The Odyssey of Orpheus: The Evolution of Solo Singing

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Summary: Notated sacred solo song dates from 1,000 B.C. Early secular song exhibits modest vocal demands of chant-like character. Popular song and liturgical solo song share common origins. Western European secular song notation began in the early Medieval Age. Compositional writing for solo voice took a dramatic turn toward virtuosity about 1600. By the mid-17th century, the modern solo voice emerged. "Classical" solo vocal literature is not static but is constantly evolving, requiring skills far in excess of those of speech or of early solo song literature; this is equally the case with ethnomusicalogical and popular singing styles. Efficient use of the singing instrument is essential to the healthy accomplishment of all of these literatures. Key Words: Orpheus--Eurydice--Folksong--Chant--Goliard Jongleur--Gaukler--Troubadour--Trouvère--Minnesinger--Meistersinger--Chorale--Opera.

Orpheus with his lute
Made trees and the mountaintops that freeze,
Bow themselves when he did sing.

To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung, as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring

Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads, and then lay by.

In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or hearing, die.

King Henry the Eighth (Shakespeare and Fletcher)

Orpheus had such beautiful vocalism that he charmed the elements of nature. He was able to convince the gods of the underworld to reverse their decision on Eurydice’s death, restoring her to life. For the ancient Greeks, Orpheus represented the power inherent in the union of language and music, a force that, down through the centuries, attested to the level of civilization a society had achieved. This joining of language and music is the major vehicle for the expression of human emotion.

The Orpheus legend is a good point from which to look at the evolution of the art of the solo singer. The skillful solo singer is to the field of voice usage what the professional athlete is to the world of sports. Stars of both opera stage and compact discs (CDs) are performers whose abilities far exceed those of voice users in normal situations, just as assuredly as the playing of Pete Sampras goes beyond that of the neighborhood athlete at the local tennis court. Doing a triple axel in an Olympic skating competition has some parallels with singing the Mad Scene from Lucia di Lammermoor or the tenor aria from Aida. The Zauberklöte Queen of the Night arias require as much skill as that demanded of the trapeze artist who performs without a safety net. All of these events involve kinesthetic coordination not encountered in usual activities. In every case, the body must be specially trained for tasks that extend beyond the capabilities of the amateur athlete or singer.
Today's "classical" solo singing may be considered from two standpoints: its historical development and its relationship to vocal health. But it should be kept in mind that popular music, as well as the ethnic vocal idioms found in what is called World Musics, have higher a degree of performance frequency than does classical vocal literature; all have common origins.

A brief look at the history of Western solo singing reveals how classical singing has developed into that which we expect when we now go to the Metropolitan Opera House or to Alice Tully Hall. Knowing how the art of singing has arrived at this point explains why we can equally enjoy opera, Lieder, ecclesiastical chanting, folk songs, or scat singing. It may even explain why scat singing of the classical repertory, as performed, for example, by the Swingle singers, appeals to our aesthetic senses.

Anthropologists suggest that ululation may have preceded the development of language itself. Zoologist Desmond Morris (1) terms these probable ululatory vocalizations as nonverbal mood events, an "inborn mammalian repertoire of grunts and squeals (from which) developed a more complex series of learnt sound signals." At least one influential modern vocal pedagogy (2) maintains that there existed a primordial vocal Atlantis that predated speech. For authors Frederick Husler and Yvonne Rodd-Marling, the subsequent harnessing of the vocal instrument for purposes of speech was detrimental to the singing voice. It is, therefore, necessary, they propose, to recover the primitive sounds of the prespeech vocal mechanism. If that questionable premise were true, one would need to posit the emergence of the first prima donna, who considered her rhythmic howling superior to that of other howlers around her. There are vocal studios today where singing lessons begin with teacher and student taking turns grunting and howling at each other, presumably in order to recapture the primal beauty of the voice that has been damaged by the development of speech. Whatever one's opinion of such vocal pedagogy, there does exist a connecting thread between primitive ululation and Mozart's much-beloved "Alleluia" (the last movement of his solo motet Exultate, jubilate).

However, examples of early song tend not to be ululatory or melodically extensive, but are syllabically set to follow speech-inflection patterns. A Hindu chant, known as a Saman (Fig. 1), is shown here in a modern transcription of ancient notation (designated as line 1), then as transcribed from a modern recorded performance (designated as line 2). This chant dates from before 1000 B.C. In translation, it reads (3):

The head of heaven, the ruler of the earth, Agni Vaisvanara, born in holy Order, the sage sovereign, guest

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The vocal demands of this chant are limited, never departing from speech-inflection range.

An early Syrian intonation from the Pentateuch (Fig. 2) shows a similar close relationship between speech range and melodic structure, but with a few embellishments of the melodic line.

