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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ

**EXTENDED FROM WHAT?: TRACING THE CONSTRUCTION,  
FLEXIBLE MEANING, AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES OF “EXTENDED  
VOCAL TECHNIQUES”**

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

MUSIC

by

**Charissa Noble**

March 2019

The Dissertation of Charissa Noble is  
approved:

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Lori Kletzer  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Charissa Noble

Extended From What?: Tracing the Construction, Flexible Meaning, and Cultural  
Discourses of “Extended Vocal Techniques”

**ABSTRACT**

This study traces the usage and development of the concept of “extended vocal techniques,” [EVT] from its early appearances in musical discourse in the 1970s to the present. Though many authors suggest a long lineage for EVT, the actual term is relatively new. In fact, this term is virtually absent from scholarly or journalistic literature before the 1970s. Vocal pedagogues and music scholars have contributed substantially to the discussion concerning which vocal practices, artists, and performance literature might be considered part of the EVT tradition. Musicological work more specifically focused on EVT has profiled individual performer-composers working experimentally with their voices, and many have woven critical theory into their analyses of these artists’ vocal practices. Curiously, few of these musicological studies have attended to their own acceptance of the EVT label, commonly applied to artists such as Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, and Pamela Z, among others. The oversight of the historical and critical issues underpinning the term itself has allowed EVT's definition to be tacitly shaped by each author’s cultural assumptions. These unacknowledged assumptions drive various definitions and responses to EVT, forming a hidden transcript that this project seeks to unearth.

By locating the appearances of the term EVT in musical discourse from earliest to latest, this work specifies the time period, social context, institutional affiliations, and musical background for each contributor to the EVT record and profiles representative artists from different social-historical contexts who have been frequently associated with EVT. Through an investigation of EVT's various historical definitions, cultural implications, and power dynamics, I formulate a rhizomatic account of the development of EVT as a concept. Moreover, I examine how its differences and similarities over the years indicate our shifting perspectives on voices, bodies, music, and identity. Recasting EVT as a culturally-situated mode of listening holds the potential to move conservatory singing toward a more flexible, inclusive understanding of vocal practice that celebrates different bodies, abilities, and backgrounds.

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## INTRODUCTION TO EXTENDED VOCAL TECHNIQUES: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

When the term “extended vocal techniques” arises, what comes to mind? And who might come to mind? Does it bring to mind composers who wrote for other vocalists’ techniques—such as Luciano Berio—or only those who wrote for their own idiosyncratically-developed vocal practices—such as Joan La Barbara? Is the focus of this label on a group of working artists or a body of practices and literature? Could it include concrete poetry (Jaap Blonk), experimental theater (Roy Hart), recitation and stylized speech (Beth Anderson), or perhaps forms of music/vocal therapy? Does this label primarily operate within the Euro-American classical paradigm, or could this term have utility in other spheres of music-making, such as jazz, death metal, or hip-hop?<sup>1</sup>

One might classify “extended vocal techniques” as simply an outgrowth of extended instrumental techniques; however, to do so would overlook some of the most fundamental properties of the voice.<sup>2</sup> Whereas many musical instruments bear

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Wendt, “Vocal Neighborhoods: A Walk through the Post-Sound Poetry Landscape,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 3 (January 1993): 67.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Edward Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra Normal Voice* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004); Martha Elliott, *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Deborah Kavasch, “An Introduction to Extended Vocal Techniques: Some Compositional Aspects and Performance Problems,” *ex-tempore.org*, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.ex-tempore.org/kavash/kavash.htm>; John W. Large and Thomas Murry, “Studies of Extended Vocal Techniques: Safety,” *NATS Bulletin* 34 (1978): 30–33; Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Margot Murdoch, “Composing With Vocal Physiology: Extended Vocal Technique Categories and Berio’s *Sequenza III*” PhD diss.

the implications of their initial historical and stylistic conception—lending some logic to the designation of some techniques as “extended”—the voice has a different set of considerations. First, though we speak of the voice as an object, singing is in fact an activity: a cooperation of systems both internal and external to the body. Second, voices emit directly from bodies, which are at once more universally shared by all humans than any instrument while at the same time more particular to an individual. Hence, it is somewhat inappropriate to discuss voices in the same way as instruments because a voice is not a fixed object designed for a particular historically-situated style. In fact, the most common function of a voice does not serve an explicitly musical purpose, per se—that is, until someone forms the intent to hear speech or other quotidian sounds as musical.<sup>3</sup> So when we talk about the “extended” voice, what do we mean?

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(University of Utah, 2011); John Potter, *The Cambridge Companion to Singing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jane Sheldon, “The Strange World of Extended Vocal Techniques,” *Limelight Magazine*, Sept. 4, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Many individuals have worked with speech in different artistic contexts, ranging from inclusion of speech into a musical work (such as in Aaron Copland’s *Lincoln Portrait* of 1942 or John Cage’s lecture-reading during performances featuring other music events), stylization of speech into a musical form (such as *Sprechstimme* found in Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* of 1912, or Robert Ashley’s recitation in *Perfect Lives*, recorded in 1983), organization of many kinds of vocal sounds (including speech) into a musical form (such as Cathy Berberian’s composition, *Stripsody* of 1966, as well as her realization of John Cage’s *Aria*), or the encouragement of listeners to take on the role of “composer” by placing a musical framework around the sounds—which could potentially include speech—heard in a daily context (a possible outcome of conceptual listening practices, pioneered by Pauline Oliveros).

At the surface level, EVT refers to vocal practices that exceed the expected mode of singing in a given context.<sup>4</sup> Much of EVT discourse has defined the term by compiling lists of exemplary techniques and musicians [Fig. 0.1 and 0.2].

	“Extended Vocal Techniques” (Szántó, 1977)	<i>Women in Music: A History</i> (Pendle, 2010)	<i>Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality</i> (Karantonis, et. all, 2014)	<i>A Dictionary for the Modern Singer</i> (Hoch, 2014)	<i>Singing the Body Electric</i> (Young, 2015)
Berberian	X	X	X	X	X
Monk	X	X	X	X	X
La Barbara	X	X	X	X	X
Z			X		
Anderson		X			
Wishart			X		X
Bleckmann			X		
Beardslee		X		X	
Oliveros	X				
Young	X				
Shakira				X	

[Fig. 0.1 A chart representing a list of vocalists mentioned across several historically significant publications on EVT.]<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> István Anhalt, *Alternative Voices: Essays on Contemporary Vocal and Choral Composition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Danielle Buonaiuto, “Extended Vocal Techniques: The New Bel Canto?” [publish.uwo.ca/~tchiles/fest2005.pdf](http://publish.uwo.ca/~tchiles/fest2005.pdf), (accessed October 10, 2016); Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice*; Elliott, *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices*; Kavasch, “An Introduction to Extended Vocal Techniques: Some Compositional Aspects and Performance Problems”; Large, “Studies of Extended Vocal Techniques: Safety”; Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire*; Margot Murdoch, “Composing With Vocal Physiology”; Potter, *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*; John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jane Sheldon, “The Strange World of Extended Vocal Techniques,” *Limelight Magazine*, Sept. 4, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Hoch, *A Dictionary for the Modern Singer* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014); Pamela Karantonis, Francesca Placanica, Anne Sivuoja-Kauppalä, and Pieter Maria Gabriël Verstraete, *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Karin Pendle and Melinda Boyd, *Women in Music: A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Ted Szántó, “Extended vocal techniques,” *Interface* 6, no. 3-4 (1977): 113–115; Miriama

	<i>Alternative Voices</i> (Anhalt, 1984)	<i>Vocal Authority</i> (Potter, 1999)	<i>Exploring Twentieth Century Vocal Music</i> (Mabry, 2002)	<i>The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voice</i> (Edgerton, 2004)	<i>The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy</i> (Sell, 2005)
<i>Sprechstimme</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Shape-note singing				X	
Multiphonics	X	X	X	X	X
Vocal fry	X			X	X
Chanting	X	X		X	
Shrieks, groans, cries, etc.	X	X	X	X	X
Ingressive singing	X		X	X	
Vocal flutter		X		X	
Laughing	X		X		
Speech	X			X	
Electronic processing		X			

[Fig. 0.2 A chart representing a list of vocal techniques mentioned across several historically significant publications on EVT.]

These lists tend to be broad, and sometimes include techniques that might not be considered atypical in other cultural contexts [Fig. 0.2].<sup>6</sup>

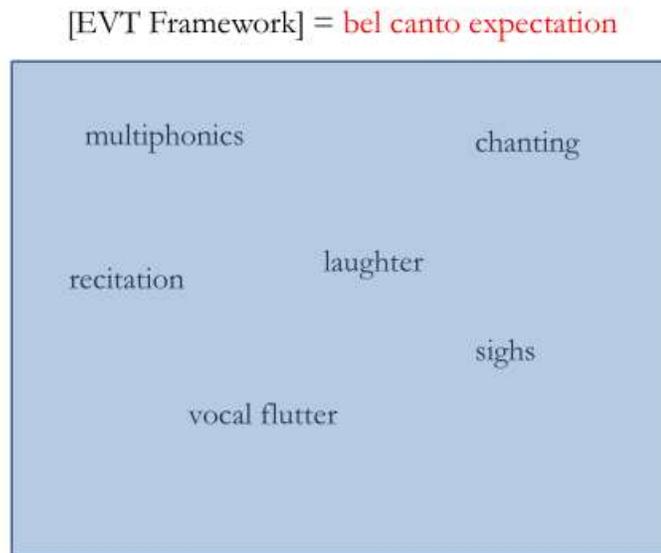
The wide range of techniques and the diversity of musical approaches espoused by the artists most often mentioned in EVT discourse makes it difficult to identify a unifying principle for understanding EVT. I suggest that we might best understand EVT as a conceptual framework in which a listener expects to hear bel

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Young, *Singing the Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Anhalt, *Alternative Voices*; Edgerton, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voice*; Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth Century Vocal Music*; Potter, *Vocal Authority*; Karen Sell: *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy: Towards an Holistic Approach* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

canto technique, but then hears something else. In other words, the concept of EVT relies on bel canto as a foil, the normative technique that presents anything else as “different” [Fig. 0.3].

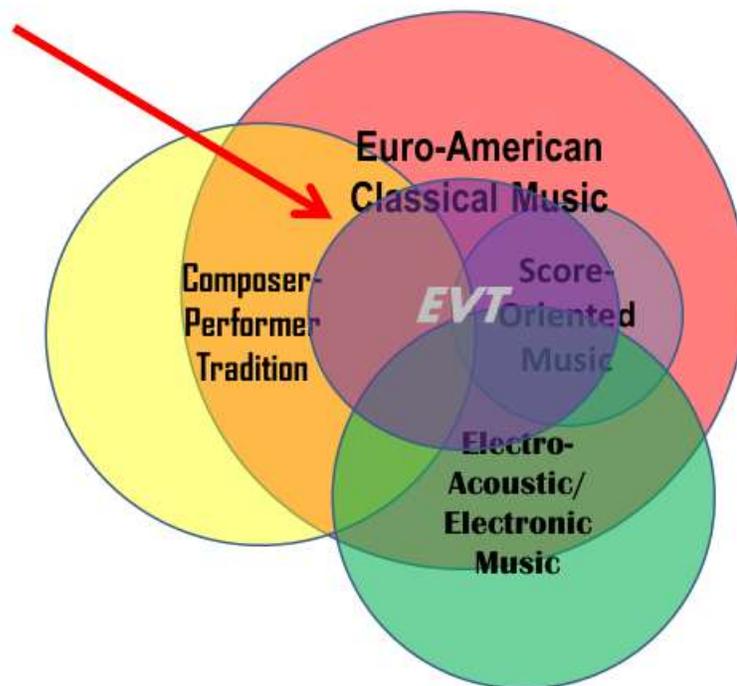


[Fig. 0.3 A visual representation of bel canto as a framework of listening in which various techniques might be heard as extended.]

Because musicology and much of arts-journalism has generally focused on Euro-American classical music, the music of conservatories, concert halls, and alternative performance spaces (which still house what is still generally understood as part of the Euro-American classical music tradition) has become the assumed given context in which we interpolate certain vocal techniques as extended, and conservatory-style singing (also known as bel canto in vocal pedagogical discourse) the expected mode of singing. For example, laughter might be considered an extended technique when a (classical) music score calls for it, but laughter at joke with friends would probably not be heard as an intentional, artistically-progressive use of the

voice. Moreover, laughter and multiphonics possess little in common from the standpoints of both vocal production and cultural context, yet both have been cited as “extended” techniques when heard in a performance by artists such as Cathy Berberian or Joan La Barbara, respectively.

Thus, productively understanding EVT involves a shift in emphasis, from list-making to exploring what EVT has signified in several Euro-American classical music practices in which it figured prominently: modernist score-oriented music, composer-performer practices, and electro-acoustic/electronic music [Fig. 0.4].



[Fig. 0.4 Positioning EVT within several overlapping music making approaches.]

Because EVT lacks an intrinsic definition its meaning conforms to the values of its given musical context, rendering EVT a nexus of cultural discourses such as gender, power, prestige, identity, and the relationship between electronics and the body.

Each chapter of this thesis explores a different way in which EVT has been understood and how its interpretation reflects broader cultural issues. Chapter One presents a history of how EVT has been used across various platforms (pedagogical writing, composer treatises, and arts journalism) and time periods. The following chapters present case studies that explore the meaning and cultural significance of EVT within several different musical practices: modernist score-based music, the composer-performer tradition, and electronic music. Chapter Two discusses the power dynamics involved in what Susan McClary identifies as the “prestige economy of the avant-garde” through case studies examining the public reception of Cathy Berberian and Bethany Beardslee and their working dynamics with Luciano Berio and Milton Babbitt, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Chapter Three identifies the connection between the development of a composer-performer tradition (linked to a musical-cultural identity British composer Michael Nyman labels “experimentalism”)<sup>8</sup> and the diversification of EVT practices, focusing on the careers of Joan La Barbara, Deborah Kavasch of the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble [hereafter EVTE], and Meredith Monk. In this chapter, I propose that the practice not only of composing *for* one’s own uniquely-developed vocal system but also composing *through* the process

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<sup>7</sup> Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” *The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition.* *Cultural Critique* 12 (Spring 1989): 57–81.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974).

of vocal discovery impacted the interpretation and cultural significance of EVT. Chapter Four addresses the impact of electronic music on the understanding of EVT and the voice itself. Through examining the discourses of musicians working with EVT and electronics (Trevor Wishart, Laurie Anderson, and Pamela Z), I suggest that the co-mingling of electronics and EVT crucially contributed to a decentering of bel canto technique and promoted an information-system model of the voice.

The case studies selected for this dissertation reflect the cohort of musicians most commonly identified with EVT in scholarly, pedagogical, and journalistic writing. To be sure, numerous artists work with their voices in innovative ways, and their work undoubtedly presents many interesting musical and cultural insights. However, the scope of this dissertation is not to provide an exhaustive list defining who belongs in the EVT category. Rather, I challenge the common notion of EVT as a self-evident category, explore how different interpretations of EVT reflect prevailing ideas about voice and musical practice, and critically consider how these ideas connect to broader cultural issues of gender, power, and recognition. Through this study of different vocalists' respective approaches to vocal practice—situated within Euro-American classical music—I hope to problematize basic assumptions made about singing and the voice in conservatory tradition, propose interdisciplinary exchange between musicology and vocal pedagogy, and invite pedagogues to develop new models of vocal study that welcome a wide array of unique physiologies and abilities.

In this disclosure of my selection process and scope, it is important to acknowledge that Trevor Wishart represents the only non-U.S. musician and non-female identifying vocalist featured in this dissertation. Moreover, of the artists studied in this dissertation Wishart stands as the least-frequently referenced in EVT discourse (especially in comparison to La Barbara and Monk). This issue reflects a connection between gender and singing in conservatory tradition that I discuss in great detail in Chapter Two and revisit in specific connection to Wishart in Chapter Four. I based my decision to include Wishart in an otherwise exclusively female-oriented study on his direct contribution to EVT discourse; Wishart published two different articles that directly address EVT in which he directly compares vocal processes to electronic processes. Thus, Wishart effectively wrote himself into the discourse of EVT, and his articles (especially “The Composer’s View: Extended Vocal Techniques”) provide crucial insight into the parallels between vocal production and signal processing that accurately reflect the work of other composers combining voice and electronics.<sup>9</sup>

I also think it important to discuss my use of the terms “avant-garde” and “experimentalism/experimentalist/experimental tradition.” Whereas these terms are generalizations, I use them in reference to specific, notable musicological works: in Chapter Two, I use the term “avant-garde” partially in reference to McClary’s description of the avant-garde in her article “Terminal Prestige” as intentionally-

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<sup>9</sup> Trevor Wishart, “The Composer’s View: Extended Vocal Techniques,” *Perspectives of New Music* (1980): 313.

innovative and highly specialized modernist music.<sup>10</sup> When not directly in connection with McClary's work, I define "avant-garde" as a score-based, forward-looking modernist musical approach that often involves unconventional musical practices, new systems of musical organization, and complexity in the music's surface features, compositional structure, or both. Commonly associated with compositional techniques such as dodecaphonicism, total serialism, and other forms of objectivist or formalist compositional processes, I specifically align the post-WWII era of avant-garde vocal music with the aesthetics of what literary theorist Anthony Mellors identifies as "late modernism" and the broader cultural experience of "modernity," as characterized by cultural theorist Marshall Berman.<sup>11</sup> As I discuss in Chapter Two, compositions that call for EVT in this time frame reflect their social-historical moment that valorized progress, systemization, objectivity and abstraction. The systematic and abstracted manner of writing for voice required a certain level of skill different from the requirements of bel canto, and raises important issues about the body, gender, and prestige.

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<sup>10</sup> McClary, "Terminal Prestige."

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne*, Angelaki Humanities (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); for further reading on the trajectory of modernism toward mid-twentieth century high modernism: Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); for further reading on the mid-Twentieth century avant-garde: Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Avant-Garde Music: from Debussy to Boulez* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jonathan Goldman, Edward Jurkowski, and Sophie Stévançe, "Structuralists Contra Serialists? Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Boulez on Avant-Garde Music," *Intersections* 30, no. 1 (November 30, 2009): 77–94; for reading on Darmstadt and its connection with the idea of avant-gardism: Martin Iddon, "Spectres of Darmstadt" 67, no. 263 (January 2013): 60–67.

In Chapter Three, I use the term “experimentalism” in connection with a tradition of composer-performers who consciously identify themselves as experimental. I acknowledge that this category has porous boundaries and has at times lumped together musicians with radically different musical aesthetics and approaches. However, as musicologist Benjamin Piekut writes, critics are not the only ones to use this label; composers themselves have also described themselves this way to demonstrate their affirmation of shared values such as individuality, intuition, and autodidacticism, as delineated by composer Michael Nyman.<sup>12</sup> The intentional identification with a label that implies a commonly known value set based around American individualism and self-knowledge renders the term “experimental” relevant to a discussion of how EVT became associated with composer-performers developing highly-individualized vocal practices.

Because singing transpires in and through bodies, imbuing its discourses with a cultural immediacy that connects music to social life. As this project explores the tacit implications underpinning EVT and the malleability of its implications when placed in different musical contexts, the prevailing ideas of voice as a static object or instrument with normative and non-normative uses might give way to new modes of understanding and engaging the concept of voice. Rather than simply closing the matter of vocal aesthetics with an unexamined, complacent relativism, this dissertation explores in greater depth both the problems and productive aspects of the

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<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 6–7; Nyman, *Experimental Music*.

different ways in which we have constructed our concept of voice and vocal normativity, which is perhaps most clearly revealed by what we define as Other—or in this case, extended.

## CHAPTER ONE: READING THE TRACE-HISTORY OF “EXTENDED VOCAL TECHNIQUES”

### Introduction

This chapter introduces the current usage and understanding of EVT, discusses the problematic elements of the term’s implicit connection to bel canto, traces its different appearances and contextual implications throughout musical discourse, and concludes with extrapolations of broader constructs involved with the term. Since the 1970s, scholarship on EVT contains a number of lists outlining the vocal practices constitute this category, such as composer and Dutch radio host Ted Szántó’s essay “Extended Vocal Techniques,” István Anhalt’s book *Alternative Voices*, and numerous dissertations by music scholars such as Linda Ann Brown, Melanie Austin Crump, and Margaret Murdoch. The techniques most often considered part of EVT by authors typically includes *Sprechstimme*, gasps, sighs, whispers, babbling, clicks, lips trills, tongue trills, multiphonics, laughing, vocal fry, whistle tone, ingressive singing (sounds made while inhaling), screaming, and growls, among others.<sup>13</sup> These sources define EVT by examples of certain recurring vocal

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<sup>13</sup> István Anhalt, *Alternative Voices: Essays on Contemporary Vocal and Choral Composition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Paul Barker, *Composing for Voice: A Guide for Composers, Singers, and Teachers* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Linda Ann Brown, “The beautiful in strangeness: The extended vocal technique of Joan La Barbara,” PhD diss. (University of Florida, 2002); Melanie Austin Crump, “When Words Are Not Enough: Tracing the Development of Extended Vocal Technique in Twentieth-Century America.” PhD diss. (University of North Carolina Greensboro, 2008); Michael Edward Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra Normal Voice* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004); Martha Elliott, *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Deborah Kavasch, “An

techniques, all of which fall outside of bel canto singing's stricter definition. When the technique or sound appears in musical contexts where bel canto is the expected vocal style, these techniques become recognizable as EVT.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas the term EVT could be thought of as simply one way to describe a set of vocal practices and that the term itself is unimportant, the frequent and consistent use of the term EVT in scholarship and journalism since the 1970s to describe not only a collection of supposedly unusual vocal practices but also associated musicians and repertoire imbues the term with history and canon of composers, performers, and high profile works. The sources mentioned above as well as many others have tacitly codified EVT into something of a genre in its own right,

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Introduction to Extended Vocal Techniques: Some Compositional Aspects and Performance Problems," *ex-tempore.org*, <http://www.ex-tempore.org/kavash/kavash.htm> (accessed February 11, 2014); John W. Large and Thomas Murry, "Studies of Extended Vocal Techniques: Safety," *NATS Bulletin* 34 (1978): 30–33; Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jane Manning, *New Vocal Repertory: An Introduction* (New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1987); Manning, *New Vocal Repertory 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Margot Murdoch, "Composing With Vocal Physiology: Extended Vocal Technique Categories and Berio's *Sequenza III*" PhD diss. (University of Utah, 2011); John Potter, *The Cambridge Companion to Singing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Potter, *Vocal Authority*; Sell: *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy*; Sheldon, "The Strange World of Extended Vocal Techniques."

<sup>14</sup> A note on my use of the term 'bel canto': the vocal pedagogy community in higher education in the late twentieth century has codified a particular singing style through the National Association for Teachers of Singing which is widely taught at conservatories for opera and art song performance. I chose to use this term in full awareness of the historical confusion that might arise for readers coming from a different instrumental tradition and for whom "bel canto" refers to eighteenth century opera. I believe the use of this term is beneficial to my project because it may potentially build bridges between musicology and vocal pedagogy by using a term a term that is already familiar in vocal science and education.

even though their focus on vocal techniques as opposed to broader structural or stylistic traits renders EVT as a musical genre that spans different spheres of musical styles and associated cultural values. Some of the significant techniques and exemplary repertoire (e.g. multiphonics and *Sprechstimme*) have remained relatively consistent in accounts of EVT. However, advances in technology, the intersection of vocal styles from different musical cultures, and the term's use across different historical and stylistic contexts has shifted the list of techniques and pieces included in the EVT category. The growing list of both acoustic and technological vocal techniques included in the EVT category undermines the underlying premise that so-called EVT practices always extend from bel canto, an assumption that this chapter will demonstrate is inherent in the term and concept of EVT.

Lists of EVT techniques demonstrate what this term means through example, but they do not provide an ontological definition of EVT. This chapter builds upon this body of literature by exploring the cultural implications embedded within the term EVT itself, thus helping us to challenge EVT's entrenchment in bel canto style and posit new models for how we construct the voice itself. Asserting that the term EVT both reveals and significantly impacts cultural assumptions about the voice, this line of inquiry into how we talk about voice and vocal practices yields a more fruitful discussion that leads us to explore the musical and social power dynamics involved in how we think about the voice.

## The State of EVT

Vocal pedagogues, music scholars, and artists have offered ideas about which vocal practices, artists, and performance literature might be considered as EVT.<sup>15</sup> Expert performers touted for their expertise in performing avant-garde music—such as Jane Manning and Cathy Berberian—have written on the interpretation and execution of vocal techniques often considered to be “extended.”<sup>16</sup> Although Manning writes that she “bristles slightly” at the term EVT and Cathy Berberian publicly denounced her association with the term, their resistance acknowledges the pervasiveness of the EVT label.<sup>17</sup>

Singer and educator Sharon Mabry has addressed performance concerns regarding EVT. She lists the techniques that most commonly appear in conjunction with this label: *Sprechstimme*, “the music of other cultures,” and “coloristic settings

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<sup>15</sup> István Anhalt, *Alternative Voices*; Paul Barker, *Composing for Voice*; Linda Ann Brown, “The beautiful in strangeness”; Melanie Austin Crump, “When Words Are Not Enough”; Michael Edward Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice*; Martha Elliott, *Singing in Style*; Deborah Kavasch, “An Introduction to Extended Vocal Techniques”; John Large, “Studies of Extended Vocal Techniques: Safety”; Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music*; Jane Manning, *New Vocal Repertory*; Manning, *New Vocal Repertory 2*; Margot Murdoch, “Composing With Vocal Physiology”; John Potter, *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*; Potter, *Vocal Authority*; Sell: *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy*; Sheldon, “The Strange World of Extended Vocal Techniques.”

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Jane Manning writes that she “is inclined to bristle when asked to explain ‘extended vocal techniques.’” Manning goes on to list the kinds of sounds in Cathy Berberian’s repertoire and says they are “often relatively simple to perform.” Jane Manning, *New Vocal Repertory, Volume 2* (1998).

<sup>17</sup> Kristen Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, ed. by Pamela Karantonis, Francesca Placanica, Anne Sivuoja-Kaupala, and Pieter Maria Gabriël Verstraete, 184–204 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 199.

of words or sound effects.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Karen Sell in *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy* affirms that in “extended vocal techniques we find vocal hybrids such as *Sprechstimme* and recitation . . . and [sounds] from outside the Euro-American tradition, such as native American, Maori, Zulu, and European folk traditions.”<sup>19</sup>

Several musicologists profiled individual performer-composers working experimentally with their voices, often drawing upon critical theories in their analyses of the cultural implications raised by these artists’ works. George Lewis details the career of Pamela Z and critically reads Z’s subject matter, and Leigh Landy writes about EVT in the experimental scene. Numerous authors have published interviews with Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, and Diamanda Galás using EVT to describe these artists’ vocal practices.<sup>20</sup> However, none of these works acknowledges its own acceptance of the term EVT, with its ambiguities and potentially ethnocentric undertones.<sup>21</sup> A few composers—such as Deborah Kavasch and István Anhalt—have traced the origins of vocal practices they identify as EVT. Yet, few authors have

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<sup>18</sup> Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Sell, *The Discipline of Vocal Pedagogy*, 4–8.

<sup>20</sup> Gelsey Bell, “Voice Acts: Performance and Relationality in the Vocal Activities of the American Experimental Music Tradition,” PhD diss. (New York University, 2015); George Lewis, “The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z,” *Journal for the Society of American Music* 1, no. 1 (February 2007): 55–77; Miriama Young, “Latent Body—Plastic, Malleable, Inscribed: the Human Voice, the Body and the Sound of its Transformation through Technology,” *Contemporary Music Review* 25, no. 1-2 (February 2006): 81–92.

<sup>21</sup> Gelsey Bell, “Voice Acts”; Janice Mowery Frey, “Volume I. between the Cracks: Meredith Monk’s Philosophy, Creative Process, Compositional Techniques, and Analysis of ‘Atlas,’ Part 1. Volume II. ‘Skeleton Woman’ for Choir and Chamber Orchestra,” PhD diss. (University of California Los Angeles, 2006); George Lewis, “The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z”; Karantonis, et. all, *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*; Murdoch, “Composing With Vocal Physiology.”

questioned the term itself or the disparities of cultural context between the techniques frequently placed in this category, or the factors in Euro-American thought that make the concept of EVT possible.<sup>22</sup>

Scholar and vocalist John Potter observes that “defining and codifying a repertoire creates legitimacy for extended vocal techniques which can then be incorporated into the mainstream. . . . In effect, a smaller hegemony is established in parallel with the main classical style. . . .”<sup>23</sup> Potter’s assessment of EVT as a genre affirms the present usage of the term EVT: as an authoritative category that is seldom overtly defined, but retains a commonly-understood and (rather specific) repertoire of practices and associated composers.

### **Before EVT: A Brief Note**

Tracing the origin and development of the term EVT in the historical record raises the issue of other terms that have been used to describe work that challenged contemporary vocal norms. Acknowledgment that EVT has not been the only available descriptive term for creative vocal work further demonstrates the

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<sup>22</sup> István Anhalt, *Alternative Voices*; Linda Ann Brown, “The Beautiful in the Strange”; Melanie Austin Crump, “When Words Are Not Enough.” Michael Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice*; Murdoch, “Composing With Vocal Physiology”; Leigh Landy, *Experimental Music Notebooks* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994): 142-147; John Potter and Neil Sorrell, *A History of Singing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Eric Salzman and Thomas Dézsy, *The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Szántó, “Extended vocal techniques.”

<sup>23</sup> Potter, *Vocal Authority*, 132.

constructed, anachronistic nature of the EVT category and reveals the significance of the specific term EVT as this category's identifying label.

An example of a different term appears in the 1956 Folkways album, *Vox Humana*, which features Alfred Wolfsohn's experiments with timbre and vocal range. The liner notes by Henry Cowell adopted Wolfsohn's own term, the "extended voice."<sup>24</sup> Although the achievement of Wolfsohn's "eight octave range" required non-standard technical training, Wolfsohn's extension does not refer necessarily to different kinds of vocal sounds but rather to pitch range. In fact, according to Cowell, Wolfsohn boasted that his students could maintain a consistent timbre and mode of vocal production across their entire range, thus emulating one of the chief aesthetic goals of conservatory singing.<sup>25</sup> Cathy Berberian also proposed the term the "New Vocality" to describe her own unconventional vocal work in her 1966 manifesto.<sup>26</sup> Berberian exhorts vocalists to adopt radically novel vocal practices to perform new, timbrally-innovative compositions. Berberian's term did not gain wide-spread use, although the "New Vocality" reappears briefly in musicologist Glenn Watkins's book *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century* (1988).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Cowell and Leslie Shepard, liner notes to *Vox Humana* (Folkways FX 6123), LP, 1956, CD.

<sup>25</sup> Cowell, *Vox Humana*.

<sup>26</sup> Cathy Berberian, "The New Vocality in Contemporary Music (1966)," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, eds. Karantonis et al., trans. Francesca Placanica, 47–66 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Glenn Watkins, *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988): 605-622.

## History of a Construct: In Search of EVT

Although many authors suggest a long lineage for practices that they have labeled as EVT—some even cite *trillo*, a common practice in the early seventeenth century of rapidly repeating a single note—the term EVT itself is actually a relatively recent construct.<sup>28</sup> In fact, this term appears to be conspicuously absent from scholarly and popular literature before the 1970s. A search of archives and other source materials including program notes, artist profiles, and festival materials written contemporaneously with the pieces most commonly associated with EVT—*Aria* by John Cage (1958), *Sequenza III* by Luciano Berio (1965), *Stripsody* by Cathy Berberian (1966), *Ancient Voices of Children* by George Crumb (1970), and *Education of a Girl Child* by Meredith Monk (1972)—surfaced no mention of the term prior to the founding of the University of California, San Diego’s [hereafter UCSD] Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble [hereafter EVTE] in 1973, no formally published use of the term before the EVTE and Richard Jennings’s joint publication of the *Lexicon of Extended Vocal Techniques*, and no reviews or concert ephemera previous to Ted Szántó’s 1977 essay, “Extended Vocal Techniques,” a short work occasioned by performances from Joan La Barbara and the EVTE at the Holland Music Festival that year.<sup>29</sup> Yet, Szántó’s essay suggest that the term had already become common enough in musical parlance to appear as a name for a performance

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<sup>28</sup> Deborah Kavash, “An Introduction to Extended Vocal Techniques: Some Compositional Aspects and Performance Problems,” *ex-tempore.org*, <http://www.ex-tempore.org/kavash/kavash.htm> (accessed February 11, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Ted Szántó, “Extended vocal techniques,” *Interface* 6, no. 3-4 (1977): 113–115.

ensemble and to include numerous performers in an account of its historical development.<sup>30</sup>

### **Ted Szántó (1977): EVT in the Experimental Tradition**

Szántó's account of EVT situates it as a second type of vocal experimentation, following the work of Berio, Berberian, and Cage (likely referring to *Aria* in 1958) in the post-WWII generation of composers. His essay contextualizes the 1977 Holland Festival's theme, *Voice*, and situates Joan La Barbara, the EVTE, and Prima Materia (a group started by two members who left the EVTE)<sup>31</sup> into a lineage of vocal experimentation. However, few artists seemed to use the term EVT before the groups for whom Szántó wrote the essay. He adopted an historical approach for his essay, outlining a proposed lineage for EVT, describing EVT's origination in instrumental extended techniques. However, in the same paragraph, he aligns both extended traditions—instrumental and vocal—with the experimental tradition, stating:

The term 'extended vocal techniques' can be freely interpreted as experimental voice techniques applied to music. Their precursor, extended instrumental techniques, dates from a few years back, and involves new possibilities of playing conventional (often wind) instruments. Extended vocal techniques may be regarded as phase two of the postwar developments in the innovations in vocal musical expression.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Szántó, "Extended vocal techniques," 113; Deborah Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, Turlock, February 28, 2018; the author asked Kavasch, "Who named you the 'Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble,'" to which Kavasch replied, "We did. . . [Our thought was] 'Let's just be upfront about this, this is what we're doing.'"

<sup>31</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Szántó, "Extended Vocal Techniques," 113.

Unlike many later discussions of EVT, Szántó's narrative never mentions *Sprechstimme*, nor any techniques or repertoire predating 1950.<sup>33</sup> Szántó's identification of EVT as "phase two of the postwar developments in the innovations in vocal musical expression" identifies this category as a recent development among his contemporaries. He identifies EVT with a generation of composers invested in radical musical innovation, and names Pauline Oliveros, Meredith Monk, and La Monte Young, among others.

By presenting a historically-specific time frame for EVT, Szántó identifies EVT as a recent concept. He does not seek to establish a history rooted in the Euro-American classical canon, but instead forms a mosaic of EVT from an assemblage of contemporaneous practices. He does, however, identify forerunners in the recent-past of then-contemporary EVT practice. Tracing a path through earlier work that led to the development of EVT. Szántó cites practices from a variety of social-historical contexts with striking differences in their application of the extended voice. His EVT history starts with therapeutic applications (Janov's "scream therapy" and Alfred Wolfsohn's Jungian-inspired vocal research), and encompasses theatrically-motivated explorations of the voice (Kenneth Gaburo and New Music Choral Ensemble), ritualistic contexts (vocal group Prima Materia, LaMonte Young, and Stockhausen's *Stimmung*), and empirically-inspired explorations of the voice's physiological capabilities (La Barbara and the EVTE).<sup>34</sup> He also brings together composers not

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> The empirical, research-oriented premise of the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble appealed to the growing scientific wing of the National Association of

typically associated with EVT but whose musical experimentation centrally featured their voices. For example, Szántó considers Pauline Oliveros and La Monte Young to be significant contributors to the development of EVT, as their work encouraged self-exploration through voice and highlighted vocal sounds typically not found in Euro-American classical music. Neither Young nor Oliveros figure prominently in later EVT discourse, and conversely, contemporary scholarship on Oliveros or Young rarely associates either with EVT. However, by bringing them into his EVT narrative, Szántó situates EVT as an important part of the Experimental tradition.<sup>35</sup>

Szántó's account provides valuable insight into EVT's meaning within the context of Experimental music. A composer working in electronic music and improvisation, Szántó championed music on his Dutch radio show, *Kollage van Alledaags en Zeldzaam* (or *Collage of the Everyday and Strange*).<sup>36</sup> At the Darmstadt festival where, in 1974, he befriended Carl Stone, Gordon Mumma, and Christian Wolff.<sup>37</sup> Szántó's community and interests gave him a different perspective on the creative vocal work of his contemporaries. Rather than writing about EVT from the perspective of a classical singer or composer listing a variety of vocal sounds that could be applied to otherwise conventional music, Szántó observed these practices from the vantage point of a participant in a community whose innovative work offered new models of music-making within Euro-American classicism.

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Teachers of Singing and yielded a 1977 study shared with International Phonetic Sciences conference and published in the *NATS Bulletin*.

<sup>35</sup> Szántó, "Extended Vocal Techniques," 113.

<sup>36</sup> Carl Stone, "Love and Respect," *New Music Box*, August 30, 2007, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/love-and-respect/> (accessed August 20, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

As Susan McClary has observed, EVT demonstrates vocal mastery and virtuosity in the framework of classical music and bel canto training, yet experimentalism's different aesthetic premise redirects the objective of vocalization.<sup>38</sup> Musicians who consciously identified with Nyman's "experimental tradition" rallied around a common interest musical activity that involved a different set of values and goals than the traditional hierarchical models in classical music.<sup>39</sup> An important aesthetic ideal of experimentalism often centered around music as process rather than product, questioned what might be considered "music," experimented with the degree of agency performers held in determining musical material and performance outcomes, and sometimes explored the relationship between performers and audience members. Artists and musicians who participated in this tradition using their voices—such as Cage, La Barbara, Monk, Yoko Ono, and Robert Ashley—sought to explore singing in new ways, often including both the process of vocal production as well as the aesthetic deployment of the resulting sounds.

The influence of Cagean thought on subsequent generations of experimental-identifying composers contributed to experimentalism's approach to singing.<sup>40</sup> Cage's challenge to the distinction between "noise" from "music" laid the groundwork for

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<sup>38</sup> Susan McClary, "Terminal Prestige," *The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition*. *Cultural Critique* 12 (Spring 1989): 57–81.

<sup>39</sup> Beal, "'Experimentalists and Independents are Favored': John Edmunds in Conversation with Peter Yates and John Cage, 1959-61," *Notes* 64, no. 4 (June 2008): 659–687; Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); William Robin, "The Rise and Fall of 'Indie Classical': Tracing a Controversial Term in Twenty-First Century New Music," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 1 (February 2018): 55–88.

<sup>40</sup> Pamela Z, interview by Charissa Noble, San Francisco, CA, April 2, 2017.

vocalists to accept all sounds as musically valid.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Cage's understanding of music as disciplined activity rather than a finished product created space for singers to explore new modes of vocal production, to embrace unknown outcomes, and to welcome unintended sounds (or vocal "faults") as serendipitous discoveries. In the absence of an expected normative vocal sound or practice, singers in this tradition approached creative activity from more individualistic perspectives. For example, Meredith Monk and Joan La Barbara had received bel canto training (La Barbara throughout her university studies from Helen Boatwright and Marion Freshl, Monk for over twenty years with Jeanette LoVetri), but each utilizes their training as one of a number of resources.<sup>42</sup> Meredith Monk uses her vocal practice to access different ideas, emotions, and identities that form the basis of her compositions. Joan La Barbara composes through improvisation and her own more empirically-driven method of sound discovery, and realizes works written for her particular creative methods.

Szántó's inclusion of La Barbara and Monk—both of whom had bel canto training—raises questions about the word "extended" in the context of Experimental music. Although these singers have similar training, neither sees her work as extensions of classical singing,<sup>43</sup> as composer and vocalist Kristen Norderval

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<sup>41</sup> John Cage, "The Future of Music: Credo," in *Silence: Lectures and Writing* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 3–5.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Midgette, "Ms. Monk's Masterclass," *New York Times*, January 29, 2006. Joan La Barbara, "Voice is the Original Instrument," *Contemporary Music Review* 21, no. 1 (2002): 36.

<sup>43</sup> Dimitri Ehrlich, *Inside the Music: Conversations with Contemporary Musicians about Spirituality, Creativity, and Consciousness* (Boston: Shambhala Publications,

observed: “the question [is] . . . conflict between Western classical vocal training, with its emphasis on the mastery of a very particular technique and repertoire, and the creation and performance of a new vocal work that requires exploration beyond the confines of an established canon and vocal aesthetic.”<sup>44</sup>

To be sure, the basic tenets of Monk and La Barbara’s respective vocal practices reflect their bel canto training, such as coordinating vocal fold adduction with the flow of breath, the release of bodily tension, and an attention to the physical experience of what singers commonly refer to as “vocal placement” (the experience of a sensation of vibrations in various places in the mouth, face, and upper chest areas).<sup>45</sup> However, utilizing lessons from one form of training differs radically from continuing to identify with the style, repertoire, and performance context of that training. Neither Monk nor La Barbara classifies her singing as operatic; such a label would inaccurately describe both of their chosen cultural contexts and vocal aesthetics.

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1997): 67–73; Meredith Monk, “Meredith Monk,” in *American Composers : Dialogues on Contemporary Music*, ed. Edward Strickland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991): 88–104; Monk, “Meredith Monk,” in *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004): 273–284; Monk, “Meredith Monk,” in *In Her Own Words*, ed. Jennifer Kelly (Urbana: University of Illinois Press): 175–194; Joan La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, New York City, NY, August 21, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Kristin Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, ed. by Pamela Karantonis et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 191.

<sup>45</sup> Meredith Monk, Voice as Practice Workshop, Garrison Institute, New York, January 2017.

La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

Therefore, if the work of classically-trained Experimental singers such as Monk, La Barbara, and their contemporaries emanates from their own personally-developed aesthetic sensibilities, then from what does their singing ostensibly extend? Does early classical training contextualize all of an artist's subsequent work as extended? These artists simultaneously identify with experimentalism (as opposed to traditional conservatory-oriented music) and also maintain that their unconventional vocal practices draw from techniques learned in bel canto training. For example, in an interview La Barbara explains her singing using bel canto terminology.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, as a conservatory-trained singer, my participation at Meredith Monk's "Voice as Practice" workshop did not conflict with my training; in fact, nearly all the techniques and exercises presented aligned with ideas about singing and vocal health espoused by authoritative vocal pedagogy sources (such as Richard Miller's *On the Structure of Singing* and James McKinney's *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*) used by the voice faculty at my conservatory.<sup>47</sup>

Monk and La Barbara's affirmation of bel canto technique as part of their respective singing practices points to another question regarding EVT: Does the "extension" refer to the mode of vocal production, the sonic result, or both? Experimentalist emphasis on process over product might suggest the former. Since singing is a system of dynamic processes that occur both inside and outside of the

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<sup>46</sup> La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Meredith Monk, Voice as Practice Workshop, Garrison Institute, New York, January 2017; Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: The Technique and the Art* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986).

body, at what point in the process of singing would an intervention in the system of singing exclude the resulting sound from being considered part of bel canto technique?

Since voice is an active process that occurs over time and space from the vocal folds to the oral cavity to the acoustic space of the room and the ear, it follows that EVT refers to the listener's interpretation of vocal sound, largely based on context and its attendant expectations. EVT is thus defined by the juxtaposition of expectations in the context in which the singer's work is presented, and the sounds produced that defy those expectations. When placed in the context of experimental music, where artists intentionally unmoor some of their musical endeavors from expected outcomes, what constitutes as extended vocal sound? The presence of bel canto training in the vocal practices of experimental composers commonly identified with EVT—Monk, La Barbara, Shelley Hirsch, Pamela Z, and others—implies that EVT's meaning continues to rely on the bel canto/operatic construction of normative singing.

### **István Anhalt's *Alternative Voices* (1984): Collecting and Codifying EVT**

In addition to the solo work by performer-composers such as Monk and La Barbara, Szántó includes Euro-American engagement with different musical traditions, and scientifically-oriented studies of the voice's capabilities in his account of EVT choral ensembles. The collection of composers, creative approaches, traditions, and cultural contexts listed in Szántó essay reflects an increasingly

expansive definitions of EVT's concept. István Anhalt's *Alternative Voices* (1984) further broadens EVT and includes even more non-operatic uses of the voice in a classical music context as part of EVT.

Anhalt, a composer and early champion of electronic music, wrote *Alternative Voices* to better understand his own writing for the voice in the context of his predecessors and contemporaries.<sup>48</sup> Observing the increasing number of vocal compositions that called for techniques outside of bel canto practice, his work redressed the lack of useful analytical models for exploring compositions organized around vocal content and timbre. *Alternative Voices* is Anhalt's search for unifying principles among his selected musical subjects' unconventional composition for the voice, using his own system of analysis.<sup>49</sup> Covering a wide range of repertoire and providing a list of vocal options used by composers, Anhalt outlines the historical development of EVT and analyzes pivotal works in their use of extended—or “alternative”—voices.<sup>50</sup> He starts with melodrama and cabaret in the early twentieth century, Dada sound poetry, and declamation, and arrives at the work of Berio, Ligeti, and Lutoslawski as the central figures of the study.<sup>51</sup> From these historical examples, Anhalt extracts his theory of EVT's unifying principles. He proposes that the motivating factors driving composition for “alternative voices” (his own term, which he uses interchangeably with the term EVT) involve theatricality, the expression of

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<sup>48</sup> Austin Clarkson, “Between the Keys: István Anhalt Writing on Music,” in *István Anhalt: Pathways and Memory*: 325–327.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Anhalt, *Alternative Voices: Essays on Contemporary Vocal and Choral Composition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

literary content, and psychological engagement with the unconscious and archetypal imagery behind linguistic expression.<sup>52</sup>

*Alternative Voices* established a foundation for non-operatic vocal studies in contemporary classical music by endorsing the aesthetic validity of the voice's capabilities outside of bel canto. Anhalt locates EVT's origins in language, rather than extended instrumental practice, and acknowledges the unique aspects of the voice in avant-garde composition. Yet, his inclusion of a wide variety of vocal techniques and traditions brings up a problem inherent to defining a category: a narrow definition cultivates oversimplification, omission, and marginalization, a broad definition both lacks descriptive power and favors one's own perspective as a conceptual framework. Although Anhalt's criterion accurately describes most EVT literature, it could also apply to vocal repertoire in many different musical contexts. For instance, vocal depiction of psychological states characterizes Lucia's "mad scene" in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lamermoor*—a staple in operatic repertoire for the classically-trained coloratura soprano—as strongly as it does *Sequenza III*, a piece that occupies a central role in Anhalt's definition of EVT.<sup>53</sup>

The juxtaposition between Donizetti's "mad scene" from *Lucia Di Lamermoor* and Berio's *Sequenza III* demonstrates one example of the degree of reduction required to find commonalities among exceptionally diverse vocal practices. Even if sounds in two different compositions bear a strong resemblance, the

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<sup>52</sup> Clarkson, "Between the Keys," 327–328.

<sup>53</sup> Susan McClary, "Excess and Fame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality; with a New Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 110.

means by which the composers arrive at those sounds determines the context in which the compositions are heard. For example, Anhalt identifies eroticized groans and shrieks in both Stockhausen's *Stimmung* and the singing style of Janis Joplin.<sup>54</sup> Yet, Stockhausen's work attempts to evoke Shamanistic ritual, while Joplin's vocal style is influenced by Ma Rainey, Willa Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, and other blues singers.<sup>55</sup> Thus, as the scope of EVT stretches beyond its point of origin within Euro-American classical repertoire, the issue of context persistently plagues EVT as long as its relation to bel canto forms its basis.

However, *Alternative Voices* constitutes an important shift in the history of writing about EVT. The EVTE identified EVT in terms of empirical research and vocal science, and Szántó defined it in terms of post-war autodidactic vocal experimentation. Neither of these characterizations tried to theorize EVT's unifying characteristics. Before *Alternative Voices*, EVT was a subset of a pre-existing category: a segment of music research at Center for Musical Experimentation at UCSD or a part of a performer-composer tradition that involves the voice. Anhalt brings together different compositions and practices based on their inclusion of EVT-identified practices; he considers EVT as a framework, supported by an historical account, detailed analyses, and precise terminology. His account of EVT practices identifies commonalities and lists variations across different musical genres, styles, and historical contexts. Although Anhalt's writing style is more personal than

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<sup>54</sup> Anhalt, *Alternative Voices*, 239.

<sup>55</sup> Edgar Zodiag Friedenberg, *The Anti-American Generation* (New York: Aldine Publishers, 1971): 150; Buzzy Jackson, *A Bad Woman Feeling Good: Blues and the Women Who Sing Them* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005): 43.

scientific, *Alternative Voices* proposes a valuable taxonomy of EVT, particularly in its systematization of a diverse array of vocal phenomena into an interconnected whole.

### **Vocal Taxonomies: EVT Diversification**

A taxonomical view of EVT allows the term to remain intact even as it expands to accommodate new repertoire and vocal practices. However, as EVT's definition expands, its name becomes increasingly odd. Although Anhalt considers Joplin's singing as EVT, for example, most listeners would obviously not define her voice by its relationship to bel canto technique. As the taxonomy of EVT branches out to include popular, folk, and religious vocal music, it invites peculiar comparisons between bel canto technique and singing styles from different traditions that serve diverse social purposes.

In the case of Joplin, the juxtaposition with Euro-American classicism seems merely ill-fitting, the categorization of non-European vocal traditions according to a European aesthetic construct raises more complicated issues. The impulse to collect and categorize in Anhalt's study of EVT evokes the intellectual projects conducted under the auspices of colonial power.<sup>56</sup> Collections and taxonomic systems construct

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<sup>56</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978): 139; Erica Mugglestone and Guido Adler, "Guido Adler's 'The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology' (1885): An English Translation with an Historico-Analytical Commentary," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13 (1981): 1–

authority by participating in the modern project of ordering the world.<sup>57</sup> As cultural theorist Tony Bennett observes, exhibitions, collections, and taxonomies represent power connected with knowledge—the power to order objects and persons into a knowable world and to lay that world out in such a way that it can be understood as an encompassing totality.<sup>58</sup> Szántó and Anhalt both categorize Tibetan chant and multiphonic singing as EVT, setting a precedent that has been followed by subsequent writers as recently as 2004 in Michael Edward Edgerton’s *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voice*.<sup>59</sup> The subsuming of these traditions into EVT reflects an ordering of the world according to a Eurological understanding of singing.<sup>60</sup>

Although these authors apply the EVT label to these techniques in the context of the contemporary classical compositions that utilize them, such as Stockhausen’s *Stimmung*, the EVTE’s use of Tibetan chant, or La Monte Young’s “experiments with vocal overtone timbres . . . since 1965 (Theater of Eternal Music),” the examination of these techniques only within their appearances in Euro-American composers’ composition perpetuates the act of viewing all vocal activity through the lens of bel

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21; Hayden White, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation,” *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (September 1982): 113–137.

