

Book Reviews

Jessica Gabriel Peritz, *The Lyric Myth of Voice: Civilizing Song in Enlightenment Italy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022). xi + 282 pp. \$65.00, £55.00

Operatic reform by Ranieri de' Calzabigi and Christoph Willibald Gluck is central to discourse associated with Italian music in the second half of the eighteenth century. Musicologist Jessica Gabriel Peritz elaborates, extends and amplifies this narrow subject, intersecting Italian singing practices with nuanced philosophical strains of Enlightenment theory, ideologies of voice and subjectivity. Presenting a fresh angle on an era dominated by scholarship concerned with the French perspective, the author engages with Italian literary genres, philosophical essays and reception history writings, demonstrating the limitations of scores to reveal expressive vocal techniques. Peritz's frameworks encompass historical musicology, voice studies and literary theory. She also embraces current methodologies regarding experience, like embodiment and phenomenology. Especially appealing to this reader was Peritz's desire to 'interrogate how we write histories of embodied practices' (p. 2). She sheds light on Italian persons, conventions and texts to determine how 'the origins of the ideology of voice-as-subjectivity' (p. 13) shaped a socio-political aesthetic.

The monograph is organized into five chapters, preceded by a lengthy introduction and concluding with a brief epilogue. At the heart of her many research questions is how eighteenth-century Italian intellectuals responded to the shifting views of voice and its potential for civilizing and domesticating effects. In order to assess how vocal myths came to be and how they might have appeased cultural anxieties, she investigates Italian music, literature and society in the late eighteenth century and takes an archival deep dive into sources that demystify traces of Italian perceptions of voice. While voice can be read in multiple ways (*la voce, il canto, gli accenti, le inflessioni, il suono*), the author is less interested in tracking terminology and instead centres on examining how the voice acquired semiotic and cultural associations that cultivated 'practices of sound making, language use, and literary production' (p. 10). In lieu of a single linear throughline, Peritz introduces overlapping narratives and interrelates them through the lens of two lyric figures: Orpheus and Sappho. These classical figures are fully fleshed out through textual analyses as well as an exploration of eighteenth-century opera singer role embodiment. Alongside detailed insights into Italy's developing cultural philosophies, this book is dense with examples of lesser-known performers, composers, librettists and primary sources.

The central arguments are crafted with contemporary concerns for identity, agency and vocality. While on-trend in current scholarship, these topics are effectively resonant through Peritz's bold and imaginative storytelling of the voice expressed in poetry and song. Ever mindful of the reader, she leads us along through clearly defined signposts and well-developed introductions and conclusions. Halfway through the book, for instance, she introduces a new research question: 'how did voice become an ideological tool for Italy's civilizing process rather than an impediment to it?' (p. 93). Clearly signalling the change, the author explores possible solutions to the question for the rest of the monograph.

The primary readership for the book may be musicologists and graduate students, as well as extending to those in other humanities, such as philosophy, history and literature. My intimate familiarity with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Denis Diderot and Johann Gottfried Herder contributed to comprehending this book. Foundational knowledge of Enlightenment ideologies is a prerequisite to fully grasp Peritz's intricate ideas, especially those regarding Giambattista Vico and Ugo Foscolo as well as Montesquieu's climate theory, with its strong allusions to Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1754; 1781). For example, Peritz traces the voice intersecting 'at the nexus of myth and song' (p. 11) to the ideas espoused by Vico in *La scienza nuova* (1725; rev. 1730, 1744). This Vichian train of thought precedes Rousseauian theory of primitive song as well as Foscolo's advancement of the ideology by the early nineteenth century. At minimum, the reader needs a basic context of eighteenth-century philosophy to follow her multifaceted – and highly developed – arguments.

Chapter 1 treats the Gaelic poet-singer Ossian as the new Orpheus, the key figure tying the author's at times disparate findings together. Peritz tracks the far-reaching impact of Melchiorre Cesarotti and his translation of James Macpherson's *Fingal*, published as *Poesie di Ossian* (1763; rev. 1772, 1801). She contends that Cesarotti believed the voice transcends the delivered content to encapsulate and reinvigorate voiced poetry. In her textual analysis, Peritz reveals Cesarotti's avoidance of the standard *ottava rima* and adeptly describes his Ossianic prosody as eliciting 'the experience of listening to someone tell a story extemporaneously, with multiple asides, run-on sentences, and other hallmarks of everyday speech' (p. 24). While Cesarotti and his Ossian translation were highly regarded as seminal to Italian literature (then and now), Peritz points out it was not viewed as musical due to its lack of Metastasian uniform rhyme schemes.

