

A Powerful Voice: Investigating Vocality and Identity

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A Powerful Voice: Investigating Vocality and Identity



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The singing voice is an embodied instrument—inseparable from the musician, and therefore just as resonant in the broader contexts of human communication, social relationships, and the construction of identity as it is in a theater or concert hall. Voices inform how song and singer are heard, serving as perceptual markers for deeply intertwined ideas about music and identity. Music studies within the humanities and social sciences, today focusing heavily on the place of music in human life, show increasing interest in exploring the difficult implications of these ideas. But it can be a daunting task to address the multiplicity of linguistic, acoustic, cognitive-perceptual, and cultural factors that shape how we produce and hear human voices. One step with which researchers have approached the problem is a broadly applicable but meaning-specific notion: *vocality*. This concept goes beyond qualities like timbre and practice, and encourages us to consider *everything* that is being vocalized—sounded and heard as vocal—and offers a way to talk about a voice beyond simply the words it imparts or its color or production techniques. Instead it encapsulates the entire experience of the speaker or singer and of the listener, all of the physiological, psychoacoustic, and socio-

political dynamics that impact our perception of ourselves and each other.

Though the word has been naturalized to the point that writers rarely offer a working definition, a reexamination of its interrelated uses across studies of cognitive science and acoustics, language, literary criticism, and music reveals its layered significance as a site where the making of sounds and the making of identity intersect. Each approach looks for different meaning, investigating the voice as a vehicle for the variety of communicative, expressive, and ideological processes at the heart of speech and song. This essay surveys the idea of vocality as it has developed across history and disciplines, proposes a holistic model for its study in the context of music, and begins to unpack the heavy sociocultural baggage that accompanies it. It is my hope that these efforts may be of use to voice and speech professionals as they seek to tap the fullest potential of the voice in performance, and to grasp the entirety of *what* a voice carries, when it carries across a theater or podium—not only lexical meanings and emotion, but also vital information about culture, identity, and the dynamics of power that suffuses human communication.

Toward a Holistic Definition of Vocality

While the term *vocality* has gained currency in music scholarship in recent years, it is not a neologism. In the 1910s and 20s, psychoacoustic researchers (e.g. Modell and Rich 1915, Weiss 1920) discussed its application to a newly suggested acoustic relationship between tuning fork tones and vowels, a perceived vocality—a vowel-ness, a human sound—in the “pure tone” of the fork’s sinusoidal wave. When a group of music scholars (Bairstow et al.) broached the idea of vocality in 1929, they were curious as to how one might (and who should) determine the suitability of a piece of music to the voice, or the capability of a voice to perform music. This group of authors were responding to a *Music and Letters* editor’s query about what exactly made a piece of music “vocal” or “unvocal,” and British musicologist Edward J. Dent raised the issue of social context as an important dynamic in such judgments. Taking up the proposed question of why folksong seemed “vocal enough but difficult to sing well” (235)—an inquiry regarding the potential vocality or unvocality of folksong—Dent, rather than implicate any inherent quality in the structure or aesthetics of the music, instead pointed to class relations and the nationalistic impulse that fueled many collections of European folk songs in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries:

People may possibly have come by now to accept folksongs as national possessions, but for a long time it was as much a matter of pretence as Marie Antoinette’s dairymaiding. Cultivated singers had by dint

Voice and Speech Science, Vocal Health

A Powerful Voice: Investigating Vocality and Identity by Katherine Meizel

of technical skill to acquire a style which suggested the manner of the imaginary peasants who ought to have sung folksongs all day by natural instinct, and at the same time to sing their songs sufficiently well (judged by ordinary artistic standards) to make them a success in the concert-room...The difficulty of singing folksongs is mainly a matter of self-consciousness, vanity and snobbery. (240-241)

For Dent, the appropriateness of folk songs to the voice was never itself in question, and the difficulty classically trained (“cultivated”) singers felt in performing them was due to an unavoidable unawareness of lost stylistic practices and a hyperawareness of class distinctions. Though he did not define vocality explicitly, Dent’s acerbic remarks suggested a sense that “folk” and “concert-room” singing might involve irreconcilable aesthetics, techniques, and, most critically, *social perspectives*.

