

Appendix 10 - Mary Garden_Coded Case Study

Biography: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Garden>

Mary Garden (February 20, 1874 – January 3, 1967) was a Scottish-American operatic soprano renowned for her compelling performances and significant contributions to early 20th-century opera. Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, she moved to the United States with her family at a young age, settling in Chicago. There, she pursued studies in violin, piano, and voice, eventually focusing on vocal training.

In 1897, Garden traveled to Paris to further her vocal studies. She made her professional debut in 1900 at the Opéra-Comique, stepping in as a last-minute replacement in the title role of Gustave Charpentier's Louise. Her performance garnered immediate acclaim, leading to a series of significant roles. Notably, in 1902, Claude Debussy selected her to originate the role of Mélisande in the premiere of his opera Pelléas et Mélisande, a portrayal that became one of her most celebrated. BRITANNICA.COM

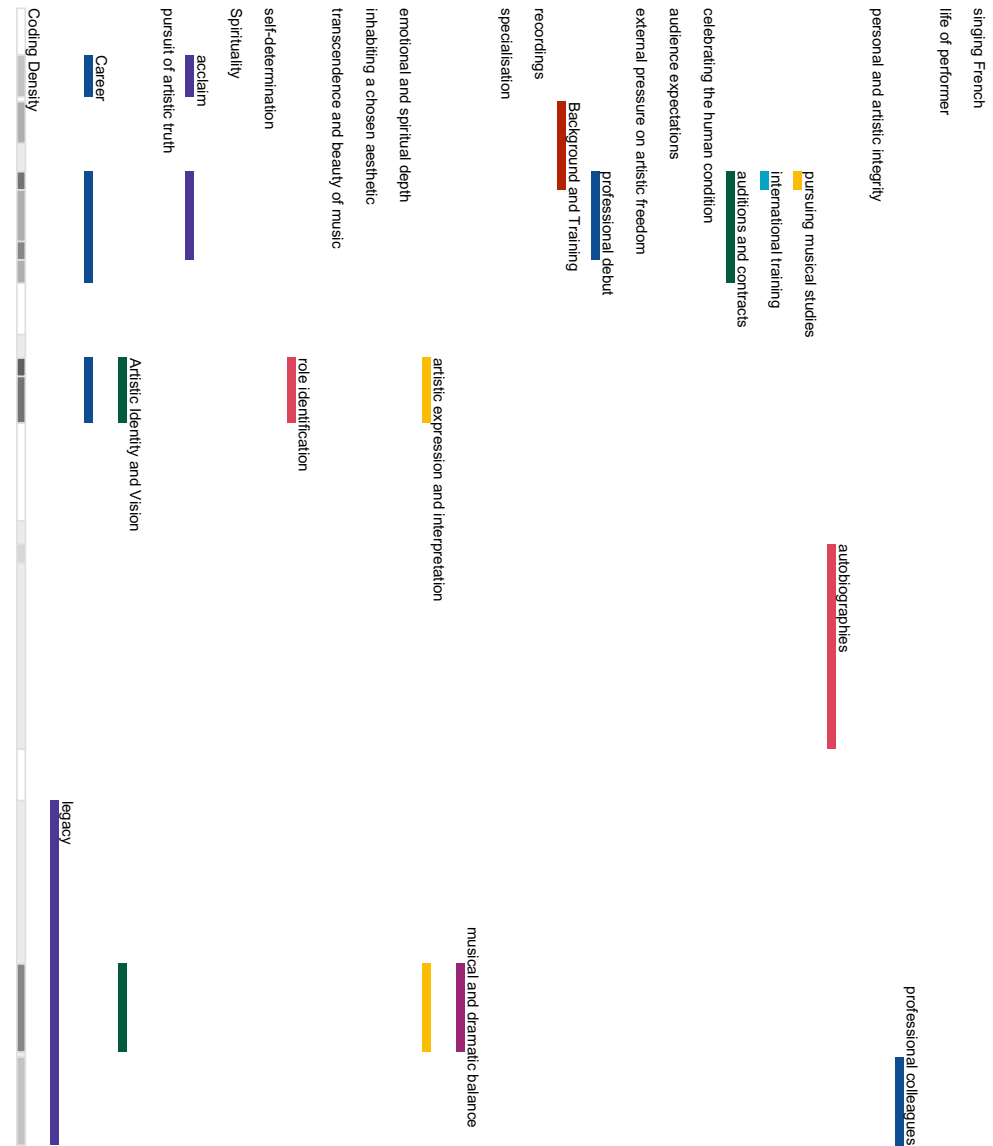
Garden's American debut occurred in 1907 at the Manhattan Opera House, where she performed the title role in Massenet's Thais. Her portrayal of Salome in Richard Strauss's opera of the same name was particularly sensational, noted for its boldness and dramatic intensity. Beyond her singing talents, Garden was acclaimed for her exceptional acting abilities, bringing depth and nuance to her characters. BRITANNICA.COM

In 1910, she joined the Chicago Grand Opera Company, becoming a central figure in the city's operatic scene for over two decades. She served as the general director of the Chicago Opera Association during the 1921–22 season, demonstrating her leadership and commitment to the arts. After retiring from the stage in 1931, Garden remained active in the musical community, engaging in lectures and recitals. Her autobiography, Mary Garden's Story, co-written with Louis Biancolli, was published in 1951, offering insights into her illustrious career and personal experiences. Garden narrates her life story, starting from her childhood in Scotland, her early musical training, and her rise to fame as an opera singer. She also shares her experiences working with some of the most famous composers and conductors of her time, including Claude Debussy, Gustav Mahler, and Arturo Toscanini. Throughout the book, Garden provides a fascinating insight into the world of opera and theater, describing the challenges and rewards of performing on stage. She also reflects on the social and political events of her time, including the outbreak of World War I and the rise of fascism in Europe. <https://www.amazon.ca/Mary-Gardens-Story-Autobiography-Garden/dp/1258086425>

Mary Garden passed away in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1967, leaving behind a legacy as one of the most influential opera singers of her time.

Distant Voices: Mary Garden
Dean Southern
Nov 1, 2011

“My art is one quite separate from that of other operatic singers, and the success I have won is not the success of vocal cords. It is by an art quite different and I want to be judged not alone by my singing or my acting or my stage appearance, but by these combined into one art.” 1
—Mary Garden
As the 19th century came to a close, the world’s operatic stages were dominated by names such as Nellie Melba, Luisa Tetrazzini, Marcella Sembrich, Selma Kurz, and Emma Eames. These sopranos, among others, were exemplars of the Bel Canto tradition of singing, with its emphasis on attaining the highest ideals of tone quality, legato, and agility. Melba, Kurz, and Eames all studied with the



legendary Bel Canto proponent Mathilde Marchesi, while Sembrich studied with Giovanni Battista Lamperti, author of the Bel Canto bible, Vocal Wisdom.

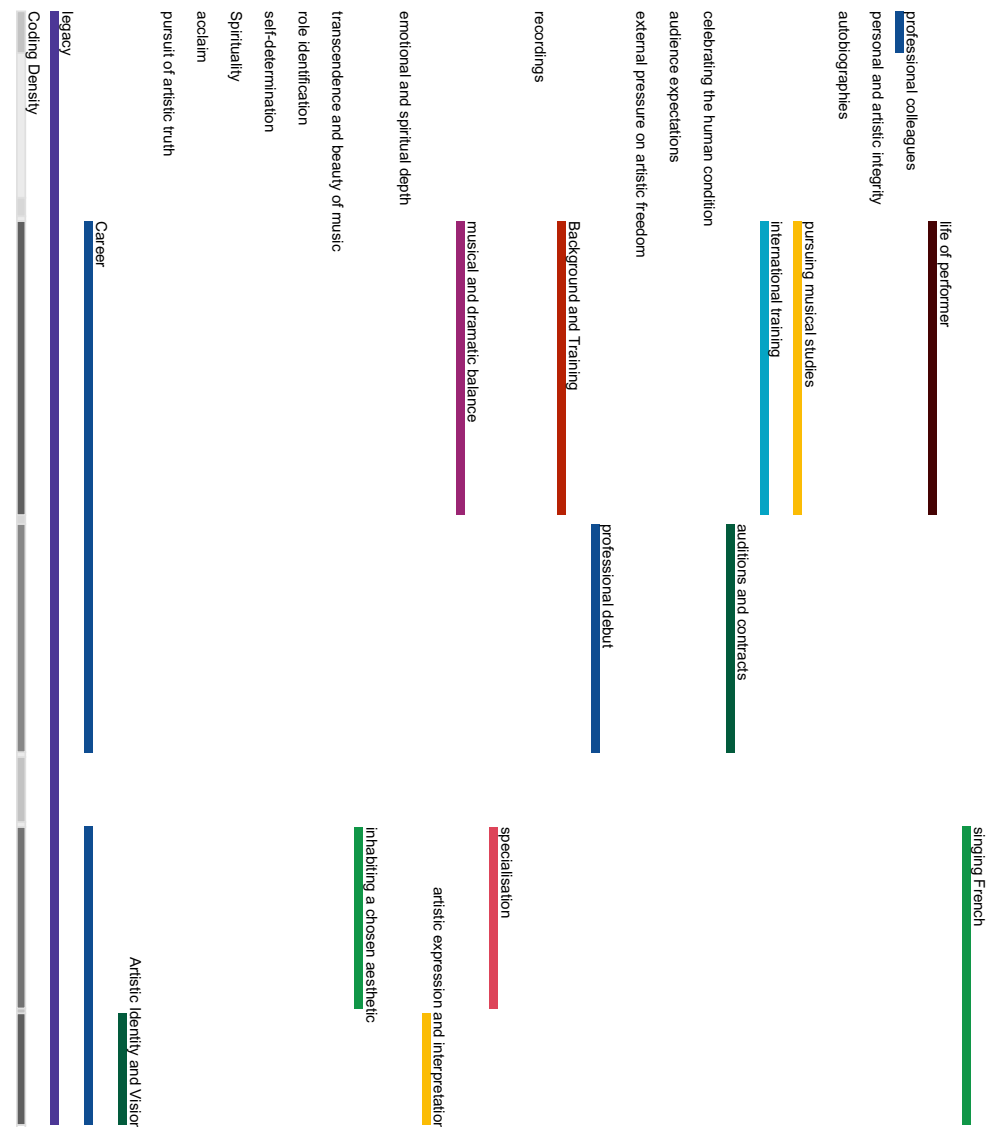
Mary Garden was a fascinatingly different kind of singer. She knew it and she made the most of it throughout her 30-year career.

Born in 1874 in Aberdeen, Scotland, Garden moved with her family to the United States in 1883. First they lived in Brooklyn, New York, and, after a year back in Scotland, they settled in Chicago. There, in 1894, Garden met Mrs. Florence Mayer, who would become the young soprano’s benefactress. In 1896, Mayer sent Garden and her voice teacher, Mrs. Robinson-Duff, to Paris, where she would study for three years.

While in Paris, Garden met two dominant figures of the stage who would prove highly influential in shaping the young soprano’s professional sensibilities and attitudes—French actress Sarah Bernhardt and American soprano Sybil Sanderson. Bernhardt had portrayed in the theater some of the roles Garden would portray in the opera house, including Salome (written for Bernhardt by Oscar Wilde), Tosca, and Cléopâtre. From Bernhardt, Garden learned not only the power of characterization, gesture, and the voice as theatrical tools, but also of the power of the press, which she wielded with great skill. Sanderson was a noted exponent of Thaïs (written for her by Massenet) and Manon, roles Garden would eventually assume. When they met in 1897, Sanderson was ill and her distinguished career was already in a state of decline. Garden stayed with Sanderson when Mrs. Mayer withdrew her financial support upon hearing wild rumors about the life Garden was leading in Paris. At Sanderson’s home, she gained invaluable insights about the life of an artist. Among the people Sanderson introduced to Garden was Albert Carré, longtime manager of the Opéra-Comique. Their meeting was pivotal in Garden’s career.

After agreeing to have Garden audition for him, Carré invited her to observe a rehearsal of a new opera that was in production at the Opéra-Comique—Louise. After the rehearsal, Garden purchased a score and immediately began learning it. Louise premiered on February 2, 1900, with Marthe Rioton in the title role. Rioton fell ill a week later, and Carré, knowing Garden was prepared to sing the role, engaged the eager soprano to begin rehearsals. On April 10, Carré called Garden to the theater when both Rioton and the official understudy became ill. Sitting in the house while Rioton courageously made her way through the first two acts, Garden was called backstage at the second intermission. She took the stage in Act III and, after an orchestral prelude, launched into “Depuis le jour.” She was an immediate success with the critics and the public alike, and Carré offered her a five-year contract. It was a remarkable beginning to a remarkable career, which would see her take the stage as Louise 175 times. Although her repertoire included standard roles such as Violetta, Juliette, Marguerite, Tosca, and Carmen, Garden was more inclined to favor newer roles to which she could apply her exceptional gifts of musical and dramatic interpretation without being scrutinized under the weight of her predecessors. Debussy chose her as his first Mélisande, which she performed 106 times, and he dedicated his Ariettes oubliées to her. Garden undertook serious dance training in preparation to be Strauss’ Salome, a role in which she was a sensation and performed 61 times. She worked closely with Massenet and was a champion of his operas, performing not only Thaïs (144 performances) and Manon (72 performances), but also Jean in Le jongleur de Notre-Dame (67 performances), Charlotte (Werther), Dulcinée (Don Quichotte), Anita (La Navarraise), and the title roles of Cléopâtre, Grisélidis, Sapho, and Chérubin, the last of which was written for her. Garden also performed roles in works by lesser-known composers such as Pierné, Bunning, Leroux, Erlanger, Février, Montemezzi, and Forrest.

In 1907, Garden left Paris for New York to perform several of her signature roles at Oscar Hammerstein’s Manhattan Opera House. Hammerstein built his opera house as a direct challenge to the Metropolitan Opera, which he felt was overrun with German and Italian repertoire. He saw French repertoire as the antidote and proceeded to purchase American rights to Louise, Thaïs, and Pelléas et Mélisande. Securing Mary Garden for his stage was key to the success of his plan.



When Garden arrived in New York, she met a public that was largely unfamiliar with her repertoire and that associated great singing with the more technical approach of a Melba or a Tetrazzini rather than with her interpretive approach. Critics were generally united in their praise of the soprano's powers of characterization, but their assessment of her singing was mixed. Nevertheless, Garden and Hammerstein enjoyed many successes in New York until 1910, when Hammerstein (whose production costs were too expensive to sustain) made an agreement with the Met to close his theater and to not produce another opera in the United States for 10 years. By then, Garden was a household name in America.

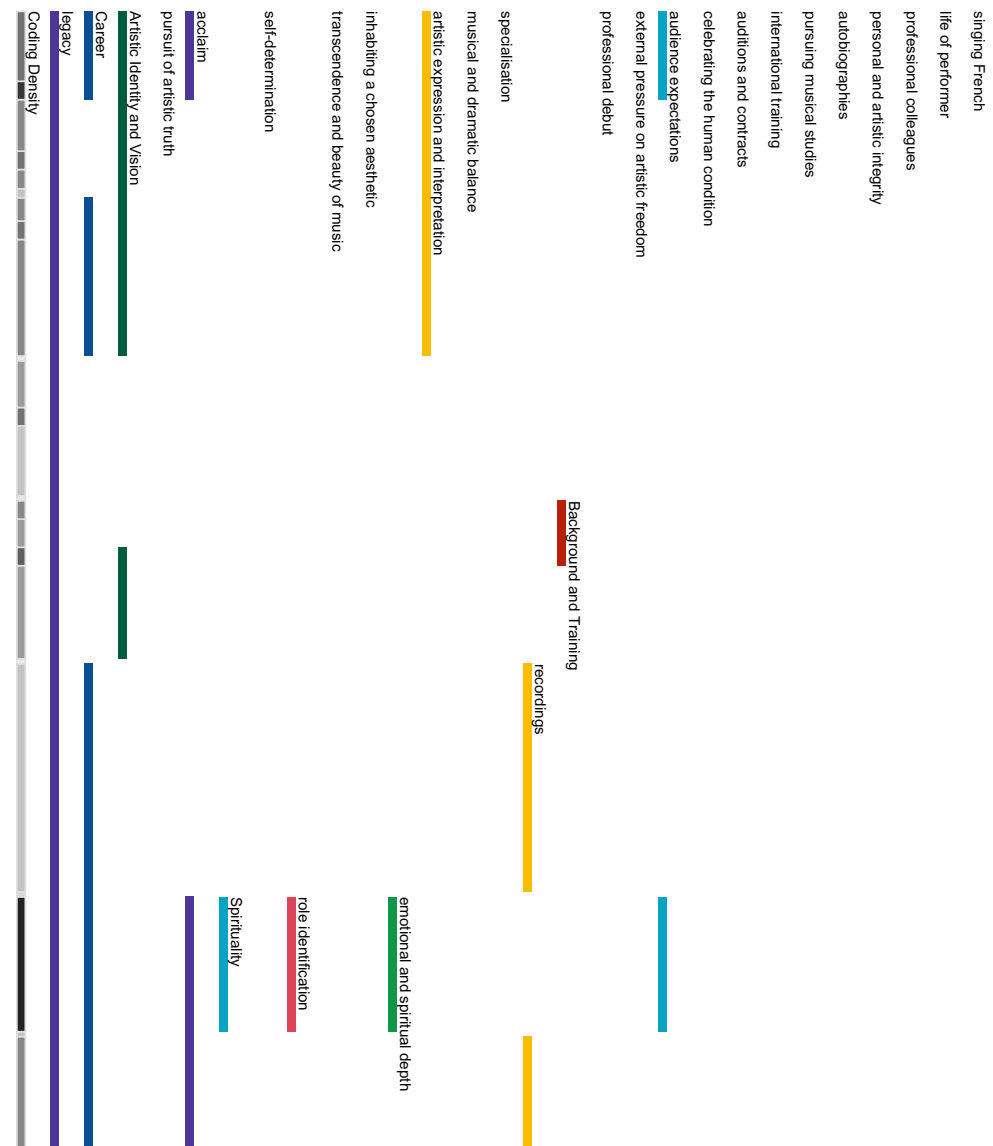
After the closure of the Manhattan Opera House, Garden did not go to the Met (in fact, she never sang with the Met); instead, she returned to Chicago and made it her artistic home for 20 years. Garden was made impresario—"directa," as she preferred—of the Chicago Opera Association for the 1921-22 season, during which she also sang many roles herself. The season was an artistic triumph and included the premiere of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*—but it was also a financial disaster, ending more than \$1,000,000 in debt. The company was restructured as the Chicago Civic Opera Company, and Garden remained a star member of the company.

Garden made her last operatic performance as Katiusha in Alfano's *Risurrezione* in 1934 at the Opéra-Comique, after which she worked as a talent scout for MGM and gave lecture recitals, mostly on Debussy and on her own career. She died in 1967 in a Scottish country hospital near Inverurie with approximately \$3,500 in cash and possessions to her name. It is unknown exactly what happened to the fortune she must have amassed during her career, although some speculate her generosity in supporting young artists depleted her accounts.

That her career lasted more than 30 years should alone be a testament to the reliability of her vocal technique, but the enigma of Mary Garden was that the sheer intensity of her personality and of her dramatic portrayals overwhelms most memory of her voice and of her singing. Indeed, she was the supreme singing-actress of her day, and her art went beyond the voice alone, but her recordings lead one to realize that she really sang better than was usually acknowledged. Perhaps her native instrument was not as sumptuous as those of some of her contemporaries, but it was very good, and the skill with which she used it illustrates what a great artist she was.

Garden left a modest number of records (41) from throughout her career and she herself hated them. She recorded six Scottish songs for Pathé in 1903. Three of the *Ariettes oubliées* (nos. 2, 3, and 5) and an excerpt from *Pelléas et Mélisande* with Debussy at the piano were recorded for Black G&T in 1904. Despite the historical authenticity of these records, Garden's voice lacks the presence of her later recordings, perhaps due to the accepted notion that Debussy preferred a drier tone. She recorded three tracks for Edison in 1905 and numerous arias and songs for Columbia in 1911-12. The Columbia sessions include "*Sempre libera*" from *La traviata* (in French), "*Depuis le jour*," "*Il est doux, il est bon*" from *Hérodiade*, and "*L'amour est une vertu rare*" from *Thaïs*. Between 1926 and 1929, Garden made 16 records for Victor Red Seal; they consist of Scottish songs, "*Beau soir*" and "*Claire de lune*" of Debussy, the Card Song from *Carmen*, "*Depuis le jour*," and "*Dieu de grâce*" from *Risurrezione*. Garden's recording of "*Sempre libera*" belies its date of 1911, showing a voice of remarkable beauty and an affecting interpretation that is solely character driven. It is not a mere showpiece in Garden's hands—there is no high E-flat—yet she dispatches the coloratura passages with clarity and apparent ease. She never performed *Violetta* in the United States because she felt American audiences would not be receptive to her approach. Also from the 1911-12 Columbia sessions was the first of her two recordings of "*Depuis le jour*," displaying a touching simplicity and directness.

Garden's second recording of "*Depuis le jour*," from 1926, shows that the voice has lost some of its bloom and security in the top notes, some of the intonation is suspect, and the rhythm may be more free than is desirable, lending support to the argument that she became a "mannerist" or a "colorist." Regardless, one must note that there is not a thread of a wobble in the tone. "*Dieu de grâce*" from *Risurrezione* reaffirms that Garden's art was very special.



Compared with other singers of such notoriety, Garden's recordings are more difficult to find. Opera in Chicago: Volume One (Symposium 1136) contains "L'ombre des arbres" from 1911 with Debussy at the piano, as well as various arias from both the Columbia and Victor sessions. Romophone has released the complete Victor sessions (8100802). All of the Columbia sessions and most of the Victors are on Mary Garden: A Selection of Her Finest Recordings (Pearl GEMM CD 9067).

Much has been published about Mary Garden's life and career, including Mary Garden's Story (Simon and Schuster, 1951), which was written with Louis Biancolli and is full of exaggerations and inaccuracies. Significant chapters about the soprano are included in The American Opera Singer by Peter G. Davis (Doubleday, 1997) and in Gillian Opstad's Debussy's Mélisande: The Lives of Georgette Leblanc, Mary Garden and Maggie Teyte (Boydell Press, 2009). The most complete biography to date is Michael T.R.B. Turnbull's Mary Garden (Amadeus Press, 1997), a thoroughly researched and entertaining read, full of absorbing detail.

The appendix to Turnbull's book contains some of Garden's thoughts regarding stage technique and her interpretive approach in specific operatic excerpts:

The bigger the house, the bigger the gesture must be in order to assure success. . . . The more you stand still, the more the audience is taken in, the more articulation is demanded. . . . Make the things you handle on stage—chairs, mirrors, books, letters, etc.—live! p. 2

On "Depuis le jour":

Opening of soul to love. It is not a vocalise but full of the awakening of love. Julien is sitting in chair at centre. You come down and stand behind him, one hand on chair. Take his hands after 'premier baiser!' and 'Quelle belle vie!' My goodness, what a gorgeous life! p. 34

Endnotes

1 Mary Garden, New York Herald (December 1, 1907), quoted in Michael T.R.B. Turnbull's Mary Garden (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997), 58.

2 Mary Garden, The Mary Garden Course (1935), quoted in Michael T.R.B. Turnbull's Mary Garden (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997), 225.

3 Ibid., 217.

Research questions - simulated answers by ChatGPT 3.0:

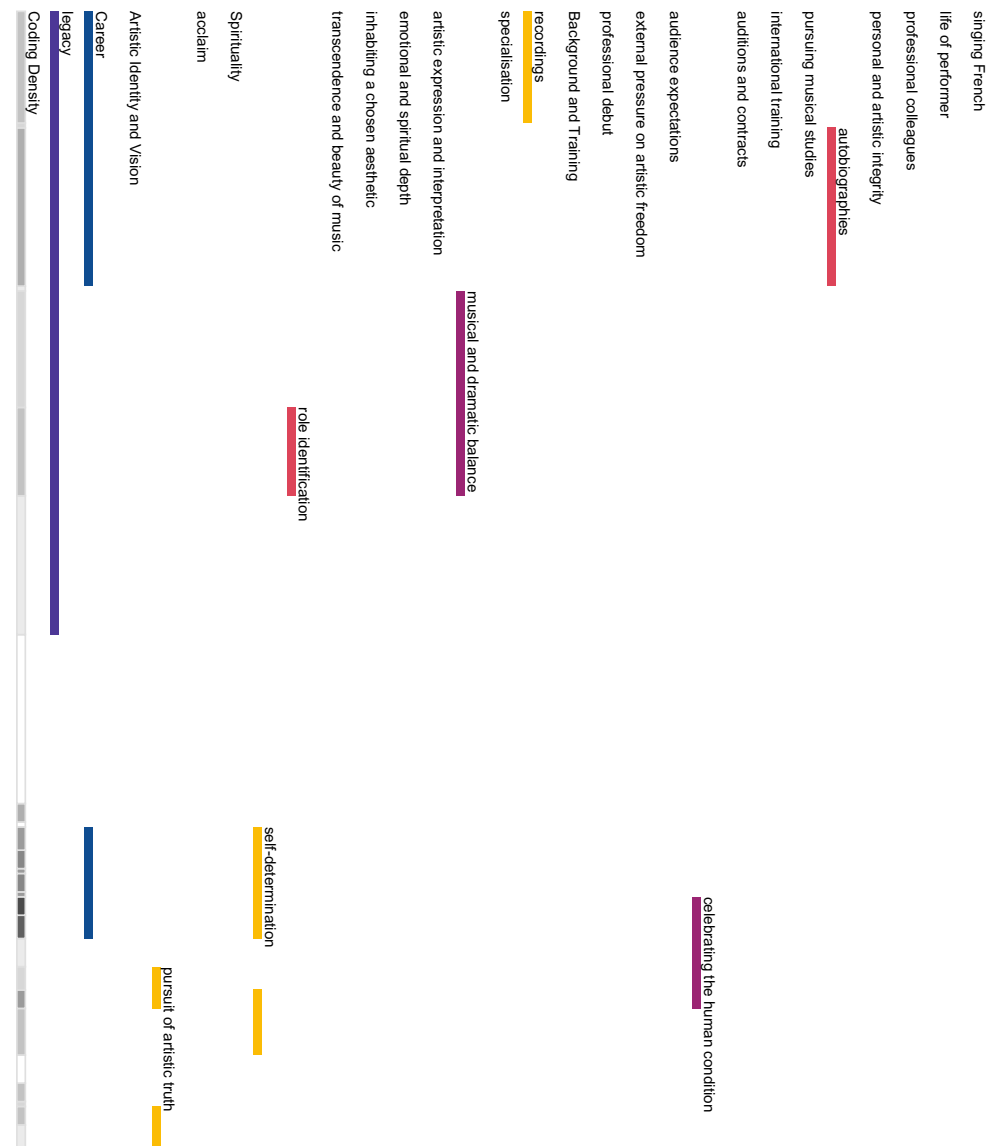
1. What impact did worldview and spirituality have on motivating your career?

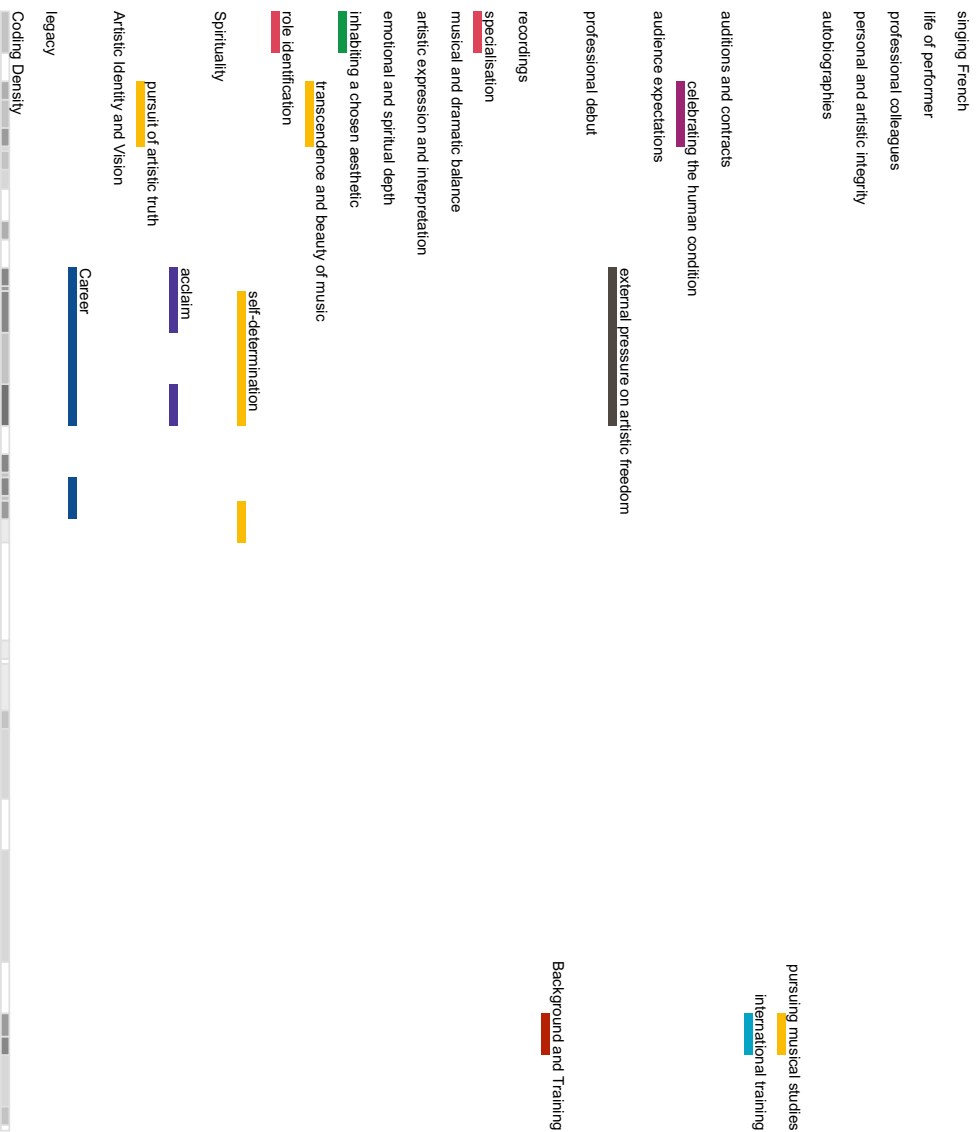
"My career was not the result of fate alone but of a fierce will and an unyielding belief in my artistic destiny. Some call that spirituality; I call it knowing one's purpose. From the moment I stepped onto the stage, I knew I belonged there. I was raised in a Scottish Presbyterian tradition, yet my faith was not one of submission but of strength. I believed in myself, in the power of music to elevate the soul, and in my duty to express the deepest emotions of the human spirit.

The stage was my cathedral, my voice a vessel for something beyond mere sound—it was an embodiment of passion, of truth, of the beauty and pain of existence. If there was a divine force guiding me, it was in the sheer determination and courage it took to claim my place in a world that did not make it easy for women to lead. I trusted in the art, and that was enough."

2. How did worldview and spirituality inform your artistic output?

"I was never one for conventions, whether in life or in music. If my worldview shaped my art, it was in my relentless pursuit of truth on the stage. I rejected the mechanical, the formulaic, the ordinary.





When I sang Mélisande for Debussy, or Thaïs for Massenet, I did not simply perform—I became them. I sought the essence of a character, their inner light and darkness, their contradictions.

Some might say there was a mysticism in my approach, a spiritual transcendence. Perhaps that was true. But more than that, I believed in music's power to strip away artifice and reveal the rawness of human experience. It was not about faith in God so much as faith in the stage as a space where one could be utterly free. I did not sing to please, I sang to awaken. And if that is a spiritual act, then so be it."

3. How did worldview and spirituality constrain/focus your career motivations and creative output relative to broader cultural, political, or socio-economic factors?
*"Constraint? If I was constrained, it was not by spirituality or belief, but by the expectations of men, of critics, of a society that wished to mold a woman into something palatable. But I would not be molded. I chose my own path, played by my own rules.

The broader world—politics, culture, economics—these were forces to navigate, but never to bow before. I refused to be confined to any single repertoire, any single style. Some critics thought me reckless; I thought myself free.

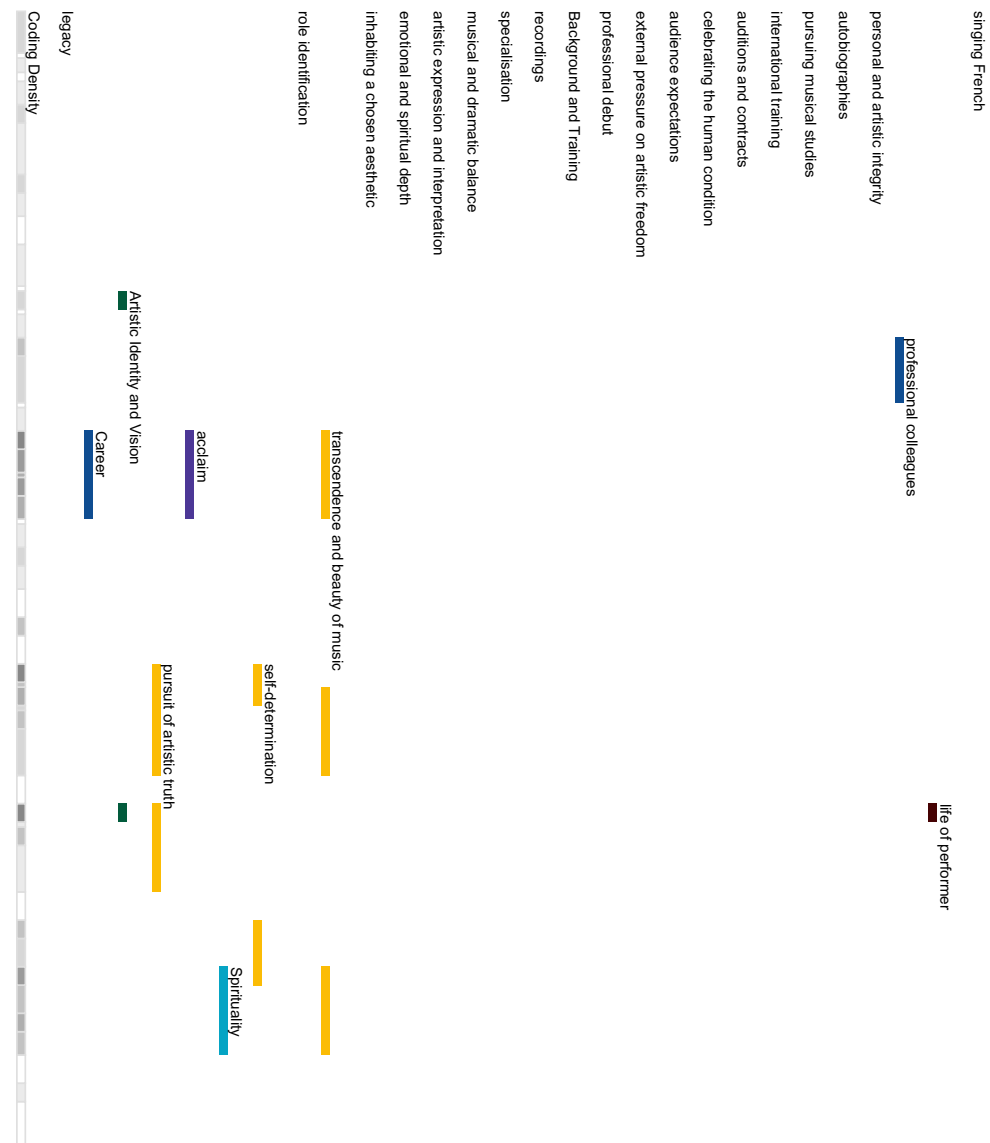
If anything, my worldview sharpened my defiance. I took risks others feared. I performed Salome when people whispered that it was too scandalous. I took on directorial roles when women were not expected to lead. My spirituality—if you must call it that—was a belief in self-determination, in living an uncompromising artistic life. I did not seek permission. I simply did."

Selected Interview Questions - simulated answers by ChatGPT 3.0

1. First singing experience and motivation:
Answer: "I first sang in front of an audience as a child in my home city of Chicago. The moment I remember most vividly was performing in a local recital or concert, where I was deeply moved by the power of music and the feeling of connecting with others through song. My motivation came from my love for music and the encouragement of my family, especially my mother, who was a great influence on me. She saw my passion and talent, and from there, I began pursuing it more seriously. I was drawn to the emotional intensity that music provided, something that always felt very natural to me."

2. First singing teacher:
Answer: "My first formal teacher was Mrs. Charles A. Webb, who was a well-respected voice teacher in Chicago. She had a way of nurturing my voice with great care, teaching me the fundamentals of technique and breathing. I remember her kindness and the way she pushed me to explore the range of my voice, while always encouraging me to sing with passion and conviction. She taught me the importance of vocal control and discipline, which laid the foundation for my later successes."

3. Owning her voice and seeing career potential:
Answer: "I began to truly own my voice during my time in Paris, where I studied under the guidance of some of the finest teachers, including Mathilde Marchesi. It was in those early days in France, after my debut at the Paris Opera, that I realized I had the potential to build a career. I had worked diligently on my technique and was determined to become a major figure in the operatic world. I had always been motivated by the desire to sing with depth and expressiveness, but it wasn't until I felt the full power of



my voice and the joy of performing on stage that I began to see myself as a true artist with career potential.

Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation:

"For much of my early career, the recognition and affirmations from others—audiences, critics, colleagues—were important, but there came a point when intrinsic motivation overtook those external validations. The moment I realized I was singing for my own growth, for my own artistic fulfillment, was pivotal. It was no longer about impressing others; it became about how deeply I could express myself and connect with the music. That shift in motivation gave me a sense of purpose and direction beyond the applause or the reviews."

Role of personal autonomy and relatedness:

"Personal autonomy played a crucial role. I worked hard to develop my own voice and style, understanding that in order to succeed, I had to be true to myself and my vision as an artist. Competence in my technique gave me the confidence to stand firm in my choices as a singer. Enjoyment came from the process of discovering new roles, learning new languages, and pushing my boundaries. The community of singers, conductors, and musicians that I worked with—especially in Paris and at the opera houses where I performed—was vital in fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness. We were all striving for excellence, and that collective pursuit was inspiring."

Invisible spirituality and visible community:

"For me, singing was always a deeply spiritual experience. While I may not have articulated it in overt religious terms, there was something transcendent about the act of performance. The connection I felt to the music and the audience was almost sacred. This spirituality was invisible in the sense that it wasn't something I necessarily shared with others in formal terms, but it was always present in my art. The visible community of my fellow performers and audiences gave me the structure and support to channel that inner inspiration. The interplay between the two—the spiritual and the communal—was what gave my performances depth and meaning."

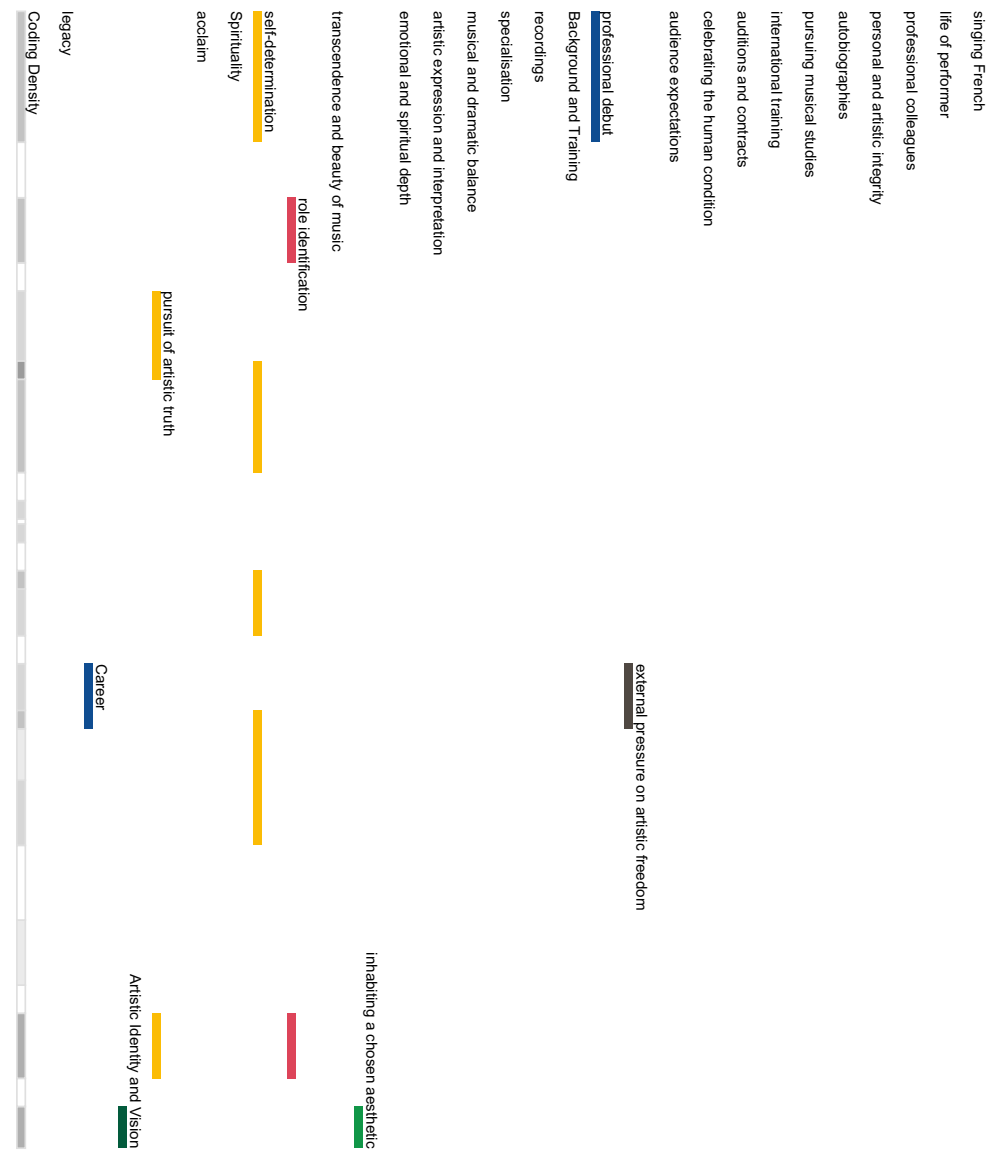
5. How do you perceive the impact of your worldview and spirituality as you pursued a classical singing career?

*"To sing is to live many lives, to embody truths beyond oneself. My worldview was shaped by independence, by a refusal to be caged—either by society's expectations or by rigid ideologies. If spirituality had a role in my career, it was in my unwavering belief in the power of music to speak where words failed, to reveal something elemental about existence. I did not approach music with dogma, but with an almost sacred devotion to authenticity and emotional truth."

"A singer's life is not merely a career—it is an odyssey, a constant unveiling of the self. If I had a guiding belief, it was in the absolute necessity of artistic truth. My worldview was shaped less by religious dogma and more by a deep conviction that music should not only be heard but felt—it must take hold of an audience's very soul."

I was never a woman who lived by prescribed faith, but I had my own kind of spiritual compass. I knew that my purpose was to inhabit my art fully, to breathe life into it as if it were the air itself. That was my guiding light, my doctrine. If I was devoted to anything, it was to the pursuit of artistic transcendence—whether in the whispered sorrow of Pelléas et Mélisande or the fiery seduction of Thais. If there was a spiritual experience in my career, it was this—losing myself entirely in the moment of performance and feeling as though I had touched something eternal."

Follow-up: Share moments in your life where your beliefs guided your spiritual experience and directed your singing career. How did your beliefs provide a map for what you wished to become and intended to express and experience in your art?



"My entire career was built on moments where I trusted my instincts and defied expectation. When I was asked—at the last moment—to step into Louise at the Opéra-Comique, I could have hesitated. I could have questioned whether I was ready, whether I was meant for this life. But I did not hesitate. I knew. When I stepped onto the stage of the Opéra-Comique for the first time, it was faith in my own ability that carried me. When Debussy entrusted me with Mélisande, I knew I must become the voice he had dreamed of.

Follow-up: How did you distinguish between your factual beliefs and emotional values?
*"Do you know what it means to truly lose yourself in a role? To forget where the stage ends and you begin? That is not mere performance; that is revelation. Emotion and belief—these were never separate to me. One sings not with the mind alone, nor with the heart alone, but with both intertwined.

I suppose some might say that factual beliefs are intellectual, while emotional values come from the heart. But I lived through my emotions, and I trusted them more than reason. Did I always make the ‘right’ choices? Perhaps not in the eyes of others. But I made choices that were true—to my instincts, my voice, my art. That is what mattered. The world of opera, particularly in my time, was filled with those who believed beauty was enough. But I believed that to sing without conviction, without soul, was a waste of one’s breath. My choices, my interpretations—they were not merely artistic, they were personal, even defiant at times. If others saw passion, fire, and intensity in my performances, it was because I refused to separate my deepest convictions from my art."

6. In your journey as a singer, how would you compare the significance of your worldview or spirituality as intrinsic motivators as compared to external factors such as cultural, political, or socio-economic influences?
*"My motivation never came from external forces. If I had listened to the world—to the critics, to the rules, to the ‘proper’ way of doing things—I would never have become Mary Garden. The fire that drove me was entirely my own.

The external world is never silent. It presses upon you, demands of you, seeks to mold you. The politics of opera, the whims of critics, the expectations placed upon women in my profession—these were forces I had to navigate. But they did not define me. What defined me was my own vision, my own voice, and my refusal to be anything but what I chose to be. When I was told a role was ‘too daring’ for a woman, I sang it anyway. When I was advised to follow convention, I did the opposite. Society wanted its singers to be obedient, predictable. I wanted to be alive. Had I listened too closely to those who sought to impose limits, I would never have sung Mélisande, never have taken on roles others feared, never have led an opera company myself."

Follow-up: Have there been moments where you felt a tension or alignment between your beliefs and the external factors influencing your singing career?
*"Oh, of course. The world is not kind to a woman who refuses to conform. I was an artist who refused to be passive. There were those who wished to see me as merely a beautiful voice, a charming presence. But I would not be contained in that way.

I remember when I sang Salome. It was scandalous, provocative—some said it was too much for a ‘respectable’ singer. But I did not care for respectability; I cared for the truth of the role. There was tension, certainly. But in that moment, standing on stage, I was utterly free.

