

CHIAROSCURO: A SINGER'S APPROACH TO EXPLORING ARTISTIC
INDIVIDUALITY IN INTERPRETATION

by

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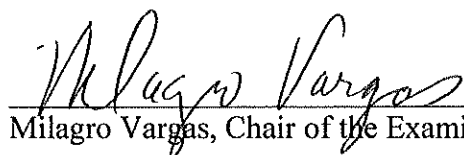
A LECTURE DOCUMENT

Presented to the School of Music and Dance
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

June 2013

“*Chiaroscuro*: A Singer’s Approach to Exploring Artistic Individuality in Interpretation,”
a lecture-document prepared by Janene M. Nelson in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in the School of Music and Dance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

GENESIS OF THE IDEA

In the spring of 2012, I began collaborating with University of Oregon Professor Milagro Vargas to coordinate a voice studio recital centered on the themes of darkness and light. I proposed the theme in response to a request made by Professor Vargas and, after sharing my thoughts for a concept that allowed for interpretive inventiveness across the studio's varied repertoire, she suggested that the theme be extended beyond the idea of darkness and light to encompass the concept of *chiaroscuro*. *Chiaroscuro* is an Italian term for the contrast and interplay of light and dark. This term is most commonly associated with the Renaissance painting technique, but modern interpretation of the term has broadened to include all significant contrasts between light and dark as seen in art, literature, film, and music. It was Professor Vargas' intention that this reimagining of the theme would explore not only the extremes of darkness and light, but also include the nuances and overlapping possibilities that exist between them. The result was *Chiaroscuro: An Evening of Song That Explores Color, Emotion, and Imagination*, a recital that explored a wide range of vocal literature through the concept of *chiaroscuro*. As my fellow singers and I reflected on the different elements of *chiaroscuro* that each of us uncovered in our individual selections, I found myself fascinated by the concept's seemingly universal capacity to depict music in a fresh way. The studio was comprised of undergraduate students, master's students, and doctoral students, and this approach to the literature allowed everyone to unearth something new. This process captured my curiosity as to whether a *chiaroscuro*-based pathway to interpretation could benefit singers at all levels of expertise.

Artistic interpretation is a vital component of a singer’s development, yet it can present unique challenges. Unlike technical proficiency, which is often approached as a collection of skills that can each be improved by breaking them down into smaller tasks, interpretation tends to emphasize the philosophical and less tangible elements of musical expression. The areas that comprise interpretation—such as familiarity with style, informed performance practice, textual analysis, and character study—contain elements that may be broken down somewhat systematically; however, to a great extent they remain more difficult to codify. The process of acquiring skills in musicianship and technical mastery can be largely objective, as much of it relates to issues of accuracy and efficiency: components that can be measured. Examples of such activities include breath support, intonation, rhythm, and tempo. In contrast, elements of the process of interpretation can be largely subjective, as it often results from a singer’s individual perception of the musical, poetic, and dramatic content, as influenced by his or her own experiences and attitudes. As described by English baritone Thomas Hemsley in *Singing and Imagination*,¹ interpretation requires a singer to channel the instinctive responses that impel him or her to express emotion into vocal intention, while simultaneously honoring the conception of the music and poetry provided by the composer.

Hemsley’s description of interpretation underscores the daunting challenge young singers face. When tasked with demonstrating a distinct understanding of style, historical context, and dramatic nuance, many singers struggle to attain the same sense of accomplishment that can be more clearly conveyed through an accurate display of musicianship. Often this leads to a fear of getting the “wrong” answer, under the

¹ Thomas Hemsley, *Singing and Imagination: A human approach to a great musical tradition*

assumption that there is only one answer to uncover. This cycle of uncertainty results in singers who, while musically and vocally strong, lack the ability to trust their own instincts and ideas. Singers who fall into this trap end up making safe, uninspired interpretive choices instead of taking license to explore the literature through a fully realized and authentic interpretation.

This is where *chiaroscuro* can be a valuable lens. Singers are familiar with the term as a component of ideal vocal sound that possesses a balance of clarity and depth. Adapting this concept to a philosophical, interpretive stance, the essence of *chiaroscuro* can be seen as the idea that lightness and darkness are not mutually exclusive extremes, but rather mutually reliant elements that pervade emotion, art, and sound. Through this new lens, singers are permitted the freedom to escape the rigid concepts of “right” and “wrong” and discover a personal and unique interpretive voice. This pathway to interpretive individuality is by no means an invitation to chaos by which a singer disregards historical and stylistic practices or replaces disciplined score study and research. It is meant as a supplement to these practices through which a singer might find an opportunity to engage with the music in a more authentic and visceral way.

THE VALUE OF A *CHIAROSCURO* PATHWAY TO INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this document is to explore artistic interpretation of vocal literature through a *chiaroscuro* lens. A *chiaroscuro* pathway to interpretation consists of identifying both the numerous ways in which darkness and light are evident, and how these various expressions of darkness and light interrelate and inform each other. Embracing the innate interdisciplinary nature of music performance—which aligns

musical interpretation and technical development with visual art, literature, theatre, history, linguistics, and social science—this process can provide a unifying lens through which singers may respond to, analyze, and experience vocal literature. The intended result of this exploration is an organic and personal means of approaching interpretation that simultaneously honors the integrity of the musical work. This requires an understanding of *chiaroscuro*, both the development of the technique in visual art as well as its adaptation to literary and performing arts (including vocal pedagogy). Equally vital is the identification of obstacles faced by modern singers in the process of interpretation, including an examination of different schools of thought regarding interpretation. In my experience, singers have often subscribed to one of two major philosophies: the belief that first and foremost a consistent tone and beautiful sound should be valued above all or the belief that expression of the musical and poetic ideas should be of primary consideration and inform the vocal sound. This component of the research will provide an historical context for the different methods used by singers in approaching interpretation, and will inform the development of useful interpretation guidelines.

Once this foundation is established, the practical application of a *chiaroscuro* framework for interpretation will be explored through analysis of a piece from the standard repertoire. The studio recital that inspired this research allowed an initial inquiry into how *chiaroscuro* elements may relate and intertwine, in a way that shifted and enriched my understanding of each piece. I found that fascinating dichotomies often exist between the core idea of the story or sentiment and the technical demands imposed by the composition itself. The dramatic idea expressed by the emotional content of the poetry and musical texture may lean strongly to one side of the *chiaroscuro* spectrum, while

elements such as tessitura and phrasing may lean in the other direction. Drastic contrasts or shifts in text may be set to identical melodies, as is often the case in strophic music, and subtle harmonic cues or articulations which are identified as “light” or “dark” may provide a deeper sense of the musical and dramatic journey.

This research will culminate in the development of guidelines that singers and teachers may use as an artistic tool. The focus is on applications of *chiaroscuro* in the interpretive process and the benefits of using the insights gained through this process to inform the musical intentions and vocal sound. The ultimate objective of this research is to provide a clearly organized pathway to interpretation that serves both the content of the music and the individuality of the singer.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

While a well-founded overview of *chiaroscuro* in both an historical and voice pedagogy context will be included, an in-depth discussion of these ideas is not the focus of this research. Instead, emphasis will be placed on illustrating the components of the interpretive process and how singers might engage in it, rather than identifying definitive answers that might result from the process. It is imperative that readers recognize that two different singers engaging in this process with the same composition will most likely arrive at different conclusions, and my analysis will be provided as an example of one of many possible interpretations. Additionally, while recognition of *chiaroscuro* as a crucial element of ideal vocal production in singing will be addressed, this document will not focus on the technical means for achieving *chiaroscuro* as applied to the vocal mechanism itself.

CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING *CHIAROSCURO*

The cross-disciplinary nature of *chiaroscuro* creates a natural kinship to the art of vocal performance, in which integration of diverse fields of knowledge is an essential component. In order to develop the foundations of a *chiaroscuro* pathway to interpretation, a deeper understanding of *chiaroscuro*, its historical context and meanings, and its application to individual perception is needed.

DEFINITIONS

Three specific concepts are of primary significance throughout this research: *chiaroscuro*, artistic interpretation, and individuality. While a general understanding of these concepts may be fairly commonplace, the specific context with which they are used in this research requires particular definition and clarification.

The term *chiaroscuro* is a compound word of Italian origin that combines the word *chiaro*, which translates in English to clear or bright, and *scuro*, which translates to dark or obscured. The synthesis of these two terms into one independent term transcends the meaning of the individual words to describe the contrast and interplay of light and dark. This juxtaposition of darkness and light explores subtle distinctions and points of convergence between these elements—not only the extremes—and acknowledges the essential interdependence of each element on the other. This interdependence is vital to the understanding of *chiaroscuro*, because it speaks to the fundamental nature of light and dark: the inextricable intersection of these two ideas is inherent to their existence. Even the most basic and literal definitions of light and dark require a reference to the opposite as a necessary means of establishing comprehension. Light and dark can both be

defined in terms of weight, texture, and clarity, yet these definitions and perceptions rely on the contrast of one term to the other.

For the purposes of this research, this fundamental understanding of *chiaroscuro* has been contextualized to provide a framework for artistic interpretation in singing. To this end, the concept of *chiaroscuro* embodies the idea that lightness and darkness are not simply polar opposites, but interdependent elements that permeate understanding, creativity, and performance. For instance, the contrast of light to dark as a symbol for good and evil, joy and pain, or clarity and ambiguity is present in everything from dramatic structure and poetic word choice to melodic contour and musical timbre. In Western culture, commonly accepted idioms and allusions provide a context for light as the embodiment of knowledge, purity, truth, joy, and life itself, while darkness characterizes that which is sinister, remote, secretive, and often deadly. Furthermore, musical elements, such as tonality, meter, or texture, can be classified as dark or light as well, based on their particular function within the composition. Conventional perception suggests that, in standard Western art music, elements such as major tonality or duple meter possess the qualities of lightness and clarity, while elements such as minor tonality or triple meter possess the qualities of darkness and uncertainty. Ultimately, singers may find meaning in the music by approaching vocal literature in terms of the balance of darkness and light. It is the intention of this research to demonstrate the value in this type of interpretive framework, with the understanding that this is merely one potential manner of many by which a singer may choose to explore interpretation.

The notion of artistic interpretation covers a wide range of ideas. German soprano Lotte Lehmann (1888-1976) offers a succinct and powerful definition: “Interpretation

means: individual understanding and reproduction...imitation is and can only be the enemy of artistry.”² This description is quite poignant when compared to traditional definitions of the term *interpretation*, such as to “tell the meaning of,” to “bring to realization by performance or direction,” or to “conceive in the light of individual belief, judgment, or circumstance.”³ However, there is value in exploring these more forthright depictions as well, as each one alludes to a key component of interpretation. Certainly the first of these definitions addresses an essential component of interpretation in singing: communication. In many ways we could just as easily call ourselves artistic communicators, as it is widely accepted that communication of the music, text, emotion, and mood—otherwise known as *meaning*—is one of our primary objectives. The second of these definitions is also quite sound, as it refers to the execution of the composition by what is often referred to as *inhabitation*. Inhabitation concerns the act of occupying and existing within the environment, circumstances, and persona presented by the composition. Ultimately, it is the final of these latter definitions that connects so directly with Lehmann’s assessment, because it speaks to the issue of individuality. To “conceive in the light of *individual* belief, judgment, or circumstance” indicates a method of informed creativity, defined by Lehmann as “individual understanding.” In essence, interpretation requires not only communication and dramatic realization, but also the originality that springs from the imagination of the performer.

