

# Gender and the Cultural Work of a Classical Music Performance<sup>1</sup>

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I can never romanticize language again  
never deny its power for disguise for mystification  
but the same could be said for music  
or any form created  
painted ceilings beaten old worm-worn Pietàs  
reorganizing victimization frescoes translating  
violence into patterns so powerful and pure  
we continually fail to ask are they true for us.  
— Adrienne Rich, “The Images”<sup>2</sup>

This passage from Adrienne Rich’s 1978 poem “The Images” evokes a problem that I think bedevils all of us engaged in what Elaine Showalter has called “feminist critique”—the deciphering and demystification of gender messages in our repertoire’s

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2. Adrienne Rich, “The Images,” in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-81* (New York, 1981), 3-5; I have quoted lines 47-54.

canonic works.<sup>3</sup> Once we've begun the deciphering, many of us feel with gathering regret that we can never listen to music again. Our urge to eschew classical music amounts to the temptation of separatism. Like separatism, it promises our psyches temporary safety from and moral superiority over misogynist and homophobic messages. But like separatism it threatens to rob feminist musicology of its political power, its power to challenge classical music's complicity in sustaining ideas of gender and sexuality we find anachronistic and oppressive. Worse, a separation from classical music threatens to rend from us a music we have loved passionately for most of our lives; a music we have found to be a source of pleasure and power; a music that once seemed to grant our psyches a safe field for the play of deep feeling with deep thought.<sup>4</sup> Our instinct to flee the implied misogyny of so much classical music is thus an instinct that threatens us with wrenching and self-inflicted psychic pain; yet how can we justify to ourselves a continued sanctioning (through listening, teaching, performance) of objectionable repertoire? *Can* we listen to this music again, now that we can no longer romanticize it?

Such questions gnawed at my students in a seminar called "Women, Music and Feminism" in the autumn of 1992. My desire to ease my students' pain led me to devise an assignment for the end of the term that was the indirect origin of this essay. I assigned Schumann's song cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben*, along with Ruth Solie's excellent exegesis of its cultural work;<sup>5</sup> part of the assignment was to compare specific performances of

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3. Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York, 1985), 128.

4. Pain at such a logical consequence to feminist critique seems to me to have been among the motivations for Pieter van den Toorn's essay "Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory," *Journal of Musicology* 9 (1991): 275-99.

5. Ruth Solie, "Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben*," in *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, ed. Steven Scher (Cambridge, 1992), 219-40.

*Frauenliebe und -leben*, to see if different performers had made the songs mean different things. For I wanted to engage my students in the idea that singers might make choices of dynamics, phrasing, timbre, and so on that would re-read even so offensive a work as *Frauenliebe und -leben* in a way that would allow us to keep it in the repertoire. If we could re-read it into acceptability, I reckoned, we could re-read anything.

My students resisted with an almost violent vigor, convinced to their cores that classical music's cultural meanings were, as they put it, in "the music itself." By "the music itself" they meant what I, too, had been taught to mean by the phrase: they meant "in the notes," in the musical work that exists before any particular performance of it.

It seemed to me that the location of musical meaning in "the music itself" was an unquestioned premise of much critical thinking about classical music. Like all premises, it would always imply a limited number of logical consequences and thus lead the discussion of musical meaning in a limited (ever-repeated) number of directions. One consequence of that premise for my students was their inability to imagine resisting the meaning of *Frauenliebe und -leben*. Instead, they imagined a binary choice: we could throw pieces whose ideology we found objectionable out of the repertoire; or we could leave them in, allowing them to go on representing an ideal of womanhood in which we might claim to no longer believe. To paraphrase Rich, if we decided the "patterns so powerful and pure" were not true for us, we could resist them only by leaving them behind, as the speaker of Rich's poem does.

The proximate cause of this apparent dilemma is the assumption that the meaning of a musical work is fixed and irresistible. But this conclusion is only logical if one adds to the major premise that musical meaning lies in "the music itself" a hidden minor premise: that performances of these works (without which they would be inaudible and thus irrelevant) must be faithful to their inherent meanings. If we remove the minor premise, the hidden assumption of faithful perfor-

mance, musical works automatically become open texts. For their implied meanings can be resisted and contested by an endless variety of performative acts that create the meanings available to receiving listeners.

The hidden assumption of faithful performance—what I have begun to call the ideology of faithful performance—would seem to serve the same interests as the powerful and pure patterns into which Schumann once translated the ideology of gender. If the former ideology could be dismantled, the dilemma posed by Schumann's representation of the latter might be resolved. Put another way, the cultural (if not the aesthetic) power of the songs' musical and verbal messages depends utterly on their being received as closed, fixed texts that can not—ought not—be tampered with by performers or listeners. Unless it is possible to imagine resisting performers as well as resisting listeners, musical works will always have an enormous (and insidious) power to force either submission to their image of gender or complete refusal to participate in it.

This essay will be an interrogation of the minor premise that leads us to this dilemma: I will describe the ideology of faithful performance as a frame story for whatever meanings might be implied in a particular piece; explore the relationship of that ideology to the power relation known as gender; and imagine unfaithful, resisting performances of the problematic piece with which my reasoning began, Schumann's beautiful and hateful song cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben*.

### *I. The Classical Performer as Medium*

I want to begin by developing the idea that the cultural work of all classical music performances, regardless of the explicit or implicit content of any particular piece, might be understood to be the public enactment of obedience to a culturally pre-

scribed script. For it seems to me that the singer's performance of a kind of womanhood we now find antiquated (if not downright repellent)—her performance, that is, of nineteenth-century ideas of gender—is framed and enforced by the larger ritual of obedience in which it takes place.

Let me imagine with you a classical music performance. I mean to imagine, for the moment, a more or less public performance, one in which there is an audience that mainly consists of people who do not know the people onstage.<sup>6</sup> Such a public performance is by its nature multivalent, in that it has several overlapping webs of meaning, each web dependent on the point of view from which meaning is derived. The audience, for example, is prepared to receive a performance in particular ways depending on what they know of the kind of music to be performed, of the *personae* of the performers, of the social rules governing this kind of performance.

For all performances in front of audiences are governed by social rules, rules that suggest the appropriate ways both audiences and “performers” should...perform. All performances, that is, are ensemble pieces involving everyone present and often, as we shall see, involving people who are not present. The actions that constitute what we call an audience's reception are every bit as performative as the actions we ordinarily call “the performance.”

