Introduction to the Special Issue

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"For you, it comes from me. For me, it goes out from me" writes Steven Connor dealing with the phenomenon of dissociated voice in Ventriloquism (Connor 2000: 3). Nevertheless, this coming and going may be considered one of the most fascinating features of vocal expression by and large. Whether speaking or singing, the voice we produce and perceive is constantly coming and going, carrying different kinds of meaning at the same time (linguistic, neurologic and so on) and even creating new ones. But the voice is not only a meaning-delivery medium, because its sound has a value of its own which is strongly connected to the body. Moreover, some aspects of vocal sound like timbre, may allow each individual to express their identity in a more effective way than language, so the voice becomes "a technology of selfhood" (Eidsheim 2008). Therefore vocal expression may be considered as a polyhedral element in constant motion whose faces are full of meaning, but whose entire form is no less expressive. Researching the voice means taking into account not only the meanings of polyhedron's faces, but also the whole body.

How should we research on the vocal expression in music? How shall we enter a realm where the relationship between sound and meaning is such a complex one? How shall we deal with the philosophical and historical aspects of vocal performance? How can we then examine the connections between the singing voice, the body and gendering the opera? How shall we go about and study the reconstruction of early vocal performances in today's context? And what about the anthropological aspects of the voice in the context of mediatization? These questions are just the starting point of this dossier, whose essays and contributions aim to illustrate the polyhedral nature of the singing voice through different methodological approaches: from philosophy to historical musicology, including ethnomusicological perspective.

The contributions in this dossier are not meant to offer a full-scale 'State of the Art' about voice studies –a domain that has experienced a striking increase over the last decades–[1] but mere to touch on some specific vocal practices linked with crucial moments in the history of Western music, that is, the philosophical dimension of singing voice in the Ancient Greek world; the oral traditions in the Ars Antiqua repertoires; the image of castrati singers in the contemporary stage, the voice in the nineteen century French and English melodrama; and the role of recording technologies in the ethnomusicological fieldwork on vocal practices. The above mentioned case-studies deal with some of the most essential issues in the research of voice: the relation between voice, body and space; the problem of the disembodied voice; the influence of modern imaginary in the reconstruction of a historical vocal style, and the complex rapport between vocal practices and technology.

The dossier opens with a philosophical reflection by Carlo Serra, who addresses the relation between voice, body and place in the ancient Greek world. This text invites us to reflect on the complex conception of vocalic sound in the Ancient world through the review of classic writings like the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Phedrus* and the *Harmonics*. The voice's ability to fulfil the entire space around it and the way it expresses the subject's identity and corporeal subjectivity are some of the topics addressed throughout this research.

Papers by Davide Daolmi, Livio Giuliano and Bianca De Mario deal with the modern interpretation of early music vocal performance practices, a complex issue that brings to mind the Arab proverb made famous by the French historian Marc Bloch "Men resemble their times more than they do their fathers" (Bloch 1962 [1954], 29). In fact, the modernity of "authentic" early music performance has been the subject of an ongoing debate, particularly during the last century (see Kenyon 1988; Taruskin 1995; Butt 2002). Davide Daolmi surveys the problem of unwritten

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[1] Researches on voice in the field of Humanities cover a wide range of disciplines such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, orality studies, cultural studies, musicology and ethnomusicology among many others. A brief bibliography on voice studies is available in the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) blog http://semvoicestudies.wordpress.com/bibliography/

traditions in Notre Dame School of polyphony, highlighting some historical misunderstandings, while Livio Giuliano examines the many ways in which the modern imaginary has influenced the reconstruction of Ars Antiqua vocal practices during the 20th century. On the other hand, Bianca De Mario explores the modern rendition of castrato singer in the contemporary stages of seventh and eighteenth century Italian opera, analyzing how the historical and complex relation between body and voice is currently interpreted.

What happened when voice and body did not seem to match properly? In that case, the phenomenon of "disembodied voice" has to be dealt with. A voice detached from the body is an issue that has been discussed from the psychoanalical approach to cultural history (see Connor 2000; Laagay 2008). Emilio Sala addresses this problem in his survey about the French melodrama *Les frères corses*, pinpointing its dramaturgical consequences and showing its bonds with early cinema's effects.

Technology is another important concept in the study of vocal traditions, particularly in the sphere of ethnomusicology. Considered as produced by human consciousness —as pointed out by Walter Ong (1982) — technologies are not only the result of electronic and digital innovations, but they are present also in orality (see Couch 1989). Scaldaferri points out that the interplay between oral technologies, such as the versification system and recording technologies gives rise to a complex network of relationships that need to be taken in consideration in the current ethnomusicological research.

It is our hope that the case studies and ideas presented in this dossier will provide the reader with an array of conceptual tools to be used in the study of vocal practices in different domains.

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