inspired source and the

⁴³⁰ Gavoty, *Reynaldo Hahn*, 193.

⁴³¹ Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, quoted in J.E. Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 70. Rivers asserts that this description is based on Reynaldo Hahn, saying this would have been ‘transparent to anyone who had heard Reynaldo perform’.

instrument that actually gives voice to the music and brings it alive. This imagery will have been particularly potent to contemporary audiences when Henschel and Hahn sang their own compositions, as they frequently did. Michael Scott, in his study *The Record of Singing* (1977), used the phrase *voix du compositeur* to describe the intimate and informal quality of Henschel's recordings, which Scott sees manifested in Henschel's improvisatory interpretations, self-accompaniment, and informal manner (the latter evidenced by his improvised modulatory bridge from the end of one song to the next and his audible throat clearing on the record). Scott attributes all of these qualities to the origins of Henschel's repertoire as music for the salon, noting that self-accompaniment had precedent in the salon singing of Rossini, Schubert, Gounod, de Lara and Hahn which contrasted significantly with the 'cold and formal' concert hall setting in which art song is now presented. 'Henschel's Henschel's *voix de compositeur*, with his own piano playing, harks back to earlier, more intimate gatherings'.⁴³² Thus, interestingly, Scott manages to preserve the association between self-accompaniment, musical inspiration and the positive qualities of the salon atmosphere, while at the same time limiting that association to singing composers.

The concept of the *voix du compositeur* is recognizably Orphic even by today's standards because the phrase itself implies a closeness to the holy grail of the late twentieth and now twenty-first century world of classical music performance: the composer's intentions. One would therefore expect these recordings by Henschel and Hahn to be treated as a goldmine of performance practice information, both for their own songs (in the case of Hahn) and the songs of the composers with which they were associated. In this sense, being identified as a component of the *voix du compositeur* is a mark in favour of self-accompaniment: there is good reason to try to embody the composer's voice, if it is associated with the artistic origin and inspiration for the song and therefore leads to a better understanding of the song. Hahn, in his published lectures on singing, did exactly that when he urged his students to imagine Schumann's personal reaction to his own songs as a route to successfully communicating them in performance:

When I listen to a performance of Schumann's 'Frauenliebe und leben', I want to be able, as I share the emotions of this certain 'woman', to imagine Schumann himself at any moment, now smiling, his heart suffused with the sweetness of a first love, now haggard and despairing.⁴³³

⁴³² Scott, *The Record of Singing*, 55.

⁴³³ Hahn, *On Singers and Singing*, 100-101.

Conclusion

This case study represents the crux of the history of self-accompaniment as a performance practice, at the peak of its complexity before it begins to decline. In the careers of Henschel, Hahn and the few singers who successfully emulated their performance practice, self-accompanied singing reached the absolute height of its artistic and technical complexity, executed by specialist performers who have mastered every aspect of the techniques involved and applied to a body of repertoire that similarly represents the height artistic and technical complexity in the field of music for solo voice and piano.

This case study presents concrete evidence that self-accompaniment could be conducive to the success of the music being performed. This is played out in several ways, some of which appeared in the previous case studies and some of which are new. The first of these is that self-accompaniment for Henschel and Hahn played a logistical role in semi-private performance settings, i.e. salons. Because Henschel and Hahn were popular salon performers throughout their careers, and frequent guests of the social, political and artistic elite, they were both regularly in a position where they might be spontaneously asked to sing by a socially powerful figure. Though neither Henschel nor Hahn give any indication in their personal writings that this played a conscious role in their choice to master self-accompaniment, in situations like these the ability to self-accompany nonetheless ensured that they were always able to fulfil the request. Defining ‘salon’ loosely as any elite and private performance situation in which performance is likely to be spontaneous, and the qualities of *sprezzatura* desirable, it is apparent that the construct of the salon setting is directly responsible for this quality of self-accompaniment. Because of the resulting independence and artistic spontaneity (remember that self-accompaniment also implies memorization), the ability to self-accompany is perhaps the most useful skill for a salon singer with which to successfully negotiate the demands of such a performance setting.

Self-accompaniment helped to create the ideal atmosphere for the repertoire Henschel and Hahn performed. The atmosphere in question is a sense of intimacy, spontaneity and domesticity, which when evoked on the public stage enables the audience to experience a connection to the performer and to experience the music in the way most idiomatic to its origins. This effect was also observed in the previous case study through the performances of Malibran, Viardot-García and Lind, and its continuation through the performances of Henschel and Hahn demonstrates that it was not solely linked to female domesticity.

Self-accompaniment enabled a unique form of interpretive freedom and expressive commitment. Contemporary reviews of recitals, first-hand accounts by the self-

accompanists themselves (Hahn, Henschel and those who emulated them), and the analyses of self-accompanied recordings all attest to this. This interpretive freedom and expressive commitment is manifested in the ensemble between voice and accompaniment, and achieved through the fact that these two components of the song are controlled and shaped by the same performer, meaning that whether they are acting independently or together with respect to timing, dynamics and articulation, they are always acting together with respect to the artistic vision for the song. According to contemporary sources, this construction results in a superior performance of the song both technically and artistically, provided that all elements of technique involved – vocal, pianistic and the coordination between the two – have been mastered. Meanwhile the physical reality of singer and accompanist as one performer provides the audience with a visual illustration of the soloistic equality of voice and accompaniment and the way in which these two parts combine to achieve a greater artistic whole, while also drawing attention to each component separately by virtue of the technical feat of one performer successfully coordinating them and shaping them independently. All of these elements together demonstrate that self-accompaniment, in Henschel and Hahn's performances of art-song, directly enhanced their audiences' awareness of the nuances of the music.

This case study demonstrates that the concept of specialization in relation to self-accompaniment is a complex one. Henschel and Hahn can be accurately called specialists in self-accompaniment because they both formed independent careers out of singing this way. They were able to do so successfully because they were both renaissance men, who developed more diverse musical talents than the average concert singer today. This diversity of talent and its importance to both Henschel and Hahn is evidenced by their specialism in a performance practice that embodies versatility. This kind of diversity within the competitive performance world was met with a degree of suspicion then as it is today. When Henschel was engaged as the first conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the appointment was met with scepticism for multiple reasons, one of which being that 'his multiple talents aroused suspicion as to his competence in any one area'.⁴³⁴ This statement could as easily have been made today, where a performer who divides her attentions between too many genres, or between multiple instruments, is expected to rise less high than a performer who devotes all of her time to one discipline from a young age. Because self-accompaniment requires the performer to divide the attention between voice and piano, this mentality partially explains modern suspicion of self-accompaniment as a sustainable vocal performance practice.

Aside from the invaluable resources for reconstructing self-accompaniment as a

⁴³⁴ Steven Ledbetter, 'Henschel, Sir George', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*.

historical performance practice, this case study demonstrates the influence of self-accompaniment upon how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century audiences first experienced and defined the art song repertoire, the song recital and the art of accompaniment. Henschel has been called a pioneer, but the term ‘pioneer’ carries the mistaken implication that his influence on the repertoire was merely introductory. Based on contemporary accounts, Henschel’s influence encompassed audience awareness of the characteristics of the art song repertoire (relationship between voice and accompaniment, the crucial need for balance and coordination between them, the consummate artistry of a good accompanist, and the artistic possibilities when voice and piano perform as one). This case study thus has the potential to inform to existing studies of the art of accompaniment and art song performance practice, and merits further examination and practical exploration of the primary source materials introduced here.

Chapter Eight

Transition:

The Decline of Self-Accompanied Singing in the Twentieth Century

Between the previous case study and the present day, the practice and role of self-accompaniment in classical singing underwent a major transformation with respect to prevalence, repertoire and reception. Negative evaluations of self-accompaniment as a performance practice begin to appear even while the most virtuosic and skilful self-accompanists in history with respect to complexity of repertoire and degree of specialization, were still very much in living memory as evidence of the feasibility and artistic potential of the practice. This suggests that aesthetic and ideological changes were as much or more to blame for the decline as technical ones. Through an examination of changes in pedagogical approach, professional expectations of classical singers, the social contexts in which self-accompaniment used to take place, and the reception of the final generation of self-accompanied singers, it becomes possible to see the progression of self-accompaniment's rapid disappearance from the accepted performance practices for classical vocal music in the early to mid twentieth century, and the variety of reasons behind it.

Pedagogy

The first evidence of the decline of self-accompaniment as an accepted performance practice is found in the trajectory of vocal pedagogy through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With any instrument and technique, approaches to teaching will change with the gain of new physiological knowledge, with the new demands placed on the performer by developments in performance spaces, repertoire, and taste, and with the on-going challenge for each generation of performers to reach new technical heights of accomplishment. With self-accompanied singing, however, there is a disconnect between what was being codified in published pedagogical writings and what was being done in performance and practical teaching.