But a performance by Pearl Jam is governed by very different social rules than one by Jessye Norman. The social rules governing any kind of performance are inextricably entwined with the *various* performers' expectations of the repertoire, and of the likely “extramusical” performances Pearl Jam's or Norman's *personae* imply.

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6. I choose to imagine this kind of performance because I think it is what we usually imagine when we seek to analyze or decipher the meanings of classical works. We actually experience those works most often through recorded performances, an experience I will address later in this essay.

(a) *The performance of the audience*

For instance, let me now imagine myself into the audience at a recital of *Lieder* by Jessye Norman. What do I think will go on? What do I think *I* will do? What do I think Norman will do?

Because I know Norman to be a classical singer, I know immediately that she will sing and I will listen. She will move around, I will try to be still. She will be in bright light, while I am likely to be in at least semi-darkness. She will be all voice, and ears, and breath, and feeling; she will seem to inhabit another world, which her performance of Schumann's notes will make vivid to me. I will be, if I behave as my music teachers in college taught me, "all ears"; I, too, will seem to inhabit another world, for if her performance is compelling I will forget all bodily stimuli except those coming from my ears. She will be intimate—emotionally, intellectually, and physically—with her accompanist, with the dead Schumann, and with me; I will be intimate with her, and through that intimacy I will know a vicarious intimacy with the dead Schumann's thoughts, feelings, and imaginings about the lives of women. We will both be alert to the meanings Edward T. Cone has identified as "the composer's voice" in these songs. Our respective performative roles, then, are clear from the start: Norman is a medium, and I am her client; we are both interested in messages from the dead.

Because I know Norman to be a "classical" singer, too, I know her *persona* almost exclusively through the repertoire she sings: French songs, *Lieder*, operatic excerpts, Christmas carols, and "pops" of varying kinds on PBS. I know next to nothing about her "extramusical" life. But because I know her performance will be that of a medium, I expect to witness the subordination of her *persona* to the *persona* in and of "the music."<sup>7</sup>

The performance of that subordination might be so complete as to make the "performance" disappear: Norman may become completely transparent to me, seeming not to mediate,

to inflect, to negotiate with the *persona* of the music. If Norman manages thus to disappear, totally replaced by Schumann's conception of womanhood, I may well judge her a magician, a genius of interpretation exactly in proportion to her genius at disappearing. Or Norman may choose to "perform" a more overt, personal "interpretation," leaving me with a sense of her struggle to adjust her *persona* into Schumann's mold. And then I may well judge her a genius of interpretation exactly in proportion to the traces of struggle which she leaves behind on her way to subordination.

Either way, my pleasure in her performance and my sense of closure at the end of it partly derives from the public display of her temporary obedience to someone else's idea of who she should be. For, either way, I know that the music I hear and enjoy is not hers. It is the composer's music, the composer's voice, which I came to hear.

How did I get to expect this recital to be a Schumann recital more than it is a Norman recital? How, that is, did I learn to expect—indeed, to require—that Norman subordinate her *persona* to that of Schumann's music? How did I learn to perform my part in the recital?

I first learned to think in a composer-identified way six months into my childhood piano lessons: I needed to know the composer of the pieces I played in order to decipher my teacher's assignments, for he wrote only the composer's name as a short-hand designation of the piece he meant. I learned com-

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7. The relative transparency of most classical performers' *personae* is in marked contrast to the situation in American popular music. Indeed, Margaret T. McFadden has argued in the unpublished paper "Anything Goes: Gender and Performance in Popular Music" (presented at the 1993 meeting of the American Studies Association) that in popular music the performer's *persona* is the musical text. Arguably, McFadden's thesis applies to the reception practices of opera queens, as well. See Mitchell Morris, "Reading as an Opera Queen," in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley, 1993), 184-200, and Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (New York, 1993).

poser-identification, then, at the same time that I learned to play music, to read written music, and to play it accurately as written. Later, when I took music appreciation in high school and in college, I learned pieces by the names of their composers. But then I learned something even more important than the identification of pieces by their composers' names: I learned how to *listen*. And I learned to listen intently focused on "the music itself," an "itself" that existed independent of any performance and that was more or less congruous with the composer's intentions.

At each stage, I was learning how to perform my role as audience member—or, rather, as listener—in a classical music performance. When I learned that the role of audience member was to listen, an important part of what I learned was to ignore the physical presence of the singer on the stage, and to suppress all I might imagine about her life outside this performance. I learned, that is, how to construct my performance so as to help Jessye Norman—and her performance—disappear. For a medium's magic depends absolutely on her clients' deep desire for the magic to work.

But *why* do I have a deep desire for Jessye Norman to disappear into the woman Schumann wanted to imagine? Why do I want her to be a medium? Why do I want messages from the dead? *Why* do I derive a pleasure of which I barely dare speak from witnessing the spectacle of her faithful performance, which is the spectacle of the disappearing Self?

And why do I want to replicate it?

For I expect to replicate her subordination of *persona*, her disappearing Self, and I expect to do it as part of my performance in the recital I imagine. Indeed, I will perform the disappearing Self much more obviously: I will be silent; I will sit still, in semi-darkness; I will become "all ears," by which I mean I will focus all my bodily awareness on my experience of sound, and will let my consciousness be entirely filled with "the music itself." If, somehow, both Norman and I disappear, I will remember the performance we shared as...as ecstasy.

Because I *think* I have become “all ears,” I will feel free to ignore the fact that my ecstasy may also have come from erotic intimacy with Norman’s body and voice, from breathing when she breathes, from feeling the vibrations of her very bones in my own. I will feel free, too, to ignore the scopophilic power I acquire from being in the dark. One result of the ideology that shapes what I will be willing to describe in my experience will be, then, an erasure of the deeply erotic nature of musical performance—this shared merging and submerging of Selves into an all-encompassing, all-powerful higher reality that I will call “the music itself.”<sup>8</sup>

One might well ask if the spectacle of the disappearing Selves doesn’t perform and provide some of the same psychic pleasures as the acts we conventionally call sexual, performing and providing them in a ritual context that denies their eroticism so as to reinforce their sacralization.<sup>9</sup>

But for this essay I want to ask if the performance I expect might also be something else that’s not nearly so nice as sex. What if a classical performance is also a meticulously organized ritual for reaffirming obedience to the guidance of “invisible hands”? What if these performances are rituals by which we all teach ourselves, over and over, the pleasure of submitting to the amorphous but ubiquitous cultural messages we have come to call “discourse”? What better frame story for texts that subtly encode all sorts of prescriptions for social behavior—including gender—than a ritual of disappearing Selves?

