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Diva Forever

The Operatic Voice between Reproduction and Reception

The operatic voice has been among the key dimensions within opera-studies for several years. Within a field seemingly reinventing itself, however, this voice is intimately related to other dimensions: sound, the body, gender and sexuality, and so forth. One particular voice highlighting these intersections is the diva's voice. Somewhat paradoxical this is not least the case when this particular voice is recorded, stored, and replayed by way of technology. The technologically reproduced voice makes it possible to fully concentrate on "the voice itself," seemingly without paying any attention to other dimensions. The paradox thus arises that the above-mentioned intersections might be most clearly found when attempts are made to remove them from the scene of perception.

The focus on "the voice itself" is familiar to readers of Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema*. Starting out with stating that the voice is elusive, Chion asks what is left when one eliminates, from the voice, "everything that is not the voice itself."¹ Relating primarily to film, and coming from a strong background in psychoanalysis, Chion moves on to discuss many features of the voice, beginning with the sometimes forgotten differentiation from speech. The materiality of the voice becomes important, and then already different intersections are hinted at. Combining Chion's interpretations with musicology is nothing new, but it opens some other questions. The voice in music is not necessarily as elusive as Chion seems to argue, or, perhaps better, its elusiveness is of a different kind.² And when it comes to the operatic voice, dimensions beyond the ones Chion discusses beckon a reflection.

In this article I attempt a discussion of some examples of the operatic voice, although in some non-operatic settings. Three films comprise the basic material, all containing scenes where opera is crucial. In these scenes the operatic voices are mediated, often several times. As such the discussion is not about "the voice itself," but rather about how the voice is related to other dimensions, where the most important one is between the recorded voice and emotions of desire or rupture on the part of the listener. In Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* (1981), the diva refuses to record her voice, but a pirate-tape is nevertheless taken and circulated. Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (1993) has a key-scene flooded by the recorded voice of Maria Callas that heightens the emotional intensity. Franco Zeffirelli's *Callas Forever* (2002), on the other hand, in-

1 Michel CHION: *The Voice in Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1999. p. 1.

2 Cf. Marcia J. CITRON: "The Elusive Voice: Absence and Presence in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's Film *Le nozze di Figaro*," in Jeongwon JOE and Rose THERESA (eds.), *Between Opera and Cinema*. New York: Routledge. 2002. p. 133-153.

vents a history of a filmic comeback for Callas, where prerecorded sound claims center stage. In these three movies, then, the voice in the age of its technical reproducibility – to paraphrase the famous article by Walter Benjamin – is at stake.³ In the operatic context this leads to several questions. Firstly, about the relation between the “natural” voice, live production, and recorded reproduction. Secondly, to receptions of the voice: the transfer to another location of the voice’s reception, which changes the meaning of the voice. This, thirdly, leads to an interesting sub-history of operatic reception, one outlined by Wayne Koestenbaum in his *The Queen’s Throat*, where the privacy of listening to a gramophone and the (former) closet of the homosexual opera-lover – the opera queen – becomes a matrix for reading relations between the operatic voice and (homosexual) desire.⁴ Beginning with interpretations of these three film scenes, where the focus is on the effects of the operatic voice, the article will then outline some arguments about a possible intersection between the opera queen and the gramophone voice.

Philadelphia

Jonathan Demme’s *Philadelphia* (1993) tells the story of Andrew Beckett (played by Tom Hanks), a lawyer who has lost his job after contracting AIDS. When the film came out it was hailed as the first mainstream Hollywood production showing PWA (people-with-AIDS), but it was simultaneously criticized for depicting stereotypes, not least in relation to gay men. In the interplay between Andy Beckett and his lawyer Joe Miller (played by Denzel Washington), one can, however, sense more of a complexity than simply stereotypical depictions. And arguably, stereotypical depictions are always a question of genre. Brett Farmer’s description of the film, in his article “The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship,” as “a hybrid deathbed melodrama cum social realist film cum courtroom drama,” is to the point, and within this mixture the film explores issues of masculinity, sexuality, and family life, not least around a notion of tolerance.⁵ As a Hollywood production, though, and on a seemingly “controversial” issue, the film continuously borders on becoming normal, in a kind of feel-good way, and one could easily argue that in the end a heteronormative nuclear family kind of masculinity becomes dominating. In the interplay between Andrew and Joe, race too is involved. The African American lawyer and the white lawyer simultaneously present a racial dichotomy added to that of sexual orientation. In the beginning of the film homosexuality becomes “the white man’s disease,” made clear by Miller’s strong homophobia. The “liberal” dimension of the film, where tolerance seemingly is about the black hetero and the white homo embodying “brotherly love” – in the

3 Cf. Walter BENJAMIN: “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (Second Version”), in Walter BENJAMIN: *Selected Writings: Volume 3 – 1935-1938*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 2002. p. 101-133.

4 Wayne KOESTENBAUM: *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*. London: GMP. 1993.

5 Brett FARMER: “The Fabulous Sublimity of Gay Diva Worship,” *Camera Obscura* 20/2. 2005. p. 174.

city of Philadelphia, no less – thus removes some of the societal differences, but within a story that at a surface level hardly challenges the underlying mechanisms the film simultaneously depicts.

