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An Introductions to the Art of Singing Italian Baroque Opera

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An Introductions to the Art of Singing Italian Baroque Opera:

A Brief History and Practice

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Music

by

Gloria Chu Young Chung-Ahn

2015
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Introductions to the Art of Singing Italian Baroque Opera:

A Brief History and Practice

by

Gloria Chu Young Chung-Ahn

Doctor of Musical Arts in Music

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Michael E. Dean, Chair

At the start of this dissertation, my original intention was to offer insight into performance practices of opera in the late baroque period in the form of a guide to young singers. As I delved into this subject matter, I began to realize how much this subject could not be understood until the singer had an understanding of the beginnings of baroque music pertaining to its considerable historical significance in the development of opera as well as its overall perceived styles. The term baroque, in itself, has caused much confusion for those in academia
and more so to students who endeavor to recreate an authentic baroque sound and performance.

Upon evaluating my own understanding of baroque music and its reaches into the operatic art form, I decided to include in this dissertation an abridged history of the baroque period such as terms and ideas that every young musician should be familiar with, as well as contributions to baroque opera of famous composers and singers, whose names became synonymous with the term Baroque. I offer a study of famous baroque arias from Handel’s masterpiece *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, including different styles of ornamentation and interpretation from some of the best resources available, divas in our own time. It is my sincere hope that this, along with the performance practices of opera relating to such characteristics as acting, gestures, costumes, instrumentation and orchestra, ornamentation and singing style, and a discussion of performance halls common during baroque times and those used in modern times, will help singers interpret and understand baroque opera in the context of baroque music.
The dissertation of Gloria Chu Young Chung-Ahn is approved.

Juliana Gondek

Ian Krouse

Rhonda R. Voskuhl

Michael E. Dean, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015
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I would like to thank professor Juliana Gondek and her wonderful teachings in her baroque seminar, which inspired me to choose baroque opera as the topic of my dissertation. Her careful interpretation of baroque music and the care she took to explain the theory behind it left a lasting impression giving me an interest to learn more about the baroque style.

I thank professor Ian Krouse and professor Rhonda Voskuhl. Even with their busy schedule they supported and agreed to be in this committee and helped guide me through this process.

I want to thank my family, John, Ashley, Curtis, and my mother for their patience and encouragement throughout this experience and for inspiring me to finish my doctoral thesis. Thank you for the support throughout these years and during my greatest times of need.

There are too many to mention by name, but I would like to thank all those people in my life who have given me pep-talks and encouraged me to see this to the end. Thank you.

Gloria Chu Young Chung-Ahn
Gloria Chu Young Chung-Ahn was one of the winners in the National Association of Teachers of Singing in 2004 career division competition and in the 1987 Young Women division competition. She received honorable awards at the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts. She has performed as soloist and choral member in major works for many performing organizations such as the LA Master Chorale at Disney Concert Hall with Zubin Mehta, the Hollywood Bowl with Esa Pekka Salonen, the 911 Memorial Concert at Royce Hall with Donald Neuen, Korean Christian Chamber Choir, Korean Master Chorale, and Han So Ri Choir. Her repertoire includes such works as Bach’s Magnificent, Choral Fantasy and Symphony No. 9 by Beethoven, Messe Solennelle by Gounod, Handel’s Messiah, Missa in Tempore Belli and the Third Mass by Haydn, Minor Mass and Requiem by Mozart, and Mass in G by Schubert. Her operatic performance highlights include Albert Herring by Benjamin Britten and Acis and Galatea by G.F. Handel. She is formal adjunct faculty at Vanguard University School for Professional Studies in general music education. She is currently the choir conductor for Wilshire United Methodist Church in Los Angeles and associate music director for Young Angeles Choir. Ms. Chung-Ahn received her Bachelors and Master’s degree in vocal performance from Manhattan School of Music under the instruction of Natalie Bondanya and Adel Addision. She studied vocal performance at UCLA, under the instruction of Professor Michael Dean, chair of the music department at UCLA.
INTRODUCTION

“Flexibility is of the essence of good baroque interpretation.”

- Robert Donington

Early Beginnings of Baroque Opera

The Baroque period refers to the era starting in the seventeenth century to the first half of the eighteenth century. The baroque style was developed from the stylistic unity of renaissance music to three different musical styles of baroque. Composers from this era were well versed in both renaissance music known as stile antico or prima prattica, and in their current style known as stile moderno or seconda prattica. In the words of Berardi the author of Miscellanea Musicale in 1689, “three styles, church, chamber, and theatre style.” This may explain why Bukofzer in his text Music in the Baroque Era, refers to this period as a degenerate form of the preceding renaissance period.

Renaissance music differed from baroque music in that harmony of sound carried more importance than the text. In baroque music, text came before harmony and was referred to as the “musical representation of the word.” The composer’s main duty was to have the music conform to the text. Bukofzer explains that Berardi incorrectly implies that the idea of the “representation of words in music” was unfamiliar to the renaissance period. Instead, Bukofzer suggests that “the two periods actually operated under the same principle, but they differed fundamentally in the method of its application. The renaissance favored the emotions of restraint and noble simplicity, the baroque the extreme emotions, ranging from violent pain to exuberant joy.” It should be mentioned that the “affections” that Berardi spoke of was influenced by the philosopher René Descartes in his Les passions de l’âme. In it, Descartes recognizes six different “affections” also referred to as emotions, that desire, joy, sadness, hate, love, and admiration. His work was influential in a time where composers sought to elicit emotions from an audience
through music, thus drama before music. Although Bukofzer emphasizes that the foundation of both the Renaissance and Baroque were similar, and that only the methods used to approach the idea that “art imitates nature” or the “imitation of the ‘nature of the words’” differed, for the young singer it is important to realize that even though there was such a conflict of thought, the importance lies in the distinction that the outer bounds of emotion were tested and given to interpretation in the Baroque era.  

Renaissance music with its *intermedi*, including pastoral interludes and the madrigal depicting dramas on a smaller scale, was based upon Greek tragedy, as was also the case for baroque opera. In contrast to opera, the intermezzo was spoken drama with musical interludes added for dramatic effect, in essence separating the drama and the music. Opera, with the newly invented continuous recitative, combined the drama and the music, effectively placing more importance on drama over the music and became known as *dramma in musica*. The distinction between opera and the intermezzo was a culmination of two contrasting views in respect to the role of music in both productions. One view claimed that only the choruses were sung, while the other claimed that the tragedy in its entirety was sung. Girolamo Mei was an avid advocate of the second view that music was wholly involved in Greek tragedy. In the 1570s, he along with Giovanni Bardi, Vincenzo Galievi, and other like-minded scholars were referred to collectively as the *Camerata of Bardi*. These men discussed at length the manner in which Greek music was performed. They agreed that the Greeks made use of a single melody, either with or without accompaniment, to elicit emotion from the audience. These discussions culminated in Galilei’s *Dialogo della musica et della moderna*. In it, Galilei turns against vocal counterpoint and the use of polyphony in the Italian madrigal and instead states that only the use of a single melody can adequately interpret the true meaning of the text and thereby move the emotions of the audience.
The practice of polyphony should therefore only be used for instruments that do not need to interpret text.  

Many composers experimented with the idea of monody, the use of a single melody to express text. However, it was Jacopo Peri who helped develop a new type of dialogue known as the recitative style or *stile recitativo*. Using the Greek theory, which highlighted the difference between “the ‘continuous’ change of pitch in speech and the intervallic, or ‘diastemic,’ motion in song,” Peri strove to find a medium between the two. This style was meant to enhance the natural movement of speech in a song-like manner over a continuous bass line. In Tim Carter’s translation of Jacopo Peri’s foreword to his opera *Euridice*, Peri explains this new style to the reader:

“…I judged that the ancient Greeks and Romans (who, according to the opinion of many, sang their tragedies throughout on the stage) used a harmony which, going beyond that of ordinary speech, fell so short of the melody of song that it assumed an intermediate form… I set myself to discovering the imitation that is due to these poems, and I considered that that type of voice assigned to singing…could in part speed up and take an intermediate path between the suspended and slow movements of songs and the fluent, rapid ones of speech… And taking note of these manners and those accents that serve us in grief, joy, and in similar states, I made the bass move in time to these, now faster, now slower, according to the emotions, and I held it firm through the dissonances and consonances until the voice of the speaker, passing through various notes, arrived at that which, being intoned in ordinary speech, opens the way to a new harmony.”

In his *Euridice*, Peri believed that he achieved a speech-song similar to that which they claimed existed in ancient Greek music. The development of the recitative in the form of a monody, including the use of arias and madrigals as song forms, helped lay the foundation for the use of these expressive tools that are now associated with the operatic form.

The recitative style was employed between arias to quickly explain changes in feelings or ideas and also evolved into different forms. Along with the appearance of the recitative or *stile rappresentativo* was the arrival of the *basso continuo* also known as thorough bass. The *basso
continuo provides an improvised chordal accompaniment to recitative, thus allowing expression of the text without musical constraints such as that of a strict beat and rhythmic patterns. It consisted of a figured bass line and was realized by the performer, allowing each to add ornamentation and embellishments according to their own preference.\textsuperscript{14} The use of the \textit{basso continuo} to accompany a speech-like song of the dialogue was first referred to as the \textit{recitativo semplice} and later as the \textit{recitativo secco}, dry accompaniment with a free rhythm controlled by accents of the words. This accompaniment is simple and chordal and mostly played by cello and harpsichord. Another form called the \textit{recitativo obbligato} which was later known as \textit{recitativo accompagnato} was developed to help move along the drama using the orchestra with the conductor at the helm. The conductor’s role was to ensure the simultaneous movement of the orchestra in parts where the beat was entirely controlled by music with more melismatic voice parts.\textsuperscript{15}

Arias were sung in various forms in opera, including the use of the popular strophic form, in which all verses were performed with the same music also hinting at the beginnings of the \textit{bel canto} style, the AB form, ABB’, ABA, and ABA’ forms.\textsuperscript{16} The ABA’ form is famously known as the baroque \textit{da capo} aria. The \textit{da capo} was included at the end of part B of the AB form, notifying the singer to return to the beginning of the aria to repeat part A in a notable manner with the addition of ornamentation distinctively different from the first instance, thus known as A’. However, particular manners of taste are followed to ensure that the original melody is not changed to the point of being unrecognizable. At times, it is even appropriate to show restraint and include as little ornamentation as possible but with still enough change to be notably different.
Bukofzer claims that the birth of opera is closely connected to the development of the recitative.\(^\text{17}\) The baroque era can thus lay claim to giving birth to opera and helping it realize the wide array of human emotions capable of being moved through music. The following chart is taken from Bukofzer’s text and summarizes the differences noted by the author between Renaissance and Baroque music, with the fine print that this is a general comparison and does not show transitions between the two that may represent qualities shared by both time periods, thus appearing as two distinctly different eras:\(^\text{18}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RENAISSANCE</th>
<th>BAROQUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One practice, one style</td>
<td>Two practices, three styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrained representation of the words, <em>musica reservata</em> and madrigalism</td>
<td>Affective representation of the words, textual absolutism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All voices equally balanced</td>
<td>Polarity of the outermost voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diatonic melody in small range</td>
<td>Diatonic and chromatic melody in wide range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal counterpoint</td>
<td>Tonal counterpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervalllic harmony, and intervalllic dissonance treatment</td>
<td>Chordal harmony and chordal dissonance treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chords are by-products of the part-writing</td>
<td>Chords are self-contained entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chord progressions are governed by modality</td>
<td>Chord progressions are governed by tonality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evenly flowing rhythm regulated by the <em>tactus</em></td>
<td>Extremes of rhythm, free declamation and mechanical pulsations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No pronounced idioms, voice and instrument are interchangeable</td>
<td>Vocal and instrumental idioms, the idioms are interchangeable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The baroque era is divided into early, middle, and late baroque. The composers of this period are vastly different in their compositions but the comparable qualities binding them together are the lasting traits of the baroque era: the use of the *recitativo* and the *basso continuo*. However, it is important to note that these timelines only pertain to events that occurred in Italy.
The rest of the European continent is said to have experienced the change in periods ten to twenty years later.\textsuperscript{19}

