INTRODUCTION

Once we understand the complexity of singing,
we can certainly broaden our scope of what it means to sing.
- Richard Miller[1]

What does it mean to sing? What do we listen for in singing? What does singing embody in our musical lives? The answers to these questions crystallized into twenty prescient, profound, and thought-provoking essays. Writings submitted by coaches, conductors, composers, musicologists, vocal artists, ethnomusicologists, philosophers, and a medical professional present a global, holistic perspective of what it means to sing, and simultaneously grapple with our precepts about singing. Each author's pilgrimage to the art of singing takes a different route, and each author beholds singing in a highly personal, unique encounter; a mother singing to her child, a toddler listening to a Caruso or Bessie Smith recording, a church choir singing a familiar hymn. Each essay depicts professional careers in academia or performance, permeated by singing and enticed by its lure. Perhaps the common thread of the essays is a wonderment, a decided reverence, and even veneration for the art of singing, regardless of style or genre.

I have chosen the authors because they speak and write about singing in ways we voice teachers rarely do. Most of us talk hourly about the technical mechanics, timbre, diction, style, interpretation, and musicality of singing, but rarely speak of the role of singing in other disciplines. These authors from "other" disciplines create new vocabularies, new structures, even new languages for singing, adding whole new fields to our body of knowledge. The essays in this volume give us a worldview of singing that can only enrich and illuminate what we are already teaching. Since many of us have been asked to augment and expand curriculum, these essays can help point us forward in the most appropriate, logical direction. If our mandate is to devise an interdisciplinary, inclusive, and diverse future for our music schools, then these essays give us a rich and varied argument with which to proceed. Indeed, we may find remarkable answers in the most unexpected places.

[1] Quotation from personal conversation with Richard Miller, April 1970, Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

The chapters are organized loosely by the authors' professions, although there is crossover between professions. A composer can also be a conductor or theorist; a singer, can be a recording producer or an ethnomusicologist. The choice of authors came through reading, discussions, personal relationships, or just simply fate. (For a list of the original list of questions, please consult Appendix.)

Chapter 1: Singing, Speaking & Signifiance [sic]

Singing, Speaking, and the Difference

Jeanette Bicknell, philosopher and independent scholar, asks us to reconsider our suppositions of the borders between singing and speaking. She argues: "Instead, the distinction between singing and speech is better made on cultural lines and on pragmatic grounds."[2]

Singing and Signification

Philosophy professor John Carvalho formulates the question, "What exactly does it mean to 'give too much away' in a performance?" "What makes one performance different from another and how does the musician grasp that difference and adjust her aims to the environment of that performance?" He argues that it is "its *signifiance* [sic], what the song means for those who listen to it, including the one singing the song."[3]

Chapter 2: Culture and its Voice

The Etic Voice: An Ethnomusicological Perspective on Voice Research in Turkish Secular and Sacred Practices

McPherson's background as a classically trained singer conveys her expertise and understanding of the singing voice while forging new bonds between the Western classical tradition and Turkish secular and sacred singing.[4] Her transition from classical singing to the Turkish *şarkı* is particularly informative. "In most ways, a voice is an unseen constructed instrument, shaped by cultural and, if you

[2] Ms. Bicknell's work on aesthetics has strong relevance to effective vocal performance. In her book, *Why Music Moves Us* (Palgrave McMillan 2009), she presents historical aesthetics and current research in emotional responses to music. "In thinking about the connections between music and the emotions, we need to keep separate two issues: music's capacity to *express* emotion and its power to *induce* or *arouse* emotion."

[3] Author's note: I first came across Carvalho's work in the article, "Strange Fruit: Music Between Violence and Death," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Special Issue on Song, Songs and Singing, 71.1 (Winter 2013), 111-19. I strongly recommend it.

[4] Upon entering Muslim countries, voice teachers are immediately drawn to the vocalism of the call to prayer. McPherson's work provides insight, analysis and significant historical context. Her analysis of the antiformant in the Turkish and Arabic spectrograms should spark further investigation.

are a trained singer, pedagogical practices. My *bel canto* voice is just one on a spectrum of possible vocal timbres and productive proclivities."

To Become Human

Gianpaolo Chiriacò surmises that "the dichotomy between measurable elements and elements that denote the field of emotions unfolds in different and complicated ways when one considers the discussion regarding the so-called black voice. One can certainly identify two separated positions that can be seen as two different ideologies: on the one hand vocalists and scholars who assume the existence of a physiologic difference in the vocal instrument based on racial groups; on the other hand, the ones who consider such position as wrong and racist. However, a number of intermediary positions can also be recognized."[5] His ethnographic descriptions of the Kenwood Academy in Hyde Park and the teaching of one of the greatest Chicago musicians, Lena McLin, are invaluable.

Play It and They Will Come: Re-approaching Gesture in Classical Music

The arguments for curriculum inclusion are well-documented and described by Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell, who challenges our decades-long model of voice teaching.[6] "As far as classical music is concerned, we are now faced with the dilemma of what to teach students to remain relevant in a changing music market; one of the main sources of inspiration for this volume." Jesús argues, "As listeners, we relate our perception of vocality to our own corporeal experience of sound, through which we seek resonance with the performer… Singers should push themselves to be more versatile and accept the unknown more."

What Do I Believe is the Future of Singing? Will our World of Singing Exist in a 100 Years?

Margo Garrett, collaborative pianist and winner of the 1992 Grammy award for Best Classical Vocal Performance with soprano Kathleen Battle, has influenced generations of singers and pianists. Throughout her long career, she has elevated the role of the "pianist" to its rightful place and removed the pejorative stigma of the word "accompanist." She says, "I have always loved the piano because of what it can do in relationship to others."[7] One quotation from this essay adds a depth of perspective often over-looked: "The musicality of language affects us always in positive ways, sometimes without

[5] Chiriacò's idea of "intermediary positions" should detonate much discussion among voice teachers. Even the discussion of black voice style and timbre has been scrupulously avoided in most of our voice publications.

