UNIARTS HELSINKI

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ARTS STUDY PROGRAMME
DocMus Doctoral School

From Werktreue to Prototyping: Reimagining the act of practicing in the Western Art Music tradition

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DEBORAH   WONG

FROM WERKTREUE TO PROTOTYPING

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Debi Wong

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Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki 2023

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ABSTRACT

Biographical Information

From Werktreue to Prototyping: Reimagining the act of practicing in the Western Art Music tradition is the result of artistic research carried out by Debi Wong at the University of The Arts Helsinki – Sibelius Academy between the years of 2012 to 2023 (year of publication of this work). As a classically-trained singer, she came to her doctoral studies questioning the culture of Classical Singing and how it has shaped her artistic practice and her understanding of how musicians engage with one another and with the world.

Content

The world of Western Art Music encompasses myriad cultures that have been defined and continue to be molded by longstanding performance traditions. These traditions carry a sense of gravitas within the culture of Classical Singing, and for individual artists it can be difficult to look beyond the practices inherited from esteemed teachers, performers and composers past and historical treatises. This paper aims to put forward new tools and exercises that can be integrated into existing practices in order to expand a performer's artistic range, hone their expressive capacities and deepen their connections to their collaborators and communities.

To distill these tools and exercises, core concepts from Design Theory, Devised Theatre and Intertextuality were used as devices for disrupting habitual ways of curating, preparing and presenting performances within Classical Singing culture. These devices were examined and tested within the context of a five-project concert series carried out by Debi Wong and further examined in a series of interviews with practicing artists from different Western Art Musical practices. The results put forward a broad cross section of creative practices and processes that all performers can use to innovate the ways in which they can engage with their unique artistic practices within existing Classical Singing traditions and culture.

Keywords

Design thinking, work concept, musicking, improvisation, collaboration, practice, Classical Singing, Western European Art Music, prototyping.

FOREWORD

This work is dedicated Andrew Dawes (February 7, 1940 – October 30, 2022) who came to every performance I gave in Vancouver and witnessed so many of my early prototypes.

Dear Ray,

You have been an inspiring force in my life since my very first steps into the world of Early Music or Historically Informed Performance Practice or whatever they call it these days. You have been a guiding voice in my many explorations of musickers and the songs they have left behind. You have instilled in me a constant curiosity for the often-imperceivable threads that tie us all together.

Thank you for the unwavering support and belief in all my wild ideas, even when it wasn't your cup of coffee. And thank you for the many coffees, which often led to more research projects. Thank you for your mentorship over all these years – I can't possibly express what it has meant to me.

And thank you for telling me to "just get the damn thing done" when I most needed to hear it.

Debi
23.1.2022

Dear Solmund,

When I look back on this work, I find it funny that I didn't speak much of our many hours of collaboration and musicking in these pages. Perhaps, for now, those feel too much like sacred spaces but I hope you know you have had a profound impact on my music, which is to say, my life.

Debi
26.1.2022

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1 How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

> *"How do you get to Carnegie Hall?*
> *Practice, Practice, Practice."*

When I was thirteen years old, I traveled to New York City for the first time to sing at Carnegie Hall with my hometown choir. On a giant poster backstage was the quote above. My thirteen-year-old-self found it inspirational. We had practiced, practiced, practiced and now we were going to perform on one of the most famous stages in the world. When we arrived on stage, I remembered everything we had practiced: from how we stood, to when we bowed; I remembered to never take my eyes off the conductor. I remembered the passages of music where I had to really focus on counting. I remembered to drop my jaw at the difficult part in my solo when the melody gets a bit too high to be comfortable; I remembered how to shape my "ah" and "ee" vowels; I remembered to smile at the end. The practice had paid off.

Fifteen years later, I stood backstage at Carnegie Hall, ready to walk back onto that famous stage with an internationally acclaimed choir and orchestra. At this point I was already part way through my doctoral studies, and I had begun wrestling with the word "practice" and was starting to wonder how our ways of practicing did and did not connect to what performers actually do in a performance. Seeing that poster all those years later made me pause and consider what "practice, practice, practice" had meant for me. My practicing was regimented and systematic: my "ah" vowels and "ee" sounds, coupled with specific collections of pitches, repeated in certain patterns that had been handed down to me from my teachers and their teachers. These exercises had accumulated over the years, and all aimed at training my body and my voice in a way that would allow me to sing the most difficult passages of Western European art music, and to execute performances of classical music with technical prowess and precision.

Years of being taught and practicing in this way reinforced in my psyche very clear ideas of musical hierarchies: there were certain ways of singing that were better than others; there were certain repertoires and composers I should and should not perform in order to best display my technical abilities. Therefore, there were certain kinds of music that were more serious than others; there were specific technical vocal exercises and musical skills that I should perfect to become a better singer of serious music; there were specific ways of performing that would earn me respect as a serious singer of serious music by serious composers.

In his book, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology,* John Potter digs into the history and emergence of Classical singing, demonstrating how changes in society, class systems and patronage in combination with a push towards scientific approaches to teaching singing allowed for "a new concept of singer [to] flourish: the singer not just as artist, but singing as

an exclusive art form, which required not just art but artifice".[1] He discusses how singing technique "was underpinned both technically and ideologically by a pedagogy increasingly based on scientific principles"[2] and alongside these new developments of singing techniques was "the tendency to mythologize singing of the past".[3] Most importantly, he points out that "the science, the myth, and the ideologies…are still very much a part of many aspects of singing in the present day".[4]

Mythologizing singing of the past, in addition to practicing for the sake of perfecting performances of serious music, all felt like enormous pillars of the culture of classical singing. How I practiced or how I engaged with my singing very much reflected the pressures of these authorities, and the performance space became a place where I would demonstrate what I have practiced. I began to understand my role as a classical singer to be partly that of an interpreter and partly that of a preservationist. The skills and techniques I was learning and perfecting were for the sake of interpreting and illuminating musical works and their creators, and in doing so I was preserving the cultural ideas and practices of their respective historical contexts.

This all contributed to an overwhelming feeling of rightness and wrongness in the ways I could engage with classical music and singing. My testing sites (i.e. my performances) became a place for constant failure, and in spite of my best efforts, my practicing could never yield the perfection, the *rightness*, I sought. It was a furious cycle that became so habitual to me that it was nearly invisible save for that growing sense of anxiety that there was no room for my creative instincts and my own voice within the culture of classical music performance; that I did not have agency; that my voice, that I, did not belong.

Then why am I doing this? Why do I perform?

The performance space, to me, had always been fertile grounds for curating unique intersections of past and present cultures and peoples and a place to nourish imaginings of what the future might hold. It was this desire to intersect and connect with the artists that originated early Baroque opera and 16th c. theatre music that inspired me to dive into the world of classical music in the first place. It was the promise of iterating on these ideas and stories, through performance, that hooked me. Rather than a space for reverence, I saw performances as a space for communion; those works of composers and artists long gone as open-ended questions and invitations to exchange intimate ideas and instigate new ones. I hold a belief that whether we are singing a piece of music, writing a script, performing in a dance recital, attending a play, or simply telling a story, we are, in some way, participating in a deeply rooted and long-standing exchange of human expression defined by our wild capacities for elaborate communication, imagination and most importantly: connection and community.

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[1] John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62.
[2] Potter, *Vocal Authority*, 47.
[3] Potter, *Vocal Authority*, 47.
[4] Potter, *Vocal Authority*, 47.

So where was the disconnect and how could I move from my current state of practicing towards the imaginative iterating and exchange of expressions that inspired me?

1.2 Practice & Iteration

When I arrived at the start of my doctoral studies, I wanted to address this disconnect I was feeling between my creative instincts and my practice. I approached the self-directed, five-project structure as an opportunity to solve what became my central research question: How do I discover new ways of engaging with performance within the culture of Western Art Music[5] and Classical Singing?

A key component in this process was the shift from *practicing* to *iterating*. Whether a verb or a noun, "practice" holds connotations of something habitual, repeated, regular, with the goals of "improving or maintaining proficiency".[6] In the context of my classical singing studies, I had never paused to consider whether or not I was improving or maintaining practices that were serving my artistic instincts in performance spaces. If I wanted to explore performances as spaces where diverse and imaginative forms of human expression can be exchanged and new communities can be connected through creative activity, then the practices I was reinforcing of seeking technical vocal perfection and the accurate interpretation of musical works were actually hindering me.

The idea of *iterating*[7] came to me from the worlds of creative technology and theatre and looking laterally across my networks of artistic colleagues. Being exposed to the processes that video game designers and devise theatre artists engage with to discover new ideas and to create new works allowed me to see through my habits and reimagine how I prepared for and presented performances; to redefine my role within a performance from interpreter to curator or facilitator; to approach each performance as part of a longer and cyclical process.

Whether or not the difference between practicing and iterating is as significant as I believe it to be, the shift from product to process, and the centering of process on discovery as opposed to perfection, allowed me to understand *how* I was practicing, *what* I was practicing and *why* I was practicing in relation to my deeply held beliefs about the value and power of performance. It allowed me to look at the culture of classical singing and Western Art Music performance in a whole new light and to strengthen my understanding of the value that Western Art Music performances can offer our communities.

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[5] Western Art Music or "WAM" is an alternative to the term "classical music" and describes a musical tradition in the Western world with a particular set of aesthetic values and is rooted in an advanced written tradition. See: Dennis Arnold's "Art Music, Art Song" in The New Oxford Companion to Music, Volume 1: A-J (Oxford University Press, 1983), pg. 111.

[6] New Oxford American Dictionary (The Apple Dictionary): "as a noun: the customary, habitual, or expected procedure or way of doing of something; as a verb: perform (an activity) or exercise (a skill) repeatedly or regularly in order to improve or maintain one's proficiency AND carry out or perform (a particular activity, method, or custom) habitually or regularly."

[7] Iterating is part of the Design Thinking process which is discussed in section 3.2. For an overview of Design Thinking, see: https://designthinking.ideo.com

1.3 Earlier Influences

This research and these activities have been difficult to commit to a written document because, in the end, it is about a process that I have been engaging with since I first set foot into the realm of classical singing at the age of three; it continues in my present work as the founding artistic director of the contemporary Canadian opera company, re:Naissance. Because of the many years it has taken me to complete this doctoral study, there are many aspects of this research and this writing that manifest as conversations between the many iterations of myself – past and present - as an artist. That said, the foundation for this particular research was laid in 2005 when I started my Bachelor of Music at the University of British Columbia and my specialized studies in Early Music or Historically Informed Performance Practice (HIP), especially in singing techniques, ornamentation and theatrical music from the 16 and 17th centuries.

Under the mentorship of historian, lute maker and former opera singer, Ray Nurse, I was fed a steady diet of research by Richard Taruskin, most notably, *Text and Act*[8], in which my undergraduate understandings of authenticity, tradition and authority were rudely disrupted; John Butt, whose *Playing With History*[9] challenged my well ingrained beliefs that a performer is merely an interpreter of a composer's work and first illuminated for me the connection between HIP and the work concept. The most formative works for me though were the writings of Ross Duffin and Judy Tarling. Tarling's *The Weapons of Rhetoric*[10] shifted my HIP practice into something multidisciplinary. Although many of my coaches had spoken to HIP music and its connection to rhetoric and oration, Tarling's book laid it out in a clearly and concisely, describing the historical context and roots of the art of rhetoric while also connecting it to the way it affects performers and listeners.

Tarling's work pushed me to compare my singing practice and training to that of an orator[11] and a true turning point in my practice came after reading about the act and importance of memorization. After several readings of Tarling's work, I memorized hundreds of works of music, poetry and theatre and performed most of my recitals from memory, completely disrupting a habit of prioritizing my sight-reading skills in order to be able to quickly learn works and perform them (often in the same day). Finally, Tarling's work ignited my interest in using artistic practices and ideas of the past as models and blueprints for creating and reimagining contemporary art practices – a theme and method that I engage with to this day.

While Tarling's work allowed me to look at my individual practice as interdisciplinary, Ross Duffin's work was equally instrumental in helping me look at musical works as intertextual and interconnected; as critically shaped by the historical contexts they existed in. Duffin's

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[8] Richard Taruskin. *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1995)
[9] John, Butt. *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance.* (Spain: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
[10] Judy Tarling. *The Weapons of Rhetoric: a guide for musicians and audiences.* (United Kingdom: Corda Music, 2004)
[11] Tarling, *The Weapons of Rhetoric.* See section 1.4 "The Education Of An Orator"

research was instrumental in drawing my attention towards historical tuning systems[12] allowing me to begin thinking about how we listen to music and how contemporary influences shape our listening and enjoyment of music. Duffin's work also introduced me to the theatrical uses of English Lute Song and other musical works I was studying, rooting this repertoire in folk song and dance traditions; I remember distinctly that the time in my life when I carried with me at all times Duffin's *Shakespeare Songbook*[13], *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*[14] and a stack of loose printed copies of manuscripts of John Dowland's first and second books of airs[15][16], Philip Rosseter & Thomas Campion's *Book of Ayres*[17], and Robert Jones' *A Musicall Dreame*[18].

In addition to my overstuffed backpack, my psyche was enchanted by the academic and artistic work being carried out by sopranos, Dame Emma Kirkby and Julianne Baird[19]. Both Baird and Kirkby had a singing tone and performance style I aspired to and I admired the academic research and approach to their technique and practice. I was lucky enough to observe and participate in masterclasses[20] with Dame Kirkby and remember her thoughtful feedback, encouraging me to embody the many tools and practices I had read in Tarling's book. She had me speak, or orate, my singing texts as if I were a politician, desperate to win over my audience. It was a wonderful exercise at the time, but I can look back now and see how this act of connecting the spoken and sung voice continued to be a fruitful place of exploration for my practice. In my doctoral studies I would see how far I could push this idea and experiment with weaving all expressive capacities of my voice into my performances. I would, I will, I continue to make the argument that all expressive qualities are a part of the palette I can and should draw on as a "classical singer".

1.4 Contemporary Context

I didn't know it at the time, but I was incredibly fortunate to pursue my doctoral studies in Finland, where I was learning and absorbing at a time when a new kind of performer-researcher was emerging. The research and ideas put forward in this paper feel best suited amongst those scholars whose work was emerging alongside my own and whose academic

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[12] Ross W. Duffin, *How Equal Temperament Ruined Harmony (and why you should care)* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: 2007)

[13] Ross w. Duffin, Frynette H Kulas, Ellen Hargi, Judith Malafronte, William Hite, Custer LaRue, Aaron Sheehan. *Shakespeare's Songbook*. (United Kingdom: W.W. Norton, 2004)

[14] William Shakespeare and Alexander Peter. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text* (London: Collins, 2006)

[15] John Dowland. *The First Book of Songs or Ayres* (London: Peter Short, 1597)

[16] John Dowland, *The Second Book of Songs or Ayres* (London: George Eastlan, 1600)

[17] Thomas Campion and Philip Rosseter. *A book of ayres, set foorth to the lute, opherian, and bass viol, by Philip Rosseter and are to be solde at his house in Fleetstreete neere to the Grayhound* (London: Peter Short, 1601)

[18] Robert Jones. *A Musicall Dreame or The Fourth Booke of Ayres* (London: John Windby & Simon Waterson, 1609)

[19] At this time in my life, I was most influenced by Baird's introduction and translation of Johann Friedrich Agricola's *Art of Singing* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and her contribution to *Guide to Performing 17th Century Music* (Schirmer Books, 1987). As a young singer, I also deeply admired and aspired to Baird's vocal sound and style.

[20] One of the extensive series of masterclasseses I participated in was organized by the Yale Institute for Sacred Music in October 2009.

contributions to the field of artistic research enrich the dialogue about the role of performers in their own artistic practices and within the traditions that we have inherited in classical music.

I remember the first time I encountered one of Elisabeth Belgrano's performance-papers (or "intra-formances"[21]) titled "Ornamentation based on more-than-human-references: moving towards and ecology of trust"[22]. As an audience member, it was the first time I witnessed an academic paper delivered as a performance and I intersected with this work at a time when I was really having trouble surpassing the boundaries and traditions I had started to question. There were two main takeaways from attending Belgrano's intra-formance that have continued to churn within my own work. The first was the way Belgrano created transparency in her artistic process by walking us through a dialogue between what she describes as the "Voice/Mind" and "a chorus of More-than-Human-References"[23] that "enter [her] thinking process quite unpredicted and spontaneously". She explains that:

> The collisions between various vocal/mental forces can be described as diffractive intro-actions by which reflection can be made possible only at a second step…without the diffractive act (the crashing into the unexpected; or if one prefers gently encountering an invisible caress – perhaps by a wind or by someone blowing air into an ear from a distance) no free and/or wild, ornamenting, reflecting act can occur. Like this the performance paper goes on and on.[24]

In the intra-formance, we watch Belgrano interact and react with different forces and elements and we witness those diffractive acts manifest as breath, voice, writing, scribbling in real time. She left me understanding that the process is always ongoing and reshaping; that the works and ideas and words that enter our psyche and our practices continue to interact and diffract in unexpected ways. In my own work which formed the basis of this paper, I would return many times to the same works and practices, a process I call iterating, because some unexpected "more-than-human" force called them out of the depths of my mind and into being.

The second formational takeaway from Belgrano's work is the interconnectedness of all things. She writes "my voice is never alone but part of my mind, my body and my thoughts. And of course co-existing is bigger than that". I had struggled (I continue to struggle) with performing my entire life and especially with stage nerves and had spent countless hours separating my mind from my physical body; trying to shut out my thoughts and how they were affecting my body and my ability to execute technical prowess in my musical performances. I can only describe witnessing Belgrano's performance as validating. Seeing

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[21] Belgrano describes this intra-formance as presenting a layer-upon a layer in her work "Ornamentation based on more-than-human references moving towards an ecology of trust" Research Catalogue. June 11, 2015. https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/210543/210544

[22] Elisabeth Belgrano. "Ornamentation based on more-than-human references moving towards an ecology of trust" Research Catalogue. June 11, 2015. https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/210543/210544

[23] Belgrano. "Ornamentation based on more-than-human references moving towards an ecology of trust"

[24] Belgrano. "Ornamentation based on more-than-human references moving towards an ecology of trust"

another performer express that our artistic practices can never exist in silos and can never be separated out of or protected from the forces of our lived experiences and the many elements we encounter in our day-to-day, let alone over a lifetime, was extremely empowering. It allowed me to embrace my imperfections as part of my practice and my being. It gave me permission to incorporate my own challenges as part of the narrative I could tell about my process and could continue to examine in my iterative practice.

For my own studies and research, it pointed me in the direction of intertextual theory which I would use as a springboard for interdisciplinary collaboration and performance (see section 2.4). My exploration of intertextuality and as it manifests in my study is akin to what the artistic researcher and singer Sara Wilén would describe as inter-performantivity[25]and for my own practice, would grow into an exploration of intersectionality[26].

Although I am only coming to her work in the present day, Sara Wilén's dissertation, *Singing in Action*[27], and her case for Classical and Contemporary Vocal Improvisation (CCVI) as a tool which singers can use to deconstruct their own artistic practices, is especially relevant to this study. Wilen describes CCVI as "a practice where classically trained singers and musicians improvise music, text and dramatic action with the aim of communicating a musico-dramatic narrative through joint interaction"[28]. The dissertation is presented as a series of articles and in the first article Wilen expresses a sentiment I am all too familiar with; she explains that in her early studies and career she "became aware that the creative agency of classical singers in performance is affected by a number of unspoken norms, rules and habits"[29]. Her outline of the different contexts in which improvisation is used as tools to transform the interactions between performance creators is especially poignant and lands her in a place where she stops referring to herself as a classical singer and instead as a "CCVI actor"[30] noting that "the most vital difference is that a CCVI actor is both performer and author"[31]. In this study, I maintain that classical singers are authors as well, scripting a specific experience for their audiences and facilitating many exchanges in dialogue between other authors. The bigger picture is what matters here: that improvisation has been a unique key to unlocking ways of disrupting, deconstructing and discovering practice and habits and Wilen's work lays out a very clear history of improvisation in many different contexts and a clear guide for how she has developed her own tools which has fostered inter-performativity and co-creation, two themes that are omnipresent in my own work.

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[25] Sara Wilén uses the term interperformativity as connected to oral traditions and performance and as put forward by Lee Haring (1988) who coins it to "name the relation between homages, imitations, or paradoies and their models". He does this to "connect storytelling events to various types of discourse which engender them". See Wilén's *Singing in Action,* pages 206 – 207.

[26] In this paper, I will only use and discuss intertextuality and describe it as an instigating force in this study. I mention intersectionality because it informs all aspects of my work today in contemporary opera but at the time of this study, it was a concept that was still unknown to me.

[27] Sara Wilén, *Singing in Action, an inquiry into the creative working processes and practice of classical and contemporary vocal improvisation* (Sweden: Lund University, 2017), 12.

[28] Wilén, *Singing in Action,* 21.

[29] Wilén, *Singing in Action,* 20

[30] Wilén, *Singing in Action,* 34

[31] Wilén, *Singing in Action,* 34

The idea of the classical singer as author stems from my multi-year collaboration with the lutenist and researcher, Solmund Nystabakk. Over the course of six years, we would visit and revisit the 16th and 17th century English lute song repertoire oftentimes the same pieces. Each time we would return to a piece, it would be with a new idea or tool from original pronunciations of Early Modern English, to placing the piece inside a theatrical work or a dance exercise, to experimenting with vocal colours, to rewriting and restructuring music, juxtaposing historical works against contemporary ones, intertwining many voices into a cacophonous and lively dialogue. Our work together is thoroughly documented in Nystabakk's dissertation *Singing With The Lute* in which he notes that "most modern players…still tend to stick very much to the printed parts".[32] He counters this practice which he notes is well documented through contemporary recordings with Thomas Campion's remarks in the preface of his 1601 songbook, in which Campion states "for the note and tablature, if they satisfie the most, we have our desire, let expert masters please themselves with better"[33]. Nystabakk argues that "this is a perfectly clear indication that the lute parts of these songs are indeed no more than basic suggestions for an accompaniment"[34] and that in mentioning "the note" i.e. the vocal part, "Campion obviously grants equal freedom to the singer"[35].

This permission and ethos turned our six year collaboration into a kind of playground where improvisation and iteration became key. In his research, Nystabakk provides very clear examples and detailed analysis of how this collaboration affected our artistic practices. For myself and this research, it shows how persistent we were in an evolving process and how prominently iteration and experimentation played into the development of a single musical work, an entire performance and a whole practice.

The clearest example of how iteration manifested in our artistic work is depicted in Nystabakk's account of a workshop we attended on Early Modern English pronunciation and theatrical practices as part of our exploration of the connection between lute song and Shakespearean texts. In this 2018 workshop, we brought in Philip Rosseter's work "No Grave For Woe",[36] and started the session by performing the piece as we had many times before. Nystabakk notes "the relationship between Debi and me is defined…by the fact that we are performing a song together that we know well, and that this is something we do with some degree of confidence because of our habit and routine of working together".[37] We were then guided through two improvisational exercises[38] originally developed for contemporary dance and theatre and we recited texts from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.* After these exercises, we performed the song once

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[32] Solmund Nystabakk, "Singing With The Lute – In search of new tools in lute song performance" Research Catalogue. 2020. https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/687266/687267
[33] Nystabakk, *Singing with The Lute,* section 2.2.1. See Campion (1601).
[34] Nystabakk, *Singing with the lute,* section 2.2.1
[35] Nystabakk, *Singing with the lute,* section 2.2.1
[36] Thomas Campion and Philip Rosseter. *A book of ayres, set foorth to the lute, opherian, and bass viol, by Philip Rosseter and are to be solde at his house in Fleetstreete neere to the Grayhound* (London: Peter Short, 1601)
[37] Nystabakk, *Singing with the lute,* section 2.3.2
[38] One exercise is David Zambrano's *Passing Through* and the other was *Sticks* developed out of the Meyerhold method.

more. In his notes from the workshop, Nystabakk observes that "the difference between the two renditions of the song is striking…our relationship as performers is defined by our having impersonated the characters Romeo and Juliet in an improvised physical enactment of their story. This makes the performing of the song… a continuation of that enactment, thus offering the idea that performing together is an element of Romeo and Juliet's relationship. Moreover, it implants Rosseter's song into Shakespeare's play (the song originally has no connection to it), as a comment to the story by its own protagonists".[39]

These acts of taking familiar works and aspects of our creative practices and using improvisational tools from other artistic fields in search of new ways of performing are repeated over and over in my research. In this paper, I focus on larger projects – the multiple performances I created and produced as individual iterations on the classical music recital format. But I highlight this one example and Nystabakk's research as a small glimpse into the smaller and intentional iterations that were happening simultaneously on a song to song, or even note-to-note basis.