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8. There is a significant anthropological literature on theatrical performance as an excursion into the liminal. See, for example, Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1986).

9. I asked this question more directly in “On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” in Brett, et al., *Queering the Pitch*, 67-84. On the sacralization of classical music, see Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago and London, 1989) and Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), especially Chapter Two, “The Sacralization of Culture.”

(b) *What does the performer “perform”?*

It would seem from my analysis thus far that the frame story of a classical music performance, is primarily “performed” (and informed) by the expectations of an audience that has been formed by amateur music-making (piano lessons, church choirs, marching bands) and by introductory music courses. We who are professionals, however, know that there is more going on than what our audiences expect. For us, good performances are ones which interpret in sensitive and imaginative ways. That is, when *we* sit down to prepare a piece for performance, we imagine the performance to be ours at least as much as we imagine it to be that of “the music itself.”

Or do we? I’m not sure we do, not if we choose to adhere to the standards for “good performance” that have prevailed in the American “classical music” scene over the last generation. I think we have all been taught to provide our audiences with “faithful performances,” exercising our interpretive franchise within quite narrow limits.

How have we been induced to suppose that our music-making is best when it makes the music someone else has prescribed? How are we, as performers, persuaded to grant the power to govern our relationship with a piece to “the music itself”?

In our earliest experiences of classical music, kiddie lessons, we learn to play from written notes placed before us, and to play those notes accurately. How else could we learn to be musicians in a literate tradition? Later, often in adolescence, we begin to be told we should play “with feeling,” or play more “musically.” The two are often elided and left ill-defined, with the result that one understands “musicality” (and “feeling”) to be simultaneously self-evident and mysterious. “Musicality” is a quality our singing and playing might have “naturally” (manifested in playing “with feeling”), but it is also a quality we might learn through initiation. The elision of musicality and

feeling eventually leads us to understand feeling, too, as something both “natural” and learnable through initiation.

It is only when we have learned the patterns of musicality—by age twenty or so—that we begin to be encouraged to “interpret.” By the time our initiation reaches a stage that imagines “interpretive freedom” we have already performed both “feelings” and “musicality” long enough and often enough to ensure that our “interpretations” will emerge from what might seem like a foundational Self but would actually be a cultural construction. That is, we might imagine the feelings we express to be our own, but all the ways we would know to shape a piece “musically” would express feelings that had originated somewhere else, in someone else.<sup>10</sup>

Let me imagine myself into that culturally constructed Self, a classical musician, who understands its Self to be involved in the work of transmitting the “feeling” and “musicality” implied by written notes whose patterns are to be accurately understood and accurately rendered. If I were to question this as the proper work of a classical musician, practically everything I might read about “good performance” would reinforce my construction.

For example, in an early twentieth-century primer on “musical expression,” Swiss pianist and pedagogue M. Mathis Lussy locates the “feeling” or “expression” a performer renders in “the music itself,” in the notes:

It is really astonishing to find the generating power of expression put down to mere sentiment or caprice. Feeling is but submission to some compulsion—our feelings are not free agents...If the performer has musical sensibility, irregular notes will disturb him...and he will express his sensations accordingly. If he be insensible, his execution,

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10. Thus we who have trained as performers are particularly good living examples of Judith Butler’s notion that the qualities we assume to be part of our “identities” are in fact only accumulated habits formed by obsessively repeated (practiced) performances. See her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1991).

though quite possibly correct, is sure to be cold and mechanical. Thus, when musicians quicken or slacken, put forth power and fire, or exhibit gentle and subdued emotion, it is not to mere caprice they yield, but, rather, to an irresistible impulse communicated by certain notes.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, for Lussy a good performer is at best a sensitive respondent to impulses in the music—not an agent with feelings originating in extramusical experience. The performer is a person whose performance is always reactive, always a yielding to compulsion, to irresistible impulse. Musical “feeling” is not the result of something independent within the performer.

The location of a performer’s “feeling” or “expression” in the “impulse communicated by certain notes” is not limited to quaint primers meant for music students. Heinrich Schenker made a similar claim in this oft-quoted passage:

Performance directions are fundamentally superfluous, since the composition itself expresses everything that is necessary...Performance must come from within the work; the work must breathe from its own lungs—from the linear progressions, neighboring tones, chromatic tones, modulations...About these, naturally, there cannot exist different interpretations.<sup>12</sup>

As a performer, then, I am to use my lungs to enable “the work” (“the music itself”) to breathe from its own lungs. It is another being that needs my body for its own to live, for it is a being without physical lungs. I must let it breathe “from its own lungs” through my own lungs; I must, then, let it invade and take over the functions of my body if it is to live. For Schenker, the musical text is all-powerful in our relationship, if remarkably like a child in the womb awaiting birth. It is easy for me, reading Schenker, to imagine myself as a medium transmitting meanings that originated in someone else.

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11. M. Mathis Lussy, *Musical Expression, Accents, Nuances and Tempo in Vocal and Instrumental Music* (London: Novello, n.d.), 2-3, note 3.

12. As quoted in William Rothstein, “Heinrich Schenker as an Interpreter of Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas,” *19th-Century Music* 8 (1984): 10.

Both Schenker and Lussy describe me in ways that deny me agency when I perform. I am to my performance as an Aristotelian mother is to her child—the “medium” (in another sense) in which the father’s seed is nourished and grows. Further, they describe me in ways that make “expressive” performance seem like obedience or submission. “Interpretation,” then, must be a practice that is exercised within quite narrow limits.

In his 1981 book *The Composer’s Advocate*, Erich Leinsdorf affirmed the notion I might have got from Schenker that good performers evacuate themselves of their Selves.<sup>13</sup> Leinsdorf seems, however, to elide the composer with his work:

A musical performer is like a talented actor, whose greatest accomplishment is to achieve such a degree of identification with a character in a play that his own personality disappears. The musician should “become” Brahms or Debussy or whoever is on his program.<sup>14</sup>

How might I “become” Brahms or Debussy? How might Jessye Norman become Schumann? According to Leinsdorf, we become the composers who “are” on our programs by knowing their intentions both in spirit and in letter. To understand the spirit, Leinsdorf says, we must be able “to distinguish between the essential character of a work—its structure, tone and meaning—and its time-bound externals.”<sup>15</sup>

The “essential character” of a work differs from its “time-bound externals”; it is, then, something permanent, inherent, not subject to changing social conventions.<sup>16</sup> It is with this “essential character” that Leinsdorf expects a good performer to so

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13. Erich Leinsdorf, *The Composer’s Advocate: A Radical Orthodoxy for Musicians* (New Haven, 1981).