There are stylistic differences distinguishing each period. The early baroque period is characterized by a rejection of polyphony and an acceptance of monody to clearly emphasize the words that were sung to express a wider range of emotions. The middle baroque period saw the beginnings of the Italian \textit{bel canto} style with a clear division between aria and recitative styles. The late baroque period is marked with the use of tonal counterpoint and chord progressions regulated by tonality along with chordal dissonance treatment.\textsuperscript{20}

The history of opera is said to have begun with Jacopo Peri’s \textit{Dafne} written in 1597, most of which has been lost. Peri also wrote \textit{Euridice} the first full opera still in existence. However, Monteverdi’s \textit{Orfeo}, written in 1607, is considered by many to be this genre’s formidable achievement with the use of \textit{stile rappresentativo} and expressions of emotion and passion taking form in strophic arias and instrumental interludes.\textsuperscript{21} This only marks the beginning of the history of opera and the baroque operatic tradition. Countless other composers are responsible for the shifts in style that occurred from the early to the middle and eventually to the late baroque periods, culminating in the operatic form that we now know as baroque opera. By the mid-seventeenth century, opera developed a style that would be sustained for the next two hundred years, consisting of the use of monody, a recognizable style and pattern for arias, and a distinction between the styles of recitative and arias.\textsuperscript{22}

While we will discuss a few crucial composers who were important to the revolution of baroque opera and their achievements that ushered in the practices and attitudes of the times, we cannot fail to first mention the singers who became synonymous with the baroque era, the castrati. The castrati held the audience captive during their own time and have continued to do so
in ours as well. Although there are no castrati in existence today, there are a few endocrinological castrati such as Radu Marian and Javier Medina. Endocrinological castrati are called natural castrati because of their hormone imbalance which bypassed puberty all together allowing them to keep their pure sound. The aforementioned endocrinological castrati do not share identical stories but the end result was a sound that was likened to that of the Baroque castrato. However, even though this natural phenomenon can occur, one must revisit the definition of a Baroque castrato as defined by history. One may argue that the procedure to become a castrato is different than a natural castrato who, we can only guess, has a similar voice. The medicine and hormones involved have never been studied enough to conclude anything with finality as to whether the endocrinological castrato is the same as a Baroque castrato. One thing is for certain, the mystery surrounding the Baroque castrato’s unique sound, in addition to their notorious larger than life persona, have intrigued young singers and opera lovers alike. No discussion of Baroque opera would be complete without a discussion of the Baroque castrati, the singers who dominated the operatic stage of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.
CASTRATO

History

One of the much debated and most mysterious consequences of the Baroque era was the existence or rather re-appearance of the practice of castration, producing the famous castrato. It has been estimated that as many as 100,000 young boys were castrated during the 18th century alone. Families hoped that their children would become the next “primo uomo”, a star of the operatic stage who was cast as the lead similar to operatic divas of our time, also known as the “first men”.

The history of the practice of castration dates back thousands of years to many varied civilizations far beyond the reaches of European theatre. It can be traced back to musical origins of vocal talents in the Imperial Chinese court and in the choirs of Byzantium. The existence of castrato as singers in eunuch choirs dates back to the 4th century in Constantinople in the Christian tradition of eunuch choirs. This practice flourished for about 800 years until Western Christendom invaded and ransacked Constantinople in the fourth crusade. About 400 years later, the castrato re-appeared in the west. These years in the history of the castrato remain a mystery as music historians struggle to understand the sudden resurgence of the castrato. Although it is unknown exactly when and where the castrato made their reappearance, they were present in 1589 singing the upper registers in the choir of St. Peters.

The re-appearance of this practice is perplexing since it was thought to be an abomination condemned by the church under canon law and subject to punishment by excommunication. However, the very practice that was condemned by the church was also embraced and encouraged by its then current practices. According to the teachings of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, his message regarding the role of women in the church was interpreted by leaders as
conveying the message that women had no place working in the church in any capacity. Thus, it was decided that women were excluded from participating in church music, although Paul’s original message was referring to the idea that women should not become leaders of the church. So it began that only men were allowed to sing in church choirs and the practice of castration was allowed to flourish ever so secretively to meet the demand of the high voices needed in these ensembles.  

With the advent of modern opera in the late sixteenth century, it was only natural that the castrati, who were employed and professionally trained by the church, were given roles requiring their expertise in performance using their high voices on the newly created operatic stage.

**Makings of a Castrato**

In 1770, the English music historian Charles Burney traveled throughout Italy to learn more about the practice of castration. What he found was a tradition veiled in secrecy. The operation was against church law and also considered to be against the laws of nature consequently leading to the denial of its very practice in every town he visited. Each province transferred the blame to the other and each was said to be ashamed of its existence.

The “doctors” who performed such an operation were known as “Norcinis.” These unskilled physicians used a special set of instruments specific for this procedure known as “Castratori,” under unsanitary conditions often without any means of disinfection. Talented young, boy singers would undergo this procedure before puberty most often before the tender age of ten.

In the BBC documentary entitled *Castrato*, Countertenor Nicholas Clapton describes the operation and two possible methods that were used. There are three essential instruments: the lancet, the cauterizing iron, and the castratore. In the first method, the castratore, which removes
a child’s entire scrotum in one step, is heated so that the cut and cauterization can happen simultaneously. The instrument itself is reminiscent of a sharp edged walnut cracker, which performs the same type of movement. The second method involves the use of a lancet, similar to a small knife, to make a cut in the scrotum in order to detach the seminal vesicles. The cauterizing iron, which has a rounded head and a small handle bent at a ninety-degree angle, is then used to seal the cut with heat.32

The consequences of removing the organs that were essential to development led to noticeable physical changes. A lack of testosterone led to no break in the voice, lack of a beard, lack of genital development, tall stature, paleness, lack of muscle enlargement, abnormal fat distribution, and the development of an extended chest cavity.33 The effects of castration were many and the success of the operation could not be guaranteed. The misfortune that followed many was that the majority of castrated young boys who were unsuccessful in their attempts to become the “primo uomo” were unable to maintain a normal adult life. Banned by the church from marrying and shunned by everyone else, the stardom that could be obtained on the stage was their only hope and the primary reason why many boys and families willingly participated in such a dangerous practice.34

Rise to Fame

During the baroque era, the castrato was the superstar of the day and as such was surrounded by scandal, intrigue, and multifaceted personalities. With the odds against them at a mere one in a hundred castrated boys achieving and maintaining a beautiful voice, and amongst those even fewer becoming successful,35 international stardom seems the only sufficient reward for their sacrifice and unparalleled vocal training that replaced their entire young adult life. Many have wondered what these singers sounded like and why audiences all over Europe swooned and
worshipped at their feet. Without clear evidence of recordings from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and only the remnants of one of the last known castrato, Alessandro Moreschi, in the early twentieth century, music historians can only imagine what this sound could have been.

Hatzinger et al conclude that the duty of a singing teacher of a castrato was to “combine a sonorous chest-voice with a softer sounding falsetto.”36 Descriptions from that time period compare a castrato’s voice as sounding more male-like while others compare it to the likeness of a deep female voice. One thing is for certain; the mechanics and physical attributes they were known to have of a small child-size larynx and a large adult-male lung capacity gave them great advantages in performing long phrases with vocal agility.37

David Howard, a professor of electronics at York University in Canada describes the mechanics and the reasoning behind the sound of a castrato’s voice in the BBC documentary, *Castrato*. The natural mechanics of the voice in a young boy is due to a small larynx of about 5 millimeters in addition to a small mouth also referred to as a tract, which emits a pure, simple sound. A woman possesses a larynx of approximately 8 millimeters in length, which combined with a larger mouth cavity and vocal tract produces a larger range of colors and sounds, including more vibrato. In comparison, a man’s larynx is about 1.4 centimeters in length resulting in a voice that is an octave lower than a female’s, and with his subsequent larger vocal tract results in a similar range as a female voice and also allows him to sing in falsetto. Singing in falsetto occurs when only the top edges of the vocal cords, contained within the larynx, touch and vibrate producing a thin, high sound. The castrato voice, on the other hand, is not singing in falsetto in the manner of a male singer. Having the larynx of a young boy’s gives it a naturally higher pitch and a range similar to that of a female’s voice. The vocal tract of a male, in addition
to a mature male’s lung capacity gives power and duration to a beautiful sound capable of singing the long passages required in many baroque operas.³⁸

**Famous Castrati**

The operatic world has always had a love affair with the story of Carlo Broschi, known on stage as the famous “Farinelli.” Born in Naples in January 24, 1705, he was trained by Niccolò Porpora who was considered then to be the greatest singing teacher. Farinelli is said to have made his operatic debut by competing and out-singing a renowned trumpet player, a scene retold and reimagined by each storyteller. He was famous for his breath-control, flexibility, phrasing, and technical abilities, and later for his musical expressiveness.³⁹

Farinelli’s appearance was described “as tall as a giant and as thin as a shadow, therefore, if he had grace, it could be only of a sort to be envied by a penguin or a spider.” This awkward appearance, due undoubtedly to the removal of an essential organ, may explain why he was known to perform without much movement or gestures, a trait similar to even the most experienced baroque performer of today. However, in spite of the relative lack of body movement, his voice was described by Mancini, a contemporary critic of the time, as “a marvel because it was so perfect, so powerful, so sonorous, so rich in its extent, both in the high and in the low registers that its equal has never been heard in our times.”⁴⁰

Alessandro Moreschi, on the other hand, was not considered the most famous operatic castrato or even the last operatic castrato. He is, however, the last castrato who remained active in a church choir in Italy until 1912, when Pope Pius X enforced the ban on castration and released all existing castrati from choir membership.⁴¹ The legacy of Alessandro Moreschi lies in recordings made between the years 1902 and 1904, in which he recorded nine selections of
This is the only modern connection remaining to the practice of castration and the last remnant of a castrato voice.

Moreschi’s recording of “Ave Maria” draws many emotions from the listener if listening to a castrato voice for the first time. In Joe K. Law’s article *Alessandro Moreschi Reconsidered: A Castrato on Records*, he quotes the writer Charles de Brosses who said,

“‘One must be accustomed to the voices of castrati in order to enjoy them. Their timbre is as clear and piercing as that of choirboys and much more powerful…. Their voices have always something dry and harsh, quite different from the youthful softness of women; but they are brilliant, light, full of sparkle, very loud, and with a very wide range.’”

My first impression of Moreschi’s voice was confusion. It sounded like a female voice but it could not be called entirely a female voice. The vibrato was barely noticeable and the higher registers were very strong. Kenneth Rosen wrote about this eeriness and confusion from his first experience listening to Moreschi in his piece titled “The Castrato.” In it, he recalls listening to Moreschi perform “Ave Maria” on the public radio “singing with his high notes held overhead as if barbells, an eerie tremolo” and describes having to “leave my chair to walk around my room to keep from turning it off, trying to listen, trying to figure it out.”