It was several decades later before vocality was more directly associated with social context. In 1987, scholar of medieval poetry Paul Zumthor proposed vocality (*vocalité*) as a concept that could circumvent the habitual but problematic binary opposition of orality and literacy, and allow for the possibility of their intersection. He employed the word to critique a neglect of the human voice in the study of poetics, and was followed by Ursula Schaefer (1992, 1993), for whom *Vokalität* also added a third field to the oral and the literate, a way to acknowledge the continued significance of the (oral) voice in the presence of literacy. Vocality entered the picture, she wrote, in “a cultural situation that very much depended and relied on the voice for mediation of verbal communication even though writing had already been well established” (1993: 205). If we return to Edward Dent’s assessment of folk song in the hands (or throats) of classically trained singers, this updated definition is especially appropriate. “Folksong,” since Johann Gottfried Herder coined the phrase in 1778, has been understood as a kind of people’s song (*Völklied*) that expresses the essence of a group or nation, and contributes to the creation of a “sense of place” (Bohlman 1988: 52). It was, to Herder, rural, orally transmitted, and an antidote to the artificiality he found in Enlightenment thinking (Filene 2000: 10).

The interconnection between oral and written culture has long been a theme of both historical musicology and ethnomusicology, two closely related disciplines with overlapping but diverging histories—while the first tended through the 20th century (though by no means exclusively) to emphasize the historical study of Western classical tradition, the other developed with a view toward the practices, discourses, and structures of music in human life around the globe. For some time in these areas, folk song remained a category considered as purely oral, or aural, tradition, but in the mid-20th century, some (e.g., Seeger 1950) began to suggest

that the aural and the written were unavoidably entangled together. Dent’s scenario perfectly illustrates this entwinement: the English folk songs collected in the early twentieth century (for example, by Cecil Sharp) were transcribed, written down by enthusiasts and scholars from the performances of singers who had learned them by ear. When published in the new transcriptions, they became part of written tradition, but at the same time never stopped being part of aural/oral tradition. The oral/written binary is also complicated by the role of transmission when music becomes a commodity. As far back as the 17th and 18th century, British ballad broadsides—the commercial music industry of early modern Europe—offered printed lyrics to accompany preexisting tunes that might be learned either by ear from a ballad-seller, from attending the theater, or from peers, or that could be learned from published books of dance music. In the 20th century, recordings, as materials of music culture, certainly contributed to the transmission of tradition, but they cannot be corralled easily into either the aural/oral or literate category. They are in many ways fixed texts (though perhaps not fixed indefinitely), but reproduce the processes of aural/oral transmission, ear to mouth. So when classically trained singers today perform celebrated ballads like “Barbara Allen” or “Greensleeves,” they are participating in a long historical interplay between the aural/oral and the literate—including folk tradition and broadsides and 20th or 21st century recordings—and highlighting Zumthor’s and Schaefer’s interpretation of vocality.

In their seminal work *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (1994), musicologists Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones borrowed from Zumthor, defining vocality as dependent on context, the meaning of voices past indecipherable without the reconstruction of their historical hearing. The move from *voice* to *vocality*, wrote Dunn and Jones, “implies a shift from a concern with the phenomenological roots of voice to a conception of vocality as a cultural construct” (Dunn and Jones 1994: 2). Drawing on French poststructuralist thinking, they described vocality as “all of the voice’s manifestations”—speaking, singing, crying, laughing—including and beyond linguistic content. This vocality encompasses both the *pheno-song* and *geno-song* that Roland Barthes expounded (after Julia Kristeva’s pheno- and geno-texts): the verbal, linguistic text juxtaposed with the non-verbal, embodied meanings that he famously heard as the “grain of the voice” (Barthes 1977).