14. *Ibid.*, 42.

15. *Ibid.*, 51.

16. Little supposing that the notion of anything having an “essential character” would become a site of extremely vigorous cultural conflict shortly after his book was published, Leinsdorf nonetheless used the notion of essential character very much as feminist critics have done.

completely identify as to “become” Brahms or Debussy. Put another way, I must give a performance that is faithful to the essential character of a piece (and, incidentally, faithful to a belief in essences); but I may change the piece’s time-bound externals. The latter will be the site of my “interpretation.” Indeed, Leinsdorf suggests that my “interpretation” of the time-bound externals may be necessary if I am to communicate a piece’s “essential character.”

As Leinsdorf develops his argument through a discussion of performance problems in the music of Bach, it becomes clear that for him, too, the meaning of a piece can be detected in the “sufficiency of the notes.”<sup>17</sup> The “sufficiency of the notes” constitutes for him both an open and a closed text: it is closed insofar as it has an “essential character”; it is open insofar as performance directions (dynamics, phrasing, etc.) are historical contingencies we may want to change so as, in his words, “to make them (the composer’s works) most meaningful to audiences of our own generation.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus Leinsdorf both gives me (as a performer) interpretive freedom and demeans the gift. For while it is clear to me that the music has an essential character, it is far less clear that I do in his world view. I am, after all, the one whose personality is to disappear. My personality, because dispensable, seems to me analogous to what he calls time-bound externals; and my work as an “interpreter” is to be done at the level of time-bound externals—those details of a piece that, because constructed by historical conditions (tunings, technical limitations of instruments, etc.), may be changed so as to better transmit the apparently immutable (because “essential”) character of the music. I am to adjust the time-bound elements of a work so as to make my similarly time-bound Self disappear and the “essential character” of the work appear in its place. Only then can the composer—the Brahms or Debussy of his writing, or the Schumann

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17. Leinsdorf, *The Composer’s Advocate*, 52.

18. *Ibid.*, 52.

of my imagined Jessye Norman recital—be said to *be* on the program, in the present tense. Leinsdorf, then, is the clearest exponent yet of the idea that the composer is brought to life by the performer's work: the composer's invasion of my body, to which I submit, makes me a medium (in both senses of the word).

(c) *The Medium is the message: performing the Other*

However thrilling the work of a medium may be, I am made uneasy by the idea that I have no "essential character" that may be imagined to negotiate a relationship with the music's "essential character" through my interpretation; the power relationship between us seems decidedly unequal. The music and the composer whom I am to bring to life by causing my time-bound Self to disappear, and by interpreting the music's time-bound externals—the music and the composer are somehow *not time-bound but timeless*. They are universals; I and my work are particulars. They are the originals; I and my work are the copies and the copier.<sup>19</sup>

This *feels* like being a subaltern person, the member of a muted culture, an "Other." It *feels* like being a woman in the heterosexual gender regime, like being gay in a straight world. Because I am already exactly those things, this is not so uncomfortable a feeling. In fact, it is a feeling that fits like the old shoes of my "extramusical" life. Because I am already a subaltern twice over, it is psychologically comfortable for me to perform (socially) the (not timeless, not essential, not universal) work called "performance."

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19. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31-4, argues that in fact there are no originals of which cultural performances can be understood to be copies. Instead, she claims, the cultural performances we mistake for originals—she is concerned particularly with the proclaimed originality of performed heterosexuality—are parodic performances of "the idea of the natural and the original." The mistaken belief in a relationship *original: copy* is part of the ideology I believe classical music performance is meant to uphold.

But I wonder...even if this is a comfortable feeling for me, even if musical performance creates a social space in which my performance of "Otherness" will receive praise rather than blame, even if the ideology of faithful performance might then seem benign to me...I wonder what purpose is served by the comfortableness of the role "performer" to this society's "Others"—women, gays, people of color? I wonder if my role as performer is partly to "perform" exactly this homology with the role of subaltern peoples. I wonder if everyone at my performances understands that one of the things I will perform will be the correct relationship of a subaltern to hegemonic power, the relationship of submission. Might my "good performance" be both a real and a metaphorical performance (or spectacle) of cultural hegemony? That is, might my performance of being taken over by the "essential character" of Brahms, say, to the extent that I "become" Brahms—might *my* particular performance serve to make the idea of a woman's submission seem natural? Might my real work be that of demonstrating for you how submission may be most beautifully performed? Might I always be performing the role of a subaltern who knows her place?

Might that be true even if I were Jessye Norman choosing to open my program with Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*, a piece of "absolute music" for voice and piano (note that it would have seemed odd to say "singer and pianist," for that would have implied the performance of Rachmaninov's notes by sentient beings, beings with Selves—however constructed—and with the potential for agency and resistance)? That is, even if I performed a work with no overt gender content, might I be in any case performing my own abjection?

That is, might my performance *always* be partly a performance of the gender system?

## 2. *Performing Hegemony and Gender with Edward T. Cone*

The critical work of Edward T. Cone, particularly his 1968 lectures published as *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, gives me tools by which I might begin to answer these questions.<sup>20</sup> The answer, as I read Cone, is that as a performer in the classical tradition I am “always already” performing discourses of hegemony and gender, even when I am performing so-called “absolute music.” But Cone’s work also suggests a way out of the submission to discourse he so heartily recommends.

To Cone, as a classical performer I am always already in the business of performing a *persona* that is not my own. Cone tells me in *The Composer’s Voice* that pieces have *personae*, *personae* that are not to be confused with the composer’s actual Self but that nonetheless are understood to speak with the composer’s voice.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Cone would not have me “become” Brahms. Instead, I am to interpret the *persona* created by the composer as his voice, and I am to do it by making choices.

For Cone acknowledges that I can never give a perfect performance; he knows this because he assumes that all the complexities of a piece cannot be made tangible in a single performance:

The more complex the poem or the composition, the more relationships its performance must be prepared to explain—and the less likelihood that a single performance can ever do the job. The composition must proceed inexorably in time; we cannot go back to explain; we must therefore decide what is important and make that as clear as possible, even at the expense of other aspects of the work. Every valid interpretation thus represents, not an approximation of some ideal, but a

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20. Edward T. Cone, *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York, 1968).

21. Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley, 1974).

choice: which of the relationships implicit in this piece are to be emphasized, to be made explicit?<sup>22</sup>

Not only does Cone know that no performance can ever capture all the complexities of the music; in using the language of choice to describe my preparation of a "valid interpretation" Cone grants me at least limited agency. Yet he also makes it clear that the work—"the music itself"—is more important and more complex than my performance. It is still the original, and my performance is still the copy. It has the *persona* I will—apparently imperfectly—perform.<sup>23</sup>

My performance, however imperfect, and my agency, however limited, will result from my choices, from distinctions I will make between the significant and the insignificant relationships in "the music," or in the *persona* of the music. Cone's book provides welcome advice about how to make good choices, advice that eventually makes clear how the *persona* of well-performed music ought to be gendered.

Cone asserts that a piece is an ontological unit, a whole which is to be performed and made intelligible by the suppression of its parts:

Valid performance depends primarily on the perception and communication of the rhythmic life of a composition...Such a comprehensive form can be made clear in performance...only by virtue of another principle: that the whole is more important than any of its parts. Any conflict of interest must be resolved by suppressing the formal claims of the parts in favor of those of the whole.<sup>24</sup>

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22. Cone, *Musical Form*, 33-4.

23. One might argue that in my imperfect performance, I perform a notion of inescapable human limits. Am I, for Cone, a creature of the phenomenal world acting out her failure to comprehend the noumena? Does "the music itself" represent the noumenon in this performance? Or does the composer? Or does the active listener? Does the active listener's vicarious performance come closer to performing the noumenon than I do? Is the merging/submerging of both performer's and listeners' Selves in the seemingly higher reality we call "the music itself" a symbolic transcendence of limits, a voyage into the noumenal?

A clever analysis of Chopin's A major prelude follows, showing exactly how Cone imagines a good performer would "resist" the interpretation to which the musical surface of dynamic markings, etc., might "tempt," guarding against the threat of "premature closure" by choosing to play the entire sixteen measures as one long phrase rather than as two balanced ones. Performance of the prelude as two balanced phrases, "allowing independence to each phrase" as he puts it, fails "to produce a unified whole."<sup>25</sup>

So while Cone seems to grant me agency to make choices about what is significant and what is not, he very strongly believes that my choices should result in a sound structure, a *persona*, that seems to be a unified whole. Does my playing of the Chopin prelude as one long phrase then perform a model of the way dominant cultures consolidate themselves—through the suppression of their parts? Will I, in this performance perform a model of hegemony? Will I then perform musical choices that replicate symbolically the choice to suppress "Others" for the sake of the whole that *is* the choice made by hegemonic groups?

If I am myself already marked as an Other—because I lack the "essential character" other entities possess, because I perform necessarily imperfect copies of those entities—just what am I doing? Am I performing the action of my own oppression? Performing it as a spectacle before people who have been taught to identify with "the music itself," and with the hegemonic wholeness of "the music itself"? Will I then provide those people—the audience at my recital—with a guilt-free experience of oppressing me (guilt-free because, after all, I have *chosen* to perform this way) that distracts them from the experience of their own oppression?

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24. Cone, *Musical Form*, 38.

25. The words enclosed in quotation marks are Cone's words; I have included them so as to emphasize just how closely his language approximates the rhetoric of sexuality and seduction.

Cone moves almost immediately to further, more complex examples of the ways a performer's careful weighting of cadences can provide the necessary sense of closure. His language becomes more and more composer-identified, undermining his earlier apparent granting of agency to performers. But perhaps more significantly, his language becomes drenched in gender imagery that is no less meaningful for being nowadays unfashionable:

One test of a good performance is the extent to which the listener knows where he is, even in a work with which he is unfamiliar. One good clue to such orientation could be the relative strength of cadences—lighter toward the beginning, when the feeling of propulsion should be stronger than the sense of arrival, and heavier toward the end, as the goals become increasingly important. Even in the case of movements that seem to remain incorrigibly feminine, some differentiation can still be made. In the case of Chopin's Polonaise in A major, for example, a clever emphasis on one of the concealed cross-rhythms at the cadence can make the last chord sound *if not precisely masculine*, at least like a strong tonic postponed by a suspension of the entire dominant (emphasis mine).<sup>26</sup>

So...a good performance is one which subordinates parts to the whole; and one which achieves a sense of unity by performing closure events so that the last one will sound "if not precisely masculine, at least...strong"? So...if it is masculine closure that makes the *persona* of a work whole (by suppressing its parts), then the desirable *persona* of even an "incorrigibly feminine" piece is gendered masculine? So...the performed submission of parts to the whole performs the submission of the feminine to the masculine?

So...if I follow Cone's suggestions about the desirable gender of a work's *persona*, and always make choices to perform "the music itself" so its masculinity is confirmed; and if I choose to perform so that the music's coherent wholeness results from the suppression of its parts; and if I am already per-

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26. Cone, *Musical Form*, 45.

forming my own subaltern condition (as a copy) relative to the greater power of this music (whose "essential character" is the original);...what am I doing?

My faithful performance is not only, at a gross level, a public demonstration of obedience to ideas manifest in a particular work; it is also always already a performance of suppressing that which contradicts Unity (suppressing the disruptive, the disobedient, the Other); and it is also always already suppressing a disruptive/disobedient that is marked feminine, as it exists within a work's *persona*, a *persona* that will be marked masculine if the suppression of the disruptive feminine succeeds.

Always already I confirm the gender regime that governs Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben* even if I choose to sing, instead, the Rachmaninov *Vocalise*.

But Cone's refinement of the ideology of faithful performance does, after all, admit that there are feminine gestures in the *persona* of every work—hence his anxiety that they be suppressed, becoming interiorized within the work, private rather than public, psychological rather than social. The very presence of such gestures suggests that the gender of a work's *persona* could be performed otherwise. Perhaps one could feminize the incorrigibly masculine? Perhaps one could camp pieces of classical repertoire into some culturally unfamiliar mix of unsuppressed femme and unsuccessfully suppressing butch? Perhaps one could remake the *persona* of a work into a lesbian, a transsexual, a hermaphrodite? Perhaps, that is, I could take advantage of Cone's relative granting of agency to performers to make choices that would *unperform* a coherent *persona*, *unperform* the suppression of disruptive parts so as to sustain a hegemonic whole, *unperform* the notion that all classical musical performances start with the prescriptions of "the music itself."

### 3. *Toward a Resisting Performance Practice*

The quest for resisting performances promises both musical and political consequences. Let me briefly summarize what I imagine the political ones to be.