The Pentateuch text (4) reads as follows:

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, "select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning."

Shortly after 1000 B.C., young David calmed the troubled spirit of King Saul by singing and playing on a lyre. The Biblical accounts (5) record that while singing, David "played before all Israel on all manner of musical instruments." He also "danced with all his might before the Lord."

In classical Greece, language and music were closely intertwined. Melody in Greek drama typically follows spoken intonation as well as the rhythm of speech syllabification. Although the ability to project the voice in spacious open theaters was necessary, the singing demands were still not extensive. From the classic Greek civilization, there remain some 20 melodic fragments written on stone and papyrus, consisting altogether of about 1,000 measures. An example is the so-called First Delphic Hymn, c. 138 B.C., shown in modern notation (Fig. 3). Here melodic excursion goes somewhat beyond speech range.

A translation (6) from the classic Greek runs as follows:

A. Hark, fair-haired daughters of the loud thundering Zeus who dwell in the deep forests of Helicon! Hasten thither, to praise in song your brother Phoebus, of the golden locks, who high above the rocky dwellings of the two-peaked Parnassus, surrounded by the august daughters of Delphi, betakes himself to the waters of limpid Kastalis, visiting at Delphi the prophetic crag.

B. Lo, the famous Attica, with its great city, which, thanks to the prayer of the arms-bearing Triton, inhabits an unassailable region. On holy altars Hephaestus consumes the thighs of bullocks; Arabian incense rises toward Olympus. The oboe, shrilly sounding, brings forth music with varied melodies, and the golden sweet-voiced kithara sounds with hymns.

We can presume that when Emperor Nero, who died in A.D. 68, won his crowning laurel wreath as the empire's best citharoedus i.e., a singer who accompanied himself on the cithara or lyre; he performed songs that closely followed word inflection in range, melodic contour, and rhythmic pattern. One also suspects that the adjudicating panel at the Olympiad may not have been entirely objective in awarding the first prize to Nero.

Roughly 100 years after Nero, in A.D. 130, the composer Mesomedes of Crete wrote his Hymn to the Sun (Fig. 4). Some 17th-century Lutheran chorale tunes are not far-distant relatives of this classic Greek hymn.

The Greek text translates (7) as follows:

Father of bright-eyed Dawn, driving your rosy chariot with the winged courses of your steeds, delighting in your golden hair, over the boundless vault of heaven, shedding your far-piercing ray and turning

Syrian intonation of the Pentateuch


First Delphic Hymn

Me-le-te sym-nai-mon hoi Phoi-e-bon o-da-ein mel-po-te chry-se-o-ko-man, Ho-a na di-le-
ryn-tes Par-na-ei-dos te-as pe-te-re hoi-dos ham'a-ga-lytai-eis De-phi-ei-in Ka-sta-li-don
soy-drou na-ma'p-i-ni-se-tai, De-phon a-na pro-na ma-nai-ei-on e-phon pa-gon.
En kly-ta me-qa-pe-lo-los At-this ou-xei-ei-se pher-pla-i-o nois ou-se Tho-ou-ni-dos de-pod-a-
thra-ston, Na-gi-ei de bo-moi-ei-se Ha-phai-ene ai-ei-thai no-on me-ra-la-mo-non, Ho-mou
de niN A-rap-e a-tmo-e O-lym-pon a-na-kid-ka-tai. Li-gy de lo-ko-bre-nou e-i-o-
le-i-o
me-le-in o-da-an brea-kai. Chry-se-a d'a dy-thron ki-tha-ris hym-noi-sin a-na mel-pe-tai.


over all the earth the far-seeing fount of splendor,
your streams of immortal fire bring forth the lovely
day. Before you the gentle chorus of the stars dance
over lord Olympus, ever singing their unrestrained
song, rejoicing in the lyre of Phoebus. And before
you the silvery Moon in due season leads the way
amid throngs of white kine; and your mild spirit is
glad as it speeds through the richly-clad firmament.

These exuberant sacred texts transport the listener
backward 2 millennia, signaling how naive is perva-
sive current thought that past generations and their
accomplishments existed only as modest prepara-
tion for the important now. Even in translation, the
beauty and dignity of the literary expression cannot
escape us.

In the 4th century, Christianity replaced pagan-
ism as the official religion of empire-dominated so-
ciety. From that time onward, in Europe, the
church was the generating source for music, drama,
and the literary and visual arts. During the life of
Ambrose, sainted 4th-century Bishop of Milan,
Christian hymnody became an important step in the
development of vocal literature. These devotional
hymns were most probably sung both individually
and in groups. An Ambrosian hymn from around
the beginning of the 5th century (Fig. 5) illustrates
the continuing relationship between speech and
song during the early Medieval period. (Three me-
locic settings are indicated.)

