Dost thou know thy tongue’s true tune?: Discovering the early opera ‘mezzo-soprano’ voice for today’s interpreters

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The purpose of this article is to provide today’s operatic interpreter with the historical insight she needs to understand the early operatic female voice. In particular, it focuses on where today’s mezzo-soprano voice classification falls within the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century operatic repertoire, which are the genre’s first efforts. This route of inquiry is particularly difficult since the mezzo-soprano classification did not emerge until the mid-eighteenth-century. Previously, it was not identified as a separate female voice category. Therefore, in order for today’s mezzo-soprano to access and, hence, engage with this early operatic repertoire, she must gain a clearer understanding of her historical predecessors, principally those in the soprano and [contr]alto voice classifications. By utilising the historically-informed performance practice approach suggested in this article, she will now possess the tools she needs to engage successfully with this early Baroque repertoire. Through this methodology, today’s mezzo-soprano can effectively begin to introduce early Baroque vocal works into her current repertory.

Stewart Carter has characterised the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as ‘an age of... [musical]...transition between the High Renaissance and the High Baroque’

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. xiv.
5 This term, which was originally invented by Claudio Monteverdi, is translated as ‘second practice’ (Ibid.).
was the disappearance of out-dated polyphony\(^6\) in favour of the more modern declamatory songs, which were based on the Italian *stile recitativo*.\(^7\) Giulio Caccini’s 1601/2 *Le nuove musiche*, a collection of solo songs and monodies composed for voice and basso continuo (12 madrigals and 10 arias in total), is one of the earliest surviving and, perhaps, most significant\(^8\) examples of music written in *seconda prattica*.

Caccini’s vocal works were novel for two reasons. First, his accompaniment was subservient to the lyrics. In other words, Caccini’s songs stressed the importance of the text first and the accompaniment second. Next, Caccini believed his vocal interpreters often created or improvised unsuitable vocal ornamentations during public performance. To combat this practice, he composed his own vocal ornamentations for specific passages in his *stile moderno* monodies, often providing several different suggestions based on the possible emotion(s) that the singer may want to convey in performance. As a result, Caccini wrested vocal (and emotional) control over the portrayal of his works from his singers. By doing so, the singers were at Caccini’s compositional mercy. Thus, while this may have provided Caccini with some form of standard vocal interpretation, it also limited the singers’ ability to showcase their voices at their ornamental bests. Finally, Caccini’s use of basso continuo was also a unique feature of his compositions.\(^9\)

**Line of Inquiry**

This article presents a contextualisation of the varied historical frequency ranges and historical pitch standards, particularly the manner in which they influenced composers’ as well as singers’ approaches to and use of the female voice. Indeed, when today’s mezzo-soprano approaches early Baroque vocal classifications and its corresponding repertoire, she must take into consideration when and where it was composed. She must understand the variety of performance pitches used, beyond today’s incorrect HIPP practice of simply using \(a’ = 415\) as a uniform historical pitch standard.\(^10\) Finally, this is reconciled with the modern-day approach to the female voice, specifically focusing on

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\(^6\) John Dowland’s lute songs offer a perfect example of this concept.

\(^7\) *Recitative* is a type of text setting ‘that imitates and emphasizes the natural inflections, rhythm, and syntax of speech’. To accomplish this, it ‘avoids extremes of pitch and intensity and repetition of words, allowing the music to be primarily a vehicle for the words’. In the seventeenth century, recitative ‘became a particular concern of composers’, such as Caccini, Peri and Monteverdi, all whom ‘proclaimed a new style of declamation’. This new style was referred to as either *stile recitativo* or *stile rappresentativo* (Don Michael Randel (ed.), *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 707).


\(^9\) Ibid.

the mezzo-soprano voice classification, recognising the detailed German Fächer system. By reconciling today’s mezzo-soprano with her female operatic predecessors, she can begin to unearth the historical vocal qualities suitable for her voice. As a result, the modern-day mezzo-soprano will gain a new approach towards the voices of early opera. She will be better-equipped to identify early operatic repertoire suitable for her mezzo-soprano voice type, despite the period’s lack of it.

Thus, today’s mezzo-soprano will begin to realise that instead of attempting to suss out exactly where the mezzo-soprano voice classification neatly fits within early Baroque operatic repertoire, she is actually required to tune herself to this repertoire. She will begin to realise that she is unable to fully reconcile the gap between the modern-day mezzo-soprano voice classification and early Baroque female voice classifications. Despite this lack of full reconciliation, however, today’s mezzo-soprano will recognise that she is the best-suited voice\(^\text{11}\) to sing the majority of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century repertoire, regardless of the voice classifications originally\(^\text{12}\) suggested for the roles.\(^\text{13}\)

An appreciation of historical precedent is essential, for many aspects of early opera performance practice ‘differ...considerably from modern...[operatic]...singing, as well as from country to country’.\(^\text{14}\) Early opera singing was far from being standardised. Rather, operatic music was often composed for pre-selected singers (still encouraging a certain amount of vocal personalisation), with composers tailoring their operas to these voices.\(^\text{15}\) Also, national singing schools existed during this time period, including, for example, the Italian, French, English and German schools,\(^\text{16}\) which further diluted the genre’s first efforts.

There is no one specific or ‘right’ way to sing early opera. Today’s interpreter must remember that she is re-creating a historical performance. This is achieved through a historically-informed performance practice (HIPP) approach. Bar discovering a long-lost audio-visual recording from the early Baroque period or gaining access to a time machine to go back in time and interview these premiering operatic performers on their performance techniques, today’s singer can only strive to make the most historically-informed decisions she can regarding this repertoire. She ‘...cannot imitate the singers of the seventeenth... [ and early eighteenth centuries]...’; rather, she can only attempt to

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\(^\text{11}\) That is, in most situations in which the range, tessitura and historical pitch standards match up for the voice.

\(^\text{12}\) Today, the mezzo-soprano is often unsure how she can engage with repertoire historically indicated to be sung by sopranos (and even altos, in some cases).

\(^\text{13}\) Since the original ‘soprano’ was actually written for the voice type known as the ‘mezzo-soprano’ today.


\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{16}\) Of course, other national singing schools existed; however, for this argument, only the Italian, French, English and German schools shall be considered, since they are the four languages in which the largest operatic repertoire is taught and studied today.
‘...learn from the varying approaches of the singers of...[her]...time who have specialized in this repertoire and developed their own understandings of the instructions from the past’ as well as learn from and create her own ideas based on historical sources. This is achieved through detailed historical performance practice-based research.

Today’s mezzo-soprano must remember this when attempting to discover the early operatic ‘mezzo-soprano’ voice – or, more aptly, attempting to discover early operatic repertoire vocally appropriate for her modern-day vocal classification. Indeed, the mezzo-soprano voice type did not exist until the mid-eighteenth century. It took until the end of the eighteenth century for the distinct differentiation between the soprano and mezzo-soprano voice types to become common. As such, a lack of readily-defined mezzo-soprano early opera publications exists.