Brian Carr, in his article “*Philadelphia* and the Race of ‘Brotherly Love’,” focuses on the handshakes in the movie as moments where interaction between the characters is highlighted.⁶ But rather than these moments, the key moment of emotional transference is the scene where Andy is lip-syncing to Maria Callas’s operatic voice.⁷ When practicing his testimony, he puts on his stereo, and we hear Callas singing “*La mamma morta*” from Umberto Giordano’s opera *Andrea Chénier* (1896). “Do you like opera?” Andy asks Joe, and Joe answers that he doesn’t know anything about opera. Andy walks through the room, dragging his intravenous drip along with him, and walks us through the opera’s plot while simultaneously interpreting the aria. The light is dimmed, and the light from the fireplace fills the room. And then, together with Callas, Andy exclaims: “I am divine. I am oblivion. [...] I am love.”⁸ This scene contains many dimensions, but I am particularly invested in the role Maria Callas can be said to play. She is, of course, not really present, but present only in a mediated way, by the gramophonic rendition of *Andrea Chénier*. Her voice is present and it fills the scene, while the gramophone makes it into an object within the movie. But this voice simultaneously penetrates into the action of the movie; it is present in the diegesis, the characters hear it and talk about it. In the scene, then, an intimate relation between the gramophone record and the film’s narrative is established. Given that Andy also seems to associate himself with the aria – he seems to take the aria’s “I” as standing in for himself – the story of the opera becomes a kind of mirror for the film’s story.⁹ Andy in a sense becomes Madelaine – the aria’s singer – through Callas recorded performance.¹⁰ The operatic genre becomes an emotional vessel, following upon understandings – as well as prejudices – that in opera everything is larger than life, not least the emotions. This might not be a proper musicological definition of opera, but it still says something about how opera functions within the cultural climate. It is not necessarily “high art” – that would depend upon context – but can border on popular entertainment. At the same time is it deeply “unrealistic” in

6 Brian CARR: “*Philadelphia* and the Race of ‘Brotherly Love’,” *GLQ* 6/4. 2000. p. 541

7 See also Marc A. WEINER: “Why Does Hollywood Like Opera?” in Jeongwon JOE and Rose THERE-SA (eds.), *Between Opera and Cinema*. New York: Routledge. 2002. p. 76ff. for a discussion of the same scene.

8 This same clip is also featured in Luca Guadagnino’s *Io sono l’amore (I Am Love)* (2009) where Emma Recchi (played by Tilda Swinton) watches it on television.

9 This is not un-common in filmic references to opera. In particular in what for lack of a better term we can call mainstream-film, opera might be seen as functioning as a way of heightening the emotional dimensions of the movies while simultaneously existing as a mirror. Take *Pretty Woman* (1990, Gary Marshall) as an example. In one key scene of the movie – key, at least, for an opera scholar – Edward Lewis (played by Richard Gere) takes Vivian Ward (played by Julia Roberts) on his plane to see a performance of Verdi’s *La Traviata*. We see a setting where Roberts’s character is deeply enthralled by the story, whereas there can be no doubt about the similarities of the two stories (cf. Marcia CITRON: *Opera on Screen*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2000. p. 63).

10 Cf. David SCHROEDER: *Cinema’s Illusions, Opera’s Allure: The Operatic Impulse in Film*. New York: Continuum. 2002. p. 276.

so many ways. The grandeur of opera can thus be used as a communicative strategy, and here shows itself particularly suited to communicate grand, overwhelming, emotions. In *Philadelphia*, then, the recording of Maria Callas becomes a way for Andy to give voice to his condition. The operatic voice establishes a proximity to his own emotional state and makes it possible for him to express himself. The voice is not a “dead” voice coming from an inanimate object, but rather seems to animate the scene with the fireplace becoming its visual analogy. This makes it possible to discuss somewhat further the relation between the recorded voice and “life” or “animation,” the differences between the phonograph and the photograph, and the possible “death” of what is technologically stored.¹¹ Rather than death, this aria establishes the pain of the situation. There is a vocal climax just before the “I am love” statement, a high b held for two measures, where we can hear Callas struggling with this tone. As David Schroeder writes, in *Cinema’s Illusions, Opera’s Allure*, it is as if she forces us “to hear the pain in her voice, not allowing us to be fooled by a moment of transcendence that arises from the depth of despair.”¹² This scene transfers passion and suffering, visible in Andrew’s facial expressions as he totally identifies with the aria. Such identification makes critical discourse difficult. Andy might interpret the aria for us, but there is no academic distance. Simultaneously, the operatic functions in heightening emotions, where identification with the recorded voice contributes something “real life” hardly is capable of.

Pointing to the relation between opera and gay identity, this scene also opens up for an investigation of the figure of the opera-queen, a figure related to many stereotypes. While such queenness may be seen as a stereotypical way of othering gay men, or where a derogatory dimension may be found in the term it is also a badge of honor. The opera queen has a huge share in cultural capital consisting of a mix of knowledge, devotion, and worship, the hallmarks of the queen’s identity. In this scene it would seem that Andy comes out as a more or less classic opera queen, but there is a difference. The emotionality of the operatic scene, and the way he relates to the voice, allows for no camp or extravagance, and so his indulgence in opera challenges some stereotypes of opera queenery. Still, it might not simply be a coincidence that Wayne Koestenbaum’s book *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* – arguably the book on the subject of the opera queen – was published in the same year, 1993. While Koestenbaum’s book is very much about the opera queen, his description contains a challenge, not least in his emotional relation to the figure. A book tinted with a touch of nostalgia for a past where the opera queen in his closet could indulge in fantasies, he seems to be describing a dying species.