<sup>57</sup> The ideas about disciplining the body as a form of colonial control that I discuss here are derived from themes in Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *New Formations* 4 (Spring 1998): 73–102.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice*. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> The term “Eurological” is taken from George Lewis’s article “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives”; George Lewis, “The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z,” *Journal for the Society of American Music* 1, no. 1 (February 2007): 55–77.

canto and Euro-American musical aesthetics, as musicologist Lucie Vágnerová observes:

The recourse to linguistic terms such as “vocabulary,” “lexicon,” and “language” appears frequently in vocalists’ descriptions of extended technique. On the one hand, extended voice can thus be understood as an alternative to linguistic hegemony. On the other hand, vocalists’ interest in the linguistically foreign (particularly the performance of incomprehensible chatter, non-Western phonology, and techniques drawn from global folk) implicates a problematic history of Western encounters with non-Western and indigenous speakers and the colonial objectification of foreign cultures.<sup>61</sup>

Vágnerová suggests that even when composers explicitly acknowledge the inherently unequal power balances in cultural exchange wrought by a history of colonialism, we must continually acknowledge the use of globally diverse vocal traditions as the products of different traditions.

The contributions of post-structuralist theory, postcolonial studies, and “new musicology” establishes a conceptual foundation that expedites the identification and critique of power, and thus renders the problems with EVT and its tenuous claims on non-European vocal traditions transparent.<sup>62</sup> This foundation might account for the sparsity of discourse that addresses EVT’s latent coloniality. Moreover, the universality of basic human physiology has served to legitimize claims of parallel

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<sup>61</sup> Lucie Vágnerová, “Sirens/Cyborgs: Sound Technologies and the Musical Body,” PhD diss. (Columbia University, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> For further reading on deconstructive theories, both musicological or in critical theory, see: Philip V. Bohlman, “Music and Canons,” in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons*, eds. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 197–210; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Susan McClary, “Excess and Fame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen,” in *Feminine Endings*; White, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation.”

discoveries made by Euro-American vocalists of vocal techniques found in music cultures such as Tibet, India, Australia, and New Zealand. This fact of shared physiology, combined with the notion of the voice as an instrument, in some ways supports the modernist claim of universality: if the voice is a fixed object—an instrument that all have shared for millennia—then it could potentially follow that its sonic possibilities could eventually be discovered by every culture in possession of it. However, if voice is more akin to an activity, navigated by individuals based on the vocal examples and sound possibilities encountered within their cultural landscape, then the idea of all properties of the voice supposedly belonging to everyone becomes less tenable.

Yet even with its colonial undertones, the development of the EVT label into a coherent taxonomic category has productively affected how we think about EVT and the voice. Though EVT's essential definition relies on a central, normative mode of vocal production as its foil, Anhalt's creation of a broader constituency of vocal practices effectively distances the category from its classical center. As vocal techniques and performance practices from diverse musical contexts populate the EVT tradition, the centrality of bel canto is weakened by the category's sprawl. The inclusion of numerous, non-classical vocal practices undermines the preeminence of classical music as the category's primary reference point; in this pluralistic view of EVT, the sense of any central normative practice fades, the category now conveying a general experience of a vocal sound as sounding "new" or unique.

## **EVT and Technology: Electronic Music Experts on Voice, 1980–1992**

The experience of something as new or unique implies a contrast with the old or commonplace. The term extended still signifies an unspoken central or normal vocal practice, left to be tacitly determined by an author's unchallenged biases. For example, Matthew Rhye's 1988 review in *The Musical Times* of Electric Phoenix's performance of *Vox 3* by Trevor Wishart and *Four Madrigals* by William Brooks supplies no description and little critique of these performances beyond a passing reference to Berio.<sup>63</sup> Yet even a surface level comparison of these pieces with Berio's *Sequenza III* or *Circles* quickly reveals that the respective compositions of Wishart and Brooks actually have little in common with Berio. Berio's work focuses on the fragmentation of speech and the depiction of psychological states, and Wishart's *Vox 3* connects human to animal sound on a sonic continuum and Brooks's *Four Madrigals* paint the text quite literally (just as the historical reference in the title suggests) with different vocal colors. The author's predisposition to hear these works as tokens of a generally understood non-normative singing exemplifies the binaristic construct of central and extended vocality built into the concept of EVT.

However, the old or normative may not always refer to a particular vocal style from which an Experimental singing practice extends. The inclusion of electronically-modified vocal work in EVT discourse indicates that the newness experienced by the listener might have to do with the way in which voices electronically extend beyond the body, the bounds of a purely internal, physiological concept of singing stretching

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew Rhye, "Music in London: Concerts," *The Musical Times*, October 1988.

past the skin.<sup>64</sup> One example of this more holistic kind of connection made between electronic sound and EVT occurs in Trevor Wishart's 1980 article for *Perspectives of New Music*, "The Composer's View: Extended Vocal Techniques." Wishart writes:

An initial (though inadequate) thought-model for describing the human voice may be based on the classical electronic synthesizer. We may describe certain oscillators, noise-generators and filters and treatments of these: 1) larynx, 2) tongue, 3) lips and cheek, and 4) whistling. All the sounds above (and below) may be filtered by varying the size and/or shape of the mouth cavity, or by projecting sound into the nasal cavities, enabling us to stress particular harmonics (as in *Stimmung*) or define and vary a pitch-band.<sup>65</sup>

In fact, Wishart holds that EVT surpasses the capabilities of instrumental extended techniques. In the same vein as Cage's "The Future of Music," Wishart affirms EVT's suitability to the expansion of music past its limitations of pitch and rhythm:

As a composer, my motivation for researching extended vocal techniques was a desire to be able to transform sounds of totally different timbre and pitch-content into one another in a continuous process. Conventional musical instruments. . . are unsuited to this aim. Beyond this point many traditional concepts begin to break down. First of all the idea of pitch as a single, definable quality of every sound begins to dissolve.<sup>66</sup>

Conceiving of the voice's operations as similar to electronics disrupts the notion of bel canto—or any specific vocal sound—as the natural or normative sound of a human voice. Analogizing EVT to electronic systems or co-mingling voice and

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<sup>64</sup> The idea presented here is derived from broader concepts in the follow works: Hannah Bosma, "Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovoical Music," *Organised Sound* 8, no. 1 (April 2003): 5–17; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Sphere Books, 1967); Miriama Young, *Singing the Body Electric: The Human Voice and Sound Technology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Trevor Wishart, "The Composer's View," 313.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

electronics in music composition thus changes the paradigm of EVT in a significant way. This notion of voice as a synthesizer, a network of co-operative systems capable of seamless interaction with electronic systems, obviates the fact that any vocal sound is but one of many possible outcomes, and any vocal practice is just one of many ways to engage the voice's system. Thus, the implication of how Wishart uses the term EVT involves a de-centralization of not only bel canto (or any specific vocal practice), but of the body itself. In Wishart's view, the extension involved in EVT is an extension of the voice's sound-making systems beyond the borders of the body, hypothesizing a continuum of sound-production involving numerous, interactive systems in acoustical space.

A musical resource with a more recent cultural presence than singing or even most Euro-American classical instruments, electronic music involves a different approach to sound. Machines create sound through a system of interactive processes, each of which can be adjusted in order to change the fundamental qualities of the sound. An instrument might also be considered a system, in the sense that it has an oscillator (string, mouthpiece, reeds, or percussive surface), a resonating body, and an opening that allows the sound to resonate in the outside acoustical space. However, electronic sound has more plasticity of sound due to the numerous, cooperative systems and processes involved in its basic generation. For example, magnetic tape possesses a particularly amorphous nature, with its ability to capture nearly any available sound and subject it to splicing, warping, superimpositions, or any number

of operations. Moreover, electronically-generated sound often starts with an oscillator, but it applies a variety of filters to shape the sound.

Thinking of EVT in connection with electronic music provides a new model for understanding the voice. The idea of the voice as a series of systems capable of producing an array of sounds resembles the concept of synthesizers, an idea which appears briefly in a 1988 article by F. Richard Moore.<sup>67</sup> Focusing on the diagnosis and correction of the shortcomings of MIDI, Moore analyzes the characteristics of human musical performance desirable for MIDI systems. In his assessment, he applies the vocabulary of electronic systems. He identifies one desirable quality in music as “control intimacy,” which he explains “is based on the performer's subjective impression of the feedback control lag between the moment a sound is heard, a change is made by the performer, and the time when the effect of that control change is heard.”<sup>68</sup> He goes on to say, “The range of musically desirable sounds producible by the human vocal mechanism is enormous—far greater than that commonly used in traditional singing as amply demonstrated in the research work of the UCSD Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble (Kavasch 1980).”<sup>69</sup> Moore touts the “range of musically desirable sounds,” (the ambiguous word “desirable” aside) “producible by the human vocal mechanism,” and goes on to propose the voice’s versatility as an aspirational model for MIDI.

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<sup>67</sup> F. Richard Moore, “The Dysfunctions of MIDI,” *Computer Music Journal* 12, no. 1 (April 1, 1988): 19–28.

<sup>68</sup> Moore, “The Dysfunctions of MIDI,” 21.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

In a slightly different vein than Moore's ideas of voice and electronics existing on a flexible continuum of sound, composer and music scholar Robert Rollin suggests in a paper for the 1982 annual meeting of the College Music Society that "the flourishing of techniques which appeared in the late 1950s and 60s" occurred "simultaneously with intense activities in both electronic music and chance."<sup>70</sup> Though Rollin groups together composers from a wide range of aesthetic perspectives under the generalized label EVT—such as Berio, Cage, Stockhausen, and Brooks—Rollin focuses on the historical context that EVT and electronic music share, and examines how new musical possibilities opened through the different ways. On the surface it might appear that Rollin's view (electronic music influencing EVT) conflicts with Moore's view (EVT as a model for MIDI development), yet both of their propositions suggest a degree of fluidity between the operations of the voice and electronic sound.<sup>71</sup> composers explored various ways of combining voice and electronics.<sup>72</sup>

Rollin suggests that the parallel development between EVT and new technological possibilities hints at a mutually-influential relationship between the two, which positions electronic sound as a catalyst for interest in extended vocal sounds. In works by the composers that Rollin names (especially Stockhausen), the

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Rollin, "Words and Music in Recent Composition," paper presented at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, Boston, October 7–10, 1982.

<sup>71</sup> Bosma, "Bodies of Evidence," 5–7; Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway (London: Routledge, 2004): 7–45.

<sup>72</sup> Rollin, "Words and Music in Recent Composition."

blending of seemingly atypical or extended vocal sounds with recorded and electronically-generated sounds blurs the distinctions between the two.<sup>73</sup> Rollin's narrative of EVT thus marks a different perspective on EVT: rather than locating EVT's origins in *Sprechstimme* or non-European singing traditions framed by Euro-American classical music, Rollin proposes electronic sound as an important factor in shaping the contemporary vocal soundscape.

Composer Elliott Schwartz also subtly links EVT and electronic sound in his review of an Electronic Phoenix performance in Oslo (1991). Schwartz describes the concert as, "a brilliant etude in extended vocal technique, a witty exploration of phonemes, formants, and pointillistic by-play both live and electronic."<sup>74</sup> Along these same lines, composer Michael Casey casually connects EVT to electronics in a natural, matter-of-fact way in his review of the seventh installment in the CDCM (Consortium to Distribute Computer Music) album series. Covering pieces by Neil B. Rolnick, Pauline Oliveros, Julie Kabat, Barton McLean, and Joel Chadabe, Casey simply describes Rolnick's piece *Vocal Chords* by the sum total of its materials, as opposed to categorizing it as a vocal piece that uses electronics, or an electronic piece that uses voice as its source material: "Voice and digital processors [combine] . . . and the voice of Kathleen Myers uses sound materials drawn from the repertoire of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Elliott Schwartz, "Two New-Music Festivals: Oslo and Amsterdam," *Perspectives of New Music* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 320–329.

extended vocal techniques.”<sup>75</sup> Although both of these mentions of EVT are brief, they indicate the increasingly common pairing of EVT and electronic music. Unlike Wishart, whose ideas about voice and technology are simultaneously poetic/metaphorical and literal/scientific, Schwartz and Casey do not conflate vocal and electronic sound by classifying electronic vocal processing as EVT in itself.

### **EVT in Journalism: EVT goes into the Mainstream (1984–2015)**

The term EVT may have started circulating among musicians specializing in contemporary music, but its expediency as a label for vocal sounds experienced as non-normative lent itself to journalistic writing about unconventional vocal work by high-profile performers and composers. It appears as early as 1984 in a *Wall Street Journal* article on Joan La Barbara by Barbara Jepson, with a review of her performance at Avery Fischer Hall.<sup>76</sup> Although the term is used only once, quoting La Barbara, Jepson’s choice to feature this quote has significance. After briefly listing La Barbara’s career highlights, Jepson turns her attention to La Barbara’s workshop. “According to Miss La Barbara, about 75 % [*sic*] of her students are able to learn the techniques,” Jepson reports, followed by La Barbara’s comment, “All children experiment with their voices, but they learn to civilize those sounds away. Most of what we call extended vocal techniques is simply rediscovering the freedom of the

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Casey, review of “CDCM Computer Music Series, Volume 7,” by Neil B. Rolnick, Pauline Oliveros, Julie Kabat, Barton McLean, Joel Chadabe,” *Computer Music Journal* 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1992): 106–107.

<sup>76</sup> Barbara Jepson, “Joan La Barbara’s Gymnastic Voice,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 1984.

voice.”<sup>77</sup> This case for EVT being a “freedom of the voice” could be read in many ways, especially taken out of context. While modernism’s affinity for aesthetic primitivism certainly underpins this claim, her statement’s significance within the article becomes clear in the next sentence. Jepson flatly states, “Not everyone loves the results. Some listeners express concern that she is destroying her instrument.” The question Jepson does not address is: who are these listeners?

The concern for “vocal health” has dominated how singing is discussed in the conservatory; it galvanized the formation of the National Association of the Teachers of Singing in 1944 and remains the central premise of current vocal pedagogy as taught by scholars such as James McKinney and Richard Miller.<sup>78</sup> This type of objection to La Barbara’s workshop would likely come from conservatory singers. In any case, Jepson sets up La Barbara’s premise, voices objection, and then responds with La Barbara’s defense: “Much of what I do is more relaxed for the throat than a normal sung tone. . . . The multiphonic is even used by some voice therapists to help rehabilitate patients who have undergone surgery.”<sup>79</sup> Jepson anticipates potential responses to La Barbara’s singing, but gives La Barbara the opportunity to name and explain her technique in relatable terms. Additionally, Jepson provides ample, vivid descriptions of La Barbara’s sounds, giving examples of what the article discusses

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<sup>77</sup> Jepson, “Joan La Barbara’s Gymnastic Voice.”

<sup>78</sup> “About Us,” National Association for Teachers of Singing, *nats.org*, <https://www.nats.org/who-is-nats.html> (accessed September 3, 2018); James McKinney, *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*, (Nashville: Genevox Music Group, 1994); Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: The Technique and the Art* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986).

<sup>79</sup> Jepson, “Joan La Barbara’s Gymnastic Voice.”

and providing an entry point for readers who have not yet become familiar with La Barbara's work or the term EVT. Thus, the appearance of EVT in this context exposes readers to the term in a sympathetic but not uncritical light.

Around the same time, music critic John Rockwell also uses the term EVT in reference to La Barbara, as well as Shelley Hirsch and Frank Royon Le Mée in his review of their performances at the 1988 First New York International Festival of the Arts.<sup>80</sup> The concert featured Hirsch, a singer-composer who was an active performer in the New York downtown scene; Le Mée, a French multimedia artist and singer-composer active in the European avant-garde in the 1980s; and La Barbara.

Rockwell's detailed descriptions of each performance avoid direct comparison to other vocalists associated with EVT, highlighting the individuality of each artist's work. However, he starts the article by framing the entire review in a history of EVT, beginning with Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*:

Extended vocalism dates back at least as far as Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" of 1912, as well as to miscellaneous Dadaist and Futurist events. But it flowered in the 1960s with singers like Cathy Berberian. . . . In the 70's and 80's, her work was continued by singers and performance artists as disparate as Meredith Monk, Laurie Anderson, and Diamanda Galás, with a full range of pop, jazz, and ethnic vocal traditions and styles as source material.<sup>81</sup>

Identifying EVT's beginnings from the early twentieth century to Berberian to contemporary artists (Monk, Anderson, Galás, and the composers who were featured in his article), Rockwell's review resembles other canonic accounts of musical traditions or genres: preliminary works lay the groundwork for a founder who brings

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<sup>80</sup> John Rockwell, "Stretching Vocal Limits," *New York Times*, July 9, 1988.

<sup>81</sup> Rockwell, "Stretching Vocal Limits."

the canon into fruition and then inspires later generations of artists.<sup>82</sup> Although in this particular case Rockwell's choice of Schoenberg also plays a strategic role in providing a point of reference for readers who are likely unfamiliar with the three singers who, according to Rockwell, were, "not well known to the general public." By claiming *Sprechstimme* as a forerunner of EVT, Rockwell grants these artists—and the EVT tradition—the credibility associated with the Euro-American classical music canon.<sup>83</sup>

The canonic founder-oriented narrative persisted in journalistic writing on EVT even as years passed, with commentators continually citing the same founders (Berberian, or sometimes Monk), musicians, and pieces. For example, music critic Phil Johnson of *The Independent* opens his review of Meredith Monk's CD release of *mercy* by stating:

If you can hear echoes of Kate Bush, Diamanda Galás, Laurie Anderson or Björk in the work of Meredith Monk, it's not surprising: Monk got there first. The American composer, choreographer and singer is a pioneer of what have become known as extended vocal techniques, using her voice as an instrument to communicate complex ideas and emotions without the benefit of conventional lyrics or text. While a voice-as-instrument approach has been common to jazz since Louis Armstrong first sang on record, Monk is no scat singer; nor is she a frighteningly accomplished modernist-mimic in the manner of Cathy Berberian.<sup>84</sup>

Johnson names most of the same people as Rockwell (Berberian, Monk, Galás, Anderson) and similarly invokes a founder narrative ("a *pioneer* of what have become

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<sup>82</sup> Marcia Citron, "Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 102–117.

<sup>83</sup> Rockwell, "Stretching Vocal Limits."

<sup>84</sup> Phil Johnson, "Stretch Your Ears: Meredith Monk," *The Independent*, December 6, 2002.

known as extended vocal techniques. . .”). Johnson observes that Monk’s vocal work emanates from a different tradition than that of Berberian. His delineation between Berberian and Monk illustrates the broader distinction many composers, critics, and scholars have made between score-oriented EVT practice and performer-composer EVT commonly associated with experimentalism. The language and narrative framework that Johnson uses to align EVT with Monk and the experimental performer-composer tradition strongly resembles Rockwell’s decades-earlier assertion of Berberian as founder in a musical lineage of tradition, innovation, and prestige (but with the addition of more contemporary, hip artists such as Björk or Kate Bush).<sup>85</sup>

As a highly visible figure within the experimental performer-composer and EVT traditions, due in part to her prolific compositional output, frequent tours, and public workshops, Meredith Monk continues to appear in journalism as an archetypal figure of EVT, such as in a 2006 *New York Times* article by Anne Midgette covering one of her workshops that year: “Meredith Monk’s music . . . relies on building blocks of sound, bits of enchanted tune interwoven with cries and clucks and other manifestations of what is known as extended vocal technique. It is about using the

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<sup>85</sup> Ethnomusicologist Sarah Thornton explored the concept of “subcultural capital” in her book, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*; Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995); For future reading on the concept of “hipness,” see: Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979); for further reading on the concept of “hipness” as it applies to music, see: Philip Ford, “Somewhere/Nowhere: Hipness as an Aesthetic,” *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (April 2002): 49–81.

voice as expression without mediating elements, like words.”<sup>86</sup> Although Midgette describes Monk’s music as intuitive, almost mystical, she also highlights Monk’s fastidiousness and control over every aspect, framing her as a quintessential founding figure within the EVT lineage:

Ms. Monk had a gimlet eye for detail, zeroing in on every bar. “Your entrance was great,” she told one singer, “But on the second repetition, your pitch was flat.” One participant, Holly Nadal, said later, “You listen, and it sounds so free and improvised. You don’t realize how much structure is there until you start trying to pick it apart. A lot of people who love her music, and who hate her music, think there’s a certain randomness. But it’s highly, highly structured.”<sup>87</sup>

The rest of the article discusses Monk’s reluctance to have others perform her work and her deep commitment to very specific aesthetic agendas with each piece. The article almost reads like a defense of Monk’s legitimacy as a composer, as Midgette repeatedly emphasizes Monk’s visionary, at times slightly domineering, working method. Monk’s fame and success with institutionalized music-making as well as with broader audiences aside, Midgette’s defense of Monk as a legitimate composer among the ranks of the Euro-American canon possibly suggests a perception of EVT (especially when associated with experimentalism’s counter-cultural leanings) as something in artists supposedly make it up as they go, relying on their novelty to cover for lack of vocal or compositional prowess.

Although this postulation about Midgette’s defense of Monk is largely speculative, there is little doubt about the widespread misunderstanding of both

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<sup>86</sup> Anne Midgette, “Ms. Monk’s Masterclass,” *New York Times*, January 29, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Midgette, “Ms. Monk’s Masterclass.”

experimental music among the general public and Euro-American classical music institutions. Therefore, it seems likely that Midgette’s portrayal of Monk as an aesthetically-exacting creative person devoted to her singular artistic vision amounts to a demonstration that Monk—and EVT more generally—deserve currency within the classical music “economy of prestige.”<sup>88</sup>

In fact, in 2015 Zachary Woolfe’s article for the *New York Times* covering the festival, *Prototype: Opera/Theater/Now*, asserts, “Choruses, it seems, are hot these days. So are the extended vocal techniques learned from Experimental precursors like Meredith Monk as well as borrowed from throat singers and screaming shepherds.” This article indicates not only the commonality and general recognition of the term EVT, but its hipness within a loosely-collected scene William Robin identifies as “indie-classical” music, in which conservatory-trained composers draw from popular music’s stylistic features and industry practices.<sup>89</sup> The same assumption of EVT’s widespread recognition as a category—however amorphous and not subtly ethnocentric—appears in an article from the same year in Australia’s classical music and arts magazine, *Limelight*. This article by Australian soprano Jane Sheldon, confirms the commonality of the term EVT and its general association with new music, stating, “If you hang around musicians who perform music of the 20th and 21st centuries, you’ll have heard the term ‘extended techniques’ being thrown

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<sup>88</sup> McClary, “Terminal Prestige.”

<sup>89</sup> William Robin, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Indie Classical’: Tracing a Controversial Term in Twenty-First Century New Music,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 1 (February 2018): 55–88.

around.”<sup>90</sup> However, as a conservatory-trained vocalist, Sheldon writes differently about EVT than her journalist predecessors and contemporaries, in that she explicitly defines EVT according to its relationship to bel canto and conservatory training:

These are sounds you're not taught to make in conventional classical music instruction. But they're also sounds that require real expertise in the manipulation of your instrument; you really do need the foundations of classical training to execute them with the finesse hoped for by the composer. Presumably the time will soon come when these sounds are routinely taught, perhaps in the later stages of a musician's training.<sup>91</sup>

Her account implies that EVT is simply a list of non-normative techniques that a classical singer should nonetheless master in order to become a more competent, diverse performer. This perspective recalls an EVT model similar to Berberian or Beardslee’s score-oriented music making rather than the exploratory mode of performer-composers such as Monk or La Barbara. However, musical traditions rarely supplant one another in tidy, linear succession; they usually co-exist, forming different pockets of cultural experience within a shared social-historical context. Considering that conservatory tradition maintains bel canto singing as the classical music vocal norm and sustains the tradition of classical music and its hierarchical dynamics, it is not entirely surprising that an account of EVT resembling earlier singers would still surface in 2015.

Although EVT’s commonality as a term and by-now firmly established canon of high-profile vocalists in both contemporary classical and popular music has

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<sup>90</sup> Jane Sheldon, “The Strange World of Extended Vocal Techniques,” *Limelight*, September 4, 2015, <https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/the-strange-world-of-extended-vocal-techniques/>(accessed August 6, 2018).

<sup>91</sup> Sheldon, “The Strange World of Extended Vocal Techniques.”

rendered it an expedient classifier for non-conventional vocal music in journalism, the term appears less frequently in contemporary academic contexts. However, several notable discussions of EVT from recent years critically engage the concept of EVT with an unprecedented curiosity and ingenuity. The aforementioned work *A History of Singing* (2012) by John Potter and Neil Sorrell identifies the hegemonic trappings of EVT resembling those of bel canto tradition.<sup>92</sup> Potter and Sorrell observe the tendency to collect and codify vocal techniques, whether in a comprehensive book like Anhalt's *Alternative Voices* or in the casual reinforcement of canonic EVT musicians (Berberian, Monk, La Barbara, Galás, and Anderson) in journal articles.

The common narrative tracing EVT from Berberian to contemporary artists has not only cultivated a canonic lineage of EVT, but has also historically entrenched EVT in a binaristic construction between bel canto and its Other(s) due to Berberian's strong identification as a classical singer. The festschrift entitled *Cathy Berberian, Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* (2014) attempts to distance EVT from its problematic reliance on bel canto for its definition. Editors Pamela Karantonis, Francesca Placanica, and Pieter Verstraete diversify the tradition of EVT by inviting other contemporary vocalists identified with the EVT tradition to reflect on Berberian's legacy. Rather than situating individual vocalists and practices into a direct lineage or establish a pattern of Berberian's influence, the editors create space for vocalists to speak about their work and speculate on the musical past and present,

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<sup>92</sup> John Potter and Neil Sorrell, *A History of Singing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

as related to the general theme of Berberian's contribution to contemporary vocal music. These artists' different perspectives form a complex portrait of Berberian and of contemporary understandings of EVT.<sup>93</sup>

### **EVT and the Classical Music Framework**

Despite the differences in time period, institutional context, and broader social-historical moment, a recurring theme in nearly all sources that discuss EVT is a reliance on conservatory tradition and bel canto technique as a framing device to hear techniques as extended. This framework operates through juxtaposition, which arises whenever EVT (especially folk vocal traditions, quotidian sounds, and vocal sounds common in jazz and rhythm and blues) are featured in the context of Euro-American classical music. For example, the classical music framework for EVT arises through a composer's inclusion of such sounds in a fully notated work intended for a conservatory-trained performer. Although the composer creates this framework by including these techniques into the written score, several other factors also reinforce and perpetuate this framework: the known musical affiliations of a singer performing these sounds that fall outside of bel canto technique, the connotations of the venue (concert hall, opera house, etc.) in which these sounds are performed, as well as the type of publication in which an author discusses such sounds (such as academically-published pedagogy books or reviewers educated primarily in Euro-American classical music). The treatment of the EVT category from within the framework of

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<sup>93</sup> Karantonis, et. all, *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*.

classical music implies a musical context in which operatic (or in vocal pedagogy terminology, *bel canto*) singing serves as the standard singing style. Placing EVT in the landscape of classical music, *bel canto* becomes the default center or the natural orientation of the voice; conversely, once any vocal sound other than *bel canto* singing technique enters into the context of classical music, it becomes an extended technique. Because the concept of EVT was built on a tradition established by Berberian and Beardslee even before the actual term EVT came into common usage, EVT's definition by its difference from *bel canto* animates present notions about EVT, vocal normativity, and the basic concept of the voice itself. The connection of EVT to *bel canto* and Euro-American classical music holds a strong connection to another recurring concept in EVT literature—the idea of voice as an instrument—which forms a central part of the discussion in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER TWO: VOICE VIRTUOSITY AND SCORE-BASED EVT  
COMPOSITION: CATHY BERBERIAN, BETHANY BEARDSLEE AND EVT IN  
THE CONSERVATORY-ORIENTED PRESTIGE ECONOMY

**Introduction: EVT and the “Voice-as-Instrument” Concept**

In her description of the development of EVT in twentieth century avant-garde composition, vocal scholar Melanie Crump comments,

While the modernism of the twentieth-century shattered previously accepted standards of sound and notation, the development of EVTs shifted the musical perspective from the singer to the voice as an instrument. In the United States, where its musical identity was defined by experimentalism, EVTs flourished through singers such as Cathy Berberian, Jan DeGaetani, Bethany Beardslee and groups such as the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble.<sup>94</sup>

Although the phrase EVT rarely appears in writings contemporary to the works that now constitute the foundations of EVT’s canonic accounts (Babbitt’s *Philomel*, 1964; Berio’s *Sequenza III*, 1965–6; George Crumb’s *Ancient Voices of Children*, 1970), Crump aptly observes that the kinds of vocal sounds subsequently labeled as EVT had already established a pronounced presence in the kind of music generally associated with score-based avant-gardism (as opposed to improvised, participatory, or performance-based avant-garde, often linked to identification with experimental music). The term EVT was possibly already circulating in common parlance as an umbrella term for innovative vocal work before it appeared in print. Crump’s statement nonetheless critically identifies the prominence of the voice-as-instrument concept in score-based avant-garde music [hereafter referred to simple as “avant-garde] and EVT discourse in the mid- to late-twentieth century.

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<sup>94</sup> Crump, “When Words Are Not Enough,” 73.

The problematic nature of the voice-as-instrument construct is hardly new: vocal scholar Carolyn Abbate asserts that the voice-as-instrument concept emerged within the early development of bel canto technique, and musicologist Jessica Holmes has discussed the common, pernicious tendency to abstract the voice from the person.<sup>95</sup> However, I suggest that the objectification involved in “instrumentalizing” the voice (conceptualizing the voice as a fixed, predictable object) in EVT and avant-gardism has a unique set of issues. Perhaps one of the more confounding issues found in EVT discourse, the notion of voice-as-instrument paints voice as a musical object—a static, abstracted entity separate from the performer’s person—yet at the same time, the EVT category also includes techniques that index the immediacy of the performer’s body and human experiences.<sup>96</sup>

I posit that the notion of voice-as-instrument particularly served the early EVT canon’s modernist project of studying, systematizing, and codifying the limits of the voice’s sonic capabilities, both for the advancement of vocal composition past the limitations of operatic tradition and for the accumulation of empirical knowledge about the voice.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, I suggest that this modernist treatment of the voice as an

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<sup>95</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>96</sup> “Voice as object” is a concept theorized by Carolyn Abbate in *Unsung Voices*; Jessica Holmes also implicates this tendency to “abstract” the voice in “Singing as Hearing”; Jessica A. Holmes, “Singing beyond Hearing,” in “Colloquy on the Disability Aesthetics of Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 69, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 542–548.

<sup>97</sup> This is the approach of most pedagogical resources, especially ones focused on twentieth-century singing and techniques outside of bel canto; Edgerton, *The 21st-Century Voice*; Elliott, *Singing in Style*; Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music*; Sell: *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy*; Larry Wendt, “Vocal

object of musical study aligned with the value system of the avant-garde, and that this new kind of extended vocal virtuosity cast avant-garde singers and EVT specialists in a prestigious, intellectualized light akin to their composer counterparts. Through an investigation of cultural texts (journal articles, interviews, historical reviews) that describe Cathy Berberian and Bethany Beardslee and their performance of now-labeled EVT practices and repertoire in avant-garde repertoire, I analyze how EVT and the voice-as-instrument concept relates to musical legibility, cultural capital, and gendered musical (and social) politics in the avant-garde conservatory context.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, I explore how the issues related to the voice-as-instrument concept within EVT discourse bear out conceptual complexities related to the classical music economy of prestige. The academic environment that fostered both avant-garde composition (including pieces that call for EVT) and bel canto technique inevitably streamlined EVT to the bel canto tradition: composers who wrote pieces that called for extended techniques often wrote for particular classical singers known for expertise in challenging modernist works; conversely, voice teachers who supported contemporary music adapted their pedagogy to prepare singers for EVT-oriented repertoire.<sup>99</sup> This link framed extended vocal sound as both a foil to—and

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Neighborhoods: A Walk through the Post-Sound Poetry Landscape,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 3 (1993): 65-71.

<sup>98</sup> David Knights and Deborah Kerfoot, “Between Representations and Subjectivity: Gender Binaries and the Politics of Organizational Transformation,” *Gender, Work, and Organization* 4, 11 (2004): 430-454; McClary, “Excess and Fame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen,” in *Feminine Endings*.

<sup>99</sup> John Potter forwards a version of this idea in *Vocal Authority*. Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

extension of—bel canto’s hegemonic normativity. The assumption of the normativity of one particular vocal style effectively places a vast array of sounds and practices into the EVT category, some of which signify mastery of the so-called vocal instrument, whereas others intentionally call attention to the embodied, intimate utterances of vocalization.<sup>100</sup>

Thus in part, the voice-as-instrument discourse in avant-garde EVT practice created a legible space for singers working on the cutting edge of vocal music to be widely recognized as musical masters and innovators. The analogy drawn between instrumental extended techniques and EVT reinforced the conservatory-centric structure of technique and pedagogy, placing the EVT performer at the cutting-edge of music while still retaining the legitimacy conferred by bel canto legibility. Moreover, the paradigmatic separation of voice from vocalist provided an advantageous platform from which female vocalists in the male-dominated field of avant-garde music could project an intellectualized distance from their own voices and bodies. Comparing voice to non-lexical instruments effectively shifted the perception of voice away from its stigma as something primarily intuitive (e.g. unthinking and natural) that flows directly from the performer’s private interior

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Additionally, pedagogical resources for deciphering and performing EVT assume at the very least a familiarity with classical training, both by the musical and vocal terminology used and the repertoire cited: Paul Barker, *Composing for Voice: A Guide for Composers, Singers, and Teachers* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Edgerton, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voice*; Elliott, *Singing in Style*; Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth Century Vocal Music*; Karen Sell, *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy*. Larry Wendt, “Vocal Neighborhoods.”

<sup>100</sup> Concept derived from: Joëlle Deniot, “Intimacy in Voice,” *Ethnologie Française* 4, no. 32 (December 2002): 709–719.

experience.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, EVT's intentional evocation of sounds associated with what musicologist Susan McClary calls "feminine excess" (such as sexual sounds and depictions of madness) exposed the artificiality of gender archetypes through the explicit artifice of performance.<sup>102</sup> Singers who specialized in EVT could thus project the masculine-coded traits of genius, virtuosity, and control while using these traits as the dominant interpretive framework in which they performed tropes of femininity.<sup>103</sup>

Yet, the use of EVT to perform Otherness has also reinscribed problematic vocal norms and gender discourses. The invocation of instrumental virtuosity as a means of exposing gender constructions reifies the normativity of masculine detachment and control in Euro-American classical music, which as I discuss in this chapter is often subtle, implicit, and sometimes unintended. Thus, I argue that because EVT in the avant-garde context relies on musical prowess as the framework in which seemingly natural sounds are heard as musically progressive, it benefits individual singers but it also participates in a gendered musical hierarchy that elevates virtuosity and control, an element of classical music and the avant-garde identified by

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> McClary, "Excess and Fame," 99–101; Allan Williams, "Madness in Music Theater Works of Peter Maxwell Davies," *Perspectives of New Music* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 77-100.

<sup>103</sup> Further suggested reading on intersections between virtuosity and gender: Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Women's Press, 1989); Katharine Ellis, "Female Pianists and their Male Critics in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2-3 (Summer 1997): 374; Here I specifically refer to Ellis's mention of Marie Pleyel's "control" in her piano performance: "As a performer, her 'manly' qualities of control were thus multiple, extending to her own emotion, her technique, and her listeners. . . ."; Mai Kawabata, *Paganini: The 'demonic' virtuoso* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

McClary in her article “Terminal Prestige” and by Catherine Battersby in her work on the concept of the genius.<sup>104</sup> The problems and productive aspects co-exist in the EVT virtuosic voice-instrument discourse, and form an important aspect in understanding what EVT means in the historical context of the emergence of avant-garde music.

### **Formalism, Voice-as-Instrument, and the Prestige: Understanding EVT in Avant-Garde Music**

The early formation of the concept of EVT arose from within avant-garde vocal music, which in turn came into fruition in the wake of the twentieth-century revival of Kantian aesthetic formalism by Ernst Bloch and Clement Greenberg, which proposed that music was most truthful when it was purely about sound.<sup>105</sup>

Additionally, the deconstructive approach to language espoused by modernist poets such as Gertrude Stein and James Joyce shaped an aesthetic paradigm for vocal music that emphasized the sound of words rather than their lexical meaning. Whereas traditional vocal composition had emphasized music as an enhancement of a text, the prevalence of formalism and linguistic deconstruction significantly reshaped twentieth-century art, and many composers began exploring text-setting in ways that emphasized the sonic qualities of words and the different effect that sounds could elicit apart from the culturally-determined meanings of language.

Thus, linguistic deconstruction streamlined EVT and avant-garde vocal music

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<sup>104</sup> Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 16–35. (These pages contain a succinct description of Battersby’s theory of the masculinization of “genius”); McClary, “Terminal Prestige.”

<sup>105</sup> Arman Schwartz, “The Absent Diva,” *The Opera Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 94–95.

with the broader aesthetic shift in twentieth-century modernism toward formalism and the avant-garde approach to music as “organized sound” (a term that was, according to musicologist Leta Miller, coined by Varèse and adopted by Cage).<sup>106</sup> Within this social-historical setting, many of the seminal pieces in the EVT canonical repertoire emerged, such as John Cage’s *Aria* (1958), Milton Babbitt’s *Philomel* (1964), Berio’s *Sequenza III* (1965), and Cathy Berberian’s *Stripsody* (1966). Each of these compositions exhibits its own unique compositional features in terms of the requirements on performers and aesthetic goals, yet each piece grants primacy to the diversity of sounds available to voice over a consistent narrative or representational subject matter.

As twentieth-century avant-garde composers increasingly wrote pieces that prioritized the exploration of sonic parameters over narrative subject-matter, vocalists who championed avant-garde music rose to the occasion. These singers’ illumination of the voice’s variety and flexibility significantly shaped the musical landscape of the twentieth-century and presented voice as equally matched with instruments and electronic resources in the avant-garde pursuit of sonic novelty and precision.<sup>107</sup> Musicologist Josephine Truman identifies this mutually-informative relationship between avant-garde vocalists, instrumentalists, and composers, noting:

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<sup>106</sup> Leta Miller, “The Art of Noise: John Cage, Lou Harrison, and the West Coast Percussion Ensemble,” in *Perspectives on American Music, 1900-1950*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Routledge, 2000), 215–263.

<sup>107</sup> Crump, “When Words are Not Enough”; Edgerton, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voice*; Deborah Kavasch, “An Introduction to Extended Vocal Techniques”; Josephine Truman, “Extreme Throats: Extended Vocal Techniques in Contemporary Music of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,” PhD diss. (University of Sydney, 2008).

In the twentieth century developments by performers and composers involving the extending of the sphere of instrumental techniques also encompassed many singers who have regarded their own voices as instruments. Either singers have been inspired by the exploratory and innovative developments by instrumentalists, or composers have been motivated by adventurous and inventive singers to challenge institutionalised paradigms of vocal use, sometimes creating new notation to accommodate new vocal techniques.<sup>108</sup>

Although both Truman and Crump affirm the primacy of the role of the composer and the canonical authority of written scores in narrating the trajectory of musical development, their statements also indicate that performers had a major role in transforming the sonic landscape. Performers not only demonstrated the breadth and variety of vocal sound—they also often commissioned works, produced expository writing about the voice, and (in the case of Berberian), composed their own works for voice. These activities undertaken by performers illuminated the realm of vocal possibility for composers, performers, and scholars alike and created a critical body of knowledge from which non-vocalist composers drew their fundamental ideas and musical materials.<sup>109</sup> Such collaborative relationships in which EVT singers have illuminated new vocal possibilities for composers have included Beardslee and Babbitt, Berberian and her one-time husband Berio (she also worked with Cage and Sylvano Bussotti), Jan DeGaetani and George Crumb, Roy Hart and Peter Maxwell Davies, and later, Joan La Barbara and her husband Morton Subotnick.

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<sup>108</sup> Josephine Truman, “Extreme Throats.”

<sup>109</sup> Kate Meehan, “Not Just a Pretty Voice: Cathy Berberian as Collaborator, Composer, and Creator,” PhD diss. (Washington University in St. Louis): 55-56; David Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator: The Work of Cathy Berberian,” *Tempo* 58, no. 227 (January 2004): 2–13.

The composer-performer creative partnerships in avant-garde vocal music demonstrate complex gender and power dynamics involved in EVT and the virtuosic voice-instrument. These partnerships—specifically those between Berberian and Berio, Beardslee and Babbitt—brought forth an aesthetic stance toward the voice that explored vocal sound from an avant-garde, formalist-inflected instrumental perspective, in that composers and performers brought the elements proper to the medium of sound to the foreground of music. Admittedly all of these performers had a very specific performance presence and public identity that they brought to each work (especially Cathy Berberian), which has been repeatedly emphasized by their contemporaries as well as by subsequent scholars who have documented their lives and careers. Their personas undoubtedly played a significant role in their work with composers and in their cultural legibility; however, what has been less frequently discussed is how the voice-as-instrument discourse contributed to the success of these performers. I suggest that the importance of these performers' personas is not incongruent with the possibility that the prestige entailed upon the formalistic sound capabilities of their instrumental voices also contributed to their favor among avant-garde composers and thus supported their cultural capital. The instrumental treatment of the voice and the desirability of the voice-as-instrument in the formalist-inflected avant-garde music circles framed EVT practice as a display of virtuosic intellectualism.

This intellectualized virtuosity ensconced these performers in positions of notoriety in the avant-garde community and has subsequently informed the meaning

and cultural implication of EVT within the context of avant-gardism and conservatory music tradition. Two case studies— that of Berberian and Beardslee—illustrate the close link between EVT and prestige in avant-garde culture and raise complicated gender and social issues that attend this relationship.

### **Cathy Berberian and Luciano Berio**

Figuring prominently in the discourse of EVT, Cathy Berberian (1925–1983) is often depicted as a founding matriarch in a lineage of performers and performer-composers working on the progressive edge of bel canto technique and institutionalized classical music. For example, the teleological turn of phrase in John Potter’s *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* fixes Berberian as the originator of the late twentieth-century development of extended vocal techniques: “The work [*Sequenza III*] is a catalogue of what have become known as extended vocal techniques. . . . Berberian succeeded in defining extended vocal techniques and created new ways in which vocal semantics could operate.”<sup>110</sup> Moreover, vocalist and scholar Pamela Karantonis and several other authors compiled an entire festschrift to Berberian entitled *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*.<sup>111</sup> Karantonis’s compilation of interviews and scholarly essays rests on the premise of Berberian as a reference point for singers working in avant-garde and experimental music, among whom they count high-profile performers in their own right, such as

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<sup>110</sup> John Potter, *Vocal Authority*, 129.

<sup>111</sup> Kristen Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, 184–204.

Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, Pamela Z, Diamanda Galás, and Laurie

Anderson.<sup>112</sup> McClary writes in the forward to this collection:

Music History owes a great deal to Berberian. Most obviously, her example inspired an explosion of performance artists and singers who specialize in extended vocal techniques. She made full use of sounds never before regarded as having a place in music, now fundamental to the work of Meredith Monk, Diamanda Galás, Laurie Anderson, and countless others.<sup>113</sup>

However, Berberian's influence was not limited to her monumental contribution as a celebrated interpreter of music, or a performer who introduced an expanded palette of vocal sounds into Euro-American classical music;<sup>114</sup> she also was actively involved in many of the compositions written for her, to the extent that scholars such as Kate Meehan have suggested attributing co-authorship to several of Berio's pieces.<sup>115</sup> Berberian's musical and vocal expertise, unflinching boldness as a performer, and indefatigable creativity in producing sounds garnered her respect and esteem.<sup>116</sup>

Berberian's renown as an avant-garde performer began with her involvement with Radio Audizioni Italiane, or RAI, but her accomplishments as a musician and bel canto singer began long before her involvement with Italian composers involved

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<sup>112</sup> Karantonis and Pieter Maria Gabriël Verstraete, "Introduction/Overture," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, 9.

<sup>113</sup> McClary, "Forward: Cathy Berberian—Modernism's Bette Middler," *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, xxvi.

<sup>114</sup> Karantonis, "Cathy Berberian and the Performative Art of Voice," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, 152.

<sup>115</sup> Meehan, "Not Just a Pretty Voice," 24. David Osmond-Smith does not explicitly call for this revision, but he perhaps suggests it through his extensive emphasis on Berberian's crucial role in much of Berio's composition.

<sup>116</sup> Osmond-Smith, "The Tenth Oscillator," (established throughout article).

in modernist compositional techniques and electronic music.<sup>117</sup> Born in 1925 in Attleboro, Massachusetts to Armenian-American parents, Berberian demonstrated an early affinity for opera.<sup>118</sup> The Berberian family relocated to New York City, where Cathy encountered numerous performing opportunities, which included Armenian folk dancing, bel canto voice lessons, pantomime classes, and stagecraft.<sup>119</sup> In 1945, she was invited to perform on the CBS radio program, “New Voices in Song,” and showcased her wide-ranging talent by featuring a diverse array of art songs, arias, and Armenian folk songs.<sup>120</sup> She received some training at New York University, but feeling that it was essential to the advancement of her career to study in Europe, she moved to Milan in 1949 to study with Georgina del Vigo.<sup>121</sup> It was around this time that she learned of the Fulbright Foundation scholarships, and decided to apply in order to support her vocal studies.<sup>122</sup> The application process included a recorded sample, so Berberian found an accompanist—Luciano Berio—by inquiring at the Milan Conservatory.<sup>123</sup> Though they only rehearsed together once, their meeting ignited a creative and emotional spark that culminated in marriage and a creative partnership. They married on October 1, 1950, remained together until 1964, and continued their friendship and musical collaboration until her death in 1983.

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<sup>117</sup> Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator,” 3.

<sup>118</sup> Meehan, “Not Just a Pretty Voice,” 13.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator,” 2.

<sup>122</sup> Meehan, “Not Just a Pretty Voice,” 16.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

After two years of musical collaboration—Berio featured Berberian in many of his original compositions and she enlisted his pianistic abilities and musical insight for her rigorous performance schedule—they had their first child, Cristina, in 1953. Berberian placed her public performing career on hold for the first four years of her daughter’s life, but her creativity and intellect contributed in other ways to the musical community that had gathered around herself and Berio. In 1953, she and Berio partnered with Bruno Madera to propose building an electronic music studio at RAI in Milan.<sup>124</sup> As both Berberian and Berio immersed themselves in studio work (which for Berberian, proved more conducive to her domestic work than public concerts), they befriended Umberto Eco, who was a colleague of the RAI director. They invited Eco to their home often, reading poetry and fervently discussing music. In the meantime, the Studio di Fonologia Musica had opened in 1955, and it included recording facilities and a bank of nine oscillators built by their resident engineer, Alfredo Lietti.<sup>125</sup> However, Eco, Berio, and Bussotti (who was also involved in the Studio’s circle) quickly realized that Berberian’s highly developed vocabulary of sound eclipsed anything the oscillators could produce, and her indispensability to the work done at the studio earned her the epithet, “the tenth oscillator.”<sup>126</sup> Though Berberian’s overall performance oeuvre encompassed both the theatrical and the

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<sup>124</sup> Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator,” 3.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>126</sup> Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator,” 4.

musical, the early years during which she honed her artistry and built her reputation primarily involved studio recording and radio.<sup>127</sup>

One night during one of Berberian and Berio's informal musical gatherings held in their living room, Berberian and Eco began reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* aloud, emphasizing the onomatopoeic qualities of the writing. The three of them decided to make this a broadcast program on the radio, which eventually became Berio's *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)*. The initial launch of the piece in 1958 dissatisfied Berio, and he eventually re-worked the piece to include only Berberian's voice. Her uncanny vocal ability once again proved her indispensability as the group's proverbial sound bank. As she continued to experiment with her voice, recording different sounds with Berio at the control board, Berberian wove a rich tapestry from the threads of Joyce's text, using imaginative vocal timbres and textures in her imaginative realization. Through Berio mixed the recorded samples, Berberian crafted all of the sonic material that comprised the piece.<sup>128</sup>

Her reputation as a voice-virtuoso grew beyond the limits of the Milanese studio when she and Berio encountered Cage at Darmstadt in 1958.<sup>129</sup> Berio convinced Cage to come to Milan and write a piece for his studio. Cage made a *musique concrète* piece (*Fontana Mix*), but upon hearing Berberian's jocular imitation of tape composition, he formulated another piece, *Aria*, specifically for

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<sup>127</sup> Meehan, "Not Just a Pretty Voice," 27–34.

<sup>128</sup> Osmond-Smith, "The Tenth Oscillator," 4.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

her.<sup>130</sup> This famous anecdote of Cage hearing Berberian impersonate the rapid, disjunctive sound of tape music illustrates his (and many others') fascination with the formidable capabilities of her voice.

Given the focus on radio, tape composition, and the extensive use made of Berberian's sounds as either a substitute for—or supplement to—electronic composition, it seems that her preliminary entrée into the male-dominated avant-garde music circles rested in large part on her voice's similarity to an electronic instrument and her ability as a performer to achieve nearly any sound imaginable (or unimaginable).

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<sup>130</sup> Arman Schwartz, "The Absent Diva," 96.



[Fig. 2.1, Left to Right: Luciano Berio, Cathy Berberian, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Luigi Rognoni, Photo uncredited, Darmstadt 1956.]

