

To Speak Is to Sing

Melodrama, *Lulu*, and the power of the spoken voice in opera

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Throughout my formative music education, I never much cared for opera. One of my most frequent complaints was (and, to some extent, remains to this day): Why does *everything* need to be sung? Surely not every line of dialogue is important enough to be set to pitch; surely it undercuts the emotional weight of a character's singing about the death of their lover if they also sing about what they ate for breakfast. In other words, if singing is the norm, what significance is song at all? Why not watch a theatre play where one can at least understand what is being said?

Of course, not everything is sung in every opera—comic opera offers a welcome reprieve, for instance—but even in lighter forms of opera, where spoken interludes often take the place of busy recitatives, an outsider to the genre may still notice the composer's nearly neurotic obsession with ensuring that, as long as a single string is vibrating in the orchestra pit, every sound that comes out of a character's mouth is arbitrarily tuned to one of the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale. To those who have grown up in Western musical culture, this habit is normal; objectively, however, it is anything but normal. One must ask: How did we get here? Why did operatic composers before the 20th century so vehemently avoid mixing unpitched speech and music? And then, when we finally began to let speech and song freely mingle—so much so that they bred *Sprechstimme*—what was it that changed our minds?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we will trace the spoken word—and the rhetoric surrounding it—from the earliest days of opera, to the innovations of Schoenberg, to the ultimate liberation of the unpitched voice in Alban Berg's *Lulu*. We will see how early expressionism, the 18th-century melodrama, and the 400-year-old pursuit to capture the natural cadence of speech in song all converge at the turn of the 20th century to usher in a new, intimately human mode of artistic expression.

“Di cosa mezzana”

The earliest operatic experiments, famously born out of the labours of the so-called Florentine Camerata, were undertaken with intense concern for the relationship between song and speech—specifically, theatrical declamation, itself a form of heightened speech. However, as noted by Leopold (25), Peri’s *Euridice* (1600) was not so much a Neanderthal ancestor of opera as it was a cousin of commedia dell’arte; this was, after all, an effort to reconstruct an ancient Greek art form, not invent an entirely new one, and Peri’s vision seemed to be more about colouring stage drama with music than it was about creating a musical drama. The result, what Leopold calls an “almost toneless declamation” (“ein[e] fast tonlos[e] Deklamation”), is something that has a stronger ideological link to 18th-century melodrama than it does to Verdi or Wagner. It was not until Monteverdi’s *l’Orfeo* (1609) that we see a work in the early operatic style where “the music gains influence on the dramatic design—and not vice versa, as with Peri or Caccini, in whose work the dramatic declamation was to determine the music.” (“...wie die Musik auf die dramatische Gestaltung Einfluss gewinnt—und nicht umgekehrt, wie bei Peri oder Caccini, bei denen die dramatische Deklamation die Musik bestimmen sollte.”) In contrast with Peri, whose arias meander stepwise and rarely stray outside the contour of the speaking voice (*Aria: Selvaggia Diva*), it is Monteverdi who infuses his setting with word-painting, dramatic intervallic leaps, and striking juxtapositions of harmonies, much of which probably ran counter to Peri’s vision of “a music which, going beyond ordinary speech, remained so far below the melody of singing that it took the form of a middle thing” (“...un’armonia, che avanzando quella del parlare ordinario, scendesse tanto dalla melodia del cantare che pigliasse forma di cosa mezzana”) (Solerti 46). What this ultimately suggests is that, even in the neonatal stages of Western opera, there was a discernable separation between text settings driven by the natural

declamation of text (i.e., Peri) and settings whose artificial musical form and gesture—although informed by the text—takes precedence over the naturalness of the text’s delivery (i.e., Monteverdi). The latter sowed the seeds for all the trappings of classical opera that Gluck would eventually criticize (Strunk and Treitler 99–101) for being self-indulgent at the expense of narrative drama: burdensome ritornellos, obfuscating melismas, disruptive cadenzas, and other conventional obligations that had little to do with the subject of the text being sung. While the former style would live on healthily in the operatic recitative for the next two hundred years at least, its ultimate realization would not be ushered in until the 20th century, by the hand of Schoenberg—that is, a self-sustained music whose expressive power is derived not from arbitrary musical forms but from the unadorned speaking voice.

Before approaching the likes of *Pierrot* with this point of view, however, one must first consider where the speaking voice lived during the three centuries following Peri. For the most part (especially during the 17th and 18th centuries), it was kept out of “serious” opera in its unadorned form—likely for the sake of opera maintaining independence not only from the genre of spoken theatre, but also from the “lower” (popular) classes of music: opéra comique, opera buffa, Singspiels, and so on. Its spirit was not, of course, entirely lost to “high” opera, but simply decked in the pretensions of declamatory recitative (as in Peri). Just as a Singspiel (or a modern Broadway musical, for that matter) may interrupt the heightened, internal drama of song with a spoken theatrical interlude to process external action, so would the most *seria* opera seria employ a musically uninteresting recitative to swiftly move through the narrative of the libretto.