In the book there is one reference to Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier*, where Koestenbaum writes about death and the end of opera. “If I die a peaceful death, I want to have

11 This difference relates to how Roland Barthes discusses photography in *Camera Lucida*. Roland BARTHES: *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage. 2000.

12 Schroeder, *Cinema’s Illusion, Opera’s Allure*, p. 276.

an opera record playing in the room."¹³ Notice he wants recorded opera, not just opera. And this also has to do with temporality inscribed both in the story of the opera, in the experience of listening to it, and in the simple fact that a record is worn out:

The end of opera is now: my moment of attentive, melancholy listening. My ear is the melody's mausoleum: when I listen to a phrase of a dated but priceless opera (a moment from Maddalene and Andrea's first-act love duet in Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, sung by Beniamino Gigli and Maria Caniglia), opera's ambitions and utopias seem to terminate in my ear, because the recording is crackly and from the 1940s, because the hackneyed, untranslated words don't match modern life, and because the music can't contain my response to it, nor can my response attain the music's height. And the words are left far behind.¹⁴

Koestenbaum's understanding of the recording, then, is still intimately related to the question of the voice's afterlife. But there is so much more at stake in this. For Koestenbaum it seems that the opera queen's existence in many ways is doubled.

Diva

In a chapter of *The Queen's Throat* entitled "The Shut-in Fan: Opera at Home," Koestenbaum writes a short passage about Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva*:

Stealing a voice: in Jean-Jacques Beineix's film *Diva*, recording a diva's voice is an act of erotic conquest, an act of questionable legality and morality. Diva Cynthia Hawkins has never consented to be recorded; her young fan, Jules, makes a pirate tape of her concert and, backstage, even steals her dress off a hanger – a theft that makes headlines. At the film's conclusion, as a final gift to the diva (now his lover), Jules plays her the pirate tape ('I've never heard myself sing', she solemnly admits). Because Jules causes the tape's music to resound in the empty theater, it appears that the voice singing Catalani's aria is the fan's, not the diva's – as if Jules has truly appropriated her voice. A voice is like a dress; playing a record is sonic drag. I'm not the voices' source, but I absorb the voice through my ears, and because I play the record – and act of will – it seems I am masquerading as that voice.¹⁵

Diva (1981) is one of the classical movies about the operatic voice and technologies of reproduction. The diva of the movie, Cynthia Hawkins (played by Wilhelmina Fernandez), refuses to have her voice recorded. But Jules (played by Frédéric Andréi) makes a secret recording of a concert, with her version of "Ebben? Ne andrò lonatana" from Alfredo Catalani's opera *La Wally* (1892). This aria is, incidentally, also featured in *Philadelphia*, but it has a very different function in the latter. One reason has to do with technology. Cynthia Hawkins has never heard her own voice. In her refusal to

13 Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, p. 192.

14 Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 192.

15 Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 49.

have it recorded, she claims that only the "live" voice will be able to communicate what is in the operatic voice. She needs an audience, and is strongly opposed to any attempt to store and keep the voice.¹⁶ As an opposite there is Jules, who is the film's version of the opera queen. He lacks several of the opera queen's fundamental characteristics, or at least they are unrecognizable, but the most important one he definitely got: he is a voice fetishist. After making the pirate recording of Hawkins's singing in the opening of the film, we see him in what is arguably the key scene of the movie. He is at his home (in a garage) listening to the tape, seemingly bathed in the voice. It is a scene that can probably best be described as "oceanic," or, as a filmic representation of *jouissance* as Kaja Silverman argues in her book *The Acoustic Mirror*:

Near the beginning of the film, Jules returns home from the opera 'supplemented' not only with the illicit tape, but with the singer's satin dress, which we watch him appropriate after her performance. He sinks into a chair, embracing the luxurious garment, turns on the tape, and surrounds himself with the rapture-inducing sounds of the diva's (reproduced) voice. The effect is surely as close as cinema has come to an evocation of *jouissance*.¹⁷

Voice fetishism aside, it is somewhat more difficult to call Jules an opera queen. It seems to be somewhat more complicated. But there are some features of the movie where the queenness is still present. Foremost among them is his relation to the operatic voice, a relation having all signs of the fetishist commonly associated with opera queens. Besides that, however, he in one sense hardly seems to have any out-spoken sexual identity, and reading the film according to sexual stereotypes, he is more likely to be seen as a rather immature heterosexual. This also seems to be how Silverman understands the relation, when she describes the voice in *Diva* as a "maternal voice." In this, Jules's relation becomes infantilized, and his bathing in sound becomes "an imaginary return to the sonorous envelope of what is clearly (given the generational gap between Jules and the diva) the maternal voice."¹⁸ Silverman's vocabulary is psychoanalytical, and her focus upon the "generational gap" between the diva and Jules makes it more difficult to relate the investment in this voice to the opera queen's. But even if it is a tape-recorder that is at stake, Koestenbaum's discussion of the idea of the "mother" makes it possible still to relate to the emotionality of the opera queen.¹⁹