Main Approach

On the superficial level, this lack of readily-available mezzo-soprano early opera publications results in confusion. It is compounded by modern-day audio/audio-visual recordings. For example, a simply youtube.com search for the well-known ‘Dido’s Lament’ from Henry Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas, Z. 626 provides the following first page of results, with 20 results in total:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>YouTube Clip Title</th>
<th>Singer’s Name &amp; Vocal Classification</th>
<th>Collaborative Performer(s)</th>
<th>Uploader</th>
<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Date Uploaded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17 Elliot, p. 6.
19 As seen with the role of Dido in Henry Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas, Z. 626.
20 In 2014, the use of digital humanities resources is common worldwide. YouTube is a particularly popular site, with more than 1 billion users visiting YouTube each month and millions of new subscriptions each day (up more than 4x times from last year). 6 billion hours of audiovisual materials are watched each month (50% increase from last year). Every minute, 100 hours of audiovisual materials are uploaded to the website. It is not USA- or English-language–centric. 80% of its traffic comes from outside the United States of America, with viewers from 61 countries accessing it. To accommodate this international traffic, over 61 languages are used on the website (‘YouTube Statistics: Viewership’, YouTube (subsidiary of Google Corporation), accessed 17 January 2014, http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html.
21 When searched using the phrase ‘Dido’s Lament’ on 4 February 2014 with resulting URL http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%27dido%27s%20lament%27&sm=3. YouTube offered about 41,000 results for this search.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Performer</th>
<th>Location/Conductor/Composer</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘When I am laid in earth (Dido’s Lament) – Sarah Connolly (Last Night of the Proms 2009)’</td>
<td>Sarah Connolly, Mezzo-Soprano</td>
<td>Antmusique</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘Henry Purcell – Dido and Aeneas – Dido’s Lament’</td>
<td>Xenia Meijer, Soprano</td>
<td>Dido Koor &amp; Combattimento Consort Amsterdam with Jan Willem De Vriend, Conductor</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>‘Purcell - Dido &amp; Aeneas - When I am laid in earth (Dido's lament) Elin Manahan Thomas’</td>
<td>Elin Manahan Thomas, Not listed</td>
<td>margotlorena2</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Jessye Norman - A Portrait - When I Am Laid In Earth (Purcell)’</td>
<td>Jessye Norman, Not listed</td>
<td>texmex0303</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘Jeff Buckley Didos Lament HD’</td>
<td>Jeff Buckley, Not listed</td>
<td>Johnny Red, Not listed</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>‘Alison Moyet -’</td>
<td>Alison Moyet, Not listed</td>
<td>khunkobfa</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 ‘When I am laid in earth (Dido’s Lament) – Sarah Connolly (Last Night of the Proms 2009),’ 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACY03VwWmnA.
24 ‘Purcell - Dido & Aeneas - When I am laid in earth (Dido's lament) Elin Manahan Thomas,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGQq3HcOB0Y.
26 This is not an error on my part; the incomplete name and use of parentheses are the uploader’s informal online handiwork. It is corrected in the clip’s description as ‘Jessye Norman - A Portrait - When I Am Laid In Earth (Purcell).’
28 However, he is most likely a countertenor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Video Title</th>
<th>Performer</th>
<th>Performance Details</th>
<th>Performance Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>'Dido's Lament - Malena Ernman (+lyrics)'</td>
<td>Malena Ernman, Not listed</td>
<td>scandal32</td>
<td>13 Sep 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>‘Purcell - (Dido and Aeneas) &quot;When I am laid in earth&quot; / Emma Kirkby’</td>
<td>Emma Kirkby, Soprano</td>
<td>protestant7</td>
<td>27 Sep 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>‘Henry Purcell - When I am laid in earth (Dido’s Lament) - Dido and Aeneas’</td>
<td>Tatjana Troyanos, Soprano</td>
<td>Not listed, Titus Rivas</td>
<td>28 May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>‘Malena Ernman - Dido’s Lament’</td>
<td>Malena Ernman, Mezzo-Soprano</td>
<td>AngelVoiceFromHeaven, Not listed</td>
<td>11 Oct 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>‘Dido’s Lament - Fiona Campbell’</td>
<td>Fiona Campbell, Not listed27</td>
<td>FionaCampbellMusic, April 2011</td>
<td>5 Jun 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13</td>
<td>‘Henry Purcell: When I am laid in earth ~ Dido and Aeneas, Z. 193</td>
<td>Andreas Scholl, Not listed29</td>
<td>Oedipus Coloneus, Not listed</td>
<td>6 Jul 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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31 From following link on the page to its Google Play webpage.
33 ‘Purcell - (Dido and Aeneas) "When I am laid in earth" / Emma Kirkby,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3wAarmPYKU.
34 As suggested by viewers in the ‘All Comments’ section.
35 ‘Henry Purcell - When I am laid in earth (Dido’s Lament) - Dido and Aeneas,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vK06iwXT0Jw.
37 However, she is an Australian mezzo-soprano.
39 However, he is a countertenor.
41 However, her website (www.emmakirkby.com), which is included in the clip’s information, identifies her as a soprano.
43 As identified in the ‘All Comments’ section by viewers.
46 As stated in the Google Play website, which is linked into the YouTube clip upload.
47 ‘Sissel - Dido’s Lament,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr1a8A_i9aY.
48 As listed by viewers in the ‘All Comments’ section.
The worldwide impact factors of these search results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YouTube Clip (By Rank)</th>
<th>Worldwide Views</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Likes/Dislikes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 MS</td>
<td>291,835</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1,007/37³²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 S</td>
<td>235,970</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>851/9³³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 S</td>
<td>13,672</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>88/1³⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 MS</td>
<td>493,812</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>1,625/23³⁵⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 S</td>
<td>424,649</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>2,320/47³⁶⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>29,555</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>259/13³⁷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>132,448</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>436/1³⁸¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 MS</td>
<td>73,758</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>341/5³⁹⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 S</td>
<td>525,993</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1,240/4³⁶⁰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 S</td>
<td>17,429</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>92/0³⁶²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 M-S</td>
<td>27,237</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>119/1³⁸²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 M-S</td>
<td>7,499</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>55/1³⁸³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵² ‘When I am laid in earth (Dido’s Lament) – Sarah Connolly (Last Night of the Proms 2009),’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACY03VwWmnA.
⁵⁴ ‘Purcell - Dido & Aeneas - When I am laid in earth (Dido’s lament) Elin Manahan Thomas,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGQq3HcOB0Y.
⁶⁰ ‘Purcell - (Dido and Aeneas) "When I am laid in earth" / Emma Kirkby,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3wAarmPYKU.
As seen with these search results, the ideal (or correct) vocal category to sing this well-known aria ‘Dido’s Lament’ and, thus, the corresponding operatic title role of Dido in *Dido and Aeneas* is hotly contested, even by the current industry’s top female opera singers. Of the twenty first page results, eleven can be analysed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer’s Name</th>
<th>Singer’s Vocal Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Connolly</td>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xenia Meijer</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elin Manahan Thomas</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dame Janet Baker</td>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessye Norman</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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65 Function disabled by its uploader.
69 ‘Sissel - Dido’s Lament,’ accessed 4 February 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trIa8A_i9aY.
73 Which includes Sarah Connolly (Mezzo-Soprano), Dame Janet Baker (Mezzo-Soprano), Jessye Norman (Soprano), Emma Kirkby (Soprano) and even Andreas Scholl (Countertenor).
74 With two not applicable due to their arrangements (the vocal ensemble arrangement by The Swingle Singers and the classical guitar arrangement by Emre Sabuncuoglu) and three due to their popular music approach (Jeff Buckley, Alison Moyet and Sissel).
Malena Ernman | Mezzo-Soprano  
Dame Emma Kirkby | Soprano  
Tatjana Troyanos | Soprano  
Fiona Campbell | Mezzo-Soprano  
Andreas Scholl | Countertenor  
Stéphanie d’Oustrac | Mezzo-Soprano

The results demonstrate the popularity of different vocal interpreters of this aria, including five sopranos, five mezzo-sopranos and one countertenor. With the countertenor as an outlier, it appears that the aria is equally sung by both soprano and mezzo-soprano voice classifications. For these two female voice classifications, mezzo-soprano interpreters received 912,911 views and soprano interpreters received 1,536,443 views.

This insinuates a slight bias in viewers towards soprano interpreters, which may suggest that more viewers think sopranos should interpret this aria than mezzo-sopranos; however, statistics on which viewers viewed which YouTube clip or clips are unavailable. Clearly, with these split beliefs regarding which vocal classification should sing this aria, today’s interpreter may certainly become confused as to whether or not this aria is vocally appropriate for her voice type. Therefore, she should abandon attempts to decode these modern-day contradictory views on who should sing ‘Dido’s Lament’. Instead, she should accept the demands of early operatic repertoire, which requires today’s mezzo-soprano to acquire or possess greater vocal responsibility for her voice and voice type.

In this instance, greater vocal responsibility means gaining a deeper historical knowledge of the female voice. This would provide her with the tools she needs to access early operatic repertoire. Such accessibility would be achieved via a historically-informed approach. To achieve this goal, this article will undertake the following historically-informed performance practice (HIPP) approach.

First, this article will address the gap in understanding early opera vocal classifications, delving into the early operatic concept of the singing voice. In particular, it will address the four differing national European singing schools: Italian, French, English and German. Four key treatises from the four national schools shall be referenced, including:

1. Dr Thomas Campion’s 1615 treatise, *The Art of Setting or Composing of Musick in Parts*, which was reprinted as the second book in John Playford’s 1654 treatise, *An Introduction to the Skill of Music*;
2. Bénigne de Bacilly’s 1668 treatise *Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter*;
3. Pier Francesco Tosi’s 1723 *Opinioni de’ cantorio antichi, e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato*;

75 The title was translated as ‘A Commentary upon the Art of Proper Singing’ by Austin Caswell. He also translated and edited the entire work into English in 1964.
And, Johann Friederich Agricola’s 1757 extended translated version of Tosi’s 1723 vocal treatise, titled Anleitung zur Singkunst. These vocal realisations will be grounded in their respective historical pitches, as historical pitch was also not standardised. This grounding will accompany the discussion of early opera vocal classifications.

Finally, this article will reconcile the early operatic understandings of the female voice with the modern-day mezzo-soprano voice classification, briefly acknowledging the use of the German Fach system in the modern-day opera industry (and its resulting attempt to create and maintain specific vocal standardisations within the larger female voice categories).77

By teasing out the links between the four differing national European singing schools – Italian, French, English and German –, this article will offer valuable musical insight, ‘reveal[ing]...both...[the]...continuity and evolution’ of the female voice as well as vocal ‘crosscurrents’ within compositional and stylistic schools.78 When these vocal concepts are grounded in their respective historical pitches, their contemporary links become contextualised within the broader seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century European musical scope. As a result, today’s mezzo-soprano gains a clearer historical comprehension of her female vocal predecessors. This historical analysis of the voice and its historical pitch contexts can then be compared and contrasted to the modern-day mezzo-soprano voice classification, seeing where these historical predecessors fall within the modern vocal world. With a more finite vocal grasp, today’s mezzo-soprano can begin to untangle the early operatic vocal quandary, self-selecting vocally-appropriate repertoire for her unique voice and voice classification.

Early Operatic Vocal Classifications

The biggest difficulty for today’s mezzo-soprano attempting to access early operatic repertoire is its varying female vocal classification systems. The fundamentals of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Baroque voice are unique, as emphasised by the similarities and differences between early operatic vocal classifications and today’s vocal classification system. Indeed, the early Baroque female voice did not yet recognise the mezzo-soprano female voice classification.79 Also, early voice classifications varied

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76 John Ernest Galliard translated the entire work into English, publishing it as Observations on the Florid Song; Or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers in 1743.
considerably based on the practitioners themselves, ranging from compositional developments and practicing singers to differences in national schools. To untangle the early operatic concept of the voice and the female voice classifications historically recognised within it, this article addresses the four major European national singing schools – English, French, Italian and German – during this time period. In addition, to gain a deeper historical knowledge of the female voice, it focuses on the four aforementioned key musical and vocal treatises from the time period.

The English Singing School Tradition

Out of the four national singing schools, the English singing school’s historical development is particularly unique compared to the rest of Continental Europe. The English theatrical tradition greatly influenced its singing and (eventually) operatic traditions. Unfortunately, much of England’s early singing and operatic treatises have been lost; only a few have survived. Instead, much more historical information is available on English acting, gesture and oration. England’s theatrical tradition impacted its professional singers and, thus, its early Baroque singing school.