1.5 Research Questions

This auto-ethnographic essay dives into this process of moving from a "practice makes perfect" mentality to an "iteration and discovery"-centered praxis within the culture of classical singing and Western Art Music traditions. It specifically looks at the following five, interconnected questions:

1. How do I discover new ways of engaging with performance within the culture of Western Art Music and Classical Singing?

   Which is to say:

2. How do I expand the range of expression I am able to bring to performances?

   Which is connected to:

3. How do I discover new ways of practicing for performances?

   And in engaging with this discovery process:

4. How will new practices affect my abilities to innovate and curate new performance experiences for audiences and bring new communities together?

   Which comes back to:

5. Why *do* I perform?

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[39] Nystabakk, *Singing with the lute,* section, 2.3.2

As I continue digging into these questions and ideas, I feel very much at home in what has become an ever-emergent process; one that has abandoned the pretext of perfection and embraced the premise of iteration; one that centers performance as a unique collaborative action as opposed to a litmus test for technical virtuosity and academic know-how. I have learned that discovering and fostering new practices within the context of Western Art Music and Classical music contributes to a living, breathing, vibrant culture. In exploring the process that has unfolded and the tools that have emerged in this study, I hope, above all, to better illuminate the importance and value of our vibrant and distinct creative practices in strengthening connections between peoples, cultures, stories, histories, presents and futures.

2   INCITING INCIDENTS

In his book *Story*, the lauded screen writer and dramaturg, Robert McKee, describes an inciting incident as an event that "radically upsets the balance of forces in the protagonist's life"[40] and then "arouses in [the protagonist] the desire to restore that balance".[41]

At the heart of this research is the act of defining new practices and means of expression within the specific context of Western Art Music and the practice of Classical singing. In this section, I outline the concepts that, in retrospect, were truly inciting incidents for this study and my artistic practice. These concepts laid the foundation for my questions and my research to emerge and define a specific framework for understanding how this study emerged. More importantly, they are the ideas that "radically upset the balance of forces"[42] in my life and provide a lens through which to better see why I have selected to engage with certain methods and actions in my artistic research. These four concepts were unstoppable forces in my artistic practice, begging me to look again and to look closer at my own habits; driving me to press up against imaginary boundaries and barriers I had placed around my performing; and challenging me to step into dialogue with ideas being generated in other artistic fields.

2.1 Musicking

In the opening of his book, *Musicking,* Christopher Small paints a broad picture of the "many settings...different kinds of action... [and] different ways of organizing sound… [that are] given the name *music"*.[43] He depicts everything from the mundane melodies spouting over supermarket speakers, to the poorly remembered popular song a mother sings to herself at home, to an old symphonic piece performed in a concert hall. His point is to reclaim the word "music" from its myriad definitions as an object and to redefine it as an action and activity. He argues that "the fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works at all, but in action, in what people do".[44] He then puts forward the verb, "to music", and clarifies that "to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing".[45]

Thinking of music in this way, places musical performance and all the actions and interactions that enable a performance fundamental to Small's arguments. As he points out, in considering "the total performance we can escape from the assumptions of the Western concert tradition as it exists today, that continue to dominate the ways in which we think

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[40] Robert McKee, *Story: style, structure, substance, and the principles of screenwriting* (United States of America: HarperCollins, 1997). 189.
[41] McKee, *Story,* 192.
[42] McKee, *Story,* 189.
[43] Christopher Small, *Musicking: the meanings of performing and listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 2.
[44] Small, *Musicking*, 7.
[45] Small, *Musicking*, 9.

about music; and we can see that tradition, as it were from the outside as a small and... tranquil lagoon of the great restless ocean of human musicking."[46]

To understand Small's standpoint and his theory of musicking, we must first address the traditions and assumptions he is referring to. To do that, we will briefly turn to the work concept and the idea that value and meaning in music exists in musical objects, i.e. in musical works.

2.2 Work Concept

In her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Lydia Goehr points out that "a concept can become so entrenched within a practice that it gradually takes on all the airs and graces of necessity. Thus, it has become extraordinarily difficult for us nowadays to think about music – especially so-called classical music – in terms other than those associated with the work-concept."[47]

Goehr first defines a musical work as "a complex structure of sounds related in some important way to a composer, a score, and a given class of performances".[48] She goes on to signify the year 1800 as the time when major shifts in the conceptions of notation, performance, composers, and performers occur.[49] The major changes can be summarized as follows:

1. Music gains autonomy as an art form - it is no longer created only for purely functional purposes.
2. A distinction is made between composer and performer, and therefore a work can be distinguished from its performance.[50]
3. The value of a work is separated from the value of its representation.[51]
4. Composers begin to feel like they have ownership over their work.[52]
5. The need for a fully specifying notation becomes urgent.[53]
6. It becomes the norm for music to travel independently of the composer.[54]

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[46]Small, *Musicking*, 11.

[47] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press, 1992), 13.

[48] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works,* 20.

[49] In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works,* the year 1800 is highlighted as the exact date after which philosophy and concepts shift, and this clear-cut position serves the purposes of providing a summary of the work concept for this paper. However, like all fundamental changes in thought, these shifts happen more gradually and over a span of time. Goehr traces these subtleties in her discussion and exploration of the historical use of the word 'work' over time, and notes the year 1800 after which it becomes a regulative force in Western Art Music cultures.

[50] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 228.
[51] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 228.
[52] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 228.
[53] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 232.
[54] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 232.

7.) Music becomes titled to indicate that it is independent, self-sufficient and inextricably bound to the composer.[55]

Within the framework of the work concept the definition of music becomes directly tethered to the score and to the composer. Music does not become completely emancipated from the performer and performance, but when the emphasis is placed on notation and the value of representation, placing no significance on the value of a work, this crucially changes the role of the performer. The performance and the performer become non-essential, which means the value of a performer and a performance lies in how well a performer can interpret a composer's specific notation and how well a performance facilitates this interpretation.

This allows for a neat and tidy system to emerge that, as Lawrence Dreyfus voices in his article *Beyond The Interpretation Of Music,* "appeals to several different interlocking authorities...the composer who creates the work, the musical text which is commonly a stand-in for the composer himself [and] teachers and music directors who transmit the authority of the composer or the text…".[56] For performers, these authorities function to "validate interpretations, to assure us that we are doing the right thing, and to help pass on interpretative practices to the next generation".[57]

Goehr's investigation of the emergence of the work concept and Dreyfus' account of the history of musical interpretation provide context for a hierarchy that most classically trained musicians will recognize: first there is the musical work which is created, owned, and specifically notated by the composer; then there are the interpretations and representations, which are validated by how closely they represent the composer's notation as communicated in the work.

For the performer, this places a heavy emphasis on developing musical literacy[58] and one's ability to interpret, as faithfully as possible, a composer's text; both of which can quickly become cornerstones in a performer's practice and creative process.

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[55] Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 228.
[56] Laurence Dreyfus, "Beyond the Interpretation of Music", *Dutch journal of music theory,* 12:3 (2007), 254.
[57] Dreyfus, "Beyond the Interpretation of Music", 254.
[58] In this paper, I use Musical Literacy to mean the ability to proficiently read Western European musical notation.

2.3 Musical Literacy & Text Fetishism

As Bruce Haynes noted in his book *The End Of Early Music,* "[musical] literacy has created a preoccupation with the "repertoire" or Canon of great works, and a text-fetishism that does not allow performers to change any detail of the "masterpieces" of the past".[59] The idea that performers must not change any detail of a "masterpiece of the past" gives birth to the notion that there are right ways and wrong ways to present a musical work and that the composer's voice (or text) is more important than that of the performer. It can lock the performer into repetitive practicing so as to make sure every note, every dynamic, every articulation is accounted for and presented "correctly".

In building his theory of musicking, Small elaborates on the deeper affects that these concepts have on musical performance:

> The idea that musical meaning resides uniquely in music objects, comes with a few corollaries the first is that musical performance plays no part in the creative process, being only the medium through which the isolated, self-contained work has to pass in order to reach its goal, the listener…The second corollary is that a musical performance is thought of as a one-way system of communication, running from composer to individual listener through the medium of the performer.[60]

Musical performance is no longer presented as a creative act (that is reserved for the composer) and the main function of the performer is to play the role of a kind of delivery person, carrying the music from composer to audience. Similar sentiments are reiterated fifteen years later in Nicholas Cook's book, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance:*

> To think of music as writing is to see its meaning as inscribed within the score, and accordingly to see performance as the reproduction of this meaning...[turning] performance into a kind of supplement to the music itself, an optional extra...[61]

Cook goes on to argue that "the musicological approach…has been to study music and performance, in contrast to studying music as performance". He compares this to the way dramatic text is studied in the world of theatre, which considers "the dramatic text as one of many inputs in a performance and…meaning as something that emerges in the course of performance".[62] He notes that "traditional musicology is [more] like literary studies [seeing] meaning…as embodied in musical notation, from which it follows that performance is in essence a matter of communicating that meaning from the page to the stage".[63] For Cook, the

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[59] Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.
[60] Small, *Musicking*, 1.
[61] Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music As Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.
[62] Cook, *Beyond the Score*, 10.
[63] Cook, *Beyond the Score*, 10.

danger in doing this is that "the performer's work [then] becomes a supplement to the composer's"; the performer and the performance are not necessary aspects of 'music'.[64]

Dreyfus, Small, and Cook are all revolving around the same aspects of music - the performer and the performance - but from very different standpoints. Dreyfus follows the performer's role as a musical interpreter and aims to liberate the concept of interpretation from the authority of the composer and the score; Cook endeavors to de-escalate the importance placed on the musical text (the score) by demonstrating how much a musical text transforms through performance and how social interaction defines a performance; and Small aims to redefine music so that it is thought of as an action that many parties participate in as opposed to an object.

If we summarize these writers, we can arrive at an understanding of music, not as an object but as an activity whose value is not solely derived from notation and scores; neither does it solely manifest in the genius of a composer nor the virtuosity of a performer nor the acuity of an audience. Meaning emerges from the culmination of all these aspects of performance: from the acts of composing, performing, listening and from the inherent social interactions between composer, performer and audience that these actions cultivate.

2.4 Intertextuality

> *These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate.*[65]

To look more closely at the inner workings of a performance, I first turned to the concept of intertextuality as it was presented to me in my music history and theory classes. As Michael Klein explains in *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* in WAM traditions, we use intertextual theory as a musicological tool to "prove connections between works".[66] As an example, he depicts a familiar narrative often found in discussions of intertextuality and musical works:

> Composer A must have borrowed material from Composer B, because she studied the older master's music as a student, she kept copies of Composer B's scores on her piano, and by some luck of documentary evidence we can prove that she attended a concert of Composer B's music on the very night preceding the composition of work X, which so obviously testifies to Composer B's influence.[67]

Within the framework of the work concept, intertextuality is used to trace lineages of composers (writers) and their works (texts). However, in the context of my academic studies, intertextuality offered an interesting springboard to explore an idea that worked against the

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[64] Cook, *Beyond the Score*, 2.
[65] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986), 89.
[66] Michael Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Indiana University Press, 2005), 12.
[67] Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, 12-13.

premise of the "creative genius" that the work concept seems to perpetuate; that every text belongs to a specific context; that those contexts are influenced by the specific and unique encounters of the writer; that the writer of a text imbues her creations with her context; that once a text is put into the world, it will continue to intersect with others and could shape, in small or significant ways, the experiences (the contexts) of those others.

I could not (I still cannot) help but wonder what our practices within classical music might look like if we instead traced the lineages of performances, i.e. the communities of people that engaged with the texts we present.[68] If we only follow the written text with the intent of tracing it back to its originator, are we then excluding more important aspects of a text? Its ability to inspire diverse communities of people and artists to create new social interactions and performances, to engage in dialogue, and how it was itself shaped by social interactions, performances and dialogues?

In her essay, *Word, Dialogue, Novel,* Julia Kristeva coins the term *intertextuality,* describing all text as "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context".[69] Again, her theory is centered on *written* text and is a very specific inquiry into literary structuralism and semiotics; however, it still opens up the idea of texts being shaped by the inherent dialogue between text and the context in which it exists.

Kristeva's position is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's theories that take us another step away from specific texts to the language itself.

In his essay, *Discourse in the Novel,* Bakhtin observes that:

> …at any given moment, languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another... Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form... Therefore languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways.[70]

He goes on to the more specific example of one's individual speech, proposing that "our speech, that is, all our utterances (including our creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness".[71] He notes that "the

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[68] John Potter touches on this in his book, *Vocal Authority* (p. 158): "*Two striking facts emerge from the study of the literature of music in performance. In the classical field there is almost no performance analysis, apart from journalistic criticism in the form of reviews and the attempts to investigate historical performance practice. Mainstream musicological attention has been focused almost exclusively on the written form of the music.*"

[69] Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 36.

[70] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 89.

[71] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 89.

unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances"[72]. This constant and continuous interaction, taken in tandem with Bakhtin's premise that "we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate"[73] the words of others, sounds like the groundwork for an iterative process not unlike the actions of empathizing, ideating, and prototyping put forward in design thinking.[74]

Again, Kristeva and Bakhtin use intertextuality in a very specific way to discuss texts, as the term implies, but I hold on to the term and the theory because of its familiarity and use in WAM culture. For this essay and for my own artistic practice in WAM, it provides the foundation to explore the fundamental ideas of dialogue between the socio-ideological contexts that are present in both Bakhtin and Kristeva's theories. It provides an opportunity to re-examine what an artistic practice is, how we practice for performance and what our role is in a performance. It allows me to stop looking at performances as containers for perfecting or displaying technical virtuosity, and instead as given moments where utterances intersect and affect one another.

Most importantly, it allows me to look beyond the authority of the texts and their authors and instead invoke the authority of our fellow performers (past and present) who all have unique ways of practicing, defining their artistic practices and curating these instances of intersection with diverse audiences. It means invoking the authority of our audiences who will choose to engage or disengage with our artistic practices based on whether or not we have curated and instigated a dialogue that reflects or questions their own values and socio-ideological concerns. Lastly: the authority of our own curiosities, intuitions and lived experiences.

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[72] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 89.
[73] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 89.
[74] Design Thinking is discussed in section 3.2. For an overview of Design Thinking, see https://designthinking.ideo.com.

3   METHODS AND MATERIALS

This essay and the methods through which it was carried out all stem from this place of curiosity and excitement about the ways in which intersecting with others and with the world in different ways might change and redefine my artistic practice. In the following section I have laid out the methods and materials used to execute the study, but it is important to acknowledge that although it is neatly laid out here, the process itself was messy and tangled, with the many methods often conflating on one another, shaping and reshaping the study from the inside out.

3.1 Artistic Research

Artistic research is the overarching method used in this study wherein I am very much "working as an insider, as a participant in the practices [and] as one of its embodiments".[75] My practice as a classically trained singer and specialist in historically informed performance practices from the WAM tradition was the starting point for this research, in which I am very much concerned with "acts that...question the conditions of that practice [and] push the envelope but still are in some relevant relationship with that practice, with its internal values, goods, commitments…".[76]

In addition to the framework of my personal artistic practice, this research was conducted within the structure of a doctoral study at the University of The Arts Helsinki (Sibelius Academy, FI) which required a five-project performance series, supporting coursework and written documentation. This paper is part of that written documentation and the aim of putting the results of an action and practice-driven research project into a written format is to "tell (sometimes convince) others by writing about [my] creations, ideas, processes"[77] and thus contribute to the building of bridges between the artistic and academic. I have used Hannula, Suoranta & Vadén's[78] guide for the verbalization of artistic research to structure the written content and organize my findings.

The five-project performance series is the heart of this research, and experimentation was very much the driving force behind the series. As such, each individual project became a dedicated laboratory for specific tools and ideas to be tested. There is a natural progression that happens in any process, but the projects in this research were not designed with linearity in mind. The aim of the series was not to culminate in any kind of single statement or *Gesamtkunstwerk.*[79] Instead, the projects were meant to test new ideas, with the goal of

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[75] Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public* (Peter Lang, 2014), 16, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Juha-Suoranta/publication/347497267_Artistic_Research_Methodology/links/60ab3413a6fdcc6d626d2cee/Artistic-Research-Methodology.pdf

[76] Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology*, 16.

[77] Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology*, 28.

[78] Hannula, Suoranta, and Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology*, 29.

[79] For a discussion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk, s*ee, for instance, Margaret Eleanor Menninger: "Introduction," in *The Total Work of Art: Foundations, Articulations, Inspirations*, ed. Margaret Eleanor Menninger, David Imhoof and Anthony J. Steinhoff, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2016), 1-18.

producing many tools and practices that might be carried forward by myself and other practitioners into professional practice. This meant that iteration was equally important in this performance series and is discussed in section 3.3 "Design Thinking".

Each project had a **preparation phase** and a **performance phase**, with each phase containing many acts that, although listed linearly in this written format, often occurred in tandem and/or in repetitive cycles until the phase was completed. In the preparation phase there was a focus on gathering or assimilating input that could shape artistic expression in the performance. These inputs were gathered in many ways, including reading academic and other written materials to inform concepts and initial ideas, and attending diverse artistic experiences and workshops to inform skill-building. Alongside gathering inputs, there was also the act of assembling the creative teams and outlining the working agreements that would define the collaboration. It was the creative team that would identify, curate, or devise (see 3.1.2) performance materials based on the inputs that had been gathered as well as define the parameters of the performance, which included (but was not limited to) length of performance, structure, audience size, audience and stage configuration and production needs. Lastly, the preparation phase included the act of rehearsing, which I describe as discovering practices to bring into performance and preparing performance materials.

The main acts of the performance phase can be described as gathering, engaging, and receiving. Creative teams and audiences were gathered into a shared space (which were predominantly physical spaces but could also include virtual spaces) for a set duration of time. When gathered, audiences engaged with the performance materials presented by the creative team. When the presentation of and engagement with the performance materials was completed, the creative teams would then receive feedback from audiences, which would come in many forms, ranging from formal critiques to juries or casual conversation after a performance to written notes or reviews shared posthumously, either privately or publicly.

Each project produced **materials** which have been gathered and used to create this paper. The materials included:
1. Input from other collaborators in the form of written or verbal commentary, materials used for performance, and contributions in performance (usually performing)
2. Performances, which were documented as audio and audio-visual performances.
3. Program notes speaking to the inspiration, concepts and contributors governing each performance, which were presented in written form.
4. Feedback from audiences, in the form of written and verbal comments.
5. Formal evaluations from jury members, which were given verbally and in-person, with the exception of one performance for which I was given written feedback.
6. An artistic journal (or field notes, which are discussed in 3.2), which documented my experiences and contributions to each preparation and performance process, including: personal experiences, stories, and thoughts, notes on collaborator ideas and input, reflections on the implementation of new practices and ideas, staging plans and dramaturgical outlines, and ideation and curation notes for performances.

Because this research was centered on experimentation and innovation, it was necessary to have "constants" that could keep my practice and the projects connected to the larger

framework of classical singing and historically informed performance practice within WAM. Some of the constants are also connected to devising and co-creation (see 3.1.2), as they made up part of the framework or "rules of engagement" for collaborators on each individual performance project. The constants in this research were:

1. **The first performance in the concert series.** This performance was curated, prepared, and presented with all my known skills, habits, and practices as they existed at the beginning of this artistic research. It contained the repertoire I was most comfortable with performing and was presented in a familiar concert hall space. This concert became a reference point for the entire artistic research aspect of the project. It was an easily accessible gauge to refer to when defining the parameters of experimentation in subsequent performances and helped determine if proposed ideas and experiments were in fact valid within the constraints of this study.

2. **Use of historical performance structures and collaborations** as inspiration for creating project parameters and guidelines. All performance projects carried out in this study were often designed after a historical precedent. This was a conscious choice from the very beginning, and was implemented as a way to reconnect with the spirit of innovation and collaboration as put forward by the Florentine Camerata[80] (which was a starting point for my own learning in historically informed performance practice) as they looked to recreate lost theatrical practices of ancient Greece and instead lay the groundwork for what is now Western European Opera (a vocal genre that continues to thrive today). It was also used to root artists and audiences in the traditions of WAM while still allowing a blank canvas for new ideas to emerge.

3.2 Devising / Collaborative Creation

Collaborative creation or devising was introduced into this artistic research after the second of five projects as a strategy for enabling knowledge sharing between artists and artistic disciplines and as a tool for confronting and seeing beyond deeply embedded beliefs about the scope and limit of performer responsibilities and duties within a classical singing performance. The idea for bringing in devised processes to this research was inspired by a series of musical improvisation workshops run by fellow doctoral candidates, James Andean and Dominik Schlienger. In the workshops, participants were given a small number of simple parameters. These parameters often included: a time limit, a space with clear boundaries, no use of verbal/linguistic communication amongst participants, and interacting only with found objects in the bounded space to create sound, narrative, or other forms of creative expression. In these sessions, my initial takeaway was how important improvisation and play are in expanding artistic practices (which is covered in section IV), but after participating in a series of improvisations with the same core people, I began to see how improvisation can lay the groundwork for co-creation and how creation and rehearsal processes, as well as the defined roles and responsibilities of performance contributors could easily conflate.

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[80] Claude V. Palisca, "Camerata," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed 13 Jan. 2022. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000004652.

In her introduction to *Devising Theatre: a practical and theoretical handbook*, Allison Oddey puts forward devised theatre as "an alternative to the dominant literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of the playwright and director".[81] This theory resonated with my own inquiry into the composer-first / top-down approach that my post-secondary musical education was centered on, and provided a way for me to challenge my own ideas of how musical-literacy fits into performance creation and singing practice.

Key to devising and stepping away from the patriarchal hierarchies that were present in my thinking and practicing is the process that is "defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes or specific stimuli"[82] and that "enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals' contradictory experiences of the world".[83]

This kind of process - one that recognizes lived experiences as being integral to how a group of artists might engage with one another and shape an artistic process and product - connected to my own reading and research into literary and musical intertextuality. Whereas the readings shaped my theoretical understanding of the concepts, devising was a method that could allow those concepts to be turned into action. This resulted in co-creative projects that intentionally brought together artists with "contradictory experiences of the world" and diverse artistic practices.

The use of devising in this artistic research meant that the planned artistic products (performances) were always being negotiated or redefined once the preparation process was underway. This proved challenging within the framework of a doctoral program that places greater importance on artistic product than on artistic process and has strict guidelines on how artistic products should be presented and evaluated. Oddey notes the impossibility of defining a "single theory...formula or prescribed methodology...that guarantees a particular product every time"[84] because the processes are "dependent on people, their life experiences and motivation, why and what they want to devise, and the pathfinder process chosen by them to explore their particular set of circumstances"[85] but suggests that "any definition of devised theatre must include:

1. Process (finding the ways and means to share an artistic journey together)
2. Collaboration (working with others)
3. Multi-vision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events)

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[81] Alison Oddey, *Devising theatre: a practical and theoretical handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4.
[82] Oddey, *Devising theatre*, 1.
[83] Oddey, *Devising theatre*, 1.
[84] Oddey, *Devising theatre*, 149.
[85] Oddey, *Devising theatre*, 148.

4. Creation [and performance][86] of an artistic product."[87]

These four tenets were introduced into this artistic research after an analysis of the process and product that emerged from the second concert project, *Who Knows Where The Time Goes, A Love Story*. In this analysis, I had discovered that I had addressed and implemented small shifts in thinking with regards to curating, creating, and preparing performance materials. However, there were not many creative solutions that had emerged in response to the broader research questions. What was missing was the "editing and re-shaping"[88] of ideas and the creative solutions and new tools that can only come from working with others - especially those who are not familiar with or work outside the artistic cultures of classical singing and historically informed performance practice.