Berberian's unparalleled sonic vocabulary may have earned her recognition among the European avant-garde, but she also became widely known for her hyperbolic glamour and theatricality. Whether on stage or sitting in a café, Berberian's larger-than-life persona made her immediately recognizable in every context: she often appeared in large blonde wigs, haute couture that blurred the line between costume and evening wear, and played the supremely self-confident, witty provocateur in nearly all of her encounters, both professional and personal. Friends, colleagues, and

audiences alike tended to admire these qualities of Berberian, and she held a personal relationship with many of the composers who wrote music for her; however, her theatrical persona and musical abilities may not have been directly connected for her colleagues composing pieces for her (or more aptly, for her voice). Reading her work hermeneutically, more formalistic valuations of her voice by her peers seems more fitting, which possibly indicates larger trends in how the virtuosic EVT voice has functioned in the avant-garde.

Much of the scholarship on Berberian tends to emphasize her performance style of overt femininity, humor, and playfulness over her musical contributions. In his article, “The Absent Diva,” Arman Schwartz questions such contemporary re-readings of Berberian, observing, “[Authors] claim that ‘there is a need to re-read Berberian's whole oeuvre as deconstructing the gender hierarchies dominating the modern art music scene, whilst reclaiming her agency as a woman artist and composer.’ Yet these familiar dynamics of authorship and resistance may distort as much as they make clear.”<sup>131</sup> Schwartz goes on to suggest that Berberian did not resist so much as acquiesce to gender norms to a hyperbolic degree.

However, Schwartz mounts his discussion on the same platform as the scholars whom he critiques by focusing more on the socio-cultural implications of her intensely feminine persona, such as when he compares her performance style to her costumes: “Berberian's piece enjoys a similar ambiguity – and a similarly knowing American exoticism (presumably part of its appeal in Europe) – but, like the backless

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<sup>131</sup> Arman Schwartz, “The Absent Diva” 95.

dress, it conceals as much as it exposes.”<sup>132</sup> Undoubtedly, her costumes, her theatricality, wit, and humor intertwined into a holistic performance oeuvre, and it is important to understand her work from her perspective, as the voices of performers—especially women—have long been excluded from the problematic “great men” and “masterwork” models of music history.<sup>133</sup>

Schwartz’s critical reading of Berberian contributes an important historical narrative that accounts for the immense impact that performers have on creative communities and addresses the many factors that exceed the written score and concert hall. However, the impulse to theorize Berberian and frame her performance in feminist or structuralist terms overlooks the more subtle gender issues embedded in how voice is culturally construed in contemporary classical music and the avant-garde by failing to consider how her contemporaries most likely viewed her voice: from a primarily sonic perspective, especially at the outset of her career.<sup>134</sup> Her vocal pliability and range of sound situated her as a virtuoso who had mastered the vocal instrument, or perhaps more accurately in this case, the voice machine. Schwartz actually hints at this idea when he affirms, “Not only does *Stripsody* avoid the blatant eroticism of most of Berio's works for female voice, its title points us away from the body, toward the ‘strips’ of magnetic tape that constituted the least physical form of transcription yet invented.”<sup>135</sup> Schwartz’s observation indicates that even as Berberian poked fun at the severity of avant-gardism and her audience’s expectations of a

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>133</sup> Marcia Citron, “Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon,” 102–104.

<sup>134</sup> Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 196.

<sup>135</sup> Arman Schwartz, “The Absent Diva,” 97.

classical singer, the instrumental or technological way that her voice was perceived (demonstrated by the frequent comparison of her voice to—and juxtaposition with—electronics) in large part contributed to her success in a masculine system, and as a result indirectly reinforced the musical hierarchical system that fetishizes virtuosity and normalizes masculine control.<sup>136</sup> Descriptions of Berberian’s voice and the kinds of compositions created for her reveal the formalist-informed aesthetic value placed on sound—specifically new sounds—within the culture of the avant-garde. For example, comparisons made to an “oscillator” reveal her contemporaries’ interest in the sonic capacities of her voice as well as a tacit (and probably unintentional) detachment of her sound from her personality; additionally, Berberian’s simulacrum of *musique concrète* resonated with Cage at a time in his career when he was intensely focused on “sounds that are just sounds”; furthermore, scholar Kate Meehan astutely describes Bussotti’s treatment of Berberian’s voice in purely formalist sonic terms, stating, “Bussotti’s *Voix de femme* and *Lecture di Braibanti* followed a similar path [to Cage’s *Aria*], with some openness with regard to time but with major decisions of text, pitch, and noises made by the composer.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, the agency Berberian that exercised in her undermining of electronic music’s cool intellectualism and lampooning of culturally-constructed feminine tropes should be acknowledged. Yet, to overlook broader aesthetic trends of the time that very likely informed how

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<sup>136</sup> Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 108.

<sup>137</sup> Cage, “Experimental Music,” *Silence: Lectures and Writing* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 7–12; Meehan, “Not Just a Pretty Voice,” 120; Osmond-Smith, “The Tenth Oscillator,” 2.

the avant-garde community perceived her voice loses sight of the problematic virtuosity discourses in EVT that reinforce gendered power dynamics in music.

The very concept of EVT (a tradition nearly always traced back to Berberian) implies that the voice is an instrument whose possibilities can be (and should) be comprehensively mastered, and that, like an instrument, there is an intended/normal use and extended/ extra-normal use. The voice-as-instrument idea embedded in the concept of EVT connects avant-garde extensions of the voice to conservatory tradition, in the sense that proficiency in bel canto technique contextualizes the so-called extended sounds as intentional departures from typical classical singing—a self-conscious, overt handling of the voice. In instrumental performance, it is always more or less obvious that the performer is handling their instrument, whether engaging in normative or extended techniques: the sound-bearing device is literally operated by hands in a visible way. However, the entire goal of bel canto—whether in opera or recital performance—is to appear as the singer’s natural expression.

Pedagogical books and treatises on bel canto dating from the seventeenth century to the present posit the appearance of a natural and effortless sound as the ideal, admonishing students to avoid visible tension in the body and to be able to move freely onstage while singing.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, both opera and (most) art song contributes to the illusion of bel canto singing as the natural expression of the singer

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<sup>138</sup> For further reading on bel canto and the development of a “natural” style of singing: Jane Heirich, *Voice and the Alexander Technique* (Berkeley: Mornum Time Press, 2005); Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Performers and Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

by invoking theater's willing suspension of disbelief through continuous singing. Thus, switching between bel canto and other modes of vocal production reminds the listener that the embodied act of singing is not natural, but an act of intellectual labor, of handling their own physiological faculties in order to accurately interpret a musical prompt (score, instructions, or improvisation).

The act of musical interpretation and the requisite technical skill required for such an undertaking become apparent through this type of vocal demonstration. This act does call attention to the body as the source of sound production, but it does so with a dualistic implication of the voice as something that the mind handles and controls at will, not unlike a person seated behind a keyboard or control board.<sup>139</sup> As sociologist David Morgan discerns,

Of other dichotomies and their interconnections with gender and embodiment . . . the embodiment of 'reason' [is] a major axis around which these issues are organized between mind and body. . . . These terms have clear gender connotations in that they are more readily associated with men than with women in central ideological constructions.<sup>140</sup>

The performance of EVT (especially in the context of avant-garde music) allows the embodied singer to read as a musician primarily engaged in intellectual (i.e. supposedly masculine) work because EVT dispenses with the illusion of song as the performer's natural expression and instead provides the singer with an opportunity to overtly demonstrate an ability to undertake challenging music, to interpret

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<sup>139</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 18.

<sup>140</sup> David Morgan, "You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine," in *Gender: A Sociological Reader*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (London: Routledge, 2002): 409.

unconventional notation, and to hold an encyclopedic knowledge of sounds possible on one's instrument.

And yet, as Morgan proposes, further scrutiny continues to reveal how these dialectical constructions of voice/instrument, intellectual/embodied, masculine/feminine fold back upon themselves.<sup>141</sup> He observes,

In so far as intellectual labor is woven into wider patterns of the sexual division of labor, then to do thinking is to occupy a particularly distinctive and often privileged place in space, public or private. . . . The thinker must be seen doing thinking, to occupy space in a particular watchful or concentrating manner. Certain props, extensions of the body may help, but the body has to be deployed in a way legitimate to the title of thinker.<sup>142</sup>

His statement recognizes that for labor to be recognized as “intellectual” (and thus, coded masculine), the body must be deployed in a way that clearly demonstrates the privileged space of thinking.

Though Morgan specifically refers to physical props (a pipe, a book, etc.), I suggest that, in the case of music making and musical semiotics, aural props create a similar effect: in the absence of an visible instrument or control board, the sounds that disrupt the performance illusion of the singer's voice as natural stand in for a physical object and demonstrate the singer's intellectual labor.

In this context, Berberian's (later) play with costumes and wigs perhaps did not draw attention to the embodied labor of singing to the extent that present social-

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<sup>141</sup> The concept of knowledge doubling over itself, giving rise to a “fold” of knowledge that lies beneath an exterior of a smooth line, is widely attributed to Foucault. Gavin Kendall, “Foucauldian Approaches to the Self,” in *Routledge Handbook of Identity Studies*, ed. Anthony Elliott (London: Routledge, 2012): 80.

<sup>142</sup> David Morgan, “You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine,” 410.

historical explosion in feminist and queer scholarship asserts. As Schwartz has noted, her costumes reflexively hyperbolized feminine performance dress,<sup>143</sup> which highlighted the artificiality of performance, and potentially redirected attention toward the performance act itself and the intellectual labor involved in performing challenging repertoire [Fig. 2.2 and Fig. 2.3].



[Fig. 2.2 Berberian and Berio in rehearsal, October 21, 1961.  
Photo Credit: Willy Prager, October 1961, ©Donaueschinger Musiktage  
Landesarchiv  
Baden-Württemberg.]

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<sup>143</sup> Schwartz, “The Absent Diva,” 100.



[Fig. 2.3 Berberian in elaborate costume for her September 14, 1973 recital, “*À la recherché de la musique perdue*” at Town Hall, New York City. Photo credit: (Unknown), Author unknown, September 1973, ©cathyberberian.com, rights held by Cristina Berio.]

Thus, even Berberian’s theatrical dress could be read as (to use Morgan’s words), “Props . . . [that] deploy the body in a way legitimate to the title of thinking,” albeit in an indirect fashion.<sup>144</sup>

This reading of Berberian’s costumes as elements that worked in concert with (rather than detracted from) her intellectual labor and the instrumentalization of her voice admittedly might seem counter-intuitive, but allowing for multiple readings productively complicates Berberian’s work and provides insight into the variety of responses to her work in different spheres of culture. For example, the *New York*

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<sup>144</sup> Morgan, “You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine,” 409.

*Times* denounced her performance of Cage's *Aria* as "obscene"<sup>145</sup> and *Stripsody* as "pop art nonsense,"<sup>146</sup> reviews that could easily be interpreted as indications that these critics heard her grunts and yelps through the interpretive framework of her elaborate, sometimes-provocative costumes. The coalescence between Berberian's avant-garde musical rigor, command of EVT, mastery of bel canto technique, and droll irreverence toward all of these institutions makes Berberian a particularly complicated case study of avant-garde prestige and the perception of intellectual work. The reading I present—that her costumes obliquely highlighted her virtuosic EVT display—attempts to account for her success among groups less interested in performance art and more interested in linguistics and artistic complexity. By considering Berberian's use of EVT in the context of the rise of aesthetic formalism, electronic music, and increased focus on the parameters of sound, we obtain insight into how EVT operated as a means of cultural capital within circles of the musical and intellectual elite, and we better understand how someone now celebrated for her use of "camp" also held a position of high esteem with the pop-art-averse critic Theodore Adorno's adulation of *Stripsody* in 1976, and more broadly, in the self-serious avant-garde scene.<sup>147</sup>

Another component of the legibility and legitimacy conferred upon avant-garde classical singers through EVT's voice-as-instrument discourse involves what Morgan described as the "privileged place in space" where a singer can be "seen

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<sup>145</sup> Albert Goldberg, "Monday Concerts Go Mad on Tuesday," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1960.

<sup>146</sup> Schwartz, "The Absent Diva," 98.

<sup>147</sup> Marie-Christine Vila, *Cathy Berberian, Cant'actrice* (Paris: Fayard, 2003): 181.

doing thinking” and where they “occupy space in a particular watchful or concentrating manner.”<sup>148</sup> The conceptual detachment from the voice-instrument and the virtuosic control a singer exercises over their instrument through concentrated study frames their work as intellectual labor. For example, iconic photographs used in press kits have featured composers (often men) sitting in electronic music studios, making these composers immediately legible as thinkers who are “occupying a space in a particular watchful or concentrating manner.” Singers also have been photographed in ways that perform intellectualism, such as the photo of Cathy Berberian studying a score with furrowed brow [refer to Fig. 2.1]. Whereas such images imply an unequal status with the composer (who delegates the score’s commands), they still elevate her performer status by highlighting the intellectual rigor of avant-garde score comprehension and interpretation. Interestingly, unlike in other intellectual disciplines where being “seen doing thinking” occurs primarily in (staged) photographs or perhaps in a university lecture hall, in music a performer is ostensibly being “seen doing thinking” in a “privileged place in space” as an inherent part of their vocation.<sup>149</sup> And yet, being seen “doing thinking” differs from being recognized as such: I suggest that EVT in avant-garde performance bridges the gap between being seen and recognized as engaged in intellectual work in a “particular watchful or concentrating manner.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Morgan, “You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine,” 409.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

As previously discussed, EVT is defined by its implied extension from bel canto, the vocal norm of classical music. Through discontinuity and performance reflexivity, EVT draws attention to the act of performance itself, rupturing the suspension of disbelief that occurs when the mode of vocal production conforms to the vocal norm and remains the same throughout the performance. But EVT not only draws attention to the physical stage and performance scenario as a privileged place in space that a performer occupies—EVT also places the vocalist in a privileged place in cultural space. In Berberian’s context (and to some extent, in the present), EVT identified a vocalist as an advocate of the musical avant-garde, which although not always popular, commanded a place in the musical highbrow that opera only tenuously held.<sup>151</sup>

As Lawrence Levine has suggested, opera had long been relegated to a lesser cultural status than absolute music because of its contamination with theater, its tawdry themes, and (most damningly) its accessibility.<sup>152</sup> Conversely, music that appeared to be more challenging—in terms of being perceived as complex and rejecting of aesthetic pandering to popular tastes—became associated with intellectualism and a privileged understanding of culture.<sup>153</sup> This association with

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<sup>151</sup> Lawrence Levine, “The Sacrilization of Culture,” in *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988): 83–168.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 102–113.

avant-garde's highbrow status conferred cultural capital onto singers such as Berberian.<sup>154</sup>

Once again, Berberian's theatricality and "campy" performance seems to contradict the claim that she benefitted from the highbrow status of the avant-garde. Yet contemporary readings of Berberian's persona primarily as an ironic performance of extreme femininity in resistance to the male-dominated world does not account for oddities such as Adorno's adulation of *Stripsody*,<sup>155</sup> or Belgian sociologist René Lindekens's publication of a deep structural analysis of *Stripsody* in the journal *Communications*.<sup>156</sup> Berberian's talent, dedication to music, and memorable persona undoubtedly drove her success and recognition, but I argue that EVT's association with the avant-garde and highbrow culture made her talents legible to the musical and academic intelligentsia in a very particular way. Whereas instrumental or electronic music often represented avant-gardism and the musical highbrow, singers who specialized in EVT could realize the sonic possibilities of both and in doing so, make themselves legible not only as indispensable sonic resources, but also as artists and intellectuals who understood avant-garde music at an elite level. Singers' participation in the highbrow culture of the avant-garde provided them a privileged place in cultural space in which they could be recognized as masterfully operating their vocal instruments and thus doing intellectual work. Through the privilege of the

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<sup>154</sup> Rob Moore, "Cultural capital: objective probability and the cultural arbitrary," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 25, no. 4 (2004): 445–456.

<sup>155</sup> Vila, *Cathy Berberian: Cant'atrice*, 181.

<sup>156</sup> René Lindekens, "Analyse structurale de la *Stripsody* de Cathy Berberian," *Communications* 24 (1976): 140–76.

avant-garde's highbrow status, Berberian had an advantage in rising above (some) of the trappings of the gendered musical hierarchies that pervaded classical music in general and the avant-garde more specifically.<sup>157</sup>

### **Bethany Beardslee and Milton Babbitt**

When considering how EVT came to be constructed in contemporary musical discourse, Bethany Beardslee (b. 1925) does not fit into this category as readily as Berberian or later musicians such as Joan La Barbara or the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble: she did not draw from a vast repertoire of non-lexical sounds, claim to be conducting “vocal research,” or reproduce vocal techniques from so-called exotic musical cultures. Yet, she is named in scholarly writing on EVT, such as in Matthew Hoch's *A Dictionary for the Modern Singer* and several dissertations on EVT, such as Melanie Crump's *When Words Are Not Enough* and Linda Ann Brown's *The Beautiful in the Strangeness*, perhaps because of her significant presence in avant-garde music, renown as a vocal virtuoso, and association with other avant-garde vocalists linked with EVT such as Berberian and Jan DeGaetani.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, since the term EVT rarely appears in critical or pedagogical literature before 1972, after which it became more associated with specific non-European techniques (such as ululation and multiphonics), it stands to reason that Beardslee

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<sup>157</sup> McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 72.

<sup>158</sup> Ned Rorem, “The American Art Song 1900-1960, a Personal Appraisal,” liner notes to *But Yesterday is Not Today: The American Art Song, 1927-1972*, Donald Hassard and Donald Gramm, Bethany Beardslee and Robert Helps (New World Records 80243) CD, 1996.

held the status conferred by EVT without having the actual label assigned to her until later, retroactive iterations of the EVT canon appear in musical discourse.

Beardslee was born into an upper-middle class family in East Lansing, Michigan. While her father's family was not particularly musical, her mother's side would often play and sing together. She describes all of her maternal aunts and uncles as having lovely voices, and one of her aunts, Irene Simpson, ended up pursuing a career as a photoplayer (a pianist who accompanied silent films).<sup>159</sup> Additionally, both her mother and aunt, Ella and Inez Simpson, studied piano and voice at Oberlin for two years.<sup>160</sup> Beardslee herself enjoyed singing from a young age; she sang in her high school chorus and her senior year, landed a leading role in the school's operetta, *The Count and the Co-Ed* by Geoffrey Morgan and Geoffrey O'Hara.<sup>161</sup>

Yet despite these early musical experiences, she recalls that she knew nothing more than "'Every-Good-Boy-Does-Fine' and 'F-A-C-E'" upon entering Michigan State.<sup>162</sup> She still thought of music primarily when she enrolled in 1942 and declared herself a liberal studies major.<sup>163</sup> However, her love of singing prompted her to take voice lessons as an elective, and when her teacher, Fred Patton, encouraged her to become a music major, she enthusiastically made the switch.<sup>164</sup> From then on, Beardslee devoted herself to music and continued her studies at the Juilliard School

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<sup>159</sup> Beardslee, *I Sang the Unsingable: My Life in Twentieth-Century Music* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2017): 9.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>162</sup> Howard Klein, "Two Singers Share an Unusual Niche," *New York Times*, June 24, 1962.

<sup>163</sup> Beardslee, *I Sang the Unsingable*, 30.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 29.

of Music, where she met her first husband and musical collaborator, Jacques-Louis Monod. They connected over a mutual devotion to modernist repertoire, specifically the works of the Second Viennese School.<sup>165</sup> Beardslee also had the opportunity to connect with a vibrant community of musicians and composers while at Juilliard. As she worked with her colleagues and friends, she realized that one of her strengths as a musician was the collaborative relationships that arises from singing works by living composers; her detail-oriented, fastidious approach to musicianship prompted her to ask incisive questions about the interpretation of new works, and also provided invaluable feedback to composers writing for voice.<sup>166</sup>

While still a post-graduate student at Juilliard, she and fellow student Jacques Monod gave the world premiere of Webern's *Fünf Kanons Op. 16*.<sup>167</sup> After this concert, she quickly secured her reputation as an authority in avant-garde music by continuing to debut avant-garde works in America, such as Berg's *Altenberg Lieder* (1959, Columbia Symphony Orchestra) as well as numerous other pieces by Dallapiccola, Maxwell-Davies, Křenek, Boulez, Stravinsky, Nono, and Milton Babbitt. Her colleagues described her musical accuracy by comparing her to an instrument, declaring that "her pitch sense . . . was as reliable as a keyed instrument. . . ."<sup>168</sup> This concert launched her renown as an interpreter of challenging music, and placed her in connection with Milton Babbitt. Babbitt was a mutual friend of one of

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<sup>165</sup> Crump, "When Words are Not Enough," 68.

<sup>166</sup> Howard Klein, "Two Singers Share an Unusual Niche."

<sup>167</sup> Richard Goode, liner notes to *A Tribute to Bethany Beardslee, Soprano*.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

the other performers in the debut concert, Ben Weber.<sup>169</sup> Babbitt was so impressed with Beardslee's musicianship that he wrote an original work for her, *Vision and Prayer* (1954), and later, one of his landmark pieces as a composer, *Philomel* (1964).

The collaboration between Beardslee and Babbitt, particularly on *Philomel*, provides insight into the complex dynamics of prestige involved in EVT's voice-as-instrument notion and the gendered hierarchies of avant-garde music. Beardslee's status as a vocal virtuoso and expert in new music equaled Berberian's, with Beardslee cutting a more severe figure. Her reputation included not just her instrument-like precision, but also her full grasp of the nuances of avant-garde composition, which led Monod to declare "All composers and amateurs will remain most grateful to our wonderful American soprano Bethany Beardslee for the cultured handling of her historic contribution to the musical activity of our time."<sup>170</sup> As this quote indicates, Beardslee and her colleagues shared a sense of the historical importance of her work. Her conviction of avant-garde music as musical progress manifests in her choice of words in an article featured in *Newsweek*. Beardslee proclaimed: "I don't think in terms of the public. . . . Music is for the musicians. If the public wants to come along and study it, fine. I don't go and try to tell a scientist his business because I don't know anything about it. Music is just the same way. Music is *not* entertainment."<sup>171</sup> While Milton Babbitt has been ensconced in music history as the quintessential ivory-tower elitist for the infamous 1958 article in *High Fidelity*,

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<sup>169</sup> Beardslee, *I Sang the Unsingable*, 65.

<sup>170</sup> Goode, liner notes to *A Tribute to Bethany Beardslee, Soprano*.

<sup>171</sup> Beardslee, *I Sang the Unsingable*, 387.

“The Composer as Specialist” (better known as “Who Cares if You Listen?”), Beardslee articulated an equally unflinching assertion of the intrinsic value of the music to which she had devoted herself, affirming her own status as a musical visionary in the process. Whereas Berberian seemed to shrug off (but nonetheless benefitted from) the intellectualism and high culture status of the music she co-created/performed/championed, Beardslee seemed to openly court the intellectual and high culture connotations of modernism and the avant-garde that arose from her identity as one who expertly and intellectually operated her voice.<sup>172</sup>

Beardslee’s reputation as a “composer’s singer” whose vocal perfection and masterful comprehension of avant-garde music prefigured her work on *Philomel*. She was one of three musicians selected to present a concert in the Ford Foundation Concert Soloist series, a subsidiary of the Creative Artist Grants, in 1962.<sup>173</sup> This prestigious award was developed by the Ford Foundation in order to enable soloists to commission original works,<sup>174</sup> and for this occasion, Beardslee selected Babbitt to craft an original piece for this concert, which resulted in the creation of *Philomel*.<sup>175</sup> Since poet and literary critic John Hollander (1929–2013) had already expressed to Babbitt his interest in setting the story of Philomela from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, the

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<sup>172</sup> Arman Schwartz says that Berberian treated Adorno’s praise and Lindekin’s article with “admirably skeptical pride”; Schwartz, “The Absent Diva,” 98.

<sup>173</sup> Rachel S. Vandagriff, “American Foundations for the Arts,” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935321.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935321-e-112> (accessed September 15, 2018).

<sup>174</sup> Milton Babbitt, liner notes to *Philomel*, Bethany Beardslee, Lynne Webber, Jerome Kuderna, Robert Miller (New World Records NW 209 80466-2) CD, 1995.

<sup>175</sup> Howard Klein, “Miss Beardslee Sings ‘Philomel,’” *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1964.

project coalesced around their three congruent interests.<sup>176</sup> Hollander undertook the libretto with Beardslee's vocal abilities in mind, exclaiming:

The words of *Philomel*, which I wrote for Milton Babbitt to set and Bethany Beardslee to sing, are a cantata text. . . . A long acquaintance with Bethany Beardslee's singing allowed me to feel that I could proceed without fear of the singer's limitations. The *Philomela* story now seemed inevitable.<sup>177</sup>

Though nothing in the libretto seems to suggest anything extenuating for a singer—especially considering that Babbitt eventually cut-and-spliced much of the linguistic material—the attitude expressed by Hollander provides insight into the contemporary perception of Beardslee's musicianship; Hollander's statement further validates Beardslee's reputation as a vocalist equal to any compositional challenge of avant-garde repertoire, which resonates with Morgan's criteria for the representation of intellectual work. Though Beardslee's voice was not compared to an instrument as often as Berberian's, and though she did not perform the kinds of sounds we now commonly associate with EVT, Beardslee's adroit vocality performed all of these traits that project intellectual work. Furthermore, Babbitt's recollection of Beardslee articulates this very phenomenon of a performer's intellectual labor becoming legible through the privileged cultural space of avant-garde music. He muses, "All of this she performed with what Martin Bernheimer has described as a 'silvery, lyric soprano' so effortlessly and punctiliously as to have been achieved only by sedulous effort,

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<sup>176</sup> Martin Bernheimer and Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, *Grove Music Online*, 2nd ed., s.v., "Beardslee, Bethany," Published online February 11, 2013, <https://doi-org.oca.ucsc.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2234296> (accessed September 19, 2018).

<sup>177</sup> John Hollander, "Notes on the Text of *Philomel*," *Perspectives of New Music* 6, no. 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1967): 134–141.

intense concentration, and musicianship invented by her. Bethany had to be heard to be believed. . . .”<sup>178</sup> Babbitt’s words highlight the understanding that “effortless” performance of such works requires not just a well-trained voice, but “sedulous effort, intense concentration, and musicianship invented by her.” His statement (not without a tinge of self-aggrandizement) acknowledges the cultural reality that the performance of avant-garde music contextualizes a vocalist’s work as intellectual labor: its complexity places the voice in obviously difficult situations that intentionally flout the dramatic illusion of the music as the singer’s “natural” expression and draws attention to the assiduous study required by such music.

Beardslee’s widespread recognition as “one of the brainiest jack-of-all-vocal-music” earned her the moniker of “a composer’s singer.”<sup>179</sup> This epithet was in some ways highly complementary to Beardslee, in that it acknowledged the gratitude felt by composers for her complete command over her own vocal instrument that could extend past the typical requirements of standard operatic repertoire, as well as her profound understanding of avant-garde music. However, the compliment also contains an implicit reference to a tacit bias toward singers. For example, composer Leslie Bassett once denounced singers for their “lack of precision—rhythm, pitch, tempo—which all musicians have. That has been my greatest complaint with many of

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<sup>178</sup> Goode, *A Tribute to Bethany Beardslee, Soprano* (comment is a quote from Milton Babbitt).

<sup>179</sup> John Von Rhein, “Bethany Beardslee Offers Study in Evolution of Tonality,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1978.

my performers. . . .”<sup>180</sup> The title “a composer’s singer” hints at the convention of disparaging singers as lesser musicians, in part because their musicality involves their own body more closely than any instrument and thus invites the gendered stereotypes of embodied work as instinctual and distinct from intellectual work.

Yet, even armed with her reputation as an intellectual singer who operated her voice with a precision that rivaled Babbitt’s electronic sounds, the hierarchical system that conferred prestige upon her also trapped her in the gendered hierarchies of what McClary has dubbed the “boy’s club of modernism.”<sup>181</sup> The prestige economy related to gendered hierarchies have less to do with actual gender and sex identification than with the practice of coding certain cultural activities as feminine or masculine (typically assigning greater authority to the latter).<sup>182</sup> However, Beardslee encountered shades of undermining based on both her actual gender identity and her gendered role as a vocalist among composers and engineers. For example, even her ardent admirer Babbitt took on a patronizing tone when interviewed by Virginia Palmer for an article on solo vocal music in *Perspectives of New Music*:

The new level of virtuosity in many female singers encourages composers. I have worked long and hard with Bethany Beardslee and know her voice. . . . I prefer voice and electronics so I can control the dynamics, tempo, etc. This medium can be comfortable for the singer—no accompanist to worry about. They can practice with the tape, which then gives them a sense of security in rehearsal and performance.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Virginia Palmer, “Composer Survey: Opinions on Solo Vocal Literature,” *Perspectives of New Music* 22, no. 1–2 (Fall-Winter-Spring-Summer 1983): 631–638.

<sup>181</sup> McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 72.

<sup>182</sup> Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1972): 5–31.

<sup>183</sup> Virginia Palmer, “Composer Survey: Opinions on Solo Vocal Literature,” 631.

Why does he specify this “new level of virtuosity” occurring in female singers in particular? Does he mean to imply that singers who are female have only recently achieved a certain caliber of virtuosity sufficient for the advancement of music? Or does his statement imply that most singers are female? While in contemporary classical music, the latter assertion holds statistical validity,<sup>184</sup> the rest of his statement carries a condescending tone: “No accompanist to worry about. They can practice with the tape, which then gives them a sense of security in rehearsal and performance. . . .” To which professional singer does he refer in this case? Beardslee, as well as her contemporaries Berberian, Jan DeGaetani, and Phyllis Brynne-Julson had proven their mastery not only of all the extended possibilities of their own vocal instrument, but also of the most pernicious of avant-garde repertoire. Babbitt specifically mentions Beardslee, but only as an interchangeable member of a general group of “new virtuosic female singers,” a group whose talents he proceeds to invalidate by implying that a virtuosic musician would have any “worry” over an accompanist, or need a sense of “security” provided by a tape that he made.

His statements to Palmer in *Perspectives of New Music* were not an isolated event. In her memoir, *I Sang the Unsingable: My Life in Twentieth-Century Music*, Beardslee comes to her own defense, wanting to set the record straight on her near-infallible musical abilities. She quips:

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<sup>184</sup> “Opera’s Gender Imbalance,” *The Economist*, March 15, 2016. <https://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2016/03/operas-gender-imbalance> (accessed September 20, 2018).

It is a curious example of Milton's predisposition to embellish for the sake of a good story, but he likes to claim that I premiered *Vision and Prayer* with a click track. And he also says that over fifty performances, I never sang *Vision and Prayer* without my score in hand—a very significant exception to my reputation as a singer who memorized difficult music and performed whole recitals never looking at a sheet of music. In Milton's version of events, I always sang *Vision and Prayer* with a score and never once performed *Philomel* with a score. . . . I could memorize *Philomel*, Milton thought, because there was a correspondence between tape and score.

It's a good story, but it's not true. The fact of the matter is that I did sing *Vision and Prayer* with a score at the premiere and then only once after that. But I *never* performed *Vision and Prayer* with a click track.<sup>185</sup>

Beardslee's recounting of her work with Babbitt on *Philomel* and *Vision and Prayer* makes sense of his claim that virtuosic singers might feel more comfortable with a tape. Under his narrative, the musical prowess Beardslee displayed in *Philomel* would be partially attributable to him because he had improved the "correspondence between tape and score."

Another instance in which Babbitt neglected Beardslee's role in the creation of *Philomel* appears in his account of how the piece came together. Though Hollander acknowledges Beardslee's crucial role, Babbitt repeatedly omits her. For example, in an interview with Jason Gross for *Perfect Sound Forever Online Music Magazine*, he recalls:

John Hollander wrote the piece for me and the piece was basically commissioned for a soprano, Bethany Beardslee. . . . He also understood that the synthesizer could do anything. It was no longer a question of whether it

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<sup>185</sup> Beardslee, *I Sang the Unsingable*, 218.

could be played or whether it could be heard. . . . So it was very much a collaboration between the two of us.<sup>186</sup>

Beardslee made *Philomel* possible, both in practical terms of starting the project and in creative terms of providing sonic palate from which Hollander and Babbitt drew their aesthetic materials, yet Babbitt continually omits her from the role of creative contributor. Babbitt again mutes Beardslee's contributions in his account of *Philomel* for the *Journal for Music Theory*:

The composer had to assign values to five separate components in order to produce an 'event.' These components were frequency, time rate of change of intensity (envelope), timbre (spectrum), intensity, and duration. . . . In my composition, *Philomel*, a pre-recorded soprano was so treated, transformed, modified, and combined with other forms of itself and Synthesizer produced sound.<sup>187</sup>

He doesn't name Beardslee, but rather relegates her role to a nameless "pre-recorded soprano." The indication almost seems as if her voice were simply some random "found sound" for an abstracted *musique concrète* piece rather than the voice of the piece's commissioner, co-creator and integral collaborator.

### **Conclusion: The Plight of EVT Singers in the Avant-Garde "Prestige Economy"**

Beardslee was not the only vocalist regularly overlooked and insufficiently recognized by her male colleagues in the avant-garde: although Berberian, like

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<sup>186</sup> Jason Gross, "Milton Babbitt Interview," *Perfect Sound Forever Online Music Magazine*, April 2000, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/ohm/babbitt.html> (accessed April 30, 2018).

<sup>187</sup> Milton Babbitt, "An Introduction to the R.C.A. Synthesizer," *Journal of Music Theory* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1964): 251–265.

Beardslee, gained wide recognition as a virtuoso and a musician engaged in the intellectual work of deftly interpreting complex scores, she too found herself subjected to the marginalization of gendered hierarchies, both literally and conceptually. For instance, Berberian and composer and friend Umberto Eco had spontaneously started reading from *Ulysses* by James Joyce one night in Berberian and Berio's apartment, which Berio recorded and later formed into the piece *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)*.<sup>188</sup> Berio ended up keeping only Berberian's reading in the final cut, yet when discussing his process for *Thema* in an interview, Berberian remains nameless; he simply states that the piece was "a gradual musical development of the verbal elements alone, as they were proposed by a female voice reading a poetic text. . . ."<sup>189</sup> Like Beardslee, to quote musicologist Hannah Bosma, "Berberian's particular, impressive voice is reduced to anonymous linguistic material, a neutral extension of the written text."<sup>190</sup>

Moreover, Berberian had made substantial suggestions and edits to *Sequenza III*, but did not receive credit from Berio, as she recalled in an interview: "Of course when I talk about it with him to this day, he maintains that the piece was always like this from the beginning! But I have the scores to prove it! And I'll tell you more, there are three versions: the original one for Bremen, the one for London, and the

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<sup>188</sup> Osmond-Smith, "The Tenth Oscillator," 4.

<sup>189</sup> Meehan, *Not Just a Pretty Voice*, 38.

<sup>190</sup> Hannah Bosma, "Musical Washing Machines, Composer-Performers, and Other Blurring Boundaries: How Women Make a Difference in Electroacoustic Music," *Intersections: Canadian Journal of Music* 2, no. 3 (2006): 104.

definitive one which reflects all the changes we did during the recording.”<sup>191</sup> Though these scores Berberian spoke of presently remain at large, the marginalization that Beardslee and Berberian encountered regarding their contributions illustrates the problems with the musical hierarchy in which they invested. Although both championed modernist music and applied their extended vocal abilities to cutting-edge repertoire, they were also in many ways musical traditionalists: they performed in concert halls, singing pieces written by composers who openly courted the “male genius” trope, and both perceived themselves as accomplished bel canto singers whose additional abilities could accommodate more rigorous musical endeavors. Essentially, these singers earned prestige and mobility in and through a system that still ranked performers below composers, and singers below instrumentalists. This system reproduced the sexism of broader culture as well, erasing the contributions of women in favor of keep the “male genius” narrative in-tact.

Thus, the voice-as-instrument notion within avant-garde vocal practices (which later became identified as the beginnings of EVT) allowed singers to distance themselves from the interpolation that occurs when one’s instrument and one’s body are inseparable. It shaped their personas not only as virtuosos but as musicians doing intellectual work. Moreover, it afforded them a place in the elite strata of highbrow intellectualism accessible primarily to those working in high modernism’s abstract, formalist-tinged paradigm. However, the singer’s intellectual work hinged on her

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<sup>191</sup> Francesca Placanica, *Cathy Berberian: Performance as Composition* MMus Thesis (Southern Methodist University, 2007): 58. Original source is from an archived interview with Cathy Berberian by Silvana Ottieri in Milan, 1981.

copious study of—and complete obedience to—the composer’s score. Both Beardslee and Berberian’s recognition and respect in the avant-garde community hinged on their virtuosic obedience, belied by their nicknames of “a composer’s singer” (implicating that she can perfectly realize any score) and the “tenth oscillator” (a device that executes the bidding of its operator). Their reputations as high-level performers perhaps pigeonholed them into being seen only as performers when engaging in the musical process with a (usually male) composer. Berberian eventually composed her own works, such as *Stripsody* and *MagnifiCathy*, but as previously mentioned, only recently has she begun to receive her due recognition in regard to Berio’s most famous pieces. In a sense, the more that these performers emphasized their virtuosic, detached control over their vocal instrument and ingenious realizations of difficult scores, the more they erased their own presence from the work and appeared to their composer colleagues as transparent vessels: Berberian was referred to by Berio as simply an anonymous woman’s voice in Berio’s *Thema*, and Beardslee merely a pre-recorded soprano in Babbitt’s account of *Philomel*.

Moreover, these performers’ command of their voice-instrument, with all of its extended possibilities, allowed them to excel in avant-garde music and aligned them with the distinction of being at the forefront of new music. Yet, in order for EVT to be legible as intellectual work in the economy of avant-garde prestige, the singer must be seen as intentionally extending from tradition, which meant that they had to maintain a reputation as bel canto singers. Without being known to possess a command of bel canto, avant-garde singers’ use of EVT might be regarded with

skepticism. In his recollection of Bethany Beardslee, music critic Tim Page acknowledges the conservatory's dismissive attitude toward EVT and avant-garde vocal music that echoed through the halls of my own undergraduate experience:

I heard her in person only late in her career, in a Town Hall concert with Robert Helps, long after she was officially retired. Even then, she stood as eloquent refutation to those trice [*sic.*]-to-be-damned pedagogues who tell their students that "modern music ruins the voice". . . . All singers could profit from such "ruin."<sup>192</sup>

Actually, Bethany Beardslee frequently performed standard repertoire in conjunction with avant-garde pieces; she paired Schumann's *Dichterliebe* with Schoenberg's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* and Debussy's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* with Webern's *Drei Lieder* (Op. 25) and Babbitt's *Vision and Prayer*.<sup>193</sup> Berberian performed avant-garde music more exclusively for several years, until later in life when she undertook early music projects. Unlike Beardslee, who displayed her competency in bel canto technique by performing standard repertoire alongside avant-garde pieces, Berberian focused almost exclusively on avant-garde repertoire for almost a decade and later decided to set the record straight on her bel canto capabilities on Dutch National Radio in Holland, 1977:

My experience with extended vocal technique is that . . . for the moment, it has hit an impasse. . . . And it would be a very foolish composer, a good composer, who would compose a piece for one of these singers. . . . I doubt that most of these people can really sing, in the true sense of the word. And,

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<sup>192</sup> Goode, liner notes for *A Tribute to Bethany Beardslee, Soprano*.

<sup>193</sup> Harold Schonberg, "Music: Rarities by Bethany Beardslee," *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1970; Raymond Ericson, "Soprano, Pianist in Joint Recital," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1962.

they're kind of . . . freaks, they're phenomena. What they used to call me. But it wasn't true in my case because I can really sing, you see. . . .<sup>194</sup>

In this quote, Berberian affirms the notion that EVT and avant-garde vocality rely on bel canto as the “center” from which avant-garde music’s vocal requirements extend. She iterates a viewpoint not exclusive to her own perspective, which embraces EVT as a legitimate display of intellectual virtuosity and avant-garde prestige only when it is demonstrably connected to a singer’s mastery of conservatory training.

This view of EVT, as expressed by Berberian, reflects the overall culture of the avant-garde: as much as modernist composers challenged tradition, they rested on the platform of tradition in order for their work to be recognized as progressive. EVT and avant-garde vocal music required (and in many segments of conservatory culture and Euro-American classical music, still requires) bel canto for its own recognition as both progressive and legitimate: when performed by an artist already capable in bel canto tradition, but who chooses to explore new musical territory, EVT simultaneously garners musical legitimacy and avant-garde capital. However, in this same construct, EVT requires bel canto as the purportedly embodied foil to its intellectual work and so-called imprecise singers to contrast composer’s singers. As a result, the valorization of the virtuosic voice-instrument in the culture of the avant-garde reinforces traditional dualisms between mind and body, masculine and feminine, privileging the former in each of these binary sets. Yet, the limitations to recognition and success experienced by the voice-virtuosos of mid-twentieth century

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<sup>194</sup>Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” 199.

avant-garde music reveal the vulnerable, indelibly embodied voice that haunts the voice-instrument (or voice-oscillator)—a haunting that occupies a central place of inquiry in the idiosyncratic, exploratory work of the later performer-composer cohort identified with experimentalism, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

### CHAPTER THREE: EVT, INNOVATION, AND INDIVIDUALIST IDENTITY IN THE COMPOSER-PERFORMER TRADITION: JOAN LA BARBARA, DEBORAH KAVASCH, AND MEREDITH MONK

#### **Introduction: Introduction: EVT, Innovation, and Collective Identity**

In an effort to make the EVT discourse more inclusive, performance scholar and vocalist Gelsey Bell writes, “The split between trained and untrained vocalist weasels its way into how particular vocal music is viewed and discussed, and ultimately hinders discussions of the activities of the voice in general.”<sup>195</sup> Bell’s assertion in many ways rings true, especially in regard to the EVT canon. For example, vocalists who come from a background of conservatory training (Beardslee, Berberian, Joan La Barbara, Diamanda Galás, Deborah Kavasch, Pamela Z) tend to be grouped within the EVT tradition. Conversely, musicians who use their voices in experimental ways but come from non-conservatory backgrounds are often categorized as “performance artists,” “sound poets,” or “text-based composers” (Yoko Ono, Beth Anderson, Jaap Blonk, Paul Dutton, and Robert Ashley are a few representative examples).<sup>196</sup> This purported “split between trained and untrained

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<sup>195</sup> Gelsey Bell, “Voice Acts,” 11.

<sup>196</sup> Author’s note: I share Bell’s opinion that traditional definitions of “music” and “singing” have contributed to a significant neglect in musicological research on vocalists such as Robert Ashley. Further research on Ashley and his reworking of “singing” and “the voice” in pieces like “The Wolfman” and his opera *Perfect Lives* has been widely overlooked, in part due to Ashley’s conscription to the labels of “performance art” and a focus on only the literary aspect of his text-based work, as opposed to thinking of his texts as something he intended to be read aloud and heard as a uniquely “American” form of singing. For further reading on Ashley’s ideas about speech and voice see: Arthur J. Sabatini, “Robert Ashley: Defining American Opera,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 27 (2005): 45-60; additionally, Larry Wendt describes sound poets’ work as EVT in *Vocal Neighborhoods*, and thus

vocalists” that Bell identifies largely traffics in generalities and thus, notable exceptions exist; Shelley Hirsch and Susan Botti, for example, seamlessly move between “theater” and “music,” yet critics frequently categorize their work as EVT.<sup>197</sup> However, I suggest that even if it is a generality, this “split” actually offers important insight into how EVT has come to be understood, particularly in regard to vocalist composer-performers in the experimental tradition.<sup>198</sup>

In its present understanding, EVT’s canon encompasses both the voice virtuosos of the mid-twentieth century (such as Cathy Berberian and Bethany Beardslee) and composer-performers whose vocal practices arose from a reflexive interest in re-examining the fundamental assumptions of how their own culture has constructed singing and the voice. For example, *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* reproduces the common chronological narrative of EVT that begins with *Pierrot lunaire* and culminates with Berberian and Joan La Barbara, neatly paired together as the purported apex of vocal exploration.<sup>199</sup> Although

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establishes more fluidity between “singers” and “sound poets”; Wendt, “Vocal Neighborhoods.”

<sup>197</sup> Susan Botti “EVT” references: Kristen Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* ed. by Pamela Karantonis, et. al., 184–204 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014): 202; Michael Slayton, *Women of Influence in Contemporary Music: Nine American Composers* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011): 55.

<sup>198</sup> The author realizes that the label “experimentalism” has a complex history with ambiguous definitions, elucidated by Amy Beal in her article “Experimentalists and Independents are Favored” (2008). However, as discussed in the “Introduction” section, I will use the term in full recognition of the politics of its construction because I am interested in exploring the politics of identification and the ways in which the “EVT” label intersected with experimentalism.

<sup>199</sup> Julie Ann Sadie, “Preface,” *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994): xv.

Berberian and La Barbara both contributed to contemporary understandings of the voice and vocal composition in their own ways, this tidy pairing of the two under the premise that both have worked creatively with vocal sounds outside of bel canto tradition overlooks some important social-historical differences between the generation of singers who voiced score-based avant-garde music by composers such as Berio, Boulez, and Babbitt, and composer-performers who considered themselves part of the experimental tradition.

As composers (such as Ted Szántó) and critics (such as Tom Johnson of the *Village Voice* and John Rockwell of the *New York Times*) began identifying certain pieces and composers with the loosely-defined idea of experimentalism, the term EVT also became more prevalent. In fact, early uses of the term EVT arose primarily within the context of experimentalism. Some examples of these early appearances of this term include: the EVTE, formed in 1972 in a music department that self-consciously identified as experimental (UCSD), and the title of Ted Szántó's 1977 essay tracing EVT's history through the work of musicians primarily associated with experimentalism.<sup>200</sup>

When considering EVT's significance within experimental music circles, I suggest that the dialectical relationship between extended and central (i.e. bel canto) vocal technique parallels experimentalism's self-characterization as purportedly alternative to conservatory-oriented music. Thus, while Berberian and Beardslee firmly planted their extended vocal work within the tenets of Euro-American classical

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<sup>200</sup> Szántó, "Extended vocal techniques," 113–115.

music and bel canto tradition, experimental performer-composers have tended to frame their work as a departure from bel canto's authoritative insistence on its own normativity, placing emphasis on their own vocal and musical discoveries as the driving force behind their creative work. Although many performer-composers in the experimental tradition who identify primarily as singers have actually received bel canto training at some point in their careers (such as Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, Deborah Kavasch, and later, Pamela Z, Amy X Neuberg, and Kristen Norderval, to name a few), perhaps one of the main reasons why EVT has been constructed around "trained singers," as Bell observes, lies in the concept itself: like experimentalism, EVT's characterization relies on its difference from a centralized vocal tradition from which it extends or departs.

In this chapter, I explore the understanding and cultural significance of EVT within the context of experimentalism by contextualizing definitions and discussions of EVT within the context of experimentalism's value systems and characteristics as a community. In order to more clearly understand the parallels between the construction of EVT and experimentalism, I draw upon Benjamin Piekut's book, *Experimentalism Otherwise*. Piekut affirms that the "consensus view of experimentalism . . . is based on an *a priori* grouping"; experimentalism, he explains, is something "performed," something "'put together' in processes that are historical, social, linguistic, and technological."<sup>201</sup> I propose that EVT is, in a sense, a performance of (vocal) experimentalism. The emergence of an EVT tradition within

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<sup>201</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 6–7.

the context of experimentalism involved similar “acts of grouping” based on a “consensus view” that Piekut identifies as the means by which composers and critics have constituted—and sustain—the experimental tradition. Examining composer statements, interviews, liner notes, critical reviews, and other discursive materials attendant to the early work of Joan La Barbara (b. 1947), Deborah Kavasch (b. 1945), and Meredith Monk (b. 1942), I trace the “putting together” of experimental vocal artists into an EVT cohort that reflected the traits common among those “grouped” under the broader category of experimentalism through the 1970s and 1980s.

### **The Composer-Performer Tradition and its Values**

In order to understand how the term EVT circulated within the context of experimentalism, it is important to examine the key linguistic and conceptual signifiers of experimentalism in music discourse from around the time that the term EVT appeared more regularly in musical discourse. In his 1974 work, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, British composer Michael Nyman proposed a concept of experimentalism based on similarities between composers in their core aesthetic values and basic approaches to music, fixing Cage’s definition of Experimental music as his reference point. Addressing this category’s pernicious resistance to definition, Nyman reflects:

Cage’s global definition of a coherent history and aesthetic of experimental music also removed the need for me to deal head-on with the tortured and futile . . . question of what precisely is *experimental* about ‘experimental music’ . . . or what is *not* experimental about ‘non-experimental’ music. . . . But my first chapter [is] . . . the most stringent attempt to classify

experimental music and to distinguish it from the serialism-based opposition.<sup>202</sup>

The radical diversity of the musicians and musical practices included in Nyman's book perhaps explains, in part, the dialectical way in which Nyman identifies experimentalism through its oppositional relationship to serialism and the (mostly European) avant-garde. The posture of challenge remains the most common identifiable feature across the musicians identified as Experimental.

In the reprint of Nyman's work in 1999, Brian Eno contributes his experience working within the Experimental paradigm, and echoes Nyman's definition-by-difference: "Whereas the avant-garde stuff—Stockhausen, Boulez, and the other serialist Europeans—could still be seen as a proper site for "real" musical skills, and was therefore slowly being co-opted into the academy, the stuff that we were interested in was so explicitly anti-academic. . . ." <sup>203</sup> In this statement, Eno connects the European avant-garde to the academy and institutionalized classical music. In doing so, he indicates that a significant difference between experimentalism and the avant-garde hinges on the latter's connection to academic, institutionalized, or conservatory-based forms of music-making. In fact, the quotes Eno places around "real" implies that a significant point of dissent—and subsequent self-understanding— between the two categories concerns more than just the actual technique of serialism; it also evokes the values that serialism had come to represent:

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<sup>202</sup> Nyman, *Experimental Music*, xv.

<sup>203</sup> Brian Eno, "Introduction," in *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, xi.

control, mastery, perfection, virtuosity; in essence, a sort of hyper-classicism laden with exclusivity and elitism.