16 Cf. Robert LANG: "Carnal Stereophony: A Reading of *Diva*," *Screen* 25/3. 1984. p. 70-77.

17 Kaja SILVERMAN: *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1988. p. 87.

18 Silverman. *The Acoustic Mirror*, p. 87.

19 "Listening, we are the ideal mother ('mother' as idea) attending to the baby's cries, alert to its puling inscriptions, and we are the baby listening to the mother for signs of affection and attention, for reciprocity, for world." Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 32f and, the passage just before Koestenbaum describes *Diva*: "The phonograph could reproduce; though the invention of men, it could speak as a woman. The phonograph, according to a medical journal, would 'reproduce the sob of hysteria, the sigh of melancholia, the sigultus of collapse, the cry of the puerperal woman in the different stages of labor'. Though a tool of male reverie and self-perpetuation, it could reproduce: the original from which recorded copies were made was called a 'mother'." Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 49.

Jules, however, “can doubtless only seem to embody *passivity*,” as Fredric Jameson early wrote about the movie.²⁰ In this passivity he also becomes, in a metaphorical, but fundamental, sense, an ear. He is open to the voice of the diva, and where Jameson argues for his “wide eyes” as signaling openness, him being all ears shows this even better.²¹ But his passivity is also of another kind, and the way he seemingly flooded by the sound of his stereo shows a voluntary passivity. The passivity is not only a wanted, but a desired, state. He wants to be overwhelmed by the voice; the diva’s voice fills the room surrounding him, and her dress – which he has also stolen – only seems to be a kind of materialization of how the sound actually works in this scene. As Jameson writes:

[S]ymmetrically, Jules’s passivity (which is rapt aesthetic reception) also includes something active within itself, yet something which cannot be thought or named but only shown. And shown it is: in the supreme movement in which, having stolen the diva’s song, he brings the illicit, sacred tape home to his miraculous garage-loft, lifted, motor-bike and all, to his place beyond the world by the cumbersome archaic-mechanical freight hoist, all cables and the grating laborious passage of time (mythic-Wagnerian moments, these). The tape inserted, Jules then sprawls upon a watersofa in the corner, abandoning his rapt body motionless for the camera to explore as for the first time it discovers the whole enormity of the place in which we find ourselves.²²

Passivity is a chosen position for Jules. He desires to drown in the sound of the diva, and thus needs the recorded sound of the voice. Only in the privacy of his home and with the homemade recording can his desires be fulfilled. This privacy simultaneously communicates with Koestenbaum’s discussion of the closet. For an opera queen to fully engage in this passive aesthetic-erotic rapture, the tape (or any other recording) is necessary. And this is the case even if one could make an argument, in agreement with both Silverman and Jameson, that this is a regression to an infantile state, and as such a shelter from the world. On the other hand, the experience of being immersed in the sound, “the all-around pleasure of listening to music,” is a bodily reaction to music, and it can challenge, as David Schwarz points out in his book *Listening Subjects*, the separation between the body and the external world.²³ According to Schwarz such an immersion establishes a fantasy space, related to theories of the oceanic, and this might very well describe how *Diva* unfolds as a movie, with different plots, different tapes, and different genres being juxtaposed.

20 Fredric JAMESON: “On Diva,” *Social Text* 6 (1982), p. 115.

21 “Jules’ wide eyes are the space of perceptual receptivity, of the openness into which the diva’s extraordinary sound will flow – the ‘endless melody’ which constitutes, better than any logic of the narrative sequence, the irreversible temporality of the film, sonata-form repetition rather than the Freudian kind, the grand ‘inevitability’ of the climatic return.” Jameson, “On Diva,” p. 115.

22 Jameson, “On Diva,” p. 115.

23 David SCHWARTZ: *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press. 1997. p. 7ff.

Callas Forever

In Franco Zeffirelli's *Callas Forever* (2002), Callas herself is present (played by Fanny Ardant), but she cannot sing any longer. Larry Kelly (played by Jeremy Irons) used to be her manager, and tries to convince her to return to public life. The film is set in 1977 when Callas no longer had a singing voice. Kelly wants to make a movie starring her, and argues that in the movie she would not have to sing. Her old recordings can be used instead, and the project is to stage her in a film-version of *Carmen*, an opera Callas never performed onstage, but which she recorded. In this film too, then, the recorded voice of Callas plays an important role in a movie, and in a self-reflexive turn this voice is related to movies, thus again highlighting how the recorded voice and film interact. The *Carmen*-film will consist of images and sound coming from two different historical times, but will be combined. In this way Callas's operatic career can begin again, saved, so to speak, by the art of cinema. She can have a comeback as a technologically (re-)produced character; voice intact in its living-on from the time of the recordings. Callas, however, is not at all convinced by Larry's arguments. The non-coexistence of voice and body appears deceptive to her.