Logistical challenges aside, the use of the devising approach on three of the five concerts within a WAM practice meant that I, as an artistic researcher, could experience three unique co-creation processes and distill useful practices and tools for practical application within the realm of classical singing and performance. These practices (improvisation, collaboration, and prototyping) are discussed in sections 4 and 5 of this paper, and the tools are summarized in 5.2. Finally, it is important to note that this iterative approach to devised music performance is intrinsically connected to the principles of Design Thinking, which are addressed in the following section (3.3).

3.3 Design Thinking

My artistic research needed a process that could offer multiple innovative solutions to a single problem. Design Thinking put forward a powerful process centered on innovation and iteration that aptly responded to that need.

The term "design thinking" is connected to the emergence of and contributions to Design Theory over the course of the 20th century. The tenets of design thinking, the process and methods as used in this paper and considered commonplace today, stem from IDEO, a global design firm, and the curriculum and materials developed at d.school at Stanford University.[89]

Design Thinking acknowledges that "humans naturally develop patterns of thinking modeled on repetitive activities and commonly accessed knowledge" and understands that repetitive activities "have the potential to prevent us from quickly and easily accessing or developing new ways of seeing, understanding and solving problems".[90] In recognizing these behaviors, Design Thinking prioritizes taking action (working quickly to develop something that can be

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[86] Within the context of this study, which centers on musical performance, I have interpreted "creation" to include the performance, as I maintain that performance is part of, and inherent to, the creation of an artistic work.

[87] Oddey, *Devising theatre*, 3.

[88] Oddey, *Devising theatre*, 1.

[89] For an overview of design thinking, see https://designthinking.ideo.com

[90] "The Problem with Ingrained Patterns of Thinking", Interaction Design Foundation, accessed December 7, https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-is-design-thinking-and-why-is-it-so-popular

shown or demonstrated as opposed to talked about) and iteration (repeating the process more than once to produce even better results).

I have applied the following tenets of Design Thinking[91] to my artistic research as such:

3.3.1 Human-centered design

Human-centered design calls for feedback, reflection, and insight as an integral part of the process. In this research there are two specific audiences being designed for: 1) the performer within the WAM traditions, who seeks new ways to express artistic ideas in performance, and 2) the general audience who attends my performances, which in this study also included other performers from the WAM tradition and the formal jury adjudicating my doctoral studies. In this paper I have centered on my experiences, feedback, and insights, because I am the main subject of the research. These experiences were documented in written correspondences with colleagues and in an artistic journal.

Throughout this research I also gathered other inputs from audience members who were likewise classically trained performers, and from professors, and teachers in WAM practices, as well as from jury members. This feedback was given verbally and in written statements or personal letters, and some feedback was documented in my artistic journal as well. The feedback was never intended for use in my paper; it was intended for use in my practice, so it will not be discussed here, but it can be understood that each performance was heavily influenced by these inputs. This accounts for why my performance plans changed so often throughout the artistic research process.

3.3.2 A Bias Toward Action

A bias toward action is fostered through the process of prototyping, which prioritizes "showing" over "telling". In this artistic research every performance was considered a prototyping opportunity: a place for experimental ideas or untried practices to be tested for the purposes of producing new reflections and feedback from myself and my audiences. The goal of extensive prototyping was to identify multiple tools and possible solutions in responses to the research questions, which could then be used by myself and other practicing WAM artists.

In this research, I considered any practice or action (or culmination of actions) that I had not previously performed on stage before to be a prototype. This could include an entirely new practice or a practice that had undergone several iterations already, and examples of both often existed in the same performance. The amount of prototyping that was carried out in each performance varied according to project parameters, and even though the concerts are

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[91] "bootcamp bootleg", The d.school (Institute of Design Stanford), accessed December 7, 2021, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c6b79629687fde090a0fdd/t/58890239db29d6cc6c3338f7/14853740143
40/METHODCARDS-v3-slim.pdf

not meant to be considered in a linear progression, the increase in the range of expression available to my abilities as a performer and performance curator did increase.

3.3.3 The Power of Iteration

The Power of iteration speaks to the power of repetition not as an act of recreation but as an act of innovation. Iteration in the design process and in this artistic research refers to both "building fluency" with design thinking techniques (engaging with the process many times so that it can become habitual) and using the process to "iterate solutions many times" for the same research problem.

Incorporating an iterative process into my practice developed after I analyzed the outcomes of my second performance project, *Who Knows Where the Time Goes* (2013), which became a major turning point in this study (see 3.2). After looking at the results of the first and second performances, it became clear to me that even though my intentions and perspectives towards curating, creating, and performing were shifting, how I was artistically engaging with performing, the performance materials and experience had not significantly expanded or evolved. I needed to do it again. I needed to iterate, and I needed a process that would ensure I was:
- Discovering and producing new ideas on how to develop and expand my artistic practice (i.e ideation which I most effectively achieved through extensive improvisation exercises as discussed in sections 4.3 & 4.4)
- Implementing those ideas in a way that would generate new practices and feedback for further expansion (i.e. collaborating with new artists to create prototypes which were presented to an audience as live performances for feedback and input).

This made for a cyclical process which was manifested in this research in the following way:
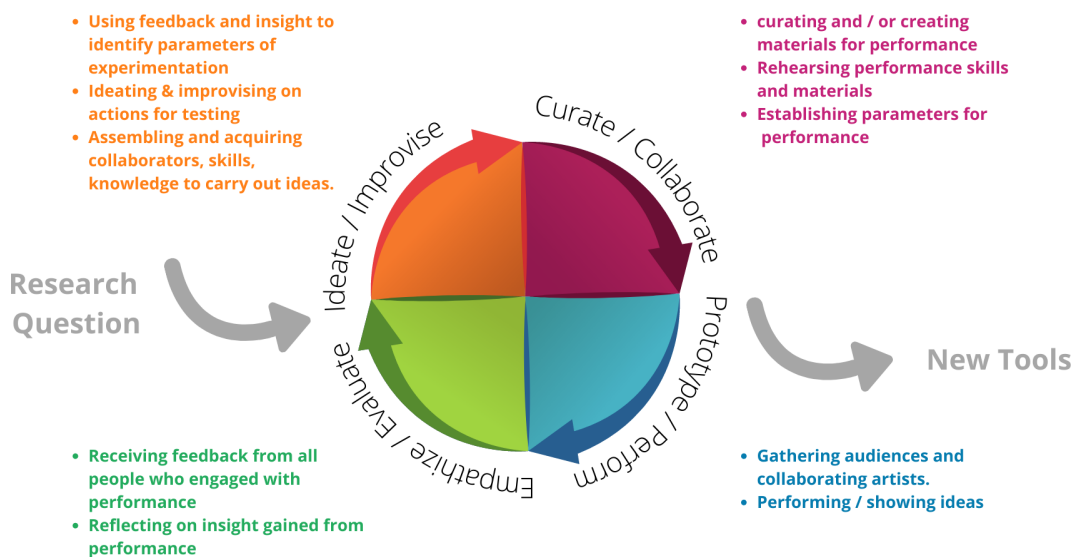
It was after this shift in 2013, that I stopped seeing my five performance projects as a linear series (as discussed in 3.1) and started approaching each project as an iteration on the first performance (*La Musa, La Musica*). In this diagram, four of the five projects in my concert series are iterations on *La Musa, La Musica* and all four iterations are responses to the overarching research question.

HOW DO I DISCOVER NEW WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE WAM CULTURE?
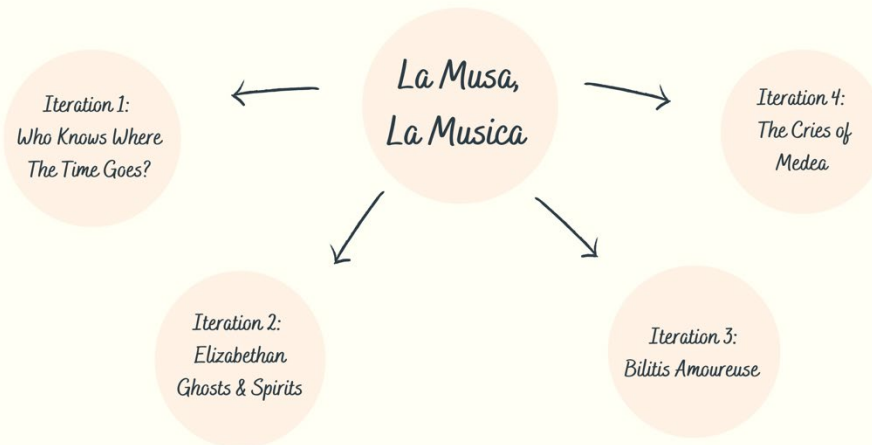
As my familiarity with design thinking and iterative processes increased, so too did the amount of prototyping in the individual performance projects, creating linearity for certain aspects of the concert series. The diagram below demonstrates common themes and ideas that were explored in each of the performance prototypes developed in this study.

RECURRING THEMES & ACTIONS FOR PROTOTYPING
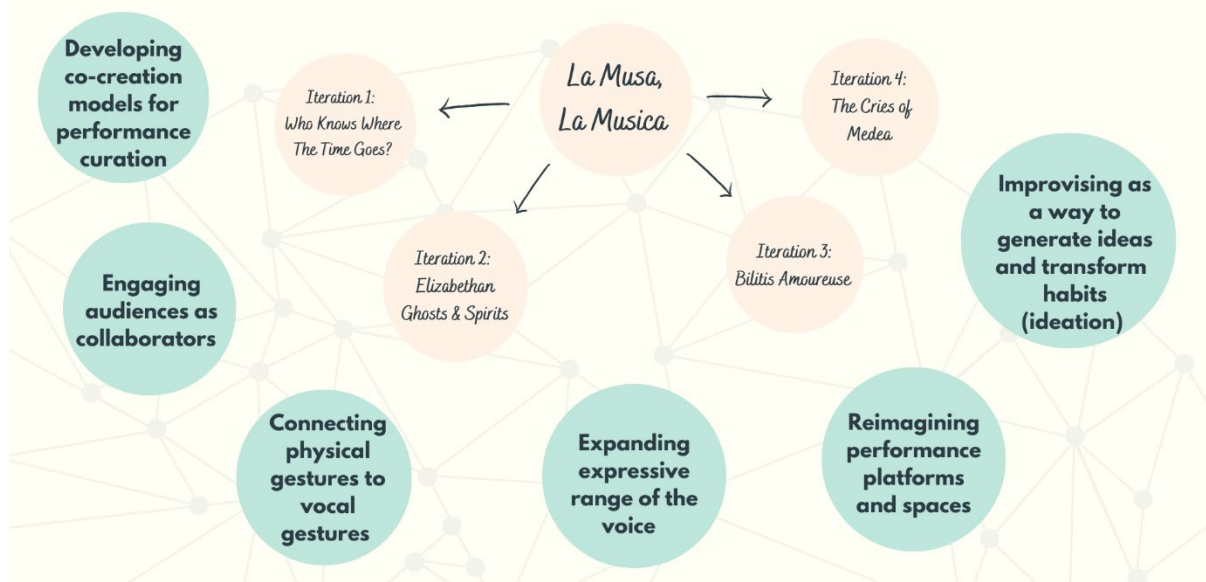
3.4 Autoethnography

> *If you were present at my first Doctoral concert, you might remember that I wondered what it would be like to transform my "official title" from "Mezzo Soprano" to "Storyteller". For those that were not present at my first concert, I confessed that the most intriguing part of studying and performing historical music was not necessarily the music itself but rather the stories surrounding the music. I confessed a desire to push the boundaries of my craft and practice to see what new performing styles might emerge if I were to embrace the idea of presenting my audiences with "stories".[92]*

Throughout this study, I have used many methods to communicate and share the experiences and discoveries produced in this artistic research. From performances to program notes, to panel presentations, to this thesis, each method of "storytelling" has required a different approach, but each story is also deeply personal. Because I have decided to research and produce knowledge as an insider, I have used autoethnographic inquiry in this thesis to structure and inform the sharing of my personal experiences and their intersections with WAM culture, practices, and traditions.[93] Some features of autoethnographic inquiry that have strongly influenced my approach to this research include: "visibility of the researcher's self in the inquiry process, a push toward strong reflexivity and deeply personal engagement with the social group or setting being studied…[and] an open-ended rejection of finality and closure". [94]

In wrestling with giving voice to my lived experiences and my own personal desire to hold space for myself and others within WAM culture, this method offered a process for "writ[ing] through painful, confusing, angering and uncertain experiences"[95] while still using "writing as inquiry in order to figure out how to live better".[96] In addition to creating a framework for processing and analyzing my experiences, autoethnographic writing also allows me to share important reflections on myself as I was at the start of this research and at the end in service of the broader goal of diversifying how practitioners within WAM think about and discuss artistic practice in our sector.

There were many materials that I have produced, sifted through, and analyzed over the course of this study that have significantly shaped this essay. These materials include personal narratives and reflections, which were documented in written journal entries as well as voice memos and personal correspondences with core collaborators documented in emails.[97] I have also used fieldnotes that reflect on personal rehearsal processes and performance material which were often scribbled in margins and on the backs of scores. Finally, I have referred to video recordings of private rehearsals to look back on my personal

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[92] Debi Wong, excerpt from "The Art Of Storytelling" Program Notes for *Who Knows Where The Time Goes*.
[93] The use of "personal experience to explore cultural practice" is discussed in Tony Adams, Carolyn Ellis, and Stacy Jones, *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), see especially Section 3, *Representing, Breaking and Remaking,* p. 358.
[94] Adams, Ellis, and Jones, *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 79.
[95] Adams, Ellis, and Jones, *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 34.
[96] Adams, Ellis, and Jones, *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 35.
[97] This data is in the author's possession.

experience of this ongoing process. All these materials culminate to address the three foundational questions I have continued to ask and answer for myself:

- What do I do as a performer?
- Why do I engage with WAM?
- Why do I perform?

I have documented and reflected on my ever-evolving responses to these questions throughout this study as a way to show how my engagement and practice has changed in direct response to the activities and experiences, I have been a part of.

One of the main ways of regularly gathering and documenting these reflections and their connection to my ongoing process was through the program notes, which were required as part of presenting each concert in my five performance project series. The program notes were an important tool, or rather, regular checkpoint in this process where I was able to 1. gather all my personal fieldnotes and documentation leading up to each concert in order to 2. analyze the fieldnotes as they related to and addressed pertinent questions and aspects of my iterative process while 3. situating myself in a very specific moment in the process. The program notes became very important material for my artistic research (as discussed in 3.1) but they were equally important for providing transparency in my process for my audience and crucial part to defining my 'voice' in written documentation and in this paper. The full program notes are included in Appendix B so the reader can explore for themself the changes in the changes in voice, tone, form and structure and see more clearly how autoethnographic inquiry and writing shaped this process.

3.5   Performer Interviews: Introduction

During my artistic research process, I interviewed seven performers, and from those interviews, I selected four to highlight: Mellissa Hughes (soprano), Bora Yoon (singer-composer-performance artist), James Andean (composer-improvisational performer), and Marianna Henriksson (harpsichordist). I selected these candidates because they all practice within the WAM tradition and are recognized by their peers and audiences as innovative, experimental, and leaders in their respective fields. As such, I believed that they could offer invaluable insight into the core research questions.

These four qualitative interviews took place between 2015 - 2016 and were conducted by myself, in person, over the course of one hour. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, producing the materials that I have worked with in writing this paper. Permission to record and use these interviews was given by the candidates both verbally and in written form.[98]

The topics of discussion were given ahead of time and were described as covering creative practice, collaboration, and improvisation. Although unstructured, each interview was initiated with the question: "How do you think about your creative process?" I asked open-

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[98] This data is in the author's possession.

ended questions to allow new ideas to emerge, but I also encouraged candidates to follow lines of thought that offered commentary on the main topics.

Naturally, this chosen structure produced a large amount of material and commentary from the candidates and therefore I have not included the full interview transcripts in this paper. Rather, I have selected excerpts from the interviews that speak directly to collaboration and improvisation and used those excerpts to facilitate a multi-voiced dialogue on these topics.

I have also used ideas presented in the interviews to inform aspects of my own artistic practice. In these cases, I have discussed the impact of the candidate's ideas on my practice by placing their commentary in dialogue with my own documentation and analysis of my artistic research. In the following sections, I introduce each of the interviewees, and in section four, I will discuss more specifically how their ideas have inspired innovation in my own practice.

3.5.1   Mellissa Hughes

"I want to perform music that you can't just ignore – that you have a visceral and emotional response to"[99]

Mellissa Hughes is an American soprano living, thriving, musicking, and creating in New York City. She was one of the first people to come to mind when I started thinking about artists who have innovative ways of engaging with Western Art Music practices and performance. She has really carved a niche for herself as a dynamic collaborator for new musical works with a performance style that exploits all aspects of her particular vocal capabilities and that is deeply connected to a unique physicality and stage presence.

When I met with Mellissa, she had just given her solo recital debut at Lincoln Center in New York City. The program, as Melissa describes in an interview,[100] is built around songs she likes and features works by living American composers, Jacob Cooper, Chris Cerrone and Ted Hearne that have been written specifically for her. Furthermore, the program also presented Mellissa's own arrangements of popular songs by Kate Bush, Björk and The Jackson 5.

Her roles as composer, performer, collaborator, and arranger in a single recital piqued my curiosity: I wanted to know how she thinks of herself and what she does, and what kind of skills, interests and experiences have shaped her artistic domain. I was even more curious to know how she arrived at this point in her performing. She comes from a very typical educational background for a classically trained singer: she has completed music degrees from high profile universities with very traditional vocal performance programs. In our

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[99] Mellissa Hughes (soprano, New York City), interview with the author, March 2014.
[100] Mellissa Hughes, "Mellissa Hughes Offers a Twist on the Voice Recital," Lincoln Center, YouTube video, published March 10, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkdpV2gkHYo

interview we discussed how she began expanding on and innovating the practices and techniques she was taught in her formal education.

3.5.2 Bora Yoon

"It's a really interdisciplinary performance practice that brings together my classical training, the multimedia languages that are available now with technology and devices and taking into account the gestural part of performance, as well as musical."[101]

Bora Yoon is a Korean-American composer-performer that creates and presents audio-visual performances. I first encountered Bora's work at Prototype Festival in New York city. Prototype has quickly branded itself as one of the leading festivals for new opera and new interdisciplinary performance in North America. Bora's piece *Sunken Cathedral* was featured in the 2015 festival, and it clung to my memory because of the out-of-time story-world Bora created using sound, voice, melody, instruments, objects, text, gesture, movement, and visual arts.

I first approached Bora thinking she would be a good person to speak to about the intersections between composers and performers and interdisciplinary performance. But as our discussion progressed, I became fascinated with Bora's commitment to her audiences and how that commitment has shaped her ideas about what her performance practice is. She sheds light on the many things an audience can experience in a performance, and she especially draws attention to the gestural and visual aspects of performing. She also refers to a performance as a dialogue and emphasizes the complex social interactions (what Bora will refer to as a social contract) between performers and their audience.

3.5.3 Marianna Henriksson

"I want to create in a light of newness, not time travel"[102]

Marianna Henriksson is a Finnish harpsichordist who enjoys an active performing career across Europe. She is a virtuosic player and without doubt a specialist in the field of historically informed performance and European Baroque music. However, like Melissa and Bora, her performance practice and the concerts she curates do not fit neatly into any one tradition or style or discipline. I have heard her perform everything from Baroque-style arrangements of Finnish folk tunes and Jacques Brel songs to orchestral suites by Georg Philipp Telemann, to jazz-style improvisations on 17th century vocal music.

Unlike my other interviewees, Marianna is working extensively with pre-existing works, and predominantly with repertoire created in the 16th and 17th centuries. On top of that, she is performing on an instrument that was invented in the Renaissance era and that was all but

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[101] Bora Yoon (composer-performer, New York City), interview with the author, February 2015.
[102] Marianna Henriksson (harpsichordist, Helsinki), interview with the author, December 2016.

obsolete by the end of the 18th century until a revived interest in historical music and instruments in the 20th century. Her repertoire and her instrument both point us in the direction of long-lost historical worlds, but these historical practices, utterances, cultures, and objects she intersects with are only a small part of the palette that she draws on in depicting her very contemporary-feeling performances.

Before our interview I had the privilege of hearing Marianna speak about her work and she introduced the concept of "creating in a light of newness, not time travel". In describing her creative process, she touched on the many different ways in which a performer can alter and innovate a concert context and therefore the concert experience for both the performer and the audience. Marianna is obviously very aware of the historical worlds and contexts she is intersecting with, but her performance practice is defined by what she chooses to illuminate from those historical worlds, and how she places them in dialogue with the contemporary voices, experiences, and perspectives of her world.

3.5.4   James Andean

"[Improvisation] is more about the collaboration and interaction with the other performers than my own practice"[103]

James Andean is a composer and performer participating in a number of fields, from sound art to electroacoustics to free improvisation. I came to know his work as a performer through his quartet, RANK Ensemble, which specializes in new music and in improvisation. When I first attended a RANK performance of free improvisations, I admit I was a little overwhelmed. I was unsure how to make sense of it, and whether or not this kind of performing contradicted all of my previous conceptions of what a musical performance is.

The truth is, however, that his performance practice breaks down many of the rigid roles and boundaries that I had built up over the many years of my own practice. In experiencing his performances, wherein he brings found objects into a space to use as instruments, or wherein he simply arrives in a space and finds ways to make the existing materials sound, I began to see that my rigid perceptions of roles, authorities, and boundaries within the classical music tradition were largely self-imposed.

In interviewing James, I was able to clarify some of my own concepts and ideas governing the collaborative aspects of music and performance. I came to learn that James and I did not actually have very different ideas about what a performance is, or the processes involved in creating performances. We were simply concerned with very different aspects of performances and, once again, those slight differences in perspectives have manifested very different creative processes and practices.

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[103] James Andean (composer-performer, currently lecturer at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK), interview with the author, September 2016.

4 NEW AUTHORITIES, NEW PRACTICES

In this next section I highlight the four interviewees who were instrumental in helping me look at my practice within the WAM sector from new perspectives at the beginning of this study. I selected them because they had already gone through the growing pains and processes of identifying habits that were holding back their artistic explorations and their discovering of new practices that could open new avenues of expression for them. I was particularly interested in understanding their perspectives on what comprised a performance space and what their role was within it. I have then used their responses to initiate conversations on collaboration and improvisation and to comment on my own practical application of their ideas in my practice.

In this section I have also laid out my exploration and my discoveries in response to the initial research questions on innovating practice, performance, and interactions with everyone who participates in a performance. I have highlighted the part of my artistic research wherein I was concerned with challenging and redefining the perceived top-down hierarchies I spoke to in the introduction, and I have defined three categories/aspects that are based on the main themes distilled from the four interviews: improvisation, collaboration, and empathy/co-creation.

For each of these categories/aspects, I have included an introductory discussion of the idea as put forward by the interviewees and as examined by myself. I have then included sections titled "in practice" to move from the conceptual to the practical and discussed how these ideas became tools that could then be honed and used in performances. By expanding the idea of who has agency and authority in defining artistic practice and creating performances, I was able to look at performance traditions within WAM as tools, as opposed to rules, and most importantly I was able to discover new tools to shape my practice.

4.1 How can I know what I do not know?

Attempting to step away from my well-established habits proved rather difficult, because I was accustomed to fixed modes of practicing. I realized that while I might be able to imagine endless kinds of performances, in attempting to put those ideas into practice I was extremely limited by my physical capabilities and my very specific body of knowledge. I had trained my voice, my body, and my mind in such a particular way and for so long that it was hard to move beyond my usual ways of doing things. I knew that there were significant blind spots in my current field of view, but I did not know how to adjust my perspective or shine a light on those areas of darkness. I was faced with a daunting conundrum:

How can I know what I do not know?
How can I transform what I know into something new?
How do I practice in a way that will enable new connections?