There were also moments of alignment—times when the world wanted what I had to offer. When I sang Mélisande under Debussy’s direction, I felt as if my artistry and the world’s desires were in

perfect harmony. But such moments are rare. A true artist does not wait for the world's approval. She sings because she must."*

7. Personal spirituality and artistic choices:

Answer: "My spiritual beliefs were deeply intertwined with my work, although I may not have expressed them in the conventional religious sense. Music, for me, was an expression of the soul, a means to connect with something beyond the tangible world. When selecting repertoire, I was drawn to roles and themes that resonated with the human experience in profound ways—roles that allowed me to explore deep emotional truths. I felt that the power of music was rooted in its ability to elevate the spirit, to reveal beauty in both darkness and light. The works of composers like Debussy and Puccini, for instance, spoke to me on an emotional and spiritual level, capturing the complexities of life and the divine mysteries of love, suffering, and redemption."

Specific instances:

"One example would be my interpretation of the role of Mélisande in Pelléas et Mélisande. The piece itself, with its mysterious and haunting qualities, was deeply spiritual to me. The way I approached Mélisande was influenced by my belief in the importance of vulnerability and mystery in human nature. I felt that her character was not just a symbol of earthly love, but also of an ethereal, almost divine yearning, which I aimed to express through my voice and stage presence."

Artistic contributions:

"I am proud of my work in Pelléas et Mélisande and Thaïs, roles that required not only vocal skill but also emotional depth and intellectual engagement with the material. I also take great pride in being part of the development of French opera in the early 20th century and helping to establish it as a vital artistic form. The societal impact of my work, particularly in bringing more attention to French opera in international circles, was something I valued greatly."

Internal ideals and societal impact:

"My aesthetic was always guided by a deep commitment to truth and beauty, as well as an understanding of the transformative power of art. I believed that art could be both beautiful and emotionally moving while still being intellectually challenging. My performances were always about telling a story authentically, not just about pleasing the audience. I felt that this internal ideal—striving for excellence and truth in every note I sang—helped shape societal standards of what great opera should be."

Emotions vs. spirituality in performance:

"Emotions are the raw materials of performance—they come from deep within, often from experiences or reflections on life. But spirituality, for me, was more of an overarching connection to the divine and the universal truths that music expresses. In performance, I tried to harmonize these emotions with the spiritual, so that each note was not just an emotional reaction, but a channel for a deeper understanding of the human condition. My voice, I felt, was the instrument through which both emotions and spirituality could manifest in their purest form."

8. Cultural and socio-political context and creative process:

Answer: "In the early 20th century, opera was changing, and society was evolving rapidly. Political and cultural upheavals had an impact on the arts, and I was always aware of how the changing world might influence the way I approached my work. However, I remained committed to the integrity of my artistic vision. At times, the broader cultural shifts, such as the rise of modernism and the changing tastes in opera, challenged me to reconsider my approach, but I always tried to stay true to my instincts as an artist."

External challenges:



"There were times when external factors, like the rise of new operatic styles or political shifts in Europe, created tension with my artistic choices. One such instance occurred when new forms of avant-garde music became popular, and some critics questioned the relevance of more traditional styles. I responded by continuing to focus on roles that allowed me to explore the emotional and spiritual depths of music, staying true to what I believed was artistically valuable."

Constraints of personal beliefs:

"My emotional values and personal beliefs sometimes constrained my choices in that I was not willing to compromise on the sincerity or emotional depth of the roles I chose. I never wanted to perform anything that felt false or superficial. While the demand for star power and spectacle was often strong, I insisted on roles that allowed for genuine emotional expression and that aligned with my artistic values."

9. Navigating differences in worldview and cultural beliefs in collaboration:

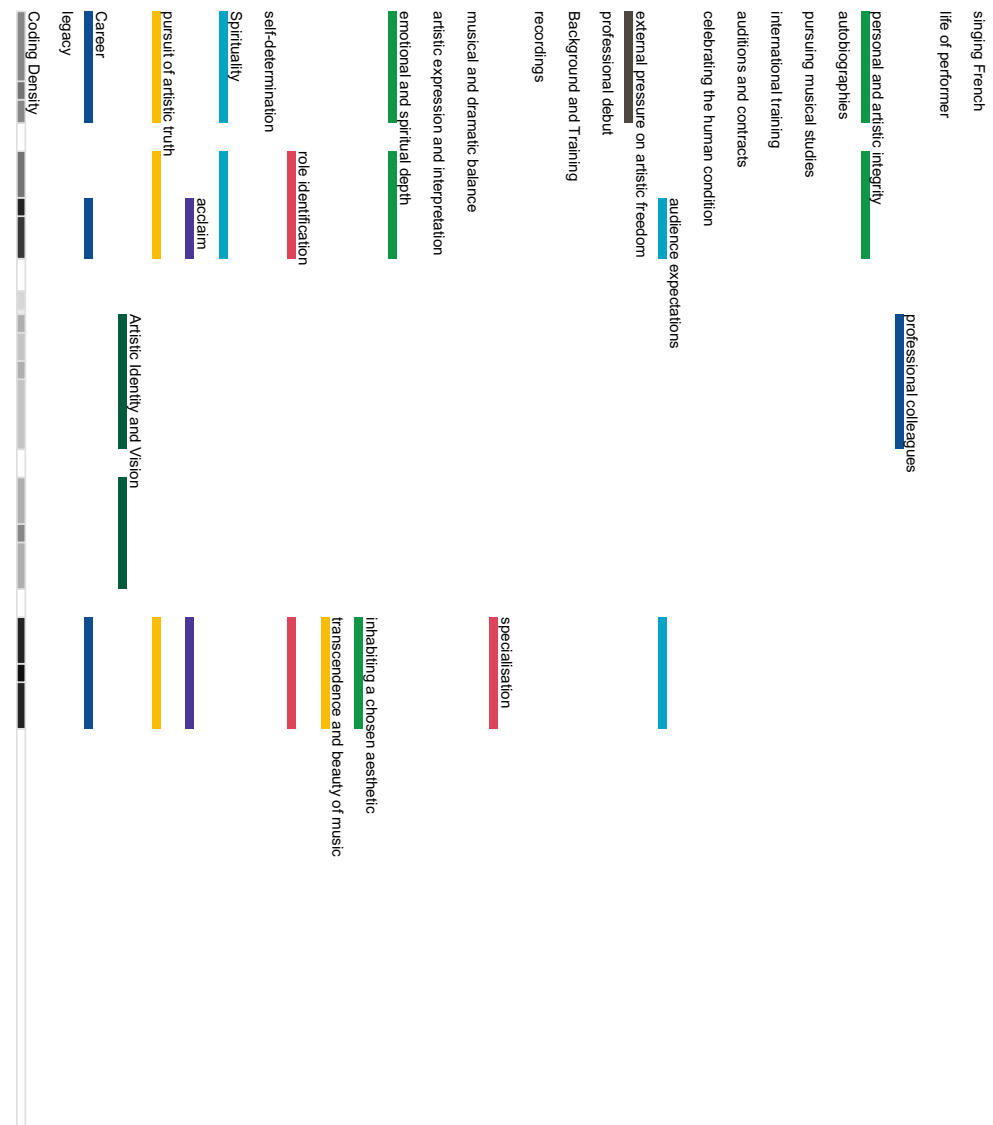
Answer: "Collaboration in opera is always a balance of different personalities and worldviews, but I always saw it as an opportunity to learn from others. I've worked with many colleagues who came from different cultures or had different spiritual outlooks. What was important to me was a shared respect for the music and the art form itself. When I collaborated with conductors, directors, and fellow singers, I aimed to create a harmonious artistic experience where differences could be explored and celebrated rather than becoming points of contention."

Enhancing the creative process:

"One instance that stands out was my collaboration with the great conductor André Messager in *Thaïs*. His deep understanding of the French operatic style complemented my own, and our shared respect for the text and its spiritual undertones enriched the production. Even though our worldviews might not have been identical, our mutual respect for the music and its emotional resonance helped us create something deeply powerful together."

Longest "winning streak" in inhabiting my own aesthetic:

"I think my longest period of artistic success in truly inhabiting my own aesthetic came during my time at the Paris Opera, especially in roles like *Mélisande* and *Thaïs*. These roles allowed me to express my artistic ideals most fully, and the intense emotional and spiritual resonance of those works helped me to truly inhabit the characters. I was able to balance my personal aesthetic with the expectations of the opera world during that time, creating performances that I felt were deeply truthful and beautiful."



Appendix 11 - Marian Anderson_Coded Case Study

Marian Anderson (1897 - 1993) was born in Philadelphia, an American contralto with a natural talent who studied with Joe Boggetti, furnished by financial support from her church choir. Anderson auditioned for him by singing "Deep River"; he was immediately brought to tears. Boggetti scheduled a recital of English, Russian, Italian and German music at The Town Hall in New York City in April 1924; it took place in an almost empty hall and received poor reviews.

Her parents were Christian, and they were deeply involved in their Union Baptist Church. Marian's aunt Mary, her father's sister, was particularly active in the church's musical life and convinced her niece to join the junior church choir at the age of six. In that role, she got to perform solos and duets, often with her aunt. Aunt Mary took Marian to concerts at local churches, the YMCA, benefit concerts, and other community music events throughout the city. Anderson credited her aunt's influence as the reason she pursued her singing career. (Schenbeck, Lawrence (2012). Racial Uplift and American Music. Univ. Press of Mississippi. p. 177. ISBN 978-1-61703-230-1). Beginning as young as six, her aunt arranged for Marian to sing for local functions where she was often paid 25 or 50 cents for singing a few songs. As she got into her early teens, Marian began to make as much as four or five dollars for singing, a considerable sum for the early 20th century. At the age of 10, Marian joined the People's Chorus of Philadelphia under the direction of singer Emma Azalia Hackley, where she was often a soloist.

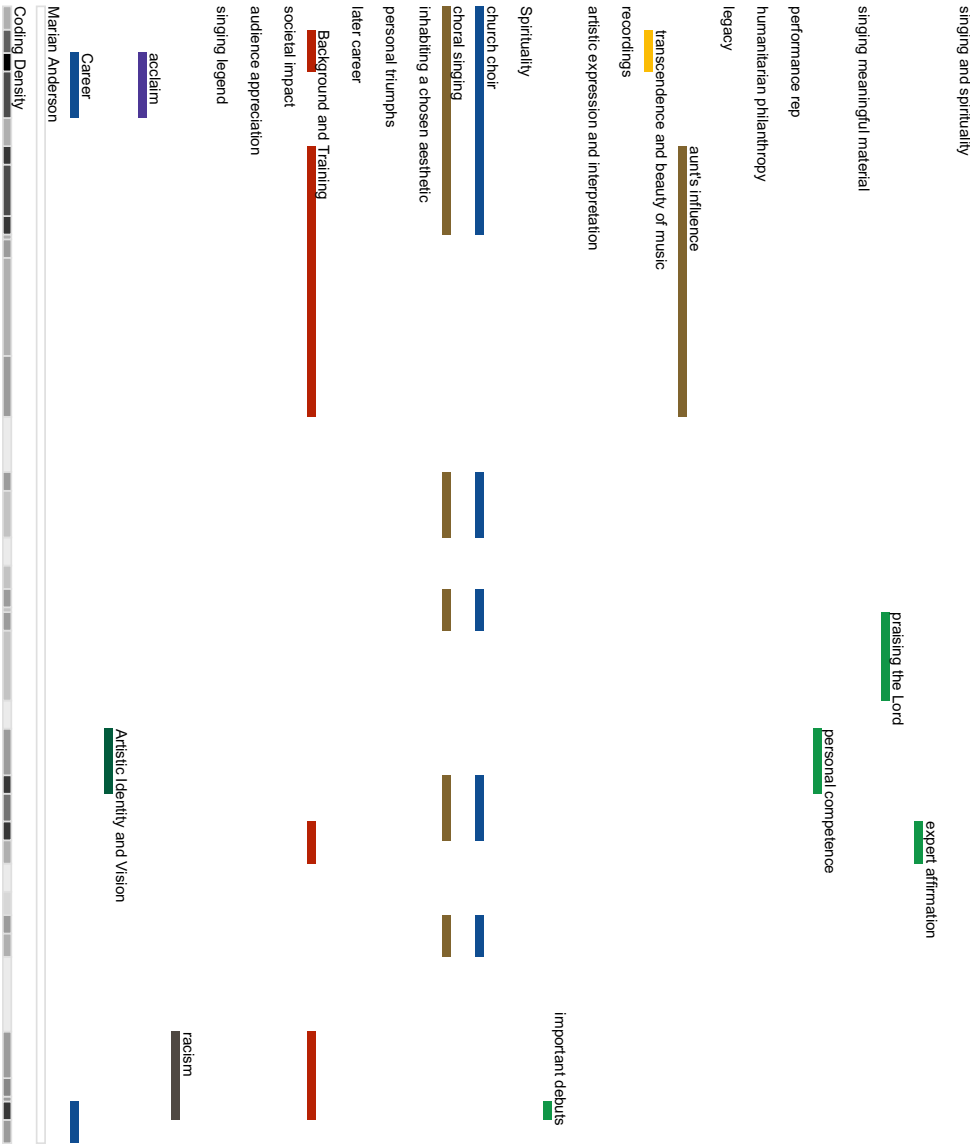
Quoting from her biography, "My Lord What a Morning, pp. 23, 24"
"As I moved into my teens singing at the church took on more importance. When I was thirteen I was invited to join the adult choir. I accepted gladly, and I continued my work with the junior choir. in fact, I sang with both groups until I was past twenty.

Singing was serious business with me, and I had a deep sense of responsibility about my work with the choirs. Our church was large. The senior choir sang in the upper balcony at one end, and our minister was at the other end. Without knowing anything about the tricks of the trade, I sang naturally, free as a bird, with a voice of considerable size and wide range. There was no difficulty in filling the church auditorium. In my youthful exuberance I let myself go, and on several occasions it was suggested gently that my voice was a little too prominent.

I had no thought about technique or style. It may seem boastful to say so, but at that moment I did not need them. I had no difficulty with any music set before me, for I could sing any note in any of the registers. Usually I sang the alto part, but I could fill in for the soprano or tenor. If necessary, I also filled in for the baritone or bass, though in that case I would sing an octave higher. When the choir sang an anthem, if one of the soloists was absent, I was given the nod. The minister would always recognize my voice and make some comment about it. That was my reward.

I became convined that my presence in the senior and junior choirs was not only a duty but a necessity for the church and me, and I never missed a Sunday. The congregation made me feel that I was an indispensable part of what went on there. It was a stimulating experience."

Anderson received her major break when she won a competition sponsored by the New York Philharmonic, resulting in a successful performance with an orchestra in 1925. Over the next several years, she made a number of concert appearances in the United States, but racial prejudice prevented her career from gaining momentum. Her career then took off, with her first performance at Carnegie Hall in 1928, and broke into Europe in 1930. Throughout the 1930s, Anderson studied languages in



Berlin, and garnered much praise while touring throughout Europe performing in front of integrated audiences. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/marian-anderson>

In Salzburg, Austria, she gave a sensational performance. The famous conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867–1957) was in the audience. After hearing her sing, Toscanini said she had "a voice heard but once in a century." ... At the end of Anderson's European tour, she was signed to a contract for fifteen concerts in the United States. On December 30, 1935, she opened her American tour at New York's Town Hall. She performed pieces by European classical composers as well as several African American spirituals (traditional religious songs). The performance was a great success. Critics welcomed her as a "new high priestess of song." In the words of a writer for the New York Times, the concert established her as "one of the great singers of our time." <https://www.notablebiographies.com/A-An/Anderson-Marian.html>

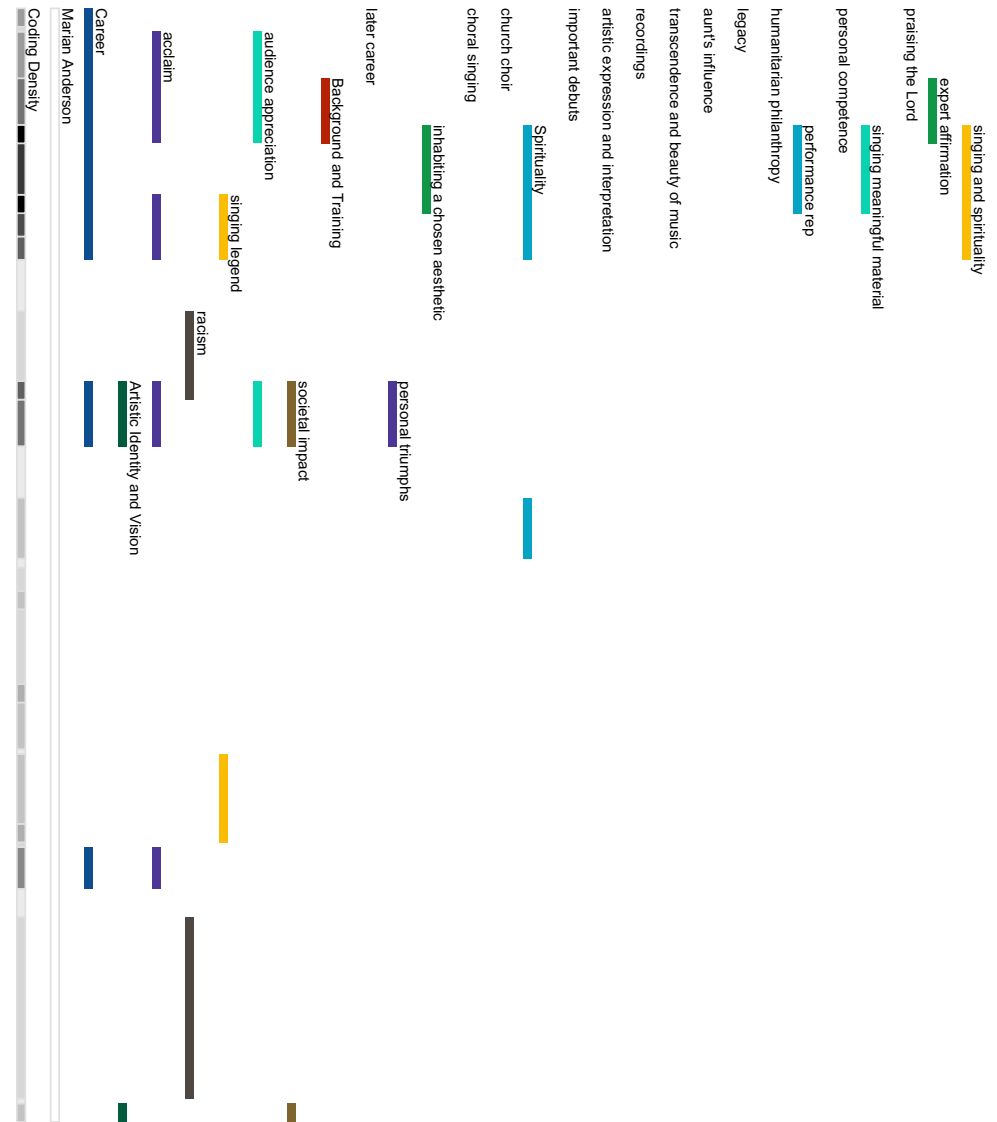
Anderson was a pioneer in winning recognition at home and abroad for African American artists. In 1939 an incident involving the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) helped focus public attention on racism. The DAR denied Anderson use of their Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., for an April concert. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR in protest and had the U.S. government allow Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial. Her concert there, on Easter morning, drew a live audience of seventy-five thousand, and millions more heard it over the radio. <https://www.notablebiographies.com/A-An/Anderson-Marian.html>

On July 17, 1943, Anderson became the second wife of architect Orpheus H. "King" Fisher in Bethel, Connecticut. Fisher had asked her to marry him when they were teenagers, but she declined at that time because she feared it would have forestalled her music career. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Anderson In 1986 Orpheus passed away and she went to live with her nephew James DePriest, a conductor who lived in Oregon.

In 1948 Anderson underwent a dangerous throat operation for a growth that threatened to damage her voice. For two months she was not permitted to use her voice. She was not sure if she would ever be able to sing again. When she was finally allowed to rehearse, her voice returned free of damage. Following her recovery, Anderson made her first post–World War II tour of Europe, including stops in Scandinavia, Paris (France), London (England), Antwerp (Belgium), Zurich (Switzerland), and Geneva (Switzerland). <https://www.notablebiographies.com/A-An/Anderson-Marian.html>

She was identified as an American star and legendary voice, the first Black American to perform at the Metropolitan Opera as Ulricke in "Una Ballo Maschera" in 1955, along with Robert McFerrin. However her 1945 cover story in Time Magazine was classified as "religion" rather than art or culture (Siefert, 2004 p. 301).

Rather than fight much of the racism she received, despite her enormous popularity, Marian preferred to avoid situations whenever possible. In Europe, she was welcomed into the finest hotels and restaurants, but in the U.S., she was shifted to third- or fourth-class accommodations. In the South, she often stayed with friends. Simple tasks as arranging for laundry, taking a train, or eating at a restaurant were often difficult. She would take meals in her room and traveled in drawing rooms on night trains. Early on, she insisted on “vertical” seating in segregated cities; meaning black audience members would be allotted seats in all parts of the auditorium. Many times, it was the first time blacks would sit in the orchestra section. By 1950, she would refuse to sing where the audience was segregated. <http://marian-anderson.com/biography/>



She sang at the presidential inaugurations of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) and John F. Kennedy (1917–1963). In 1957 Anderson made a concert tour of India and the Far East for the U.S. State Department. In 1958 President Eisenhower appointed her a delegate (representative) to the Thirteenth General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). She was awarded the UN Peace Prize in 1977. In her later career, Marian Anderson also acted as a goodwill ambassador, traveling to many places around the world including: Germany, India, Mexico, Guinea, Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan.

Anderson gave her farewell concert (last public performance) at Carnegie Hall in New York on Easter Sunday in 1965. After retiring from singing she continued to appear publicly. She often narrated Aaron Copland's Lincoln Portrait, with her nephew James DePriest conducting. Among her substantial awards she was awarded 24 honorary doctoral degrees, by Howard University, Temple University, Smith College, Saint Mary's College and many other colleges and universities.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Anderson

From J.B. Steane (1998) Singers of the Century. Hal Leonard Corporation:

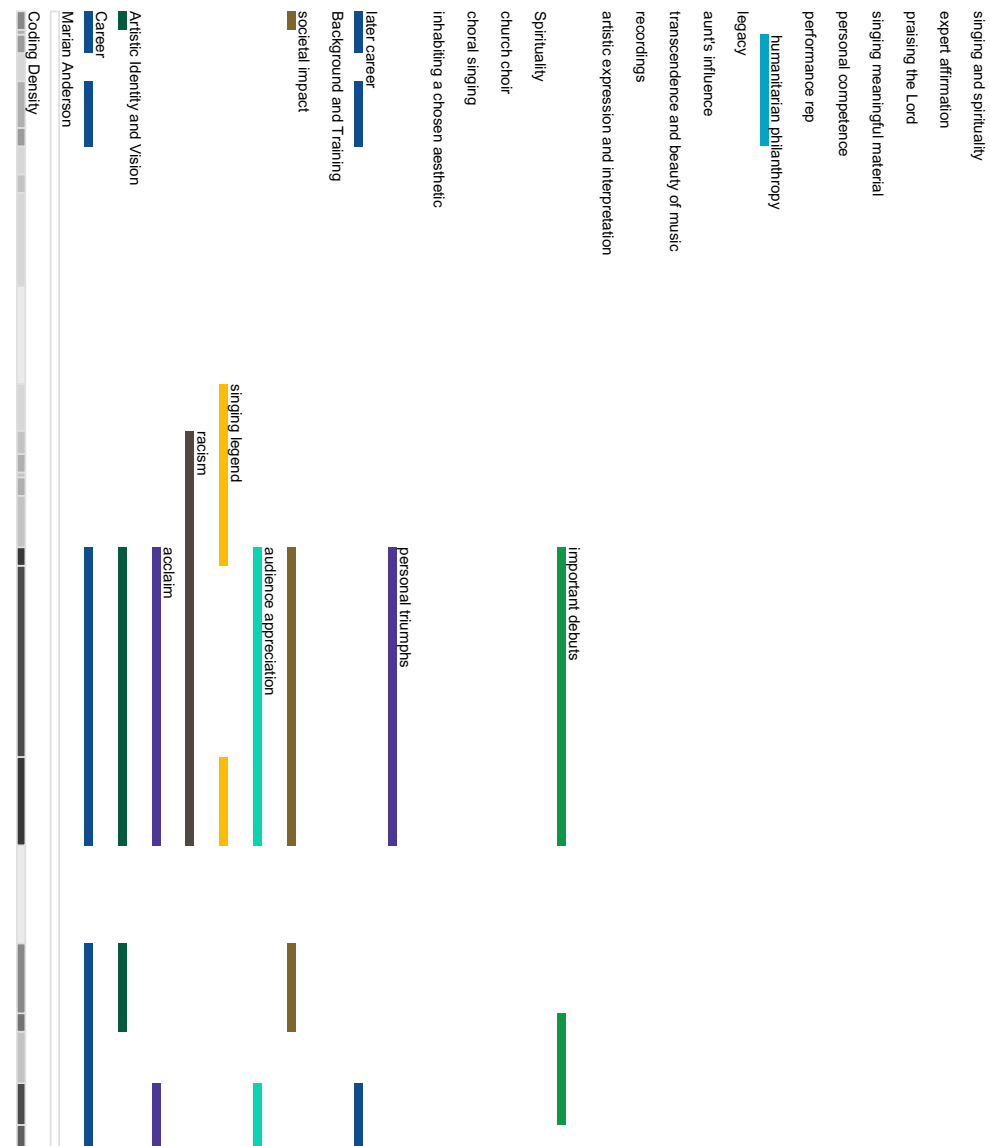
Legends are misty things. Even by 1965, and even in America, there must have been some to whom the name did not mean anything very specific, and now, about thirty years later, the big bold headline news of the 1930s and '50s fades from view or defies the eyesight in the minute print of a footnote or supplementary reference. So the mention of Washington in connection with Marian Anderson may not mean much. But it did then: she was at the centre of a storm which had been blowing up since the abolition of slavery, and which was to break with renewed strength in the long hot summers of the 1960s.

Briefly, the story was this. Anderson, by then a singer honoured throughout Europe as well as the United States, was booked to give a concert, as she regularly did, at the Washington Howard University School of Music. In 1939 their hall was destroyed by fire and they tried to transfer the concert to the Central High School. The school board refused, and when a similar application was made for use of the Constitution Hall, this was refused by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). It was clearly a test case and everybody rallied accordingly. The Parents Association supported the board but Mrs. Roosevelt resigned from her membership of the DAR, and Howard Ickes, Minister of the Interior, arranged for an open-air concert in which the banned singer stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and sang (with amplification system in-stalled) to an audience which eventually extended as far as the Washington Monument hill and which numbered 75,000. Of such events are legends made.

There was of course more of the same kind in essence though not as spectacular - hotels and restaurants which denied entrance and so forth. But tolerance - like charity - begins at home, and the musical world spoke on the subject with a cracked voice as long as the stage of the national opera house rejected her obvious fitness for it. Black singers were excluded, and it took all of Rudolf Bing's resolve, when he became Director, to put a stop to this. Again Marian Anderson became a test case and again the cause succeeded. She appeared as Ulrica in Un ballo in maschera on 7 January 1955, giving in all eight performances, and again history was made.

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These two events - the Metropolitan debut and the Lincoln Memorial concert - flash out like beacons, but the whole latter part of her career was pretty well illuminated. The World's Fair recital and concert for the King and Queen of England on their visit to the White House (these both in 1939); an inter-



racial war bond rally with Paul Robeson in 1942; European tours after the war, then South America, Japan, India (Nehru attending); innumerable awards and honorary degrees; and in 1958 her appointment as UN delegate on the Committee of Human Rights in which she spoke independently and strongly on behalf of the Cameroons: all of this stood, personified, before the Carnegie Hall audience at the Farewell in 1965. There was in fact nothing presumptuous about it if she did appear as the celebrity, regal and majestic'.

"She is the symbol of America. And yet a human being a great human being with the warmth, depth and simplicity that communicate directly with the hearts of her audiences. In the words of Fannie Hurst -"She has not grown simply great; she has grown great simply."

Still, this all deflects attention. It is the nimbus or halo rather than the head itself. In the long run, the singer is more important than the legend (the legend' after all owing its existence to the singer); and rather than the celebrity, however regal, what we want to see is the 'Negro contralto'.

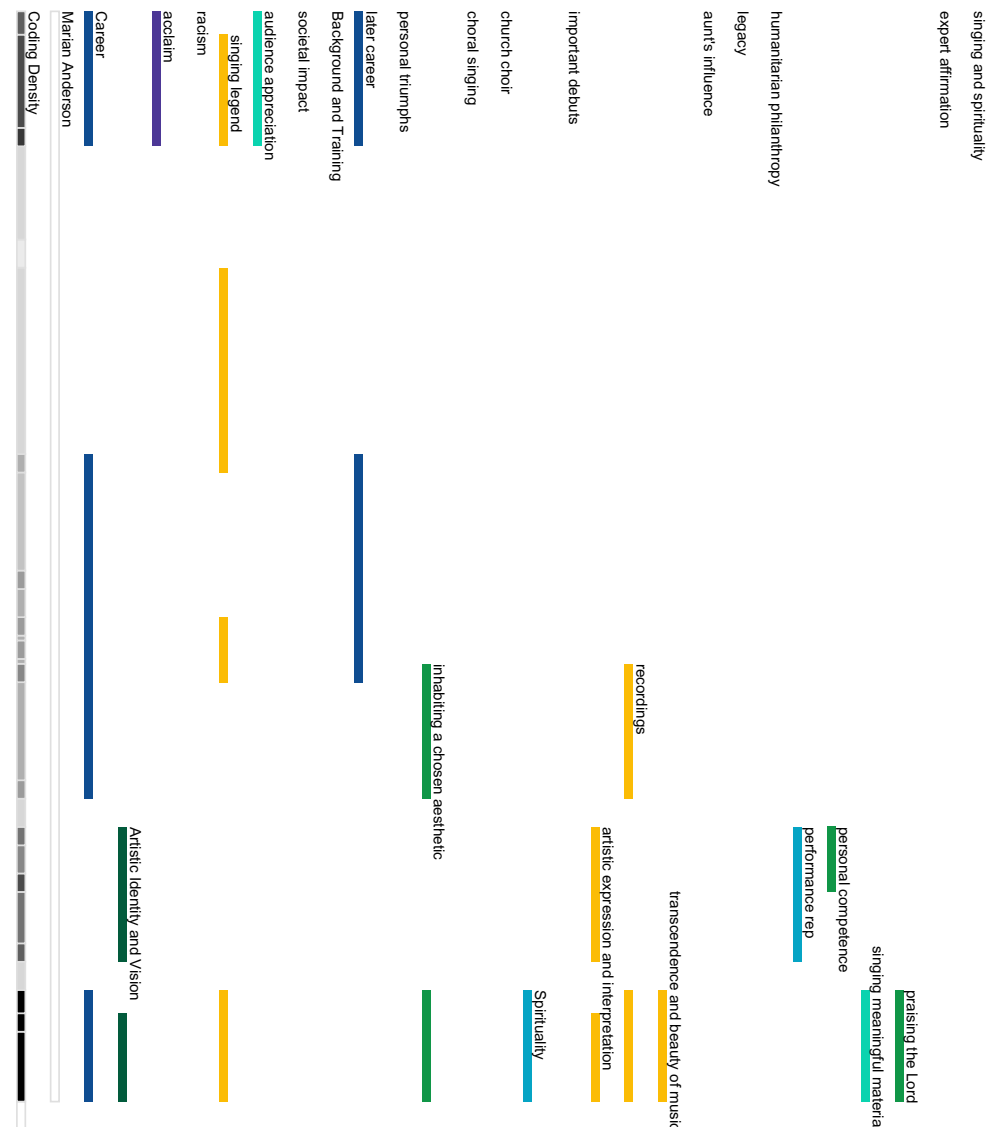
In some ways the legend has not merely caused a diversion; it has even created doubt. Inevitably the suspicion arises that this singer owed more to being the right person in the right place, than to purely musical considerations. I am personally certain that that is untrue: I heard Marian Anderson in concerts when she was still in magnificent form, and for what it is worth can vouch for the general truth of Harold Schonberg's tribute that 'she managed to make a great experience out of every concert' - except that I would have to qualify that 'every' because on the last occasion, which would have been about 1956, the uncertainties of intonation, vibrato and breath-support proved embarrassing.

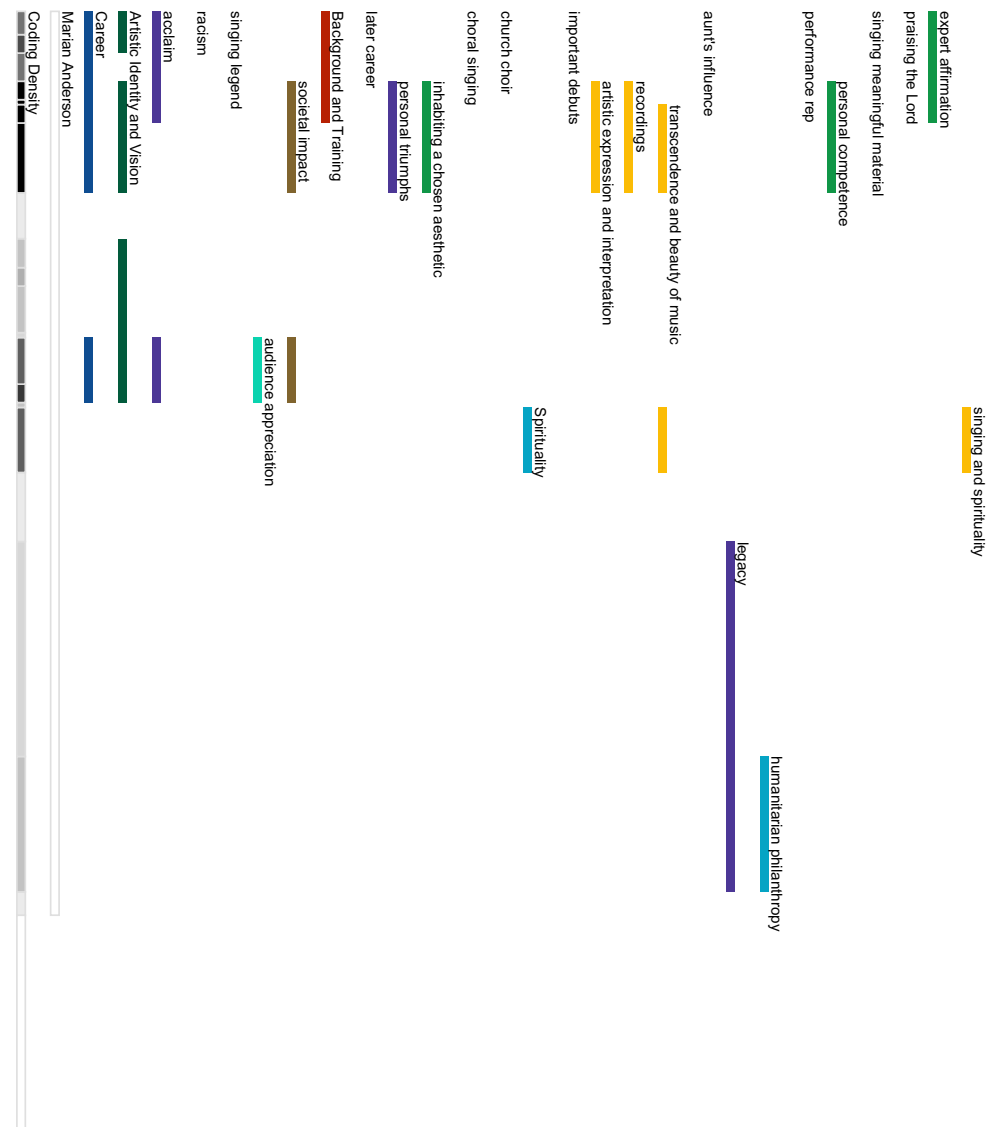
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In fact a decline had probably set in a few years earlier, for in 1954 an article appeared in the American press with the headline • «Marian Anderson's voice failing" declare top US music critics.' Certainly by 1960 the Washington Post 'sorrowfully' felt that she was 'no longer mistress of her voice'. So, along with the legend', the performances of later years also need to be put aside in order to reach the singer, the 'Negro contralto', as she should be surviving in the esteem of musicians.

For this we can go back to recordings. Nobody (I should think) could listen to her Samson and Delilah arias - those recordings in English, on the old plum labels, that used to be broadcast in every other programme of 'Housewives' Choice' or These You Have Loved' - and not feel some tremor or tingle in the presence of sheer vocal glory. Her voice, one would surely have said, was made for opera (in Moscow in 1936, Stanislavski urged her to stay and study Carmen with him, but she had to press on with her engagements and later came to feel that this was one of life's missed opportunities). Or one could turn then to her classical repertoire, to Handel's 'Ch'io mai vi possa', where the sumptuous Delilah-voice sheds its weight as if by magic and covers the ground as nimbly as any light soprano. She always loved and found a natural affinity with Schubert's 'Der Tod und das Mädchen', and her record of that too has the touch of greatness, with its otherworldly stillness in the Death-voice, 'the more insinuating and terrible because it is so soothing, as she herself wrote.

Then there are the Sibelius songs, a reminder of an unexpected specialisation in her repertoire. But fine as these and so much else may be, it is the spirituals that remain above all. The deep tone of Tramping, the curiously veiled vowels of 'Crucifixion', the rhythmic joy and the triumphant top A at the end of 'My soul's been anchored in the Lord': these are all caught on records, well enough at least for posterity to understand what the legend was really about, and that it was the 'Negro contralto' who mattered.





But her records are far from telling all, and we have to return to the printed word also, and listen to the witnesses: to the tributes paid by Bruno Walter, Sir Henry Wood, Roger Quilter, Toscanini, Sibelius - Sibelius, to whom she sang in his home with the effect that he embraced her and called for champagne instead of coffee. There are also the critics, like Schonberg who so vividly described that 'black velvet' of a voice. And there must be many who remember, above all, a figure on the platform, who changed her voice from the big macho tone appropriate to the lyin' man, the gamblin' man, the crapshootin' man' to an infinite tenderness of a lullaby-voice for the little bitsa baby. 'He's got the whole world in His Hand', she used to sing, and when she sang that, you felt that she surely had it in hers too.

In a 1951 concert Marian Anderson sang three spirituals, 1) Oh, What a Beautiful City, 2) He's Got the Whole World in His Hands, and 3) He Never Said a Mumblin' Word, and when she was done her audience fell silent. Jozef Sterkens posted it on Youtube in his "Critical Past" series: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAdes1-eqVA>

At the mention of the crucifixion the audience responded with a rare tribute of silence. American writer, artistic photographer and patron of the Harlem Renaissance Carl Van Vechten wrote, "Many a listener comes away from one of her recitals uncertain whether he has enjoyed an aesthetic or a religious experience, so completely fused are the two ideals in this great artist's own nature." (Source of quote not available).

Legacy

She was an example and an inspiration to both Leontyne Price and Jessye Norman.

Anderson established the Marian Anderson Award in 1943 after she was awarded The Philadelphia Award in 1940, which included \$25,000 in prize money (equivalent to \$543,705 in 2023). Anderson used the money to establish a singing competition to help support young singers. The prize fund was exhausted in due course and disbanded in 1976. In 1990, the award was re-established and issued annually up to 2019, when the last award was granted to Kool & the Gang. In 2022, the Award moved from a private operation to a program administered by Play On Philly, a classical music education organization aimed at local youth. Instead of an annual award ceremony, the funds were used to create the Marian Anderson Young Artist Program,[99] a tuition-free program with a mission to "serve those individuals whose communities have historically been excluded from the highest levels of musical excellence due to structural barriers in our country. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Anderson

Appendix 12 - Jon Vickers_Coded Case Study

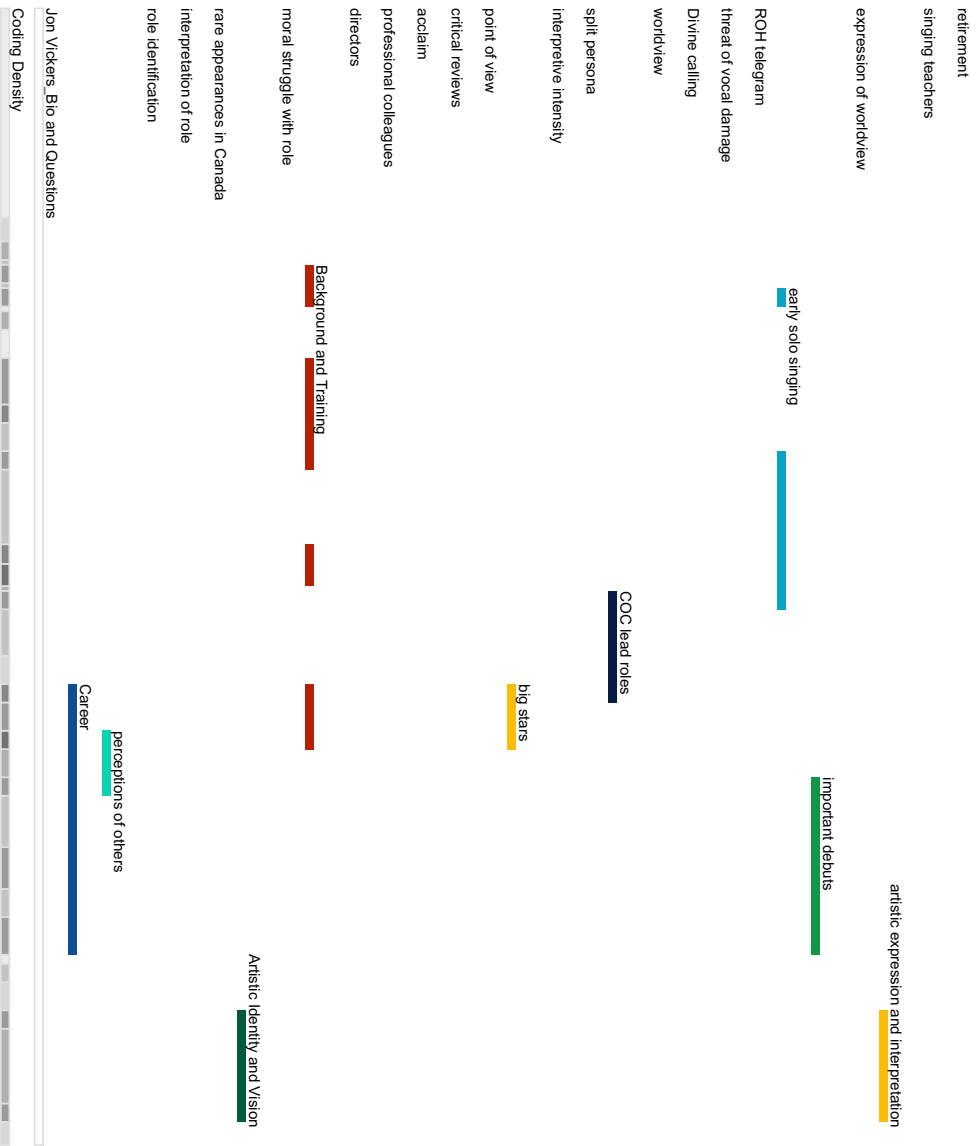
Biography - Canadian Encyclopedia: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/jon-vickers-emc>

Jon (Jonathan Stewart) Vickers, CC, tenor (born 29 October 1926 in Prince Albert, SK; died 10 July 2015 in ON).

Jon (Jonathan Stewart) Vickers, CC, tenor (born 29 October 1926 in Prince Albert, SK; died 10 July 2015 in ON). Honorary LL D (Saskatchewan) 1963, honorary D MUS (Guelph) 1977, honorary LL D (Laval) 1978, honorary LLD (Queen's) 1984, honorary D LITT (McMaster) 1985, honorary D MUS (Toronto) 1986, honorary D MUS (Windsor) 1989. The sixth child in a family of eight, he recalls singing in a Christmas concert at the age of three. His boy's treble had become a robust tenor by the time he had finished high school, and he joined Baptist choirs in Prince Albert and Flin Flon (where he worked in chain stores) and sang leading roles in Gilbert & Sullivan and Victor Herbert operettas. Compulsive about his gift, he sang, in those days, 'for anyone anytime anywhere.'

In 1946 he became assistant manager of a chain store in Winnipeg, but soon the demand for his service as a singer began to encroach on his time, and his employer ordered him to give up singing. Instead he resigned and became a hardware salesman, but continued to sing. Encouraged by Mary Morrison to study voice formally, he sent a recording of his singing to Ettore Mazzoleni at the RCMT. Accepted as a scholarship student in the fall of 1950, he began training with George Lambert. During his first year in Toronto Vickers sang in 30 oratorio performances for the Board of Education, was soloist in Messiah at the University of Western Ontario, was chosen by Mazzoleni as soloist for the Canadian premiere of Bruckner's Te Deum with the massed RCMT choirs, and in the fall of 1951 sang in Messiah at Massey Hall with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir. In 1952 he won honourable mention in the CBC radio competition 'Singing Stars of Tomorrow' and first prize in Radio Canada's 'Nos Futures Étoiles'. By 1955, despite wide exposure in concert and oratorio and some 28 operatic performances, including COC appearances as the Duke in Rigoletto (1954), Alfredo in La Traviata (1955), and Alfred in Die Fledermaus (1954), he had received no offers from either the USA or Europe. However, after his performances as the Male Chorus in the Stratford Festival's production of Britten's The Rape of Lucretia and as Don José in a 1956 COC production of Carmen with Regina Resnik, he was invited in 1957, on Resnik's recommendation, to sing in concert performances of Fidelio and Medea, the latter with Eileen Farrell, in New York. Also in 1956 Sir David Webster, general administrator of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, visited Canada, heard Vickers, and invited him to London for an audition. A three-year contract with the Royal Opera was the result. After his debut on tour with the Covent Garden company as Riccardo in The Masked Ball (January 1957) Vickers received enthusiastic notices, and he subsequently enjoyed great personal success in Carmen, Don Carlo, Aida, and The Trojans. After his debut at Bayreuth in 1958 as Siegmund in Die Walküre, Vickers was acclaimed as the world's leading interpreter of the role. That same year he sang Jason to Maria Callas' Medea in Dallas. By the end of the 1959-60 season, having appeared with the Vienna Staatsoper and the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and having sung in Peter Grimes and Fidelio at the Metropolitan Opera, he decided to become a freelance artist.

