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## Voiceless Songs: Maria Malibran as Composer

Not long after his death in 1848, a claim began to circulate that Gaetano Donizetti's prodigious success in both serious and comic opera derived from a neurological idiosyncrasy. As biographer Filippo Cicconetti related, the composer had been ambidextrous, in a unique sense. Examining the failing composer, doctors noticed that he had »two founts of inspiration, one on the left side, which gave forth comic music, and the other on the right, from which sprung the serious music. When he sat down to compose it worked like a valve, which opened on one side or the other depending on the genre of the opera.«<sup>1</sup> This is just the most whimsical of the innumerable anecdotes that highlight the speed with which the Italian composers of the era worked. Elsewhere Donizetti is described as tossing off melodies in quarter-hours in coffee houses, and Rossini's facility was supposedly such that it was easier for him to rewrite a page from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* than to retrieve a page of music that had blown out of his hands.<sup>2</sup> These indications of haste were compounded by accusations of opportunistic recycling of musical material. With Italian opera early in the nineteenth century still more securely defined as »act« than as »text,« the question of who deserved to be called an »author« was an important topic of debate in journalistic discourse, broached implicitly whenever vignettes of speed or self-borrowing were retailed in the press.

In light of the disapproval that informs such anecdotes, contemporary accounts of the composerly activities of mezzo-soprano Maria Malibran make surprising reading. In memoirs and early biographies, Malibran is celebrated for just the kind of speed and distraction that raised critical eyebrows when

1 Filippo Cicconetti, *Vita di Gaetano Donizetti*, Rome 1864, p. 178.

2 Donizetti's biographer Cicconetti relates that »often fearing that the ideas that came to mind during his walks through the city and during his pleasant conversations would flee from his memory before he returned home, [Donizetti] would enter some restaurant and, taking up a piece of paper, would note his ideas with lightning speed«. Ibidem, pp. 69–70. The Rossini anecdote was first recounted in Geltrude Giorgi Righetti, *Cenni di una donna già cantante sopra di maestro Rossini*, Bologna 1823, and reprinted in Luigi Rognoni, *Rossini*, Parma 1956 (Biblioteca di Cultura Musicale 6), pp. 304–305. Philip Gossett discusses these tropes of speed and carelessness in his »Gioachino Rossini and the Conventions of Composition,« in: *Acta Musicologica* 42/No. 1–2 (1970), pp. 48–58, here: pp. 49–50.

suspected in Rossini or Donizetti. As the Comtesse de Merlin recounts in her 1838 memoir of the singer, Malibran would often pass the time during rehearsals either drawing sketches and caricatures or jotting down songs. Merlin claims that Malibran could compose even amid the din of orchestral warm-ups and carpenters hammering away at the set: »I have seen her with a sheet of music paper and a pencil, busily noting down, without labor or study, airs worthy of a first-rate composer.«<sup>3</sup> Merlin is, in fact, one of the very few biographers who comment at all on Malibran's activities as a composer: most accounts of her career focus exclusively on Malibran's triumphs on the opera stage, her intense personality, and her colorful behavior, both on- and off-stage.<sup>4</sup> Merlin mentions Malibran's work as a composer several times, but the compositions are always invoked in contexts that emphasize lightness, effortlessness, conviviality, entertainment, and sociability. Expanding on her boast about Maria's speed, Merlin describes an encounter in Florence at which Malibran tossed off a new »romance« in a mere quarter of an hour for the Marquis de Louvois, to make up for having forgotten her promise to write a new piece for him.<sup>5</sup> In other contexts composition is equated with improvisation, or with caricature or social games such as charades.<sup>6</sup>

- 3 Countess Maria Mercedes de Merlin [Maria de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo Merlin], *Memoirs of Madame Malibran / by the Comtesse de Merlin and other intimate friends / with a / selection from her correspondence / and notices of the / progress of the musical drama / in England*, Vol. 1, London 1840, p. 219. Maria de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo (1789–1852) born in Havana to an aristocratic family, married the French General Christophe Antoine Merlin in 1809. Once settled in Paris, the Countess studied voice with Malibran's father Manuel Garcia, established a successful literary salon, and became a fixture in Balzac's salon. In addition to her memoirs of Malibran, she published three memoirs and a series of travel narratives, although a good deal of her writing may actually have been written by Prosper Merimée. On Merlin's writings and the charges of plagiarism, see Adriana Mendez Rodenas, *Gender and Nationalism in Colonial Cuba. The Travels of Santa Cruz y Montalvo*, Nashville and London 1998; on the connection to Balzac, see Michael Lucey, *The Misfit of the Family. Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality*, Durham/N.C. 2003.
- 4 See, for example, April FitzLyon, *Maria Malibran. Diva of the Romantic Age*, London 1987; Patrick Barbier, *La Malibran. Reine de l'opéra romantique*, Paris 2005; and Howard Bushnell, *Maria Malibran. A Biography of the Singer*, University Park/Pennsylvania, 1979.
- 5 Merlin, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran* (note 3), pp. 218–219. The *romance* must have been *Les Noces d'un Marin*, which was published with a dedication to Louvois.
- 6 Confronted in Venice with a gondolier who arrived under her window in the middle of the night to sing an unflattering song about her private conduct, Maria improvised a reply on the spot; see Merlin, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran* (note 3), p. 219. Merlin also reports that Malibran »possessed a great talent for caricaturing; but she never exercised