Although their aesthetics and means of expression differ vastly, the two—the recitative and the spoken interlude—are functionally identical within their contexts: both serve to propel plot and both belong to a sound world driven primarily by the natural cadence of speech and only

secondarily by musical expression (if at all, in the context of unaccompanied spoken scenes). Consequently, we can observe that, even though the speaking voice is far from alien to the operatic stage before the 20th century—whether unadorned or dressed up as a recitative—it separates from its more musical surroundings like oil from water. Certainly before Wagner, it is almost always painfully clear where song ends and recitative or spoken interlude begins; trite cadences demarcate each set piece in a way that the soloist onstage might as well announce, “I have finished my aria and now I am going to begin a recitative,” or vice versa. Even in Wagner, the scaffolding of this framework is still audible, albeit faintly—an achievement made in part by the fact that Wagner’s recitatives tend more towards the singing end of the speech-song spectrum, rather than the other way around, as we will soon see in Debussy.

“Déclamation épurée”

Although the recitative-aria dichotomy begins to crumble well before the turn of the 20th century, *Pelleas et Melisande* (1902) marks its complete, intentional disintegration. The reason for this is clear and highly relevant to our topic: from beginning to end, the text setting is like an unbroken recitative, where, as Pasler notes, “[Melisande’s] vocal lines remain as close as possible to actual speech, following the flux of feelings in the moment and keeping any lyrical expression to an absolute minimum” (62) (although almost the same can be said for every other character in the opera). Additionally, owing to Debussy’s nonfunctional tonal language, vocal lines have little obligation to adhere to any harmonic plan and seem to simply flow in whatever direction the characters’ passions take them. Lydia Goehr describes this effect as Debussy’s “mov[ing] musically from exterior to interior” in order “to give way to the dramatic power of the voice” (62) This was an intrinsic part of Debussy’s revolution against Wagnernism—a

fundamentally nationalistic revolution that sought to counter extroverted German grandeur and excess with introverted French grace and subtlety. Contemporary French critics conjured up the notion of “déclamation épurée” to describe “declamation without ornament, refined, sober, expressive, and true” (Pasler 62). In other words, to the anti-Wagnerian French of the *fin de siècle*, there was artistic virtue in a style singing that eschewed vain ornamentation and musical formalism in favour of a perceived “purity.”

Purity of *what*, though? Should we infer that, if the dialogue of *Pelleas* were to be spoken instead of sung throughout, such an “opera” would have been a more effective realization of Debussy’s intentions? Of course not, and the reason is the same as for why Sprechstimme could not have emerged before the innovations of Schoenberg: the matter of tonality.

Natural speech is not *toneless*, but *atonal*. The declamation of a good stage actor (Sarah Bernhardt’s recordings, as Leopold points out, are a prime example [28])—or of an effective master of ceremonies, or of a person in the midst of impassioned conversation, or of anyone trying to speak clearly and firmly—can nearly be transcribed as pitches on a staff; albeit that, because people’s bodies are not tuned to Ab major or C# minor (or equally tempered, for that matter), such pitches are close to random and change too quickly to be used as tonal musical material. One could be facetious and conclude, therefore, that the truest French notion of “déclamation épurée” is Schoenbergian atonality, but this is not the case any more than Peri tried to inject dodecaphony into *Euridice*. *Pelleas*’ unravelling of opera’s formal seams may have allowed for the spirit of the recitative—of speech-driven singing—to flow freely into every aspect of his text setting, but what it could still not allow was the flow of unadorned speech into singing—of unorganized pitches into organized pitches.

“Deklamierte Opera”

There is one last genre that demands scrutiny before any discussion can be had about 20th-century operatic speech: the 18th-century melodrama, the mostly neglected bastard child of opera and spoken theatre. In most historical accounts of the genre, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* (1762), is credited as being one of the first, if not *the* first, of its kind—that is, a spoken and possibly pantomimed stage act accompanied by music—written, ironically, because Rousseau believed that “the French language, destitute of all accent, is not at all appropriate for music” (497). The next major masterpieces of the genre are usually identified as Georg Benda’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1775) and *Medea* (1778), whose success and influence can be gauged alone by the fact that Mozart wrote about finding them “truly admirable” (“wahrhaft fürtrefflich”) and “lov(ing) them so much” that he “travelled with them” (“ich liebe diese zwei wercke so, daß ich sie bei mir führe”) (*Wolfgang Amadé Mozart an Leopold Mozart, No. 504 [Bd. 2, S. 505-507]*). It’s no surprise, then, that Mozart went on to include two extended melodramatic scenes in his Singspiel *Zaide*, and even enthusiastically began to write (but never completed) his own melodrama, *Semiramis*, on poetry by Herr von Gemmingen—a project he interestingly referred to as a “deklamierte Opera” (“declamatory/declaimed opera”) (*No. 508 [Bd. 2, S. 516-517]*). He went as far as to opine that “one should treat most of the recitatives in the opera this way – and only occasionally, when the words can be expressed well in the music, sing the recitative” (“...man solle die meisten Recitativ auf solche art in der opera tractiren – und nur bisweilen, wen die wörter gut in der Musick auszudrücken sind, das Recitativ singen”) (*No. 504 [Bd. 2, S. 505-507]*). Maybe the question as to whether *Pelleas* should be spoken instead of sung would have not been so facetious to Mozart.