My method for tackling these questions was to invest in expanding my body of experiences, i.e., the domain of personal experience from which I can curate my artistic practice. For me,

this involved participating in and exposing myself to new experiences, such as performances, art exhibitions, and workshops that I would not have normally chosen to attend. I went through a period of time where I attended everything from infinity room art installations to audience controlled moveable theatre performances, to modern dance and alternative movement sessions, to freely improvised performances (as both performer and audience), to formal script writing classes, to embodying Greek mythology workshops, to curated whiskey tastings, to virtual reality films, etc. etc. etc. If it appeared on my radar and it involved artists and practices that I was unfamiliar with, my answer was: yes, I will try that.

My method for seeking out new experiences and my participation in many of these experiences was extremely improvisatory. At first it felt haphazard and unstructured, but as I continued to try new things, leaving room for impromptu artistic experiences, unplanned ideas, and spontaneous exploration became a powerful and efficient tool for expanding my body of knowledge and, in turn, the range of vocal and physical expressions that I now use in my practice.

My other solution to this problem was to seek out artists and new opportunities to co-create works and performances with. In working with other artists, especially those who work outside of the realm of music, I began to see that I had a narrow view of what it meant to collaborate. To me, "collaboration" within the context of my musical practice meant working on the interpretation of a musical score with other musicians. As I began working with actors, dancers, writers, and visual artists, I began to see that there is a robust range of ways for a group of collaborating artists to work on a performance together, from starting with an entirely blank canvas, to starting with rough sketches or fully formed concepts, to working on a single piece of music that contributes to the bigger picture.

Again, my first collaborations felt messy and confusing, but as I continued to practice collaborating with others, new methods began to emerge. The methods were carried forward to new collaborations, and the more I practiced collaborating the more effective I became at using collaboration as a tool for expanding the range of performance experiences that I can imagine for, and offer to, my audiences.

At the beginning of my study I thought of this initiative as a short-term re-learning plan, but now I consider both seeking out new experiences and collaborating with other artists as integral to my practice. In addition to these two core aspects, there is the performing itself which I also categorize as integral to my practice, because it is through repetitions of performances that I am able to learn and grow. Saying yes to new experiences, collaborating with others, performing regularly, all have allowed me to expand the range of my performance abilities – but most importantly they provide an important context for my practice. They ground me in my lived experiences, and they bind me to my contemporaries: to my audiences who are attending diverse performances and experiences; to my colleagues who are curating and presenting those experiences. They allow me to look at my own performances and see them as existing alongside the many others available to my audience members. My practice is no longer something that is self-contained and self-reliant but in dialogue with the other experiences I participate in and the other artists I collaborate with.

When I think of my practice as a single thread in an elaborate tapestry of performances and artists, it allows me to look to those artists and performances for new knowledge and new ideas. It also allows me to invoke a new kind of authority: that of my colleagues and my fellow performers who are curating experiences for audiences. I can look across my networks of artists and ask: how would my colleagues in modern dance approach this problem? How would the world of devised theatre tackle this issue? What would this performance look like if it existed in the realm of digital art?

Looking linearly across my networks of colleagues as opposed to backwards to artists long gone has been a revealing new aspect of my practice.

4.2 New Authorities: Improvisation

In the world of theatre there is a very simple improvisation game called "Yes, let's!". The premise of the game is simple: everyone stands in a circle and each individual takes turns proposing an action with the prompt "Let's _____" (ex: Let's climb a tree). The entire group responds with "Yes, let's!" and uses their bodies to physically express that action.

Because the rule of the game is to always answer "yes", it establishes a culture of safe risk-taking and free play. No matter what is offered by each individual, the group will respond with "Yes, let's". It means that there are no wrong ideas and that every idea will be explored by everyone. This simple premise fosters trust amongst the group and because it is presented under the guise of a game it also encourages everyone to take bigger risks; to let the imagination run wild; to be silly; to play and riff off each other.

In addition to this environment of trust and free exploration, the rules provide the groundwork for improvisation to thrive. There is only time to react with "yes" and then to dive into performing the action that is offered. There is no time or use for self-judgement or to fine-tune or edit one's actions and contributions. There is only time to react and to observe how others react. Because the group is arranged in a circle, all participants immediately see how others use their bodies to express the given action, and if there are ten participants, then there will surely be ten unique reactions. Without really realizing it in the moment, every participant is being shown a new vocabulary of movement and expression while also demonstrating their own unique expression to the group.

Finally, because the game is meant to be played with a group, it demonstrates the power of collaboration and shared creativity. Because everyone offers their own ideas and demonstrations of how those ideas can be manifested, every participant will experience and discover something new, whether it is a small gesture or an entirely new arsenal of movements and ideas. The game is simple and it is silly - but it clearly outlines tools and practices for moving beyond our own boundaries and peering into our blind spots.

In the world of modern dance, there is a philosophy of movement that emerged around 1990, developed by choreographer and dancer Ohad Naharin, called Gaga Dance.[104] As Naharin explains, Gaga is a tool that allows dancers to "move beyond their familiar limits", and which is rooted in exploring the imagination as well as discovering new gestures, however small. This "sense of discovery", Naharin explains, "helps the dancers go beyond their familiar limits on a daily basis".[105] He emphasizes that it is "not about making you a better athlete…it's about a range and about listening to something that is beyond the athletic side of the dancer…about the soul and connection between your demons, fantasy, passion and longevity".[106]

In learning about the philosophy behind Gaga and by participating in Gaga workshops and other improv-based activities from the dance, music, and theatre sectors, I began to realize how important cultivating a sense of discovery was. What exercises and practices do we engage with that aim to expand the range of the imagination? What do we practice regularly that expands on the range of our performance abilities as they pertain to, for example, the face, the arms, or the rest of the body? What tools do we actively hone that improve our abilities to listen, react, and co-create flexibly with other performers? Unlike repeating scales and certain passages of music, wherein we very much keep the desired end product in mind, improvisation invites the artist to think about the process as a whole, and as Naharin aptly points out, to listen or to tune in to something outside of that pressure to hone and master one's technical athleticism.

These themes of discovery and range are echoed in my interview with Mellissa Hughes. In our discussion, she recalls the first time she performed John Cage's work, *Walden's Pond*. For a classical singer who had been trained in a very standard and traditional way, *Walden's Pond* was a work that challenged her perception of her role as a performer and her capabilities as a singer.

In the score for *Walden's Pond*, Cage provides the performer with a map of Walden's Pond. As Mellissa describes it, the performer then has to map out a route from one point to another on the score. Once the route is mapped, the performer then turns the map on its side and this route becomes part of "the score" and is part of the performer's notation, alongside some texts provided by Cage. At the time of our interview, I had not had any experience with improvisation or descriptive notation, and so I assumed that this newly drawn line would be interpreted into a melody, to which Mellissa responded:

> That is how I immediately thought of it – but you don't have to think of it that
> way, you don't have to think of it as a melody. This [rising line or shape]
> doesn't necessarily have to mean go up – it can mean an increase in
> something. There was also a text associated with the map and every time the

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[104] Which now includes a practice called "Gaga People" for people who are not professionally trained in dance. For further discussion about Gaga People, see: https://www.gagapeople.com/en/

[105] Ohad Naharin, "Gaga -- Interview with Ohad Naharin on "Arts in the City"", Sara Porath, published on March 13, 2017, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4U3FnDjFo8

[106] Ohad Naharin, "Ohad Naharin discusses Gaga movement," danceconsortium, published on October 25, 2012, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGPG1QL1vJc

font changed, that was an invitation to do something different. So for me, it was such an amazing way to think about music that wasn't X &Y.[107]

Cage's Song Books are notorious for their unconventional use of notation, or for what is called "descriptive notation", meaning it will provide some kind of instruction (such as "draw a path to Walden Pond") but how one engages and translates that instruction into performance is entirely individual to each performer. We can tie this into the discussion of music as writing and the work concept as presented earlier by Nicholas Cook and Lydia Goehr. As Mellissa points out, this is a very different way of interacting with notation than what we often encounter in our formal education and in WAM practices. In this case, Cage's notation is not telling her which notes to sing, how to sing them, when to sing them, how long, slow, fast to sing them, etc. These details are left to the performer to decide, in turn, inviting them to examine the boundaries of their own creativity; to participate in a sense of discovery; to improvise.

For Mellissa's performance of *Walden's Pond*, she created a list (which I will refer to as Mellissa's list) of everything that her notation could be depicting outside of pitch. In other words, she took stock of everything she could affect or change outside of the obvious choice of melody. Her list included: velocity, volume, timbre, and character, which was then expanded to include what she, personally, was able to do with her body and voice and performance with regards to velocity, timbre, character, etc. Like the intention behind Gaga dance, this invitation allowed Mellissa to move beyond her familiar limits and to examine a new range of performance possibilities.

It was performing Walden's Pond and engaging with this kind of process that shifted Mellissa's perception of what a performer does. She recalls a particular moment when she was describing her experience with Cage's Song Book to a composer-colleague. Her colleague reacted with "*You [have] all these variants in place and you [make] musical decisions based on what feels right - that's composing*" - and she marks this as the moment when she started to think of her contributions to performance as an act of composing or co-creation. She now prefers to work in this realm of co-creating and performing that is defined and driven by her ever-expanding range of performance abilities.[108]

With regards to training and professional experiences, Mellissa came from a similar background as myself, so I was curious to know how (or if) these concepts of expanding range and discovery would translate to other practices within WAM culture. This line of thinking led to an interview with the electroacoustic composer and improv-based performer, James Andean. For James, improvisation is a given in his performance practice, and the idea of traditionally notated scores is antiquated and not applicable to his work as a composer. Before interviewing him, I went to a performance given by one of his ensembles, RANK, which primarily performs freely improvised music, or new works by composers who use descriptive notation. There was one moment I found particularly interesting in the performance I attended which was when an audience member knocked over a metal cup. The cup scraped along the concrete floor and rolled from one end of the space to the other. As it

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[107] Mellissa Hughes, interview.
[108] It is also worth noting that Mellissa has gone on to compose her own pieces and to perform them.

tumbled across the floor, James watched it intently, and then used some of his own objects to roll across the ground, turning the whole moment into one of discovery.

In our conversations, I asked him about this moment and about what draws James to improvised performing. The first word he shared is "liberating", and he, too, immediately illuminates the sense of discovery that comes with improvisation. He impresses that he prefers to improvise with "tools" that are unfamiliar to him, so that he can be "quickly enthused about discovering new things and figuring out how they work". He does not say anything about the end product, but instead focuses on "exploring the process" and then seeing what comes of each unique process.

As we dig into what that process looks like, James speaks to "discovered objects that work well" for his performances and "ways of making sound that are more productive than others[s]...that can be applied to almost any object". He describes these as "categories of objects" and "categories of movement", and that his performances are sometimes defined by the objects he has brought to a performance, and other times it is more defined by his gestural arsenal. He considers both his categories of objects and categories of movements to contribute to what he describes as a constantly expanding "vocabulary of making things sound".[109]

What I found most interesting is that this expanding vocabulary speaks to the idea of 'range' proposed by Naharin, but it is discovered in performance and not in a practice room. This conflation of process and performance was a new idea that I had not considered before. To me, process is what happens in private or under the guidance of a teacher or mentor. When I asked James if there is a process that happens outside of the performance space, he replied that either it is an "eternal process or an instantaneous one". I did not immediately know how to interpret this, and he further noted that "at the end of the day...it's the same thing", [110] which I take to mean that all processes, all experiences, all interactions we have with all beings and objects in the world shape our practices. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are constantly in modes of discovery, constantly expanding our range of ability to interact with the world.

Implementing regular improvisation into my practice felt radical at the time but after attending several improv-based performances and workshops and initiating these discussions, my own sense of discovery was piqued. What would it look like to try out Mellissa's list before embarking on technical exercises to learn a piece of music? How does the concept of a 'vocabulary of gesture' translate into a rehearsal with a traditional ensemble? What demons, fantasies, passions might reveal themselves if I re-forged that connection between artistry and the inner desires of the soul? Could I be brave enough to improvise in performance? What does performing look like, *feel* like, without a score?

These questions, and this new-found curiosity, drove me forward into my artistic work, and although it felt like stumbling blind most of the time, I kept certain mantras thrumming in the background: explore the process; expand the vocabulary of performing; discover what lies

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[109] Andean, interview.
[110] Andean, interview.

beyond technical perfection and virtuosic literacy. As a result, improvisation became (and continues to be) a reliable tool for generating new ideas or ideating.

4.3 In Practice: Improvisation & Ideation

Mellissa's list is a tool that has carried forward in my practice and that I have adapted into many different versions over the course of the eight years since I first spoke with her. In our interview she went on to explain that while the list for her performance of Walden's Pond was a tool she used for that particular piece, she also keeps a one-page description of her own performance abilities that she often goes through with composers who are creating new works for her. The list is updated regularly, and it also helps her keep stock of where she is in her practice. I loved these ideas of both creating a list of more abstract terms that could be translated into myriad performance options, and also a list of what her voice and body can do in performance.

These ideas were the starting place for the creation of a new vocabulary of vocal sounds that would make up the palette from which James Andean composed the music for our performance, titled *The Cries Of Medea*. In that project we were exploring themes of voicelessness and powerlessness, as experienced by the character of Medea, and we asked: What does the voice do if it cannot speak?

...cries, utters, intones, shouts, screams, talks, expresses, pronounces, enunciates, articulates, converses, chats, shrieks, yells gossips, spouts, bellows, bawls, murmurs, sighs, hushes, moans, groans, bemoans, boasts, blares, resounds, reverberates, whimpers, wails, vibrates, weeps, howls, warbles, belts, yelps, squawks, sobs, laments, calls, exclaims, screeches, roars, pleas, snivels, bleats, declares, blurts, trills, chants, croons, squeals, whispers, mutters, stutters, sputters, wheezes, mews, whines, coos, eees, aayys, aaas, ohhs, ooooh, feu-feus, ai-ais, io-ios, moi-mois, ea-eas, omoi-omois, lagrime mie, hor che'l tempo di dormire, lagrime e voi sospire.

This list was retrospectively called "The Voice Beyond Speech", because of the ideas that helped shape it. In reality though, it was a list we quickly scrawled on a giant white board while we were in the recording studio. The end of the list falls into vocal sounds, some of which are present in the Euripides telling, and the list concludes with some renaissance and Baroque pieces that include singing sounds that depict tears. As soon as we ran out of words, we started recording my interpretations of the list. From each sound, new ideas emerged and were recorded as well. I include this insert about the messiness and impromptu feel of this process to push back against how describing such a process in writing might make it all sound very planned and formalized. What was so important here was that every word was an improvisation, and every idea opened a new window to new discoveries. For every word, there were unique sounds and expressions that came from my voice. As we progressed through the list, I began to realize that I was not only offering vocal expressions but also physical ones. Every sound was connected to a unique gesture. Every gesture embedding my body with a new sensation for what it means to 'spout' or 'snivel' with the voice.

4.4 In Practice: Improvisation, Curation & Ranges of Expression

I keep coming back to Naharin's concept of 'range' and juxtaposing it with Mellissa's list because I think these two concepts serve classically singers especially well. When we talk about range with regards to a singer's practice, we are almost always talking about the registers of the voice and how high and low a singer can phonate. Once the range has been determined, we talk in terms of how balanced the registers are in terms of tone and whether or not the voice can move between the registers and how audible the voice is in a particular singer's high range versus their lower one. In other words, coming into this study, the concept of range was tied to a lot of stress about having to get my rather low-set but light sounding voice to phonate easily and vibrantly higher and higher so that my range would be increased. I remember a singing lesson once in which my teacher sternly told me: every professional singer has a solid range of at least two workable octaves.

Mellissa's insight allows us to think of range beyond pitch. When I think about how I am curating my performances, I am thinking about the range of expression I am using with regards to my vocal production in connection to my physical gesture. I think about how this breadth of expression supports and furthers the broader story I am trying to tell. Have I chosen the right expression? Is my story landing with my audience? Can I go further? Is there another way for me to express what I am trying to communicate?

Experimenting with a range of expression was a practice that became clearer to me in my collaborations with the classical guitarist Otto Tolonen. Otto specializes in European guitar music composed between 1955-86, and at the time of our first meeting, I was specializing in English Elizabethan lute song. Our project, *The Winter Of Our Discontent,* was an experiment that very much grew out of a shared goal to innovate the way Classically-trained musicians interacted with and presented notated music from the WAM canon. We entered the collaboration thinking that by creating a dialogue between our areas of expertise and the repertoire we specialized in, we might be able to produce new practices to inform our own performances and open new realms of knowledge.

In our first interactions we found ourselves getting hamstrung by focusing on what a final performance might look like. We kept coming back to a performance or presentation mode that felt novel merely because of the centuries that separated our repertoire. I remember the meeting in which we finally made the discovery that would propel us forward. Otto was describing Hans Werner Henze's piece *Mad Lady Macbeth* for solo guitar to me, and showing me the score. I had recited Lady Macbeth's text from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for him, and as we sat staring at all these texts, he suggested that we try an exercise.

We both knew our texts from memory, so Otto proposed he start with the music, and then I would interject lines from Lady Macbeth's texts in response to the material I was hearing. "Let's just improvise and see what happens", he suggested (yes, let's!). I remember how rigid this first improvisation felt. I was afraid of doing something wrong. I was nervous about sounding stupid. I sat on my hands in a chair in the practice room, but kept my gaze pensively at a place above Otto's head so as not to accidentally make eye contact.

But as tentative and uncertain as that first exercise was, it again opened a whole new range of performance possibilities to us.

What was perhaps most interesting is that we started listening to each other in a new way. Every note that Otto played felt like an offering that I could react to or allow to pass by. When I chose to react by interjecting text, Otto would make space in his playing and in the music. As we deepened our listening my text began to take on certain shapes that were put forward by the music and Otto's musical phrases started to assume different rhetorical and emotional qualities as put forward by my voice.

In subsequent improvisations, I started to move beyond the text and started to experiment with the idea of texture. For example, a soft whispered voice adds a very different texture than percussive laughter; the vocalizing that is required to produce sobbing sounds transitions easily into a full operatic sung voice, but still offers an extremely different color and texture.

What was also interesting from my perspective was that, much like the Medea project, finding these new textures was made easier by adding physical gestures to my improvisations. For me, discovering the sense of liberation that James speaks about when he improvises was very much tied to a physical freedom that I had not experienced in my training or early career. In my singing studies, I was taught to use a very specific body language when performing. Arms hanging relaxed by my side, shoulders down and back, chin slightly lifted and eyes gazing just above the heads of audience members. I had a specific way of walking on stage and acknowledging the audience and interacting with my colleagues on stage, and I had not realized that this was creating a physical feeling of constraint and rigidity. When I use my voice my body wants to move, and in discovering this during *The Winter Of Our Discontent*, I could start to experiment with intentional gestures to support my vocal expressions, and to enhance the characters I wanted to portray and the narratives I wanted to communicate.

The Winter Of Our Discontent started as a one-year project intended to end in a single performance, but grew into a four year collaboration that continued to evolve and change as we found new ways to listen, improvise, and perform together. I look back on our Lady Macbeth improvisations quite often, because once we transitioned into performing, I would estimate that we performed it around fifty times. What was interesting about having this experience in the body was that because nothing was notated or specifically written down, or timed, there was always a certain freedom in these performances. There were, of course, actions, gestures, and sounds (a vocabulary of gesture and sound) that would become consistent and habitual, but these repetitions did not feel lackluster or rigid or constraining; it did not feel like we were hammering a technique or a prescribed action over and over again. Instead, the repetitions of the performance and of the gestures that remained constant became cornerstones of our performing; small respites before reembarking on another excavation of the imagination. And, whereas I had those fears at the very beginning of not having enough to offer, dozens of performances later we were still discovering new ways to dig into the character of Lady Macbeth in our depiction of her.

I remember meeting Otto for a gig after several months of not having performed *Mad Lady Macbeth*. We stood on stage in a new venue, in a new country, and he asked, already knowing the answer, "should we rehearse this before the performance?"

"No," I replied. "I'll just make sure I know where all the entrances and exits are, so I don't walk into any doors."

This was a stark departure from my regular routine, wherein I might be practicing, vocalizing, and warming up until I walked onto the stage,[111] worried about those higher ranges of my voice, wondering if I would make it through the performance; if I have practiced enough. But, we've set up a different practice here. We know where the cornerstones are, we know how to listen to each other, we have built a vocabulary of gesture and sound, and we trust each other to "say yes" should we reach the edges of our expressive range and wish to push beyond. We also recognize that whatever comes out of the rehearsal will be completely different from the performance (our processes and performances have conflated) so instead we high-five and decide to save our energy for the performance.

"See you on stage in half an hour."

4.5 New Authorities: Collaboration with Artists

When asked about collaboration, Marianna Henriksson muses that "The first word that comes to my mind is...collaborator - a person who invites other artists to come together". I had decided to ask Marianna about her experiences collaborating with other artists because I had recently watched her performance AD OLIO (2017) and was particularly struck by her presentation of *Ninna Nanna: Improvisation on Tarquinio Merula´s (1595-1665) Canzonetta spirituale sopra alla Nanna.* The performance is of an iconic baroque vocal piece written in the style of Le Nuove Musiche but Marianna invited two artists from different musical backgrounds to perform it with her: one from the realm of electronic music and one from a jazz background. "I wanted to combine my ways of working with those of these artists I know, who work in different and interesting ways. I thought it would be really nice if we could find a way to work together."[112]

I found this performance and Marianna's ideas particularly interesting, because to me they seem to discreetly negate the premise of performer as interpreter and composer as creative genius and any hierarchies associated with that. In listening to and watching the piece, four distinct co-creators seem present: Marianna on the harpsichord, the jazz trumpetist, the electronics performer, and Tarquinio Merula. Furthermore, because of the marriage of musical languages and practices, the piece seems to claim a rightful place in our era, evoking a sound and story world that feels mysterious because of its unique and new qualities. "I

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[111] Which, by the way, is a terrible idea, but for me, performance and singing was always associated with striving for perfection. This created a lot of anxiety and stress-driven habits and routines.
[112] Henriksson, interview.

think of it as a kind of collage - like when you have an artwork where the artist has chosen different pieces to put together", says Marianna, "but collage isn't quite enough. It's not just putting different things together, the goal has to be and it has been and it is, melting some things into each other and finding ways to really let things influence each other."[113]

The idea of bringing artists together and the image of a collage brings to mind two distinct works that have influenced my artistic research: *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*[114] and *Le Nuove Musiche.*[115] These works have certainly embedded themselves into the canon of Western Art Music, but what relates to our theme of collaboration are two specific performances connected to these works, and the ways in which those performances came about.

In 1898, the French poet Pierre Louÿs (1870 - 1925) published a set of French poems, translated from ancient Greek, titled *Les Chansons De Bilitis.*[116] The collection contains 143 poems and 3 epitaphs all depicting the intimate details and emotions of the life of the Grecian courtesan Bilitis, who hails from the 6th century BCE. The poems are written in a style that so closely resembles that of the Greek poet Sappho (a contemporary of Bilitis), that upon first readings, no one thought to question Louÿs' translations,[117] nor his exotic story of traveling to Limassol with one Dr. Heim (an archeologist) to Bilitis' newly discovered tomb.

The poems were met with great success, and it was not uncommon to find Louÿs reading his works aloud to an abashed and blushing audience in the prominent literary salons of Paris. When it was later discovered that Louÿs was not the translator, but rather the creator of Bilitis, her world, and her writings, the work was still celebrated as a literary triumph, now for its creativity and its bold and sensitive depictions of feminine sensuality and lesbian themes. Instead of being criticized as a fraud and labeled a fake, Louÿs' reputation as a creative writer was only heightened, and the poems and the imaginary historical world and characters they portrayed inspired an entire wave of artistic outputs from various Parisian artists[118] ranging from new instruments to sculpture to art deco prints.