By all accounts Malibran had a voracious, almost desperate, appetite for parties, and her friends often remark on her talents for theatricals, comic impressions, and for improvising jokes and riddles. The pianist Ignaz Moscheles described one such gathering in his diary for 1836:

»She came at three o'clock; with her were Thalberg, Benedict, and Klingemann. We dined early, and immediately afterward Malibran sat down at the piano and «sang for the children', as she used to call it, the Rataplan and some of her father's Spanish songs. For want of a guitar accompaniment she would, while playing, mark the rhythm now and then on the board at the back of the keys. After singing with exquisite grace and charm a number of French and Italian romances of her own composition, she was relieved at the piano by Thalberg, who performed all manner of tricks on the instrument, snapping his fingers as an obbligator to Viennese songs and waltzes. I played afterwards with reversed hands, and with my fists, and none laughed louder than Malibran.«<sup>7</sup>

Later that evening, after a group outing to the Zoological Garden, Malibran entertained the company further with impressions of singers, conductors, and patrons, before settling down to sing some Lieder and then moving on to *Don Giovanni*, for which she played and sang all the parts herself. These vignettes are usually trotted out to emphasize Malibran's tendency to excess, her compulsion to over-exert herself and burn the candle at both ends – qualities that are treated as helping to explain her early death, with which critics and biographers were obsessed. But the same stories could be read as part of a deliberate strategy to humanize the diva and to deflate the significance of her compositions, to reduce her music to just another form of entertainment or diversion.

In addition to the insistence that Malibran's music arose from sudden inspiration rather than hard work, the Comtesse de Merlin takes pains to assert that the singer's music was intended exclusively for personal or philanthropic use, rather than for publication or financial gain. Blotting out Malibran's impressive publication record – which comprised more than forty songs, issued in multiple editions and transcriptions across four countries during her lifetime – Merlin insists that »she exercised [this talent] only for amusement, giving to her friends,

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this talent in a way to wound the feelings of others. Her sketches were incomparably droll, but not ill-natured. Her great amusement was to sketch the profiles of her operatic colleagues during the time of a performance, and this generally when she was waiting between the side-scenes to come on. She frequently took caricature likenesses of all the performers in the green room, and showed them to the parties themselves, who, knowing that no malice was intended, would be heartily amused«. Ibidem, p. 211.

7 Charlotte Moscheles, *Life of Moscheles, with Selections from his Diaries and Correspondence, in two volumes*, Vol. 2, London 1873, pp. 7–8.

or to charities, the pieces she composed», and drives the point home with a sentimental anecdote. Malibran once approached an impoverished but proud friend claiming that she had composed six airs without text, asking if the woman's son, a poet, might consider supplying the words, so that they could divide the profits when the songs were published.<sup>8</sup> As Merlin tells the story, Malibran never did publish the songs, but nevertheless bestowed six hundred francs on the woman, allowing her to believe they were profit from the publication. It is easy to imagine that the picture Merlin paints was shaped partly by contemporary unease about a woman making money or damaging her reputation by putting herself into the marketplace, concerns that stifled the desires of both Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann to disseminate their music in print. But the broad dissemination of Malibran's songs in published form makes the dénouement of Merlin's tale seem to stretch credulity beyond the breaking point.

On one level it is no surprise if Malibran's public image, and the reception of her compositions, were subject to the familiar anxieties and constraints that attended creative women in the early nineteenth century. Yet we might expect something different of the singer who led a fairly unconventional personal life (including an annulled marriage and a common-law relationship with Charles de Bériot) and whose enormous fame as a performer might seem to neutralize any questions of exposure or display raised by the comparatively modest step of publishing her songs. But it is not only because Malibran lived her entire career in the public eye that the conventional historiographies of gender and genius in the nineteenth century do not quite fit. Her case is complicated also by the type of music she wrote, which was conceived – and received – primarily within the not-quite-public yet not-quite-private sphere of the salon.

The music Malibran wrote down bears little resemblance to what we might call her true authorial signature, residing in the music she performed on stage, and especially in her distinctive interpretative twists and embellishments. With the exception of a few operatic arias for her own performance, Malibran composed entirely in the genres of solo and chamber vocal music. Over the last ten years of her life she published four song collections, along with many individual songs, many of which appeared in separate editions in London, Naples, Milan, Leipzig, and Paris (see Table 1 for an overview of her published music). Generically, these songs correspond neatly with the familiar categories of Parisian salon music – melancholy barcarolles, nocturnes for two similar voices, comic

8 Merlin, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran* (note 3), pp. 105–106. On the importance of charity and philanthropy in the image-making of nineteenth-century female singers, see Hilary Poriss, »Prima Donnas and the Performance of Altruism,« in: *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, Oxford 2012.

chansonnettes, and such – and the vocal demands are modest, within the reach of competent amateurs.<sup>9</sup> The dedications of individual songs further underline their destination for the salon, with many inscribed to the hostesses of the leading Parisian musical salons. *La tarantelle* is dedicated to the Countess Merlin, while the two-voice »romance« *Les Refrains* is offered to Madame Orfila, another prominent *salonnière* and the wife of a prominent Parisian doctor and toxicologist, while *Il mattino* is dedicated to the Countess Giulia Samoyloff, who was the patroness and lover of Giovanni Pacini. A smaller number of songs are dedicated to fellow musicians (Gioachino Rossini, tenor Adolphe Nourrit, bass Luigi Lablache), and a handful of the songs for »deux voix égales« are inscribed to Malibran's close friend the Comtesse de la Sparre, herself a professional singer, suggesting that the two may have sung them together.<sup>10</sup>