Exploration of the ways in which a singer might channel his or her unique qualities into music performance requires a closer examination of the concept of

² Lotte Lehmann, *More Than Singing: The Interpretation of Songs* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1945), 6.

³ *Merriam-Webster Online*, 2010 ed., s.v. “Interpretation.”

individuality. Looking back to the roots of the term, we see that it initially related to the state of being *indivisible*.⁴ To this effect, individuality represents an element that is inseparable from the whole; in this case, that whole is the singer.

Singers possess individuality in two distinct ways: through the instrument itself and through interpretation of the musical literature. American soprano Sylvia McNair puts it another way:

“Singers want to work. They see what gets cast and think, ‘If I can only sound like that.’ And so they try to copy the most popular singers...when they should be trying to be unique. I have a favorite phrase: the vocal fingerprint. Every voice should sound like one of a kind, as unique as a fingerprint.”⁵

McNair’s assessment sheds light on a crucial obstacle for singers: embracing individuality as an asset. Often singers can become discouraged due to a focus on what their voice “isn’t,” and the way that contradicts their desires to perform certain repertoire or pursue certain opportunities. Individuality plays a particularly significant role in the life of a singing musician because it is innate to the vocal instrument. Each voice is unique. A vital part of interpretation and artistry for a singer is learning to love the instrument you were born with, understanding and embracing its natural aptitude for certain sounds and literature, and putting that to the most effective use in service of the music.

⁴ *Merriam-Webster Online*, 2010 ed., s.v. “Individuality.”

⁵ James Inverne. “From Her Mouth to God’s Ear,” *Ravinia Magazine*, July 2011, <http://sylviamcnair.com/2011/06/15/from-her-mouth-to-gods-ear> (accessed January 20, 2013).

CHIAROSCURO AND THE ARTS

The concept of adopting the definition of *chiaroscuro* to a separate artistic medium is hardly a new conceit. The term has been embraced by an array of disciplines throughout the visual, performing, and literary arts, and adapted to express the nature of how the core aesthetic of *chiaroscuro* is realized. Over time the term has evolved to embrace increasingly layered connotations of the dark-light relationship.

References to the elements of *chiaro* and *scuro* as fundamental elements of art can be traced back as far as the late fourteenth century; however, the traditionally accepted definition of the combined term—specifically depicting the contrast and interplay of light and dark—is a product of the sixteenth century.⁶ The discriminating use of light, shadow, and perspective to create a visual dimension of depth was used by a variety of artists at this time, including Ugo da Carpi (1480-1532), Raphael (1483-1520), Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530), and Michelangelo da Caravaggio (1571-1610). As it evolved, the definition of *chiaroscuro* broadened to include many of the earlier conceptions of the idea: both descriptions—such as those presented by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472)—and representations, such as the ancient monochrome paintings of fourth and fifth century Greece.⁷ Both da Vinci and Alberti embraced the shared properties of light and shadow in *chiaroscuro*, what da Vinci referred to as the “synthesis of opposites.” Da Vinci wrote of the “median, which cannot be called either *chiaro* or *scuro*, but participates equally of

⁶Evelyn Lincoln, *The Invention of the Italian Renaissance Printmaker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 71.

⁷ Lincoln, *Italian Renaissance Printmaker*, 80.

this *chiaro* and *scuro*,” and Alberti saw them as “opposites to be mediated,” espousing the idea that all colors embodied some gradations of black and white.⁸

The development of *chiaroscuro* techniques in painting and print making evolved concurrently and most certainly informed and influenced each other. Ugo da Carpi’s developments in woodcuts, seen at the time as the primary example of *chiaroscuro*, initially used multiple engraved blocks to layer different shades of black ink on paper. While this revolutionary process was the epitome of *chiaroscuro* technique, it was understood that these images were inspired by the art of wash drawings.⁹ These drawings used diluted paint to create a wash of color on the canvas, which obscured brushstrokes and created a sense of depth, while definition was created through distinct forms drawn in pencil.¹⁰ As da Carpi’s processes became more advanced, he embraced a wider range of ink colors—such as browns, blues, yellows, and greens—and explored varying intensities of individual hues by layering multiple imprints of the same block and ink pigment to reach the desired result. This latter technique mirrors the developments in monochrome painting that del Sarto explored in his renowned “fresco paintings” for the Chiostrò della Scalzo in Florence.¹¹ These varied and expanding representations of *chiaroscuro* demonstrate the concept’s innate capacity for adaptation, as well as its inherent focus of attention to opposites.

In literature, *chiaroscuro* serves both a thematic and structural function. It is often described in literary terms as the use of, “such elements as light and shadow in

⁸ Lincoln, *Italian Renaissance Printmaker*, 72.

⁹ Lincoln, *Italian Renaissance Printmaker*, 82.

¹⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 2010 ed., s.v. “Wash drawing.”

¹¹ Lincoln, *Italian Renaissance Printmaker*, 81.

descriptive writing to serve a symbolic function.”¹² In this manner, the elements of light and dark (and manifestations thereof) are used to reinforce larger thematic ideas, establish tone, describe characters and environments, and convey emotion and meaning. This commonly occurs in the way physical environments—ranging from buildings and towns to forces of nature and weather—are described to foreshadow or emphasize action in the plot. Genres and literary devices can also be considered *chiaroscuro* techniques by using the fusion of contrary elements vital to satire, paradox, or irony to represent an idea, character, or dramatic world. These elements can be seen in the darkly delicious events of Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, or the sweet yet biting commentary of Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Ernest*, just to name a few.

This two-tiered realization of *chiaroscuro* can also be seen in cinematic art. Cinematographers use different combinations of artificial and natural light sources to create a visual representation of mood and character. Lighting aesthetic is a vital means of cinematic storytelling, and low-key lighting (emphasizing shadows by using a lower ratio of light to accentuate contours) is often used as a *chiaroscuro* film technique.¹³ This visual embodiment of *chiaroscuro* brings the thematic ideas to life, most notably in genres such as film noir and dark comedy, each of which have distinctive storytelling elements that are complemented by their equally distinctive visual representations. The common themes of film noir, such as moral ambiguity, fatal attraction, and the contradictory complexity of allegiances and motives, are communicated through

¹² Donald A. Ringe. “Chiaroscuro as an Artistic Device in Cooper’s Fiction,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (1963): 351.

¹³ Angela Vacche. “Chiaroscuro: Caravaggio, Bazin, Storaro,” *Senses of Cinema*, 53 (2009), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/feature-articles/chiaroscuro-caravaggio-bazin-storaro> (accessed December 21, 2012).

obscured faces, smoky settings, and glossy flashbacks.¹⁴ This particular evolution of *chiaroscuro* demonstrates a rich marriage of both the visual and literary adaptations, and has resulted in some of the most psychologically and visually compelling films of the last seventy years.

Music is among the performing art disciplines that have also adopted the concept of *chiaroscuro* and adapted the meaning to its own purpose. There is a notable distinction to be made here, as performing arts differ fundamentally from visual and literary arts. In general, the artistic process is comprised of two functions: creation and expression. In the visual and literary arts both functions are generally fulfilled by the same artist, yet in the performing arts often the creator is different from the performer. The nature of this dynamic requires exploration of *chiaroscuro* both in composition (creation) and in performance (expression). A number of composers throughout history have explored diverse combinations of timbres, harmonies, and variations of form that could be described as *chiaroscuro*, such as the pairing of different instrument and voice timbres in the oratorios of J.S. Bach or the layering of contrasting motives in the works of Debussy. However, if we look to direct references to the term *chiaroscuro* by musicians themselves, more often we see it used in reference to musical execution.

Musically speaking, the term *chiaroscuro* is frequently used in reference to phrasing, whether in respect to dynamic profile or inflection. The contrast of *piano* to *forte* has often been described in terms of *light* and *shade*, as evidenced by quotes from noted musicians such as Leopold Mozart (1719-1787), C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788), and

¹⁴ Alex Ballinger and Danny Graydon. *The Rough Guide to Film Noir*. (London: Rough Guides Publishing, 2007), 217.

Johann Quantz (1697-1773).¹⁵ Mozart makes a clear connection between musical *chiaroscuro* and the painting technique:

“Indeed, one must know how to change from soft to loud without direction and of one’s own accord, each at the right time; for this, in the familiar language of painters, means *light and shade*.”¹⁶

Quantz elaborates on this idea, relating musical *chiaroscuro* to intention:

“Good execution must be *diversified*. Light and shadow must be continuously interchanged. For in truth you will never move the listener if you render all the notes at the same strength or the same weakness; if you perform, so to speak, always in the same colour, or do not know how to raise or moderate the tone at the proper time.”¹⁷

This understanding of musical *chiaroscuro* relates to interpretation in particular, as it largely refers to the realization of the music in performance as opposed to merely what is indicated in the score. While composers do indicate expressive markings to varying degrees of specificity and frequency, they also expect a certain level of musicality and musical intelligence. Depending on the cultural norms, prevailing performance practice, and circumstances surrounding the composition, many expressive ideas may have been omitted from the score because they were implicitly understood and, therefore, considered too obvious to mention.

Chiaroscuro has also gained notable use in the area of vocal pedagogy as a description of ideal tone quality. In this particular context, there are countless subjective interpretations of how the *chiaroscuro* sound might be described, as well as varying perspectives on the physical means by which this sound is most effectively achieved. The basic definition of a vocal tone that is simultaneously dark and bright refers to a sound

¹⁵ David Blum, *Casals and the Art of Interpretation* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977), 17-18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

that embodies the qualities of brilliance and roundness that individually could become either shrill or muffled, respectively.¹⁸ While there are varying perspectives on how this sound is best achieved, many pedagogues agree that it is the result of a firm glottal closure combined with expansion in the pharynx so that the resulting harmonic spectrum sounds both warm and resonant.¹⁹ The *chiaro* timbre of the voice is often referred to in terms of light, clarity, and energy, by descriptors such as squillo, ring, brilliance, or vitality. The *scuro* timbre of the voice is often referred to in terms of texture, shape, and dimension, by descriptors such as velvet, depth, roundness, and warmth.

The teachings of the renowned Spanish baritone and vocal pedagogue Manuel Garcia II (1805-1906) have played a pivotal role in modern understanding of the *chiaroscuro* vocal sound. In addition to explicitly defining and classifying the two timbres, which he referred to as *clair* and *sombre*, he advocated the notion that these two elements need not exclusively exist in equal measure. Garcia encouraged the borrowing of one timbre from the other, allowing these varied sounds of differing proportions to expand into an infinite collection of vocal colors. To this end, his writings on the subject demonstrated the means by which these diverse vocal colors could be used to express an array of emotions.²⁰ This pursuit is the ultimate objective of a *chiaroscuro* approach to interpretation. By weaving the thread of *chiaroscuro* through the interpretive process, the results can then be applied to achieve the unique vocal *chiaroscuro* that most effectively

¹⁸ Berton Coffin. *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics*. (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989), 21-22.

¹⁹ James Stark. *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 34.