This is particularly relevant to England’s female singers. Prior to the 1660 Restoration, women were not allowed to perform professionally in England. Their opportunities had been restricted to amateur performances in private. As such, the treble parts in all publicly-performed church and theatrical music was sung by boys. Likewise, female speaking roles in plays were portrayed by boys. Only with the Restoration of King Charles II to the English throne did women finally enter the public performance area. With Charles II’s 21 August 1660 warrant to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, he not only re-opened the public theatres and created two new acting companies, the King’s and the Duke’s, but also regally decreed that from thenceforth only women – and not boys – should portray female roles. In addition to their entertainment factors, plays would now be ‘useful and instructive representations of human life’. With this royal decree, women could now perform publicly.

Previously banned from the public performance sphere, the English women who first began performing publicly were not the ‘trained virtuoso female performers’ that simultaneously existed in Italy. Rather, these first ‘women of the stage’ desperately needed to be familiarised with the theatre and its customs. They quickly needed to

80 Elliot, p. 32.
81 Ibid., p. 33.
84 Elliot, p. 33.
85 Wilson, p. vii.
receive basic theatrical training so they could perform publicly. The church and theatre boys of the 1660s were well-trained. Accordingly, they continued to sing the treble parts in music and female roles in operatic works until English women could assume them. Armed with their new training, virtuoso female performers began to appear, phasing out the use of boy performers for these parts and roles. Indeed, composer Henry Purcell (who had also been a choir boy from the age of seven in the Chapel Royal) employed several women and girls (as young as twelve or thirteen) to sing his intricate vocal works.

The English Solo Voice

Several factors shaped English vocal classifications and the voices which sang them. In particular, songs performed in Restoration theatre were often composed for a specific performer and, hence, a specific voice (and not a voice classification). However, this song personalisation did not hinder the typical Baroque tradition of ‘lifting’ songs from their original plays and performers and re-using them in other (often non-related) works performed by different singers. As these singers were, in fact, well-rounded performers, they also acted, danced and orated in plays. The ‘fundamentals’ of Restoration performance included ‘speaking, singing, dancing, and...even...walking’. Although performers could specialise in singing and could be a ‘singer...in a play’, he or she also acted and vice versa. Performers who specialised as actors were also expected to sing proficiently. This vocal proficiency in Restoration theatre must be contextualised. Some theatre singers were properly trained singers, with several even holding dual memberships in the court or chapel choirs. Others were not and possessed only ‘modest’ vocal skill at best. In all cases, the singers did possess enough proficiency for the music they were required to sing.

These singers were not the ‘virtuosic’ singers of Italy or France. Often, these ‘Jack- (and) Jill-of-all-trades’ singing performers have been likened to today’s Broadway performers (actors who must also sing and dance) instead of today’s opera singers, who are first singers and second actors/actresses. Elliot argues that Broadway performers would probably interpret and perform Purcell’s theatre music, for example, quite differently than their modern-day operatic counterparts. Although there is merit to this argument, she overlooks the obvious fact that even modestly trained seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century singers would have been trained in the vocal technique of the time period. The singing technique used on Broadway is completely unsuitable for this early Baroque repertoire. Therefore, unless the Broadway performers were re-trained in

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86 Ibid., p. 50.
87 Elliot, p. 34.
88 Ibid., p. 33.
89 Ibid., p. 34.
90 Wilson, p. 50.
91 Elliot, p. 34.
early Baroque singing techniques, they would lack an essential key skill in interpreting Restoration theatre roles.

**Dr Thomas Campion’s Remarks on English Vocal Classifications**

Complementing the common compositional practice of setting a work based on vocal personalisation, Dr Thomas Campion explored vocal classification in his 1615 treatise, *The Art of Setting or Composing of Musick in Parts*. John Playford reprinted it as the second book in his 1654 treatise, *An Introduction to the Skill of Music*. Campion states that all music is made up of four parts, regardless how many have been composed in a musical work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal Part</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Treble’</td>
<td>The ‘highest… [part or]…place’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Meane’ or ‘Counter Tenor’</td>
<td>The part ‘…next above the Tenor’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Tenor’</td>
<td>The part ‘…placed next above the Base’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Base’ (Bass)</td>
<td>The ‘…lowest part and foundation of the whole Song’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Campion’s work offers insight into the historical terminology of English vocal classifications. In addition, Campion clearly delineates each vocal part by its musical position, which is most clearly demonstrated in part-singing. As such, Campion relies upon the singer’s previous knowledge to understand this explanation of musical position. Consequently, he fails to offer specific vocal outlines for each vocal part. This may be particularly frustrating for today’s female mezzo-soprano wishing to access early English Baroque opera. It is clear she is initially restricted to the ‘treble’ voice in this early operatic music. Still, a plethora of variety exists within this vocal classification as seen, for example, with Purcell’s sopranos. Nevertheless, even with this ‘soprano’ classification, one should, again, keep in mind the historical pitch in which these vocal works were composed. In the early Baroque period, which includes from approximately 1600 to 1730, English pitch frequency varied in range from 384Hz – 397Hz to 480Hz – 508Hz with a historical pitch standard including 392Hz to 495Hz.

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92 As expected, the mezzo-soprano vocal classification is not mentioned.
93 Dr Tho. Campion, ‘A briefe Exposition of the Gam-ut, or Scale of Musick, shewing a shorter and surer way for calling Notes in singing, then the Gam-ut doth demonstrate’ in *The Art of Setting or Composing of Musick in Parts* (London: Printed for John Playford & are sold at his shop in the Inner Temple, 1665).
94 Unlike today, in which modern-day Western music performance pitch is standardised to $a' = 440$ Hz for all musicians and their accompanying instruments (which would be tune according to today’s pitch standard and corresponding tuning system), a variety of early operatic concert pitches and corresponding tuning systems existed. Indeed, the early operatic attitude towards pitch is very different to the modern-day approach. They widely varied from country to country and even region to region in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe.
In “Purcell’s Sopranos”, Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson argue that today’s singers should actually sing Purcell’s vocal works in this lower historical pitch, as it allows the singers to realise the vocal part with better ‘clarity and ease’. Whether or not these vocal works should still be sung by today’s ‘sopranos’ as Baldwin and Wilson argue, however, is a point still hotly contested. Indeed, even the best performance scholars today find ‘...determining the ranges and possible voice types for specific English choral and solo vocal music’ for this time period extremely difficult. As Martha Elliot concedes in *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices*, this is ‘a complicated business’. Naturally, this negatively impacts today’s singers who wish to access this music. As such, today’s mezzo-soprano singer must consult each early English operatic score she wishes to perform in order to decide which ‘treble’ roles might best suit her voice. The variances among the ‘treble’ parts are too vast in this repertoire to simply argue that today’s mezzo-soprano can – or should – sing any (or all) of these roles.

### The French Singing School Tradition

French singers occupied a different performance space than their English, Italian or German counterparts. Most of the ‘significant music making’ in France during this time period occurred at the royal court of Versailles. Accordingly, the majority of musicians – as well as dancers – were also members of the French royal court. The musicians were professionals; however, the dancers were not. In fact, professional dancers were not employed until the middle of the seventeenth century.

French solo singers, called *acteurs* and *actrices pour les rolles*, underwent a standardised ‘system of training’. While this vocal training was more vigorous than the initial training available to English female singers, it was still inferior to Italian voice training. In order to bridge this vocal gap, some – but not all – *acteurs* and *actrices pour les rolles* travelled to Italy to complete their training. To assist those who did not choose this Italian route of training, Bacilly, a noted voice teacher himself, devoted a significant amount in his 1668 treatise to choosing an appropriate singing teacher, in order for all French singers to achieve vocal success.

In addition to this advice, which is valid even today, it is his comments on vocal classification that are particularly relevant to this discussion. Bacilly argues the ‘smaller, higher, ...[lighter and]...sweeter voices were preferred’ in early French Baroque music. Yet, the human voice was as varied back then as it is now. A variety of voices existed in

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95 Ibid.


97 Ibid.

98 Elliot, p. 34.

99 Elliot, p. 43.
early Baroque France, similar to the breadth of voices which exist today.\(^{100}\) Therefore, in spite of this preference to the higher voices and their corresponding vocal colour (being lighter and ‘sweeter’), the larger singing voices should not try to sing quieter overall; this negatively affects vocal quality. Instead, they should ‘relax and never force the voice so that it will have the vocal quality it ought to have’.\(^{101}\) Today, the roles are reversed, with bigger voices preferred to fill our larger, post-nineteenth-century sized opera houses.\(^{102}\) Regardless of voice size, however, Bacilly’s advice remains true for all voices: every singer must allow his or her voice to fulfil its own vocal destiny. Accordingly, today’s singer must not alter his or her voice or vocal quality, as any attempts are detrimental to the vocal instrument overall. Instead, the singer must accept his or her own unique instrument as it is. Each voice possesses unique qualities which can be used in the repertoire.

**Bénigne de Bacilly Remarks on French Vocal Classifications**

Bénigne de Bacilly delves deeper into the singing voice, further remarking upon vocal colour as well as vocal classification in his 1668 *Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter*. In his ‘Different Voice-Types’ Chapter, he states that one must ‘consider...the voice according to its musical range using this musical terminology’. Most likely, Bacilly is insinuating that vocal classification is directly linked with vocal range. Bacilly only directly mentions four vocal classifications:

1. Soprano,
2. Contralto,
3. Tenor,
4. Bass, etc.’\(^{103}\)

It is frustrating that de Bacilly does not complete his list of vocal classifications and, instead, opted to use ‘etc.’ to complete his thoughts. He assumed a contemporary common knowledge that today’s singers do not possess. A prime example is his exclusion of the lower tenor voice,\(^{104}\) a customary practice of the time period. This common practice only further alienates today’s singer who is new to early Baroque

\(^{100}\) Elliot, p. 43.