*Matinées musicales: album lyrique* (Paris: Troupenas, c.1828, Naples: Girard, 1828)

song, genre	Poet	dedicatee
1. Le beau page, ballade	Loroux de Ronsière	
2. Il ritrovo, barcarola a due voci uguali		
3. Il gondoliere, barcarola a due voci uguali	Marcelline Desbordes-Valmore	
4. Rataplan, chansonette	adapted from »Tambour de Ville,« by Robert-de-Rigoulène <sup>11</sup>	Comtesse de la Sparre
5. La Bayadère: romance	Ambroise Bétourné	Comtesse de la Sparre
6. No chiù lo guarracino (nuova tarantella napoletana)		
7. Il barcajuolo, barcarola a due voci		
8. Il follettino, barcarola a due voci		
9. Chant caractéristique des matelôts anglais («Enfants, ramez«)	[unknown]	Gioachino Rossini
10. Le Mènestrel: romance	Ambroise Bétourné	
11. La voix qui dit: je t'aime, romance	Sylvain Blet	
12. Les refrains, romance	Ambroise Bétourné	

9 On the topoi and archetypal genres of Parisian salon music in the 1830s, see Mary Ann Smart »Parlor Games. Italian Music and Italian Politics in the Parisian Salon,« in: *19th-Century Music* 34/No. 1 (2011), pp. 39–60.

10 The Comtesse de la Sparre was born Mademoiselle Naldi, daughter of a prominent Parisian singer. When Maria's marriage to businessman Eugene Malibran, ended, the Comtesse de la Sparre took her into her own home and became her chaperone.

11 Poem printed in *Le Chansonnier des grâces pour 1831*, Paris: F. Louis.

*Album lyrique, composés de quatorze chansonnettes, romances et nocturnes mis en musique avec l'accompagnement de piano e dédié au Général Lafayette par Madame Malibran*<sup>12</sup> (Paris: Troupenas, 1833; Naples: Girard, 1833)

<i>Song</i>	<i>poet</i>	<i>dedicatee</i>
1. Le Réveil d'un beau jour, chansonnette	Ambroise Bétourné	General Lafayette
2. La voix qui dit: je t'aime, romance	Sylvain Blet	Madame la Duchesse d'Allupin
3. Le village, chansonnette	M. Zacharie fils	Mme. Lagrange
4. La tarentelle › chansonnette	Ambroise Bétourné	Comtesse Merlin
5. Les refrains, romance	Ambroise Bétourné	Mme. Orfila
6. Rataplan, chansonnette	[unknown]	Comtesse de la Sparre
7. La Bayadère, chansonnette	Ambroise Bétourné	Comtesse de la Sparre
8. La résignation, romance	Ambroise Bétourné	Comtesse de la Redorte
9. Le Ménestrel, romance	Alexandre Duponchel	Baronne de Rothschild
10. Enfants, ramez!, chant caractéristique des matelôts anglais 10a. Row, boys!	[unknown]	Rossini
11. Le Batelier, nocturne à deux voix égales	[unknown]	Comtesse de la Sparre
12. Le Rendez-vous, nocturne à deux voix égales	[unknown]	Comtesse de la Sparre
13. Belle, viens à moi, nocturne à deux voix égales	Marceline Desbordes-Valmore	Madame Naldi
14. Le lutin, nocturne à deux voix égales	Marie-Emmanuel-Guillaume-Marguerite Theaulon	Comtesse de la Sparre

*Les sept romances françaises* (Naples: Girard, 182?)

La fiancée du brigand	Ambroise Bétourné	Sophie Bertin de Veaux
Le message	Emile Deschamps	Virginie Cottinet
Le retour de la tyrolienne	M. Loraux de Ronsière	
Hymne des matelôts	[unknown]	Clotilde Troupenas
Au bord de la mer	[unknown]	Paul Perignon
Le montagnard	Ambroise Bétourné	Daniel-François-Esprit Auber
Prière à la Madone	Marquis de Louvois	Sophie Boutellier

<sup>12</sup> Re-issued as part of *Album lyrique and Dernières Pensées*, New York 1984. Also published with guitar accompaniment, with fourteen lithographs.

*Dernières pensées, album lyrique faisant suite aux Matinées musicales* (Troupenas, Girard, 1837)<sup>13</sup> Published posthumously, bringing together the contents of the *Sept Romances francaises* and the *Trois Ariettes*.

La fiancée du brigand, ballade	Ambroise Bétourné	Sophie Bertin de Veaux
Le message, romance	Emile Deschamps	Virginie Cottinet
Prière à la Madone, romance	Marquis de Louvois	Sophie Boutellier
Hymne des matelôts	[unknown]	Clotilde Troupenas
Les noces du marin, chanson	Ambroise Bétourné	Marquis de Louvois
Au bord de la mer	Emile Deschamps	Baron Paul Perignon
Adieu à Laure	Mestastasio, trans.	Rossini
Addio a Nice, canzonetta	Deschamps	
Le montagnard, tyrolienne	Ambroise Bétourné	Daniel-François-Esprit Auber
Les brigands, ballade	F. Géraldi	Adolphe Nourrit
La morte	Antonio Benelli	Lablache
Le Moribond		