Vickers' roles over the years represented most of the dramatic and Heldentenor repertoire: Don José, Radames, Don Carlo, Canio, Otello, Tristan, Aeneas (The Trojans), Siegmund, Parsifal, Florestan, and, his favourite, Peter Grimes. In the latter role he was noted for the projection of a dramatic dimension rare on the operatic stage. He regarded the operas of his repertoire as conveyances for their composers' deepest emotions, intuitions, and beliefs, not as vehicles for voices. Consequently he concerned himself with Nietzschean philosophy in his interpretation of Tristan and conceives Otello as 'the Julius Caesar of the Venetian Empire.' One of Vickers' most significant associations was with the conductor Herbert von Karajan. He sang in Karajan's first three Salzburg Easter Festivals (1966, 1967, 1968), recorded

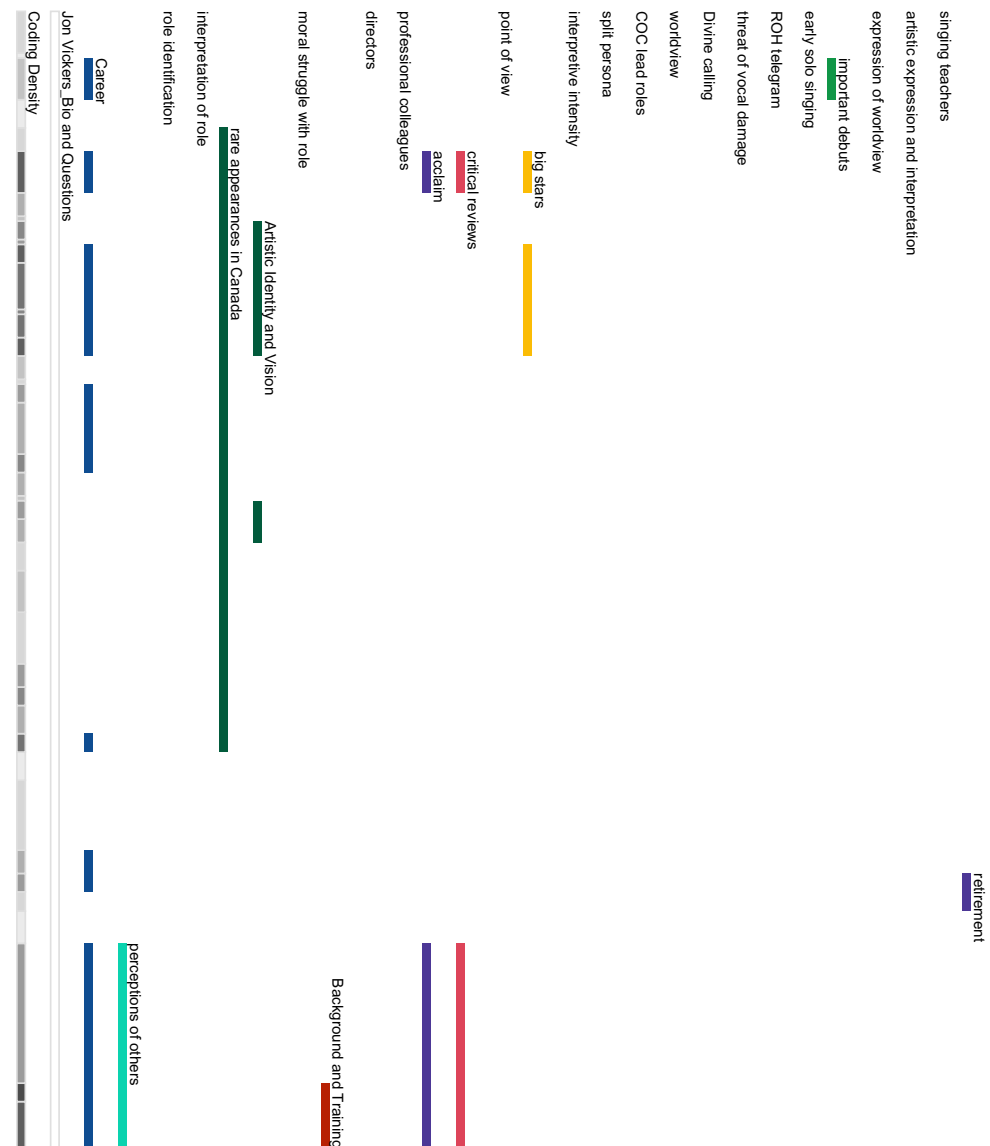


Tristan und Isolde, Die Walküre, Otello, and Fidelio and filmed Pagliacci and Otello with the conductor, and sang under his baton in the great opera houses, including La Scala and the Metropolitan. In 1985 Vickers starred in Handel's Samson at Covent Garden in a joint production with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Met, to celebrate Handel's 300th birthday.

Though he has given occasional recitals in Canada, notably in Toronto and at the opening of the 1969 Guelph Spring Festival, Vickers in his maturity sang little opera in Canada. While this has been blamed on Toronto critics' reactions to his recitals, in the 1960s and 1970s it probably was due to his fees, which by then were justifiably large, and to his time, which was too limited to accommodate the weeks of rehearsal often demanded. Nevertheless, there have been stellar occasions: he sang Otello in four performances in July 1967 at the World Festival (Expo 67) in Montreal. With the soprano Régine Crespin and the MSO he sang Act I of Die Walküre at the opening ceremonies of the NAC, 10 Jun 1969. He was the Male Chorus in the Guelph Spring Festival production (4, 6, and 8 May 1974) of Britten's The Rape of Lucretia. With the soprano Birgit Nilsson and the TS under Zubin Mehta he sang opera excerpts in what was billed as a 'Dream Concert' in Toronto in November 1974. And with the Opéra du Québec in May 1975 he was Tristan in five Montreal performances of Tristan und Isolde and acted as host for the production when it was seen on CBC TV (9 Feb 1977). An eight-city tour of Saskatchewan in 1977 with his accompanist Peter Schaaf culminated in a recital in his home city, Prince Albert, in the church where his father had preached as an elder and where he had sung in the choir as a child. The program included excerpts from Samson (Handel), Die Walküre, Hugh the Drover (Vaughan Williams), and Peter Grimes. He gave his first public performance of Schubert's dramatic song cycle Winterreise at the Guelph Spring Festival 9 May 1979. He returned to Canada that August to sing at the funeral of former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker at Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa. He sang Winterreise to a near-capacity audience at Roy Thomson Hall in 1983 and gave recitals in Prince Albert and Vancouver in 1984. For the Toronto International Festival in 1984 he sang in Die Walküre and Peter Grimes with the Metropolitan Opera on tour. In 1985 and in 1988 he made concert appearances with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra including entire acts from Die Walküre and Parsifal. In 1987 he returned to sing at the RCMT centennial concert at Roy Thomson Hall, and later at the Guelph Spring Festival. In order to spend more time with his family Vickers limited his performances to 65 a year after 1966. For years at the height of his career he maintained a farm in Ontario, working it himself between engagements to maintain a contact with realities different from those of the operatic world. In 1973, however, he moved to Bermuda.

Vickers included a number of Canadian works in his recital repertoire. He was a champion of the songs of Bernard Naylor, stating 'I love Naylor's songs... I don't think the world is really ready for Naylor's songs but his day will come' (Music Magazine, Nov/Dec 1986) and he was well reviewed (Toronto Globe and Mail, 25 Apr 1987) for his performance of Jean Coulthard's Six Medieval Love Songs. He recorded these and other Canadian songs for Centrediscs in 1986. Vickers announced his retirement in 1988.

A Newsweek article (15 Mar 1976) on the world's leading tenors described Vickers as 'an austere, reflective Canadian... goaded by the demands of a protestant work ethic' and continued: '[He] uses his rugged voice with a contemptuous disregard for musical or national boundaries and a compulsion to challenge the brutes of the repertory... The sound of his muscular, tireless voice is pitted and scarred as if hacked out of a Canadian quarry. But it is clearly made by hand, its imperfections redeemingly human and individual. What he conveys with unrelenting concentration is a profound dramatic sensibility.' Will Crutchfield commented in the New York Times (30 Mar 1987).that at 60 years of age Vickers 'can put [his voice's] full strength behind long, sustained phrases in the region of upper F, G and A flat without strain or apparent fatigue, and he can soften it... without fading into insubstantiality.



This should come as no surprise: Mr. Vickers has an enormous voice, but does not sing as though a special effort at bigness is the point.'

Vickers was named a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1968 and in 1975 won a Molson Prize presented 21 Jun 1976 at Ottawa. Outside Canada he won the 1978 Evening Standard Award for the 'most outstanding achievement in opera' for his performance of Tristan, and in 1985 he was named to the Academy of Vocal Arts Hall of Fame for Great American Singers. He returned to Canada in 1986 to be the first Wilma and Clifford Smith Visitor in Music at the University of Toronto, giving lectures on Dichterliebe, Winterreise, and Peter Grimes to overflowing houses of students and the general public. He also gave a series of three lectures on 'The Contribution of the Art of Music to the Civilizing Process' for the RCMT in July 1991.

From the CoC (Schabas and Morey, 2000, p. 46)
"...Jon Vickers, who had already gained an impressive reputation as an oratorio singer, sang the role of Filipeto in the Wolf-Ferrari piece, and the Duke in Rigoletto (1953). Vickers, from Saskatchewan, had been urged by Mary Morrison to come to Toronto in the late 1940s. His voice was still relatively light, but its robust quality and cutting edge were more than evident to perceptive listeners. Vickers was a stiff actor who needed loosening up, but he learned fast. He would go on to become the leading heldentenor of his time."

Interview Questions applied to documents on the life of Jon Vickers

Williams, Jeannie. (1999). Jon Vickers: A Hero's Life. Boston, Northeastern University Press.

Documentary - Jon Vickers, A Man and His Music. (1974) Vancouver.
<https://www.operaonvideo.com/jon-vickers-a-man-and-his-music-documentary-vancouver-1974/>

John Vickers Interview, Houston, 1980: The "Opera Addict"<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXYBoZK3YDo>

This is about his great roles of Otello and Peter Grimes, his foray into comedy with Vašek in The Bartered Bride, and the one role he wanted to do -- but couldn't.

Vickers, J. (2009, Summer). Working with Herbert von Karajan. Opera Canada, 50, 20-21. Retrieved from <http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/working-with-herbert-von-karajan/docview/220307161/se-2>

Part I – Background and Introductory Questions

1. When and where do you first remember singing in front of an audience? Who or what motivated you to do this?

Jon Vickers grew up on a farm in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan as the middle son of a strict Lutheran/Presbyterian preacher and school teacher during the Great Depression. The piano in their

Coding Density
Jon Vickers, Bio and Questions

Career

perceptions of others

role identification

interpretation of role

rare appearances in Canada

Artistic Identity and Vision

moral struggle with role

Background and Training

directors

professional colleagues

acclaim

critical reviews

point of view

big stars

interpretive intensity

split persona

worldview

Divine calling

threat of vocal damage

ROH telegram

early solo singing

important debuts

expression of worldview

artistic expression and interpretation

singing teachers

retirement

COC lead roles

home was always in use and they sang as a family for Bill's preaching jobs with the Salvation Army, Plymouth Brethren, and the United Church around Prince Albert. Jon called his family group this "poor man's Trapp family" as they helped raise money for war bonds and the Canadian Red Cross (Williams, 13). Vickers claimed to be shy as a child and singing was one way out of this shyness.

Follow-up: What community surrounded you in your early years? Where you part of a religious tradition, professional group, etc?

The First Baptist Church choir as boy soprano; home life --> on Saturdays the family scrubbed and washed the floors while listening to radio broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera (which began in 1931). Jon remembered the 1938 performance of Aida when he was 11 years old, and how the main tenor Giovanni Martinelli collapsed in the middle of his aria and needed to be replaced by Frederick Jagel (Williams, 12); singing in the community, and strict adherence to hymn-singing at home on Sundays. In the early years he didn't care if he sang well or not, he was just having fun. Later in life he expressed other thoughts, "I do feel, of course, that there has been an indelible imprint on my whole personality by this upbringing. I think it has made me um, uh, be uncompromising into my demands on myself... but at the same time those uncompromising demands that I make on myself whenever I fail in my own thinking as far as being demanding of myself I feel that I've let God down, I've let myself down, I've let my profession down, I've let my talent down, and I guess that is... a natural product of my upbringing" (Jon Vickers, A Man and His Music).

What ideal community or communities did you imagine for yourself during your early singing years?

Jon sang for church weddings and funerals and enjoyed singing because of its physical and social pleasures. The First Baptist church in Thunder Bay was one example. His first job was as a trouble shooter for Woolworths and positioned in various cities such as Flin Flon, Winnipeg and Brandon. Eventually he ended up in Toronto at the RCM.

2. Describe your first singing teacher, and anything you remember about him or her. Church organist Luther Roberts heard Jon sing just after puberty and told him not to hurt his voice, warning him not to extend his "baritone" range. At the end of high school, he took four months of lessons with Roberts, who gave him solos from the oratorio repertoire – this was the beginning of Vickers singing apart from his family (Williams, 18). "Despite his lessons with Wood and Thomson in Winnipeg, Vickers made a point throughout his career that his sole teacher had been George Lambert, the conservatory faculty member who had auditioned him in Winnipeg... The young singer plunged into Poppa's [Lambert's] plan that he should learn as much music as possible" (Williams, 35).

Part II – Transition Questions

3. When did you start to "own" your voice, and when did you first see yourself as a singer with career potential?

Did your community/ies affirm your early singing ambitions?

Frank White Jon's father's closest friend encouraged Jon to sing professionally, since Jon also had dreams of being a farmer or a doctor. White said that Jon had a gift from God. When Jon sang as a teen at St. Paul's, the parishioners were stunned by the size of his voice, and the windows would rattle as he hit the final high notes of "The Holy City" at full blast. Someone remarked that he should be trained but his mother Myrtle objected, "No, Jonathan sings along with the rest of us" (Williams, 13). This incident sparked future conflict as Jon's interest in singing progressed.

When and how did intrinsic motivation take precedence over extrinsic affirmations? When Jon became a professional singer, he had resistance from his immediate family (mother). However, he felt called by God to sing, and he did. "I sang because I had to sing. It was part of me ... an absolute necessity, fulfilling some kind of emotional and even perhaps physical need in me" (Williams, 13).



7. When working on a new artistic project, how did your personal spiritual and/or worldview beliefs influence the choices you made in terms of repertoire, roles, themes, lyrics, expression, or musical style?

Vickers was deeply committed to the truthfulness of his portrayals, with passionate expression. He believed the whole point of opera was to understand the minds and the psyches of the human beings that he portrayed, whether Otello, Grimes or whoever. It is what Verdi, Boito, Shakespeare wrestled with that went way beyond words, stage directions, counterpoint, etc. The techniques they used were merely put at the disposal of a greater revelation – the essence of art. He said he approached the role of Vašek in *The Bartered Bride* with the same probing observations and research as he had done for his heavier roles (Vickers Interview, Houston, 1980). The director Elijah Moshinsky's view of Vickers' portrayals was that the tenor "has trained himself to make that entrance into the character's ego very direct. And that gives a lot of his performances something very uncontrollable.... And that is, of course, great interpretation.... He also enters the violence of the character, so that you have lots of stories of people who've sung [Pagliacci with him or Otello, where they've said he's become dangerously violent. The point is that in order to be inside the part, he also opens himself up to the psychoses of the part, becomes psychotic with the character. And that's why I say he's a very complex kind of person. Sometimes he [comes] close to madness because he's developed this ability for complete identification" (Williams, 221-222).

Follow-up: Can you recount specific instances where your artistic output was directly informed by your worldview and spirituality?

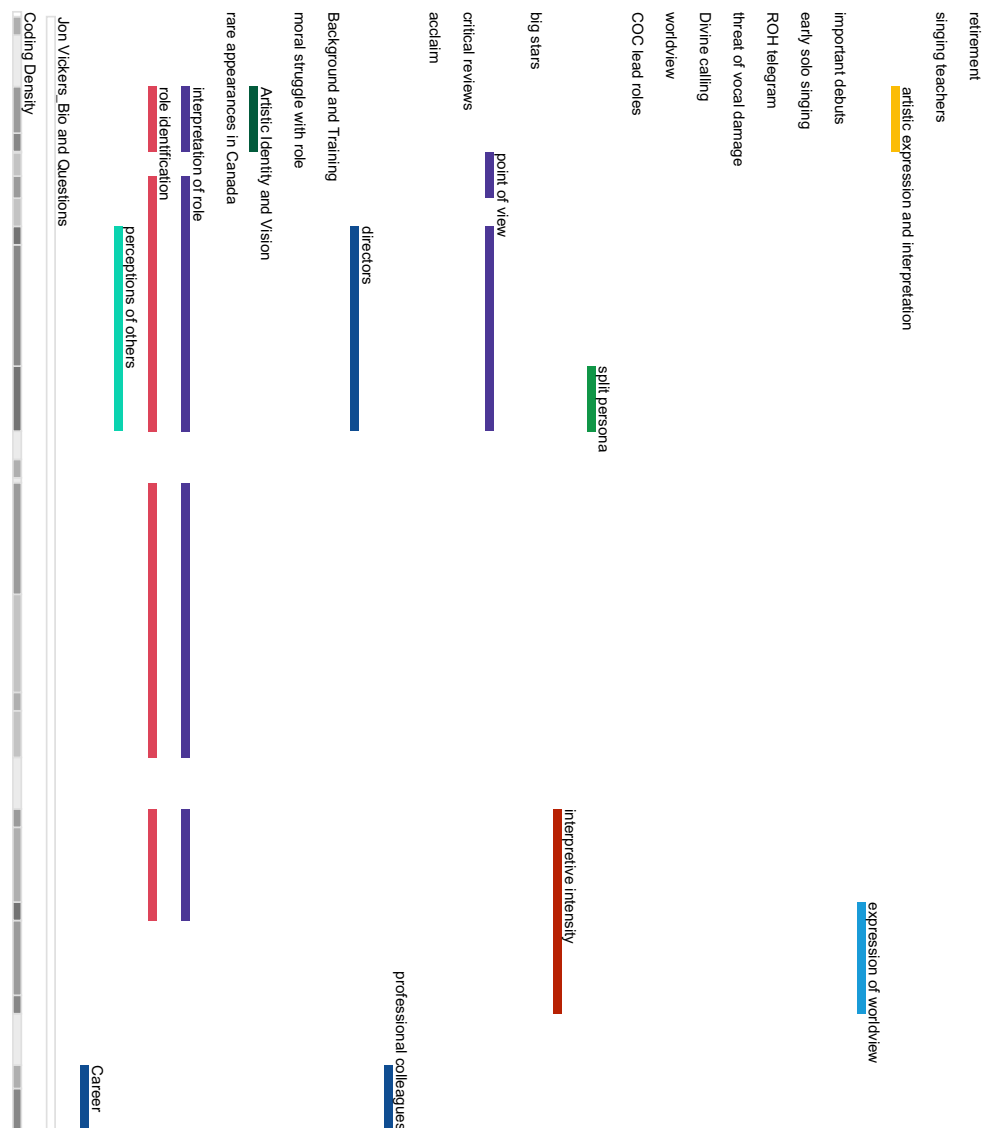
"The way that a person develops a character, interprets a character. ... In my case I cannot separate the interpretation of the role from the fundamental belief I have about humanity, and that is that I do believe that inherent in every single solitary human being there is every capacity for good and every capacity for evil, in different portions of course, and I think the thing that makes one individual different from another is the balance of the facets of personality. When I study a role I decide which are the predominant facets of personality that suit the personality that I'm supposed to portray... and then having decided what those facets of personality are, I seek to find them in myself, and as I work out the role decide where I have to exaggerate that particular facet of personality to make Othello. And when I have completed the study of a role I then go on the stage, not to sort of from the outside put on a character, but on the contrary, that it is motivated from within the facets of personality that I possess myself, which I have consciously distorted so that I become Otello" (Jon Vickers, *A Man and His Music*).

What artistic contributions are you personally most proud of in terms of quality, content, and societal impact?

Playing Tristan with Birgit Nilsson as Isolde was a highlight of Vickers' career. Vickers had matchless intensity. Williams (1999) describes, "How does the singer work up to expose so much of himself in a single act of an opera? Such intensity and freshness of feeling go far beyond the repetition of a role sung many times. Courage and confidence may be gained by repetition but reaching that point cannot be easy with less time to prepare onstage. Such a performance makes clear once again that the sound of his voice was totally individual. It cannot be overstated: Other voices are more beautiful, but few if any voices have been able to convey such passion and meaning. It is a question how much of this singer's art rested on the God-given fact of that sound quality, which can be separated from technique and from the years of mastering the performance of demanding repertoire" (pp. 291, 292).

How did your output live up to your own aesthetic of what you considered good, true, and beautiful, and how did this internal ideal affect visible society?

Vickers first career performances in the 1950s began in the small Canadian town of Kitchener, Ontario with Lois Marshall, Maureen Forrester and James Milligan singing Verdi's *Requiem*, and it ended in Kitchener singing *Parsifal* in 1988 with Gail Gilmore as Kundry under the baton of Raffi Armenian and



the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony. After more than thirty years Jon Vickers walked away from opera quietly, with simplicity and dignity (Williams, 1999, pp. 291-292). Vickers believed that true art comprises “Beauty, truth and love, and if any one of them is missing, there is no work of Art” (in Williams, 297). He brought enormous integrity to his art, to the point where he worked with an attitude of “having a pipeline to God” (ibid). His twin interests were art and its salvation and Jesus and the salvation of the world (Williams, 1999, p. 299).

8. Considering the broader cultural, political, and socio-economic context of the late 20th century, how did you navigate and reconcile your personal beliefs with external influences on your creative process? (constraints on motivation)

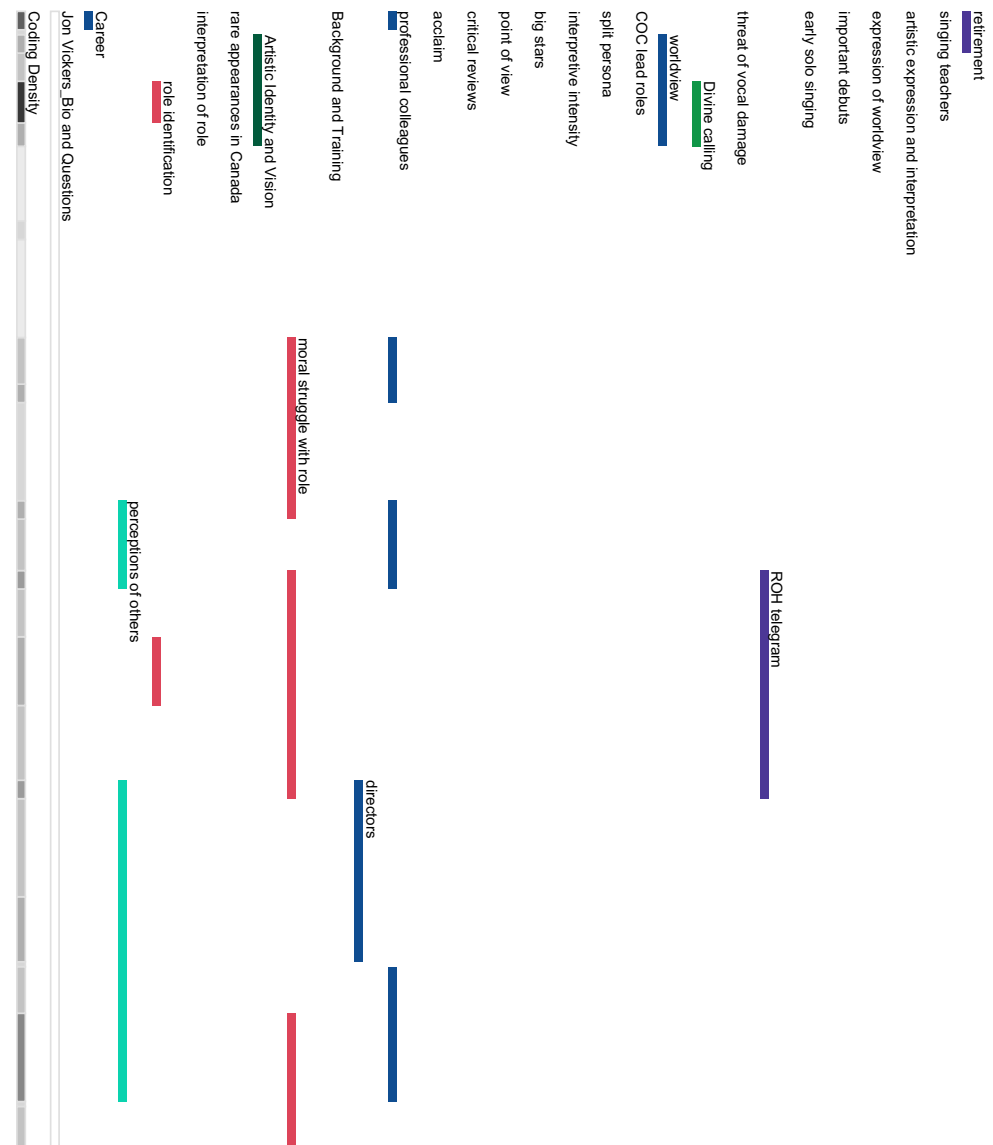
Follow up: Have there been instances where external factors posed challenges to your creative freedom or convictions, and how did you address them?

1970 Tristan and Isolde fiasco

Final San Francisco performances in 1976

The Tannhäuser scandal ROH 1977 – “Vickers was torturing over Tannhäuser with Knie in September 1976, she recalled, when they were doing Die Walküre in San Francisco. She thought it odd that he was worried about Tannhäuser when Siegmund was, in her view, equally problematic morally. Vickers recalled he had the role memorized and was studying it at home in Bermuda. As he put it in a 1988 lecture, “I learned Tristan in three months, I learned Peter Grimes in twelve days. But I choked on Tannhäuser for thirteen months. I have a profound Christian faith, and I don’t apologize for it...Wagner challenged the redemptive work of Jesus Christ...Tannhäuser was despicable... brutal, abused Elisabeth... and at the end he gets a pat on the head from [the Almighty]” (Williams, 212)...In debates with colleagues he emphasized that Elisabeth’s intercessions on Tannhäuser’s behalf saved him, and Vickers couldn’t do it. When they pointed out Siegmund’s incestuous love with his sister, Vickers brushed it off and said he had to “stand on the side” (Williams, 213). Jon’s telegram to the house read: “It is with profound regret that I must inform you that I wish to withdraw from the revival of Tannhäuser. This decision has not been made easily, and more than was the decision to accept the offer in the first place. As you know, it has always been essential for me to have a point of personal contact with the personality of each role I portray so that by my identification with the role I can bring the characters to life on stage. I failed completely to find any point from which to begin. I am therefore convinced of the impossibility for me to interpret Tannhäuser. This decision, I know, is late in arriving, due to the prolonged, intensive study and enormous effort on my part to come to grips with this work. I apologize for the difficulties that this will cause you, but thank you for your cooperation and understanding.” (ROH Archives, in Williams, 215). Elijah Moshinsky, the director, probably had the best take on Vickers’ refusal: “I personally believe the following: It wasn’t a matter of singing it musically or not. Because he wasn’t that sort of artist. I really do think that he couldn’t find the psychological knob to hang his performance on. And I think it’s the particular kind of contradictory sexuality, which is something he always used to portray brilliantly - no one could do that like he could, longing against...purity against danger.” But with Tannhäuser, “There was something about the way Wagner wrote it which was indulgent and unpleasant, and it was the fake religiosity of the end that he couldn’t do. And I do believe that to be the case.” (Williams, 219). It is probably rational to believe that both vocal and moral demands played into Vickers’ unyielding decision. To most of his colleagues turning down a role on moral grounds was unheard of. Franz Kraemer echoes writer Peter Conrad in the reason for Vickers’ distaste for the role. Vickers could never shake the feeling of guilt about being onstage. “He very often said, ‘I’d rather be on a farm and use my hands [instead of doing] all this sham stuff.’” Added Kraemer, “And if you don’t like being up there, then you want to be sure that the roles you do have real meaning.” (Williams, 218).

Jon Vickers was not alone in his distaste of Tannhäuser. Clara Schumann also did not like Tannhäuser, saying that in it Wagner gave “free reign to every abomination”. (The Marriage Diaries of Robert and



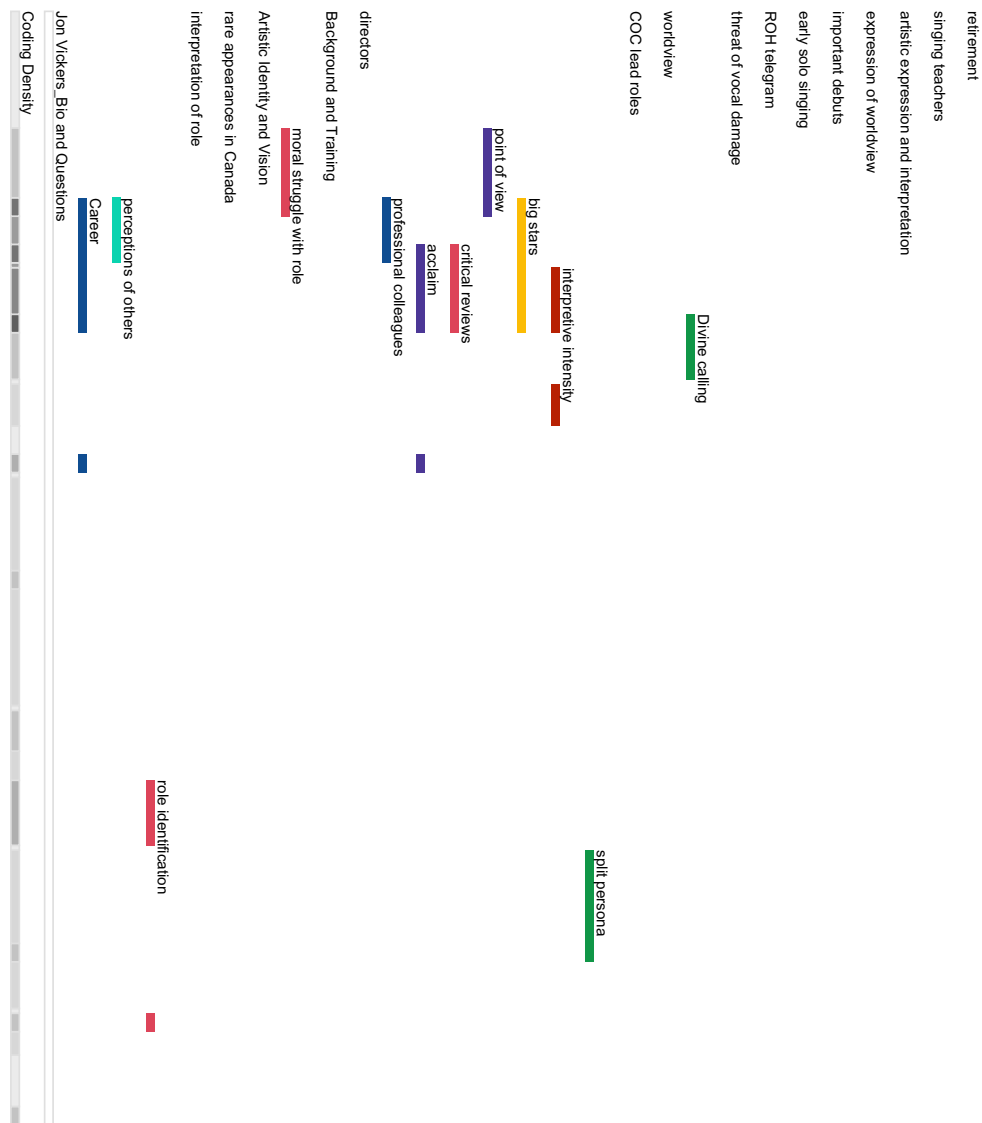
Clara Schumann) Schumann, Robert, and Clara Schumann. The Marriage Diaries of Robert and Clara Schumann. Edited by Gerd Nauhaus, translated by Peter Ostwald, Northeastern University Press, 1993. Ferris, David. Schumann's Eichendorff Liederkreis and the Genre of the Romantic Cycle. Oxford University Press, 2000

Parsifal is an opera Vickers called “the most blasphemous work ever.” Although he shunned Tannhäuser on moral grounds, he sang the wise fool many times. He must have come to terms with the messianic Parsifal; in a 1986 Chicago interview he said that the opera is about “the joy of giving not taking”. Leonie Rysanek emphasized how seriously Vickers took the part. “He is possessed! He believes he is Parsifal now when we do it. He’s absolutely a saint, a priest, after Kundry’s kiss,” she told Robert Jacobsen in 1986. Andrew Porter saw this in the spring 1985 Met Parsifal, Vickers’ last in that house. Porter’s high accolade: “Mr. Vickers and Miss Rysanek’s reenactment of Christ and the Magdalen and his mystic celebration of the Last Supper were so vivid as to make their presentation in a common playhouse almost unseemly... Mr. Vickers is a tenor who avowedly ‘carries the responsibility of revealing Christ’s continuing redemptive power to the world’ [Porter is quoting the Cambridge Opera Handbook], and he does so herein a performance that transcends mere aesthetic appraisal. Porter noted, “Today there are no other tenors, and few singers, who interpret with such intensity” (Williams, 276-277)

Sang into the late 80s at the MET and Chicago lyric – Parsifal, Samson, etc. The process of being engaged as an opera singer is tiring. He says, “If you’ve had an evening of success, or if there has been a tremendous feeling of unity in the performance, of cooperation between conductor and designer and your colleagues on stage, it is a very exhilarating sensation. You scrape off the makeup, you have a shower, and you walk out, and you sign a few autographs, or sometimes a lot of autographs - and then suddenly, just like that, it’s over, and you are just a person in a big city in a strange place where you go home to a hotel room. A hotel room to me is a prison; it’s a place that I have to go to willingly or unwillingly to preserve my energies for my work. I removed myself from society; unfortunately, I must also remove myself from my family. The opera singer is a lonely person and if there is one characteristic, if there is one thing that the opera singer, that the international opera singer must learn to cope with it is a sense of personal loneliness” (Jon Vickers, A Man and His Music). When discussing his desire to play the witch in Hansel and Gretel he told the interviewer that he was refused the role because he had no sense of humor. Like the Tannhäuser issue, this illustrates how others in the opera industry often misunderstood him. Whether this was from an actual contradiction in Vickers, or a misunderstanding is a debatable topic (Check Williams). This is probably why Vickers was so attracted to the role of Peter Grimes, who was rejected simply because people would not take the time to understand him.

“I have consciously tried to become a what I’ve called a conscious schizophrenic, in that I have kept my personal life and my professional life totally separate one from the other because when I stand on the various stages of the world the various operatic stages of the world I am not being Jon Vickers; I am being Othello or Tristan or Aeneas or Don Jose or Cano in Pagliacci or Don Carlo or all the various personalities that that I have learned to become on the operatic stage.... I try to make them happy kids. I am determined that as they grow up that they think of me as nothing but their dad I don’t want them thinking of me as some kind of a celebrity whatever that means” (Jon Vickers, A Man and His Music). He can’t portray something that is untrue to the character. Jon was a perfectionist, demanding the best out of himself and his colleagues, driving them (Jon Vickers, A Man and His Music).

9. When collaborating with others in the music industry how have you navigated differences in worldview or cultural beliefs to create a cohesive artistic output?



Follow up: Have there been collaborations where diverse worldviews, cultures, or spiritual experience either complicated or enhanced the creative process, contributing to a unique artistic product?

Lotfi Mansouri, director for the Dallas Civic Opera said, “That’s why sometimes I had trouble when he was starting to quote the Bible to me. If you believe in certain things, then carry it off in your life.” Mansouri saw what he called “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” in Vickers. “I felt there were two Jon Vickerses, the one that wanted to be worldly, attractive and dashing [have] love affairs, [be] Don Giovanni. And the other one who would read the Bible to his kids before every meal.” (Williams, 220).

The Canada Council of Arts turned down Vicker’s first tour proposal for political reasons because they didn’t like Jon Vickers for his outspoken Christian views (ethnic and sexist biases), and his difficult temperament. Maureen Forrester was chariman at the time and said, “He’s not a nice man, you know” (Williams, 293). Check Maureen Forrester’s autobiography

When was your longest running “winning streak” in terms of inhabiting your own aesthetic?

Singers are a product of their time. Vickers grew up in a time when the voice was one voice from top to bottom – the meaning of bel canto and evenness of voice. This is beautiful singing, where the technique is invisible (Jon Vickers Interview, 1980).

Part IV – Closing Reflections

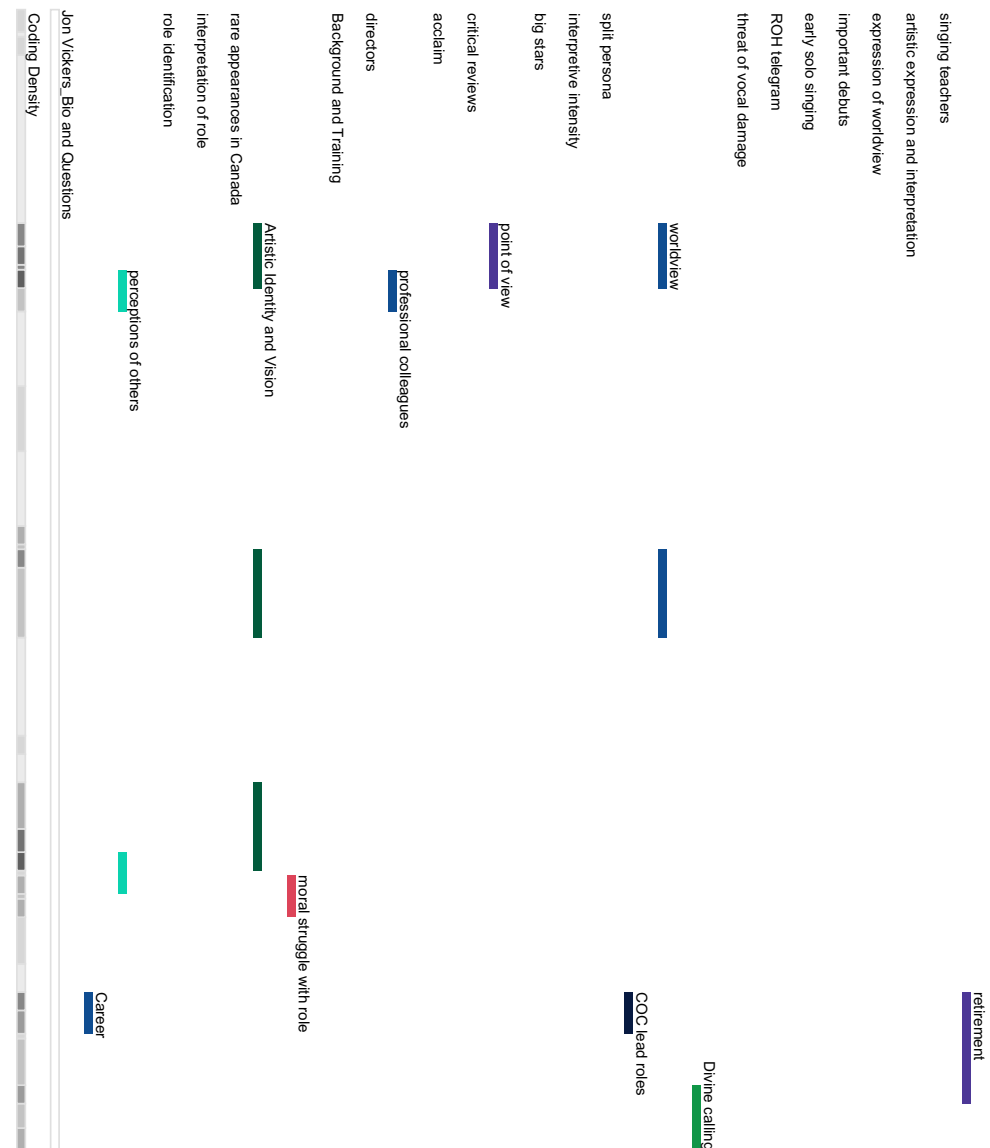
10. How have your worldview and spirituality evolved over the course of your singing career, and how have these changes impacted your motivation and artistic expression? Worldview supplies the criteria for all thinking and engenders a basic understanding of the true, the good, and the beautiful. (Nietzsche and the Crisis of the Humanities Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 45-65, 187-99.)

Follow up: Can you share a specific turning point or experience where your beliefs significantly influenced a shift in your approach to your singing career?

Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience as a professional singer of the late 20th C that you think exemplifies how personal beliefs have motivated your artistry that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

“Vickers wrestled with himself and his convictions. He fought hubris, although he believed himself to be among the best, if not the best, of the tenors of his time. He spoke of his contributions as tiny, but, paradoxical as always, he clearly was aware that they were huge. ‘I have involved audiences over and over again with my Tristan, my Grimes and my Fidelio – I’m not bragging, it’s fact.’ Some said he battled sexual temptation, always a musky companion for performers on the lonely road. He exhausted himself in weighing the moralities of all his business and artistic dealings. And he never did conquer his stubbornness, perhaps his most enduring quality. ‘I never bluff’ was a favorite warning. Jon Vickers rarely changed his mind, once he had made it up” (Williams, 1999, p. 299).

Stuart Hamilton did a 1996 CBC Radio program of 4.5 hours concentrating on the 1950s years of the CBC Opera Company in which Vickers sang seventeen roles. Vickers showed up, enthusiastic about how his CBC work had stood him in good stead when he went to Europe. He introduced Hamilton to his wife Hetti and said he was so happy. Hamilton mentioned the happiness Vickers had given to audiences, but Vickers explained, “I am really happy because I don’t have to sing anymore.” Hamilton felt this was indicative of what his career had meant. “For him it was a torture, not a pleasure... He was put on this earth to do it. He was very religious and it was his cross to bear. He did make a lot of



retirement
singing teachers
artistic expression and interpretation
expression of worldview
important debuts
early solo singing
ROH telegram
threat of vocal damage
Divine calling
worldview
COC lead roles
split persona
interpretive intensity
big stars
point of view
critical reviews
acclaim
professional colleagues
directors
Background and Training
moral struggle with role
Artistic Identity and Vision
rare appearances in Canada
interpretation of role
role identification
perceptions of others
Career
Jon Vickers_Bio and Questions
Coding Density

money, and he was very smart with it.” Hamilton could only think of the anguish of one of the greatest of the century’s singers during his life on stage (Williams, 308). This matches the forward by Birgit Nilsson who noted that Vickers was very unhappy and a conflicted man.

Appendix 13 - Eleanor Steber_Coded Case Study

Bernheimer, M and Blyth, A. (2008) Eleanor Steber. In Lucy, W. Macy (ed.) The Grove Book of Opera Singers, Oxford: Oxford UP. p. 464

(b Wheeling, WV, 17 July 1916; d. Langhorne, PA, 3 Oct 1990). American soprano. After studying pirlvately with Paul Althouse and William Whitney, and appearing in Boston in 1936, she won the 1940 Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air. This led to her debut on 7 December as Sophie, and she remained a leading soprano with the Met until 1963. As her voice matured, its silvery sheen gave way to greater warmth and breadth, and she began to undertakes heavier roles such as the Marschallin, Elsa, Desdemona, Tosca and Donna Anna. She was particularly noted for the suavity and poise of her Mozart heroines - the Countess Almiviva, Fiordiligi, Pamina, Donna Elvira and Konstanze, which she sang at the Met premiere of Die Entführung in 1946. She also created the title role in Samuel Barber's Vanessa (1958), sang the title role in the American premiere of Arabella (Met, 1955), and Marie in the first Metropolitan Wozzeck (1959). She appeared at the Edinburgh Festival, Bayreuth, Vienna and Florence as well as with numerous American companies; she sang Miss Wingrave in the American premiere of Benjamin Britten's opera (1973, Santa Fe).

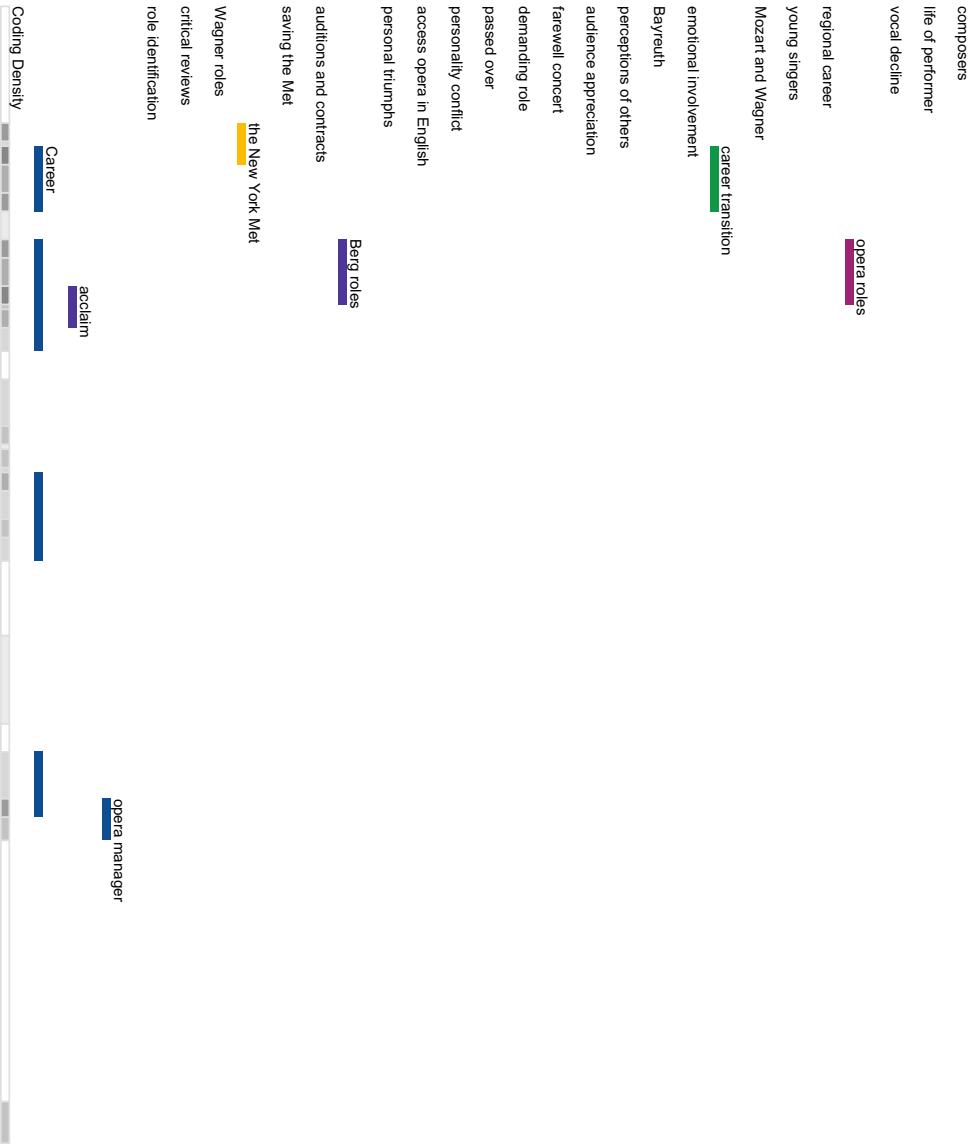
An admired concert singer and recitalist, Steber commissioned and gave the first performance of Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915 (1948), which she later recorded; in 1964 she gave three recitals at the Wigmore Hall in London. She also appeared in musical comedy. She was head of the voice epartment at the Cleveland Institute, 1963-72, and was appointed to the Juilliard School in 1971; in 1975 she established the Eleanor Steber Music Foundation to aid young singers. She made many recordings, including the roles of Countess Almaviva (Met, 1943), a deeply eloquent Elsa (Bayreuth, 1953) and the title role of Barber's Vanessa. She wrote "Eleanor Steber: an Autobiography" (Ridegwood, N.J, 1992).