The melodramatic craze spread well into the 19th century, with representative works by Schubert (*Die Zauberharfe*, D. 644 [1820] and *Abschied von der Erde*, D. 829 [1826]), Schumann (*Manfred*, op. 115 [1848]), and Strauss (*Enoch Arden*, Op. 38 [1897]). Opera was not spared: Beethoven famously injected melodrama into *Fidelio* (1805-1814) with its grave-digging scene; Weber in *Der Freischutz* (1821) with the Wolf's Glen scene; Verdi in *La traviata* (1852) with Violetta's recitation of Alfredo's father's letter. This is not even to mention the slew of examples in comic operas by the likes of Offenbach and Gilbert and Sullivan. The point being made by singling out the works above is that the unadorned speaking voice apparently found favour as an expressive accessory to "serious" music by "serious" composers.

The question remains, however, whether the majority of these composers even saw the unadorned voice as being a component of the music at all, when used in the context of a melodrama. Mozart likely did, given his opinion that "most recitatives" should be treated this way. (Note that he says this knowing full well that spoken dialogue in opera was very much in use, implying that his idea of a melodramatic [i.e., non-sung] recitative was something different.) It is telling, however, that many of the composers of the aforementioned examples of melodrama are very coy to actually have music and spoken text occur *simultaneously*. Benda avoids it throughout his works, having the orchestra pause in the moments during which the actor speaks; Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber are a little more daring, but still generally keep other musical lines well out of the way of the speech. Even Strauss, on the cusp of the modernist revolution, only allows crumbs of *Enoch's* dialogue to overlap with the piano. Schubert's *Abschied* is fascinating in its commitment to having the narrator speak consistently over the piano, which never once breaks for the narrator's sake—however, the piece is barely three minutes long and musically minimal and cannot compare to an *Enoch* or a *Medea*.

It would seem, then, that the oil-and-water relationship of speech and music prevails even in melodrama. As Wili Apel puts it in his less-than-objective definition for the *Harvard*

Dictionary of Music:

“Experiments in melodramatic style have not been rare, but have scarcely met with lasting success, on account of the acoustic incongruity of the spoken word and of music. In the Greek drama, which made ample use of melodramatic performance, this contrast was considerably less noticeable, because of the more “musical” character of the Greek language, and the more “speech-like” nature of Greek music. Modern speech, with its monotonous pitch, and modern music, with its richness of harmonies, do not combine very well.” (435)

Apel seems to confer with the notion that our naturally atonal speech cannot accompany tonal music without significant dissonance (although he makes the issue determinant on language, which is a variable that does not seem to play much of a role as far as Western European languages are concerned, but this requires a study of its own). Considering that we can peer ahead into the 20th century and easily find works for narrator and musical instruments that follow Benda’s model almost exactly—Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* (1936), Honegger’s *Le Roi David* (1921), and Poulenc’s *L’Histoire de Babar* (1940), to name a few—we can either conclude that the problem of integrating the atonal voice into music was never solved by such composers (not the case, of course, since Prokofiev, Honegger, and Poulenc all freely wrote atonal works), or that they did not view the narrator’s voice in these works as having a musical role, and thus kept it separate from the music. The latter is likely, but this doesn’t mean that the speaking voice was ultimately found to be ineffective for musical expression. What this merely indicates is that the turn of the century split the course of the melodramatic voice into two major directions: one marked by the musically detached narrator, and the other by *Pierrot*.