#### Individual Songs, not included in collections

<i>Title</i>	<i>poet</i>	<i>publisher, date</i>
Tyrolienne («Adieu, douce pensée), à deux voix	Marceline Desbordes-Valmore	Girard, c. 1832
Le Prisonnier	Pierre-Jean Béranger	Pacini, n.d.
Les Adieux d'un brave (Ecoissais)	Zacharie	Garcia, c. 1820
La fête du village	Zacharie	Garcia, c. 1820
Prendi: per me sei libero; substitute aria for <i>L'elisir d'amore</i>	Felice Romani	Milan: Ricordi 1837; first ed. attributed to Charles de Bériot)

**Table 1** Maria Malibran's published compositions

This association with salon performance brings with it specific assumptions about authorship and the status of the work that have more to do with function than with gender. Although most of the music heard in salons was composed by men, the salon was a feminine space. All salon music is gendered feminine, in the sense that it has no more than a passing acquaintance with genius, and is instead bound and shaped by mundane factors like function, performance setting, the identity of the performers, and taste. Salon music was confined within narrow social and expressive boundaries – presented as just one element in a constellation that might include, on a single evening, poetic recitation, charades and riddles, tableaux vivants or amateur theatricals, and

<sup>13</sup> Also published posthumously with texts in English, by Mori and Lavenue.



conversation. Within such a mosaic of sociability and convention, authorship devolves into groupthink – into music that is more a barometer of collective taste than expression of individual style.

Far from being marginalized as »trivial« or »light,« as was once the case, such music has become central to musicological investigations that focus on understanding how music functioned as an element of social and political discourse, and on how audiences listened and processed musical style.<sup>14</sup> Valuable as this new direction is, we perhaps have not yet taken account of its implications for gender studies. In the context of the occasional, anonymous, and convention-driven world of salon performance, songs by Malibran become almost indistinguishable from songs by Louis Niedermeyer, or Henri Romagnesi, or Vincenzo Bellini. Do gender and authorship dissolve completely as heuristic concepts when we focus on this kind of generic, social music? In an interpretive sphere in which the idea of authorship yields to an event-based, performative and collective notion of expression, what role remains for specifically female experience and creativity?

One answer is suggested by Jeffrey Kallberg, who has theorized the piano nocturne as a genre that was addressed to a specifically feminine audience, and whose content and musical gestures reference dramatic scenes in which a male lover courts a beloved woman with song.<sup>15</sup> Kallberg focuses on a single genre, and his methodological goals are to destabilize musical autonomy and to show how musical details acquire new relevance when viewed through a lens of reception and social meaning. In what follows I want to explore what happens if we approach a broader array of genres from this angle, thinking not just about the demonstrably feminine associations of the nocturne but about the implicit feminization of the salon space and the music written for it. Kallberg's understanding of genre as a social category rather than a formal one is a crucial starting point, as is his observation that genre functions as a »communicative concept, shared by composers and listeners alike«<sup>16</sup>. I want

14 Recent studies include Thomas Christensen, »Four-Hand Piano Transcriptions and Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Musical Reception«, in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52/No. 2 (1999), pp. 255–298; Jennifer Ronyak, »'Serious Play.' Performance, and the Lied: The Stägemann *Schöne Müllerin* Revisited,« *19th-Century Music* 34/No. 2 (2010), pp. 141–167; Dana Gooley, »Liszt, Thalberg, and the Parisian Publics,« in: *The Virtuoso Liszt*, Dana Gooley, Cambridge 2004, pp. 18–77; and Peter J. Rabinowitz, »With Our Own Dominant Passions: Gottschalk, Gender, and the Power of Listening«, in: *19th-Century Music* 16/No. 3 (1993), pp. 242–252.

15 Jeffrey Kallberg, »The Harmony of the Tea Table. Genre and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne,« in: *Representations* 39 (1992), pp. 102–133.

16 Ibidem, p. 103.



to ask what social and expressive messages are communicated by these genres of salon song, and especially to probe the ways these songs mean differently from the autonomous music to which musicologists still devote greater attention. As we shall see, one key difference lies in their approach to subjectivity – in the ways they constitute the speaking or singing subject as a fictional author.

The music Malibran composed both was and was not intended for herself to perform, was and was not intended to showcase her own voice. She did sing much of this music herself, but never in the big public settings of opera house or concert hall. It was, instead, destined to be heard often late at night, amid noise and gossip. Nor do these songs have anything musically in common with the operatic music on which Malibran's fame was built. As described by Henri Romagnesi in his 1846 treatise »L'Art de chanter les Romances, les Chansonnettes, et les Nocturnes...«, this music called for a different voice altogether: not the »strong and rebellious« vocalization of opera, but a voice that is »more modest and more accommodated to the majority of amateurs«.<sup>17</sup> Romagnesi also observes that intensive study is not only unnecessary for salon music, but may even be harmful, damaging the larynx of a delicate voice. Finally, Romagnesi specifically cautions against too much overt emotion or expression, which would be suitable only in the theater. Although the salon singer should evidence a strong and sincere emotional connection with the music s/he sings, the confrontational address and dramatic gestures of an actor in the theater would be in bad taste in the more intimate setting of the salon.