\(^{103}\) While de Bacilly never explicitly provides range outlines for these voice types, it is helpful to understand the concert pitch and tuning system of seventeenth-century. According to Haynes, it was ‘A – 2’ = 392Hz with a frequency range of 384-397 for A (iii) based on the influence of Lully’s operas (Haynes, p. 100).

\(^{104}\) Bacilly, p. 23.
music. She lacks this necessary cultural currency to read between the historical treatise lines. For her, this ‘etc.’ dilutes Bacilly’s vocal argument, as he never completely outlined all of the available French voice classifications of his time period. Despite this assumption, however, today’s singer can safely assume that he did not include the mezzo-soprano classification in his blanket ‘etc.’. The term did not exist yet as we understand it today.

The French Attitude Towards Castrati and Female Singers

Unlike the Italians who favoured the male castrato voice, the French were ‘uneasy’ with not only the voice type but also with the ‘sexual ambiguity’ it represented. Compared to the Italian castrato, who had attained unprecedented fame in both opera and society, French castrato were almost non-existent. French castrato employment was extremely limited. They could only perform ‘imported Italian music’ in Paris. Instead, women sang castrato parts; however, they were restricted to private court performances ‘…Groups of “pages” or boys’ publicly sang castrato roles. They sang the dessus parts for both the musique de la chambre and musique de la chapelle.

The French Female Solo Voice

The French female solo voice is more complex than its English counterpart, which only initially recognised the treble voice classification as suitable for female singers. Elliot identifies two general early Baroque French solo voice classifications: the dessus and the haute-contre. In order to contextualise these voice classifications within today’s concept of the female operatic solo voice, Elliot equates the historical French solo voice classifications with today’s approximate corresponding voice classifications. To provide a true overview of early Baroque French solo classifications against today’s voice equivalents, both male and female solo voice classifications are considered:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Classification</th>
<th>Modern-Day Voice Classification Equivalent</th>
<th>(Choral) Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dessus</td>
<td>Sopranos, including women, falsettists, castrati and boys</td>
<td>Possibly C to g’ with a falsetto or faussett range after g’ to d.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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105 Elliot, p. 42.
107 Which means ‘chamber music.’
108 Which refers to the music of the French royal chapel.
109 While outlined for choral works, these ranges can be extrapolated to their respective solo voices, understanding that these ranges are not definite and were probably more complex for their solo voices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Haute-Contre(^{112})</th>
<th>Altos, including women and men(^{113})</th>
<th>From d to b(^{\prime}), with after g(^{114}) up to b(^{\flat})(^{115}); however, Brossard’s Dictionaire expands this approximate range for the haute-taille to a(^{\prime}).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taille</td>
<td>Tenors</td>
<td>From c to g(^{116}) with an extension to b(^{\flat})(^{117}). This contrasts with the new ‘ténor élevé’ (range e to b(^{\flat})), with a falsetto extension to d(^{\flat})(^{118}) and the taille naturelle (with an approximate range of e – f(^{119})).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basse-Taille</td>
<td>Baritones</td>
<td>From B to f(^{120}) or extending from E to d(^{\prime}) with lower extension to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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110 The Helmholtz pitch notation system will be used throughout this article.
111 As outlined in Joseph de Lalande’s *Voyage en Italie* (1769). However, he outlines this for the ‘tenor’ voice. de Lalande also outlines two voice classifications which are lower to the tenor: haute-contre and taille. Therefore, it is confusing which voice type to which he is referring.
112 Primarily a classification used for soloists, this voice classification was commonly used in French opera for principle male roles. For example, Lully composed eight of his fourteen leading male roles as haute-contre parts. Rameau was equally besotted with the voice type, writing the majority of his leading title roles for Pierre de Jélyotte (1713–97), one of the most famous haute-contre singers (‘Haute-contre,’ *The Oxford Companion to Music, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 14, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e3175.).
113 Please refer to the above chart for a more detailed discussion, particularly the haute-contre choral part.
114 Above g\(^{\prime}\), Lalande claims that the haute-contre voice must ‘force their natural means by contracting their throats; but in this manner they lose in charm what they gain in range’ (N.E. Framery, *Encyclopédie méthodique: Musique*, i, 1791).
115 As outlined in Joseph de Lalande’s *Voyage en Italie* (1769).
116 As outlined in Joseph de Lalande’s *Voyage en Italie* (1769).
118 As outlined in Joseph de Lalande’s *Voyage en Italie* (1769).
119 As outlined in Sébastien de Brossard’s discussion of the oboe in his *Dictionaire de musique* (1703).
120 As outlined by Sébastien de Brossard in his *Dictionaire de musique* (1703).
In seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century France, the top two vocal classifications were designated to be sung by women, with the *haute-contre* also sung by men. The French *dessus*, the highest voice classification, did not exist exclusively. Rather, these French *treble* parts consisted of ‘divided textures’ and could be indicated as either *premier dessus* and *second dessus* or *haut-dessus* and *bas-dessus*. The *petite haute-contre* was also recognised.

The French delineation of a higher and lower *treble* or *dessus* voice in solo vocal compositions ‘created a more consistent...[and detailed]...terminology,’¹²³ which is more akin to today’s concept of the higher female voice classifications. This means that the French identified the split in the *dessus* or *treble* (or, today’s soprano) voice early on, with the *dessus* voice – the highest – versus the *bas-dessus* (or, today’s mezzo-soprano) voice – the second highest (also known as the second soprano voice), clearly delineated in their music. With this line of inquiry, the following French understanding of the female voice begins to emerge:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Classifications</th>
<th>Modern-Day Voice Classification Equivalents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Dessus</em>¹²⁴</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bas-Dessus</em>¹²⁵</td>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹²¹ As argued by Manuel García in his *Traité complet de l’art du chant* (1840-47).
¹²² ‘Dessus.'
¹²⁴ While the term *dessus* (the French equivalent to the English treble) was mainly used during the Baroque period, it remained in use in France until the nineteenth-century. In fact, Giachino Rossini’s first edition of *Guillaume Tell* in 1829 uses *dessus* to indicate the highest voice part, even though other French Baroque terms were no longer used (‘Dessus,’ *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 14, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/07655.).
¹²⁵ In Jean-Jacques Rosseau’s 1768 *Dictionnaire*, he states that the solo *bas-dessus* voice (today’s mezzo-soprano voice equivalent) was valued more in Italy than in France; however, he does champion one Mlle Gondré for her ‘...very fine *bas-dessus*. Indeed, Mozart’s approach and use of the treble voices in his serious operas was akin to that of his Baroque antecedents. Mozart composed ‘young, heroic male roles’ for castrati, including Sextus in *La clemenza di Tito*. While his female roles were all written for the soprano voice type, he did not specifically delineate between the higher and lower soprano voice. As such, his roles fall into both the soprano and mezzo-soprano voice categories (such as Annius in *La clemenza di Tito*) (Owen Jander, et al., ‘Mezzo-soprano,’ *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 14, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18571).
Once again, these delineations need to be kept in context with French historical pitches in the early Baroque period from approximately 1600 to 1730. French pitch frequency ranged from 384Hz–397Hz to 453Hz – 479Hz with a historical pitch standard including 390Hz to 464Hz.\(^{126}\)

### The Italian Singing School Tradition

Italy was the birthplace of the ““new music””: opera. This was greatly influenced by the Florentine Camerata’s exploration of ancient Greek theatre.\(^{127}\) With this exploration came new problems. Chiefly, Florentine composers were ‘confronted with the problem of imitating human feelings’\(^{128}\) in their music within this new musical genre. This necessity to convey emotions continued as opera evolved away from its Florentine origins to the Baroque structures (as first highlighted by the Roman and Venetian schools). Rodolfo Celletti, in *A History of Bel Canto*, argues that this was the ‘most important of these...principle[s]’. Singing ‘should model itself on the expressive capacity of human speech and ‘imitate’ the feelings and passions depicted in the poetic text, with the aim of arousing emotion’.\(^{129}\) Clearly, early Baroque composers needed new compositional styles to portray emotions, such as the seventeenth-century Italian *stile moderno* or *seconda prattica*.

Italian vocal training conservatories first opened in the early Baroque period; however, singers were not just trained at conservatories in Italian cities, such as Naples. Singers often learned the craft from family members, who passed down the singing tradition to each generation. Italian singers were often employed or – at the very least – ‘associated with’ churches and/or courts. They could also sing at private events or purely for their own enjoyment of music. The majority of Italian Baroque singers were ‘complete musicians’, meaning that they were trained in the art of composition, were apt musical theorists and could also proficiently play an instrument.

### The Italian Female Solo Voice

In the early Baroque period, high voices – both in solo and ensemble works – were the ‘most favored’. Female singers garnered their celebrity status singing in operas and concerts. Contrastingly, *castrati* became famous singing in churches, sacred places where women were forbidden to perform. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, *castrati* crossed the sacred-secular divide and conquered the public stage as well.

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\(^{126}\) Haynes, pp. 155-229.

\(^{127}\) Elliot, p. 19.


\(^{129}\) Ibid., p. 16.
For unaltered male voices, the highest voice classification – the tenor – was ‘favored’. Both Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi regularly composed for this voice type. As a famous tenor himself, it was natural for Caccini to compose for his own voice classification. Monteverdi assisted in the development of this voice type, composing important roles for tenors in his operas.