During the long Medieval period, Gregorian
chant became the chief form of liturgical musical
expression. Chant, also known as plainsong, is cast
within a complicated system of eight ecclesiastical
modes, but speech rhythms and pitches dictate me-
locic excursions. Libera me (responsorium), written
after the 7th century, illustrates how closely word
and vocalism were allied in Gregorian chant (Fig. 6).

There occur alternating sections between solo in-
toning and choral responses. Passages sung by the
cantor, who was also known as the Precenter, in-
fluenced later solo literature. More extended vocal-
ism is found in the melismatic passages, i.e., in pas-
sages embellished with more than one musical note
per syllable (Fig. 7).

This became accepted practice in late Medieval
chant, perhaps bridging the ululations of Desmond
Morris' naked ape and the coloratura of Mozart's
"Alleluia."

Culturally far removed from the Christian world,
an ancient popular Arabian song, originating in
what was to become modern Tunisia, also exhibits chant-like characteristics (Fig. 8). There is little doubt that sacred and secular modes of singing influence each other in all cultures. (Witness contemporary “pop” gospel idioms heard in many Christian churches.)

It is clear that folk-song literature has continually paralleled liturgical music. There must always have been love songs, morning songs, evening songs, cradle songs, work songs, battle songs. However, liturgical texts predominate within the song literature. What was formerly thought to comprise folk music has been revised by the International Folk Music Council, founded in 1947. At its Congress in São Paolo in 1955 (8), folk music was designated as a separate category of music:

Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are (a) continuity, which links the present with the past, (b) variation, which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group, and (c) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.

A further assessment of the folk music tradition, formed primarily by solo singing, came about in 1956 with the founding of the Society for Ethnomusicology. Rather than considering folk music as separate from music literature in general, these scholars consider all music as dependent upon social organization (9). For members of the society, many of whom are social anthropologists, the socio-cultural aspects of music and music making largely determine the results of all forms of music, whether written or oral. The odyssey of Orpheus—the history of the solo singer—supports this viewpoint.

Only in the modern era, with its access to record-
ing devices, has it been possible to document the influences of folk-song literature on the art of solo singing. New instrumentation for permanently recording previously ephemeral performance practices now provides the capability for wide dissemination of such events. The influence of popular and folk music has never been more pervasive in any society than it is in our own. But historical necessity requires that we return to the written record.

It was not until the late Medieval period that significant secular solo vocal literature was encountered. Beginning in the 10th century and continuing into the mid-13th century, there came into being a body of solo vocal literature called the Goliard songs, or Goliardlieder. Even the Goliardlieder have their origins in the Church, developing as protest against moral constraints imposed by the Church. The term Goliard derives from the Latin gula, from which come our English words “gullet” and “glutton.” Indeed, gluttony and lechery are often subjects of the Goliardlieder. Goliards claimed a mythical Bishop Golias as their patron saint (10). The term may also have originated from the name of Goliath (the giant who battled the shepherd-boy David), who, in Christian exegesis, was the enemy of the Church.

A major collection of Goliardlieder, known as the Carmina Burana, was discovered in 1803 in southern Germany at the monastery of Benediktbeuren. The earliest of these songs are provided with staffless neumes that cannot easily be deciphered. (A neume may consist of a number of symbols for single tones as well as for groups of two, three, or more tones.) The 20th-century composer Carl Orff popularized this collection of Medieval song texts through his engaging work Carmina Burana for chorus, soloists, and orchestra.

Once thought to have been written by student roustabouts, many of the Goliardlieder were composed by established churchmen and educated lay

Alleluia: Angelus Domini


persons. The Goliards took great pleasure in profane jokes, witticisms, and outright sacrilegious expressions. Drinking songs, spring songs, ancient classic themes, love songs, songs moral and immoral—all were Goliard topics. The Confessional of Golias, by a 12th-century poet writing under the name of Archipoeta, was typical. An English translation is provided by J. A. Symonds (11):

In the public-house to die
Is my resolution:
Let wine to my lips be nigh
At life's dissolution.

Beata viscera

To make the angels cry,
With glad elocution,
Grant this toper, God on high,
Grace and absolution!

This song swept through the streets of a Medieval town just as does a hit tune in today's metropolitan America. The Goliards disappeared in the 14th century as a result of the establishment of the new permanent universities and the further development of urban life.