One typical example of the style is Malibran's 1828 »romance« *Le Prisonnier*, with words by Pierre-Jean Béranger. Beginning as a straightforward barcarolle, the song could be another of the many characteristic songs, colorful sketches of picturesque regions or pastoral scenes, that filled contemporary song collections. Béranger's poetry was originally penned as a scene for an operetta (Amadée de Beauplan's *La Balançoire*), and thus contains more narrative content and dramatic tension than the average barcarolle, qualities that are emphasized by Malibran's music.<sup>18</sup> A prisoner closed into a cell

17 A. [Antoine Michel, dit Henri] Romagnesi, *L'art de chanter les Romances, les Chansonnettes, et les Nocturnes et généralement toute la musique du salon*, Paris 1846, pp. 14–15.

18 See Patricia Adkins Chiti (Ed.), *Songs and Duets of Garcia, Malibran, and Viardot. Rediscovered Songs by Legendary Singers*, Van Nuys 1997, p. 45. Malibran did not set the first quatrain of Béranger's text, which reads: »Thus sings, through the bars, a captive, who every day sees a most beautiful girl sail by on the waters that bathe the tower.« She also omitted his final stanza in which the prisoner's hope revives that he may still be rescued tomorrow.

gleans knowledge of the outside world only through the overheard songs of a girl who passes each day in a boat, and he imagines that she will become his savior, his path to freedom. In its original incarnation, Béranger's text began with a quatrain that set the scene, a narrator intoning: »Thus sings, through the bars, a captive, who every day sees a most beautiful girl sail by on the waters that bathe the tower.« But Malibran's song begins *in medias res*, with the prisoner's invocation of the girl and her sailing song, sung by two sopranos:

Reine des flots,  
sur ta barque rapide,  
vogue en chantant,  
au bruit des longs échos.  
Les vents sont doux  
L'onde est calme et limpide.  
Le ciel sourit:  
vogue, vogue, vogue,  
reine des flots.

(Queen of the tides, on your quick boat, row and sing with the sound of the distant echos. The winds are gentle, the waves are calm and limpid. The sky smiles: row, row, row, queen of the tides.)

This refrain alternates with three stanzas sung by the lead soprano alone, expressing the prisoner's yearning for freedom. In the first stanza he equates the pleasure of the hearing the girl's voice with the hope of liberty; in the second he imagines that the gondoliera will actually set him free; and in the third he gives up hope («Tu passes, tu fuis, et je meurs«).

Moi, captif, à la fleur de l'âge,  
Dans ce vieux fort inhabité  
J'attends chaque jour ton passage  
Comme j'attend la liberté.

De quel espoir mon coeur s'ennivre!  
Tu veux m'arracher de ce fort.  
Libre par toi, je vais te suivre:  
Le bonheur est sur l'autre bord.

Tu t'arrêtes et ma souffrance  
 Semble mouiller tes yeux des pleurs.  
 Hélas! semblable à l'espérance,  
 Tu passes, tu fuis, et je meurs.

(I, captive, in the flower of the my youth, in this old fortress... every day I await your passage, just as I await freedom. What hope seizes my heart! You wish to rescue me from this fortress. Free by your hand, I will follow you: happiness lies on the opposite shore. You pause, and my suffering seems to soak your eyes with tears. Alas! like hope itself, you pass, you disappear, and I die.)

By leaving out Béranger's explanatory prelude, Malibran renders the song less dramatic and less specific, and the fluidity of its persona is intensified by the intertwining of the paired voices in the refrain. The two singers – together perhaps representing the voice of the boatwoman, as replayed in the prisoner's mind – either call to each other, echoing across space, or sing in close harmonies in the lilting compound-meter refrain (see Example 1). Effects like the luxuriant sustained dissonance of the simultaneous G and A in the voices on the word »échos« (m. 11) and the sequence of 3rds and 6ths beginning at »le ciel sourit« (mm. 16–22) capitalize on the timbral possibilities of the paired-soprano combination. The solo verses, in duple meter and the tonic minor, are more down to earth, musically and poetically. In a series of rhythmically chunky, resolutely stepwise phrases, the prisoner speaks in the first person, articulating the usual dreams and dashed hopes of the Romantic subject.

The play of subjectivity and impersonation in this »romance« goes beyond the usual limits of salon performance. Duets were common, of course, combining all manner of voices; but they usually cast the voices either as undifferentiated, *not* as characters at all, or as engaged in a flirtatious dialogue appropriate to the voice types employed. An obvious model for the duet is the »nocturne«, a sub-genre of »romance« that was always composed for two like voices.<sup>19</sup> One close analogue is

19 Romagnesi, *L'Art de chanter les Romances* (note 17). Romagnesi himself composed many nocturnes for two sopranos, as did his Parisian contemporaries Félice Blangini and Auguste Panséron. In a recent study that examines the vocal nocturne as a model for Chopin's nocturnes, James Parakilas characterizes the two-voice nocturne as a genre that can adopt any metrical topos but that is often set as a barcarolle, and as »not a genre that entirely shunned the pleasures of operatic singing«. See Parakilas, »Nuit plus belle qu'un beau jour'. Poetry, Song, and the Voice in the Piano Nocturne,« in: *The Age of Chopin. Interdisciplinary Inquiries*, ed. by Halina Goldberg, Bloomington 2004, pp. 203–223, here: p. 218.