The poem cycle is well known to the world of Western Art Music because of Louÿs' connection to the famous French composer Claude Debussy (1862 - 1918). In 1897-8, Debussy set three of Louÿs' poems for voice and piano, which resulted in the 1899 publication, *Trois Chansons De Bilitis* and its debut performance in 1900. Later in 1900, Louÿs encouraged Debussy to create *Les Chansons De Bilitis: Musique de Scene* for a private performance at La Salle des Fêtes in Paris, featuring musicians, poets, actors, dancers, singers, and sculptors, all reimagining the culture of Grecian courtesans and giving birth to the new mythic character of Bilitis.

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[113] Henriksson, interview.
[114] Claude Debussy, *Trois Chansons De Bilitis* (Paris: E. Fromont*,* 1899).
[115] Giulio Caccini, *Le Nuove Musiche* (Firenze: li Heredi di Giorgio Marescotti, 1602).
[116] Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de bilitis* (Paris: J. Tallandier, [1894]1928).
[117] Susan J. Kerbs, ""*Les Chansons de bilitis*" by Claude Debussy: A discussion of the original stage music and its resulting transcriptions," (PhD diss., Rice University 2000). https://hdl.handle.net/1911/19522
[118] See, for instance, Jean-Léon Gérôme's sculpture "Tanagra" and Georges Barbier's illustrations for "Songs of Bilitis".

Three hundred years prior, an entourage of 16th century Italian humanists (musicians, poets, philosophers, historians) under the patronage of the poet Giovanni Bardi had begun gathering regularly with the shared goal of reconnecting music to its dramatic roots, which reached back to ancient Greek theatre. This social group later became known as the "Florentine Camerata" and is familiar throughout the world of Western Art Music because their discussions and creative outputs are recognized as the building blocks and origins of what is now Western opera.

In the WAM canon, the most prominently featured publication that emerged from the Florentine Camerata is the composer Giulio Caccini's *Le Nuove Musiche* (1601/1602), a series of songs that featured the new musical style of that time: a single voice with a simple accompaniment and rhythms that followed the natural speech patterns of the text. Less familiar today, but equally important, is the collaboration between the two composers Jacopo Peri & Jacopo Corsi and the poet Ottavio Rinucci, *Dafne* (1597). Their collaboration and performance of *Dafne* was a fully staged, through-sung depiction of the mythological nymph, Daphne, and her story of escaping Apollo.[119]

As with the 1900 performance of *Les Chansons De Bilitis: Musique de Scene* given in Paris, the 1598 performance of *Dafne* in Florence also set in motion a chain reaction of artistic outputs that reimagined the lost world of Greek drama and gave birth to a style of collaborative art-making and performing which would later be dubbed as opera; the most obvious example of this chain reaction being Claudio Monteverdi's first opera (which is also often cited as the first Western European opera) *L'Orfeo* which was created and performed in 1607 and continues to be a part of regular opera programming today.

What I find so fascinating about these two performances is that both cohorts of artists had set out to recreate lost artistic practices from Ancient Greek culture and in doing so, they gave birth to two entirely new cultures of performance. To me, these performances and the performance given by Marianna and her colleagues illuminate the potential of collaborating with artists of different lived experiences and artistic practices as well as being in dialogue with historical practices and voices. It also underlined the importance of the audience - that we perform *for* people; that a big part of the joy of creating the immersive musical-theatrical experiences that Louÿs, Debussy, the Florentine Camerata and Marianna's crew created, is the excitement of the audience coming to be a part of it all.

4.6 In Practice: Collaboration, Co-creation/ Reciprocity & Vulnerability

Collaboration (especially cross-disciplinary collaboration) is something that has always been interesting to me, but Marianna touches on something more intimate by framing it as "finding ways to really let things influence each other".[120] As I learned slowly over the

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[119] Barbara Russano Hanning. "Dafne (i), " in *Grove Music Online*, accessed 13 Jan. 2022. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5002275721.
[120] Henriksson, interview.

course of many performances, allowing other practices to really influence your own, and vice versa, is unique to each collaboration, but always requires trust and vulnerability.

Because a successful model already existed, I decided to use Louÿs & Debussy's collaboration as a framework for my own performance experiment called *Bilitis Amoureuse.* The performance project brought together baroque instrumentalists, composers, a dancer, and a visual artist to recreate the 1900s Salon style performance that saw the debut of Les Chansons de Bilitis. Like our fore-artists, we created something entirely new, but being in dialogue with a historical performance precedent established that initial sense of discovery that I had found in other collaborations through improvisational play.

Of particular interest, was the development of *Les Hymnes De Bilitis, a new song* cycle for this performance by Pierre Louÿs (poetry), Aki Yli-Salomäki (composer of music & melody), Debi Wong (voice), Vilma Tihilä (Dance), Riina Laina (Painting), Sirje Ruohtula (Lighting), Johanna Kilpijärvi (Viola Da Gamba), and Kari Olamaa (Baroque Violin). I am highlighting this particular creation process because the composer, Aki, set a precedent for a collaboration rooted in vulnerability and reciprocity, and in doing so we were all able to influence each other's practices and co-create a performance piece that could not be captured by notation alone.

Reciprocity is defined in the *New Oxford Dictionary* as "the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit, especially privileges granted by one country or organization to another".

Because the poetry and the text were the driving forces of this project, Aki suggested starting the creative process by focusing on how the text would be read aloud in both English (my native language) and French (the performance language). He wanted to hear how my particular voice would deliver the text without melody or music. We then recorded recitations of the poems (in English and French) which gave Aki a better understanding of the technical aspects of the poems, such as the diction and rhythm of the French text, but also communicated an artistic idea of the text: I recited them with my idea for the voice of Bilitis, as if the poems were her intimate secrets and she was speaking aloud in a solitary place. In other words, I recited the poems as an actor embodying a character. When we brought in the instrumentalists, we all experimented with different kinds of timbres and textures to emphasize the poetry and find a speech-like, secret-telling quality in the voice and the instruments throughout.

I had never actually worked with a composer like this before, and I felt very exposed because I knew Aki was listening to every breath, scratch, pause, etc. in my voice and my delivery (it felt strange to have someone listen so closely at first). However, I nevertheless really admired this suggestion, because even though it wasn't apparent at the time (I was very much in the cycles of "yes, let's!") the invitations to speak the text as myself and then recite the text as I imagined Bilitis might recite it allowed for the overlapping and existence of many living versions of this text, and it opened up a way for those versions (our different voices) to influence one another.

What gave this piece the air of a living, breathing text was the way in which the score was (and was not) created and notated, and the way in which the exploration we discovered in the creation process continued through the performances. This was demonstrated most clearly in two places:

1. The initial recitations became so integral to the piece that we eventually incorporated them directly into our collective understanding of what the score was, but it was improvised every time by both myself and the gamba player and was never expressed in the actual notation of the score. In other words, part of the "score" existed in our imaginations and was only illuminated through performance.

2. In contrast, there were other parts of the score that were notated with specific note values, pitches, dynamics, and articulations; but again, because the idea of the recited poetry was driving the whole concept of this piece, some of those pitches, note values, and articulations were in the score almost as formalities. The notation demonstrated that there was a certain passage of text, occupying a certain space within the context of the whole piece, but (as was agreed upon by our creative team) it never depicted how we would actually perform certain passages. Again, those aspects of the "score" only ever existed in our imaginations and would only ever come to light through performance.

I felt very at ease in performing these pieces because they had developed very organically out of a constant exchange of ideas and experimentation between myself, the instrumentalists, the composer, and the dancer. In the performance I had a different relationship with the musical work because I felt very much like a co-creator: I understood where all the ideas came from, and I knew how all the musical gestures developed. The feeling of having to execute all aspects of the notation correctly and perfectly did not present itself; instead, there was a desire to illuminate that intimacy that was first discovered in the poetry, then embodied in my spoken voice, and then translated into different vocal and instrumental expressions. This expanded the concept of our "score" to include the performance which was and is the only way this particular group of artists were able to fully express all aspects of our shared creativity.

When it came time to put the final touches on the score, I remember Aki asking me what he should do about the opening spoken text. "How am I supposed to notate this?". I had not realized that those spontaneous, spoken passages never made it into the working score. I shrugged my shoulders and replied that I did not know. They never did make it into the printed score.

In retrospect, I see that Aki came to the collaboration trusting that we would all engage in this reciprocal exchange of ideas and that we would all co-create this piece of music. The expectation of reciprocity and vulnerability created an empowering space for us all to thrive in and I could immediately see the importance of setting up all performing spaces in this way.

Six years later, Aki would invite me to collaborate again on a full-length album of new songs. This time I ended up co-writing the text and melodies, and we did not even bother with scores; and I knew what would be expected of me, and I was excited to see how this collaboration would influence my practice too.

4.7 New Authorities: Empathy, Co-creation & The Audience

One of the important steps in Design Thinking is empathizing with one's audience in order to gather knowledge and a deeper understanding of the people who will be engaging with your product or experience. Although I cannot recall any dedicated discussion or courses about audience experience in any part of my formal education, the idea of empathy and centering the audience experience emerged as a common theme amongst my interviewees and in my own artistic research. When I asked Marianna where her ideas for her performances came from, she connected them to her experiences as an audience member attending contemporary dance and jazz performances. She describes that she "love[s] being in the audience for contemporary dance performances and like[s] trying to understand it",[121] which is what led her to collaborate with a contemporary dancer (and the jazz trumpeter) and was the impetus for wanting to learn their ways of doing things.

She takes this audience consideration even further, noting that after her first performance with a contemporary dancer, she received entirely new feedback from a predominantly new audience demographic. "They were people that were more interested in contemporary dance, and people that are not music specialists... people that are my age who are not automatically interested in early music. I was so moved when some of them asked 'so *this* is Baroque music? This is Early Music? Or did you just compose something?'"

I find it deeply interesting to be able to switch hats between performer and audience; to have access to be able to draw on those feelings of discovery from the perspective of one bearing witness to a performance or in the baroque sense, the feelings of one's emotions being affected by the performance. "They didn't believe [me] because they thought the music was so interesting and living. In this context [the music] suddenly seemed different. maybe because it didn't connect to their [ideas of] historical images, or because it was put in a room that was there to make something contemporary."

As a performer, especially in the WAM world, it is also such a powerful experience to be able to reach and connect with new audience members because we are often inundated with a narrative about aging and dwindling audiences. "It really made me realize that 'this is what I really want to do'. I want to play this music that is very near to me and that is, to me, very fresh and interesting and doesn't evoke historical images, and I want to find new ways of presenting it." This revelation is very personal and specific to Marianna's practice but the arrival at the revelation is something that can easily be honed into a tool to inform myriad practices. She used her own experiences as an audience member to develop new ideas on artistic collaborations and to define her target audience. She then used performance to present these ideas to her audience after which she made important observations about the impact of

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[121] Henriksson, interview.

the performance and gathered feedback from her audience. Not only does this practice allow her to grow an audience, and community for her own artistic work, but it also highlights the power of empathy and dialogue, or as I now think of it, co-creation with one's audience.

"It's important to say that I am still interested in the historical contexts, and I am not against [these historical images]. I really love 17th and 16th century art and paintings, but I think it's a pity if, [an audience] hear[s] this music [and] get[s] these visual ideas. I think it makes the music more remote or removes it from their lives. They can just put it in a box with all the other historical or distant things."[122]

Bora Yoon describes her relationship with her audience similarly. She notes that she too "thinks very empathetically about the audience" and often starts her performance creation process by placing herself in their shoes. She shares that her "litmus test for whether a performance has been good or not is actually: "Did you transport people? Did you transport yourself?"[123]

Her questions, given from the audience's perspective, immediately places me back in the world of Bilitis and the mythological world that Louÿs, Debussy and their many collaborators were able to bring to life for their audiences - both in the imaginations of the audiences but in physical space with the Salle Des Fêtes performance. The success of this performance and of the hoax in general is very much tied to what Bora identifies as an important audience desire of being transported into the (fake) historical world of Bilitis.

If we step back to the birth of Western Opera, we can draw similar connections between artistic output and transportive audience experiences as well. There was an expectation of an elaborate spectacle, both aurally and visually, that was inherent to a public operatic performance. From the construction and application of elaborate sets and new (to the 17th c) technologies to the delivery of dramatic texts set to music, audiences came to operatic performances with expectations of being drawn in and held captive by the spectacle.

In contemporary times, this kind of spectacle and these immersive events still thrive. With the debut of *Sleep No More* in New York City in 2011, theatre goers were given another poignant example of how multi-disciplinary collaboration and audience-centered design can culminate in transportive experiences. I attended the performance in 2011, when I was at the very start of my artistic research. I attended as a curious audience member, but also as an artistic researcher who was actively seeking out new performance experiences to inform my own practice.

On my first consideration of the performance, I felt confused about the story and what I had experienced, or what the "takeaway" was supposed to be. But I had been given two crucial pieces of information as an audience member, the first was that the story is based on William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a story I was extremely familiar with; the second was that I, the audience member, had full agency over how and where I would participate in the experience as a spectator.

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[122] Henriksson, interview.
[123] Yoon, interview.

When I look back on that experience now, I see it through a "light of newness". My many interactions with the story of *Macbeth* intersect with *Sleep No More*. The newly composed music, the film-noir esthetic, and the contemporary dance now allow me to distill even more richness from this 400-year-old play. It is also fair to say that if we go by Bora's litmus test (Was the audience transported?), then the experience was a resounding success. From the moment I set foot in the venue, I was transported to another world, because every detail of the performance felt like it was centered on piquing my interest and guiding me through a unique narrative that could only be driven by my curiosity and interactions in that world.

Sleep No More is an extreme example, but it opens up a spectrum of options for performers to consider and is especially useful for WAM practitioners who may be more accustomed to audiences playing passive roles in their performances. We now have a gauge we can use and as Marianna and Bora proposed, the connection to questions about our audience can open up new practices.

What role does the audience play in your performance practice, and what kind of experience are you hoping they will have? What empathetic instincts or knowledge do we have access to that can inform our design of the audience-experience, and how we engage with our own artistic practice?

4.8 In Practice: Empathy (Co-creation with the Audience)

It was asking these questions that allowed me to co-create the piece "Where Is Ophelia" with James Andean and William Shakespeare. The piece was presented as part-two to "The Winter of Our Discontent", and like *Sleep No More* it was site specific and used an original script and original music to depict the story of Ophelia's struggle with trauma and how it affected her mental health - a journey we do not see in Shakespeare's telling of Hamlet.

We wanted our audience to have the experience of what we described as "curious voyeurs", and we wanted to charge them with closely and actively observing Ophelia in her present state. On the gauge of audience-input, it was a few notches above passive observer: nothing the audience said or did would influence or alter the performance path, but we wanted them to actively follow and stay engaged with Ophelia and the details of her story as it is expressed through her body language, the text she speaks and sings and the music.

We chose this kind of experience for dramaturgical and dramatic reasons. We wanted the audience to really consider and bear witness to the omission of Ophelia's struggle with mental health from the story of Hamlet, and we wanted the audience to gain a new understanding of the trauma that instigated the decline in her mental health. We also wanted the audience to feel like they were inside Ophelia's experience of her struggle and that it was as immediate and inescapable for the audience as it was for Ophelia.

To empower the audience to become these active witnesses, we used, or rather innovated and removed, three familiar aspects of the audience-experience:

1. In lieu of program notes, each audience was given a letter from Ophelia's doctor describing her condition and asking them to observe her closely (without physical contact) and to make note of any changes or developments they might observe.
2. In place of the proscenium stage, we set the performance in a five-room basement of a bookstore, which we set to be Ophelia's living quarters. We then activated all five spaces with an immersive soundscape and with a staging plan that had Ophelia moving between all five rooms and being visible at most times from any of the rooms, so that audience members could choose to be as close or far as they wished.
3. We removed traditional seating arrangements. There was still plenty of seating available to audience members throughout the experience (and incorporated as part of the setting), but we wanted the audience to feel like they were "on their toes" and to follow Ophelia through the space.

"Thinking about [performance] audio-visually from an audience member's perspective helps keep me grounded and not get so experiential in my own performance. It helps me to always be considering that this is a dialogue; that [the audience] should be getting something from this too" says Bora, as she describes her own connection to shaping performances and experimenting with audience-experience.

> It's about finding a way to open up the space in a way that is meaningful. When you're on a stage with a proscenium it is very two dimensional; it is very presentational oriented. But there are many ways in which you as a performer can connect or use the spatial details in the room. Or let's say you're playing in a historic space. You could find repertoire that riffs on the idea of nostalgia or history that might be evoked here - I kind of look for those kinds of threads to make a performance less presentational and more as something that encompasses an audience.[124]

The very simple shift of thinking about performance as a space for dialogue between audience and performer has become instrumental in decentralizing and uprooting my performance anxiety and obsession with perfection. What I appreciate about Bora's commentary is that she too gives a range of possibility from the familiar proscenium recital stage to nostalgia-inducing historic space.

> I know in classical [music] there is a protocol or etiquette, for example the singer sings in the crook of the piano; that's where you bow, and I suppose the most visual that it gets is of course the expressivity of the singer's face, the eyebrows, the hands, but it's also the dress, the costume. So much of this visual information tells you about the exposition: where are we in time, in space, in what culture, and it sets up the social contract of the room. It tells us that "we're in a fantastical place" or "we're in a very just mundane place". It's in your gait; when you walk onto a recital stage, it tells us a lot: are you going to adhere to normal recital etiquette?[125]

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[124] Yoon, interview.
[125] Yoon, interview.

This level of attention to how the audience might perceive these details revealed another of my persistent habits. I discovered that when programming and preparing a performance, I thought that I, the performer, "knew better" than my audience. I believed this because I was educated in the traditions and practices of WAM; I had done my research on my composers and performance history; I had succeeded in my education and in my career in terms of attending and performing with some of the leading institutions in our sector. Since I knew best, I should not give in to the audience's desires or whims.

But what strikes me as a complete antithesis to this rather pretentious belief and habit, is a connection between what Bora is honing in on and a particular experience from "Where Is Ophelia". In that performance, there is a moment where Ophelia sits down on a sofa in her personal chambers. When she gets to this moment in the story, she is recalling the trauma of Hamlet bursting into her private space while she was dressing and using physical force to restrict her movements. In this performance, the staging called for very subtle and small movements in my wrists; details that would only be observed if an audience were close by. When it came to that moment in the performance, I noticed an audience member sitting on the sofa. He had decided to sit there to watch me from afar. As I approached the sofa in my staging, I assumed he would move. But he did not. He stayed right beside me, and I could feel the intimacy of his stare on my wrists as I carried out my choreography. Because of his attention to this detail, it also helped draw the whole audience into this important moment.

I think on this particular moment of discovery in "Where Is Ophelia?" and it contrasts so starkly with the practice I was taught in my classical singing training with regards to where a singer should look when they are performing. I was taught, more than once, that I should find a fixed place to look at, somewhere above the audience's heads (but not too high) where I can gaze meaningfully into the distance. This was always so confusing to me, and it made me feel like there was an invisible barricade between myself and my audiences. I felt that I had to avoid any kind of intimate connection, like eye contact, with my audience members. In changing seating and staging arrangements, in providing the audience with a new performance format and in reinforcing the power of bearing witness, both myself and the audience were able to forge a new connection. In much of my performing now, I like to have my audience physically close and gathered in seating arrangements that allow us to at least be in a circle. I do not stare above their heads; instead, I find moments to make eye contact and as the performer, I feel responsible for drawing them closer into the details of the stories I have asked them to witness.

I spoke about vulnerability and reciprocity in my collaboration with composers, and how powerful it is when a collaborator arrives in a co-creation space with those values in mind. However, as performers we demand reciprocity from our audiences as well, and the simple act of showing up is an act of giving and communicating to the performer that an audience member is present to participate in whatever journey the performer will take them on. The vulnerability a performer shows an audience is also reciprocated by audiences in the form of trust - a trust in the story and the experience that the performer will unravel and a willingness to follow that story even if it means having their expectations altered.

Bora reminds me that "The connection to the audience is the whole reason someone is in the room, paying a ticket - to come see you. I think that kind of social contract is very alive and well in theatre and opera."[126] It speaks to the ideas of music as performance and the inherent social interactions Cook and Small put forward, and it certainly resonates with my own experiences as a performer.

I try to be empathetic to all of this whether I am walking into the performance space as Ophelia or Debi Wong, Early Music Mezzo Soprano. I try to remember our social contract: that we are all in an intimate, vulnerable situation, seeking connection and there is much we can make of this moment, together. This also feels like co-creation and collaboration to me.

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[126] Yoon, interview.

5 DENOUEMENT

5.1 The Power of Iterative Performance (iteration vs. repetition)

What really became obvious through this process was that the only way to practice performing is to perform. As simplistic as it sounds, at the start of my artistic research I had always thought of practicing as something that happens before a performance. I thought of the performance as the place where I was supposed to display (and be critiqued for) everything I had practiced leading up to the performance. After the performance, the process would restart with whatever repertoire or material was needed for the next performance. For me, what was daunting and often terrifying about this process was that it very much reinforced a right-wrong or succeed-fail scenario for my performing. If things went as practiced, then I was successful. If they did not, then I had failed.

What truly changed for me over the course of this artistic research was that I started to see performing as part of my practice regime (instead of the end product of a dedicated practice cycle), and thus sought out more opportunities to perform so that I could continue to innovate my performance practice. This meant that the time between my performances decreased (note: at the time of my artistic research, I was also performing full time as a professional chamber singer and soloist) and that in each performance there was an aspect of prototyping involved: there was something I was intentionally trying to test or practice. Whatever I might be prototyping would be cultivated and planned for in advance, but because we design *for* and perform *for* others, it could only really be tested in performance. Much like the audience-experience gauge, I felt very much like I had a "prototyping-gauge", and I defined anything that I had never brought on stage before as a prototype. Depending on the performance situation, I made active decisions on how many things I wanted to prototype in a performance.[127]

The idea of a prototype-gauge is akin to risk-taking but implied in taking risks is a win-lose scenario. In Design Thinking the concept of right and wrong does not really exist. It is about following and refining ideas that resonate with whomever the target audience is or whomever you are problem solving for.[128] For my own practice, it helped me eliminate the concept of failure and turn that into a question of "Who am I prototyping for and is this resonating with them? How can I make this resonate even more?".

It is nice to take this bird's eye view now, because I did not have the language to describe this at the time I was carrying out my research performances. I often felt frustrated in my juried performances where there was clearly an expectation of a specific kind of performance product, but I saw an opportunity to test different ideas in each of the performances and, over the course of the study, saw the benefit of putting performances before audiences regularly and consistently because of the feedback and experience that can only be gained by "doing" (or performing). To me, performing was not (and still is not) the end product or culmination of everything an artist or artistic team has worked on. Rather, a performance is part of an

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[127] I also learned that I get easily excited about "trying new things" and that trying all the new things at one time isn't very helpful.

[128] It is also used as a process to uncover unknown challenges or assumptions of problems.

ongoing dialogue between artists and audiences on the relevance and role that the performing arts play in our societies and every performance we put forward is one iteration or one test in response to that overarching question.

Lastly, prototyping does not have to be all or nothing. Small changes can be implemented and tested one at a time, but a process that involves prototyping offers us a method for challenging deeply rooted assumptions that might inhibit us from uncovering new ways to resonate with our world.

5.2   The Tools & Takeaways

Progressing through the process of this study has allowed me to view and engage with performance as a dynamic and unique kind of territory where composers, performers and audience are afforded a temporary time and space to intersect and interact; by looking at composers, performers, and audiences as equal parts in a common collaborative and embodied experience; by looking at music as what emerges from that collaborative, embodied experience.

The word 'territory' has several definitions, but the one that lends itself well to the concept of a performance is "an area of knowledge, activity, or experience".[129] Performance is comprised of all three of these areas: 1) the area of knowledge, referring to the unique skill set and know-how of each individual collaborator; 2) the area of activity, being musicking, i.e., the actions and contributions of each collaborator; and 3) the area of experience, being a shared event comprised of personal reactions to, and embodiments of, the common activity. Therefore, a musical performance is an event where various parties with unique areas of knowledge gather with the understanding that they will participate in a common activity (musicking), and in doing so, create a shared experience.