Barthes, in *Image, Music, Text*, was also exploring the ties between different forms of human communication, and found in his “grain” something like the middle ground between orality and literacy that Zumthor would locate in vocality (“The sung writing of language,” Barthes expounded (185)). Barthes’ grain, though, linked the aural and the written not simply with the voice, but explicitly with the *body*. “The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings” for Barthes,

“the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs” (188). And, significantly, the burden of embodiment does not fall only on the singer; it is borne by the listener as well. “If I perceive the ‘grain’...” Barthes continued, “I am determined to listen to *my relation* with the body of the man or woman singing...” (188, my emphasis). That relationship between the singer and the listener is another key theme in the study of vocality. In an application of linguistic anthropology to music, Steven Feld, Aaron A. Fox, Thomas Porcello and David Samuels map vocality as a site where music and language meet, serving “among the body’s first mechanisms of difference”—where we learn to hear distinct individualities, to aurally separate our own voices from others’. Vocality in this view is “a social practice that is everywhere locally understood as an implicit index of authority, evidence, and experiential truth” (Feld et al. 2004: 341).

Given these precedents, vocality helps to shape the self- and other-knowledge of the body. It is metaphor and meaning, style and content, idea and performance. To arrive at a comprehensive model for its study, I turn to ethnomusicologist Cornelia Fales’ three-part schema for research in musical timbre, or sound color. She recommends a broad view, taking into account three domains of sound: the productive, acoustic, and perceptual. The productive domain has to do with the source of the sound, the ways in which the physical vibrations are produced. The acoustic domain comprises the way the sound is structured and transmitted, and the perceptual domain involves the sensations produced by sound (Fales 2005: 157). I propose the explicit supplementation of these areas with a sub-domain of perception that is already implicit in her ethnomusicological work—an attention to sociocultural context that profoundly informs the making of sonic meaning. I understand *vocality* as encompassing the act of vocalization and the entirety of that which is being vocalized—it is a set of vocal sounds, practices, techniques, and meanings that factor in the making of culture and the negotiation of identity. Vocality, then, is part and parcel of how we interact with the world around us, of who we think we are.

Vocality and history

The study of vocality as a symbol of identity is intimately tied up in a set of difficult, painful, and interlaced histories—of European modernity and colonialism, of ideas about race and nation, and of the study of humanity as an academic discipline. Documents from the early years of European expansion provide a glimpse into how vocality attracted the Western gaze (or ear) even at the beginning of the colonial project.

Calvinist missionary Jean de Léry’s 16th century reports of his time in Brazilian Tupi territory, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, are illuminating, though not easy to

read. The voice in the body became the locus for de Léry’s understanding of difference, as he watched Tupinamba dancing and singing, their voices shifting during “rites and ceremonies” from “tuneable” and “pleasing” to “muttering,” “trembling,” and “howl[ing],” signaling to de Léry what he believed must be possession by the Devil (de Léry 1578)—an embodied difference, essentially, of the soul.

Later, during the Enlightenment, as the seeds were planted for the ascendance of the modern nation-state, Jean-Jacques Rousseau found proto-national identity in the voice. He suggested in his *Dictionnaire* that differences between spoken French and Italian led to different ways of singing. It is an idea that Sally Sanford returned to in 1995, in the service of historical performance practice, to propose that the two languages involve different patterns of airflow, leading to distinct “schools of breathing” and disparate French and Italian singing techniques in the 17th century (Sanford 1995).

In the late 19th century, around the same time that the British Empire began to expand its hold on the Middle East and the African continent, and Queen Victoria became empress of India (1876), anthropology began to flourish as a scientific pursuit, and scholars debated the existence and meaning of physiological differences among the world’s peoples. Concepts of nation and race were both conflated and reified separately, but to some the racialized body, and voice, were indicative of national character. In 1869, “London’s foremost laryngologist” (Laurenson 1997) Sir G. Duncan Gibb delivered an unusual paper to the Anthropological Society of London on “The Character of the Voice in the Nations of Asia and Africa, Contrasted with that of the Nations of Europe” (published 1870). The Society, founded in 1863, was not yet representative of an independent academic field, but was established by supporters of polygenesis theory—followers of surgeon Robert Knox, who imagined that anatomical comparisons of various racial groups could show that they were actually different species (Lorimer 1988). Though their literature may inspire incredulity today, at the time it provided fuel for the justification of imperialist work. On the voice, Gibb spoke his position plainly:

Europe is the cradle of song, although a large cradle, if you like, but it points to superiority of voice in strength, power, compass, and sound...the character of the voice is superior in the European to the Asiatic and African. He, perhaps, cannot *bellow* as loud as the Negro, nor can he screech as loud as the Tartar; nevertheless, his vocal character is superior to both. (Gibb 1870: 258)

Gibb systematically discussed what he believed to be a number of distinctions among African, East Asian, Central

Voice and Speech Science, Vocal Health

A Powerful Voice: Investigating Vocality and Identity by Katherine Meizel

Asian, South Asian, and European (he included German, French, Russian, Italian, and English voices in this category) voices; strikingly, he deemed some to be *powerful*—German and Tartar (Tatar)¹ voices—and some to be *weak*—Chinese, Japanese, and also the colonized Indian voices. He guessed that the cause of such weakness might lie in the structure of the larynx, which he believed differed among peoples in the “pendency” of the epiglottis and the length of the vocal folds. In India, for example, he had learned from a secondary source that men were never basses or baritones (aural purveyors of masculinity), but always sang falsetto. This he attributed to a “pendant” and “curled under” epiglottis he supposed to cause a “loss, or rather absence, of physical power and strength in the entire inhabitants of the plains” (253). Non-European voices were characterized by unpleasant sounds he named “twang” or “whining”—notably, the hearing of “twang” as vocality has carried on and crossed the Atlantic, today often used as a race- and class-associated descriptor of American country music, an adjective that in five letters implies race, place, and status (whiteness, ruralness, and working-class). In Chinese and Japanese voices, the twang Gibb heard was “metallic,” but he could not be certain whether it was due to linguistic peculiarities or “a shallow formation of the larynx, approaching to that in the female sex” (245).

Here, Gibb’s Victorian attitudes about the embodied voice extend not only to racialized and geographical thinking but also the perception of gendered sounds. The superiority of European voices, for Gibb, depended in part upon a “good length of vibrating vocal cords” (258). We are aware today that adult fold length varies among individuals, and that it contributes to the cultural engendering of sound as male and female—the longer associated in Western discourse with male voices, and range depth associated with masculinity. And the conjunction of race and gender in Gibb’s description of Indian, Chinese and Japanese voices is not coincidental; the desexualization or feminization of the Asian male body in the Western imagination is today a well-theorized phenomenon (e.g. Sinha 1995, Cheng 1999, Espiritu 2008). Conversely, the Tatar voice, which he admired as powerful, is to him just as potent in women—he quoted renowned traveler Évariste R. Huc, echoing his assertion that rather than the “soft languishing physiognomy of the Chinese women, the Tartar woman presents in her bearing and manners a power and force well in accordance with her active life and nomad habits, and her attire augments the effect of her masculine, haughty mien” (quoted in Gibb 1870: 249²). Gibb’s views, derived from diverse sources including personal observations, the travelogues and communications of other authors, and his own study of the epiglottal characteristics of Englishmen, seem untenable today (and he acknowledged himself that he was opening the door to potential criticism), and his contemporaries did cast doubt on his methods in a response summary. They also critiqued

his theory: one disapproved of his failure to distinguish Germans from German Jews, who he believed “were distinct in the shape of the head, as well as in the character of their voice” (Gibb et al. 1869: lxiii). A Dr. Rowdon thought that there might be other anatomical differences outside of the larynx—“the nasal organs, for instance” (lxiv)—and a Mr. McGrigor Allan wished Gibb had praised further “the Negro, who had a most musical voice,—so musical, in deed, that a Negro could almost be distinguished by his voice alone” (lxiv).

In the postcolonial 21st century, we understand race as a construct, and we know that there is no scientific evidence of any morphological laryngeal or skeletal characteristics indicative of it. In her 2008 dissertation *Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance*, musicologist Nina Eidsheim discusses the continuing association of race and voice in classical music discourse, particularly in a multiculturalist United States, and provides an overview of scientific research that finds against the existence of any collective structural distinctions among the world’s voices (Eidsheim 2008: 32-33, see also Miller 2004: 220, Wilbur J. Gould in Rubinstein 1980). Eidsheim posits that, instead, the differences listeners hear in timbre are “based on the flexibility and possibility of the instrument, and the choices made” as to the vocal qualities emphasized (33). In other words, like race, vocality is perhaps best considered as a social construct. Nevertheless, a substantial body of scholarship and ethnographic work demonstrates the very real discursive persistence of vocality as a marker of identity and difference, among singers and listeners across identity groups.