²⁰ Stark, *Bel Canto*, 39.

expresses a piece of music, an individual phrase, a particular moment, or even a single pitch.

It is not hard to imagine why so many artistic forms have embraced *chiaroscuro*. If we accept that the nature of art is to reflect the human condition and experience, one that is mired in complexity and contradiction, then it is only rational that the means of reflecting that condition would itself be composed of these elements. Art that is truly satisfying requires more than a one-dimensional view of simplicity, beauty, or truth; it demands the depth of what lies beneath.

CHIAROSCURO AND PERCEPTION

Established theories of human thought, dating as far back as ancient Greece, provide support for this idea of the “synthesis of opposites” as an element of how individuals process and engage with the world around them. This correlation between *chiaroscuro* and perception—or what is more specifically known in the philosophical community as perceptual experience—is essential to a *chiaroscuro* pathway to interpretation. (The difference between “perception” and “perceptual experience” is a crucial distinction, as references to perception outlined in this research are based in a philosophical understanding of “our knowledge of the world around us,”²¹ as opposed to a cognitive psychological understanding of perception). This view of perception, as defined by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and P. F. Strawson (1919-2006), allows for the concept of a shared world that all people inhabit, yet is processed and regarded differently by each person.

²¹ Johannes Roessler, *Perception, Causation, and Objectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 104.

In an attempt to establish both a context and basic structure for acquiring the personal awareness that artistic interpretation demands, this research will briefly explore several theories of perception and learning presented throughout history. The concept of allied yet contrary elements—inherent in *chiaroscuro*—can be seen in Socrates’ (469-399 BCE) Argument from Opposites, Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1908-2009) theory of anthropological structuralism, and Patricia Shehan Campbell’s Arts Process. The discussion of these theories within this research is meant to underscore the presence and identification of opposing forces in our understanding of the world, so that we may classify these forces within the *chiaroscuro* framework. It is not meant to suggest that *chiaroscuro* was an original component of their work, as there is no evidence to suggest this.

The concept of correlation between opposites was relatively well established by Socrates’ time, with evidence tracing it as far back as Homer (c. 800–c. 750 BCE).²² In Plato’s (423-347 BCE) account of Socrates’ final days entitled *Phaedo*, Plato details Socrates’ philosophical examination of existence through a dialogue with Cebes (430-350 BCE), one of Socrates’ disciples and friends. Socrates posits that all living things that possess an opposite, in fact, emerge from that opposite. Socrates demonstrates numerous examples of this mutual reliance, such as great and small, strong and weak, and hot and cold. He argues that for something to be greater, stronger, or hotter, it must at one point have been smaller, weaker, or colder, respectively.²³ Socrates’ theory underscores the inherent relationship between opposites that exists in *chiaroscuro*: understanding of light

²² G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 105-06.

²³ Harold North Fowler, trans., *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1966), 70-71.

(or that which is represented by light) cannot be achieved without understanding of dark (or that which is represented by dark).

Socrates' argument further states that a spectrum exists between the two opposites, through which one element either increases or decreases to the other. He refers to this as the "process of generation."²⁴ This description of the incremental shifts that exist in the continuum between polar opposites further demonstrates the innumerable shades of grey that run the gamut from light to dark. It is within these infinite possibilities that *chiaroscuro* can unlock a singer's individuality through the process of interpretation. This idea of interconnectedness inspires inquiry and investigation on the part of the singer, whether addressing the imagery evoked by poetic language, the musical color created by a particular harmony or texture, or the emotional state suggested by a story or dramatic moment.

We can build on the concept established by Socrates by looking at Claude Lévi-Strauss' formative work in structural anthropology. Lévi-Strauss' writings center around the idea of "binary opposites," (more simply defined as two contradictory elements) which "coexist and synthesize towards a solution."²⁵ The fundamental dynamic of *chiaroscuro*, in which two interdependent contrasting elements interact in service of a more complex result, can be found in this explanation of the nature of human perception. Viewed through this conceptual construct, all elements of life, culture, and knowledge can be classified into one of two contradictory elements that, when combined, create a result of greater depth and dimension than either single element could achieve on its own.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Ecology," *Social Science Information* 12 (1973): 7.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss' examination of the nature of myths revealed a number of shared structural and thematic components across cultures and time periods.²⁶ This recognition of the innate complexity of the world around us, and the elements that comprise it, may allow singers to move beyond the obvious and explore a deeper understanding of vocal literature and performance.

Looking at the intention behind Lévi-Strauss' work can enhance the idea of exploring meaning through a *chiaroscuro* approach. In the second volume of his writings titled *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss states that, "Structural anthropology strives to answer the question of meaning."²⁷ This assertion alludes to the influence of linguistic structuralism on his work, as linguistic structuralism embraces the concept that everything in both the physical and metaphysical world is absent of meaning until assigned meaning by the human mind and expressed through language.²⁸ The pursuit of meaning is at the heart of this *chiaroscuro* pathway to interpretation, which encourages exploration of how composers expressed meaning through their shaping and manipulation of opposing musical, textual, and emotional forces.

Establishing a framework through which to explore these relationships of light and dark is essential to engaging in a *chiaroscuro* process. As learning processes also play a key role in perception and creativity, it is only logical that an approach to learning aimed at interpreters of music should emerge from an arts-centered place. Patricia Shehan

²⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68 (1955): 429.

²⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology: Volume 2*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 10.

²⁸ Peter Berry, *Beginning theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*, 3d ed. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 39.

Campbell's "arts process" provides an excellent definition of how this may be achieved. Campbell outlines six essential steps to arts learning: perceiving, responding, skills development, evaluating, understanding, and creating.²⁹ Campbell's process has been used in a variety of music education contexts as a way of experiencing and understanding culture through its distinct musical content and values. Campbell asserts that elements such as range, tessitura, form, rhythm, and text reflect the needs and values of the society they represent.³⁰ The arts process incorporates the individuality of personal perception, the creativity and understanding of interpretation, and development of technical execution into one concrete approach to learning. When applied to the preparation and performance of vocal literature, a *chiaroscuro* lens can be applied to each of her processes to provide a unique framework for analysis and meaningful consideration, while also affording significant capacity for a diverse range of questions and answers.

While this research focuses on areas of philosophical thought that advocate the concepts of opposing forces, interdependence, and the search for meaning, there are many diverse and compelling ideas regarding human thought and behavior that challenge such claims. Aristotle's (384-322 BCE) writings on the nature of opposites diverged from those of Socrates, classifying distinct types of opposites and distinguishing between differences such as correlatives, contraries, and positive-negative relationships. This taxonomy tested the preconceived notion that all opposites are interdependent, arguing

²⁹ Patricia Shehan Campbell and Carol Scott-Kassner, *Music in Childhood: From Preschool through the elementary grades*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 363-64.

³⁰ Patricia Shehan Campbell and Megan M. Perdue, "Musical Matters in the Songs Children Sing."

that certain pairings that appear opposite are merely different circumstances of the same condition, such as sight and blindness.³¹

Similar to the points of distinction between Socrates and Aristotle, many modern and post-modern theorists took exception with the assumptions presented at the core of structuralist thought. Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and his followers argued that theories presented by Lévi-Strauss and his contemporaries were designed in a manner that made it difficult to either prove or disprove their premise, resulting in a dichotomy where central ideas were accepted as true by their advocates, yet easily dismissed by critics. A particular point of contention was the nature of existence. Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss referred to life and death as clear examples of polar opposites while post-modernists viewed life and death as varied properties of existence itself. Anthropologist Stanley Diamond (1922-1991) pointed to primitive cultures as a representation of this divergent understanding of existence: “In a primitive culture “life” and “death”— which the secular mind conceives as irreconcilable—may not be perceived as polar at all, but rather as aspects of a single condition, the condition of existence.”³²

While the arguments of Aristotle and Heidegger may oppose some of the fundamental claims made by Socrates and Lévi-Strauss, respectively, they are not in and of themselves incompatible with a *chiaroscuro* understanding of perception. Socrates and Lévi-Strauss provide arguments rooted in the relationships between clearly defined opposites at the extreme ends of the spectrum. These obvious contrasts provide a clear demonstration of the fundamental *chiaro* and *scuro* elements and draw connections

³¹ Lloyd, *Polarities*, 161.

³² Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*, (New Brunswick: NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1974), 308.

between them, making them ideally suited to an initial definition of what *chiaroscuro* perception might look like. The arguments made by Aristotle and Heidegger seek to classify subtler distinctions and exist more fully within the intersection of dark and light. They embody a truly *chiaroscuro* nature, demonstrating the capacity of such a pathway to perceive the same thing from a variety of different, even contradictory perspectives.

Ultimately, the discussion of historical theories regarding perception and opposites presented in this research is centered on cultural manifestations as opposed to cognitive mechanisms. Lévi-Strauss' conceptions of how the mind processes information are clearly a significant and valuable contribution to the study of human thought, establishing a foundation for modern understanding of the brain. Recent discoveries in the area of neuroanthropology have revealed the considerable complexity of the brain and its functions, and a modern understanding of mental processes diverges somewhat from Lévi-Strauss' conclusions.³³ However, the sources used in this research are not intended to make a definitive statement about the nature of psychology and mental processing. They are valuable as an historical basis for the prevalence of certain customs, ideas, and experiences in Western culture, and the multitude means of expressing these shared instances in a meaningful way.

These contrasting ideas regarding perception present varied ways of exploring individual attitudes and identity, tools that are essential to artistic interpretation. cursory observations in using *chiaroscuro* as an interpretive lens strongly suggest that it provides a broad spectrum of accessibility. Western culture embraces a dynamic of conflicting emotions, beliefs, and assumptions as a constant part of everyday life. This acceptance of

³³ Greg Downey, author of "Thinking through Claude Lévi-Strauss, Neuroanthropology Blog, article posted November 8, 2009, <http://neuroanthropology.net/2009/11/08/thinking-through-claude-levi-strauss/> (accessed March 25, 2013).

the presence of and relationship between opposing forces in the world informs how singers respond to the poetry, music, and characters they explore. The extent to which this informs the perspective of different individuals may be diverse, but it is still well contained within a framework of this nature.

CHAPTER THREE: UNDERSTANDING INTERPRETATION

It stands to reason that an understanding of philosophies and approaches regarding singing must be established prior to exploring an alternative method of engagement. Examining prevailing attitudes—as well as some of the prominent artists who espouse them—offers invaluable insight into the nature of modern interpretation, how it has evolved, and the challenges faced by singers today.

For the purposes of this research, two major singing philosophies will be discussed. Notable singers, pedagogues, and pianists have demonstrated allegiance to one or the other of these philosophies of singing. This is evident not only through their artistry, but also through their writings and remarks. We are able to draw certain conclusions regarding interpretation based on these sources. Special attention was paid in the selection of singers for this research, in an effort to account for the differences in national singing aesthetics.

SINGING PHILOSOPHIES

The two contrasting philosophies explored in this research will be referred to as *primacy of beautiful sound* and *primacy of expression and meaning*. My use of the word primacy in each of the titles is intended to bring attention to the impetus of each approach. It is imperative to note that mastery of vocal technique and musicianship is of great significance to proponents of both philosophies. Both approaches share a dedication to musical excellence by both technical and expressive means; however, the methods by which such excellence is achieved differ significantly. In a broad sense, we can begin to identify these differences of opinion upon broaching the subject of interpretation.