Note: Eleanor Steber was raised in a Christian home. She grew up in Wheeling, West Virginia, in a Lutheran family. Her parents, especially her mother, were deeply involved in her early musical training. Her religious background likely influenced her early exposure to sacred music, though she became best known for her work in opera and art song.

Eleanor Steber's career decline was influenced by multiple factors, including her unhappy marriages, struggles with alcoholism, and conflicts with Rudolf Bing, but it's difficult to say definitively which had the greatest impact. Steber continued to perform successfully in recitals, recordings, and teaching after leaving the Met. This suggests that Bing's influence alone didn't destroy her career. However, her alcoholism and personal struggles likely affected her longevity as an active opera star. A combination of both personal and professional factors played a role in the decline of her operatic career, but her legacy as a singer remained strong despite these challenges.

Black, C.A. (2008) A primitive-donna: A survey of the operatic career of Eleanor Steber, University of Houston.

Family:
The foundations of the operatic tradition were present in her life from a young age, as her German grandfather told her the stories of Wotan and Fricka, of Siegfried and the dragon, and of the ring.



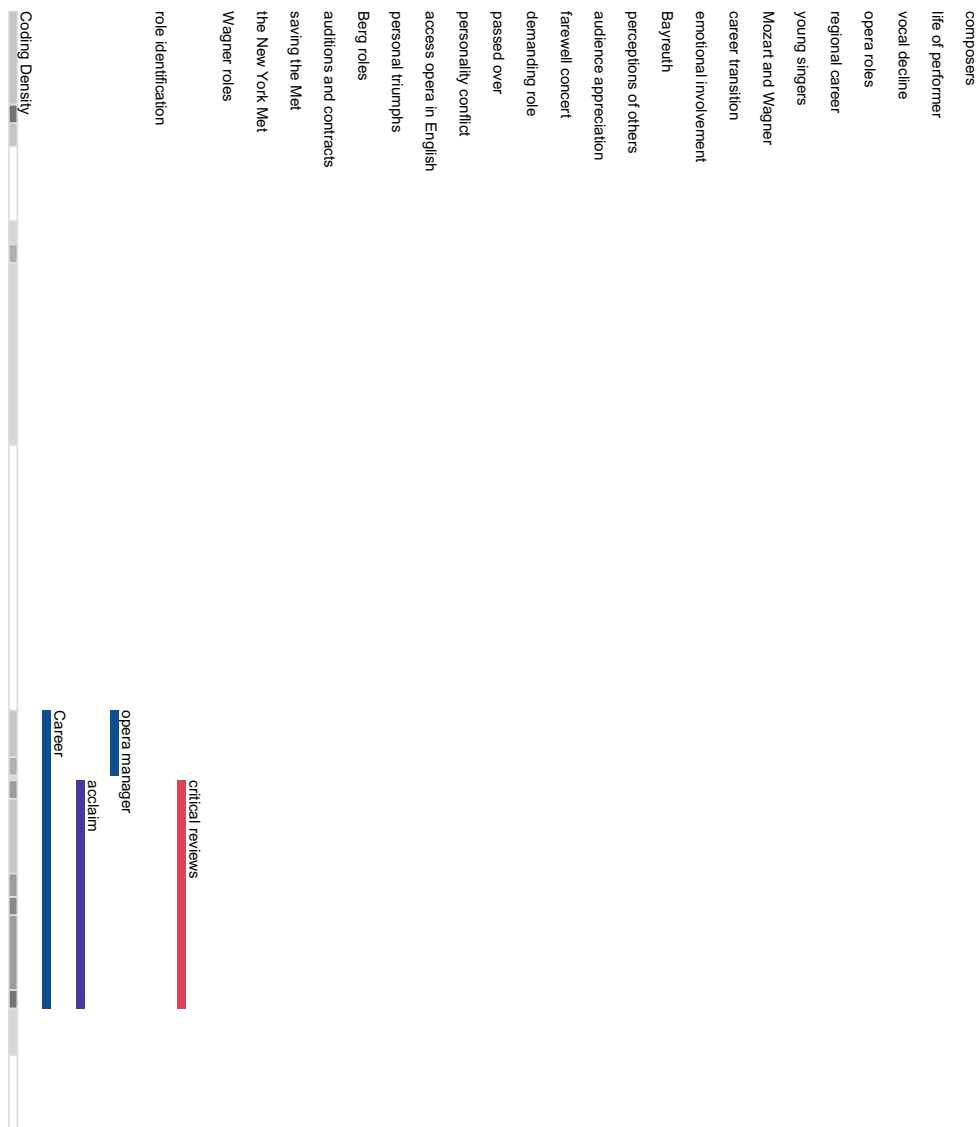
Nights were often spent watching her grandmother knit while her grandfather read from his German Bible. Her mother, a good singer who grew up in a time when a woman's family was considered her career, paid for her three children's college educations with fees collected from her own singing appearances. In fact Steber gives credit for her career to her mother, the driving force in her developing years. Eleanor was made to play piano from an early age as a backup plan should she have any problems on her singing path.

Training:
Whitney, like his father, was a singing product of Italy, as both father and son had studied with Luigi Vannuccini in Florence. Throughout her career, Steber consistently attributes Whitney with her flawless bel canto technique. Steber says Whitney taught her to "mount the breath" which means bringing support up under a phrase and keeping it there so that the sound is riding "on the breath." It is the breath vibrating as it passes the vocal cords and resonating against the mask (the face and its resonant cavities) which produces the quality of tone...he eased my voice down to the essential core of my middle range, then gradually extended it in either direction, letting it grow naturally in strength and quality...He drilled me in coloratura, cadenzas, appoggiaturas, and embellishments until they were my second nature. He taught me to use my voice like an instrument"
Eleanor Steber in Peter Davis, *The American Opera Singer: The Lives and Adventures of America's Great Singers in Opera and Concert From 1825 to the Present* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1997), 403-404. (in Black, p. 2)

Career:
Steber's career is separated into and analyzed in three major periods: "The Johnson Era: A Germanic Metropolitan Debut and the Birth of a Mozartean (1940-1950)"; "Change in Management: Repertoire Expansions and Political Developments (1950-1958)"; and "The Fire Horse: The Final Stages of the Operatic Career of Eleanor Steber (1958-1966).

Edward Johnson was manager at the Met when Steber won the Auditions of the Air, in 1940, and she turned to him as a mentor in all regulatory matters (p. 12) For his retirement in the 1949-50 season, he awarded Steber the role of the Princess in *Der Rosenkavalier*. After having sung Sophie in the opera for nine years, this was a coveted role. Even though she was already a star at the Met, some saw the soprano as too young for the role. Irving Kolodin agreed and called Steber's *Marschallin* "light in sound" and "rather tentative in manner."

The maturing diva took great offense at critics' accusations of her being too young for the role. Steber never viewed the process of learning a role as a finished product, magically ready on opening night, but as an ever developing craft. From her perspective, critics deemed her incapable because of her youth and inherent lack of life experience. "That's a lot of rot!" Steber said. "Were people trying to say you can't sing 'Depuis le Jour' from Louise unless you have lived in sin?" After much soul searching, the thirty-five year old soprano took the *Marschallin* into her heart as well as her repertoire. Though her first performance received mixed reviews, the portrayal was significant enough to earn twenty-seven more performances of the coveted role. (p. 22)



The effects of WWII provided an influx of European singers to American opera companies and audiences. Steber would always remember Bing as a manager who championed European singers over their American counterparts.

Indeed, upon Bing's arrival at the Metropolitan, he expressed a fear that he would be required show preferences to American singers. In 5000 Nights at the Opera Bing recalls:

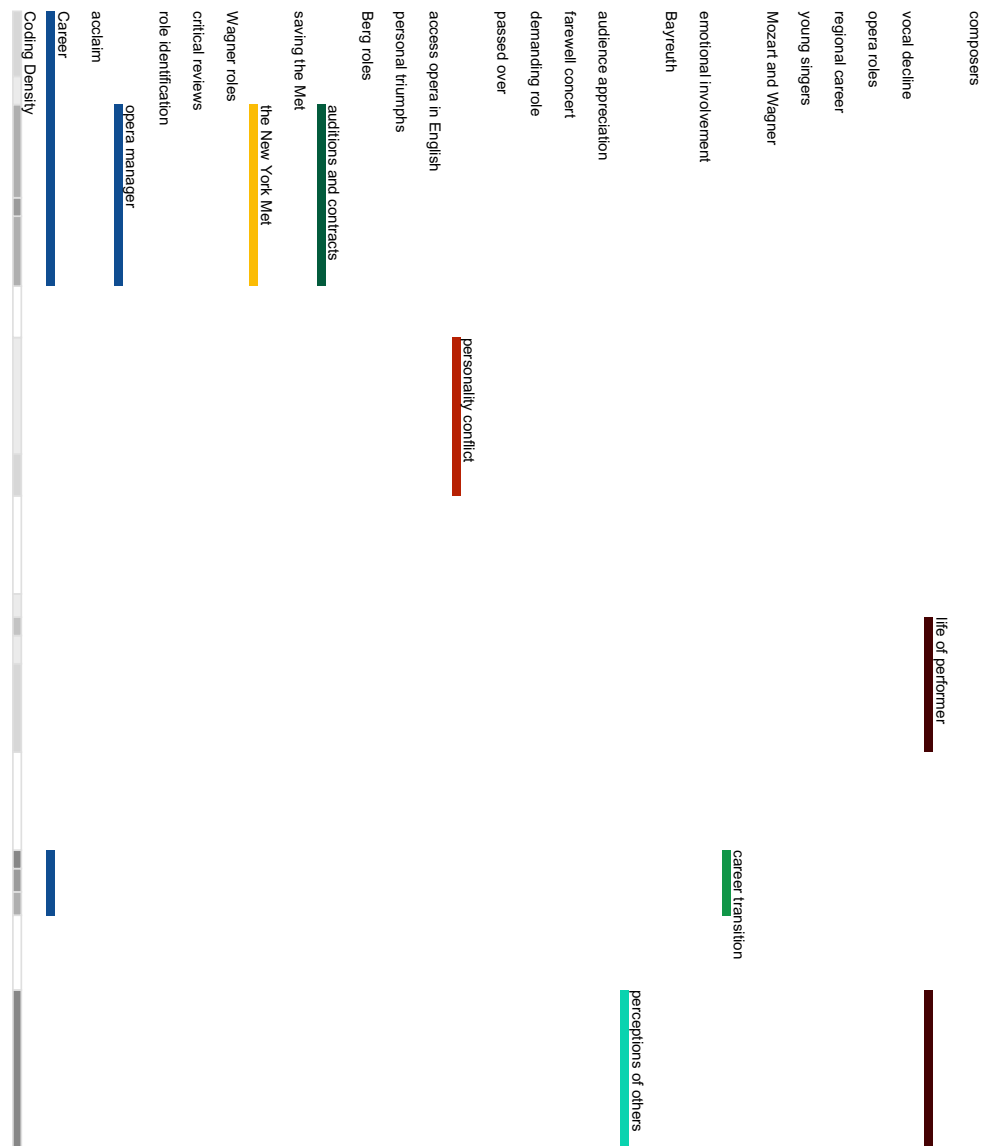
"A cadre of healthy, important American voices, many of them new to me, had become a strong backbone for the house during the war years. I was at first concerned with the effects of a union contract which required me to hire American soloists in a ratio of at least two to one as against foreign soloists, but my year of observation removed any fears that this so-called 'Chicago convention' would harm the artistic quality of Metropolitan productions."
Sir Rudolph Bing, 5000 Nights at the Opera (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), 142-143, in Black, p. 28.

Regardless of Bing's preferences or his simultaneous respect for her instrument and usefulness, Steber's jovial, direct, and sometimes unsophisticated conduct "clashed with Bing's Old World hauteur." A working relationship became more and more difficult between such inherently different personalities. "Rudolf Bing surely valued Steber's voice, artistry, and versatility, but he never seemed entirely comfortable with her maverick personality—especially when she turned up for a morning rehearsal of Figaro still very much the worse for wear after a night of partying" Peter Davis, "Diva Manquee," Opera News 68, no. 5 (November 2003) 55.

Though posterity has suppressed this aspect of the soprano's life, it is a real part of the woman, the artist, and the performer and, no doubt, contributed to the personality or which she is remembered. Steber enjoyed drinking, especially at parties, but was she an alcoholic? This question remains unanswerable. Within two short years after her successful 1954 performances on the same day as both Desdemona and Fiordiligi, her increasingly stressful, chaotic career coupled with her rapidly disengaging marriage made Steber's life difficult to manage. In January of that year Steber arrived at a rehearsal at the aforementioned Figaro rehearsal "still feeling my drinks. I made it to the Met all right, but when I got off the stage, I got lost in the scenery. I couldn't remember my entrances or a single word of the text. I tried, but I was gone"
Eleanor Steber in Peter Davis, The American Opera Singer: The Lives and Adventures of America's Great Singers in Opera and Concert From 1825 to the Present (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1997), 407.

Clearly, the soprano did imbibe. Even years later, as a teacher, Steber encouraged her voice students to "go out, have fun, get drunk once in a while. Why? Because singers, for the most part, cannot allow themselves to let go too much in the sex department. There's got to be release for pent-up energy". Leslie Rubenstein, "Improper Diva: the Shocking Miss Steber," Opera News 55, no. 4 (October, 1990, p. 65, in Black, p. 29

Steber believed her incessant love for parties and beautiful reckless abandonment never caused her voice or professionalism to suffer.
"Well, I will not deny it. Throughout my life I've played hard. But despite all that has been said about me and my delights in the fleshpots of this world, of my joie-de-vivre, despite all the labels people have pinned on me, I've always preserved myself and my voice...Of course, like many of us, I have certain self-destructive streaks. I've had a lot of rough moments. But that's almost as it should be. You see, whatever I did, I always went the



whole way."
John Gruen, "Will Destiny Give Steber Another Chance?" New York Times, 18 February 1973, 181, in Black, p. 30

Expanding her Mozartean repertoire to the role of Donna Anna in Don Giovanni after having sung Donna Elvira - she was primed to depict Danna Anna, the role her teacher, Whitney, always believed would be hers.

By 1955 Rudolph Bing was passing Steber over at the Met and favouring Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. After contract negotiations she was cast to sing Rosalinda in Die Fledermaus. The New Year's Eve performances traditionally included star-studded, second act entertainers in the ball scene.

"Steber arrived for the performance that evening with celebratory champagne at the ready and began to prepare for the performance as usual. A wave of visitors came to the dressing room, including Mr. Bing and his assistant, Bob Herman. when the overture started, Bings' chief administrator, John Gutman, appeared to say, 'I think you should know that tonight's special guest in the ball scene is Renata Rebalidi.' Steber became incensed. Not only had Tebaldi made the more Italianate repertoire immensely more difficult to obtain, she would now upstage the demanding "Csardas" with some Italian songs and stop the show.

Steber quickly improvised her revenge. That night's Adele, Patrice Munsel, provided a first hand account: "The minute Eleanor made her first appearance I knew something was up! The lines, 'Alfred! Or was I imagining? No. No. What could imagine such a voice? were delivered in the thickest West Virginia accent imaginable! John [Brownslee] was shaking visibly with laughter and Charlie [Khulmann] had to bite his lip to keep from breaking up entirely! When Eleanor asked her maid (that's me) 'Did you find your old clothes!' I replied 'YASSUM!' trying to join into the spirit of the thing with the best Southin' drawl I could muster. Her fans went wild with joy at her unpredictability."

The entire performance continued with the outlandish dialect as Tebaldi's entrance became more and more imminent. At the end of the "Csardas" Steber retired downstage left near the footlights, and played Rosalinda completely out of breath.

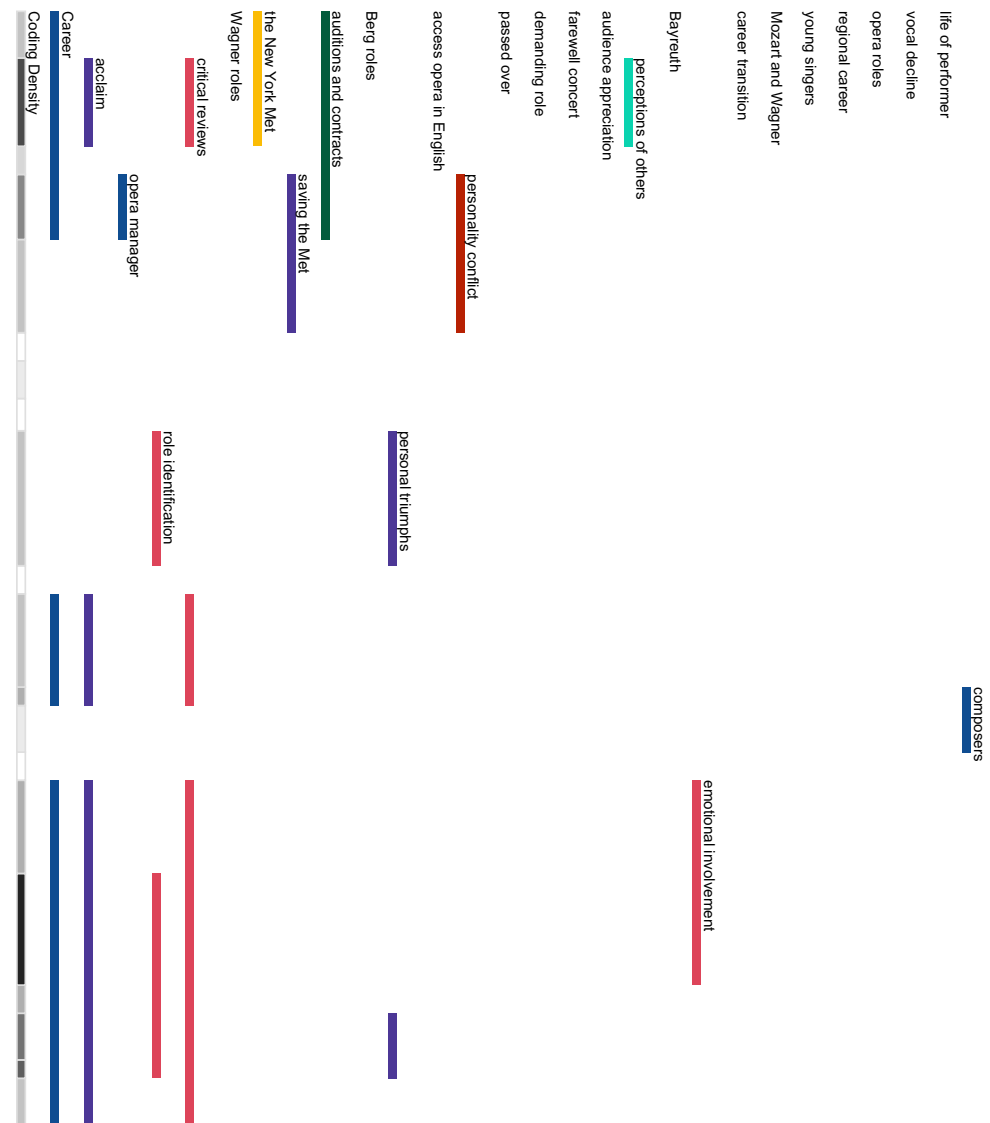
"When Tebaldi came on stage to sing, I briefly cooled the histrionics, but when she finished, i rose quickly during the applause, walked directly to her and impulsively kissed her on the cheek. Tebaldi walked off the stage, somewhat dazed, with no encore, and I took back my show... That was the most fun I ever had at the Met."

Needless to say, the stunt did little to mend her already tense relationship with Mr. Bing. The next morning Bing reprimanded the soprano, but the real animosity would appear at her annual contract negotiation. Steber insisted on increasing her fees to that of her European rivals, Bing refused. The actual outcome of her "South'un" Rosalinda was her absence altogether in the 1956-57 season.

pp. 35-36

Approaching her eighteenth season in New York, Eleanor Steber showed astonishment when her contract was reduced to two roles, Donna Anna in Don Giovanni and Marie in Wozzeck. The operatic performances between Steber's 1958 appearance in the world premiere of Barber's Vanessa and her final Metropolitan Opera performance in Lafanciulla del West in 1966 marked a precipitous decline in her activity with the New





York company. The number of occasions when Miss Steber saved Metropolitan performances at the final hour contrasts sharply with the reduction of her contracted engagements. By comparing recordings and reviews of the above mentioned operatic accomplishments to the contract renewals of this interval, contrasts arise between Steber's personal perception, and the critical, historical reception of the end of her operatic career.

Rudolf Bing might have completely phased out the fiery soprano altogether had European diva Sena Jurinac not canceled her entire New York contract six weeks prior to her debut in Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*. A late phone call from Steber's publicist, Edgar Vincent, began quick communications about her taking over the role which left her "...mute for a moment, wondering what to say. I was still hurting because I had never been approached about the part. I didn't know whether Mr. Bing wanted me to do the part or not, but I was obviously his last chance." (p. 37)

After a divorce she remarried Lt. Gordon Andrews on 29 December 1957, just before a performance of *Vanessa*.

In the soprano's autobiography she discusses how *Vanessa* was "difficult to get into the voice." During the first performance she was so near to collapse that the New York Times inaccurately reported she had fainted between acts. Although she prided herself on always having something in reserve for a party, Steber admitted that, with *Vanessa*, she "spent everything." Facing such difficulty learning and performing the role on such short notice, one might expect the singer's angst to be reflected in the reviews.

Actually, with the exception of her diction, the critics approved. Irving Kolodin noted that "little could be understood of Miss Steber's part," but immediately offered her quick study as a defense. Perhaps a better justification still, Paul Jackson's review of a performance on 1 February 1958 seconded the singer's "difficulty with clear word projection. But then, the fault is as much Barber's as hers, for he attempts to suggest *Vanessa*'s fussy, unsettled nature by abrupt leaps into the stratosphere, and throws in a passel of melismas to further aggravate articulation."

Later in the review, on the contrary, Jackson champions Steber for her articulation and acting when the character's emotions become more relevant to the plot. "By the time she reaches the love duet in the third act (of the original four act version)...she unleashes some of the most magnificent phrases of her entire career. She is quite compelling in the intimate scenes with Erika. At last the selfish, petulant *Vanessa* recedes, and Steber, when questioning her niece about her love for Anatol, is able to show us her capacity for feeling. In this mature phase of her career, her voice ranges freely with its dramatic soprano thrust, but she has not forsaken the quieter modes of expression. Tender compassion marks the final scene...and the moment is deeply touching...Steber alone is able to inflect the theme with a touch of poignancy."

As Kolodin wrote in a later review, Steber sang the role "as if it were written for her" and acclaimed her "delivery was best of all." Furthermore, Max De Schauensee, a critic of Metropolitan performances for almost fifty years, said the soprano "sang with the sovereign musicianship for which she was noted." Max de Schauensee, "January 15, 1958, *Vanessa*" Philadelphia Bulletin datelined New York, 15 January 1958. (in Black, pp. 39, 40)

Both Rudolf Bing and Samuel Barber were appreciative. Barber was quoted in the New York Times, "I cannot adequately extol her gallantry in undertaking this difficult role in so short a time. She sang it wonderfully." Tensions between management and Steber, beginning with the cutting back of her contract and escalating to the end of her career, abated briefly as Bing showed his gratitude. After the debut, he wrote Steber on 16 January 1958.

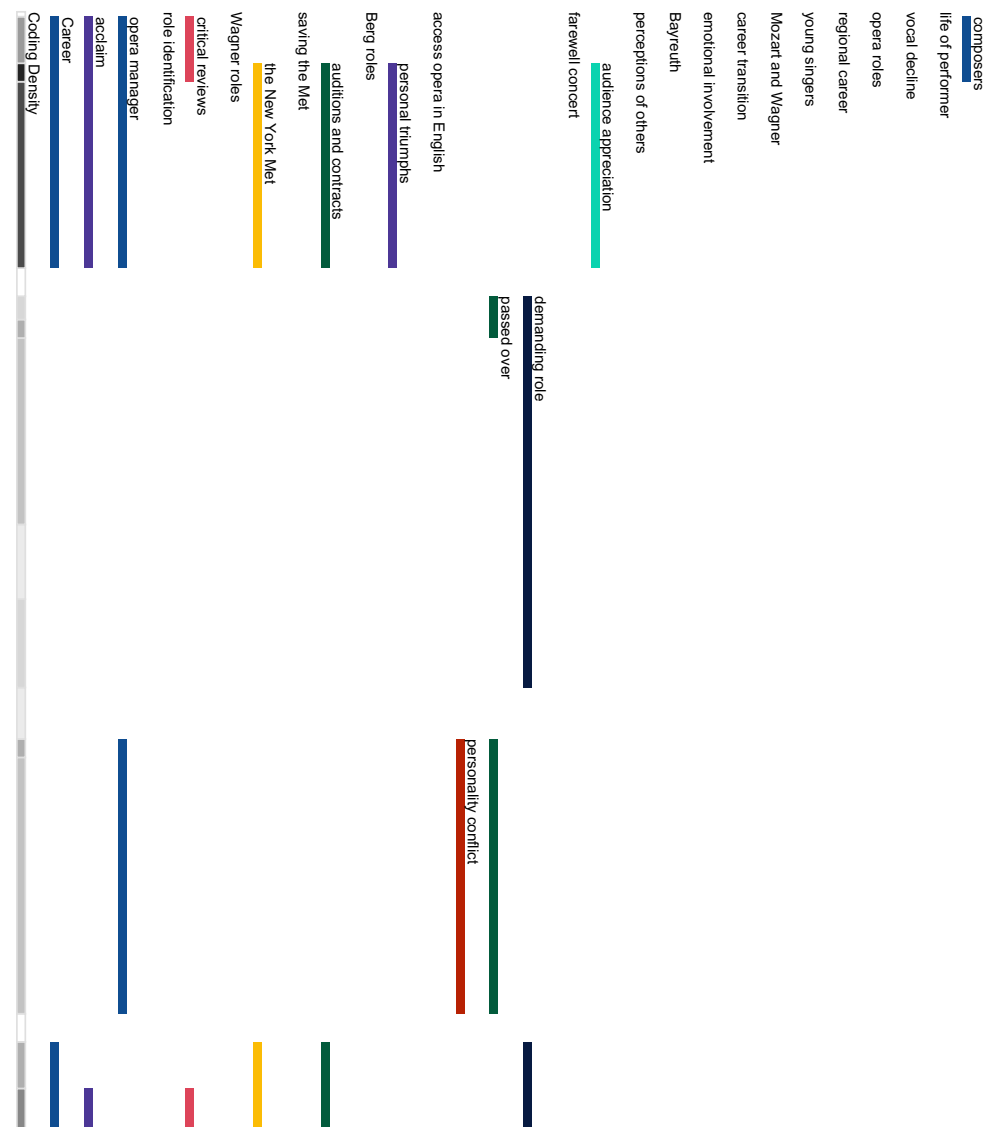
"Now that the smoke has cleared away a little, let me say once again how immensely grateful we all are for your courageous and helpful action in taking over Vanessa. You proved once more that a great artist need not worry about false dignities, but that such an extraordinary feat and wonderful performance justify everything. Indeed it was a triumph for you." (in Black, p. 41)

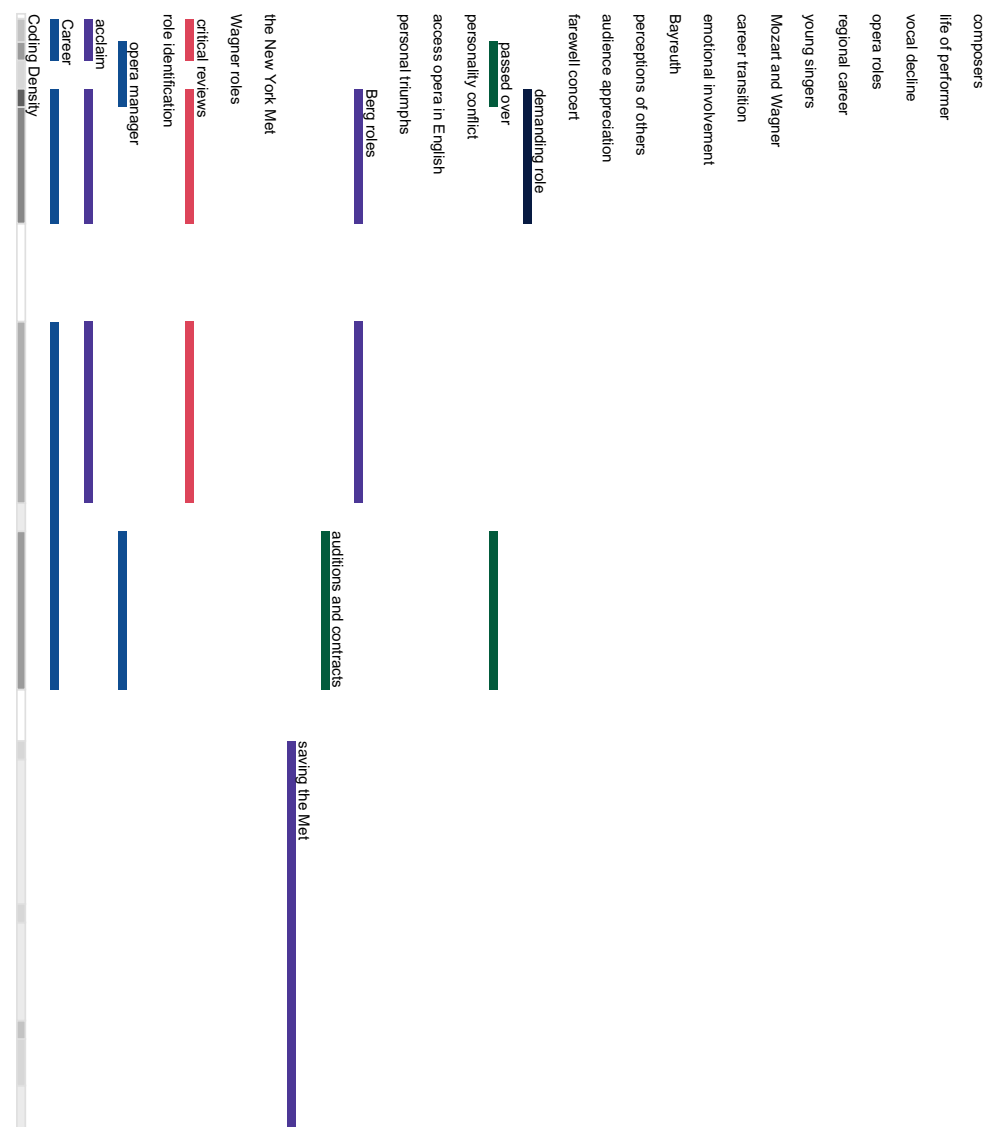
Then Tosca - Bing thought Callas was the only one to do it, and passed Steber over. He also passed her over for the broadcast of Vanessa. At this point her new spouse, Andrews, took over every aspect of her career. After seeing her first Metropolitan Tosca, Andrews decided her suicidal leap at the end of the opera lacked a dramatic aspect due to the positioning on stage. During a subsequent performance, her husband went backstage and ordered the stage hands to move the mattress to a different spot, much to the portest of stagehand, Patrick Tavernia. Andrews assured Tavernia he, as her husband, would tell Steber, because she was not yet dressed. Having plenty of time before her third act entrance, the soprano requires no great rush to ready herself. When Steber was finally dressed and ready to go on, the stagehand tried to explain the mattress move about which Andrews had simply hold her to "look before you leap."

"The scenic arrangement made it impossible for her to see from the wings the new position of the damned mattress.... I heard Eleanor's footsteps above me as she ran up the stairs to the top of the platform for her death leap. She was deeply immersed in the music, of course—simply saturated with every aspect of that demanding role. No Eleanors, Gordons, Patricks, or anything but Tosca was on her mind when she finally sang her final line and jumped. But she jumped exactly where and how she'd been doing the jump for so many previous performances. She landed on her head and broke her teeth."

Only a week earlier, the dangerous combination of Andrews and Tosca hindered her professional career before taking a toll on her physical well being. Steber was assigned the second act of Tosca for a Metropolitan Gala but, when she arrived to perform, the program listed Licia Albanese instead of Steber. Nothing was said to her until Bing came to her dressing room that evening. Steber's voice could be heard outside the dressing room, and when Bing left, Andrews flew out of the room, screaming at the departing Bing. "'What wudda happened to the army during the war if we'da done things this way? We'da all been killed!' And Bing coolly turned to face him and replied, 'And you'd not have married Eleanor.'" Had the feud ended there, the incident would not be out of the ordinary between impresario and singer, but Andrews took the fight to the front of the house. Robert Herman, Bing's assistant, and Andrews exchanged loud words and "there had apparently been some shoving, if not actual fisticuffs." Regardless of the extent of physical violence, the encounter destroyed any residual good will between Steber and management.

Politics aside, Steber sang three in-house and three touring Toscas for the Metropolitan Opera in the season of 1958-1959. Of her first appearance in the role, the New York Times said, "The entire cast of Tosca Saturday night at the Metropolitan seemed stimulated by the presence of Eleanor Steber."





The reviews were not great, Jackson saying that she did not own a Tosca voice, "Tosca falling victim to her cool, distancing, timbre". Bing agreed and never assigned Steber the popular role at the Met again. He also phased her out of her Mozart roles. Other than Donna Anna, she would never again be asked for her Mozart heroines, her Verdi leads or her Wagner staples. Wozzeck, though quite a challenge, was the singer's way of staying on the roster and delaying an end too fast approaching...

On 5 March 1958, Steber added the role of Marie to her vast resume with successful English depiction. "She sang the cruel role with impressive musical security, never hesitating to let her voice soar. Her acting was very good and at times, as when she read from the Bible, gripping." Paul Henry Lang, "Metropolitan Premiere of Berg's Wozzeck, March 5, 1959," New York Herald Tribune, in William H. Seltsam, Metropolitan Opera Annals, Second Supplement: 1957-1966, A Chronicle of Artists and Performances (New York: H. W. Wilson and Company, 1968), 20.

Once again, Jackson championed the singer's 14 March 1958 broadcast, noting, "Steber suggests both the earthly commonness of Wozzeck's mistress and Marie's craving for some small measure of warmth and beauty.... Not only affecting but vocally assured."

Irving Kolodin, on the other hand, disparaged her depiction in numerous publications. The critic believed Steber's Marie was, "for a singer of her background, not bad; but for Berg, it is not very good. Her puffy, well-fleshed outlines scarcely suggested deprivation and poverty, her vocalism, perversely, better than it need be." Irving Kolodin, Saturday Review, 21 March 1959, in Black, p. 46.

In 1960 the soprano found her employment further limited to a handful of Donna Annas and the last Marschallin of her career. The following season Bing offered her a single performance of Violetta in La traviata and the opportunity to cover all the roles in her repertoire. Respectfully, and not without resentment, Steber declined and faced her first season without the Metropolitan since her debut in 1940. Her final negotiations contracting the 1962-1963 season allotted her five performances of Donna Anna and no further renewal. Bing clearly accomplished his intention of phasing Steber out of the company's roster. (p. 47)

After three years of silence from the Metropolitan, Steber received a message from Bing on Saturday, 15 January 1966 and immediately returned the call from a beauty parlor. "Eleanor," [Bing] said, "I understand you know Minnie in The Girl of the Golden West?" Know it? Hadn't it broken my heart when he gave it to [Leontyne Price]? "Yes, Mr. Bing." "Do you think you could do it at the Metropolitan on Monday night?" "Yes, Mr. Bing, I can do it." That was it. Joy and terror swept over me simultaneously. I had done it again! I had committed myself to the impossible. I hadn't sung the opera in almost ten years—and in English at that—but it never occurred to me to refuse.

During the next 48 hours the soprano worked on the inconceivable. Designer-courturier, Max von Waldeck, slimmed her previous costumes down to the size fourteen she now needed while William Weibel, prompter for the performance, coached her Italian day and night. The past eight years had wreaked havoc on her marriage as Andrews was trying to control every aspect of her career, instructing the veteran soprano on every facet of the role, including how to fire her pistol. Musical clues, pasted to every prop and piece of scenery, could be found "in the Bible, on table tops. I never spent so much time behind the bar as I did that night because that's where most of my music was" Thomas P. Lanier, "If I

Could Tell You...; Eleanor Steber, on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of Her Metropolitan Opera Debut, Reflects on an Extraordinary Career," Opera News 45(December 1980) 12.

During the rehearsal period, Milton Cross made a radio announcement on "Voice of the Opera" informing the country of Steber's circumstances. Immediately after, the Metropolitan received a flood of phone calls from prospective ticket buyers wanting to welcome back the neglected soprano. Monday night was a subscription performance and few tickets were available, requiring some to wait all day for standing room viewing while others stood in line from the matinee until the box office closed that night.

Steber's long awaited Act I entrance arrived.

"I charged out with my pistol blazing! It was only a split second before I heard the roar of the crowd. I remained frozen, gun in hand, watching and listening as the whole audience stood up and hollered. Through all the clapping and shouting, I heard one thing cutting through, loud and clear—my name —"STEBER!!!" The whole Opera House went up in smoke. The orchestra had to stop, and there was absolute pandemonium! It was great, and I felt fantastic, absolutely fantastic.... It was the greatest single moment of my life." (p.49)

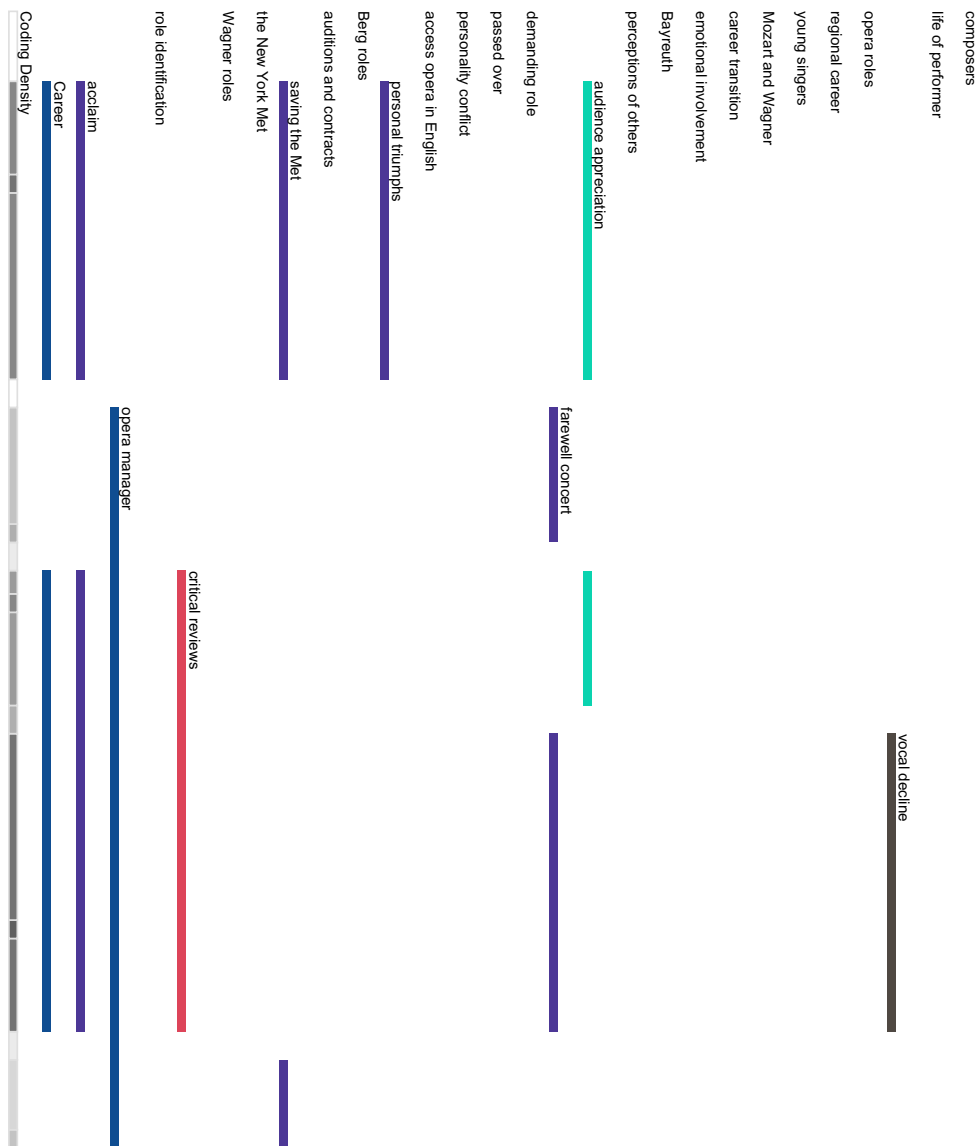
Having saved the show, Steber collected the reward of an extensive curtain call, her last at the Metropolitan. While the soprano accepted congratulations backstage from a lifetime of colleagues, Bing "almost passed me. Then he said, 'Good show, Steber.' That was all." Steber was stunned. "Bing was obviously grateful, but hardly taken in by the sentiment of the occasion. Steber's Met career, which had begun so rosily twenty-five years earlier, was over. (p. 50)

Steber fans still struggle to understand why management ceased to employ one of the greatest American sopranos of the time. After more than twenty years of service, multiple rescues, and amazing musicianship, why did her career end there? Why then? Even Jackson, who gave Steber conflicting reviews throughout her late career, found "management's decision to forgo her services in the early sixties not only incomprehensible from the artistic standpoint, but heartless."

One is forced to consider the reviews of the performance to understand Bing's perspective. No positive reviews of the 17 January 1966 rescue can be found. In fact, when one looks at her autobiography, Steber seems to be oblivious to the critics' reaction after the curtain call. For journalist and author Peter Davis, "Steber's pathetic farewell remains my most painful night at the opera" Peter Davis, "Unnatural Disasters," Opera News 63, no. 6 (December 1998) 120, in Black, p. 51.

In another publication, Davis wrote, "By then Steber's aging soprano had begun to unravel, and she now looked distinctly blowsy after years of high living." Similar comments from her reviews on Tosca attacked her lack of Puccini sentiment with a voice that "was simply too rich, with its plush vibrato and throbbing overtones, to give a Puccinian phrase the proper sharply focused thrust" Peter Davis, The American Singer: The Lives and Adventures of America's Great Singers in Opera and Concert from 1825 to the Present (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1997), 410.

Had the voice failed? Had she made the wrong choice, agreeing to do La fanciulla del West? Was Bing justified in callously expelling the only woman willing to come to his rescue? Or was the fire horse syndrome that kept her career moving the definitive factor in the demise of her operatic career? Steber's agent Bill Judd is quoted:



"...That automatic reflex to step in at the last moment's notice—it's the "old Firehorse syndrome." Somebody would ring the "save the show" bell and, just like the old fire horse who automatically backs into the shafts at the fist alarm, there would be Eleanor, ready to go. But that's Steber. Whatever else she may be or do, the big ring of truth is in the voice! More than any other singer I have ever known, she loves to sing. It is as essential to her as breathing."

The ultimate career ending factors are debatable. One can grasp, however, the ambition, the bravery, the gumption, and the talent that was Eleanor Steber.

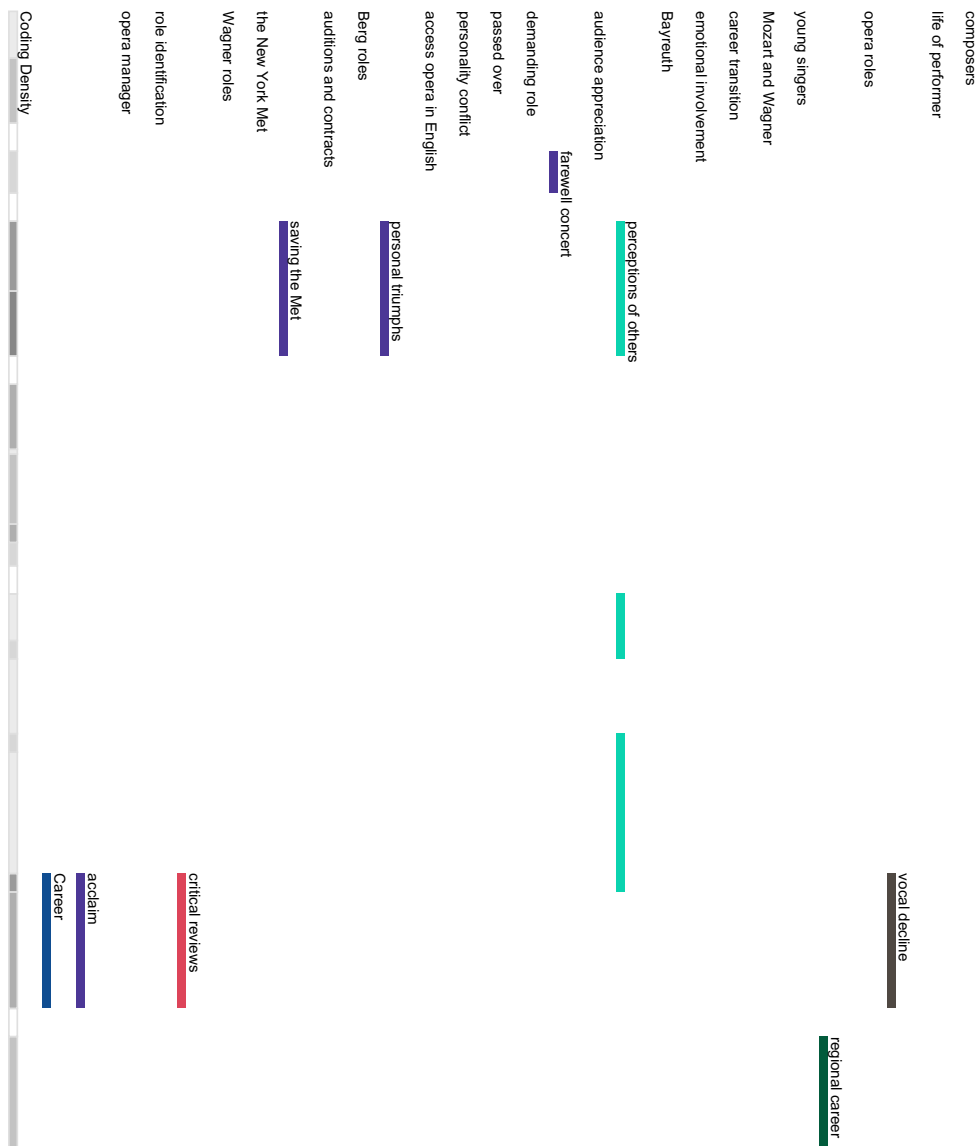
The end of the Steber reign came with a single performance of Lafanciulla del West in 1966 in which she bravely stepped in at the last moment. Steber remembered that performance as one of the highlights of her career, but the reviews provide a more realistic viewpoint. That she was capable of such a courageous and seemingly impossible feat is the stuff of legends and deserves to be remembered before the sobering reviews of that fated performance.

