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When Divas and Rock Stars Collide: Interpreting Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé's *Barcelona*

Eve Klein

Mamma mia, what's this? Freddie Mercury, the man who perpetrated heavy-metal opera in 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' shrieking alongside an actual opera star? In 1987 Mercury somehow conned a world-class diva, Montserrat Caballé, to slum with him for an entire album. The result apparently was deemed too flaky to be released in the U.S., but in the wake of Queen's commercial resurgence (and Mercury's death last November from AIDS), any curio is up for grabs. (Farber 1992)

Introduction

This chapter considers Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé's operatic-rock album *Barcelona* (1988) as a logical extension of Mercury's fascination with operatic musical devices, narrative structures and iconography. With this album, two global superstars from divergent musical genres met and brought their musical perspectives into genuine collaboration. However, *Barcelona*, like other popular explorations of opera, has remained largely

unexamined because it sits somewhat uncomfortably across art and popular music, agitating anxieties and authenticities as they operate in both terrains.

This chapter will investigate how such anxieties became established by unpacking the circulation of opera within popular recording cultures as elite reproductions of operatic repertory, as ‘crossover’ music and through its appropriation by popular musicians. This chapter will then conduct an analysis of the *Barcelona* collaboration that situates its creation in the context of Mercury’s musical trajectory. Special consideration will be paid to the musical style established in ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ (1975). Comparing previous performances to the *Barcelona* album indicates that Mercury and Caballé largely did not attempt to emulate each other’s vocal style, but reproduced their existing vocal technique. Despite *Barcelona* exploring musical and vocal terrain already cultivated by Mercury in previous releases, critics had considerable difficulty viewing *Barcelona* as a credible exploration of rock and opera, precisely because Mercury and Caballé occupied the same creative space. Operatic critics aligned Caballé’s performance with crossover singing due to the apparent simplicity of the *Barcelona* songs. Rock critics heard Caballé’s operatic voice and *Barcelona*’s orchestral accompaniment and viewed it as ‘weird’ and ‘difficult to handle’ (Gage, 2012). As the first recording bringing together genuine international stars from their respective genres (see Promane, 2009, p. 140), Mercury and Caballé’s collaboration is problematic precisely because it bridged the popular/elite divide from both directions simultaneously.

Contextualisation: Opera within Popular Recording Cultures

This section will unpack the location of opera within twentieth-century popular recording cultures¹ and argue that opera has diverged into three distinct categories on record. The first category is elite reproductions of the operatic canon, usually presented as whole works or concert performances, and whose singers perform primarily in the world’s most

1 Morton defines recording cultures as encompassing ‘the motivations for and the outcomes of the act of recording; the relationships between the creators, promoters, and users of recording technology; and the interactions between people, recording machines, and recordings themselves’ (1999, p. 91). The term ‘popular recording cultures’ is employed in this article to situate recording cultures as occurring within the broader hierarchies of popular culture.

prestigious opera houses. The second category is ‘popular’ or ‘crossover’ presentations of operatic repertoire in which singers present selections of popular repertoire, where the material may be arranged or produced to reflect popular music production techniques, and where singers tend to orient their careers around record releases and touring shows. The third category is appropriations of opera into popular music by popular artists who use operatic forms to agitate, critique, add extended narrative coherence, create spectacle or explore more complex approaches to composition within existing genres of popular music. By unpacking the formation of these divisions, we can better understand how *Barcelona* brought different recording cultures into dialogue.

Recording and broadcast technologies such as record players, radios and microphones recast the way Western audiences listened to and engaged with classical music throughout the twentieth century (Morton, 1999, pp. 187–623; Day, 2000, pp. 199–256). The presentation of classical music on recorded media became highly stylised, in part because of the technical limitations and aesthetic practices such media imposed in their early developmental stages (Philip, 2004, pp. 26–62). Excerpts of operas, particularly arias, were popularised on recordings by singers such as Enrico Caruso and Mario Lanza. Despite successful operatic stage careers, both singers became mainstream celebrities whose audiences were most familiar with their voices via records, and, in Lanza’s case, also through his film career (Macy, 2009; Hischak, 2009). Macy (2009) notes that Caruso’s recordings ‘not only made him universally famous; they also did much to encourage the acceptance of recording as a medium for opera ... It has been aptly remarked that Caruso made the gramophone and it made him’. Lanza famously played Caruso in the 1951 biopic *The Great Caruso* (Thorpe, 1951).

