Introduction

This is not a book about Monteverdi in the traditional sense. Instead, it is a book about the embodied female voices, real and imagined, through which his music circulated. It re-hears singing as an embodied activity and argues that when women sang they made themselves into unruly women: that is, women who break the rules and occupy the spaces between the lines. Unruly women do things with their bodies, consciously or not. Unruly women say no when they are meant to say yes, and yes when they are meant to say no. In the Renaissance women acquired their unruliness simply from their form. Their bodies – understood as inherently excessive, leaky, and oversexed – threatened those around them. Their mouths opened up the dark and scary abyss of their bodies, while long hair symbolized a freedom that society tried again and again to contain. Their minds moved toward ideas forbidden to their kind. And their voices expressed joy, sorrow, lust, and adventure, which not even restrictive clothes could hide. This is a book about the ways in which singing women – of the corporeal and fictitious varieties – embodied that unruliness. These women are not the kind of rebels seen today in the form of skimpily clad pop singers, of the quirky, unwieldy protagonists of Margaret Atwood's novels, or even of television heroines like Xena or Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Their unruliness worked at a much subtler level. It operated in a world where what one did on the outside of the body directly implicated the inside, and where women were not supposed to reveal their bare arms, dance, sing, or be overly merry. In this world the voice could be a woman's most potent possession. As such, Monteverdi did not need to make his women misbehave. That they did themselves.

The book attempts to re-hear the female voice through the music of Monteverdi. Though Monteverdi's music makes the same demands on singers who perform his music today as it did for singers four hundred years ago, the experience of that voice depended on a set of truths about the gendered body and its inner workings that diverges from modern sensibilities. An exceedingly malleable instrument, the human voice varies according to anatomy, taste, time, and place, and thus, like the body from which it emerges, it is anything but essential. Furthermore, at the end of the Italian Renaissance the voice must have been experienced

in ways unimaginable to us since it came from a very different elemental body, one imagined as a small but fiery corpus in which hearts and veins pumped the same vital spirits as the universe and in which there existed no natural separation between inner and outer states. Taking the body as the medium through which music was experienced suggests that musical practice was one of the key ways in which early modern singers and listeners inhabited their bodies.

Monteverdi's madrigals and music dramas written between 1600 and 1640 serve as textual and performative accounts of the musical and cultural production of the voice in early modern Italy. My story about gender and the body revolves around the music of Monteverdi and thus shifts the balance of power away from the composer as an omnipotent entity. I chose Monteverdi both because he is *the* riveting musical personality of his generation and because he serves as a representative of musical culture and the forces with which it interacted. In other words, Monteverdi is certainly special, but not so special that he fails to exemplify the world in which he lived. Straddling the Renaissance and what we tentatively call the Modern so precariously that scholars have touted him as the last gasp of the Renaissance and the father of modern music, his compositions bring into relief points of tension in a rapidly changing culture. Though many scholars have made good use of the composer's prolific and self-conscious prose to expound upon musical culture, few have considered his music in the context of ideas about sense and body. Given that my approach to the music moves in a different direction than that of most musicologists, I hope that focusing on a composer about whom scholars care deeply will help to ground my arguments within a musicological tradition.

This book contributes to and interrogates two distinct literatures: it adds sound to a well-established industry of scholarship devoted to gender and the body in early modern Europe, and it brings an increased engagement with medical and literary representations of the female body to the growing field of scholarship treating gender and music. By accounting for the sonic dynamism of individual female voices in specific sung performances, rather than just reading metaphors of voice, I diverge from scholars of social and literary history who often depict early modern culture as a world of silenced women and creative men. To be sure, social mores in the decades around 1600 demanded tacit women whose quieted voices supposedly reflected their chastity and distanced them from inappropriate eroticism. But music from that time regularly depended upon and displayed trained women's voices. This paradox inflected musical productions with tantalizing contradictions that situated both women's bodies and sonorous expression precariously between harmless pleasure and threatening excess. It also created a space in which women could, through singing, seize power. Just as

neglecting the intoxicating sounds of early modern women limits the methods of literary scholars and historians, so too has musicology's frequent tendency to sever canonic works from their ideological contexts constrained the discipline's interpretive scope.