If, as philosopher Judith Butler has argued, gender is a performance, and if proper gender is the performance of a discursively prescribed set of actions that, taken together, are intelligible as gender, then for musicians to learn how to model resistance to a discursively prescribed script could be a critical contribution to breaking up the rigidities of the old gender script. We might use our subaltern but shaman-like status to teach resisting and alternative performance practices instead. Indeed, this is just what various pop artists and performance artists already do. It seems possible to me, in fact, that our rigid adherence to performance rituals and standards that teach obedience might be held partly responsible for the dramatic decline in classical music's popularity over the last generation. The problem might not lie either in "the music itself" or in the inadequately formed listening habits of the general public, but in the anachronistic social patterns so powerfully affirmed in the rituals and beliefs surrounding "the music itself."

But to arrive even at the adumbration of a resisting performance—one, that is, that would teach resistance to the amorphous prescriptions of discourse as subtly and powerfully as the lieder recital I have been imagining would teach obedience—resistance has to be performed at every level. Thus, one would first have to reconstruct the ritual of classical performance itself, so as to challenge, mock or reconfigure in unpredictable ways the likely performances of audiences. In their ways, John Cage and Pauline Oliveros, sexual as well as aesthetic renegades, have suggested ways to do just that.

Secondly, in conceiving the "performer's" performance—Jessye Norman's imaginary performance—one would have to refuse both apparently opposite poles of the binarism that in-

forms the literature on interpretation. One could neither cede the power to govern the performance to "the music itself" nor treat that music as "merely vehicles for performers." For both ends of the binary represent symbolically a master-slave relationship. Instead, one would have to redefine interpretation as a complex negotiation between performer and script, in which both have agency, both respond to what Lussy called "pressure" from the other, and either could seize the power to govern their relationship.

Thirdly, one would have to de-stabilize the unity of the *persona* the performed piece would seem to have, refusing closure some of the time so as to refuse symbolically the hegemonic consolidation of identity against Others, and so as to refuse symbolically the construction of masculinity out of the suppression of the feminine. Logically, one might want to strive instead to give the music's *persona* a discontinuous Self; and one might want to assume that the music's Self was not essential, but contingent on choices and performative acts governed as much by "audience" and "performer" as by "the music itself." Is this perhaps the point of, say, Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke XII*, and of all kinds of interactive pieces imagined both before and since?

What would such a performance do to *Frauenliebe und -leben*? What if "Seit ich ihn gesehen" were sometimes to be sung after "Süsser Freund," and before the exuberant "An meinem Herzen"? Wouldn't the woman portrayed be understood as much more profoundly invested in her child than in its father? And what if "Er, der Herrlichste von allen" came next, as a mother's song in celebration of her man-child's successful individuation and maturity? Would it matter?

What if a singer were to perform these songs in their usual pedagogical order — "Er, der Herrlichste von allen" first, "Du Ring an meinem Finger" second, "An meinem Herzen" third, "Seit ich ihn gesehen" fourth, and so on? For singers are ordinarily quite comfortable with the first two songs, songs that require and allow the display of considerable physical self-

mastery, before they encounter the songs that deny the Frau's independence of mind. The usual pedagogical order results in singers learning the songs according to a different plot than that implied by Schumann's order, a plot of decreasing range, decreasing breath control, decreasing melodiousness. The gradual assimilation of the tomboyish tendencies of "Er, der Herrlichste" into short-breathed, declamatory utterances teaches singers to experience a plot in these songs that is not unlike that of *The Taming of the Shrew*. This alternative plot presumably already hovers like a shadow behind the narrative that is implied by the usual performance, in which the initially inarticulate, breathless girl of "Seit ich ihn gesehen" grows more confident and capable because of her love and her lover. Would a foregrounding of the singer's different experience of the plot restore her right to be present as an autonomous Self in her performance?

#### 4. *Resisting: A Recorded Performance by Jessye Norman*

When I began to write this essay, my invocation of a Jessye Norman performance of *Frauenliebe und -leben* was a writer's device, a way of trying to focus on an easily imagined scenario of live performance. I have never witnessed a live performance by Norman, and at the time I did not know there was a recorded performance of these songs by her available from Philips on compact disc.<sup>27</sup> My discovery of this recording, however, has given me the opportunity to move us all back from the brink of speculation, and into consideration of Norman's performance, a performance that brilliantly exceeds my speculations about how musical performance might teach resistance to discourse

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27. Robert Schumann, *Frauenliebe und -leben*, op. 42; *Liederkreis*, op. 39, Jessye Norman and Irwin Gage (Philips 420 784-2, 1975).

and that demonstrates, as well, that a resisting performance need not seem “unmusical.” Indeed, this is a performance that teaches us how resistance, rather than submission, may be beautifully performed.

(a) *Reconfiguring the ritual*

First, the fact that this is a recorded performance—the most common experience of performance we have in the late twentieth century—means that the ritual of classical performance has already been transformed. Recording technology would seem to have done a great deal of the cultural work you and I might have performed to make Norman disappear. She has been reduced from a woman to a voice; and we have been forced to apprehend her performance as if we were “all ears.” That is, recording technology focuses the erotics of musical performance just as the assumptions of classical performance rituals require—on the intimate relationship of disembodied sounds and fetishized ears.

Yet recording technology radically changes the ways both listeners and performers behave—perform—during the “performance.” For as listeners we need not be in the dark; we need not sit still; we need not be silent. Because we can arrange to be alone when we listen, we can experience Norman-as-voice in a situation of the most private intimacy; we can have her all to ourselves. Because we can move about, expressing our experience of ecstasy any way we choose, we need not focus on it as an exclusive experience of minds and ears. We can choose to replicate Norman’s disappearance into the higher power that is “the music itself”—or we can choose not to. The ritual of sharing the performance of complementary bodily obedience to higher power is dismantled: only Norman’s body must be disciplined to produce the performance we will share.

Except that we can never share Norman’s performance with her. Because the recorded performance—the material fact of the CD—is not likely to be a single-take record of her perfor-

mance in the studio, *her* performance is permanently separated from ours. And that separation liberates her body from some expected performances of obedience. For although *we* may perceive technology to have made Norman disappear, *she* has not had the experience of disappearing into the costumes and customs of live performance. Freed from bright lights, from the need to be either still or dramatizing, beautiful or beautified, she is freed from the constraints of our scopophilic power, freed from the requirement that she disappear to her Self, as a Self.<sup>28</sup> Standing before a microphone in the clothes and attitudes of her everyday life, Norman may bring much more of her everyday Self to a studio performance, without risking that our illusion of her medium-like performance will be destroyed.