[6] I highly recommend Prof. Ramos-Kittrell's *Playing in the Cathedral: Music, Race, and Status in New Spain* (Oxford University Press 2016), as an ancillary text for our students. This is the first study that addresses the intersection of race and music in Mexico City.

[7] Margo Garrett, "Musings from My Summer: The Great Power of Songs," *Journal of Singing*, January/February 2018, Volume 74, No. 3, pp. 345-348.

our even being aware of it (or even translating, when we deal with a language not known to us), and teaches us a kind of subtle musicality we cannot learn in any other way."[8]

Singing and the Multicultural Platform

Carolyn Sebron is pursuing her DMA in Vocal Pedagogy at Shenandoah University. Carolyn, similar to Estelí Gomez, has had to figure out other vocal techniques in order to have a career. Of particular value is her discussion of *code switching*, a term borrowed from linguistics that means to adapt from culture to culture. "Depending on one's background, social and cultural influences in tandem with music training, provide the environment for a musician to develop 'musical code switching' or 'bi-musicality.'"

Chapter 3: Singing as Muse

The Voice in My Life

"When we sing, we experience the pleasurable sensation of vocal vibrations, the satisfaction in having produced them in our own body, and the communal delight of *harmonizing*—both literally and figuratively."[9] Author, composer, scholar and theorist, Robert Hatten gives us a uniquely detailed glimpse into the creative process of operatic vocal writing. His research interests include semiotic theories of musical meaning (including agency, expressive genres, gesture, style, topics, tropes, and narrativity), performance and analysis (as pianist), music and the poetic text (as poet), and 20th-century opera (as librettist and composer). "You never know where a fascination with the voice will lead" is one of my favorite Hatten quotes.

Teaching Voice in a 21st-Century World

Composer-bandleader-improviser-percussionist Graham Reynolds writes operas that ram the vocal boundaries of what we university studio voice teachers teach. "Singers deserve exposure to a wide range of music history, styles, and techniques; institutions need to step up and offer this wide range. The time has come to radically rethink the way voice is taught, maintaining the pillars of the old ways, but incorporating the new."[10]

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[8] Ibid, p. 346.

[9] Robert Hatten's books, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven* (Indiana University Press 1994) and *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes* (Indiana University Press 2017) should become required reading for all our doctoral voice students.

[10] Graham's first opera *Genghis Khan* is riveting, hard-driving, and mesmerizing. His latest operatic success, *Pancho Villa at a Safe Distance,* "experiments with an exciting hybrid of compositional techniques, including looping

The Imagined Voice: How Singing and Vocal Music Affect me and My Work

"Music touches us in ways that nothing else can." Dan Welcher is a composer and conductor whose long professional and personal association with Jan DeGaetani early in his career gives him a keen understanding of vocal writing and performance practice. He discusses in detail how he composes for the voice. Dan is also a poet whose understanding of text greatly influences his settings of vocal music. Critic John Ardoin of the *Dallas Morning News*, who also was Gian Carlo Menotti's biographer, said this about Welcher's music: "a bright voice to listen to amid America's gray compositional landscape. He has something to say, and he says it directly and in a way very much his own."

Gary Powell in the Studio

Gary Powell has combined all of his musical skills in his long enviable career as singer, recording engineer, producer and song writer. In this interview, Gary discusses the process of working with recording artists and details his path in the recording industry in his inimitable Ann Richards-style humor.[11]

An Interview with Andrea Clearfield

Composer Andrea Clearfield's works cultivate a very special relationship with the voice and expose her unique gift of vocal color, enmeshed in rhythmic and textual complexity.[12] When asked the question, "What do you believe the future of singing to be?" she responded with two perceptive comments. First, "I want to say that there will be a return to intimacy with the voice." Her second observation was equally definitive. "Maybe it's because in our society... there's alienation through the various devices and there are so many ways that people are separated from themselves and each other when they interact through the digital world. I think there will be a revolution and the human voice will have a renaissance."

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and sampling in Ableton Live, overdubbed layers of vocals, and remixes by Mexican electronic artists." https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1792012231/graham-reynolds-creates-an-experimental-chamber-op

[11] Gary has taught me all that a voice can do. I marvel at his work in the studio; the intensity, the detail, and striving for perfection rivals any opera recording session.

[12] My first experiences with Clearfield's music was through *The Golem Psalms* and *Rabsong Shar*. On both occasions, all in the audience were completely entranced.

Chapter 4: The Voice behind the Voice

Personal Notes on Coaching and Singing

Robert Spillman, well-respected author, composer, and coach, discusses his career both in Europe and the U.S. "Telling the story, communicating a feeling—these are the goals of every singer. And that is the secret of all coaches, rehearsal pianists, stage managers, etc.—we are telling the story, too. We are all part of the great dance."[13]

Texting from the Stage: Singers as Communicators

Dan Kurland, recent DMA graduate in collaborative piano and current *Repetitor* at Theater Hagen in Germany, exhorts young singers to allow skills that seem specific to classical or CCM singing to "cross-pollinate" and help the "other" skill set.[14] Logically Kurland writes, "Therefore, if one must be able to sing or play from the contemporary commercial music realm, we must find a way to teach it in our curricula." Dan states, "The fundamental tenet of understanding and connecting to the text is an excellent way in which to begin."

We Care If You Listen

What does our singing future hold? Kathleen Kelly,[15] international coach, conductor, and teacher, explores the future of the recital and live singing. "Music is inextricably linked to the spaces in which it sounds, and through the centuries physical spaces have shaped vocal practices and aesthetics as much as any other factor." "Here's the question for classical singers in the age of the @ symbol. If our practice is to infuse words with human vocalism in a way that is inextricably bound up with the acoustic space in which we're making our noise—what do we do when the meaning of location itself changes? Where are we sending that resonant sound, when 'where' becomes an abstraction?"