By bringing sound to literary models and context to musicological models, I bring new perspective to several well-studied pieces. For instance, Monteverdi's final piece for the gargantuan 1608 wedding festivities in Mantua, *Il ballo delle ingrate*, which ends with a solo *ingrata* bemoaning her sentence to the dark and fiery underworld where she never again will have an individual voice, is easily read as a mechanism for disciplining the female voice. However, because vocalist Virginia Ramponi animated that song through her powerful performance, the means of delivering the message exceeded the message itself. Even though the *ingrata* ends up in hell, Ramponi's song defied social injunctions to silence. As for *L'Arianna*, musicologists have sought to prove the musical genius of its final lament by citing court chroniclers who proclaimed that at its conclusion, "there was not one lady who failed to shed a tear."[1] But since the ladies supposedly cried in response to most early modern dramatic productions, this statement reflects neither an actual flood of tears nor the genius of the lament. Instead, it reinscribes a gendered discourse that imagined women as "leaky vessels" whose excess fluids rendered them inherently incontinent, unruly, and lascivious. Such an interpretation depends on the reading of different discursive systems against one another and the juxtaposition of dramatic and lyric representations with other facets of social life.

Let me stress from the beginning that I have not chosen to isolate real living women composers, characters, or historical subjects. My interest in the female voice and the bodies from which it emanated, as well as the ways that gender difference was figured, necessitates moving freely between traces of real embodied women, imaginary and idealized women, male fantasies of women, and female characters – categories that are radically contingent on one another. For instance male fantasies enabled and circumscribed the lives and sounds of women who sang, while female performers stimulated those fantasies.

Real women exist for us as represented by male writers and serve as entrées into larger issues. Two young women of whom we know very little – Caterina Martinelli and Margherita of Savoy – serve as examples and were each unruly in their own way: Caterina because she sang, and Margherita because she was sung to. The Roman prodigy Caterina Martinelli, known as La Romana, would have sung the title role of Monteverdi's *L'Arianna* at the Mantuan Court but for her death

[1] As translated in Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, trans. Tim Carter. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.

from smallpox shortly before the first performance. Before the Duke of Mantua would let her even rehearse at his court, he forced her to endure a virginity test. She was thirteen. Caterina's mandated virginity test brings to the fore the early modern connections between acting vocally and acting sexually for women – an entanglement that implies something zestier than the Neoplatonic non-fulfillment and spiritual arousal generally associated with performances of Monteverdi's Petrarchan madrigals. Teasing out these connections inspires a very detailed exploration of contemporaneous accounts of female anatomy and brings together fragments of evidence often overlooked by modern scholars. For example, statements by Renaissance medical practitioners espoused the ancient belief that a woman's voice changes when she has intercourse because "her upper neck responds in sympathy to her lower neck."[2]

The slightly older Margherita of Savoy, aged eighteen, attended the production of *L'Arianna* during the spectacles written to honor her wedding to Francesco Gonzaga in 1608. These spectacles staged a stream of violated, punished women, including a ballet in which her groom dressed as one of a group of women eternally condemned to the smoky infernos of the underworld. In that role, he danced in and out of the gaping mouth of hell while Mantuans and visiting dignitaries from all over Europe gazed upon his young bride. The productions centered around her nuptials emphasized clashes between representations of women in music dramas and conduct books and the female singers who envoiced them.

This focus on women could seem to perpetuate the very structures of difference it aims to illuminate by recreating fictions of femaleness, rehearsing traditional notions of sexual difference, and disempowering women through the act of figuring them only as subjects of patriarchal control. Keeping these methodological problems in mind, I move toward an examination of the ways that gendered bodies were produced and deployed in early modern Italy, and the ways that music-making worked to reinforce and challenge ideologies of difference. Rather than suggesting that anatomy means everything, in the pages that follow biological difference stands as something that translates into social distinctions, behavioral codes, and institutional forces.

A focus on women also raises the question of men's voices. Were they sexual? Were they threatening? At the simplest level I might say that this book does not address men's voices directly, and that such a fascinating project is sorely needed. At the next level, the book does argue for an inextricable connection between music, love, and women. As Linda

[2] As quoted from Hippocratic gynecology in Ann Hanson and David Armstrong's "The Virgin's Voice and Neck: Aeschylus, Agamemnon 245 and Other Texts," *British Institute of Classical Studies* 33 (1986): 99.