During the same period, another type of itinerant musician became prominent. In France, such a
singer was known as a jongleur, in Germany as a Gaukler. The Latin word *joculatores* (from *jocus*—a joke or jest) is the etymological parent of the words jongleur, Gaukler, juggler, and gleeman. In Germanic lands, these strolling musicians were also called *fahrende Sänger* (traveling singers). They were neither ecclesiastical students nor clerics, rather having emerged from the poorest levels of society. A jongleur or Gaukler traveled about with a few other destitute persons, perhaps accompanied by a chained bear, caged birds, or an assortment of trained animals. They were the ancestors of the groups of entertainers found today around the Pompidou museum in Paris, in the public squares of Munich, Frankfort, and Salzburg, and, sometimes, in Rockefeller Plaza. From the 12th century comes a vivid description of the duties and functions of a Gaukler (12): in addition to singing, “he is expected to play the drum, the cymbals and the hurdy-gurdy; to juggle apples; to catch knives, to perform card tricks; to jump through hoops, to play the cithara and many other instruments.” (Those familiar with today’s Music Education curricula may draw some parallels.) These performers were professional secular musicians proficient with their voices and musical instruments. They played viols, small harps, bagpipes, and flutes. Gilbert and Sullivan devotees will recognize that the character of Jack Point, with his “I have a song to sing, oh” (The Yeoman of the Guard), is patterned after a Gaukler. Ingmar Bergman, in his film The Seventh Seal, portrays a family of strolling players whom the knight befriends and protects.

Contemporary with the Goliard and the jongleur/Gaukler movements were the troubadours. Jongleurs lead us directly into the solo literature of the troubadours. Increasingly, jongleurs performed songs that the nobleman composed, or they accompanied the troubadour as he sang his verses to his lady.

Troubadours flourished in Provence in the region known as Languedoc, where “yes” was *oc*, as opposed to the language of Northern France surrounding the Ile de France, where “yes” was *oui*. The language of the North became known as langue d’oil and is the source of modern French. Verses of the southern troubadours elevated the Provençal language to a high literary level.

A further indication of how social fabric and the organization of society dictated the art of singing can be attested to by the fact that the troubadour literature concerned itself with chivalrous love.
A new notion of womanhood began to emerge. The lady now became an object of poetic devotion, although in actuality she was still considered chattel. However, no longer was she to be bargained for, but to be wooed. At the same time, the great Gothic cathedrals were rising upward to pierce the still unbroken urban skylines. With great frequency they were named *Notre Dame* (Our Lady). The necessity for making God more approachable through the introduction of a feminine devotional component paralleled the chivalric literature of idealized love.

It was the natural culmination of the "Mother-of-God (Mater Dei)" controversies that had so shaken the church during previous centuries. The composer Perotinus, who died in 1220, composed a typical song to the Virgin (Fig. 9) called *beata viscera* (Blessed Offspring).

Eight hundred years ago, in 1195, the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn wrote a song, a *canzo*, entitled *Be m'an perdut* (Fig. 10). It laments lost love (13):

> Ja nuns honis pris (Ballade)

*Richard Coeur-de-Lion (1157-1199)*

Ja nuns honis pris ne dira sa raison.

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Indeed, all my friends there around Ventadorn
Are lost to me since my lady does not love me.
I have no reason ever to return there,
So harsh is she toward me and so ill-humored.
See how she always appears angry and grim:
But I find joy and peace in her love!
And this is the only thing over which she may
lament or complain.
So harsh is she toward me and so ill-humored.

Adoration of the Virgin Mary, known as Marian Devotion, gained prominence during the Age of Chivalry. The troubadour movement was the culmination of the Medieval Chivalrous Age. Elevation and ennoblement of womanhood was seen in both secular and sacred solo vocal literatures of the late Medieval period. The Virgin became the recipient of religious devotion, and the female became a secular pedestal figure. This feminine image dominated the literature of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic eras. Only now is it being discarded in favor of gender equality.

Over 1000 troubadour poems have been preserved, at least 300 with their melodies intact. The romantic ring of the names of these musicians reaches us from a millennium past. Among these early solo singers were Guillaume de Poitier, Marcabru, Bernart de Ventadorn, and Folquet de Marseille (whom Dante later admitted directly to paradise!). Folquet wrote that "a verse without music is a mill without water" (14). Other noted troubadours were Raimon de Miraval, Aimeric de Peguilhan, and Guiraut Riquier (called "the last of the troubadours," whose death occurred in 1294). Of what did they sing? Songs political and moral, songs of battle, songs of dawn, songs of evening, courting songs, songs of chivalry, and devotional songs to the Virgin. Their melodies do not make major demands on the vocal instrument but are fully expressive of the
text they set. They herald the expression of the personal desire and individual motivation that were so characteristic of emerging Renaissance arts and letters. The troubadour Perrin d’Agincourt’s Quant voi, composed in tripartite ballade form (Fig. 11), is typical of chivalrous song (15):

(a) At the end of the summer when I see the leaves fall
(b) And the great prettiness of birds comes to an end,
(c) Then I feel a desire to sing greater than is my wont,
   For she to whom I give myself loyally has ordered me to sing;
   Therefore I shall; and when my lady pleases, I have joy.