Primacy of Beautiful Sound can be defined as a philosophy of singing that values a consistent tone and beautiful sound above all else. Champions of the primacy of beautiful sound contend that expression is so innate to the music that the only interpretation necessary is an exceptional execution of the compositional material. This philosophy is characterized by rigid adherence to purity of vocal production and consistency of timbre throughout the entire range of the voice, the latter of which was “considered ideal”³⁴ in the operatic tradition of the early and mid-twentieth century. According to this approach, the primary consideration of singing is beautiful tone, and drama, meaning, and expression are secondary objectives.

It is quite possible that the perceived decline in vocal artistry and technical mastery over the course of the last century contributed significantly to this particular point of view. Skilled and studied veterans of the vocal arts are often faced with an increasing number of developing performers who place a premium on putting a “personal stamp” on the music *without* placing equal emphasis on flawlessness of technique and adherence to the material presented in the score. This can result in a certain disillusionment regarding the future of vocal performance, a sentiment that has been expressed by many artists, dating as far back as the German singer and pedagogue Emma Seiler (1821-1886) in the mid-nineteenth century. Seiler refers to the ideals and objectives of vocal artistry during the seventeenth century, placing emphasis on the union of highly-developed vocal skill and informed expressivity that allowed the great singers of that era to captivate an audience with their emotions and imaginations. Her disenchantment with the values of modern singers appears to stem from a perceived shift

³⁴ Bruce J. Saxon, liner notes to *Soprano Assoluta*, Maria Callas, STKM Records, B0051JW1TI, CD, 2011.

in intention, no longer rooted in the act of moving the listener but rather in a pursuit of personal satisfaction for the performer:

“The dramatic singer was now strongly tempted to neglect the externals of his art for the æsthetic, purely inward conception of the music. Certain, at least, it is that to the neglect of the training of the voice (Tonbildung), and to the style of writing of our modern composers—a style unsuited to the art of singing, and looking only to its spiritual element—the decline of this art is in part to be traced... True it is, that a beautiful tone of voice (Gesangston), which must be considered the foundation and first requisition of fine singing, is more and more rare among our singers, male and female, and yet it is just as important in music as perfect form in the creations of the sculptor.”³⁵

Many modern-day performers and pedagogues echo Seiler’s argument regarding the importance of beauty of tone. In the first half of the twentieth century, cultivating a singing voice with an even tone throughout the entire range was considered a hallmark of vocal achievement. Artists as accomplished as Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007) shared in this notion:

“...Agility, elasticity, smooth, even flow of liquid, well-focused sound, uniformity of color...every singer needs all of [these] qualities as part of their technical equipment.”³⁶

This uniformity serves the axiom that a crucial objective of singing is the formation of beautiful tone. German baritone Horst Günther (1913-2013) puts this idea into more distinct terms:

“All singing, all perception of vocal literature I experienced in my youth, was based on the same *sound quality*: opera, operetta, oratorio, Lied, Melodie [*sic*], light classical music, dance music, folk music—all was based on the same vocal technique—with stylistic changes—and the goal was to make the voice, the sound, beautiful.”³⁷

³⁵ Emma Seiler, *The Voice in Singing*, Trans. Herman Hemholtz (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1879), 27.

³⁶ Helena Matheopolous, *The Great Tenors from Caruso to the Present* (New York: The Vendome Press, 1999), 98.

³⁷ Horst Günther, “Mental Concepts in Singing: A Psychological Approach, Part I,” *The NATS Journal* (48), May/June 1992, 4.

Günther's sentiments are passionately upheld by renowned vocal pedagogue

Richard Miller (1926-2009):

“Continuous vocal sound will of its own accord ‘move’ the phrase and give it ‘direction.’...Communication of musical and textual values best occurs when sound, not interpretive gimmickry, is the medium of their conveyance.”³⁸

Miller's reference to “interpretive gimmickry” sheds light on the widely varied concepts regarding not only the validity and need for interpretation, but what constitutes interpretation in the first place. This issue is not unique to music. Consider the stance of American literary icon Susan Sontag (1933-2004):

“Today is such a time, when the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling...the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.”³⁹

Clearly, divergent ideas on the act of interpretation have an impact on how its role in the artistic process is perceived.

Primacy of Expression and Meaning offers a different outlook on interpretation. It is defined as a philosophy of singing that values vocal sound that is informed by expression of the unique musical, poetic, and dramatic ideas presented by a piece of vocal literature. Champions of the primacy of expression and meaning assert that the responsibility of the singing artist extends a step further to imbue the sound with the color, emotion, character, and mood implied by the composer. This philosophy is characterized by a commitment to expression and communication first and foremost. Embracing the perspective that beauty is only one component of the complex emotional

³⁸ Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123.

³⁹ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: MacMillan, 2001), 7.

and musical ideas conveyed in vocal literature, this approach asserts that vocal quality must be expertly and meaningfully varied in order to suitably express these ideas. Furthermore, this approach advocates a commitment to technical vocal skill that allows for effective expression of a diverse array of ideas as opposed to one that is simplistically confined to the beautiful.

There is an identifiable connection between this philosophy and the belief that music must be performed in order to fulfill its ultimate creative purpose. More aptly stated by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855):

“Music exists only in the moment of its performance, for if one were ever so skillful in reading notes and had ever so lively an imagination, it cannot be denied that it is only in an unreal sense that music exists when it is read. It really exists only being performed.”⁴⁰

This conviction maintains that content in the musical score must be transformed into sound to truly be considered music. Typically when the term ‘music’ is used to describe an element of human experience or a component of culture, it is musical sound that is being evoked. If musical ideas must be brought to life to exist, then it stands to reason that the resulting sound is meaningful and thereby obliges the performer to imbue the music with as much meaning as possible. This notion pays reverence not only to the tradition of music that preceded notation, but also to the essence of music as an art form.

Among singers who ascribe to this philosophy, musicianship and technique are of high priority. Consider German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau’s (1925-2012) account of the role interpretation and individuality played in his technical training:

“Only by example (and not by shortcuts based on career decisions) can critical understanding and its relationship to interpretation be learned...technique and interpretation always [go] hand in hand.”

⁴⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, Trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian M. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 66-67.

This sense of individuality as an invaluable musical asset, as well as an inherent element in the process of artistic preparation, is expounded on by English alto Dame Janet Baker (b. 1933):

“We’re all singing the same repertoire - presumably on a certain level we are all singing very well. The thing that sets us apart, like all human beings, is the personality of the human being behind all this and there are never two of us totally alike. And so the great artist brings that sense of uniqueness to everything they do and it’s unmatched. It’s why I think there should never be any jealousy between singers, because, no matter what we do, we are all quite different from one another.”⁴¹

The impact of this technique-interpretation relationship on timbre is stated succinctly by German soprano Lotte Lehmann:

“The voice must be capable of responding with the greatest subtlety to every shade of each emotion. But it must be subordinate, it must only be the foundation, the soil from which flowers true art.”⁴²

and defined in greater detail by Spanish tenor Placido Domingo (b. 1941):

“To *really* sing, you must delve deeply and meticulously into the score and seek to unravel all its secrets, all the little things behind the notes and between the lines. For instance, whenever there is a change of key there is also usually a change of mood—from joy to wistfulness or whatever—and you must modulate your voice accordingly, even though the audience may be unaware of it. Equally important is to color your voice according to the instrumentation. Being a tenor doesn’t mean you have to sing with the same voice all the time. Although you only have one voice its color can, and should, vary tremendously with the character and style of the music, and especially the orchestration, which, in opera, is everything.”⁴³

These singers continually return to the artistic impulse as they further develop the practical means of conveying expression, demonstrating how technical development and artistic expression seamlessly coexist, inform, and inspire each other.

⁴¹ Sean Rafferty. Interview with Dame Janet Baker. Radio Interview. London, May 19, 2012.

⁴² Lehmann, *More than Singing*, 10.

⁴³ Helena Matheopolous, *The Great Tenors from Caruso to the Present* (New York: The Vendome Press, 1999), 109.

In addition to the perspectives provided by singers themselves, teachers of singing, both in the present and as far back as the beginning of the art form, advocate individuality and interpretation. If we study the writings of Pier Francesco Tosi (c. 1653-1732), we see that he quite simply advocates the creativity of the singer: “To copy is the part of a Scholar, that of a Master is to invent.”⁴⁴ (A modern language understanding of the roles of “scholar” and “master” would result in “student” and “artist,” respectively).⁴⁵ This sentiment is paralleled closely by the philosophy of modern American vocal pedagogue Clifton Ware (b. 1937):

“Outstanding song interpreters...freely incorporate their emotional lives into their singing...by manipulating tone color, tempi, or dynamics...performances [by] outstanding singers demonstrate consistently how they create unique and exciting song interpretations.”⁴⁶

Perhaps the crux of this philosophy is most aptly stated by opera manager Herbert Witherspoon (1873-1935):

“No teaching of an art can be entirely mechanical, nor can it be entirely scientific. It must return again and again to the art itself for further inspiration, in order that Technique, rightly developed, may be the servant of Expression and Interpretation.”⁴⁷

Returning to the role of timbre in expression, we may return to the wisdom of Garcia, who states quite beautifully: “Timbre...form[s] an inarticulate language composed of tears, interjection, cries, sighs, etc., which one could properly name the language of the soul.” Speaking to this issue in particular, there is much to learn as well

⁴⁴ Pier Francesco Tosi. *Observations on the Florid Song: Facsimile of the 1736 English Edition*, Trans. John Ernest Galliard (London: Travis and Emery Music, 2010), 152.

⁴⁵ Coffin, *Historical Vocal Pedagogy*, 4.

⁴⁶ Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundation and Process of Singing* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1998), 236.

⁴⁷ Coffin, *Historical Vocal Pedagogy*, 89-90.

from the collaborative keyboardists so well versed in the vocal repertoire and yet removed from the vocal instrument. American pianist and coach Robert Spillman asserts:

“Besides the more obvious consideration of wanting a beautiful vocal sound, performers need to seek shadings of timbre which will support their interpretations...[this] may reflect choices regarding *Stimmung*, character, or dramatic intent; they may also be latent in the details of the language and of the musical setting...the interpretations and decisions are based first and foremost upon understanding the poetic text and how the composer is conveying that text in musical sound.”⁴⁸

Spillman’s assessment of the role of timbre establishes a clear lineage between the composer’s musical conception of meaning and the evocative, meaningful sound used by the singer to give that concept life.

There is value to both of these approaches to singing; however, this does not necessarily render them equal. The tenets of primacy of beautiful sound are well founded and apt, but they stop short of the final essential element of artistic singing performance. Primacy of expression and meaning absorbs all the principles of primacy of beautiful sound and infuses them with the expressivity (and subsequent expressive tools) that makes a vocal performance complete. A *chiaroscuro* pathway to interpretation is essentially a process of engaging in interpretation that functions within the ideals of a primacy of expression and meaning approach.

INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES

Informed by the wisdom and intention of these different approaches to artistry, it is beneficial to also identify the major obstacles that singers face in the process of

⁴⁸ Deborah Stein and Robert Spillman, *Poetry into Song: Performance and Analysis of Lieder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87

interpreting vocal literature and how a *chiaroscuro* approach might help to overcome them. Too often, when faced with the myriad challenges of interpreting classical vocal literature, singers strive for the explicitly evident or even “correct” interpretation. It is the aim of this research to compel singers at every level to consider a different approach to meeting these challenges in pursuit of a more satisfying result.

As has been alluded to by many of the noted professionals referenced in this research, one of the initial (and most debilitating) challenges to interpretation is the fallacy that the “correct” interpretation already exists. This is often the result of a singer’s rigid allegiance to established ideas regarding performance practice. German mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig identifies this problem in her memoir:

“Everyone experiences life differently, so everyone’s interpretation of a song will be a little different, too. And there are no laws about how songs must be done... There are always exceptions, and one of the greatest challenges a singer faces is to know when it’s right to break the rules, and when it isn’t.”⁴⁹

Singers must engage their creativity, take risks, and learn to trust themselves in order to develop as interpreters.

Many singers reach an interpretive “dead-end” by failing to engage in a continued process of refining interpretive choices. This demonstrates another way in which technical development and artistry are often approached as mutually exclusive pursuits. As a singer continues polishing a particular piece, there is never a point at which he or she stops working towards an improved sound, a purer vowel, or a more efficient breath. However, this unending dedication to excellence does not always translate to interpretation. It is not uncommon for singers to let interpretation become stagnant by

⁴⁹ Christa Ludwig, *In My Own Voice: Memoirs* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1999), 149.

replicating the same ideas in the same way without continued exploration. Lotte

Lehmann warns against this:

“Everything which breathes the breath of life is changeable: a momentary feeling often makes me alter an interpretation. Do not build up your songs as if they were encased in stone walls—no they must soar from the warm, pulsing beat of your own heart, blessed by the inspiration of the moment.”⁵⁰

Singers must continue to channel their imaginations to explore different possibilities to express the music and text emotionally, infusing each performance with the continually developing nuance of their own identity and experiences.

Complacency in interpretation itself is not the only way interpretation suffers. It is all too tempting to avoid literature that highlights vocal flaws or weaknesses and only “play to the strengths.” While this is good advice for auditions, the only sure way of developing a complete and versatile instrument is by tackling technical challenges head on. Christa Ludwig considers this:

“Although I hate to admit it, vocal limitations can be a blessing. If I’d had a voice right from the beginning with which I could have sung everything from top to bottom without difficulty, I probably would have learned very little. I would have sung without thinking...trying to solve vocal problems makes you study more intensely and that’s when you can really learn something and discover your own special way of interpreting a song or opera role.”

The appreciation and growth that develops through such struggles provides breadth of both technical faculty and character. The singer trades a limited amount of time battling these limitations yet gains a multitude of expressive resources that are truly lasting.

A *chiaroscuro* approach has the potential to address each of these challenges. It can bypass the absolutes of “right” and “wrong” and uncover tangible, vibrant relationships within the piece. The realization that the balance and interplay of light to dark can exist in varying degrees within that relationship allows singers to explore a

⁵⁰ Lehmann, *More Than Singing*, 10.

unique, living, breathing interpretation of the piece each time it is performed. The personal growth a singer experiences from working through vocal challenges cannot help but impact his or her ever-evolving sense of perception, intensifying the concept of depth and dimension so crucial to *chiaroscuro*. This is the type of universality a *chiaroscuro* approach has the potential to provide: a loose structure for interpretive reflection that can be tailored to each singer's individual circumstances, gifts, and points of view.

CHAPTER FOUR: APPROACHING VOCAL LITERATURE

A deeper understanding of these concepts can only truly be attained through practical application. The following chapter will recount observations gathered from approaching a specific piece of vocal literature through *chiaroscuro*-informed interpretation. Based on criteria including accessibility of language, familiarity of form, and adaptability of chosen text, the piece selected for this demonstration of the *chiaroscuro* pathway is Henry Purcell's *If Music Be the Food of Love*.

Late in his career, British composer Henry Purcell (1659-1695) composed three settings of Colonel Henry Heveningham's (1651-1700) poem *If Music Be the Food of Love* for solo voice and continuo. The first of these pieces was composed in 1692 and has since become one of Purcell's most well known contributions to vocal literature. The third version, a distinctly more intricate and dramatic version from his collection of songs *Orpheus Britannicus*, was composed in 1695 shortly before Purcell's death. These two versions (Z. 379a and Z. 379c) will be the subject of *chiaroscuro* analysis in this research.⁵¹

CHIAROSCURO INTERPRETATION ANALYSIS

At this point it should be reiterated that the intention of this inquiry is not to replace the principles of artistic and vocal preparation that include score study, stylistic and historical research, and poetic and dramatic analysis. The objective is to explore the literature through different means in hopes of opening up a fresh avenue of creativity and understanding in relation to the vocal literature.

⁵¹ Full scores for both versions of Purcell's piece can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

Approaching the pieces from a perspective of contrasting collaborative forces reveals a number of ideas about the nature of Purcell's settings. The textual, character, and musical observations gleaned from this perspective provide some exciting opportunities for interpretation. Initially each of these areas will be explored individually through a *chiaroscuro* framework; however, the intrinsically cyclical nature of exploring meaning, in which each area informs and impacts the others, will undoubtedly reveal crucial overlapping connections.

Chiaroscuro exploration begins with an analysis of the text. The first line of Heveningham's text (and the title of Purcell's settings) is actually a quote from William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) play *Twelfth Night*. Heveningham uses the idea presented by this quote as the catalyst for an impassioned ode to music:

If music be the food of love,
Sing on till I am fill'd with joy;
For then my list'ning soul you move
To pleasures that can never cloy.
Your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare
That you are music ev'rywhere.

Pleasures invade both eye and ear,
So fierce the transports are, they wound,
And all my senses feasted are,
Tho' yet the treat is only sound,
Sure I must perish by your charms,
Unless you save me in your arms.

There are several elements at work in the text that suggest a *chiaroscuro* relationship, such as word choice, contradictory word pairings, and philosophical questions. A line-by-line analysis of the poem offers the opportunity not only for in-depth engagement with the text, but also an outline of the dramatic action—otherwise known as *dramaturgy*—of the character's experience.

The first statement of the text proclaims, “If music be the food of love, sing on till I am filled with joy.” This conditional statement sets up an important relationship between the physical appetite for sustenance and the emotional appetite for love and joy. This seemingly sweet sentiment actually begs the question, “At what point is an individual’s appetite for love satisfied?” Unlike physical cues that make excess food undesirable, conventional wisdom regarding love is that a person can never have too much. This ode to excess (consistent with the meaning and context of the statement as used in Shakespeare’s play) sets up a vital philosophical dichotomy, rich in *chiaroscuro* qualities, by demonstrating how an excess of something seen as good or pleasurable (*chiaro*) actually has the potential to be painful (*scuro*). The pleasure-pain duality is then explored through various descriptions throughout the poem, set in motion by this initial statement.

“For then my list’ning soul you move to pleasures that can never cloy,” provides an answer to our philosophical question by stating that the gratification derived from music is incapable of leading to distaste. The word “cloy” is an acutely *chiaroscuro* term, as it means to “disgust or sicken [someone] with an excess of sweetness, richness, or sentiment.”⁵² This phrase also specifies that music consumed resides in the soul, continuing the elegance of the food metaphor.

The final phrase of the first strophe continues the exalting tone, as it states, “Your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare that you are music ev’rywhere.” The word mien is unusual in modern English, representing an individual’s demeanor or outward expression

⁵² *Oxford Dictionary Online*, 2013 ed., s.v. “Cloy.”

of mood.⁵³ The idea presented here by assigning distinct features to music, an otherwise ethereal and fleeting concept, can be seen as an imagery-based representation of *chiaroscuro*. Filtered through the concept as used by painters and visual artists, we can see the description of music take distinct form. The transparent and diffuse embodiment of music becomes more defined as a physical (albeit figurative) entity that now possesses facial features and countenance. The way in which music communicates with the speaker of the poem is suddenly far more direct.

The second strophe of text has a more assertive and descriptive tone, evoking strong imagery through pairings of seemingly contradictory words or ideas. The initial phrase, “Pleasures invade both eye and ear, so fierce the transports are, they wound,” suddenly imbues the consumption of music’s decadent sound with a sense of forcefulness. The *chiaroscuro* dichotomy of pleasure fiercely invading the listener to the point of inflicting pain reopens the question at the heart of the poem. At first it appeared that such beauty could never cause harm, but as the listener takes in more and more, the intensity of joy begins to cross over into more complex emotions.

The following phrase begins to explain the root of this shift. “And all my senses feasted are, tho’ yet the treat is only sound,” suggests that this invasion has intensely engaged all of the speaker’s senses, yet pleasure is only found through the sense of sound. The description of the senses being “feasted upon” is vivid, creating a powerful contrast between the pangs of sight, taste, smell, and touch and the joyful relief of sound. Singers have a unique conception of how the senses engage through music due to the physical makeup of the voice, and the concept of experiencing music through all senses is certainly not a foreign one.

⁵³ *Merriam-Webster Online*, 2010 ed., s.v. “Mien.”

The final phrase of the poem suggests a paradox in which the root of this discomfort is also the cure. “Sure I must perish by your charms, unless you save me in your arms,” continues the use of *chiaroscuro* word pairings with the concept of being enraptured to the point of death. However, it also provides a means of relief by pointing to music’s capacity to rescue the speaker from this fate. This idea can be connected to the concept of *chiaroscuro* in musical execution, suggesting that the passionate intensity of climactic musical moments must occasionally subside in order to provide the listener with emotional and sensual release. Music is so enticing that speaker cannot willingly resist it, yet perhaps it is within the nature of music to offer reprieve.

Shifting the focus of analysis from text to character reveals the dramatic escalation of Heveningham’s loaded text. Looking more broadly at the relationship between the two strophes, the sweet enthusiasm of the first stophe is notably more *chiaro* than the anxious intensity of the second strophe. This creates an emotional outline and trajectory for the sentiments expressed by the speaker. Some element of the action must change to account for the shift between music’s charming demeanor at the end of the first strophe and it’s fierce invasion of the senses at the beginning of the second.

This emerging emotional sketch sheds light on a significant rhetorical device used by Heveningham throughout the poem: personification of music. With the exception of the first line, which is the Shakespeare quote, all of Heveningham’s text addresses music with the personal pronoun ‘you,’ as if to imbue it with human form. This creates a much more personal relationship between the speaker and music. Music—in its personified incarnation—is making choices that the speaker must react to; it is sweet and blissful, yet

enticing and powerful. The arc of that relationship, from the initial point of joy to the brink of death and the plea for mercy is a spectrum of *chiaroscuro* tones.