Melodrama paves the road to expressionism

“It is seldom realized that there is a link between the technique of forerunners and that of an innovator and that no new technique in the arts is created that has not had its roots in the past,” wrote Arnold Schoenberg in a 1948 essay on his own technique (76). Schoenberg was not attempting to revolutionize vocal music when he wrote *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912); such should be evident by the fact that he opted to call it a melodrama. When we look at the work through this lens, with Benda in the distant background, it could be said that the most groundbreaking feature of the vocal part is not the fact that it is half-spoken or atonal (and, as we know, these two aspects are intrinsically related) but simply that it is performed overtop atonal music. We can even look back one year earlier to the cantata *Guerrelieder* (1911) and find the progenitor of *Pierrot* in its final movement, another overt melodrama, this time with only rhythms notated (unlike the relative pitch notation of *Pierrot*). It is also not insignificant that both works stem from the composer’s expressionist period, coming on the heels of the song cycle *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* (1908). Expressionism is not so far removed from melodrama when we consider Brooks’ definition that “melodramatic rhetoric, and the whole expressive enterprise of the genre, represents a victory over repression” (27) and Keller’s observation that Schoenberg’s use of the spoken voice is a means of “reorganiz[ing] repressed (read: resented) elements of human expression ... our primitive cries, our elemental musicality” (13). The melodrama is an ideal vessel for expressionism because the unadorned voice is *inherently* expressionistic.



With Schoenberg having, at long last, consummated the marriage of spoken text and music—no longer kept apart at arm’s length like oil and water, but intimately mixed—the way was paved for his pupil Berg to first bring the expressionist melodrama to the operatic stage. He did this, of course, with *Wozzeck* (1922), which includes a lengthy instruction (*Wozzeck X*)

(supposedly copied from Schoenberg's prefaces to *Pierrot* and *Die Glückliche Hand*, though records of these are not readily available) directing performers to execute the vocal parts in three different ways: fully pitched singing (not explicitly mentioned, but implied in parts where no special instruction is given); "rhythmic declamation" ("rhythmisch[e] Deklamation"), which seems to refer to the *Pierrot* style of melodramatic declamation; and "ordinary speaking" ("gewöhnliches Sprechen"), which is, of course, not entirely "ordinary," given that any performer on a stage is still expected to act and project their voice. Why and how Berg utilized these three different styles of text delivery is a question best addressed in the context of *Lulu* (which, instead of three distinct styles, utilizes at least six). Suffice it to note that a), it is the third of these styles that most closely resembles the melodramatic voice of the 18th and 19th centuries, and b) that Berg (and/or Schoenberg) refers to the style of the so-called "rhythmischen Deklamation" as "by no means a realistic-natural way of speaking" ("zwar keineswegs ein realistisch-natürliches Sprechen"), while also insisting that "it must never resemble singing" ("es darf auch nie an Gesang erinnern"). Perhaps this explanation could have been less confusing and contradictory if Berg had simply quoted Peri on his idea of "a music which, going beyond ordinary speech, remained so far below the melody of singing that it took the form of a middle thing."

Die Stimmen der *Lulu*

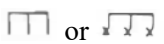







Berg prefaces the score of his opera *Lulu* (1935, completed in 1979 by Friedrich Cerha) with the same performance instructions as appeared in *Wozzeck*, this time with a notable addition:

"The text is to be interpreted in 6 ways:

1. as unaccompanied dialogue;
2. as free prose (accompanied);
3. rhythmically set by stems and beams without note heads;
4. as a speaking voice in high, middle and low register.* Notes indicated by ;
5. half sung: Note marked by ;
6. fully sung: with normal stems.” (Berg, *Lulu [Prolog Und 1. Akt]*)

The asterisk denotes where Berg makes reference to the earlier *Wozzeck* note (which is supposedly originally Schoenberg’s note).

We can therefore attempt to relate *Wozzeck*’s “gewöhnliches Sprechen” to methods 1 and 2 and “rhythmisch[e] Deklamation” to method 4. In practicality, virtually all six methods appear, voluntarily or involuntarily, in *Wozzeck* when performed (to this effect, I refer to the authoritative 1953 recording by Erich Kleiber, the conductor who premiered the piece in 1922 [*Erich Kleiber Conducts Wozzeck*]), but it is not until *Lulu* that they are precisely indicated as six distinct methods. Rudolf Stephan takes this a step further, arguing for the existence of a twelve-method “speech-song scale,” which he derives from differences in Berg’s markings employed on top of his original six methods:

- “1. dialogue without musical accompaniment
2. dialogue with background music (melodrama)
3.  or  rhythmically fixed speech
4.  rhythmic fixed speech with implied pitch movement
5.  rhythmically fixed speech with implied pitch movement and articulations, or rather regulations
6.  musical speech
7.  more musicalized speech
8.  musical speech with fixed pitch (bound melodrama)
9.  half sung

10. ♪ sung parlando
11. ♪ sung poco cantabile
12. ♪ sung molto cantabile” (Stephan 250)

Stephan goes on to note that Berg’s highly nuanced range of markings suggests he had a continuum in mind—a near-seamless scale beginning with unadorned, unmeasured speech and ending at *molto cantabile* song. The next question—for what musical purpose?—can be answered fairly easily when we examine the work through the historical lens we have acquired.