Here, then we arguably find an argument about the technologically reproduced voice resembling the one found in *Diva*, even if the argument in *Diva* takes this thought further. In *Diva*, the live performance is lifted totally out of the ordinary, and any reproduction will compromise the voice and vocal power, whereas in *Callas Forever* it seems that recording the voice and the image simultaneously would not be seen as deceptive at all. It is the recycling or reuse of the old and bygone voice and hooking it up to the present body that is the problem. Interestingly enough in Callas's only film-appearance, in Pier Paolo Pasolini's movie *Medea* (1969), she was cast in a non-operatic role, but this too seems to highlight the presence/absence of her voice, at least when compared with her public persona. When the movie of *Carmen* is presented in the film, however, Callas finds it magnificent, but still demands it is destroyed. Suddenly the problem is not any imperfection in the matching of voice and body; the problem is that it succeeds. In addition to *Carmen*, *Tosca* is the other opera of importance in the movie. Here too a feeling of incompleteness is crucial; Callas has unfinished business with these two classical works. But in the case of *Tosca* she wants to sing anew, and thus in total opposition to Kelly's idea.

In her article "The Afterlife of Maria Callas' Voice," Michal Grover-Friedlander argues that *Callas Forever* "abounds with references to comebacks, second chances" and, adding, "reclaiming one's life, mourning over one's lost voice, and questions of immortality."²⁴ These are different kinds of doublings than the ones found in *Diva*, even if there are some similarities. The recording of the voice in *Diva* seems doomed to end with some kind of "death," except that is, that in the end it works almost like the *deus ex machina* Adorno references as he ponders the operatic in its relation to the LP.²⁵

24 Michal GROVER-FRIEDLANDER: "The Afterlife of Maria Callas's Voice," *The Musical Quarterly* 88/1. 2005. p. 35.

25 Theodor W. ADORNO: "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," in Adorno, *Essays on Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2002. p. 284.

In contrast, in *Callas Forever* the gramophone seems to be what makes possible a second career for Callas. She can use her old recordings and simply record the visual track anew. The discrepancy between what one would then see and what one would hear would simply disappear, and the rift would be healed by way of technology. The disembodied voice of the recording would be reembodyed, even if by a technological trick.

But it is not the realization of the film within the film that contributes the most important scene of the movie. Related to the topic of this article, the key-scene is one dealing with the voice and the gramophone where another kind of doubling is at stake. We see Callas singing over a recording of "the real" Callas. Callas sits alone at night listening to her own voice, and partly lip-syncing to it, partly singing along. The two voices never blend, and, as Grover-Friedlander argues, it makes sense to see this doubling as one between a "good" voice and a "bad" voice.²⁶ What Larry has proposed will take this duality away; the aged voice of Callas will never be heard, and in a process resembling early sound-film's use of "voice-doubles" for the famous silent-film actress, here the "good" voice, which is the young one, will be used instead. What this scene highlights, however, is the temporal discrepancy, the gap between the sound of the past and the sound of the present. Hearing the different timbres of the voice, we so to speak hear the past and the present simultaneously. Here, the gramophone record is only about the past, and Callas's meeting with her own past is more or less doomed to be accompanied by feelings of loss more than anything else. The record testifies to the voice as lost, as a thing of the past, and the film illustrates this by letting us as audience hear two voices. Fanny Ardant's voice becomes – in a realistic sense – the aging voice of Callas, the after-voice so to speak.

But as audience to the movie we participate in the eavesdropping of Larry – and, to a somewhat lesser degree Bruna – and the emotions of loss become emotions of sadness. In one sense we are witnessing a degree of death, or, rather, decay. The voice is decayed, and in this scene we witness it. In one particular sense decay is not for us to witness; in the empirical – so-called real – world decay is difficult to witness. This is due to comparison in one way or another being necessary to see decay. Hearing decay is even more difficult, and before the age of technological reproducibility arguably impossible. Here the gramophone – and the record – becomes a token on this process. The possibility of storing a voice, and replaying it at a later time, opens up for a new temporality. In comparison with the ongoing life of the singer this simultaneously allows for an experience of the voice at two different points in time. We can hear the recording, and if the same singer sings simultaneously with the recording we so to speak hear time, or, rather, hear time's impact on the voice. This is more radical than hearing what Roland Barthes famously called "the grain of the voice."²⁷ It is not simply that we hear the body, or that what we hear both comes from a body and contains elements of that body in its sound. We also hear time in the sense that two different points in the life of a voice become hearable simultaneously.

26 Grover-Friedlander. "The Afterlife of Maria Callas's Voice," p. 46.

27 Roland BARTHES: "The Grain of the Voice," in Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*. London: Fontana. 1977. p. 179-189

With the possibility of storing and reproducing the voice something different may occur, and this is what is staged in Zeffirelli's movie. In the diegesis of the film we hear "the same voice" twice, and at two different points in time. Firstly at the moment of recording, and secondly when Callas listens to her own voice and tries to sing along. In reality this is done with two different voices: Arnant's voice representing the aged voice of Callas whereas Callas's real voice is heard from the gramophone. This is the filmic way of representing this dimension. But the diegesis is still important; there is a kind of realism to the scene, and the vulnerability and decay are so to speak heard. This makes Arnant's lip-syncing to Callas very different from Tom Hanks's lip-syncing in *Philadelphia*, due to the different functions Callas's voice has in these two films. In *Philadelphia*, Callas is dead, and that is of no importance for the movie. It is the voice as a memento that is of importance, as well as the voice as the possibility of experiencing the strong emotions by proxy. Andy's project is not to become Callas; he is using Callas to voice his own emotions, but also as a way of transcending his own state. In *Callas Forever*, on the other hand, the recorded voice of Callas is represented to have a close connection to one of the characters. We are supposed to believe that it is "the same" voice as the voice we hear coming from "Callas," in the impersonation of Arnant. The realism, however, still uses the filmic medium to underscore something of the age of reproduction. We become witness to a meeting that could hardly exist in real life.