Wariness toward the musical hierarchies implied by traditional Euro-American classical music plays out in numerous, more specific values that Piekut rehearses as the salient traits applied to composers in experimentalism's act of "grouping":

In Michael Nyman's influential formation, a set of "purely musical considerations" sets off experimentalism from its close cousin, the avant-garde. Experimentalism, he writes offers . . . an ontology that foregrounds performance over writing. . . , A desire to replace an inherited European tradition with a fresh American music, an expansion of the concept of music. . . , An openness to non-Western musics. . . , A mission to liberate sounds, stress timbre and rhythm over melody. . . . Other hallmarks of this consensus view of experimentalism include notions of rugged individualism, a "maverick" spirit, academic nonaffiliation, and general noninstitutionality.<sup>204</sup>

Although a seemingly sprawling description (and the list presented is already significantly pruned for the purposes of later relating to EVT's traits), this characterization essentially boils down to an extrapolation on experimentalism's negative self-definition as "not institutional," and "not classical," especially since not a few musicians and composers linked to the experimental tradition have chosen some degree of institutional affiliation.<sup>205</sup> Composers who identify with experimentalism have taken academic posts, won high-profile grants and awards, enjoyed numerous performances of their works ranging from college chamber music

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<sup>204</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 5-6.

<sup>205</sup> This statement speculates on one aspect of how experimentalism came to be understood and defined; Beal, "Experimentalists and Independents are Favored," *Notes*, 659-687.

ensembles to the symphonies and orchestras of major cities. For instance, Gordon Mumma, Robert Ashley, Pauline Oliveros, Christian Wolf, Morton Feldman, Alvin Lucier, and many others commonly grouped together as Experimental composers have held academic positions; moreover, Meredith Monk has won a MacArthur grant, La Monte Young was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and Steve Reich has two Grammys and a Pulitzer to his name, to name just some of the artists who have received institutional recognition for their work and who have been commonly associated with experimentalism by critics and scholars.<sup>206</sup>

Considering that experimentalism has (in varying shades) a socially-transformative program, it seems inimical to its agenda for artists to limit their work's exposure to the fringes of music and culture. Rather, I hope that the list in the previous paragraph shows that the sincere values held by members of the Experimental cohort represent something more than just physical circumstances: experimentalism, as Amy Beal and Piekut acknowledge, is a discourse, a value system shared by musicians looking to change the musical status quo and imagine new musical and social possibilities. The qualities I have selected from Piekut's list also permeate the discourse of EVT and, as I will discuss, have shaped the

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<sup>206</sup> Michael Broyles, *Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995); Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown: Writings from The Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); David Nicholls, *American Experimental Music, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); John Rockwell, *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1983); James Saunders, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

understanding of EVT's concept, its relationship to bel canto and conservatory singing, and the composers and composer-performers grouped into the EVT canon.

### **Resituating EVT: Joan La Barbara as an “Experimental Singer”**

Eno and Nyman, both English composers, admit in the reprint of Nyman's book that their interest in Experimental music stemmed from the work of American composers. In both the original text and the reprint's introductory content, the authors primarily cite male composers as the American exponents of experimentalism:

Christian Wolf, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Morton Feldman, and of course, John Cage. However, Nyman had also met Joan La Barbara at the time that he states he was finishing the book (1970–1972, published in 1974).<sup>207</sup> La Barbara and Nyman met while she was touring in the UK with Steve Reich and Musicians in 1972.

Nyman had already worked with Reich several times, and he performed with La Barbara in Reich's *Drumming* at the Hayward Gallery in London on February 4, 1972.<sup>208</sup> At that time, La Barbara had not yet debuted any of her own compositions, but she had firmly established herself as a fixture in the Experimental community, as an improviser and frequent collaborator.

La Barbara says that she played piano from a young age, but found herself attracted to the stage through her involvement in her high school's theater program

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<sup>207</sup> David Allen Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community: The Philip Glass Ensemble in Downtown New York, 1966-1976,” PhD diss. (Washington University, 2013): 259; Joan La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017; Nyman, *Experimental Music* (1974): xv.

<sup>208</sup> Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 259.

and through singing in the folk band that she had formed with some of her friends.<sup>209</sup> It was at this point in her life when she started connecting more with her voice as her primary means of music-making; she realized that she felt more comfortable acting and singing than she did playing the piano, which she describes as so anxiety-producing that her hands would slip off of the keys from nervous sweat during performances.<sup>210</sup> She began studying voice at a local music school in preparation for university music studies, and was accepted to Syracuse University, where she studied traditional operatic vocal repertoire from 1965–1968. La Barbara transferred to NYU in 1969 to continue her studies in voice, still primarily considering a career in opera and conservatory music.<sup>211</sup>

Yet during her studies at NYU as a music education major, La Barbara found herself increasingly attracted to the vocal freedom in the jazz scene. La Barbara spent her free-time singing at jazz clubs around New York City, and eventually became connected to free jazz through Frederic Rzewski.<sup>212</sup> A musician with a wide range of interests, Rzewski had previously lived in Rome and while there, formed the egalitarian, co-operative musical community, *Musica Elettronita Viva*, alongside fellow ex-patriots Alvin Curran, Richard Teitelbaum, Carol Plantamura (another vocalist associated with EVT practice) and Jon Phetteplace.<sup>213</sup> Upon returning to the

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<sup>209</sup> Joan La Barbara, interview by Libby Van Cleve, *Oral History of American Music*, New York City, February 17, 1998, 8–9.

<sup>210</sup> La Barbara, interview by Libby van Cleve, 9.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>212</sup> Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 202.

<sup>213</sup> Beal, “Music is a Universal Human Right,” in *Sound Commitments*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 99–120.

United States, Rzewski formed another group, NYC-MEV, and organized weekly improvisatory jam sessions, which were mounted by radio WBAI's Free Music Store.<sup>214</sup> By 1970, she found her intention of pursuing the path of bel canto training waning, desiring instead to seek more radical forms of music making that explored the diverse potential of vocal sound. Although she had heard recordings of Cathy Berberian during her earlier studies at Syracuse, it was through these sessions that she learned new ways to engage her voice. La Barbara recalls:

I began to work with jazz musicians, working with one instrument at a time, asking individual instrumentalists to play long tones on single pitches as I tried to imitate that sound. I also became fascinated with the ways instrumentalists were extending their sounds, stretching the boundaries of what was the established technique. I didn't hear other singers doing that, and I wondered why. I had heard recordings of Cathy Berberian, of course, and also listened to jazz scat singing. But I wanted to discover for myself what my voice could do, so I started improvising, alone and with other musicians. . . on Thursday nights, jazz and New Musicians would gather for improv sessions.<sup>215</sup>

La Barbara's description of her learning process gives important background to the sounds that characterize her vocal milieu. For example, in one of La Barbara's earliest pieces, *Circular Song* (1975), she employs two relatively common wind instrument techniques, circular breathing and sliding tones, to the voice. She sings a

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<sup>214</sup> Bernard Gendron, "Rzewski in New York (1971-1977)," *Contemporary Music Review* 29, no. 6 (December 2010), 563.

<sup>215</sup> Joan La Barbara, "Voice is the Original Instrument," 35-48; In this article, La Barbara says that these sessions were called the Free Music Store, but the details La Barbara recalls exactly match the jam sessions that Gendron describes in his article on Rzewski's activities in New York City. The jam sessions La Barbara seems to describe were organized by Rzewski and included musicians often featured in Free Music Store concerts, but were not the same as the Free Music Store concerts, which featured a diverse rotation of music groups.

continuous series of glissandos between different pitches in different registers of her voice, alternating between exhaled and inhaled singing. La Barbara has referred to her early 1970s pieces (such as *Circular Song*) as “etudes,” and the similarity between the wind instrument technique and her vocal adaptation in this piece reflects La Barbara’s development of her unique vocal techniques by imitating instrumentalists at the Free Music Store.<sup>216</sup>

La Barbara’s regular participation in this group placed her in a lively center of artistic experimentation in New York City. The Free Music Store continued from 1969–1976 and was frequented by Garrett List, Anthony Braxton, Julius Eastman, Laurie Spiegel, and others. The jam sessions combined jazz, free improvisation, experimental techniques, and ideas gleaned from ethnographic recordings distributed by record labels such as Folkways.<sup>217</sup> Through this network, she connected with the Free Music Store co-director Michael Sahl, who recommended her to Steve Reich to sing in *Drumming*; according to musicologist David Chapman, a March 16, 1971 entry in Reich’s sketchbook reads, “Call Joan La Babera [sic.] (Peter La Barbera).”<sup>218</sup> In this note, Reich is referring to Joan La Barbara’s husband at that time, jazz vibraphonist Peter La Barbera. Their marriage was annulled after ten months, but she decided to keep the name, changing the spelling slightly to “La Barbara.”<sup>219</sup> La Barbara joined Reich’s ensemble that same year, in 1971, and she joined Philip

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<sup>216</sup> Joan La Barbara, liner notes to *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Wizard Records RVW2266) LP, 1976.

<sup>217</sup> Gendron, “Rzewski in New York,” 563.

<sup>218</sup> Chapman, “Community, Presence, and Collaboration,” 205.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

Glass's ensemble in 1973. Purportedly her capability to imitate of instrumental sound and seamlessly shift between timbres facilitated her entrée into these groups; however, it seems likely that La Barbara's integration into an active network of (mostly New York) composers came not just from her unique musical skill set but also from her creativity as an improviser and embodiment of an artistic individualist: although conservatory-trained, she refused to be satisfied with simply accepting the authority of bel canto pedagogy, choosing to explore her own relationship with her voice through experience, collaboration, and community.

By the time La Barbara met Nyman in 1972, she had acquainted herself with many composers in New York City. La Barbara describes their encounter:

We would sit sort of towards the back of the bus, and he would show me the galleys, and we'd go through, because some of the stuff he was writing about he hadn't actually heard. And he'd say, "Now, is this a fairly accurate description of this particular stuff?" And we'd go through and talk about it and everything. And from that book, I then wrote to [*New York Times* critic] John Rockwell and said, "If you have any question about what to call what I do, I want you to refer to me as an experimental vocalist, because I really feel as if I fit into this experimental tradition."<sup>220</sup>

1972 was still early in La Barbara's career, and at that time she had not yet adopted the term EVT; yet, her letter to John Rockwell demonstrates a pronounced sense that her work had departed in an important way from the avant-garde singers' extension of the conservatory-trained voice into particular sound effects called for in fixed compositions meant for concert halls.

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<sup>220</sup> Joan La Barbara, interview by Libby Van Cleve, 77.

Another of her early pieces, *Hear What I Feel* (1975), demonstrates her interest in individually developed processes of music-making. Containing elements of performance art and experimental theater, *Hear What I Feel* directs the performer to deprive the senses by sitting in a silent, dark space for an hour before performing. Donning a blindfold, the singer follows a designated guide to the stage where bowls of unfamiliar substances laid out on a table await. La Barbara intended for the shock of touching unknown items in front of an unseen audience to elicit automatic, instinctual vocal responses. The concept of this piece uses elements of theater and performance art to access sound beyond the reach of conscious vocal effort. La Barbara's realization of this work for her recorded album, *Voice is the Original Instrument* (1976), includes bird-like, high-pitched squeaks, guttural growls, and vocal flutters, although the sonic outcome of this piece is intentionally indeterminate and only dictates the conditions under which the performer explores new vocal possibilities. Not unlike many other experimental, performance-oriented works by Cage or by artists associated with Fluxus, the creative process comprises the material of the piece, and thus exemplifies La Barbara's assimilation of experimentalism's emphasis on autodidacticism and self-discovery. Her choice to compose for her own voice as well as her commitment to composition-as-process significantly shaped her interpretation and practice of EVT, evident in the radical difference between her sonic vocabulary and that of her predecessors such as Berberian.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> For further listening: Joan La Barbara, *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Lovely Music LCD 3003), CD, 2003.

Her understanding of her voice and its role in the music she wanted to explore seemed, to her, a fundamental shift. For example, in Walter Zimmermann's 1976 interview for his anthology, *Desert Plants*, La Barbara discloses, "My training was in basic western classical opera, and I just decided that I was going through the motions. I wasn't getting anything out of singing it. You know, because all the questions were already answered. And I wanted to find something where I could answer some questions, you know?"<sup>222</sup> As her work came to be described later as a high-profile example of EVT—by herself and others—her earlier narratives of how she arrived at this tradition-weary, exploratory, investigative approach to music and the voice deeply resonate with Nyman's formulation of experimentalism.

La Barbara eagerly embraced the styling of "experimental singer" as a way to identify herself with the historical stream that flowed from the ideas set forth by Cage in the 1950s. In fact, La Barbara frequently invokes an encounter with Cage in 1972 as part of her personal mythology. She recounts that she attended a performance of *HPSCHD* in Berlin while on tour with Steve Reich and Musicians in 1972. Feeling overwhelmed by the number of simultaneous activities and throngs of people, La Barbara angrily confronted Cage. She declared that his piece added chaos to an already disordered world, to which he replied ("smiling beatifically," she recalls),

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<sup>222</sup> Joan La Barbara, "Joan La Barbara," in *Desert Plants: Conversations with 23 American Composers*, ed. Walter Zimmerman, 355–360. Originally published Vancouver, 1976. [Out of print. No publisher listed. Available in PDF form on website: "Walter Zimmerman/Writings." [http://home.snafu.de/walterz/biblio/10\\_joan\\_labarbara.pdf](http://home.snafu.de/walterz/biblio/10_joan_labarbara.pdf) (accessed June 26, 2017).

“Perhaps, when you go out into the world, it won’t seem so chaotic anymore.”<sup>223</sup> For La Barbara, her inclusion of Cage in her personal mythology constitutes an act of grouping herself in the idea-based community of experimentalism. This grouping became a crucial component of how she understood and represented herself and her creative vocal work. In a journal entry dating February 15, 1974, she reflects further on Nyman’s ideas, and looks ahead to her new venture consciously identifying as a composer in her own right:

I’m in the midst of reading Nyman’s *Experimental Music* & [*sic.*] I think in the future it would make more sense to refer to me as an ‘experimental singer’ not avant garde singer. Cathy Berberian is an a.g.s., I am experimental because I investigate my instrument, explore the environment, react with people, musicians & audience at the time of performance & perform works of experimental composers (Reich, Glass, Feldman) as opposed to the avant-garde like Berio & Stockhausen.<sup>224</sup>

In this entry, La Barbara identifies common traits between her work and the ideals that experimentalism represents. Moreover, she groups herself with composers who (especially in the 1970s) embraced anti-institutionalism and free exploration of numerous musical, philosophical, and social parameters. But in addition to this positive mode of association, she also delineated herself (in part) through negation.

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<sup>223</sup> Joan La Barbara, interview by Libby Van Cleve, 54-55; La Barbara, “Voice is the Original Instrument,” 38; Stephen Raskauskas, “How composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham changed the art of collaboration,” *WFMT*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.wfmt.com/2017/02/24/composer-john-cage-choreographer-merce-cunningham-changed-art-collaboration/> (accessed June 5, 2018).

<sup>224</sup> Gelsey Bell, “Extended Vocal Techniques and Joan La Barbara: The Relational Ethics of Voice on the Edge of Intelligibility,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies* 1, no. 2 (2016): 146; The quote from La Barbara’s journal was found in this published source.

She set up two conceptual categories, “avant-garde singer” and “experimental singer.” La Barbara casts Berberian (arguably the preeminent singer of post-war avant-garde vocal repertoire but who, as La Barbara overlooks, was also close with Cage) as the archetypal figure of the avant-garde (read: Euro- and bel canto-centric), and defines herself by difference from the former, aligning herself with Nyman’s (and other experimental artists’) critique of avant-gardism’s rigidity, valuation of hermetic compositional processes, and reproduction of traditional Euro-American classicism’s hierarchical distinctions between “composer,” “performer,” and “audience/listener.”

By setting forth an oppositional paradigm—represented by Berberian and herself—La Barbara establishes herself as the pre-eminent vocalist of experimentalism, and re-casts unconventional creative vocal work (which she later identifies as EVT) within experimentalism’s framework. In this paradigm, the avant-garde conception of EVT extends from bel canto’s value of virtuosity and control; in essence, incorporating new sounds into an otherwise traditional musical framework. By contrast, La Barbara’s reference point for her vocal practice centers around her encounters with experimentalism’s culture, as expressed by those grouped under its banner. Her narrative of how she came to practice EVT hinges on her performance of experimentalism: she identifies herself with several of the overlapping scenes linked with experimentalism—free improvisation, experimental jazz, and performance art—and emulates the qualities valued by the ethos of experimentalism—such as personal experience, autodidacticism, and skepticism toward the authority-based pedagogical models of traditional music-making institutions.

However, certain problems arose with the label of experimental, as she later found. After quitting Steve Reich and Musicians in order to join the Philip Glass Ensemble in early 1974, she encountered overwhelming support from Glass to pursue her own compositional interests.<sup>225</sup> Her compositional debut came later that year, on December 9, 1974 at St. Mark's Church, where she performed *Voice Piece: One Note Internal Resonance Investigation*, in which she demonstrates the different timbral and textural possibilities of her voice sung on one pitch for the entirety of the piece. Her next concert on January 15, 1975 at Washington Square Church featured *Hear What I Feel* and *Vocal Extensions* (an etude for her voice and guitar pedals). Tom Johnson, a music critic who wrote for the *Village Voice*, attended this concert, and according to La Barbara, understood her work to be literal experiments rather than Experimental compositions. He titled his review of La Barbara's concert "Research and Development," and referred to her pieces as musical "research findings" that could be used to artistic ends.<sup>226</sup> Although La Barbara herself later refers to these early works as "etudes" and the pieces from that concert (especially *Hear What I Feel*) display a marked interest in spontaneity and open-ended work, she had wanted her work to be seen in the same light as that of her colleagues. She recalls:

When I was talking with Michael [Nyman] about his book *The Experimental Tradition: Cage and Beyond*, I said, "Well really what I'm doing is I'm using the voice as an instrument, and I think of myself as an experimental vocalist.

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<sup>225</sup> Chapman, "Community, Presence, and Collaboration," 140.

<sup>226</sup> Tom Johnson, "Research and Development: Joan La Barbara," *Village Voice*, January 15, 1975, <http://tvonm.editions75.com/articles/1975/research-and-development-joan-la-barbara.html> (accessed June 12, 2018).

So, I was more using the term “experimental.” The problem that came up then was when I started doing my concerts, Tom Johnson at the time was reviewing for the *Village Voice*. And so, he looked at what I was doing and said, “Oh, well these are “experiments,” as opposed to, “Oh, this is music.”<sup>227</sup>

La Barbara also mentioned to Kristen Norderval in 2009 that some considered her early work “performance art” and not music composition,<sup>228</sup> due in part to her instruction-based scores but also perhaps due to the theatrical measures she undertook in order to, as she put it to Walter Zimmermann in an interview years earlier in 1976, “surprise herself into making new sounds.”<sup>229</sup>

As a contributing music journalist in New York City, writing for *SoHo Weekly* from 1974 to 1975 and for the *Los Angeles Times* on several occasions in 1978 as a “stringer” (a journalism industry term for a guest writer),<sup>230</sup> La Barbara understood the importance of a label in providing an interpretive framework for one’s work. She shared many of the same values as other artists grouped with experimentalism, but she also wanted her work to be taken seriously—something not always easily attained for an unaccompanied vocalist-composer or for a woman. Eulogistic accounts of MEV and the Free Music Store tend to highlight their aspirations toward egalitarianism and inclusion; yet marginalization based on ethnicity, gender, and even musical instrument was still present in the community, and historical narratives of experimentalism still frequently overlook the contributions of African American

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<sup>227</sup> La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

<sup>228</sup> Kristen Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” 202.

<sup>229</sup> La Barbara, “Joan La Barbara,” in *Desert Plants*, 356.

<sup>230</sup> Chapman, “Community, Presence, and Collaboration,” 228.

musicians, women, and vocalists.<sup>231</sup> La Barbara discussed her sense of this marginality to Zimmermann as a significant reason behind her manifesto-like album title, *Voice is the Original Instrument*. La Barbara asserts that the album title

comes I suppose from having studied as a classical singer and from being regarded by musicians as not being a musician. . . . You know musicians refer to each other as musicians, and singers are referred to as singers. And I believe that the voice is an instrument, and that actually many if not all instruments were created in imitation of the voice.<sup>232</sup>

Considering how frequently the voice-as-instrument comparison has been invoked over years of EVT discourse and how both Berberian and Beardslee found legibility as expert musicians through their instrumental command of their voices, La Barbara likely refers to her voice as an instrument in a similar bid for musical validity. Like these singers of the post-war avant-garde, La Barbara's reference to her voice as an instrument attempts to discursively dodge the cultural coding of singing as "feminine," or in other words, to shed the perceptual baggage of one's work being considered more embodied than playing an instrument and thus, less "intellectual."<sup>233</sup>

Yet La Barbara's discourse significantly differs from the ways in which the voices of Berberian and Beardslee had been compared to instruments by composers, critics, and historians. This difference lies in the orientation of her vocal creative activity toward the aesthetic goals of experimentalism. La Barbara's early

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<sup>231</sup> George Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (January 2002): 215–246; Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 216.

<sup>232</sup> La Barbara, "Joan La Barbara," in *Desert Plants*, 356.

<sup>233</sup> Desmond C. Sergeant and Evangelos Himonides, "Gender and Music Composition: A Study of Music, and the Gendering of Meanings," *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, no. 276 (March 2016). [Published online].

compositions emphasize the idea of music as an exploratory activity, which ranged from process-oriented pieces, indeterminate pieces, and conceptual works. La Barbara embraced this idea of voice as a field of exploration and of yet-unknown musical possibilities, as she expressed to Zimmermann, “Instead of trying to direct the voice I try to let the voice direct me.”<sup>234</sup> In this quote, she casts voice as an object almost in possession of its own agency or volition, establishing voice as a unique site of highly-individualistic creative potential. Although she initially broke free of the limitations of bel canto by imitating instruments, her discovery of her ability to imitate numerous instruments led her to theorize that perhaps vocal production contained the timbral possibilities of all instruments, and that this understanding of the voice had potentially been obscured in Euro-American classical music through years of bel canto uniformity.

Her claim that voice is the original instrument thus decenters the normativity of bel canto technique and establishes voice as possibly the most multivalent, idiosyncratic, democratic, and (in the context of classical music) conservatory-repressed sound source; seen in this light, La Barbara’s vocal project amounts to the quintessence of experimentalism. As a vocalist who early on in her career associated herself as the preeminent singer of works by Cage, Feldman, Reich, and Glass, La Barbara had stepped into a highly public role as the face of EVT, whether she specifically used that title or not. By identifying as an expert in EVT and aligning herself so strongly with experimentalism, La Barbara effectively placed EVT within

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<sup>234</sup> La Barbara, “Joan La Barbara,” in *Desert Plants*, 356.

the experimental tradition. For example, the liner notes for her 1976 album, *Voice is the Original Instrument* describe her as, “A composer and experimental vocalist,” and her work as “extending the sound spectrum associated with the vocal instrument, exploring its vast and relatively unexplored possibilities. . . .”<sup>235</sup> La Barbara describes her work as extending the voice, and the language she chooses to describe her work links the open-ended exploration and outsider discourse of experimentalism to EVT practice.

Although La Barbara has continued to identify primarily as an Experimental vocalist from as early as her 1972 letter to Rockwell to present day interviews,<sup>236</sup> others began to refer to her vocal work as EVT, including Ted Szántó in his essay that wove together his observations of the different strands of unconventional vocal practices in American experimental music circles.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, La Barbara does use the term EVT in an important way that both co-opts EVT into experimentalism’s outsider discourse and suggests a “baton-passing” of EVT from Berberian to herself. Her 1977 album *Tapesongs* (1977) features the piece “Cathing” (1976) as the opening track, a piece with a rather sensational back story that in many ways performs the narrative of experimentalism, recasting EVT in light of the values espoused by experimentalism as opposed to the (older) avant-garde. “Cathing” opens with a recording of Cathy Berberian talking about EVT in an interview she gave during the

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<sup>235</sup> La Barbara, liner notes to *Voice is the Original Instrument*, LP, 1976.

<sup>236</sup> Maria Murphy, “Interview: Joan La Barbara,” *Title Magazine*, 2017, <http://www.title-magazine.com/2017/09/interview-joan-la-barbara/> (accessed June 12, 2018).

<sup>237</sup> Szántó, “Extended vocal techniques.” 113–115.

1977 Holland Festival on Dutch National Radio, in which she distanced herself from the emergent crop of vocalists exploring EVT and dismissed the practice as at a creative “impasse.” The clip used in “Cathing” was allegedly played during the intermission of La Barbara’s concert. In it, Berberian states:

My experience with extended vocal techniques is that . . . for the moment, it has hit an impasse. . . . And it would be a very foolish composer, a good composer, who would compose a piece for one of these singers. . . . I doubt that most of these people can really sing, in the true sense of the word. And, they’re kind of . . . freaks, they’re phenomena. What they used to call me. But it wasn’t true in my case because I can really sing, you see. . . .<sup>238</sup>

In her commentary on the 2016 re-release of *Tapesongs*, La Barbara recalls the shock and disappointment that motivated the creation of “Cathing”: “She basically trashed those of us doing extended vocal techniques. She used the interview for her own self-promotion rather than taking on the mantle of the ‘mother’ of vocal explorations.

Rather tragic, I thought. So I created a work exploring extended vocal techniques and manipulating her spoken voice.”<sup>239</sup> Although La Barbara’s strident account of the incident with Berberian comes across as condemnatory, her experience of the encounter illuminates the motivation behind one of La Barbara’s earliest tape compositions, “Cathing,” and provides insight into the stakes involved in how EVT chose to themselves with either the avant-garde or Experimental camp.

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<sup>238</sup> Norderval, “What We Owe to Cathy,” 199.

<sup>239</sup> Unknown author, album commentary for reissue by Arc Light Editions of La Barbara’s 1977 album *Tape Songs*. Notes present on multiple websites selling this album, none of which identify the writer, but who apparently worked “in full collaboration with La Barbara on this reissue.” Joan La Barbara, liner notes to *TapeSongs* (Arc Light Editions ALE006) LP, 1977. <https://arclighteditions.bigcartel.com/product/joan-la-barbara-tapesongs> (accessed November 4, 2018).

In “Cathing,” La Barbara wove a rich musical tapestry using multiple recorded tracks of her own extended techniques—the very techniques Berberian seemed to dismiss in this particular interview. These vocal tracks wind around warped fragments of Berberian’s interview, which through electronic treatments increasingly sound like extended vocal techniques themselves.<sup>240</sup> La Barbara’s piece performs experimentalism in two important ways. First, she challenges a musical authority figure, not to mention one who was particularly linked with the European avant-garde and who had become renowned for EVT. Second, La Barbara questions Berberian’s assumption that there is nothing further to explore in EVT by showcasing her own unique vocabulary of vocal sounds, and in doing so, affirms the experimental value of radical exploration that seeks to go beyond the avant-garde status quo of simply adding new sounds to traditional forms of music making. Her work on “Cathing” emphasized self-discovery and direct experience in formulating new ways of making music. By espousing the values and politics of experimentalism in relation to EVT, La Barbara offers a different narrative stream of EVT, redirected from the avant-garde singers of the 1960s into the vocal experimentation of composer-performers.

### **EVT on the West Coast: Deborah Kavasch and the EVTE**

In 1977, the Holland Festival had chosen “The Human Voice” as its theme, which partially explains why Berberian’s infamous interview would have been

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<sup>240</sup> For further listening: Joan La Barbara, *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Lovely Music LCD 3003), CD, 2003.

featured during La Barbara's concert, why Szántó wrote a history of EVT, and why so many high-profile experimental vocalists were present—notably, the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble of UCSD's Center for Music Experiment. Although some of the more well-known West Coast musicians commonly grouped with experimentalism (such as Henry Cowell, Harry Partch, and Lou Harrison) conducted much of their work outside of a university context, other west-coast based composers linked with experimentalism studied and held jobs at institutions, some of which were more welcoming to radical art forms, such as Mills College (Robert Ashley, Maggi Payne), University of California at Santa Cruz (Gordon Mumma), California Institute of the Arts (James Tenney), and University of California at San Diego (Pauline Oliveros, Roger Reynolds, Kenneth Gaburo, and Diamanda Galás). In fact, the University of California at San Diego Music Department (hereafter referred to as "UCSD") consciously established itself as an institution, "isolated from East Coast, Midwestern, and European musical traditions" where the "emphasis was to be on composing and performing new and experimental music."<sup>241</sup> Under the direction of Pauline Oliveros, UCSD created the Center for Music Experimentation (CME), an official "Organized Research Unit" of the university.<sup>242</sup> The CME served as a crucial platform supporting the creative vocal work of the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble (hereafter EVTE), further linking the concept of EVT with experimentalism's spirit of exploration and research in a way that reflects the

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<sup>241</sup> "Departmental History," UC San Diego Music, <http://musicweb.ucsd.edu/about/about-pages.php?i=417> (accessed June 15, 2018).

<sup>242</sup> UCSD Class Schedule 1976–77, *UCSD Library Digital Collections*, 91, [https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb1504296t/\\_1.pdf](https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb1504296t/_1.pdf) (accessed June 20, 2018).

conclusions reached by Tom Johnson in his review of La Barbara's debut concert, but in this case, years earlier and on the other side of the continent.

The EVTE began in 1972 and was initially a larger group of approximately eleven people, but as their numbers gradually thinned (in fact, two of the members who left started another group identified in Szántó's essay, *Prima Materia*), the ensemble eventually solidified around four members: Edwin Harkins, Philip Larson, Linda Vickerman, and Deborah Kavasch. Harkins, Larson, and Vickerman were fellows at the CME and Kavasch was a Composition doctoral student who had been assigned a research assistant position with the EVTE.

Although Kavasch was the only student in an ensemble comprised of faculty, the group operated in an egalitarian way; additionally, as a composer, she had a significant impact on the EVTE's development. Kavasch grew up playing violin and entered Bowling Green University as a music minor in order to secure a scholarship, but after studying abroad in Salzburg, Austria, she decided to devote herself to her musical studies. She began taking composition lessons and became immersed in the music major curriculum, including a course in modern music. It was in this class, taught by composer and clarinetist Burton Beerman (b. 1943), that Kavasch became interested in Experimental music and new sounds for instruments and voices. She decided to pursue graduate studies in composition, and her inclination toward experimentalism prompted Bowling Green music faculty composer Donald Wilson (b. 1937) to suggest working with composer Robert Erickson (1917–1997) at UCSD. Kavasch entered UCSD in 1973 and was offered a research assistantship through the

newly-developed Center for Music Experiment. She had her choice of research groups, and upon perusing the catalog, she saw the Extended Vocal Techniques Group (an earlier iteration of the later quartet) and felt immediately drawn to their project.<sup>243</sup> Over time the group's numbers shrank, and it eventually distilled into the quartet that toured the world and became part of the musical landscape of experimentalism and EVT.

In contrast to some of the other well-known vocalists in the EVT tradition—such as La Barbara, Monk, Galás, Z, and more recently, Bell and Norderval—Kavasch and Harkins had only a limited amount of formalized vocal training before working experimentally with their voices in the EVTE. Larson and Vickerman comprised the bel-canto trained members of the group, and Vickerman, who taught bel canto voice lessons, loosely guided the group's vocal explorations; however, the group essentially developed their own vocabulary through collective improvisation and experimentation. In fact, Kavasch's description of the quartet's rehearsals bear a striking resemblance to La Barbara's account of Rzewski's jam sessions:

We were actually considered an “organized research unit,” or ORU, within the CME at UCSD. So we met an hour and a half, three days a week. . . . But, basically at first, what we were doing was just experiencing, trying to learn the sounds. . . . We did not have a director, per se. . . . A lot of it, we were just imitating each other, or imitating recordings. . . . But what we were trying to do was to expand the range and the voice type associated to these sounds. . . . A lot of it was just us saying, “Well, what do you think about this sound? Can you imitate? Can you do this?” And someone would make a sound.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Deborah Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, Turlock, CA, February 28, 2018.

<sup>244</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

Like La Barbara, Kavasch and the ensemble members learned new ways of engaging vocal sound through listening, imitating, improvising, and retroactively assessing the musical and vocal processes that emerged during the group activity. Instead of starting with prescribed vocal sounds found in established repertoire, the members of the EVTE sought their own personal and collective understandings of the voice through community, presence, spontaneity, and direct experience—characteristics enthusiastically embraced in discourses of experimentalism.

As the group members continued to rehearse and learned the (often unexpected) possibilities and proclivities of their voices, each developed their own unique vocabulary of sounds that Kavasch drew upon in writing her compositions for the group. In addition to the music applications of the group's vocal explorations for Kavasch's compositions, the group also contributed their collective discoveries to empirical research. They compiled their findings from rehearsals into a two-part document, the *Lexicon of Extended Vocal Techniques*, which consists of a text portion that lists a number of their techniques, each of which is named in an intuitive way, and an accompanying recorded portion documenting each sound.<sup>245</sup> Kavasch explained that they initially tried to use more technical terminology, but that it complicated their communication and did not prove particularly helpful. Instead, they found that referring to the different sounds in more simplistic and directly descriptive terms worked better practically in their musical practice. The EVTE's research interests were primarily guided by ideals of accessibility, simplicity, and utility, as

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

opposed to research that exists primarily for the sake of knowledge acquisition and for the advancement of a specialized field.

In addition to their *Lexicon*, the EVTE also worked with vocal pedagogue John Large.<sup>246</sup> Although contemporary vocal pedagogy emerged from a twentieth-century revival of interest in bel canto technique (codified through the establishment of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, or NATS), the attendant hegemonic normativity of bel canto's normativity perhaps had less potency in the context of a decidedly experimental music department.<sup>247</sup> Based on both the record of their subsequent performances and Kavasch's account, Large's coaching sessions did not hamper their vocal exploration. In fact, one of the main objectives of their sessions with Large was to contribute to his own research project examining EVT from the perspective of the emerging shift in vocal pedagogy toward vocal science, an approach that used concepts derived from scientific observations of vocal phenomenon to describe and evaluate vocal technique.<sup>248</sup> In 1976, Large played the recorded portion of the EVTE *Lexicon* (notably without context of the performers' training or career histories) for a research project that polled the perception among NATS members of the vocal safety of EVTs at the 1976 national meeting in

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<sup>246</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

<sup>247</sup> Brianna Robertson-Kirkland, "The Silencing of Bel Canto," *eSharp* 21 (Winter 2013). [Published online].

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/esharp/issues/21winter2013silencedvoices/>

<sup>248</sup> John Large and Thomas Murry, "Studies of extended vocal techniques: Safety," *NATS Bulletin* 34 (1978): 30–33.

Philadelphia.<sup>249</sup> Leading up to this conference, Large brought the EVTE with him to several smaller chapter meetings of NATS in San Diego (1975) and San Francisco (1975), where they gave several demonstrations of the sounds they had worked on as a group.<sup>250</sup> Large's 1976 study and Kavasch's recollection of their live demonstrations involved numerous pedagogues questioning the vocal health of the EVTE's techniques, an assessment that essentially constricts the authority of medical discourse in the normalization of bel canto, despite the fact that Vickerman taught bel canto technique in her studio at UCSD, Kavasch had begun bel canto training with renounced opera singer Frank Kelley, and all of the performers found themselves able to manage numerous rehearsals, performances, and later, international tours.

However, the EVTE's main work did not pertain to abstract scientific research or the science of vocal pedagogy, but rather to purely musical experimentation through group vocalization sessions. After the group had worked out their internal dynamics of which techniques best suited each member, they primarily focused on performing set compositions written for their unique abilities. In this sense, the group departed from New York City's improvisation-oriented strain of experimentalism, the context in which La Barbara had begun exploring her path as an experimental vocalist and composer.

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<sup>249</sup> Large, "Studies of extended vocal techniques." It probably comes as little surprise that these sounds taken out of context, played for a conservative audience whose main concern is Euro-American bel canto singing, and listeners given no specific definition of what is meant by "safe," "unsafe," or "vocal damage," earned overwhelming scores of "unsafe." The study also showed that multiphonic techniques garnered much higher "risk ratings" from teachers than monophonic techniques.

<sup>250</sup> Large, "Studies of extended vocal techniques."

Yet, even as they performed fixed repertoire with determinate scores, their narrative continued to represent the ideals of experimentalism in several important aspects. First, they were a collective formed in the interest of exploring the voice in ways unsanctioned (and thus, under-explored) by the dominant university technical framework of bel canto. For example, the group's *Lexicon* identifies numerous techniques that are listed in John Large's article as potentially vocally harmful, but in order to find out more about the nature of each technique's vocal demand and its degree of sustainability, the group still practiced these sounds, albeit judiciously.<sup>251</sup> Second, their own personal experience formed the starting point of their research; they did subject their individual findings to vocal science and pedagogy, but the fact that they regarded their own experience as equally valid sources of information embodied the individualistic autodidacticism esteemed in experimentalist discourse. Moreover, even as they familiarized themselves (or in the case of Linda Vickerman, had already been quite familiar) with bel canto technique, it was just one of many options, all of which were equally welcome in their music.

Inspired by the group's unique approach to EVT, Roger Reynolds wrote a series of pieces for them called *Voicespace* (1975–1980).<sup>252</sup> The first piece in the set,

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<sup>251</sup> Large's study confirms some of the judgment involved in the "vocal health" discourse that does not function to support vocal sustainability, but rather reinforces the normativity of bel canto and thus, perpetuates the assumption of superiority of conservatory-oriented classical vocal pedagogy; Large, "Quantitative analysis of chant in relation to normal phonation and vocal fry." Paper presented at the Current Issues in the Phonetic Sciences: Proceedings of the IPS-77, Miami Beach, December 1977; Large, "Studies of Extended Vocal Techniques," 30–33.

<sup>252</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, digital interview, August 12, 2018; Roger Reynolds, "Voicespace," *rogerreynolds.com*,

“Still” (1975), features the EVTE’s application of circular breathing to the vocal fry technique, which created a constant flow of clicking sounds that they could either accelerate or slow down at will. The ensemble used this technique and “swishing” whisper noises to depict a “windstorm” as the background for Philip Larson’s separately-recorded track, on which he softly read excerpts of “The Wanderings of Cain” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>253</sup>

Reynolds recalls,

In the early 70s, at the Center for Music Experiment in La Jolla, I heard daily rehearsals of the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble as they perturbed vocal norms. . . . I sought spare but evocative texts and tried to conjure up unfamiliar yet appropriate vocal behaviors with which to present them. . . . They attempt to create a personal theater through the mind’s ear.<sup>254</sup>

Reynolds was likely describing their free-improvisation sessions early in their formation. Kavasch remembers Reynolds’s interest in their rehearsals:

I think we were just doing a lot of improvisation. We would talk about doing structured improvisations and we’d say, “Ok, let’s do an improvisation that’s going to be two minutes long.” And we’re going to go from soft sounds to a crescendo in the middle and diminish away. Just figure [it] out. In fact, I think Roger Reynolds used it [that is, one of the recordings of our structured improvisation] as an example in one of his Twentieth-Century Techniques classes. . . .<sup>255</sup>

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<http://www.rogerreynolds.com/recordings/voicespace.html> (accessed November 5, 2018).

<sup>253</sup> Factual details of the piece can be found in the liner notes of the 1992 release of *Voicespace* by Lovely Music. Roger Reynolds, *Voicespace*, Philip Larson, Ed Harkins, Deborah Kavasch, Linda Vickerman, Carol Plantamura (Lovely Music, LCD 1801) CD, 1992.

<sup>254</sup> Roger Reynold, “Voicespace,” *rogereyonds.com*, <http://www.rogerreynolds.com/recordings/voicespace.html> (accessed September 25, 2018).

<sup>255</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

Although Reynolds is not typically associated with experimentalism, his explanation of what interested him about the EVTE indicates several significant discourses of experimentalism that the group's work expressed: he was drawn to the way in which they "perturbed vocal norms" (recalling experimentalism's interest in uncovering what lies outside the status-quo of music-making); he was interested in using spontaneity as a way of moving past norms ("conjure up unfamiliar yet approach vocal behaviors"); additionally, his "attempt to create a personal theater through the mind's ear" demonstrates an engagement of experimentalism's interest in conceptualism and the phenomenon of consciousness—or, as Brian Eno has explained, experimentalism's displacement of "the fundamental act of listening from 'out there to in here' . . . a music borne of perception and intellection, that exists principally in the aural imagination. . . ." <sup>256</sup> Reynolds's description of the EVTE's practices involved several of the terms and concepts associated with Nyman's formulation of experimentalism. In this way, his composer's statement in a sense performs the values of experimentalism and frames EVT as a quintessentially experimental practice.

Another composer who wrote a substantial work for the EVTE was William Brooks. Brooks took up a teaching post at UCSD from 1976 to 1978, and during Philip Larson's absence from the EVTE, Brooks sang with the group. <sup>257</sup> During his

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<sup>256</sup> Quote attributed to Brian Eno without citation in the description of Cornell University's "After Experimental Music" conference, <http://improvisationinstitute.ca/event/after-experimental-music/> (accessed June 19, 2018).

<sup>257</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

last year at UCSD, Brooks wrote for the group a set of songs, *Madrigals* (1977–1978), which—even though the British group Electric Phoenix performed the premiere—became a core part of the EVTE’s repertoire, especially the final piece, “Nellie was a Lady.”<sup>258</sup>

The *Madrigals* consist of four songs, all of which expertly utilize the sonic possibilities of language and the singing voice. Brooks created the piece around two texts, one by English composer Orlando Gibbons (1583–1925) and the other by American composer Stephen Foster (1826–1864). The first song, “The Silver Swan,” and the last song, “Nellie Was a Lady,” both leave their respective texts in tact. The second and third songs, “Bad Bottle Blues” and “Osanna,” were derived from extracting the most common phonemes within the pre-existing texts, which Brooks then assembled into palindromic configurations. The unusual compositional approach and gamut of vocal styles ranging from sound poetry (“Bad Bottle Blues”) to barbershop (“Nelly Was a Lady”) indicates a familiarity with the EVTE’s expansive sonic palette that Brooks had probably acquired during his participation in the group. The first song in the set, “The Silver Swan,” demonstrates Brooks’s specific knowledge of the group’s technical vocabulary. The piece opens with tightly-voiced harmonies and calls for the singers to manipulate their vowel sounds on each note,

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UCSD Class Schedule (accessed June 20, 2018).

<sup>258</sup> It should be also be noted that the group that preceded the formation of Electric Phoenix, Swingle II, was present at the 1977 Holland Festival where the EVTE, Joan La Barbara, and Cathy Berberian performed; Festival Program, “The Human Voice,” Holland Festival, 1977. A Microsoft Word copy of original program was generously shared with the author directly, via email, by the administrative organization of the Holland Festival.

slightly changing the resonant frequencies of their voices to generate subtle harmonic tones. The voices gradually settle into an octave unison, and then begin to alter their vowel sounds more dramatically in order to produce stronger harmonics. In this passage, Brooks creatively exploits sounds in the English language that already generate a variety of formants, such as the rhotic “r,” to create numerous opportunities for the multiphonic singing while preserving the intelligibility of the text.<sup>259</sup> This use of the rhotic “r” to generate harmonics is also present in Kavasch’s earlier piece for the EVTE, *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1975), which likely indicates that this was a regular practice within the ensemble’s milieu.

As a composition student of John Cage and self-identified Experimental composer, Brooks’s involvement with the group further aligned them with the experimentalism. In addition to composing original work for the EVTE, Brooks also suggested that the ensemble perform several of Cage’s *Mesostics* at the Bourges International Festival of Experimental Music.<sup>260</sup> A mesostic is a poetic form in which a vertical phrase intersects with horizontal lines of text; it resembles an acrostic, except that the vertical phrase intersects the middle of the line, as opposed to beginning each new line. Cage wrote many poems using this form, which are often collectively referred to as his *Mesostics*, even though most of these poems are independent works. The EVTE initially elected to improvise on a few mesostics and

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<sup>259</sup> For further listening: “Imaginary Landscape: A Concert by the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble (EVTE),” *radiOM.org*, digital archives, recording of live performance on December 19, 1980, <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=IL.1980.12.19.A> (accessed October 30, 2018).

<sup>260</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

have each member spontaneously choose which text and vocal sounds they would sing. However, they felt unsatisfied with the results this approach produced, and after a few performances decided to take a more methodical approach.<sup>261</sup> They determined that they would leave the assignment of text open to the discretion of each performer, but everyone was limited to using only three different kinds of vocal timbres throughout the piece.<sup>262</sup>

Like several other European festivals devoted to Experimental music, many Americans populated the Bourges festival, including Charles Dodge, Joan La Barbara, Morton Subotnick, and Christian Wolff, among others.<sup>263</sup> The *Mesostics* not only rounded out the EVTE's (still scarce at that time) body of repertoire, but also served as an important positioning of their work. Programming a Cage piece signaled a particular affiliation and identity, but also, the *Mesostics* created an intellectual framework in which the group's EVT vocal sounds would be heard as part of the experimental tradition. In a broader sense, performances at this festival of EVT-as-experimental by numerous musicians reinforced the idea that EVT was not limited to the older generation of expert avant-garde singers, and that, contrary to Berberian's assertion, the voice could continue to be a productive field of exploration. As the group's resident composer, Kavasch wrote several of their staple pieces, most of which freely incorporated the group's expansive palate of vocal sounds, including bel canto singing. For *The Owl and the Pussycat*, Kavasch set the eponymous poem

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> David Keane, "The Bourge International Festival of Experimental Music," *Computer Music Journal* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 51–59.

written by Edward Lear in 1871, which had also been set by Igor Stravinsky (*The Owl and the Pussycat*, voice and piano, 1966) and Laurie Anderson (“Beautiful Green Pea Boat,” on the album *Bright Red*, 1994). Traditionally notated but occasionally relying on text directions indicated the style of vocal production, Kavasch’s piece calls for seven voices, one of which is a narrator, who speaks the poem’s entire text using ingressive speech.<sup>264</sup> Her decision to feature ingressive speaking heavily was based on the group’s discovery of Harkins’s adeptness at the technique. “The narrator’s voice is all inhaled, so it’s Ed Harkins reciting the poem, basically,” Kavasch laughed. “It’s funny, when Ed was doing the inhaled voice, it sounds so natural.”<sup>265</sup> While the narrator speaks continuously throughout the piece, the rest of the ensemble elaborate on certain words in the text, incorporating numerous colorful techniques such as ululations (Kavasch identifies as a specialty of Larson),<sup>266</sup> syllable fragmentation, vocal fry, multiphonics, lips trills, the “water drop” sound (which she owned was her specialty), and intermittent occurrences of contemporary classical choral singing, a version of bel canto with reduced volume and vibrato.<sup>267</sup>

Kavasch continued to write in this technique-inclusive way for the remainder of her time with the group, culminating with a large-scale work for the EVTE,

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<sup>264</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, August 12, 2018. Kavasch wrote the piece before the EVTE solidified into its later iteration as a quartet. According to Kavasch, the other members of the group were Ann Chase, Warren Burton, and Martin Gruesome.

<sup>265</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> For further listening: “Imaginary Landscape: A Concert by the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble (EVTE),” *radiOM.org*, digital archives, recording of live performance on December 19, 1980. <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=IL.1980.12.19.A> (accessed October 30, 2018).

*Requiem* (1978). Kavasch composed this work for her DMA dissertation project, and set the traditional requiem text for the four EVTE members and tape. The ensemble recorded themselves singing additional parts in order to create a bigger sound, and the tape accompanied all of their performances. In this piece, Kavasch includes bel canto technique and straight-tone singing alongside the numerous extended techniques that the EVTE had cultivated over the years. Kavasch reflects on her polystylistic approach for this work:

*The Owl and the Pussycat* used ululations. The narrator’s voice is all inhaled. . . . And then, you know, we’re doing different things, overtone singing. It wasn’t until I wrote my dissertation that I really incorporated almost all the sounds [that we had learned]. And not so much because I felt like I needed to do a compendium of all the sounds that we did, but it just seemed appropriate because it was a Requiem mass, and when you get to the imagery—the darker imagery—it just seemed to call for the kinds of sounds that were there.<sup>268</sup>

Extended techniques appear most frequently as a text-painting device in this work: the shaking sound of cross-register ululation illustrates the words “quantus tremor” (“how great the trembling”), and the low growl of ingressive vocal fry at the opening of the “Dies Irae” mirrors the ominous tone of the text.<sup>269</sup>

The pluralistic, ecumenical way in which EVTE regarded vocal knowledge and vocal technique reflected the decentralization of authority that has characterized experimentalist values. The group’s work with EVT involved creative practices that signaled important ideals found in the discourse of experimentalism. For example, the

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<sup>268</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

<sup>269</sup> For further listening: “Imaginary Landscape: A Concert by the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble (EVTE),” *radiOM.org*, digital archives, recording of live performance on December 19, 1980. <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=IL.1980.12.19.A> (accessed October 30, 2018).

EVTE's practice-based learning signified an emphasis on experiential knowledge and process over vocal uniformity. Moreover, the EVTE's free improvisation (both in their formative years and in their later repertoire) signals a belief that spontaneity leaves space for the co-mingling of the ordinary and the aesthetic, an idea that united artists such as Cage, Nam June Paik, Rzewski, Oliveros, and others. Additionally, their collective, co-operative approach to learning reflected the anti-hierarchical, socially-progressive views held by composers such as Cornelius Cardew and Christian Wolff, who were driven by a belief in art's ability to re-shape social realities.

Thus, even though contemporary narratives of EVT-oriented experimental composers often focus on solo performers such as Monk, La Barbara, Shelley Hirsch, and Susan Botti, it is difficult to imagine that the EVTE's presence would not have also contributed to an understanding of EVT in the experimental music community.<sup>270</sup> Their work depicted EVT as research—vocal practice rooted in curiosity, continuous practice, and collective discovery. They were not (as the EVT practice of the avant-garde has been characterized) classical singers ascending the summit of musical difficulty with a measure of quotidian sounds strategically injected into the music. Rather, they reframed EVT as a site of learning and of practice that transcended vocal sounds of the everyday, and yet could be discovered by men, women, trained, and (so-called) untrained singers alike.