In the diary of Fanny Erskine, who travelled to Paris in 1847 she travelled to Paris in the hope of studying Manuel Garcia (fils), we learn that she met Frederic Chopin, who listened to her sing and agreed to recommend her to Garcia as a student:

Aunt M & I dined at Mrs James Erskines the only other company
Chopin of whom Miss Jane Stirling made much. He is such an

interesting looking man but oh! so suffering, & so much younger than I had expected.... He asked me about the Beethoven Fest. & was so happy to see Aunt Mary again, he grew quite playful, & seemed to forget his suffering. I was in a dreadful fright about singing & felt my hands quite cold but the moment at length came & I commenced, he was so encouraging & while I was still playing the accompaniment said, 'Ah that will do she is a Musician. I will speak to Garcia myself about her' - wh. I was delighted at from him & after I had sung several things he came to me & told me to be sure to go on with my Music, & that as to my voice he was sure I had twice as much as I shewed; so my first great alarm is over!⁴³⁵

The diary later reveals that in her first lesson with Garcia, Fanny sang songs from *Die schöne Müllerin*, also 'Euridice' and *solfeggi*; in subsequent lessons she studied an aria from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, Swedish songs by Jenny Lind and other unspecified German songs. The diary of Lillian Henschel (American soprano and later wife of George Henschel) in 1878, when she travelled to Paris in order to study with Manuel Garcia's sister, Pauline Viardot-García, who left behind no pedagogical writings advocating self-accompaniment. An excerpt of Lillian's Paris diary is quoted in her daughter Helen Henschel's biography of her parents' musical careers. The excerpt describes Lillian's first meeting and lesson with Viardot-García, in which she sings to her own accompaniment and to Viardot-García's:

Wednesday evening we called on Mme. Viardot. [...] I sang *Connais-tu, Gretchen am Spinnrade*, and *Aime-moi*, the first two to my own accompaniment, the latter to hers. *Gretchen* and *Aime-moi* I never sang better, the *Connais-tu* did not go so well. She is evidently great on execution and as I have not much of any I think that is the reason she was not more demonstrative. However, she said she could make something of me, that there was a great deal of good and a little bad in the singing, and I really think was very much pleased; but she showed her good sense by not saying too much until after she has given me lessons and knows my voice and my singing better.⁴³⁶

Manuel Garcia (son), who was one of the most respected singing teachers of his century and published *Ecole de Garcia: traité complet de l'art du chant par Manuel Garcia fils* (1847).

⁴³⁵ Fanny Erskine, diary entry for 6 or 7 December 1847, *Diary of Fanny Erskine*, transcribed by Emma Corke, volume 7 (Paris, Nov 1847 - Jan 1848).

⁴³⁶ George Henschel, diary entry for July 1878, in Henschel, *When Soft Voices Die*, 18-19.

Garcia was not documented as a self-accompanist himself, but he was taught by his father who self-accompanied, both of his famous sisters performed self-accompanied, and according to Angus Heriot, he was assisted in the writing of his treatise by Velluti, the last great castrato, who himself performed self-accompanied.⁴³⁷ Despite these various connections to the performance practice and at least one student who self-accompanied, Garcia makes no mention of self-accompaniment in any of his writings on singing. Another example is Laure Cinti-Damoreau, a documented self-accompanist, whose *Méthode de Chant composée pour ses classes du Conservatoire* (1849) makes no mention of self-accompaniment.

George Henschel presents an equal contradiction between his performance, teaching and written work. He taught both privately and as a professor of singing at the Royal College of Music, and his reputation as a lieder specialist drew students interested in art song interpretation, many of whom would then advertise having made special study of *lieder* with George Henschel, ‘the greatest of lieder singers’.⁴³⁸ His daughter Helen wrote that he sometimes taught ‘twelve or thirteen lessons a day’ in the summers, when aspiring foreign artists would travel to London to increase their ‘prestige as singers or teachers by having some lessons with him’.⁴³⁹ One student, Miss Wilma Berkley, reported of Henschel’s teaching that he ‘possessed to an almost unique degree the faculty of imparting to his pupil in unmistakable manner just exactly how he wished her to sing a song’.⁴⁴⁰ Yet apart from his daughter’s career and Michael Head’s accounts of his encouragement, there is no specific surviving evidence that Henschel taught his lieder students to self-accompany as part of their studies, and his work *Articulation in singing; a manual for student and teacher, with practical examples and exercises*, published in 1926, makes no mention of self-accompaniment, begging the question of whether Henschel himself considered self-accompaniment to be a sustainable performance practice that was beneficial to the repertoire he sang, and achievable by singers other than himself.

Thus, the transition from pedagogical advocacy of self-accompaniment to discouragement of it was a subtle process. Agricola’s 1757 annotated translation of Tosi’s *Opinioni* may be the latest explicit advocacy of self-accompaniment as a specific skill to be learned, as a component of vocal study by professional singers, with the intention of public performance. After this begins the slow divergence of public performance practice and practical teaching from written pedagogy. From the late nineteenth century, pedagogical

⁴³⁷ Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera*, 198.

⁴³⁸ ‘Australian Singer’, *The West Australian* [Perth, Australia], 12 September 1936: 21.

⁴³⁹ Henschel, *When Soft Voices Die*, 50.

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Noted Singer at Devonport’, *Advocate* [Burnie, Tasmania] 29 May 1937: 9.

works frequently refer to the role of keyboard skills in the vocal learning process, as a valuable tool for learning notes, improving tuning, and developing solid musicianship, and a few of the early twentieth-century publications go so far as to allude to additional advantage of independence afforded by self-accompaniment. One of these is Harriette Moore Brower's *Vocal mastery; talks with master singers and teachers* (1920), which quotes teacher Florence Easton: "The girl with a voice who has never worked at the piano, is greatly handicapped from the start, when she begins her vocal studies. As she knows nothing of the piano, everything has to be played for her; --she can never be independent of the accompanist".⁴⁴¹ Luisa Tetrizzini, in her 1923 book *How to Sing*, asserted that the singing student required a wide basis of general musical knowledge as a foundation for the specialized study of singing, and that keyboard skills were essential for this:

To this end the study of an instrument is, of course, invaluable. [...] The piano naturally suggests itself as the most useful one for the purpose, since it helps directly in the pupil's vocal studies and makes him independent to some extent of an accompanist.⁴⁴²

From approximately 1860 to the 1930s fewer and fewer pedagogical publications refer to self-accompaniment directly, and those works that do address self-accompaniment begin to do so with the intent to dissuade students from the practice. These include Frederick James Crowest's *Advice to singers* (1900), in which the author encourages the student to stand while practising and asserts that it is best to only play the first note of a passage and then practice it unaccompanied, because 'the attention is not divided between the pianoforte and the voice, while it leaves the singer free to give all his attention and care to the production of the notes which he is endeavouring to sing artistically'.⁴⁴³ Lilli Lehmann, in her *Meine Gesangkunst* (1902), also discouraged the student from playing the piano during practice, saying 'Only in a standing position can a free, deep breath be drawn, and mind and body be properly prepared for the exercise or the song to follow'.⁴⁴⁴ David C. Taylor wrote in his *Self help for singers* (1914), 'Even if you can accompany yourself on the piano, do much of your song practise standing, only now and then striking a chord or two to keep you on the key'.⁴⁴⁵ Harry Robert Wilson, in his *The Solo Singer* (1941) similarly urges

⁴⁴¹ Florence Easton, quoted by Harriette Moore Brower, *Vocal mastery; talks with master singers and teachers* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1920), 121-132.

⁴⁴² Luisa Tetrizzini, *How to Sing* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1923), 27.

⁴⁴³ Frederick James Crowest, *Advice to singers* [1900], 10th edition (London: F. Warne and Co., 1914), 55.

⁴⁴⁴ Lilli Lehmann, *Meine Gesangkunst*, trans. Richard Aldrich (New York: Macmillan Co., 1902), 210.

⁴⁴⁵ David C. Taylor, *Self help for singers; a manual for self instruction in voice culture based on the old Italian method – a sequel to 'The psychology of singing'* (New York: The H.W. Gray Co., 1914), quoted by Jeffrey Brent Monahan, *The Art of Singing. A Compendium of Thoughts on Singing*

the student to ‘practice all exercises [and songs] standing, without attempting to play the piano accompaniment at the same time’.⁴⁴⁶

For the remaining nineteenth and twentieth-century pedagogical works that do not mention self-accompaniment outright, their stance on the topic can be inferred from discussions of posture that imply that singing seated at the keyboard would be undesirable. Jeffrey Monahan, in his *The Art of Singing: a compendium of thoughts on singing published between 1777 and 1927* (1978) observes that singing teachers are generally opposed to singing while seated,⁴⁴⁷ and this focus on singing posture can indeed be traced back to the earliest pedagogical writings. Tosi himself wrote that the singing teacher ‘should always make the scholar sing standing, that the Voice may have all of its organization free’.⁴⁴⁸ Tosi also strongly advocated the elimination of unnecessary movement in the singer’s face and body, for aesthetic and technical reasons. We see these two sentiments echoed in a variety of later documents by other teachers. Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) wrote in his *Der Volkommene Capellmeister* (1739) that

a singer never succeeds as well sitting as standing, moreover he should stand straight, not leaning forward nor backward, for the carriage of the body, the turning of the face, the movement of the hands, the manner of holding the music (if singing from the notes) all contribute to the advantage and good effect of the singer.⁴⁴⁹

Mattheson did admit to the possibility of singing while sitting, but said that in this case, the singer must sit ‘like a coachman on a box’,⁴⁵⁰ implying that the singer should take great care to sit properly, still, straight and forward. Another example comes from Jean Philippe Rameau’s *Code de musique pratique* (1760), in which he advises:

the singer should stand during vocal exercises, keeping the body at ease and without discomfort, making certain that all parts of the body are without tension, for in no other way can the voice be kept flexible and produce its most beautiful sounds and sentiments necessary for perfect and natural performance.⁴⁵¹

Published Between 1777 and 1927 (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978), 32.