The real treasure in the first chapter is the connection of Cesarotti's translated poetry to Vico's philosophy, which asserts history as simultaneously 'progressive and cyclical' (p. 27). Vico professes an age of gods and heroes in which Cesarotti wishes for society to return. Peritz alludes to Cesarotti's ability within the translation's uncommon versification to achieve 'the immediacy and vocalicity of a primitive song that expressed nonrational, uncategorizable, originary passions ... [Cesarotti's] *Ossian* turned Vico's emphasis on the historical role of poetry into an emphasis on the voices that sing poetic histories' (p. 29). This is just one example of the author's careful consideration for prosody that illuminates ideals of voice in this era.

It would not be a book about poetry and theatre in eighteenth-century Italy without reference to the preface of Gluck and Calzabigi's *Alceste* (1769); the elaboration of the preface and connection to Cesarotti provide beneficial context to the scholar wishing to expand their understanding of Enlightenment practices permeating across national cultures. Besides drawing a clear parallel of Ossian to Orpheus as poet-singers, she suggests similarities in the writing styles of Calzabigi to Cesarotti. To further drive home the Ossian–Orpheus comparison, she contrasts the languishing death texts of the heroines Euridice and Comala and the responses of their lovers Orpheus and Fingallo. This analysis returns us to one of her main ideas. Specified as a 'Vichian-turned-Cesarottian metatrophe', Peritz states the voice possesses power over 'life and death, presence and absence' (p. 47); thus, it manifests in physical dichotomies.

This abundant chapter concludes by considering the broader influence of Cesarotti's reimagined Vichian historiography on his contemporary culture.

Invoking intellectual historian Joseph Mali, Peritz emphasizes how myth affords a “concrete story”¹ that relates the abstract to real people and events’ (p. 51). Intrinsic to the popularized Italian myths was the possibility of song as a civilizing tool to form political subjects, as chapters 3–5 more pointedly explore.

Chapter 2 highlights specific performers, delving into performance practice and reception history as modes of inquiry. It reads more fluidly than the first chapter, in my opinion, and offers an innovative model for historically informed performance practice framed through twenty-first century scholarly interests in agency and embodiment. Breaking open the concepts of music historian Charles Burney’s ‘extemporaneous effusion’² and literary scholar M.H. Abrams’s ‘lyric effusion’,³ Peritz’s discourse is especially valuable for current opera singers in search of an accurate and clarified aesthetic approach when analysing, interpreting and embodying an eighteenth-century score. In Burney’s 1770 description, a singer’s effusions were not mere musical embellishments but rather an ‘instance of apparent vocal spontaneity’ (p. 63). Abrams, too, considers expressive spontaneity critical to lyric effusion. Peritz connects these ideas to compositional writing, saying ‘the sense of lyric effusion was signaled by a notated switch from the cantabile to the declamatory’ (p. 62). Therefore, singers can infuse effusions – breaks or contrasts in the style of melodic content – with their own spontaneous interpretations.

In the second chapter, Peritz begins to unpack *sensibilità*, which is critical to the investigation of Enlightenment philosophies. She fittingly refers to it as ‘Settecento sympathy’ (p. 54). Three pivotal castrati who played Orpheus during the 1770s–1790s – Giuseppe Millico, Gaetano Guadagni and Gasparo Pacchierotti – dictate the story she unfolds. These lesser-known singers chronicle the development of a reimagined *Orfeo* that utilized Calzabigi’s text but replaced Gluck’s music with that of Ferdinando Bertoni. Referencing Diderot’s *Paradox of the Actor* (1770–1778; 1830), Peritz emphasizes *sensibilità* as an expressive ‘mode of performance’ (p. 54). The castrati found this useful to help maintain their relevance, as their artificial place in society was questioned in the shifting idioms and ideologies of the latter eighteenth century. Rather than seeking to express the self, castrati implemented the sentimental notions of character immediacy and impulse to ‘successfully (re)make their voices, and thereby establish themselves as the natural alternative to the virtuosic castrato stereotype’, which allowed them to ‘carve out space for themselves in a culture that was showing less and less tolerance for external manifestations of “unnatural” bodily difference’ (p. 55). Her argument here reminded me of the mid-century embodied transition from the artificial elements intrinsic to the learned style to the sensitive and tender features found in the galant and *empfindsamkeit* idioms. Yet she brilliantly extends it beyond expected musical structures to engage in disability studies.

Both castrati Millico and Guadagni believed it was the singer’s voice that provided sensibility to the Orpheus myth, rather than the libretto itself. Guadagni, in particular, led the shift in Italian acting practices through the influence of English actor David Garrick, resulting in what Peritz describes as the ‘Garrick-Guadagni approach’ (p. 56). Continuing with a performance studies

¹ Joseph Mali, *Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico’s “New Science”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 203.

² Charles Burney, *General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, 4 vols (London: T. Becket, 1776–1789): 4:496.