Vocality and Identity

While marking difference often carries negative implications and effects, it is important to note that the idea of a sound with identity-specific meanings can serve as a source of pride, too. Country musician George Strait’s 2009 hit “Twang” went gold, and Tim McGraw’s manifesto of regional vocality “Southern Voice” started 2010 with a jump to first place on *Billboard’s* Hot Country Songs chart. In the sphere of opera—a genre with its own discursive associations of race and class—singers of color have walked a notoriously uphill road to the stage, accompanied along the way by the notion that their voices are racially distinct. Though this imaginedⁱⁱⁱ vocality often blocked the way, the meaning it has for black singers varies. In a 1991 interview in the NAACP’s magazine *The Crisis*, baritone Simon Estes and tenor George Shirley, both African American, affirmed their belief in the existence of a “special black timbre.” Author Carla Maria Verdino-Sullwold recounted that Shirley told her, “There is such a thing as a black voice, and it is a compliment to recognize it because black voices are generally warm and round—dusky in color.” (Verdino-Sullwold

1991: 14) In 2009, an interview I conducted with Marion Caffey, creator of the hit revues *Three Mo' Tenors* and *3 Mo' Divas*⁴, underlined for me the power of such ideas. I asked him if he thought there was such a thing as a “black voice.” “Yes. Of course,” he said, without hesitation, though he was less certain whether the source of difference was located in physiology or practice. But, he continued, reiterating his concerns about the underemployment of black opera singers, “I don’t see how it [the sound] becomes ‘right’ or ‘wrong’” (Interview, 4 November 2009).

In Western opera, the concept of a “black voice” is a loaded one that has followed African American, and to a degree other black singers, for decades, if not centuries. Nina Eidsheim pinpoints the idea’s inception at the moment of Marian Anderson’s 1955 debut at the Metropolitan Opera, and though descriptions of African American classical singers had tended to racialize their voices long before—consider Sissieretta Jones, called the “Black Patti” in contrast to the European-American opera star Adelina Patti—1955 is indeed a watershed time in the ideation of the “black voice.” It is nearly the precise moment when the nationalized commercial vocality in the U.S. began to shift from the operatically-tinged crooner to a sound overtly and explicitly informed by the vocal practices of gospel and the then-infant genre to be known as soul—it was at that time that Ray Charles transformed Harry Dixon Loes’ “This Little Light of Mine” into the secular hit “This Little Girl of Mine,” in one of his earliest endeavors to bring the musical energy of the church to the secular charts. As America’s old racialized culture of appropriation grew into the new and powerful business of rock ‘n’ roll, voices like Charles’ became a fulcrum upon which the possibility of a cross-racial market balanced. The vocality that he and his contemporaries helped to fix in the music industry’s consciousness—characterized by acoustically noisy (rough) timbres, extramusical shouts, and melisma—is pervasively evident and drawn upon across popular genres today.

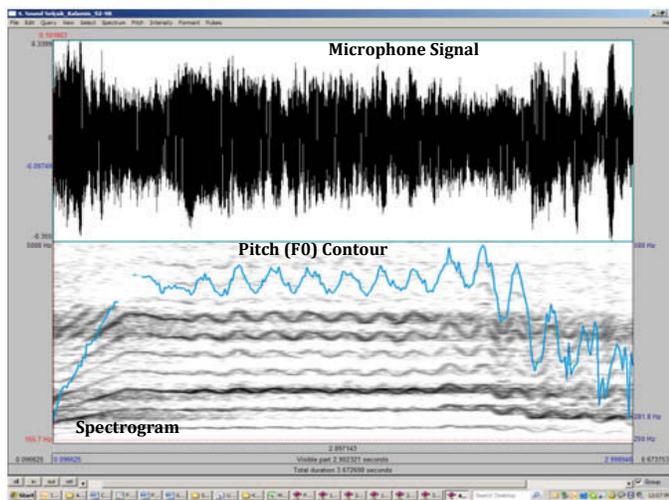
Vocality can also figure significantly in the negotiation of national cultural identity. As I have discussed elsewhere (Meizel 2011), the omnipresence of melismatic singing in U.S. popular music highlights the centrality of the “black voice” in the construction of 21st century American culture. It is not for nothing that Barthes includes “the coded form of the melisma” as a part of his pheno-song (Barthes: 182)—it holds a multitude of meanings, a multivocality, for those who sing and hear it. It is for some an embodied spirituality, a heightened mode of expression, even a symbol of black history. John Burdick recounts that a gospel singer he interviewed in Brazil heard the effects of American slavery in melisma, believing that it had developed as a way for slaves to exercise rhythmic skills when they were forbidden to play drums (Burdick 2009: 34).