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<sup>270</sup> The author recognizes that Monk's ensemble's significant contributions are routinely overlooked by musicologists. I include her in my list of "solo artists" because her body of work is generally referred to as "Monk's work," and I am discussing the tendency of EVT discourse to highlight solo artists.

### **Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble: EVT and Interdisciplinarity**

While the EVTE performed a handful of theatrically-oriented, performance art types of works—Kavasch recalled one of the group’s pieces that involved her coming onstage dressed in formal concert attire only to make her signature “water drop” sound and promptly leave the stage—many EVT performers associated with experimentalism have also held ties with performance art and experimental theater.<sup>271</sup> Diamanda Galás (b. 1955) had befriended Kavasch while studying at UCSD and sat in on several EVTE rehearsals, later applying similar techniques to her own performance art oeuvre critiquing the cultural silence on AIDS.<sup>272</sup> Julius Eastman (1940–1990) notably succeeded English experimental theater troupe leader Roy Hart (1926–1975) as the pre-eminent performer of Peter Maxwell Davies’s *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969). Additionally, Joan La Barbara’s early works, especially *Hear What I Feel*, also drew upon the drama of performing blindfolded as a way to frame her sounds as spontaneous, and therefore authentic.

One performer-composer whose exploratory vocal work connects to experimental theater is Meredith Monk. Her work unites elements of music, movement, and theater, all of which take shape through the creative vocabulary of her vocal ensemble. According to Monk, some of her earliest musical experiences combined voice and movement: “My mother, knowing I had a very natural musical and rhythmic talent, sent me to Dalcroze Eurythmics as my first movement

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<sup>271</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. Although on seemingly very different career paths, Kavasch and Galás enjoyed a warm collegiality during their time at UCSD and have remained friends over the years.

experience,” she reminisces. “I was lucky, in a sense, because then music and movement became so integrated for me that I don’t think of them as two separate things.”<sup>273</sup> Considering that the Dalcroze method emphasizes intuitive movement, aurally-based musical learning (using solfège), and improvisation, this detail of her early life perfectly frames her long-standing creative interests.

Monk continued to meld her interests in music, dance, and theater at Sarah Lawrence College (BA, 1964), where she says she “began to envision how to combine singing, theater, and dance. I came alive there, artistically. . . .”<sup>274</sup> The highly-individualistic, experience-based culture of Sarah Lawrence provided a supportive atmosphere for Monk to craft her own idiosyncratic understanding and approach to art-making. She received bel canto training at Sarah Lawrence, but like Kavasch and the EVTE, her training became simply one of many perspectives on how the voice operates in and through the body. Another crucial source of insight for Monk into different ways that she could understand and relate to her voice came through dance. She studied dance and theater with Bessie Schönberg while at Sarah Lawrence, remembering:

I think Bessie knew right away that I was going to be singing, and I think having some of that movement background was very helpful to me. Movement was very hard for me. I had a lot of physical limitations with my eyes and my body, so it was very challenging. And because of my limitations, I had to find a very idiosyncratic way of moving. I was quite successful at finding a vocabulary that was built on my own body. Maybe the limitations worked to my advantage in that situation. When I really started working with

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<sup>273</sup> Merce Cunningham, et. all, *Art Performs Life: Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, Bill T. Jones* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1998): 295.

<sup>274</sup> Marc Myers, “Meredith Monk’s ‘Wizard of Oz’ Moment,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 28, 2016.

my voice, I had a realization that I could use that same methodology with my voice. I asked myself, “How do I find material based on my own vocal instrument?”<sup>275</sup>

The bodily limitations that Monk mentions in this quote are her visual impairment and her resultant struggle with physical coordination. Monk does not discuss any analogous vocal limitations, but by learning to accept and explore what she could do creatively with her unique physiology in the context of dance, she gained a new perspective on singing. Instead of learning a particular set of techniques in order to conform her voice to the stylistic standards of bel canto, Monk focused on discovering the possibilities specific to her own voice. Her process of vocal self-discovery included some exercises common in bel canto training, but she ultimately deferred to her own intuitively-developed knowledge of her body because her end-goal was to find out the kind of vocal sounds that laid within her particular voice.

Monk’s story about dance narrates creative self-discovery within the parameters of her own body, which since her early training in Dalcroze Eurythmics has comingled dance and voice. Her teacher, Bessie Schönberg (also a devotee of Dalcroze Eurythmics) founded the Bessie Schönberg Theater at Sarah Lawrence College, combining elements of modern dance and experimental theater, a place where artists such as Monk would be encouraged to allow their diverse artistic interests to intersect and grow.<sup>276</sup> A student of modern dance pioneer Martha Graham,

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<sup>275</sup> Meredith Monk, “Meredith Monk,” in *In Her Own Words*, ed. by Jennifer Kelly (Urbana: University of Illinois Press): 177.

<sup>276</sup> Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994): 54.

Schönberg continued in the vein of celebrating quotidian gesture that was pioneered by postmodern dancers such as Merce Cunningham and aesthetically echoed by the music of Cage, who delighted in the sounds of everyday life. She accommodated a range of body shapes and abilities in her troupe, and encouraged the discovery of individual movement vocabularies.<sup>277</sup>

After Sarah Lawrence, Monk became involved with the Judson Dance Theater, another group that encouraged interdisciplinary aesthetic exploration and individual discovery.<sup>278</sup> The Judson Dance Theater—named after their weekly meeting space, the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, NYC—came from a group of students who had taken classes with the Merce Cunningham dance studio under Robert Dunn and started meeting independently from Cunningham’s studio in 1962.<sup>279</sup> They held workshops, mounted performances, and engaged in important dialogues about dance, movement, and performance on a weekly basis in the home of dancer/choreographer Yvonne Rainer (b. 1934).<sup>280</sup> After moving their

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Deborah Jowitt, *Meredith Monk* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 83; for further reading on the Judson dance theater, see: Sally Banes, “Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theatre and Its Legacy,” *Performing Arts Journal* 5, no. 2 (1981): 98–107; Banes, Andrea Harris, and Mikhail Baryšnikov, *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything Was Possible* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Ana Janevski and Thomas J. Lax, *Judson Dance Theater: the Work Is Never Done* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2018). Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>279</sup> Banes, *Democracy’s Body*: 35–41

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

meetings from Rainer's home to the Judson Memorial Church, they decided upon the name "Judson Dance Theater."<sup>281</sup>

As Monk had already formed a deep connection between voice and movement from childhood, she learned a new way of thinking about voice through her experiences with experimental theater and Judson Dance. Singing, like dance, comes through bodily processes, and each body has different limitations and abilities. Thus even after learning bel canto technique, Monk's experience with modern dance offered another avenue of vocal learning, teaching her that methods and trainings offer instructive glimpses into the creative practices and discoveries of others, but in the end, an artistic practice of one's own comes from learning with and through the possibilities of one's own body.<sup>282</sup> She continued her learning process through the body, and eventually guided others in their own creative discovery processes when she formed Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble in 1978, the group with whom she continues to compose for and perform into the present.<sup>283</sup> Her solo work and her work with her ensemble explores vocal sound and choreography through imaginatively engaging what monk calls "characters" and thinking about how these characters talk to themselves and share stories about their experiences with others.

Monk's characters are imaginative, archetypal personas that she inhabits as she composes.<sup>284</sup> Although they are abstractions, these characters are also deeply

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<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>282</sup> Nicole Elaine Anaka, "Women on the Verge," MA Thesis (Mount Allison University, 2001): 2.

<sup>283</sup> Deborah Jowitt, *Meredith Monk*, 11.

<sup>284</sup> Jowitt, *Meredith Monk*, 50-51.

personal for Monk and her ensemble members: the characters stem from the group members' own experiences in an effort to connect individual mythologies with global narratives.<sup>285</sup> During her creative process, Monk envisions how these imagined persons would respond emotionally, gesturally, and vocally to widely-shared human experiences, such as coming-of-age (in *Education of a Girl Child*, 1972–73), religious experience (in *Songs of Ascension*, 2008), fear (*Scared Song*, 1986), immigration (*Ellis Island*, 1981), and suffering brought on by war and tyrannical governments (*Quarry*, 1976).<sup>286</sup> Throughout her artistic career Monk rarely uses intelligible text (excepting certain pieces such as her 1991 opera, *Atlas*), preferring to allow emotional realities and ideas to more directly inform her vocal sound.<sup>287</sup>

One of Monk's earliest pieces to demonstrate her intuition-based engagement with the choreographic and theatrical elements of her character archetypes is *Education of a Girl Child*. She initially conceived of this work as a solo piece, which she premiered in 1972, and expanded the piece into a larger-scale performance for nine cast members the following year. Monk considers these versions as two parts of one cohesive work, and retroactively labeled the solo version Part I and the opera Part

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>286</sup> Meredith Monk, personal conversation, City Center Studios, New York City, August 29, 2016.

<sup>287</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Four American Composers: John Cage, Robert Ashley, Meredith Monk, Philip Glass*. Berlin: Absolut Medien, DVD. 2006.

II.<sup>288</sup> In this work, she depicts different stages in the life of a woman through gestures and sounds that are at once concrete and abstract.<sup>289</sup>

The opening of the piece features Monk singing with a high, breathy, flute-like timbre in the upper register of her voice as she continually repeats the word “mama.” As she sings, she toddles down a long, narrow white sheet stretched across the performance space, using minute steps and seldom bending her knees. Monk does not literally act like an infant, but she employs several semiotic codes that evoke the idea of infancy: small steps, limited speech, and a high-pitched vocal tone. However, Monk’s vocal sound and physical movement are motivated by more than simply their programmatic function within the concept of her piece; her self-described physical limitations in dance likely inspired the limited space and shuffling steps, and her light, clear voice lends itself to the breathy, child-like chirping in her upper range. The depiction of an abstract, archetypal child collected a set of gestures and vocal sounds within Monk’s aesthetic vocabulary into a coherent whole.

Following her infant-character, Monk stops at the mid-point along the path created by the sheet, bends over and begins pumping her arms in a fluid, graceful, precise manner, seemingly representing the passing of time. As she straightens, she slowly, almost defiantly, crosses her arms and emits piercing, nasal, cross-register ululations that repeatedly oscillate between the same two pitches, sung on the single

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<sup>288</sup> Meredith Monk, “Education of a Girl Child,” *meredithmonk.org*. [www.meredithmonk.org/currentrep/educationsolo.html](http://www.meredithmonk.org/currentrep/educationsolo.html) (accessed November 9, 2018).

<sup>289</sup> An excerpt of the 1972 performance at Common Ground can be viewed on The House Foundation’s YouTube channel, *mmonkhouse*, at the following address: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQp\\_6qKpOAI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQp_6qKpOAI) (accessed November 03, 2018).

syllable “ma.” Here Monk seems to embody the youthful energy and aggression of adolescence. This character drew upon her ability to produce strident sounds while maintaining vocal pliability and pitch accuracy.<sup>290</sup> It is worth noting that Monk’s cross-register ululations bear some similarity to Kavasch’s, but the creative environment in which these two vocalists used this technique differs significantly: Kavasch and the EVTE developed their vocal techniques as an official Organized Research Unit at UCSD where they systematically discovered, tested, and catalogued their findings in order to create a useful compendium for composers and vocal pedagogues; in contrast, Monk has primarily explored her voice through imaginatively engaging with concepts, characters, and emotions, and most often chooses to work without scores or musical compendiums. Both of these composers’ respective means of vocal discovery constitute research, but with different premises, methodologies, and applications.

Monk’s working method of imaginatively engaging character archetypes and broadly shared emotional experiences remains an enduring part of her artistic milieu. In one of her more recent works, *On Behalf of Nature* (2012), she expands the notion of shared emotional experiences to include the earth, imbuing landscapes and ecosystems with the same agency as human characters. In this piece, reenacts ecological cooperation using her signature highly-interactive choreography and non-linear, interlocking musical motifs. At one particular moment in the piece, Monk

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<sup>290</sup>An excerpt of the 1972 performance at Common Ground can be viewed on The House Foundation’s YouTube channel; Meredith Monk, “Education of a Girl Child,” *mmonkhouse* (YouTube Channel), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQp\\_6qKpOA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQp_6qKpOA) (accessed November 3, 2018).

performs a solo that anthropomorphically portrays Nature as a character responding to the devastation wrought by pillage and neglect. As Nature, Monk delivers a vehement, non-lexical speech that virtuosically traverses her expansive range of vocal sounds. This solo displays an array of emotive vocal expressions: guttural sounds, sharp consonants, moans, yelps, and sweeping glissandi. Mirroring her vocal litany, her gestures depict anger, fear, and vulnerability: she alternately protrudes her head toward the audience, covers her face with her hands, and slowly sweeps her arms in circular gestures.

The way in which Monk cultivated her repertoire of vocal sounds came from a process of self-discovery, learned through her experience in modern dance and the experimental theater, both at Sarah Lawrence and with Judson Dance Theater—a process that involved seeking and discovering the borders of her own vocal possibility and proclivity. For Monk, her use of EVT (a term for which she has expressed dislike)<sup>291</sup> was not an extension of her classical training; rather, the vocabulary of vocal sounds she developed actually comprised the center of her vocal practice. This individualistic mode of discovery led her to numerous sounds and even “characters” within her range of vocal possibility. This way of understanding EVT, whether the vocal sounds in question are extending from bel canto or some other central technique, resonates with the autodidactic, artistically individualistic discourse frequently invoked in connection to experimentalism.

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<sup>291</sup> Monk, personal conversation, August 29, 2016.

In fact, Monk's frequent association with experimentalism might be more related to her uniquely embodied vocal practice than to her compositional approach, considering that—similar to minimalist composers of the 1970s such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass—she has mostly composed completely determinate works that adhere to the classical music concert format. However, Monk's vocal practice developed out of literally experimenting with her voice, placing herself into different physical and emotional scenarios via experimental dance-theater as a way to elicit new sounds and bypass the aesthetic limitations of traditional vocal pedagogy. Monk's process of vocal discovery somewhat resembled that of La Barbara's work at the Free Music Store, and Kavasch's experience with the EVTE, but with the crucial difference that Monk's vocal practice was inextricably tied to dance and theater. Because of the ties to other artistic disciplines, her work with voice was less systematic in approach and more closely related to her practice of observing and integrating her physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences into her vocal practice.

Monk has demonstrated a reluctance to align her vocal practice with any generalized technique system. Monk consistently affirms that her vocal practice is her own, culled from her eclectic influences and experiences with dance, theater, and the overlap between the two in Experimental contexts. However, when she does discuss her various influences, most are non-mainstream and interdisciplinary, which echoes the values placed on artistic inclusivity and non-traditionalism in experimentalism.

Her strong association with EVT and experimentalism brings her approach to the voice into the network of composers, performers, and repertoire that constitute the

conceptual category of EVT. In this way, Monk's inclusion into this category significantly contributes to a different, more experimental understanding of EVT: her inclusion expands the EVT category from a set of vocal sounds added to classical voice in service to the demands of the (avant-garde) composer, and reshapes EVT to an interdisciplinary field of vocal research and aesthetic discovery. By casting EVT in the light of research, new frontiers, and self-learning, Monk links EVT to experimentalism's value system.<sup>292</sup>

### **The Composer-Performer Tradition and EVT: Cross-Sections, Issues, and Implications**

Even as a study of how the artists mentioned in this chapter have similarities as fellow participants in the experimentalism-associated EVT canon, their respective aesthetic approaches have important differences pertaining to the spiritual, political, and social domain of music. For example, La Barbara continually affirms the non-spiritual nature of her sonic explorations.<sup>293</sup> Additionally, Kavasch's magnum opus for the EVTE, *Requiem*, served more as a vehicle for the themes and colors she wanted to explore than as a religious expression.<sup>294</sup> In contrast, Monk's embodied vocal practice connects profoundly to her Buddhist practice and her ecumenical

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<sup>292</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 7.

<sup>293</sup> La Barbara, liner notes to *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Wizard Records RVW2266) LP, 1976; La Barbara, *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Lovely Music LCD 3003), CD, 2003; La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

<sup>294</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

espousal of art as a form of spiritual practice.<sup>295</sup> Kavasch and the EVTE rarely made political statements, whereas La Barbara politicized the role of “singer” within the musical hierarchy through her debut album and interviews, and Monk directly addressed broader social issues, such as the AIDS crisis (*New York Requiem*, 1993) and global climate change (*On Behalf of Nature*).<sup>296</sup> La Barbara fled the rigidity of bel canto’s vocal sound-world and credits jazz, free improvisation, and imitating instruments with her discovery of vocal sounds.<sup>297</sup> By contrast, Kavasch began her practice through listening to recordings and group experimentation, only later accessing a higher octave of vocal sound possibility through bel canto training.<sup>298</sup> Monk, differing from both La Barbara and Kavasch in her respective relation to bel canto, developed her vocabulary of sound through an assemblage of her collected experiences with bel canto, experimental dance theater, and performance art in New York City.<sup>299</sup>

Despite these obvious differences, however, the divisions cited above are highly porous; performance art and free improvisation have often overlapped, many artists involved in both free improvisation and performance art have demonstrated varying degrees of interest global music cultures, and this multivalency of artistic engagement characterizes each of the vocalists mentioned. Their common identification as EVT specialists unites them in a surface manner, but one of the

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<sup>295</sup> Bonnie Marranca, “Performance and the Spiritual Life,” *Performing Arts Journal* 31, no. 91 (January 2009): 31.

<sup>296</sup> La Barbara, “Joan La Barbara,” *Desert Plants*, 356–357.

<sup>297</sup> La Barbara, “Voice is the Original Instrument,” 37.

<sup>298</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

<sup>299</sup> Jowitt, *Meredith Monk*, 10–14.

deeper threads running through each of their narratives is their role in reframing the musical and cultural understanding of EVT. Whereas, as Szántó observed, Berberian and Beardslee shaped the 1950s and 1960s avant-garde repertoire that sparked the wave of interest in exploring the voice throughout the 1970s and 1980s, these later vocalists associated with experimentalism significantly re-directed EVT.<sup>300</sup> Rather than framing EVT as the non-normative extension of bel canto's normativity, used in virtuosic avant-garde compositions, singers working in the experimental tradition approached their vocal work as individually-developed creative processes with the objective of encountering new musical outcomes.

All of the musicians discussed in this chapter have received bel canto training and identify primarily as singers, providing a degree of continuity within the EVT tradition between the former generation of avant-garde singers and the later experimentally-oriented EVT generation. Yet all of these singers—La Barbara, Kavasch, and Monk—also identify the core of their vocal practice as something that unfolded outside the walls of a conservatory voice studio, whether in an improvisatory jam session, a research unit, or a dance/theater troupe. In the context of experimentalism's discourse, the understanding of EVT shifted from an extension of bel canto and classical music, to a way of defining creative vocal work by its difference from the conservatory tradition of inherited or authority-based knowledge and aesthetic uniformity, aligning with the individualistic, highly personal, radical outsider ideal of experimental music.

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<sup>300</sup> Szántó, "Extended vocal techniques," 113–115.

Experimentalism's autodidactic, interdisciplinary bent and fascination with traditions viewed as an alternative to Euro-American classical music cultivated a vocal pluralism in EVT tradition that, while still relying on bel canto as a tacit foil, productively undermined the assumed centrality of bel canto in art music. However, the realignment of EVT into the often-hagiographic discourse of experimentalism does not come without the complicated ideological consequences around appropriation and representation attendant to experimentalism. In cases where composers have drawn inspiration from different music cultures—such as Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell, Steve Reich, John Cage, the New Wilderness Preservation Band, and others—scholars have discussed the tenuous ethical dynamics of using or representing the music of others, due in large part to the inescapable power imbalance involved in cultural exchange between groups who have benefitted and who have suffered from the history of colonialism.<sup>301</sup> Yet the problem of decontextualizing

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<sup>301</sup> Many scholars have discussed cultural appropriation in numerous disciplines from within diverse cultural contexts: David W. Bernstein, "Techniques of Appropriation in the Music of John Cage," *Contemporary Music Review* 20, no. 4 (2001): 71–90; Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Marcus Boon, "On Appropriation," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 1 (April 2007): 1–14; Steven Feld, "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (January 2000): 145–71; Heidi Feldman, "Which Side Are You on? 'Victim Art' and the Cultural Politics of the Art–ethnography Continuum," *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 25–37; Alexander James Glenfield, *Embodying Numinous Sounds, Exchanging Numinous Symbols: 'New Age' Overtone-Singing Rituals in Tuva*, PhD diss. (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 2007); Jay D. Keister, "Seeking Authentic Experience: Spirituality in the Western Appropriation of Asian Music," *The World of Music* 47, no. 3 (January 2005): 35–53; George Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950"; Elizabeth Ann Lindau, "Avant-Gardism, 'Africa' and Appropriation in My Life in the Bush of Ghosts," in *Collected Work: Brian Eno: Oblique Music*, ed. Sean Albiez and David Pattie (London: Bloomsbury, 2016): 193–

cultural products belonging to groups who have been disadvantaged by global power imbalances has additional considerations in the specific context of vocal sound.

Many of the artists associated with EVT cite interest in and inspiration from the music of cultural traditions different from their own. Artists such as La Barbara and Monk subscribe to the idea that since each human shares the experience of a body, the voice is a so-called universal instrument. This concept (inadvertently) participates in a problematic, neoliberal normalization of one's own vocal tradition by imagining voice as a universal instrument without attending to the ways in which culture inescapably defines basic assumptions regarding how a voice works, what the phenomenon of voice is, or the aesthetic ends of singing. For instance, in an interview with Edward Strickland, Monk reflects,

When you've been working with voice for a while you realize there are universal sounds, even archetypal songs. . . . The other aspect is that each person's voice is unique. . . . That's the excitement of working with the voice—having the *universal* human experience yet working very much with your *own* instrument.<sup>302</sup>

To her credit, Monk does identify the uniqueness of each voice, as this idea is central to her own vocal practice and ideology. However, acknowledging the particularity of one's own experience while simultaneously proposing the existence of allegedly

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210; Henry Spiller, "Lou Harrison's Music for Western Instruments and Gamelan: Even More Western than it Sounds." *Asian Music* 40, no. 1 (January 2009): 31–52; Timothy Taylor, "'Nothin' but the Same Old Story': Old Hegemonies, New Musics," in *Collected Work: Peter Gabriel, from Genesis to Growing up*, ed. Sarah Hill (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010): 131–140; Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao, *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1997).

<sup>302</sup> Meredith Monk, "Meredith Monk," *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music*, ed. by Edward Strickland (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991): 94.

universal vocal sounds and universal experiences seems incongruent, unless it is believed that one's own experience can transcend the imprint of culture on the perception of one's own body.<sup>303</sup> Although all humans share a basic physiological makeup, our understanding of the body and its workings is culturally situated, and thus the idea of a supposed universal experience of the human voice inherently involves a high degree of personal and cultural projection.

Popular and scholarly writing on Monk has also taken up the idea of voice-as-universal. Pianist and author Sarah Cahill writes of Monk in an article titled, "A Voice for All Time": "Working with the most basic human utterances, her vocal music immediately sounded fundamental, as if it had always meant to exist, both archaic and brand-new."<sup>304</sup> In this assertion, the voice can allegedly transcend geographic and temporal distance. But how does anyone know what "ancient" vocalization sounded like? The idea of ancient vocal sound participates in the imagining of a geographically and culturally exoticized Other, in that certain vocal sounds are coded as primitive or natural, with the tacit implication that other vocal sounds are, by contrast, cultured or developed, when by these artists' own admission,

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<sup>303</sup> Concept of imprinting or constructing the body in and through culture is extensively discussed by Foucault, in both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

<sup>304</sup> Sarah Cahill, "A Voice for All Time," *NPR Music*, January 11, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/11/132810433/meredith-monk-a-voice-for-all-time> (accessed June 29, 2018).

it took time, effort, and self-conscious exploration to cultivate and develop these seemingly universal or natural sounds.<sup>305</sup>

La Barbara has made similar remarks that reflect the notion of voice as a universal instrument, as in an interview with Kathy Kennedy in 1990 for *Midnight Snack*, a radio show on Montreal's Radio CKUT. She mentions that the sounds used in her piece *Urban Tropics* were "inspired by Santeria vocal sounds," and later in the interview, when discussing her music's relatability to the public, La Barbara replies that her listeners, "relate to the sounds because they are being made by a human . . . by an instrument that we all have. . . ."<sup>306</sup> In another, earlier interview with Walter Zimmermann in 1976 for his anthology of composer portraits, *Desert Plants*, La Barbara explains her discovery of multiphonic singing in a way that echoes the notion of the voice as a universal instrument:

Another of the things that I have done is worked with poets, where they will read their works and I will try to create a fabric of sound behind them that is my reaction to their words . . . to what their images are creating. And one of the things that I've found when I was doing that. . . . A poet named Armand Schwerner was reading some Tibetan scriptures. And as he read, one of the vocal reactions that were made was an octave split. That I learned later, but I haven't [sic.] heard it yet. But I learned it's done by Tibetan monks . . . it was a sound that came out. . . .<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* exposed the history of Western culture's characterization of the "East" as an exoticized foil to Western post-Enlightenment. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); McClary, "Excess and Fame," 10–13; W. Anthony Sheppard, *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>306</sup> La Barbara, interview by Kathy Kennedy, *ckuttimecapsule.wordpress*, "Midnight Snacks," November 8, 1990, <https://ckuttimecapsule.wordpress.com/1990/11/08/the-many-voices-of-joan-la-barbara-1990/> (accessed January 28, 2015).

<sup>307</sup> La Barbara, "Joan La Barbara," *Desert Plants*, 357.

Her account of discovering multiphonics through an unconscious vocal reaction to the *Book of the Dead* implies that the voice, as an embodied means of music-making, is universal, and thus that all vocal sounds are equally discoverable by all people and all cultures. Moreover, her story frames multiphonics as something that arose from the recesses of her unconscious. Her story recalls Orientalist tropes that represent Middle Eastern and South Asian people groups as a more spiritually-in-tune Other who provide glimpses of an imagined ancient self within European culture's ethnocentric self-construction.

Kavasch and the EVTE have fewer statements that invoke the problematic modernist idea of universalism and voice as a universal instrument, most likely because the group was so heavily invested in empirical studies of the voice rather than cultural statements. However, her group's use of techniques learned from field recordings of Bulgarian women's choirs without engaging with these cultures in a meaningful way (providing an accurate context for the sounds or ensuring some form of reciprocity and/or compensation) reflects the privilege of Euro-American musicians in the free use of others' innovations and cultural products.

At the same time, these different musicians' respective interests in diverse musical traditions should be understood within a complex, nuanced understanding of cultural appropriation, especially considering that vocal practices are not concrete, physical objects that can be definitively traced to one culture of origin, as scholars Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao discuss in the introduction to their seminal anthology, *Borrowed Power*:

Just as defining the parameters of a cultural group is difficult, so too is establishing a theoretical basis for connecting a particular cultural practice to that group. If cultural practices develop from an amalgam of influences, it becomes difficult to assign these to one group over another. The existence of shared cultures and histories suggests that sometimes these entitlements might also be shared or sharable.<sup>308</sup>

Ziff and Rao raise the issue of the difficulty in assigning immaterial cultural products—such as a practice—to one particular people group. For instance, ululation appears in numerous musical traditions such as the *Prespa* Albanian culture, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Morocco, Indonesia, and (according to antiquity scholar Howard Jacobson) ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures dating centuries before the common era.<sup>309</sup> The presence of this vocal technique across so many different cultures does not render acts of borrowing innocuous, but it does complicate the issue due to the ambiguity surrounding ownership and borrowing. The use of a so-called non-Western vocal technique—such as ululation—by a Euro-American musician falls on a highly-nuanced spectrum of appropriation, and thus involves different kinds of issues than more direct instances of appropriation such as the use of an identifiable song or field recording from a specific culture without proper acknowledgement and compensatory arrangements—an issue discussed in-depth by Anthony Seeger in his chapter within Ziff and Rao’s collection,

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<sup>308</sup> Ziff and Rao, *Borrowed Power*, 3.

<sup>309</sup> Joel C. Kuipers, “Ululations from the Weyewa Highlands (Sumba): Simultaneity, Audience Response, and Models of Cooperation,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 490–507; Howard Jacobson, “Jacob’s Wedding,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 3 (July 2004): 521–522; Jane Sugarman, “The Nightingale and the Partridge: Singing and Gender Among Prespa Albanians,” *Ethnomusicology* 33, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1989): 191–215.

“Ethnomusicology and Music Law”<sup>310</sup> and by Steven Feld in his seminal article, “Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis.”<sup>311</sup>

Because a vocal technique such as ululation indexes a number of musical traditions, when a Euro-American classical composer features it as a decontextualized, modernist sound effect in a piece, the problem is not necessarily one of intellectual theft, degradation of cultural products, or essentialization of a specific group and more about the inescapable normalization of the dominant culture through juxtaposition between the exoticized sounds of an amorphous Other and the classical music framework of the piece.<sup>312</sup> Thus, the issue with European or Euro-American artists like La Barbara, Kavasch, and Monk borrowing a technique such as ululation has to do with the power dynamics latent in representation and projection and belongs more to the discursive domain of the social than the juridical.

Understanding these kinds of distinctions within the wide net of cultural appropriation facilitates a more accurate and productive discussion on this crucial issue. By parsing out the numerous factors involved in cultural borrowing and power, we can potentially circumvent the heavy-handed, accusatory mode of discourse and encourage artists who have championed other social justice causes to participate in this crucial discussion.

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<sup>310</sup> Anthony Seeger, “Ethnomusicology and Music Law,” in *Borrowed Power*, eds. Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao (Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1997): 52–70.

<sup>311</sup> Steven Feld, “Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (January 1996): 1–35.

<sup>312</sup> Ziff and Rao, “Introduction,” in *Borrowed Power*, 12.

Even with the problematic issue of representation in some elements of these musicians' compositions, their work was instrumental in decentralizing bel canto's ethnocentric normativity in Euro-American art music. I suggest that the choice of EVT singers to explore different vocal approaches from numerous creative traditions—including those that had been labeled as “risky” or “harmful” by vocal pedagogues such as throat singing, multiphonics, and the timbral diversity of jazz—challenged bel canto's normativity and exclusive claims on vocal health, thus creating space for vocal work that fell outside the heavily-gendered norms of classical singing and conventions of vocal beauty.<sup>313</sup> Additionally, experimentalism's challenge of the supposed boundaries separating “dance,” “theater,” “music,” and “visual art” exposed the assumptions of Euro-American art music, including the unquestioned status of bel canto as the de facto vocal style. In inquiring after the parameters of what fundamentally constitutes a particular medium (such as “music” or “theater”), artists committed to the ideals of experimentalism opened the discourse for musicians to further question what singing is, what it could be, and how the rapidly-developing possibilities of sound technology impacts our understanding of EVT and our fundamental concept of voice.

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<sup>313</sup> Large, “Quantitative analysis of chant in relation to normal phonation and vocal fry.”; Large, “Studies of Extended Vocal Techniques: Safety,” 30–33; Jepson, “Joan La Barbara's Gymnastic Voice”; Pamela Z, interview by Charissa Noble, April 2, 2017.

CHAPTER FOUR: EVT, TECHNOLOGY, AND “VOICE-AS-SYSTEM”:  
TREVOR WISHART, LAURIE ANDERSON, AND PAMELA Z

**Introduction: Technology’s redefinition of the body**

In the decades following World War II, exponential growth in the possibilities offered by sound technology captured the imagination and critical inquiry of many musicians and artists. Such innovations offered new kinds of aesthetic experiences and many in the Experimental community were captured by Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1964), intrigued by the philosophical implications of technologies that allowed humans to understand, create, and disseminate acoustic and visual phenomena in unprecedented ways.<sup>314</sup> Writer and composer Larry Wendt remarked, “Many sound poets examined extended vocal techniques, which had become more accessible as a result of electronic explorations. . . .”<sup>315</sup> Thus, radical experimentation in sonic phenomena not only generated new electronically-derived sounds, but also gave rise to new speculation on the nature of sound and the body.

As more sound possibilities became available over the course of the late twentieth-century through increasingly accessible electronic resources (whether commercially-available, university-funded, or DIY equipment) many singers involved in EVT also incorporated electronic processes into their vocal practices. The

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<sup>314</sup> Musicologist Eric Smigel discusses the popularity of McLuhan among many artists who had collaborated with Carolee Schneeman and James Tenney; Smigel, “‘To Behold with Wonder’: Theory, Theater, and the Collaboration of James Tenney and Carolee Schneemann,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 11, no. 1 (February 2017): 1–24.

<sup>315</sup> Larry Wendt, “Sound Poetry: History of Electro-Acoustic Approaches,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 18 no. 1, (January 1985), 11–13.

concept of EVT significantly expanded through the radical diversification the singing practices and artistic disciplines in experimental vocal performance, as Szántó identified: with the increased availability of technology, the realm of aesthetic possibility changed even more for singers working experimentally with their voices. These new possibilities further negotiated the meaning of what an extension of vocal technique meant, and subsequently expanded the range of artists and practices identified with EVT.

The confluence between EVT and electronic music has continued to raise productive and interesting questions about the concept of EVT and the voice itself. The wide array of practices, sounds, and performance contexts now considered part of the EVT legacy have effectively rendered this term more ideological than descriptive, now referring generally to all kinds of vocal experimentalisms that, in some cases, have little or no relation to bel canto training. The expansion of the EVT category in the wake of electro-acoustic vocal music's flourishing has legitimized vocal innovation as its own artistic medium across different aesthetic disciplines (theater, performance art, and music), but it has also weakened the term's descriptive efficacy. Thus, the aesthetic commonality conveyed by an umbrella term such as EVT obscures, to an extent, the diversity of approaches to singing as well as the type and usage of technology between different vocalists grouped into the EVT tradition.

Looking at the work of several vocalists identified with EVT whose compositional milieu extensively involves electronics—Trevor Wishart, Laurie Anderson, and Pamela Z—I discuss the particularities of these artists' respective

vocal practices and reflect on how their different projects both subvert the concept of EVT as an extension of bel canto and productively reimagine EVT as a revisionist approach to the concept of voice.

### **Trevor Wishart (b. 1946)**

While the EVTE conducted rehearsals in pursuit of different vocal sounds in San Diego and Joan La Barbara debuted her research oriented vocal compositions in New York City, British composer Trevor Wishart had undertaken a vocal research project of his own, across the Atlantic. He majored in music at Oxford University, earning his degree in 1968. During his Oxford years, Wishart devoted his attention to highly-structured, abstract music. He described himself at that time as a devotee of Xenakis, but a significant personal loss radically changed his musical trajectory:

The death of my father while I was still a student made me reconsider what I was doing as a composer. The post-Xenakis type orchestral work I was writing (based on seven intervallically distinct tone-rows and random number tables) seemed irrelevant to his life, working in a factory in an industrial town, and this is what first inspired me to buy a tape recorder and go out recording the sounds of industry around the region with some vague idea of making a piece of music out of it.<sup>316</sup>

Although Wishart described himself previous to this event as, “committed, in a youthfully idealistic way, to the ideas of taking art out of the usual contexts and into the community,” he admits that his study of tone rows and number tables did not

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<sup>316</sup> Yiorgos Vassilandonakis, “An Interview with Trevor Wishart,” *Computer Music Journal* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 9.

prepare him with “any realistic notion of how this might be achieved.”<sup>317</sup> Thus, he sought meaningful connection between his work and his community by capturing the sounds of everyday life and bringing them into his studio.

In 1969, he began working toward a Master’s degree at the University of Nottingham, but his more major significant musical work was extra-curricular: he purchased a small portable tape recorder, and this new tool allowed him to feel closer to the people and places of meaning in his life. With his recorder in hand, Wishart began to regularly visit foundries, workshops, and power stations in his working-class hometown of Leeds to collect sounds from its industrial landscape:

I just bought a little portable recorder, very cheap. It ran at three inches per second, which is like a sampling rate of 6,000 hertz. It had a built-in microphone, and I went out around power stations and factories for making recordings without any idea what I was going to do. And then I applied to the University of York, which had a studio, with some vague idea that I was going to make a piece with sounds from the real world.

Although the history of Pierre Henry (1927–2017) and Pierre Schaeffer’s (1910–1995) work at the *Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète* (GRMC) in France (est. 1951) or Cage’s work on *Williams Mix* (1952) may not have been familiar to Wishart at that time, he had essentially embarked upon a *musique concrète* project. Recounting these years, he reflects, “I knew that there was the electroacoustic music, I knew there was the great debate about electronic music versus *musique concrète*, but I didn’t really know a great deal of music.”<sup>318</sup> However, he quickly became

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Nicholas Marty, “‘Creavolution’ with Trevor Wishart,” *The Journal of Music and Meaning* 10 (Summer 2011): 83.

acquainted with a variety of compositional approaches and ideas about tape music once he began working with composer Richard Orton (1940–2013) during his Ph.D. program (1970–1973) at the University of York.

Orton introduced Wishart to Cage’s ideas regarding technology’s unique ability to create music outside of the limitations of pitch and rhythm, suggested by the similarities between Cage’s ideas about the possibilities of tape composition from his 1950s-era essays (published in *Silence*, 1961)<sup>319</sup> and Wishart’s later formulations in his book, *On Sonic Art*.<sup>320</sup> Wishart recalls, “Richard was really into the American experimental things. So it was more those kind of things that I knew about, rather than the French tradition of electroacoustics. . . .”<sup>321</sup> This exposure to American experimentalism brought him into contact (directly or indirectly) with Cagean principles, reflected in a later statement about how he contextualizes work:

Sometimes it’s useful to describe to people what you do as ‘soundscape’, or ‘sonic art’, because then they don’t have to think ‘It’s not quite a tune’ or ‘It’s not like the music that I like.’ As far as I’m concerned it’s all music, because it has to do with the organization of sound in time.”<sup>322</sup>

Whether or not Wishart had already become acquainted with the ideas of Varèse and Cage concerning music as “organized sound” at the outset of his exploratory work with electronics and voice, his statement resonates with the overall values of

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<sup>319</sup> John Cage. *Silence: Lectures and Writing* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

<sup>320</sup> Wishart, Trevor. *On Sonic Art*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.

<sup>321</sup> Nicholas Marty, “‘Creavolution,’” 83.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

experimentalism and aptly conveys his highly-individualistic approach to vocal exploration and discovery.

Not unlike other experimentalist-associated musicians such as La Barbara and the EVTE, Wishart began exploring the possibilities within his own voice through improvising. In the analog studio at York University, he combined found sounds, collected from Leeds with recordings of his vocal improvisations. He explains, “In the analog studio, the improvisation lay mainly in generating the material, which for me was done through controlled-improvised live performances, always ending up being much more than I would finally use. I would then select from the recorded materials to work on for a piece.”<sup>323</sup> In addition to his own improvisatory sessions, Wishart also used recordings of sounds made by other people, many of whom were other music students at York. He needed a bigger pool of recorded sounds, so he began bringing volunteers to the university studio and requesting that they make sounds that he could record. Wishart remembers asking people to “blow down scaffolding tubes, or all kind of things.”<sup>324</sup> He recalls, “I eventually generated [my first piece] *Machine: an Electronically-Preserved Dream*, which combined those industrial recordings with semi-improvised sound materials for singers or speaking voices and cutups [*sic*] of media clips and of my own voice. . . .”<sup>325</sup>

To create this piece, Wishart assembled the sounds he collected from Leeds a continuous tape piece, which he used as a kind of audio “score” (or what he calls a

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<sup>323</sup> Vassilandonakis, “Interview with Trevor Wishart,” 10.

<sup>324</sup> Marty, ““Creavolution,””84.

<sup>325</sup> Vassilandonakis, “Interview with Trevor Wishart,” 10.

“directed improvisation route-map”) for several improvisation sessions he directed with the York Chamber Choir.<sup>326</sup> In these sessions, Wishart asked the choir to imitate the mechanical sounds they heard on the tape, and emphasized that he wanted them to try to create a gradual, nuanced transition from one sound to another. Weaving the recordings from these choral sessions into a larger tapestry that included the concrete sounds from his collection, stock media clips, and his own vocals, Wishart created his first major composition, an hour-long *musique-concrète* piece titled *Machine: an Electronically-Preserved Dream* (1970).<sup>327</sup>

In this piece, Wishart groups together similar sounds and superimposes them at different volume levels, forming musical cells about ten to fifteen seconds in length. Although the specific content of these cells changes with each repetition, they have a sonic profile that makes it easy to identify their overall sonic profile and thus, to track these thematic recurrences. One cell that recurs most often consists primarily of layered stock media clips of different male voices all discussing the topic of technology’s impact on society; another cell consists primarily of tracks of the choir’s improvisation sessions in which they mimicked the recorded drones of industrial noises (although most of the choir’s singing remains consistent with traditional choral sound, complete with several moments of conventionally-harmonized chords).

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<sup>326</sup>Michael Hall, *Music Theater in Britain 1960-1975* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015): 268; Trevor Wishart, “Sonic Art Pieces,” *Trevorwishart.co.uk*, <http://www.trevorwishart.co.uk/rbfull.html> (accessed September 30, 2018).

<sup>327</sup> Trevor Wishart, “‘Machine: An Electronically Preserved Dream’ by Trevor Wishart,” *radiOM.org*, digital archives, [https://archive.org/details/G\\_WIS\\_TRE\\_01](https://archive.org/details/G_WIS_TRE_01) (accessed October 15, 2018). This recording found on this link is from the 1972 American premiere of *Machine*.

Another particularly interesting cell features much more abrupt editing techniques, featuring short, sharply-defined clips of Wishart's screams, mechanical sounds, and shrieks from the choir alternate at a rapid, unpredictable pace. Yet, despite the cell-like structure of the piece and the at-times intentionally abrupt editing, one of the most unique aspects of this piece is how the sounds seem to transform at certain moments. For example, near the beginning of the piece, one hears the chattering whispers of the chorus gradually evolve into the whirring, swishing sounds of industrial equipment.

Wishart's success in exploring the voice as a type of synthesizer—capable of transforming its sonic identity so subtly and gradually that it creates an almost imperceptible bridge between other sampled sounds—commenced Wishart's life-long interest in sonic transformation.<sup>328</sup> After completing *Machine*, he concluded that, unlike other instruments or found sounds, the voice possessed a plasticity that matched synthesizers in its manifold sonic possibilities. His first major work had shown him that voice could replicate the sonic profile of numerous other sounds, but it could also immediately and gracefully morph from one sound to another. Just as Cage believed that tape music would ultimately relegate pitch and rhythm to a place of lesser importance in music, Wishart proposed that the voice (particularly in its extended capacity) would change fundamental Western musical assumptions. "Pursuing my research (in extended vocal techniques)," he says, "has led me to re-examine traditional assumptions about the 'parameters' or 'internal architecture' of

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<sup>328</sup> Marty, "'Creavolution,'" 98.

sounds. . . . First of all the idea of pitch as a single, definable quality of every sound begins to dissolve. . . .”<sup>329</sup> As he continued to explore vocal sound in greater depth, he found that voice could do more than just co-exist with sampled sounds: it could also serve as a conduit between different sounds, connecting mechanistic, animal, and human sound through its transformational capabilities. Mining the timbral diversity and flexibility of the voice, Wishart expanded the palate of sounds between which he could slowly switch; he learned to match the timbre and texture of his voice to non-vocal sounds and would practice gradually phasing into another by experimenting with different sounds, improvising sound-transition passages, and taking note of his aural and physical sensations. Thus, the connection between art and life that he had so ardently pursued since the loss of his father not only occurred on the level of representation, but also through literal sonic connection within the music, facilitated by the polymorphic nature of voice.

Wishart utilized these vocal discoveries in his next major work, *Red Bird* (1973). This piece demonstrates the voice’s plasticity, eliding bird cries, sounds of machines, and human voices on an evolving continuum of sound. Slightly shorter than *Machine* at forty-five minutes, *Red Bird* is a work in four movements and focuses on the process of sound transformation, both through both acoustical means and strategic tape-splicing. It differs from its predecessor, *Machine*, in that the only human voice featured is Wishart’s. The piece’s program dramatically depicts the abstract dualities of imprisonment and freedom, which he captures by exploring the

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<sup>329</sup> Trevor Wishart, “The Composer's View,” 313.

gamut of emotional extremes in the voice through the extended vocal techniques he had developed. These techniques include screaming, high-pitched shrieks, vocal flutters, ingressive vocalization, guttural growls that generate subtones, and mouth sounds (such as sustained air-expulsion through the cheeks and lips) that create sputtering noises. While at times the sonic transformations between the bird calls, mechanical noises, and Wishart's cries unfold gradually, at other moments Wishart's screams dramatically tear across the soundscape of the piece, only to be brought to a grinding halt by the roar of industrial equipment.<sup>330</sup>

After completing *Red Bird*, Wishart continued experimenting with voice and developed a systematic understanding of the voice as a network of sound production. He completed a residency at IRCAM (*Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*, Paris) but even with the more sophisticated technology available to him there than at the University of York, voice remained for him the most flexible and diverse sound source: "When I started studio work, the thing I discovered . . . was that the most manipulable [*sic*] sound-source of all was my own voice."<sup>331</sup> Like the EVTE, Wishart catalogued and categorized his observations of the voice's sound-making capabilities and, "came up with his own lexicon," which he shared in very

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<sup>330</sup> A recording of *Red Bird* (1972) can be found on the Sub Rosa label's website. Trevor Wishart, "Red Bird: A political prisoner's dream," *Subrosa label*, <https://subrosalabel.bandcamp.com/album/red-bird-a-political-prisoners-dream> (accessed October 15, 2018).

<sup>331</sup> Dick Witts, "Trevor Wishart and 'Vox,'" *The Musical Times* 129, no. 1747 (September 1988): 454.

practical language in an article run by *The Musical Times*, titled “Extended Vocal Techniques” (1980).<sup>332</sup>

In this article, Wishart shares his vocal research, which conducted while composing the *Vox* cycle (1980–1988).<sup>333</sup> He composed this work on a commission from the vocal group Electric Phoenix while he was working at IRCAM. Wishart’s descriptive language relies heavily on the vocabulary of electronic music and sound technology:

We may describe certain oscillators, noise-generators and filters and treatments of these. The principal oscillators are: (1) larynx (2) tongue . . . (3) lips and cheek . . . and (4) whistling. . . . Sub-audio (click-like) oscillations may be produced. . . . The noise-generators of the voice are manifest in the consonants. . . . All the sounds above (and below) may be filtered by varying the size and/or shape of the mouth cavity. . . .<sup>334</sup>

Wishart’s article goes beyond a figurative analogy of the voice as a synthesizer—references that have been made anecdotally about Cathy Berberian and Joan La Barbara as well. Applying the concept of the synthesizer more literally to voice, Wishart isolates the bodily and acoustical systems involved in vocal sound and categorizes them based on their independent functions, then explains how each system potentially relates to others, resulting in different sonic properties.

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid. Also it should be mentioned that, in this article, Wishart says he met “founding member of the EVTE Warren Burt”; however, the EVTE went through several iterations and Burt actually departed before the Extended Vocal Techniques “Group” became the Extended Vocal Techniques “Ensemble.”

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 453. Electronic Phoenix commissioned Wishart for a piece, and he composed the *Vox* cycle, completing *Vox I* in 1982.

<sup>334</sup> Wishart, “The Composer’s View,” 313.

Although traditional vocal pedagogy also engages in systematic, scientific discourse about singing and uses empirical language to explain vocal sound, vocal pedagogy is generally oriented around mastery of bel canto, or sometimes more vaguely around the goal of achieving a “free voice,” a vague term that tacitly still refers to bel canto in the context of conservatory singing. In this sense, vocal pedagogy constructs the voice as a singular instrument with a particular mode of operation in order to produce a specific kind of sound. In contrast, Wishart’s explanation of vocal sound does not reverse-engineer a specific, desired vocal sound; when he calls the voice an “instrument,” he uses this term in the same way that others might call synthesizers “electronic instruments,” a point that he makes earlier in the same article:

The human voice, however, is particularly suitable as an 'instrument' both because of its amazing flexibility and variety of sound generation . . . (compared, for example, with computer synthesis). Conventional musical instruments, constructed on the assumption that timbre should be held (relatively) constant, are unsuited to this aim.<sup>335</sup>

Thus, for Wishart, the underlying premise of EVT is that voice is a network of interconnected but open systems that contribute to sound.

Furthermore, Wishart considers sound something dynamic and process-oriented. Viewing timbral consistency as a limitation of instruments, he has expressed the view that the plasticity of vocal sound is the most remarkable (and useful) asset of voice. The idea of sound transformation is a prevailing theme in Wishart’s work beginning with *Red Bird* through the *Vox* cycle and into his later compositions,

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<sup>335</sup> Wishart, “The Composer’s View,” 313.

*Journey into Space* (2002) and *Encounters in the Republic of Heaven* (2011), demonstrating that even as technology has developed, voice remains central to Wishart's compositional oeuvre. He explains, "I explored extended vocal techniques. . . . I catalogued them, noticing that you can manipulate one sound by doing a particular thing, for example changing the vowel shape. . . . The point is about openness . . . they [vocal sounds] evolve through sonic transformation."<sup>336</sup> A now internationally-recognized vocalist and EVT specialist, Wishart began his work in EVT not from singing avant-garde works, nor from solely exploring his voice alone, but from developing his understanding of voice and of electronics simultaneously over a decade of radical experimentation. Each area of learning informed the other, leading him to approach voice mechanistically and electronics, biologically.

In terms of the gender and social implications of EVT, singing, and the voice in Euro-American classical music, Wishart complicates the discourse of EVT in several ways—most notably in his chosen gender identity as a cisgendered male. Few accounts of EVT (including the work at hand) prominently feature cisgendered [hereafter cis-male or cis-men] male performer-composers, reflected in prominent composer and music critic Kyle Gann's declaration, "One can name a few men who make music from their own extended vocal techniques, notably Toby Twining and David Moss. . . ." <sup>337</sup> (What's more, even in Gann's "male exceptions," Wishart is absent.) Furthermore, when cis-men are included in the EVT canon, they are usually

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<sup>336</sup> Marty, "Creavolution," 98.