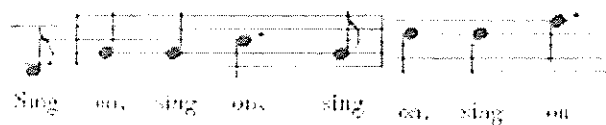
The presence of a strophic musical form often compromises a singer's dramatic instinct because many singers interpret this form as a homogenization of the text and choose to replicate the same vocal choices despite the change in textual meaning. When a poem such as this is read aloud, the natural build of intensity that exists within the text is exemplified by a reader's voice rather instinctively. The act of mirroring the dramatic action of the poetry with the sound created by the spoken voice is often achieved through the freedom of expressive tools such as speed, pitch variance, and volume. In truth, transferring this dramatic intent to singing simply requires different vocal tools, such as phrasing and color. An understanding of the dramatic arc of the text presented in the analysis above would render a one-size-fits-all vocalism illogical and uninspired. Ideally, *chiaroscuro* exploration may serve to spark the type of creative inquiry in a singer that gives form, shape, and personality to different stanzas of strophic music, providing distinctive meaning that can more easily be translated into secure interpretive choices.

Turning to an analysis of the musical conceptions of this text, it is evident that Purcell makes a distinctive statement with each of these two drastically different settings. The musical treatment of the text and dramatic action in each setting brings to life different ideas about Heveningham's poem. Purcell's capacity to perceive the same text in such varied and unique ways is a testament to the broadening landscape of interpretation encompassed by a *chiaroscuro*-informed pathway. The tuneful simplicity of the first version, a sweet, *chiaro* response to the text's initial sentiment, is contrasted against a deeply passionate and florid *scuro* representation of the text's vivid extremes.

Purcell's first setting was originally composed in the key of G minor in a 2/2 meter. The piece encompasses a range of an octave and a fourth and consists of near constant rhythmic movement. The atmosphere that is created musically is one that underscores excitement and intense desire—as demonstrated by the moving eighth-note patterns and expansive range of each phrase—colored by the implication of suffering suggested by the minor key. The *chiaroscuro* dynamic is immediately evident here, as Purcell juxtaposes the joyful sentiment expressed in the beginning of the poem with the foreboding effect of the G minor tonality. Purcell's choice of key bears significance here, as G minor carries an established association with death in the English music tradition that predates Purcell's work by several generations. Notably, all of Purcell's settings of this text are originally composed in G minor.⁵⁴

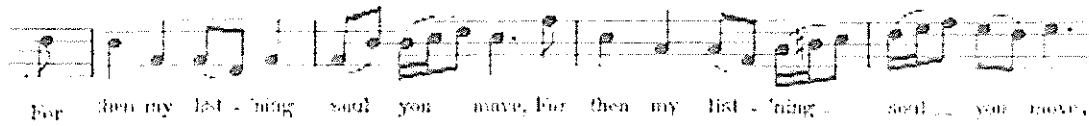
The form of this setting is strophic and employs a great deal of repetition. There are two distinct ways that repetition is used to create tension within the piece, the first of which is through immediate repetition of text. With the exception of the final phrase of each strophe—which is repeated with the same text and melody—Purcell heightens the intensity of repeated text by also setting it in a musical sequence. Examples of this are provided in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2.

FIGURE 1.1 m. 4—5



⁵⁴ Curtis Alexander Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 23.

FIGURE 1.2 m. 8—11



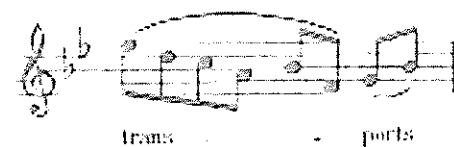
The second way that Purcell builds tension through repetition is through the reiteration of musical material. This provides interesting insights as to how certain motives may function at different times. For instance, in the first strophe Purcell sets the final part of the phrase 'Sing on till I am fill'd with joy' with a sighing figure of steady eighth notes which are grouped in slurred pairs (Figure 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3 m. 6—7



The same musical material is used in the second strophe to set the phrase 'So fierce the transports are, they wound.' In this case the first syllable of the word 'transports' is set with melismatic word painting over six slurred eighth notes (Figure 1.4).

FIGURE 1.4 m. 28



This example demonstrates how the same pitches and rhythmic values can serve very different expressive functions within the context of a strophic piece. This recognition of distinct functions impacts the color and breath used to execute the motives, yet must also contain a varied emotional meaning that causes the singer to sigh at one moment and be whisked away in the other.

Purcell's third setting shares some similarities with the first. Both settings are originally composed in the key of G minor, and Purcell uses some of the same devices. Of particular note is the shift to the relative major on the first appearance of the word 'love,' which is achieved through use of the raised seventh at the close of the initial phrase. Nevertheless, the constant driving motion of the first setting is absent in this third version, which broadens to reflect on ideas at length through extended melismatic material, often on a single word. This effect is achieved by a through-composed form in two parts: the first stanza is set in an expansive 4/4 meter, while the second stanza is primarily set in a spritely 3/8 meter, with a return to the duple immediately preceding the penultimate phrase.

Purcell uses range to a different effect in this setting, alternating phrases that encompass a smaller range—such as a fifth—with phrases that explore a more substantial range, such as a ninth. Purcell also uses particular tessituras to represent the character of the embellished words within these pairings. For instance, in the first stanza the words expressing emotions, such as “joy” and “pleasures,” sit in a high tessitura with ample time above the staff. This is in contrast to the words expressing actions, such as “sing” and “move,” which sit in a lower tessitura. (Figures 2.1 & 2.2 and 2.3 & 2.4 appear on the following pages).

FIGURE 2.1 m. 6—7



FIGURE 2.2 m. 9—10

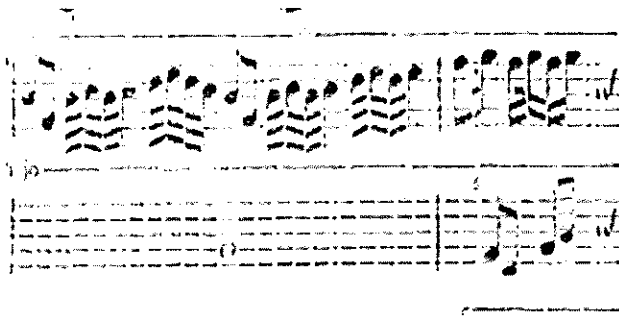


FIGURE 2.3 m. 13—14



FIGURE 2.4 m. 16—18



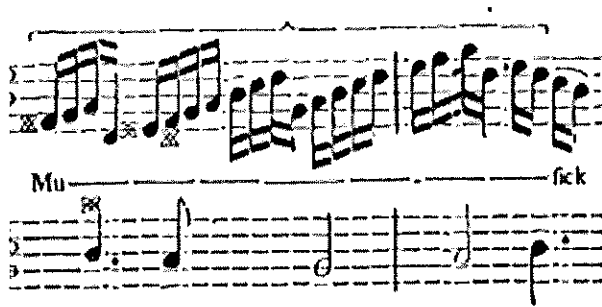
Purcell also uses a diverse palate of rhythmic figures in this setting, including many dotted rhythms. Dotted rhythms frequently close out melismatic material and are used to provide clarity and distinction leading into the cadence. Purcell uses this effect to emphasize certain textual elements that are not as prominent in his first setting, such as the word “never” in the phrase “to pleasures that can never cloy” (Figure 2.5).

FIGURE 2.5 m. 18—19



The use of dotted figures within melismatic material is also used to give a certain momentum to the overall musical line. An excellent example of this can be seen in his setting of the word ‘music’ in the phrase “that you are music ev’rywhere,” which is also one of only two moments in the piece in which Purcell repeats the same text and pitches. In the first appearance of this material he uses constant sixteenth notes leading to the top of the phrase, at which point he shifts the impetus by grouping two sixteenth notes with a thirty-second note and a dotted sixteenth (Figure 2.6 appears on the following page).

FIGURE 2.6 m. 25—26



In the second appearance of this material, he begins the melisma with this same dotted rhythmic motive and then proceeds to alternate groupings of steady sixteenth notes with this dotted motive, creating a different sense of motion for the final statement of the idea (Figure 2.7).

FIGURE 2.7 m. 31—32



This distinct approach to repetition has other implications as well. Text repetition is used nearly as often in this setting as it is in the first; however, Purcell rarely sets full musical sequences without infusing the melodic structure with variations. Rather more striking than using repetition as a point of emphasis is how Purcell's constant restatements of text accentuate the significance of a phrase that is set only once. This

absence of repetition, as used in the final phrase, is remarkably effective in making an emotional statement and defining the distinctive character of this version. While the form and rhythmic motion of the first setting lend it a simple and direct character, the copious embellishments of the third setting imply powerlessness in the face of music's wiles. In this setting, only music (in its personified form) can relieve the speaker from this irrepressible passion, and Purcell's exclusion of a second statement of the final plea, "unless you save me in your arms," allows the following silence to become part of the musical expression.

This analysis of Purcell's pieces demonstrates how encouraging a singer to identify *chiaroscuro*-based contrasts and dualities—not only in an intellectual sense through recognition but also in a personal sense through emotion—can provide a substantive process for examining meaning. This experience may inspire increased confidence in the singer and allow them to be more courageous about expressing a personal point of view through interpretation. The anticipated outcome for the singer is informed risk-taking, a vital element of artistic interpretation. For instance, what might it mean to a singer to experience beauty or pleasure so intense and captivating that it cannot be sustained? Does focusing on that contradiction bring about images, memories, or sensations that can be channeled into an interpretive performance? A *chiaroscuro* pathway provides a framework for exploring questions that are personal and intuitive as well as artistic and imaginative.

CHAPTER FIVE: ENGAGING IN THE *CHIAROSCURO* PROCESS

Like most approaches to interpretation, the *chiaroscuro* process isolates the elements of music, text, and character in order to analyze them individually and then rebuild the whole. This pathway is not a shortcut or a replacement for vital preparation, such as analysis of historical, poetic, dramatic, and stylistic context and practices. Once that work has been done, the *chiaroscuro* process can function in a similar way to a Schenkerian analysis: a structural process for exploring and uncovering relationships and patterns of meaning in the music. Ideally, the *chiaroscuro* process may serve as a potential pathway to consider the piece differently and spark creativity that is perhaps undiscovered by other means.

The *chiaroscuro* process is designed to guide singers through a self-informed performance experience by serving as an outlet for them to explore their individuality—the innate musical and expressive gifts that make them unique—in interpretation. This is where Campbell’s “arts processes” can be of great use. Adapting each of the six processes to the exploration of vocal literature provides defined areas and techniques through which to apply a *chiaroscuro* lens.

If upon choosing to study a piece of music a singer first reads the text and listens to a recording, here lies an opportunity to engage in the first two arts processes and begin to enter the *chiaroscuro* landscape. The first two processes are perceiving and responding, which require the singer to answer two fairly direct questions: 1) What did you read/hear? and 2) How did it make you feel? Responding to a piece of music or musically set text will often lead to a sense of mood and atmosphere, while perceiving details about the music or text will identify specific features of the music that create that

response. Answering these questions, even in the most basic sense, provides singers with vital information about themselves, both as individuals and as musicians. A singer may discover that his or her initial response to a piece is impacted by a general temperament, such as pessimism or optimism (another *chiaroscuro* dichotomy), or a preference for specific musical motives and textures or particular rhetorical devices in the text. This process engages a singer's curiosity by reflecting not merely on how the piece impacted him or her, but how the composer and poet manipulated their artistic resources to create that impact. This deeper recognition of individuality allows the singer to recognize the resources he or she possess as well, and begins the process of imagining how to put those resources to the most effective use.