As high voices were the ‘most favoured in the early Baroque’ period, the majority of the early treatises ‘aimed’ their vocal advice at these singers. In particular, Pier Francesco Tosi, a castrato whose career peaked in the late 1600s, dedicated his key singing treatise at sopranos. Similar to the initial French attitude, the bass voice classification was not ‘popular’. However, low male singers as well as castrati with lower mezzo or alto ranges who achieved ‘virtuosic’ singing status could maintain successful careers.\(^{130}\)

Pier Francesco Tosi’s Remarks on Italian Vocal Classifications

Pier Francesco Tosi stipulates four vocal classifications in his 1723 treatise, *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Classifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soprano or ‘Treble Voice’(^{131})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contralto or ‘Contr’Alto’(^{132})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor(^{133})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass(^{134})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Offering more insight into the early Baroque vocal classification quandary, Tosi focuses on the higher voice categories, reaffirming the time period’s preference towards high (female and male) voice classifications.\(^{135}\) Tosi states that the top two voice categories and their respective terminology were interchangeable\(^{136}\) between males and females.

Accordingly, the theorist focuses on the high voice, the soprano, of the ‘fair Sex’\(^{137}\) (meaning women); he also dedicates significant time to the male castrati. In his treatise, Tosi is explicit in his understanding of the soprano voice classification. He details the

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\(^{130}\) Elliot, p. 20.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., p. 1.
\(^{133}\) Ibid., p. 11.
\(^{134}\) Ibid., p. 103.
\(^{135}\) As stated in the previous section.
\(^{136}\) Such as male sopranos and contraltos.
\(^{137}\) Tosi, ‘To ALL Lovers of MUSICK.’
generic soprano classification\textsuperscript{138} as one used to describe both the highest female voice classification as well as the highest male\textit{ castrato} voice classification. To help define the soprano voice further, he utilises a ‘compare and contrast’ method; simply, he juxtaposes it with the contralto classification.\textsuperscript{139} Accordingly, Tosi outlines the \textit{correctly-trained} soprano voice\textsuperscript{140} via two vocal range points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soprano Vocal Outlines</th>
<th>Musical Notation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The upper extreme of the ‘full natural Voice terminates...upon the fourth Space, which is C; or on the fifth Line, which is D.\textsuperscript{141} It must be noted that Tosi is using the soprano (C1) clef as his point of reference.</td>
<td>\textit{In historical notation:}\textsuperscript{139}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In modern-day notation, this would be noted in the treble clef (see right) with C as the third space and D is the fourth line.</td>
<td>\textit{In modern-day notation:}\textsuperscript{139}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then, the ‘feigned Voice becomes of Use’ to ascend the higher notes as well ‘...as returning to the natural Voice’ in a</td>
<td>\textit{In historical notation:}\textsuperscript{139}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{138} English translator John Ernest Galliard argues in favour of Tosi’s soprano bias since he believes it is the classification which ‘Youth possesses...mostly, and that is the Age when they should begin to study Musick.’ Hence, as they believe most singers are sopranos (at least to begin with), Tosi addresses the vocal majority. Of course, this argument neatly sidesteps the early Baroque preference for higher voices, omitting this bias from their argument completely.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 1.

\textsuperscript{140} Tosi is explicit in his discussion regarding the soprano voice classifications and its two vocal range points. Both are dependent upon the voice being \textit{correctly-trained}. The soprano voice cannot achieve its full potential if it is either untrained or ill-trained. Therefore, Tosi argues the following regarding voice teachers responsible for training (soprano) voices: ‘A diligent Master, knowing that a \textit{Soprano}, without the \textit{Falsetto}, is constrained to sing within the narrow Compass of a few Notes, ought not only to endeavour to help him to it, but also to leave no Means untried, so to unite the feigned and the natural Voice, that they may not be distinguished; for if they do not perfectly unite, the Voice will be of divers’.

\textsuperscript{141} Tosi states in his treatise that he prefers the \textit{Pitch of Lombardy} (Tosi, p. 6), which was more than half a tone higher than the \textit{Pitch of Rome} (Galliard’s thirteenth footnote (Tosi, p. 80) explains this tonal concept). Although he never specifically states what this pitch and tuning system are, Bruce Haynes conjectures that Tosi most likely meant ‘A + early 18\textsuperscript{th}-century Venice. Haynes based this conjecture on a statement made by Paolucci (1756): ‘Venetian pitch [Il Corista Veneto] used to be the same as Corista di Lombardia, and is preserved in a few organs still, but the already celebrated organ maker Master Pietro Nacchini was the first to lower organs in those countries about a semitone, and his students follow their master’s example; indeed some organs have been lowered more than a semitone, and all the organs they make there [in the Veneto] now are like that compared to the organs in Lombardy’(Haynes, p. 160).
seamless vocal transition. Of course, Tosi is referring to the ‘head’ voice and ‘chest’ voice’, respectively, with the vocal break occurring around high C or high D. The ‘chest’ voice (Tosi’s ‘natural Voice’) goes up to the ‘head’ voice (Tosi’s ‘feigned Voice’).

In modern-day notation:

It must be noted that the ‘full natural Voice’ is the only register which terminates in this discussion. More pointedly, it only terminates on the upper end of the soprano vocal range. Tosi does not provide a termination for the lower end of it. The theorist also fails to indicate a termination for the ‘feigned voice’ range. This leaves the vocal range possibilities open to each individual soprano’s voice. Nevertheless, based on his argument, if both of the above points are satisfied, the soprano’s voice will have an expansive and smooth range with easy access to the higher notes intrinsic to the soprano vocal classification.

Similarly, Tosi defines the contralto voice via vocal range as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contralto Vocal Outlines</th>
<th>Musical Notation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| When a singer cannot sing ‘Notes...[which] exceed the fourth Space’. | **In historical notation:**

In modern-day notation:

If the singer cannot sing above a high C, Tosi argues that he or she should not be classified as a soprano; the singer should sing as a contralto. Still, he does not completely use the ‘fourth space’ as a determinant of contralto vocal classification. Tosi often states
that a singer’s inability to sing above the ‘fourth Space’ is an unwanted side effect from ineffectual teaching of the ‘first Rudiments’, stating that ‘many Masters put their Scholars to sing the Contr’Alto, not knowing how to help them to the Falsetto, or to avoid the Trouble of finding it’. Therefore, the contralto vocal classification is not completely determined by vocal range. Rather, it is more of a guideline of singing comfort.

Once again, today’s interpreter is reminded to keep early Baroque Italian historical pitches (from approximately 1600-1730) in mind. Italian historical pitches ranged widely in frequency from 384Hz - 397Hz to 480Hz - 508Hz (in Venice and the Venetian Republic); 409Hz - 427Hz to 480Hz - 508Hz (in Milan, Lombardy and the Veneto); 384Hz - 397Hz to 409Hz - 427Hz (in Rome and its environs); 361Hz - 383Hz to 453Hz - 479Hz (in other Italian cities and areas, including Mantua, Padua, Naples and Ferrara, in the Veneto), Florence, Tuscany and south of Naples, the northern cities/areas, the Veneto overall, Naples and Bologna); and 384Hz - 397Hz to 453Hz - 479Hz (in Venice and Milan). Also, Italian historical pitch standards included 392Hz to 495Hz (in Venice and the Venetian Republic); 413Hz to 495Hz (in Milan, Lombardy and the Veneto); 384Hz to 453Hz (in Rome and its environs); 373Hz to 464Hz (in other Italian cities and areas, including Mantua, Padua, Naples and Ferrara, (in the Veneto), Florence, Tuscany and south of Naples, the northern cities/areas, the Veneto overall, Naples and Bologna); and 392Hz to 464Hz (in Venice and Milan).

**Italian Vocal Registers**

142 Tosi, p. 5.
143 Ibid., p. 6.
144 In fact, the theorist argues that most singers are sopranos forced to sing as contraltos due to ill-educated voice teachers who do not know ‘how to help them to the Falsetto, or…avoid the Trouble of finding it’. As such, a ‘diligent [singing] Master, knowing that a Soprano, without the Falsetto, is constrained to sing within the narrow Compass of a few notes, ought not only to endeavour to help him to it, but also to leave no Means untried’. If singing teachers could successfully ‘unite the feigned to the natural Voice’, the singing world would not have experienced ‘so great a scarcity of Soprano’s.’ Tosi further admits that vocal range will diminish once the singer is past her prime. As she becomes older, the singing voice will ‘decline…and, in Progress of Time’. Accordingly, the singer ‘…will either sing a Contr’Alto, or pretending still, out of a foolish Vanity, to the Name of a Soprano’. In order to keep up the latter charade, the singer will need to ‘make Application to every Composer, that the Notes may not exceed the fourth Space (viz., C) nor the Voice hold out on them’.

145 From approximately 1600 to 1730.
146 Haynes, pp. 118-133.
147 Ibid., pp. 128-227.
148 Ibid., pp. 132-227.
149 Ibid., pp. 118-133.
150 Ibid., pp. 128-227.
151 Ibid., pp. 132-227.
Clearly, as indicated by Tosi’s discussion of different vocal registers, their use as well as the ‘proper...combining or blending...[of]...them’ was extremely important to early theorists and, hence, consistently addressed in contemporary sources. Indeed, they were ‘discussed at length’ in a variety of sources, including Tosi’s treatise. This is particular relevant to early Baroque music, since its vocal music only possessed a ‘modest range’. Seventeenth-century vocal music usually did not span more than an octave.

By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the range of vocal music had expanded. It now required its singers to be able to sing almost two octaves.\footnote{Elliot, p. 20.} As a result, singers needed to develop their instruments to accommodate these expanding ranges. With this range development came the management of different registers, a delicate and necessary evil for all singers.