<sup>337</sup> Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997): 208.

included as “composers” (such as Berio and Babbitt) in the traditional music-hierarchical sense: the (usually male) composer is thus removed from the embodied act of performance and instead, imagines a particular vocal sound in service to his predetermined aesthetic program and delegates these musical tasks to an obedient performer.<sup>338</sup>

Although one can make the case that EVT performance—especially in the context of avant-garde music—had more intellectual capital than conventional operatic singing and thus cast a cerebral light on the vocal work of singers like Berberian and Beardslee (see Chapter 2), the embodied act of performing still bears the traces of gendered hierarchies. Thus, the sparse population of cis-male vocalists from the EVT narrative likely does not arise from an actual absence of cis-male EVT vocalists, but perhaps from the way in which singing and vocal work have been culturally gendered as “feminine,” as noted by cultural scholars and musicologists such as Susan McClary and Freya Jarman-Ivens.<sup>339</sup> This gendering of musical activity colors the interpretation of cis-male vocalists, giving rise to different categorizations of their work than their cis-female, gender-queer, and non-binary counterparts in an

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<sup>338</sup> Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 16–35; McClary, “This is Not a Story My People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson,” in *Feminine Endings*, 138.

<sup>339</sup> For further reading on how certain musical activities become “gendered” by cultural precedent and association, see: Lucy Green, “Exposing the Gendered Discourse of Music Education,” *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 2 (May 2002): 137–44; Freya Jarman-Ivens, “Introduction,” in *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (London: Routledge, 2007): 1–20; McClary, *Feminine Endings*.

unusual inversion of typical patterns of historiographical exclusion. For example, Robert Ashley frequently performed as a vocalist in his compositions, yet he is usually referred to as a “composer,” and rarely referred to as a “vocalist.” Likewise, Jaap Blonk is categorized as a “sound poet,” and Theo Bleckmann is typically referred to as a “composer” and “jazz musician” first, with the label “singer” applied as a modifier to his primary identification.

Therefore, Wishart’s absence from most of the writing about EVT despite his self-initiated identification with the term EVT (for example, in his article entitled “Extended Vocal Techniques” in *The Musical Times*) seems to suggest that EVT, and vocal work more generally, bears the impression of gendered social-constructions. However, it is important to note that other considerations related to Wishart’s musical background also inform his relative absence from most EVT accounts. First, EVT became closely associated with experimentalism, a primarily American grouping that at times included different scenes in the urban centers in Europe, whereas Wishart has chosen to reside in the less population-dense region of York in the UK. Second, Wishart does not have a bel canto background and thus, does not make explicit connections between his vocal practices and classical singing technique, echoing musicologist Gelsey Bell’s observation about how the “split between trained and untrained singer” has defined the discourse of EVT.

Yet, in spite of these factors limiting Wishart’s legibility as a contributor to the EVT canon, his work still participates crucially in the construction of EVT’s meaning, especially as EVT has become linked with electronic music. As an

articulate exponent of his own theories and methods, Wishart's detailed published accounts of his vocal learning process and ideas about voice formulated a concept of EVT—and of voice itself—as a network of information exchange and activity; in other words, a technology. Wishart's hybridized, improvisation-based formulation of EVT contests the idea of one vocal technique as “central” because the only “center” in Wishart's theory is the body itself. Moreover, even within the body, Wishart poses vocal production as a non-linear process: the vocal folds are not central to the process because air can be expelled to make sound without them; furthermore, the body is not, in some respect, even necessarily the “center” of the sound because Wishart's sound constantly evolves, transforming as it moves along a continuum of bodily and electronic processes. Thus, rather than “extending” from the “normal” or “classical” voice, Wishart's concept of EVT reflects back upon “normalized” vocal sound and exposes the constructed (and limited) way in which classical music has hampered our understanding of the voice.

### **Laurie Anderson (b. 1947)**

In showing how the concept of EVT has been understood and how its musical and social implications morph within different aesthetic and cultural contexts, Laurie Anderson presents an interesting case. Anderson, like Wishart, does not appear as frequently in EVT discourse as her vocalist-composer-performer peers such as Joan La Barbara, Diamanda Galás, Meredith Monk, and Pamela Z. Anderson seldom discusses any experience with conservatory vocal training or connection to bel canto

technique, and considering that the proposed center from which EVT “extends” has traditionally been understood as *bel canto*, the absence of this frame of reference might account for Anderson’s less-common identification with EVT tradition. Yet, in spite of the conservatory-divide that cordons off the more commonly recognized EVT cohort from other vocalist-composer-performers in the Experimental tradition, some writers still situate Anderson in the EVT category. For example, recalling Phil Johnson’s review for *The Independent* of Meredith Monk’s album, *mercy*, Johnson rehearses the familiar EVT canon (with several pop singers added, perhaps to contextualize Monk’s work for a broader audience) and notably includes Anderson:

If you can hear echoes of Kate Bush, Diamanda Galás, Laurie Anderson, or Björk in the work of Meredith Monk, it's not surprising: Monk got there first. . . . While a voice-as-instrument approach has been common to jazz since Louis Armstrong first sang on record, Monk is no scat singer; nor is she a frighteningly accomplished modernist-mimic in the manner of Cathy Berberian.<sup>340</sup>

Alex Ross similarly places Anderson among Monk, La Barbara, and Galás in his 2015 *New Yorker* article, “Guided by Voices”:

Downtown Manhattan became a haven for a new breed of singer-composer: Laurie Anderson recited surreal slogans, Joan La Barbara traced airy patterns, Diamanda Galás howled demonically. In Europe, Cathy Berberian’s collaborations with Luciano Berio established a form of avant-garde *bel canto*.<sup>341</sup>

Additionally, scholars discussing EVT also occasionally include Anderson, for example Susan McClary, who lists Anderson as a benefactor of Berberian’s legacy.

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<sup>340</sup>Phil Johnson, “Stretch Your Ears.”

<sup>341</sup>Alex Ross, “Guided by Voices: Meredith Monk and Gabriel Kahane,” *The New Yorker*, January 5, 2015.

McClary situates Berberian as the matriarch of the EVT lineage (echoing the familiar trope of Cage as the patriarch of experimentalism) and situates Anderson as one of Berberian’s artistic progeny:

Music history owes a great deal to Berberian. Most obviously, her example inspired an explosion of performance artists and singers who specialize in extended vocal techniques . . . now fundamental to the work of Meredith Monk, Diamanda Galás, Laurie Anderson, and countless others.<sup>342</sup>

Composer Paul Barker also includes Anderson in his book, *Composing for Voices*, in which he more explicitly discusses EVT as a general musical category. In addition to providing a sort of lexicon of EVT sounds, Barker lists examples of what he calls “composer performers . . . working with extended vocal techniques across all musical styles,” in which Anderson appears (once again) alongside La Barbara, Galás, and Monk.<sup>343</sup>

The inclusion of Anderson in a cohort of other musicians more commonly recognized as part of the EVT tradition has to do—in part—with their common identity as vocalist-composer-performers. Yet, I posit that her occasional presence in the EVT narrative indicates something more profound, hinted at in musicologist W. Anthony Sheppard’s mention of Anderson in his book, *Revealing Masks*. Sheppard not only generally identifies Anderson with EVT, but also specifically cites her as a prime example of EVT’s aesthetic:

The concept of a composer “masking” the individual human voice through the use of extended vocal techniques loses some of its relevance [as an identifying

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<sup>342</sup> Susan McClary, “Forward: Cathy Berberian—Modernism’s Bette Middler,” *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, xxvi.

<sup>343</sup> Paul Barker, *Composing for Voice*, 42.

feature of modernist music theater] when individual performers, such as Laurie Anderson, are celebrated and recognized for specializing in these experimental vocal styles.<sup>344</sup>

Anderson has certainly earned recognition and acclaim for her significant contributions to the cultural landscape, but Sheppard's assertion of Anderson's recognition for "specializing in these experimental vocal styles" holds a degree of ambiguity. To which experimental vocal styles does he refer? Over the years of its development as a concept, musicians considered part of the EVT tradition have typically striven to develop a variety of vocal sounds produced acoustically, and some (like La Barbara and Wishart) later used electronic procedures that layered and spliced their acoustically-produced sounds into complex compositions. However, Anderson's exploration of vocal sound draws primarily from electronic resources, and focuses on a more specific kind of vocal aesthetic. I posit that Sheppard's statement indicates a shift in the understanding of EVT, pluralizing the kinds of sounds and practices considered EVT to include those sounds produced with and through technology. On another conceptual stratum, I further suggest that understanding Anderson's work with electronic vocal transformation as EVT contests the idea of an essentialized voice that exists outside of mediation, that the body is the site of this essentialized voice, and that the body itself is a clear and distinct entity from the technologies involved in its being.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> W. Anthony Sheppard, *Revealing Masks*, 252.

<sup>345</sup> Lucie Vágnerová, "Sirens/Cyborgs," 60.

Anderson played violin from the age of five, but began composing original works around the time she completed a master's degree in sculpture at Columbia University in 1972.<sup>346</sup> In the same year, Anderson gave her debut performance, *An Afternoon of Automotive Transmission (Automotive)*, inspired by a weekly Sunday evening event in Rochester, Vermont where audience members parked cars around a gazebo in which the local high school band played; audience members honked after each number in applause.<sup>347</sup> Anderson loved the orchestral cacophony of the car horns, and subsequently designed a piece in which artists honked the car horns and audience members sat in the gazebo.<sup>348</sup> In addition to her live performances, she also began working with recorded sound that year. Anderson disclosed that she prepared by taking her tape recorder out onto the streets of New York City and asking people in their cars to honk their horn into the machine.<sup>349</sup> Like Wishart, Anderson was interested in collecting sounds from the urban landscape and, during sound collection, would invite other people to contribute their sounds.<sup>350</sup>

Anderson's early interest in timbre as a primary feature of sound continued into her vocal work. Many of her works with voice have other dimensions, both in terms of the different media she uses and the meanings these convergent media convey. Yet, her interest in vocal timbre remains a salient feature of her staged and

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<sup>346</sup> William Duckworth, *Talking Music*, 369.

<sup>347</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Laurie Anderson* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 2000): 37.

<sup>348</sup> Mel Gordon, "Laurie Anderson: Performance Artist," *The Drama Review* 24, no. 2 (June 1980): 52.

<sup>349</sup> M. Dickey Drysdale, "Automotive Orchestra Bows in Stunning Rochester Debut," *White River Valley Herald of Randolph*, August 31, 1972.

<sup>350</sup> Drysdale, "Automotive Orchestra Bows in Stunning Rochester Debut."

recorded work. One of her more involved performance pieces, *For Instants* (initially developed in 1974, presented at the Whitney Museum in 1976) consisted of two parts: in the first half, Anderson created a film that she projected onto a wall as the backdrop for her performance on the electric violin; in the second half, she read an original text detailing the film-making process. The breath she expelled while reading moved the flame of a candle, which was set up in the path of a photo cell's beam so that the electrical circuit of the spotlight would be interrupted based on the breathiness of different words and sounds.<sup>351</sup> In one sense, her voice activated visual events, but in another sense, the visual events illustrated fluctuations in the timbre of her voice, highlighting the breathy and aspirated sounds.

In *For Instants*, Anderson demonstrates an interest in vocal timbre as part of a broader network of intersecting performance actions and events. A particular vocal timbre (breathiness) served as both the end and the means within the totality of the overall performance. The piece reflects an ecological unity, in which an essential function of vocal production (breath) comes to the forefront as a noticeable sonic feature of her voice and of the piece's overall sound; at the same time, her breath also perceptibly participates in the interconnectivity between the candle, the photo cell beam, and the spotlight. By presenting a function of vocal production in a multivalent way, Anderson challenges the notion of a unified "voice instrument." Moreover, by giving a component of vocal production an aesthetic purpose that directly affects the spatial dimension of the piece (the spotlight's projection into the room), she

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<sup>351</sup> Gordon, "Laurie Anderson: Performance Artist," 52–53.

externalizes the phenomenon of “voice,” distancing voice from body in a way that hints at her later electronic work’s play with vocal sound.

In addition to her more famous, text-based electronic pieces that use a Vocoder, such as *O Superman* (1981), and her development of the filter she calls the “Voice of Authority,” Anderson has re-configured the network of vocal sound through other DIY technological means. Starting with *Duets on Ice* (1974), Anderson began electronically altering instruments, including her violin. In one instance, she attached a recording head to the body of her violin and replaced the bow hairs with audio tape, allowing her to “play” her own voice.<sup>352</sup> With this voice-violin, Anderson simultaneously distances the voice and re-negotiates its relationship to the body. At an earlier point, Anderson obviously recorded herself speaking in an act that originated within her body; yet, Anderson’s altered violin does something different than playing a recording of a voice. Just as one’s lungs, vocal folds, mouth, and tongue require collective physical activity in order to produce vocal sound, she incorporates the inert physical materials of her recording into something that, once again, must be produced by ongoing, present activity. Anderson does not simply employ the perceptual trick of the voice divorced from its source (the *acousmètre*).<sup>353</sup> Rather, she deconstructs the elements of vocal production, (re)constructing a “voice” that bears a reconfigured relationship to the body through a melding of the

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<sup>352</sup> Jon McKenzie, “Laurie Anderson for Dummies,” *The Drama Review* 41, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 42.

<sup>353</sup> The concept of the *acousmètre* is widely attributed to Michel Chion. For further reading, see: Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

mechanical, electronic, and organic. Her physical body still controlled her vocal sound, but in a way that subverted the idea of the body's interior as the voice's point of origin, and thus challenged the notion of the voice's transparent revelation of an essentialized identity.

Anderson supported her performing career in part by writing reviews and editorials for high-profile art publications such as *Artforum* and *ARTnews* throughout the 1970s, and later won a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) award that supported a more technologically-ambitious work, *O Superman*.<sup>354</sup> A dark-horse hit on the British pop charts soon after its release, *O Superman* commenced Anderson's iconic use of the Vocoder and her various filters that elicit different effects and personas, such as the "Voice of Authority."<sup>355</sup> This filter warps the voice, placing its pitch-level at a much lower register and imbuing it with an overtone-rich timbral quality. The lower pitch conveys masculinity, yet its obvious mediation elicits a mechanistic, alien quality. The "Voice" appears in *O Superman* at the lines,

And the voice said:  
this is the hand, the hand that takes.  
This is the hand, the hand that takes. . . . Here come the planes.  
They're American planes made in America.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Kenneth R. Fletcher, "Laurie Anderson: The celebrated performance artists discusses Andy Warhol, NASA, and her work at McDonald's," *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2008, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/laurie-anderson-779875/> (accessed July 31, 2018).

<sup>355</sup> Laurie Anderson, *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective 1972-1992* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994): 150.

<sup>356</sup> For further listening: Laurie Anderson, *Big Science* (Nonesuch Records 130428-2) CD (Digitally Remastered), 2007.

Journalist Dave Tompkins, author of *How to Wreak a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip Hop*, remarks that although Bell Laboratories had invented the Vocoder as early as 1928, it was still a relatively expensive piece of this equipment by the 1980s; ergo, it is possible that Anderson's NEA grant provided her with the resources to work with this equipment.<sup>357</sup> It came into use within the military-industrial complex during WWII, after the U.S. learned that the Germans had intercepted and deciphered conversations between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>358</sup> The specific feature of the Vocoder that lowers the voice's pitch level arose from a prevailing discomfort among the developers and government agencies of hearing world leaders with high-pitched voices.<sup>359</sup> Whether intentionally referencing this part of the device's history or simply drawing on the structural meanings attached to lower voices in Euro-American culture, Anderson used this feature to create her signature "Voice of Authority," one of the many vocal filters that she refers to as "audio masks."<sup>360</sup>

Although this lowered-voice feature of the Vocoder has drawn the greatest amount of journalistic and scholarly attention for its queering of authority, masculinity, and technology, Anderson has also used the Vocoder for numerous other effects, such as multiplying her voice to create the choral "ha" drone that continues

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<sup>357</sup> "The Vocoder: From Speech Scrambling to Robot Rock," *National Public Radio*, May 13, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126781688> (accessed August 1, 2018).

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> McClary, "This is Not a Story My People Tell," 139.

throughout *O Superman*,<sup>361</sup> or scrambling her voice to give it a grainy, disruptive, bubbling texture. Whether lowering, multiplying, scrambling, or granulating her voice, the connective thread that runs through Anderson's work is that her voice is (arguably) most recognizable in its Vocoder-processed form. Her filters are intrinsic to her vocal identity, which begs the question: if her "masks" constitute the essential components of her vocal practice, what, exactly, lies beneath the proverbial mask?

The metaphor of the mask assumes a duality of the "authentic" and the "artificial"; its true identity is revealed only when the mask is stripped away. However, in Anderson's work the masks are in fact her voice; her digital tools constitute a crucial part of her artistic identity and therefore are only "vocal masks" in the sense that when she uses them, she self-consciously engages in the act of performance. By that same token, anyone using their voice (or really, doing anything at all) in the act of performing dons a conceptual mask, and thus the mask is not so much what one does with a voice, but rather, the framework of performance itself. Within the world of her performance milieu, Anderson rarely hints at an "authentic" voice being obscured; rather, Anderson's voice is characteristically transformational and uncertain, high and low pitched, human and robotic, singular and multiple, refusing to be fixed in place. The processing systems of her Vocoder co-mingle with the oscillator of her vocal folds and the processing system of her oral cavity, coalescing into a sonic complex that defies distinction between the organic and the

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<sup>361</sup> Dave Simpson, "How we made Laurie Anderson's O Superman," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/apr/19/how-we-made-laurie-anderson-o-superman> (accessed August 1, 2018).

electronic. Echoing her earlier exploration in *For Instants* of breath as a vocal function that contributes in multiple ways to a larger aesthetic network, her work with the Vocoder continues her exploration of voice as a de-centered aesthetic phenomenon, comprised of interpenetrating acoustical and perceptual events that occur in her body, in the digital realm, in acoustical space, and in the cognition of her listener.

Recalling Sheppard's point about extended vocal techniques as form of vocal masking, he notably does not delineate between acoustic and electronic extension of the voice when he mentions Anderson as an example of EVT. By not distinguishing between the type of masking involved in EVT, Sheppard remains consistent with EVT's underlying premise of a normative or natural voice that performers extend or mask using purportedly non-normative or unnatural techniques. Yet by stating that any so-called non-normative vocal practice—electronic or acoustic—masks a true voice, he places acoustic and electronic means of alteration on the same continuum of vocal processing. Sheppard blurs the line between bodily and electronic processes of vocal masking, ironically affirming the way in which Anderson's work challenges the notion of an essential voice and its fixed relationship to the body. Thus, Anderson's inclusion in the EVT canon puts pressure on EVT's notion of central and extended technique, not only in the superficial sense of not having a bel canto background that she ostensibly extends from or rebels against, but in a more intrinsic sense, in that her work confounds the idea of voice's central location inside the body. Anderson's "pleasurable confusion" (a term coined by Donna Haraway in "A Cyborg Manifesto,"

1985) between organic and electronic forms an important part of the narrative of EVT in the experimental tradition.<sup>362</sup>

### **Pamela Z (b. 1956)**

In recent decades, with the widespread dissemination of techniques and technologies formerly considered the territory of contemporary music specialists or downtown artists ranging from Björk's celestial utterances to Imogene Heap and Kanye West's Vocoder choirs, EVT has in many ways diffused into the musical everyday. The current prevalence of shrieks, sighs, and electronic manipulations of the voice in numerous musical acts that headline big festivals and attract millions of followers begs the question, what does EVT mean in our present musical landscape? More specifically, what might a continuation of vocal experimentation sound like, now that we have such a replete, well-known vocabulary of EVT sounds and repertoire collected between the 1960s through the late 1980s? What can we still discover in the voice after decades of seeking and codifying supposedly new sounds?

Pamela Z pursues this line of inquiry. A composer, vocalist, and media artist, Z uses old and new technologies, images, sounds, gestures, and a variety of singing styles (bel canto, pop, jazz, and some extended techniques such as clicks and non-lexical rapid chanting). In this sense, Z follows after Laurie Anderson and others within the Experimental tradition of evading tidy categorization as an artist. She

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<sup>362</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway (London: Routledge, 2004): 7–45.

primarily composes with her own voice, sampled and processed during live performance through MaxMSP. Most often, she combines pre-recorded sounds with vocal samples she creates in the moment, using motion-triggered MIDI controllers that she wears on her body to weave dense sonic textures.

One of the salient features of Z's singing is that, most of the time, it sounds undeniably operatic, yet scholars continually associate Z with the EVT tradition.<sup>363</sup> The quest to discover and catalogue the extended capabilities of the voice beyond its classical construction—exemplified by the early work of La Barbara and the EVTE—eventually ossified into an expected set of vocal sounds within classical music: ululations, multiphonics, vocal fry, and tongue clicks, to name a few. Thus, the vocal aesthetics of earlier avant-garde singers in the mid-twentieth century—such as Bethany Beardslee and Jan DeGaetani—as well as Experimental performer-composers who worked with their own voices in the 1960s and 1970s—such as Joan La Barbara and Meredith Monk—heavily informed the vocal aesthetic of EVT and the singing style preference among cohorts of post-Cage composers. Although EVT has come to include an expansive range of sounds and practices, both acoustic and electronic, its operative definition has essentially become anything that is not bel

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<sup>363</sup> Johannes H. Birringer, *Performance, Technology, and Science* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publication, 2008): 133; Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*, 208; Herman Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 177; Karantonis, "Introduction/Overture," 9; Lewis, "The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z,"; Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 216; Robert Raines, *Composition in the Digital World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 306–317; Pamela Z, "Pamela Z," in *In Her Own Words*, ed. Jennifer Kelly (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013): 211–227.

canto or what vocal pedagogue James McKinney calls modal singing—singing that involves the full adduction of the vocal folds and results in a consistent, pitch-centered tone.<sup>364</sup> Considering the social-historical development of EVT’s concept within the Experimental tradition as a departure from conservatory authority, Z’s unabashed embrace of her bel canto voice seems an odd fit. However, the cognitive dissonance created by placing Z’s bel canto voice within the EVT canon brings to light the binaristic constructions that have limited our concept of singing, which Z’s work specifically addresses—binaries between bel canto singing and EVT, between the so-called natural voice and the electronic systems that alter it, and ultimately, between an imagined normative mode of singing and its purported extensions.

Z’s work issues a significant challenge to these distinctions. Using live sampling and delays, Z fragments her classically-trained voice, highlighting the often-unnoticed constituent sounds of bel canto vocal production. Focusing on Z’s employment of electroacoustic performance to illuminate the voice’s microcosmic phenomena, I suggest that Z’s inextricable use of bodily and electronic processes does more than just extend her operatic voice: it reconfigures it entirely. Her work frames the voice not as an immutable object but as an activity—an interpenetrative system of events occurring both inside and outside the body. Thus, I posit that Z expands the field of EVT and Experimental singing beyond the aesthetic and conceptual limitations of EVT by re-thinking the ontology of the singing voice itself.

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<sup>364</sup> James McKinney, *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults*, 98–105.

Z's approach to the voice arose from a place of tension between the creative resources offered by bel canto training and the music that sparked her interest in composition. While working toward a degree in classical voice at the University of Colorado at Boulder in the late 1970s, she earned her living playing gigs as a singer-songwriter. Z felt equally at home in both a more pop-oriented vocal style and bel canto, but the artistic offerings of both the acoustic guitar-driven folk clubs and the concert hall left her unsatisfied. "I went through some confusion when I left school," Z explains, "because I couldn't figure out how to combine all these vocal styles."<sup>365</sup> During this time, she took different odd jobs in music, one of which was hosting a local radio show in Boulder called "The Afternoon Sound Alternative." While there, she encountered music by composers who identified with experimentalism. Her exposure to Experimental music was pivotal for Z, who recalls, "Toward the end of my time in Colorado, in the early 1980s, I became interested in experimental music and electronic music . . . and that was a huge turning point. . . . I heard recordings of Laurie Anderson and Pauline Oliveros, and Steve Reich, all these different people, and became really inspired by that."<sup>366</sup> Her exposure to these artists amounted to an artistic paradigm shift for Z, who reflects, "I woke up to the fact that the music that I was really interested in was not the music that I was actively singing. . . . I wanted to do more experimental music, but I was having a hard time finding my voice. . . ."<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Kathy Kennedy, "A Few Facets of Pamela Z," *Musicworks: Explorations in Sound*, Spring 2000. <http://www.pamelaz.com/musicworks.html> (accessed November 5, 2016).

<sup>366</sup> Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 217.

<sup>367</sup> Pamela Z, "Pamela Z," in *In Her Own Words*, 211–227.

Soon after experiencing this creative stirring, Z went to see the jazz-fusion band Weather Report in 1982 and witnessed Jaco Pastorius (1951–1987) sampling and looping his bass in live performance.<sup>368</sup> It was then, as she tells it, that she realized she could bring together her seemingly-disparate interests: she could create the densely-woven textures of repetitious cells inspired by her interest in experimental music; she could use this repetition and juxtaposition to explore operatic singing in a new sound context; and, she could incorporate all of these elements in a live, raw, intimate setting similar to her singer-songwriter shows. As she tells it, Z found her voice—both metaphorically and literally—when she bought her Ibanez DM1000 Digital Delay:

It was my first real exposure to sampling. I had been trying to do more experimental work, and somehow I couldn't break through with the tools that I was using. I couldn't break through my old habits, and I couldn't find a new voice to do something different. When I started working with the delays, that was totally it for me. And delays have remained the mainstay of my gear, though now I'm doing it with Max/MSP.<sup>369</sup>

Through the digital delay, she realized she did not have to invent and catalog new vocal sounds or abandon her classical training; rather, she encountered the wonderful strangeness within a style written off in much of the Experimental community as the vocal status quo. An early example of her use of technology to reconfigure the operatic voice occurs in one of her early pieces, *Bone Music* (1992), in which she uses a loop pedal to repeat a short, staccato motif sung in her high coloratura range

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<sup>368</sup> Tom Sellar, "Parts of Speech," *Theater Magazine: A publication of the Yale School of Drama/Yale Repertory Theater* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 58–65.

<sup>369</sup> Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 217.

(reminiscent of Mozart's Queen of the Night aria from *The Magic Flute*).<sup>370</sup> The loop transforms her song into a seagull-like sound through successive repetition, evocative of the amorphous continuum of human and animal sound in Trevor Wishart's *Red Bird* but accomplished solely through electronic fragmentation of operatic singing.

Experimental singers such as Z found looping and layering technologies incredibly conducive to creating compositions based solely or primarily on their vocal sound; La Barbara began creating larger-scale, more densely complex compositions as she gained access to a radio station's tape recording studio during her DAAD Fellowship in Berlin, but as live looping technologies became commercially available, composers like Z could perform complex electronic pieces live.<sup>371</sup> For Z, the delay pedal allowed her to express the voice's diversity of sound all at once rather than sequentially, making an aesthetic (and conceptual framework) in which the voice could be more readily comprehended as a complex activity between cooperative systems rather a fixed object.

As Z explored the different aesthetic possibilities offered by the delay pedal, the continuous repetition feature revealed to her the latent qualities of simple musical materials. This revelation turned Z's attention to the microcosmic within her own conservatory-trained voice. She explains, "Because my voice was constantly coming back at me in the delay loops, I began to play a lot more with [the] timbre and texture

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<sup>370</sup> For further listening: Pamela Z, *A Delay Is Better Than a Disaster* (Starkland ST-213) CD, 2004.

<sup>371</sup> Joan La Barbara, "Voice is the Original Instrument," 35–48.

[of my vocal samples].”<sup>372</sup> As she continued to explore the relationship between her voice and her delay systems, she found that “because of the looping (infinite hold) feature on the delay, I gained a keen awareness of the kinds of things that happen to our perception of small pieces of sound when we hear them repeated at length.”<sup>373</sup> Reflecting her interest in the projects of artists such as Pauline Oliveros and Steve Reich (particularly his early tape compositions), Z’s statement describes how the phenomenological effect of repetition on her perception of sound led her to think about the sound of singing on a smaller scale. Yet Z’s work differs crucially from Lucier’s famous *I Am Sitting In a Room* (1969), in that while Lucier sought to erase vocal irregularities through repetition and layering, Z intentionally highlights the small, strange constituent sounds of singing and uses them as primary materials in her sonic tapestries.

George Lewis describes Z’s enhancement of the microscopic vocal phenomena through repetition, observing, “Repetition actually brings materiality to sound on a level not of musical development or progression, but . . . on the purest tonal and timbric level.”<sup>374</sup> The constant, successive repetition made possible by the delay pedal’s looping feature drew Z’s attention to the numerous activities and miniscule sounds that coalesce into what we hear as simply, a voice: small sounds that, when highlighted as aesthetic material in themselves, become uncanny and intriguing—such as the sound of breathing, the initial contact between the vocal folds,

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<sup>372</sup> Pamela Z, “A Tool is a Tool,” in *Women, Art, and Technology*, ed. Judy Malloy, 349–361 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003): 351.

<sup>373</sup> Z, “A Tool is a Tool,” 351.

<sup>374</sup> Lewis, “The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z,” 71.

and slight timbral variations brought on by vowel changes and vibrato. In summary, Z gained a new concept of her operatic voice through compositional practices that rearranged the linear events of singing and transformed simple musical materials through repetition, looping, and layering.

This change of perspective developed into a long-standing aesthetic interest in playing with the variety of timbres and textures present in different moments during the activity of singing. Through sampling and looping small moments within operatic vocal production, Z reveals the uncanny diversity of a vocal technique developed for the express purpose of achieving a uniform sound.<sup>375</sup> Her work contrasts the fully-executed operatic voice with its own constituent elements, which brings to light the teleological way in which we hear and interpret the singing voice.

For example, in “Breathing”—a short piece from a larger work, *Carbon Song Cycle* (2013)—Z works with two primary vocal musical ideas: a syllabically-set, minor-mode melodic phrase “I was breathing,” and the actual sound of her breathing. Brief, pre-recorded speech samples, such as “I’m breathing” and “physical,” also punctuate the musical texture spun from her live-sampled loops at various intervals. As she introduces the primary musical idea of the piece, the “I am breathing” motif, Z

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<sup>375</sup> Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* (London: Forgotten Books, 2017); This book is a reprint of a 1774 treatise on bel canto, in which pedagogue Mancini writes, “. . . the worth of a voice will always depend upon its evenness of quality throughout the entire register. . . .” In the contemporary revival of bel canto technique (propagated in large part by the establishment of NATS), vocal pedagogue Richard Miller echoes Mancini’s ideas in *Solutions for Singers* (2004), stating “Laryngial stabilization is the only certain route for securing timbre consistency throughout an equalized scale”; Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers*, 57.

fragments the sample, cutting and looping various moments of the sung phrase. She repeats the motif several times, placing in juxtaposition the phrase in its entirety and her subsequent fragmentations. In the final iteration of “I was breathing,” Z isolates and loops the segment in which she initiates her vibrato on the word “was.” In this clip, two notes can be heard on the word “was.” The notes have distinct timbres, the first resembling an “oh” vowel with more mellow resonant frequencies, while the second rings out with a brilliant “ah” sound. By cutting the sound right before the full engagement of her vibrato, she makes apprehensible the presence of different pitches and colors experienced during sustained singing as simply warmth of tone.

The soundscape of the piece teems with non-linear fragments of Z’s vocal samples, busily weaving in and out of the musical texture over her quiet acoustic singing. In the midst of these activities, the operatic voice bursts upon the scene, seemingly acting of its own accord, and then leaves the texture just as abruptly. The fragmentation and persistent repetition of the minutia of vocal production (breath, onset, and vibrato) eventually imparts these small fragmented sounds with their own sonic identities; eventually, they become more familiar than the completed melodic motifs.<sup>376</sup>

This non-linear treatment of the voice relies on technological intervention, a facet of Z’s work that further reveals the voice as an active exchange between systems. Her vocal practice is inextricable from her creative practice, which in turn,

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<sup>376</sup> For further listening, video excerpts of the April 12, 2013 premiere at the Berkeley Art Museum with cellist Christina McPhee are available at: <http://www.pamelaz.com/carbonsongcycle.html> (accessed January 17, 2018).

developed around the use of an instrument comprised of both her voice and her technology. She asserts “For me, the digital processors were not ‘effects’; rather, they were components of a more complex instrument, which included my voice. . . .”<sup>377</sup>

The seamless continuum between her physiological and technological musical systems raises a more fundamental question about the nature of the voice itself: if the voice—operatic or otherwise—is not an object but, in fact, a cooperative system of activities, then the voice becomes something one does rather than something one has. Reading Z’s vocal practice as an activity operating on a continuum of interconnected acoustical phenomena complicates the trope of the natural voice, a construct that relies on an assumed ontological divide between vocal sound that is at once both human and technological.

However, overviews of Z’s work still use the term EVT as a separate source of sound-making from her technology, including her own website bio: “Her solo work combines experimental extended vocal techniques, operatic bel canto, found objects, text, and sampled concrete sounds.”<sup>378</sup> Of course, artist bios must communicate using familiar terminology in order to concisely convey the essential features of one’s work to a broad audience. Yet, her invocation of EVT raises the question of what this term describes about Z’s voice. Although Z’s vocal milieu includes sounds and techniques besides bel canto—such as pop-inspired vocals, clicks, and non-lexical murmuring—she has clarified her position on her own voice

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<sup>377</sup> Z, “A Tool is a Tool,” 360.

<sup>378</sup> Pamela Z, “Pamela Z: bios,” *Pamelaz.com*, <http://www.pamelaz.com/pzbios.html> (accessed July 17, 2018).

regarding EVT, stating, “I don’t really do ‘extended vocal techniques.’ Joan La Barbara really does extended techniques.”<sup>379</sup> Thus, Z’s use of the term EVT, especially as a separate category from her electronics, constitutes what Piekut calls an act of “grouping”: a way of discursively situating oneself into a historical tradition.<sup>380</sup> Even though the term EVT does not connote a consistent set of techniques, over the years it has become connected to musicians considered vocal innovators. In this light, Z’s use of the term in a list that includes her technology and vocal sound as separate items does not separate her voice from her technology as much as it does describe two facets of her aesthetic oeuvre: her identification with a tradition that challenges the vocal status-quo and the means by which she accomplishes her redefined approach to singing.

Therefore, despite the fact that summaries of Z’s work separate the digital components of her work (her midi controllers and MAX/MSP) from the vocal components (her so-called extended vocal techniques and bel canto singing), her work still critically disrupts the concept of an essential or natural voice that engages with technology as an distinct, external entity. For Z, neither her voice nor her electronics have primacy over the other, and both are inextricably linked within her artistic practice. By contrast, Joan La Barbara specifies in her liner notes for *Sound Paintings* (1980) and the re-release of *Voice is the Original Instrument* (2003): “All of the vocal sounds on this CD were recorded in real time with no electronic

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<sup>379</sup> Pamela Z, interview by Charissa Noble, San Francisco, CA, April 2 2016.

<sup>380</sup> Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 6–7.

manipulation and consist of both traditional and ‘extended’ vocal techniques I have developed over the past twenty years. While the sounds are layered to create various textures, they remain natural.”

However, Z disputes the idea of the natural voice by describing her own vocal instrument as a network—a “combination of her voice and her electronics” as one unit. Her compositions demonstrate this concept of voice that she articulates: her vocal sounds meld into an aggregate, in which it is not only impossible but irrelevant to discern which voice is the real Pamela—they all represent her, in that they all manifest her aesthetic envisioning of the piece, discovered through routine improvisation with her chimerical “voice machine.”<sup>381</sup> Without the assumption of a singular vocal object at the core of her layered compositions, the concept of EVT in Z’s work shifts from the assumption of voice as a singular subject of mastery to a field of discovery, exploring the complex web of related, interactive behaviors, events, and experiences that comprise vocal sound.

Z’s work further emphasizes a shift away from the binaristic construction of EVT by primarily featuring bel canto singing in her work, a technique that typically signifies musical convention rather than vocal innovation. By aligning herself with the EVT tradition, she confronts the notion that EVT is an extension of—or at odds

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<sup>381</sup> The use of the term “chimerical” refers to Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs.” Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” 7–45; or further reading about the concept of the “cyborg” as it relates to women in electronic music, see: Vágnerová, “Sirens/Cyborgs”; Bosma, “Musical Washing Machines, Composer-Performers, and Other Blurring Boundaries,” 104; Bosma, “Bodies of Evidence, Singing Cyborgs and Other Gender Issues in Electrovocal Music,” 5–17.

with—bel canto by engaging the operatic voice in an experimental process of creative investigation. Scholar Jennifer Kelly describes Z as, “more interested in process than product, and she explores subjects to inspire thought in an audience. Technology allows her to play with an audience, experiment with reaction, and progress through her own artistic creation.”<sup>382</sup> As Kelly explains, Z’s creative explorations awaken listeners to the complex phenomenological apprehension of “a voice.” Z’s aesthetic orientation offers a paradigm of EVT that accommodates a diverse array of projects involving any aspect of vocal activity, from the simple act of breathing to complex digital processing to listener experience. Thus, by reconsidering which parts of singing merit aesthetic attention, by obscuring the borders between natural and extended, and by reimagining voice as an active, open process, Z’s work gestures toward the potential of EVT to become a unique site of vocal inclusivity, empathy, and connection.

### **Concluding Thoughts: EVT, Technology, and Voice-as-Network**

As the work of many experimental vocalists came to be understood as EVT, the concept of EVT expanded to include vocal practices that investigated the foundational premises of music, sound, and perception. The exploratory impulse of experimentalism used the tools of music technology to explore new channels of aesthetic experience and cultural discourse, and in the case of Experimental-EVT artists, technology facilitated new ways of inquiring as to what a voice is and what it

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<sup>382</sup> Pamela Z, “Pamela Z,” in *In Her Own Words*, 212.

can be. Through technology, the act of singing became not only observable in unprecedented ways, but also malleable. Tape and live electronics opened the formerly closed-circuit path from breath to the listener's ear. The work of experimental vocalists who incorporated technology into their vocal practices—such as Wishart, Anderson, and Z—reveals the voice as a system comprised of interdependent phenomena, which includes listening and perception. In essence, the very different work of these three artists all demonstrate that voice is a network of sonic events, that some of these events occur outside of the body, and thus, that as technology participates in the network of vocalizing, it becomes part of voice.

The confluence of vocal and electronic experimentalism problematized the notion of voice as a fixed instrument and posited voice as a field of activity. Thus, as the category of EVT expanded to include Experimental voice-electronic work, the understanding of EVT shifted from a codifiable set of techniques to an exploratory approach to voice that confronts vocal norms and offers a different aesthetic experience of voice. Although pedagogues, composers, and scholars still inscribe particular techniques, pieces, and artists as exemplary of EVT, and bel canto's entrenchment in university music departments still ensconces it as the art-music vocal status quo, the exploratory model of EVT creates a legible alternative space for many types of vocal work and productively troubles assumptions about the voice. This expansion of the EVT category to include electronics circumvents the idea of a central or normative technique, challenges the notion of voice as a fixed musical object, and invites a plurality of vocal practices, musical backgrounds, and even

artistic disciplines to participate in negotiating the meaning of EVT, and the voice itself. Conceptualizing the voice as an interconnected system that includes internal and external phenomena significantly reworks the concept of EVT because it reconsiders the idea of voice itself. In a certain sense, EVT has become a less-specific musical label since its early postulation in the 1970s; yet what it loses in specificity as a musical category, it gains in flexibility of meaning that creates space for vocalists to define EVT for themselves as it relates to their own projects and unique voices.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL, CULTURAL, AND PEDAGOGICAL REFORMATION OF THE VOICE

### **Concluding Thoughts: Overview**

This work contains an exploration of historical reviews, pedagogical literature, critical theory, and artist interviews in an effort to trace the ways in which EVT has been defined within different social-historical moments in Euro-American classical music, and to explore the questions EVT raises about voice, gender, and power dynamics in these different contexts. Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a variety of progressive, modernist musical traditions have emerged within Euro-American classical music. These streams of musically-innovative practices have prioritized different aesthetic and conceptual aspects of sound, listening, artist identity, and audience relationship, and their differences impact the definition and practice of EVT in important ways.<sup>383</sup> In relation to vocal sound, the conservatory-oriented avant-garde prioritized virtuosic precision in pieces that incorporated EVT; thus, vocalists who aligned with this tradition emphasized the arsenal of sounds at their disposal and expanded the timbral and textural range of the bel canto trained vocal virtuoso (Chapter 2). In contrast, Experimental music emphasized authenticity over virtuosity and practice over product. The interviews with La Barbara (Appendix A), Kavasch (Appendix B), Z (Appendix C), and Marino (Appendix D) bring to light the ways in which radical changes in the musical landscape cultivated an environment in which many singers explored voice on their

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<sup>383</sup> Nyman, *Experimental Music*; Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*.

own terms, creating musical works around their personally-developed practices (Chapter 3) while still (at times) incorporating aspects of bel canto technique that suited their unique approaches to vocal sound.

### **EVT: A Conceptual Framework**

A significant recurring theme surfaced in each chapter and interview: EVT's inherently complicated relationship to bel canto technique, conservatory tradition, and so-called vocal normativity. Embedded in both the concept and practice of EVT is the assumed centrality of bel canto in Euro-American classically-oriented vocal music.<sup>384</sup> Even though pedagogical texts and compositional treatises on EVT list vocal practices, canonical lineages of practitioners, and bodies of significant repertoire, the EVT category remains almost impossible to define with precision because of the limited definition of the normative center. Thus, rather than discussing EVT as a musical category in which various vocal practices may or may not belong, a more productive way of thinking about EVT might be to conceive of it as a conceptual framework for hearing and interpreting vocal sound. Just as Cage's *4:33* requires the concert stage to frame ambient sound as music (and thus to radicalize everyday sound as a pointed critique of Euro-American listening culture), EVT requires a proverbial concert stage to be heard as an extension of bel canto and as something vocally radical. This concert stage might be a literal performance venue or simply the performer's association with conservatory tradition. Whether through a background in

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<sup>384</sup> Concept derived from Carolyn Abbate, in *Unsung Voices*.

bel canto training (La Barbara and Monk) or more generally in institutionalized music-making (Anderson and Wishart), the musicians who populate the EVT tradition orient their musical practice around Euro-American classical music, even if the reference is in the form of a conscious distancing or criticism (as in the case of some Experimental musicians). The conceptual frame of the concert stage renders sounds such as laughing, gasping, screams, spoken word, and techniques borrowed from other cultures (tongue clicks, ululations, and multiphonics) as radical musical gestures through the interpretive framework in which bel canto is expected, or if not expected, then perhaps considered as the default training of the musicians involved.<sup>385</sup>

When EVT is considered as a frame of interpretation that draws on juxtaposition with classical music, its participation in broader discourses of Euro-American classical music comes to the fore. The discourses that arose in both the case studies of Chapters 1-4 and the interviews (Appendices A-D) involve gender and hierarchical constructions and the prestige economy, aesthetic and personal identity negotiation, and the increasing sense of musical pluralism in contemporary culture, which encompasses awareness of popular and global traditions as well as developments in music technology.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 6–7; James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 59–60.

<sup>386</sup> Battersby, *Gender and Genius*; Holmes, “Singing beyond Hearing;” McClary, “Excess and Fame; Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?”; Young, “Latent Body—Plastic, Malleable, Inscribed,” 81–92.

### **EVT: Context, Meaning, and Gender in La Barbara's Interview**

An unsettling example of the intersection of gender constructions and EVT arose during La Barbara's interview. She disclosed a situation early in her career when her use of EVT became subjected to gender-based interpolation: she had been invited to sing on Don Sebesky's 1975 album, *The Rape of El Morro*, as Sebesky desired to employ a vocalist who sounded like Yma Sumac. The track that prominently featured her EVT sounds had the working title "Spanish Blood" at the time when she made the recording, but was later renamed (without her knowledge) as "The Rape of El Morro." The album's title, cover image (a picture of two naked women curled up and lying in a hole), and liner notes by Leonard Feather (which talked about how La Barbara's sounds evoke sexual acts)<sup>387</sup> made her feel that her vocalizations had been interpreted in a light that trivialized her creative work by projecting essentialized gender tropes onto both her person and her work.<sup>388</sup>

Her shock at this reductive response to her vocal sound was perhaps heightened by the stark contrast between this incident and her experience in the free jazz/experimental music scene. The same sliding tones, multiphonics, and vocal fry clicks that she used for Sebesky's album had been received very differently during her participation in Frederick Rzewski's improvisation sessions at the Free Music Store (Chapters 3 and 5).<sup>389</sup> During these improvisation sessions, she developed her techniques by imitating the instrumentalists and posing questions surrounding their

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<sup>387</sup> Don Sebesky, liner notes to *The Rape of El Morro* (CTI Records CTI 6061 S1) LP, 1975.

<sup>388</sup> McClary, "Excess and Fame," 103–111.

<sup>389</sup> I discuss Rzewski's scene and La Barbara's experience there in Chapter 3.

methods for producing certain sounds.<sup>390</sup> In these instances, her work with instrumentalists was collaborative and focused on sound experimentation, which fostered a sense of equality and belonging for La Barbara.<sup>391</sup> Thus, her EVT work in one context (the Free Music Store) was seen as part of the group's collective exploration of new sound possibilities, but in another (the Sebesky recording), it was interpolated as separate, gendered, and more "embodied" in contrast to the other musicians on the track, contradicting her self-perception as simply a musician using voice in non-lexical, sonically-experimental ways.<sup>392</sup> Thus, EVT's various culturally-contingent meanings—a component of experimental jazz improvisation and a signifier of what McClary calls "feminine excess"—collided in this formative moment of La Barbara's life. The disparity between interpretations of EVT reveals two ways of thinking about EVT, especially when it intersects with gender.<sup>393</sup> La Barbara's command of vocal sound and exceptional timbral flexibility garnered her notoriety among elite musicians, but also, on this occasion, contributed to her interpolation as an always-already sexualized Other.

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<sup>390</sup> La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

<sup>391</sup> Hanna Bächer, "The Diverse Explorations and Inspirations of Joan La Barbara: the composer discusses her favorite musical experiences with Hanna Bächer," *Red Bull Music Daily Academy*, June 30, 2016, <http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2016/06/joan-la-barbara-interview> (accessed October 29, 2018); in this interview, La Barbara recalled the same incident, but offered further insight into how this recording experience solidified her choice to pursue "new music."

<sup>392</sup> La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

<sup>393</sup> "CTI Records Discography and History, 1975-1976," *Dougpayne.com*, <http://www.dougpayne.com/ctid7576.htm#rapeofelmorro> (accessed October 17, 2018).

La Barbara's story provides the opportunity to explore how, as Carol Robertson states, "Musical performance affords us a point of entry for understanding how people achieve what they want in their own environment, how they act out their assumptions about each other, and how they challenge authority." The gender-based interpolation of La Barbara's sounds on the Sebesky album sheds light on how broader social binaries—intellectual/masculinized work versus embodied/feminized work—color the interpretation of EVT in different musical contexts. Yet because these binaries are artificial and assigned by social convention, EVT connects with both poles of the dialectical spectrum at varying intervals, depending on the context. EVT can be interpreted as representative of feminine excessive sexuality (as in La Barbara's experience with Sebesky's album), but it can also be construed as a marker of "prestige," either as a highly-controlled, intellectualized display of musical virtuosity (as discussed in Chapter 2 about Berberian and Beardslee) or an authentic expression of autodidactic creativity (as mentioned in Chapter 3 about the Experimental "maverick" or individualist identity).

### **EVT: Re-Negotiating Vocal Normativity in Experimental Music**

The interplay between aesthetic and personal identity negotiation and EVT surfaced in a discussion with Z about EVT, bel canto, and experimentalism. Identity is a significant part of experimentalism, particularly in identifying as an artist who challenges the status quo (discussed in Chapter 3).<sup>394</sup> Whereas Z fully embraces the

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<sup>394</sup> Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, 6.

label of experimentalism for her vocal practice, she expresses ambivalence toward identifying with EVT. One of her misgivings stems from her sense of its implicit ethnocentrism. But in addition to this quip with the EVT label's problematic reinforcement of bel canto normativity, Z also offered an alternative perspective on EVT, identity, and prestige that she experienced as a self-identified part of the Experimental tradition. According to Z, although EVT is still somewhat on the fringes of conservatory music-making, it has become the expected approach to voice in Experimental music through the precedent of musicians such as La Barbara, Monk, Wishart, Julius Eastman, Shelley Hirsch, and others. She corroborated this observation with an experience at the Composer-to-Composer festival at the Telluride Institute, where she attended a panel on voice that included La Barbara, John Cage, Colin Nancarrow, and several other composers discussing the problems with using vibrato (the hallmark of bel canto style) in new music.

To Z, the idea of excluding any sound possibility—including vibrato—seemed antithetical to the spirit of experimentalism. At an earlier point in the trajectory of American experimentalism, La Barbara had felt limited by the musical establishment's exclusive focus on bel canto technique and looked to experimentalism to discover new vocal possibilities; further down this path, Z encountered experimentalism as a tradition that developed its own trappings and entrenchments, among which are a hegemonic eschewal of overt bel canto style and a valorization of idiosyncratically-developed vocal practice. EVT came to epitomize the experimental, artistically-individualist identity for vocalists aligned with this

tradition; yet, in the attempt to liberate EVT and Experimental vocal practice from dependence on bel canto, EVT became simply a different kind of orthodoxy with its own prescriptive aesthetic expectations for voice.

For Z, this idea that the operatic voice was incompatible with experimentalism felt like a false dichotomy, and initially made it difficult for her to find her voice as a composer, literally and metaphorically. EVT's various shades of meaning in conservatory contexts and the Experimental community occasioned Z's own identity negotiation as an artist. Her alignment with the anti-establishment spirit of experimentalism meant resisting prescribed aesthetic approaches, even if those prescriptions came from significant figures within experimentalism. In this way, Z's discomfort with the label EVT may also stem from its authoritative status within the (ironically) established Experimental base. She does occasionally use the term EVT to describe her work on her personal website and in various artist bios, but because she primarily fragments and warps bel canto through electronic processing, Z repurposes bel canto as a new kind of vocal experimentalism. Negotiating what vocal experimentalism, EVT, and the artistically-individualistic spirit mean at a different social-historical moment than her predecessors, Z's story illustrates EVT's participation in identity negotiation in the dynamic fluctuations of musical context and value systems.