For the performer, there are endless tools we can use to curate these shared experiences for ourselves and for our audiences, and so I offer this list of the main discoveries and tools explored in this research as a starting place only:

1. **Fostering discovery and play** are powerful ways to generate new ideas (ideate) and encourage oneself and one's collaborators to move beyond their familiar limits in both artistic expression and their engagements with the world. Improvisational activities and tools such as theatre games (yes, let's!) or free-movement (Gaga-dance) are ways to encourage discovery & play, as are more structured approaches like providing artistic collaborators with creative structures to explore (such as trying to recreate a Parisian performance from 1900).

2. **Invoking new authorities** means acknowledging that there may be prescribed power structures and hierarchies we cannot easily see when we are steeped in a culture but we can look in all directions, including inward, when opening conversations about the role of the performers and artists in our societies and/or

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[129] New Oxford American Dictionary (The Apple Dictionary)

curating performances for our communities. Some tools that were used in this study to gain new perspectives and ideas on curating and creating performances included personal conversations with other performing artists and conducting personal interviews with artists who were producing works that piqued my curiousity. Other tools, included self-reflexive exercises to better understand what excited me about my artistic practice and what has shaped my artistic instincts. There was also a period of building trust in my own artistic voice as an authority in my practice which included expanding how I thought about the voice and defining and practicing new ways of using my voice (such as Mellissa's list).

3. **Cultivating spaces that encourage vulnerability and reciprocity** allows for a fluid exchange of ideas between people and their practices and opens up the opportunity for significant artistic and personal growth and discovery through collaboration with others. This often manifested as a kind of community and trust building process that encouraged all collaborators to "come as they are" and then using improvisational exercises to encourage dialogue between people and artistic practices. Another tool that was used in this study was the act of researching and analyzing historical precedence for innovative artistic collaboration (such as Pierre Louÿs' creation process for *Les Chansons de Bilitis*) and then using historical examples as an invitation and framework for collaborators to engage in co-creation in ways they may not have considered before.

4. **Empathizing with the audience** is another way for artists to gain new perspectives on their personal practices. By engaging in feedback and dialogue with one's audience, and gaining an understanding of what brings them to performances, performers can define new value that they can offer to people who attend performances and the communities they are a part of. In this study, this aspect was embedded in an iterative process and cycle rooted in design thinking that aimed at producing new ideas and tools for performers to use when curating and performing projects.

5. **Honoring social contracts** is a way to recognize the equal importance of all contributions to a performance and that every person present, whether they are creating materials for the performance, performing, or bearing witness has a crucial role to play and contribution to make. This discovery emerged through consistently asking the question "why do we perform" to all people who engage with performance, answering it for myself over a long period of time and consistently performing.

6. **Connecting the lineages of performances** is a way of looking at significant contributions to our artistic landscape (past and present) that celebrates the collaborative effort and multiple contributions it takes to bring them to life. Instead of looking at the history and practice of an individual artist (such as a composer) and the lineages of their individual works, this study looked at whole performances such as *Les Chansons de Bilitis* at Le Salle des Fêtes in 1900 or the premiere of *Dafne* in 1598 and the many dialogues, social interactions, artistic

contributions and collaborations required to execute these kinds of performances. Doing so reminds us that all things happen in dialogue with our historical and present socio-ideological contexts, including performance.

There is a larger takeaway here too, with regards to my personal practice. I now understand my personal practice to be a "constant and continuous"[130] improvised interaction with others. I consider my performing to be an act of gathering others to share stories and examine connections between lived experience, interests, and knowledge. A significant part of my practice centers on the ongoing exploration of the voice as a multifaceted instrument that creates aural and physical sensations within my own body and the bodies of others through the use of breath and my personal physiology. In my iterative interactions with others, I seek out ways to expand and strengthen the expressive and emotive capacities of my voice so I can continue to tell stories that enable connections between others.

My practice also centers on the exploration of my voice as it relates to agency. As a performer, my voice is the means through which I express and amplify stories. As I consider the stories that I wish to tell and why I choose to tell these stories, I also explore where my voice does or does not have agency, be it in musical conservatories or academic institutions, concert halls and performance platforms, or local and global communities. I ask myself: where does my voice need to be heard? Where does it not need to be heard? What stories need to be told in these spaces? How can I use my voice and employ these tools and takeaways to tell those stories?

All of these aspects contribute to why I perform: to build new communities by illuminating spaces wherein people of present and past cultures and of diverse ideologies can intersect freely and participate in a common experience, together. I perform because I am a community-builder and because performance is the space where I know best how to gather people from diverse walks of life to share experiences and stories; to connect and imagine, together.

5.3   Reclaiming conventions

It took a lot of messy exploration to uncover "why" I perform. In reconnecting with my "why", I can look at my practice and ask if it is serving my ability to create performances. It is a stark departure from understanding performance as a kind of "one-shot-test" to prove my technical ability and seriousness as a performer and how I was taught to think about performing as a young singer in the classical music system.

In the beginning of this thesis, I outlined how the Work Concept creates a framework in which we perceive and think about music as an object, as writing. I also discussed the overwhelming discomfort I was feeling as a classical singer-in-training. At the heart of that discomfort were repetitive actions that were reinforcing:

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[130] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 89.

- the concept of music as fixed notation and sacred writing;
- inflexible hierarchies of authority that place the composer at the helm;
- the idea that my value as a performer was directly tied to my vocal virtuosity and my ability to read and reproduce these fixed writings without error; and
- the notion that my technical abilities and musical literacy would be perfected through private study and "practice".

I then moved to highlight the idea of music as performance wherein performers, composers and audiences intersect and contribute equally to what we define as "music". Thinking about music as collaborative performance meant that I had to look more closely at the roles that performers, composers, and audiences take on in performances, as well as the processes that lead up to performing.

To further this train of thought, I reached out to performers who produce unique kinds of performances and have diverse ideas to offer on what a creative process is and how it unfolds and is shaped. Looking linearly allowed me to encounter Design Thinking and apply it to my own artistic practice, resulting in a change of perspective where I started using performances as opportunities to discover new ways to enable meaningful exchanges of human expression and strengthening connection between communities.

The application of this process was explored within the context of a five-part concert series. The series aimed at generating ideas and performance prototypes that would reveal new ways to engage with classical singing and performing. In carrying out this study, I have been able to step away from the idea of practicing for the sake of perfection and towards practicing for the sake of exploration and connection. In doing so, I have uncovered so many more ways to use my voice. I have also discovered that the problems were not with the conventions of classical singing; rather, the problems were in how I was engaging with them and applying them to my own performance practice.

This discovery was revealed through action - through engaging with music as collaborative performance; through developing and executing performance prototypes that were designed to test the boundaries of my abilities and beliefs as a classical singer (which, as I found out, had only taken on the airs of necessity and importance because of how often I engaged with them). Integral to this process was collaborating on and co-creating works and performances with others so that together, we could produce a free interchange of ideas and utterances. Such an interchange inevitably expands on our unique body of experience and introduces new possibilities for our individual practices. Again, this is only possible through doing; through action; through musicking with others. Describing a performance is not to perform (which was made clear through the process of implementing an idea: the final prototype never resembled what I thought it might).

The culmination of re-examining the traditions in classical singing and then creating performance prototypes to test these new ideas, ultimately produced, for me, a new kind of practice and a new kind of practicing. This new practice accounts for my voice, my physical body, my body of experience, my body of knowledge, and my imagination. My new kind of practicing fosters my curiosity, embraces improvisation and experimentation, and

incorporates all of the abilities of my physical voice and body into my distinct version of classical singing. Most importantly, my practice is now centered on how I intersect with others and how we use performance to share time, space, and the stories we carry in our bodies.

I began this journey feeling voiceless, and questioning why I perform and how I could ever belong within the culture of Western Art Music practices. I became aware of how the traditions we can encounter in any artistic practice that has a long and elaborate history can feel like doctrine. When those traditions do not uphold our own artistic instincts or interests, questioning the lineage and the practices of those traditions can feel like sacrilege or failure. However, I offer this essay and these parting thoughts in hopes that they will enable new kinds of traditions to flourish: to engage in dynamic exchanges of ideas and imaginations, we must honor our unique voices that carry with them our individual experiences of the world and our own instincts on how we can connect and be in community with one another. To honor one's artistic instinct is to trust one's voice; to trust that when a tradition or method does not feel right it is an invitation to re-examine and reconnect with that tradition. It is an invitation to seek other ways to expand on one's practice. When a performer commits to that voice, she commits to transforming traditions and allowing new practices to emerge. She commits to embracing a tradition of being deeply in touch with, and knowledgeable of, our very human ways of expressing and how they are connected to the past, present, and future. She commits to enabling new opportunities for more voices to join in on the musicking and starts a new conversation.

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APPENDIX A: Five Doctoral Concert Programs for *The Art of Storytelling*

1. Concert: April 27, 2012
Sibelius Academy, R-House Concert Hall

"La Musa, La Musica: Muse and Music in Renaissance Europe"

Clio, The Muse of History

Innsbruck, Ich Muss dich lassen | Heinrich Isaac (c.1450 – 1517)
Can She Excuse My Wrongs? | J. Dowland (1563 – 1626)
Time Stands Still | J. Dowland
Now, Oh Now, I Needs Must Part | J. Dowland

Polyhymnia, The Muse of Sacred Poetry

Salve Regina | Anon. 11th c.
Virgine Bella | Bartolomeo Tromboncino (c. 1470 – 1535)
Never Weather Beaten Sail | Thomas Campion (1567 – 1620)
Miserere My Maker | Anon. 17th c.
Agnus Dei à 3 | William Byrd (c. 1540 – 1623)

Thalia, The Muse of Comedy

Greensleeves | Anon. 16th c.
Ostinato Vo' Seguire | B. Tromboncino

Melpomene, The Muse of Singing and Melancholy

Consert Des Différents Oiseaux | Etienne Moulinié (1599 – 1676)
Can Doleful Notes? | John Danyel 1564 – 1626)
i. Can Doleful Notes
ii. No, let chromatic tunes
iii. Uncertain turns
Flow My Tears | J. Dowland

Erato, The Muse of Love

Come Again, Sweet Love Doth Now Invite | J.Dowland
Enfin La Beauté | E. Moulinié

2. Concert: April 28, 2013
Sibelius Academy, R-House Chamber Music Hall

"Who Knows Where The Time Goes: A Love Story"

Prologue: The Story
Sentirete una Canzonetta | Tarquinio Merula (1595 – 1665)

Chapter 1: All I Want
All I want | Joni Mitchell (b. 1943)
Canto di Bocca Bella | Barbara Strozzi (1619 – 1677)

Chapter 2: Intimate Invitations
Suzanne | Leonard Cohen (1934 – 2016)
Odi Euterpe | Giulio Caccini (1551 – 1618)

Chapter 3:Of Faith and Constancy
The Dawntreader | Joni Mitchell arr. Solmund Nystabakk (b.1982) & Debi Wong (b. 1984)
Non e dunque per me | Claudio Monteverdi (1567 – 1643)

Chapter 4: Loss and Lament
Lagrime Mie | Barbara Strozzi
Hallelujah | Leonard Cohen

Epilogue: Reminiscing
Vedro'l mio Sol | Giulio Caccini
Who Knows Where The Time Goes | Sandy Denny (1947 – 1978) arr. Nystabakk & Wong

3. Concert: Sept. 8, 2013
Sibelius Academy, Music House Organo Hall (Part 1)
Arkadia International Bookshop (Part 2)

"The Winter of Our Discontent"
Part 1: Richard III, Juliet, Lady Macbeth
With selected text by William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

Gloucester	Hans Werner Henze (1926 – 2012)
Eyes Look No More	John Danyel (1564 – c.1626)
Ritornello	Hans Werner Henze
A Dream	John Dowland (1563 – 1626)
So Sweet Is Thy Discourse	Thomas Campion (1567 – 1620)
Romeo and Juliet	Hans Werner Henze
And is it night?	Robert Jones (1577 – 1617)
Ritornello	Hans Werner Henze
Oh Let us Howl	Robert Johnson (1583 – c. 1634)
Awake Ye Woeful Wights	Anon. Broadside Ballad
Oh Death, Rock him Asleep	Anonymous Ballad
Mad Lady Macbeth	Hans Werner Henze
In Darkness Let Me Dwell	John Dowland

"Where Is Ophelia?"
Part 2: Ophelia
Electroacoustic Composition & Sound Installation by James Andean
Text by William Shakespeare & Debi Wong

The Shrine - *Ophelia accepts the news of her father's death*
i. How Should I Your True Love Know? [Traditional Ballad]
ii. They Bore Him Barefaced On The Bier [Trad. Ballad]

Love Letters – *Ophelia struggles with how to tell her brother of her father's death. She finds an old love letter from Hamlet.*
i. And Will He Not Come Again / Go From The Window My Love [Ballad]
ii. Weeping Improvisation / Willow song [Improvisation / Ballad]

Close encounters – *Ophelia relives an unexpected intimate moment with Hamlet. She remembers poignant advice from her brother and father.*
i. Breathing Soundscape [Improvisation]
ii. Tomorrow Is St. Valentine's Day [Ballad]
iii. My Robin Is To The Greenwood Gone [Ballad]

Remembrances – *Ophelia decides to go find the Queen of Denmark. She gathers flowers as gifts and as symbols.*
i. Ballads & Flowers [Improvisation on Traditional Ballads]

4. Concert: April 4, 2016
Sibelius Academy, Music House, Organo

"Bilitis Amoureuse"

Les Nuits de Bilitis | Solmund Nystabakk (b.1982)
i. Roses dans la nuit
ii. Ombre du bois

Les Chansons de Bilitis | Claude Debussy (1862 - 1918)
i. Le Flûte de Pan
ii. La Chevelure
iii. Le Tombeau des Naïades

Les Hymnes de Bilitis | Aki Yli-Salomäki (b. 1972)
i. Chant Funèbre
ii. Hymne à la Nuit

Les Mémoires de Bilitis | Matthew Whittall (b. 1975)
i. Épitaphe
ii. L'Arbre
iii. La Pluie
iv. Hymne à la Nuit
v. La Pluie au Matin

5. Listening Experience, recording released April 15, 2019

The Memories of Medea
Medea is proud. Medea is violent. Medea is driven by a desire for power in society.
Medea is intelligent. Medea is manipulative. Medea is uncompromising.
Medea is also a mother. Medea is a wife. Medea is a woman.

She is not insane. She is not a witch. She embodies the traits that society deems "male".
When her husband threatens her pride and leaves her powerless and voiceless, Medea must
retaliate. She cannot escape her pride. She cannot allow her legacy to be marked by his
actions and she cannot let him go unpunished.

We enter this version of the infamous Medea myth after she has taken the life of her son;
after she has revealed to her husband, Jason, that his son is dead and he will never again set
eyes on him nor lay him to rest. She finds herself, 48 hours after the deed, behind bars and
isolated in a jail cell. These are the thoughts and the memories that now echo in her mind.
These are the cries, the voices, the arias that ring in her ears.

To be experienced in isolation and heard through headphones.

The Memories of Medea was adapted from the the project ***The Cries Of Medea (2017)***[131]
and was curated and edited by Debi Wong (b. 1984). ***The Memories of Medea*** includes
excerpts from:

i. The Cries of Medea by James Andean (b. 1972) with vocal improvisation by Debi Wong;
ii. The Temple Of Tears: Improvisations on the theme of lamentation by Debi Wong & Millä
Mäkinen

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[131] *The Cries Of Medea* by Debi Wong & James Andean, Musiikkitalo Black Box Theatre, Helsinki, October
11, 2017.

APPENDIX B: Accompanying Program Notes for five concerts in *The Art of Storytelling*

1. Program notes for *La Musa, La Musica: Muse and Music in Renaissance Europe*
Format: Written and printed in program booklet
Date: April 27, 2021

According to the Greek poet, Hesiod (8th c. BCE), the muses were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne or Memory, and possessed knowledge of everything past, everything present, and everything to be expected. They are depicted as "dancing on soft feet"132 and chanting with "sweet voices" that cause the "dark earth [to] resound about them"133. "Lovely sound [rises] up beneath [them]"134 and should you be so lucky as to be loved by a muse, "gracious words" will flow from your mouth and you will be greeted "as a God, with gentle reverence".

That is a pretty impressive list of virtues, and it is no wonder that thousands of years later, we still use the concept of the Muse as a poetic synonym for the word "inspiration". The idea of invoking the muses, or calling upon some abstract being to inspire our worlds to resound about us and our mouths and minds to fill with "gracious words" is something that playwrights, poets, singers, storytellers, actors, (to name a few disciplines), have been doing for centuries.

Heck - I did it yesterday.

It wasn't anything ritualistic or enchanted. I didn't sacrifice anything, I didn't paint my face, I didn't chant in tongues. I paced around my apartment, and searched the far corners of my memory, and my imagination for just a single thought, or word to inspire my creativity to flow.

I met a man once who believed that all musicians were capable of performing magic. He believed this because to him being able to create a melody, meant being able to create something from nothing. He asked me: "If I asked you to compose a melody right now, could you do it?" to which I replied, "Yes". This lead him to argue that I would be creating something from nothing, and therefore, performing magic.

I mention this story because I disagree with his amazement and wonder (however pleasing it might be to be thought of as a magician with super powers). I am able to create a melody because I have studied hundreds of melodies, I have performed hundreds more, and I have been taught how to construct and deconstruct melodies. This is not a knowledge I acquired

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132 H.G. Evelyn White, *Hesiod, Theogony,* http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodTheogony.html
133 H.G. Evelyn White, *Hesiod, Theogony,* http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodTheogony.html
134 H.G. Evelyn White, *Hesiod, Theogony,* http://www.theoi.com/Text/HesiodTheogony.html

through magic. It was a part of my process in becoming a musician; and my point is that all things are a part of a process, even though we often only experience the end results of other people's processes.

You might ask, then where did the very first melody come from? We could turn to Aristotle to answer this question, who believed that from the very first of our days as individuals and as a species, we learned through mimesis or imitation. With regards to something like music, Aristotle argues that it is born from our "rude improvisations"135. Our abilities to imitate and to improvise are the tools we are born with and the tools that we use to learn, to develop, and to create.

The concert this evening, *La Musa, La Musica*, is part of a process. It is the result of years of my own imitation: learning to sing and perform, learning the style connected to this music, learning to create and organize performance programs. It is also the beginning of my new artistic endeavour at Sibelius Academy, which is an exploration of self and intention, and wondering what performances will look like if I dare to step past the boundaries of what I have learned, and enter back into the realm of "rude improvisation".

For tonight, I present music I have lived with for many years in the way that I have learned and been taught to present it. We begin the program by invoking Clio, the muse who had the power to make men great. The set highlights the songs of the English composer John Dowland (1563 - 1626) who sought greatness and seemed to achieve it everywhere but where he most desired: at the English Court. Even though he is hailed as one of England's greatest composers, and the inventor of the English Lute Song, for the first half of his life, Dowland was denied time and again, the position at the English court as 'Lutenist for the Queen'.

After denouncing the Catholic faith and declaring England a protestant country, Queen Elizabeth I was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1570. Following her excommunication, her government actively persecuted people practicing Catholicism, or withdrawing from Protestant mass services. While he denied being Catholic, Dowland was associated with many Catholic social circles, and was famously accused of being an "Obstinate Papist" by the Queen. We cannot know for certain that this is the reason he was denied the position as 'Lutenist for the Queen', but we do know that Elizabeth I had a temper to be reckoned with, and the ability to hold a grudge to the death. The two galliards, *Now Oh Now I Needs Must Part*, and *Can She Excuse My Wrongs* make light of Elizabeth's fickle temper, and two of her suitors, The Duke of Alencon, and The Earl of Essex; who quickly rose to favour by wooing Elizabeth, and just as quickly, fell from grace by stoking her anger. *Time Stands Still* could very well have been an ode to Elizabeth I herself as the poetry reflects a common theme of timeless beauty that is found in other poems and dedications to the Queen.

Opening the concert, is the German song *Innsbruck, ich muss dich Lassen* by Heinrich Isaac. Isaac is associated with the franco-flemish school of composers, and is often grouped with his better-known contemporary, Josquin des Prez. Isaac was a unique song composer because he set poetry in several different languages, including German, Italian, Latin, Dutch

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135 S.H. Butcher, *Poetics by Aristotle,* http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.1.1.html

and French and often blurred the lines between the song genres unique to each those languages.

We then move to the domain of Polyhymnia, or 'She of Many Hymns'. Inspiring sacred poetry for centuries, the Virgin Mary is the theme of the two first songs of this set. We open with an 11th century Gregorian chant that is still used in liturgical settings today and we introduce the Italian Frottola, a secular song form and often considered as the predecessor to the Italian Madrigal. Bartolomeo Tromboncino (c.1470 – 1535) is praised for being one of the most significant and prolific composers of the Frottola and was both famous and infamous in his lifetime. He held positions as composer and lutenist at the courts of Isabella d'Este, the Marchesa of Mantua, and Lucrezia Borgia of Ferrara and was often 'pardonned' or 'excused' for crimes because of his powerful patronesses.

Never Weather Beaten Sail is a hymn composed by the English lutenist, singer, and poet, Thomas Campion (1567 – 1620). Before he published his five books of ayres, containing his own poems set to music, Campion had gained notable recognition as a Latin and English poet. He was most recognized for his Latin work: 'Poemata, a collection of Latin panegyrics, elegies and epigrams'.

We close the first half of the concert with *Miserere My Mak*er and *Agnus Dei* from William Byrd's Mass for Three Voices. *Miserere My Maker* is a mysterious piece that is found in only two manuscripts and is without authorship. Although neither composer nor poet are known, the music is loosely based on Giulio Caccini's *Amarilli Mia Bella* and seems to be influenced by the declamatory and speech-like style that define Caccini's compositions.

William Byrd is perhaps one of the most famous composers in English history. He studied under Thomas Tallis from a young age and was officially appointed a gentleman of the English Chapel Royal in 1572. From 1572 onwards Byrd was a very successful composer and enjoyed patronage from many powerful people in the English aristocracy. Most of Byrd's patrons were Catholic, as was the composer himself, however unlike the case with Dowland, the Queen always seemed to turn a blind eye to Byrd's religious activities. Byrd's Mass for Three Voices was most likely composed and printed for Catholic services taking place in recusant households in England.

The second half of the program is ushered in by Thalia, the Muse of comedy. We open with the famous ballad *Greensleeves*. The English Broadside Ballad was a popular musical genre amongst the lower classes in England. They were often printed as single pages with many verses of text, and a commentary at the top of the page to indicate which tune the words should be sung to. Broadside Ballads were a great source of entertainment, but they were also a powerful form of propaganda and gossip.

The songstress of Melancholy, Melpomene, introduces our last two composers: John Danyel (1564 – c.1626) and Etienne Moulinié. In the Renaissance, Melancholy was considered an affliction or illness, which was caused by the excess of black bile in one's body. Even though it was considered an affliction, being Melancholic was actually quite fashionable, especially in England. In his piece *Can Doleful Notes*, Danyel explores the contemplative

condition caused by Melancholy. He works through the enigmatic poetry (written by his brother Samuel Danyel) and its central question: "can doleful notes express unmeasured grief?", with long chromatic lines and dense polyphony. *Can Doleful Notes* is a unique piece as it is published in Danyel's Songs For The Lute, Viol, and Voice as three individual pieces that can be linked together to form one of the earliest examples of a song-cycle.

Etienne Moulinie (1599 – 1676) was a French singer and composer in the court of the Duke of Orleans. He was predominantly a composer of the French Air de Cour which was a strophic secular song either sung with four or five voices, or with solo voice and lute. The Air de Cour and the French style have a very unique flavour, distinguishable by the elegant melodies and ornamentation, and the sense of suspended meter. Due to his patron's turbulent political career, Moulinié spent years of his life in exile, and so acquainted himself with the musical styles of Spain and Italy. His music displays the unmistakable elegance of the French Air de Cour, but hints at his nomadic lifestyle.

When I began studying music from the European renaissance, I quickly became enchanted by the stories surrounding the songs. I am still curious about why Dowland was denied a well-deserved position at the English court. What could he possibly have done to deserve a lifelong grudge from the Queen of England? The story of William Byrd risking his life by composing and publishing music for his exiled Catholic community still breaks my heart. And the thought of John Danyel creating musical interpretations for his brother's poems, makes me wonder about the conversations they might have had.