Even at first glance, certain patterns are obvious: When characters are alone, only the last three methods of Stephan’s scale are employed. The same is also true when multiple characters sing over each other in extended passages, but not when those characters are actively trying to communicate with one another. Different characters seem to favour different portions of the continuum in their singing style—e.g., Lulu the upper end, and Schigloch the lower end. In order to posit a rationale to this use of the continuum, I will begin with a historically informed generalization: natural speech, and that which resembles it, is a representation of that which is candid and/or grounded in objective reality—that is, Pasler’s “*déclamation épurée*,” or perhaps Keller’s “primitive cry.” When characters employ speech over song, they are *really* speaking, and, more often than not, they mean what they are saying (even if what they’re saying is not objectively true). Conversely, when characters inhabit the cantabile end of the continuum, we cannot be sure whether they are communicating externally at all, and, if they are, if they mean anything of what they sing. This last observation is exemplified in the way Berg consistently sets characters’ sarcasm to pitch, even if it occurs in the middle of a section of unpitched/spoken dialogue (as with Lulu in m. 438, “Und wenn es der Kaiser von China wär!”) (Berg, *Lulu* [Prolog Und 1. Akt]).

Let's break down these few observations further—first, the notion of song being used to express internal contemplation, which is by no means new, but a hallmark of operatic form since Monteverdi: When the characters of an 18th-century opera seria have an argument, they do so in recitative; then, when one of those characters is left alone to reflect on their own misery or ecstasy, they break into a *da capo* aria. Likewise, when the Painter quarrels with Lulu following her first husband's death, his part is marked "Recit" (m. 280); when Lulu goes off to change, leaving the Painter alone with the body, the Painter breaks into full-voiced singing (m. 332) as he dreadfully contemplates his inevitable betrothment to the cruel Lulu. It would make no sense for him to speak these lines, or for his singing to resemble speaking in any way, since this contemplation is purely internal. We observe the same pattern at the beginning of Act II, when Dr. Schön wanders his house alone, paranoid for Lulu's infidelity, as well as at the very end of Act III, with Countess Geschwitz's final monologues before (and even during) her death alone in the London apartment.

As previously noted, during the handful of passages throughout the opera when characters sing cantabile overtop one another, the situation is always one of internal turmoil or contemplation, not external discourse. In Act I, when Lulu and Dr. Schön engage in a cantabile duet following Schigolch's visit (Act I, m. 579), each character begins simply repeating lines sung previously, in ignorance of one another; they are no longer communicating, but contemplating. The same occurs during the chaotic sextet in Lulu's dressing room following her fainting onstage (Act I, m. 1185), as well as at the end of Act III, in the apartment, when Alwa, the Countess, Schigolch, and Lulu all begin to reminisce over Lulu's old portrait, each with their own air of ecstatic nostalgia or regret.

Cantabile song is also a symbol of power, stolidity, and self-centeredness. When the Painter desperately quizzes Lulu as to her morals (Act I, m. 314), her repeated cries of “Ich weiß es nicht” (“I don’t know”) become increasingly melismatic, thus increasingly removed from speech, thus increasingly internalized, and thus increasingly removed from the reality of her husband’s death. In Dr. Schön’s Act I conversation with the Painter that drives the latter to suicide, the moment that Dr. Schön initiates the switch from speech to Sprechstimme is the moment that he begins to exert his power over the Painter (in this case, the power of his knowledge of Lulu’s past). Finally, in the letter-writing scene at the end of Act I, in the moment that Lulu claims absolute control over Dr. Schön (m. 1304), her vocal line not only becomes *molto cantabile*, as marked, but also takes on the theme of the act’s overarching “Dr. Schön sonata,” initiating its recapitulation. This is the ultimate gesture of power: Lulu’s vocal line moves so far away from the spoken cadence—beyond even cantabile song—that it becomes intimately part of an artificial musical structure. In catalyzing the recapitulation of the sonata with her song, Lulu transcends objective reality entirely and becomes a supernatural instrument of fate.

As for the opposite end of Stephan’s continuum: When is speech (or speech-singing) employed? Most extensively, we find the purest form of speech in extended interludes separating scenes, such as the beginning of Act I, scene 2, when Lulu and the Painter discuss the letter from the art dealer, or in the middle of Act II, scene 1 (m. 239) (Berg, *Lulu* [2. *Akt*]), when Alwa enters Lulu’s salon after the Countess, the Gymnast, and the Schoolboy have gone into hiding. The effect here is purely narrative, as it is in the spoken interludes in *Die Zauberflöte* or *Der Freischütz*; spoken lines do not carry the same effect here as when they occur in the midst of song, as discussed below. Nonetheless, we can be assured that what is being said is being *said*, in

the purest objective sense—the characters are not inwardly reflecting or waxing poetic about each other’s fates, but processing an external, temporal situation. Noteworthy, this seems to be a law that transcends *Lulu*; I have yet to find an exception in any opera earlier or later.