⁴⁴⁶ Harry Robert Wilson, *The solo singer: a method of teaching singing in the studio and classroom* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1941), quoted by Victor Alexander Fields, *Training the Singing Voice* (London: King’s Crown Press, 1947), 57-58.

⁴⁴⁷ Monahan, *The Art of Singing*, 42-43.

⁴⁴⁸ Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, 25.

⁴⁴⁹ Johann Mattheson, *Der Volkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg: Christian Herold, 1739), 98f, translated in Philip A. Duey, *Bel Canto in its Golden Age – A Study of its Teaching Concepts* (Milton Keynes: Lightning Source UK Ltd., n.d., first published by King’s Crown Press, 1951), 66.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Code de Musique pratique ou méthodes, etc.* (Paris: L’imprimerie Royale, 1760), 14f, translated in Duey, *Bel Canto in its Golden Age*, 69.

Vincenzo Manfredini, in his *Regole Armoniche* (1797), described the desirable posture in great detail, suggesting that the body and limbs should be still, and implying that standing was necessary for projection:

When singing, one should always hold the head high, firm and straight; neither should one make any unwanted motions with the shoulders, arms, or any other part of the body; one should hold oneself in a noble posture, and sing while standing in order that the voice might come out more easily, particularly when studying and when one must work hard and is anxious to be heard.⁴⁵²

A much later example is *The Art of Singing: A Manual of Bel Canto* (1974) by Lucie Manén, who was a student of Anna Schoen-René, who in turn was a student of Pauline Viardot-García. On the subject of posture, Manén wrote: ‘The length of his [the singer’s] career can, however, be extended provided he succeeds in preserving his physical fitness. In order to achieve this he must learn to stand correctly, since the singer is usually required to perform in a standing posture’.⁴⁵³ All of these arguments seem to rule out the possibility of self-accompaniment as a viable way for a professional singer to practice and perform.

Throughout these examples, it is important to observe that the first teachers and singers to establish self-accompaniment as a component of vocal pedagogy were also the original great teachers, credited with developing the rigorous training programs that produced the most legendary professional singers in history. The great castrati, and the height of the bel canto era are still lauded today as a mystical and un-recoverable time in the history of singing, which represents a degree of virtuosity and artistry difficult to imagine today. Neither their reputation nor their music has gone out of fashion, and teachers and singers still return to treatises like Tosi for inspiration and advice on how to approach bel canto repertoire, albeit selectively. In the form of the singing treatises examined here, as well as contemporary accounts, we have ample evidence that these singers and teachers taught and studied self-accompaniment, finding it helpful technically in practice and artistically and politically in performance. Either they found ways to overcome any technical disadvantages of self-accompaniment, or considered them secondary to the advantages. Despite such an endorsement, and despite the fact that we still look to these documents for insight into ornamentation and interpretation, modern vocal pedagogy has eliminated self-accompaniment from the curriculum of a professional singer.

⁴⁵² Vincenzo Manfredini, *Regole Armoniche*, 2nd edition (Venice: 1797), 66, translation by Robin Bier.

⁴⁵³ Lucie Manén, *The Art of Singing. A Manual of Bel Canto* (London: Faber Music LTD, 1974), 14.

Professional expectations and social context

The avoidance of self-accompaniment as a component of serious vocal study in the twentieth century is not because teachers and students could not recognize the potential pedagogical and even artistic advantages of singing this way. We have just seen that some pedagogues acknowledge the potential advantages of independence. With regard to artistic value, multiple scholars who have reviewed Hahn's and Henschel's recordings have noted that the self-accompaniment contributed something special to the interpretation of the music, for the obvious reason that the pianist and singer were one. The problem lies rather with the growing disconnect between the idea of self-accompanied singing and the feasibility of achieving it in the context of modern vocal training and current professional expectations for singers and the presentation of classical vocal repertoire.

Under the current model for conservatory vocal training self-accompanied singing would be a difficult course of study for a number of practical reasons. The foremost of these is the fact that first-study singers are no longer expected or required to develop the necessary keyboard skills to self-accompany well. The repertoire of Henschel and Hahn is impossible without extensive piano study. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century continuo songs and early bel canto arias would be more achievable under Bacilly's model, where the singer is not expected to master the instrument, but today audiences expect accompaniment and singing to be equally accomplished and performances in which the playing is amateur would fall under heavy scrutiny. As Adler noted, 'The performer will find it extremely difficult, however, to find the right balance between singing and accompanying; usually, one will dominate at the expense of the other. Balancing pianistic ability against vocal gifts will take a great deal of judgement'.⁴⁵⁴ Theatrical presentation raises similar technical difficulties: first-study singing students are coached carefully on how they present themselves in recital, including where to stand in relation to the piano, where to direct the face and eyes, where to rest the hands, how still to hold the head and body, and how gesture may be effectively but not obtrusively incorporated into the performance of a song. The circumstance of sitting at an instrument for self-accompaniment, where the hands and arms are engaged in playing and the head must choose between engaging with the instrument or the audience, requires an entirely different approach to the physicality of the singer and how they communicate the theatre of the song. Again, Adler spoke sceptically on this issue, noting that audience contact with the singer's face is crucial during self-accompaniment:

your profile will not do the trick. In order to have your personality reach the audience, you will have to use a spinet piano. If you try to

⁴⁵⁴ Adler, *The Art of Accompanying and Coaching*, 224.

use a concert grand, and turn away from it to face the audience, your accompaniment will suffer.⁴⁵⁵

The constant pressure to specialize maintains this situation. Competition in conservatories and in the professional world is such that singers are unlikely to risk slowing or hindering their vocal progress by devoting practice time and energy to the broader skills required for self-accompaniment, particularly when there are also concerns about artistic viability. Of course, we have seen historical examples of self-accompanied singers who appear to have overcome these difficulties; Lind turned away from the piano and no one commented upon her accompaniment suffering, and many singers performed at grand pianos without eliciting criticisms of their visibility and balance; either Adler's concerns did not bother contemporary audiences due to different expectations, or contemporary singers were accomplished enough at self-accompaniment to overcome them.

Changing social context and expectations also play a role in inhibiting the modern professional singer from pursuing self-accompaniment. One of these areas is the changing role of the musical salon in twentieth-century society. Self-accompaniment has long been associated with salon repertoire and salon performances, which historically was not indicative of amateur or low quality performance; indeed, quite the opposite. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, the salon and salon repertoire gained a reputation for being artistically lightweight as societal tastes and musical changed around it. The evolving reception of Reynaldo Hahn's compositions through the course of the twentieth century is an illustration of this. Today, scholars and performers have developed a serious interest in Hahn's songs, treating them as a doorway to the aesthetic of turn of the century Paris. His compositional style is now favourably compared with that of Fauré and Duparc, skilfully-crafted products of a time when elegance and charm did not preclude the expression of deep feeling. Mid twentieth century, however, his works were written off as 'mere salon pieces'. Hahn's practice of self-accompaniment may have been partially responsible for this: Hahn wrote many of his songs for his own voice, and sang them in the salon employing a performance practice suited to and directly associated with the salon, reinforcing their connection to an environment that has come to be perceived by modern listeners as increasingly superficial. It has also been postulated that self-accompaniment held back the compositions of Michael Head from becoming more widely respected. Richard Nicholson, reviewing a Hyperion CD of Head's songs, noted that it could not be because of insufficient credentials given that Head was a top student at the Royal Academy of Music and later became a professor of piano there. Instead, Nicholson blames his choice of performance practice: 'More likely may be his chosen method of performing his songs,

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

to his own accompaniment, which he initiated at the suggestion of Sir George Henschel. Reynaldo Hahn did the same; he has acquired a reputation as a musical lightweight and the two may not be unconnected'.⁴⁵⁶ In these observations we see the idea of the 'voix du compositeur' being used in a more negative light to describe what are perceived as performative quirks in a composer's performance of his own music, rather than to refer to Orphic inspiration and a definitive interpretation that reflects the composer's true intent.