This experience is similar to watching the film “Farinelli” for the first time. You see a handsome man open his mouth to sing, and hear a voice that seems displaced and unnatural, but quite fascinating to the modern audience. However, repeated listening of Moreschi’s recording helps you understand the beauty that could have existed in castrato singers of that era. The recordings only provide an “inkling of the sound of the castrato voice,” and together with earlier written accounts of castrati voices should be accepted with a grain of salt.

**Closing Remarks**

In recent times, the roles previously performed by the castrati have been taken over by the countertenor. However, the introduction of the countertenor in the twentieth century is better
stated as a re-introduction of a voice part that had seen its beginnings as early as the Renaissance period. England has always had a continuous presence of the countertenor in their use as part of choral music and also due to the English composer Purcell, who identified himself as a countertenor leading to the composition of many pieces for this voice part. The countertenor made a comeback in the 1940s as a solo voice from the shadows of a choral background thanks to Alfred Deller, an English countertenor, who overcame many prejudices and whose voice mesmerized and caught the attention of the musical world in England and abroad. Currently, the countertenor has found his place in early baroque music and also has expanded his roles into twentieth and twenty-first century operatic music by composers such as Jonathan Dove, Alan Ridout, and Peter Maxwell Davies who wrote roles specific to them.

Countertenors differ from the castrati in that they do not undergo any major physical changes in order to sing in higher ranges of the vocal tessitura. Most countertenors are natural basses or baritones and are described as singing in a falsetto to achieve these high pitches. Depending on technique and the individual’s natural born apparatus, some sing with great power in their falsetto and offer us a momentary view into the operatic role the castrati filled.

Castrati do not exist today, explaining the mystery surrounding their previous tenure. Why do we care about the lives and the voice of the castrati? Because as the “primo uomo” of their time, their singing gave inspiration for a number of composers whose operas are still performed today directly influencing our musical world. In order to understand the manner in which this music is meant to be performed, there needs to be an understanding of the original voice part the composer sought fit to fill the role. The mechanics behind the castrati voice can explain why many of the phrases in baroque operatic music seem difficult to perform, and also why many of the operas seem to be without a lot of movement. This was all due to the existence
of the castrato. The next step is to determine how to re-create authentic baroque opera without having the physical characteristics and same unique vocal quality as the castrato. By incorporating the ideas that were the foundation of the baroque era such as those of expressivity and moving the emotions, along with the styles of the recitative and *da capo* arias, we can reconstruct to the best of our abilities the “baroque” sound in the manner it was meant to be performed. Having an understanding of who castrati were and what they stood for may help you approach baroque music in a whole new light and hopefully with a new perspective.
COMPOSERS OF THE BAROQUE ERA

Jacopo Peri (1561-1633)

Jacopo Peri’s lasting contribution to the history of opera, aside from his compositions, was helping to develop the musical style, the recitative. As one of the scholars who believed that Greek comedies and tragedies were expressed through song in its entirety through the convention of using a single melodic line known as monody, his aim to find an intermediate form between speech and singing led to the development of the recitative. His most famous opera, *Euridice*, used the recitative style and demonstrated the intermediate form that he was trying to accomplish becoming an example of *dramma in musica* that was used as a model by later composers.

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Claudio Monteverdi was a prolific composer of madrigals, operas, and ballets. He published nine books, eight of which were published during his lifetime and the ninth after his death. Monteverdi’s works can trace the musical developments of baroque music and serve as an example of the importance placed on words. In his eighth book, he speaks about different “affections” or emotions mentioned previously by Descartes. According to Monteverdi, although the emotions of wrath, humility or prayer, and temperance have representative forms in music, the emotion of anger has thus far been missing in music. To appropriately convey this emotion, he proposed another style known as *stile concitato*, a style in which “rhythmic subdivisions of repeated notes” could show such feelings as terror and agitation. As historian Bukofzer mentions, “the principle of the *stile concitato* was so simple and so devoid of harmonic interest that only a composer of Monteverdi’s imagination could make measure of it.” Monteverdi’s dramatic style and his contributions to musical development helped shape the direction of baroque music.
One of Monteverdi’s lasting achievements was his opera, *Orfeo*, which was first performed in 1607 and considered by many to be the first operatic triumph. Monteverdi continues the tradition of the *stile rappresentativo* and creates dramatic effects by using sudden key changes and interspersed solo melodies with polyphonic lines. He also used larger orchestras to help emphasize dramatically critical moments. Known for his dramatic flair, he used all the tools at his fingertips to express this drama by combining music and text to create an opera similar to the form we are accustomed to today. During his time, Monteverdi’s *Euridice* was another model composition of *dramma in musica* or *dramma per musica*, and served as a model representative work of the baroque era.

**Jean Baptiste Lully (1632-1687)**

The influence of Italian opera on French music is largely attributed to the influence of Mazarin, an Italian cardinal who served under a French king, and invited many Italian performers to France. At this time, there existed an Italian faction and a French faction, two opposing parties. the latter which “criticized the violence of the singing and ridiculed the realistic accents as convulsions in reference to Italian opera. The Italian opera *Orfeo* written in 1647 by Luigi Rossi was at the center of the French faction’s opposition to Italian opera, giving the French faction fuel with such criticisms directed at its expenditures, which were great and procured via taxation of the French people, and also the dislike of castrati by the French. The ballets interspersed in *Orfeo* were written and performed by Lully and were said to be more popular than the opera itself.

Jean Baptiste Lully had a multifaceted musical career being himself, a violinist, composer, dancer, and Italian comedian. Born as a Florentine, his musical education was mostly French rather than Italian. Lully for a time appeased the Italian faction in court by passing his music as
more Italian, but after the death of Mazarin in 1661, his music became more French. He incorporated the Italian proclivity for drama into the French style of recitative. His era of opera composition known as tragédie lyrique, saw an abundance of music to the amount of an opera a year starting in 1673 with the collaboration of Jean-Phillip Quinault, a famous librettist.\textsuperscript{55}

The Lully’s recitative took on a style distinct from the Italian recitative due to the innate differences in accent and rhythms of the French language. The Italian recitative maintained a natural flow of the text and gave the singer freedom of interpretation. Lully’s recitative was executed by means of a stylized music, which helped intensify the variety of accents inherent to French speech. The rhythmic pattern of the recitative was of main importance with a change in meter being used whenever appropriate to fit the verse, thus changing meter from 4/4 to 2/2 to 3/2 and so on. This change in meter was meant to help the singer perform the recitative in a “lively and intense” manner without the “danger of monotony”. According to Bukofzer, “While the Italians traced the words primarily by the melodic curve, leaving the rhythm to the singer, the French directed their main attention to the rhythmic patterns giving only small attention to the melody.”\textsuperscript{56} This difference in composition of the recitative is apparent when comparing a recitative written by Handel and Lully. Handel’s recitatives form a more melodious line by using the meaning of the text to draw a melodic line, while those of Lully have a rhythmic flow that help it move without it being dull and repetitive.

Both Italian and French recitative adopted a style to complement their language to help create a natural sound to emphasize the text in the style of Baroque opera. Lully’s contribution was to help conform opera dominated in the Italian style to that of a distinct French style with a use of rhythmic patterns that became idiosyncratically French. Both forms flow so well to their own language that putting their distinction into words is quite difficult, but what we cannot
describe in words can be easily heard as two clear styles of recitative so naturally moving to the text that they are unmistakably under the umbrella of the style of Baroque opera.

Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787)

Gluck was born in Bavaria and wrote operas in the Italian style until the reformation movement in the 1750s. Deeply influenced by the ideas of the reformation, Gluck sought to return opera to its “true function” - serving the text and emotions as in the Baroque spirit and to the development of the plot. Like other reformers, Gluck felt that the true function of opera had become overrun with the rampant use of the da capo aria and its over embellishment with ornaments added by singers solely for the purpose of showing off skill and technique than for serving the purpose of the text. Gluck believed that a “greater part of my task was to seek a beautiful simplicity, and…avoided a display of difficulty at the expense of clarity.” There is no better example than Gluck’s opera Orfeo and the famous aria Che faró senza Euridice. The aria is sung with little ornamentation and thus the simplicity of the music gives great attention to the text, serving the “true function” of opera as believed by the reformers. His simplicity was like a breath of fresh air for opera in a time when ornamentation and showing off of technique was widely evident in the music of other composers.57

George Frederic Handel (1685-1759)

Handel was renown during his lifetime and even after his death, an achievement held by few contemporaries of his time. He was internationally known and traveled easily between countries speaking English, Italian, and German. Although he was German born, his operatic roots were developed in Italy explaining his characteristic Italian operatic style of writing. His accomplishments in the realm of opera include Agrippina (1709), Rinaldo (1711), Radamisto (1720), Ottone (1723), Giulio Cesare (1724), Rodelinda (1725), Admeto (1727), Orlando (1733),
Alcina (1735), and Serse (1738) among others. Most of these operas and his other musical achievements were made while living in London, specifically for the English audience. He became a naturalized citizen of England in 1726, and hence became identified with English music and traditions.  

Handel’s time in Italy was likely to be his most definitive. It helped shape his operatic style of writing. Most presumably having met some of the most influential composers of the time such as Vivaldi and Scarlatti, Handel, according to Winton Dean, spent this time learning “the command of a rich, free, and varied melodic style, long-breathed but rhythmically flexible, which distinguished all his later music” with which “he won absolute mastery of the technique of writing for the voice.” Handel learned the cantabile style of writing unique to the Italian bel canto type of song. Handel’s arias were also strongly influenced by dance music which Bukofzer divides into four types: (1) the siciliano when representing conflicting inner thought and pastoral emotions; (2) slow flowing bel canto cantilena characterized by the triple meter; (3) allegro arias for emotions describing nervous, tense excitement and victory using a repeating rhythmic phrase; and (4) the melody in the form of a simple arietta.

Handel wrote using the underlying principles of opera seria: the da capo aria and the recitative. His genius was being able to use these practices in unconventional ways for character development within the confines of the recitative alternating with the da capo aria. While the period in which he composed was marked by the use of recitativo secco, Handel wrote recitative in the style of the seventeenth century recitativo semplice in which the recitative text was expressively set to music in contrast to the eighteenth century where recitative was characterized by being briskly sung. According to Buelow, his most impressive dramatic moments occurred
in recitative. Handel uses the *da capo* aria to his advantage, fully exploiting it for its dramatic and musical capacity. The details of how this works will be discussed in later chapters.

**Commentary**

The choice to use *recitativo secco* versus *recitativo semplice*, writing music in the *cantabile* style, or even the choice to express anger using *stile concitato* were pioneering achievements of these composers and many others. Without their lasting contributions, opera, in the form as we know it would not be able to exist today. The development of the recitative was a major advancement in the history of opera and is one of the most difficult styles to master. It may help singers to appreciate that it is the text that is important and that the accompaniment also known as the *basso continuo* was meant to give freedom to the singer. It was not only used in recitative but found its way into the music throughout an opera. *Dramma in musica* was the foundation of opera, although in later years the music took precedence over the drama in the era of romanticism.