In fact, then, recording technology enables the bodies of both “listeners” and “performers” to resist one aspect of the old ritual of cultural obedience, the ritual of the Self’s disappearance into a higher reality represented by “the music itself.” It also enables us—performers and listeners alike—to resist Cone’s requirement that Schumann’s music be performed in a way that gives it a continuous, coherent *persona*. Thus, in the world of recorded performance both “performers” and “listeners” may resist the symbolic performance of hegemony and gender.

For Norman’s performance as we perceive it on the finished recording may not sound much like the performances she gave in the recording studio: almost certainly, she sang each song several times, choosing the “best” performance of each for in-

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28. As a person alive in the postmodern world, Norman may not have a Self in the modern sense: that is, she may be imagined instead to have any number of Selves, all of them performative if mostly quite separate in her own mind from either her *persona* as “the diva Jessye Norman” or the *persona* of Schumann’s Frau. In the usual ideology of performance I have tried to outline, all of these possible Selves, including that of the diva, are evacuated to make room for the performance of a work’s *persona*—whether that be the *persona* of a piece of absolute music or the more easily imagined *persona* of Schumann’s Frau.

clusion on the finished, engineered recording. Because the recording will thus have been compiled from multiple takes, she may not have performed any particular song as if it had a continuous *persona*; like Glenn Gould, she may have allowed her engineer to compile the illusion of such a *persona* from radically discontinuous fragments spliced together. And it is not so likely that she performed a continuous *persona* for Schumann's Frau from song to song: indeed, she may have sung the songs in an order deliberately chosen to subvert Schumann's intentions, for her own pleasure. Because her actual performance is ontologically separate from the recorded performance we will hear, she can have resisted *Frauenliebe und -leben* privately, once again insulated by her studio solitude from the fear that her resistances might disturb our expectations. In any event, the performance we hear is a copy for which there is no original: thus the disparity of power between music and performer (as original and copy) that Leinsdorf delineates is dismantled, and with it the homology between Norman's "performance" and the relationship of a subaltern to hegemonic power.

Yet if recording technology promises Norman safety from having to "become" Schumann or his Frau for a continuous half hour, it decreases her power to control how we will hear the "recorded performance" she will allow to be issued in her name. Her sound engineer, re-arranging the takes to match Schumann's ordering of the songs (and perhaps filtering or otherwise altering elements of her sound like timbre and dynamics), may or may not respect her wishes as to which takes might together create the "performance" she preferred. And we, her unseen, unknown listeners, can further resist her wishes—and her engineer's, and Schumann's—by performing on *our* instrument, the CD player's remote control device.

In effect, the remote control device gives us the power to re-perform Norman's performance—by choosing not to listen to some bits, by replaying our favorite bits over and over, by playing the songs in any order regardless of the narrative or *persona* she may have tried to create. Norman and her perfor-

mance, whose existence Leinsdorf has implied to be like historical contingencies, become contingencies we can interpret as we choose. Schumann's ordering of the songs, which Leinsdorf might have included in the "essential character" of the music, becomes contingent as well. Just as our ability to move and speak during a performance Norman may have created in full cognizance of her everyday Self can perform all our bodies' resistance to the old ritual of disappearing Selves, so our power to create a discontinuous, resisting performance of Norman's recording can perform our minds' resistance to the hegemonic unity of any work's (or any performance's) *persona*.

The fact that the performance we are about to consider is a recorded performance of *Frauenliebe und -leben*, therefore, means that it will already be a performance in which both Norman's and our roles have changed, changed in directions that allow us to resist the frame story of a live classical music performance *and* to resist our residual inclination to consider the recording against a standard of fidelity or infidelity to "the music itself." For although the material fact of holding "the music itself" in our hands (in the form of a CD) tempts us to think otherwise, the world of recorded performance is already a world open to the performance of multiple resistances.

(b) *Jessye Norman's resisting voice*

But what if for the moment we succumb to the temptation posed by the CD in our hands? What if we suppose that Norman's recorded performance is a coherent, continuous whole, the result of her intentional interpretive negotiations with Schumann's songs? Is Norman's "performance" faithful, faithless, or something else altogether?

Let me focus our attention on Norman's recorded performance of the cycle's second song, "Er, der Herrlichste von Allen." Ordinarily what we expect from this song is a passionate rush, a piano part that might represent in its energy and triad outlines the young man she loves, or that might represent

her own thrill at the sight of him. We expect, too, an exuberant, joyous, unfettered singing style.

We expect, in short, some variant of Lotte Lehmann's famous and oft-emulated performances, performances she popularized to the verge of canonicity through her publication of interpretive guides to the standard repertoire in the book *More than Singing*.<sup>29</sup> Of "Er, der Herrlichste" she wrote:

Now you are beginning to grow accustomed to this strange feeling of ecstasy which pervades you. You have no desire, you are contented in the knowledge of your own love, which it is impossible to share with anyone. Again and again you look with rapture at the image of your beloved...and you find your greatest joy in raving about his virtues, his wonderful character, his great beauty. The absolute lack of passionate desire makes it possible for you to be completely happy in your love.

Begin this second song joyfully, radiantly, almost dizzy with delight. The first phrase is like a fanfare of victory...<sup>30</sup>

Such a performing tradition does not prepare us for Norman's astonishingly clear, exaggerated diction—so out of character—nor for her lumbering, somber tempo, nor for her consistently amateurish execution of the vocal turns that end phrases praising the young man's virtues. Nor does it prepare us for Norman's peculiar sound, wavering between a voice placed far back in her throat and one placed where a woman's voice should be, in her head.

What is Norman doing? Why does she sound so forced, forced even to the brink of sounding "unmusical"?

Norman performs the Frau as an utter contradiction of her own *persona*. It is a performance that thus draws attention to itself *as a performance*, the performance of a woman who—rad-

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29. For her meticulous prescription to other singers of how musically and ideologically faithful performances of these songs might be executed, see Lotte Lehmann, *More Than Singing: The Interpretation of Songs*, trans. Frances Holden (New York, 1985), 151-9.