The decline of piano culture and the rise of recordings played a similar role to the salon in redefining the social context of self-accompanied singing in the twentieth century. Self-accompanied singing thrived in the home as much as the salon in every period of the history singing, regardless of its presence on the public concert platform. Every major nineteenth century performer we have examined in the last two case studies – Malibran, Viardot-García, Lind, Henschel, and their contemporaries, was invited and obliged to sing in the homes of the wealthy and noble even as they pursued their careers on the stage, and it was in those semi-private performance contexts that they performed alongside highly skilled amateur singers who had been trained in self-accompanied singing as a matter of social expectation. An important part of the appeal of self-accompanied singing upon the concert stage when it appeared there was its association with the domestic and exclusive private environments, bringing the intimacy of music-making in those places before the public eye. The increasing availability of recordings, radio broadcasts and gramophones in the home as a replacement for live musical entertainment, however, meant a decline in the prevalence of the private performance platforms for self-accompaniment, and as a result a decline in the social relevance of self-accompaniment upon public platforms. The decline in piano culture also affected a shift in compositional styles and consumption. As W. H. Squire, referring to the genre of English ballad song that was amongst the most popular and common repertoire for self-accompanied singing in the nineteenth century, observed: 'as the public tend less and less to sing and play themselves, relying on broadcasting and mechanical instruments, it seems likely that ballads will not again have the vogue they formerly had'.⁴⁵⁷

Over the course of the twentieth century, self-accompanied singing becomes increasingly associated with low-brow repertoire and performers, particularly musical entertainers and popular music. This is in part due to fewer classical singers practicing self-accompaniment, and in part due to the shifting perception of salon repertoire by twentieth century audiences, but regardless of the catalyst for the change, it has lead to further

⁴⁵⁶ Richard Nicholson, review, *Songs by Michael Head* (Hyperion CD A67899), n.d.

⁴⁵⁷ W.H. Squire, 'My Songs – and Myself', *Music Masterpieces: Gems from the World's Famous Operas & Musical Plays*, vol. 2. ed. Percy Pitt, (London: Educational Book Company, Ltd., n.d.), 142.

connotations of professional illegitimacy for self-accompaniment in classical music. This is an interesting cultural shift, given that nineteenth century newspapers demonstrate that self-accompanied classical virtuosi and self-accompanied musical entertainers used to coexist fluidly. As late as the 1890s the casting calls of theatre companies seeking girls who could accompany their own singing appear in the same papers as advertisements and reviews of Henschel's self-accompanied recitals of Brahms and Schubert. By the mid-twentieth century, this fluidity has been lost: self-accompanied singing is entirely absent from the performance of standard classical vocal repertoire on a professional, virtuosic level, but it is a ubiquitous, accepted and unspoken component of modern vocal performance practice in popular music, jazz, a huge variety of folk musics, and amateur music-making in general regardless of genre. Self-accompanied singers no longer give *lieder* recitals, but self-accompanied singer songwriters perform their own compositions at the guitar or keyboard, in the living room or on high-profile televised public platforms like Britain's Got Talent. A tenuous connection to classical music was and is maintained through certain theatrical and comedic contexts: for example, in the 1930s entertainer Victor Borge (1909-2000) (a highly accomplished concert pianist but not a singer) began presenting his one-man musical comedy act, which featured self-accompanied singing in an entirely different relationship with classical music. Though highly successful and popular, this kind of performance relies on a diversity of skills at odds with the modern expectation for specialization for the virtuoso classical musician, and presents self-accompaniment as a vehicle for a variety of performative goals, none of which include genuinely good singing.

The last generation of specialists

In the first decades of the twentieth century, there were still a number of specialized self-accompanied singers active as recitalists and recording artists, but they were both becoming more scarce and becoming perceived as more unusual. George Henschel and Reynaldo Hahn were still performing and recording, though at the ends of their careers. Henschel's daughter Helen (1882-1973), who followed in her father's footsteps, was active as a self-accompanied recitalist from the 1910s to the 1930s. Singer, pianist and composer Michael Head (1900-1976) gave self-accompanied song recitals from 1928. Baritone and pianist Ernst Wolff (1905-1999) began an extensive self-accompanied song recital and recording career in 1933. Richard Tauber kept the performance practice alive in the recording studio and in his film performances. Though these singers all self-accompanied to a virtuosic standard, their performances occurred without the backdrop of broad range of regular, lesser classical self-accompanied performances, as was the case for George Henschel, Reynaldo

Hahn and their predecessors. From the turn of the twentieth century, British newspapers noticeably report fewer and fewer self-accompanied performances on the smaller scale, such as the individual self-accompanied selections on classical variety concerts and the self-accompanied theatrical entr'actes in opera and stage productions that occurred in such a steady flow during the nineteenth century. Through the lens of music critics, newspaper and recording reviews and personal accounts from audiences of this final generation of self-accompanied classical singers, one can see the gradual shift in audience expectations for the programming and presentation of classical vocal music, particularly art song, in which self-accompaniment was beginning to be perceived as being at odds with artistic and academic integrity in vocal performance.

Between 1913 and 1932 Helen Henschel performed at least twelve public song recitals self-accompanied in venues ranging from Wigmore Hall to The Hague, and broadcasted at least eighteen short song recitals of six to eight songs each in England, including a five-programme series dedicated to French art songs by Delibes, Gounod, Saint-Saens, Chabrier, Massenet, Bizet, Faure, Bruneau, Hahn, Duparc, Chausson, Aubert, Debussy and others, a four-programme series dedicated to the songs of Schumann including a complete performance of his *Frauenliebe und leben*, and a four-programme series dedicated to the songs of Schubert. In addition to these broadcasts she also presented a great number of children's radio programs which featured her singing, and which were probably self-accompanied.

Michael Head gave his début recital in Wigmore Hall in 1929 as a self-accompanied singer and continued to give live and radio recitals in this manner in Britain and abroad. During Head's trip to Australia to administer music examinations for the Associated Board, a local newspaper observed,⁴⁵⁸ 'Besides being the composer of about 40 songs, Mr. Head is an accomplished pianist and possesses a fine baritone voice. In England a speciality of his broadcasts has been that he has always played his own accompaniments. George Henschel, the famous German singer, encouraged him in this'. Another newspaper observed, 'Encouraged by Sir George Henschel, Mr. Head mastered the difficult art of self-accompaniment.'⁴⁵⁹ Ernst Wolff, who began his career as a concert pianist and professional accompanist, and also served as director of the Frankfurt Opera, began to pursue a career as a self-accompanied lieder recitalist after successfully filling in for a singer in an opera dress rehearsal. He gave self-accompanied lieder recitals in England, Italy, Germany, Austria, Holland and Switzerland from 1933 to 1935, after which he went to the USA where he

⁴⁵⁸ 'Vitality Of Modern British Music', *The Daily News* [Perth, Australia], 19 May 1936.

⁴⁵⁹ 'From A Musician's Scrap Book', *Examiner* (16 June 1936), accessed online (on 30 October 2012).

recorded extensively for Columbia and gave lieder recitals across America and Canada.

Contemporary reviews and publicity for Helen Henschel's and Michael Head's self-accompanied performances, as well as for some of George Henschel's latest recitals, remain highly positive about the performer but begin to reveal a shifting perspective toward self-accompaniment as a performance practice for art song. A review of a recital by George Henschel in 1909 observed: 'How perfect the ensemble was can hardly be guessed by those who have only heard some of the younger singers try to accompany themselves. Here is an accomplished pianist whose fingers and voice are equally under control, and in this case, as in so very few others, the result is completely satisfactory'. This review demonstrates that self-accompaniment was still a frequent occurrence, but that audiences were perhaps also becoming more critical of the skill with which it was practiced. A progression of reviews of recitals by Helen Henschel demonstrates other changes in perspective. A review in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* in 1913 wrote: 'She is completely master of her art, down to the smallest detail. Equal homage is due to her beautiful and deeply sympathetic accompaniment, which was a joy in itself'. A review from a recital of French songs at Steinway Hall in London in 1913 speaks equally positively about Henschel's abilities, but suggests that the performance practice has limitations: 'In all the great charm lay in the completeness with which the singer, accompanying herself at the piano, conveyed the feeling of each song.... She attempted nothing that was too large for her, and so she made everything tell without effort and without waste of energy. Within its narrow limits the art seemed perfect.'⁴⁶⁰ A review from a recital at Wigmore Hall in 1922 again speaks glowingly of Helen's programming, singing and accompanying in a diverse program of French, German and English songs, but disparages the audience's ability to appreciate the subtlety of her performance:

An English audience is a curious thing. Whole rows of a room which was fairly full sat in complete silence while these perfect little things were set before them, and the first thing that roused them to some sort of enthusiasm was 'Miss Ellen, versez-moi le thé', which has little in it beyond what a singer can put there. Was it that it was the first line they were able to translate, or that prose reaches the seat of the emotions quicker than poetry, or that it was short enough to catch the inattentive, or that the conversational tone made them forget for a moment they were at a 'classical' concert? Perhaps those who showed this indifference were newcomers, and were under the delusion that singers usually pronounce three different languages like a native, that they usually have a sustained