The achievements of Handel cannot be overlooked. His ability to use recitative and the *da capo* aria to the benefit of drama set in motion a style that we have come to know as the epitome of the *da capo* aria. If anyone wants to study the *da capo* aria, there is no need to look further than at Handel’s operas. The essence of the baroque period in emotionally compelling the audience to live in the moment of the drama is captured in Handel’s recitatives and his arias. When listening to his arias such as *Piangerò la sorte mia* sung by divas such as Monserrat Caballe, the simplicity of his melodic line and an orchestration that does not overpower the singer but instead simply moves with the melody casts a spell on the audience. The audience is then capable of feeling the intense sadness and loss that Cleopatra felt herself. That is opera at its finest and is made possible only by the influences of all those composers, philosophers, and
musicians before him. Being able to understand and appreciate an art form such as opera is being able to understand and appreciate its history and beginnings.
Performance Practice of Baroque Opera

Singing Style: Recitative, Aria, Ornamentation, Vibrato

“Not every reader, I hope, will take this evidence in quite the same way, for baroque music was never meant to be taken in quite the same way, and we shall not succeed today by being rigid and impersonal. But in providing the basic information, I hope to have given readers the means by which their own understanding and interpretation of the music may fall within the broad boundaries of baroque style and performance.”

-Robert Donington

Baroque opera’s unique characteristic, and one that presents a great challenge to many singers, is the freedom it extends to the performer. In this day and age where we are taught to follow every note, rhythm, and marking written on the music score, it is often more daunting to be given so much liberty in interpreting music. A da capo aria and recitative in the baroque style should never be strictly sung the way it is written on the page. Especially the da capo aria which intuitively suggests that changes need to and must be made. But how do you know what is appropriate and acceptable when most scores do not give you any idea of the type of ornamentations that existed during that time period?

Robert Donington calls this “‘[being] your own editor.’” The first step is to obtain a copy of the music printed in its most original form, the earliest prints that you can find. Quite similar to jazz music and its improvisational style, the bare bone of the baroque score requires the performer to use their skill and judgment to interpret it. The melodic line in both the recitative and aria is often left unornamented and the singer must use their good judgment and fill it with whatever ornamentation they deem appropriate. Similarly, the accompanist is given a bass line, also known as the basso continuo or thoroughbass, which they are expected to realize and thus create their own version of the accompaniment. This shared responsibility for both the
singer and accompanist is required in order to come together to create Baroque music. Some
more recent editions will contain recommended accompaniment parts along with ornamentation
that is considered important or essential to the piece. However, this is only a recommended
interpretation made by an editor and it is the singer’s or accompanist’s personal responsibility to
decide what is considered opinion and what is considered essential. The Baroque aria is often
preceded by a recitative with one complementing the other and helping to tell the story. They are
two distinguishing styles and should be approached differently. Thus, we will first begin with a
discussion of the recitative.

Recitative

The foundation of opera is the invention of the *stile recitativo*. With the recitative, the
ideas of the Camerati thinkers could come to life and the belief that all Greek drama was sung in
its entirety could be realized. It is essentially *dramma in musica*. Drama and text can come to life
and move the emotions through music in a speech-like song. The primary difference between the
*stile recitativo* and the *aria* is the dependence on the beat; the first is open to interpretation
essentially free from the beat, while the latter is closed and dependent on the beat. In the words
of Monteverdi “it is sung to the time of the heart’s feeling, and not to that of the hand.” Placing
importance on the effects of the text, set to continuous music on the emotion is the entire goal.

Early baroque recitative is characterized as being more melodious thus more similar to
the aria, whereas later baroque recitatives were less so and became more contrasted from the
aria. Regardless of the period in the baroque era in which a recitative was composed, the first
step to studying it is to master the text and to learn it as one would prepare a speech. Written text
existed before text was put to music. Therefore, the diction, pronunciation, grammar, inflection
of the language the text is written in requires careful study in order to correctly interpret the
language into sung words. It is up to the singer’s personal interpretation to bring to life the character and the words, which is the main reason they are afforded the luxury of being free of the beat and the baton.

The recitative was sung in a monadic line so that the text could be emphasized and heard above the music. However, often times it is performed in such a way that most audiences might find this important aspect of opera to be tedious and mundane. The luxury of being free of the beat and being given the freedom of interpretation has often been ignored, although this is the foundation of the recitative and baroque opera. Winton Dean emphasizes this in his piece *The Performance of Recitative in Late Baroque Opera*, that the recitative “must never be sung in strict time…[it should] be fluid and flexible, faster or slower according to the sense of the words…there should be no regular pulse.” It should never be sung using a full voice and should be performed *parlando*. This allows the text to be delivered more clearly and differentiates it from the performances of arias. Modern singers are trained to follow the written markings without deviating from it, but the baroque recitative loses its style if performed in strict time. A dramatically charged recitative with a mastery of the language can enliven the experience for both the audience and the singer.

**Aria**

On the other hand, the aria is dependent on the beat and its primary focus is the music. During the latter half of the seventeenth century, more and more composers wrote arias in the *da capo* form. This ABA form of composition was one in which the second A form was ornamented and embellished. It may be more correct to notate the form as ABA’. In the eighteenth century, the *da capo* form was used to display the vocal abilities and the agility of famous singers. They became more ornate, longer, and more difficult in order to showcase a singer's musical and vocal
skills. Music historian, Charles Burney, is said to have commented that ‘Farinelli’s ornamental display ‘which excited such astonishment in 1734, would be hardly thought sufficiently brilliant in 1788 for a third rate singer at the opera,” showing the need for singers to continually outmaneuver and out sing their colleagues in order to keep captivating audiences.70

Ornamentation

Ornamentation in baroque opera is used as a tool for expressiveness, to move the emotions, and to accentuate the text. The following are examples of different types of ornamentation employed in operatic arias and to an extent in baroque recitative, and include those compiled by Martha Elliott and Robert Donington.

Elliott separates ornamentation into two categories known as graces and diminutions. Graces are small decorations of the melody that do not change it in any substantial way, including techniques such as trills, gruppi, trillos, messe di voce, and esclamazioni. Diminutions, also called divisions, can significantly alter the melody through the subdivision of longer notes by lining them with fast rhythmic notes. 71 This is what is commonly known as coloratura. The following tables summarize the types of ornaments used in the early and late baroque era:
### Early Baroque Ornamentation

| **Disposizione and Divisions** | Also known as *disposizione di voce* this involves passages with rapidly moving notes, also referred to as runs. While some singers are naturally good at fast passages, others can master this technique with slow practice and by gradually increasing the speed. It should be performed evenly and clearly. Avoid separating each note with an “h” sound. These divisions should not be overused. They are most appropriately placed on long syllables and at cadences. If they cannot be performed well, they should be avoided. |
| **Trills or Trillo or Tremolo** | According to the practices of the early baroque era, this type of trill refers to the re-articulation of a single note using differing speeds. The use of the throat for re-articulation can be used for a lively effect and the use of the diaphragm can be used for agony and grief. |
| **Gruppo** | The gruppo refers to the modern day trill of wavering quickly between two different pitches either a whole step or half step apart. However, if done improperly a trill or gruppo could be confused for a natural vibrato. |
| **L’intonazione or Intonation** | Also referred to as voice tuning or *cercar della nota* (note searching), this is when the singer starts an interval of a third or a fourth below the desired note and gently glides up to it. This can be done quickly or more hesitantly by holding the first few notes longer than the rest. |
| **Esclamazione and Messa di voce** | Singing an *esclamazione* can be done by first singing softly and then gradually increasing in loudness. The *messa di voce* is starting a note on a crescendo and then gradually into a decrescendo to shape the note. The subtle difference between the *esclamazione* and *messa di voce* is the decrescendo, which is characteristic of the latter. |
| **Sprezzatura or Rubato** | *Sprezzatura* or rubato allows a singer to take time in music, both in arias and recitativo for expression of meaningful words and phrases. Most times, the accompaniment maintains a steady tempo while the singer speeds up or down the music and words. |
Later Baroque Ornamentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appoggiaturas</th>
<th>It is sung by leaning on another note adding dissonance before resolving the tension to the intended note. It usually occurs on a strong beat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trills</td>
<td>The trill of later baroque music was used at major cadences, minor cadences, and to decorate melodies. The most common trill consisted of starting on an upper note above the primary note and alternating rapidly between the two until finally resolving onto the primary note.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisions and Improvised Variations</td>
<td>The divisions and improvised variations are at the heart of the da capo section in da capo arias. The alterations made to the melody must be harmonically fitting to the music and must follow good voice leading rules. Diminution or divisions can generally be used in slower arias and improvised variations can be used in fast arias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadenzas</td>
<td>The important cadences in an aria, such as the last cadence of the first section, are performed with embellishments followed by a small trill before completing the cadence. These embellishments are known as cadenzas. Although the accompaniment should not stop playing at cadenzas completely, this was often the case because embellishments became more and more elaborate thus becoming elongated. The added ornaments should suit the character and also be similar to material used previously in the aria. Cadenzas should be performed in one breath.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously mentioned by Elliott, the appoggiatura means to lean on another note and the approach to the main note can be either from above or from below either in a stepwise motion or by a leap, although the leap usually occurs from below at an interval of a fourth found almost entirely in recitative. The appoggiatura is used both in arias and in recitatives. Dean considers it a melodic ornament in arias, whereas in recitative it is a necessity often placed at cadences between the dominant and the tonic or between a third and the tonic. Shorter appoggiaturas change the harmony less significantly while longer appoggiaturas are generally
considered more expressive but have a greater effect on the harmony. Late baroque music is said to favor the longer appoggiatura while the appoggiaturas in early baroque music were of a somewhat shorter length.\textsuperscript{76}

There are two different ways in which appoggiaturas may be applied in recitatives:

(1) When approaching intervals of a fourth, the appoggiatura may be applied depending on whether the main note is a single note or a doubled note:

a. In the case of a single main note, the arrival of the main note is delayed by the appoggiatura taking half of the value of the main note.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, in the following example\textsuperscript{78} the main note is the C-sharp with a value of a quarter note but the appoggiatura assumes half of the value and adds a D-natural a half step above the original note with a value of an eighth note.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example1.png}
\caption{Example of a single main note.}
\end{figure}

b. In the case of a repeated main note, the appoggiatura changes the first note.\textsuperscript{79} Thus, in the following example\textsuperscript{80}, the first of the doubled G-sharp with the value of an eighth note is replaced by an A-natural and then arrives on the main note on the second G sharp.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2.png}
\caption{Example of a repeated main note.}
\end{figure}
(2) When approaching intervals of a third, the appoggiatura takes the middle note of the interval and fills it in similarly in cases of the single note and the doubled note as previously mentioned in cases of an interval of a fourth.

In both instances, the appoggiatura assumes half the value of the main note whether it is single or double and also in the process becomes accented. The double appoggiatura is formed by approaching the main note from above and below usually with neighboring notes of single intervals. It becomes accented and leans when occurring on the beat and is unaccented and does not lean when occurring before the beat. The passing appoggiatura occurs between the beats as an unaccented passing note. When applying appoggiaturas in music, the harmony surrounding it must be studied. The dissonance and consonance of a note must be considered when deciding on the length of the appoggiatura. For example, if a dissonant main note becomes a consonant note when the appoggiatura is applied then remaining on the appoggiatura for an extended amount of time is not recommended. Appoggiaturas on the beat are stronger and accented and have a larger affect on the harmony, while those not on the beat are not leaned on or accented. The use of the appoggiatura in recitative is necessary. However, there are no strict rules but rather recommendations that should be applied according to each singer’s own discretion.