"When I am singing, then I am a unified spirit - the warmth and love that is 'me' show through consistently in my art; it is the only way I can fully share what I am." Peter Davis, "Diva Manquee" in Opera News 68, no. 5 (November 2003) - in Black (2008, p. 53)
Steber was an innate musician who loved her art above all else. Even more important to her than the constant logistics of a successful career was the musicality she poured into her work. Though her voice continued to develop as she took on new heroines, the musicality and honesty in her singing were always present. The love she had for singing at a young age only blossomed throughout her career. Until the day she died, Steber love to sing.

Upon looking at the whole of Steber's operatic career, one is confronted with an interesting dichotomy. Memories from those who knew and loved her always recall her love of life and bubbling personality, but her own memoirs present a more honest, balanced perception. The American soprano lived a precarious, exciting life in a career perpetuated at the whims of the Metropolitan. This lack of security was the root of many unhappy moments. Steber was always concerned about her career. She asked herself why others were being paid more than her. She worried about younger sopranos entering the field. She measured herself by broadcast performances and reviews. But in public, to her fans and her loved ones, she was the life of the party and an infectious well of happiness.

Contemporaries remembered the end of her career in two different ways. Some remembered that night as the glorious return of the American diva so sorely missed in the New York opera scene, while others saw a beautiful performer who continued passed her prime. Though reasons contributing to the end of her career continue to be speculated upon, the public noticed her absence. "If the voice had been spared the Maries, the Vanessas, and the Wagner—and especially the vodka—Steber's career climax might have been a memorable Norma. Instead it was a sad ending." On the contrary, her contemporary critics believed management's resolution to do without Steber not only unfathomable from the creative position, but callous.

Steber's career, successful as it was on a domestic level, never completely expanded to an international status and her career is still often overlooked in favor her European contemporaries; this is undeserved. Very little has been published considering her talent and the enormity of the topic."One rejoiced in a ravishing lyric soprano and generous musical personality that outshone them all: Eleanor Steber. Only after her career was over and could be properly assessed did a wondering posterity realize that Steber



was by far the most prodigiously gifted singer of her generation. With her diversity of striking vocal talents, she seemed poised to join the world pool of great singers and establish a truly American vocal style at last. The fact that Steber failed to make that leap and become the international artist she could and should have been is one of the saddest tales in the annals of the American singer."

Steber never seemed to take offense at Europe's seeming ambivalence toward her but considered the Metropolitan her home. It was only when her Metropolitan career was coming to an end that she began to feel hurt. Eleanor Steber performed over four-hundred times at the "Old Met" and bemoaned the fact she was never afforded the opportunity to sing at the new house. Two-hundred and thirteen of her performances were of Mozart operas alone. During her tenure with the company she mastered every kind of singing from Wagner to Verdi to twentieth-century American opera. "She could do everything—mezza voce, pianissimo, whatever; and she had a quality in her voice that was pure sugar and honey."

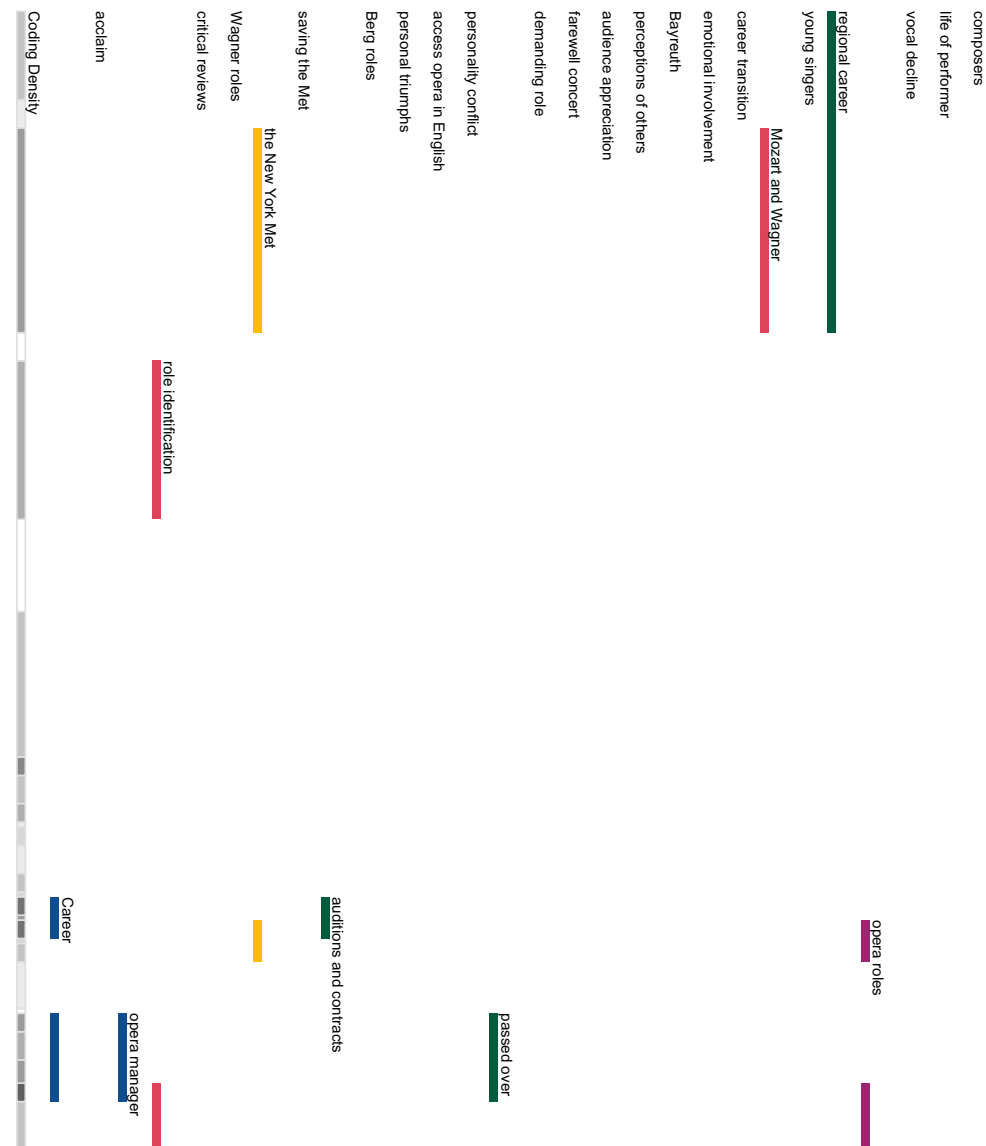
When looking back on Steber's enormous operatic career, one must remember its beginning and the affinity she felt to the translation of her first libretto. The translation in Steber's autobiography of Sophie's prayer seems an appropriate reflection of her career. "In this most sacred hour, my God, When thy great blessings lift me high above my worth, I thank thee. Oh, grant that the sin of vainglory be ever far from my soul... Let me not be puffed up with pride unduly by the honors of my new station. Ye saint in heaven, I know that pride is a most deadly sin; But this day all my prayers are in vain—I cannot be duly meek—For it is all so fair! So fair!" pp. 52-54

Duffie, B. (1985) A Conversation with Eleanor Steber. <https://bruceduffie.com/steber.html>

Bio:

The eminent American soprano, Eleanor Steber, grew up in a musical family. Her mother was an accomplished amateur singer and taught her voice and piano, took her to concerts, arranged for coaching, and strongly encouraged her to study and to sing in school and community shows. Eleanor later studied at the New England Conservatory in Boston, originally intending to major in piano, but her voice teacher, William Whitney, persuaded her to focus on singing, instead. She received Bachelor of Music in 1938. At the beginning she did a lot of radio, oratorio, and church work. Steber's opera debut was in 1936, appearing as Senta with the Commonwealth Opera in a WPA production of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, a demanding role indeed for a 21-year-old. In 1939, she went to New York to study with Paul Althouse who had a great influence on her. In 1940 she won first prize at the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air, earning a Met contract.

Steber's first role at the Met was Sophie in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* on December 6, 1940. During the next years she benefited from conductors such as Bruno Walter, Sir Thomas Beecham, Erich Leinsdorf and George Szell. She was a versatile artist and appeared in Italian, French and German operas. Things began to change for her at the Met when Rudolf Bing took over the company in 1950. By this time, her career extended well beyond New York (San Francisco, Chicago and Europe). At the Met, though, she began to feel that she was being passed over for mainstream Italian roles in favour of Tebaldi and Callas. Altogether she appeared 286 times in New York and 118 times on tour. She sang 28



leading roles in an extremely large repertoire. Her easy upper range, coupled with a rich, smoothly produced lower voice made her a natural for Mozart roles, such as the Countess in Le nozze di Figaro, Pamina in Die Zauberflöte, Donna Anna in Don Giovanni, and even Konstanze in the Abduction from the Seraglio. The 1951 production of Così fan tutte, with Steidry conducting and Alfred Lunt directing, was a major event in the New York season and was recorded on Columbia LP records.

As her voice matured, Eleanor Steber sang some of the spinto roles in both the German and Italian repertoire. Her roles in this repertoire included Violetta, Elisabetta, Desdemona, Marguerite, Manon Lescaut, Mimi, Tosca, and the Marschallin in Der Rosenkavalier. In Wagner's operas she sang Eva in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and Elsa in Lohengrin. She was also the company's first Arabella in 1955, and in 1959 was the first to perform at the Met the challenging part of Marie in Alban Berg's opera Wozzeck. In January 1958 she created the title role in Samuel Barber's opera Vanessa, and commissioned his Knoxville: Summer of 1915.

Her European engagements included appearances at Edinburgh (1947), Vienna (1953), and Glyndebourne. In 1953 she was amongst the first Americans to appear at the Bayreuth Festival after World War II. The very successful 1953 Elsa in the Bayreuth Lohengrin was recorded and issued by London/Decca; it is still in print on Sony CD.

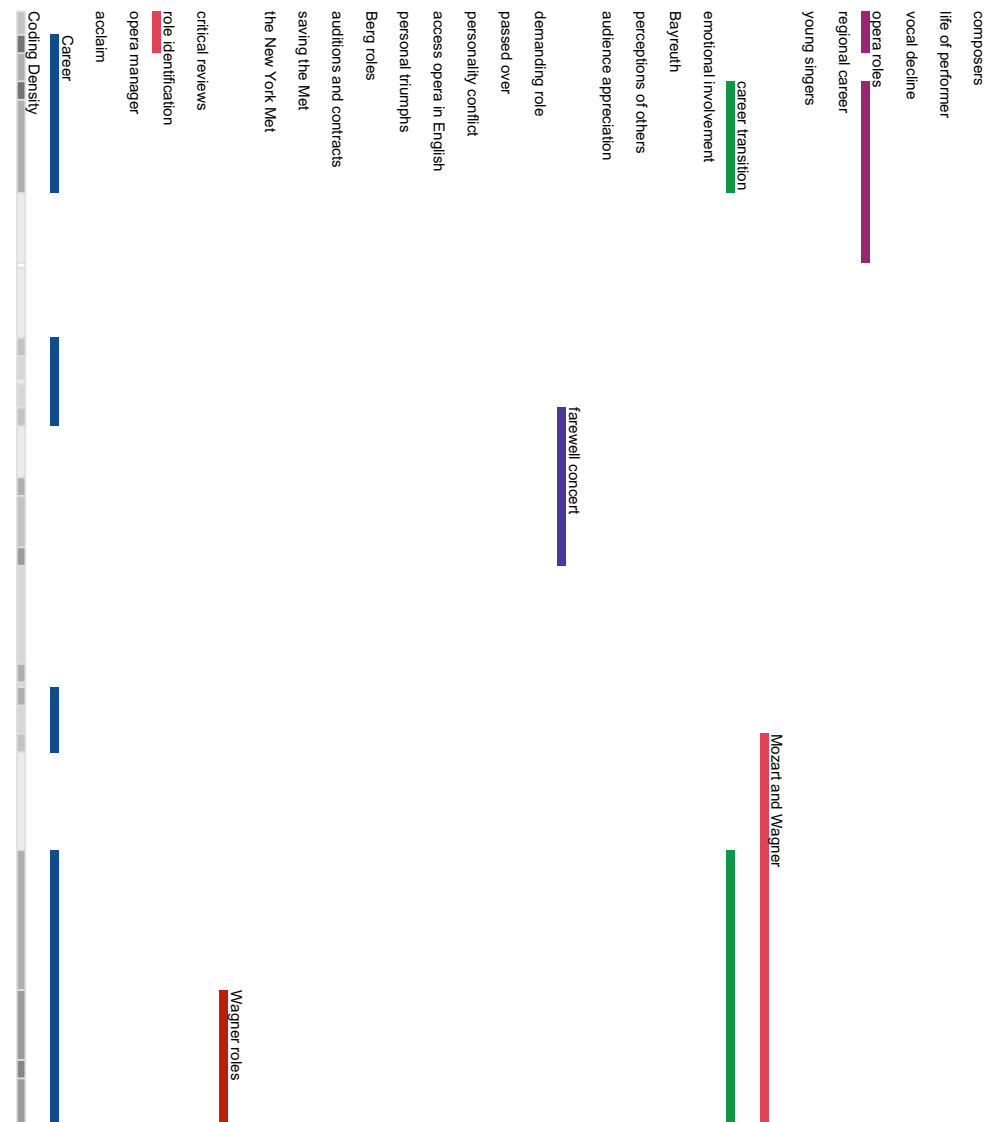
In addition to opera and recitals, Eleanor Steber was a frequent guest on The Voice of Firestone's television broadcasts. After several years of absence from the Metropolitan Opera, she took part in the final gala performance of the old opera building in April 1966. After partial retirement in 1962, she turned her attention more and more towards recitals and concerts. She made some appearances on Broadway, mostly in supporting parts, and also gave one of the notorious bathhouse concerts in New York in 1973. She and her husband opened and managed a record label, ST/AND (combining their names)..

Steber was head of the voice department at the Cleveland Institute of Music from 1963 to 1972. She taught at the Juilliard School in New York, and at the New England Conservatory of Music (both from 1971), also at the American Institute of Music Studies in Graz (1978-1980; 1988). She established the Eleanor Steber Music Foundation in 1975 to assist young professional singers. With R. Beatie, she published the study 'Mozart Operatic Arias' (New York, 1988). Her autobiography, written in collaboration with M. Sloat was published posthumously (New Jersey 1992).

Conversation:

Bruce Duffie: Let us start with Wagner. You're a famous Mozart singer! How does a Mozart singer sing Wagner?

Eleanor Steber: There's no real problem about that. Once you learn how to sing Mozart, all of these things sort of fall into the proper kind of life. Wagner is just an extension of the beautiful line that you get when you're doing Mozart. The style is romantic and requires a great deal of expansion of tone and expression. But in a sense there is no real problem about that. I didn't go very far with Wagner. I didn't become only a Wagnerian. Experience is always a very funny thing; I made my debut as Senta in The Flying Dutchman when I was 21 years old. But that was when I was in school. I did Eva in Die Meistersinger, and Lohengrin at the Metropolitan and in Bayreuth and other places. And there were the smaller roles like Flosshilde, one of the Rhinemaidens, and the Forest Bird in Siegfried, but they were the smaller roles at the very beginning of my career at the Metropolitan.



BD: But it seems to be very rare that you have a fine Mozart singer who is also doing Wagner.

ES: Oh, I don't really think so. In the past it's been done many times by the people who would have sung Mozart first. Then you became a Wagnerian soprano. One would say that seems to be a logical kind of progression, but that doesn't make any difference because I did the Wagner and then I went back and did the Mozart.

BD: In my recollection you have to hark back to the days of Lilli Lehmann before you really get someone who would do both and alternate them in a career.

ES: There were a lot of people who did it, but it's all a matter of excellent technique and beauty of line and tone. It's not really any big deal.

BD: What about the ability to ride the larger orchestra?

ES: That just depends upon your own voice. I made my debut as Senta when I was 21, but I didn't force the voice in any kind of way. It's just the way the voice is placed, how it resonates, and how it carries through in an auditorium and over an orchestra.

BD: Now you sang Elsa [shown in photo at right] both at Bayreuth and at the Metropolitan. Was there a big difference in the sound, in the acoustics at Bayreuth because of the covered orchestra?

ES: I guess in a sense it was.

BD: Did that make it easier to carry?

ES: Bayreuth was a quite a remarkable place, of course. So was the old Met, don't kid yourself! But Bayreuth was like a finely tuned violin as far as the acoustics were concerned, and the orchestra being down underneath the stage was something else again.

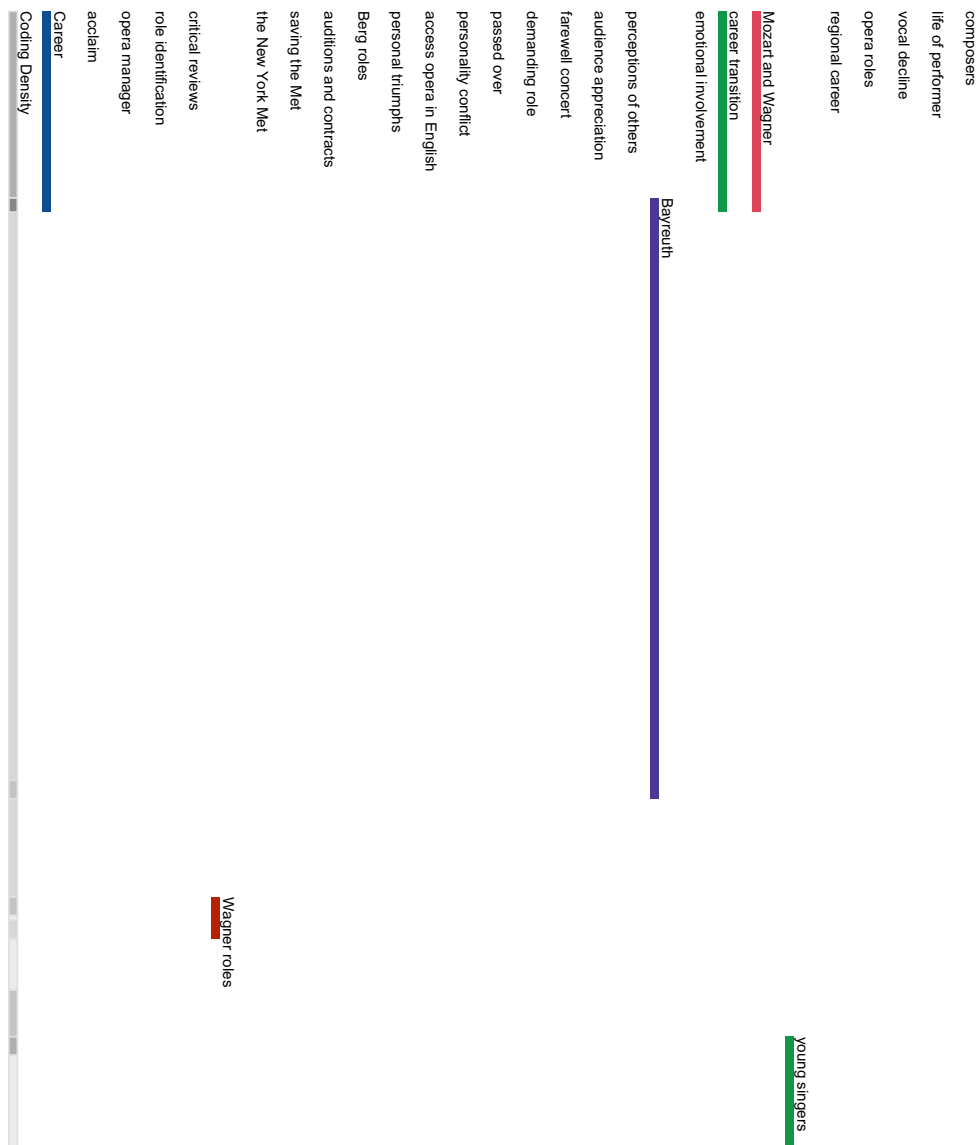
BD: Would that kind of arrangement work for the operas of Verdi or Mozart?

ES: No, it's typical and quite right for the Wagnerian medium. I wouldn't say that I would go so far to do Verdi or Mozart with a covered orchestra, but I must admit that there are sometimes today that the orchestras, no matter what they're playing, play too loud for the singers.

BD: Without mentioning any names, is that the fault of the conductor?

ES: [Laughs] No, no, I won't mention any names! They often get the orchestra to be very big. The voices have just got to be placed right and have their own timbre. Then they will carry. Thinking of Wagner, not that I ever did the whole role of Isolde, but I have done the Liebestod. I've also done Strauss roles, which are done usually by voices that are quite along the Wagnerian ground. I've done an awful lot of Strauss. The Strauss medium is the same as the Wagner, really. Strauss really requires the same thing. The only thing that Wagner needs is a sort of a longer, deeper sustaining sound so that it carries. As far as the voice is concerned, if your voice is in good control you should be able to do any kind of role. That's the way the old singers did it. I've been able to do it all my life. It's all a matter of coloring, and your approach to it.

BD: Then is it a mistake now for younger singers to get pigeon-holed?



ES: I don't think the younger singers ever have a chance to know where in the hell they are today! [Both laugh] They start out and they make a success in one part that would seem to have a rather large expanse, like a Wagnerian role, and all of sudden they're being thrown into roles that are like that. They should have a variety which makes it possible for the voice to expand itself in all ways. Not only that, they have a tendency to start and do these things much too young. It was a fluke that I did Senta in The Flying Dutchman when I was 21. It was just very absurd, but I was very well cared for by my maestro who listened to me every day. I was not allowed to force anything, and he helped me to place the whole thing. But youngsters today are thrown in, and all of a sudden they come on and seem to have done a good Traviata. I can remember a critic who said one youngster sang Traviata like a young Steber. So because they said that, all of a sudden they throw her into Vanessa, and she's no more capable of doing Vanessa that flying to the moon! [Both laugh] As a matter of fact, she came a cropper with it. She really nearly ruined her voice.

BD: So she should have stayed with the Verdi roles, and perhaps gone into Mozart rather than into Vanessa? [Vis-à-vis the recording shown at left, see my Interviews with Giorgio Tozzi and Regina Resnik. A cast-photo of the European premiere of Vanessa appears in the box at the bottom of this webpage.]

ES: Even with Verdi you've got to be careful. I did Traviata and that sort of thing, but I never went on to do Trovatore and others. I did them in concert version, and it doesn't mean that I couldn't have done them, but my career didn't take me that way. People get the idea that you've got to have a 'Verdi voice', or you've got to have a 'Wagnerian voice', or you have to have a 'Mozart voice'. A voice is capable of doing all of these things as long as it's well framed and it's not pushed into singing a role that requires more than it's capable of doing at its time of development.

BD: Are there roles that demand too much of a voice?

ES: At certain times, yes; too much of a young voice, yes.

BD: Are there roles that simply cannot be handled by any human voice?

ES: I wouldn't say so, no.

BD: Even something like Lulu?

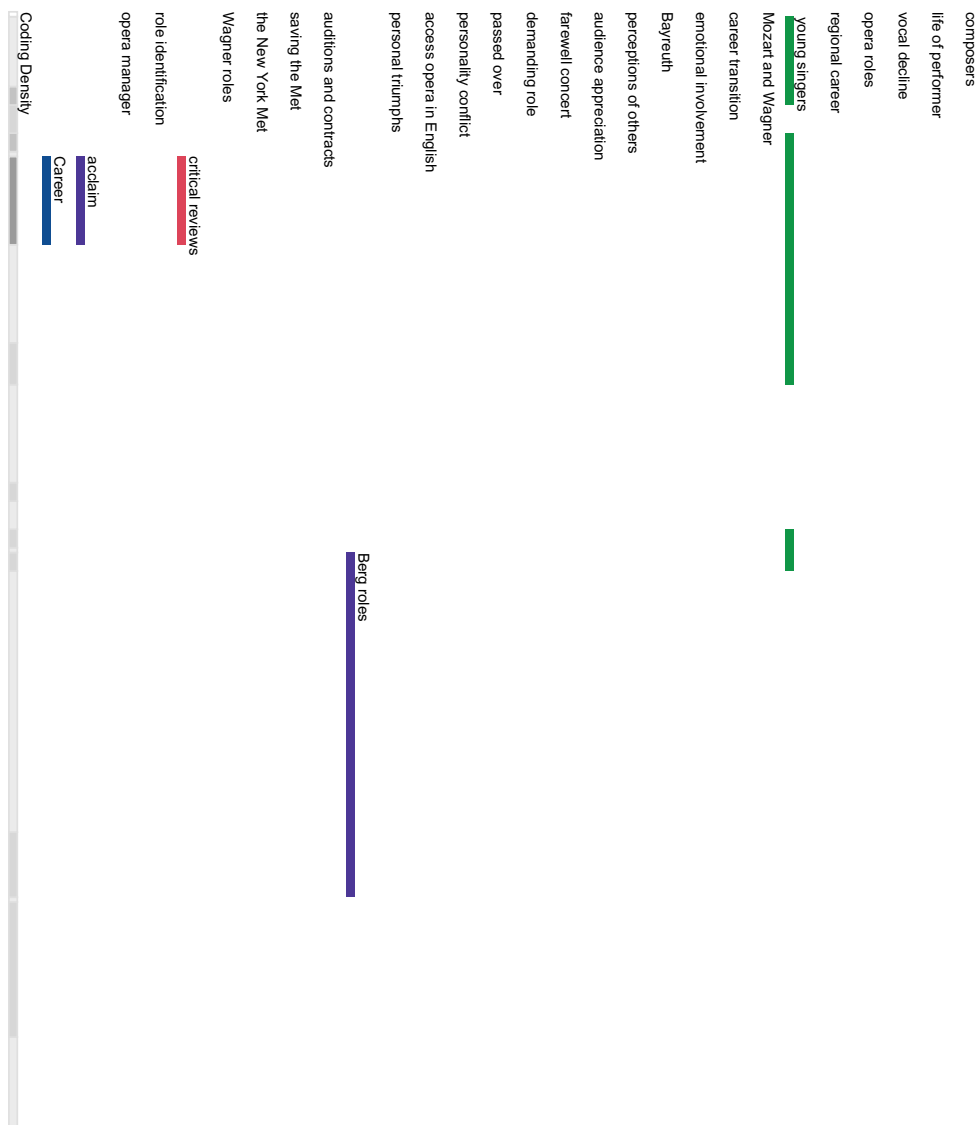
ES: Well, I don't know Lulu. I did Wozzeck which is not as extensive a role as Lulu, but it certainly was completely different medium as far as I was concerned. I approached Marie wholly and completely from a singing standpoint, and for my vocal standpoint. The Sprechstimme gave me no problem whatsoever because I was always thinking of it from the standpoint of where my voice was placed.

BD: So the important thing is the placement of the voice?

ES: That's right.

* * * * *

BD: Going back to Mozart a little bit, is it difficult to alternate music with spoken dialogue?



ES: You mean like The Magic Flute?

BD: Magic Flute or Abduction. Does this present special problems?

ES: It is always a little difficult. For instance, take South Pacific in which you were singing, then you would do a great deal of speaking. When you're doing it night after night after night, that takes a tremendous toll on the vocal cords, but not the occasional Wozzeck, though that's not really a spoken role. It's half-sung, half-spoken. But the occasional Magic Flute would not be that difficult. It really is wearing on the cords to go from a singing line to a speaking line. It puts a strain on the cords.

BD: Would it be better then to have the spoken dialogue changed into recitative?

ES: [Laughs] Whether it would right or not, it is not possible because that's not the way the operas are written.

BD: What about something like Carmen where you could take out the spoken dialogue and make it recitative?

ES: That depends. In France they speak the recitatives a great deal. They are called Opéra Comiques and are done in a different theater.

BD: One French role you sang was Manon. Tell me a little bit about her character.

ES: Manon is beautiful, lyric, expansive. She's a romantic type, and you use the same voice as you would choose in a Mozart or a Wagnerian work! It's just that the medium is different and the music is different. If your technique is sufficient that you have no problem with these things no matter with the music is that you're singing, you can sing anything. I believe this. I'm a living proof of it! [Bruce laughs]

BD: Is it right that composers make that kind of distinction between Grand Opera and Opéra Comique, or should it all just be a Musical Theater experience?

ES: A composer has his own ideas about what he wants the singer to do and about what he wants his operas to sound like. I don't think that he should be limited in any way about doing what he wants to do, but the thing is to find a singer that's able to do it!

BD: Are the composers always right?

ES: [Hesitates] I have found some of the works that I have done are pretty far out as far as stretching the voice is concerned, and I would advocate that anybody do them before their voice is well seasoned.

BD: Have composers taken the form of opera too far?

ES: Oh, I don't think that it can be taken too far at all. A singer has to be careful about what he or she does within a certain period of time so that she does not put extra strain on the voice. For instance, I know a Penderecki score, which is really a way-out score as far as the voice is concerned. I have done Roger Sessions works in which there are jumps and changes of tessituras and that sort of thing. I think

life of performer	
vocal decline	
regional career	
young singers	
Mozart and Wagner	
career transition	
emotional involvement	
Bayreuth	
perceptions of others	
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farewell concert	
demanding role	
passed over	
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access opera in English	
personal triumphs	
Begin roles	
auditions and contracts	
saving the Met	
the New York Met	
Wagner roles	
critical reviews	
role identification	
opera manager	
acclaim	
Career	
Coding Density	
composers	
opera roles	

Lulu has a very strange tessitura, but a singer has got to know what she can do and what she can't do. She must know her limitations and her abilities.

BD: How difficult is it to say no?

ES: [Laughs] We just hope that she has, as I have in my career, a mentor who would say, "Be careful about that, and if you can, put it off until another time!" But as far as my career was concerned, things just fell into place in their proper order. After a while, a lot of people thought that I was doing things much too heavy for me, and wondering what I was doing with my lyric voice when I sang things like Donna Anna. But in my estimation, Donna Anna is as lyric a role as you can possibly have. Not that I ever went beyond my capacity as far as my singing ability was concerned, but one role that I really feel took a great deal out of me, a great deal of strength and power, was the Lohengrin, and especially in the Wedding Scene. But when I did that I had been trained. If I had been in a position where I was singing those roles constantly, which I don't think is a good idea, my body and my voice would have found its level and would have built itself to the place where I was able to handle those things. Also remember that it also depends on where you are singing Wagnerian roles, where you are singing these big Strauss roles.

BD: When you were doing Elsa at Bayreuth, was that in the Wieland Wagner production?

ES: No, it was Wolfgang's first production.

BD: Was he a help to the singers, or a hindrance?

ES: [Laughs] You had to do what he wanted to do. I don't know whether he thought that he was a help or not! You just did what he wanted to do. It's the same thing as what a conductor wants to do or what the composer asks of you. You've got to be capable of doing it!

BD: Was he not being flexible at all?

ES: Oh, honey, you can't be flexible with the score! You mean as far as action is concerned?

BD: More the stage deportment and the ideas of where to move or how to move or how to project.

ES: I didn't find that to be difficult. Elsa is a role that's not very physically tiring.

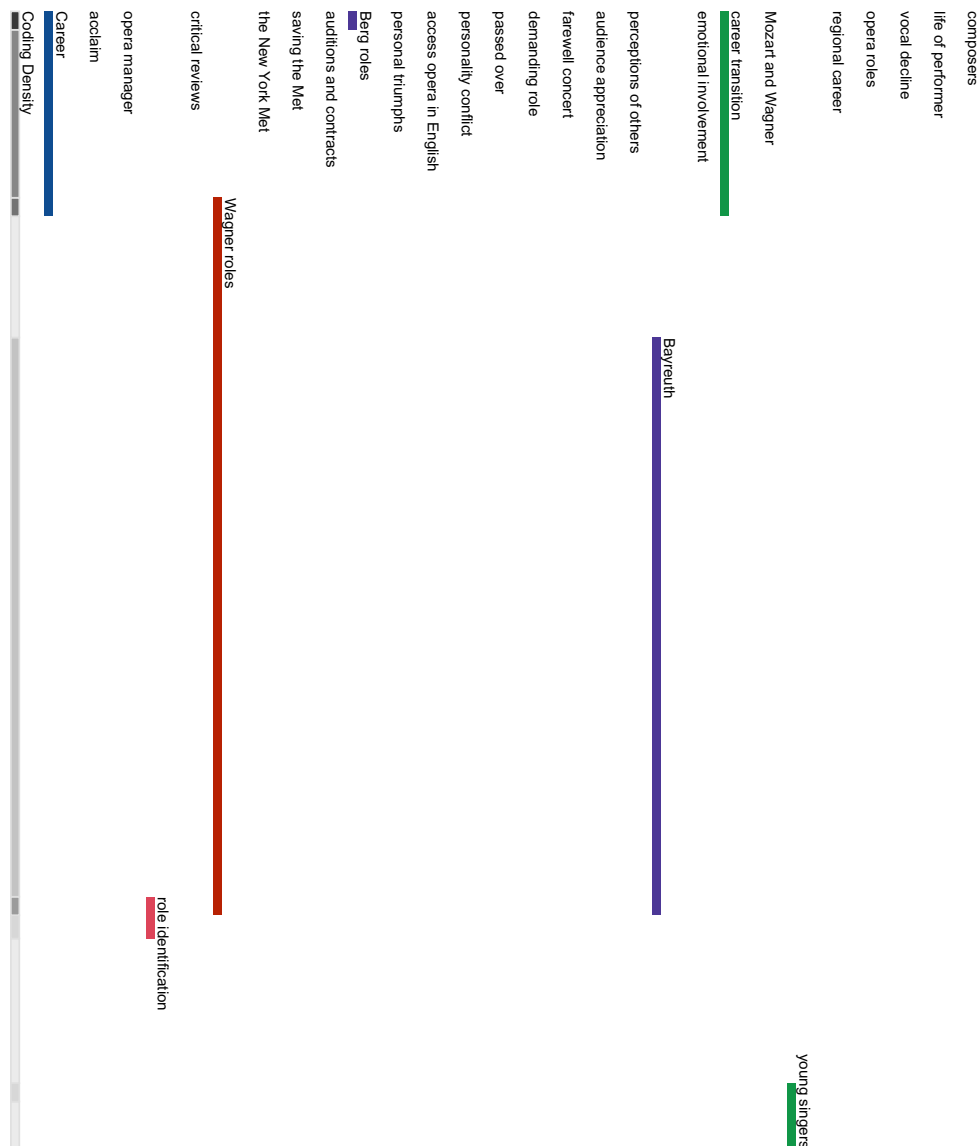
BD: Is Elsa an interesting character?

ES: Oh, I loved her. A lot of people feel she's kind of dumb, but I loved her. It was great music and it was a great experience. I hope you have the recording that was made at the time.

BD: Yes, of course.

ES: As you can tell, that was something. But I did all of these things with my own voice, meaning I didn't try to make my voice different for this role or for that role. I sang as Eleanor Steber! That's the best way to sing, I can tell you that. People who listen to other singers do roles and try to emulate them, eventually get into a lot of trouble because you cannot be somebody else.

BD: So each singer has to decide and find what he or she can do?



ES: That's right.

BD: Is that a mistake that a lot of young singers are making by trying to do things they shouldn't?

ES: The only thing that I can say about the young singers is that sometimes they attempt roles that they're not ready for vocally. They are not mature enough vocally. They have not had enough experience under their belt or in their cords.

BD: Let's go over to your other Wagner role, Eva. Was she fun to play?

ES: Oh, I loved Eva, yes.

BD: How much of a pixie is Eva? Does that word describe her at all?

ES: Oh, no! Eva was a very, very serious, lovely German girl! She was no pixie! There was nothing like that about her. There was no fun. She was very serious.

BD: [Surprised] She was not mischievous at all???

ES: Oh, I don't think so, no!

BD: Do you think she would have been happy with Hans Sachs if Walther had not happened to come along at that particular time?

ES: Oh, yes. I think she was in love with Hans Sachs anyway.

BD: Then was she happy with Walther?

ES: I think so, but it was a matter of use. She was in love with Hans Sachs and his music and what he meant to her, being her mentor and all that. He was really like a father figure to her, and as you know many young girls have married older men because they are father figures, and have been perfectly happy. But if a young man comes on the scene and touches another chord in them, they run into a little trouble.

BD: So if Walther hadn't come along, she would have been perfectly happy with Hans Sachs?

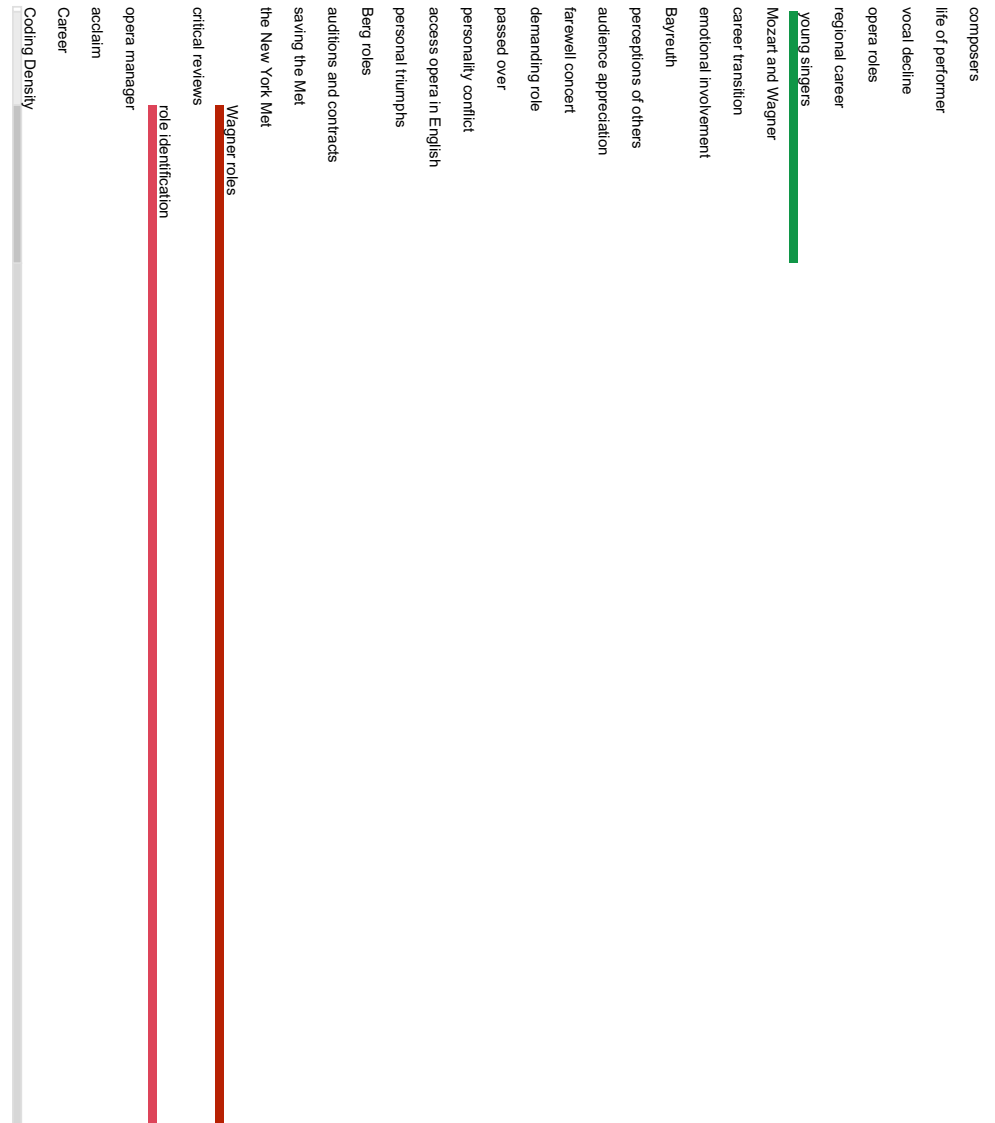
ES: I think so.

BD: It would have been a good marriage?

ES: I think so.

BD: Do you think she had a good marriage with Walther, or was he too impetuous?

ES: I think it could have been a little stormy because she was a very serious girl and she was very determined. She got what she wanted in the end, and Walther would have to be a pretty strong young man. I don't think he went around running with the other girls, although you never can tell in those days. Things were very funny. I don't think she looked sideways.



BD: So once she made the commitment, that was it?

ES: That's right.

BD: If she had married Hans Sachs and Walther had come along, she would not have given him another thought?

ES: That might have posed a problem! [Giggles] She might have been tempted! But that doesn't mean that she wasn't serious.

* * * * *

BD: When you sing these characters, do you actually become the character on stage, or are you still Eleanor Steber singing a character?

ES: I become the character. I study my character and I put around it as much as I know of her background, and imagine myself as much that character as I possibly can. I do not allow Eleanor Steber to come out.

BD: All of this within a framework of projecting the voice and watching the conductor and playing off the scenery?

ES: Right! I'm sure I was watching the conductor during the music, but I was never conscious of any other thing except absolutely singing Elsa or Eva or Traviata. I was never conscious of any of those things except the role I was doing.

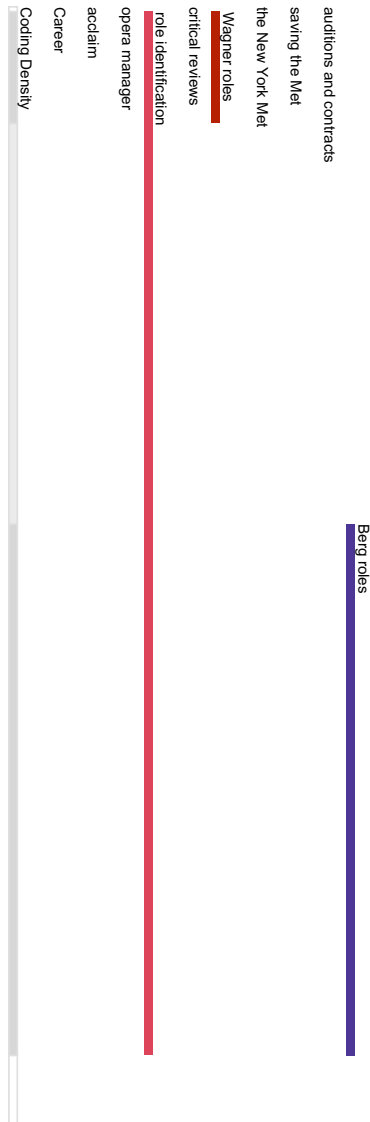
BD: Then did you take that role back to the dressing room with you, and back home that evening after the performance?

ES: There was only one that ever did that to me, and that was Marie in Wozzeck. When I went off the stage, all the other roles could have slipped off my shoulders very easily. Working into them and working in the rehearsals and working with my colleagues on the role, I had to project my imagination into the character that I was portraying. But after I had the character there and had portrayed her, I would go back to the dressing room and could have done the role all over again. The only role that ever bothered me or did anything to me was Marie, and that's because it's just so hopeless. The time and the period and the character of Marie was so pathetic.

BD: Is that the result of the character or the music, or both together?

ES: Both together. She was a very pathetic creature, and the fact that however she tried to live, whatever happened, he was trying to get her, and she comes to an untimely death with Wozzeck drowning her. Then the little kid at the end is unaware of the terrible forces of life that were involved in that opera. He is just hopping around on the stage at the end, a bit like the Simpleton at the end of Boris Godunov. He's out there at the end of the opera commenting on the futility of life. I have had a happy and wonderful life, and when I got to a role like that I knew and felt the futility as if I were Marie. I could never be like that when I left that house, never being very happy.

BD: Then is it right to subject the audience to that kind of depression?



ES: The audience wants to be projected into it. Why do you think people go to see such things as that, or watch things on television like these murder mysteries? That's what entertainment is. The audience wants to be taken there.

BD: So is opera entertainment, or is it art?

ES: It's both. Mostly it's like getting involved in a very profound play like Mourning Becomes Electra or The Iceman Cometh, or something like that. You're really getting profoundly involved in it, but it depends on what opera you're watching. If you're watching Meistersinger, you can have differing emotions, and if you're watching Così fan tutte you come out feeling you've had a nice experience. This happens with many operas, especially the funny ones, but then a lot of them leave you with tears. I was always left with a kind of a sadness after I'd finished singing Butterfly, but people love Butterfly because they want to sit there and cry with her. They want to be made to cry. They want their emotions to be stirred, and in many respects opera does more than anything. Music itself is the one thing that stirs the emotions more than this stuff that you see on television. That stuff is for the birds. It doesn't stir anything up, and I think that's the reason some people go to the opera... though many, many people just go to hear singers and that's all there is to it. [Laughs]

BD: It then degenerates into a vocal marathon!

ES: Yes, I think that's true many times.

BD: That's the wrong way to approach opera?

ES: I think so!

BD: Does opera belong on the television?

ES: I watched Rigoletto last night, which was very well done. I must say, I think that the proximity of the television screen takes away a bit of the glamour, no matter what you do to dress it up. Did you see the Rigoletto?