Austern has argued, associations between music and femininity could threaten the masculinity of those who performed it.[3] In his famous *Il cortegiano*, Castiglione's interlocutor Gaspare insisted that "music, like so many other vanities, is most certainly very suited to women, and perhaps also to some of those who have the appearance of men, but not to real men who should not indulge in pleasures which render their minds effeminate and so cause them to fear death."[4]

At the deepest and most important level, the question of men forces the issue of difference, which lies at the very center of this endeavor. In the early modern period women served as sites around which sexual difference circulated. Masculine identity existed in relation to the fantasy of difference – an abstraction used to denote women's marginality and to create a marked space that existed apart from the male universal. That women were imagined as always threatening to exceed boundaries made it especially crucial for men to constantly reinforce limits placed upon them.

The sexualization of the female voice emerged from the sexualization of their bodies, which meant that male voices were less contentious and less eroticized than their female counterparts. Particular understandings of women's bodies, grounded in reigning scientific and medical philosophies, implicated their singing in ways that did not affect men. The body parts that made singing possible – mouths, lips, tongues, and throats – were imagined differently when attached to women. For instance, early modern associations of mouths and wombs related women's singing to a sexually productive part that men lacked. Similarly women's bodies, imagined as colder and leakier then men's, were necessarily affected in their own special way by the temperature-altering and fluid-exuding act of singing. In men, on the contrary, voice was associated with virility.[5] The Paduan doctor Giulio Casseri directly associates voice and power, suggesting that a man needs the appropriate tone and pitch to command domestic power.[6]

These physical differences play out in accounts of listening. Responses to male singers reflect the belief that music could, in the proper hands

[3] Linda Phyllis Austern, "Alluring the Auditorie to Effeminacie: Music and The Idea of The Feminine in Early Modern England," *Music and Letters* 74 (1993): 343–354.

[4] Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, ed. Giulio Carnazzi (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1987).

[5] Valeria Finucci discusses the associations of virility, semen, and voice in *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Her book appeared too late for me to fully digest in time for the publication of my study, but she cites the Venetian traveler Nicolò di Conti's account of ritual in which men enact their newly achieved manhood by making their penises literally sing through the attachment of gold, silver, and copper bells.

[6] Giulio Casseri, "The Larynx, Organ of the Voice," trans. Malcolm Hast and Erling Holtsmark (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1969), 15.

(and mouths), educate with delight, whereas responses to female singers tend to show the dangers of music exuding from the wrong mouths. In effect, this contrast inverts the eye of the beholder. Women's singing reflected their natural tendency toward the lascivious, while their essential inability to control themselves made it impossible to trust them with such a powerful instrument as song. Because women's voices, like their bodies, existed on the contested margins, men's voices came under less scrutiny and received less adulation: correspondingly, descriptions of them tend to traffic in much tamer adjectives. The best poets serenaded in verse the best female singers, lavishing upon them conventional but effusive adjectives, while men seldom received such double-edged honor. The power ascribed to male voices related to an imagined orphic rhetorical fluency, which was distinct from ravishing pleasure. Their praise reflected the humanist celebration of rhetorical persuasion and elegance and the sense of these skills as the distinguishing features of poets, courtiers and politicians.

Marco da Gagliano explains the experience of listening to Jacopo Peri, a renowned tenor and composer of *L'Euridice*, writing that he "gave them such grace and style that he so impressed in others the emotion of the words that one was forced to weep or rejoice as the singer wished."[7] Similarly, descriptions of the Florentine tenor Francesco Rasi, who played the title role in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, tend to stay within the realm of Neoplatonic adoration, as in the claim that he "who to the harp made the woods echo with celestial harmony."[8] Even castrati had not yet reached the pyrotechnical heights that would eventually lead to overzealous descriptions of their virtuosity. Expressing his satisfaction with the castrato Giovanni Gualberto, who sang in the first performance of *L'Orfeo*, Francesco Gonzaga wrote that, "he has done very well and given immense pleasure to all who have heard him sing . . ."[9] Such a bland description contrasts markedly with the exuberance that pervades descriptions of women, which will be the focus of the fourth chapter of this book.