For the Love of the Voice: Toward a New Generation of Coaches

Pianist and vocal coach Richard Masters is one of the brilliant young talents on the horizon. His knowledge of vocal repertoire, performers, and vocal music history belies his young years. How he describes the road to becoming a successful vocal coach is particularly useful to the voice teacher and the

[13] I am indebted to Bob Spillman, who convinced me to move to Germany in the first place and who prepared me for my first German audition. It is thanks to him in part that my German career flourished.

[14] Dan mentions an important source which is vital to our discussion: Matthew Shaftel and Christopher Swanson, "The Problem with Beautiful Singing," *College Music Symposium* 47 (2007): 53 –71, accessed June 28, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40374504.

[15] Coaches and conductors have an immediate understanding of each concert hall with its quirks and pockets of sound. Kathy's argument about the ambience of the hall is timely and vital for the future of singing.

student: "Their (Katz, Zeger, Garrett, Jones) performances were not only musically and technically excellent, but their understanding of the voice could be heard in every phrase. How did they dovetail with the singer? How was the balance achieved? If the singer was having an off night, how did the pianist help out?"

Chapter 5: Vocal Artistry Defined

The Nature of Singing

True to his status as revered artist and spokesperson for three generations of singers, George Shirley states, "In sum, singing that pours from the linked pathway of intent-cum-feeling that remains unsevered or unblocked by mechanical manipulation will continue to reflect the psyche of the singer and their life experience in a manner dictated by cultural influence. The emotive tonal properties of the voice and the method of producing them will gratefully remain intact, retaining their age-old distinctiveness. Technique is great so long as it enables and enhances nature. To the extent that it interferes with nature, its value is lost."[16]

I Sing the Body Eclectic: Empowering the Process-Oriented Vocal Artist

Estelí Gomez, soprano and member of Roomful of Teeth, asks the question, "How can we as educators, collaborative colleagues, or audience members foster an artistry dedicated to personal responsibility, generosity and authenticity of self-expression, one that produces consistently high-quality performance? If the interconnected world of classical music is as small as we are told, don't we [singers] possess all the more power to create the kind of environment in which we want to live?"[17] Her observation that "voice professors have an opportunity and responsibility to recalibrate these hierarchies, and respond to a market that demands more collaborative, flexible artists" is particularly valid.

Chapter 6: The Body, the Mind, and the Soul of the Voice

Essay on Singers: The Perfect Marriage

Dr. Lesley Childs, singer and Associate Medical Director of the Clinical Center for Voice Care at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, has established herself as one of the foremost singing

[16] George Shirley's words are as stellar as his singing. Prof. Shirley has become the pre-eminent voice for our art form. It is worth noting that three of our authors highlight Steven Mithen's *The Singing Neanderthals* (Harvard University Press 2006) in their essays.

[17] Estelí's name was given to me by the Director of the Butler School of Music, Dr. Mary Ellen Poole. Ms. Gomez is an enormously gifted singer and teacher whose career should become the archetype for the 21st century singers. The vast skill sets she has mastered could become a new model for our teaching.

voice specialists in the U.S.[18] She states that "counseling the singer represents the art of laryngologic medicine… certain counseling strategies are also likely to result in more favorable outcomes." In her essay, she shares four case studies which will be of interest to voice professionals.

Voice, Music of the Soul

Author, singer, pedagogue, Lynn Helding once again compels us to think about the voice, the mind and what it really means to sing. Her numerous NATS articles tackle some of the bigger questions in singing and the new science of the mind, a field she believes must "usher in a paradigm shift in emphasis from how well teachers teach, to how well students learn." Lynn's work is ground-breaking and exciting; she constantly reminds us that the brain is the source of our art.[19]

[18] About twenty years ago, I decided I didn't know enough about high school choral programs, high school singers, the Texas All-State Music system or the 15- to 17-year-old singing voice. One student I taught was Lesley (French) Childs. Little did I know that we would have such a long and fruitful relationship.

[19] Lynn's articles and books give us new insights into the brain and singing. She distills current cognitive neuro-science and its application to singing. Her column, "The Mindful Voice," is a regular column in the *Journal of Singing* (September 2009-present).

Chapter 1

Singing, Speaking, & Signifiance

Singing, Speaking, and the Difference

Jeanette Bicknell, Independent Scholar

The differences between singing and speaking seem obvious at first sight. When people are asked to specify those differences, they typically point to two kinds of things. The first are the physiological differences in what a vocalist does when she speaks or sings. The second are differences in the resulting sounds.

I have several aims in this paper. One is to show that the differences between singing and speaking are not, in fact, obvious, and to examine some seemingly ambiguous cases. These *borderline* cases merit philosophical reflection on the categories being used. Another aim is to argue that the distinction between singing and speech is not best made along physiological or auditory lines, or even solely along musical lines. Instead, the distinction between singing and speech is better made on cultural lines and on pragmatic grounds. What a singer or speaker is considered to be doing when he or she communicates, and how that communication is received, will depend heavily on social and cultural factors, and on the shared expectations of singers, speakers, and listeners. Different cultures understand the difference between speech and song in various ways. Finally, I aim to explore the ways in which composers, songwriters, and performers exploit the differences and the boundaries between singing and speaking.

With the distinction between song and speech made along cultural and pragmatic lines, we can better understand some of the borderline cases, both in artistic contexts and in social life more generally. This in turn will allow us to consider some of the wider implications: why does singing continue to have a place in nearly every musical genre, and why sing when speech usually is a more efficient means of communication than song?

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Quora (www.quora.com) is an internet forum where anyone can ask and answer questions; the answers are edited, rated, and organized by the site's users. It is a great way to get a variety of answers on topics from current science and politics to popular culture, the arts, and mundane practicalities. Participants range from curious and naïve to people who are experts in their field. When someone asked, "What is the difference between speaking and singing?" the question did not arouse much con-

troversy. The relatively narrow range of the answers was instructive, although not particularly surprising.[20] According to Quora's users, the primary differences between singing and speaking are physiological. Both singing and speaking are physical processes in which breath is moved through the larynx and vocal folds, and the resulting sound is shaped into consonants and vowels with the tongue, teeth and lips. Singing demands a larger range of pitch and requires greater effort, together with proper breath support, and greater control of the vocal apparatus. The answers also mention that singing tends to be more "emotional" than speech, and that singers usually sing existing compositions, whereas everyday speech is "composed" moment-to-moment.