⁴⁶⁰ 'Music', *Times* [London, England] 2 May 1913: 8.

legato tone, and usually sing in tune – that in fact there was nothing unusual about the recital at all.⁴⁶¹

A review in the *Glasgow Herald* of Helen Henschel's three sets of self-accompanied songs on the final concert of the University of Glasgow Choral Society in 1923 more distinctly highlights the changing ideas about what was required to perform serious art song well, and how audiences expected to see it presented. On this concert, Helen performed six songs by her father, three songs by Brahms, French songs arranged by Wekerlin, and some English folk songs. The review praised her programming, interpretations and overall impact as a performer, but questioned the application of self-accompaniment to the Brahms songs in particular:

....In the second group were three songs of Brahms. It is questionable if in such a song as 'Von ewiger Liebe' even Miss Henschel can do it or herself complete justice while engaged in the dual role of vocalist and accompanist. As regards the accompaniments as a whole they are all finely played, and now and then a perfection of ensemble is reached that would be rarely possible between two people; but might it not be better to risk a little loss of perfection in ensemble if, as a recompense, Miss Henschel might be able to sing always to her audience and give them the constant benefit of her very expressive features? Facial expression forms an important part of song singing as Miss Henschel understands and practices it.⁴⁶²

It is interesting that 'Von ewiger Liebe' in particular prompted the reviewer to weigh the pros and cons of self-accompaniment. This particular Brahms song is popular, theatrical, extroverted, and pianistically and vocally demanding, but the review does not indicate that Henschel struggled technically with the accompaniment or the singing. Instead, the reviewer reports the same perfection of ensemble as we have observed in the recordings and reviews of older self-accompanied lieder singers of lieder, even admitting that a duo performance might lead to an inevitable loss of said perfection. The difference is that unlike a few decades previously, it is now being suggested that such a loss of purely musical content is worth the gain of theatrical impact. Helen, as we have already seen, followed her father's performance career closely and was intimately acquainted with his teaching and philosophy of song performance practice. Furthermore, we know that any skepticism that the self-accompanied singer could do dramatic justice to a very theatrical or technically difficult song was completely absent in contemporary reviews of George Henschel's recitals. Knowing this history, and knowing Helen Henschel's dedication to the text and

⁴⁶¹ 'Music', *Times* [London, England] 18 March 1922: 8.

⁴⁶² 'University Choral Society – Miss Helen Henschel', *The Glasgow Herald*, 27 February 1923.

meaning of a song via the art of exacting and expressive diction, the reviewer's assertion that 'Facial expression forms an important part of song singing as Miss Henschel understands it' reads more accurately as a self-discovery for the twentieth-century audience of a growing expectation and desire, now long established, to see the singer in a role of greater theatrical realism, at least in character songs like 'Von ewiger Liebe', devoting more attention physical embodiment of the story.

Helen Henschel's own writings suggest that she may have been under greater pressure than previous generations of professional singers to justify her choice to self-accompany in recital: 'I am sometimes asked why I always accompany myself when singing? It is because I feel that the accompaniment and the vocal part of a song are a complete whole, and that the two can be blended together most artistically by the same person'.⁴⁶³ She further argued that the disadvantages to self-accompaniment, such as having to sing from a seated position and the need for more lengthy practice and preparation, were balanced by the 'spontaneity of the whole musical result'.⁴⁶⁴ By the time of writing this account, her approach to her repertoire had clearly come to be perceived as unusual.

Michael Head, expressing his own views on how he came to give self-accompanied song recitals, reinforce this relatively new idea that self-accompaniment was uncommon: 'I have been told that I write difficult accompaniments', he added, 'and I always play my own accompaniments when I sing. This unusual practice was first carried out by Sir George Henschel, who played his own accompaniments, and who encouraged me to do it'.⁴⁶⁵ The context of these statements is not entirely clear: Head may have simply meant that he, Head, was not the first to give a song recital in this way. Or, he may believe that Henschel was the first, placing him amongst a younger generation of performers and audiences with changing expectations for vocal performance practice and a decreasing awareness of what had been common and accepted in the previous century.

Richard Tauber (1891-1948), whose recordings we examined in the previous chapter, was a pivotal self-accompanied singer who embodied the shift in repertoire and context that was taking place. While Tauber performed and recorded a wide variety of standard operatic and art song repertoire, he became best known for his singing of operettas (he was a close friend of Franz Lehár, who composed a number specifically for Tauber – a *Tauberlied* – in each of his later operettas), popular songs, and for his musical film appearances, and it was in association with these lighter repertoires and performance contexts that he was known as a self-accompanist. In the recording studio (not including his

⁴⁶³ Henschel, 'Famous Musicians I Have Met', 55.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ 'Music in Britain', *The West Australian* [Perth, Australia], 20 May 1936: 21.

filmed recordings in connection with the film and stage productions of *Blossom Time*), Tauber recorded six tracks self-accompanied: four were popular German songs by Henry Love, Richard Heymann, Walter Jurmann and Hans Rossmann, and the remaining two were songs of his own composition in a similarly light and popular style. In these recordings Tauber sings and plays with a highly communicative and improvisatory approach, employing a type of vocalism well suited to intimate spaces and popular music. His self-accompanied film performances of Schubert songs and other songs composed as part of the film score are delivered with more operatic vocal technique, but with touches of the same improvisatory ‘voix du compositeur’ freedom and liberty of timing, which did not always meet with positive reviews. For example, a letter to the editor of *The Musical Times* responded to Richard Tauber’s 1933 radio broadcast of Schubert’s ‘Serenade’ thus:

Sir, – Is the B.B.C. Initiating a rather subtle form of advertising? Recently, after the poetry reading, we were informed that a very special surprise item was to follow. The announcer introduced Herr Richard Tauber who, he said, was about to start his season of ‘Lilac Time’ at the Aldwych Theatre, where he would take the part of Schubert, &c., &c.

After this little preliminary boost, Herr Tauber gave a miniature recital – a musical counterpart of the ‘Forthcoming Attractions’ we are familiar with in the cinema. The first song was the ‘Standchen’, of Schubert, sung to his own accompaniment. Whether he claims to be an accomplished pianist I don’t know, but his accompaniment distinctly broke down in one place, while in many others his left hand certainly performed a hitherto unheard arpeggio ‘improvement’ on Schubert’s version. He also favoured the hiatus, *e.g.*: [*here a short musical example is printed*] and concluded with a further improvement in the shape of a little cadenza. His next song was, ‘You are my heart’s delight’. As, by this time, he certainly wasn’t *mine*, I switched off. – Yours, &c.,⁴⁶⁶

In this letter, though it is only one example, we see self-accompaniment treated quite differently from nearly contemporary responses to radio broadcasts by Henschel of the same kind of repertoire. Tauber’s choice to display his pianistic abilities as well as his voice is noted with sceptical surprise, and the writer seems to blame Tauber’s self-accompaniment at least in part for the pianistic errors and interpretive liberties, despite the reality that both

⁴⁶⁶ Arthur Goodchild, ‘Tauber at the Microphone’, *The Musical Times*, 74/1089 (November 1933), 1026-1027.

errors and improvisatory bridges between numbers are a common feature of early recordings (Henschel and many others did this, self-accompanied and not).

Ernst Wolff's earliest recitals in England were very well received: 'To hear music of such completely different styles sung with the ease and aptitude shown by Ernst Wolff is most unusual. This musicianly and sensitive singer is certainly an artist much above the average, who utilises his fine baritone voice with indubitable effect'.⁴⁶⁷ In America, he was met with a similarly warm reception, though advertisers and reviewers increasingly described his self-accompaniment as an unusual feature of his performances. His debut performance in Milwaukee in 1938, at which Wolff was to perform Schubert's complete *Die schöne Müllerin*, was advertised: 'The Milwaukee music lovers who recall the recitals that Max Heinrich used to give here years ago will be interested in Mr. Wolff's appearance, for the latter has revived the practice of accompanying his own baritone voice'.⁴⁶⁸ In 1939 Wolff returned to Milwaukee for a second recital, and received a highly favourable review which is significant for its recognition of the intimate and Orphic qualities of Wolff's performance practice, echoing the vocabulary that used to be consistently applied to Henschel and Hahn in previous decades:

The baritone is a troubadour. He makes of his songs what he pleases. He takes what liberties he likes with the tempo, with the accent, with the mood and even the text of the ballad that interests him. He turns each song into an intensely personal affair, a confession gay or boastful or shy, but always individual.

Because of the fact that he plays his own accompaniments, the singer is able to remain impulsive to a most unusual degree. The delighted listener has the feeling that he seldom sings a song the same way twice and that is surely an especial asset in an intimate recital. The accompaniments, moreover, are gems in themselves.