The slide and the tirata are often confused for the other and the differences are almost imperceptible. While both utilize an ascent or descent using diatonic or chromatic intervals, the slide is shorter in length and the tirata is longer in length. Similar to appoggiaturas, slides used as
ornaments are stronger when occurring on the beat and less so when occurring before the beat. Depending on the music and the emphasis placed on the words, the singer can choose to slide before or on the beat. The rhythm and value of the slide can elongate the beginning or the end of the slide or can be equally dispersed throughout the slide depending on the desired emotional effect.  

Example of a slide:

The acciaccatura occurs mostly in instrumental music, such as the harpsichord. The simultaneous acciaccatura occurs when the main note is played simultaneously with an adjacent note creating dissonance but which is quickly released. The passing acciaccatura occurs between two main notes such as those found in a chord, and are played similarly to arpeggios with the main notes held out to its full value and the passing notes being played and then quickly released. Accompansists use the second type of acciaccatura frequently during recitatives.

The definition of a trill is to play two notes quickly by alternating between the two. The main note is considered the bottom note while the auxiliary or extra note is usually directly above it by a half or whole step. There are two functions that trills serve: (1) as an embellishment; and (2) to change the harmony for an intense effect. In the first function, it behaves more as a means of free ornamentation and thus is used flexibly by starting on either the note above or below the main note. The second function of the trill is less flexible. Music composed in the second half of the baroque period used what is known as the cadential trill. Having a harmonic function, cadential trills were placed as convention prior to an authentic cadence. These start on the note above the main note and are placed on the beat, subsequently resolving to the main note.
This upper note trill should lend a feeling of intensification of the harmony and if that is not the case should not be used.\textsuperscript{86} The use of trills is another necessity when performing baroque music. The standard baroque trill: starts on the beat, it is accented, should be executed confidently, and it should intensify the harmony by starting on the upper note and resolving to the main, lower note.

The mordent is a type of free ornamentation comparable to a half-trill. It serves a rhythmic function, begins on a main note and wavers between it and the note below, occurs on the beat, it is normally seen short in length, and its beginning and ending takes only the value of the main note and does not extend it.\textsuperscript{87} The following is an example of a mordent:

- Example of a mordent:

The following chart is a comparison between the trill and the mordent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baroque Trill (specifically the cadential trill)</th>
<th>Mordent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Begins on the upper note and alternates with the main note</td>
<td>• Begins on the main note and alternates with the note below it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be longer in length</td>
<td>• Short in length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Serves a harmonic function by intensifying the harmony</td>
<td>• Serves a rhythmic function by sharpening the rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Begins on the beat</td>
<td>• Begins on the beat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Upper note may be accented or extended in value</td>
<td>• Everything occurs within the noted value of the main note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are half trills and continuous trills, the main differences being time length</td>
<td>• No harmonic function</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The turn is a specific ornament in which the main note is preceded by either an upper or lower note then followed by a note of opposite direction from the previous. The standard turn describes a turn starting on the upper note and the inverted turn describes a start on the bottom note. Turns may occur on the beat and are accented serving a harmonic function or are between
beats and are unaccented serving a melodic function. They are described as equal or unequal depending on the rhythmic variation or lack of when performing the turn. In general, the most common turns are unaccented, standard, and equal in character. Traditionally turns consist of four notes, but a start on the main note before the conventional four-note turn can result in a five-note turn that has a melodic function.\textsuperscript{88}

Compound ornaments are formed when more than two ornaments are performed in succession. This can occur with numerous variations of the ornaments that were previously mentioned, but two of the most used compound ornaments occur between mordents and appoggiaturas and between trills and other ornamentation.\textsuperscript{89}

The following include a few of Donington’s suggestions for free ornamentation:\textsuperscript{90}

- Embellishments added to vocal lines must always take into consideration the meaning of the text: ornaments should be added to longer syllables; ornaments should not be added to the final syllable of a word; the next to last note is usually a good place to add ornamentation; ornaments should not be used excessively in passionate segments of music.
- Embellishments should not be ornate for the sake of being ornate but should have purpose and meaning that adds to the overall expression of the text.
- Ornaments should be added sparingly if at all to the first section of a \textit{da capo} aria. The reprise of the first section can include additional improvised variations thought appropriate by the singer. Ornaments added to the reprise of the first section should be added without significantly changing the original melody.

Ornaments had a specific purpose in baroque music. They were used as tools for expressiveness. Knowing the workings of each ornament individually will help when singing arias in the \textit{da capo} style and in baroque recitative. As previously mentioned, such ornaments as the appoggiatura are requisites essential to recitative and the addition of various combination of ornaments into the \textit{da capo} section of a \textit{da capo} aria is not only recommended but expected.
Vibrato

The controversial debate on vibrato appears to have been and still remains a topic of discussion for critics and singers alike. It is obvious that there is a clear distinction to the vibrato used to sing Verdi in comparison to that used to sing Handel. It appears, then, that the question is not about the use or lack of vibrato, which many consider a natural quality of the voice, but instead shifts the debate to how much vibrato is presumed to be appropriate. According to Donington, the vibrato used should not change the original pitch and be produced only to the point of “producing no uncertainty about the harmony.”91 Vibrato can be used as a means to ornament the music for the expressive needs of the music. However, it is often mentioned that long notes should be devoid of excessive vibrato and should be held using a clean, pure sound. The accompaniment and the basic chordal structures should be studied to determine the proximity of the vocal line to the chord. If there is dissonance, attempts should be made to avoid excessively large or fast vibratos so there is no obstruction to the sound of the chord.

Seventeenth century baroque music was often performed in smaller venues and with instruments that produced softer sounds. Similarly, the baroque singer was expected to sing sweetly in an unforced tone.92 This standard applied in the seventeenth century along with considerations of harmony should serve as a guide when determining the appropriate placement of vibrato.

The largest contribution to the difference between modern vibrato and baroque vibrato is directly related to performance practices. Performance halls built today are larger, and singers are accompanied by orchestras consisting of a greater number of musicians with instruments that have often evolved to emit a louder sound contributing to an overall higher level of sound. Singers therefore have to compensate by singing more loudly and often fight to be heard. Singing loudly is directly related to vibrato production. In Frederick K. Gable’s article Observations
concerning Baroque and Modern Vibrato, he writes of authors in the baroque era cautioning against singing too loudly for this very reason. Gable refers to Greta Moens-Haenen’s study on vibrato in the baroque period leading to the following conclusions about vocal vibrato in the baroque era: (1) vibrato was used as a means to ornament the music for expressive effects; and (2) the natural vibrato of the day was far narrower and inconspicuous than modern vibrato measuring less than half a step in distance from the main note.93 The narrow vibrato presumed to have been used in the baroque period allowed for the use of vibrato as an ornament because a distinction between different types of vibrato could be heard. For example, the audience could recognize the difference from a particular singer’s normal vibrato from that used to form trills and ornament the music using such techniques as messa di voce, when the singer gradually crescendos and decrescendos on the same note as a means of expressiveness adding more vibrato as he or she gets louder. In Gable’s opinion “this kind of evidence indicates that modern string or vocal vibrato as part of basic tone production is far too wide for proper (dare I say ‘authentic’) use in baroque music.”94 The best early music singers of today are able to control the pitch and vibrato of their voice. In today’s performances of early baroque music, not singing with a vibrato can actually serve as a tool of expressiveness and in the right moments can create great drama.
Acting, Gestures, and Costumes

There was a time when I believed that singing could be mastered by focusing mostly on technique. I thought that vocal agility and beauty were all that were needed to bring characters to life and to convey the deeper meaning of the music to the audience. This idea is quickly crushed the first moment you stand in front of an audience and awkwardly stand, suddenly becoming aware of every movement or lack of movement made by your arms, hands, fingers, and even your legs. This is an experience that I will never forget. Acting and gestures are problematic for the most virtuosic of singers. Do you lift your hands at this point in the music? One hand or both hands? Do you plant your feet or do you move them? When should they be moved? These most basic instincts become not so instinctive when it comes to singing and acting.

The artful combination of sung text and gesturing to form a complete performance has been an area of critique in the current generation and also in the early and late baroque periods. The early baroque was built upon the foundation that importance is placed more on the drama and the text and that music was secondary to it. As mentioned, it was called *dramma in musica*. The whole idea was to emotionally sway the audience into feeling what the character was feeling. Thus, the singer should also be an actor and as such, a great orator. Orators are known to combine great diction and emphasize good taste in word inflections to recreate the drama of the text. The invention of the form *stile recitativo* made this possible in the baroque era.

The difficulties in combining great acting and great singing, the ideals which singers strive to attain are only achieved rarely. The opera singers primary concern must be to sing beautifully with good breath support and intonation, but needs to go a step further and also sing expressively with good acting skills and diction to relay the text. These were the requirements for an early baroque opera singer. The composer Gagliano even recommended using a double that
could do the acting so that the original could sing in instances when it became too tiring to succeed in both. Monteverdi expected that there be substantial time dedicated to rehearsals in order to ensure that the music and drama, including the action, were done in perfect harmony. Great importance was placed on blending together acting and singing in the early baroque opera often to the extent that composers would give specific directions for the types of movement that they desired. According to Monteverdi, the singer should “‘master the appropriate gestures completely’” and “‘be bold in the imitation of the music, the actions, and the changes of time.’”

The Italian critiques remaining from the seventeenth century stress that acting should be above all natural and able to sway the emotions, a resounding theme throughout the baroque era. Although early baroque sought to maintain these principles, later baroque is characterized by the extravagance of vocal technique display, which we commonly think of today as being idiosyncratically baroque. This attention to vocal agility took a toll on operatic acting, essentially resulting in a shift in practice leaving the audience and critics of the time wanting more. It could be blamed on the vanity of the singers and of the prevalence of the castrati who were known to have great vocal technique but awkward bodies. Their uncontrollable physical characteristics may be the reason for the florid vocal lines that we see today.

Bridging the practices of operatic singing in the early and late baroque periods is a continuing practice. Mancini, an author and critic of the late eighteenth century, offers this advice: study languages and grammar, study history of each character, read poetry aloud, listen to great orators, study acting, and study recitative in its spoken form. Since recitative can be thought of as an extension of the text, and since its definition is a speech song like form, it is only appropriate that study of the text in its spoken form is done first. Sung recitative contains in itself much of the shifts in drama and can only be expressed if the singer understands the
language, the meaning and the inflections of the words. Considerable study and attention should
be given to the text in order to understand the character and language, and before the addition of
gestures so as to perform in a natural fashion. The bulk of the responsibility is placed upon the
singer to cultivate and refine their acting skills. They must learn to act naturally through
observation, personal practice, and by seeking out more advanced singers to use as examples of a
complete performance.\textsuperscript{97}

The French definition of the word gesture involves action with the hand according to the
words being spoken. The art of rhetoric encompasses the act of gesturing. Rhetoric was divided
into five parts in the seventeenth century: (1) invention (\textit{inventio}); (2) arrangement (\textit{dispositio});
(3) style (\textit{elocutio}); (4) memory (\textit{memoria}); and (5) delivery (\textit{actio}). Gesturing is part of the
delivery of rhetoric, often viewed as a fundamental element in oration.\textsuperscript{98}

There are many ways to gesture, but only one correct way; there must be a correlation
between the words being spoken and the gesture being done in order for the singer to affect the
emotions of the audience. The French style of acting was more systematic and standardized.
According to Powell, most experts recognized that the right hand was mainly used for gesturing,
and that it should be done in the area between the eyes and the lower stomach. Gesturing does
not stop at the right hand but encompasses the whole body, from the posture, the head, eyes, and
eyebrows. A lifting of the eyebrow and a tilt of the head can do just as much when done at the
right moment as a movement of the arm and hands. Charles Le Brun, a renowned French
sculptor, left his mark on the correct representation of facial expressions according to each
different human emotion such as compassion, anger, sadness, acute grief, hatred, anger mixed
with rage, etc. In his illustrations, importance was placed on the eyes. Powell further mentions
that “authentic seventeenth-century gesture should rightly be considered an extension of Baroque
performance-practice." Natural movement is a necessity to effectively communicate emotions through sung text.