It was presumably such commonsense insights that prompted philosopher of art Frances Sparshott, long before Quora, in an article about the difference between singing and speaking, to claim that, "it is usually easy to tell when someone starts singing."[21] There are several problems with this seemingly unproblematic claim. First, not all cultures make a distinction between speech or talking on the one hand, and song or singing on the other.[22] So while it may seem straightforward enough for members of our own Western culture to make the distinction, it does not follow that it is easy for everyone.

Second, even if it is indeed "easy" to tell when someone starts singing (which I am not quite prepared to allow), it is so because we typically already have a good understanding of the context in which an individual vocalizes, and we judge on that basis. If we were to attend purely to the auditory features of an utterance, purely to the quality of sound that he or she makes, it would not always be easy. There are two kinds of complications. The first are cases where the vocal production falls between singing and speaking. The second are cases in which we need to understand the social and cultural context in order to determine what the individual in question understands herself to be doing, and how she expects that utterance to be received.

Let's consider the borderline cases first: many vocal productions fall between singing and speech, yet arguably belong clearly to neither. In a 1963 article, George List proposed a classification of vocal production based on modifications of speech intonation. (He limited his analysis to non-tonal languages, since including tonal languages such as Mandarin Chinese in his classification would present "innumerable" difficulties.) "Intonation" here refers to the melodic pattern of an utterance, which can be exaggerated or minimized by speakers. Speech intonation may level out and approach a monotone or be heightened and exaggerated. List defined song as a communication form exhibiting relatively

[20] "What is the difference between speaking and singing?," Quora, accessed on September 15, 2017, https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-speaking-and-singing.

[21] Francis Sparshott, "Singing and Speaking," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37:3 (July 1997): 199.

[22] George List, "The Boundaries of Speech and Song," *Ethnomusicology* 7 (1963): 3.

stable pitches, possessing at least a minimally elaborate scalar (melodic) structure, and showing little influence of speech intonation.[23]

Some of List's examples of borderline cases drew on ethnographic research, but we do not need to search far afield to find vocal practices, both in art and in everyday life, that fall sonically between singing and speech. Non-artistic examples include children's skipping and clapping rhymes, auctioneers' chants, street sellers' calls and cries, field and street hollers, the chants used in meditation and religious practices, and calls to prayer. In the arts, we find vocal practices that fall somewhere between speech and singing in the "heightened" speech of musical theatre, spoken word poetry, recitative, *Sprechstimme*, rap, and "talking" blues.

The second kind of complication revolves around cultural and social practices, rather than auditory qualities. I mentioned earlier that not all cultures distinguish between speech and song. Other cultures recognize what we may consider intermediate forms between the two (such as chanting), and the social function of these forms may vary widely.[24] While singing is a physical activity, it is also a social and cultural activity, and some singing is artistic. Singers' activity is subject to a variety of collective expectations and takes place within specific shared contexts and shared cultural understandings of "music" and its role in society. When we look at musical practice globally, what an individual is considered to be doing when he or she vocalizes will depend heavily on social and cultural factors, and on the expectations of everyone involved.

Consider the role that vocalizations of different kinds play in religious practices around the world. In cultures where music is understood as a secular pursuit or has little prestige, participants may be reluctant to describe their vocal activity as singing or as musical. Instead, they may see it as just one part of a larger spiritual practice. Islamic calls to prayer may sometimes sound like songs but are not usually considered by adherents to be singing performances. Similarly, in Jewish religious practice the chanting of passages from the Torah is referred to as "reading" or "recitation," rather than singing. The role of the cantor or chazzan in Judaism is seen to be primarily moral or spiritual rather than musical.

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Sprechstimme (from the German verb *sprechen*, to speak) is the musical name for the vocal production halfway between speech and song. I'll first say something general about it, and then discuss it in terms of two musical genres (hip-hop and "talking" blues). I see all of these as forms of song. Then I'll contrast these with spoken word poetry, which I see as a related artistic practice that, for reasons

[23] List, "The Boundaries of Speech and Song," 3.

[24] List, "The Boundaries of Speech and Song," 3.

of culture and artistic tradition, is not properly a musical genre and not a form of singing, but of speaking.

Peter Kivy described, in a paper delivered to the American Philosophical Association in 2013, how early opera composers were faced with the problem of how to set dramatic dialogue to music, given that the pace of music is slower than that of conversational speech. One response to this problem was the development of the genre melodrama, in which words are spoken, accompanied by music. While the genre did not survive much past the eighteenth century, the technique of having a character speak accompanied by music, instead of sing, is still used occasionally in opera. A well-known example is found in Beethoven's *Fidelio* (Leonore in Act II). Arnold Schönberg most fully developed *Sprechstimme* in his opera *Moses and Aron* and in his song series *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Kivy argues that the vocal practice in melodrama and *Sprechstimme* are best understood as a type of song or "singing in speech." He bases his argument on the sound quality of the vocal production: "We are drawn to the *sounds* of the words, *as if* they were a kind of musical sound, as we are not to the merely spoken dialogue in the opera …."[25] I agree with him that *Sprechstimme* is a type of singing, although I would emphasize historical and cultural reasons in support of this claim. *Sprechstimme* developed in a musical context (as opposed to a strictly theatrical context), was developed mainly by composers (not playwrights or theatre directors), and is a technique expected in the repertoire of singers (rather than actors or poets). To put it a little crudely, *Sprechstimme* is a form of singing because we treat it like one.