I suppose we all have different muses: the goddesses singing from helicon, a royal grudge, an exiled community, an older brother. Even though I have been a musician and a singer for many years now, I have come to realize that it is not the music that inspires me, it is the stories embracing the music, that enchant me. Throughout my process, I have always thought of myself as a singer, but I am wondering what it would be like to think of myself as a storyteller.

Tonight, you are seeing the result of my musical process and my journey as a singer. Tomorrow, I intend to pace my apartment, and invoke the muses to fill my mouth with gracious words. I will take those words and improvise and imitate, create and construct, deconstruct and disassemble, in hopes that those rude ramblings will give way to my own stories. When we meet again, I hope to tell you those stories.

2. Program Notes for *Who Know Where The Time Goes: A Love Story*
Format: Printed in program booklet

And so we meet again. Welcome to the second part of my ongoing doctoral project "The Art Of Storytelling". If you were present at my first Doctoral concert, you might remember that I wondered what it would be like to transform my "official title" from "Mezzo Soprano" to "Storyteller". For those that were not present at my first concert, I confessed that the most intriguing part of studying and performing historical music was not necessarily the music itself but rather the stories surrounding the music. I confessed a desire to push the boundaries of my craft and practice to see what new performing styles might emerge if I were to embrace the idea of presenting my audiences with "stories".

Your patience this allowing, I will begin with a little anecdote about my journey from my last performance to this evening's.

On my path to enlightenment, I did an exploration of Baroque gesture and its relationship to Baroque vocal music with a teacher who has been studying these subjects for many years. When the opportunity presented itself, I was extremely excited because the idea of using Baroque gestures to enhance my performance of Baroque music sounded like the perfect "next step" in my journey from singer to storyteller.

To introduce the importance of gesture in the performance of Baroque music, my teacher evoked musical and literary treatises from the 17th and 18th centuries. He referred to images, textbooks, and dance moves from the baroque period; he talked about posture, stance, and even how one would walk. We spent a series of days walking, talking, standing, moving, gesturing, singing, dancing, as if we lived in the 18th century, and on the last day, he asked me what I thought of it all and to my horror, I blurted out "it just doesn't feel right".

I wanted to say that this performing style was wonderful and revolutionary; that I would never go back to my old way of performing; that I would now conquer the world of Baroque music one gesture at a time; but all that came out in response to his barrage of information was "it just doesn't feel right".

Normally I would have written off these "weird feelings" as the result of being an inadequate or poorly informed musician; but I went into the workshop truly invested in the idea of adding Baroque gesture to my performance practice, and left having all but sworn it off. Instead of accepting my inadequacy, I decided to ask myself why it was so unsuccessful.

Four years ago, I attended an advance theory class. In our very first lesson, our professor opened with an inspiring warning, that soon became a class-mantra: "never underestimate your musical instincts". I realized that in my baroque-gesture workshop, my teacher and I were having a battle of musical instincts. We all have a musical instinct and that instinct is unique because it is deeply rooted in our musical studies, interests and interactions; it is

rooted in our physicality, in our life experiences, and in our beliefs about what music is and how it functions in our lives and our worlds.

My teacher and I were both obviously interested in body language and how it affects and is connected to music performance, but we had very different ideas about music performance, not just Baroque music performance, but all music performance. I realized that this style of performing didn't "feel right" because it just simply did not "fit" me – my body, my beliefs, my interests, my goals. It fit my teacher like a glove, and the beauty of our battling instincts, is that he will develop a performance and a performing style that is completely different from mine; and I believe that these very different performances will enrich our audiences much more than if we were to endeavour to create and recreate the same performances over and over again.

And so, like we often have to do when we are on any kind of journey, I had to take a step back from my original plan and rethink my next step. This time, I decided to invoke my theory class mantra, and follow my musical instinct. It encouraged me to investigate all the ways I interact with music, and to consider more carefully the music I enjoy for its storytelling qualities. I also began my own study in body language. Instead of looking to the past for answers on how to perform, I looked at to the world around me. I attended theatre shows, dance shows, operas, recitals, concerts, and watched what kind of postures, stances, gestures, and movements were successful on stage. I watched people in everyday situations: walking to work, talking to friends in the park, greeting neighbours, laughing with their children, and took note of how we tell elaborate stories every day, all day long, with our bodies. And finally, after much watching and wondering, I decided that tonight I would like to tell you a love story.

This love story isn't about anyone or any one relationship in particular. It is simply about the stages of the varied relationships we enjoy in our lifetimes and I have chosen poems and a body language that I hope will guide you through those stages; From the first time we are intrigued by another person, to the excitement of our first encounters, to the gratitude we develop when those encounters turn in to something more significant, to the doubts we cannot ignore when we surrender our insecurities to others, to the inevitable loss or endings of relationships, and finally to that moment we develop a sense of an ever-growing love within ourselves despite the realities of time and our own corporeality.

You are hearing the music of Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, and Sandy Denny alongside the music of Giulio Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, Claudio Monteverdi and Tarquinio Merula, because the poems they have set, or have written themselves serve to tell my story best; and because my musical instinct connects these very different musicians and their very different musical styles. To me, recitating a work by Sandy Denny bears an uncanny amount of similarities to recitating a work by the 17th century composer, Giulio Caccini. To me, there is a sensuousness in Joni Mitchell's music that I also find in Barbara Strozzi's compositions; To me, the canzonettas of Tarquinio Merula are as timeless and accessible as the ballads of Leonard Cohen. But above all, in each of these pieces, the poetry is the most important layer, and the music and melodies serve to enhance the recitation of the poetry.

Before I go on, I will make two disclaimers:

1.) This is not a concert about academic research and connecting the musicological dots. It is a concert about re-imagining what the performer can offer an audience. Tonight, I would like to recitate a story to you.

2.) "Recitate" is not a word. I made it up. In the English language we have the words: "Recitative" which is a noun that describes musical declamation, "Recite", which is a verb that means to repeat aloud or to declaim from memory, and "Recitation" which is a noun describing the act of having repeated something aloud; and so I propose the word "recitate" to be a verb meaning to declaim aloud and from memory, a poem that is amplified by melody and music. Tonight, I will present poems that are most successful when recitated.

You might wonder why I have chosen pieces by Mitchell, Cohen, Caccini, Strozzi, Denny, Monteverdi, and Merula, and why have I not included other music in this program that is famous for featuring musico-poetic relationships, like, for example, the songs of Robert Schumann.

I would argue two things: that in a song written by Schumann or in any of the 18th, 19th and 20th century western art song traditions, the music often tells a part of the story, or takes over a part of the story or poem, and is therefore as equally important as the poetry, and is in some places, more important. Tonight's performance features pieces wherein the poetry is absolutely the most important layer of the whole. Tonight, the music and the melody serve to amplify the text being recitated.

Secondly, we interact with and perform western art music written between the 18th and 20th centuries in a very specific way. One of the biggest differences between dealing with a song by Schumann and dealing with a song by Joni Mitchell or Giulio Caccini is the way we interact with the musical scores.

When we first learn a song by Robert Schumann, we generally use a musical score. We do this because in his time, musical scores were created as a means of preserving the works of composers (so that the works could literally be performed forever), and also a means of ensuring that a composer's works were being performed as the composer intended. Therefore, a Schumann score will be very detailed - every note the pianist should play, and the singer should sing will be indicated. How loud or soft certain parts of the song should be will also be indicated, as will the lengths of notes and phrases, and even the speed of the song, etc. In other words, a Robert Schumann score is a very precise thing and our performing traditions encourage us to honour what is written in the score.

A Joni Mitchell song doesn't really have a score-form the same way a Schumann song does, although there are similarities. Her songs are also preserved, but in video and sound recordings, and instead of learning from written or notated scores, we tend to learn her songs by listening and by imitating. There are of course, written or documented versions of her songs that people can learn from, but even those are not created with the precision of a Schumann score. They are created as "outlines" to assist in the performance and presentation

of Mitchell's music; they are not created to preserve the original form in which Mitchell intended her piece to be performed, and they are not created to last for centuries and centuries.

A Caccini score is similar to a Mitchell score. In the 17th century, scores were not created as a means to preserve the way a piece of music was intended to be performed. Composers created scores to serve as outlines for the performers and it was assumed that the performers would know what to do with these "outlines". Our current studies in historical performance practice are about learning what performers of the 17th century did with these outlines, and the way they might have performed these very vague scores.

To summarize my rather long point – interacting with Joni Mitchell "score" is actually rather similar to interacting with Giulio Caccini "score"; both provide a text and a rather rough musical outline to enhance the text. And both have plenty of room for experimentation and improvisation. Tonight's project is the result of just that: experimentation and improvisation.

The experimentation was shaped by a series of questions: what could a concert look like if something other than musical genre defined the programming? How does the use or lack of a score influence the learning, performing and interpreting of a piece? Can contrasting musical genres be presented and performed cohesively in a concert?

Shaping the concert wasn't so difficult, although, I quickly discovered that dealing with a score, even if it is a 17th century score, is a lot more limiting than dealing with a piece of paper that has some lyrics scribbled on it and a few chords. I realized that because of the way I have been educated (as a "classical musician") working with a score often feels like working with a set of laws that must not be broken or disobeyed. Whereas working with a text and general idea of how a melody goes, liberated me to just focus on the text and the structure of the how I wanted to deliver the text.

Combining the contrasting styles was also a bit of a challenge because even though I listen and interact with both baroque and contemporary music every day, endeavoring to perform them in one concert was not the easy task. I realized that I sing the Baroque music with the same technique that I would sing any classical styled music, and I sing the contemporary music like any other person who sings in the shower or to the radio in the car. In the end I think I have settled on a vocal colour that allows me to recite all of the poems effectively.

To add cohesiveness to the program, I decided to have all the songs played on Baroque instruments, and to have seamless transitions between many of the pieces. In some pieces, for example, in Joni Mitchell's "Dawn Treader" you will even hear a mix of styles. We open her piece with a falling four-note scale, which was familiar to 17th century audiences as a "passacaglia" and often depicted sadness or a lament. We invite you to listen for Barbara's unique handling of dissonance in both her "Lagrime Mie" as well as in Sandy Denny's "Who Knows Where the Time Goes".

As for the improvisation - it came naturally and out of necessity. Since half of our repertoire only existed as words on a page, we came together in our first meetings with nothing to

rehearse. Instead, we had to discuss text, analyze poetry, demonstrate the various colours our instruments were capable of, improvise melodies and harmonies, present as many ideas as we could, and most importantly be willing to try out every idea without fear of failure or prejudgment.

It was a wonderful process and this exchange of ideas shed light on a belief I have about musical performance. I believe that a musical performance is a type of open-ended (and open-minded!) conversation. There are many contributors: performers, teachers, composers, musicologists, stage managers, producers, audience members, who add their voices to any given performance, and I do not believe that any one voice is more important than the other. They are all essential, and they all add something important to our "conversation". In this very collaborative activity, we all exchange our ideas (albeit in very different ways, and in some cases at very different times in history). And as I learned in my baroque gesture workshop, each distinctive exchange of ideas, will produce distinct performances and this variety of performances enriches us all.

I see this performance today as a collaboration between myself and the other storytellers on and offstage: Solmund, Markus, Tuuli, Joni, Claudio, Leonard, Giulio, Barbara, Tarquinio, Sandy. And most importantly I believe you are a part of this collaboration as well - in music philosophy there is an ongoing and endless debate about meaning in music, some argue that music is heavy laden with meaning, others argue that there is none at all – I present that it is you, the audience, our most important collaborators, that gives meaning to our performances. It is you, with your unique set of desires and interests and stories and histories, that are able to discern meaning from our performances; it is you, who adds the most important voice to this conversation; it is you that makes this conversation open-ended and ongoing.

3. Program Notes for *Elizabethan Ghosts & Spirits*
Date: Sept. 8, 2013

Part 1: *The Winter Of Our Discontent*
Format: Spoken aloud to a live audience

[TO BE READ ALOUD]:

I first met Juliet at a dinner party. I wish I could say that she really stole the show, but ten minutes before our first encounter, I had walked into a closed glass door with an entire plate of food. The plate shattered (along with my dignity), the gourmet dinner transformed into a Jackson Pollock painted across an unforgiving glass canvas, and the eyeglasses I had unfortunately been wearing transformed into a pair of hawk talons that drew blood as they claimed a permanent residence on my face. And then to really make a scene, I cried. A lot. And even at nine-years old, I was spectacularly loud.

Enter Juliet. Or rather, enter mortified-nine-year-old Debi into an empty side room in the basement where the television is playing a live broadcast of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. In the wake of what was to my nine-year-old self, the greatest disaster of all time,

surrendering to Juliet's world was the best possible thing that could have happened. She was on the balcony calling to Romeo, and even though the subtleties of the story and the language were beyond my grasp, her world of wanting, of desire, of fear, anticipation, pain, grief enveloped me.

That evening, my family was amongst the last guests to leave as I insisted on residing in the realm of Juliet until the bitter end. Debi versus the Glass Door became a secondary plot to the main event of the evening: the discovery of William Shakespeare and his unparalleled story of Juliet and her Romeo. The glass door had barred my way to a boring evening of grown-ups with weird food, and
unraveled the road to entire universes that ached to be explored.

I am reflecting on this memory because it of course pertains to this evening's performance, but not because it is a story about my first interaction with the works of William Shakespeare. Without really knowing it at the time, I was discovering the power of storytelling, the many different ways in which a story can be told, and the many more ways in which we interact with stories and storytellers.

If you've been following me from the very beginning of this series, then you will know that this project explores storytelling and the mediums of expression available to the "classical" singer. If you are just joining us today, let me explain, briefly, where I am today with my study.

There are two big questions that dominate this study. The first is: What would my performance practice look like if I were to stop thinking of myself as a classical singer, and start thinking of myself as a storyteller instead?

And secondly: What would my performance practice look like if I considered my instrument to be my entire body (instead of simply my sung voice), and my expressive mediums to be limited only by the capabilities of my body?

To explore these questions, I have created these five concerts, each one designed to address a certain aspect of storytelling and to challenge my habits as a classical singer. First, let me explain what I believe storytelling is -

To me, storytelling is the ability to envelop an audience in an imaginary world rich with characters, plots, and places, and that is defined by the way these elements interact and the order in which they do so (When I say imaginary, I don't necessarily mean something that does not, has not, or cannot exist. I simply mean existing in the imagination). It is the characters, places and plots that make up the story world, and it is their interactions and the timing of the interactions that make up the actual story. It is your responsibility –the responsibility of the audience - to allow your imaginations to run wild to bring these characters, plots, and places to life; it is our responsibility - the responsibility of the storytellers - to use the mediums at our disposal to aid you in creating these imaginary story worlds.

I believe that music easily lends itself to storytelling because of its innate ability to inspire the imagination. I believe that singers are especially apt to being storytellers because we work with text and most of those texts feature characters, places, and events that interact to form short stories. My goal is to explore the various ways I can use music and my instrument to create engaging and interactive story worlds and stories for my audience.

The Winter Of Our Discontent is concert number three in my series and explores the function and depiction of character in a story. The performance presents four sketches that use different combinations and interactions of: spoken and sung text, music with text, and music without text, to bring four different characters to life. The four character sketches are all unique starting with our first and most basic idea and moving to the most complex and experimental. In other words, you are also seeing a bit of our working process; which is also why you have been given scripts tonight.

In the scripts you will see how we have woven all the elements together, and you will also see under each character name, the mediums we are experimenting with and the music and texts we have arranged and their authors. You also have in your scripts both the English and Finnish texts for the performance so you can easily follow along in whatever language you are most comfortable with. If you have any questions at the end of the concert, please feel free to approach any of the storytellers to ask.

Finally, you will notice that your script tonight only contains the full sketches for three of the four characters: Richard III, Juliet, and Lady Macbeth. If you are curious to hear Ophelia's, you will have to look for her tomorrow afternoon at 4pm at Arkadia International Bookshop. You will find her roaming the lower chambers as she struggles with questions surrounding her father's murder, and who is really to blame.

And now without further ado – we leave you with Richard the third, the hunchbacked duke of Gloucester as he considers his deformities and resigns himself to a life of villainy.

[Performers take their places. Black out]

Part 2: *Where Is Ophelia?*
Format: Printed letter delivered to arriving audience members

Dear Friends,

Welcome to part 2 of The Winter Of Our Discontent. You are undoubtedly looking for Ophelia. She is here, but I must warn you, she is not in the best of spirits.

As you may or may not know, it has only been a few days since Ophelia admitted to her father, Polonius, that she and Prince Hamlet have been meeting in secret and exchanging vows of love. Polonius insisted on determining whether Hamlet had honest intentions with Ophelia, and so he brought the news to Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark.

Yesterday, Polonius and Gertrude convinced Ophelia to meet "alone" with Hamlet, while they looked on from a hidden place. They convinced Ophelia that they would be able to tell if Hamlet were truly in love with her or not. What they witnessed was a display of pure madness. Hamlet scolded Ophelia for her beauty, forsook their love and the vows he had made, he denied the gifts and remembrances he had gavin her, and raged against the validity of all loves and marriages. Ophelia, horrified to see Hamlet in such a state and embarrassed by his rejection, retired to her chamber for the rest of the day.

Later that evening, Hamlet had arranged for a play to be presented at court. Ophelia of course attended, but as if their encounter earlier were not enough, Hamlet insisted on embarrassing her in public as well by making off-colour jokes about their intimacy.

And now this already tragic tale takes a turn for the worst. Ophelia was convinced that Hamlet no longer cared for her and so she returned to her chambers to sleep away the sorrows of the day. Polonius, however, was not satisfied. He went to spy on Hamlet and Gertrude (with Gertrude's blessing) to see if Hamlet would admit that he was being tortured by his love for Ophelia. Hamlet discovered the "spy" behind the curtain in his mother's bedroom and lashed at him with a dagger. The dagger buried itself deep in Polonius' stomach and the wound quickly proved mortal.

But that is still not the end of this gruesome report. After murdering Polonius, Hamlet then took his body and hid it below a set of stairs in the castle. When Gertrude explained to his royal majesty, Claudius, King of Denmark what had transpired, he became fearful that the news of Hamlet's crime would cause an uproar amongst his people. He ordered that Hamlet be sent to England, and that the body be found and immediately buried. It took hours to find the body of Polonius and when the king's men had located him, they disposed of him in a pauper's grave without proper funeral rights.

And yes, dear friend, all of this happened before Ophelia had even been notified of her father's death.

Which brings us to the present moment. The king's men were here an hour ago to tell Ophelia of the evening's horrors. Queen Gertrude did not want to come herself, but she promises favours to anyone who will observe Ophelia and bring her reports of her well-being. If you wish to observe Ophelia, you may descend the stairs and look for her – she is without sleep, and clearly tormented, but that is all I know for certain.

When you descend the stairs, you will enter into Ophelia's world. You will hear her thoughts, you will know her emotions, you will see her distress. There is no telling what she will do, but you are free to follow her as she wanders her chambers. You may approach her and stay as near to her as you like, but please refrain from touching her – she seems unstable and she may lash out.

The Queen thanks you for looking in on her dear Ophelia. And I thank you for bearing witness to her tragedy.

Sincerely,

Anonymous

P.S. - You may explore any of the rooms, and you may stay as long as you please. If you are feeling weary, you can rest in any of the seating areas and experience Ophelia's world through sound. You will find the official account of her story in books on this upper level. You are welcome to return to the upper level and read through the story at any time, just as you are free to stay for as much or as little time as you wish.

4. Program Notes for *Bilitis Amoureuse*
Format: Printed in program booklet
Date: April 4, 2016

Welcome…

Thank you for joining us for "Bilitis Amoureuse" (Bilitis in Love). The performance you will see tonight has been an incredible interdisciplinary collaboration between a poet, four composers, four instrumentalists, a singer, a body painter, a dancer and you - our audience. This collaboration spans centuries and artistic genres and it is rooted partly in the past, partly in the present and partly in the imagination of all who participate in it.

This project was inspired by Bilitis, a Grecian courtesan who was a contemporary of Sappho, and possessed a rivaling talent for poetry. Her life and legacy comes to us from the verses she inscribed on the walls of her tomb; now she exists in the imaginations of all who encounter her strophes. She grew up in the land of the nymphs; she lived as a companion on the isle of lovers; she is buried on the island of Cypress. Even though she hails from a world that seems far removed from our own, her memories of the freshness of spring rain, of the warmth of summer breezes, of the imposing presence of the gods in the thick of night, are bound to strike a familiar chord with you all.

It was the French poet, Pierre Louÿs, who first discovered her poems. Being a scholar of ancient Greek and a literary artist of great esteem, he was able to translate her words into French, without dissembling the personality and the sensuousness of Bilitis' voice. He first published these translations in 1894 and shortly after, Bilitis was given a new life. She climbed into the imaginations of all who read her poems and little by little her verses became entwined with memory; until the feeling of snowflakes on bare skin could invoke the reminiscences of tracking satyrs, and the smell of roses could conjure the image of nymphs kissing in the shadows of night. When the composer, Claude Debussy, finally set her poems to music, it was almost as if she were really there, singing to us all of the muses on the dark shores of Melas.

This is how she came to us. Through words and memories, verses and songs. Entering our brush strokes, and our movements and our melodies as gently as a dream slips into the mind of the sleeper.

We invite you into this dream to meet Bilitis. You won't be able see her. You won't be able touch her, but she will be here - an impalpable shadow weaving together verse and memory, movement and colour, song and silence, imagination and history.

About Bilitis Amoureuse and The Art Of Storytelling

Bilitis Amoureuse is my fourth doctoral concert and the penultimate performance in my series titled "The Art Of Storytelling". This series is about exploring the mediums of expression and performance options available to the "classical" and "historically-informed" singer. In doing so, I am also endeavoring to transform my own performance practice and the way I create and present performances.

At my last concert, I introduced two main questions that define my study:

The first: What would my performance practice look like if I were to stop thinking of myself as a classical singer, and start thinking of myself as a storyteller instead?

The second: What would my performance practice look like if I considered my instrument to be my entire body (instead of simply my singing voice), and my expressive mediums to be limited only by the capabilities of my body?

Tonight, I would like to introduce a third one:
How does one innovate a performance practice?

I have always been interested in performance practices: how they developed, how they are studied and how they shape the experience of the audience and the performer. But at the beginning of my doctoral study, I was feeling limited by the performance practices I had learned and the performance options I was familiar with. I was feeling "stuck" and I was wondering how my creativity and artistic instinct could fit into and shape the way I perform. I wanted to explore new ways of performing, but I wasn't sure how one goes about changing the way they do something; especially if it has become almost secondary nature. How does one discover new means of doing habitual things?

By embracing the idea of being a kind of storyteller and expanding my concept of how I craft and express performances, I was able to consider my role and abilities as a performer from a new perspective. But changing the way one thinks about something is different than changing the way one does something. I may have started thinking about performing in a new way, but what I was able to do, was still limited by my body of knowledge and experience, and lack thereof.

So, I decided to go out and do things. I attended art openings and conferences, I read new books, I signed up for any kind of workshop that fit into my schedule, I went to all kinds of performances regardless of artistic genre, I watched and analyzed obscure films, I introduced myself to new artists, invited strangers out to coffee, I asked a million people a million questions about how they think of their creative processes, I wrote letters, I directed and produced operas, I took acting classes, movement classes, dance classes, script-writing.

None of this is revolutionary, but I mention it because the process of exploring new experiences with the intention of discovering new ways to do things, was very revealing. It quickly occurred to me that I often decide on what kind of activities and experiences to pursue based on what I think I will like and dislike. But my idea of what I think I will like and dislike is almost entirely based on what I am familiar with and what I know how to do. I began to see a vicious cycle and to understand, in part, why I was feeling stuck as a performer.

It also occurred to me that I often create and carry out projects with a very clear and detailed vision of what the end product will be. I don't want to imply that this is a bad way of doing things; having 1 a clear vision allows me to develop effective plans for moving forward with my ideas and realizing them. But until recently, it simply had not occurred to me that I could create or participate in a performance in any other way; that I could shift my focus from the final product, to the creative process; that I could develop a concept and a working plan for a performance without any preconceptions of what the final product will be and then be open to discovering something new.