Theorists, including Tosi, began to discuss these different registers and their management in great detail. They identified two registers for both male and female voices: the chest voice (or voce di petto) and the head voice (or voce di testa). For men, the use of the falsetto voice instigated a full plethora of opinions. Male falsettists were commonly employed in church choirs, even during the reign of the castrati. Yet, there was no contemporary consensus on this male voice type. In fact, not everyone appreciated male falsettists. Giulio Caccini did not favour it, preferring his singers to ‘sing with a full, natural voice, avoiding falsetto,’\footnote{Giulio Caccini, \textit{Le nuove musiche}, Florence, Appresso I Marescotti, 1601, p. 56.} so that the singer did not have a noticeable break in his voice. This also helped to avoid a ‘tense, forced quality’\footnote{Elliot, p. 20.} in the voice’s higher range.

Naturally, however, Tosi argues for a different approach in his 1723 treatise. Tosi, who was in his seventies when he penned his treatise, formulated his own ideas on the subject based on the singing style of his musical prime: the late 1600s singing style. As his treatise was published 105 years after Caccini’s death in 1618, there had been plenty of time for vocal technique to advance and solve this vocal register/vocal break issue. Accordingly, rather than avoid engaging the two registers, he suggested ‘uniting’ the two, so that they could ‘...not be distinguished’.\footnote{Ibid.} He further argues: ‘Among the Women, one hears sometimes a soprano entirely di petto...[using only her ‘natural voice’]..., but among the male sex it would be a great rarity’.\footnote{Tosi, p. 6.}

While Elliot acquiesces that Tosi’s stress on ‘blending the different registers of their voice into one smooth-sounding whole’ might not be particularly relevant to today’s singers, it is extremely relevant to his discussion on voice classifications. According to Tosi, if the voice does ‘...not perfectly unite, the Voice will be of divers Registers’, which would result in the voice ‘los[ing]...its Beauty’. For sopranos, their ‘difficulty consists in uniting...’the ‘full natural Voice’ with the ‘feigned Voice’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 5.} If this is not done correctly, it ruins the singer’s voice.
Therefore, Tosi’s discussion on registers is more than simply a ‘warning...against screaming’ as is commonplace today or a reminder to today’s singers that a ‘preference for gentle, soft higher notes’ would not go amiss. It is a vital part of understanding early Baroque singers and their voices, particularly their concept of voice classifications and how they were created and accessed. Thus, although it does suggest that today’s female singers could utilise the chest voice a bit more to their lowest notes, and that both female and male singers could also ‘blend a little more head voice into the higher notes,’\textsuperscript{158} it also argues for a clear break between the ‘chest’ and ‘head’ voices, which helps to define either the soprano or contralto voice classification.\textsuperscript{159}

**The German Singing School Tradition**

Even in the seventeenth century, Italy and the Italian style heavily affected music in Germany, with Christoph Bernhard – like his teacher Heinrich Schütz before him – travelling to Italy to recruit singers for the Dresden chapel. The Italian craze held steady into the eighteenth century, with Germany still actively seeking out Italian singers to perform in its operas and noble households as well as continuing to recruit them to perform in their court chapels. Similarly, the Germans were besotted with French dance. They often hired French dancing masters to instruct the German aristocracy in the newest of French courtly dances.\textsuperscript{160}

Two other factors influenced German Baroque music: first, the Lutheran doctrine in church music and education affected music, as seen with J.S Bach’s compositions; and, second, the King of Prussia’s – Frederick the Great – consistent involvement in the creation, development and performances of music in the Berlin court. An amateur performer and composer,\textsuperscript{161} Frederick instantly made his musical presence known at court when he was crowned king in 1740. He immediately employed Quantz, C.P.E. Bach and Agricola at his court. But, rather than leaving the finite details to the professionals, Frederick ‘enjoyed involving himself with every aspect of musical life and production at his court,’\textsuperscript{162} often meddling in his hired professionals’ crafts too much. Unfortunately, this over-zealous attitude led him to implement strict rules and edits, which specifically controlled musical composition and even ornamentation.

While some of these rules were introduced in the hopes of assisting musical taste, particularly the preclusion of ‘tasteless excess by Italian singers,’ an overall environment of restriction and limitation erupted instead. This led some to believe that Frederick’s musical palate was relatively ‘conservative’.\textsuperscript{163} For example, Frederick forbade singers to improvise vocal ornamentations in *da capo* arias. Instead, he commanded that all

\textsuperscript{158} Elliot, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{159} Of course, Elliot’s suggestions could help today’s interpreters possibly achieve a similar vocal quality to what Tosi was referring.
\textsuperscript{160} Elliot, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{161} He studied studied flute with Quants and performed the keyboard with C.P.E. Bach.
\textsuperscript{162} Elliot, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{163} Elliot, p. 79.
ornamentations were to be pre-plotted and written out by the music’s respective composer. This control extended down to appoggiaturas and even trills. Accordingly, Agricola’s interpretation of Tosi’s 1723 treatise and his Italian musical style (especially his interpretation of ornamentations) also reflect the ‘restrictive’ quality of the Berlin School.

Johann Friedrich Agricola’s Remarks on German Vocal Classifications

In 1757, Johann Friedrich Agricola expanded Tosi’s original 1723 treatise in a translated and interpreted version of the treatise, titled Anleitung zur Singkunst. Again, as the Italian style influenced German music as far back as the seventeenth-century, this extrapolation of (or, rather, response to) Italian ideas is a logical manifestation of its influence. In it, he offers a discussion on the ‘various voice types’. Agricola believes that types – or classifications – vary according to vocal physiology. The theorist divides voices into two types: the ‘principle types’ and the ‘most common middle classifications’. With one last reminder, today’s interpreter must contextualise these ‘voice types’ in German historical pitch frequencies, which ranged from 384Hz - 397Hz to 480Hz - 508Hz, and a historical pitch standard from 391Hz to 495Hz. Historical pitch frequency ranges and pitch standards differed in specific cities and areas, including Dresden (with historical pitch frequencies ranging from 384Hz - 397Hz to 409Hz - 427Hz and a historical pitch standard including 392Hz to 413Hz); Leipzig (with historical pitch frequencies ranging from 384Hz -397Hz to 453Hz - 479Hz and a historical pitch standard including 391Hz to 464Hz); Berlin (with historical pitch frequencies range including 397Hz - 405Hz and a historical pitch standard of 401Hz); Hamburg (with historical pitch frequencies ranging from 384Hz - 397Hz to 480Hz - 508Hz and a historical pitch standard including 392Hz to 495Hz); Nuremberg (with historical pitch frequencies ranging from 409Hz - 427Hz to 453Hz - 479Hz and a historical pitch standard including 413Hz to 464Hz); Darmstadt (with a historical pitch

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164 This is quite amusing since even though Frederick forbade singers to improvise, he probably studied improvisation with Quantz. Frederick actively composed cadenzas and ornaments, as seen with an aria by Johann Hasse in the Wolff collection of vocal improvisations (Hellmuth Christian Wolf, Original Vocal Improvisations from the 16th-18th Centuries, Anthology of Music 41, Cologne, A. Volk, 1972, pp. 143-68).

165 Elliot, p. 79.


167 Ibid.

168 Haynes, pp. 134-267,

169 Ibid., pp. 270-273.

170 Ibid., pp. 273-275.

171 Ibid., pp. 274-275.

172 Ibid., pp. 275-276.

173 Ibid., p. 276.
standard ranging between a major second higher and a minor third higher as well as a major second lower than other German pitch standards\(^{174}\)); Frankfurt am Main (with historical pitch frequencies ranging from 397Hz - 405Hz and a historical pitch standard including 403Hz\(^{175}\)); Stade (with historical pitch frequencies ranging from 409Hz - 427Hz to 480Hz - 508Hz and a historical pitch standard including 413Hz to 495Hz\(^{176}\)); Halle (with a historical pitch standard with a minor third difference\(^{177}\)); Breslau (with a historical pitch standard varying between a major second and a minor third\(^{178}\)); Zwickau and Zeitz (with a historical pitch standard with a variance of a major second\(^{179}\)); and Zerbst (with a historical pitch standard a semitone lower\(^{180}\)).

First, Agricola recognised four ‘princip[al] types’\(^{181}\) in his 1757 treatise, which he identified according to vocal mechanism physiology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Princip[al] Vocal Classification Type</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male or Female Soprano</td>
<td>The ‘princip[al]’ voice classification with the smallest windpipe opening of all principle voice classifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male or Female(^{182}) Alto</td>
<td>The ‘princip[al]’ voice classification with a ‘windpipe opening ...larger than a soprano[’s]... windpipe opening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>The ‘princip[al]’ voice classification with a windpipe opening ‘... larger than an alto[’s]... (^{183}) windpipe opening. Also, Agricola notes that the male soprano voice usually changes into the tenor voice classification (when not castrated).(^{184})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>The ‘princip[al]’ voice classification with a windpipe opening ‘... larger than the tenor...[’s]...(^{185}) windpipe opening. This makes the bass voice’s windpipe opening the largest of all principle voice types. Again, Agricola notes that the male alto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{174}\) Ibid., pp. 276-277.
\(^{175}\) Ibid., p. 277.
\(^{176}\) Ibid., p. 277.
\(^{177}\) Ibid., pp. 277-278.
\(^{178}\) Ibid., pp. 278-279.
\(^{179}\) Ibid., pp. 279-280.
\(^{180}\) Ibid., pp. 279-280.
\(^{181}\) Ibid., pp. 276-277. Meaning principal vocal classifications.
\(^{182}\) Ibid., p. 72.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., p. 71.
\(^{184}\) Ibid., p. 72.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., p. 71.
Following Tosi’s original line of inquiry, Agricola also often focuses on the ‘soprano’ classification (for both female singers and male singers\(^\text{187}\)) in his vocal classification discussion. Specifically, he notes that differences in tones are more ‘easy to perceive’\(^\text{188}\) in the soprano voice than in the ‘middle voice…’ classifications.