Rap can also be seen as a form of *Sprechstimme*. Like *Sprechstimme* in art music, it strikes the ear as something between singing and speaking and is usually accompanied by music. Interestingly (and despite the obvious differences between them), rap also arose as a response to challenges of artistic media. The origin of hip-hop dates to the mid-1970s with huge block parties in the Bronx and other areas of New York City. DJs broadcast popular dance music, manipulating turntables to isolate percussive passages and keep the crowds dancing. Another person, the MC, rapped over the music to keep the party going and the crowd entertained. MCs soon sought to out-do one another, and their rapping reflected their ambitions. While initially the focus in hip-hop was on dancers, not vocalists, rap is now a medium for personal expression and political comment.[26]

Like *Sprechstimme* in art music, the vocal delivery of rap is stylized and does not sound either like regular speech or standard singing. Also, like *Sprechstimme*, rap can be appreciated for its auditory and musical qualities—its "flow" (rhythm and rhyme), and for the performer's skill, as well as for its

[25] Peter Kivy, "Speaking in Song and Singing in Speech: Another Paradox for the Paradoxical Art." Unpublished manuscript.

[26] I have oversimplified the musical and cultural development of rap. See James McBride, "Hip Hop Planet," *National Geographic,* April 2007.

lyrical content. Listeners are drawn both to the meaning of the words and to the musical qualities of their arrangement and delivery. And like *Sprechstimme*, there are historical and cultural reasons why rap is best understood as a form of singing, rather than speaking. For one, it is now firmly part of the music industry. Rap artists are considered to be musicians rather than poets. For example, in 2017 when Eminem performed a freestyle (improvised) rap highly critical of President Donald Trump during the Black Entertainment Television awards, *Rolling Stone* magazine called his performance, "a ferocious a cappella freestyle." They didn't call it a poem or a speech, and "a cappella" is, of course, a term that refers to song without musical accompaniment.[27]

In the performing arts, vocal practices that sound superficially similar may respond to different kinds of expectations, carry different associations, and arouse different meanings for listeners. Consider the different expectations and meanings surrounding talking blues on one hand and spoken word poetry on the other. Both combine rhythmic speech and instrumental music. Both practices have names that refer to or emphasize speech. Both can be used didactically, to state a political position, or for entertainment, or both. Yet how they are classified and how listeners respond to them involves many more factors than how they sound. These include most importantly the traditions from which they arose and the cultural milieu in which they are situated.

Talking blues arose from the blues musical tradition. Structurally, works tend to be formulaic and to adhere to some form of song structure, yet with a much simpler chordal structure. Performers are usually instrumentalists or singers. Spoken word poetry comes from a very different tradition, that of modern poetry recitation. Works are freer, more individualistic, and tend not to adhere to established forms. Performers are usually poets rather than instrumentalists or singers. The cultural associations of talking blues are low, including popular art, folk, and country music. Spoken word poetry, on the other hand, has high cultural associations and is often seen as a more elevated, esoteric pursuit.

Compare two examples, both with political themes, that date from around the same time. In 1971 country music star Johnny Cash had a hit with "Singing in Vietnam Talking Blues."[28] In the song, Cash describes the trip he and his wife June Cash took to Vietnam to sing for American troops. It ends with a plea for peace and for the war to end. While Cash wrote and sang other, more conventional songs expressing political positions, presumably he chose the talking blues form in this case because it is well-suited to convey a lot of words (compared with a conventional singing style), and to do so in a way that they can be readily understood by listeners (again, when compared to a more conventional singing style). At a time when views about the Vietnam war were highly polarized, Cash wanted to

[27]Jon Blistein, "Watch Eminem Demolish Donald Trump in BET Awards Freestyle," accessed October 11, 2017, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/watch-eminem-demolish-donald-trump-in-bet-awards-freestyle-w508187.

[28]PeterRabbit59. "Johnny Cash–Singing in Vietnam Talking Blues." Filmed [March 1971]. YouTube video, 03:12. Posted [May 2010]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQAXTvcMoMA.

convey the complicated sentiments of supporting American troops while being anti-war. His vocal style is that of a matter-of-fact storyteller, recounting events as they happened. There are few vocal or musical flourishes drawing attention away from the narrative. Again, all of this draws listeners' attention to the words and the message they contain.

My second example, from 1970, is Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution will not be Televised." [29] It first appeared on the album "Small Talk at 125th and Lennox," the cover of which announces Scott-Heron as "A New Black Poet." Like Cash's "Singing in Vietnam Talking Blues," it is an overtly political work. Scott-Heron's vocal style is different from Cash's. He does not adopt a storyteller style but is more declamatory. The musical background of the two works is also different; while Cash accompanies himself on a guitar, Scott-Heron performs with flute, congas and bongo drums. I assume that Scott-Heron chose to perform his work and release it on an LP (rather than simply publish a written text) partly in an attempt to reach a wider audience.

While talking blues and spoken word poetry share many similarities, there is one fundamental difference between them. Talking blues is best understood and usually treated by listeners as a form of song. Spoken word poetry is a form of speech. This difference stems not only from vocal style or anything that could be measured with a spectrograph, but from audience expectations having to do with their respective traditions and cultural milieu. We distinguish one from another by these means, rather than on the basis of auditory cues.

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Although I've argued that talking blues is a form of singing, there are other types of "speaking in song" that are unambiguously speech, and these also deserve our attention. I have in mind popular songs with the addition of ad lib (or "ad lib") speech (accompanied by music), and popular songs with spoken lyrics.

The most obvious examples of ad lib speech within a song are the times when a singer breaks off in the middle of the song to speak directly to the audience. Bruce Springsteen is well-known for this practice. He breaks off singing and speaks directly to the audience *in propria persona*, sometimes telling a story about his past that inspired the song he is singing. Usually the band plays on, accompanying him, and he resumes singing when he reaches the end of the story.

There are many reasons why singers might do this. First, they may be responding to practical considerations, especially in live performance. Springsteen is known for marathon performances, so

[29] Ace Records Ltd. "Gil Scott-Heron—Revolution Will Not Be Televised (Official Version." YouTube video, 03:06. Posted [October 2013]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwSRqaZGsPw.

the speaking interludes may give his voice a rest (singing being more physically demanding than talking). As I have already mentioned, song is not a particularly efficient means of communicating words. Singers may speak rather than sing when there is something they want to be sure that the audience understands.