The relationship between opera and popular music in the twentieth century consists of two interleaved histories. The first history is the evolution of popular opera, or popera, and its persistent tensions with ‘serious’ music, particularly elite repertory opera. The second is the appropriation of opera, including its styles and motifs, by popular musicians. Day considers that, in the twentieth century, the ‘production of recordings required mass markets’ and consequently ‘music lovers who frequented the opera house and concert hall and played chamber music ... at home had never represented more than a small minority of the population at large’ (2000, pp. 206–207). Distinctions between repertory opera and popular opera can be charted back to the early twentieth century when classical recordings

were promoted to the public as a means of enhancing ‘music appreciation’, and were considered by figures such as Schoenberg, Adorno and Toye as desensitising audiences and thereby devaluing the experience of music (Day, 2000, pp. 206–210). Importantly, a tradition of sentimental, light-hearted or highly stylised versions of arias continued to be captured even once full-length recordings of entire operas were possible. Adorno (1990) was highly sceptical of early reproduction of opera on short-playing (SP and EP) records in which selections of popular repertoire dominated due to durational restrictions. He was a more optimistic advocate of the longer-form LP record, considering the medium capable of resurrecting the operatic form through its extended temporal dimension (Adorno, 1990, pp. 65–66). However, despite the increased length of recordings made possible by LP records, charismatic and marketable singers like Lanza continued to present arias with contemporary arrangements alongside other popular songs and oriented their careers around singles releases, touring shows and films (see Bessette, 1999). Lanza released over 100 single and EP records from the late 1940s to early 1960s (see Discogs.com, 2016). Despite being one of the most recognised operatic singers of his generation, Lanza’s legacy is as an entertainer rather than an opera singer. Arguably, this is at least partially due to Lanza’s latter career being focused primarily on recording and broadcast media, rather than in the opera house sanctified by figures such as Adorno. By contrast, Caruso is remembered as an iconic repertory opera singer, because, unlike Lanza, Caruso continued to perform widely in the best-regarded opera houses throughout his recording career (see Macy, 2009). Despite similarities between the two singers and their recording careers, these artists have come to signify the distinction between repertory and popular opera within recording cultures.

The influence of classical vocal style, including smooth register transitions, vibrato, trills and other ornamentation, was evident in popular singing until the early–mid-twentieth century. At this point, popular music vocal production shifted radically towards the vernacular, speech-oriented vocalities of jazz, blues and rock-and-roll, made possible through emerging microphone technologies and necessitated by the co-emergent adoption of instrument amplification and later electrification (see Lockheart, 2003; Potter and Sorrell, 2012, pp. 244–245). Stark (2011, p. 255) considers that crossover singing is a phenomenon in which ‘classically trained singers perform in vernacular styles’, largely moving from performing classical to popular music. By implication, crossover singers are performing with the assistance of amplification technologies. However, popular opera singers

like Lanza, or, later, The Three Tenors, often continued to approach vocal performance using classical vocal techniques (Potter, 1998, p. 187). Therefore, distinction between elite repertory and popular opera can also be made at the level of the recording: by producing records with methods employed in popular music record production; by juxtaposing popular songs with classical repertoire; or by varying the arrangements of canonical arias and songs. Using a variety of devices, popular opera artists have navigated the precarious space between Western art music and Western popular music.

Recording aesthetics have subsequently played out tensions that persist between popular opera and ‘serious’ classical vocal music. Classical music aficionados compare recordings by contemporary popera singers like Katherine Jenkins, Sarah Brightman, Andrea Bocelli and Il Divo with ‘high-brow’ reproductions of operatic repertory performed by singers like Renée Fleming, who have distinguished themselves in the world’s elite concert halls and opera houses. Musical sales charts like Australia’s ARIA charts differentiate releases by labelling them as ‘Core Classical’ or ‘Classical Crossover’ (ARIA, 2016). These classifications, made by performing rights organisations and record companies, veil a range of social and cultural preconceptions around the role and value of classical music and the people who consume it. Pejorative distinctions between popular and artistic music, crossover and elite music echo wider anxieties about the threat media cultures have posed to the canonical narratives of Western art practices, including opera (see Morton, 1999, pp. 312–637; Ashby, 2010, p. 8; Klein, 2014).