Contemporary with the Provençal troubadour movement was another group of solo singers named trouvères, found chiefly in the north of France. Although trouvères were often middle-class persons, some were of royal lineage. Among the most noted trouvères were Richard the Lion Heart, Blondel de Nesles, Thibaut of Navarre, and Adam de la Halle. Adam’s Jeu de Robin et de Marion, composed in 1285, incorporated an early experiment in pastoral comedy, foreshadowing the opera commedia. Music manuscripts of this period are decipherable only by specialists. Many of these manuscripts resemble the two pages (Fig. 12) taken from a rondeau by Adam de la Halle.

Richard Lion Heart’s Ja nun hons pris ne dira sa raison (Fig. 13) was written while Richard was held for ransom in an enemy dungeon. (Richard Coeur-de-Lion’s dates are 1157–1199.) The song is in the typical ballade form of the period, and the vocal demands continue to be limited, not surpassing animated speech. The text reads (16):

Swa eyn vriund

Sievriund, diem andern vriunde bi-gestüt. Mit gantzen trouwen ger an alle minzet. Da ist des vriundes
hefis güt. dom er sie willichliche hut. Die sie geli-ch eisander helen. Dom menet sich des hunne.

Sievriunde eisander wege sicht. Das ist ein mi-ched wunne.

(a) Indeed, no captive can tell his story
Properly, unless it be sadly,
(b) But with an effort, he can make a song.
I have many friends, but poor are their gifts.
(c) They will be put to shame, if for ransom
I am held here for two winters.

Chansons de geste (songs of deeds) were long epic poems written by both the troubéres and the troubadours. These verses were sung to repetitious formal melodies of limited range. They resembled the intoning of dramatic speech. The most famous of these epics is the Chanson de Roland.

Across the Rhine, solo song was not neglected. It is traditional to say that documented German solo song dates from 1156, when, at the wedding of Frederick Barbarossa and Beatrix of Burgundy, the Minnesinger Giuot de Provins sang and played. (Minne denotes the kind of adoration the knight offers to his lady.) Although it was generally conceded that the Minnesinger were indebted to the trouvères and to the Goliards, Gregorian chant was the earliest of their sources (17). An early Minnesinger of widespread fame was Spervogel. His rather square compositional technique was apparent in his Swa eyn Vriund (Fig. 14). This 12th-century song extolled the virtues of friendship (18):

Whenever one friend stands by another
In loyalty, without false deed,
There the friend's aid is indeed good.
To him to whom he grants it willingly,
So that they are in complete agreement,
His kin increases in numbers.
Wherever friends are well-disposed to each other
Then that is a great joy.

A famed Minnesinger, who assumed the name Frauenlob (which means “in praise of women”), was considered the last important Minnesinger. He was a transitional figure from the Minnesinger to the Meistersinger solo vocal art. A precursor of a Meisterlied can be found in Nu al’erst (Fig. 15) by Walther von der Vogelweide (d. 1230). It is a hymn about the Crusades (19), a frequent topic of the 13th century, and is the only solo Lied remaining from Walther’s hand:

Now at last my life seems worth while
Now that my sinful eyes behold
Here the land and soil
Which men hold in such high honor.
I have attained that for which I so often prayed,
I have set foot on the spot
That God in human form has trod.

The Germans Walther and Spervogel used a heavy metric element that was not present in the more elegantly flowing melodic lines from the French trouvère and troubadour songs. These differences correspond to the distinguishing features of the Germanic and the Romance languages. Inflections and accents of speech are mirrored in the contours of the respective national melodies. Again, vocal demands are not great in either the French or Germanic solo songs of the Medieval period.

What connection do these poet/composer/singers of the past have with contemporary vocalists and music lovers? Wolfram von Eschenbach composed a Parzival; Gottfried von Strasbourg wrote an early version of the Tristan legend; and Walther von der Vogelweide is mirrored by the character of Walther von Stolzing in Wagner’s Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Tannhäuser was yet another Minnesinger, who is known to us from Wagner’s treatment of the late medieval/early Renaissance musicoliterary heritages. Literature and song have woven a continuing thread down through the centuries.