When speech or Sprechstimme occurs in the midst of song, the effect is an expressive one. The abrupt switch to rhythmic, unpitched speech at Act I, m. 196, occurs precisely at the moment that Der Medizinalrat discovers his wife (Lulu) with another man (the Painter) and throws a fit of rage; Lulu and the Painter also switch to speech in their panic. In this manner, Keller’s notion of speech as a “primeval cry” rings true—the characters are thrown into such a state of emotional upset that they are forced to drop the artificial veil of song and revert to their basest means of expression. However, immediately after Der Medizinalrat’s death, the return of Lulu’s confidence (and power) is signaled by a gradual return to singing, through Sprechstimme, at m. 229. (Here, we must also note the difference between *internalized* panic and *externalized* panic; the latter, occurring here, is expressed with the spoken voice; the former, such as what occurs in the moment that the Painter is left alone with Der Medizinalrat’s body, is sung, for reasons already discussed.) Similarly, in Act I, upon learning the truth about Lulu from Dr. Schön, the Painter’s responses degrade further and further into speech-tone (first, at m. 675, “halb gesungen,” and then, at m. 679, “ganz gesprochen”) as his panic sets in. In Act I, m. 1176, just prior to the aforementioned sextet in Lulu’s dressing room, Dr. Schön’s distressed, irate entrance is spoken, even while everyone around him is singing—suggesting that he is the only person processing an external reality in that moment.

In Act II, m. 274, Dr. Schön’s horrified reaction to seeing Lulu flirt with his son is shouted, unpitched (“Mein eigener Sohn!”). The fact that Alwa and Lulu, both deeply lost in cantabile song, do not hear him, permits us another curious observation: that those who speak

cannot hear those who sing, and vice versa, because they occupy different dramatic states (the external and the internal, respectively). This observation also proves true at m. 335, when, with Alwa's head in Lulu's lap, she speaks a horrible truth ("Ich habe deine Mutter vergiftet..."—"I poisoned your mother..."), but Alwa does not hear her, because he has not yet followed her outside the realm of song. As such, her confession sounds only in an external reality that no one else on stage currently occupies.

This observation is not without historical precedence, either: in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, in one of the scenes leading up to the previously mentioned melodrama, we find Lenore singing aloud about the terrible thought of having to dig her husband's grave, all while Rocco—who still believes she is Fidelio, a man—stands by and continues his own sung musings, deaf to Lenore's incriminating vocalization. A similar instance occurs following the melodrama, where Lenore (singing) swears to set Florestan free, even while Rocco looms over her. As with the speech-song continuum in *Lulu*, Lenore's *arioso* singing has transported her to an internal realm, removed from that of the other characters on stage, that allows her to divulge her secrets without anyone else hearing.

This leads us to our final observation: speech channels honesty and vulnerability. This should not be farfetched, given everything that has already been discussed regarding "déclamation épurée" and Berg's other uses of speech (that is, in its expressive uses, not its narrative uses), but, for completeness, I will point out one of Lulu's most striking spoken lines in the opera, occurring in Act I, m. 616, in the middle of a sung dialogue, where she declares to Dr. Schön: "Wenn ich einem Menschen auf dieser Welt angehöre, gehöre ich Ihnen." ("If I belong to anyone in this world, I belong to you.") The fact that she completely abandons her singing tone at this moment clearly telegraphs to the listener that she means what she says; however,

considering the observation about Lulu's other major confession ("Ich habe deine Mutter vergiftet..."), it is worth wondering whether Dr. Schön, still occupying the realm of song, actually hears her declaration. Interestingly, in Act II, m. 565, after having shot Dr. Schön five times in the back, Lulu recalls her earlier declaration of dedication with the exclamation "Der Einzige, den ich geliebt!" ("The only one I [ever] loved!"), but the fact that it is sung in full voice suggests, contrary to her spoken line in Act I, that her heart has turned and that she is not being as honest.

As previously mentioned, we also see characters' personalities being conveyed by the portion of the speech-song continuum they most frequently occupy. Where the Painter and Dr. Schön make frequent shifts between speech, Sprechstimme, and cantabile song—communicating emotional instability and susceptibility to external pressures—Lulu exerts her command over almost every scene in which she appears by consistently maintaining her singing voice, and only rarely divulging a glimpse of her speech—her vulnerable, rational humanity. It is fitting, therefore, that her final words before her death at the hand of Jack the Ripper at the end of Act III—"Nein, nein!"—should be shouted. On the opposite end of the continuum, Schigolch seems most comfortable communicating in modes of Sprechstimme. Besides this style naturally suiting his character as an asthmatic old man, it also conveys the sense that he is never trying to be any more than he is; he does not attempt to exert power over other characters through artifice, as his daughter Lulu does. As George Perle notes (102–03), even the dodecaphonic set associated with Schigolch's character is the plainest and most fundamental of the opera—a fragmented chromatic scale, the bedrock of tonality from which all other themes emerge and dissolve, indifferent and immortal (as Schigolch appears to be, being the sole character to survive at the end of the opera).