While the phenomenon of singers speaking directly to the audience within the context of performing a song seems to be found most often in live performance, it has been captured on recordings as well. One great example can be found on Pearl Bailey's 1956 recording of "Tired" with Louie Bellson's band. It comes near the end of recording, before the final chorus:

> Well I guess by now y'all have the general idea: I am tired! I… I am in the wrong place, too. You know I… what I am I doing in this studio? Well I just passed by and heard "Tired" playing. Do you know I'm in the wrong place? I thought this was *my* recording session. This is Louis's recording session. Sounds so good, though, I think I'll stay here and at least sing four more bars and enjoy myself while I'm here. Come to think of it, you know something else, I don't know nobody here. They certainly look like nice fellas, though. They keep playing this song … maybe they expecting me to come in later? Yeah, it's a long wait but I'm trying to wait for a few more bars and then I'll sneak in on 'em [she suddenly resumes singing "Tired."]

In this example, speaking allows Bailey briefly to step outside of the song's persona. This enables her to comment on the performance in progress ("I guess by now y'all have the general idea that I am tired!"). It also conveys something of her personality (as when she tells us that she's going to wait four more bars and "sneak in" on the musicians. It is also worth noting that "Tired" likely offered little of interest, musically or lyrically, to Bailey. She had already sung it wearing a frilly apron and wielding a feather duster in the film *Variety Girl* in 1947. Her spoken comments in the 1956 recording may be a way of gently sending up the song and amusing herself and her musicians, while also including listeners in on the joke.

In these examples (the Springsteen and the Bailey), and unlike in the talking blues example, I would argue that we understand the speech as speech, rather than as song. Although the speech is accompanied by music, the words are not generally pronounced in a stylized manner. Rather, the aesthetic effect of the speech within the song performance depends on listeners understanding what is being said.

My last category of speech in song occurs when singers do not ad lib but, instead, speak the lyrics of the song, with or without musical accompaniment. Unlike rap or melodrama, in the examples I have in mind, the words are spoken more or less "straight." My final example of speaking within a song is the Leiber and Stoller hit, "Is that All There Is?" It has been recorded by many performers, most notably by Peggy Lee in 1969. She recites the verses and sings the chorus.[30]

[30] peggy4AL. "Peggy Lee—Is That All There Is? 1969." Filmed [1969]. YouTube video, 04:37. Published [Oct 2009]. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCRZZC-DH7M

The verses describe the narrator's experience of a house fire, a circus performance, and falling in love for the first time. Each of these leave her underwhelmed. In the chorus she asks, "Is that all there is?" and counsels us to "break out the booze and have a ball" if life really is as disappointing as it seems. It would be tempting, and yet unfortunate, to sneer at the song's "dime-store existentialism." Let me share some of its origin. The lyrics were inspired by Thomas Mann's short story "Disillusionment" written in 1896. This places it in a similar cultural milieu to Albert Giraud's cycle of poems, written in 1884, which inspired Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. I would argue that in both works—the popular song and the atonal melodrama—using speech or *Sprechstimme* rather than straight singing—serves a similar purpose. These vocal performances are contrary to listeners' expectations. Listeners expect singing, not talking, and not something in between singing and talking. The effect is uncanny, and I would argue, extremely apt to the lyrical content.

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I've said something about the differences between singing and speech and how these differences are not necessarily obvious. I've argued that we do not (and should not) draw the line between singing and speech primarily on the basis of auditory cues. I've also said something about the artistic difference it makes when a performer speaks or uses *Sprechstimme* when the audience expects unambiguous singing. What of the larger differences between singing and speaking? Why does the practice of singing persist, and indeed thrive, in every musical genre in which it has a place?

Let me return to the article by Sparshott that I referenced earlier. He frames the problem in this way:

> Singing is a fundamental use of a part of our built-in psychophysical apparatus, the voice mechanism. If the basic use of that mechanism is speech, why should it be susceptible of modification in a different way, proving to have possibilities that speech does not exploit?[31]

What I find interesting here is the assumption that speaking is primary (the "basic use" of the built-in mechanism) and singing is derivative (a "modification"). The fact is, we do not know what form the first human vocal communications took. Were they threats howled in imitation of an animal's cadence, or perhaps in a mother's reassuring syllables, crooned and repeated until a lilting melody took shape? No matter what the origins of human vocal communication, it is not outrageous to conjecture that singing and speaking evolved together.

Yet at the same time, something about Sparshott's assumption seems fitting. Whether singing or speaking represents an earlier stage of human evolution, it is clear that today speech is the default

[31] Sparshott, "Singing and Speaking," 201.

mode of vocal communication. Singing, regardless of the social context in which we find it (and along with *Sprechstimme*, chant, and all of the in-between forms), is socially demarcated as special. To sing when speech is expected is to draw attention to oneself. Singing is a form of heightened expression, with words enhanced by affect, emphasis, repetition, rhythm, and the power of music itself. And as heightened expression, singing invites intensified or special kinds of attention.

In 2015, Barack Obama faced surely one of the most difficult moments of his presidency when he was called upon to deliver the funeral address of South Carolina State Senator Clementa Pinckney.[32] Pinckney was murdered, along with eight others, in a racially-motivated shooting at a church in Charleston, South Carolina. Near the end of his address, Obama paused, then started to sing "Amazing Grace." That silent pause was nearly thirteen seconds long. It was a silence in which the transition from one mode of communication to another, from the declaration of speech to the emotive language of song, was made ever so gradually. Those standing with Obama on the dais laugh at first, clearly not expecting this, yet they recover, stand up, and start to sing along. Soon everyone in the church is singing.

Obama is well-known and highly praised as an orator. Yet the power of his words, in this instance, were no match for the power of song. His gesture brought everyone together in a way that words alone could not have done. The best speakers understand when words alone are not enough.[33]

[32] C-SPAN. "President Obama sings Amazing Grace (C-SPAN)." Filmed [Jun 2015]. YouTube video, 02:30. Published [Jun 2015]. https://youtu.be/IN05jVNBs64.