I had been operating under the belief that it was my job, as a performer to create and deliver a product to the audience. Of course, this is still in my job description, but when I shift my focus away from that end product and towards the creative process, I begin to see that my role is more subtle and more complex than that. The performer is uniquely positioned between the world of the artists who create material for performances and the world of her audience; she is also uniquely positioned between the historical and imagined worlds of past cultures, and her own contemporary society. So perhaps, on a larger scale, it is the role of the performer to enable these interactions between worlds.

Bilitis Amoureuse was developed with these things in mind. The concept was inspired by Pierre Louÿs' collection of poems, Les Chansons de Bilitis (1894) and the way they were presented to audiences in the 19th century. When Louÿs first published these poems, he did not claim authorship, but rather asserted that he had found these songs written on the inner walls of a tomb belonging to a 6th c. BCE Grecian courtesan named Bilitis. And everyone believed him. It was soon discovered that Louÿs was, in fact, the author of the poems, but the character of Bilitis, and her sensuous and evocative poetry had already come to life, and fictional or not, the work was celebrated to great acclaim.

Louÿs would read his poems aloud and he also collaborated with actors, dancers and composers, such as Claude Debussy, to give performances of these poems in the salons that he would often frequent. The culmination of the poetry, the music and the dance were all inspired by artistic practices from 6th century BCE, however, the result was the birth of new works of art, new collaborations and new performance practices that embodied the cultural interests of the 19th century.

This whole scenario is intriguing and endearing to me. It makes me think on my own experiences with historical performance practice. How fascinated I am with past cultures and societies, and the music and arts they produced; how desperately I want to step back in time;

and how in my attempts to interact with, and at times, recreate the past, I always end up with something completely modern and new.

1 As a side note, I also realized that I judge the success of a performance based on how closely the final version did or did not resemble this clear and detailed vision I had in mind from the getgo.

2 I'm not sure what this means for my own evaluation - will I now judge the success of a performance based on the kinds of interactions that have been fostered? Or will I continue to be self-critical and hold my performance practices to the same standards?

With Bilitis Amoureuse, we have reached back to 1894 and examined this collaboration that Louÿs and his colleagues participated in, and while we are not trying to recreate it, we have used it as the model for our project. When I first planned this concert (five years ago!), I had originally imagined it set in a French style salon, using actors and dancers to create tableaux vivants while I sang Debussy's songs and the new music commissions. But when we started working on Bilitis Amoureuse, shortly after my third doctoral concert, I had already started shifting my focus to the creative process and so I challenged myself to step away from my specific vision of the outcome and allow the process to yield whatever it would.

In case you are unfamiliar with the premise for this project, five artists were commissioned to create new works of art using selections of their choice from Louÿs' Les Chansons de Bilitis. Three composers first set the text to music, a choreographer then interpreted the music and text into dance, and a visual artist has used the text, the music and the movement to create a work of art for the bodies of the performers. Tonight, you will see the text and the character come to life in all these ways: through music, movement, speech, song, painting.

I can't really describe how much I have learned about myself and the importance of collaboration throughout this process. Every artist brought a new level of understanding to the text and a new interpretation. Every artist had a very different impression of Bilitis, and yet somehow, we ended with something quite cohesive and distinct. Every artist also had a unique way of working and to participate in all these creative processes has opened up a world of possibility for my future work. I could not have imagined this project turning out the way it did, and had I stuck to my original plan and working methods, I don't know that I would have found it as rewarding.

This was a long and convoluted way to answer my third question: How does one innovate a performance practice? And how do we discover new ways of doing habitual things?

There is no definitive answer to this question, but for me, it started by closely examining my artistic instincts and what I wanted to and could accomplish as a performer, and it is carried out through interdisciplinary collaborative projects. I'm still not sure how to describe my work and how I work as I am still uncovering new tools and mining new experiences; but I can say that I certainly don't feel stuck. If anything, there are endless performance options before me, and it is a bit daunting trying to decide where to go next…

Thank you for being here tonight - it is an honour to share this performance with you all.

Thank you to my collaborators, Vilma, Hedi, Matt, Solmund, Aki, Kari, Johanna, Riina - without you, Bilitis would still be drifting somewhere in the recesses of my imagination. Debi

PS - I wanted to include my idea of storytelling from the program notes from my third concert, "The Winter Of Our Discontent":

To me, storytelling is the ability to envelop an audience in an imaginary world rich with characters, plots, and places, and that is defined by the way these elements interact and the order in which they do so (When I say imaginary, I don't necessarily mean something that does not, has not, or cannot exist. I simply mean existing in the imagination). It is the characters, places and plots that make up the story world, and it is their interactions and the timing of the interactions that make up the actual story. It is your responsibility –the responsibility of the audience - to allow your imaginations to run wild to bring these characters, plots, and places to life; it is our responsibility - the responsibility of the storytellers - to use the mediums at our disposal to aid you in creating these imaginary story worlds.

I believe that music easily lends itself to storytelling because of its innate ability to inspire the imagination. I believe that singers are especially apt to being storytellers because we work with text and most of those texts feature characters, places, and events that interact to form short stories. My goal is to explore the various ways I can use music and my instrument to create engaging and interactive story worlds and stories for my audience.

5. Program Notes for *The Cries Of Medea*
Format: Four online blog posts

Blog Post 1: My Endless Struggle With Program Notes
Date:

"What the hell are we supposed to do with program notes these days?
Am I supposed to keep talking about 'motifs'?
Seriously....motif?
Nobody cares about motifs!!"

- A dear musician-friend who shall remain anonymous

Hello World!

Thank you for checking in on Medea. Later this week I will start introducing the creative team and all the collaboration that has taken place to put this project in motion. But today, I will want to talk about my old nemesis….program notes.

Since beginning my doctoral studies, I have had a complicated relationship with my program notes. I've been trying (rather desperately) to find ways to understand them, to innovate

them, to incorporate them into the performance, to avoid them, to abolish them, all to varying degrees of success.

In most concerts I attend or create, the program notes are delivered to the audience at the entrance of the concert hall, just before the concert begins, and in some kind of booklet or printed format. They usually include a personal note to the audience from the performers or presenters, some pictures and biographical information about the creative team, an outline and order of the material that will be performed and a longer explanation of the material and its creators. In the case of vocal recitals or programs that use text, one will most likely find the text in its original language alongside a translated text.

This is what is familiar to me and if you are an avid concert-goer or performance-attender, it probably is, to some extent, familiar to you too.

But what looms large over every performance I create, are the questions:

How do these program notes affect the concert experience for the audience and the performers? Are they going to enhance it or distract from it? Or will they have no effect (in which case, why do we have them to begin with)?

What kind of content do I want to deliver in the program notes? Is this content integral to the performance or is it supplemental? If it is integral, then what kind of format should it be presented in? If it is supplemental, when should it be delivered so as not to disrupt the performance experience?

Theses questions and my ideas concerning program notes have been shaped by an interview (which will be published in my doctoral dissertation) with the sound-artist, composer and audio-visual performer, **Bora Yoon**. In our discussion, she talked about how every aspect of a performance, from the venue, to the seating configuration, to the program notes, to the material being presented, to the way the performers are dressed, to the instruments are all part of the performance context and all these aspects convey important information to the audience about the experience they are going to have. And most importantly how we, as artists, think about and shape these aspects of a performance will impact the ways in which an audience can engage with and experience the performance.

In general, I like receiving my program notes at concerts. I like to learn about the performers and the ideas in a show and when I am bored at intermission, I like to have something to read. But my struggle comes from creating these performances that don't really fit into what we might call a traditional format. And this is especially the case with Medea which is a four-episode performance that will take place, predominantly in the imagination of the audience members (I know. This sounds very elusive so I promise to explain more in later posts). I still want to deliver information to my audience about the creative team, the ideas and the development of the project but I can't really deliver an actual, printed program.

So. Here they are. The program notes in the form of an online blog (my fourth attempt at a new kind of program notes within the context of my doctoral studies). As the weeks progress

and we get closer to the release of the first episode of this performance project, I will continue releasing information about the project, the collaboration, the creative team and the concepts that have shaped this performance.

In the case of this performance, these online program notes are supplemental to the performance project and like the other aspects of this project, you, as an audience member, will have the choice to engage with them as much or as little as you like. For those who are interested in following the progress of this project, I hope these notes will help you to develop a deeper understanding of all the moving parts, voices and layers that have been woven together to create this telling of *Medea.*

In the meantime, if you have thoughts on program notes and how they shape your concert experience (as a performer or an audience), I would love to hear them! Share your comments here, or on the **Facebook page**!

Until next time,

Debi

Blog Post 2: The Evocativeness of Sound
Date:

Welcome to the first segment of the official "program notes". Again, these notes are supplemental to the performance experience and intended for those of you are interested in knowing more about the creative process and where all these strange ideas for the Medea project have come from. Feel free to engage as much or as little as you like, and as always, feel free to comment and ask questions.

One of the main questions that inspired me to embark on doctoral studies:

How do I innovate my performance practice?

Or:

How do I find new ways to engage with performance and performing?

Coming out of my masters degree, I felt that I had developed a very specific (and useful) arsenal of tools that taught me to engage with singing, classical music, and performing in a very particular way. And while I still use all these tools in my performing today, I was curious about expanding on this foundation and exploring new ways to engage with the different realms of my artistic domain.

There were certain aspects of what I had been taught that didn't 'fit' my personality, my body and voice, or my ideas of what performance is. This question was inspired by my interests in music, literature, theatre and performing and my desire to find many different

ways to perform that could embrace those interests as well as the capabilities of my body and my voice; that could honour and exploit my artistic instincts and creative impulses.

Medea is the fifth and final concert in a series of five. The five concerts were all designed to push my boundaries as a performer and to challenge myself to engage with music, sound, gesture, text, storytelling and singing in different ways. At this point in the study, *Medea* feels like the most extreme of these experiments, but when I think back on the previous concerts, each and every one of them has felt like this because the experience of creating and executing these projects, is entirely foreign and new. I take this to be a good sign: one that indicates that I have been pushed into the realm of uncertainty and risk taking, which, for better or for worse, always yields artistic growth.

The concept for *Medea* was inspired by the evocativeness of sound and the capacity of the imagination. I have always been fascinated with how effectively sound engages the imagination. How, for example, when you watch a scary movie scene, it isn't necessarily the visual information that builds the tension, but rather the way the music and sound is employed. The most classic and perhaps obvious example is the movie Jaws. In the scene "Get Out Of The Water" we see an ocean full of happy swimmers enjoying a typical day at the beach, but overtop of this happy scene, we hear the infamous Jaws theme song. And it's terrifying.

Take away the sound and the scene isn't nearly as pungent. But take away the visual information, and the sound track is still terrifying. I can't help but wonder if it would be even more frightening to hear that soundtrack and listen to someone simply narrate the events that are happening as opposed to seeing the movie clip with sound because then there would be nothing to bind the imagination - she would be free to conjure up the most terrifying version of the story.

When I was speaking about this with the journalist in our project, Petja Pelli, he quoted a teacher that said "radio is the best form of television", implying exactly this - that sound has unique ways to provoke the imagination.

Which made me ask: How can I use sound, singing and my musical vocabulary to provoke the imaginations of my listeners? And can I create a performance that mostly exists in their imaginations?

These questions became interesting to me because my previous concerts were incorporating more and more visual and gestural elements. I enjoy using my entire body as an instrument and incorporating gesture and visual information into my performances. These additions to my performing feel like a very natural way for me to create performance experiences for my audience that better express my creativity. However, in developing this final concert, I needed to remind myself, that diversifying my performance options and the ways in which I engage with and create performances, is integral to my research and my development. Also integral to this study is expanding the ways in which I think about and use my voice. Creating a performance almost entirely out of sound seemed conducive to fulfilling both of these objectives.

With those things in mind:

Medea is a four-episode performance that combines personal listening experiences with a live sound-installation and performance to depict the story of Medea and her husband, Jason as they face the prospect of divorce after seventeen years of marriage.
The audience is asked to engage with the episodes either on their own in a suggested space as a personal listening experience or live in a specific location. The personal listening experiences will be released online as weekly podcast episodes, and the live experience will take place in Black Box Theatre in Helsinki on October 11, 2017. The episodes are as follows:

Episode 1 (Podcast - Online): To be listened to at your home while doing the dishes or any other part of a daily routine; or in the car or on public transit on a familiar commute somewhere. You have just turned on your radio and tuned in to WGRK, Corinth's popular music radio station.

Episode 2 (Podcast - Online): To be listened to in a public place, such as a cafe, or restaurant. You are overhearing a conversation between two people beside you. They happen to be the infamous, Medea and the producer, Homer Holmes from WGRK radio. It seems like they are recording an interview.

Episode 3a (Sound Installation & Live Performance - Black Box Theatre, Musiikkitalo, Helsinki): To be listened to inside the bedroom of Alceste (the six year old son of Jason and Medea). You will experience this part of the story as if you are Alceste and you are overhearing parents arguing about their future, and yours.

Episode 3b (Podcast - Online for those who cannot attend the live performance): To be listened to in a bedroom as if you were hearing an argument unfold outside its walls.

Episode 4 (Podcast - Online): To be listened to in a private space such as a bedroom, or your own living room. You have just tuned back into your favourite radio station, which is broadcasting live from the public mourning vigil being held for Alceste, the son of Jason and Medea Argos.

I will leave you there for today and in the next installation of these program notes, I will discuss how we have developed the material for these episodes and the conventions we have adapted from Classical Greek Tragedy to create this performance experience.

Until then,

Debi

PS - Before there was the Jaws theme song, there was Tarquinio Merula's (1595 - 1665) "Hor ch'è tempo di dormire". Have a listen to L'Arpeggiata's version of this song and see where your imagination leads you...

Blog Post 3: On Singing & Musicking
Date:

cry utter intone shout speak scream talk express pronounce enunciate articulate converse
chat shriek yell gossip spout bellow bawl murmur sigh hush moan groan moan bemoan boast
blare whimper wail weep howl warble belt yelp squawk sob lament call exclaim screech roar
plea snivel bleat declare blurt trill chant croon squeal whisper mutter stutter sputter wheeze
mew whine coo eee aayy aaa ohh oooo feu feu ai ai io io moi moi ea ea omoi omoi

After creating the governing concepts for this project, I approached the sound artist, composer and performer, James Andean. I have been fascinated with James' improvisation performances, his use of objects as instruments and his electroacoustic compositions from the very beginning of this study because they have challenged and shaped the way I define music, singing, and musical performances.

I define a musical performance as a specific time and space wherein composers, audiences and performers collaborate to engage with sound in creative ways; I define music as the culmination of the collaborative actions that performers, composers and audiences partake in to create performances and the performances themselves; I define singing as the use of the voice to make musical sounds.

The use of the voice to make musical sounds is where the above list comes in. Since we were creating a story and a performance out of vocal sounds, the first step was to create a palette for James to work with. To do this, we recorded my own improvisations based on our list. Because of my interest and connection to historical repertoire, we also recorded excerpts of and improvisations on three 17th century baroque pieces. From this palette, James composed his *Medea* piece which will define the story and sound world for episode three of this project. In the live experience, my voice will improvise and interact with the world James has created to tell this particular part of this story.

Moving away from working with traditional notation and the twelve tones I am so accustomed to has challenged me to expand my understanding of what singing is and what singing can be. In the context of this project and under the definition above, can a yell, can a whimper, can a wheeze, can a cry, be considered singing?

In my third doctoral concert, *The Winter Of Our Discontent*, I worked with the Finnish guitarist, Otto Tolonen to create new depictions of Shakespearean characters. To do this, we created a performance that combines Shakespearean monologues, with renaissance lute songs and the contemporary guitar solos of Hans Werner Henze. In our depiction of Lady Macbeth, I improvise various different vocal sounds - I speak, I call, I yell, I weep, I laugh, I hush, I sing, I hum - over Henze's *Mad Lady Macbeth*. My improvisations are intended to become a part of the musical landscape that Otto is creating with the guitar, all of which aim at producing a more poignant depiction of Lady Macbeth's madness. In this context, where the

vocal sounds become a part of the musical landscape, how should I describe my voice - is this part of my singing voice?

After Henze's *Mad Lady Macbeth*, I perform John Dowland's lute song, *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. This is more easily recognized as singing, but within the song, I gasp during the introduction, I translate some of the notation into moans, I yell some of the text, I whisper the last word. In the context of this song, are my gasps, moans, whispers, yells, also part of the singing? They, too, are musical gestures that I create with my voice; are they part of my singing? Is this the same as the vocal sounds used in Henze's *Mad Lady Macbeth*?

In my original proposal to apply for doctoral studies, I spoke of the struggles I was having as a singer within the traditions of western art music and historical performance practice. I wanted to use this study to expand my understanding of what it can mean to be a singer within these traditions and to explore new kinds of performing and performances. I wrote that I wanted to step away from being a classical singer and towards being a storyteller.

Now, at the end of my study, I realize that this focus on storytelling is what has allowed me to move beyond the imaginary boundaries I previously struggled up against. But I am not a storyteller. I am, I always have been, I always will be, a singer, a musician who uses her voice to perform, to express musical gestures, to connect with composers and audiences, to bring characters, worlds, stories, histories, to life. Whether it is a lute song recital, a dramatic Shakespearean show, or a fully improvised vocal performance, it is all a part of my singing and my performance practice in Western Art Music.

You are warmly invited to join James and I for Medea on October 11, 2017 at 19.00 in the Black Box Theatre at Musiikkitalo (Helsinki). After the performance, I encourage you to consider the questions I have posed above - My answers to them all are: yes.

Yes, it is all singing. It is all a part of my singing, my musicking, my performing. This might be different from your singing, or your performing or your experiences of performing and singing, but isn't that the beauty of all art? That we can all have unique voices and yet still speak and connect to one another.

Blog Post 4: Reimagining History & Tradition
Date:

In my previous program note post, I discussed my goals of innovating my abilities and output as a performer within the world of Classical music. After my first two doctoral concerts, I discovered that the easiest ways for me to expand my skills, knowledge and ways of performing and creating performances, were to expose myself to new artistic experiences, such as performances, art exhibitions, and workshops I wouldn't normally choose to attend; and to collaborate on projects with artists that specialised in fields that were different from my own (both inside and outside of the classical music world).

I went through a period of time where I attended everything from infinity room art-installations to audience controlled moveable theatre performances, to dance and alternative

movement workshops, to freely improvised performances (as both performer and audience), to formal script writing classes, to seminars on Greek mythology, to whiskey tasting events, to fashion shows, etc. etc. etc. And through these experiences, I met many of my current collaborators and I developed a lot of the ideas and skills that are present in my performance projects now.

Before I dive into specifics, I should tell you that *Medea* was never a part of my original concert plan. The ideas for this project developed out of these new experiences and collaborations I was engaging with and it also developed out of my ever-during passion and interest for history and historical performance practices. I was drawn to this project for the same reason I was drawn to European renaissance and baroque vocal music: I love to look back at lost worlds and reimagine them for contemporary audiences. I love to stand with one foot in the past and one in the present and weave together performances that span the eras. I love to invite audiences to creatively rewrite history with me.

Approaching and engaging with Ancient Greek mythology and performance traditions are particularly interesting to me because of my work in historically informed vocal performance from the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The artists I am most drawn to from this time were looking to the Ancient Greek philosophers, poets and performers in hopes of returning to their traditions. We all fully know that we cannot, no matter how hard we look, return to 'old ways of doing'; But in looking back and engaging with historical traditions, we are afforded a very unique opportunity to intersect past voices with our own and those of our contemporaries. And this intersection, this dialogue between past and present, can yield new ways of doing. This is how opera was born, how Shakespearean Tragedy was formed, how the art of rhetoric developed.

In looking back at Greek mythology and Ancient Greek Tragedy, I pictured myself in a similar place as those composers and poets I so admire from the 17th century: searching for new ways of doing by engaging with the traditions that have come before me.

I don't know that a lot of these conventions will be recognised in the final iteration of this project, but in case you are curious, here are some of the "rules" and conventions that have informed the creative development and artistic choices of the Medea project:

Unity of time and space - The four episodes of this story and the events that each episode depict will be released and occur in real time. Each episode will take place in a single location (space), however the location will change from episode to episode.

The use of violence - While violence is implied in the third episode of this project, it will not be depicted on stage. It will be implied with sound and gesture.

The use of the Chorus - There is only a true chorus used in the final episode of this performance but the concept of using outsider voices to comment on the main action of the story, is a running theme throughout the entire series. The radio commentators, the journalist, the singers in the temple of tears, the singing in the sound-installation are all 'voices' that offer outside commentary on what is happening in each episode of the performance.

The use of singing and vocal sounds - While we can't really know how Greek tragedy was performed or the kind of singing or vocal delivery used in the performances, there is at least agreement on the fact that there were a lot of musical elements in the performances, especially with regards to singing (or heightened vocal delivery). Not all episodes will feature singing, but almost all the episodes will be constructed entirely out of vocal sounds (with some small exceptions such as the radio songs played in the first episode, and a few sound effects in the episodes 1 & 2).

The text comes first - Like the Ancient Greeks, there was a belief in the 17th century that music was a form of poetry. When people spoke of music, they almost always meant music with text because the two were inextricably bound. This made music subservient to the text, or secondary to the text, which is also the case in the Medea project. All of the texts were created first and the world of sound that accompanies it, was born in reaction to the text and in hopes of elevating the text and exploiting new ways to understand and experience the text.

That being said, it is important for me to note that the text was all developed in connection to how the voice, and it's many capacities, might deliver those texts, or heighten or depict or add depth to the meaning of the text.

Rhetorical gestures - You can't really study renaissance and baroque music without studying rhetoric and the art of rhetoric. How we apply it to renaissance and baroque music, stems from the culture of public speaking in Ancient Greece. In the 17th century, not only was the text that composers set laden with rhetorical devices, but the music was as well. This combination of textual and musical rhetoric was all aimed at convincing and persuading the affects of the audience. In the live improvisations, as well as in the scripted texts and pre-composed materials, we have adapted and employed the instruments of rhetoric to try and persuade the emotions and the experience of our listeners.

Vocal Affect - Again, we can't really know how singers, performers, orators, actors sounded in Ancient Greek theatre or 17th century opera. But we can develop ideas based on the artistic material that survives from those times, as well as the primary sources that describe and detail performances and performance techniques, and the incredible amount of research that has been conducted on historical performance practices. In engaging with these materials and developing our ideas, we end up producing something entirely contemporary and unique to our own place and practice in history.

The basic, founding idea that I have developed over the course of this study, is that the voice is something that we, as humans, can easily relate to and understand in an intimate and personal way. In knowing this, we can use the voice to communicate very complex emotions, thoughts, ideas, narratives, that can be precise and detailed, or nebulous and abstract. We can combine the voice with language to shape our communication or when words fail us, we are still capable of shaping communication with the raw and guttural sounds the voice; we can combine the breath and with the resonating body to still depict complex emotion and story.

When I think of my voice, I immediately think of classical style singing and the way I have studied historical vocal practices. But in creating this project and in re-imagining these practices, I realized (whether or not this is true) that in their experiments, the 17th century opera composers were doing what I am doing now: trying to uncover new ways to use the voice to tell a story, to communicate meaning, to connect and persuade the affects of an audience.

In this project, you will hear vocal sounds and affects and musical gestures that are taken directly from 17th century compositions and our contemporary ideas of 17th century vocal practices. But you will also experience the new ways in which I think about the voice:

> - As a multifaceted instrument that creates aural and physical sensations within our own bodies and the bodies of others through the use of breath and our own personal physiology.

> - As something most humans can connect to and understand through hearing, memory and / or physical sensation.

> - As the full gamut of sound that can be produced using my breath, my body, my creativity, my languages.

I will leave you here for today and perhaps with a task that James Andean (who I will talk about in the next post) and I did when we began talking about the voice: write a list of every "sound" you can make with your voice and then go through that list and try out every sound - don't think too hard about it, just go for it.