## **Vocal Pluralism: EVT, Bel Canto, and the Conservatory**

An additional prominent theme in this exploration of EVT involves this term's meaning in an increasingly de-centralized, pluralistic musical landscape. One productive aspect of EVT's situated position within Euro-American classicism is the potential to challenge the monopoly of bel canto through continued vocal diversity within conservatory oriented music-making. Although in some ways EVT's reliance on bel canto as a foil further ensconces bel canto's exclusive claims on vocal normativity within classical music, it also offers musicians the possibility to challenge bel canto's hegemony from within the system. This disruptive potential of EVT is most clearly articulated from within the context of experimentalism's critical edge. By intentionally referencing and subsequently thwarting the conventions of Euro-American classical music (including bel canto singing), EVT brings to light the entrenched expectation of bel canto and exposes the limitations placed on creative vocal work by the dominance of a single technique in the conservatory.

EVT can therefore be positively re-imagined as an initial foray into transforming the way that we understand and practice vocalization in classical music. I use the word "initial" because the term EVT continues to remind us that these practices extend from a central practice, which in conservatory tradition is (at present) almost exclusively bel canto technique. However, composer Jesse Marino discussed in her interview (Appendix D) that, for her, the Euro-American classical tradition is just one of many traditions populating the cultural landscape, and specifically in the context of vocal practice, bel canto seems less like a central aesthetic reference point

and more like just another vocal option (Appendix D).<sup>395</sup> This pluralistic approach to music that Marino expressed glimpses a potential shift in the conservatory vocal paradigm away from bel canto dominance and toward a more explorative, diverse approach.

Marino's inclusive, flexible view of musical and vocal tradition rests on the precedent of her predecessors, featured in Appendices A-C. Each of these musicians pushed the boundaries of traditional modes of composition, performance, and vocal style in important ways. Artistically encumbered by bel canto's emphasis on vocal uniformity, Joan La Barbara cultivated her own approach to vocal sound, guided by the bel canto value of sustainable vocal sound free of physical tension.<sup>396</sup>

Conversely, Deborah Kavasch received bel canto training after she had already explored multiple approaches to vocal sound. Bel canto opened new vocal possibilities for Kavasch as a performer and composer (as discussed in Appendix B), but because she came to bel canto as a composer already steeped in the nontraditional culture of UCSD's Experimental music department, bel canto remained simply one of many musical options at her creative disposal.<sup>397</sup> Both Kavasch and La Barbara affirm bel canto's utility in providing a systematic, linear understanding of vocal sound production while concurrently championing vocal plurality and the maintenance personal intuition as a central point of reference. It is important to note that these two composers differ in the extent of their bel canto use: Kavasch uses bel

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<sup>395</sup> Jessie Marino, interview by Charissa Noble, June 30, 2018.

<sup>396</sup> La Barbara, interview by Charissa Noble, August 21, 2017.

<sup>397</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, August 12, 2018.

canto frequently alongside her extensive EVT repertoire of sound, perhaps because the context in which she received bel canto training did not present bel canto as exclusive or absolute; conversely, La Barbara primarily works within her own constructed vocal milieu, which most likely connects to the creative limitations associated with bel canto during her early musical training. La Barbara still utilizes the bodily-awareness that bel canto requires, but finds vocal work outside of bel canto sound more artistically stimulating.

However, both of these composers' interviews articulated a similar endorsement of a more ecumenical concept of vocal technique, which has perhaps been realized in the hybridized vocal aesthetic and creative fluidity of Pamela Z and the inclusive ideas about voice characterized by the emergent generation of composers such as Marino. The concept of pluralized vocal learning and expression in EVT practice not only decentralizes bel canto; it also poses a challenge to the idea of any central or normative vocal practice. If voice is considered an activity that involves interconnected sonic (and perceptual) phenomena, the idea of an inherently natural mode of vocal production becomes less plausible.

### **Vocal Pluralism: EVT and Electronics**

The flourishing of electronic music has been an important factor in the erosion of vocal normativity and the increase in vocal plurality. As discussed in Chapter 4 and Z's interview (Appendix C), composing with voice and electronics indelibly changes the way that one thinks about voice, the activity of singing, and vocal

aesthetics. Whether dealing with magnetic tape or Max/MSP, the ability of technology to expose the previously imperceptible constituent sounds of the voice problematizes the notion of voice as a unified object that produces a particular sound. In fact, the integration of electronic and vocal processes poses an alternative to the voice-as-instrument notion with the concept of voice as a programmable synthesizer. EVT demonstrates that many vocal sounds (such as ululations, multiphonics, or tongue clicks) do not actually extend from bel canto technique, but rather arise from completely different engagements of vocal physiology and physically-adjacent acoustical phenomena; thus, if vocal production is compared to the construction of synthesized sounds, then we might have a more advantageous conceptual model for engaging the idea of multiple, equally-valid sound paths yielding a wide range of vocal results.

The integration of electronic processes and vocal processes in the work of composers such as Wishart, Anderson, and Z occasions a different way of conceptualizing the voice, not just from the perspective of the sound producer but also from the vantage point of the listener. EVT had already proposed alternative means of sound-making, and electronic involvement in avant-garde; Experimental vocal work continued the project of vocal exploration initially encompassed by EVT. With the exposure to vocal sound fragmented into its constituent elements (as in Z's music), warped into multivalent identity expressions (as in Anderson's music), or joined along a continuum of sound with mechanical and animal sounds (as in

Wishart's music), the idea of normative vocal sound has changed, evolving with the increasingly diverse vocal soundscape.

An interesting question raised by the coalescence of electronic vocal experimental work into the EVT category is the determination of where EVT occurs: does the supposed extension have to occur inside the singer's body to be considered a vocal technique? Many musicians associated with the EVT category have included significant electronic intervention in their singing practice, either intermittently or throughout their musical corpus: Pamela Z frequently loops, delays, and fragments her voice; Laurie Anderson granulates and re-pitches her voice; Trevor Wishart samples, splices, and streamlines his voice with animal and industrial sounds; and even Joan La Barbara (who has made specific points in numerous CD liner notes that all of her sounds are produced acoustically) experimented with the Buchla's different effects on her vocal sound in an early piece, *Autumn Signal* (1974). Since the EVT label has been so frequently applied to musicians who experiment with vocal sound primarily through electronic means, the question of whether the extension of vocal technique must occur within the body serves more of a rhetorical purpose, leading to larger questions about the ontology of the voice. What is a voice? Where does voice begin and end? What actions might be considered part of the process of vocal production? The confluence of EVT and electronic music suggests these lines of inquiry that further complicate notions of voice and the body.

## Radical Inclusivity: A Call for Collective Reformation

EVT's divergent definitions, aesthetic affiliations, cultural interpretations, and identity negotiation since the 1960s expose the limited way in which we have approached the voice, especially in the world of Euro-American classical music. Bel canto has allowed voices to accomplish incredible feats not possible using other vocal approaches. Yet its dominance within the conservatory and its exclusive claims on vocal health have severely limited the development of vocal pedagogy and our concept of what sound activities might be considered part of vocal production. Bel canto's ubiquity is demonstrated by Kavasch's recollection of her experience at the 1976 National Association for Teachers of Singing conference in which participants expressed alarm over the EVTE's vocal techniques despite the ensemble's work at the Veterans' Affairs hospital and collaboration with renowned pedagogue John Large.<sup>398</sup>

However, as Marino disclosed in her interview (Appendix D), even though her intended performers all primarily practiced bel canto style singing when she composed for UCSD's seminar project *The Voice Machine*, bel canto hardly felt normative or expected for her; like many Americans, she had been exposed to symphonic instruments in her earlier school music programs, but did not grow up attending operas or classical voice recitals. Marino's experience indicates that bel canto may not be experienced culturally by many musicians today as the vocal norm, but that conservatory-modeled university music programs continue to train voice

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<sup>398</sup> Kavasch, interview by Charissa Noble, February 28, 2018.

students in primarily, if not exclusively, bel canto technique.<sup>399</sup> As a result, vocalists are provided with limited resources with which to explore inventive, new approaches to their musical practice.

Although EVT has productively complicated bel canto, I suggest that its endurance in classical music discourse springs from the conservatory-sustained normativity of bel canto, and confirms a need for more robust exchange between the disciplines of vocal pedagogy, musicology, and cultural theory. By bringing these respective knowledge fields into conversation, the vocal normativity that has been perpetuated by bel canto's dominance can be challenged both in theory and practice. Considering that voice bears a particularly close relationship to the body, broader social orthodoxies (such as gender norms and intellectual hierarchies) are frequently reproduced in vocal training and performance; however, if music is a space in which we express and negotiate culture, then such a deconstructive (and re-constructive) project bears implications beyond conservatory walls. As we decouple vocal training and bel canto monopolization within classical music education and performance, we create a hospitable environment for unique physiologies and different abilities to emerge as new creative forces in classical music. Moreover, we symbolically affirm a social paradigm of a more truly inclusive, vibrant society in which we embrace the unrepeatable remarkability of persons.

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<sup>399</sup> Juniper Hill, "The Influence of Conservatory Folk Music Programmes: The Sibelius Academy in Comparative Context," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18, no. 2 (November 2009): 207–241.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW WITH JOAN LA BARBARA

CN: So, I think I told you a little bit about what my project is. I'm investigating where the term "extended vocal techniques" started to pop-up and the different ways in which it's been applied, because very radically different musical contexts have still kind of drawn upon that term, or categorized [music] according to that term. I'm trying to disentangle it [the term] and define it in different ways. And, as you are probably very aware, you're a really big part of the development of this genre. So, I'm wondering we could maybe start by just thinking back to your early time here [in New York City] in the late 1960s and 1970s, and where—and when—you first started encountering this term.

JLB: Well, for instance, when I heard recordings of Cathy Berberian. I guess historically, we sort of trace extended vocal techniques back to her, even though she eschewed the term.

CN: She wanted to call it the "New Vocality," I recall . . .

JLB: She didn't want to be included in this group. What Berio used of her voice, it was mostly exaggerated natural sounds: laughing, coughing, gasping, that sort of thing. She didn't really get into the territory of "noise." And I think a lot of the things that I'm known for would be more associated with "noise," such as the inhaled glottal click, which is definitely a noise thing: it's similar to the vocal fry but the inhaled variation. You don't inhale very much—you're almost not breathing—but you can

actually slow down the clicks, whereas with the fry, it's more or less a steady subtone noise factor.

But there's a lot of influence from other people; I would say from jazz singers as well, who weren't necessarily doing what we would refer to now as "extended techniques," but they were imitating instruments: scat singing, not unlike Louis Armstrong's vocal imitation of the trumpet. That's really fascinating to me, and always has been. When I started in this territory, I was basically imitating the sounds of instruments, playing with one instrument at a time. I would make long, sustained tones, trying to change my vocal tract so that the resonances would more clearly imitate a particular instrument. Then from there, I would imitate other kinds of sounds, whether it was birds or animals or even singers from other cultures. So, a lot of my initial work was imitation: imitation of what I was hearing, and then learning things like overtone focusing. But I learned it all by experiment, rather than sort of picking up a technique. I did do a couple of classes with Sainkho Namtchylak. What was astonishing to me about her method of throat singing was how much pressure it put on the physical instrument. And what I have always been about is lack of pressure. If I do a multiphonic, what I'm doing—as it's been explained to me—is activating the false vocal folds to sympathetically vibrate with the true vocal cords, and you do that with your brain, by engaging the vocal instrument through cognitive engagement. You're not doing it with this kind of enforced physicality. So what I saw Sainkho Namtchylak doing was actually a little bit frightening to me. I tried it, just

out of curiosity, but it's not a technique that I would want to investigate because I'm doing so many other kinds of techniques.

Another technique I had learned through experimentation that I had heard others do was what I think people generally refer to as a "whistle stop." It's where you tighten the vocal cords and then force air through, so you sing a very, very high pitch. It's something that I heard Ed Harkins do, many years ago.<sup>400</sup> But Ed of course was focused more on being a trumpet player, and again, it was a technique that I felt was very extreme for the vocal apparatus, and so I chose not to do this.

My journey into the territory of extended vocal techniques was very much experimental; it was just trying things out, reacting to different things, recording a lot. The first time I made a multiphonic, Jerry—Jerome Rothenberg, who is a poet—was reading from some writings of Milarepa.<sup>401</sup> And, the sound that came out of me was this wonderful low, growly sound, which I liked. So then I had to figure out how to replicate it. Instead of having a teacher show me techniques, my voice was teaching me. I would generate these sounds, and then, using my classical technique, figure out how I made them.

CN: I was actually going to ask you about your classical technique, because you're conservatory-trained, and a lot of what you were saying sounds very much like the discourse of vocal health used in bel canto training. I'm also a classical-trained singer, so I'm recognizing these principles, such as taking care of your instrument and

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<sup>400</sup> Edwin Harkins was one of the founding members of the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble at UCSD, where he is currently an emeritus faculty member.

<sup>401</sup> Milarepa was a Tibetan yogi and poet, 1052-1135.

making sure that you can work with it sustainably. I'm wondering about the idea of a lack of tension or pressure that you had mentioned a few times. Is that one of the main things that you retained from your classical training? Or were there other aspects of classical singing that you feel like you retained as you explored these new vocal territories?

JLB: One of the main things I kept is the act of warming up. I do a physical warm up, and it's all about relaxing the tension in your neck and your shoulders. Then I do a series of tongue exercises, because the back of the tongue is connected to the vocal folds, and so when you gently stretch the tongue, it's like exercising a muscle: you're automatically bringing blood up to that area. And I think it's what has allowed me to stay singing actively as long as I have. You know, my pitch range has changed, it's lowered a little bit. But I think that's a natural effect of growing older—everything changes. But I think for the health of the instrument, that's something that has helped. And I hear other singers, like Diamanda Galás, who has had some vocal problems even though she was classically trained. But I think she tended not to worry about whether she was going to be able to sing more traditional kinds of music; I think she was just out there, doing her own thing, which was great. Demetrio Stratos was also very extreme with his voice, and not worried at all about what repertoire he would be able to sing in the future. And unfortunately he didn't last very long into his future.

When you listen to his recordings (or at least what happens to me when I listen to recordings and hear somebody singing), my instrument reacts. And so when I

heard recordings of him singing, or when I heard him singing live (I knew him), I could feel what he was doing to his instrument, which was very extreme.

So, to sum it up, I use what I learned in classical training to produce sounds without endangering my voice. And I teach, as you know. When I do workshops, and people want to learn as much about extended vocal techniques in the shortest span of time, what I try to do is emphasize relaxation. I always give the vocal warm-up, and then I go through a certain number of techniques that I can easily teach: resonance-focusing (very specifically, placing your voice in a particular space in the head), overtone focusing, the inhale glottal click, and inhaled singing (which is very easy). It's funny, typically men have the most difficulty with it . . .

CN: With the ingressive singing?

JLB: With the ingressive singing. Because they'll tend to sing in whatever their natural voice is, which is low. So if I'm singing low and I inhale, I get a click. And so I say, okay, use your falsetto. And it's then it becomes easy for them because they're not putting pressure on their instrument. With the ingressive singing—and you probably know this—I'll tell students that you draw the breath and the sound along the roof of your mouth. If you want to do the glottal click, you're drawing the air, the pitch, whatever, along the base, you know, the surface of the tongue toward the back of the throat.

It's dropping the tongue and engaging the vocal cords, giving them just enough energy to make them react.

CN: I want to return to your mention of how jazz singers explored these kinds of vocal techniques early on. I remember reading in your interview with Libby van Cleve that you were frequenting the Free Music Store and that Rzewski was doing these analyses after the group improvisation sessions, saying, “Okay, what were we doing here? Let’s talk about it.”<sup>402</sup> And you mentioned that this experience was really formative for you in developing your techniques. So, I want to know what was it like to be there as primarily a classical singer?

JLB: Yeah, when I sort of “ran away” from classical music, I went into jazz. I started singing jazz standards. There was a place at Trinity Church, down at Wall Street, and they used to do noon time concerts for the workers down there. They would do a lot of jazz, and so I got to do a lot of concerts there. And I worked with some really wonderful musicians, doing standards but also basically learning to improvise. So, when would this have been? Sometime between 1970 and 1972.

CN: Ok, yeah.

JLB: I was contacted by a jazz composer-arranger Don Sebesky. And he was recording an album for CTI, which was a jazz label.<sup>403</sup> Creed Taylor was the owner of the label. He had a tune that he had recorded already with the Brecker Brothers, and he was looking for Yma Sumac to do some sort of vocal.<sup>404</sup> He couldn’t find her, but somehow he connected with me. So I went out to this recording studio in New Jersey.

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<sup>402</sup>Joan La Barbara, interview by Libby van Cleve,, *Yale Oral History of American Music Project*, February 17, 1998.

<sup>403</sup> CTI, or Creed Taylor Incorporated, also produced albums by Astrud Gilberto, Stan Getz, and others in bossa nova, jazz, and “exotica.”

<sup>404</sup> Yma Sumac was a Peruvian-American coloratura soprano prominent in the “exotica” genre (which was related to jazz), 1923-2008.

The tune was called "Spanish Blood." I improvised over it, and he thought it was great. Then I went off on tour with Steve Reich, so this must have been close to 1971. When I came back, the album was out, and the name of the tune had been changed to "The Rape of El Morro." The liner notes, by Leonard Feather, who was a jazz critic, basically only discussed the perceived sexual qualities of this vocal treatment.

Now, I was very young, I was 21, 20 . . . something like that. And, in a way, it so shocked me, because all I was doing, as far as I was concerned, was improvising. I was using my instrument, I was using the techniques that I had discovered, and I was reacting to the energy of this jazz tune. I was horribly offended. I did do some more jazz recordings with Hubert Laws and Jim Hall.<sup>405</sup> Anyway, it just seemed exploitative to me.

Some singers might have had no problem selling the sexuality/sensuality of what she was doing vocally. I had a problem. I was using these kinds of vocal sounds, in my opinion, as music. And yes, when I started doing my solo concerts, I would have people in the audience start to giggle, because some of the sounds that I was doing were obviously associated with non-musical sounds.

CN: Yes, I see what you mean. They have an indexical quality.

JLB: Yes. So, there was awhile where I just had to keep insisting, that I was using this vocabulary as music. I was developing a kind of orchestra of voices. I had categories

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<sup>405</sup> Other jazz recordings La Barbara had done with composer/arranger Don Sebesky included: the Jim Hall album *Commitment* on the "Lament for a Fallen Matador" track, and the Hubert Laws album *My Time Will Come* on the "Malaguena" track.

of sounds: there were string-like sounds, percussion-like sounds, reed sounds, woodwind sounds, and brass sounds, using voice to explore all of this territory. Ultimately, I became a composer because with the things that I was doing, I felt they would not be heard and given their rightful place in a musical context without my saying, “Okay, I’m a composer. I’m not *just* an improviser.” The categorization is just so infuriating because improvisation is composition. It’s real-time composition! It’s certainly what Bach did, as well as many of the great virtuoso instrumentalists: they were improvising and creating.

CN: How did you meet up with the Free Music Store people? How did you get exposed to that?

JLB: When I started to improvise and work with instrumentalists, I met Garrett List, who was one of the first people I worked with. He was a trombone player and composer, and a friend of Fred Rzewski. It was a long time ago, but that would be the most honest answer I can give to that question. I also knew Alvin Curran. I was concertizing with Garrett, I was concertizing with Alvin Curran, but Alvin was back and forth between New Haven, New York, and Italy, and later on, California. I think it was more Garrett List and Fred Rzewski who would have brought me to the Free Music Store, and perhaps Michael Sahl.

CN: Yes, I also saw that he had connected you with recording people for that Japanese perfume commercial.

JLB: Yes. Michael was Judy Collins’ music director. And he was also a composer. But he was making a living with Judy Collins and doing commercials. So, because I

knew Michael, and he started using me for commercials, when Steve Reich was looking for somebody who could imitate the sound of instruments, Michael recommended me. So that's that connection. I think Michael also would have been a connection to the Free Music Store at that point in time.

CN: I wanted to return again to the concept of extended vocal techniques: I remembered in another one of your interviews you were talking about one of the times you were on tour with Steve Reich, and you were in England talking with Michael Nyman about the experimental tradition.<sup>406</sup> After that, you called John Rockwell and said, "I want to be called . . ."

JLB: . . . an experimental musician, experimental vocalist.

CN: So, had you heard somebody else use the term "extended vocal techniques" to describe anyone's work before that time when you said you wanted to be an experimental vocalist, or did that come along after?

JLB: I think it came along after. Because when I was talking with Michael about his book *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, I said, "Well really what I'm doing is I'm using the voice as an instrument, and I think of myself as an experimental vocalist. So, I was mostly using the term "experimental." The problem with that, however, arose was when I started doing concerts of my original music. Tom Johnson was reviewing for the Village Voice at the time, and he looked at what I was doing and said, "Oh, well these are experiments," as opposed to, "Oh, this is music." The

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<sup>406</sup> Michael Nyman is a UK composer who wrote *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (1974).

whole term, “experimental music”: some people like the term, some people can’t stand the term. But I still think of myself as “experimental.”

...

As far as “extended vocal techniques,” I know that at UCSD there was the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble. In London, there was a group called Electric Phoenix. So, those two quartets were part of that category. There were a lot of composers who were writing for them, so obviously, the UCSD people were already using the term. And, they had their lexicon. I mean, the whole idea that they were photographing the vocal cords and trying to describe what they were doing; it’s such a marvelous document about exactly what it is we’re doing when we make these sounds, because a lot of us just do it.

You know, we don’t think about what it is that we’re doing or how we get there, we just know we’ve developed a certain technique and note to ourselves, “This feels like this, and this feels like that, and if I do too much of this it makes me cough.” It’s very practical. With them [the EVTE], they were really getting into the voice’s inner-workings and trying to identify these things. Actually, it’s through them that I learned about the false vocal folds.

CN: Oh, did you work with them?

JLB: I went out there. It’s interesting, Roger Reynolds asked me to relocate from New York and join the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble. And I said, “No Roger, I’m perfectly happy in New York.” I did come to San Diego, however, and I performed several concerts there, I met them, I worked with them, and I liked them a

lot. I was not about to relocate out there, but I really appreciated what they were doing. Debbie Kavasch was a composer, Phil and Ed were more spontaneous improvisers, and Linda was more of a classically-trained singer, so it was an interesting mix of people. And I think with Electric Phoenix, there may have been one member of the ensemble who was a composer, but the rest of them were basically singers.

CN: What I find really interesting about the difference between the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble or Electric Phoenix and what *you* do is that their music has a madrigalism type of application for extended techniques, using the techniques as text painting. But it seems to me that you frequently don't use text, or if you do, you use the text in more of an abstract way.

JLB: A lot of what I did was use parts of words, or made-up language, or just the shape of a word; I don't know if it came from Cage, or if Cage used that aspect of what I was interested in, but the shaping of words and seeing what happens when you're focusing more on the shape of the word than the meaning. . . . Dissecting words in a way that is almost Joyce-ian.<sup>407</sup> I really sought to use language in that way.

Another thing, I think the repertoire that the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble and the Electric Phoenix commissioned from the composers who were writing for them tended to use extended vocal techniques to imply madness. I mean, even before the EVTE, there were *Eight Songs for a Mad King*.

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<sup>407</sup> La Barbara is referring to author James Joyce.

Interestingly enough, I had a student a couple of years ago, a composition student who was focused on electronics, but he was very much into noise, and he came to study with me because of the noise aspect. But, this student was referencing very specific compositions that I had sung as well as some of my own work, and it was noise element that he was interested in. So, you know, people have different reasons for looking into extended vocal techniques.

CN: Yes, absolutely. I'm curious about what you had said earlier—and I've heard you mention this before too, in some of the published literature—that you felt like you ran away from classical music when you were younger. I was really touched by your story about when you called the summer opera program saying, "I can't sing above a high G!" And I was struck by the response: they said—

JLB: — "we'll fix it"—

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CN: I'm wondering if that discourse of "fixing," that focus on what not to do with the voice, speaks to your experience with classical training and why you ran away? Was that anywhere in your motivation?

JLB: It was very complicated. What frustrated me greatly in singing classical music was that, the more you get into it, the more you're learning centers on how things were done hundreds of years ago. And the closer you can get to the way that things were done then—hundreds of years ago—the better everyone's going to like it. And, so I was learning a tradition, and I respect the tradition, but I felt that I wanted to do more with my instrument. I didn't feel that there was a sufficient amount of respect,

at that point in time, for any kind of stepping outside the boundaries. I felt, in the rigidity of what I was learning in bel canto, that there was not sufficient room to accept the possibility of other kinds of sounds. In the meantime, there were composers using the voice differently; there was a choral album that has some choral works by Earle Brown, Pauline Oliveros, and possibly Alvin Lucier. Nothing really far-out, but they incorporated things like breathing, whispering, similar things. But when you think back into music history, bel canto came about at a certain point of time. There was certainly singing before that.

CN: Yes, absolutely.

JLB: And, we don't know exactly what it was like, but I would guess that there was a broader range of acceptable vocal sounds in early music, based on what the reconstructed early music instruments sound like. There's a kind of grittier quality to it. So my guess is that there might have been a kind of grittier vocal sound at that time, or at least a possibility of grittier sound in early classical technique.

Along those lines, I actually worked with an opera conductor, Lisa Stumpfögger, I guess it was about ten years ago, and she had done a KlangKunstBuehne workshop with me at the University of the Arts in Berlin. She brought me to Graz, Austria where she was directing Mozart's *Idomeneo*. And she wanted me to coach the chorus because she wanted them to make more "emotive" sounds. (I mean, we could talk for hours about that kind of thing.) But, basically, I went there, I taught the chorus, but their chorus master was East German and not at all pleased with my ideas. So, I'm teaching them vocal fry and growling, and really

visceral sounds. Then the music director came, a British conductor, Paul Goodwin. He loved it. So when they did the premiere of this production, the chorus was doing all of these unusual sounds. But as soon as he went away and another conductor came in, the chorus master took over again and said, “Just get rid of that stuff.”

So, just generally dealing with classical tradition had a lot to do with the reason that I ran away. It’s not that my voice teacher, Marian Szekely-Freschl, was not supportive. She actually said to me, “You have to work with living composers, because you have to teach them how to write for the voice; they really don’t understand how to write for the voice.” So she was very supportive of contemporary music. She might even have been supportive of the extended direction, or the experimental direction that I was going in. But I didn’t want to take the chance that she would be unsupportive, so I moved toward what I felt was a better direction for me. I wanted to work with living composers. I wanted to have a dialogue. I wanted to discover things, I wanted to use the voice in unusual ways, and contribute not just the instrument that I’ve got but also my mind and my willingness to work *with* composers and develop new ideas.

CN: The statement your teacher had made seems like it was really important to you—this idea of working with composers to help them to learn how to write for an instrument that they often times, don’t write idiomatically. What’s interesting to me is that then, it seems like you just took up the gauntlet and said, “Alright, maybe I’ll just be the composer.”

I love that your work asks, “what new sounds can we hear from an instrument that hasn’t been explored very much [in classical singing]?” It does seem that there have been extended techniques on instruments for so long, and yet it seems like the voice was a little bit late in the game, in terms of thinking of vocal sound in that way, as “extended” or “experimental.”

JLB: Sure, as far as classical music is concerned. But if we look at other cultures, there are the Inuit throat singers, there are the Tuvan throat singers, there’s Ba’Aka singing, there are Swedish cow-callers, there’s Peking opera. The uses of the voice are many and varied.

And where we locate the voice, what we focus on with the voice, varies from culture to culture. So, when we talk about “extended” vocal techniques, we’re talking about extended beyond bel canto.

CN: Absolutely. It’s very culturally situated.

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CN: Another thing that I wanted to ask you about was that year when you were at the Holland Festival and Cathy Berberian gave that interview that you used for “Cathing.” I was curious if you remembered seeing the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble there?

JLB: I don’t remember. They had a whole focus on the voice that year.

CN: Was it a very big festival?

JLB: Oh yeah. And the Holland Festival has gone on for many years. I was there presenting my own music.

CN: So, I remember you had said earlier that the way you came to understand and use your voice sprung from a collection of different experiences for you: first, jazz and imitating instruments, and then, wanting to use your voice instrumentally, and later, you heard recordings of global music traditions. I'm wondering if any of the avant-garde singers in the 1960s contributed to your understanding of the voice. I recall reading that you were not aware of Cathy Berberian's work when you were studying music at University?

JLB: Well, actually, I was. I heard recordings of her when I was at Syracuse. And so, probably the earliest that had heard a recording would have been 1966.

CN: Oh, okay. Okay. So you were studying at Syracuse when you heard her?

JLB: Yes, and Phyllis Bryn-Julson was at Syracuse at the same time I was there. She was a year or so ahead of me. And she certainly had been known for doing avant-garde music. Her work with Gunther Schuller really brought her to the forefront. I always envied her perfect pitch, because she could do these outrageously difficult scores that would take me months to learn and memorize, which was the only way I could do them. But she could just look at them; maybe not just look at them, but that music was definitely easier for her. But really, Phyllis wasn't doing what I would call "extended techniques": she was doing traditionally-oriented contemporary music.

CN: Right. And I think that I read that you had perceived a notable difference between an "experimental" and "avant-garde" singer. Do you recall more thoughts about that insight and the differences that you saw between "avant-garde singers" and what you were doing?

JLB: Well, I think avant-garde—the whole avant-garde tradition—comes out of the kind of traditional Western musical trajectory. So, you get to, I guess modernist/post-modernist. And all of that is avant-garde. You know, if you think of Varèse, you think of avant-garde. But it's a term that now has no relevance. I mean, at this point in time, commercial music is using all the terms. They've got new music, they've got avant-garde, they've got experimental. And none of these things, if you listen to those genres and the people who are using those terms, have any reference to where they were, purportedly, in the stream of Western classical music. Now, it's just a term. And so we use this term, and it sounds good, and someone might say, "Okay, I'm that." The delineation between avant-garde vocalists and an experimental vocalist, in my opinion, is that the experimental vocalist is willing to go further: to make sounds that were outside—way outside—the boundaries of the tradition, to really engage in noise. So I think noise is a big factor in experimental music and extended techniques. Noise is not something that an avant-garde singer would participate in, necessarily. When Cage wrote *Aria* for Cathy Berberian and told her to choose ten different vocal styles. Her choices, are, in a way, old-fashioned; the furthest "out there" that she gets are baby sounds.

CN: Right, it's all modal singing, basically.

JLB: Yes. And then, the noise things that she did were finger-snapping or tongue clucks, or gasping . . . I think she did some yelling as well. When I do that piece, I'm doing it predominantly with extended techniques. Because I think, why not? Why not give that version of what it could be?

It does, however, make it a little bit difficult to understand the languages, like if you're doing Russian on inhaled glottal clicks, for example. Pretty hard to get it.

But it doesn't matter, because sound and noise are a lot of what *Aria* is about: it's about the shapes and the punctuation of those black boxes, the noise things, those "unmusical" uses of the voice. Which, as an aside, I think is one of the most extraordinary things that you have in print—Cage saying that anything could be "unmusical"!

CN: [Laughs] I know! I remember seeing that, and I thought, "Oh that's seems out of character for Cage!"

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CN: So, I wanted to also ask you about reception of your work among bel canto singers, particularly those working in primarily Euro-American classical music. I've heard some singers object to the term EVT because they're worried about losing credibility as a classical singer, or they find it ethnocentric . . .

JLB: You know, people always worry about whether new sounds are going to harm their voices. But I have never encountered any conflict between my classical training and what I do now. I sometimes do workshops and people ask, "Oh, will this hurt my voice?" And I respond, "No, I've been doing this for years, and there are ways to make these sounds without putting pressure on the instrument."

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH KAVASCH

CN: Ok, let's begin! Regarding the questions, I want to let you know that they are ethnographic in nature. Specifically what I mean is that, while I have theories based on my research over the last couple of years, I wasn't there during the 1970s to personally experience the cultural context in which EVT came together as a concept/repertoire/musical category, so I am interested in hearing about your personal encounters with EVT during your time with the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble. As far as I can find, before the group that you and others formed at CME, there aren't any published sources, or even reviews or concert ephemera that use the term "extended vocal techniques" before your ensemble formed. Where had you and/or the other founding members of EVTE heard that term? Or did you come upon the term yourselves and later find other people using the term?

DK: Well, when I came to UC San Diego in 1973, I discovered that the Center for Music Experiment had been set up the previous year as the Project for Music Experiment, funded by Ford and Rockefeller Foundation grants, and so new that it wasn't in the catalog I had looked at when applying to UCSD. They had many visiting artists/residencies of various lengths and resident fellows in areas such as instrumental and vocal performance, dance, computer and electronic music. There had been some experimentation in 1972 in what I came to know the next year, my first year there, as "extended vocal techniques" by resident fellows and students including a masters student named Bonnie Barnett, who eventually wrote a master's

thesis, Aspects of Vocal multiphonics. I did not meet her in 1973 as she was no longer on campus, must have finished her degree coursework by then, thesis later, but I think we stayed with her in San Francisco a few years later when attending a NATS conference with John Large.

In 1973 the Extended Vocal Techniques Group (in the following year “Group” became “Ensemble”) was officially formed at CME as an ORU (organized research unit) and met three days a week for one and a half hour sessions. I’m not sure when the term extended vocal techniques was first used, perhaps the year before. I just know we were using it when I got there.

In 1974 we created a lexicon which attempted to label sounds with linguistic terminology that became quite cumbersome, so we recorded a second lexicon (I have it now on CD) organized a different way from the first with descriptive rather than linguistic names (compare “lip/finger trill” to “digito bilabial trill”), for example.

CN: Excellent. Now, when did you start noticing more people using the term "extended vocal techniques"? Did you feel that there was a relatively uniform understanding of what that term meant, or did you feel it was pretty flexible in meaning? Were you ever surprised at a particular author/critic's application of that term to a particular artist, piece, or practice?

DK: Joan La Barbara came for a visit in one of the early years that EVTE was in residence and she also used the term extended vocal techniques if I recall correctly. I was rather surprised that her sounds were very similar to ours, since she was working completely independently from us on the east coast, although I’m not sure if she used

any of the same terminology for the individual sounds. Julius Eastman, who had performed and recorded Peter Maxwell Davies *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, also visited us at the CME. I think he probably talked about his sounds similarly to how we did.

CN: That's so interesting. I'm wondering about other intersections as well: was your ensemble inspired by anyone else doing similar work at the time, like Alvin Lucier's ensemble at Brandeis in the 60s? Or did you encounter people doing similar work?

DK: As far as I was aware, we were influenced only by recordings that had come out with music from Tibetan monks chanting in octaves with a loud overtone, Mongolian overtone singers, Bulgarian women doing ululations, rock singers creating multiphonic sounds (Janis Joplin), Ella Fitzgerald singing choruses in "octaves" like the Tibetan chant technique (to imitate the sound of the bass), and ourselves coming up with our own unique sounds. It was only after the first couple of years that people like Joan and Julius came through, and we had also heard recordings of Roy Hart.

When I met with Terry Edwards in 1996 on a trip to London, he mentioned that the Electric Phoenix was actually influenced by the EVTE after hearing us perform at a new music event/festival in the late 1970s that they also attended. There is a brief history of them that refers to us on their website, although there are a few discrepancies with dates in the article regarding how we came together.<sup>408</sup>

CN: Oh yes, I came across that history and I was wondering what you thought of it! I was also wondering if the EVTE had any overlap with Kenneth Gaburo's work at

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<sup>408</sup> Kavasch refers to the Electric Phoenix's website, which can be found at: <http://www.electricphoenix.darylrunswick.net/about/history>

UCSD. Did you ever have classes with him or work with his ensemble, etc.? What was your impression of the main similarities and differences between your work and the work that Gaburo's group did?

CN: Ken Gaburo taught a course called “Compositional Linguistics of Musical Theatre” that I took my first year there (1973–4). My main memory from that experience was experimenting with vocal clusters that I eventually used in my piece, *The Owl and the Pussycat* in the “his nose” section, also with phase music. I’m not sure what ensemble of Gaburo’s you are talking about, unless it was the dancers he worked with? I’m not aware of a vocal group he had unless it was just the vocal exercises we occasionally did in that class. Maybe he had a group in 1972, but not after I was there in 1973–78.

CN: Oh, he had an ensemble called New Music Choral Ensemble. I was just curious if your two groups had ever had any overlapping activities or shared members. I was also curious about how you approached your research as a group. Did you have any particular expectations for what kinds of vocal research you all would be doing together? What was a typical rehearsal like in the earliest days? What activities did you do when you were together?

DK: We just met on a regular basis to discover new sounds or practice ones we heard on recordings, trying to extend the ranges of the various techniques to see how far we could carry those sounds. Our main goal was to discover what sounds we could master that could be used upon command or in what contexts we would need to “warm up” to some sounds, which ones were not always reliably there on command

and whether some would have to be pre-recorded to make sure they would be there at the right point in the music (as I did in my *Requiem*, 1978). The actual research we did was simply to record the *Lexicon* to document our vocabulary, so to speak. We wanted to create a library of sounds that composers could know about and use in new works. Sometimes they would notate a particular sound that we would have to reinterpret to make happen but for the most part they used our terminology and created their own notation.

We met three days a week for one and a half hour sessions during the time I was there from 1973–1979, then I got the job at Cal State Stanislaus, so we would rehearse when I was back in town for concert tours that we gave, all the way up to our last concert in January 1983 at UCSD. Early on, a typical rehearsal early on would involve practicing a particular sound. For example, a simple ululation (like a sheep “baaing”) would be done in as wide a range as possible, using different vowels. The cross-register ululation was like the machine gun sound and at first very loud—many of the sounds we did quite loudly just to get them to sound, to make them happen. Eventually, we got better dynamic control of them.

After we had had a number of sessions just practicing the sounds, we would do some improvisations. At first they were kind of free-for-alls and not very satisfying musically, so we would impose restrictions of say, limit it to two different kinds of sounds and create a shape that might be soft to loud to soft and last about 1 or 2 minutes. We also created voices for excerpts from *Alice in Wonderland* (I think I was a very high-voiced oyster!) so we could have something to perform in casual

concerts at the center. Most of the rehearsals involved almost as much laughter as actual vocal sounds. We even tried to do an improvisation on laughter, but that was a bust—there's nothing worse than artificial laughter, just not funny.

I wrote *The Owl and the Pussycat* during the second quarter I was there, in early 1974 when there were still seven of us in the group. We had a really hard time not laughing during the performances we did! The next year there were just six of us, which I remember because Roger Reynolds writing a setting of excerpts from T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* for Phil Larson as a soloist, but he needed a windstorm from the six of us, so we did the sounds in pairs so we stagger breathe—you know, breathe individually without the overall sound stopping—and it turned out to be a pretty cool ten minute windstorm, as I recall. It was released by Lovely Records as one of the pieces in the *Voicespace* series. He wrote another song that became part of that set for Linda Vickerman, Ed Harkins, and me which was called *A Merciful Coincidence*. The text was by Samuel Beckett. Originally he wrote it so we could perform it live at the Bourge festival of electronic music in the summer of 1976, but he later decided that he wanted to exist only as a recording.

When Roger taught a new music course in the late 1970s, he had his students come work with us during our rehearsal time. I remember Diamanda Galás was in that class; she came to a number of rehearsals and would practice some of the sounds, but in the way that a singer would do vocal exercises by repeating them up and down in a series of half-step modulations, which was something I had never thought of. We just used to practice them a lot more freely, not so much like how traditionally trained

bel canto singers would rehearse.

Rehearsals in the first couple of years were focused mostly on mastering as many sounds as we could and eliminating any sounds that hurt. Although I think Warren Burt didn't care: he would try anything! But those of us who were trained singers were a little more careful! We would then document the sounds, both the ones we kept and those we eliminated, in the lexicons. We were also there as a resource for faculty and student composers who wanted to experiment with sounds or to write pieces for us, which we would perform on occasion at CME concerts. Roger Marsh wrote us a piece that wasn't particularly extended but was very cool. It was called *Not a Soul but Ourselves*. Bill Brooks also wrote a set of four madrigals that we premiered, contrary to an article on the Electric Phoenix's website which states that we "only managed to learn numbers 1 and 4." I honestly think the Electric Phoenix version of number 1, "The Silver Swan," was better, but in my opinion they never quite got the hang of the barbershop style for number 4, "Nellie Was a Lady."

There was also a two week conference called "Voices and Visuals" that brought together the various research groups in CME involving some collaborations (including dancers, instrumentalists, computer and electronic music composers, video artist Ed Emshwiller, and visiting composers in residence; I'm not sure if Joji Yuasa and Thorkell Sigurbjornsson were there at that time or if they wrote pieces for us at another time. Anyway, they also brought in someone from campus that did sign language, and they also brought in Mel Blanc, the voice actor who did all the cartoon character voices for Warner Brothers. Mel did a special session with us.

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As more composers wrote for us, we started to structure our rehearsals around actual practicing of pieces. Sometimes, for our rehearsals we made ourselves available to try out parts of new pieces for composers, or we would help composers figure out how to create sounds that they were trying to get for particular pieces. It always involved laughter! I remember one time rehearsing a piece by Ed London, *Psalm of These Days*, and Ed Harkins (who was primarily a trumpet player but was our “tenor”) tried out about four or five different octaves of a particular pitch before he found the right octave notated in the score. We all had extremely wide ranges due to including inhaled sounds from low vocal fry to high inhaled pitches.

CN: Yes, I’ve noticed that from listening to your recordings! Speaking of range and technique, I wanted to ask you about your work with John Large and his article that he later published about the EVTE in 1977. I was also curious about how your experience of presenting at the National Association for Teachers (NATS) of singing with Large.

DK: I enjoyed the research sessions we did at the VA Hospital, after learning to control the gag reflex when we would be positioned over a mirror that was inserted above the vocal cords to videotape the action of our cords. I also did a bunch of sonograms that I eventually gave away years later to someone writing a book; although, maybe what I gave them was just my personal research that I did at the VA with the idea of using it in my doctoral research. I’m not sure. Anyway, Linda and I were in Paris in 1977 when John Large gave some kind of conference presentation; I

think we just helped pass out papers. Earlier than that we had been involved in a NATS presentation John did in San Francisco and another in San Diego, where we did some performing as part of it and answered questions from the audience. I was not overly impressed with the NATS sessions, but then I was very unfamiliar with the organization. We also were involved in a biomedical conference in San Diego (I don't remember if this had anything to do with John) where Ed Harkins was hooked up to some device that measured his brain waves for alpha output during an improvisation to see if there would be any noticeable changes during what we considered peak moments in it—nothing really changed!

CN: Interesting! I am curious to know what your impressions were regarding the various thoughts about EVT, particularly in the classical music world. Did you feel that the term was used more often in academic writing, colloquial writing (reviews, liner notes, and common parlance), or did it seem like it was simply “in the air”?

DK: I think we understood the term “extended vocal techniques” to be a descriptive term that encompassed our attempt to extend beyond, but to also include, traditional Western art music singing as part of our sound vocabulary. Ed Harkins was the only member of the quartet who was not a trained singer, but he had very good control of his voice, so he was a great fit for our kind of experimentation. When we were a group of six in the second year, it included soprano Ann Chase, and composer Warren Burt (the fearless one who tried any sound no matter how raucous it might be!) Other performers such as Joan La Barbara seemed to have abandoned any significant use of traditional singing (bel canto) and used just the extended sounds, to very

interesting effect. As a composer, I have always preferred to incorporate both tradition and extended techniques depending on what the texts I set would suggest or demand. My feeling is that tradition singing does have a great capacity for emotional expression but that the extended techniques do extend the capabilities of expression.

One of the greatest compliments I received after a performance of my solo piece, *Soliloquy* (1981), was from another soprano who said, “That isn’t extended vocal techniques, it’s extended emotional techniques!” I feel that the sounds can capture the extremes of both humor and tragedy.

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## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA Z

CN: So, in terms of what I'm doing for my dissertation, I am generally putting pressure on the category of "extended vocal techniques." I am asking questions about where and when the term "extended vocal techniques" as a conceptual category start appearing in music literature, what the term meant at different points in time, how has its meaning has expanded and changed over the years, how the term has been problematic in certain ways, but also how the term could be reworked into be something productive. This line of inquiry I've embarked on was actually inspired by one of our earlier conversations, when we had talked about what would it look like if we moved the assumed centrality of extended vocal techniques—

PZ: —what it is that you're extending—

CN: Exactly. And so that sums up the critical angle of my work. I see your work as kind of extending the body itself through electronics, through images, and sometimes through other instruments that you write for in ways that resemble your vocal practices. That's the overview of what I'm doing and where I envision you into the narrative of my project.

CN: I wanted to start off talking a little bit about your voice, but I know that you do so much more than that, especially recently; it seems like you're doing a lot of instrumental ensemble works recently.

PZ: Well, a lot of these instrumental works are commissions. In terms of the commissions, it's kind of funny because they reflect my own aesthetic but at the same

time, they become a different trajectory for my work. And there's no solid line between them—it's very fluid between the two trajectories. For instance, there are my regular performances, which tend to remain within the realm of my voice and my electronics, sometimes with the addition of video or combined with larger works that have other instruments. Then there are the commissioned works, where I don't have as much control over the direction. I mean, suppose in a certain sense I do have control over everything because I can always decline a commission, or when someone asks, "Can you do it this way?" I can always negotiate. But, for example, if I'm approached by a chamber ensemble and they're asking me to write a piece for them, there's already a constraint inherent in the ensemble's instrumentation. And that's not necessarily a bad thing; it's actually a good thing. I find it really helpful to my work to be spurred on by assignments, by having something specific that's coming, because it takes away some choices and makes other choices possible. So that's a little bit about how commissions fit into (and assist) my creative process.

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CN: One of the things that I wanted to ask you about was how you start your process when you're composing for your voice and electronics, when you are creating work for your set-up of voice, laptop, and all of the other electronic media. What is that like for you? You had mentioned previously that you start with images a lot of the time.

PZ: It is really contingent on the piece; depending on what kind of piece I'm making, the way that I start varies hugely. If I'm making a piece that is just my voice and electronics, I typically start by setting up my gear as if I was going to perform, and

then I start improvising. Once I find something that makes me think, “Oh, that’s it! That’s good,” I go back and listen to the recording and figure out what it was that I did. And sometimes I’ll realize, “Oh, the last five minutes of what I did is a piece.” It will be something that is almost whole cloth-ready and I just simply need to learn what I did so I can recreate it, and that’s all I need to do for the piece. Other times, I’ll feel that I like part of what I did, but that I want work on the material a little bit more. But, if it’s just for my voice and my instruments, me to perform as a soloist, I frequently start by just playing.

By the way, I don’t know if we’ve discussed my take on improvisation versus composition . . .

CN: I would love to hear you elaborate on this topic!

PZ: I’ve always had this sense that there are these very conventional composers who feel threatened, I think, by the idea that people conflate improvisation and composition. My sense is that these composers think that composing must involve making little black dots on a piece of paper that you put on somebody else’s music stand, and that a supposedly “real” composer isn’t somebody who composes by just singing stuff. I’m exaggerating here to make a point, but that’s my sense of things when it comes to the divide some people make between improvisation and composition. There are certain composers in conventional music circles that dig their heels in about the definition of what “composing” is, but my response to that perspective has always been to say that *all* composers are improvisers at some point. They may not improvise in front of an audience, but improvising is simply making it

up as you go, on the fly. And all composers are making it up, it's just that some of them are not doing it in front of the audience; they're doing it privately in their studio, but they're still making it up. They're letting their thoughts go and ideas are being realized. Now, I realize that everybody is different and that some people are very methodical about some kind of process, so maybe their composition really has no perceivable improvisational element because they do algorithmic composing or something akin to that. Everybody has their own way. But for the most part, people who are composing music are making it up. Again, some of those people do not play the instruments for which they're imagining the music, but maybe they're sitting at a piano and they're sketching it out that way. But it's still coming to them like an improvisation, even if it's fleeting and even if it's only in tiny little bits that they have to carefully assemble at a later point. I think the difference between an improviser—a good improviser who makes works that are engaging—and a composer is just that an improviser is doing it in front of the audience and they're doing it in only one take. So I always like to emphasize that my feeling about composition is that there isn't a hard line between composing and improvising.

...

So that's one end of the spectrum of my process. However, if I'm making a large-scale performance work—even if it's going to be just me with my electronics and some projected images, sampled sounds, and so forth—and there's a subject around which that piece is happening, sometimes I start by interviewing people, doing what you're doing, except that I start with a predetermined set of questions that are

designed to get people to start speaking so that I can collect samples of their voice, because I frequently use voices in these kinds of pieces. To give an example from my piece, *Baggage Allowance*, I asked people questions about baggage. The questions I asked ranged in depth, from something as simple as asking people to list for me all the things they might put in their suitcases when packing for a trip to something deeper, like asking if they have anything that they have held onto for years and can't let go; when you have something that you haven't laid hands on for twenty years and you have it in laying storage somewhere, and you never actually look at it and hold it, but you can't seem to get rid of it.

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I make these text-collages that are coming from fragments of speech sounds from the interviews. So, the first part of my process is to set up those interviews and record them.

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The next step in the process is sitting in front of Pro Tools, opening those files and editing them. My method of editing is basically just listening to them for a phrase, sentence, word, or syllable I like. So I'm really selecting interview segments based on their sound rather their content; however, you can't divorce those two, so certain thematic elements come up in my work.

...

CN: That's really interesting. It sounds to me like your process is very eclectic, and that it doesn't always have a particular way of starting. It seems like you work with an intuitive sense of what this piece might become, and follow where that leads you.

PZ: Yes. The method really depends on what kind of structure I'm going for. For instance, if I'm working on a chamber piece, pretty early on I start playing notes and melodies on the MIDI keyboard and capturing them onto the computer so that I can see what they sound like in strings, or in winds, and engage with the material that way. Those melodies will often come as I sing something, and then I'll play that.

...