[33] For comments and discussion, I am grateful to Joseph Agassi, Ian Jarvie, and especially to Jennifer Judkins.

Singing and Signification

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Once, in an interview, Diana Krall mused, "The greatest thing about music is putting it out there for people to figure out. You want the listener to find the song on their own. If you give too much away, it takes away from the imagination." Krall packs a lot into that short observation.[34] There is this thing called "music," she offers, which certain people, musicians, say, put "out there" and others "figure out." This figuring out is attributed to listeners, at this stage apparently distinguished from musicians, who "find the song on their own." So, now, in addition to music, there is a "song" that seems to enjoy a separate status: it is distinct from music by being an instance or a token of it (we'll have to make it clearer to you, if we can, about exactly which it is, an instance or a token or something else entirely). "If you," she continues, seeming to address herself as well as others who make music, "give too much away," that excess "takes away from the imagination." Taking away from the imagination is presumed to be a bad thing, then, at least when it comes to figuring out music.[35] The imagination is, in fact, presumed by Krall to be precisely what the listener engages to figure out the music. When she figures the music out, she finds the song, or when she finds the song, she figures the music out. In any case, and there are good reasons for thinking the latter formulation is closer to the truth, Krall appears to recommend that musicians lure listeners into an environment where their imagination can find the song, and perhaps also the music, in what musicians have put out there for them to figure out. Krall makes this recommendation as if she might think it is the aim of music in general to put out such lures for listeners to figure out on their own.

To be fair, Krall likely didn't expect remarks in an interview to marry her to philosophical commitments about the nature and aim of music in general. At the same time, what she says is well worth taking seriously, not just because she is recognized as an accomplished musician but because what she says merits our attention. She says, for example, there is this thing called music that is something more than the instances or tokens of it. She identifies a division of labor that includes putting music out there, on the one hand, and figuring it out, on the other. She describes something called "finding the song," which we'll come to find musicians, as well as those who are merely listeners, also accomplish

[34]Cited in a recent retweeted message, traced back to an internet site called "Brainy Quotes" https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/d/diana_krall.html which does not give a source.

[35] Limiting the role of the imagination would seem to be a good thing when it comes to science or the law and maybe, for some, even the interpretation of art. (The value of imagining the *Pietà* as Michelangelo's attempt to work out issues with his own mother is questionable, at least.) It is interesting to note that the complaint about sex in the movies used to be that it left nothing for the imagination. That complaint waned as sex scenes came to be shot more artistically, hiding the brute collisions of bodies only the imagination could make erotic. Here, again, in Krall's comments, it might be thought that the imagination is endowed with a power to take brute sounds and hear music in them.

or achieve. A lot could be said about each of these claims. I am especially interested, however, in the excess she recommends that musicians hold back the better to lure the listener into an environment where she, the listener, might find the song on her own. What exactly does she, the musician, hold back and how does she do it? Is it the same thing in every performance? To an extent, because she is a professional, the musician can deliver the same material in the same way time after time, but she can, as well, because she is a professional, adjust what and how much she gives away in a particular performance. What exactly does it mean to "give too much away" in a performance? What makes one performance different from another, and how does the musician grasp that difference and adjust her aims to the environment of that performance? How does she adjust what she holds back in a particular performance, and, more importantly, what exactly is she holding back? In what follows, I defend the claim that she holds back the signification of the song or, better, its *signifiance* [sic], what the song means for those who listen to it, including the one singing the song.[36]

At bottom, what Krall is recommending can be understood from a view that takes music to be emergent in the singing of the song. On this view, music emerges in the generally sonic environment of the song through an engagement with that environment by skilled performers, on the one hand, and skilled listeners, on the other.[37] To achieve or enact the emergence of music in this environment of sound, performers turn up what are called "affordances," perhaps anticipated by a score, using the skills they have acquired for engaging that environment, which affordances, in turn, determine what those performers can achieve or enact with those skills. Put another way, performers make music from what is virtually present in a sonic environment using skills they have acquired and refined for engaging such environments. What musicians put out, their listeners figure out from affordances of the music virtually present in the song that turn up for the skills listeners have acquired and refined for engaging that song.[38] Of course, some of those listeners also are musicians, and some of those musicians are also performing the song. The music that emerges in the song will be different from listener to listener, relative to differences in the skills acquired and their degrees of refinement, but also comparable from listener to listener to the extent that their skills are shared through training, practice, study and familiarity.

[36] *Signifiance* is a term Roland Barthes uses for the over-fullness of signification or meaning that attends a thing or the sign of a thing. It is the closest Barthes will come to identifying the "truth" of that thing, and I will gloss what I describe as the music that emerges in the performance of a piece of music as its truth, the truth of music understood as the over-fullness of meaning, the *signifiance*, of music. See Roland Barthes, "Listening" and "The Grain of the Voice" in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 245-298.

[37] John Caravalho, "Music and Emergence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound & Imagination*, eds. Mark Grimshaw, Mads Walther-Hansen, Martin Knaakkergaard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[38] So, as it turns out, the song is not an instance or a token of music but a virtual site for the emergence of music. This point is elaborated in what follows.

In what follows, I explain what it means for music to be emergent in the sonic environment of a song. I describe music as a form of embodied meaning or cognition that turns up in the engagements with that environment by especially skilled practitioners. I call special attention to the embodied skills of singers in these engagements. I account for what and how a singer might scale back on or, better, reticulate in what she gives away in her performance of a song, and I conclude that while this capacity of singers can be generalized and alert us to the generally emergent quality of music in environments of sound, there is something special about the embodied music to be found in singing. What a song means, its signification, which is not reducible to what the words mean, emerges or not in our engagement with the music in that song. What the song means will be achieved if performers pick up affordances in the composition of the sonic environment and leave affordances for the listener to figure out or enact as a meaning or signification of the song. Singing offers an especially rich example of this mode of embodied, enactive cognition and signification.