Agricola outlines the ‘most common middle classifications’\(^\text{189}\) as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male or Female(^\text{191}) Low Soprano</th>
<th>Modern-Day Voice Classification Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today, HIPP interpreter Julianne Baird(^\text{192}) identifies this vocal classification as the modern-day <em>Mezzo-Soprano</em>(^\text{193}) voice classification.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Tenor</td>
<td>Agricola also equates it with ‘Baritone’(^\text{194}) (sometimes referred to as ‘high basses’(^\text{195}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Again, the male low soprano usually changes into the low tenor or baritone (when not castrated).(^\text{196})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, Agricola defined the middle voice classifications much more arbitrarily. Also, it is important to note that the male or female low soprano is equated to the female mezzo-soprano\(^\text{197}\) voice classification today by Baird. Just as Elliot identified modern-day voice classification equivalents for early Baroque French voice classifications, so does Baird in her translation of Agricola’s 1757 treatise. By identifying the female low soprano,

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\(^{186}\) Ibid., p. 72.
\(^{187}\) Ibid., p. 68.
\(^{188}\) Ibid., p. 66.
\(^{189}\) Ibid., p. 71.
\(^{190}\) Ibid., p. 72.
\(^{191}\) Agricultural voices and falsettists also played a major part in early opera; however, since this discussion is limited to the modern-day mezzo-soprano and, thus, focuses primarily on female voice types, we will omit a detailed discussion on castrati at this time.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., p. 71.
\(^{194}\) Ibid., p. 71.
\(^{195}\) Ibid., p. 77.
\(^{196}\) Ibid., p. 72.
\(^{197}\) Baird notes that the ‘…nineteenth- and twentieth-century term for this voice range is “mezzo-soprano”’ (Ibid., Note #46, p. 263).
Agricola (and, indirectly, in Tosi) treatise began to recognise the extreme breadth that the historical soprano voice classification encompassed. Indeed, the historical soprano voice classification could no longer describe the variety of voices it represented. The middle voice was no longer absorbed by the soprano classification. A separation of soprano voices was needed, with the middle vocal classification\(^{198}\) finally emerging. Given the evolution of vocal technique and compositional vocal settings, this 1757 treatise hints at the emergence of the mezzo-soprano voice classification, which only became common towards the end of this century.\(^{199}\) With this recognition of another possible voice classification, Agricola distinguishes three female voice classifications: ‘soprano’, ‘low soprano’\(^{200}\) and ‘alto’.

The theorist, however, does not appear to be attempting to revolutionise vocal concepts. As such, Agricola acquiesced that the ‘principal’ vocal classifications are not rigidly set. Due to the unique and varying physical nature of the human voice, each main classification can contain ‘numerous subgroups’. Agricola further argued that vocal classification is dependent upon vocal ‘comfort’, which can be understood as vocal tessitura today. Accordingly, a singer with a ‘predominant’ chest voice will actually ‘prefer the middle notes’ in his or her ‘range (étendue)’, even if the singer can sing ‘quite high’. Correspondingly, the singer who sings ‘predominantly’ in the ‘head voice’ will ‘prefer’ to sing in the higher range. It would be detrimental to a voice not comfortable with a certain part of her range to forcibly sing in it for a prolonged period of time. Consequently, Agricola is insinuating that singers’ vocal classifications are based on the vocal mechanism itself. Both the anatomy of the windpipe as well as the singer’s vocal tessitura affects the singer’s vocal classification, with the singer’s optimal comfort level dictating the singer’s most suitable vocal classification.

The Historical/Modern-Day Mezzo-Soprano Voice Classification Quandary

Taking Haynes’s advice to heart, is a reconciliation between historical and modern-day voice categories appropriate? As modern-day HIPP interpreters, such as Elliot and Baird, have often provided modern-day equivalencies to historical vocal classifications, it does not appear that this approach can be avoided. However, since modern-day vocal pedagogies and techniques significantly affect modern-day vocal classifications and concepts, it appears that this approach is biased from its beginning. Indeed, today’s singer should instead be asking: which vocal pedagogies and techniques were used and

\(^{198}\) By this time, vocal range and training had pulled higher as well, which necessitated an addition of a new voice type to accurately describe the soprano and mezzo-soprano voice classifications. It must be noted, however, that the soprano voice classification (and not the mezzo-soprano classification) was new. Simply, the previous ‘soprano’ voice had been moved down and renamed.


\(^{200}\) Today’s mezzo-soprano.
not used during the early Baroque period? Nevertheless, since this equivalency approach cannot be avoided, it is best at least to address today’s mezzo-soprano vocal classification and how it is defined in today’s operatic industry.

**Modern-Day Vocal Classifications**

Unlike the early operatic understanding of the voice, the current operatic understanding of the voice is largely standardised throughout Western operatic traditions. While the operatic art form is still evolving, a large percentage of operas in the current canon are from the nineteenth-century vocal school. Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century operas are rarer and are more often token or perfunctory when presented by a general opera repertory company. Nevertheless, early opera is less mainstream than the operatic standards of Mozart, Puccini and Verdi. Accordingly, the training provided for today’s opera singers exists to help singers fit into this vocal mould so that they can successfully perform standard repertoire only.

**The Solo Female Voice**

Contrasting to her predecessors, three distinct solo female vocal classifications exist today:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern-Day Female Vocal Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contralto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the mezzo-soprano vocal classification is now recognised as a distinct vocal classification, there is still some disagreement on the basic particulars of the vocal

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201 The larger opera houses, such as the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York and Covent Garden in London, UK, will hark back to the works of Georg Frideric Händel more consistently, and others, such as Glyndebourne, attempt to regularly include earlier works, even back to Monteverdi. Of course, audio and audio-visual recordings also affect the availability of early music repertoire.

202 Several operatic companies do exist today which specifically specialise in early operatic repertoire, such as The Early Opera Company (Kent, England, UK), Pinchgut Opera (Sydney, NSW, Australia) and Helios Early Opera (Boston, MA, USA).

203 Again, the distinction between the soprano and the mezzo-soprano vocal classifications appeared at the end of the eighteenth-century, with the division of the soprano voice into two voice classifications becoming widely-accepted and used in the early nineteenth-century. This was due to the phasing out of the male castrato voice, which had approximately the same range as the female mezzo-soprano (Owen Jander, J.B. Steane, Elizabeth Forbes, Ellen T. Harris (with Gerald Waldman), ‘Mezzo-Soprano [mezzo],’ Oxford Music Online, accessed 12 August 2012, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com).
classification. For instance, the mezzo-soprano vocal range is still hotly contested today, with disagreement existing on its exact range. Several range outlines are suggested, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist(s)</th>
<th>Suggested Mezzo-Soprano Vocal Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Richard Wigmore | Its range is ‘midway between those of the contralto and the soprano, roughly $a—a''$ (often $b''$):  

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{\includegraphics[width=1cm]{range1.png}} \\
&\text{to} \\
&\text{or} \\
&\text{\includegraphics[width=1cm]{range2.png}}
\end{align*}
\] |

| Owen Jander, J.B. Steane, Elizabeth Forbes and Ellen T. Harris (with Gerald Waldman) | Disagree, arguing the music typically written for the mezzo-soprano vocal classification possesses the range  

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{\includegraphics[width=1cm]{range3.png}} \\
&\text{of} \\
&\text{to} \\
&\text{\includegraphics[width=1cm]{range4.png}}
\end{align*}
\]  , allow they do accept that this range can be expanded – lower or higher – and is often done so in composition for solo voice. |

While insightful, these basic understandings are limited. Modern-day vocal theorists argue vocal classification is based on more than range. Theorists Frederick Husler and Yvonne Rodd-Marling as well as Meribeth Bunch all argue vocal classification is two-fold. It is based on:

1. Range;
2. And tessitura,\(^{205}\) which can also insinuate vocal colour

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\(^{205}\) The term means ‘texture’ in Italian and refers to the ‘vocal compass’ in which a vocal work lies. It does not outline the full range of notes used but, rather, refers to the ones which are used most often (Owen Jander, ’Tessitura,’ Grove Music Online, accessed January 8, 2013, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/).
Such an understanding offers deeper insight into modern-day vocal classifications. As this investigation focuses on the female solo voice, the following shall exclude the modern-day male vocal classifications.

In *Singing: The Physical Nature of the Vocal Organ – A Guide to the Unlocking of the Singing Voice*, Husler and Rodd-Marling expand upon modern-day vocal classifications, outlining the ranges of only the contralto and soprano vocal classifications as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal Classifications</th>
<th>Vocal Ranges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contralto Voice</td>
<td>[(\text{range of notes} )]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soprano Voice</td>
<td>[(\text{range of notes} )]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They do admit that a lack of high notes or low notes – or even a comprehensive vocal range – is ‘not always proof of the category to which a voice belongs’. Whereas natural limits on both ends of the range spectrum do exist, one cannot underestimate the range that lies between them. Hence, Husler and Rodd-Marling believe the best way to determine a voice’s category is by its ‘sound’ – provided that the listener’s ear has been properly trained to determine between the ‘sound-character’ of a voice and its vocal quality, which also insinuates its vocal classification.

Second, vocal classification is determined by tessitura, or the ‘ease or difficulty with which a voice (an ‘unlocked’ one...), is able to maintain a high pitch, a high tessitura – not just to sing an isolated high note here and there’. In extremely difficult cases, the theorists advise waiting until the voice has completely matured before classifying the voice – or, rather, letting it classify itself. Still, both realise that ‘every possible gradation exists between the main vocal categories; nature does not classify as rationally as the

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206 Of course, this is extremely problematic as it flagrantly omits the modern-day mezzo-soprano voice classification, which is firmly embedded in the modern-day operatic canon.

207 These range limits are guides, at best.

208 It must be noted that the category of mezzo-soprano is not listed in these vocal classifications and, thus, does not receive a range outline. This omission of the standard mezzo-soprano voice is not, however, supported by the majority of the standard operatic community.