³ M.H. Abrams, *Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (New York: Norton, 1986): 160.

angle, she examines how singers practising this new approach sought to fully imitate the character with verisimilitude, as opposed to the traditional reliance on a performer's star status and/or superhuman vocal feats to draw in the audience. Guadagni's interpretation of Orpheus, for example, was dependent on his 'vocal-expressive immediacy' (p. 62). Even Burney 'struggled to distinguish Orfeo's scripted voice from Guadagni's second-nature performance of it' (p. 63). In addition to identifying changes in acting conventions, Peritz's musical analyses of both Gluck and Bertoni's scores of *Orfeo* are beautifully crafted and detail oriented.

This chapter ends with multiple subjects, loosely tied together through Millico. She provides a history of the two-tempo rondo form as the precursor to the cantabile-cabaletta aria form, followed by a summary of Millico's instructional preface of *La pietà d'amore* (1782). In it, he prizes the voice as saviour and reformer of opera. Connecting the musical structures to philosophy, Peritz shifts the conversation from composer or performer to what she calls the 'receiver' of the art (p. 72). Through *sensibilità*, the receiver is encouraged to have a 'self-reflective' aesthetic experience (p. 73). Finally, she introduces a third sensibility castrato, Pacchierotti, as a successor of Guadagni and Millico. While a bit ambitious, these many ideas contribute to the overall narrative of the Italian Enlightenment's influence on vocal practices.

Chapter 3, 'Civilizing Song', dives into polemics, emphasizing a connection between song and morality, liberty and democracy. Peritz jumps around Parma, Venice, Rome, Milan and Naples to paint a picture of the politically disjunct city states of Italy via the musical scene in the 1780s. The chapter is bursting with diverse case studies, from the iconography of a sketch to treatises, performers, operas and philosophers. She weaves together a tangible, thrilling political tale and defines her coined term, *civilizing song*, in two ways: 1) a compound noun where a melody civilizes those listening and 2) a gerund and object that 'refers to the process by which song itself becomes civilized' (p. 86). She argues these definitions are 'dyadic' and not opposing because 'they both grow from the premise that the singing voice has the power to shape feeling subjects *and* political ones' (p. 86). Notably, Peritz addresses the imperialist and colonialist ideologies latent in the process of civilizing societies. She calls upon many primary sources concerned with civilizing through edification in this discussion. Peritz determines that if the genre of opera is not the agent of change, the instrument itself (voice) is. Beyond the expected concept of the opera theatre as an edifying public space, the coffeehouse is another public sphere where she aptly describes theatre and commerce as converging.

Pivoting from the Orphic tales, Sappho becomes the dominant character of study in chapter 4. Peritz imparts a detailed backstory of Sappho's oeuvre and the translation process of the extant fragments. Argued as sublime by eighteenth-century translators, Sappho's fragment 31 is one of the documents examined. Peritz then considers how specific translations, compositions and novels contributed to the domestication, and thus subjugation, of women's voices. A particular noteworthy example is Alessandro Verri's sentimental novel *Le avventure di Saffo, poetessa di Mitilene* (1782). Though presented as a translation of the original source, the fictional novel was actually Verri's own storytelling intermingled with Sappho fragments (for added authenticity). Verri excludes positive achievements of Sappho's real life as a poet-singer, instead focusing on her lovesickness for Phaon and the loss of her agency. 'By casting Sappho's lyrics as the breathless confessions of a teenage girl, Verri was doing more than merely updating ancient history with a dash of Settecento sensibility (though that was certainly part of it). He

was also simultaneously capitalizing on and asserting control over certain literary aesthetics that were then increasingly associated with women' (p. 119). Peritz argues that Verri's novel, alongside a plethora of other examples expounded upon, added to the civil impact of creating domesticated female Italian subjects.

The second half of chapter 4 provides an excursion into early Italian salon culture (*salotto*) in the 1780s–90s with Niccolò Zingarelli's musical setting of fragment 31 and also the only opera in the 1790s with Sappho's story: *Saffo, ossia i riti di Apollo Leucadio* (1794), by Simone Mayr and Antonio Sografi. The male characters Phaon and Alceo represent the theme of duty over desire, which reaffirms *opera seria*'s 'code of honour while proposing to reward self-sacrificing women with conjugal domesticity' (p. 149). The creators decided to forgo the usual suicide with a *lieto fine*; therefore, Sappho and Phaon represent the Enlightenment ideals of domesticating each other. Using this rewritten Sappho story alongside Foscolo's epistolary novel *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1798/1802), Peritz illuminates a fragile – but intriguing – metaphor, likening the domestic union to a needed political unification: 'haunting all this talk about unifying fragments was the notion that Italy, dismembered by foreign powers, could be brought together culturally and politically – could be domesticated and civilized – if a proper narrative of its history were cobbled together with archaeology and then pronounced far and wide through literature and music' (p.153). Peritz posits that Foscolo used Sappho and these characters as an allegory for the utopia he imagined for his beloved, fragmented Italy.