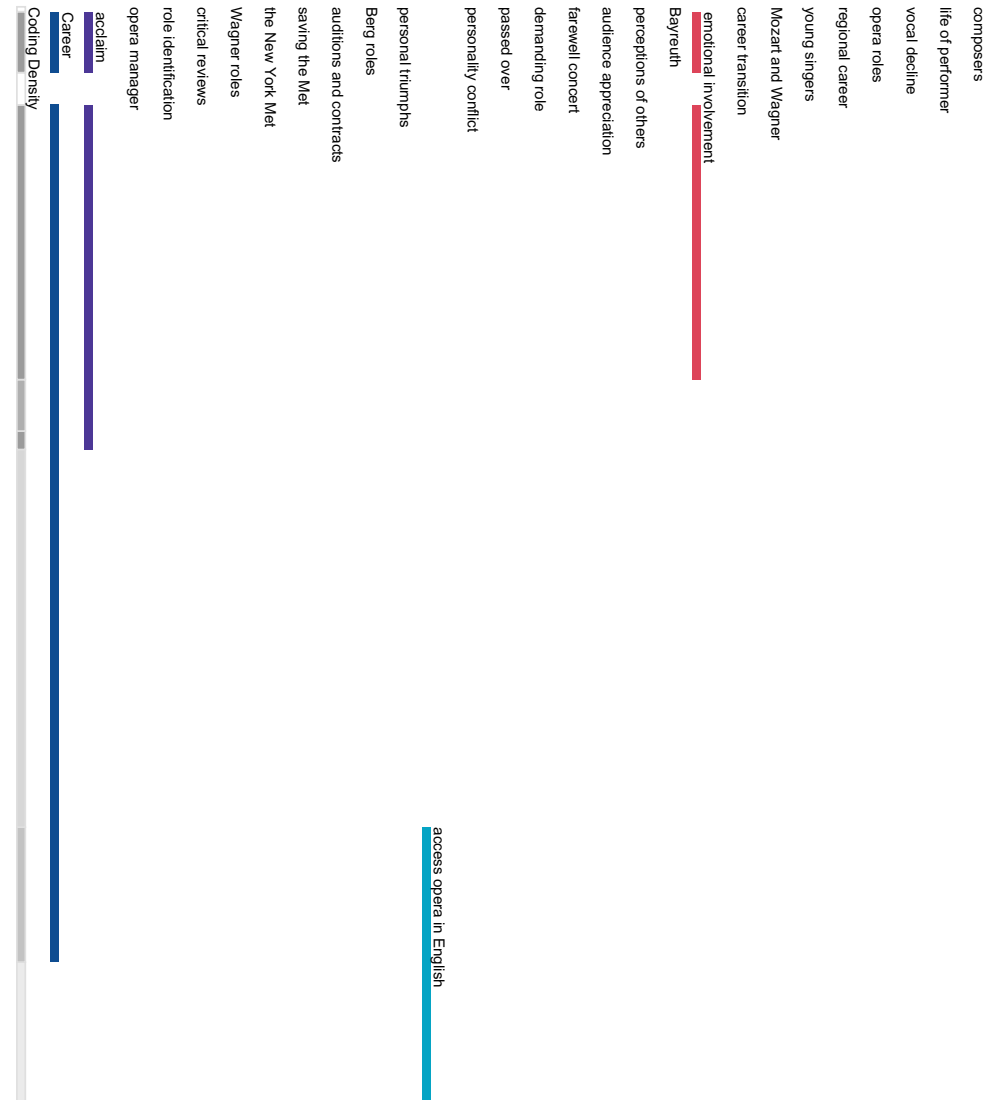
BD: No, I was working at the radio station last night. I did not see it, but I've seen opera on television a number of times.

ES: The ones that are done from a stage itself, in which you are watching a performance on the stage, carry much more of the magic than these which are particularly made for the television in which there are close-ups and all that sort of thing. I don't care so much for the ones that have been made strictly for the movies in which they can do all kinds of tricks like close-ups, and having a singer sing everything beforehand and then mouth it on the screen. It takes away a lot of the glamour and a lot of the lovely feeling about opera for me.

BD: So live opera has to have more immediacy?

ES: It has to have more expanse than the television can give it.

BD: Does having the translation underneath help or hurt?



ES: I don't think it hurts. You become used to it.

BD: Would it be better to do opera in English?

ES: I haven't found it offensive. [Vis-à-vis the photo at left, see my Interviews with Roberta Peters and Blanche Thebom.]

BD: You've done a number of operas in English, so I just wonder is that a better solution?

ES: The operas that I have done in English have been a very successful, and I felt very good about them. I like doing opera in English when there's a good English translation.

BD: Do you work harder at your diction when it's in the language of the audience?

ES: No. You see, when we Americans came along, we had to sing French better than the French people and we had to sing German better than the Germans and we had to sing Italian better than the Italians. Aside from Flagstad, they'd never really tried to sing English. I happen to have been a Drama major, and worked a great deal on my English diction before I got into opera. But I also had a technique that I was able to sing the English through so that it could be understood. I am known that my English diction was one of the best!

BD: You were exemplary!

ES: Oh, thank you. That's because I placed the English and sang the English in the same way as I sang all the other languages. It's a matter of where you place the vowels, and that you are very exact — as I was with my other languages.

BD: When you're singing in English, did you find a closer communication with the audience because you knew they were getting every word?

ES: Oh, yes, it's much more fun to do that. It's much more fun to do *Così fan tutte*, for instance, and even *Seraglio*. I did both of them onstage in English, and the audience got the jokes and the fun much more. I did concert versions of *The Marriage of Figaro* in English, but not onstage. I also heard glorious English translations of Massenet's *Manon*, for instance.

BD: Then why doesn't the Met do more operas in English?

ES: [With a huge laugh] That's the Met's problem, honey! That's not mine! [Both laugh]

BD: Should American opera companies do more opera in English?

ES: Oh, I think a lot of them are.

BD: It seems the smaller ones do, but the big companies rely on the original languages.

ES: Well, I think there's an awful lot of chauvinism involved in that. They just say they'd better do them the way they were originally written and let the audiences fend for themselves.

composers
life of performer
vocal decline
opera roles
regional career
young singers
Mozart and Wagner
career transition
emotional involvement
Bayreuth
perceptions of others
audience appreciation
farewell concert
demanding role
passed over
personality conflict
access opera in English
personal triumphs
Berg roles
auditions and contracts
saving the Met
the New York Met
Wagner roles
critical reviews
role identification
opera manager
acclaim
Career
Coding Density

BD: Other singers have talked to me about the closeness they feel — the melding of the words and the music — and when you change the words it upsets the musical line.

ES: That depends upon the translation, my dear. For instance, I've seen some horrible translations, and have really tried to sing some horrible translations of The Marriage of Figaro. But having a little bit of knowledge about language, I've just changed them so that it suited the voice better. That's all.

BD: So what we need is better translations?

ES: I think so.

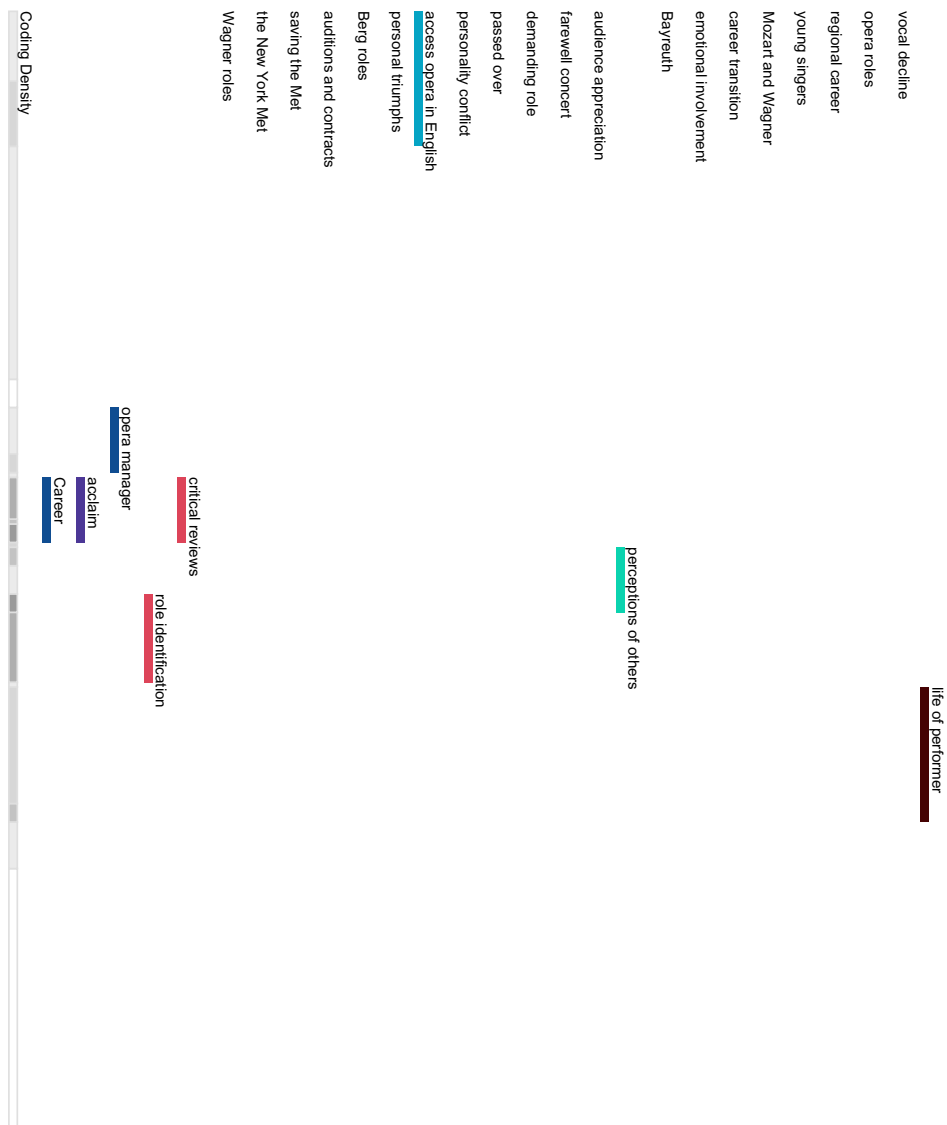
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BD: Let me take you back to 1954, here in Chicago. You were in the Don Giovanni, which was the 'calling card' for Lyric Opera. Was that special, knowing that you were involved in the rebirthing process of an opera company?

ES: Oh, I didn't think of that at all. I was only conscious of the fact that I was doing my first Donna Anna, and for which I was very grateful. I had been hoping, agitating with the management at the Metropolitan about it. When I was in Edinburgh, Scotland, I first did the Countess there in 1947, and Mr. Bing asked me back. He wanted me to do Donna Elvira. Well, I had done Donna Elvira at the Metropolitan, and the thing that I wanted to do more than anything else was Donna Anna. I was not able to do it then, and nobody thought I was the right Donna Anna. Strangely enough, when I finally did it they said there's never been a Donna Anna like mine! My maestro had told me when I was still in school, "Your role in Don Giovanni is Donna Anna because it's really not a big dramatic role." But others kept saying, "Oh you have to have a dramatic singer do this!" We're talking about times and things, and times have changed so much and ideas have changed so much that it really bothers me, and I almost feel like a ghost. But I was very pleased that Chicago asked me to do this role. I was thrilled and impressed, bit as a singer you can't allow yourself to be too impressed by this or that. You have to just get out there and do the role, and do the part the best way that you know how.

BD: [Meaning no disrespect] But isn't singing a role like that more than just a job?

ES: Oh, but of course! I never meant to infer anything like that. Every time I walked on the stage it was like I was walking into my life. It was my life. It was not a job. But the thing is I had sung in San Francisco, I had sung in Edinburgh, I had sung in Bayreuth and other places throughout the country and throughout the world. Then when I returned to Chicago in 1956, I opened the season with The Girl of the Golden West. It seemed as though I sang practically every role on that season!



Appendix 14 - Frederica von Stade_Coded Case Study

An Oral History with Frederica von Stade - Opera America <https://www.operaamerica.org/industry-resources/2024/oral-history-project/an-oral-history-with-frederica-von-stade/>

On November 9th, 2023, mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade sat down with OPERA America's President/CEO Marc A. Scorca for a conversation about opera and their life.

Her mother took her to her first opera, Der Rosenkavalier starring Christa Ludwig. All she had wanted was to be a Broadway singer, so she hadn't even gone there in opera. By the time she was 10 to 12, she would listen non-stop to Broadway and adored Ethel Merman, and went in to see Broadway, taking the train to New York and see a matinee, take a break, and then see another in the evening. Every weekend she saw two shows during the 1960s and 1970s. Her first pants role was singing Nakeepoo in the Mikado at school.

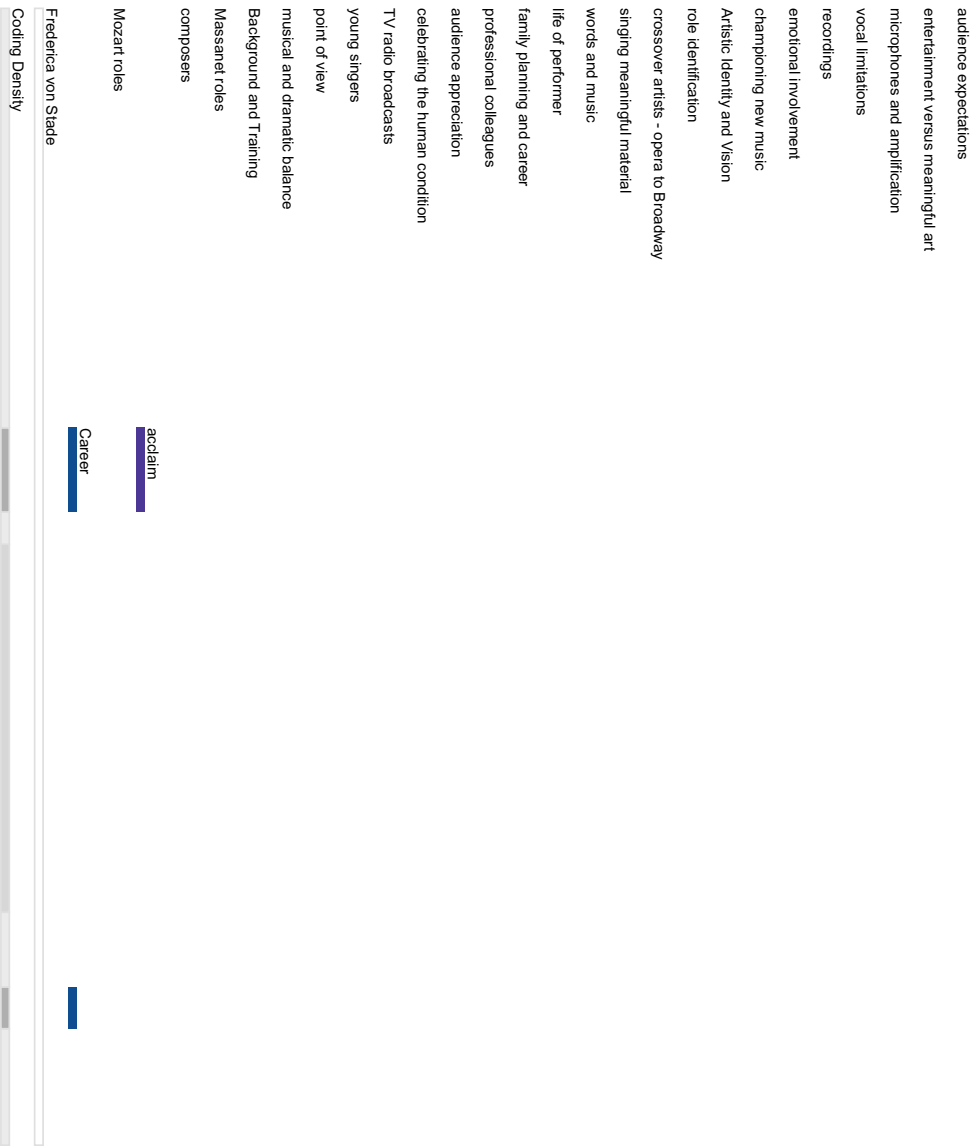
IMG Artists Biography - <https://imgartists.com/roster/frederica-von-stade/>

Described by the New York Times as “one of America’s finest artists and singers,” Frederica von Stade continues to be extolled as one of the music world’s most beloved figures. Known to family, friends, and fans by her nickname “Flicka,” the mezzo-soprano has enriched the world of classical music for four and a half decades.

Though she retired from full-time performances in 2010, she continues to make special appearances in concert and opera. During the 2019-20 season, Ms. von Stade will perform a recital and give master class at the LIFE Festival for the Fundació Victoria de los Angeles in Barcelona, Spain. She will also create the role of Iris in the world-premiere of Awakenings by Tobia Picker at the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Recent season performances have included the world premiere of Lembit Beecher’s Sky on Swings at Opera Philadelphia; a performance alongside Susan Graham for the Orchestra of St. Luke’s DiMenna Center Benefit in New York City; a return to the San Diego Opera where she portrayed Madeline in Jake Heggie’s Three Decembers, a role she created a decade ago, based on the play by Terrence McNally; opening the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s season with a tribute to Leonard Bernstein conducted by Andris Nelsons; singing with Tony award-winning Broadway star Liz Callaway, Daniel Rodriguez, and Matthew Lee Robinson in the New York premiere of the 45-minute cantata Street Requiem – composed in 2014 by Australian’s Kathleen McGuire, Andy Payne and Jonathon Welch – at Carnegie Hall; making her Arizona Opera debut by joining The 45th Anniversary Sapphire Celebration concert celebrating the company; performing on a gala benefit concert with Sarasota Ballet in Florida; and singing with Hawaii Opera Theater in Three Decembers. She also gave master classes at the Peabody Conservatory.

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Ms. von Stade’s career has taken her to the stages of the world’s great opera houses and concert halls. She began at the top, when she received a contract from Sir Rudolf Bing during the Metropolitan Opera auditions, and since her debut in 1970 she has sung nearly all of her great roles with that company. In January 2000, the company celebrated the 30th anniversary of her debut with a new production of The Merry Widow specifically for her, and in 1995, as a celebration of her 25th anniversary, the Metropolitan Opera created for her a new production of Pelléas et Mélisande. In addition, Ms. von Stade has appeared with every leading American opera company, including San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Los Angeles Opera. Her career in Europe has been no less spectacular, with new



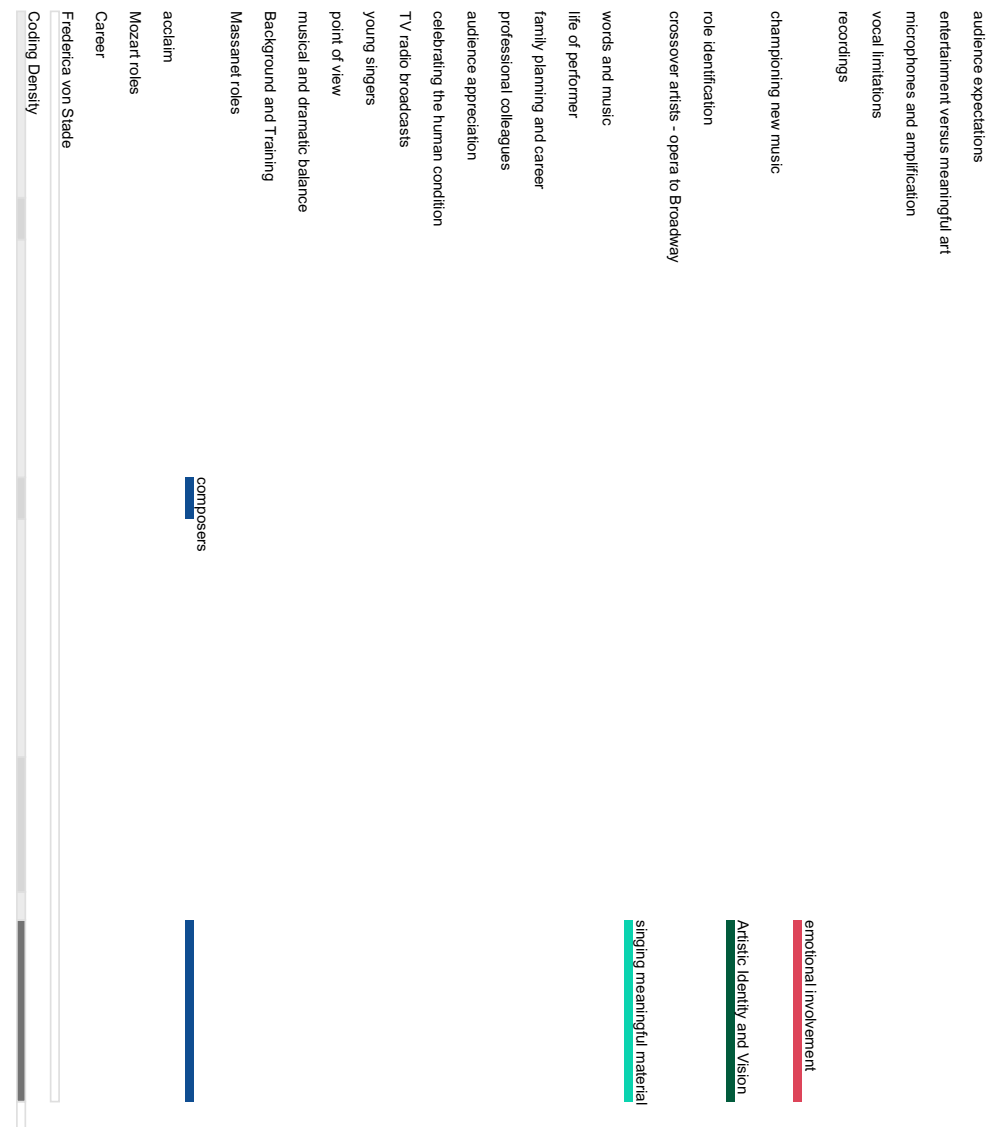
productions mounted for her at Teatro alla Scala, Royal Opera Covent Garden, the Vienna State Opera, and the Paris Opera. She is invited regularly by the finest conductors, among them Claudio Abbado, Charles Dutoit, James Levine, Kurt Masur, Riccardo Muti, Seiji Ozawa, André Previn, Leonard Slatkin, and Michael Tilson Thomas, to appear in concert with the world’s leading orchestras, including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, Washington’s National Symphony, and the Orchestra of La Scala.

With impressive versatility, Ms. von Stade has effortlessly traversed an ever-broadening spectrum of musical styles and dramatic characterizations. A noted bel canto specialist, she excelled as the heroines of Rossini’s *La cenerentola* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Bellini’s *La sonnambula*. She is an unmatched stylist in the French repertoire: a delectable Mignon or *Périchole*, a regal Marguerite in Berlioz’ *La damnation de Faust*, and, in one critic’s words, “the *Mélisande* of one’s dreams.” Her elegant figure and keen imagination have made her the world’s favorite interpreter of the great trouser roles, from Strauss’ *Octavian* to Mozart’s *Sesto*, *Idamante* and – magically, indelibly – *Cherubino*. Ms. von Stade’s artistry has inspired the revival of neglected works such as Massenet’s *Cherubin*, Thomas’ *Mignon*, Rameau’s *Dardanus*, and Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*. Her ability as a singing actress has allowed her to portray wonderful works in operetta and musical theater including the title role in *The Merry Widow* and *Desirée Armfeldt* in *A Little Night Music*.

Ms. von Stade enjoys close collaborations with several contemporary composers, including Jake Heggie, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Dominick Argento, among others. She created the role of Tina in The Dallas Opera’s world premiere production of Dominick Argento’s *The Aspern Papers* (a work written for her), as well as the role of *Madame de Merteuil* in Conrad Susa’s *Dangerous Liaisons* and Mrs. Patrick De Rocher in Jake Heggie’s *Dead Man Walking*, both for San Francisco Opera. Ms. von Stade created the role of Myrtle Bledsoe in the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon’s *A Coffin in Egypt* at Houston Grand Opera, a role she later reprised at Opera Philadelphia, The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills, and with the Chicago Opera Theater. Ms. von Stade will also create the role of Mrs. Edward “Winnie” Flato in the world premiere of Jake Heggie and Terrence McNally’s *Great Scott* directed by Jack O’Brien, with performances at The Dallas Opera and San Diego Opera.

Ms. von Stade’s orchestral repertoire is equally broad, embracing works from the Baroque to those of today’s composers. She has garnered critical and popular acclaim in her vast French repertoire as one of the world’s finest interpreters of Ravel’s *Shéhérazade*, Berlioz’s *Les nuits d’été*, and Canteloube’s *Les chants d’Auvergne*, as well as the orchestrated songs of Debussy and Duparc. She is continually in demand for the symphonic works of the great Austrian and German composers including Mozart and Mahler, as well as the new works of American composers.

It was the American composer Richard Danielpour who in 1998 helped Ms. von Stade to realize an artistic and personal dream when he wrote *Elegies*. The work, scored for orchestra, mezzo-soprano and baritone, is a tribute to Ms. von Stade’s father, Charles von Stade, who was killed in the final days of World War II, and is based on the text of letters Mr. von Stade sent to his wife during the war. It is through these letters that Ms. von Stade came to know her father, who died two months before her birth. In January 1998 the Jacksonville Symphony, led by Roger Nierenberg, offered the world premiere of *Elegies* with performances in Florida and in New York’s Carnegie Hall. *Elegies* is available on SONY Classical and has been performed throughout North America and Europe.



Unparalleled in her artistry as a recitalist, Ms. von Stade combines her expressive vocalism and exceptional musicianship with a rare gift for communication, enriching audiences throughout the world. Here, too, her repertoire encompasses a rich variety, from the classical style of Mozart and Haydn to Broadway; from Italian “Arie antiche” to the songs of contemporary composers – who compose especially for her – such as Dominick Argento and Jake Heggie.

She has made over seventy recordings with every major label, including complete operas, aria albums, symphonic works, solo recital programs, and popular crossover albums. Her recordings have garnered six Grammy nominations, two Grand Prix du Disc awards, the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis, Italy’s Premio della Critica Discografica, and “Best of the Year” citations by Stereo Review and Opera News. She has enjoyed the distinction of holding simultaneously the first and second places on national sales charts for Angel/EMI’s Show Boat and Telarc’s The Sound of Music.

Ms. von Stade appears regularly on television, through numerous PBS and other broadcasts. In 2002 she was seen on national television in a concert with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir as part of the opening ceremonies of the Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games. In 2001 she participated in the opening of Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts performing in a concert together with Sir Elton John, Andre Watts, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Other highlights of recent television appearances include a gala concert with the San Francisco Symphony to open the 1998-99 season at New York’s Carnegie Hall and a “Live from Lincoln Center” television event opening the 1999 season of the Mostly Mozart Festival, both broadcast throughout North America. She can be seen in “Live from the Met” performances as Cherubino, Hansel, and Idamante, and through PBS broadcasts of her celebration of the art of American song with Thomas Hampson, Marilyn Horne, Dawn Upshaw and Jerry Hadley in a program at New York’s Town Hall titled “I Hear America Singing,” as well as a program with Tyne Daly which included arias, art songs and popular crossover material. Also seen on PBS were a holiday special, “Christmas with Flicka,” shot on location in Salzburg, “A Carnegie Hall Christmas” with Kathleen Battle, and an evening of operatic and musical theater selections with Samuel Ramey and Jerry Hadley titled “Flicka and Friends.” Her recent portrayals in Dangerous Liaisons and The Aspern Papers were broadcast throughout North America. She can also be seen in the Unifilm film of the classic Jean-Pierre Ponnelle production of La cenerentola.

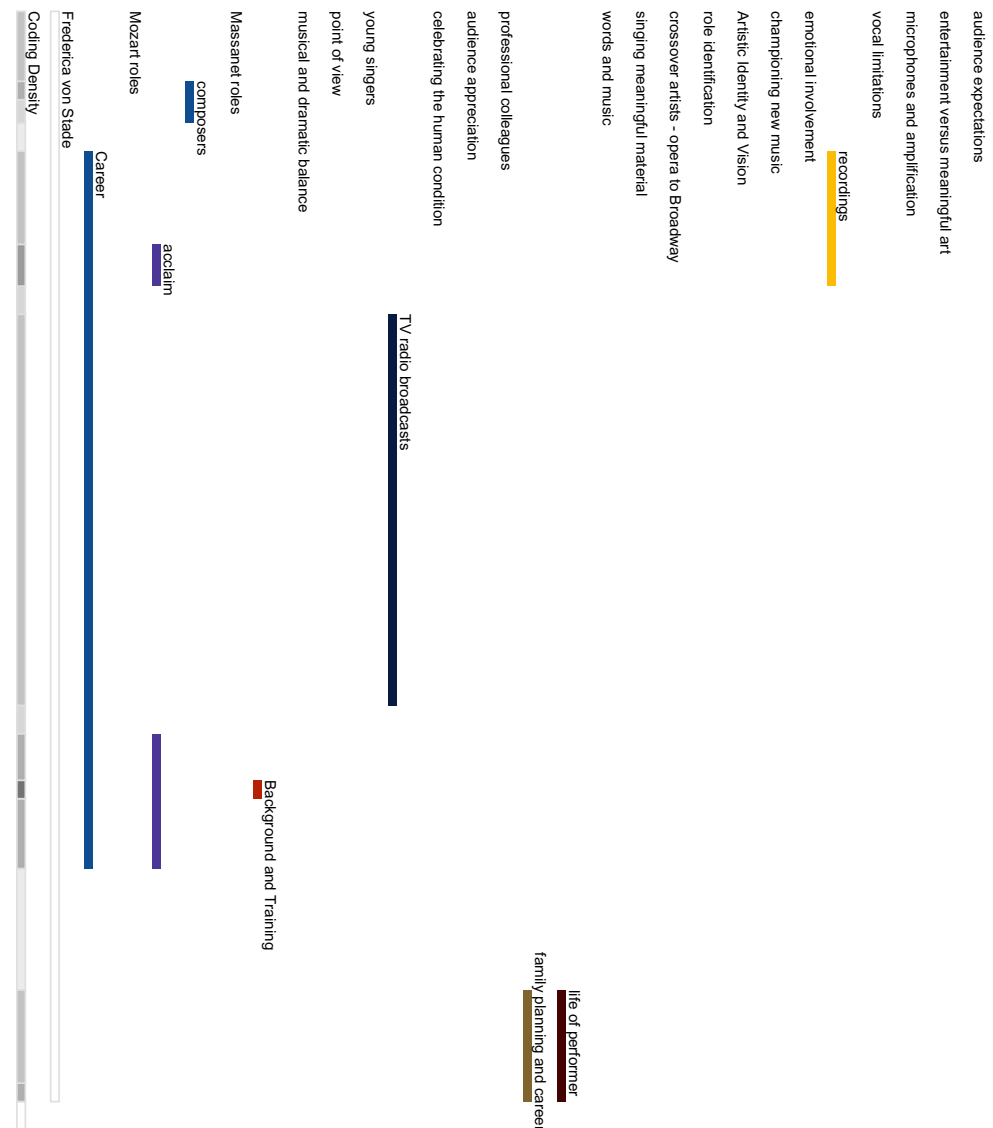
Ms. von Stade is the holder of honorary doctorates from Yale University, Boston University, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (which holds a Frederica von Stade Distinguished Chair in Voice), the Georgetown University School of Medicine, and her alma mater, the Mannes School of Music. In 1998 Ms. von Stade was awarded France’s highest honor in the Arts when she was appointed as an officer of L’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and in 1983 she was honored with an award given at The White House by President Reagan in recognition of her significant contribution to the arts.

Interviews with Bruce Duffie (1987, 1994): <https://www.bruceduffie.com/vonstade.html>

Bruce Duffie: Tell me the joys and sorrows of being both a mother and a singer at the same time!

Frederica von Stade: The sorrows are just having to be away from home.

BD: Aside from having to be away from the family, do you like being a wandering minstrel?



von Stade: I don't mind it as much as protest. It gets lonely, but I make projects for myself now. I study a number of hours a day, and make myself do things just to pass the days when I really have to be on my own all day. Also, it allows one to store up for the extension of energy when I am home. I get all my learning done so that I don't have to one minute away from the girls when I am home. So it has its purposes. It's a rest period, because it is hard to be at home and running the house, and learning an opera at the same time. Then it gets very tiring.

BD: Are you luckier than housewives who are home all the time, and never get a chance to get away?

von Stade: Yes, maybe. I was just astounded this summer, when our eldest daughter, at her own request, wanted to go to camp. It wasn't illogical. I thought she was a year too young, but her best friend's family run the Camp, so it made it a little bit more possible. She just did things that I know she wouldn't have done if I'd been there. She had to jump in a lake where there were snapping turtles! It was not cruel, but these were things that all the kids had to do, and she loved it! I went up to see her one day, and she said she was miserable. But then the next day she made the decision that she wanted to stay, and that's astoundingly mature for a nine-year-old. It's not that I don't want her to have maturity, but I want her to have her childhood as long as is possible. It's almost like an instinct that children know how to take care of themselves. In a way, they follow what they know about themselves. When it was time for me to leave, she said she just wanted to say good-bye to me. She's very astute in knowing that, and there's no more to the message than that. It's her decision. I would have taken her home if she'd wanted to go, but I would have probably encouraged her to stay, because I think it would have been better for her. Of course, I can offer them things that maybe other mothers can't. They get to travel, and the people in theaters are wonderful. All my colleagues also have children themselves, and they love children, and children are very, very welcome. It's just incredible. We've been lucky enough to have the company of Maria Ewing's daughter and Sir Peter's daughter at all rehearsals. She's five years old, and she sits there all day, and amuses herself and amuses us. She's been like a wonderful little ray of sunshine. In this particular era of singers, she's one of seven or eight children that are out here now with their parents. [She mentions singers in other productions at Lyric during this period] Alan Titus has children, Kiri Te Kanawa has children, Catherine Malfitano has her little girl here. There was an awful lot of sympathy for me when I went home for Hallowe'en weekend in the middle of rehearsals. So it's wonderful! We're also very lucky because there are built-in playmates, too.

BD: Does she co-ordinate that with what she's seen her own Mama doing on the stage?

von Stade: Not necessarily. I think she knows that the dressing rooms are all alike. She's spent a lot of time in them, so it's maybe a little more familiar to her than it is with other children. One time she asked, "How famous are you, Mommy?" I said, "I'm not really very famous," but she said, "You're famous because Susan Lucci is on one of the soaps, and her children go to our school!" [Both laugh] I didn't really encourage that idea terribly much, but all of my colleagues are very nice to them, so most of their experiences in the theater have been nice ones.

BD: Since she's on stage in a straight play, is she wondering where's the guy waving the stick?

von Stade: No, there's music in it as well. She also plays the violin, so she has some experience of music. The little one seems to be more dance-orientated at the moment, and I'm not pushing them to instruments. Jenny wanted to give up the violin, then all of a sudden towards the end of the year, she started making this pretty sound on the violin, and she loved it. She loved this connection between what she was doing and what she was hearing. I don't know how long she'll stay with it, but anything she

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decides is fine. If she went into the business, I'd be delighted because I've had a wonderful time, and if she doesn't, I'll be delighted. They can be whatever they choose.

BD: Just so long as they are happy?

von Stade: Yes, exactly, exactly!

BD: Tell me the secret of singing Mozart.

von Stade: [Thinks a moment] If I had a secret, I'd probably have it bottled and sold! There isn't one, other than being as respectful as is humanly possible of his wishes, and loving it. If you really love it, you'll enjoy singing it.

BD: How are his wishes different from the wishes of later masters, or lesser lights?

von Stade: I'm not really enough of a musicologist to know. I think of Mozart with the pure line and transparent orchestration. For me, the genius of Mozart, apart from all of the other aspects of his genius, is his capture, or definition, of character through music. The people of The Marriage of Figaro, which is the one I'm the most familiar with, are almost visual to the music. It's not only what they say, and at what time in the opera, it's how they say it. It's in total character with the part they're playing, and it's also very current. There's nothing archaic or dated about it. This is how people were.

BD: And still are?

von Stade: Yes. They have different clothes on, but passion is this way, disappointment is that way, anger is another way, and teasing is yet one more way. It's very tangible to us today, and maybe that's part of the secret. It's not easy, in spite of my doing a part like Cherubino, which I've done for twenty years. I don't toss it off. I don't think I can fly in two hours before and just do it. It's hard to sing Mozart. It's hard to tune it. A lot of it is much more difficult than the arias. It's a pure line, and it's very exposed. Faults that you may have in other places which aren't so visual or exposed, are just totally exposed in Mozart. It's a form of bel canto. What's going on is your line above the orchestra.

BD: But is it a different bel canto than Bellini?

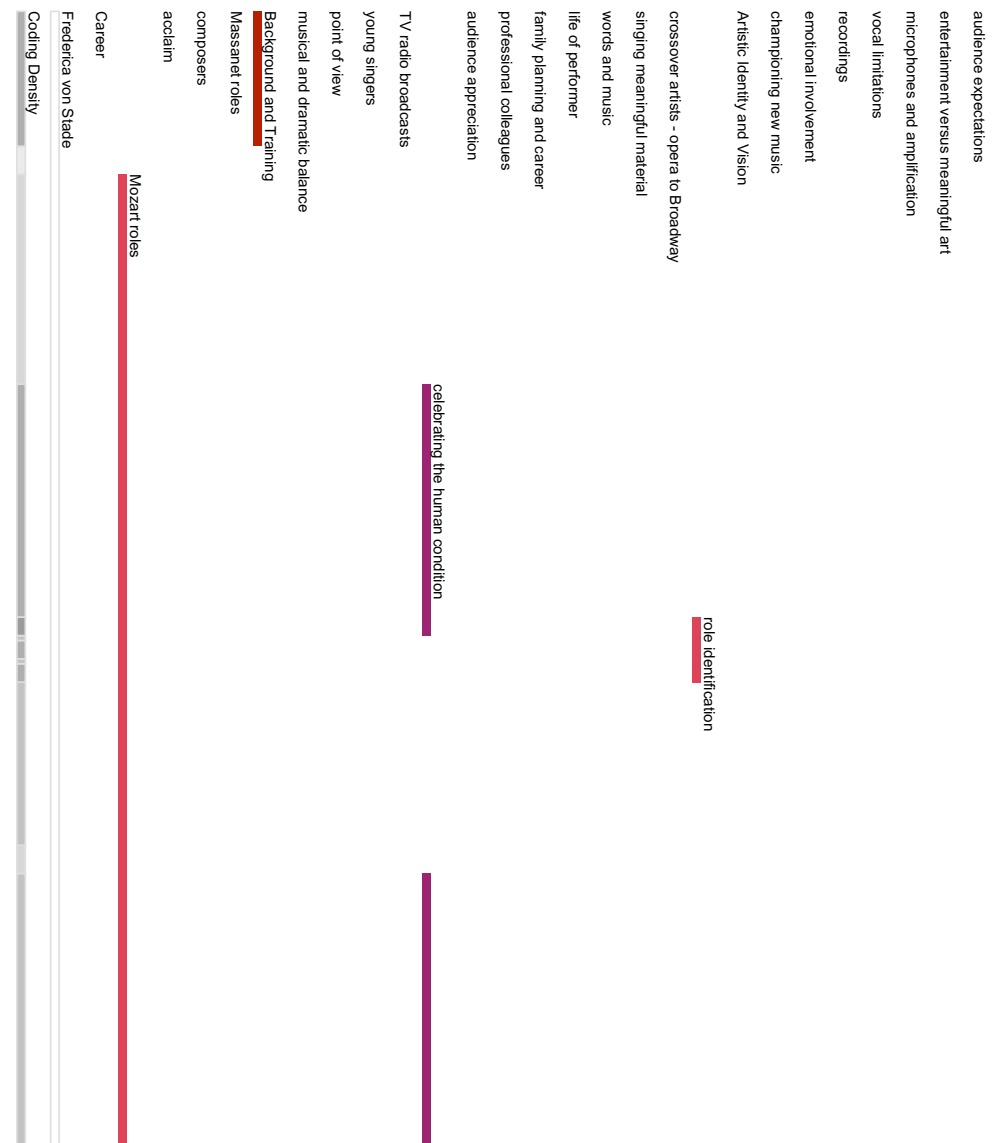
von Stade: Oh, yes. It's a much more interesting orchestration. I adore Bellini, and for me he was just the perfect union. I love Bellini more than all the others of that period.

BD: Let's stay with Mozart for a moment. I often ask what happens to the characters after the opera, in the 'fifth act', but in Figaro we actually know what happens because there's another Beaumarchais drama which follows. Should you bring any interplay between you and the Countess into the Mozart opera?

von Stade: Your question will be answered in this production! That's the whole point. It's the Countess's great disappointment with her own love that is a broken love. Her arias, 'Porgi Amor' and 'Dove Sono' are about that fact, that it's gone, it's over and yet...

BD: Will it come back?

von Stade: With them, probably.



BD: Mozart gets them back together again at the end...

von Stade: ...sort of. [Both laugh]

BD: It's a façade?

von Stade: No, I don't think it's a façade. I think it's real. The Count's nature is that he's going to pursue Susanna continually. It's going to be a problem, and the only real thing that's left is Figaro and Marcellina discovering that the woman who really wanted to marry him is actually his mother! Probably that's tucked away, and it's very much played out by Cherubino and the Countess. There's a very interesting article that was written in Paris about the time I was doing this role in a big new production almost twenty years ago. It was called 'Chérubin a vingt-et-un ans' [Cherubino at twenty-one years old]. The author put forward that he was sort of tired, and worn out, and jaded.

BD: A classic case of burn-out?

von Stade: Absolutely burn-out. But that was probably not untypical of Mozart's time. There were marriages of unions of familial, financial, or fiscal reasons. The form of the marriage was respected, but the content was not, and that's case for the Countess, because she probably would be married to the Count the rest of her days. There wasn't divorce or separation. Her next course is to take a lover.

BD: In The Barber of Seville, the Count actually pursues Rosina, and he's really infatuated with her. It's not a marriage of convenience arranged by someone else.

von Stade: No, but I'm not sure that one really follows the other. It's the same cast of characters, but Mozart and Rossini are generations apart in a way.

BD: [Gently protesting] But they're both from the mind of Beaumarchais.

von Stade: Yes, but I don't know that it's the same thing. Even if it is or isn't, it's just what many people did in that time. The Count had an insatiable ego, and Rosina was just another feather in his cap.

BD: Is he a failed Don Giovanni?

von Stade: Yes, maybe he's a bit of a Don Giovanni, or maybe just a particular man, and maybe it's the acceptance of that which makes the form work. It's not unheard of that men had mistresses. Some men still do have mistresses. It wouldn't be my idea. I haven't experienced it, but it isn't outside the possibility of something working. Once it was all accepted, and maybe it is all 'happily ever after', and she decides to have one or two flings here and there. That's all right, and they die having been devoted to each other. That's also a possibility.

BD: Yet she doesn't become pregnant from the Count. She becomes pregnant from Cherubino.

von Stade: Apparently that happened a lot, too. These ladies had babies all the time just because there was nothing to do about it.



BD: Is it possible that we can over-analyze all of these characters, and lose the flavor of Mozart in all of this?

von Stade: We can, but once you're sitting and listening to it, no. It all comes into the context of 'who gives a darn about Freud, really?' It comes back to what it is, which is essentially a musical experience.

BD: Where is the balance between the musical experience and the dramatic experience?

von Stade: [Thinks a moment] I don't know where the balance is. It's probably in and out of balance. I think that the musical is an explanation of the dramatic, and the dramatic is a reinforcement. They actually reinforce each other, but they don't always double each other, so that it doesn't become boring.

BD: Does one over-shadow the other?

von Stade: No, I don't think so, especially in The Marriage of Figaro. In other Mozart operas, the characters are less clearly defined, and they are more part of a musical form than a dramatic form. Figaro is just so perfectly constructed. The whole opera takes place in a day! It's one day, and you feel the heat of morning in the first act, and late morning in the second act, and hot afternoon in the third act, and nighttime relief in the fourth act.

BD: It's almost real time?

von Stade: Oh yes, absolutely.

* * * * *

BD: You've sung Cherubino quite often. Have you ever sung the Countess?

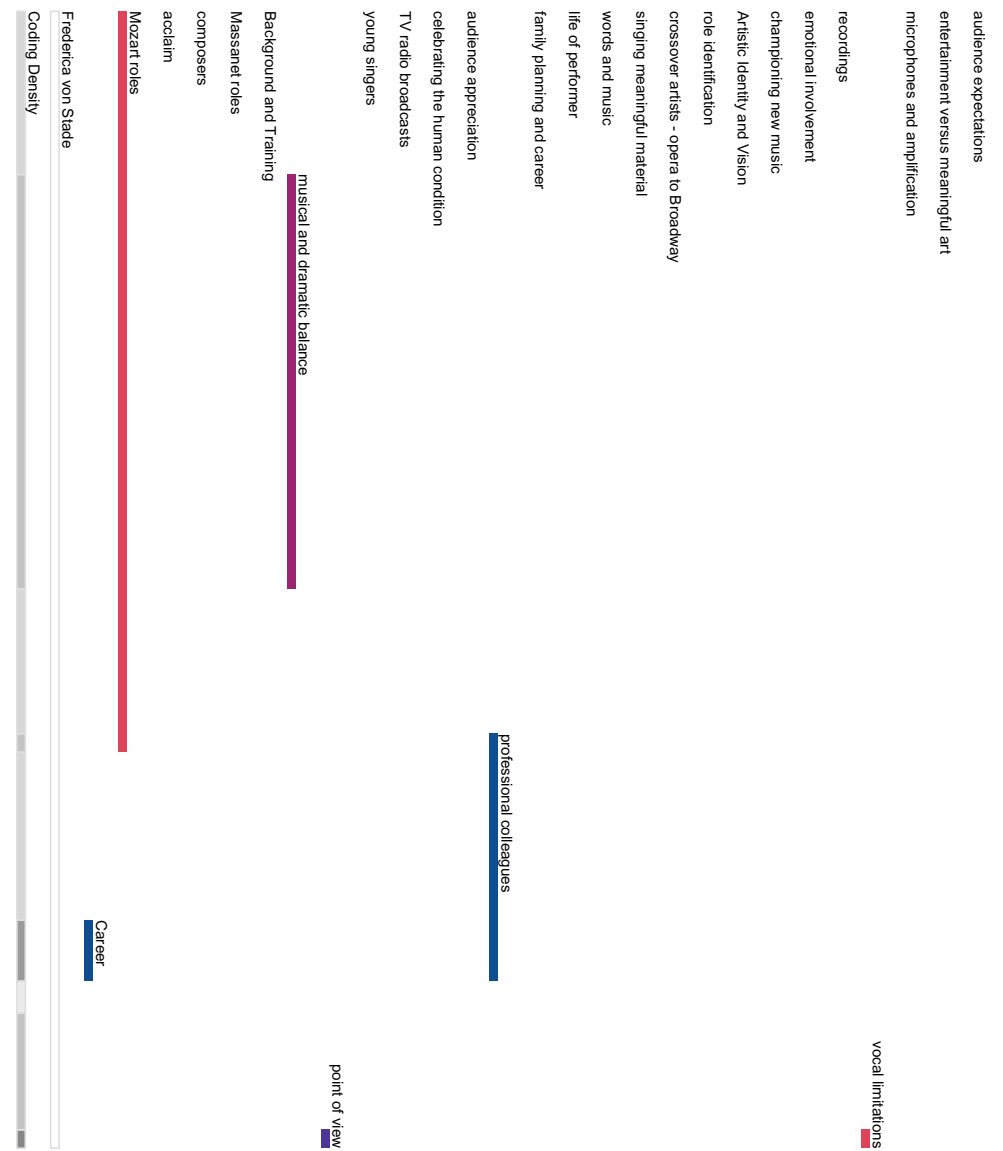
von Stade: No, I've never sung the Countess, but I've been asked to sing Susanna hundreds of times, and I don't have any plans to do it. The ones who have done it, like Maria, have a voice which is just sitting up there. That's the way it's going, and she'd be a fool not to respect that. There's an upper extension and a really exciting quality in her voice. I didn't know her voice well, and this is really the first time I've ever worked with her and heard her live. I've heard her on recordings..