The singer was not better in one than in another. Each listener, cherishing his own memories, found his own delight in the different songs and frequent were the sighs of deep contentment. Milwaukee is not yet fully aware of Ernst Wolff may heaven forgive us for being such turtles – but one by one the lovers of music are coming awake.⁴⁶⁹

In 1947, Wolff performed a recital at the Union College Memorial Chapel in Schenectady,

⁴⁶⁷ The London Morning Post, quoted by Ronald Russell, 'Ernst Wolff', in *The Record Collector*.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Ernst Wolff Gives Piano and Lieder Program Friday', *The Milwaukee Journal* [Milwaukee, WI], 11 December 1938, 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Richard S. Davis, Richard S., 'Lieder Singer Stirs Dreams. Ernst Wolff Returns to Athenaeum and Delights with Intimate Recital', *The Milwaukee Journal*, [Milwaukee, WI], 16 December 1939, 5.

NY that received an equally positive review that again marvelled at his ‘unusual’ practice of self-accompaniment: ‘Ernst Wolff, conductor at the Frankfort Opera House until 1933, presented a most remarkable song recital at Union college Memorial chapel last night. His voice is a heroic tenor and can only be described as magnificent. In addition to being a most unusual singer he is even more unusual in that he plays his own accompaniments – and superbly. It is a practice that can be highly recommended’.⁴⁷⁰

In contrast to these positive reviews of public song recitals, reviews of Ernst Wolff’s recordings received responses that ranged from lukewarm to outright negative, from contemporary and modern reviewers alike. Assessments of his recording of Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* by recording critics B.H. Haggin, Irving Kolodin and David Hall were unanimously negative: Haggin wrote ‘As for *Die schöne Müllerin* you may have a friend with a pleasant voice who can sit down at the piano and sing through the songs for you; if not, Ernst Wolff will do it for you, but he will do no more than that; there is in his singing none of the imaginative insight and evocative power that there would be in the singing of a great artist’.⁴⁷¹ Irving Kolodin called the recording ‘a sincere, misguided effort’, noting that Wolff’s voice was ‘at best a parlour baritone’, and that Wolff was ‘his own accompanist and only tolerably good’,⁴⁷² while Hall noted that Wolff had ‘a pleasant informal manner of presentation’, but was ‘no great artist’.⁴⁷³

The noteworthy element in these critiques of Wolff and the other singers discussed above is that they increasingly speak about these singers’ self-accompaniment and manner of presentation in terms that a generation before had carried entirely positive connotations: in particular, the informality, intimacy and culture of the salon setting. This shift in connotation of vocabulary is largely independent of the evaluation of the singers’ objective quality as musicians; all were highly praised by audience members, if not by academics, for their skills in their respective repertoires. This suggests that the decline of classical self-accompanied singing in the first half of the twentieth century is due to changes in social context, professional expectations and audience taste rather than to declining ability and skill on the part of the performers. Hahn, for example, experienced a gradual decline in success during his own lifetime, due, according to Graham Johnson, to the passing of time and the changing tastes of society around him while he himself did not change. ‘Reynaldo was never truly to belong to the twentieth century: he cocooned himself in memories’.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁰ D.E. Ritz, ‘Ernst Wolff Presents Fine Song Recital. Artist Possesses an Heroic Tenor Voice, Superbly Plays Own Accompaniments’, *Schenectady Gazette* [Schenectady, NY], 11 February 1947: 10.

⁴⁷¹ B.H. Haggin, quoted in Russell, ‘Ernst Wolff’.

⁴⁷² Irving Kolodin, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ David Hall, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ Johnson, liner notes to *Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) Songs*.

His music continued to be performed, he gained particular success through his operettas in the 1920s and 1930s, and in 1945 he was appointed the first director of the Paris Opera which returned him briefly to the public eye, but as a salon performer, Hahn's style and what he represented had fallen out of fashion. In the 1950s and 1960s, many music critics wrote off Hahn's songs as mere salon pieces, representative of Parisian musical fashion at the turn of the twentieth century but lacking relevance outside that sphere.

Conclusion

In the twentieth century, fewer and fewer classical singers perform self-accompanied as aesthetic and ideological changes in society redefine how self-accompanied singing is received, and the artistic contexts in which self-accompaniment historically belonged fall out of fashion. Evidence of this changing perception can be seen in the way self-accompaniment and keyboard skills are treated in twentieth century works on vocal pedagogy, in the critical response to the performances and recordings of the last specialised self-accompanied song recitalists such as Helen Henschel, and in the changing language used to describe and evaluate the performances and recordings of Hahn and Henschel. As the century continues, self-accompanied singers become increasingly associated with the idea of the composer-performer, no longer an iteration of the Orphic, ideal musician, who stands apart from legitimate professional performers due to over-diversification of skill and an outmoded form of presentation. The final, concluding chapter of this thesis will examine the complete trajectory of the identity of self-accompanied singer as ideal musician from its origins to the present, and seek to identify how we must reassess and recontextualize our understanding of this performance practice if it is to regain relevance as a vocal performance practice today.

Conclusion

The first goal of this thesis was to document the long and complex history of self-accompanied singing in western classical music, through a broad, multimedia and interdisciplinary compilation of sources. This documentation, presented in Appendix 1, constitutes a rich body of primary source material upon which to draw for information and inspiration in reconstructing self-accompaniment as a historical performance practice. The next goal was to build a detailed understanding of the technical, artistic and cultural significance of self-accompanied singing at those points in history where it was practiced at a virtuosic or professional level, through detailed analysis of a series of case studies encompassing four centuries of performers and repertoire. Those case studies have demonstrated that virtuosic self-accompanied singing blossomed in multiple time periods and repertoires, from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century secular song to early opera to English parlour songs to German and French art song. Self-accompanied singing transcended gender and performance platform, practiced by both men and women at every level of skill, upon multiple instruments, in the home, the salon and upon the most prominent public stages.

Each of these instances of virtuosity, examined in the context of the broader sweep of self-accompanied singing in society at the time, reveals a common theme of aesthetic effect and symbolic significance which can be traced back to Classical mythology, music and culture. This theme is the construct of the self-accompanied singer as a manifestation the inspired musician whose art embodies the highest virtuosity, *sprezzatura*, and an almost supernatural power to entrance the listener: the Ideal Orpheus. Prior to the twentieth century, this aesthetic and symbolic impetus for self-accompaniment co-existed with practical considerations such as the development of musicianship, independence in practice and performance, freedom of interpretation, and support of the voice. Pedagogues, performers and composers advocated self-accompaniment, whilst contemporary audiences recognized and perpetuated the Orphic ideal of self-accompanied singer through art, literature and their accounts of performances witnessed. These accounts collectively form a subjective but vivid record of the artistic impact of the idealised self-accompanied singer.

From the early twentieth century, however, audience recognition of and response to the construct of self-accompanied singer as ideal musician changed dramatically, while academic opinions on the validity and value of self-accompaniment also changed. Reviews and recordings demonstrate that the final generation of specialized self-accompanied singers performed with comparable skill to their predecessors, but due to changing in social contexts, different expectations for the skillset of the professional singer, and increasingly

formal conventions for the presentation of classical vocal music, fewer and fewer singers were being encouraged to develop the skill of self-accompaniment, and their audiences were growing less receptive to it. By the middle of the twentieth century, self-accompaniment had essentially ceased to be a living performance practice for serious classical vocal music. Since then, the absence of adequate knowledge and awareness of self-accompaniment's history and former artistic role in public and private performance has meant that surviving examples of self-accompanied singing, such as the recordings of George Henschel, Reynaldo Hahn and their contemporaries, have been evaluated according to modern criteria. This has produced inevitably skewed opinions about the validity of the practice and the reasons behind it, perpetuating a disconnect between the inherent qualities of the performance practice and how it is executed and received today. As a result of this research, however, it is now possible to reconsider self-accompaniment as a historical performance practice, and to evaluate its artistic merit and technical challenges according to the criteria of its time.

From Ideal Orpheus to dilettante

The image of self-accompanied singer as the archetype of the inspired musician originated in the culture of Ancient Greece, whose mythology, literature and musical practices abounded with characters depicted as self-accompanied singers. The idea of self-accompaniment was embedded in the vocabulary of oratory and early song forms, demonstrating the extent to which self-accompanied singing was a ubiquitous and meaningful practice. The myths of Orpheus, Apollo and others afforded the self-accompanied singer and his instruments god-like skill, grace, communicative ability and inspiration, and through those things, the power to influence both man and nature. The resulting iconography and characteristics of the Classical Orphic self-accompanied singer endured in western art and music over the centuries, lending a dynamic significance to musicians who practiced the art of self-accompanied singing.