Each of the book's five chapters uses a piece or group of pieces to illuminate issues surrounding the female voice at the turn of the seventeenth century. Embodied readings take musical compositions as performances constituted by a constellation of discourses, not tacit texts. Though each chapter explores different contexts for the voice, they all circle around

[7] As cited in Carol MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 189.
[8] Warren Kirkendale, *The Court Musicians in Florence During the Principate of the Medici* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993), 571.
[9] As cited in John Whenham's *Claudio Monteverdi, Orfeo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 170.

issues of agency, erotics, and body. They also face the challenge of simultaneously doing cultural work and accounting for the music. I have resisted claiming a direct one-to-one correspondence between specific musical gestures and larger ideological issues, but like many scholars exploring these issues, I have not, I am sure, found an ideal solution to the problem. The book, then, asks how to approach this challenge but does not propose a codified method for it. I use analysis sparingly as a mechanism for exploring sonorous moments that open up questions about cultural issues. In an attempt to think through the experience of the music, I have tended to avoid discussing architectural elements of the music, even though they are clearly germane to the production and composition of the pieces.

A book that uses Monteverdi's music to illuminate widespread phenomena must confront the relationship between changes in his musical style and structures of knowledge. As other scholars have already discussed, Monteverdi composed during a pivotal shift in European sensibilities and epistemologies. His involvement in new solo-voiced genres, public opera, and abstract tonal systems have led scholars to characterize his music as moving from what Foucault called an epistemology of resemblance to one of representation, a move that reflects the emergence of new world views that were ultimately capstoned by Descartes. By relating issues of female vocality and the physicality of song to shifts that have been understood in largely metaphysical terms, this book explores what those important changes meant for women, real and represented, and particularly for the subversive potential of their voices.

The first chapter, devoted to vocal anatomies, opens up a space for a unique engagement with early modern music by recovering the materiality of the human voice and its imagined organic relation to bodily processes. The chapter begins with a reading of "O come sei gentile," a soprano duet from Monteverdi's seventh book of madrigals, as a textual and performative account of the voice. It then examines the philosophical, medical, and literary contexts for the corporeal rhetorics embedded in early modern singing treatises by Camillo Maffei, Giulio Caccini, and others. Understood in early modern Italy as a kinesthetic entity with a physical substance, the voice consisted of vibrating air that flowed through the throat of the singer into the vulnerable ear of the listener, where it was thought to work with essential animating spirits composed of air and heat that coursed through the body. This theory reflected the continued dominance of humoral understandings of the voice first put forth by Aristotle and Galen. These treatises presented virtuosic embellishments such as ornaments, which manipulated throat, tongue, and breath, as processes that physically disciplined singers in a manner similar to vocal compositions and descriptions of singers.

The second chapter moves from the material voice to musico-dramatic and literary representations of the female voice and the complicated matrix of agency and constraint in which it was embedded. I examine Monteverdi and Rinuccini's *Il ballo delle ingrate* and *L'Arianna* in light of the recent scholarly tendency to portray early modern culture as an opposition between female silence and male creative expression. Rendering this dichotomy more dynamic, these pieces reveal resistant voices whose performances enacted early modern struggles over the female voice – struggles in which constraints were defied and then redoubled. On and off the stage, women continually asserted the unsettling force of their voices, despite the attempts of discursive and social systems to mold them into passive and closed-mouthed projections of patriarchal ideals. In contrast to literary, artistic, and philosophical representations, these women were not quiet, chaste, and absent. Moreover, then as now, real women rarely acted quite like the ideal figures described and prescribed by patriarchal discourses.

Bringing to the fore the erotic potential of song around which the first two chapters circled, the third explores the libidinal economy of sung performances through an examination of selections from Monteverdi's fourth book of madrigals (1603). The pieces in this collection sing of desire, but mostly of its unfulfillment. The sexual buildup of "Sì ch'io vorei morire" and the spiritual climax of "Cor mio, mentre vi miro" enact an experience that encompasses the spiritual Neoplatonic love immortalized by Petrarch and the *trattati d'amore*, as well as the corporeal voices that stand in complex relation to it. Within this collection, the textual and musical excesses of "Sì ch'io vorei morire" present physical pleasure so graphically that it resembles the works of the sixteenth-century erotic satirist Pietro Aretino. I argue, however, that the piece is anomalous only in degree, not in kind. While poetry and philosophical writings could separate virtuous from vulgar love, sung performance propelled bodily motions homologous to the sensations underlying sex and spiritual love.