In *Callas Forever* the role of the opera queen is divided. On the one hand there is Larry, as an open homosexual man working in the music business, having been Callas's agent, and on the other Michael (played by Jay Rodan). Michael is a painter, and he is deaf. This then shows a focus on visuality, whereas the sense of hearing is lost (or at least heavily reduced). However, the sound of Callas is important for Michael's paintings; he listens to her voice on gramophone and tries to visualize this sound, to translate the voice into visuals. As such it is an almost physical dimension that is highlighted; the voice is caressing – or in some places hitting – the body. This opens up for a comparison between the sense of vision and the sense of hearing. Michael so to speak embodies this dualism, as he translates the vibrations of Callas's voice – the physical impact of singing – into images. As in the story of the film *Callas Forever*, the visual – in the film primarily the cinematic – and the musical dimension of the opera found in the voice do not match perfectly. But it is in the way they don't match that the film's basic strand comes to the fore, and it is here that time becomes of the essence. The temporality of music, the temporality of film, and the temporality of life all co-exist without one being possible to overlay the others. *Callas Forever* may be "quite a silly film by almost any measure," as Mary Ann Smart writes,²⁸ but whereas Smart gets "the intense pleasure of watching French diva Fanny Ardant impersonating Callas – heavily mascaraed, dressed by Chanel," there are also important questions raised in this movie about the voice and its relation in particularly to the body and to (im)mortality.

28 In a review of Adriana Cavarero's *A più voci*; Mary Ann SMART: "Theorizing Gender, Culture, and Music (review of Adriana Cavarero, *A più voci: filosofia dell'espressione vocale*)," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 9, 2005, p. 110.

Opera Queens and the Gramophone

The three male protagonists of the film embody different versions of the opera fan. They still, however, in different ways, resemble a particular figure of opera fandom: the opera queen. As different scholars have discussed, "the opera queen" (in the singular) is a difficult figure to uphold. Mitchell Morris's "rough definition," in his article "Reading as an Opera Queen," is: "an *opera queen* is any member of that particular segment of the American gay community that defines itself by the extremity and particularity of its obsession with opera." And whereas "queen" could be seen as derogatory he adds: "opera queens are apt to wear the phrase the way a diva wears a tiara."²⁹ Paul Robinson, in his article "The Opera Queen: A Voice from the Closet," claims that the particular kind of devotion to opera included in opera queenery is not only excessive but also involves a fetishization of opera.³⁰ The opera queen's life, in Morris's reading, is an almost total commitment to opera. They are "arguably the largest, most knowledgeable, and most devoted single section of the opera-going public."³¹

Morris's project in the article, however, is "to describe the stance of a stereotypical opera queen and take it as seriously (and at the same time as playfully) as do the queens themselves, as a way to challenge and perhaps even to display the dominant critical understandings of the musicological academy."³² The relation to the opera is, then, different than within musicology, or so the basic assumption goes. But this is only partly the case, as is testified by Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat*. The history of the opera queen will probably never be totally the same after this book, even if several commentators, including Robinson, in their different ways, challenged his understanding. The challenges are understandable, as Koestenbaum's book is a highly personal book, written very much in a first-person perspective, even if that perspective still seems staged. But it is no big surprise; after all, this is a story dealing with personal journeys and identities, but in a time where identity is still up for grabs as a contested concept. How does one write about identity after the criticism of identity as an ungrounded entity? Not that "identities" don't exist in one way or another; it is more that the inter-subjective dimensions of a possible understanding of another human being's "identity" or "self" or "subjectivity" has become problematic. But the criticism also has to do with, as Koestenbaum would be the first to admit, what used to be called "the closet." In similar ways to how "the opera queen is a dated species,"³³ the closet is supposed to be a thing of the past. But there is a solitude to the opera queen's indulgence. "The solitary operatic feast, a banquet for one, onanism through the ear," as Koestenbaum writes, in phrases that strongly resemble how Thomas Laqueur

29 Mitchell MORRIS: "Reading as an Opera Queen," in Ruth A. SOLIE (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1995. p. 184.

30 Paul ROBINSON: *Opera, Sex, and Other Vital Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2002. p. 160f. (The article "The Opera Queen: A Voice from the Closet" was first published in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 6/3 (1994), 283-291).

31 Morris. "Reading as an Opera Queen," p. 184.

32 Morris. "Reading as an Opera Queen," p. 185.

33 Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 31.

describes solitary sex.³⁴ Reading Kevin Korsyn's discussion of Koestenbaum and technology, in his book *Decentering Music*, it is almost as if reading an echo of the description of masturbation in Laqueur's book.³⁵ The problem of masturbation, Laqueur argues, is that it became a sexuality strongly related to "imagination, solitude, and secrecy."³⁶ Sexuality devoid of any link to reproduction was in itself a problem, but more problematic was the "private" dimension of masturbation understood as "solitary sex." And, most important in the present context, the relation to the imagination meant that no "live" partner could ever live up to the expectancies.