**Allegretto**

Rei-ne des flots, sur ta bar - que - ra -

Rei-ne des flots, sur ta bar - que - ra -

pi - de, vo-gue en chan-tant,

pi - de, vo-gue en chan-tant, au bruit des

longs é - chos. Les vents sont doux, l'on-de est cal - me et lim -

longs é - chos. Les vent sont doux, l'on-de est cal - me et lim -

Rossini's song *La pesca*, from his 1835 *Soirées musicales*, set to a text by Metastasio.<sup>20</sup> But the timbres in the refrains of *Le Prisonnier* also recall the blend of voices

<sup>20</sup> Malibran herself composed at least two other similar songs, with watery themes, for two like voices: *Le Batelier* (poet unknown) and *Belle, viens à moi* (to poetry by Marce-

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pi - de, le ciel sou - rit, le ciel sou-rit: vo - gue, vo - gue,

pi - de, le ciel sou - rit, le ciel sou-rit: vo - gue, vo - gue,

vo - gue, rei-ne des flots, vo - gue, vo - gue, vo - gue,

vo - gue, rei-ne des flots, vo - gue, vo - gue, vo - gue,

rei-ne des flots. Vo - gue, rei-ne des flots, vo - gue, rei-ne des flots.

rei-ne des flots. Vo - gue, rei-ne des flots, vo - gue, rei-ne des flots.

**Example 11** Maria Malibran, *Au bord de la mer*, from *30 Day Songs and Duet* by Robert Goss. Malibran, the *la Voix de l'Époque*, rediscovered songs by legendary singers, and by Patricia Adkins, Chiti, Van Nuy, California. Alfred Music Publishing 1997.

gentle barcaroles of the young boatmen. Every where gentle scenes awaken pleasure, to  
 bitter-sweet major second (over a dominant seventh) between the voices. *Au bord de la mer* (poetry by Emile Dechamps, for a single voice) is a strophic song in which the speaker's emotions exactly mirror the state of the sea by which he sits (first serene, then stormy); Malibran's music here is slightly more adventurous harmonically and melodically.

cultivated in the classic Rossini repertoire that Malibran performed to clamorous acclaim in duo-recitals with the soprano Henriette Sontag. Sontag and Malibran first sang together in a concert organized by the Comtesse de Merlin in 1828, the very year *Le Prisonnier* was composed; as their duo-act migrated from the salon to the concert stage their signature pieces were duets from Rossini's *Tancredi* (*Fiero incontro*) and *Semiramide* (*Ebben, a te: ferisci*). James Davies has written about the curiosity of these duo appearances, the near-paradox that Malibran seemed to define herself most fully as a diva when she blended her voice imperceptibly with that of another prima donna who might usually have been considered a rival. Davies connects the public fanaticism aroused by these performances with the seismic shift that took place in the distribution of voices and dramatic types at this time: just as the soprano took over from the castrato and the trousered hero as the central and compelling archetype of opera, public enthusiasm began to be directed not so much towards dramatic impersonation, nor to the polish or control of a voice, but to the elemental »charge« that could be emitted by a voice, and especially by two voices in tandem.<sup>21</sup>

This strange phenomenon, of a diva making a splash by melding her voice with that of another singer, draws attention to a rarely noted feature of Malibran's songs, and of salon song in general. This music not only disperses the author-function into an ether of social practice and generic expression; it also, to a surprising extent, sacrifices the *representation* of a unified subjectivity, blurring the identity and affective profile of the singing persona much as it erases the imprint of a particular author. In fact, it may be easier to define this repertoire in terms of lack than of its actual qualities: there are no characters to speak of, to identify with, and only the slimmest shards of narrative or setting to grab on to. In this sense, Malibran's songs and their many salon siblings operate on a different expressive plane than the one usually assumed to operate in nineteenth-century music. What marks these performances is that they were not really Romantic, although their poetry superficially adopts the tropes and preoccupations of Romantic literature.<sup>22</sup> Rather than showing listeners to themselves, or allowing listeners to experience grander and better versions of themselves in a heroic mold, these songs offer generic and anonymous perso-

21 James Davies, »Gautier's Diva. The First French Use of Word« in: *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, Oxford 2012; and James Davies, »The Sontag-Malibran Stereotype« in: *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*, ed. by James Davies, Berkeley and Los Angeles, forthcoming 2013.

22 In this they have much in common with the Lieder of the Biedermeier period, which re-purposed the traits of Romantic poetry within a more sentimental and more domestic context; see Jane Brown, »In the beginning was poetry,« in: *Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. by James Parson, Cambridge 2004, pp. 12–32.

nae that blur and mesh with each other promiscuously.<sup>23</sup> The very blankness of the images, and the slim narratives of the songs, may have wielded its own expressive power, perhaps by opening up what Catherine Gallagher has called »suppositional identities« – vaguely delineated characters that could be temporarily appropriated by anyone, allowing readers or listeners to try on emotions with minimal personal investment.<sup>24</sup>

Gallagher connects the demand among eighteenth-century readers for such labile, forgettable personae to changes in the economic basis of British society. In the Parisian setting in which Malibran's songs were created and performed, uncertainty about the nature of political authority seems a stronger force than economic anxiety. The July revolution had overthrown a king, Charles X, but on 9 August 1830 resulted in a coronation, of Louis-Philippe. As Sandy Petrey has written »Louis-Philippe was known as the Citizen King, and a century and a half of repeating the designation has concealed the fact that it's a glaring oxymoron«<sup>25</sup>. The interchangeability and permeability of the selves represented in these songs, as well as the weakening of the identity of the author, may have made them a perfect cultural pursuit for a Parisian society in which the lineaments of the king and the government kept shifting in subtle ways and in which disillusion reigned supreme.