Gestures involving the hands, arms, and feet are especially difficult to master. The following is a list of general rules that govern the appropriate use of specific gestures in the hands and fingers, placement of arms, and in the placement of feet:

1. In reference to the hands and fingers there are two general hand positions: the palm facing up or the palm facing down. The fingers may be clenched into a fist to show anger or spread when surprised. The index finger may be extended but the rest of the digits should gracefully be curved toward the palm. The fingers should move naturally without being held in the same position. Fingers should always look delicate and slightly bent in a natural manner.

2. Specific rules also govern the placement of the arms. As mentioned, the hands should not be raised above the eyes or below the waist since it is not aesthetically pleasing. This rule is repeated emphasized by many different teachers and books due to the fact that raising the hands above the eyes and below the level of the waist appears to be a natural instinct for many singers and actors. The acceptable distance of the arm from the body is about six inches but the arms should never be so close as to touch the body leaving only the hands to do the acting. Leaving distinction between the forearm and the upper arm with a slight bend at the elbow also creates better posture and is more pleasing to look at. When moving one arm from one side of the body to the opposite side, it should not extend further than the opposite arm. The movement is awkward and ungraceful.

3. Feet placement also followed very specific rules: the weight of the body should be shifted more onto one foot and never should have equal weight in both feet; they should be
placed with toes turned out much like the stance of a dancer. The opposite hand and foot should be placed forward when gesturing. For example the right hand and the left foot should be forward when making gestures.  

According to Geoffroy, in reference to good gesturing, “the actor must never forget grace, even in moments of the greatest abandon.”  

As previously mentioned, facial expressions are as essential as gestures in terms of expressing some emotions and can elicit the same effect. This includes weeping as a gesture, which when singing is done more with the face and eyes than with actual tears. The emotions of terror, anger, and surprise can be expressed using the eyes and eyebrows and by changing the shape of the mouth. Aversion and refusal can also be expressed by pushing away with the hands and turning the head slightly to the opposite direction, the movement of the entire head becoming in itself a gesture.

As taken from Dene Barnett’s *The Art of Gesture: The practices and principles of 18th century acting*, the following is a summary in the authors words on style in gesture:

A SUMMARY OF STYLE IN GESTURE

Good style in the art of gesture involved the following elements:

1. pictorial beauty and grace in gesture and posture, even in the portrayal of violent passion and death,
2. a nobility to match the kings and heroes, the eternal truths and the majestic themes of classical tragedy,
3. actions and gestures which were elevated and devoid of colloquial gestures; they must be idealized and without too much detail from real life, in order to match the idealized characters, and the idealized stories, costumes, scenery and verse,
4. gestures which were clear in meaning (except for special effects such as irony) and always precise in timing, to match the clear and articulate verse being declaimed,
5. variety in the gestures used. Gestures of emphasis, for example, usually made with a small downward movement, should sometimes be made sideways and sometimes upwards, sometimes with the hand and at other times with eyes, finger or head.
6. art, and civilized life, were full of ornamentation and graceful ceremony; the gestures of the actor should often celebrate an event on stage, or a rich phrase being declaimed, with ceremonious ornament and elegant flourishes,
7. the actor should display a certain air of repose, and aristocratic ease, even in moments of passion and movement.

Costumes are essential when bringing a performance to life especially in a time period different from our own. As musicians and singers, we can attest to the fact that costumes transform us and help us become our character. A queen is not a queen until she is wearing her tiara and a perfectly fitting corset gown, studded with gems and rhinestones. However, the style of the opera along with the costumes must have a deeper meaning pertaining to the overall story. According to famed costumer Bonnie Kruger in a personal email correspondence, she exclaims that “what [I] dislike is when an opera style looks like it has been imposed on an opera for no apparent reason…If I can understand the purpose and the reason the styles have been changed, I usually enjoy them.” A director, conductor, producer, singer, and the designer may come to the drawing board with different ideas that need to be consolidated to make sure that everyone is appeased. Although many times the director, conductor, and producer may have a larger influence in final decisions, the singer needs to find meaning in these choices in order to genuinely represent the character no matter the look of the costume.
Performance Halls and Stage Equipment

Acoustics matter a great deal to a singer. It is not a simple matter of how the audience perceives the sound but it has to do with the comfort level a performance space affords a performer. Some rooms are dry and the sound feels as if it immediately dies away as soon as the singer opens their mouth. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the singer is hit with constant feedback making it difficult for them to hear the sound that they are making. There is little argument that opera houses today are built differently than those centuries ago. We also know that opera houses differed depending on their location and country as well.

The original baroque opera house is said to be an acoustical combination of a small recital hall with elements characteristic of a modern opera house. In Edwards and Kahn’s *Acoustics of a Baroque Opera House*, the main difference between the acoustics of an original baroque opera house and an opera house today is the proscenium arch in the former along with the audience seating or orchestra pit replacing the forestage of the proscenium in the latter. The proscenium arch provided sidewalls from which sound could reflect, and because the stage was raised above the main floor, sound projection was very good no matter where the singer was placed on stage. The orchestra was placed on ground level behind a pit wall rather than in a deep pit, which allowed the sound to flow above the main floor audience.\(^{108}\)

In an acoustics study of a few famous 18\(^{th}\) century opera houses by Bassuet, the curved and elongated shape of the original baroque opera houses along with a smaller proscenium resulted in smaller houses that made singing more comfortable for the singer. The following chart compares a few characteristics of these original opera houses and modern opera houses:
Modern Opera Houses

- Houses are larger.
- Shape is more circular.
- Proscenium is larger.
- Perspective scenery effects are not utilized.
- Deep orchestra pits are used.

Baroque Era Opera Houses

- Houses were smaller in size.
- Shape was more elongated.
- Proscenium was smaller.
- Perspective scenery effects were utilized.
- Orchestra pits did not exist, instead they were placed on the ground floor in front of the stage behind a pit wall.

The location of the orchestra pit in baroque opera houses acoustically helped the orchestra project their sound and was thought to be louder than the acoustics of the orchestra pit in modern opera houses. However, this was to accommodate the smaller sound output of the baroque instruments used in that time period. The singers did not have to sing as loudly as they did in larger houses and this may have contributed to the vocal agility and flexibility characteristic of baroque singers.

Perspective scenery was used in baroque opera houses and refers to a visual trick in which a flat surface can resemble a three-dimensional space making it appear real and giving it a feeling of distance. This was part of what Bassuet refers to as a “‘shutter and groove’ scenery system that consists of regularly spaced slots on a raked-floor stage and painted scenery on flats that move together in a synchronized manner.” Other stage equipment used included flying machines for the many mythical and extravagant characters in operas and instruments used to imitate sounds such as rain and thunder. The stage equipment and materials used to make scenery were made mostly of canvas, wood, and ropes resulting in very low amounts of sound absorption which aided sound production and thus created better acoustics for the opera house.

The study of baroque scenery and stage equipment are important areas of study in the practice of illusionism. Baroque opera sets were masterworks of illusions, creating three-
dimensional illusions with a two-dimensional set. They evolved machinery for scene changes that, although would appear antiquated today, were the foundation for modern stage equipment. The foundation of baroque thought is placed on the importance of the word and drama, but the evolution of set design and machinery helped the themes of baroque opera take flight in visual fantasy.

Edwards and Kahn say “there are no opera houses today that have the acoustical properties of an original baroque opera house.” Stage equipment, scenery, and special effects used in modern opera houses are all different. What does this mean for singers and what are its consequences when attempting to recreate an authentic baroque performance? The reason behind sets, machinery, and the importance of acoustics to an audience and the performer was to create a live, dramatic performance with an emphasis on human emotions and passions. Keeping in mind this reason, singers should consider acoustical balance and look back to the reasons why Baroque opera houses were built the way they were rather than focusing on the specific details of what made them different.
Instrumentation, Accompaniment, and the Orchestra

Instruments that evolved from the Renaissance period served the baroque ideal of music as instruments of expressiveness functioning as solo instruments or as instruments for accompaniment, serving a supportive function as background harmony to help the soloist. Baroque orchestras consisted of and are not exclusive to the family of violins and viols, baroque bassoon, oboes, recorders, trumpets, trombones, lutes, harpsichords, clavichord, organ, and the pianoforte. Most baroque orchestras were said to average about 40 members, including those that were used in opera houses. The most constant family of instruments that were standardized in most baroque orchestras was the strings, and all others were added for the sake of coloring the sound.\(^{113}\)

The instruments used for continuo accompaniment were varied in the early baroque period but became more and more focused on the harpsichord and the organ by the latter half of the period. Optionally, a bass instrument such as a contra-bass could also double the harpsichord and organ. Other continuo instruments included strings, flutes, keyboards, lutes and varied in number as well.\(^{114}\) Baroque music often included additional options and choices for substitution when instrumentation was specified. Therefore, instruments used in a performance could be thought of as the performer’s choice. The only question that Donington posed when attempting to change instrumentation is whether or not an instrument could represent the music and give the listener a whole experience of the music as was originally intended. We must always ask ourselves if the instrument is suitable for the music.\(^{115}\)

Continuo accompaniment is as important in intimate settings as it is in larger ensembles such as orchestras, and keyboard instruments, such as the harpsichord, frequently perform these duties. Often times, the harpsichord, even if doubled by a bass string instrument, may prove to be
insufficient and additional instruments may be employed to strengthen the continuo accompaniment. These can be other string instruments or other melodic instruments such as the lute. Some orchestras even used two harpsichords, one used during solo passages and the other used during tutti passages. During solo or tutti passages, bass instruments can also support the harpsichords.¹¹⁶

The success of the baroque recitative is highly dependent on the intuitive skills of the continuo player. They serve to function as a support to the singer, and often times, to keep the recitative moving in action. Dean calls against “slow lingering arpeggios” by the continuo players at the beginning of recitatives and alternatively supports fast and short broken chords and arpeggios.¹¹⁷ Doing so allows the singer to quickly move on with the action. At appropriate times, the continuo accompaniment should press forward with the next chord even before the singer has finished the current phrase. The continuo player helps the singer move on with the action but at the same time gives the singer enough flexibility for moments of expressiveness. The accompaniment player should not use counter melody during a recitative and always be mindful of the singer.¹¹⁸

Baroque accompaniment is based on appropriateness. Because written notation was often lacking in detail, the accompanying musician took it upon himself to determine the best accompaniment for the singer. The following are a few guidelines for appropriate baroque accompaniment: the realization of a continuo should avoid doubling the melody; often times a plain accompaniment is better than a florid one using lots of accented and unaccented passing notes; counter-melodies should be musically related to the music at hand; fresh material is not necessarily conducive to the music if a motif previously introduced is already fitting. The
singer’s melodic line should be the focus of the piece and the accompaniment should help to support the singer without being overly florid.\textsuperscript{119}

The question of authenticity is often discussed when deciding between the use of modern or baroque period instruments. There are many advocates who support the use of baroque period instruments in order for a performance to be called authentic, however there are other considerations that should be taken into consideration. Donington notes that it is not simply the use of the period instruments that makes a performance authentic. Rather, it is the instrumentalist who must have the same technique and mastery of any particular instrument, as would have been the case during the baroque period. Furthermore, you cannot say that modern instruments and technique are any better than baroque period instruments and technique. Baroque period instruments should be used if the instrumentalist is one who has mastered the period instrument and if the instrument being played is in good condition. Only then will the true colors and beauty of the instrument be displayed and give an accurate representation of the baroque sound. In many performance settings, one of the largest obstacles is financial feasibility of being able to obtain and pay for authentic instruments and instrumentalists. In all cases, the best technique and best instrument available, regardless of its label as an authentic or modern instrument, should be used.\textsuperscript{120}
Baroque Opera without Castrati

Gender roles play an important part for audiences today, although that convention is constantly being tested through such avenues as musical theatre and also changes in our own perceptions influenced through society. Take for example, the broadway musical Rent based loosely on Giacomo Puccini’s La Boheme, in which one of the main characters, Angel Dumott Schunard, is a male with AIDs who chooses to cross dress as a female.