Krall is not the only one to think that music is a distinct something that musicians and listeners put out there, find on their own, figure out or achieve. Friedrich Nietzsche held something of the same view.[39] When he famously quipped, "Without music, life would be a mistake," he was not referring to the patterns of sounds that today pour from radios or stream from the internet or that, for him, were heard in music halls, cabarets and salons.[40] Instead he thought, though he did not express it this way, that a special achievement of music, the making of music from music, was valuable and that human life would be a mistake without that achievement. Nietzsche, as we know, had a distinctly Dionysian conception of music. Ancient Greek tragedy, Nietzsche thought, staged the emergence of Dionysus: it made the god of music appear. Opera, in his day, at its best, he thought, restaged this apparition. The figures on the stage were a projection of the music played in the orchestra. The orchestra was a simulacrum of the audience. The drama enacted on stage was, then, a projection of the Dionysian impulses, of the fundamentally musical natures of those collected in the audience. For Nietzsche, what emerged in opera was, again, at its best, the mercurial, intense, musical truth of being human. This truth is precious and rare for Nietzsche. It emerges in music when composers, performers and listeners all have acquired and refined skills that turn up, sound out or find the music emerging in an environment of sound.

[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Ronald Speirs, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and "On Words and Music," trans. Walter Kaufmann, Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 103-119.

[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman, "Arrows and Epigrams," 33 in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160.

The opportunities for music to emerge in an environment of sound will show up for skilled practitioners as what we've said are called "affordances" in that environment.[41] What counts as an affordance (an empowering resource or opportunity) will depend on the skills embodied by these practitioners, just as those skills will be defined by the environments in which they have acquired and refined their skills. To take a banal example, musicians trained in the Western classical tradition who have acquired and refined skills for performing music from an exposure to only that environment of sound, while highly skilled at playing music in that tradition, will sometimes have difficulty finding and achieving the music in an improvised musical line. To take a more nuanced example, Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble found and continues to achieve what they call a "music of strangers," music that emerges in the overlapping environments and skills embodied by practitioners from a number of different musical traditions. It took time, exposure to the different environments of sound associated with each of them, and the adaption of already refined skills for these professional musicians to achieve a "music of strangers." In their performances, they identify and pick up affordances and achieve or enact that music as they find it emerging in their playing together.

These skills constitute a form of embodied knowledge or cognition, a *know-how* that is also a *know-that:* knowledge of a repertoire, a musical tradition, and of music itself. Skills obviously are a know-how. A singer, for example, must know how to contract and relax the skeletal muscles of the body to draw in the air she needs to produce the tone she wants. Through study, practice, and performance, she acquires and refines skills that are both the embodiment and the expression of that know-how. What she learns about how to contract and relax those muscles allows her to produce a tone with more or less volume, with a raised or lowered pitch, a tone that is brighter or darker, raspy or clean, vibrant or straight, and so on, becomes, with practice, a part of her singing body and becomes expressed through her singing body.[42] Perhaps the most important muscle a singer must become skilled at engaging is the diaphragm. A singer contracts her diaphragm to increase the volume capacity of the lungs and thorax.[43] She contracts her external intercostal muscles, the outermost layer of muscles in the thorax, to expend further the volume of air she can inhale.[44] Inspiration, drawing in air that powers the singer's voice, is important to her singing but relatively simple in comparison to the controlled expiration that makes her voice an instrument.

Expiration can be divided into breath support and breath control. Breath support is a pulmonary function.[45] Six sets of muscles contribute to pulmonary expiration. They are the internal intercostal

[41] J. J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979).
[42] Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 2nd ed. (Delaware, OH: Inside View Press, 2012), 2-5 and 76-79.
[43] ibid, 83.
[44] ibid, 85.
[45] ibid, 88.

muscles, the four sets of anterior abdominal muscles and the *quadratus lumborum*. "All of these muscles contribute to expiration either by depressing the thorax, or by compressing the abdominal viscera upward against the underside of the diaphragm to help deflate the lungs."[46] Exactly which of these muscles are engaged in expiration depends on whether the singer uses a thoracic breathing technique, which depends on the release of the diaphragm and the contraction of the internal intercostal muscles, an abdominal breathing technique, which depends on contraction of the abdominal muscles pulling against the viscera and pressing the diaphragm back into its resting position, or a combination of the two.[47] While breath support powers the production of beautiful sounds, breath control is required for the refinement and extension of these sounds. Breath control is a laryngeal function, a skilled working of the passage of air through the larynx that activates the vocal folds to produce phonation.[48]

This anatomy is detailed with more precision and expertise by Scott McCoy. I have drawn on McCoy to begin to approximate the complexities of the body's contribution to the music a singer achieves in her skillful engagement with an environment of sound. I have abbreviated as the laryngeal function the process that involves closing the glottis to make the vocal folds vibrate in a moving stream of exhaled air, lifting the soft palate to keep air from escaping through the nose, moving the tongue to articulate the distinct sounds to be sung, and the contributions of bone, cartilage, intrinsic and extrinsic muscles, the detailed articulations of the vocal folds, other laryngeal structures, and laryngeal innervation that participate before opening the glottis to end phonation.[49] McCoy holds the traditional view that the brain is responsible for coordinating these complexities.[50] He does not distinguish the brain, technically part of the body, from the mind, and seems to suppose that a mental representation of the tones to be sung and of the arrangements of those tones is realized by the nervous system centered in the brain, directing all of the relevant parts of the body to act out a complicated sequence of tasks. The task assigned the brain on this model is made more complex by the way the singer will adjust the singing of her song by what she hears of it while she is singing and even more complex when what she hears is not just her singing but the music of those accompanying her singing and the sounds of the audience responding to the music she is making.

The environment in which the singer sings her song, which is in turn created by her singing, is dynamic and fluid. It is dynamic because it is constantly changing and because the changes are a result of a variety of contributions embodied by the performer, the accompanists, and the auditors, which includes the audience, the accompanists, and the performer of the song herself. In the verse for "The

[46] ibid, 86.
[47] ibid, 90.
[48] ibid, 88.
[49] ibid, 124-25.
[50] ibid, 76.