Following this examination is the third process, skills development, which allows the singer to identify the musical and vocal skills required to both execute the material and create the mood. At this point the technical and expressive converge, allowing elements of technique to connect to expressive ideas and develop concurrently. This relationship flourishes when each informs the other: the development of vocal skill should serve to express the artistic ideas of the singer, and the emotional ideas should serve as opportunities to meet technical challenges with creative solutions. This speaks to the importance of the word "exploration." Each piece, each phrase, each moment is different: one may require attention to a perfectly crafted legato line to bring an emotional idea to life, while another may require an unusual dramatic premise or relationship to deliver the utmost clarity of diction. The crucial element is that throughout the skills development process the approach to the artistic and the technical is one of a partnership, not one of divide and conquer.

Skills development is not isolated to the vocal instrument. This process also includes deeper engagement with a contextual understanding of the piece. Development of stylistic skills, consultation of original source texts and language resources, and continued study of historical and cultural influences all occur in this central process. The opportunities for *chiaroscuro* connections in this process are vast. Considering the issues faced by composers and poets throughout history—ranging from struggles of national identity and creative freedom to illness and social controversy—there are many opportunities to contemplate the interaction of opposing forces and their impact. Contextual understanding connects to the ideas presented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Socrates, and others. What opposing cultural influences led to the operas of Gluck or the development of *mélodie*? How does a singer’s own biases color their perception of poetic texts, musical genres, or performance practices? These all speak to developing an authentic artistic identity, the aim of a *chiaroscuro* approach.

These three initial steps establish a foundation that allows the processes of evaluating, understanding, and creating to flourish. Singers can evaluate the effectiveness of how their technical choices convey meaning, as well as their assumptions or conceptions regarding the piece. Understanding can be gained through continued depth of exploration, for as interpretation progresses, new questions will arise and new truths will become apparent. The point at which a singer achieves a level of excellence and freedom that allows for risk taking and originality in each performance is the creating process, when the literature, vocalism, and style are prepared at such a level that each performance is an exercise in freshness and imagination.

There are countless ways that singers can connect these processes to *chiaroscuro*. Ideally, a *chiaroscuro* approach to interpretation will inspire an increased range of possibilities for the singer. Development and expansion of both emotional and poetic vocabulary, as well as curiosity and inquiry, serve as pivotal elements of exploring depth and individuality as a vocal artist. The connotation, nuance, and idiomatic context of language is rich with meaning, and deeper consideration of these elements provides a singer with a greater store of interpretive resources. Appendix 3 details additional guidelines for engaging in this concept, such as developing an emotional “color wheel” devised of *chiaro*, *scuro*, and *chiaroscuro* terms, or identifying the foreground and background elements of the piece through analysis guidelines.

As the impetus for this research sprang from a first-hand awareness of the challenges instructors face in teaching interpretation skills, the *chiaroscuro* process also seeks to provide opportunities for voice instructors to more effectively engage in that dialogue. This process can vary considerably based on the age and skill level of each individual student, yet hopefully it can act as a unifying medium through which singers with a variety of experiences and talents can communicate as equals. This can prove particularly useful in studio classes or group voice classes, where the experience levels and mastery of formal terminology may vary significantly.

Instructors provide the invaluable link between the singer’s artistic conception and the demonstration of that concept. From the perspective of a *chiaroscuro* pathway, this may range from introducing the concept and channeling a singer’s thinking to helping them identify any holes or missing steps in their process or even challenging their assumptions. Often singers are asked to “dig deeper” into the meaning of a piece, and

chiaroscuro offers a tangible means by which to do just that through engaging creativity and imagination in a different way.

An example of how a *chiaroscuro* perspective may be used to solve a common interpretive challenge can be seen in the way vocalism is related to mood. A common trap for young singers is to assume that a “dark” piece (i.e. a piece with a solemn message, in a minor key, etc.) requires an equally dark vocal sound. This often results in phonation that lacks sufficient resonance and sounds muffled or “woofy.” A *chiaroscuro* solution to this familiar struggle would be to introduce the idea of a “chiaro” vocalism working in tandem with the “scuro” mood. This suggestion opens the door to a discussion of everything from how *chiaroscuro* can exist in an intersection of technique and meaning to how specific vowels, consonants, and phrase contours balance light and dark. Appendix 4 details a comprehensive list of *chiaro*, *scuro*, and *chiaroscuro* terms that instructors can use to spark a singer’s imagination, engage their curiosity, and expand their expressive vocabulary.

It should be noted that the *chiaroscuro* process might also prove extremely helpful in the interpretation of both modern and early music. These two genres provide unique challenges for singers who are accustomed to consulting various or “definitive” interpretations of the pieces in their repertoire. The experience of creating an original interpretation without other interpretations to draw on opens up a whole new world of interpretive freedom, which some singers may find more overwhelming than liberating. A *chiaroscuro* process can provide direction by building an interpretation out of the identifiably familiar elements and creating a palpable form to the piece, which can then be infused by the individuality and ingenuity of the singer. The presence of elements such

as text, rhythm, and melody is fairly constant, and these elements retain similar functions in both standard repertoire and early and new repertoire. For instance, a singer can analyze a text and deliver it expressively whether it is sung, spoken, or somewhere in between (as in *Sprechstimme*), any of which might be the case in a newly composed work. Furthermore, text can be sung meaningfully regardless of whether the assigned pitches have regular rhythmic values and meter or have flexible temporal constraints as one might find in early music. Using *chiaroscuro* thinking to unearth the character and journey of the piece provides the foundation for a singer to translate this character into sound through the expressive use of a wide range of tools, such as consonants, breath, articulations, text emphasis, and tone color.

While the method would obviously require some creative adapting, it is clear that the *chiaroscuro* process need not be limited to singers. Instrumentalists may benefit from a new lens through which to view their repertoire, which contains the same musical and dramatic elements contained in vocal literature. While text clearly does not serve the same function in instrumental music that it does in vocal music, extra-musical elements—including but not limited to texts—are an ideal fit for *chiaroscuro* exploration.

This research has specifically referenced the reflections of Robert Spillman, one of many notable collaborative pianists who have contributed to the existing scholarship on song interpretation. The nature of the relationship between piano and voice in song literature renders these contributions extremely valuable, and underscores one of the ways text can influence an instrumental player. If we investigate Spillman's ideas on piano interpretation, he places an emphasis on informed timbres, such as emulating the

pianoforte or what he calls an “orchestral palette” based on the context of the piece.⁵⁵

This idea is highly compatible with the *chiaroscuro* process as it allows pianists to determine for themselves what balance of dark to light exists for each of those soundscapes, and how tools such as attack, touch, pedal, and decay can be used to bring that sound to fruition. This can be of particular use to collaborative pianists when faced with accompaniments of sparser textures that require a great deal of color for expressive purposes.

Another source of inspiration for instrumentalists interested in a *chiaroscuro* process comes from Spanish cellist and conductor Pablo Casals (1876-1973). Renowned for his innovative interpretations of both solo cello and symphonic literature, Casals maintained: “Technique, wonderful sound...all of this is sometimes astonishing—but it is not enough.”⁵⁶ The natural timbre of the cello seems a perfect fit for *chiaroscuro*, with its warm yet energetic sound (although cellist Jacqueline Du Pre bemoaned its limiting color in comparison to the voice). Investigating form, range, and rhythm through a *chiaroscuro* lens certainly allows for a fresh and creative approach.

⁵⁵ Stein and Spillman, *Poetry into Song*, 84-85.

⁵⁶ David Blum, *Casals and the Art of Interpretation* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977), 1.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Approaching interpretation from the perspective of contrasts between dark and light opens up an array of intuitive creative opportunities that take advantage of the imagination's capacity for identifying and classifying opposing elements. *Chiaroscuro* can embody a vast array of meanings and interpretations, providing both freedom and structure in the interpretive process. Musical, textual, and dramatic elements can be broken down and analyzed as complex, gratifying elements of a living, breathing artistic whole.

A *chiaroscuro* process can be a compelling pathway to interpretation because it embraces the complexity of the human experience. This is significant because, while complexity may not always be positive, it is a truth that transcends emotion, action, and intellect. When seemingly dissimilar entities interact to form something else, it is fascinating and worthy of exploration. Personal identity becomes evident from this process, and a truly captivating artistic interpretation must be as multifaceted as an individual. Just as no individual should tolerate being reduced to a single identifying characteristic, no composition should be reduced to a singular, perfunctory emotion or idea. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler."⁵⁷

Ultimately, this *chiaroscuro* pathway is focused on the process of interpretation. Like the artistic works that inspired the term, *chiaroscuro* interpretation provides a sense

⁵⁷ Albert Einstein, *On the Method of Theoretical Physics*, Trans. Sonja Bargmann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 270. The original quote is: "It can scarcely be denied that the supreme goal of all theory is to make the irreducible basic elements as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender the adequate representation of a single datum of experience."

of foreground and background within the musical work. It brings into focus the elements of the poetry, character, and music that a singer responds to most distinctly and impels the singer to communicate those elements to the audience. One singer may engage in it and find that he or she finally understands and connects with a piece that was initially abstract, while yet another singer may find that he or she discovers a fresh perspective on a familiar and frequently performed work. This is what is so distinctive about a *chiaroscuro* pathway to interpretation: it is fluid. It is not limited to the initial learning and interpretation process; it can be revisited to ensure a continually evolving interpretation of music that represents the evolving gifts, skills, and spirit of the performer. While a singer may certainly find other effective means of analyzing vocal literature and informing interpretation, a *chiaroscuro*-informed process invites an atmosphere of creativity in which exploring a piece becomes a cycle of responding, asking, imagining, learning, and reevaluating.

This research focuses largely on the way in which a *chiaroscuro* lens can aid the interpretation of standard vocal literature, yet there are several additional areas where a *chiaroscuro* pathway may be valuable. These areas include choral ensembles, sacred music, and role interpretation.

While no specific references to choral performance were made in this research, applications of *chiaroscuro* interpretation in a vocal ensemble setting offer a significant opportunity for exploration. Choral performance is an innately *chiaroscuro* experience, as it involves the combining of varied individual voice timbres to create a new sound. The accessibility of the *chiaroscuro* concept and its terminology may provide conductors with a new avenue for expressing both musical and interpretive ideas.

Another area with a seemingly intrinsic connection to *chiaroscuro* is the genre of sacred music, which lends itself to the *chiaroscuro* concept thematically, musically, and textually. Sacred texts, particularly those relating to Western religions, offer extensive allusions to dark and light. These ideas are expressed musically through different timbres, instruments, ranges, and textures, offering insights into cultural context. A *chiaroscuro* framework may also provide a different pathway for singers to connect with the dramatic action and character of sacred works without becoming preoccupied with the ideology behind them. The spiritual connotation of these pieces can be a challenge for certain singers, and *chiaroscuro* may serve to neutralize an overly delicate treatment of sacred works and allow singers to connect with them as the vibrant dramatic works they are.

Applying a *chiaroscuro* lens to dramatic action and music as it pertains to one character over the course of a song-cycle, oratorio, or opera also presents an opportunity for further exploration, as it would engage a singer's imagination and curiosity to explore relationships in a larger context. Deeper consideration of *chiaroscuro* in areas such as character study, the emotional journey as a shifting balance of light and dark, and interpretation of recurring musical motives provides exciting possibilities for examination of relationships across a variety of contexts.