BD: Both being mezzos, you mostly sing the same roles?

von Stade: Yes, we were always doing the same roles, so we were never together. That's just where her voice is going. What's hard is when some other people have gone from Carmen to Norma, such as Shirley Verrett and Grace Bumbry. Shirley certainly had that gorgeous extension, and how lucky we are to be able to hear her use it. Hers is one of the most beautiful voices around.

BD: How do you decide which roles you will accept and which roles you will decline?

von Stade: I sing a lot of soprano roles. Rosina is obviously a mezzo, but I sang Cendrillon [Cinderella] of Massenet, which is a soprano role, and Octavian is written as a soprano role. Cherubino is also written as a soprano. I'm doing Chérubin of Massenet, and that's written for a soprano, but it's a type of soprano. It's not a Mimi, but a lyric in weight. I select parts by the role rather than by the



category. Very few voices fit absolutely in any one category. They all have their own character. I've never had any trouble with high notes, but I'm sure I'd have a lot of trouble with high notes if I exploited them. I don't sit up on the top of my voice.

BD: So, it has to do with tessitura? [Vis-à-vis the recording shown at right, see my interviews with Evelyn Lear, and Ruth Welting.]

von Stade: Yes, but I've sung Amina in a special version of La Sonnambula. I did all of it in the right keys except the arias. [We come back to Bellini later, but at this point the phone rings, and she had another discussion with her offspring.] This is just persistence. [Imitating her child] "I won't do my homework, and I won't watch television, and I won't do anything unless..."

BD: Is she having a problem?

von Stade: She's not having a problem with anything. It's just she is going through the process of making everything a problem, and that's cool! That's not bad, you know!

BD: Do you ever wish you could just take the top off her head and pour in all your knowledge?

von Stade: No, because it's process, and the information is almost secondary to the process. I was so pleased when I was home last week. I went to see my other daughter's teacher who said she's just a remarkable student. That's something I knew my elder one was, but I didn't know that about the little one. Kids basically don't always show off in school the way they show off at home, and that's good, because at home they should be able to be any way they want to be. They should feel free to be as awful as they want, because there's got to be some place in the world where you can be without any veneer. When you're in a social situation, like school, you have to conform, and you've got to meet the rules.

BD: Do you find that you can get rid of your own veneer by putting on someone else's veneer for the stage?

von Stade: I think so, to a certain extent. The hardest thing to do is play myself. I did a Christmas film on Austrian television, and by the fifth day I was used to the camera being there but, in the beginning, it was very difficult. The director would say, "Flicka, I want you to sit forward, pick up the book, open the page, read it, and put it down again." You feel there's a camera there, and all of a sudden there's a self-consciousness that comes. You do your damndest to get rid of it when you're performing, because it impedes you from telling a story. You may be allied to yourself, but you're not playing yourself. It's hard to bury it in gesture. The intention has to be more subtle on the stage. I'm not a boy, and I don't know what he feels like to be fourteen, but I feel I am fourteen when I'm doing it. I use my imagination. Everything in my energy is used to convey it, and the only way I can really do that is to organize a state of mind where I believe I am.

BD: Even though Jenny is not a boy, when she gets to be fourteen will you have more observations because you've played the fourteen-year-old boy so much?

von Stade: No way! [Laughs] Boys are much easier than girls as teenagers. Girls are very complicated teenagers. From what all my friends have told me, I suspect they're not easy to deal with. But I'm not dreading it, because everyone has said that on every stage of children's development. "Wait until you get to the Terrible Twos!" Then, "Oh, my Gosh, wait until she gets to eleven years old!"

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Nothing suits them...” I have found every single stage to be absolutely marvelous, so that I’m just sure that fourteen is just going to be another thing.

* * * * *

BD: I knew you had sung both Cenerentola and Cendrillon, but I didn’t realize that you had also done Cherubino and Chérubin. Tell me about the connections.

von Stade: The Chérubin of Massenet is more French than Italian. He’s a little bit older, but has that same sort of torture. It’s a different story. Chérubin is in love with everybody, and everybody’s in love with him. He has all these countesses dropping handkerchiefs all the time, but he falls in love with an actress called L’Enseleillad, who is the soprano. But she just absolutely tosses him over. Then there are two other characters. There’s Nina, who is like a Susanna character, and really devoted and dear to him. You really feel the intention is that they will be a team by the end. Then there’s Le Philosophe, and when I did it he was played by Samuel Ramey. He’s sort of like Chérubin’s mentor, and just keeps him on the straight and narrow.

BD: How old is Chérubin?

von Stade: He’s older than fourteen in this. He’s about eighteen, and a little bit more like Octavian.

BD: Is it the same guy as in the Mozart?

von Stade: Yes, he’s the same guy, except there’s no Count and Countess. He’s just a young page. It’s the same character in another set of circumstances.

BD: Tell me the difference between singing the Massenet style and the Mozart style.

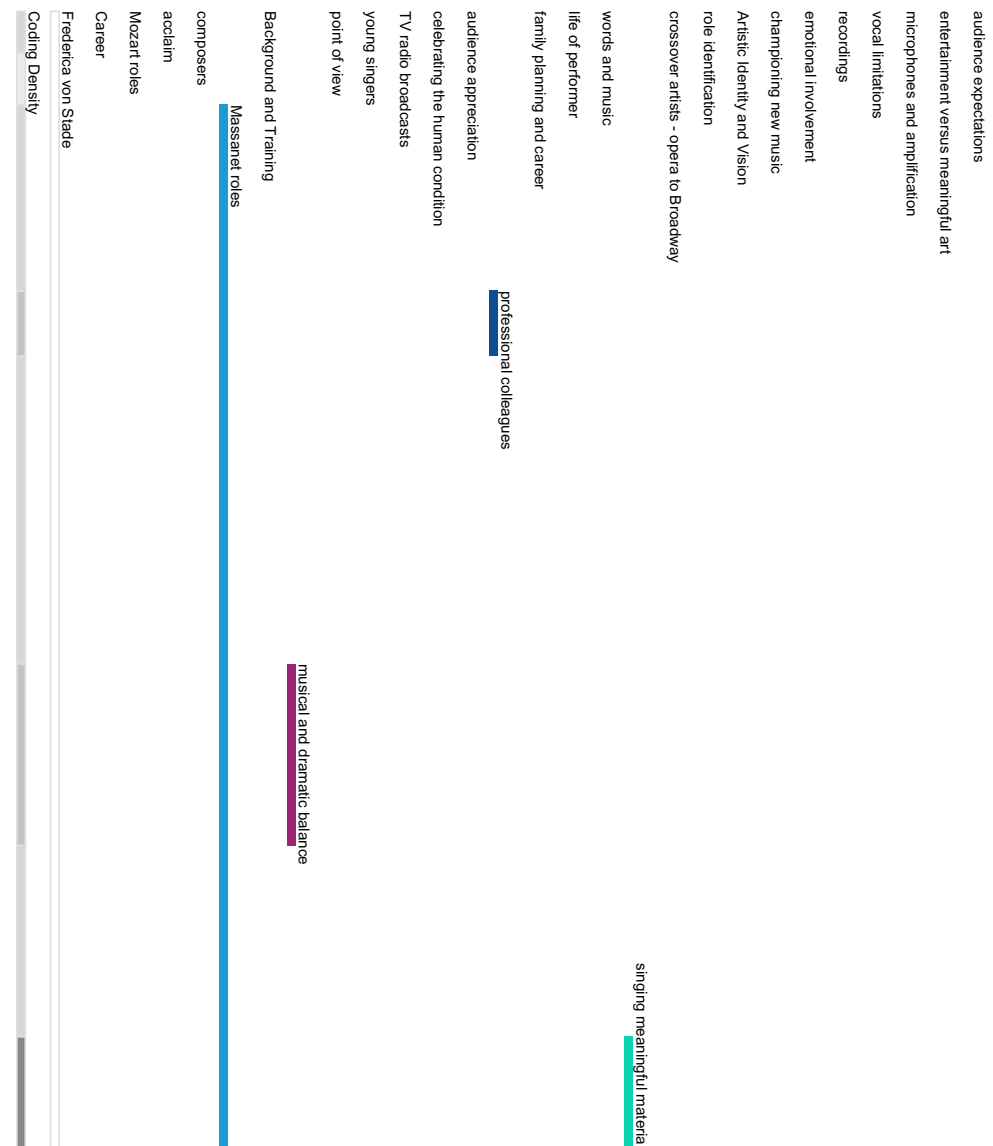
von Stade: [Thinks a moment] Massenet is closer in style to Puccini and to verismo. There’s less of the form of the aria. There may be a simple melody with diversions, but not variations. Massenet, like Puccini, was absolutely adamant with his directions, like putting together a child’s wagon at Christmas. You have to do the right steps, and you really have to do it exactly as he specifies. Massenet works best if you respect all that. When he doesn’t want you to slow down, he doesn’t just say not to slow down! He insists upon not slowing down. Otherwise you can wallow in Massenet, because it’s that beautiful, beautiful melody, and long arching phrases. But if you actually respect his directions, it propels the drama. As with Madam Butterfly, you do want to applaud at the end of certain arias, but you almost don’t. You want it to go on. It’s part of the whole, and Massenet is the same.

BD: Now you’ve sung several Massenet operas...

von Stade: Only three. Werther, Chérubin, and Cendrillon.

BD: Another comparison would be Cendrillon beside Cenerentola. [Note that von Stade goes back and forth between the two operas in the following answers.]

von Stade: Cendrillon is much more the fairy-tale as we know it. It’s more closely allied to the Charles Perrault version. One interesting detail is the glass slipper. In French, there are two words with the same pronunciation. Verre, which means glass, and voire, which means fur. So, most probably the original Perrault was a little fur slipper. Then it got translated into being the glass slipper, and became very much about its magic. The Cinderella I grew up with, which is the Walt Disney version, is much



closer to the Massenet than the Rossini. The Massenet is really one of the most beautifully-constructed operas, not only musically but textually. There's terrifically beautiful symbolism. It's not only a little fairy tale. She has a bracelet, and the bracelet represents a ring. If you see me as I really am, and you want me, then I pledge my life to you, and it is symbolized by the ring of marriage, and the symbolism the hearth. It's a woman's warmth, the warmth of true womanhood. There are all these wonderful allusions to it, so in a way it's very spiritual. The words can be taken very spiritually. The first little thing that she sings, her once-upon-a-time idea, is her real story. She was nobly born, and it was all taken away from her through death and transference of funds. She doesn't just hope that her nobility will be recognized. It's not a nobility of possessions, but a nobility of spirit. She recognizes the purity of the prince. She falls in love with him in his disguise, and without being heavy about it, there is that wonderful Italian leading to something that's almost a little religious. Alidoro, the philosopher, the Magic Man who's like the Holy Spirit, directs it and makes it happen.

BD: Does all the coloratura in the Rossini add to the tension of the drama?

von Stade: Oh, yes, and like all coloratura, it has a reason. The biggest illustration is in the last aria with the big recitative before it. There's part of it that's joyful, there's part of it that's surprise, there's part of it that's sorrowful, there's part that's forgiving, and all of it is beautifully done. It's interesting that most of the recitatives of Cenerentola, excluding the one preceding the final aria, were not written by Rossini, so they're not especially beautiful.

BD: Since they weren't real Rossini, should someone re-write them more in his style?

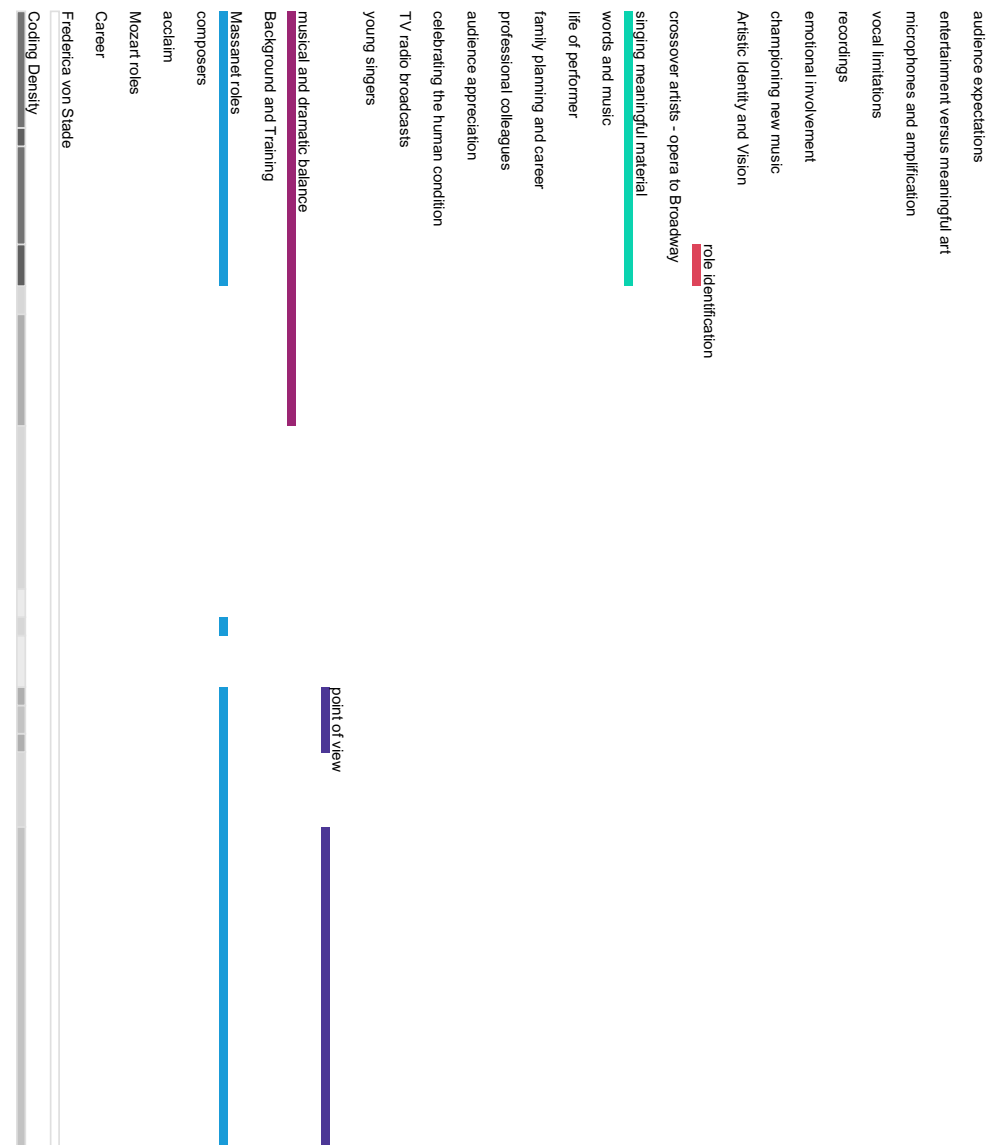
von Stade: I don't know. It would be a possibility, but it's only an idea that they don't need to be so incredibly respected. They can be cut and reorganized a little bit, and it's not great sacrilege.

BD: Let's talk about the other Massenet opera, Werther. Tell me about Charlotte. [Vis-à-vis the recording shown at left, see my interviews with Isobel Buchanan, Robert Lloyd, and Janine Reiss.]

von Stade: I did it years ago, and I've just done it again. Charlotte is not all that close to the character of Goethe. Werther is about Werther. It's not about Werther and Charlotte. It's mostly about a man's love from his point of view. You do see her point of view, but not until the last minute.

BD: It truly is The Sorrows of Young Werther [the title of the Goethe novel].

von Stade: Yes. Charlotte is certainly not in the category of a prop for Werther, but rather than being firmly a character on her own, she is more of an extension of his love object, and the role is not as clearly defined by Massenet. You hardly see her at all. You see her as this person who is in love within the first act, and in the second act you see her as married to somebody else, and being quite curt and determined to respect her own marriage. It isn't really until the third act that she comes alive at all, and says that she wanted to tell Werther, "From the first day I met you, I adored you." I don't mean to diminish it, and I love doing it, but I think the opera is about Werther and his magnificent tenor voice. [Laughs] I was telling this to a friend, and they said, "One of the curses of the Middle Ages was they gave us this incredibly potent idea of romantic love." Not to be an old sour-puss about romantic love, but it's so idealized in our country. It's on television and film, and every cover of Cosmopolitan magazine on every news stand. It can overshadow the wonder of real love that is a part of romantic love. It's that the ideal situation of running down platforms in smoky railway stations. The magic of our own humanity is way beyond that, but Werther is the absolute pinnacle it. It is as if you rolled it all up into one. It's being in love with words, and ideas, and images. It's



narcissistic in a way, and if you really squash it, it's much nicer than simply being narcissistic. It's the epitome of romantic love.

BD: Is it a grateful role to sing?

von Stade: I love singing it, but I just love the tenor arias. I could hear them all night and never get sick of them. I love all that drama. I love a good romance, and it's fun to be a girl! I do so many boys that I'm really thrilled to get to play a girl!

BD: Did Massenet write well for the human voice, especially the female voice?

von Stade: He wrote beautifully, with wonderful sweeping phrases, rest periods, and simple little songs. But Massenet can grate on you in an awful way if it's not respected. If it's too slow or too indulged, one can feel that here is the most magnificent phrase, so I'll milk it for all it's worth. He had an idea of how he wanted it, and his idea of how he wanted it is the right one. But it's very easy to abuse. That's like Puccini. [She sings indulgently the beginning of *Mi chiamano, Mimi*] It's a beautiful phrase, but what are you saying? It's simply "My name is Mimi," so don't indulge too much. It's like being tickled to death. [Both laugh]

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BD: Do you sing differently in front of a microphone than you do in performance?

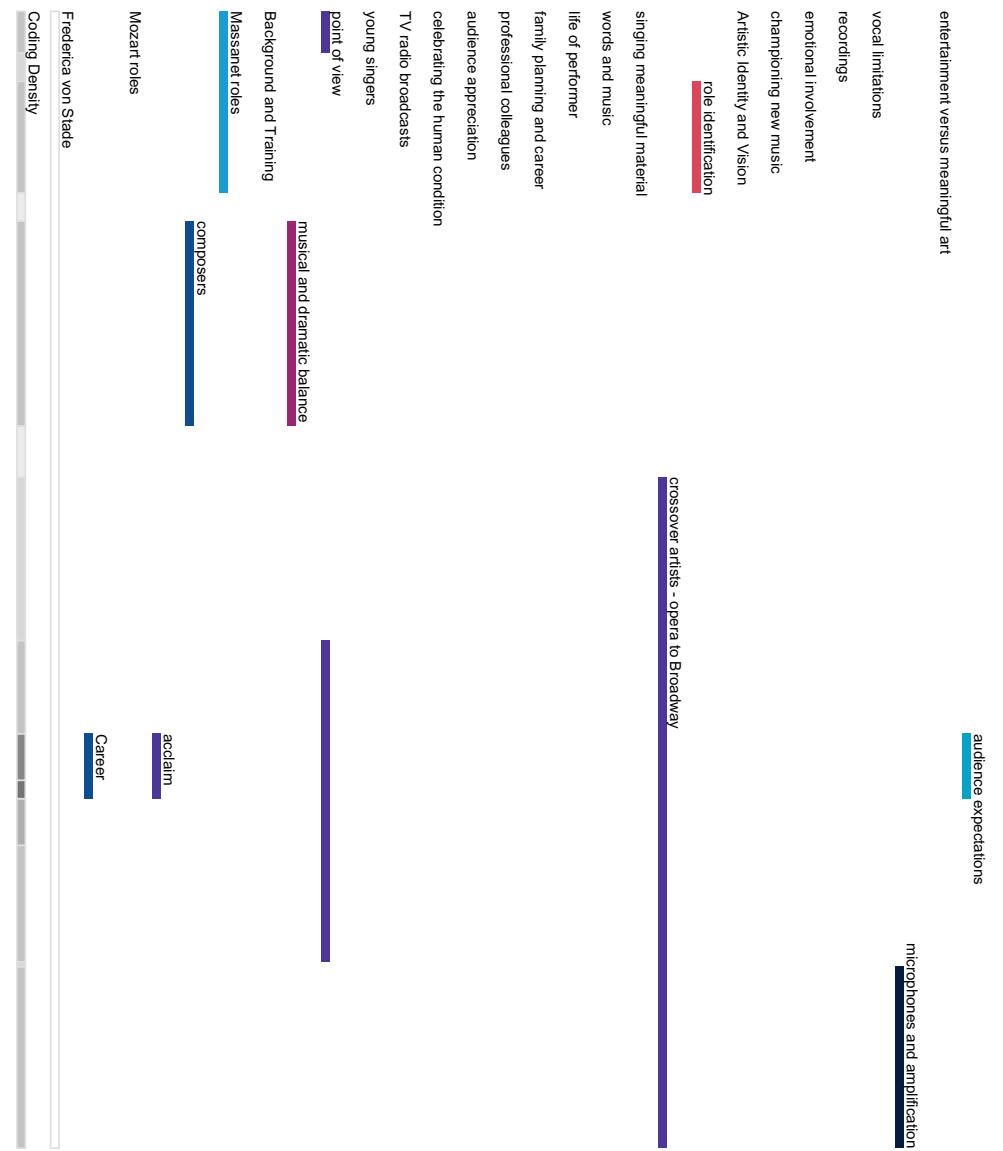
von Stade: No, not opera mics. I just made a pop record, and you really sing differently for that kind of record! [Laughter, and then she sings 'My heart belongs to Broadway'] I have always loved that music. I love Barbra Streisand as much as Maria Callas, and Peggy Lee and Eartha Kitt and Whitney Houston!

BD: Should we try to get the Broadway audience to come to the opera, and should we try to get the opera audience to go to Broadway?

von Stade: There was just this big article in The New York Times about that, about crossovers, but I don't think you can. It's like the New York City Opera public and the Met public. They're two different publics, and if one is on strike, people don't all go to the other one. That's just what New York is. It's just a huge combination of people. I love Broadway. I love the size of the theaters, and I feel it's part of being an American. I'm proud of Jerome Kern, and Gershwin, and Rodgers and Hart, and Rodgers and Hammerstein. It's part of my heritage.

BD: And are you also proud of Thomas Pasatieri, Dominick Argento, and Gian Carlo Menotti?

von Stade: Definitely, and I think it's thrilling! All of us in the business have to take our hats off to Kiri Te Kanawa who really started this as crossover stuff. She opened up the possibilities for us as additional work that we would enjoy. A lot of the voices of that time, such as Jerome Kern, were a lot closer to opera than to Broadway sounds. Some of it is probably the recording equipment of those days, but if you hear the original Showboat with Irene Dunne, it's not an unoperatic sound. It is the same type of vocal production that we have, with slight moderation in that we may obscure words in our opera-ness. Jerome Kern apparently adored words as much as melodies. He insisted upon understanding the words, and that might take a slightly different emphasis than we would be initially comfortable doing, or be knowledgeable enough to do. But other than that, especially since you are not having the Ethel Merman-types pop onto the scene in Broadway with the great voices, you're having



more actors who sing, and becoming singing-actors. The real culprit is the microphone on stage, because our ears don't listen the same way.

BD: Helen Traubel would sing at the Met, and then sing in night clubs... or is that a different thing?

von Stade: I don't know. I haven't done it for twenty-odd years. I did do a little bit of it, but if it worked for her, it's great. I don't think you can make a rule about it. It's hard to make the switch over.

BD: If you can't make a rule, then you don't want to put a limitation on it?

von Stade: That's what I mean. If people can do it, fantastic, and if it works, great! If it doesn't work, and it's clear that it doesn't work for that particular voice, okay, nice try.

BD: Let me ask a big balance question. In opera, where's the balance between the artistic achievement and the entertainment value?

von Stade: Opera is incredibly entertaining because it's a spectacle. You get as much spectacle in any opera as you do in a Broadway show. It may not be as commercial as we're accustomed to. It doesn't have the glitz and the big band, but it is as spectacular as anything one can see. There is a spectacularness of the human voice in the fact that it is used without amplification or artificial interference. The sound is going from vocal cord to ear, and we don't have much of that in the world anymore. It's Walkmans, and CDs, and stereos, and TVs. Everything is transmitted via something else. That's our generation. It's nothing to hate, but there are few situations left where it's a real human exchange. It is coming out of my throat into your years, and that's wonderful. That doesn't change in opera. That's the essence of opera.

BD: Are you conscious of the audience when you're singing on the stage?

von Stade: Oh, sure. You can feel the public right away, and you know if they're not in the mood because opera takes a certain amount of participation from the public. They have to be willing to sit there and concentrate. It's not as much fun without them.

BD: Is that one of the drawbacks of making a recording, because there's no public in the studio?

von Stade: Yes. I don't like recording. I don't like listening to my own voice.

BD: Do you like listening to other's voices?

von Stade: Yes, but when I'm on my own, I listen to pop music more than opera.

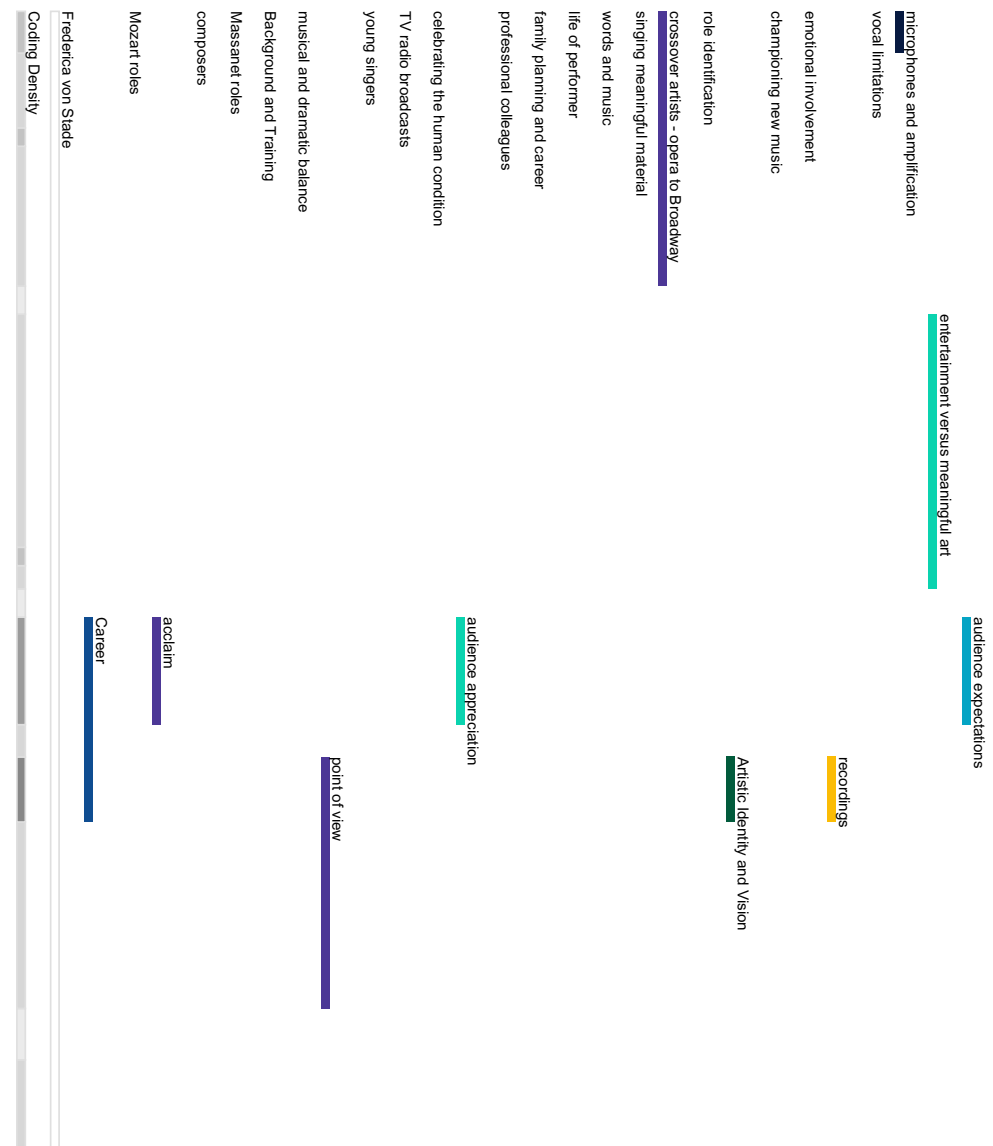
BD: Sure, but when you're performing opera all the time, you get your fill of that material.

von Stade: Yes, exactly.

* * * * *

BD: Tell me about singing early opera, such as Monteverdi.

von Stade: I loved singing Monteverdi, especially in the versions of Raymond Leppard. [Both musicians are shown on the LP cover at left.] They're just wonderful. Talk about how the phrases



were absolutely built around the words! It's just marvelous. That's my only experience with it, doing some Cavalli and Monteverdi, but what I did of it, I adored.

BD: Do you sing much contemporary music anymore?

von Stade: No, I don't. I'm doing a new Dominick Argento piece, The Aspern Papers. I love his work.

BD: Is it a song-cycle or an opera?

von Stade: It's an opera, and I'm going to record a song-cycle of his next year. I'm very pleased about that.

BD: Does he know how to write well for the voice?

von Stade: Oh, fantastically. We're in a very exciting time for vocalism. William Schuman is not a young man, but he wrote The Mighty Casey. Lee Hoiby is also a wonderful composer.

BD: [Gently protesting] But these are all lyrical writers, rather than hard complex writers.

von Stade: The hard complex writers I don't know, but there are certain limits to the voice. I did a modern piece with Gerard Schwarz once [when he was still playing trumpet, before his conducting career] and I asked him how to practice this stuff because I was going hoarse! He said he didn't practice modern stuff because it would ruin his lip! So if it's that category, I don't want to ruin my voice on it. I'm not gifted enough to know how to use my voice and not hurt it. There are certain things for the voice that aren't good, such as intervals jumping around, and difficult words on high notes. It's not the nature of the human voice to be able to negotiate those things comfortably. There are certain things that show the voice off, and it's not switching registers! Unless you are a real smart cookie and figure it out, you can get hurt. Not every composer writes that way, but if that's what you mean by 'modern music', that's not for me.

BD: You've picked the ones who write wonderfully for the voice, and this is great! I'm so glad we're getting back to music that can be easily listened to.

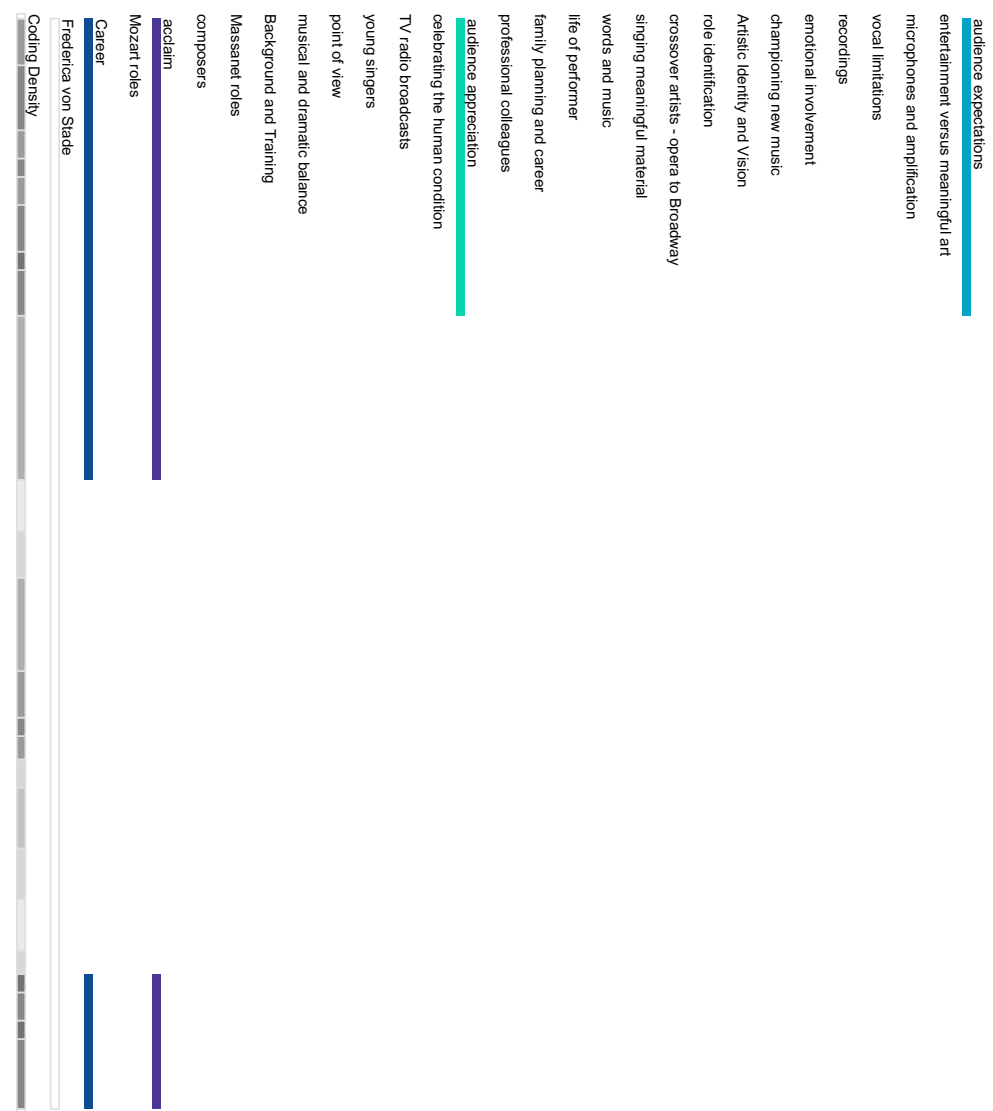
von Stade: Argento did Casanova., and it's just a scream! It's as good as any Broadway show I've ever seen, and that scene in the Grand Canal in Venice is marvelous! He's a wonderful librettist as well, and he does his own librettos.

BD: Is singing fun?

von Stade: Yes! Singing is very athletic, and when it's right it's like hitting the ball in the middle of the racket. It kind of goes clunk, and it feels right. It's very physical, and it's very concentrated without being tight. Singing is removing tension, and letting everything be a conduit to the voice. It's a real high when it's good, and when it's bad, it takes a lesson or two to get it right. I just adore it! I hate it sometimes when I have a lot of work and I'm tired, but I just cannot believe my good fortune to be paid to do what I love doing. It is worth sitting by myself here in Chicago to wait for performances. It's not to neglect my personal life, but it's a small sacrifice for a really terrific reward.

BD: How is the public different from Europe to America, or from city to city?





von Stade: In Europe, everybody goes to the opera once a week. It's just part of their life. It's right there. A lot of activity is geared around the opera. They're usually smaller cities and smaller houses, so they're maybe a bit more spoiled in that it's more available to them. They generally don't have the big city pressures that we all have in America in the big houses, such as the Met, and San Francisco, and Chicago. The Europeans wait to the last curtain to leave and get a cab to go home, or take the subway or a tram. It is not a major thing, and that's how they do it. So there's less pressure on them, and they can somehow sit back and enjoy it more. It's been part of their culture for hundreds of years, and it's much more state supported. So while tickets are unbelievably expensive, there is subsidy, and it's not as much of an investment as it is in this country. Also, the big houses take away a little bit of that intimacy of opera, which I regret. I have loved so much singing a lot in Europe in the last couple of years. There I can see the first three rows, but here in Chicago I just barely see shadows because it's a big house. I'll put in a plug for the marvelous theater, Glimmerglass. They got the money together and built this wonderful theater, and it is a dream.

BD: Where is this?

von Stade: This is in Cooperstown, New York, near Saratoga, and with the ingenuity and hard work of a few individuals, they got the funding. It looks very much like a barn and overlooks the lake, which is just beautiful. It's about the size of Glyndebourne with wonderfully little chandeliers. So it's very pretty, and in the intermission, the walls withdraw. It's just so attractively done.

BD: Before we finish up, let's go back to Bellini for a moment.

von Stade: I don't know much about Bellini, just my experience of La Sonnambula. But I think Ah! non credea mirarti is the greatest aria ever written for the voice, for the spirit, for the words, for the melody. He is a melody man.

BD: Have you sung Adalgisa [Norma]?

von Stade: Yes, I did actually, but it was so many years ago that I don't remember too much. It's just so pure, so loving of womanhood. It's marvelous. I know it's not interesting to play... it's oom-pah-pah, oom-pah-pah, and the orchestras don't like it. There are very few conductors around who really understand it and know wherein lies its greatness. It's the most demanding of the voice because it's rubato, it's line, it's trills, it's coloratura. It's every vocal technique within the human range, and it's the most refined.

BD: But it demands the right things of the voice? [Vis-à-vis the Mahler recording shown at left see my interview with Yoel Levi.]

von Stade: Oh yes, absolutely. That generation had control, and they didn't go on stage unless they had it. It kept the voice very pure, and very light, and very fragile. Because of the size of our houses over here, we're a little gung-ho on 'the big voice'. Big voices are marvelous, but there's a whole other palette, too. In the last twenty-five years, you have Birgit Nilsson, and Maria Callas, but there was also Teresa Berganza, and Victoria de los Angeles, as well as people who did not have big voices, like Lily Pons. There's quality of voice, and sometimes when the theaters get too big and the orchestras play too loud, those voices go a little unnoticed.

BD: I'm glad we have continued to notice your voice!

von Stade: Oh, thank you, thank you!

BD: Thank you for finally coming to Chicago!

von Stade: Thank you very much for having me.

BD: Will you come back?

von Stade: Yes, I'm planning to come back...

[She would return two years later for Barber of Seville with Thomas Allen, Frank Lopardo, Claudio Desderi, Nicola Ghiuselev, and Cynthia Lawrence, conducted by Alessandro Pinzauti, directed by John Copley, and designed by John Conklin, with wigs and makeup by Stan Dufford. After a return engagement in 1991 for Figaro, with Ramey, Marie McLaughlin, Lott, William Shimell, François Loup, Benelli, and Philip Kraus, again with Davis conducting and Hall directing, von Stade made one more appearance again in Barber with Allen, Rockwell Blake, Desderi, and Nicolai Ghiaurov, conducted by Carlo Rizzi.]

In November of 1994, exactly seven years after our first meeting, we got together again and continued our discussion. This time while setting up, she was speaking about learning music on her plane trips

BD: Is that where you learn all the music — on the plane?

von Stade: A lot of it, yes. It's amazing, just the repetition. Most singers today would live with tape recorders, just to get the bare structure of everything.

BD: How much are you're learning from that, and how much are you learning from inside? How much are you putting into music?

von Stade: It's a combination. You've got to get the mechanics of it all straightened out first, and get the words translated and the rhythms right. Then comes the memorization. Once that's all tucked away is when you're free enough to start really liking it! That's when all the additions come, and all the ideas, and the reorganization.

BD: So, once you've got it all learned, then it's starts?

von Stade: Yes, then it starts, and you get some ideas. But when it's still an enemy on the page, it takes a little more patience. [Laughs]

BD: There really is an adversarial element???

von Stade: Oh, yes there is, depending on how difficult the piece is.

Coding Density

Frederica von Stade

Career

Mozart roles

acclaim

composers

Massenet roles

Background and Training

musical and dramatic balance

point of view

young singers

TV/ radio broadcasts

celebrating the human condition

audience appreciation

professional colleagues

family planning and career

life of performer

words and music

singing meaningful material

crossover artists - opera to Broadway

role identification

Artistic Identity and Vision

championing new music

emotional involvement

recordings

vocal limitations

microphones and amplification

entertainment versus meaningful art

audience expectations

BD: You've just gotten through with The Dangerous Liaisons by Conrad Susa on the west coast. Was that particularly difficult?

von Stade: No, but it was difficult in some ways. He is not rhythmically difficult, but melodically it's very complicated. It just takes getting it in your ear, and getting used to it. It does not fall into your ear the way some things do.

BD: Does it fall into the voice?

von Stade: Yes, very well, and it was nicely distributed from the point of view of words. A big problem with some of the new operas is how easy a job they make it for us deliver a clear sentence. If there are too many words, or if there are too many notes, or if they're too high, there are lots of complications that you've got to have to be careful of. In that regard, it was very, very comfortable and very thoughtful.

BD: Is that something you look for when you're deciding if you're going to accept a new role?

von Stade: In this situation, where it's being written, Conrad was amazingly tuned in to what everybody could and couldn't do, and where the range was. He asked us as well, but he also came to a number of performances, and was familiar with all the people he was writing for.

BD: He came to performances of other works to watch you?

von Stade: Yes, to see what was the comfortable register, where you could do specific things, what was the most dramatic, etc. I was able to work with him and actually make a few adjustments. These adjustments were words, not notes.

BD: Some ways to project the text?

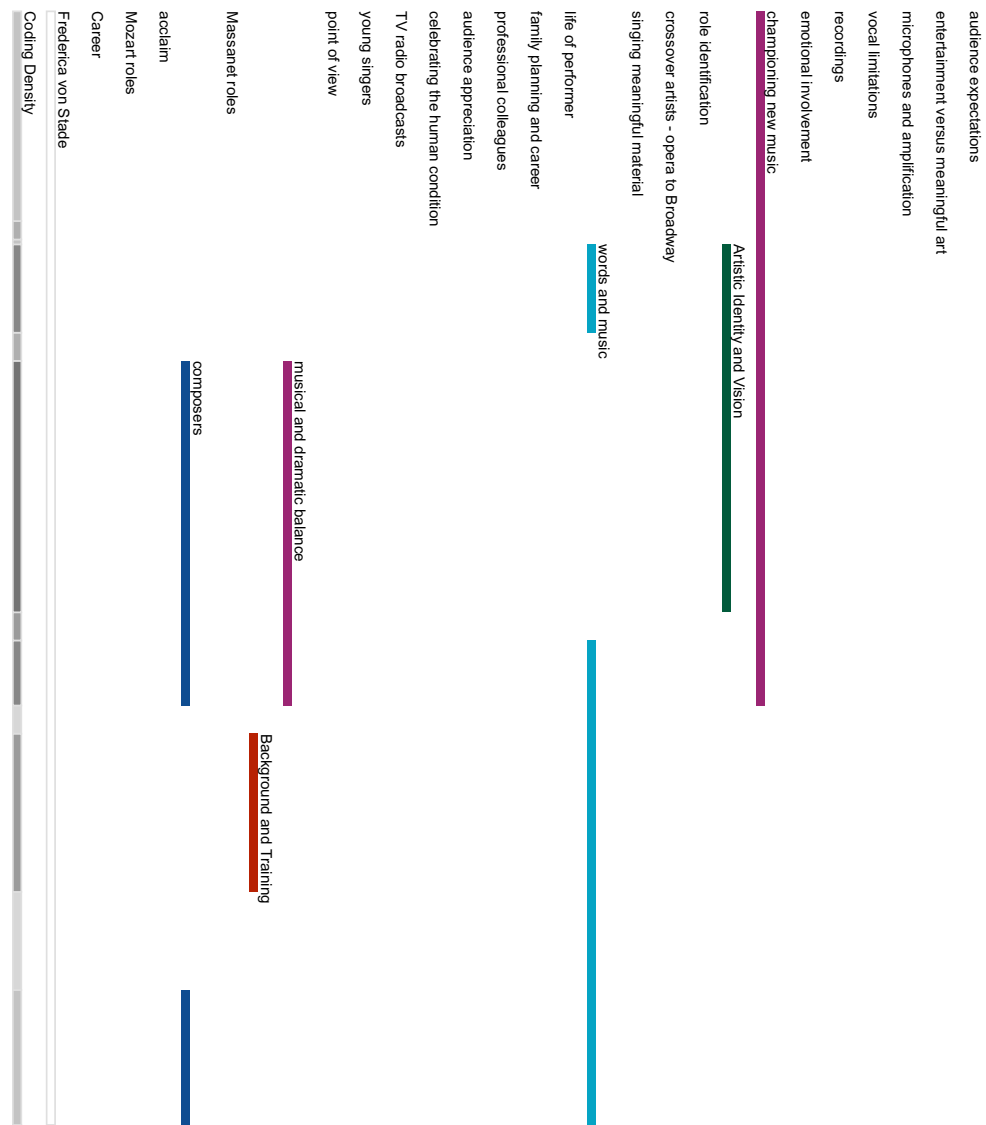
von Stade: Yes, not to try and project an important passage way high.