Popular music possesses a counter-tradition of artists like Freddie Mercury, who have problematised the definitions and distinctions of ‘opera’ as a musical form through the appropriation of operatic musical devices, narrative structures and iconography into the sphere of popular music. Mercury, the lead singer of UK rock band Queen, was, along with guitarist Brian May, responsible for writing many of the band’s international hit releases (Whiteley, 2011). Mercury’s eclectic musical taste encompassed a fascination with opera; this interest was thrust upon 1970s rock audiences with the release of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ from the album *A Night at the Opera* (1975). Momentum generated from Queen’s rock opera explorations carried through into other music styles. McLeod (2001, p. 194) describes ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ as a juxtaposition of hard rock and operatic recitative, aria and chorus forms, utilised to represent a ‘world turned upside down, the Bohemia underworld of “Beelzebub”

where it is certain that “nothing really matters”. Further, McLeod argues that ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’s’ underworld motif mimics the ‘common tropes in opera, one found in works such as Monteverdi’s Orpheo, Purcell’s King Arthur, Mozart’s Don Giovanni, Weber’s Der Freischütz and Wagner’s Ring Cycle’, with the intent of mocking ‘the fascination with moral transgression shared by both opera and rock’ (2001, p. 194). McLeod offers a similarly novel analysis of Queen’s production techniques by comparing ‘the complexity of the 180 choral overdubs’ to ‘traditional operatic virtuosity and bombast’, concluding that the integration of rock and operatic forms is used ‘not to lend musical cachet but rather to mock the musical conventions of both opera and rock’ (2001, p. 194).

In the wake of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and the continuation of rock opera and related genres like hip hopera, artists such as Dollie de Luxe, Kate Miller-Heidke and Nina Hagen have continued a tradition of incorporating elements of opera and operatic vocal style into popular releases to add extended narrative coherence, create spectacle and explore more complex approaches to composition within existing genres of popular music. I have written about these appropriations elsewhere in more detail (see Klein, 2013). This music has a different sensibility from popular opera, with singers producing original material or recontextualisations of repertoire that unsettle audience expectations through the signification of opera in rock, pop and related contexts.

‘Eccentric’ Vocalities? Pairing Mercury with Caballé

Sitting between popular opera and the tradition of rock opera, which Mercury himself propelled, was the *Barcelona* album collaboration with operatic soprano Montserrat Caballé. *Barcelona* is notably different from most other explorations of opera in popular recording cultures because the album is simultaneously in dialogue with both the rock and operatic genres and audiences through the presence of its two lead performers. Caballé was a Spanish operatic *spinto* soprano² who was widely considered the leading interpreter of Verdi and Donizetti of her generation, and a successor to Maria Callas (Blyth, 2008). Caballé’s presence on the album

2 Spinto is an Italian term used to describe vocal timbre with a ‘pushed’ quality that is ‘large enough to sound powerful and incisive in dramatic climaxes’ (Jander and Harris, 2016a). The term also indicates particular operatic repertoire in which this vocal quality is necessary for its realisation (Jander and Harris, 2016a).

lent considerable credibility to the project for art music audiences, as her public profile signified the most elite aspects of operatic performance. Mercury too was widely considered the most virtuosic³ and iconic rock vocalist of his generation (Gilmore and Greene, 2014) who brought Queen's massive international fan base to the collaboration.

The *Barcelona* collaboration eventuated via a 1986 Spanish radio interview in which Mercury declared that the singer he most admired was Caballé (Promane, 2009, p. 141). Mercury and Caballé subsequently met in March 1987 and spent an evening improvising together with producer/arranger/composer Mike Moran. After, Caballé pursued Mercury to formally collaborate with her on a creative project (Promane, 2009, p. 147). The result was the *Barcelona* album, which brought together Mercury's powerful rock vocals with Caballé's soaring voice, over a mix of synth rock and orchestral textures, on what proved to be Mercury's final solo release.⁴ Mercury and Caballé kept their collaboration a secret until a televised concert of a performance in Ibiza, Spain, on 29 May 1987, which was intended to celebrate *Barcelona's* acceptance to host the 1992 Summer Olympic Games (Promane, 2009, p. 159). The title track 'Barcelona' became one of the two official commemorative songs of the Barcelona Olympics. Notably, the other official commemorative song was a popera track entitled 'Amigos Para Siempre' (Lloyd Webber, 1992) performed by (then) music theatre soprano Sarah Brightman and operatic tenor José Carreras. While Mercury died in 1991, a video montage featuring the song opened the televised coverage of the opening ceremony on 25 July 1992.

The *Barcelona* recordings had three pivotal releases. In 1987, after the initial live performance, 'Barcelona' was released and followed by a full album of the same name in 1988. Songs were co-written by Mercury

3 Recent acoustic analysis of Mercury's voice confirms the complexity of his vocal devices, encompassing a 37-semitone vocal range (F#2-G5), a 'surprisingly high mean fundamental frequency modulation rate (vibrato) of 7.0 Hz' and subharmonic phonation (Herbst et al., 2016).