In Dorothy Keyser’s article entitled Cross-Sexual Casting in Baroque Opera: Musical and Theatrical Conventions, she discusses the role of gender in Baroque opera of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the confusion that ensues today for audiences, producers, and directors of operas from that era. The author goes into great detail regarding the differences between “convention” and “device.” “Convention” is defined as elements on stage that differ from real life that are expected to be disregarded by the audience. “Device,” on the other hand, refers to elements on stage that differ from real life but those that the audience are expected to acknowledge, and also to understand its symbolism in terms of the plot. The problem presented by Keyser is that “conventions” of the baroque era were understood as being “conventions” only to audiences of that time period, whereas to audiences of today they are perceived as “devices”. Herein lies the problematic role presented by cross-sexual casting in Italian baroque opera for the modern director.121

This practice was plausible during the beginnings of baroque opera, because of the existence of castrati, who in the words of Keyser were “perceived as blank canvases on which either sexual role could be projected, in real life as on the stage…the virile heroic or romantic male lead who sings soprano or alto.”122 The audience became accustomed to separating the sexual identity of the performer versus the character being depicted allowing the composer the
flexibility to substitute any form of treble voice regardless of their appearance. The treble voices available to composers of that time period include castrati, female vocalists, and boy sopranos. Castrati may have gained momentum as the leading treble voice with the progression of the baroque era, but mixed casting of treble voices is evident from the beginnings of opera as early as Jacopo Peri’s casting of *Euridice*, in which several female voices, three castrati, tenors, basses, and a young boy were used.\(^{123}\)

Close examination of roles and their associated scores can reveal the intentions of composers in regards to vocal parts. Although in range they may appear to be suitable for any treble voice, phrasing, rhythm, and agility written in the music can help determine its original casting. Take for example Handel’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*. The role of Giulio Cesare was written for an alto voice type and was known to be specifically written for the famous castrato, Senesino. The character is known to involve little action, customary for a castrato role, and instead involves vocally difficult phrases in which the castrato is expected to hold and sustain a vocalise for an extended period without taking a breath. According to Keyser, “In one particularly fiendish instance (‘Al lampodel’armi’), he sings a rapid sixteenth-note passage with text followed by a sustained whole note followed by a sixteenth-note melisma on ‘ah’ followed by a sustained whole note.” In contrast, Cleopatra, a female role, is florid but does not require the sustained phrases expected of the castrato.\(^{124}\)

The question of reconciliation between practices of Italian baroque opera in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and current practices must take into consideration cross-sexual casting traditions and conventions of the baroque era to cast aside previous notions of a treble voice in association to a specific gender. The treble voices available to current baroque opera productions include the female voice, boy soprano, and the countertenor in lieu of the
Baroque era’s castrato. It should be taken into account that the voice of a countertenor differs significantly in range and strength in comparison to that of a castrato, and problems of balance can arise when singing alongside women. The end of the reign of the castrato, once thought to be synonymous with the baroque era, does not impede the ability of the baroque opera to flourish. Baroque opera can survive without the castrato. Rather, the interchangeability of the treble voices and the freedom taken by composers of that era along with their tradition of making use of whatever voice was readily available, allows us to follow in their stride and render our own good judgment when making casting decisions to re-create as much of an authentic baroque operatic performance as currently possible.
George Frederich Handel’s *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*

“We are saying, therefore, that there is a general vocal method which can be learned. But the specifics...are matters of such subtlety that often good taste is the only guiding rule. For this reason, it is necessary...to refer yourself to the judgment of a wise person in these matters. Also, it is just as often necessary to refer to the thousand different nuances of the vocal art, and also to those singers who have had more experience. In this way, the student will learn from those who have performed longer...since it is obvious that singing is not always learned through a knowledge of its rules.”¹²⁶

Bénigne de Bacilly (1668)

The dilemma for a singer learning the baroque style of music is obvious when looking at early editions of baroque scores. There simply is not enough information written on the score for it to be used as the only source. If that were the case, the performance would be incomplete and inaccurate. The imprecise nature of the score may be attributed to the musical education afforded to performers of the baroque era, which expected instrumentalists and singers alike to have sufficient knowledge of counterpoint and harmony so they could embellish their own music in the appropriate places while also using correct rhythm.¹²⁷ In any case, you may still learn baroque music by using a different technique: learning from the greatest singers of our time. With the advent of recorded music and most recently the phenomenon of the internet and websites such as YouTube, you can simply listen to and learn from experienced singers whose approaches to baroque music have already been widely accepted. It is in this spirit that I offer a study on varying approaches to the *da capo* section of two of Handel’s most acclaimed soprano arias from his opera *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*.

In one of Handel’s most enduring operas, he explores the love story of Cleopatra and Caesar. The arias *V'adoro pupille* and *Piangerò la sorte mia* are sung by Cleopatra, a soprano
role. In the first aria, she is dressed as her maid Lydia and sings a love song to Caesar in order to seduce him. Caesar is charmed and follows her song with a love duet. In the second aria, she is also dressed as her maid Lydia and asks Caesar for help against Ptolemy who is said to have taken her fortune. Caesar is captivated and promises to help her. Both arias are emotionally wrenching and require a great deal of interpretation by the singer. The da capo section of each aria is ornamented and as we now know ornaments appropriate to the feeling of the piece should be used. The following are the complete Italian lyrics and the English translations of the two arias, although our focus is only on the da capo section, which is a reprise of the A section or A’ in the ABA’ song form.

**V’adoro pupille**

**Italian lyrics:**

(A) V’adoro, pupille, saette d’amore, le vostre faville son grate nel sen.

(B) Pietose vi brama il mesto mio core, ch’ogn’ora vi chiama l’amato suo ben

**English Translation:**

(A) I adore you, O eyes, love’s darts, your sparks are pleasing to my heart.

(B) My sad heart, which never ceases calling you beloved, begs for your mercy.

**Piangerò la sorte mia**

**Italian lyrics:**

(A) Piangerò la sorte mia, si crudele e tanto ria, finchè vita in petto avrò.

(B) Ma poi morta d’ogn’intorno il tiranno e notte e giorno fatta spettro agiterò.

**English Translation:**

(A) I shall weep for my fate, so cruel and so evil, as long as I have life in my breast.

(B) But then in death, from every side, my ghost shall prod the tyrant night and day.
The following includes five examples of the *da capo* section of *V’adoro pupille* and six examples of the *da capo* section of *Piangerò la sorte mia*. The first three examples for both arias are taken from publicly accessible recordings of performances given by Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, and Montserrat Caballé. I personally wrote the last three examples of the first aria and the last two examples of the second in a baroque seminar taught by Professor Juliana Gondek at UCLA. I hope that these may serve as an example to show that there is no one perfect way to perform baroque opera and as the quote alludes in the beginning of this section, that referring to a singer with experience is another invaluable tool in mastering baroque performance.
V'adoro pupille da capo section:

Original Version
V'adoro pupille da capo section:

Example 1: Beverly Sills
V’adoro pupille da capo section:

Example 2: Joan Sutherland
V’adoro pupille da capo section:

Example 3: Monserrat Caballe
V’adoro pupille da capo section:

Example 4: Gloria Chung-Ahn Variation A
V'adoro pupille da capo section:

Example 5: Gloria Chung-Ahn Variation B
Example 6: Gloria Chung-Ahn Variation C

V’adoro pupille da capo section:

Soprano

Example notation...
Piangerò la sorte mia da capo section:

Original Version

Soprano

Pian-ge-rò, pian-ge-rò la sor-te mi-a

si cru-de-le e tan-to ri-a fin-chè

vi-ta in pet-toa-vrò pian-ge-rò,

pian-ge-rò la sor-te mi-a, si cru-de-le

e tan-to ri-a, pian-ge-rò la sor-te mi-a, si cru-de-le e tan-to

ri-a fin-chè vi-tain pet-toa-vrò,

fin-chè vi-ta, fin-chè vi-tain pet-toa-vrò
Piangerò la sorte mia da capo section:

Example 1: Beverly Sills
**Piangerò la sorte mia da capo section:**

Example 2: Joan Sutherland
Piangerò la sorte mia da capo section:

Example 3: Monserrat Caballe
Piangerò la sorte mia da capo section:

Example 4: Gloria Chung-Ahn Variation A
Piangerò la sorte mia da capo section:

Example 5: Gloria Chung-Ahn Variation B
COMMENTARY

The da capo sections of Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, and Monserrat Caballe are, at the same time, very different but also very alike. The use of grace notes, trills, passing tones among others as ornamentation is present in the examples of all three singers. In many of their examples, although not all, they chose to raise the last few notes of the da capo section by an octave. However, some would consider this incorrect when it comes to baroque music that regardless of ornamentation a da capo aria should finish on the original notes in the original octave. This rule was most likely bent in order to showcase the abilities of the singer and may have been done by singers of the baroque era as well.

A comparison of the da capo sections of Beverly Sills and Joan Sutherland shows many similarities in their placement of ornaments but also in the types of ornaments they used, most commonly the trill and grace note. Beverly Sills examples are much more ornamented than that of Joan Sutherland. This difference in sheer number of embellishments added to the da capo section may be due to the difference in their voice timbre and weight. In the recordings used, Joan Sutherland’s voice sounds slightly heavier and rounder than that of Beverly Sills. Ms. Sills voice color is brighter and also lighter in weight. Thus, even the same trills or grace notes used sound different for each singer. When choosing which ornaments to add to a da capo aria, singers should always consider their voice color and timbre before adding ornaments that sound good on other singers. Finding examples from singers with similar vocal quality may help in finding ornaments that best suit an individual voice type. Learning by example means being smart in the choice of model and being careful not to emulate a singer simply because their ornaments sound more elaborate and beautiful in their voice.