Late 20th century and early 21st century performances of the U.S. national anthem have underlined the nationalized cultural weight placed on melismatic practices. While José Feliciano shocked the nation with his unorthodox and somewhat melismatic arrangement at the World Series in 1968, the trend began in earnest with a revolutionary soul-influenced rendition Marvin Gaye performed at the 1983 NBA All-Star game. For Mark Anthony Neal, Gaye’s “Star Spangled Banner” was a performance that “suggested that African-Americans had a right to ‘African-Americanize’ the composition, because of the price they paid for American democracy, while highlighting African-American music’s hegemony within American popular music and perhaps American popular culture” (Neal 1998:72).

The United States is not the only case in which vocality has factored in nation-building. In the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and the first of the Turkish Republic, for example, music was caught up in the complicated business of balancing a long, rich history of Ottoman culture and a fraught near-century of Westernizing reforms. Musical aesthetics and technique, vocabulary, historical perspective, and presentation all became contested sites in the early 20th century, and vocal style, John Morgan O’Connell has argued, “provided a locus for debating larger social and political issues” (O’Connell 2002: 781). Music was discursively divided into *alaturka*—representative of the Eastern in Turkish music—and *alaf-ranga*—aesthetically European style—with an increasing preference for the latter. Along the road to the 1923 establishment of the Republic, the debate led to a synthesized national style, *millî musiki*, that reimagined Turkish culture within the parameters of Western conventions. *Alaturka* was at times considered a foreign influence, due to its historical relationship with Arab music, and vocality was disparaged for its Eastern qualities, such as “chest register, guttural nasality, sobbing character, and amplitude,” as well as for its “intense melisma.” Even the lifestyle of *alaturka* singers was criticized as an unfortunate remainder (and reminder) of “Ottoman disorder” (782-3). As the new Republican government pushed music education and vocal instruction toward the adoption of Western conservatory methods, singers developed new ways of voicing Turkish culture. The celebrated Münir Nurettin Selçuk (ca. 1900-1981), for example, composed and performed music categorized as *alaturka* using *alaf-ranga* vocality, applying Western techniques, timbre, breath management, enunciation, and a certain amount (though O’Connell does not mention it) of vibrato, but keeping, to a restrained degree, the melisma and ornamentation associated with the Turkish musical system called *makam*. In his famous “Kalamış,” one of Selçuk’s many songs paying homage to a Turkish place (see Stokes 1997), his special blend of vocalities is especially apparent in acoustic terms.

In the spectrographic representation (using Praat) in

Ex. 1 below, a moment from Selçuk's 1945 recording of "Kalamış," we can see some aesthetic characteristics of Western classical vocality, and some that more typically correspond to Turkish vocal *makam* practice. The passage comes on the last syllable of the phrase "eski zamanlar" ("bygone times," literally "old times"). It is in a *makam*—a Turkish melodic mode with a set of characteristic practices—called *Nihavendî*, on the tonic D, and I've chosen this particular segment because in a monophonic performance by voice and instruments, it is a pause in which only the voice is heard. On the spectrogram, the thin, upper line traces the fundamental frequencies (F0s) sung, describing a 5.5-second passage entered through a slightly-portamentoed ascending octave leap; then the top F0 (the pitch A) is held for approximately 1.5 seconds with an even vibrato that measures 5.579 cycles per second—within the range of preferred rates in Western classical singing (Titze suggests that this range includes a qualified 4.5–6.5 Hz, and acknowledges that what is considered acceptable varies situationally and over time—in the first half of the 20th century, he writes, faster vibratos between 6.0 and 7.0 were common (Titze 2000: 325)). Then follows a brief shake or trill succeeded by an ornamented, mostly stepwise descent to G (the fourth degree of the *makam*). The spectrogram also highlights the formant areas, and it is plain that Selçuk employs the singer's formant (here outlined, at left, in the area of 2860 Hz.) so valued among vocalists trained in Western classical technique.