30. *Ibid.*, 152.

ically unlike Norman—seems ill at ease with her own voice; for the voice of this song is full of timbral inconsistencies and discontinuities, and it is gawky and hesitant in its execution of the phrase-ending turns. Further, in her choice of exaggeratedly clear diction Norman performs in a way that forces our attention to the words. Both the discontinuities of voice and the exaggerated diction direct our attention away from “the music itself,” the patterns (so powerful and pure) of sound to which one might innocently listen, as if they were beautiful in themselves. Further, by refusing the urge to blur words with her voice’s sheer beauty and power and by emphasizing the Frau’s vocal difficulties, Norman refuses the means critics from Abbate to Robinson have identified for performers—especially divas—to usurp the composer’s authorial voice by a display of virtuosic power.<sup>31</sup>

Norman thus avoids either “becoming” Schumann, as in a faithful performance according to Leinsdorf, or using Schumann’s song as a “mere vehicle to express [her] own personality.”<sup>32</sup> And she denies us both the luxury of hearing this song as Schumann’s “music itself” (freed from the time-bound ideology of its text, hearable as having an essential character like absolute music) *and* the luxury of hearing it as primarily *voice*, and thus as springing from the supposedly unconstructed semiotic or pre-linguistic.<sup>33</sup> Instead, Norman forces us to confront this song as Symbolic, socially constructed, fully bearing

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31. See, for instance, Carolyn Abbate’s brilliant exegesis of all sorts of musical voices in the first chapter of *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1991); Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, especially Chapter Four, “The Callas Cult,” 134–53; and Paul Robinson, “Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera” in *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton, 1988), especially 333–8.

32. The phrase is a variant of Joseph Kerman’s paraphrase in *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 199, of remarks by Charles Rosen in “Should Music Be Played ‘Wrong?’” *High Fidelity* (May 1971): 54. Kerman’s paraphrase reads “The idea that the performer should use music as a vehicle to express his own personality may indeed be ‘intellectually disreputable’ today, as Rosen said.”

its verbal message. And, because of the strained and amateurish sound Norman produces, we must confront the unnaturalness of the song as a text for the performance of gender. For in Norman's performance, "Er, der Herrlichste" cannot be heard as Lehmann's interpretation crafts it—the song of an innocent, enthusiastic girl in love. Rather, Norman invites us to hear the Frau's voice struggling with the enforced discipline of enunciating someone else's seemingly uncongenial words; a voice struggling to perform in the phrase-ending turns the Frau's coming social role as ornament to her future husband's life.

Norman's performance of this song—and of the cycle as a whole—invites hearing, too, as an example of the ways philosopher Judith Butler has suggested one might craft resistant performances of gender that avoid replicating its binarism: hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation.<sup>34</sup> Both Norman's exaggerated diction and her vocal clumsiness can be interpreted as constituting hyperbole in that they draw attention to the mechanics of the performance, to its constructedness. Both qualities may also be understood to be dissonant with Norman's *persona* as a diva, for she is a singer whose voice typically obliterates most of the consonants in its path, a singer whose technical mastery is second to none. And Norman's performance performs an internal confusion of voice as well, for it can easily be heard as several voices, displaying several contradictory levels of self-mastery as it wanders among various placements. As listeners to the other songs of this performance can confirm, the internal confusion of voice proliferates throughout the cycle: sometimes we hear the exquisitely controlled, powerful voice other performances by "the diva Jessye Norman" lead us to expect; sometimes we hear the

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33. See Carolyn Abbate, "Opera, or the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference* for a clear explanation of this distinction as first articulated by Julia Kristeva.

34. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31-4.

straining amateur voice that is Schumann's nameless Frau; we can easily lose track of whether there are only these two voices, or more than two.

It is in the cycle's last song, when Schumann's melodic grace gives way to the stunned monotony of the Frau's grief at her husband's death, that Norman's voice performs the greatest internal confusion (a hyperbolic level of internal confusion?). In this song, she sings *every* timbre she has previously used, revealing all of them to have been effects of her performance. Norman thus refuses, even in closing, to perform the continuous, difference-suppressing Self for which Cone's criticism calls.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps more importantly, she refuses to resolve for us which of her many voices might be taken for "natural," "real," or unconstrained ones—originals—and which may be heard as mere copies. All the voices she has used to perform Schumann's Frau are revealed to be parodies, as Butler puts it, "of the idea of the natural and the original."<sup>36</sup>

Neither faithful nor faithless but something more complex, Jessye Norman's recorded performance of *Frauenliebe und -leben* might be understood to provide us with a politically useful model of how we all might perform cultural resistance rather than cultural obedience. Yet we should bear in mind that as a recorded performance it already allows the proliferation of variant interpretations, all of which would further de-naturalize and de-stabilize the *personae* of Schumann's music, his Frau, and Norman's "performance." The CD in our hand is, we should recall, a copy for which there is no original. But because it can be endlessly repeated, Norman's recorded performance—a copy of the idea of resistance—allows for the circulation of new ideas of both gender and performance, ideas that more closely match the concerns of our time than they do

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35. In her refusal to give the Frau's *persona* closure, Norman might be understood to be giving a quite vivid performance of what Cone called "the incorrigibly feminine."

36. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31.

those of Schumann's time. Thus, Norman's recorded performance deftly sidesteps the work of a medium, for it does not bring either Schumann or his Frau alive for us. Rather, Norman performs our own anxieties about these songs even as she sings their notes. In doing so, Norman also refutes Leinsdorf's—and my students'—notion that the music's "essential character" lies in its notes (its relationships of pitch and rhythm). The "patterns so powerful and pure" into which Rich (rightly) claims violence has been translated are revealed not to be fixed, naturalized originals, but copies subject to a constantly proliferating displacement by deeply resisting performances.<sup>37</sup>

We *can* listen to music again. Indeed, the existence of even one performance such as Norman's *Frauenliebe und -leben* suggests that we must, if we are to learn how to engage music's power to teach cultural norms on the side of resistance to anachronistic power regimes. What we cannot do is *romanticize* music again; and that means we must learn to listen differently, listening (to paraphrase Roland Barthes) not so much for the work as for the text, the text produced by our and the "performer's" performances of resistance. Resisting, alert to the performed resistances of others, we must listen a little less reverently to the patterns (so powerful and pure as to be proposed to us as timeless and true) formed by pitches and

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37. The performance I hear as resistant in Norman's recording may also be heard as participating in an African-American performance practice, where in the *mere* reproduction of the cultural text being performed would be contrary to the notion that music-making is fundamentally a means of "being alive." Both improvisation and call-and-response development of ideas are means of demonstrating the continued vitality of musical texts; arguably, Norman's vocal resistances serve a similar role. I am grateful to Maria Johnson for raising this point. On African-American performance practice, see Portia Maultsby, "Africanisms in African-American Music," in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph Holloway (Bloomington, 1990), 185-210, and Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," *Black Music Research Journal* 11 (1991): 265-88.

rhythms, and a little more attentively to the subtle but powerful ways those patterns may be continually transformed by the displacements of endlessly proliferating resistant performances.