With the conclusion of the Age of Chivalry in the 14th century, the jongleur, the Gaukler, the troubadour, the trouvère, and the Minnesinger ceased to exist. Musicians then became associated with the

Nu al’erst (Bar)

Walther von der Vogelweide (d. 1230)

emerging citizen Guilds, made up of persons who p lied trades. The socio-cultural milieu was remarkably altered with the further development of urban life. As is always the case, such changes directly affected the practice of music making.

A major transitional figure from the Minnesinger movement to the Meistersinger schools was Gottfried Oswald von Wolkenstein (1377–1445), who was known for his skill in the accompanied Lied. Der May (the month of May) shows both syllabic and melismatic textual treatment, and has a specified, written-out accompaniment (Fig. 16). Consisting of 80 measures, 60 of which are subsequently repeated, Der May is an extended accompanied composition for the solo vocal performer. The tune is typically restricted to an octave, mostly approximating the singer’s speech-inflection range. What is chiefly remarkable about this Lied is the composer’s imitation of poetic content through musical means—what, in the 19th century, came to be termed musical word-painting. His descriptive musical figures go beyond mere word inflection and speech rhythms. Von Wolkenstein’s text (20) is as appealing today as it was 550 years ago:

May with its charming host
covers all the land.
Hill and plain, mountain and vale

resound with sweet bird call.
Dove and lark, thrush and nightingale
sing lusty songs.
The cuckoo comes aflying after them,
A terror to the little birds.
Listen to what he says:
cu, cu, cu, cu, cu, cu,
pay me my due,
I must have that from you.
Hunger makes my stomach almost ravenous.
Alack a day! You would
that I should? so spoke the small birds.
Klingel, siskin, titmouse, lark, now we come
a-singing;
Oci and toowee, toowee, toowee, toowee
Oci...
fi...
ci...
ci ri..
And all the while the cuckoo sang.
Caw, said the crow,
indeed I sing well too
but I must be full;
my song goes thus:
Shovel it all in! all in! I must be full!
Liri...
so sang the lark.
I, the little thrush, sing clearly...
That song resounds in the forest.
You pipe, you preen yourselves,
You rock, and wave
to and fro, just like our priest.
Cidiwigg...
Nightingale with her song lightened our woe.

Urban life in the 15th and 16th centuries, with its developing intellectual and commercial centers, produced a new kind of musician singer, the Meistersinger. The Minnesinger had practiced a courtly art; the Meistersinger engaged in a bürgerlich (citizen) art. Whereas earlier secular solo singers were independent performers, Meistersingers grouped themselves by trade and occupation into solo-singing societies. No longer was solo performance the property of the cleric, of the ecclesiastical student, of the transient entertainer, of the nobility. Composing and singing one’s own verses and melodies now became a competitive national pastime. Once again, sociology dictated the nature of literature and music and determined the form that singing would take.
Hans Sachs (1494–1576), the cobbler poet/musician/philosopher immortalized by Wagner in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, was the most famed Meistersinger. Sachs’s Der gülden Ton (The Golden Tone) is cast in so-called Barform—AAB (Fig. 17), a tripartite musical form still found in 19th and 20th-century Lieder, including songs by Schubert, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Reger. Der gülden Ton shows the influence of Reformation theology. Sachs’s verses read (21):

(a) Praise God the Father on his throne, who graciously makes known to us His word, the treasure of Grace, in many a place.
(b) Thereby we clearly recognize His will from the Holy Scriptures.
(c) These were hitherto quite obscured by the harmful doctrines of men, that have plunged us into grave doubts. The Lord has decreed this for us since we have embraced the path of human error and poison.

The Lutheran chorale is not far removed from these Meistersinger melodies. But before turning to the chorale melody, mention must be made of yet another type of 14th-century song, the Geisslerlied, of interest because it combines folk and liturgical elements. These Geisslerlieder take their name from the word geisseln, which means to whip or to beat. Penitential processions of flagellants, in the hope of atoning for personal sins and for the guilt of the age, paraded through towns, beating each other and singing as they stumbled along. The year 1349, when the plague known as The Black Death reduced the population of many European towns and villages by one third, was particularly conducive to such behavior. Such practices still exist in some countries during the Lenten season, for example in the Philippines. An excellent example of a Geisslerlied is Maria, muoter reinū maît (Fig. 18) (22):

Oh Mary mother, Virgin mild,
Forget not Christendom thy child;
Have pity on our misery,
We have no help but only thee.

Oh Mary mother, full of grace,
Why hast thou turned away thy face?
Our refuge here alone art thou;
From sudden death defend us now.

We have no help but him and thee,
Thy Son who reigns eternally.
Oh Mary, hear thy children's cry:
Have mercy on us, or we die.