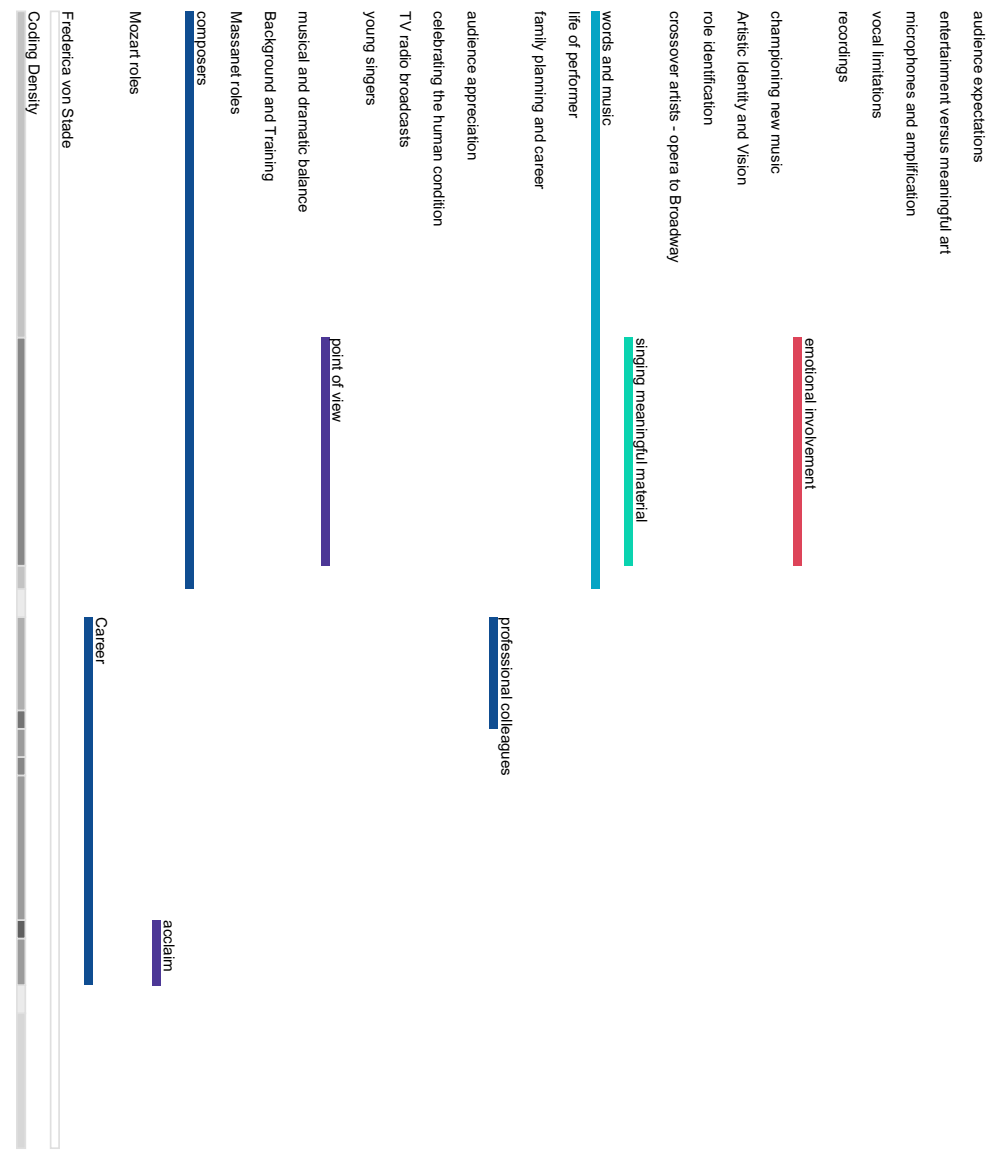
BD: At the moment you're singing Rossini, and he has lots of words. I assume they're fairly comfortable for you to deliver?

von Stade: That's patter, which is a different thing. It's a much lighter way of singing. It isn't like you take the voice back, but that's part of the skill of it. For example, in Gilbert & Sullivan you can't dig into the words with the same type of delivery that you can in other things. That's part of the challenge.

BD: Have we lost that today, the idea of dealing with words and music together the way the old Italians did?

von Stade: I don't think so. There are some very exciting composers around right now in this generation. There's William Bolcom, who just writes wonderful words, wonderful poems, wonderful stories with great use of the American idiom of songs that I'm familiar with. He has a great interest knowledge of the voice. Interestingly enough, he and Dominick Argento are both married to singers. So, if there's any doubt, there's a singer there to ask. There's also Lee Hoiby. There are some wonderful composers who really love the voice, and who understand it and know how to write for it.





They write lyrically, doing passages that show off the voice rather than treating it in an instrumental way that doesn't show what a voice is good at.

BD: [With a gentle nudge] You mean, you don't want to be treated like a clarinet???

von Stade: [Laughs] Nope! Maybe a clarinet, but not a high oboe or trumpet! [Both laugh]

BD: What advice do you have for composers who want to write songs or operas these days... beyond marrying a singer?

von Stade: Show it to singers who know, because it's the delivery that is all-important, and it's a singer who can make that possible or not. Also, there's great value in simplicity. In my experience of almost every type of music, the clearer the manner in which the thought is expressed, the clearer it fits. When it gets very convoluted and obtuse, or if there are too many words that don't carry a thought or a story forward, then it's hard. Deeply psychological things are hard to make clear.

BD: How so?

von Stade: There was a song-cycle to be commissioned in Minneapolis. Dominick Argento was writing it, and he asked me what texts I was interested in. At the time I was reading a lot of Sylvia Plath, and I sent him some of her poems. They're very complex. You're not quite sure what the thought is, so it would have added a little bit of confusion to a song. But he said, "The bottom line is that I don't think this is you!" So, it ended up being a cycle of songs based on wonderful letters from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her father and to her sister describing her life in Florence. They're marvelous songs, and they've been done very successfully by numbers of people in different places.

BD: You and Marilyn Horne have gotten together and are trying to re-emphasize the American song literature.

von Stade: I can't take any credit for it. This foundation that she started is really Marilyn's idea. I've sung for her on several occasions to benefit it, but she really has an understanding of it. Recitals do seem to be falling off in this country, and people are not as in love with the idea as they were, say, ten or fifteen years ago.

BD: Why is that?

von Stade: I don't know. Sometimes the halls have gotten too big. Part of the delivery, charm and joy of a Lieder recital is a certain intimacy that's not the same experience as an opera house, and for that you just can't have as big a hall. Yet for economic reasons now, a lot of them are being done in opera houses, or in huge theaters. We've been enormously lucky in our business. You can't count Lyric Opera of Chicago because that is the brilliant exception in the world of opera, but everywhere else there are companies going under.

BD: Is there any way to get either the Rock audience, or the baseball audience, since there's no baseball in the late fall, to come to these performances?

von Stade: People like Luciano Pavarotti and Plácido Domingo are attempting to draw them in through those gala extravaganzas, and I'm all for it. I think it's great. There aren't many singers who have that kind of a draw, but I find it terribly exciting to be part of this profession in a time when everything is

produced within an inch of its life. We have every kind of entertainment, thousands of channels on the television, and still the human voice, albeit three of the great human voices of all time, can draw a standing room only crowd at Dodger Stadium. It's pretty thrilling!

BD: Is the crowd coming for the artistry, or they are coming just for the event?

von Stade: Who cares? They're coming, and they're paying their bucks, and it's getting on television, and it makes it accessible. Beverly Sills did an enormous amount for that, making it not a 'sport of kings', but having it be accessible to everyone.

BD: Is this translating into people coming to subscription concerts and general opera performances?

von Stade: I can't tell you. One thing that has improved attendance enormously is subtitles, and I wish they'd get in all the symphony halls as well. That's the next step. It would be fantastic if there were some firm or company or organization that did translations, and was willing to do surtitles for recitals. People enjoy everything when they know what's being said. I've sat at many recitals and not understood everything that was going on.

BD: But at a Lieder recital, theoretically you have the text in front of you in the program.

von Stade: You do, but then it's hard to see if the light isn't quite right. If you're good and studious, and read it during the intermission, you can't really remember what's there. If it's right above you, or right at the singer's feet, there it is. It's going to be expensive, and it's going to be an undertaking, but I think it would be terrific. In the day of computer, once someone has the skill and understands music, it would be a great art to do it.

BD: Is the use of the subtitles going to mean the death of opera in English?

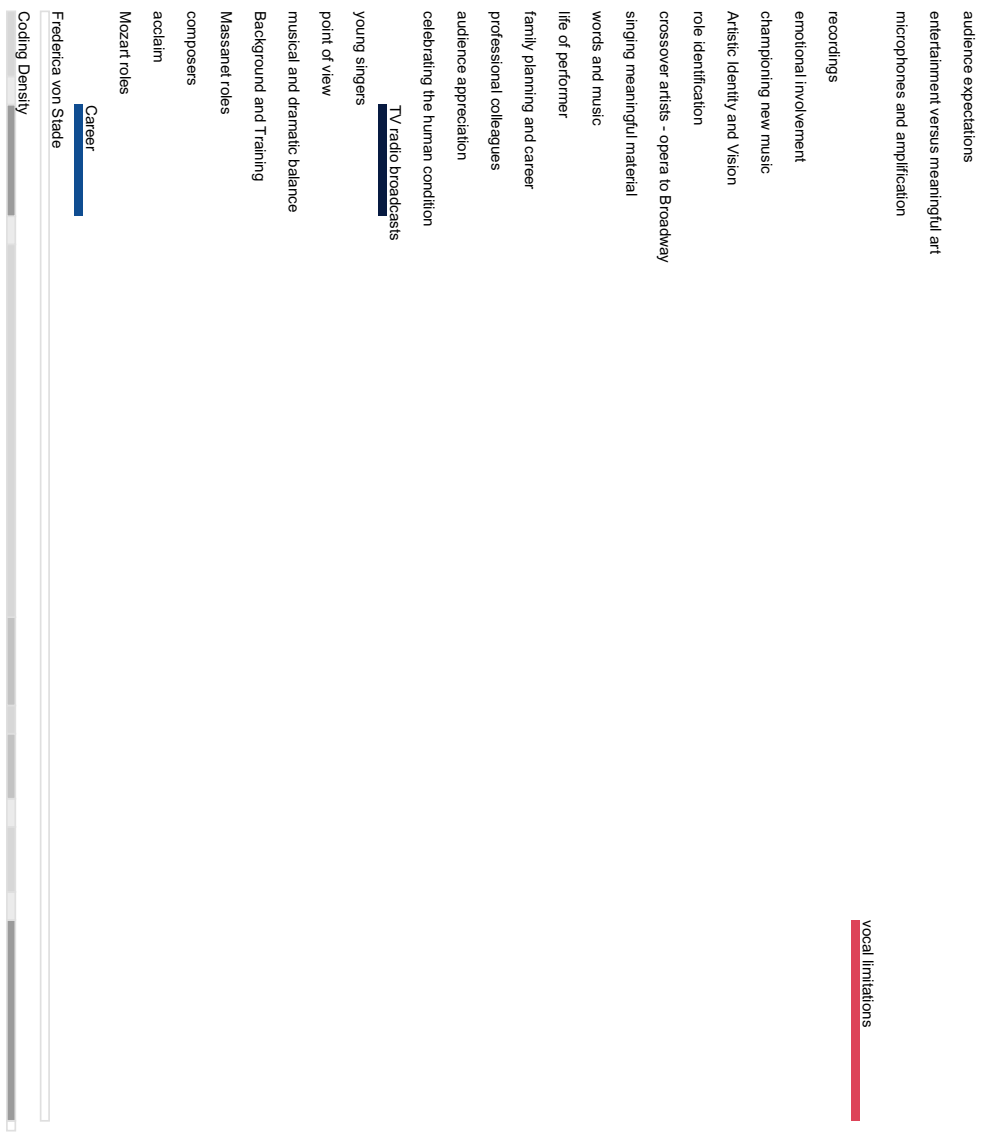
von Stade: Not necessarily. Some operas just sound horrible in English, but most of the operas that are being composed in the United States are in English. It's a really good question.

BD: I like to have both in the season, but I'm greedy! [Both laugh] We have a second company, the Chicago Opera Theater that does everything in English. They always do a modern opera, or a recent piece, and/or a novelty, rather than Aida, La Bohème, and Carmen.

von Stade: Yes. [The Chicago Opera Theater would present An Evening with Frederica von Stade and Jake Heggie in 2010, and she would return in 2015 for A Coffin in Egypt, which was written for her by Ricky Ian Gordon. CD of the premiere is shown above-left.]

BD: I'm sure you're asked for more than you could possibly do in six lifetimes. How do you decide what you will sing and what you won't sing?

von Stade: What I've chosen to do or not do has been dictated by my voice, and I've been very careful not to sing outside its parameters. I have a lyric voice, and that's it. That's the bottom line. It's ridiculous to think of me doing Verdi, and I never will. Some of the outside limits are Der Rosenkavalier or Werther. Now I can slightly chug into some of the more dramatic things, but just! They have to be borderline, and I have to have a sympathetic conductor because I don't have a big voice.



BD: A lot of people will think that it's strange to say you don't have a big voice, because you fill this house very well in the repertoire you sing.

von Stade: Yes, but if I were to take on something that was outside of the confines, I would sound like Minnie Mouse! [Both laugh]

BD: We are glad that you've managed to find roles from Monteverdi through yesterday's opera, through the whole spectrum. You are one of the very few singers who has gone from the very beginnings of opera to the current works.

von Stade: Yes, I've had wonderful advice and wonderful ideas handed to me by both the pianist I worked with, Martin Katz, and my first manager, Matthew Epstein, who is on the Chicago Lyric staff. He has a great knowledge of the repertoire and of singing, and understands what the voice should do at what stage. It was his idea for me to do Mélisande, and I've had a wonderful experience singing her all over the place. [Vis-à-vis the recording shown at right, see my interviews with Richard Stilwell, and Nadine Denize.] It was his idea to resurrect Cendrillon, and Chérubin which is absolutely out of this world. They are two of the prettiest, loveliest, most delicious operas. So I'm very grateful.

BD: Do you get a special joy out of singing French?

von Stade: Yes. I lived in France after high school, and again in the 1970s. My girls were born there, and I love France and everything about the French. I love the colors and the way things are put out in shops. I am a great Francophile.

BD: Are the French audiences different from the Italian audiences and the American audiences, and the English audiences?

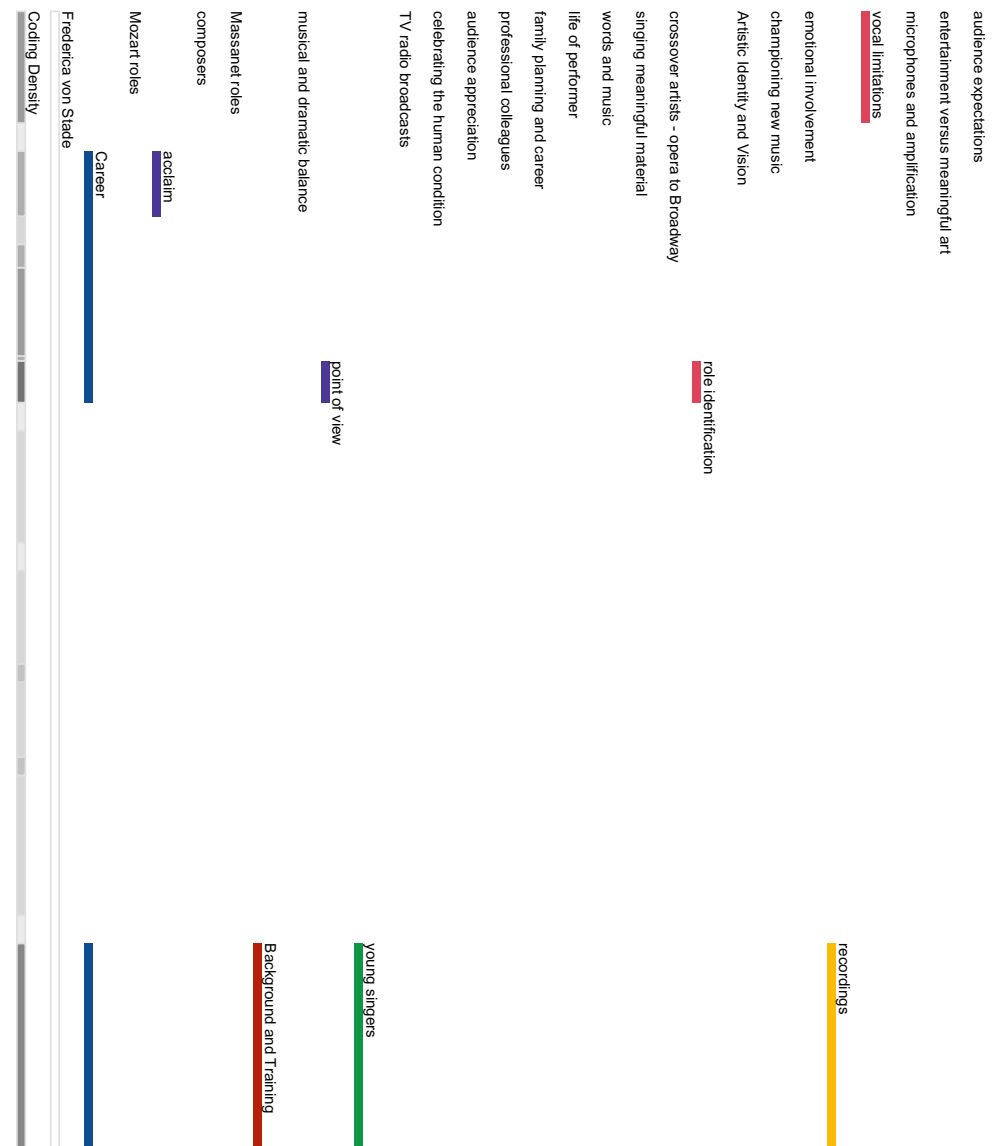
von Stade: Slightly. Opera is not really part of their world. The Paris Opera, for example, had this God-awful reputation for years. It was just a joke. In the years I was there, Rolf Liebermann took it over, and it was centered on the map. It was terribly exciting and terrific. Now it seems to be in a great metamorphosis again. It's had the fight of the Bastille. The French have had a difficult path in opera, and it is a very different public. The French love to talk about things, but they're not quite as extrovert in either their approval or disapproval. The Italians, in my experience, are different, and I've been very lucky. They are much more extrovert, but somewhat terrifying in the bel canto repertoire. I've done very safe operas in Italy, being terrified of having vegetables flying at my feet.

BD: Do you have to stand up against the shades of everyone back through Garcia and Malibran?

von Stade: Exactly.

BD: Is there a competition amongst the current crop, and the current recordings, as well as the old recordings, and the old memories?

von Stade: Oh, there is an innate competition. I've never been terribly preoccupied with it because I've been so pleased to be part of it in whatever measure. In some regards, I haven't even considered myself available for competition, though there is a certain sense of it. I've never listened to hundreds of recordings to learn works, because I feel that each voice is so personal. I listen to recordings for my pleasure, and you can get sidetracked by trying to do something that's natural to somebody's voice, and maybe not natural to your own. I've had great delight in listening to lots of young singers coming



along. It's a wonderful, thrilling crop, as you say. There are some fantastic baritones, and wonderful mezzo sopranos. The other night I heard Cecilia Bartoli on the television. I'd met her a couple of times, but I've never heard her live. I thought she was marvelous, adorable, charming, such a musician, sort of like Teresa Berganza. I'm a great fan of Susanne Mentzer, and Susan Graham. There are some absolutely thrilling voices now coming along. I've also heard one or two tenors...

BD: Without mentioning names, are the voices that are coming along today ready to eventually stand alongside the greats of today, and yesterday?

von Stade: Every voice of yesterday takes on a certain heroism and perfection that probably wasn't really present in the time of the singer. That's natural, human nature.

BD: We embellish our memories?

von Stade: Yes. You can't go a whole lot better than Luciano Pavarotti and Plácido Domingo in that regard. However, there are a number of things which work against great voices.

BD: Such as?

von Stade: Such as these giant halls, and these way-too-loud orchestras. There's become a tradition, or habit, of playing at the maximum loudness of decibels, and that can be very harmful, especially to the voices that are going into the more spinto repertoire. Unless they are as secure as Lyric Opera's position in this city and the world of opera, lots of luck. It's terribly dangerous, and it's why I'm thrilled when a young voice like Cecilia Bartoli comes along, who really knows what she's doing. The orchestra has got to bring it down to meet the singer, and every time anyone's done that, it's been successful. It works! It's not the quantity of voice, it's the quality of voice. There are great voices around, but it always makes me nervous when there are the demands on the bigger voices. They need the time and careful development. I don't see as many careful loving guardian angels as I had.

BD: Those would be the managers and advisers?

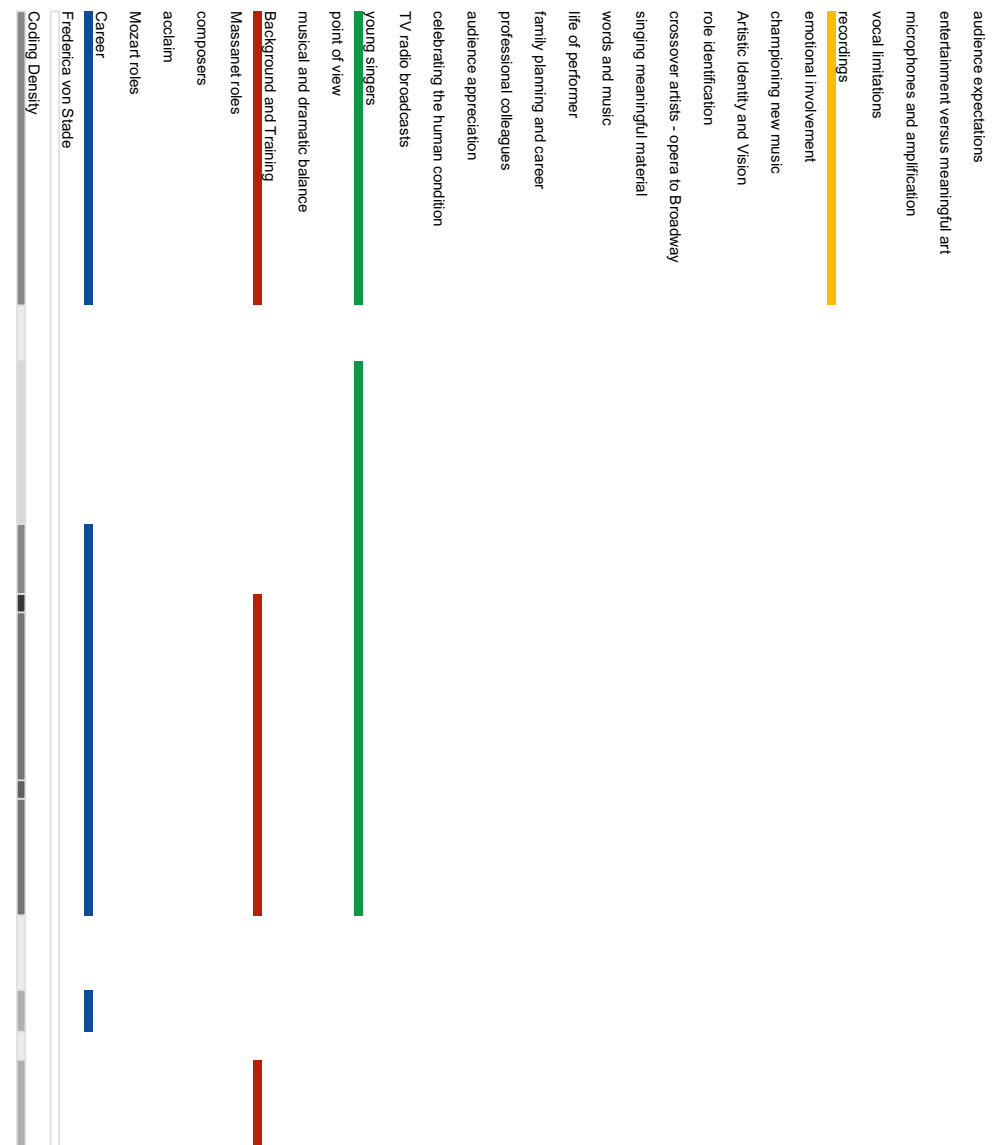
von Stade: Managers and advisers. I don't know that there's the same kind of wealth of knowledge that was around when I was in my 20s. I was at the Met, and was working every day with the marvelous Jan Behr, and all sorts of marvelous men who had been in the business for forty-five years on several continents... Roberto Benaglio was in Dallas, and Ubaldo Gardini in London. All these extraordinary coaches would say, "If you sing that, you are such a fool, and you may leave my studio." [Both laugh] They might put it in kinder terms, but they had that wealth of knowledge and experience to be able to protect the young voice. It's not that voices are not ready to mature. It's just that your whole experience isn't ready to deal with the orchestra, and all the things that happen.

BD: Is this the advice you have for young singers, to seek out a knowledgeable mentor?

von Stade: A knowledgeable mentor, yes. You cannot go wrong with someone who is deeply schooled in bel canto. I mean, a real pro.

BD: Are we getting these teachers and coaches coming along?

von Stade: There are one or two of them around. There's Bruno Bartoletti, and this wonderful guy we're working with now, Carlo Rizzi. He knows his stuff. They are around, but a lot of them are the



older guys, like Giuseppe Patanè. One of the greatest people I ever learned from was Nicola Rescigno. It really is very hard to sing proper bel canto. I had the best times working with Marilyn Horne on certain things. It does not come without an extraordinary amount of effort and time.

BD: Are there students these days who are willing to put in that effort?

von Stade: Oh, yes! An American student very specifically will do anything, and they're very good at it.

BD: Is that a problem, that they'll do anything?

von Stade: No. They'll hang by their toes and try and sing a high C. [Both laugh] There are marvelous programs. The Adler Program, and the Merola Program in San Francisco are brilliant, and I find those kids are nurtured and very well-prepared. I've worked a lot with them over the last five years in different productions, and they're sensational. There is a wonderful staff there, and the staff here is fantastic. Ardis Krainik [General Director of Lyric Opera] really builds young singers.

BD: But, of course, she comes from the singing background.

von Stade: Oh yes, and she knows!

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BD: Let me broach a dangerous topic. We're talking about the large orchestra, and we're in the age of electronics. Could we perhaps have any kind of discreet amplification for the singers?

von Stade: I don't think so. I think you'd kill it. I'm against it all together, because I've seen what it's done to Broadway. Opera is the last bastion where you hear throat-to-ear with nothing in between, and if you take that away, it'll confuse the production of the sound.

BD: Many years ago, Boris Goldovsky was trying to explore this. He even was a proponent of trying to get the engineers to really work on electronics so it would be very discreet, so you wouldn't really know it was being used, and yet the voice then would carry a little better.

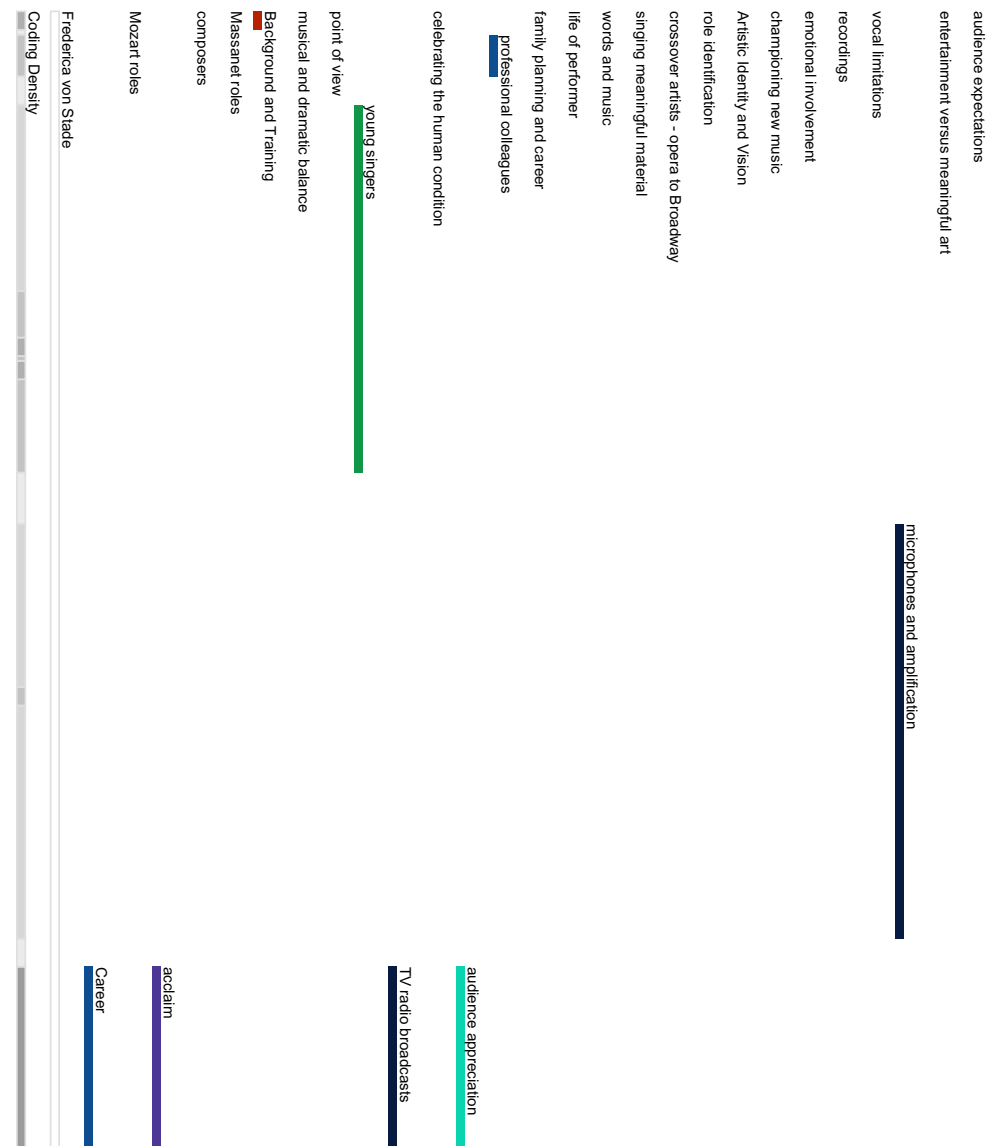
von Stade: No, I think you take away the obligation of the public to listen. The worst thing about it is that you see someone singing from stage left, and you hear them somewhere else, wherever the speakers are. I've seen it where it's controlled. I went to a play here in Chicago, The Sisters Rossensweig, and I couldn't believe that it was amplified. It was a small theater, and all these actors and actresses have wonderful voices. It makes for laziness on the part of the public, and you hear things differently. The thrill of the human voice is that it is not amplified. Everything else is amplified, and we have enough of that.

BD: Is the public not used to hearing amplified voices on television and on the stereo?

von Stade: Yes, they certainly are! But the real public doesn't go as wild in their living room as they do in the opera house.

BD: Should they?

von Stade: In their living room? No, they should be there in the opera house.



BD: But if you're listening at home, should you applaud?

von Stade: [Laughs] No, I don't think so.

BD: Why not? I do sometimes.

von Stade: I get terribly excited at times listening to something, and want to applaud. There's a little bit of the experience of being in an opera house that's not dissimilar to a sporting event, in that it absorbs the total concentration of a public. It takes them completely away from whatever their world happens to be. I go to basketball games a lot. I love basketball, and the excitement of being in that space with all these people who are focused on one thing is really a marvelous experience.

BD: [With mock horror] I hope you don't scream with them!

von Stade: [Laughs] No, I don't scream! But I must say every time I've sung 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at one of their games, they lost, so I'm getting discouraged by that! [Both laugh] But part of the experience is being in this place together with human beings, not with electronic beings.

BD: Is there any way of getting the fans of Michael Jordan going up for a basket to come into the opera house the next night to hear you going up for a beautiful high note?

von Stade: I think there is! That's a little bit of the appeal of something like The Three Tenors concerts. The hard part is getting in them to purchase an expensive ticket.

BD: Where is opera going these days?

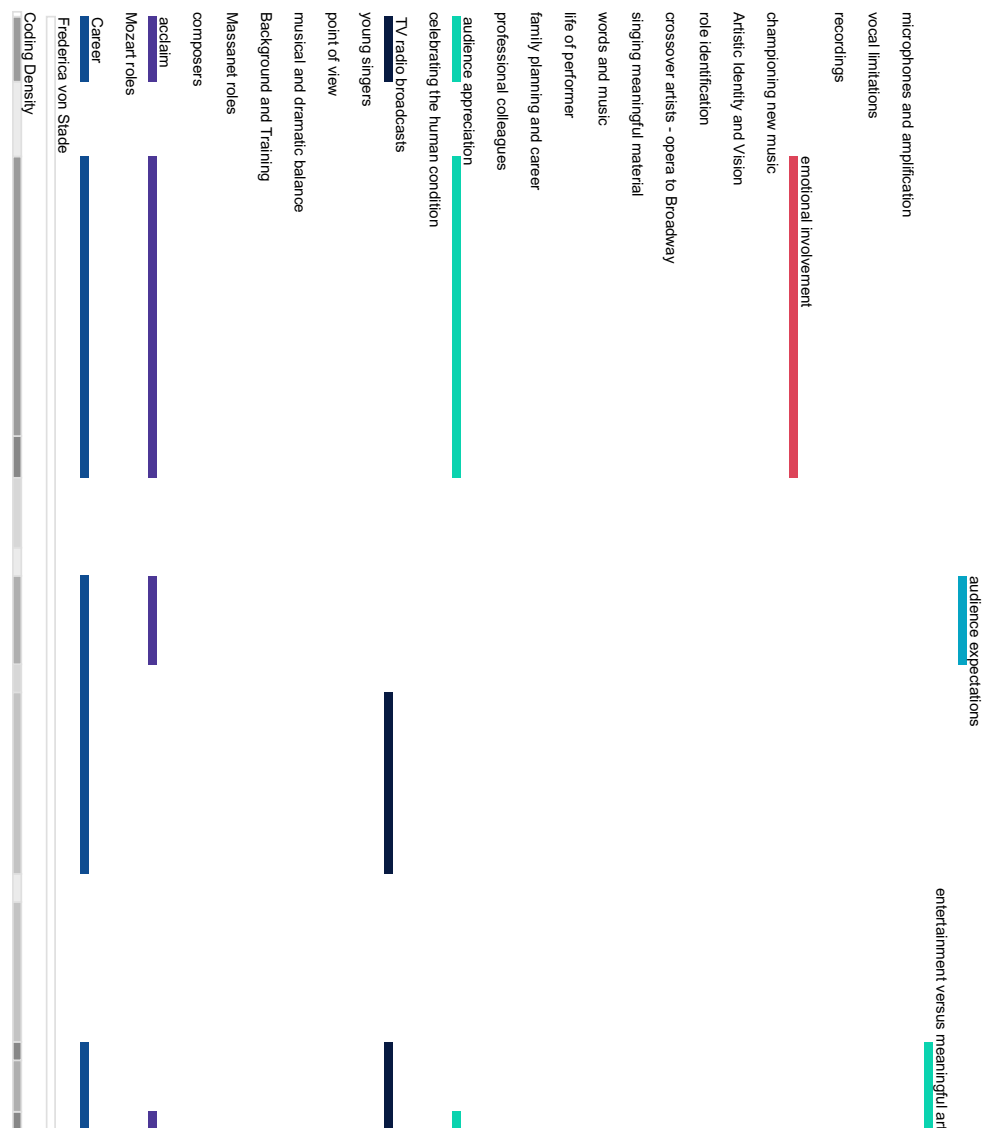
von Stade: I don't know where opera is going. Obviously it does have to accommodate what's happening in the world, but I don't know what it is.

BD: Opera has wound up on records and on television. Do you think it belongs on the small screen?

von Stade: I think it does. It's fascinating. There again, it gives an opportunity to make it available to many hundreds of people who wouldn't see it otherwise. The expectations have to change. Opera singers in general are playing people who are not themselves. They're playing younger people. They're not typecast because of their age or personality. They're typecast because of their voices, and sometimes television can be a little unforgiving in that. But it's good that it gets into that medium.

BD: I have a theory that it was the use of subtitles on the television that allowed acceptance of the supertitles in the theater. Do you think there's any credence to that?

von Stade: It's possibly true, yes. I don't know why the theaters were against it. The Met is still against it. [Remember, this conversation took place in 1994! Beginning the following year, they started using Met Titles in the seatbacks.] They're going to do something, but I guess it was thought of as a distraction at times. Before television, there was not the possibility to stay home and do anything except listen to the radio. Television has changed all our lives in that regard. Why go out when you can watch it on TV? Certain coverages can be more interesting at home, such as sporting events. You don't have to get in your car and go out. So, in that regard, to include opera in the general world of



entertainment is important. I have a friend whose young son is nine, and every Christmas he gets a tape of an opera, and she called me in desperation. He was going to see a Wagner opera at the Met. It was his big treat. We live in California, and because of jet lag he fell asleep during part of the opera. When he realized he had slept through part of it, he was inconsolable. So she called me to try and get other tickets, and so I was able to get him in. He is gah-gah over watching opera, and how would that have happened if it hadn't been on the television? It isn't the singers necessarily, it's the whole thing! It's not the music, it's not the conductor, it's not like he wants to be any those characters. He just loves it!

BD: This is what we need, more opera consumers.

von Stade: Yes.

BD: You bring up the word 'entertainment'. How much in opera is art, and how much is entertainment, and where's the balance?

von Stade: If you tell people it's art, they kind of get into a panic, and automatically think they're going to hate it. I think it should all be entertainment, I really do.

BD: Even Wagner?

von Stade: Yes! Those who love Wagner are just berserk for it. You have to realize that there are different tastes, and it's all right for people not to like something. That's where the American public is very self-conscious. If they don't like it, why should they go and sit through it? They might love The Magic Flute and hate Die Walküre, and that's fair enough. I don't know any Wagner operas, so I'm not thrilled at going to them. They don't mean anything to me. It is a lack of education which generally decides it.

BD: Give them a chance!

von Stade: Yes, exactly.

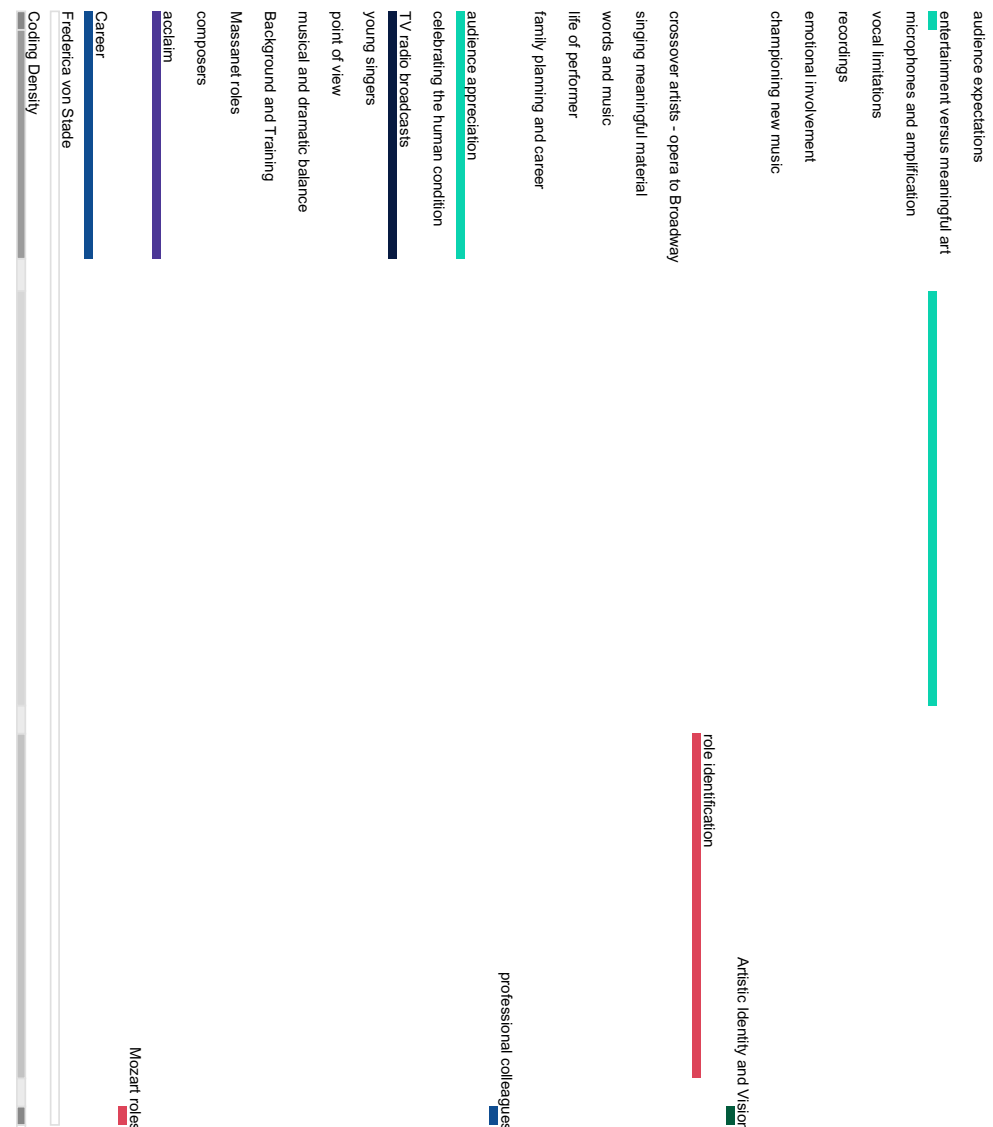
BD: When you walk out on the stage, are you portraying a character or do you really become that character?

von Stade: It's a combination. At times you become that person, and at times you portray it. I've had to be boys most of my life, and I don't know exactly what it feels like to be a boy. But there are certainly moments when I feel whatever the emotion is of the moment. Theater is fraud. It's pretending. It's based on reality, on real emotions and real things, but you can't go through it at the time or you will not have the control of what you're doing to portray it. So it's a combination. It's based on reality but it's portrayal.

BD: It's a fraud???

von Stade: It sounds like you're being duped, but it isn't. It's all real. It's human emotions, but you aren't that person. I can't think of a movie character who really is the person they're portraying. There may be great elements of them in those combinations of characters, but they really aren't those people.

BD: One last question. Is singing fun?



von Stade: Great fun! Opera singers are a riot. I just wish someone could have the experience of spending a day rehearsing with us, especially when it's a happy cast, and for most of my career I've had happy casts. I've been in The Marriage of Figaro forever and a day, and there is no nicer world than that particular arena of Mr. Da Ponte and Mr. Mozart. Opera singers are very funny people. There are a few difficult characters, but basically there's great humor and a great sense of fun. Singing is fun. It usually feels good. It doesn't always feel good, but when you're in good form, and rested, and singing the right role, it just is wonderful. I watched some ice-skating last night, and I thought it looks like fun because it doesn't look hard at all. They make it look easy.

BD: You make it look easy! [Vis-à-vis the recording shown at right, see my interviews with Siegmund Nimsgern, and Elisabeth Söderström. Notice that there is a video of a Metropolitan Opera production of this same opera shown below!]

von Stade: Thank you.

BD: Since you've sung so many boys, does that make you be even more feminine when you are a girl on stage?

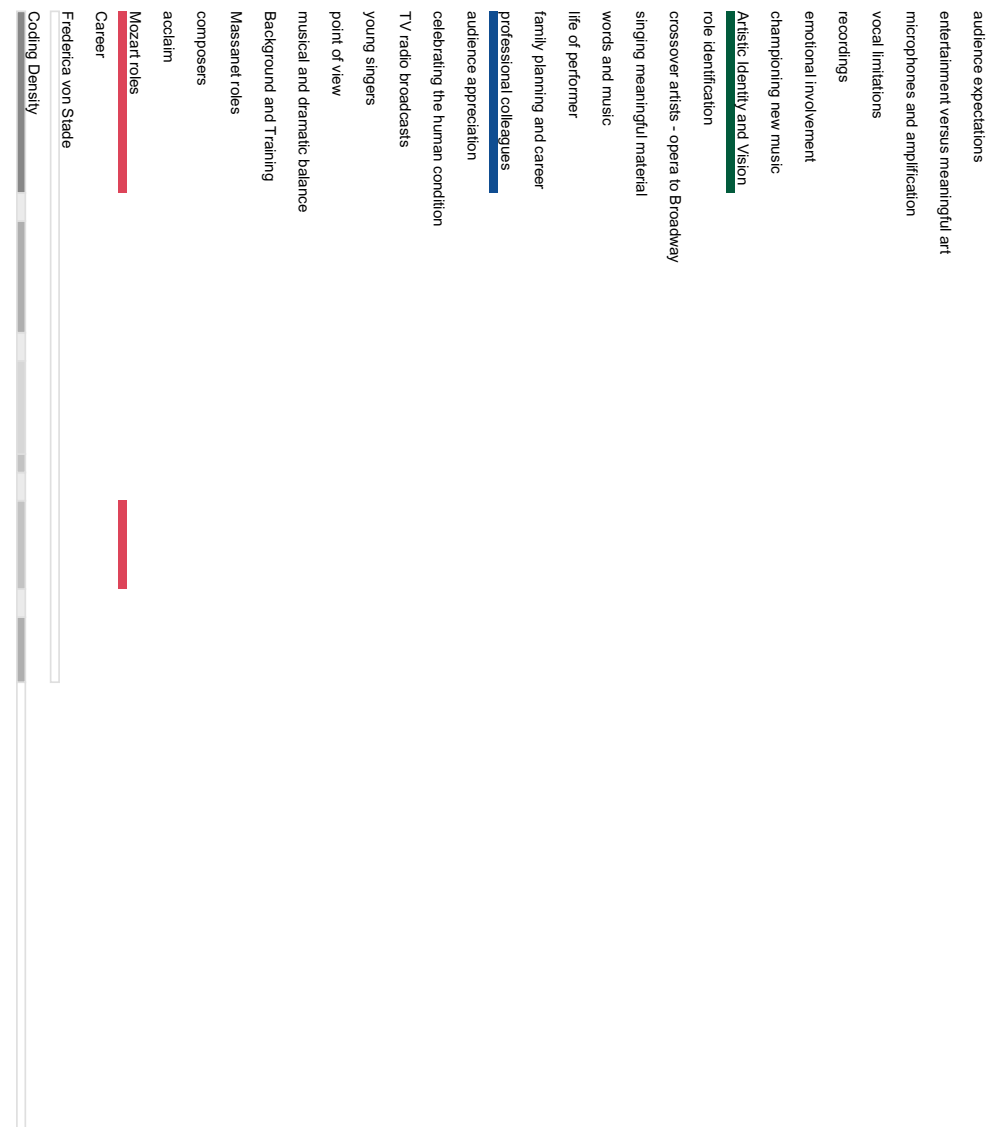
von Stade: Yes. It's such a thrill for me to be dressed up in pretty party dresses that I just feel like I'm eight years old and going to a party! [Both laugh]

BD: Should Cherubino know that he's going to wind up with the Countess in the next opera?

von Stade: Oh, I don't think so. At that age he'd be terrified if he knew he was going to end up with her. He'd be delightfully terrified.

BD: Thank you for being a singer, and for coming back to Chicago.

von Stade: It's always a great joy to be here. Thank you.



Appendix 15 - Interview Codebook, Coding Tree Map, Comparison Charts