CN: So, I wanted to ask you a little bit about your eclectic working methods: do you see your eclecticism stemming from various influences? If so, who might these people be, and what is it that you might pull from their ideas and working methods?

PZ: I think in a general sense, I have influences in the field, but I rarely have a direct influence. I don't say to myself, "Oh, I love the way Meredith Monk works so I'm going to listen to her and try to make something that sounds like that." I never work that way. The way that I engage other people's work is more like when I go and I see something and it moves me, I ask myself, "What was I moved by? How can I do something that has that kind of power?"

CN: Yes. I wanted to discuss something that you said in another interview that really resonated with me. You had mentioned that when you are imagining your sound and thinking about what sounds you want for a piece, you don't hear your own voice and

*then* think about what electronic things that you can do to it, but rather that you think about your voice and your electronic together as one instrument.

PZ: Yes. An example of this that I often cite is an electric guitar. When you think you want the sound of a distorted guitar, usually that comes to you as a single idea, not two ideas of an *unprocessed* guitar melody to which you decide to add distortion; it's a composite of sound that you think of. Another example would be a composer who writes for strings all the time writing a pizzicato passage. They would probably imagine the string sound as pizzicato from the outset; they probably wouldn't think, "This melody is going to be played by strings . . . Oh, I know what would be interesting! If they played it pizzicato!" Perhaps sometimes a thought-process like that happens, like when the players begin a melody on arco and then in the next section play some of the same notes on pizzicato. Actually, there was a section in one of the movements of the Kronos piece I wrote—it was called "Rain"—and I had the string players imitating the sound of random raindrops. And I never, ever conceived of them playing that arco. It was just this sound that came to me for that section, without me making a decision as to what effect they would use; it was just the technique called for in that section. And I think the same thing is true of how I think about my voice. For example, one of the things I do is to grab a tiny fragment of my voice and put it in a really short, repeating delay so that you get almost a motor-like sound. When I want that sound in a piece, that sound comes to my mind, not an acoustic vocal sound with processing later applied to it. It's more like that thing, that

sound, is a thing in itself that I can just take out of my creative tool box and say, “This is what I want here.”

CN: I remember this collection—I think it was *Women, Art, and Technology*, edited by Judy Malloy—and one of the chapters is an essay by you called “A Tool is a Tool,” and in it, you’re talking about how your technology is a tool.<sup>409</sup> But since you have also expressed that you don’t see your voice and your technology as separate from each other, do you think you would extend that concept to your voice as well? Specifically, would you also consider your voice a tool?

PZ: Well, that’s an article I wrote years ago, but I think my point in making the analogy to a tool is that I was observing that musical instruments in general are analogous to tools. If you’re a woodworker, you have certain tools, and if you’re a musician, you have certain tools. A musical instrument is the tool that a musician uses to create. And you and I both contest this perception in the field of music that voice is something other than an instrument . . .

CN: In a certain sense, yes.

PZ: Or, more appropriately, that vocalists are something other than musicians.

CN: Yes, absolutely.

PZ: But, at any rate, I feel that in my case, my tool—my main tool—*includes* the human voice. And the human voice is pretty important in my work, because regardless of what else I’m pairing with it, it’s very frequently my source, whether

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<sup>409</sup> Z, “A Tool is a Tool,” in *Women, Art, and Technology*, ed. Judith Malloy

it's my own voice, other people's voices, or fragments of speech sounds. But I almost never think about my voice and technology as individual ingredients to my work.

CN: I know what you mean, that you see it as this holistic thing, as your starting point. That's where you're beginning. At least, that's what it sounds like to me.

PZ: Right. There's a lot I've developed over the years, a kind of tool box full of different ways that I process my voice, so I can make some things from complete scratch and not have any idea where it's going to go, but I can also go into that tool box and pull out these things that are already partially-made.

CN: What are some of those things, the partially-made ones, that you draw from most often?

PZ: Well, one of them would be the sound-bed that is this sort of dense, vibrating vocal sound. It's made from . . . well, I can show you over here. [Plays clip from computer]

CN: Great!

PZ: But it's made from setting the delay feature on a really, really short delay with a lot of feedback on it, and then making a sound, a very simple and short sound. So, I'll go [makes a short vocal sound], and I'll get [acoustically imitates a longer, oscillating tone]. This is just a bed of sound that I can then put underneath other things. That's just an example of a sound that appears in my work a lot, and it's a tool that I have at the ready that I can use. Another one is a sound made by three delay lines all set at different tempi, so that when I put a vocal sound of some kind into all three of them and pan them a bit center, and a little left, and a little right, you get this soup sound, a

sort of in-and-out of phase, continuously rolling, multi-rhythmic sound. That's sort of a thing—an element—that also appears in a lot of my work.

CN: Great, yeah. So, I wanted to circle back to one of the things that we both identified as frustrating, and that is this precedent of separating “musician” from “singer.” As vocalist, it's really hard to break out of that box . . .

PZ: Oh! I have a story about that!

CN: Oh, great!

PZ: When I was in Boulder, Colorado, I was making my living—one hundred percent of my living—as a singer-songwriter. Basically, I would play in clubs, coffeehouses, bars, restaurants, and ski resorts in the wintertime, playing during weekends and evenings, and I had to join the musicians union. And I always had mixed feelings about it because it wasn't completely clear to me what the benefit was of being part of this union. But because I knew other professional musicians and they had joined, I felt that somehow that's what I was supposed to do. And I don't know about now, but in those days, you could not be a member of that organization if your only instrument was voice; I think the implication was that you should be in the actor's guild if you are a singer.

So, all the singers had to join the actor's guild, or you had list something else as your instrument, and then you could be in the musician's union. So because I sang and played guitar I listed the guitar as my instrument, which was totally misleading because no one would hire me as *just* a guitarist. I was never going to get a gig as a guitarist for someone else! The work I was doing was based on my voice and my

work as a singer-songwriter: I was writing and singing songs. But, if you were looking through the roster of the musician's union trying to find a guitarist to hire, I am not the guitarist you want! I had to list myself as a "guitarist" to be listed on the rolls of the musician's union because you couldn't list "singer" or "voice" as your instrument. And one time, I looked through the rolls and noticed that there were all these musicians who had listed their instrument as tambourine! I wonder what they really did!

CN: Right? You know, it almost seems that there's this sense in which singers almost have to prove themselves in order to be taken seriously as musicians. And I sometimes think that the label of "extended vocal techniques" "Others" one's vocal practice from classical singing, but at the same time "extended vocal techniques" seem like a way in which a classical singer can find some sort of notoriety and get out of the "singer box." And I think that this idea relates to the story that you had told me about going to Composer to Composer a few years back.

PZ: So, this was one year at Composer to Composer in Telluride that I attended, and the featured composers were these illustrious, remarkable names. It was John Cage, James Tenney, and I think Morton Subotnick and Joan La Barbara were there that year, and possibly Meredith Monk, but I can't remember for sure; she could have been at a different one, but I think that she might have been there. Now, I went to several of the different talks and I might be conflating some of the people in this story, but I definitely know that Cage was involved in this story. Oh yes, and Conlon Nancarrow was also involved!

Cage, Nancarrow, Tenney, they were in the room. And so, this big discussion came up during one of the sessions where the composers discussed with each other whether or not performers should use vibrato when performing their compositions. And I couldn't believe that in a group of people who claim to be experimental, that there was any argument as to whether any particular technique or sound should be banned outright!

And so I listened to them debate, and it became a very vehement argument. When it came time for audience participation and questions, I finally raised my hand and said, "I just want to say that it seems really strange to me that you would try to limit the pallet of sounds that you can use. To me, the most interesting thing is to include all sound possibilities and to use your voice in every way that it can be used, and then pick from those possibilities, selecting some passages with no vibrato, some with vibrato, some with 'non-normal' singing sounds. . . . But all these different sounds should be included. It seems a little contrary to the idea of being Experimental to say that there's one particular style of singing that's just not allowed, ever." It made me nervous to actually stand up to this group of people who are *the* list of experimental composers! And it's been so many years, maybe twenty-five, thirty years ago, so I can't remember what their reaction was or anyone's response. But what I do remember is that it felt freeing to express that.

CN: Well, I think that's fascinating, because it does seem like there's very much a "new music vocal aesthetic" that requires straight-tone, and so I find it inspiring that

you use the vocal technique that's right for your voice. And that, as you describe it, it's not even a technique—it is just your voice.

PZ: Yeah.

CN: And I liked what you had said at one of our previous meetings about how your approach to voice is not so concerned with thinking about technique but thinking about sensations and how a sound feels.

PZ: Well, when you were specifically asking a question about visualizing the voice and I said that I had never experienced that sort of method or approach, what I meant was that I remember my voice teachers talking mostly about sensation. They would emphasize that feeling like you're putting your voice at the front of your face; you know, "singing in the mask," feeling that buzzing sensation.

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This actually somewhat relates to the things I talk about in the workshops on technology and composition that I teach. When I talk to them about sound and signal path, of course there's an entry point. I always jokingly refer to it as a garden hose. People say, "Oh, I always get confused with this idea of an input or an output. How do I know which is which?" And I explain, "Well, with most kinds of cables, it's like a garden hose: both ends are exactly the same. What makes one an input and the other an output is what you hook it to."

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So there's a lot involved in the path that a signal has to go through before it even gets to my processing. But, if I wanted to go further with that chain, your mouth is an

output. The reason I'm saying that is that, yes, if I was going to be very literal, I would say that the entry point is where it gets out of the microphone into my audio interface and goes digitally into the computer, where it gets processed. But, talking about that in terms of the composition process is like talking about when the violinist wraps their hand around the bow and picks it up, and when the bow comes in contact with the strings, and the vibration of the string becomes sound waves that move out into the air. If we were to analyze it, we all know that is what happens, but when we're composing, we certainly are not thinking about those elements in that way; we're thinking about wanting this smooth line, or a line that has a little bit of grit on it. What produces that sound is a combination of playing *arco* bow and pressing hard on the string, but that's not what I think about while I'm composing. Or with singing, I might want either a purer voice and or I might want a grittier sound. I could sing with a purer voice and put it through some kind of a processing to add grit to it, or I could just sing with a gritty voice. But what I think most composers are after is the finished sound that comes from either action, not the signal path that had to happen in order for that to occur.

CN: Yes. You know, I find myself really interested in how you said—something to the effect of—“Whether it's adding grit to the voice through the electronic process or vocalizing in a gritty way.” How would you decide between the two options?

PZ: Well, I would decide based on what I hear in my head, because the sound that comes from singing in a gritty way versus the sound that comes from putting a pure tone through a processing system such as granulation—those two options sound

different in the end. In fact, it would be very hard to vocally imitate that same grit that the processor creates. It would be an interesting exercise to have a vocalist listen to a processed sound and then try to sing like that acoustically.

But what I'm saying is that, ultimately, there's a big difference between the two. Just like there's a difference between one person saying something and a comedian impersonating that person; those two things sound very different from each other. Singing in a gritty voice versus singing in a pure voice and adding grit through sound processing has a different aural effect. But, there have been times when I had an idea of a sound I wanted, and I wasn't sure how to get it, so I had to try different things. And I had to explore whether I could get that sound I was thinking of by singing in a particular way. So, I guess, it's a little bit like looking at the finished canvas and asking a painter, "You have this bubbly, foamy-looking blue line on your canvas. How did you decide to have that? Was it just an accident from the way the paint was mixed that day? Or did you go to great lengths to achieve this? Did you think of that picture?" And I would say that probably if you ask a painter those questions, half the time their answer would be something like, "Oh, I was trying to do something else, and I came up with this, and I thought this was better so I kept it." At least, that happens to me all the time. You know how I said that sometimes I improvise and I get something whole-cloth, just from the first pass? I get it just by *doing* it. I don't wake up in the morning with an entire song in my head. That has never happened for me. My music happens by doing it. So, a lot of things I come up

with are from happy accidents, because I either wasn't trying to do anything particular, but the thing that actually happened was really interesting!

CN: Yes! There was something else that I wanted to revisit, if you don't mind.

There seems to be this undercurrent, this theme in our conversation of being between worlds: between "popular music" and "classical music," between the implicit vocal aesthetic of experimental music and bel canto singing, between being a "musician" and a "sound artist." I would really like to hear more about that element of your experience.

PZ: Well, back in a completely different time from where we are now, when I was in music school and I was also working as a professional musician playing clubs, there was this chasm between the type of music that I was doing. I think it is an artificial chasm, but it was a construct that came from people on both sides: from the popular music world and from the classical world. People in the pop world would say things like, "Your voice sounds too trained," while people in the classical world would say, "Singing other music besides bel canto is going to harm your voice and you shouldn't do it." I had affection for both of those worlds, and I was trying to straddle this chasm between them. It was later that I found my own artistic voice and where I actually fit into the world of music, which turned out to be in neither of those worlds. I found myself in this third place, a place of adventurous music, experimental music, which I think gets classified as "contemporary classical" music but even within that category you have a wide range of work that is more or less adventurous. And I guess there were all these actors from these different worlds who were converging together:

people leaving the classical world; people coming from the world that most people thought of as the “popular music world” but they would often be these art school drop-outs making rock bands, like David Byrne with Talking Heads or Brian Eno and other people like that. I guess I stepped into the experimental world because I got very bored with the conventional music that I was doing on both sides, classical and popular. I think by some people’s standards what I was doing was not that conventional, but to me it was. I was doing singer-songwriter, folk-rock songs. I did start getting quirkier with the way I wrote songs, and I started trying to diversify the covers tunes that I would do; for example, instead of covering Joni Mitchell and the Beatles, I started covering Talking Heads and punk rock songs, and I tried to convert weird electronic music into acoustic versions. And so, my music was getting a little “quirky,” but it was not really experimental. And then, on the classical side, I was doing pretty straightforward repertoire: arias, contemporary art songs, all written in a pretty conventional way. But the music that I started discovering on my own, outside both of those worlds, was this experimental music that seemed to rise above the divide. It was its own thing. In a way, experimental music saved me from straddling a chasm. As I said, it took me to a third place, a completely different place that draws from—but is somehow bigger, more expansive—than those other two places, at least for me.

CN: That’s fascinating! I wanted to ask you a few questions about extended vocal techniques, because I remember you had some really insightful critiques about that term and concept the last time that we spoke. One of the things you had mentioned is

that this term is really problematic because it assumed a normative or central way of singing that's presumably classical. I agree, and I'm wondering if you could elaborate more on that idea.

PZ: Well, I would augment your statement by saying that the assumed center of "extended vocal techniques" is not just classical, but actually conventional Western classical singing. It's Eurocentric. However, I think that people think of a bigger category for "normal singing," whether it's bel canto—opera or classical vocal work—or whether it's just singing folk or popular songs. I don't think that singing in a folk or pop style would be considered "extended" either. But anyway, the "extended" thing is when you start doing these techniques that are not included in those types of "normal" singing, classical or popular. And so my problem with the term was almost more about the assumption that there is any kind of "normal singing," and that anything that diverges from that is "outside." It was little bit like the comparison with broader society that I made before; I don't want this to sound too much like a political thing, but the comparison that I made is that the "norm" in society is to be male and white. So, if you're both of those things, you don't need any adjectives or qualifiers to explain yourself. But, if you're female, or if you're non-white, you're different—you differ from the norm in certain ways. For instance, in the days before they started trying to remove sexism from the language, it used to be that a police officer was a "policeman," so a woman who was a police officer was like a special kind of policeman. So with the term "extended vocal techniques," I feel like it is almost placing Western singing (classical and folk/pop) in that position of being the

“normal” vocal style, and then these other techniques venture off of that path. So I was just making the comment that there are techniques that wouldn’t seem like “extended” techniques from the standpoint of the culture in which they originated. If you were a Tuvan throat singer, overtone singing is not some strange extension from the norm. That’s basically what I meant. Some of the things that people who are famous for extended vocal techniques have come up with, people like Joan La Barbara, turn out to be things that have already been done somewhere else. For some people, it would not seem an extended technique; it would be just another kind of normal singing for them. So that was my biggest problem about the term, that it was presuming a specific and very finite set of aesthetic rules to be the “norm.” But on the other hand, I also have to acknowledge that regardless of which perspective you’re coming from, if that’s the culture that you’re steeped in, it’s natural to assume that it’s the norm and to consider anything that steps away from it to be moving away from the norm. So, it’s complicated because it’s sometimes the best shorthand for describing what you are doing; it makes sense, and it’s the easiest way to describe what you’re doing without a lot of explanation.

CN: Yes, and I really connect with what you just said. So, to aim these thoughts in a more personal direction, what do you think about the kind of lens it places on your work when people refer to your work as “extended vocal techniques”? Basically, if you were to have a chance to say, “This is what I think about my voice in regard to this label, this is what I see as accurate, this is what I see as inaccurate.” I do not mean at all that other work that has been done on your music needs to be redressed in

any way; rather, I want to create space in my own work for you to speak to the concept of “extended vocal techniques” in regard to your work, or as it has been applied to you in the past.

PZ: Well, you know, when people categorize me in that way it’s never clear to me why they are doing so. There are a number of reasons as to why they might, because there are some pieces where I go through a litany of different sounds, like in *Bone Music*.

In *Bone Music*, I start with this kind of singing that is what would be heard as “normal singing” for people in this culture, but then I go into this chattering, and then I do these squeaking sounds, and gradually bring forth lot of different sounds. So, in regard to how we have come to understand that term, there’s nothing inaccurate about applying it to my work. But also, I do think that I probably don’t veer away from what’s considered “standard” Western singing techniques as much as others in that category. There are some people who have made an entire career of extended vocal techniques, and that’s all they do: they use all of these different kinds of techniques and work with sounds. And a lot of the people that do that don’t even process their voice: the processing is all done in here, in the body, as opposed to singing into a microphone and then granulating.

Joan La Barbara, for example, uses electronics, but when she uses electronics, it’s not often in a way that distorts or changes her vocal sound. The most dramatic distortions and changes that she makes occur *before* her sound gets to the microphone. And I admire that about her because that’s a unique thing that she’s

accomplished. She's discovered this incredible, huge vocabulary of different sounds that can be made with the vocal instrument, whereas I have a much smaller set of vocal sounds. My vocabulary is more finite, but I work with it by processing it, changing it electronically. And I do that kind of work a lot more than I have ever heard her do it. In the times I've heard her, she does have pieces that use electronics, but if she wants this sound [demonstrates vocal fry], it's not going to be through electronics. So, that's interesting to me. I do think that "extending" the voice by putting it through electronics is a different kind of thing than coming up with different modes of vocal production that you can do unassisted. But to be clear, I'm not saying that one is better or worse than the other; they're just different. Yet, she achieves sounds that are almost like electronic music because of her ability to distort or change her vocal sound, playing with glottal stops and other techniques like that. And that is true of Joan La Barbara as well. I've heard Joan do things acoustically that really sound like electronic music.

CN: You know, I'm curious, how do you think your early encounters with sound technology shaped your approach to the voice?

PZ: Well, right now people can download an app to do looping. When I first started doing it, you had to buy a piece of hardware for each effect you wanted. I mean, some people were using computers to do it, but there were not any programs that could do things like what Max/MSP can do. Max software existed, but the MSP part of it—which is Max Signal Processing—meant you can take an actual acoustic sound, put it through there, and process that signal. In Max you could do synthesis, but you could

not do signal processing up until I think the 1990s, when they added the signal processing. And so when I started doing this stuff, it was the mid-eighties. I bought my first digital delays in the early eighties, and the equipment was not cheap; I wasn't buying just guitar stomp boxes, I was buying rack-mountable digital delays. If I wanted two delay lines, I needed to buy two digital delays, and if I wanted a multi-effects processor with pitch-shifting and other things, I needed a different box. So, I had this stack of black boxes in a rack. Anyone who was really serious about this could find and buy these things, so it was not as if they were unavailable.

It is a lot easier now that performers can just have a computer and every time they want a different effect, they can just purchase another plug-in, or another app, or in my case, build it in Max/MSP.

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CN: Did all of these changes in technology that you've experienced over the course of your career change how you experience your voice?

PZ: Well, I see it as my instrument. I see the body as an instrument, and I think a lot of actors and performance artists feel this way as well. It's the part of what we use to make our work. And this is not to say that a human being is reduced to having no more value or substance than a bass guitar. [Laughs] What I always tell people in workshops is, "The voice is a very special instrument, because it's the only one that's always with you." In other words, you don't have to remember to bring your "ax"—you've already got your "ax." It's built in. But the other thing about the voice is that makes it special is that it is a manifestation of your humanity. We can't deny that the

sound of a human voice affects us like no other sound. So when I say that it's an instrument, I'm not saying that it is just like other instruments; I understand that it is an instrument imbued with powers that most instruments do not quite possess. And also, it has the capability of speech built into it, which further complicates thinking of the voice as an "instrument." What I mean is that, when you add speech into other wordless sounds, you suddenly have the meaning of language layered on top of how we hear the voice, and you can't divorce the sound of the voice from that meaning once it's heard. So, I'm not naïve about those factors, but even acknowledging all of that, I still say it's my instrument. It's the thing that I use to make my work.

Actually, I remember this one anecdote that relates to what we're talking about. I once had a student in a class I used to teach regularly called SoundWORK; I was teaching people a combination of technical things (like learning how to use Pro Tools) and the more craft-oriented parts of musical practice (such as experimental composition techniques as well as performance and how to use your presence on the stage in a certain way). All of these things were involved in this workshop. One of my students started experimenting with her voice by distorting her own voice, pitching it down, much like Laurie Anderson's "voice of authority." And I remember telling this student, "You have to be really careful when you do that. I'm not telling you that you can't do it, but you need to consider a few things. First, the way that you're doing it has already been done, and because Laurie Anderson did this, it's actually very well known to anybody who's studied this kind of contemporary practice. So by doing this, you're referencing her whether you want to or not. There's nothing wrong with

that, but you need to know that. You need to know that people would say, ‘Oh, she’s doing that Laurie Anderson thing.’”

That was the first issue going on that I wanted to address; the second was thing I said was, “When you distort the voice, it has a great impact on people.” The example that I always give when addressing this issue is that vocal distortion produces a really similar effect as the visual distortion of the human face; it’s not just because it’s a human face, it’s because we are humans, and so we experience it as a distortion of our own faces. And so I explained to her, “If you take a picture of a tree, and you stretch it, and do something weird with the picture of the tree, emotionally, it will probably not impact people very much. They’ll mostly look at it with an aesthetic eye and just think about the balance of the picture, how color is used, how the picture affects them. But if you do the same thing with a human face, it becomes like a horror movie. If you take a face and start stretching it, or distorting it, the response isn’t simply, ‘Oh, interesting shape and form.’ People will see it as an affront to the human form. It will make people uncomfortable, even if it’s unconscious.” I also think that because we are drawn to the image of the human face, it’s hardwired into us to be affected emotionally by the image of a human face. And distorting it is a little bit like harming a person. We see that part of it.

It’s upsetting, even if we don’t understand why it upsets us or what’s going on psychologically when we experience this distortion. So I explained, “The same thing is true with the human voice.” Even if you take the sound of a human voice doing wordless sounds, and you process it and chop it up, the presence of the human voice

already piques peoples' ears. But then if you then take somebody speaking words, and you change and distort the spoken voice, it adds another layer to our response that all of a sudden has little to do with aesthetics. People start hearing the voice as monstrous, or angelic, or frightening; it might even evoke for them a memory. And all of that comes out of distorting the human image to which people are unconsciously bonded." But I don't want to limit peoples' expressions; I just want them to expand their awareness of what a given mode of expression brings up for their listeners, in terms of both musical precedent and potential psychological response.

So I concluded my meeting with this student by saying, "It's not that you shouldn't do that, it's just that it's naïve to do that without acknowledging these factors." I cite this anecdote because I think it illustrates my view of the body: I'm fully aware that the human voice is a powerful thing, and effects people.

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## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW WITH JESSIE MARINO

CN: So, tell me about your composition for *The Voice Machine*. Can you give me the back story of how the project started and what led you to take the unique approach that defined your work?

JM: That project came out of a class that was co-taught by Jaroslaw Kapuscinski and Susan Narucki via the internet. Every week, we would meet through live broadcast, from our class to the San Diego class, and vice-versa. Each week we were looking to collectively discover what's happening in the current state of opera: what's going on, and what is defined as "experimental" opera. And over the course of these class discussions, I realized that my definition was really different from the ones that were being proposed by my colleagues. There were definitely some members of the class whose thoughts on opera involved experimental theater and they were interested in things like Wooster Group or some of these really strange experimental 1970s Polish theatrical events pioneered by Jerry Grotowski.<sup>410</sup>

But, Susan Narucki's take on experimental opera was, as I understood it, just conventional Western opera, but written in our current time. She didn't propose any changes to the standard format: the audience walks into a theater, the theater is packed full of people who sit and watch in a certain direction, and they watch singers who perhaps sing stranger melodies or talk about contemporary topics but still use a

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<sup>410</sup> Jerry Grotowski (1933-1999) is an experimental theater director and theorist.

very traditionally recognizable operatic voice. Essentially, it felt like the same mechanism.

In all of my music, I'm really interested in figuring out ways to tap into a performer's musical language, identity, and practice, but not necessarily through their primary instrument. Specifically, I don't really write for violins, or oboes, or bassoons; I've written music for violinists, for oboists, for bassoonists, but I almost never have them play their own instruments. So, given this framework that I've chosen as my primary means of creative exploration, why would I take a different a different approach when it comes to opera and operatic singing?

Actually, there was some pretty heated discussion amongst the class members around my approach, as applied to the operatic voice, and my ideas of vocalizing were not entirely endorsed by Susan. But luckily, her students—who were the performers—were game. They were totally open to new ways learning to use their voice, or new ways of thinking about how to use the voice.

Basically, the message I received was, “Why wouldn't you use the operatic voice when using operatic singers?” It almost felt, to me, like there was an implication that I was being wasteful, and that other peoples' talents weren't being used, or being properly used. My argument against that was, “Well, actually, when considering performers more holistically, they are full, complex human beings who have lots of talents. Their operatic voice is a very special and unique talent, but it's not the ability that I'm interested in using. The operatic voice has a lot of ties with socio-economic privilege, and it's something that for me as a composer, I don't feel

comfortable using; it's not my cup of tea. And you know, I tried very hard to be clear about the other ways that musical and vocal training could be enacted, but not directly. So, we did a lot of different experiments in making my opera in these workshops where we got together with the vocal studio. I had a very experimental approach, and I hadn't really worked with singers before, I hadn't worked with operatic singers before, and even though I use a lot of staging and ideas about staging in my work, I don't use them in a conventionally theatrical way. In fact, that was the first time I had worked in a theater with proper lighting, schematics, and advanced speaker systems. So we would arrive, put up the speakers, and just go. It was a whole new model for me at that time. So anyway, we worked on a bunch of different techniques.

CN: That's so interesting. Can you expand a bit on your thoughts about the operatic voice and its culturally problematic nature? I would also love to hear more on what you had stated earlier, about your intention to draw out the musicality of the singers in a different way? I think both of those items you mentioned are very interesting and really align with some of the concepts and questions that I'm exploring in my project.

JM: So, the operatic voice in its traditional format, has all of these ties to a type of societal listening that has an immense amount of economic privilege associated with it, at least in its current form; I'm sure you know much more about the history of where operas were first taking place. But in its current form, you can't be a member of the Metropolitan Opera without contributing thousands of dollars to have the privilege of going to a gala with other predominantly white and wealthy people. And

by the way, this does expand to sorts of traditional modes of instrumental playing as well, especially with this economy of the virtuoso. I actually really appreciate virtuosity—it is an important part of a lot of my performances—but I’m trying to find new modes of virtuosity. Not that they get divorced from an economic system—I think it’s still unavoidably there—but I’m trying to at least ask some different kinds of questions within that system of virtuosity. So, the operatic voice for me, it just triggers all of those associations. And I think that for any musician, being able to figure out your own way in many different modes of music making is really important to being a working, professional musician these days. Only allowing yourself the opportunity to perform as an operatic soprano is really limiting, especially in a scholastic setting such as this project. This project was for a class and for a studio of singers who were there to learn about opera, but also to learn about their own voice and their own interests. In an educational setting, I think it’s really important to create opportunities for people to experience new ways of understanding their own musical bodies and preferences, and to gain experience in a wide range of genres. I think that is a fundamentally important part of education.

That was what I did for myself as a performer, but outside of school. At school, the message was, “Become an orchestral musician or chamber musician! And choose one or the other, don’t do both!” And my response to the limited scope of how musicianship was defined in that setting was, “But I really like new music and improvising; I like singing in karaoke bars; there are a lot of different ways of engaging in music.”

So, I have a few techniques that I generally use in my compositions to cultivate an environment in which musicians can discover for themselves new ways of using their voices. One technique that I use (and I use this technique a lot) involves sampling from four or five different movies. I choose different characters from those movies based on their character archetypes, like the snobby mid-sixties woman, the bratty teenage boy, or the passive-aggressive waitress; you know, these cinematic archetypes appear all the time. I record their lines, running the gamut of very simple things they would say, like, “Well, she said,” or, “I don’t know, what you feel like doing?” Things that any person would say, but because these characters are so specific and have such particular speech mannerisms, their seemingly normal lines start to have these parenthetical meanings that just come out of the way that their lines are spoken. So for *The Voice Machine*, I make recordings of all of these lines, I wrote a script, and then I asked each of the performers to listen to all of these little snippets of the characters saying the lines that I had written in the script. This is basically a really crude type of dictation exercise; I’d ask them to follow the pacing, the rhythm, and the pitch of the words that were being said, and to try and recreate the recordings as precisely as possible. My intent is that the performers try and listen to the line as a musical phrase, not as just an emotional phrase or character-driven phrase; I want them to try and translate it into music, almost to the extent that someone could get a computer program and notate the pitches and the rhythms of those lines.

So that was one technique I used to engage musical skill while still trying to connect with the singers' embodied experiences with the script. I learned a lot about singing lessons and how a lot of it is just trying to intuit, to find parts of your body that you can never see but that you can feel doing certain things. I wanted to also bring that into this work, so they had to do these transcriptions (not literal transcriptions, as I mentioned), and then I wanted them to try and bring those transcriptions into their own body, into their own voice, using those mechanisms of those crazy, voodoo moments where you feel you trachea moving. . . . You know, those interesting tricks that you learn in singing lessons to engage with your body.

CN: This is so fascinating. I would love to hear you expand on your working method with these musicians.

JM: Well, another thing that is interesting about the singing practice is this sort of invisible learning that has to happen. You cannot see your body doing these things; you have to feel it, or you have to be sort of coaxed into the idea of feeling it. So, in the very few vocal lessons that I have taken, a lot of it is about this imagination exercise. For instance, my teacher might say, "Imagine that the front of your chest is going through the back of your head," or you know, something like that; it was inputting these completely impossible scenarios in your brain to try and get you out of certain habits in the body: maybe something is tightening up, or maybe a note that's just out of reach and if something just shifted, a new pitch range might open up.

So going back to my own work with the voice, my process ends with the singers transcribing these characters' lines, but then trying to figure out ways to get those

lines into their own voices in the most accurate way possible. I think it also dips into this idea of embodying a character, which is a lot of what operatic singing is about; you're acting as well as singing. I thought this process I had come up with was a good way to draw upon their skills as actors and utilize traditional operatic skills while at the same time starting from a place of working with these less typical musical parameters.

CN: It sounds like, in a way, you're trying to get at some of the core methodologies of opera without coming up with the same end product of what we know as "opera" in our present time. Would you say that reflects your idea behind this project?

JM: Yeah, I would definitely say so!

CN: I'm also interested in the fact that you took voice lessons. Did you take them during your undergraduate, or did you take them as a graduate level composer because you wanted to learn more about the voice? What were the circumstances and how long did you take them?

JM: Actually, I have taken only three vocal lessons in my entire career! And they were really about my own interests. I'm actually very fascinated by this invisible learning practice. But, you know, I'm primarily a cellist. I was trained as a cello player and I went to conservatory for my undergraduate. But there were very precise things that happened in those lessons; my teacher could move my elbow in a particular way that would result in a better tone quality, and then it was a matter of practice learning to do that particular thing with my arm that he had physically done in the lesson. I could see it happening, I could see my elbow dipping into the wrong

place and then corrected, so I could say, “Okay, I understand, my arm has to be up, level with shoulder.” But with singing you don’t have that option. It is certainly an imagination exercise as much as it is a concrete set of physical practices, because no one can really point or press on anything. I mean, they can put pressure on your diaphragm or do something with your back, but you can’t really see the sound producing element directly. You can start to learn about it and to note the different adjustments your body has to make, but because it’s such an interior instrument, I found the learning process to be really different from my experience as an instrumental performer when I could directly see what was happening. For example, I could observe that I was out of tune because my finger was too far up on the fingerboard, and that was it.

I took one singing lesson in my undergrad, one when I was living in Berlin, and I took a third sort of conceptual singing lesson with this wonderful soprano named Jessica Aszodi who was coming up with this art practice. The lesson with her was very much about directing your sensations. She would say things like, “Now feel here,” and put her hand on my neck and have me push against it, or she would embrace me in different ways to try to focus my attention to different parts of my physical body that I hadn’t really engaged, or wasn’t thinking about.

CN: Also, I wanted to know more about something you were saying earlier: you were talking about your love of karaoke, and you mentioned that you sort think of yourself as a multivalent musician, because that is the game for musicians and especially composers; it seems especially true these days, that you sort of have to do a little of

everything and you need to have a lot of different ways of approaching music. I'd love to hear more about your other, perhaps less formal, interest in voice and singing.

JM: I think it's a pretty obvious thing: diversity is a good thing. We have had a culture of classical music-making that has told us that we have to specialize in one thing, and that's just not the reality anymore. I think pursuing your authentic interests, all of them, seems like an easy decision in today's musical climate. I don't think what I'm saying is revolutionary; why wouldn't you do that?

CN: That feels really true. I've noticed it too, this phenomenon of multivalency, especially for young composers. I mean, it seems like we are past even considering yourself to be solely a composer, and that the emergent generation of musicians perform their friends' works, and one has to be entrepreneurial in curating concerts. They do many kinds of things, and I think that's actually really fun. It makes music more communal, and more of space where you can explore your own interests and find people who share them. I'm wondering if you have ever sung for any of your friends' compositions, and if so, what was that like for you, and what kinds of things did you do? What did you take away from those experiences?

JM: Well, I recently performed at Lucy Dhegrae's Resonant Bodies festival, and I sang there, in many formats. It was a forty minute set that included two pieces.<sup>411</sup> The first piece was basically a sound and gesture exercise in which I took an excerpt of a speech and removed all the vowels. So, not singing necessarily, but definitely using

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<sup>411</sup> The Resonant Bodies festival is a festival devoted to creative vocal music that allows each performer to curate their own repertoire, established in 2013 by founder Lucy Dhegrae. <https://www.resonantbodiesfestival.org/home>, accessed 11/03/2018.

my mouth and vocal chords. The second piece was a song by Laura Steenberge, who is another really phenomenal composer: I played cello and sang one of her songs. Most recently, I sang in one of Natacha Diels's pieces. It was this performance piece where we recited texts and did gestural movements, and at the end the whole piece dissolves into this extremely slowed-down version of a Tina Turner song called "Simply the Best." I sang through a vocal processor that shifted the pitch of my voice down two octaves, and I'm not sure how it worked out, but it was at least a quarter of the original tempo. That was the last eight minutes of the piece, the band playing with me while I sang this really low, slow and heavily manipulated song.

CN: Your diverse experiences are so interesting to me, and your two examples contrast in a really striking way. In one, you made a lot of consonant sounds, which is like contracting words; in the other, you sing at such a slow tempo that you can't help but stretch out the words, filtered through this electronic, sort of Laurie Anderson-like vocal mask. I'm wondering if those experiences shaped your idea of what singing is and what it can mean. Or perhaps they were already in line with what you had been thinking about voice?

JM: I think that these pieces were aligned with what I had already been thinking about, in terms of music and the voice. I would like to accept all forms of singing into an idea of what a singing practice can be, and that doesn't exclude karaoke, experimental sound poetry, operatic singing, singing a lullaby to a baby, traditional forms of singing that are not native to Western culture; I think all of these things are totally acceptable as singing practices. I know that I have my own limitations in my

performance of some of these things. I have intuitions, but I don't have a really developed vocal practice. But I have been working on it, and I've been trying to incorporate singing, but more in an improvised, noisy kind of context rather than any sort of formal singing or singer-songwriter kind of music.

CN: Have improvisation and noise been a big part of your overall musical development?

JM: I would say they've been at the forefront of my work very recently. I've recently been exposed to a lot of different people making unique kinds of music with their voices. A few of my recent favorites include Phil Minton and Audrey Chen recently came into town (and by that, I mean Chicago) a couple of months ago. It was just the two of them with microphones: no electronics, no processing, just them making these incredible noises, and it's fully improvised. They've been performing as a duo for seven or eight years so they have a real language that they have developed, and it's pretty remarkable watching all the ways that their bodies create these sounds that, for lack of a more sophisticated vocabulary, resemble electronic music.

Another person that has been very influential for me is this woman named Haley Fohr, who has a band here in Chicago called Circuit des Yeux. Her band is totally rock music, crossing over a little into experimental music but basically a rock band, and she has this low, guttural voice that is entrancing. She's also been developing her own solo vocal practice that uses guitar pedals and a lot of electronic manipulation, looping and those sorts of thing. I've just heard a lot of stuff in recent

years that's been very inspiring to me in starting to find new ways of making sound, whether it be with my voice, electronics, or other musical resources that I have.

CN: I would be interested to hear more of your thoughts on Phil Minton and Haley Four of Circuit des Yeux in the context of your really inclusive concept of singing, especially in relation to the body and electronics. I was wondering if you had some thoughts about electronics becoming a streamlined part of vocal practice. That's a question I've been exploring, and your comparison of Phil Minton and Audrey Chen's acoustic sounds to electronic music, (which is actually a pretty common comparison) as well as your mention of Haley Fohr's electronically-experimental vocal work raised that issue in my mind. Is there a connection between all of these interests, past and present, for you?

JM: I would say that Phil Minton and Haley Fohr, while I find them to be extraordinary examples of musicians who are captivating performers and who have developed and interesting practices as artists, it's not new. None of this is new to me or fundamentally challenging the way that I think about music. The impact has more to do with the fact that I come from a conservatory background and I was fully infused into this Western classical tradition, and so these experiences just further substantiate my current direction. There is so much overlap between extended vocal techniques and electronic music, and overlap between extended vocal techniques in new music and in other places. What Phil Minton and Haley Fohr are doing is absolutely extended vocal technique, it's just not presented at a new music concert, and that is great! It's pretty astounding to me that people don't know about these

artists, or these practices, and I feel like the focus of the new music community is very narrow. New music is devoted to knowing everything that's going on inside their circle, but the things happening outside their circle—but that are really musically related and just have different practices or modes of presentation—they often fail to notice. But they're really connected, especially if you break down the sonic identities, the rigor of practice, the attention to detail in performance. I just don't see these things as being separate.

Actually, I think my access to performing has been pretty traditional. I get asked to do concerts in venues that present concerts dedicated to contemporary music, or maybe they have a series dedicated to contemporary music. So, it's already kind of focusing in on a particular audience, and it comes along with its own expectations about rehearsal, sound check, about all sorts of things. So I guess I'm interested in finding these experimental modes of creative inquiry in different realms of music-making, outside of this model that I know very well, to which I'm often invited to and in which I feel comfortable in. But quite frankly, I'm kind of tired of it as well. I like finding other places where experimental work, experimental vocal work is happening, electronic experimental work is happening.

CN: You know, it sounds like there is some overlap between your feelings about opera and it's indexical meaning and the current state of contemporary music; or maybe that's the way contemporary music has always been, in terms of its hermeticism and its similarity in performance format to conventional classical music. I'm curious about your experiences with these experimental musical acts outside of

the realm of new music; were you talking particularly about the band that you had seen, or were you including Phil Minton in that group of new music outsiders as well?

JN: I would include Phil Minton and Circuit des Yeux as part of this non-classical scene. And by the way, those performers have pretty small audiences; maybe Circuit des Yeux is a little more popular in that they might have thousands of fans and Phil Minton maybe has hundreds of fans.

But you know, they are definitely within a scene themselves. Phil Minton and Audrey Chen, they're in the experimental music scene, experimental-improvised scene, and that's another genre unto itself. And Circuit des Yeux, they're definitely a rock band. It's not that they are trying to blur the genre lines; they're also deeply focused and interested in their own scenes. It just seems to me that there are a lot of overlapping scenes involved in the kind of music that I want to be making, even if the practices look very different. What it comes down to is that I want to know more about these different scenes, and now I'm much more inclined to go to one of these kinds of shows that maybe a new music show, for example.

CN: So, what you were saying about seeing a lot of overlap between these scenes, especially in regard to what you want to do, musically. Tell me more about what you want to do, what you want to see in your music, and that you're seeing in these sorts of vernacular experimentalisms. I would love to hear more about these intersections and how they coincide with your compositional aesthetic.

JM: Well, I think it centers around wanting to develop a personal practice that then goes out into the world. And you know, I came to composing in a sort circuitous way.

I play in this band called Pamplemousse and they were the ones who encouraged me to start composing, but it was always in the context of this band. I didn't write music for other people, I just made things for whatever concert we were playing next, and then we'd move on. But through doing, I learned more about writing music and the types of things that I was interested in making. And I learned pretty quickly that I don't actually want to write for musical instruments, I'd rather write for bodies. I want to write text. I want to write virtuosic, synchronized gestures for performers. But I did not want to write a flute solo. The process of becoming a composer was completely intertwined with playing all the time and performing constantly with the band. And there's also the factor that these people are my closest friends, and so I have a lot of trust with them. They were patient and helpful, they made a lot of suggestions, and they were completely willing to let me steal their ideas. And later, they would steal my ideas. We all sort of contributed to this shared body of musical ideas.

I think at the moment, the thing that's really inspiring me is looking at how people develop an artistic practice—either through an instrument or their voice—of improvisation: how they build this toolbox of things that they have already made, ready for performance. I love that they can hear the situation as it is developing and come up with the right tool for that situation. For me, this more listening-driven mode of composition that is intrinsic to improvised music is very exciting. You have to be a great listener and you have to be watchful; in Pamplemousse we say “having your head on swivel.” What we mean is noticing what is going on at the present moment,

anticipating what might come next, and sometimes providing something that isn't there yet but that will add to that moment in time, either through texture, timbre, or just knowing when to do nothing.

Right now I have this dilapidated guitar, four tape cassette players, seven bells, and an old drum machine. And that might be my set-up, and it's exciting to me to try and figure out all the possible tricks that I could do with these seven things in front of me, to make a musical language that would still express my identity, my sound world as a performer. You know, you have these identities that you put out into the world. For a long time now, I've been a composer and a performer of this sort of new discipline style music, but now I want to shift gears and develop a new set of tools and techniques that might gain me access into a different type of music-making scenario. To be able to play with improvisers is, for me, exciting and completely terrifying, but it's something that I'm slowly working toward and that I have as a new goal.

CN: Yeah. You know, maybe I'm wrong, so I'd love for you to respond to this in any way you see fit, but I feel like I'm hearing an overlap between *The Voice Machine* and what you're doing now, which sounds like it is centered around this idea of music as a space where performers can work outside of the limitations of their primary instrument in order to connect with their own sense of musicality and discover their own personal musical identity. Does that resonate with you?

JM: I would definitely say it does, in that music-making for me is a social act. The thing that is exciting for me about music is that you make music with other people, and for other people.

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One thing that I wanted to clarify is that I think improvisation is a good vehicle for all those social practices that we've been talking about, but I don't think it's the only one. I think it's one that's very inherent to that type of practice, but I've been trying to find creative ways of infusing that into my former practice as a composer and as a new music person. One thing that has stuck is that I am still working with new music performers, and some of these new engagements are coming in the forms of commissions, which is really fantastic. So, I do write pieces for other people, but I really want to work with the performers. And you know, not all performers are interested in working that way. Sometimes they approach me saying that they really like my work and that they will do whatever I write, but that they just want a score. I think that's fine, and I understand that there are a lot of different ways of making this happen, but the process of working together is most satisfying to me. I realize that it takes a long time, though, and that's a model that requires deep involvement from both of us, and we also have to have the expectation that life will get in the way of finishing quickly. With improvisation, these relationships through music can be accessed more readily, and on the compositional side of things, I've been working with performers in this kind of relationship where they become a part of my life and I become a part of their life.

With *The Voice Machine*, we did have this opportunity of doing workshops, and so we did get to know one another better as a result of doing it. I think there was still quite a lot of that academic environment present that prevented us from being more intimately connected with one another. It felt like there was this mindset of, “This is a class project.” I think also not just the classroom environment but the way that things sort of manifested as being heavily controlled by the professors dampened some of that connective possibility. I think that sort of alignment of responsibilities made the project feel less organic, and that it heightened the barrier between the composer and the performer, which I found frustrating. I wanted a lot more input, and of course that would take a lot more time from the performers, but I felt that because we had to get it done in a certain timeframe, and there were grades involved, it precluded that possibility. There were these expectations of the composer presenting an authoritative score to the performers, and they had to learn that score as written; the circumstances upheld that expectation, which for me, is not so interesting anymore.

CN: Yes, and actually I noticed a connection between your frustration with those limitations placed on the composer by the classroom situation and what you had said earlier about singing more generally. If the expectation is that the composers are supposed to provide the performers a written score that they can learn on their own, then that would also entail that the composer writes in a way that is familiar to the singer. So the composer is kind of forced into writing according to the vocal status quo, using techniques that the voice students will have learned in their studios with

their teachers. It's like format and vocal style are glued together in this music department context.

JM: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I've been making tutorial videos, because a lot of the things that I'm asking performers to do are not easily notatable or interpreted for that matter. A three second video is much easier. But what I've also noticed about that is it whittles down the possibilities for interpretation. The performer can then see exactly what I meant and replicate it. Very seldom does someone see the video and say to themselves, "Well, I'm going to do my version of that." They usually get very detailed about it, noticing things like the palm being up and the fingers are clasped together. I think that those tutorial practices actually limit the interpretative availabilities for performers, so I've been trying to figure out new ways of doing that.

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CN: Do you send your tutorial videos out individually when people request a piece from you, or do you just make them available on your website?

JM: They are part of the performance materials. If people want to get the score, they'll get the PDF, but they will also get a folder with the tutorial videos and audio examples. And it's stated in the score, "Please watch the tutorial videos in order to gain more information about how to do this kind of move. And I guess, I think, in the past I've made things in very particular ways, and I liked having a particular style and being able to show exactly what I meant because I wanted that particular style to show up, but I think now that's not the most important thing for me anymore. Now I'm more focused on making pieces that will allow the interpreter to bring themselves

into it as an equal author. But that requires me to make pieces really differently, and I'm not really sure what that always means for me, but I'm finding out as a go.

CN: Great. If you don't mind, I want to pivot our conversation to talk a little bit about the voice again. I know that you're not necessarily a singer, in the sense that you don't identify with the narrow conservatory definition of what that means. Can I ask you to talk more extended vocal techniques? It came up sort of briefly when you were talking about Phil Minton and *Circuit des Yeux*, and I see some commonalities between extended vocal techniques and your treatment of the voice, or at least in your idea of singing as something that can be flexibly negotiated and that emerges through a process of musical engagement. I guess I'm just really curious to hear what you think of when you hear the term "extended vocal techniques"? What do you think other people associate with that term? What does it mean for you?

JM: Well, extended vocal techniques are things that lie outside of a sort of socially agreed upon normative singing, or speaking. So, talking is not an extended vocal technique. Singing a love song is not an extended technique. I would say that, actually, singing opera is an extended vocal technique, although maybe on the border of it! I would say that in our culture's present time, with opera memberships on the decline, that it might be closer to that category. But I suppose for now, let's not put it in the category of extended vocal technique. But I would say that there are the traditional new music extended vocal techniques, and you brought up Cathy Berberian and Joan La Barbara. I would put in Shelley Hirsch, and also Jennifer Walsch is a great example. She has developed her own way, and it's basically this

speed-talking with lots of audible mouth sounds. I would put ASMR into the category, and auctioneering, and of course somebody like Diamanda Galás. She's definitely on that spectrum as well. I guess I definitely don't identify as a singer or a vocalist because I have very little experience. I would be accepting of that term, but I haven't done enough for me to consider myself part of that category. Which is interesting, actually, because when Lucy Dhegrae invited me to be a part of the Resonant Bodies festival this year (she did a Chicago chapter), I was on the bill with Pamela Z and Nathalie Joachim, who both have highly developed vocal practices. It's what they do. I was just kind of taking my first stab at it. When she asked me to be a part of it, I decided I would make a piece that only uses consonants and doesn't require the vocal tract. I wanted it to be more about using your mouth and your body as your instrument. I also did a final piece that had some strange karaoke elements, but that was more about the body than the voice.

CN: It is so fascinating to me when people challenge the definition of what singing is and how we have come to define it. I think that blurring of how we understand singing is more interesting than defining it. Reflecting on your experience at this festival and in your overall musical encounters, what do you notice about the cultural implications of the term "extended vocal techniques," and how have you come to understand that term?

JM: What I perceive now as the crux of what extended vocal techniques shares across many genres is that its flexible and contingent a performer's personally-developed version of extended vocal techniques. For example, Pamela Z's extended vocal

techniques are very different from those of Diamanda Galás. I think it really is about the individual, figuring out these weird, super delightful tricks that their unique physical bodies can make. That is a really personal exploration that has a lot to do with the performer's individual body and their aesthetic priorities. I would not ever use my voice the way that Diamanda Galás uses her voice because I don't want to shriek, I don't want to scream. That's not something that I want to do with my voice. One of the things that I do is I make these absurdist sounds that sounds a little like beat-boxing, but in a more abstracted sense that doesn't have the rhythmic logic that a beat-boxer has, but that uses similar physical mechanisms. So, thinking about what extended vocal techniques means today, I believe it's really tied to people's personal practices. The things that I see that I am interested in are not the more codified extended techniques; for example, you might see vocal fry indicated in a score, or overtone singing. These sounds have kind of been canonized, wrapped into a certain type of practice. But I think the type of extended techniques that I hear when I go and see shows are really based on the individual performer.

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