The Lutheran chorale often appropriated pre-existent melodies from both sacred and secular heritages, a practice known as contrafactum. In the 16th century, settings of the psalms in the Dutch Reformed Church were also based on popular tunes. They were termed Souterliedekens. (Using pre-existent melodies for liturgical purposes is also known as musical parody, although the results are not parodic in nature.) Some chorale and Souterliedeken melodies were made use of by 19th-century Lied composers. Thus, there can be seen a continuing line of solo-song melodic development, remolded by the social condition of each period.

Certainly Luther's own Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott (A Mighty Fortress is Our God), written in AAB Barform (Fig. 19), is heard more frequently on Sunday mornings in our time than in his. (It is worth noting that Luther's dates are 1483–1556; those of Hans Sachs are 1494–1576.)

By the time of Franz Tunder (1614–1667), noted Baroque composer, the chorale tune had become an accompanied Lied for solo voice. Heinrich Schütz, one of the great composers of all time (1587–1672), wrote Geistlichelieder (sacred solo songs) that are still part of the church musician's repertoire. By this time, the modern sacred solo song had emerged. Technical demands on the singer, as on the instrumentalist, had increased. Although the early Renaissance ensemble literature of the Parisian and Burgundian schools, and the polyphonic choral writing of the Counter Reformation, were often exceedingly complex and vocally difficult (23), solo literature tended to remain closely bound to the speech-communication range until the 17th century. With the opening of the new century, the solo song underwent radical change in all continental European countries and England.

However, in order to explore the steadily increasing requirements placed on the laryngeal mechanism in response to evolving performance prowess, it is to the Italian peninsula that attention must be directed. As is well known, it was a gentleman/musician/poet group of Florentine called the camerata who, at the conclusion of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, made a conscious effort to rediscover the union of word and song as found in the Greek drama. In experimental specu-
what had been composed previously, L’Orfeo avoided the pyrotechnical (Fig. 20).

Monteverdi’s second opera, L’Arianna, has been lost, except for the magnificent fragment Lasciatemi morire, the Lament of Arianna. It is shown here in a popular late-19th-century realization of the accompaniment by the early musicologist Parisotti (Fig. 21). Lasciatemi morire serves as an illustration of the vocal and communication tasks set before the professional solo singer of the early 17th century.

In following the development of the art of solo singing, it is instructive to see how far Monteverdi traveled in subsequent decades. In the stretch of time from 1607 to 1639, Monteverdi’s vocal writing expanded beyond what had previously been demanded of the solo singing voice. For all vocal categories Monteverdi invented new tasks: singing range was extended, greater sustaining power of the voice (sostenuto) was called for, the agility factor took on pyrotechnical dimensions, and embellishment of the vocal line (fioritura) increased. Il
ritorno d'Ulisse in patria, performed in Venice in 1640, exemplifies these advances. But it is in Monteverdi's last opera, L'incoronazione di Poppea, performed in Venice 1642, that vocal demands reached an unprecedented high level (Fig. 22). The role of Ottavia was written for Anna Renzi, the premier soprano of the 17th century, who was celebrated for her vocal skill. Nerone, written for a high castrato singer, is rangy and difficult. The bass role of Seneca offers almost Verdian demands. Even minor characters, such as the soldiers, the maid, and the valet, are asked to execute difficult passages. Duets for female voices, and for Ottavia and Nerone, are challenging for singers of any period.

By the year 1673, in Antonio Sartorio's Orfeo, Eurydice had to engage in vocal maneuvers (Fig. 23) equal to those of the role of Bellini's Norma in the 19th century. Nothing less than skillful control of the aerodynamic/myoelastic aspects of phonation can meet such demands. To conceive of early Baroque solo vocal literature as the domain of the vocal miniaturist is to ignore the internal evidence of what was demanded of the highly-trained professionals of the period. Within six decades, Orpheus and his beloved Eurydice, who had also become a singer in the hands of composers, had traveled a great distance in their vocal odyssey.

Arias such as Negatemi respiri, from Francesco

Cavalli's Ciro (Fig. 24), which premiered in Venice in 1654, contain a sustained high tessitura that could be accomplished only through breath management skills that exceed the demands of early 17th-century Venetian opera. These lines, whether sung by a castrato or a soprano, are as challenging as Violetta's M'ami, Alfredo in La Traviata.

It was not only on sopranis and castratis that increasing demands were made. Passages comparable in difficulty can be found for male voices as well. Pages from Cavalli's Egisto (Fig. 25) rival the vocal demands of Verdi and Puccini.

It was at this juncture that the voice teacher began to play a major role in the art of singing. In order for singers to meet the increasing vocal demands made by composers, the singer's technical facility had to increase. The voice needed to be freely produced in order to accomplish the new technical feats demanded of it and to project in public theaters. Conservatories were founded, and the names of great teachers of singing, many of whom were themselves composers as well as singers, came to the fore. Porpora, Mancini, and Tosi are names better known to us than are many of the singers who studied with them.