Beyond *Lulu*

We have established that *Lulu* embodies the most comprehensive continuum of speech and song for any work up to its time, and we have made informed observations as to what the various points of that continuum represent. Have the roads that *Lulu* paved been taken up by its progenies?

Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* (1932) provides a striking example of the affirmative. This grand, unfinished opera tells the biblical account of Moses' struggle to communicate God's commandments to the Israelites lost in the desert in order to lead them to the Promised Land; fittingly, this central conflict—of Moses' frustration in his efforts to convey the divine truth he has been given—is sonically depicted by his vocal part being entirely spoken (with only relative pitches suggested in the notation, as in *Pierrot*). In contrast, the charismatic Aron, charged with being Moses' mouthpiece, is given a fully sung part, but consistently misunderstands Moses (and thus, God's message) and leads the Israelites astray as a result. The parallels to our observation in *Lulu* are already apparent, including the miscommunication of the titular characters (Moses occupies the realm of speaking, and Aron, the realm of singing, so they do not “hear” each other); the representation of the sung voice as an authoritative, form-driving, charismatic power (Aron is the only one of the two who can sing the central tone row); and the representation of the spoken voice as a means of conveying truth (in this case, divine truth).

Outside of the Second Viennese School, we also find corroborating examples: Krzysztof Penderecki's *The Devils of Loudun* (1969), another opera that utilizes the near full speech-song continuum, unadorned speech and Sprechstimme are utilized with relative frequency in a), transitionary (melodramatic) interludes, b) heartfelt proclamations (as in Ninon's declaration of love to Grandier [“Ich bin von dir!”] or Phillipe's cry for human touch [“Ich wünsche berührt zu

werden.”]), c) comedic dialogue (e.g., between Adam and Manoury, as their characters intentionally lack complexity and belong mostly to the external—not internal—world), and d) prayer (which may also fall into the category of heartfelt proclamations; significantly, at the height of the opera’s drama, Grandier’s crucifixion, singing falls away entirely and almost all words are spoken). Conversely, the most arbitrary, un-speech-like, sung lines belong to the “possessed” nun Jeanne, who is lost to the external world and lives entirely inside her obsession of Grandier.

Bern Alois Zimmermann’s *Die Soldaten* (1957) goes even further than Penderecki or Berg in the rapid alternation between speech, Sprechstimme, and song, often switching multiple times in a single phrase. Still, we find similar patterns as in *Lulu*: characters are more likely to use speech when they are flustered or angry, and more likely to use song when they are attempting to command power over a situation. We see this in Act I, scene 3, with Baron Desportes’ courtship of Marie: Desportes, when attempting to win Marie’s affection, mostly sings, except in moments where his excitement gets the better of him and speech breaks through his façade of song. When Marie’s father appears and urgently tries to thwart Desportes’ advances, he addresses Desportes mostly in song (as he is a nobleman and commands respect), but falls more frequently into speech when addressing Marie, to whom he can comfortably betray his fear and frustration. Marie, in turn, responds tearfully in speech, as she has no command over the current situation.

While it would seem that German expressionists and the lineage of the Second Viennese School made the most use of the speech-song continuum, we also find traces of it elsewhere in Europe. Britten utilizes expressive speech generously in a single scene in *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), in which the ghost of Peter Quint attempts to coax Miles into stealing the Governess’

letter to his Guardian (Variation XII). The use of speech here is interesting in that it occurs at a moment when Quint is desperate to exert his influence over Miles in order to stop the Governess from exposing him, yet—on the premise of our *Lulu* model—he resorts to a less powerful instrument for doing so. A possible explanation is that Quint is in fact telegraphing panic; his repeated questions of “What does she know?” and “What has she written?”, accompanied by the snare drum, certainly have this effect, especially in contrast with his usual singing tone, which is the most melismatic in the opera (not coincidentally, a musical symbol of his power). This notion of panicked speech is enforced at the very end of the opera (Var. XII, reh. 128), when, threatened again by the possibility of Miles’ revealing his identity to the Governess, Quint’s melismatic cries are suddenly interrupted by an irate shout (“Be silent!”). Miles’ singing voice also fails completely under the pressure of the situation (“Is he there? Is he there?”), with his final line, one of the most crucial in the opera, being shouted also (“Peter Quint, you devil!”).