210 Ibid., p. 86.
composer’. For that reason, they argue fach specialisations can offer further assistance in understanding the qualities of a voice.

In Dynamics of the Singing Voice, Meribeth Bunch similarly argues that vocal classifications are best determined by range and tessitura. First addressing vocal range, Bunch claims that the current ‘artistically acceptable range’ for the majority of singers is ‘two to two-and-a-half octaves although they can produce notes of higher and lower pitch’. Nonetheless, singers should not be expected to sing his or her highest or lowest notes in public. Those who possess a range of four or five octaves are ‘exceptional’. Of course, in early Baroque repertoire, a range of two to two-and-a-half octaves for any vocal classification would have been non-existent until the early eighteenth-century (with very few exceptions). It is only as the art of singing progressed that female voices got pushed higher and higher.

Pointedly, Bunch negates the ‘common misconception’ that singers are classified as soprano, mezzo-soprano or contralto based on ‘their range of pitches’. She argues singers in these vocal classifications will possess almost the exact ranges – and, with training – all be able to sing a high C:

\[ \text{\includegraphics[width=0.2\textwidth]{highC.png}} \]

Rather, it is the quality of the high C which helps to determine vocal classification. Therefore, modern-day vocal classification is based on range as well as on where the ‘best quality of tone’ is found in a singer’s voice. ‘Depth and ease of sound’ within these pitches help to confirm the singer’s optimal tone quality. Accordingly, the higher tessitura is of better quality for a soprano voice, the middle tessitura for a mezzo-soprano voice and the lower-middle tessitura for the contralto voice.

Modern-Day Vocal Fachs

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211 Ibid., p. 87.
212 Vocal fachs will be discussed last.
213 In conversation with Tim Carter.
214 This begs further exploration, particularly the when, why and how; however, due to limit constraints, it cannot be explored here. Please see my thesis for further examination on the topic of the female (mezzo-soprano) voice.
215 Modern-day sopranos will have the best high Cs.
Today, an even more detailed system for vocal classifications exists. The German Fach-Systeme is one such way to detail these finite vocal classifications for today’s singers.\textsuperscript{217} Fach are vocal subcategories which originate from the German-theatre Fach system.\textsuperscript{218} They are ‘coloration[s]’ or types of vocal ‘timbre’\textsuperscript{219} in fully-matured voices. In this system, fächer are used to differentiate ‘specialized categor[ies]...of opera role[s]...within...[each]...of the chief vocal categories’. Thus, the professional fach system goes far deeper than the modern-day female vocal categories of:

1. Soprano;
2. Mezzo-soprano; and,
3. Contralto.\textsuperscript{220}

This system ‘distinguish[s]...between the various types of singing voice and...stipulate[e]s...which operatic roles are suitable for each of them.\textsuperscript{221}

The following concepts help define each fach:

1. The orchestral writing accompanying all operatic roles, which helps to indicate the vocal weight of a role;
2. The sostenuto\textsuperscript{222} and tessitura requirements of all operatic roles;
3. The quickness of skill necessary (i.e. ability to singing coloratura), which also helps to indicate vocal weight and colour;
4. And, finally, the ‘morphology’ of the performer.

The most basic characteristic of range is understood, since the general range of each overarching female voice classification (soprano, mezzo-soprano and contralto) helps to inform their corresponding fächer.

Yet, this standardised system of vocal sub-classifications and subsequent typecasting\textsuperscript{223} did not develop until the nineteenth-century. Therefore, while four mezzo-soprano fächer exist today, including the following:

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\textsuperscript{217} Naturally, this is not exclusive to the Germans. The French, Italian, etc. all have more finite vocal classification. However, as the Fach-Systeme offers a clear outline, it will be utilized in this discussion.


\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., p. 37.

\textsuperscript{220} Roughly twenty-five fachs are currently recognised ‘unilaterally’ in the operatic world, although several additional more ‘specialized’ sub-categories exist for certain operatic roles.

Whilst no ‘absolute definition’ exists for any of the fach sub-categories, these sub-categories have been ‘agreed upon as guides for both singers and opera houses by the people who know the roles and their requirements best: the directors, conductors, and the singers themselves’.


Mezzo-Soprano *Fach* Specialisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginner Mezzo-Soprano (Anfängerin-Mezzosopran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric Mezzo-Soprano/Acting Alto (Lyrischer Mezzosoprano/Spielalt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloratura Mezzo-Soprano (Koloratur-Mezzosopran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano (Dramatischer Mezzosopran)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It provides confusing insight into early Baroque operatic roles. While it would be ideal to co-opt these early Baroque roles within the confines of this new nineteenth-century vocal sub-classification system, it would be incorrect to try and claim older, non-canonical repertoire and attempt to assimilate it into the *Fach-Systeme*. Thus, any attempt to utilise the *Fach-Systeme* with early Baroque repertoire must be abandoned immediately.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, tension exists between the historical and modern-day female vocal classifications. Today’s mezzo-soprano clearly straddles the area most-contended as she is in the grey middle ground. Indeed, it is always easy to define (and re-define) the extremes of a vocal concept. It is much more difficult to identify where the middle voice fits.

Therefore, rather than trying to attempt to force early Baroque vocal classifications into modern-day vocal ones, she should instead analyse the problem itself: are modern-day vocal classifications appropriate or applicable for early Baroque repertoire? And, if they are relevant to this period, can they usefully be mapped out onto the repertoire? Unfortunately, rather than reconciling the gap between early Baroque female vocal classifications (accompanied by early Baroque historical pitch standard implications) and modern-day female vocal classifications, it appears to have widened it. Indeed, no wonder why there are a variety of modern-day voices co-opting ‘Dido’s Lament’ from Henry Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* for themselves – there is no hard and fast rule to this repertoire.

Yet, despite these difficult questions, this article still brings to light the following argument: the mezzo-soprano vocal classification (though unrecognised in the early Baroque period) is most likely the best-suited voice to sing the majority of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century repertoire, regardless of the voice.

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225 That is, in most situations in which the range, tessitura and historical pitch standards match up for the voice.
classifications originally\textsuperscript{226} suggested for the roles.\textsuperscript{227} In fact, it is these understandings which provide the modern-day operatic mezzo-soprano the justification to sing early Baroque ‘soprano’ roles. Although this will, most likely, remain a hotly-contested concept of the female singing voice, it appears that the historical evidence backs up this claim. As long as today’s mezzo-soprano undertakes an informed approach to seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century vocal music, she can access it much more successfully. Based on this investigation, I can offer the following informed HIPP approach:

1. First, she must better understand her vocal predecessors.
2. Next, she must consult the score to analyse its range and tessitura.
3. Then, she must contextualise the vocal music within its appropriate historical pitch standard.
4. Finally, she must attempt to sing the music.

Each step must be successful in order to proceed to the next. Still, if the final step is unsuccessful – since a compositional setting may simply not be suitable for a singer’s voice –, the song must be passed on in favour of better-fitting repertoire. This similarly applies to modern-day mezzo-soprano \textit{fächer} that are not vocally appropriate to sing this repertoire. As there was not only one kind of voice classification in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{228} there is not just one kind of mezzo-soprano voice recognised today.\textsuperscript{229} This should also be the case if the work is independently pitched outside of its original historical pitch, such as the widespread and unfortunate incorrect HIPP practice of using $a' = 415$ as a uniform historical pitch standard.\textsuperscript{230} Indeed, Bruce Haynes acknowledges that ‘of all musicians, singers are probably the ones who benefit most from performing at original pitches’\textsuperscript{231} as this directly impacts where the work fits the singer vocally. As previously explored within female voice classifications within the English, French, Italian and German national singing schools, a myriad of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century pitch standards and corresponding tuning systems existed in early

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{226} Today, the mezzo-soprano is often unsure how she can engage with repertoire historically indicated to be sung by sopranos (and even altos, in some cases).
\item \textsuperscript{227} Since the original ‘soprano’ was actually written for the voice type known as the ‘mezzo-soprano’ today.
\item \textsuperscript{228} This article moved from the general to the specific. Therefore, it does not dispute that more than one kind of mezzo-soprano voice exists today. However, it would be too presumptuous to attempt to assign early Baroque repertoire to modern-day \textit{fächer} as their understanding, composition and use of the female voice (through vocal personalisation) is different from that used today.
\item \textsuperscript{229} As seen above, with four \textit{fächer} recognised for today’s mezzo-soprano voice classification.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Italics mine.
\end{itemize}
operatic repertoire. If a singer accepts a singing engagement in which the piece is pitched independently from the pitch it was originally composed, today’s mezzo-soprano – despite following the above HIPP approach – may not be the best-suited singer for this work. Therefore, she must decide if the piece still fits vocally. If not, she must abandon it to her other female counterparts,\(^{232}\) as today’s soprano or contralto may be better suited to the work.

By addressing these historical vocal classification and pitch standard disconnects as well as addressing the modern-day female voice, today’s mezzo-soprano can begin to engage with early Baroque opera. Naturally, further investigation into this topic can assist in this engagement. For example, historical clefs also offer additional insight into this line of inquiry as they impacted the female voice and their classifications, particularly in regards to range breadth and tessitura. With a better historical and modern-day insight, she can begin to identify the repertoire that would best suit her voice according to these aspects. By independently deeming what is vocally-appropriate via this approach, she will rediscover early operatic repertoire.\(^{233}\) Finally, she can introduce early Baroque vocal works into her current repertory.

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\(^{232}\) Naturally, it is hard for any singer to decline a singing engagement; however, today’s mezzo-soprano must place the integrity of her vocal instrument above booking work. Otherwise, she puts her own instrument at risk.

\(^{233}\) Often, this means she can sing early Baroque repertoire labelled for the ‘soprano’ voice, as long as it fits vocally.