Ex. 1. Passage from Münir Nurettin Selçuk's "Kalamış." The top of the figure shows the microphone signal. The bottom figure shows a narrow band spectrum (black and grey lines) from 0 to 5,000 Hz (left vertical axis) and the fundamental frequency (F0) contour whose referent axis is the right vertical axis (with a range of 250 to 500 Hz). The F0 contour indicates an ascending portamento followed by vibrato on approximately A440, with a subsequent short trill and descent to approximately F4.

Through his carefully constructed Republican vocality, and his performances in recital format and Western concert dress, Selçuk both adapted and contributed to the establishment of a new national culture.

Concluding Thoughts

Its far-reaching significance in the formation of personal and cultural identity makes vocality a complex and often fraught idea. The notion of vocality as vowel quality broaches issues of language and difference; the position scholars have granted it between orality and literacy ties it to the processes of industrialization and ideas about class and race; the role of vocality in human relations raises questions about the voice and power. And thinking about vocalities in terms of nation, race, ethnicity, and gender brings up the very troubling danger of essentializing *the singer or speaker*. Patsy Rodenburg, in *The Right To Speak* (1992), argued against what she astutely called "vocal imperialism," and cautioned voice users about the risks of believing in "the sound of one right voice" (105). The discursive history we've seen in this essay highlights the very real connections between political and cultural imperialism and thinking about the voice, and at a historical moment when political scandals still arise over the perceived blackness of a presidential candidate's speech patterns⁶, it is clear that the voice remains an important site for the negotiation of power. When we investigate vocality, then, attention to cultural meaning is more urgent than ever, so that we hear the voice as integrated with the body, and the embodied voice as a crucial component in how we listen and speak to the world around us, to each other, and to ourselves.



Notes

1. Turkic peoples then largely inhabiting a swath of central and northern Asia, including today's Russia and neighboring states, and Manchuria in China. (While sometimes European sources conflate the Turkic and Mongol peoples of the region, Gibb does separate them in his assessment.) It is worth noting, also, that Gibb was praising the power of German voices on the eve of German unification (1871) and the establishment of the German empire.
2. It is unclear which edition of *Souvenirs d'un voyage dans la Tartarie, le Thibet, et la Chine pendant les années 1844, 1845 et 1846* Gibb was citing.
3. To be clear, I use "imagined" here not to mean "imaginary," but in a manner after Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1982) in the sense that it is invisible, intangible, and created through thinking.
4. *Three Mo' Tenors* has been performed by exclusively black casts; Caffey says that *3 Mo' Divas* has included other singers of color on occasion (Interview, 4 November 2009).
5. Many thanks to fellow ethnomusicologist Eric Ederer for his assistance in identifying *Nihavend*, and for explaining the nuances of the Turkish text.

6. In early 2010, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid came under fire for a comment recounted in the newly released book *Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime* (by John Helemann and Mark Halperin). Reid had told the authors two years before, as the nation followed perhaps the most racially fraught campaign in its history, that the public was "ready to embrace a black presidential candidate, especially one such as Obama – a 'light-skinned' African American 'with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one.'" Though some called for his resignation, Reid made apologetic phone calls to President Obama, to African American congressmen, and civil rights leaders, and the president declared, "the book is closed" (Cillizza 2010). Reid's faux-pas was heavily criticized for its focus on (shade-specific) skin color, for its unwelcome resuscitation of the loaded term "Negro," and for reinforcing the long-controversial idea of an identifiable and universal African American form of English.

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Voice and Speech Science, Vocal Health

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