The fourth chapter moves from the erotics of song to the desire and fantasy that it inspires. It takes as a starting point the continuo madrigal "Mentre vaga Angioletta" (1638), in which two tenors enact Guarini's 1582 lyric description of an erotic encounter between a seductive female singer and her admirer. Imbuing the words with the sensuality of song, the music propels the performers through a dizzying course of passaggi, gorgia, diminutions, and other flourishes popular at the turn of the seventeenth century. Reflecting connected discourses – literary, social, musical, and medical – this piece imagines the ravishing female voice as dangerously alluring. In effect, "Mentre vaga Angioletta" uses male singing voices to animate a poem that rationally analyzes the female voice, presenting virtuosic song as a series of effects and sensations

working on the male lover/listener. At the same time, it partakes of a dismembering and controlling manipulation of the female voice that resonates with medical dissections, early modern singing treatises, descriptions of singing virtuose, and Petrarchan blazons.

The fifth chapter broadens the focus from specific pieces to an inquiry into shifting ways of knowing, one that brings together the diverse issues touched upon in the previous case studies. It relates gender to the experience of song in general, and thus insists that a book about gender is necessarily a book about larger cultural issues – in other words, gender does not exist in a vacuum. I read musical and scientific discourses against each other in order to illuminate the ways in which the experiences of singing and listening changed during the seventeenth century. For example, the discovery by astronomers that the universe was not held together by the music of the spheres rendered untenable the notion of music as a microcosm of the universe's divine harmony. And the shift from a conception of the body as a vessel that depended on the maintenance of an appropriate balance of humors and temperament to theories of the circulatory system undermined notions of song as a material force that helped keep the body in motion.

The book closes with an epilogue devoted to conceptions of the female voice and body at the end of Monteverdi's career. I juxtapose two pivotal characters: Clorinda, Tasso's virginal heroine to whom Monteverdi gave voice in the *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, and the luscious Poppea of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. An unlikely pair, these female figures can be read as an axis around which orders of knowledge rotated during the seventeenth century, and they exemplify the representations and enactments of voice that fill the pages of this book.

In writing this book I have used my students as muses not just because many of them helped me work through the ideas contained here, but because the challenge of making the early modern world accessible to them has kept me historically honest and challenged. Having come of age with a generation that finds Madonna's lace bra feminism passé, my students always doubt me when I try to convince them that the women who sang Monteverdi's madrigals and music dramas also transgressed social boundaries. They find it unimaginable that ladies who had to cover even their naked arms and whose music trafficked in a noise level several decibels below most sounds familiar to them used their voices and bodies in ways that caused trouble. They inhabit a world where female musicians assault the senses. The assault on the senses by Monteverdi's unruly women did something even more visceral and more body-altering than what most of us experience today.

1

Vocal anatomies: mouths, breath, and throats in early modern Italy

Breath, throats, tongues, lungs, and chests comprise the stuff of the voice. From our twenty-first-century vantage point, we can see that the rush of air from the lungs as a singer exhales causes the vocal cords to vibrate. The long and thick male cords produce low pitches, while the short thin female cords produce high pitches. Thanks to the singer Manuel García, who, seeking the causes of a cracked voice, plunged a dentist's mirror down his own throat in 1854, doctors or anyone with enough nerve and either a mirror or a good web browser can look at their vocal cords.[1] In early modern Italy, the understanding and hence the experience of the voice was different, conditioned by a set of truths about the gendered body and its inner workings that diverge from modern sensibilities. A kinesthetic entity with physical substance, the early modern voice was imagined to be vibrating air that flowed through the throat of the singer into the vulnerable ear of the listener. In keeping with Galenic and Aristotelian notions of the body, the voice – a physical substance – was understood to work with essential spirits composed of the air and heat that kept living things alive.

Today, however, it is impossible to escape completely our post-Renaissance, post-MRI sense of anatomy and enter the heads of early modern listeners. We are left with only traces of an experience that must have been stunningly powerful. Theirs was a world where laments that to us sound almost recitative-like made ladies cry, and the sound of a low bass voice could send shivers through even the bravest soldiers. The effects of close parallel thirds derived from the erotic friction that led to sexual reproduction could manifest themselves in body parts, words, or sounds. When women did fantastic things with their mouths and throats, they did so in a world that imagined the uterus as a closed mouth and tested a woman's fertility by sitting her over potent garlic and checking the smell of her breath.

[1] Manuel García, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, trans. L. J. Rondeleux (Geneva: Minkoff, 1985).