This research briefly touched on how a *chiaroscuro* pathway could be useful for interpretation of early and modern music; however, the application of *chiaroscuro* to certain crucial elements of these genres of music is worthy of deeper examination. Concepts such as mensuration—which, for both genres, can manifest outside the traditional structure commonly applied to the majority of solo vocal literature—and temperament—which may apply to tuning other than equal temperament in early music

and the use of microtones in modern music—offer a vast opportunity for exploring *chiaroscuro* thinking and interpretation.

The *chiaroscuro* pathway addresses the process of interpretation without identifying specific objectives or desired results. It exists to present questions for consideration, not to provide definitive answers. The outcomes from exploring this process are sure to be wide-ranging and infinite, and may potentially play a role in the development of distinctive and personal vocal artistry. A constant and continuing dialogue on both the barriers and approaches to developing interpretive skills is an important one. Artistry demands courage and imagination, and interpretation cannot exist as a separate entity from technical skill. This research is designed to identify these challenges, and potentially provide a different pathway to interpretation that ties imagination, personal reflection, and creative exploration to the rich tradition of artistic expression represented by *chiaroscuro*.

APPENDIX ONE: *If Music be the Food of Love*, Z. 379a⁵⁸

26

If music be the food of love

First Version

(Original key)

(Andantino)
(p)

Voice

It mu - sic - be the food of - love. Sing on, sing on, sing

PIANO

(p) *(Andantino)* *(Andantino)*

on, sing on till I am full, an - full with joy: For

then my list - ning soul you move, For then my list - ning soul you move. To

(rit.)

please - says that can ne - ver cloy. Your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare That

(rit.)

Unpublished

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⁵⁸ Henry Purcell, *40 Songs* (New York: International Music Company, 1958), 26.

you are out - side ev - ry where, Your eyes, your mind, your

tongue de - clare That you are ma - sic - ev - ry - where.

Second Stanza

Plea-sures in - vade, bath eyes and ear, So fierce, so fierce, so fierce, so fierce, the
 trans - ports are, they wound, And all my senses least of all, And
 all my senses least of all are; Tho' yet the tread is on - ly sound, Sure
 I must per - ish by your charm Un - less you save me in your arms, Sure arms.

APPENDIX TWO: *If Music be the Food of Love*, Z. 379c⁵⁹

The musical score is presented in seven systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a lute accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are as follows:

I If Musick, if Musick be the food of Love, Sing on, sing
 on, sing on, sing on, sing, on, sing
 on, till I am fill'd with joy
 —y, till I am fill'd with joy; for then my lifting Soul you mo—
 ve, for then my lifting Soul you mo—
 ve, you move, to plea—sures that can never, never

⁵⁹ Henry Purcell, *Orpheus Britannicus* (London: J. Hepinstall, 1698), 6.

cloy; your Eyes, your Meen, your Tongue de—clare, that you arc

Mu—sick ev'—ry where; your

Eyes, your Meen, your Tongue de—clare, that you arc Mu—

sick ev'—ry where.

Pleasures in—vade both Eye and Ear, pleasures invade both Eye and Ear, fo

fer ce, fo fer

ce the transports are, they wou
nd, fo fier

ce the transports are, they wound, and all my Sen-fes feasted are, and all my Sen-fes feasted

are; tho' yet the Treat is on-ly Sound, tho' yet the Treat is on-ly

Sound, Sound, Sound, Sound, Sound, Sound, is on-ly Sound;

sure I must perish, I must, I must pe-rish by your Charms, unless you

fa
ve me in your Armes.

APPENDIX THREE: GUIDELINES FOR SINGERS

The following guidelines are provided as an introductory aid to using *chiaroscuro* to enhance the interpretation process.

FREE ASSOCIATION

The simplest way to use the *chiaroscuro* process is by sitting down with your chosen composition and listing everything you can identify, free from judgment. Create a master list for the text and a separate one for the music. Once you've completed these lists, compare them side-by-side and look for significant contrasts and similarities. This straightforward process is a surefire way to enter into a *chiaroscuro* mindset. An example of what this might look like is included in the figure below:

TEXT ELEMENTS	MUSIC ELEMENTS
1. Addresses "Love" as a person	1. Minor key/
2. Contrasting word pairs (pleasures invade, perish [by your] charms)	2. Duple meter
3. First stanza sweeter (filled, move, pleasures)	3. Strophic form
4. Second stanza more forceful (fierce, wound, feast)	4. Constantly moving eighth notes
5. Animation of the senses (listening soul, invade eye and ear)	5. Melodic sequences

LIGHT AND SHADOW ASSESSMENT

Visual representations of *chiaroscuro* draw focus to a particular element by using light as a method of emphasis and using shadow to provide contrast and dimension.

Vocal literature can be analyzed in a similar construct by approaching each element (music, drama, and text) and identifying A) the point of emphasis (focus) and B) how that emphasis is achieved. This allows for a process of working from the “big picture” to the more specific and nuanced details. Consider the questions below:

TEXT

1. What is the focal point of the song textually?
2. How is this achieved?
 - a. Key words or phrases
 - b. Repetition of text that retains a different meaning
 - c. Similar phrases with distinctive modifications to the use of language
 - d. Word choice (what does the language mean to the character, what is the significance of using a particular word or phrase)

DRAMA

1. What is the focal point of the song dramatically?
2. How is this achieved?
 - a. “Climax” of the emotion and/or story
 - b. Most poignant or meaningful moment
 - c. Character realization and/or arrival point
 - d. “Punchline” of a joke and/or humorous story

MUSIC

1. What is the focal point of the song musically?
2. How is this achieved?
 - a. Pitch duration (longer note values)
 - b. Range (extremes at the top or bottom of the vocal range)
 - c. Dynamics (extremes at the top or bottom of dynamic range, subito markings, etc.)
 - d. Tempo (drastic or significant shifts)
 - e. Phrase contour (longer or shorter, different trajectory)
 - f. Articulations (accents, tenutos, slurs, sforzandi, etc.)

SCOPE

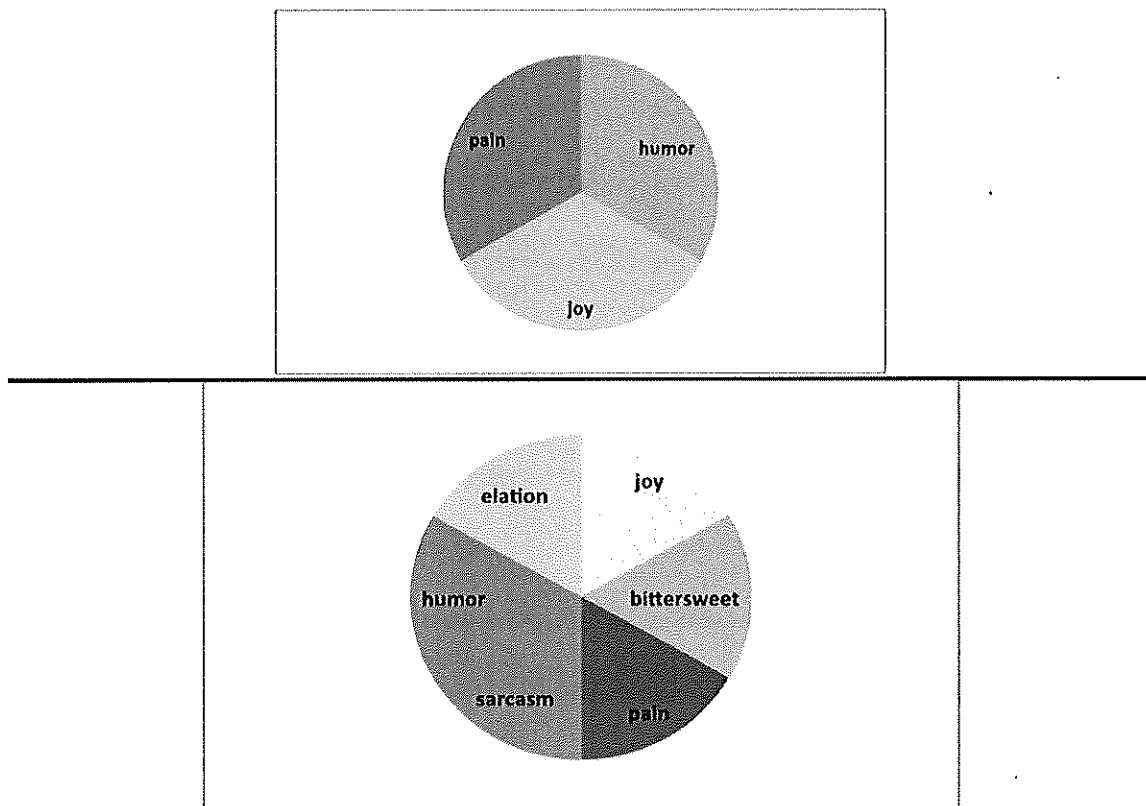
1. Once these questions have been answered for the piece as a whole, consider them by sections in the form (ABA, strophic, etc.), then for each phrase.
2. Consider what contrasts exist that bring identified elements into the foreground.

COLOR WHEELS

In painting, there are three primary colors and from those you get three more colors and so on. This idea has obvious applications for *chiaroscuro* if you think in varying shades of white, black, and gray. This exercise is a little more detailed, but essentially it allows you to create an “emotional color wheel.” Start with two or three contrasting emotions or states of being, such as joy, pain, and humor. Out of those three, you see the “colors” that exist by mixing two adjacent colors. For instance, sarcasm

might result from the intersection of pain and humor; elation might result from the combination of humor and joy; bittersweet might result from pain mixed with joy. This process spawns specificity, providing you with a number of ideas to choose from and from which to develop unique vocal colors.

The first step to this *chiaroscuro* exercise is to select one *chiaro* emotion, one *scuro* emotion, and one *chiaroscuro* emotion (examples can be found in the compendium of terms in Appendix Four). Once these emotions have been placed on the “color wheel,” proceed to brainstorm what might result from a combination of any two adjacent emotions. This process can continue indefinitely, building layer upon layer of emotional complexity for use in interpretation. See illustrated example in the figure below:



APPENDIX FOUR: COMPENDIUM OF *CHIAROSCURO* TERMS

The following terms are categorized by general association. Words that typically represent light are in the *chiaro* category, words that typically represent dark are in the *scuro* category. This list is designed as an entry point to spark the imagination, not as a complete, unchangeable collection.

<i>CHIARO</i>	<i>SCURO</i>	<i>CHIAROSCURO</i>
Good	Evil	Bittersweet
Heroic	Tragic	Tragic-Hero
Hopeful	Hopeless	Cloying
Victorious	Defeated	Ironic
Optimistic	Skeptical	Ambitious
Trusting	Suspicious	Boisterous
Decadent	Lacking	Pensive
Joyful	Forlorn	Remorseful
Triumphant	Disappointed	Paradoxical
Rewarding	Punishing	Striving
Rejoicing	Despairing	Ambivalent
Conquering	Succumbing	Rehabilitated
Pure	Contaminated	Compromised
Content	Miserable	Poignant
Ecstatic	Enraged	Fervent
Embraced	Isolated	Nostalgic
Peaceful	Disturbed	Sententious

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