To talk about authorship in the nineteenth century is to talk also about broader historical notions of subjectivity. When the author is female, understanding the nature of authorship also entails careful attention to the boundary between actual artistic creation and representations of that creative act. Perhaps *all* authorship is subject to rhetorical exaggeration and mythologization;

23 The subjective, or »heroic«, model of nineteenth-century listening has been described by Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero*, Princeton 1995; Michael Steinberg, *Listening to Reason. Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music*, Princeton 2004; and John Toews, »Integrating Music into Intellectual History. Nineteenth-Century Art Music as a Discourse of Agency and Identity«, in: *Modern Intellectual History*, 5/No. 2 (2008), pp. 309–331.

24 Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story. The Vanishing Act of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1994. Gallagher argues that early female novelists blurred the boundaries between their own identities and those of their characters, or disappeared into collaborations with their fathers, in order to secure a position in the literary marketplace. For Gallagher characters in these early novels are »nobodies«, characters with whom readers could identify while they were reading, and from whom they could learn to navigate the new feelings and relationships required of them in a new economy based on exchange rather than land-ownership. For an insightful discussion of Gallagher's book in these terms, see also Blakey Vermeule, »Gossip and Literary Narrative«, in: *Philosophy and Literature*, 30/No. 1 (2006), pp. 102–117.

25 Sandy Petrey, »Pears in History«, *Representations* 35 (1991), pp. 52–71, here: p. 61.



for female authors, that rhetoric leans heavily away from narratives of genius and rebellion, toward domestication and self-erasure.

No surprise there – except that as a flamboyantly public figure who also lived an unconventional personal life very much in the public eye, one might have expected Maria Malibran to be immune to the imperative to tone down her authorial persona. We have seen that Malibran's compositional role was downplayed both by the narrative spin provided by the Comtesse de Merlin and by the dispersal of her compositions into the multi-voiced (yet anonymous) realm of salon performance. I want to suggest in closing that the seismic event of the prima donna's sudden death at the age of only twenty-eight fundamentally altered that unwritten contract, so that the events of last year or so of her life are narrated in very different terms.

The circumstances of the singer's demise have stimulated the imaginations of journalists and biographers since 1836. The cause of death was a fall from a horse, but Malibran lived for three months, plagued by pain and headaches before succumbing; the combination of sudden violence and lingering decline allow biographers to evoke vividly both the cataclysmic drama of injury and the periods of melancholy retrospection that followed. One of her last compositions was the song *Le Moribond*, written and performed privately several times in 1836, but published only posthumously. The convergence of her composition of a song about a dying man with her own demise just two months later has proved sentimentally irresistible to chroniclers, who are unanimously compelled to posit connections between the artistic work and the life. The comtesse de Merlin calls the song *The Romance of Death*, and notes (as did every subsequent writer) the sad irony that Malibran wrote it just a month before her death, while the author of the poetry, Antonio Pellegrino Benelli, had himself died just two months after he penned the verses in 1830.<sup>26</sup> Merlin recalls that Malibran had always had presentiments that she would die young, and notes that in her last weeks of life, her behaviour became even more extravagant: »in the intervals between her severe bouts of headache [...] She would run about, dance, disguise herself, paint her face to perform burlesque scenes: never was joy so exuberant.«<sup>27</sup> Another account tells that just two weeks before her death Malibran wanted to sing the »romance« for bass Luigi

26 See Merlin, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran* (note 3), pp. 259–261. Antonio Maria Pellegrino Benelli (1771–1830) was a tenor, voice teacher, and composer based in London, and later Dresden. In 1819 he published the *Regole per il canto figurato, o siano precetti ragionati per apprendere i principi di musica, con esercizi, lezioni, e infine solfeggi per imparare a cantare*, Dresden 1819.

27 Ibidem, p. 261.

Lablache, but while singing she became so overwrought that she had to retire to her bed.<sup>28</sup>

The song to which these premonitions attach is a surprising vehicle for this sentimental reception, since its address to death is resolutely ironic. Benelli's poetry is disjunctive, almost modern in its disregard for regular patterns and clear structure. A twist on the »death and the maiden« topos, the song begins and ends with an onomatopoeic stanza in which death knocks on the door and demands to be admitted. This is answered by two quatrains in the voice of the invalid, who laments that he had continually wished for Health to visit him, but had never been able to convince her to stay long:

Pan, pan! Qui frappe là?  
 Pan, pan! Je suis la mort.  
 La mort! Eh, camarade!  
 Vite, ouvre la porte,  
 Que je t'emporte,  
 Ouvre à la mort.

Belle santé,  
 tous les jours je t'invoque,  
 l'ingrate qui se moque  
 paraît et puis s'en va.  
 La folle aux bois danse avec les bergères,  
 Crie et tempête avec les militaires,  
 Chante avec les saints frères,  
 Et moi me laisse là.

(Tap, tap! Who knocks there? Tap, tap! I am death. Death! Ah, comrade! Quick, open the door, so that I may take you away; open up to Death. Beautiful Health, every day I invoke you, the ingrate who makes fun of me appears and then runs away again. The madwoman dances in the woods with the shepherdess, cries and storms with the soldiers, sings with the holy friars; but me she leaves all alone here.)