During the renaissance, the overtly Orphic qualities of the self-accompanied singer were clearly recognizable to contemporary audiences, as evidenced by the language of encomia and other accounts that praised Tarquinia Molza and other virtuosic self-accompanied singers of the period. Self-accompanied singing was regarded as a natural and desirable practice, and served as a vehicle for displaying the artistic accomplishments befitting a courtier. Simultaneously, the ideals of courtly behaviour and society were seen to be expressed by those same performers through their skill, style and repertoire, to the end result that self-accompanied singing became synonymous with the embodiments of

effortlessness and unconscious grace, or *sprezzatura*, in performance.

From the turn of the seventeenth century, self-accompanied singing began to be codified in early works on vocal pedagogy as a component of serious vocal study. Though this might seem to be a departure from the aesthetic trajectory of self-accompanied singer as ideal musician, in fact the impetus to incorporate self-accompaniment into the training regiment of an aspiring musician stemmed from the same artistic, social and political goals. Self-accompaniment was learned and practiced in the castrato singing schools, through which it became connected to the legendary vocal powers and reputations of those singers. It was taught as a practical necessity which would enable the performer to sing with ease (by avoiding the need to work with other performers or to force the voice and breath), with style (by learning to realize figured bass lines and apply *rubato* tastefully) and behave with social grace (by being able to acquiesce to requests to sing in any situation), all of which can be understood as elements of *sprezzatura* in performance. In this way, the practical incorporation of self-accompaniment into historical writings on vocal pedagogy functioned as a logical continuation and codification of renaissance courtly expectations for elite singers, designed to equip students to meet the technical, artistic and social demands of their art.

By the nineteenth century, performance venues, repertoire, and performance conventions had developed such that self-accompanied singing could no longer be seen as a literal embodiment of the qualities of *sprezzatura* when it occurred on the public concert stage. Instead, the public, virtuosic self-accompanied performances by singers like Lind, Malibran, Viardot-García and their contemporaries were a decadent, professional distillation of a broader sweep of nineteenth century amateur practice and intimate traditions of elite music making from previous centuries. Upon the nineteenth-century operatic and concert stage, singers who chose to self-accompany chose to adopt the visual persona of the Ideal Orpheus, which continued to resonate with Victorian audiences and exert its influence through romantic depictions of a variety of Orphic and neoclassical figures from history: angels, sirens, saints, troubadours, the perfect courtier, and Orpheus himself. This character of the Ideal Orpheus conjured up nostalgic longing for an artistic golden age, and was understood by nineteenth-century audiences to embody the musical and performative qualities of *sprezzatura*. Contemporary accounts demonstrate that audiences enjoyed indulging in the illusion of performer as romantic ideal. In adopting this character, the self-accompanied singer made a show of private intimacy upon the public stage, presenting her or himself as an Orphic creature who possessed the power to entrance and mystify through music, but who was also intimately knowable.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the identity and significance of the Ideal

Orpheus character entered a state of flux even while self-accompaniment reached the peak of its complexity as a performance practice. George Henschel's self-accompanied song recitals affected the same display of private intimacy upon the public stage, and contemporary listeners described Reynaldo Hahn's singing in the salons through the same Orphic, idealized language and imagery as had been applied to the previous generations of singers. At the same time, the act of self-accompaniment was becoming more closely associated with the particular characteristics and quirks of the individual performer than with abstract ideals and neoclassical symbolism. Highly specialized art song repertoire; the developing concept of the 'voix du compositeur', and gender all commanded Henschel's and Hahn's audiences to focus their attention increasingly upon the music rather than the visual pleasure of symbolic presentation. The display of female beauty and accomplishment remained a goal and function of self-accompanied singing in certain circles, but it played no part in Henschel's and Hahn's reception, and assessments of Helen Henschel's self-accompanied song recitals in the 1910s and 1920s would focus entirely on the music, with no discussion of her physical appearance and presentation.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the self-accompanied singer no longer conveyed the same symbolic message of ideal musicianship as it had to the audiences of Orpheus and Achilles, of the troubadours, of Tarquinia Molza and Giulio Cesare Brancaccio, of Caffarelli, of Malibran and Lind, or even of Henschel and Hahn in the prime of their careers. Instead of evoking Orpheus (or a siren, or an angel or the perfect courtier) and thereby evoking the qualities by which those characters had captured Victorian imaginations, self-accompanied singing instead was more likely to evoke the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century singers who previously adopted that persona, and whose vocal style and interpretation was now considered old-fashioned. Modern pedagogy, musical academia and concert audiences were growing increasingly sceptical of diversity in a performer: specialization in a single discipline, instrument or style was equated with professionalism and the route to mastery, while over-diversification was a luxury of the amateur and the dilettante. Henschel's and Hahn's 'voix du compositeur', later applied also to Michael Head and to a lesser extent Richard Tauber, shed its Orphic connotations and was increasingly used to denote a distinctly un-Orphic ideal 'composer-performer' who lacked mastery in a specific discipline and whose 'authorial voice...eschews emotive highlights.'⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ Woolf, review, *Reynaldo Hahn - Mélodies et airs d'opéra*. Woolf continues: 'As with most composer-performers Hahn is straightforward and decisive'.

Redefining self-accompaniment as a historical performance practice

Historical evidence of virtuosic self-accompanied singing has fallen out of the public and academic consciousness. As noted in the introduction and literature review of this thesis, much evidence of self-accompaniment in history is technically visible and available in literature and art, but not recognized as such because the concept of the self-accompanied singer has not been codified as a specific, meaningful phenomenon. Other disparate historical evidence of self-accompaniment has not been considered collectively, creating the impression of insignificant, isolated events rather than a wide reaching established tradition. As a result, today we define self-accompaniment according to its most recent permutations, without the artistic and symbolic context of its long history.

In this respect, the fading potency of the symbol of self-accompanied singer as archetypal, ideal musician carries logistical as well as artistic implications. Once the conventions of nineteenth-century public performance eliminated practical necessity from the equation, the artistic success of self-accompaniment depended upon audiences' lasting recognition and acceptance of its symbolic significance. As long as audiences recognized (even subconsciously) the artistic ideals which self-accompaniment was being used to represent, self-accompaniment remained a pleasing form of presentation that contributed to the atmosphere of the performance and enhanced the music, even in the absence of superior skill. Without that recognition, the theoretical benefits of self-accompaniment are quickly outweighed by the perceived drawbacks for the singer, the audience and the music: this is clearly demonstrated by critical reception of historic self-accompanied recordings. As long as teachers and audiences continue to conceive of self-accompanied singing as primarily a nineteenth-century, domestic, amateur practice, or even as a potentially virtuosic but outmoded practice (for the recordings by Henschel and Hahn, at least, are known to collectors and connoisseurs), there is little motivation for performers to explore self-accompaniment in any kind of serious, commercial artistic context.

The qualities represented by the Ideal Orpheus character are still recognized and valued in performers today. Audiences still desire unparalleled musicianship, to be moved and transported, and to experience virtuosity that unfolds with grace, and apparent effortlessness. What has changed is modern perception of what actions and performance practices *convey* that ease. If a modern singer does master self-accompaniment to the extent that the singing and playing are equally accomplished, the presentation may be perceived as awkward or unsuited to the music. When presented with the film of Richard Tauber singing Schubert's 'Serenade', undergraduate seminar students from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music undergraduates found the performance uncomfortable to watch, particularly when

Tauber broke the fourth wall and looked directly into the camera. Interestingly, those moments forged a relationship between Tauber and the seminar students similar to what the insertion of *arie de baule* in Rossini's lesson scene once affected for nineteenth century audiences: simultaneous experience of the music at hand as a live performance.⁴⁷⁶

Inevitable problems and irrelevancies arise when self-accompanied vocal performances are compared directly to standard vocal performances according to modern expectations for professional musicianship and concert presentation. Bruce Haynes observed, 'the history of art can be seen as a kind of Darwinian evolution only if we remember one essential condition: evolution depends on the principle of appropriate adaptation to environment. The goals of a Vivaldi concerto are quite different from those of Mozart, Beethoven, or Paganini; and to compare them is rewarding only in the context of their differing artistic aims.'⁴⁷⁷ If self-accompaniment is applied to the relevant repertoire, if performances and recordings are evaluated in light of the relevant historical goals, and the technical challenges are evaluated in light of historical approaches to overcoming them, self-accompaniment may again become a meaningful performance practice with the potential to give modern performers and audiences insights into not only the music, but also the social context in which it first was heard. Self-accompaniment, if re-framed as a historical performance practice, has the potential to serve as a conduit to previous eras, styles and repertoires. The *mélodies* of Reynaldo Hahn, for example, have made a comeback in popularity and critical acclaim: in recent years, his music has been thoroughly studied,⁴⁷⁸ compared favourably to the songs of Fauré and Duparc,⁴⁷⁹ and performed and recorded more frequently. Graham Johnson attributes this renewed interest to the fact that Hahn's music 'evokes a Paris, indeed a way of life, forever gone and, like Proust's world, retrievable only in precious moments where taste, sight or the sound of a musical phrase provoke the memory, or even perhaps the collective unconscious'.⁴⁸⁰ How much more true might this be if Hahn's songs were presented to audiences in a salon setting, or even upon a public stage, using the same performance practice of self-accompaniment that was so intrinsically linked to their conception and original performance, reframed as a nostalgic echo of the past?