How, then, not to compare this with the gramophonically reproduced voices of the opera divas, where one as a voice fetishist can indulge in the free play of the imagination in one's home listening to the favorite arias in sound alone and adding – if so desired – imaginary visuals to go along? The notion of the closet clearly resonates with Koestenbaum's discussions of "the shut-in fan," as chapter two is entitled. Here, the importance of recorded opera becomes apparent, and this includes even the materiality of the record itself.

The grooves of a record suggest conformity, enclosure, entrapment: the groove pattern dooms a record to say nothing new, to replay and replay, a parrot. Grooves keep the sound coded; touch the grooves and you get no closer to the mystery. A record is like a dream; you require a needle to unravel its meaning.³⁷

But the arguably most important dimension opera on record contributes to Koestenbaum's discussion is related to privacy and "the home" – a room clearly related to a version of "the closet."

As an art form music disappears while appearing; it is revealing and concealing at the same time, as Adorno wrote in "Fragment on Music and Language."³⁸ But with the gramophone-record this in some sense changes, since the music becomes repeatable. Walter Benjamin argues in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility" art has, in principle, always been reproducible.³⁹ As such it is not reproduction per se that is "new" with the emergence of technologies for reproduction. And arguably, the "newness" of these technologies works differently in various forms of art. After all, when re-playing a gramophone record some of the same mechanisms work on us as audience as in the old practice of repeated live performances of a score. We need to consider our possibilities for remembering the performance and comparing it in our mind with the "same" for the sound to be recognizable. We know that it is the same, but this knowledge may not be radically different than it used to be in the age of live performances where the audience compared in speech – and writing – what they had

34 Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 30; Thomas W. LAQUEUR: *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*. New York: Zone Books. 2003.

35 Kevin KORSYN: *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003. p. 145ff.

36 Laqueur. *Solitary Sex*, p. 277.

37 Koestenbaum. *The Queen's Throat*, p. 57.

38 Theodor W. ADORNO: *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*. London: Verso. 1998. p. 2.

39 Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility," p. 102.

heard. In Benjamin's essay he hardly mentions music. But one key dimension is still the possibility of the "original" meeting the recipient halfway, as when "a choral work performed in an auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room."⁴⁰ This example would, most likely, be even more telling in the case of opera. Not least given that it is – after all – only a part of the multi-media performance that is opera enjoyed in the private room; and this part is, primarily, the voice (even if, of course, the music and the libretto is part of the reproduction).⁴¹ The voice takes over, and leaves, so to speak, the bodies behind. One intriguing possibility in the aftermath of Benjamin's argument is found in Adorno's thinking on recorded – and reproduced – music. Combining not least his early texts on the gramophone record and his rather late article on opera and the LP, Adorno seemingly comes out in a position very close to Koestenbaum's. And, I must admit, the possibility of seeing Adorno as an opera queen intrigues me. But what is this about? Admittedly, it is necessary to read Adorno somewhat against the grain to get this dimension unfolded. And this is first and foremost related to a contextual reading. In "Opera and the Long-Playing Record" (from 1969) it is not that difficult. In that essay Adorno claims that "the gramophone record comes into its own [...] by virtue of the fate of a major musical genre: the opera."⁴² As a genre it seems that for Adorno the opera has outlived its potential, in particular as a live form. The stylization of opera, and the way it is marketed, contrasts with what for him is a valid musical practice. And it is here that the LP "makes its entrance as a *deus ex machina*."⁴³ It is not simply the gramophone, then, but specifically the long-playing record. As Adorno writes:

It [the LP] allows for the optimal presentation of music, enabling it to recapture some of the force and intensity that had been worn threadbare in the opera house. Objectification, that is, a concentration on music as the true object of opera, may be linked to a perception that is comparable to reading, to the immersion in a text.⁴⁴

In an earlier essay, things look differently. In "The Curves of the Needle" (from 1927), Adorno claims that "Male voices can be reproduced better than females" adding that the female voice easily sounds shrill and that it "requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it."⁴⁵ In this understanding, the gramophonic reproduction be-

40 "Second, technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a gramophone record. The cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover; the choral work performed in an auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room." Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," p. 103.

41 The rapid change today, with opera on DVD, will most likely contribute new changes in perception. They will, however, also relate to the differences between the senses, as well as questions of the imagination. How not, from the point of view of the gramophone enthusiast having experienced operatic performances for his inner eye, see the fixation of one particular staging as a reduction in the play of the imagination?

42 Adorno, "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, p. 284.

43 Adorno. "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," p. 284.

44 Adorno. "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," p. 284f

45 Adorno. "The Curves of the Needle," in *Essays on Music*, p. 274.

comes problematic since it separates the voice from the body. It is interesting to contemplate what the differences are between these two texts Adorno wrote on the gramophone. One dimension, of course, is comprised by the technological developments, not only leading to the long-playing record, but also to better transmission of the voice. This, however, does not take away the separation of the voice and the body. But perhaps one could claim that the bodily dimension of the voice becomes more easily transmissible. On the other hand, Adorno seems to claim that in the case of opera, the visible dimensions distract from what is at stake in the music.