As in *Le Prisonnier* and the other two-voice nocturnes, the singer is asked to portray a shifting persona, envoicing first Death himself, then the invalid. The characterization of Health as an »ingrate« and a »madwoman« who dances with shepherdesses and sings with monks lends the poem a grotesque tinge that is matched by Malibran's musical setting. The invocation of Health moti-

28 See Bushnell, *Maria Malibran* (note 4), p. 220.

vates a shift to the major key and some bright and mercurial musical effects, especially for the third verse. For all three stanzas, Malibran's music emphasizes the instability of the invalid's situation. The opening section is marked by the onomatopoeic F pedal in Bb minor, with a good deal of chromatic coloration (see Example 2). The elusive quality of Health is represented in the second section by a long descending bass line from the tonic Eb (mm. 26–32), and a play of substituting dominants that never quite resolve directly, beneath syncopated cries of »Ah!« in the voice (mm. 33–40). The music for the third verse is both the most harmonically stable and the most changeable, adopting a new local tonic and new rhythmic topoi for each of the three settings in which Health is imagined (pastoral, military, religious; mm. 47–60). The song ends with a literal reprise of the opening section, the solid closure it provides almost certainly probably signifying the death of the invalid.

The constant tonal shifts and the restless motion of the bass line project a condensation and detachment that dilute the song's emotional impact, rendering it less immediate. Yet the song's slim contemporary reception betrays none of this uncertainty about its intention, instead wholeheartedly embracing the weighty parallels with its composer's untimely death. Besides the overwhelming compulsion to equate art and life that shapes so much nineteenth-century biography, and that beckons especially to those who write about the transgressive lives of female singers, that reception may have been informed by Malibran's performance practice and by a general climate in which female authors were almost joyfully understood through images of death. This was a period that was anyway obsessed with death, and that had with the English Romantics found some new ways to write about loss, memory, and funerary monuments. But Patrick Vincent has recently suggested that female poets were particularly dependent on close association with death, whether as authors of elegies or as the subject of odes and elegies when they themselves expired. Vincent describes a kind of parasitical relationship, in which poetesses could be forgiven for venturing into print, exposing themselves to wide dissemination, and making money, their success redeemed or defanged by a morbid glorification of their deaths.<sup>29</sup>

Maria Malibran was the subject of scores of such funerary lamentations, as well as of a surprising number of valedictory poems penned during her life-

29 Vincent attributes a similar redeeming function to the salon, suggesting that by 1830 the actual salon had become irrelevant to literary success in Paris, but that critics like Saint-Beuve still liked to read female poets as tied to the salon as a nostalgic signifier for a time when literary production by women was more private and personal. Patrick Vincent, *The Romantic Poetess. European Culture, Politics, and Gender, 1820–1840*, Lebanon/NH 2004.

**LE MORIBOND**  
Paroles de Benelli  
Traduites par Émile Deschamps.

*Allegro* (♩ = 176) *à Quiliches*

*Chant.*

*Piano.*

Pan! pan! qui frappe

là? pan! pan! je suis la mort la mort eh! cama - ra - de he! vite ho

le ou - vre la por - - te que je l'em - por - -

- te ouvre à la mort.

*FIN.*

Dies obige Bild wurde aus der Word-Datei entnommen.  
Nicht druckgeeignet.

74.

Bel - le san - té tous les jours je t'in - vo - que

fin - gra - te qui se mo - que pa - rait et puis s'en va

la san - té je t'in - voque ah! fin - gra - te qui se moque ah!

fin - gra - te qui se moque ah! pa - rait et puis s'en - va pa -

- rait et puis s'en - va pa - rait et puis s'en - va

*un poco più mosso.*

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of five systems of music. The first system has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The fourth system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The fifth system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score is in French and includes lyrics for each system.

La folle aux bois danse a - vec les her - ge - res

crie et tem - pête a - vec les mi - li - tai - res chante a - vec

les saints frè - - - res vuide a - vec eux les ver - - -

- res et moi me laisse là et moi me laisse là me

lais - se là melais - se là. Pan! pan! qui frap - pe

**Example 2** Maria Malibran, *Le Moribond*, mm. 1–71, in: Maria Malibran, *Album lyrique and Dernières pensées*, New York: Da Capo Press 1984

time as she departed from Naples or Bologna or Lucca to perform in the next city.<sup>30</sup> Malibran's own »Romance of Death«, *Le Moribond*, completely eschews the consoling Romantic language that posits ever-resounding poetry or song, or the vibrating strings of an Aeolian harp, as a substitute for the voice of the deceased person. The refusal of that particular poetic and musical convention may be another attribute by which we can arrive at a sense of who Malibran was as an author.

Although the songs do exist in a space between performed event and notated text, they do so in a way that has little or nothing to do with Maria Malibran's *operatic* self, and everything to do with her friends and patrons and the social world she occupied. This also must be on some level an authorial choice, whether conscious or conditioned. It is a strange irony that to find notations of what Malibran's public performances sounded like we must look not to her own compositions, but to those of her friend Moscheles, who transcribed her embellishments for arias by Mozart, Rossini and Niccolini in two virtuosic works for piano solo titled *Bijoux à la Malibran*. In these pastiche compositions vocal spontaneity melds seamlessly with instrumental mechanistic, resulting in a transcription of Malibran's voice that artificially emphasizes speed, range, and mastery of fioritura. Perhaps it is in the space between the virtuosic voice transferred to the piano and the tamer utterances of the salon songs that Malibran's true voice can be discerned.

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30 A number of these are reprinted in Merlin, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran* (note 3), pp. 271–294. The most famous of the many poetic laments written after her death is Alfred de Musset, »À la Malibran. Stances« (1836).