This research, supplemented by my own practical explorations as a self-

⁴⁷⁶ Poriss, *Changing the Score*, 140. Poriss references the observations of Edward Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 29-37, and 'The World of Opera and Its Inhabitants', in *Music: A View from Delft*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 13-28.

⁴⁷⁷ Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6-7.

⁴⁷⁸ For a detailed analysis of Hahn's *mélodies*, see Thea Engleson, 'The Melodies of Reynaldo Hahn' (PhD diss., Graduate College of the University of Iowa, 2006).

⁴⁷⁹ O'Connor, 'Hahn, Reynaldo'.

⁴⁸⁰ Johnson, liner notes, *Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) Songs*.

accompanied singer (documented in Appendix 5), suggests that further efforts toward such reconstructions are worthwhile. Aside from historic interest, the advantages to be gained include those technical benefits explained by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century singing teachers, the artistic insights experienced by virtuosi like Helen Henschel, and a potential increase in the accessibility of the repertoire performed. Throughout the nineteenth century the self-accompanied song frequently served as a welcome source of textural and presentational variety within a concert. This forms a sharp contrast to the modern song recital, in which singer and pianist progress solemnly ‘from the seventeenth century to the twentieth through four or five groups, with only the piano as an accompanying instrument’, a process has been called ‘a trial both for the singer and for the public’.⁴⁸¹

Self-accompaniment may prove useful as a way to re-associate classical singing with popular music through common presentational style. Before the twentieth century, opera and art songs were much closer to popular music, and the popular and classical repertoires had self-accompaniment in common. Today, styles and audiences have diverged to the extent that classical singers are cut off from the repertoire that is most popular and accessible to the bulk of society, and self-accompaniment has retained its association with familiar, accessible, well-loved music and performers. Amongst classical music audiences, there is an equal desire and appreciation for the kind of intimacy regularly experience in non-classical genres. Perhaps by embracing this aspect of self-accompanied singing’s heritage and connotations, classical singing can take advantage of this association and song recitals with a new historical intimacy.

In the modern early music movement, isolated examples can be found of performers self-accompanying according to some of the historical models presented in this thesis. Early music specialists who have begun to explore singing to the lute, theorbo, harp and similar renaissance and medieval instruments include Viva BiancaLuna Biffi, who performs late fifteenth century madrigals self-accompanied by singing the upper voice and playing an arrangement of the other voices on the viola d’arco, soprano Nell Snaidas who is also a renaissance guitarist, the three members of Trefoil each of whom sing and play a medieval instrument, singer, lutenist and composer Frank Wallace who self-accompanies in the context of his early and contemporary music ensemble Duo LiveOak, and Derek Scott, who recorded a CD of self-accompanied Victorian and Edwardian ballads in 1988. There are more such examples, as well as interesting moments of crossover like Sting, who accompanied himself in Dowland songs in his album *Songs from the Labyrinth*. Many of these performers are recognized as expert musicians within their repertoire and upon their instruments, but are not widely recognized as established classical singers. This is

⁴⁸¹ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 349.

particularly the case in early music, where a musician who specializes in early renaissance or medieval vocal music may not be a conservatory-trained singer, or perform later repertoire that would bring them into competition and comparison with singers of the more standard baroque, classical and romantic canon. On the other hand, the early music movement encompasses other performance conventions in which diversification and duality of musical role is accepted on a professional level, such as the construct of conducting from the keyboard or as the leader of a consort. These performers and conventions demonstrate self-accompaniment's potential as a historical performance practice, even if thus far it remains rare. A renewing of the historical association between self-accompaniment and virtuoso professional singing is yet to come.

What skills and knowledge does a modern singer need to acquire in order to recreate a self-accompanied performance that would have been favourably received on the nineteenth-century concert stage, or earlier, taking into account the expectations and tastes of contemporary performers and audiences? Each subsequent generation of self-accompanied singers shaped the performance practice to fit the needs of their own repertoire and audiences. Early advocates of self-accompaniment likely never intended for it to be practiced on the public concert stage: renaissance musicians who connected self-accompaniment to musical *sprezzatura* abhorred the public stage as we know it today; early vocal pedagogues rationalized the previous era's aesthetic by teaching self-accompaniment as a learning tool and political escape route; romantic prima donnas and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century song recitalists self-accompanied despite the trajectory of developments in vocal pedagogy for the sake of symbolic presentation and, eventually, interpretive freedom.

This thesis has identified specific repertoires and periods in history where self-accompaniment was advocated from every perspective (aesthetic, artistic, technical and logistical), as well as repertoires and time periods where performers chose to overcome the technical challenges of self-accompaniment for the sake of the artistic and symbolic results. The appendices contain myriad examples from which to discover the specific conventions required for self-accompaniment in a given repertoire or context, and the recordings analysed in Chapter Seven enable study of the sounding results of self-accompaniment when executed by specialist performers who possessed the necessary skills and awareness of cultural context. If modern performers undertake the necessary study to acquire those same skills, and present them to audiences in a manner that also attempts to convey the historical social context, symbolic significance, and artistic goals of presenting vocal music this way, self-accompaniment will once again become a meaningful performance practice for classical vocal music and increase the diversity of approaches available to singers in the

field of historically informed performance.

Areas for further research

As has been already noted, the process of documenting self-accompanied singing in western music history is a vastly interdisciplinary and multimedia one that is greatly complicated by the variety of ways in which self-accompaniment was identified and depicted in primary sources. Because the historical scope of this thesis is so broad, it was not practical or possible to present a case study of every relevant genre of repertoire, instrument, and performance venue, and the appendices of this thesis which present evidence of self-accompanied singing in primary sources, are necessarily works in progress. It is expected that additional occurrences of self-accompanied singing will continue to be discovered in every type of source material represented in the appendices of this thesis, but particularly in literature, visual art, and the personal accounts and correspondence of musicians, patrons of the arts and audience members.

This study has made a thorough examination of digitized British and American historic newspapers, but foreign language newspapers merit significant further exploration, particularly as the most prominent self-accompanied singers in the nineteenth century had international careers. Meanwhile archival sources such as historical concert programmes, posters and playbills have been consulted only sporadically due to the extent to which these materials remain largely un-digitized and un-catalogued. Further examination of these kinds of sources will yield useful additional detail about the known self-accompanied performances, and is also expected to lead to the discovery of many more currently undocumented performances.

More musical treatises by singers, teachers and composers need to be examined, particularly seventeenth century works bridging the gap between Caccini and Puliaschi who are writing in the early seventeenth century as performers about a common practice, to Tosi who is writing in the early eighteenth century as a teacher codifying the earlier practice into a method. The remainder of Hiller's publications and other German language works also bear further examination, and it is expected that an on going examination of private and personal accounts of singing teaching and study (such as the letters of Mozart and Fanny Erskine, which will be considered momentarily) will continue to produce supplementary evidence of self-accompaniment applied in singing teaching in parallel to these pedagogical works.

Early self-accompanied recordings are another area that merits further research. The recordings consulted and examined in this thesis were all initially commercially

released and later remastered and re-released. Catalogues of historical recordings such as the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) list many more self-accompanied recordings that were unable to be consulted because the recordings were tests or never commercially released. Such recordings are likely to be inaccessible, unless the pressings were obtained and preserved in the hands of private collectors.

Archived radio broadcasts are another important area where further research is needed. The BBC Genome Project has begun to make the listings of the Radio Times from 1923 onward available, and these listings contain records of numerous broadcasts of self-accompanied recitals by Helen Henschel and others, though the identification of the self-accompaniment is frequently ambiguous. It will be invaluable to add these and George Henschel's earlier live broadcast song recitals to the range of self-accompanied recordings examined in this thesis.

Further research is needed to examine the extent to which self-accompaniment played an artistic and logistical role in non-classical theatrical repertoires and contexts in Britain and America, such as Vaudeville. Discovering the presence and significance of self-accompaniment in other 'low brow' and crossover theatrical musical contexts may help to clarify why self-accompaniment disappeared from the serious classical concert stage, and the circumstances under which it became (or remained) an idiomatic performance practice for jazz and popular musics.

This thesis made no attempt to catalogue or examine self-accompanied singing in non-classical and non-western genres of music, except in the case of specific examples that were perceived to be of analytical use as a basis for comparison. However western and non-western folk musics, popular music and jazz represent a vast realm of music making to which self-accompanied singing is integral, idiomatic and widely practiced and accepted. Study of self-accompaniment in these contexts would be a worthwhile study in isolation, and might also shed further light on the decline of self-accompanied singing in classical vocal music in the twentieth century. Examination of the significance and success of self-accompaniment in western popular music may also prove useful to performers interested reconstructing self-accompaniment as a historical performance practice for modern audiences.