Handel, with some 60 operas and 30 oratorios to his credit, was perhaps the best voice teacher of all time. The two poles of what was to become bel canto—sustained singing (cavatina) and rapid scale passages (cabaletta)—were already apparent in Handel's early Italian operas of the first decade of the 18th century, and continued into midcentury. Handelian arias remain a staple of modern recital programming.

The operas and oratorios of Haydn are no less demanding than the vocal writing of Mozart, most of which was still to come. Many Haydn arias demand a range that extends over two and a half octaves, often with difficult bravura singing. With Mozart, of course, we are in familiar territory. Scarcely a role, hardly an aria, by Mozart fails to


show to what extent Orpheus and Eurydice were now expected to master extensive vocal skills. Although it is not one of the most demanding Mozart arias for soprano, his famous Alleluia (Fig. 26) is an appropriate reminder of the development of ululation from its primitive naked-ape origins to its artistic peaking.

Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti make even greater demands on their singers. A page from Bellini’s Norma is typical (Fig. 27). The same passage mounting to High C, sung by the soprano in the role of Norma, is repeated by the mezzo-soprano Adalgisa. All categories of voice were now required to negotiate the vocal instrument’s full range, which becomes characteristic of the bel canto (beautiful singing) style.

The ever-increasing need to ensure the most efficient production led to the first in-depth investigation of laryngeal function related to singing. In mid-19th century, Manuel Garcia, singer and teacher of singers, whose pupils included the most famous singers of the century—an international list including Jenny Lind, Hans Hermann Nissen, Erminia Frezzolini, Julius Stockhausen, Mathilde Marchesi, Charles Bataille, and Charles Santley—invented the laryngoscope. Following his own singing career, Garcia worked in military hospitals in France, where he studied laryngeal physiology (25). With his long life (1805–1906) devoted to study and teaching, he left an indelible imprint on future vocal pedagogy. Other noted teachers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in search of more efficient tools for vocal pedagogy, sought information on how the vocal instrument functions. This quest continues today.

Contemporary opera goers are familiar with the demands of the verismo operas of Verdi, Puccini, Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and Cilea. They are aware of the perennial casting problems for the music dramas of Richard Wagner. Certainly, the vocal writing of Richard Strauss at times nearly exceeds the capabilities of the human larynx. Salome, Elektra, the Composer, and the Rosenkavalier Italian tenor are assigned vocal tasks at high emotional, tessitura, and decibel levels (Fig. 28). The necessary subglottic pressure and airflow skills required for the execution of this demanding literature go far be-
ODYSSEY OF ORPHEUS

Beyond the demands of speech communication and of early solo song.

What of the vocal music of the 20th century? Schönberg, Babbitt (Fig. 29), Berio, Berg, and Dallapiccola; Henze and Stockhausen; George Crumb and Peter Maxwell Davies (Figs. 30 and 31) all make increasing demands of the human larynx.

Historical vocal pedagogy has responded by providing technical solutions for the vocal assignments that composers create. Modern vocal pedagogy adheres to the conviction that the vocal mechanism can be trained to undertake these tasks if it remains functionally efficient. This is possible only when the physiology and the acoustics of the singing voice are not violated.

A complete look at the centuries-long perambulations of Orpheus and Eurydice should properly include an examination of literatures to be found in nonclassical forms of vocalism, including jazz, skat, rap, pop, soul, Blue Grass, Country Western, Broadway, extended vocal techniques, and ethnic idioms. The muezzin who calls from the minaret (or who did so before the invention of amplified recording), the Broadway belter, the youngster gyrating with a microphone while competing with a noisy back-up system—all are members of the Orpheus/Eurydice family. New to the recent history of solo singing is a category of performer known as “the untrained professional.” There is no need to establish an order of merit among various styles of singing or to exercise judgmental evaluations regarding them. But, in all cases, whether with the classical vocalist or singers of popular and ethnic idioms, tasks given to the larynx require appropriate training to ensure healthy accomplishment. The higher the level of achievement presumed, the greater the level of skill to be acquired. Therefore, the greater need for precise functional information.

The Odyssey of Orpheus continues today. It is not possible to predict the final chapter of this voyage. Since the 17th century, each succeeding decade has brought about additional demands on the solo singer. The art of singing is not static; it is in a constant condition of change.


How the singing voice best functions, what constitutes its limitations, and how it should be trained to meet the performance demands placed on it, are interdisciplinary concerns in which experts must cooperate. Only then can a healthy Orpheus and Eurydice continue to move us with their singing.

REFERENCES