Monserrat Caballe’s da capo sections are the most ornamented and different of the three singers. In her recordings, her execution of the ornaments was awe-inspiring and impressive. The
notation does not do enough justice to the interpretation of the ornaments. Although on the music score the ornaments do not appear as difficult as others, her use of piano dynamics all throughout the *da capo* section adds a degree of difficulty that most singers cannot master. The same can be said for both Beverly Sills and Joan Sutherlands *da capo* sections in their use of dynamics. The range of dynamics from double piano to double forte leaves the heart longing for more. Beyond ornaments, interpretation involves the manipulation of dynamics, vibrato, and changes in vocal color by changes in vocal pressure as mentioned in previous sections.

The power of dynamics as a part of the interpretation of song cannot be overstated. You may notice that the previous examples of the *da capo* sections do not include any dynamic markings. This was a conscious decision made after much thought. At first, I attempted to capture the dynamics in notation but soon found that this was not serving justice to the beauty of each singer’s performance. The dynamic markings themselves are not enough to fully reproduce each *da capo* section as a whole. With a keen ear, it is possible to replicate another singer’s exact style, but then it becomes a matter of whether that is truly in the spirit of baroque opera. As previously discussed, baroque scores contained minimum notation and relied on the musician to fill in the gaps. This practically ensures that no two singers will sing an aria in exactly the same way, which is precisely the case in the previous examples. Although the notation may appear similar, the execution of each aria is markedly different allowing each singer to leave something similar to a signature on their rendition of that particular aria.

In order to properly learn the ornamentation in the *da capo* section, dictating the ornaments is not enough. Listen to the interpretation of various singers to find the one that best suits your voice. The degree of expressivity of each singer is present in every note that they sing. Each note is given importance, either more or less, to serve the purpose of the text, even in a *da*
capo section where often times we can get lost in the sheer number of notes that are added to the embellishments. My various versions of the da capo sections of both V’adoro pupille and Piangerò la sorte mia take a great many liberties. Some of the ornaments that I have included are not necessarily those that I can execute in a performance myself nor would I want to. They are simply ideas that may or may not take form, but are part of the creative process to discover other beautiful ornaments. The important thing to remember, and something that I was reminded of myself when dictating these da capo sections, is that more is not necessarily better. This leads to an important point. Is Joan Sutherland’s less ornamented version of Piangerò la sorte mia less impressive than the more elaborate version of Monserrat Caballe’s? We know that the correct answer is no, both versions are sublime in their own way. It is not only the added ornaments that impress but the realization of those ornaments in performance that moves the heart of the audience and leaves a lasting impression. We cannot ignore the power of dynamics in performance, which gives life to these ornaments and consequently to the music. Moving the emotions is at the heart of baroque music and should continually be our goal.
CONCLUSION

Performing a baroque opera with the mindset of re-creating an “authentic” performance becomes a problematic issue. There are numerous aspects to consider such as the use of modern instruments versus period instruments, time period costumes and staging versus modern styles, the idea of convention versus devices and their meaning to modern audiences, and even the unavailability of the castrati voice type. Writer Michael Sartorius explains that “authentic” performances of today are more about exciting the audience rather than following historical truths and thus fail to conceive the full potential of the music.129 Andrew Jones comments on staged productions of Handel’s *Giulio Cesare* saying that “differences between performances are not bad in themselves, but when they are so extreme that the identity of the opera is undermined, one might justifiably ask: what is a Handel opera?”130

I believe that an “authentic” performance of a baroque opera is one that is performed in the spirit of the baroque period. The baroque era was based on emotionally touching the audience and telling a story using the idea of *dramma in musica*, text set to continuous music. Composers of the era were known to practice the use of voice types that were readily available to them, thus not limiting the modern production in the absence of the baroque castrati. Conventions inherent to audiences of the baroque period have now become devices to modern audiences, necessitating the need for changes to accommodate the modern audience. Donington has already mentioned that period instruments are not superior to modern instruments, and that the best choice of instrument is given to superior technique and better preservation of an instrument regardless of its consideration as a modern or period instrument. Staging and costumes should not take away from the music nor should it be a distraction as it has become in recent productions in attempts to engage modern audiences. Using the best resources available to produce a baroque opera is in the
spirit of the baroque era, and if it is performed with the intent to deliver a story through words set to music with significant consideration of the text, then there is no better example than this of an “authentic” baroque opera.

When I decided to give a performance of Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, I pushed for a baroque sound and wanted to give an “authentic” baroque performance using period instruments. In my pursuit of everything baroque, I forgot to consider a simple dilemma: modern singing technique and a modern performance hall. Modern singing technique accommodates the changes in performance venues to larger spaces with louder singing. Modern instruments were built to produce more sound to accommodate this change in volume as well. Consequently, the combination of a modern vocal technique and performance hall with baroque period instruments changed the nature of the ensuing rehearsals and performance. It became a practice in vocal restraint in order to stylistically complement the timbre and volume of baroque period instruments. Thankfully, the period instrumentalists and singers were talented and artistically gifted enough to work as an ensemble to create an ideal balance of sound and give a beautiful performance at UCLA’s Schoenberg Hall. However, I still felt that the acoustics of this modern space did not do justice to the beauty of baroque period instruments.

In hindsight, I learned the importance of acoustics in music. It was the acoustics of baroque performance halls that led to the baroque sound and technique of singing, creating a light sound capable of the vocal agility composers required of singers. The time period following baroque opera saw the advent of *bel canto* style of singing that is much different from baroque technique. Many singers today still use this style of singing, and with the reappearance and recent revival of baroque operatic literature, vocal technique to complement the feats required in baroque music has become a hot topic. Current singers use any technique that will help them
power through the ornamentation and long phrasing characteristic of this music. I am, myself, a lyric soprano so musical passages requiring agility were very difficult to master, taking a lot of time and repeated practice in order to be in performing condition. I enjoyed this challenge, and in doing so I developed an admiration and respect for baroque music and the singers who are able to perform it so exquisitely.

Period instruments performed in acoustically suitable performance halls create a sound so beautiful that you cannot imagine one without the other. This is what I imagine was the castrato’s role in baroque opera during the baroque period: the music needed them and they in turn flourished through the music. However, even if a castrato were to magically reappear and claim their rightful role in baroque operas, modern audiences would be confused and unable to comprehend the contradiction that they were seeing: a man singing with what sounds similar to a woman’s voice. Although this would be considered “authentic,” the audience would not be able to accept this baroque convention and instead it would become a modern device that would be detrimental to the telling of the drama. The drama is then lost to the modern audience and they are left emotionally unmoved. Consequently, this cannot be considered an “authentic” baroque performance if keeping with the fundamental thoughts that are the foundation to baroque music and opera.

Authenticity is only that which can be accepted and widely established as such. I advise singers not to get caught up in the meaning of the word, but rather to strive to utilize the best of everything that is available as a resource. Watch and listen to the divas of past and present times and study their ornaments and expressive styles not only specific to vocal sounds but to movements and gestures as well. Take from them and learn how to best deliver the text using the music. Consider not only baroque conventions but try instead to adapt these to become modern
conventions, so that they add to instead of detract from the performance. Learn and appreciate not only the music, but also the ideas that made them uniquely baroque. Once you are able to recognize these as being baroque, any performance you give will become authentic and in the spirit of baroque music and opera.
ENDNOTES

1 Quoted from Donington’s *Baroque Music Style and Performance A Handbook*, page 5.


3 Bukofzer, page 4.

4 Explanation and quote from Bukofzer text, page 5.

5 Mention of the “affections” in reference to René Descartes in Anderson’s *Baroque Music: from Monteverdi to Handel*, page 10.

6 Thoughts based on Bukofzer’s ideas, page 8.

7 Grout’s, *A History of Western Music*, page 260, 263.

8 A contrast of opera and the intermezzo, Bukofzer, page 55.

9 Discussion of two contrasting views in Greek music, Grout, page 263.

10 Mention of the Florentine Camerata in Grout, page 263-5.

11 Peri’s contribution to the development of the recitative in Grout, page 267-70.

12 As quoted from Carter’s *Composting Opera: From Dafne to Ulisse Errante*, page 25-7.

13 A continuation of Peri’s contribution to the recitative from Grout, page 270.


15 Mention of different types of recitative in Grout, page 312-13.

16 Different song forms mentioned by Grout, page 309.

17 Claim by Bukofzer, page 6.

18 A comparison by Bukofzer, page 16.

19 A brief timeline of the baroque era, Bukofzer, page 17.

20 A continued explanation of variations during the different time periods of the baroque era, Bukofzer, page 17.

21 Bukofzer’s take on significant events in the rise of opera, page 55-7.

22 Features of opera, Grout, page 278.
Castrato, documentary produced by the BBC in 2006.

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A quote of Charles de Brosses found in Law’s article, page 5.

Law, page 2.


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Peri and the recitative style, Grout, page 265.


Anderson, section titled *Monteverdi: The ‘affections’ expressed* talking about the composer’s life and works, page 20-23.

On the topic of the stile concitato, Bukofzer, page 38.

Monteverdi’s works discussed, Bukofzer, page 58-60.

Bukofzer page 58, Anderson page 27.

Bukofzer, page 147-151.

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Bukofzer, page 156-7.

Grout, page 446-7.


Anderson, section titled *Handel in Italy*, page 143-3.

Bukofzer, section titled *Italian Journeyman Period* discussing the lasting impression upon Handel made by Italian musical influences, page 318.


Buelow, page 484.

Taken from the author’s note in Donington’s *Baroque Music Style and Performance A Handbook*, sentiment’s that I share with the author.

Donington, page 7.
An approach similar to my own is shared in Elliott’s *Singing in Style*, page 7-10. Her remarks give more substance to my own thoughts.

Donington quotes Monteverdi in the section titled *Flexibility in recitative*, page 23.

Donington, page 24.

The previous quote and this recommendation by Dean in “The Performance of Recitative in Late Baroque Opera,” page 290.

Elliott, in the section titled “Recitative and Aria,” page 32.

Discussion about the da capo aria and its uses by Elliott, page 71

Description of ornamentations by Elliott, page 21.

Description for early baroque ornamentations along with some of my own commentary, Elliott, page 21-7.

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Donington, a discussion on the proper use of the appoggiatura, page 121.

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86 Donington, a discussion on the trill, page 124-6.

87 Donington, a discussion on the mordent, page 139.

88 Donington, a discussion on the turn, page 141-2.

89 Donington, a discussion on compound ornaments, page 143.


91 Donington, quoted from section titled Vibrato, page 35.


94 Gable, quoted from page 92.


96 Termini, page 150.


99 Discussion of gestures and quote referenced can be found in Powell, page 3,5,6,9.


102 Discussion on the feet, Barnett, page 114-8.

103 Quote found in Barnett, page 108.


107 E-mail correspondence with Kruger, “An Interview Proposal,” e-mail.


110 Quote and discussion referenced from Bassuet, page 1646-7.

111 Mention of illusionism and opera in the seventeenth century by Mayeri in “Miracles and Disasters in Renaissance and Baroque Theater Mechanics,” web.

112 Quoted from Edwards and Kahn, page 30.

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116 Discussion about orchestral continuo accompaniment in Donington’s article, page 133.

117 Winton, page 391.


120 A discussion regarding the use of baroque period instruments versus modern instruments in Donington’s article, page 137-8.


122 Quoted from Keyser, page 50-1.

123 Discussion found in Keyser, page 49, 51.

124 Discussion and quote found in Keyser, page 52-3.
125 Keyser, page 54.

126 Quoted from Elliott, page 6.


128 Lyrics and translations from Handel’s *Julius Caesar* BMG recording and accompanying booklet, 1967.


130 Quoted from Jones, “Staging a Handel Opera,” page 278.
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