The final chapter continues to examine a woman's position in Enlightenment society in both public and private spheres, while also looking at emerging vocal practices and aesthetics. The Portuguese singer Luigia Todi is the central figure alongside Venetian theatre critic Innocenzo Della Lena and his treatise on contemporary theatre. Peritz bounces between humanizing singers, dissecting vocal technique and dismantling the socio-political ramifications of gendering *sensibilità* and the sublime. According to Della Lena, Todi's voice signified how opera would remain relevant – not through 'new libretti nor Gluckian reforms' (p. 160) but rather through vocal expressivity. Tying into the themes of chapter 2, Peritz shows Todi as essential to the transition from castrati conventions to nineteenth-century prima donnas and *bel canto* technique. Peritz cross-references Burney, Della Lena and Stendhal to convey a sense of Todi's vocal production and technical deficiencies. Despite her flaws, Todi's acting captivated spectators. Evidence from a *Gazzetta* critic mentions moral sense (a *sensibilità* buzzword) as one of Todi's embodied attributes: she was the *cagione morale* that helped modify behaviour by entrancing, and thus civilizing, the audience.

In addition to describing her singing and acting, Peritz uses Todi to address the dissent against forced domesticity and prescribed gender roles within civilized society. Todi was praised as domestically virtuous for traveling with her family, while the trend in opera singers had been 'bad motherhood' (p. 177). Positioning the mother's voice within the conversation, Peritz acknowledges Italy's sacred roots in the mother Mary. The new domestic ideology, though, placed 'the mother's song as a tool for secular progress – for furthering the civilizing project that many pursued in the wake of Enlightenment thought' (p. 185). As Peritz explains, motherhood was deemed 'good' when it submitted to the established patriarchy and did not distract from progress. Operatic examples of good and bad mothers who kill themselves for self-sacrifice include *Ines de Castro* (1793), *La morte di Cleopatra* (1796) and *Andromaca* (1797). This chapter, detailing Todi's career and significant influence, is a striking intersection of voice studies,

gender studies, philosophy and historical musicology; it is a masterclass in interdisciplinary analysis.

The book's epilogue begins with one final opera scene, Act 3, Scene 1 from *Giulietta e Romeo* (1796) by Zingarelli and Giuseppe Maria Foppa. With its remarkable number of revivals (it was produced 57 times from 1796–1837), the opera acts as a bridge between eighteenth and nineteenth-century vocal practices. The two main characters are poetically likened to the figures guiding this book, Orpheus and Sappho. Describing its tragic ending, Peritz intertwines this opera with characters and singers from previous case studies.

This monograph is a testament to Peritz's rigorous historical work and commitment to a wide assortment of sources and scholarship. Knowledge as a construct of culture is not a new idea, yet Peritz's path of inquiry from a Vichian perspective epitomizes innovation. Her creative use of 'originary' (p. 200) genres like song, poetry, literature and myths to investigate the voice provides a rich array of new discoveries. *The Lyric Myth of Voice* satiates the reader like a meaty seven-course meal. Despite some slight overindulgences, no moment lacks in flavour, content or creativity. The reader is left full of a vast variety of abstract ideas made concrete.

Danielle L Herrington
 University of Central Oklahoma
Dherrington1@uco.edu

doi: 10.1017/S1479409823000344

First published online 26 September 2023

Candace Bailey, *Unbinding Gentility: Women Making Music in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021). xviii + 292 pp. \$30

Musicologists in the United States have come to apply the term 'binder's volumes' to nineteenth century collections of bound sheet music (or, more rarely, musical manuscripts) belonging to a particular person or family. Because of the mass-production and wide accessibility of most of their contents, these volumes have long been dismissed from musicological consideration as ephemeral, even superficial remnants of a homogenous middle-class White female parlour culture. However, Candace Bailey's *Unbinding Gentility: Women Making Music in the Nineteenth-Century South* argues that the condition, marginalia, provenance and content of these binder's volumes have more to tell us about women and music than has previously been supposed. Bailey's study focuses on the American South before, during, and after the Civil War and approaches the volumes from the perspective of gender, class, geography and race. A committed archival historian, Bailey also draws on newspaper advertisements and performance reviews, the rosters and curricula of finishing schools, and family letters and financial documents. The result of her analysis of this broad swath of sources is a newly diversified picture of music making among nineteenth-century women in the South.

At the heart of Bailey's work are numerous examples of 'musicking', or actions including but not limited to music making; in her words, 'musicking belongs in a discussion of performative contexts' (p. 217). The author weaves together narratives of female musicking with women's shared pursuit of gentility in its evolving forms. Bailey describes gentility as a 'borderless ideal' (p. 219) that accompanied