The repeatability of the gramophone makes it possible for the listener to grow familiar with the work, something much more difficult in performances. And, most importantly in relation to the LP, it "provides the opportunity [...] to recreate without disturbance the temporal dimension essential to operas."⁴⁶ Listening to an opera on LP is, then, becoming familiar with the work, engaging in the "sea voyages" operas are in Adorno's understanding. The recordings become a kind of aural museum.

Similar to the fate that Proust ascribed to paintings in museums, these recordings awaken to a second life in the wondrous dialogue with the lonely and perceptive listeners, hibernating for purposes unknown.⁴⁷

It is not difficult to see these "lonely and perceptive listeners" as related to Koestenbaum's opera-queens, indulging in their wondrous dialogue with their favorite divas. Obviously there are differences in tone in the writings of Adorno and Koestenbaum, where the latter writes what David J. Levin calls a Neo-Lyricism and Paul Robinson confessional, features far from Adorno's prose.⁴⁸ Still, in writing about the gramophone there are similarities, primarily in how the recordings makes it possible to listen differently. The immersion played out in the three film scenes, and so much described by Koestenbaum, is possible only with the gramphonic opera.

The three film scenes I discussed center on the recorded operatic voice. In *Philadelphia* it works as a vessel for Andy's emotions. He identifies with the emotional content of the operatic aria, and even more with the struggles of expressing it. It is not primarily any operatic narrative that is at stake; it is one single aria rather than the story of the opera. In this, David J. Levin is surely right in claiming that the way opera is used in film is contrary to the operatic understood as staging.⁴⁹ Rather it is the operatic in the sense of larger-than-life emotions that is at stake. In *Diva* the scene is somewhat different. Here Jules's emotions are, as Jameson points out, a kind of passivity. This is no identification with the operatic. Jules drowns in the sound, and is seemingly disconnected from the world. The scene in *Callas Forever* shows another dimension of the recorded voice. Here it is the artist herself lip-syncing to an earlier performance,

46 Adorno. "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," p. 285.

47 Adorno. "Opera," p. 285.

48 David J. LEVIN: "Is There A Text in This Libido? *Diva* and the Rhetoric of Contemporary Opera Criticism," in Jeongwon Joe & Rose Theresa (eds.), *Between Opera and Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 122; Paul Robinson, *Opera, Sex, and Other Vital Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 158.

49 Levin. "Is There A Text in This Libido?"

and the male protagonist is eavesdropping – as are we as audience. The scene still contains a lot of emotions, and illustrates time passing by. The vocal after-life is heard differently, though, as it testifies to Callas's struggling in a totally different way than her presence in *Philadelphia*.

Philadelphia and *Callas Forever* are joined together by way of Callas's voice. And in one sense even *Diva* can be said to point to her. The story of the pirate tape may echo the famous pirated version of *La Traviata* with Callas in the leading role, the topic of Terrence McNally's play *The Lisbon Traviata* (from 1989). *La Traviata* is one of the important operas depicting passions and disease, and as such could be related to *Philadelphia*. As Susan Sontag has pointed out, metaphors of illness are important within our cultural climate, and AIDS contributed its share of metaphors.⁵⁰ The operatic too is related to passions and desires, and the overwhelming of emotions. It is obviously forced to interpret these three film-scenes as expressing the same. The point of reading them together is rather to see how they open up for different ways of relating to opera within film. What they have in common, though, is how the recorded voice can be said to contain dimensions not found in the voice experienced live. By being able to listen to the operatic voice in a private and secluded space, the voices heard are much more intimately connected to the filmic characters. Where Andy expresses his pain and his hopes, Callas experiences life passing by, whereas Jules disappears into a secluded space with no relation to real life.

50 Cf. Susan SONTAG: *Illness as Metaphor / AIDS and Its Metaphors*. London: Penguin, 1991.

Abstracts

Artiklen diskuterer mødet mellem den operatiske stemme og dens teknologiske reproduktion gennem at fokusere på relationen mellem *the opera queens* og divaens stemme. Afsættet er tre filmscener, fra Jean-Jacques Beineix' *Diva* (1981), Jonathan Demmes *Philadelphia* (1993), og Franco Zeffirellis *Callas Forever* (2002), og med dette udgangspunkt diskuteres forskellige receptionsmodi af den gramofonerede stemme. Via Wayne Koestenbaums *The Queen's Throat* (1993) læses disse receptioner inden for konteksten av *opera queenens* private lytterum, og særligt hvordan det operatiske anvendes for at højne emotionel intensitet. Herigennem diskuteres lytteakten, mødet mellem stemme og øre, og hvordan dette møde kan give lytternes emotionelle erfaring en stemme.

The article discusses the intersection of the operatic voice and its technological reproduction, by focusing on the opera queen's relation to the voice of the diva. Taking as point of departure three film scenes, from Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* (1981), Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (1993), and Franco Zeffirelli's *Callas Forever* (2002), different modes of reception of the gramophoned voice are discussed. By way of Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat* (1993), these receptions are read within the context of the opera queen's private space of listening, with particular attention to how the operatic is used to heighten emotional intensity. In this, the act of listening, the meeting between the voice and the ear, and how this meeting may help to voice the listener's emotional experience are discussed.