Britten goes on to use a similar device in *The Rape of Lucretia* (1958) with the male chorus’ whispered monologue (“When Tarquinius desires...”) in the buildup to the opera’s climactic scene. Superficially, the monologue achieves its skin-crawling effect because of the nature of the text and the listener’s dread anticipation for what will follow; but, more than that, the spoken voice elicits a visceral response from the listener because of the way it throws aside the artifice of song to paint a portrait of the ugliest, basest human instinct—a horrific kind of “honesty.”

Kaija Saariaho’s *L’Amour de loin* (2000) provides our most contemporary example, specifically in the voice of the Pilgrim who travels between Blaye and Tripoli. Being the only one of the three main characters who remains grounded in reality—a foil to the characters of Jaufré and Clémence, who live mostly in internal fantasies—the Pilgrim has the curious tendency

of ending most of his sung phrases on unpitched (spoken) syllables or words. However, in moments when the Pilgrim joins in on Jaufré's and Clémence's fantasies, such as when he describes Clémence's beauty to Jaufré or Jaufré's songs to Clémence, his tone becomes more aria-like and his unpitched cadence disappears. The presence or absence of speech in his tone becomes an indicator of his distance from the external world.

I have intentionally skirted discussion on vocal writing that merely attempts to imitate the natural cadence of the spoken voice while pitches are still fully sung. Examples in the 20th century are copious, but ultimately do not accomplish anything more than *Pelleas* did at the turn of the previous century. Notable works that fall into this category are Poulenc's *La voix humaine* (1958) (specifically intended to mimic a conversation on the telephone), the operas of Janacek (whose obsessive analysis of the natural cadence of conversational Czech influenced his entire oeuvre of vocal writing), and Britten's *Death in Venice* (1973) (specifically, Aschenbach's arhythmic monologues). While basing extended passages or entire works on the natural cadence of speech may have been revolutionary in Debussy's time, and while these works may lend themselves to similar patterns as described above (that is, in the alternation between speech-like cadence and arioso song), these works' avoidance of any extended use of the unpitched voice makes the expressive effect of their vocal writing no different than that of *Pelleas*. I have also opted against mention of operas that verge on the genre of the musical, such as those of Bernstein or Weil, as the use of the spoken voice in this genre serves more of a narrative than an expressive function, generally speaking (though the topic could benefit from an analysis of its own).

“To talk is to sing”

In his essay on operatic form, Atli Ingólfsson writes:

“[T]here is no reason to consider [operatic singing] as opposite to spoken text. If we compare a sung dialogue by Puccini, an accompanied recitative by Monteverdi, a Sprechgesang melody by Berg and an aria by Mozart, we see that although this is all called ‘song’ it is not all at the same distance from speaking. We might as well invert the song axis and rename it speech axis, pointing out that each composer finds a particular place on the speech axis, determining how close their vocal style should come to ordinary speech. When it comes to employing the voice on stage the separation between speech and song is unnecessary. The task is always the same: to design, by composing or directing, the rendering of the text. ... All organised performance of text and sounds is music, may be regarded as song. So, talking is not only similar to singing. From a dramatic point of view to talk is to sing.” (56–57)

In tracing the history of perspectives on the spoken voice in opera and similar dramatic forms—from the musings of Peri on “di cossa mezzana,” to 18th-century melodrama, to “déclamation épurée,” to Sprechstimme—we have found that, even though the spoken voice has served as the aesthetic foundation of operatic writing from the very beginning, it is not until the turn of the 20th century that unadorned speech is liberated and the unpitched or half-pitched voice becomes fully integrated in pitched music as an expressive device. The primary reasons for this liberation include the dissolution of tonality and the emergence of expressionism, with its ties to melodrama.

Just as Ingólfsson speaks of a “song-axis” and Stephan of Berg’s “speech-song continuum,” Gerd Rienäcker writes of the transformation from *word* to *speech*, and from *speech* to *song*; how, in each transformation, “webs, thickets of different, complementary or contradictory meanings emerge.” (“...Geflechte, Dickichte unterschiedlicher, einander komplementärer oder zuwiderlaufender Bedeutungen”) (221). To Rienäcker, “speaking” something and “saying” something are entirely different matters—that is, what is “said” is what

is *meant* by what one speaks—and, in song, one may *say* something entirely impossible to communicate in speech alone. However, when, in opera, the normal mode is to sing—to always be saying something far above what the words alone may stand for—there is deep and unnerving power to the naked, spoken voice. It is, as Keller says, “too natural” to belong to the realm of art (Keller 14). To speak in opera is to cast off a myriad convolutions and, for a brief moment, be utterly, dangerously human. Emerging from song, it *transcends* song, and says that which even song cannot say.

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