4 Despite being a collaboration, *Barcelona* is widely represented as one of Mercury's solo album releases (for example, see Sullivan, 2012). This representation is likely due to Mercury characterising it this way himself: 'I was planning to do my second solo project, and I really did not want to do another album with a bunch of songs. I wanted this to have something different. It had to have another sort of stamp, something that spearheaded the damn thing. Suddenly, "Barcelona" emerged and swallowed me like a tidal-wave' (cited in Promane, 2009, p. 147). This characterisation stuck, as *Barcelona* was one of only two album releases Mercury made outside of Queen during this period, a period in which Mercury was also actively writing with Mike Moran (see Promane, 2009, p. 142). Another factor in this perception could be that Caballé did not contribute to the album's songwriting, whereas Mercury was active as a songwriter and producer of the release.

and Moran (who formally arranged and notated the orchestration) with Caballé contributing vocal cadenzas (Promane, 2009, p. 151). Tracks from *Barcelona* were included in *The Freddie Mercury Album*, a compilation of Mercury's solo repertoire released by EMI in 1992. For the 2012 reissue of *Barcelona*, Stuart Morley reorchestrated the synthesised orchestra parts and they were replaced with recordings by the 80-piece FILMharmonic Orchestra.

Each *Barcelona* release has been met with degrees of scepticism from music critics, mostly reviewing from the rock perspective, who have struggled with the combination of rock and operatic sensibilities. The *Entertainment Weekly* review that opens this chapter was typical of the perplexed responses to *Barcelona*. After contextualising the juxtaposition of Mercury and Caballé as performers, this review cuts to the heart of the difficulty:

All the material in *Barcelona* (cowritten by Mercury) is penned in a style meant to snub rock in favor of 'real' opera, but likable pop hooks keep peeking through. The stuff lands somewhere between Andrew Lloyd Webber and 'Climb Ev'ry Mountain.' Such a goofy context ultimately makes Caballé seem less like Maria Callas and more like Yma Sumac. But then, Mercury's reverence for the star and his flair for kitsch make this a novelty item too cracked to resist. (Farber, 1992)

Characterisations of the album, including 'flaky', 'goofy', 'kitsch' and 'novelty' (Farber, 1992), are echoed in reviews of the 2012 re-release, which similarly struggle with the pairing of Mercury and Caballé's voices:

Possibility [sic] the weirdest combo in pop history: the flamboyant Queen frontman Freddie Mercury and opera superstar Montserrat Caballé certainly hit the world between the eyes with their *Barcelona* album 25 years ago. To mark its quarter century, this special edition has been reworked ... You can tell the difference: big and lush and sweeping, it makes the previous version seem a little on the cheap side. Whether you can handle that eccentric vocal pairing, mind you, is quite another matter. (Gage, 2012)

At some level, these descriptions of *Barcelona* as a 'weird', 'eccentric', 'novelty' project are justified because the pairing of two such iconic operatic and rock virtuosos was something not previously heard within popular recording cultures. However, looking at the project within the trajectory of Mercury's career, the vocal and compositional devices employed in

Barcelona are a logical extension of the playful exploration of operatic forms he had been entertaining since he wrote ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’. An analysis of the musical and vocal devices Mercury employed across *Barcelona* and ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ establishes the continuity of this trajectory (see Table 7.1). Table 7.1 also compares the vocal devices Caballé employed on repertory opera recordings⁵ with her vocal performance on *Barcelona*. Additionally, sonic and musical alterations made for the 2012 reissue of the *Barcelona* album due to its reorchestration by Morley are also noted in Table 7.1. This analysis is used to assess the impact and rationale behind the critical reception of *Barcelona* within popular recording cultures.

An analysis of the *Barcelona* releases and ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ compiled for this article is summarised in Table 7.1 and indicates that compositional forms are fairly consistent between ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and the *Barcelona* songs. The aesthetic tendency underpinning both releases is operatic pastiche woven though rock with heavily mediated, hyper-real music production devices including vocal overdubbing and audible effects processing. Such production techniques have frequented Mercury’s songwriting and are present in earlier songs such as ‘My Fairy King’ (1973), which similarly used densely overdubbed vocals to create a choral effect. Mercury’s piano playing, familiar to Queen fans from ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and other tracks including ‘Nevermore’ (1974), ‘In the Lap of the Gods’ (1974) and ‘Love of My Life’ (1975), also features in *Barcelona* and is particularly showcased in ‘The Fallen Priest’. However, a key sonic difference in *Barcelona* is the absence of electric guitars as an instrumental texture in favour of strings timbres (synthesised in the 1988 album release). Drums are replaced by orchestral percussion except on ‘The Golden Boy’ and ‘How Can I Go On’.

5 Sampled recordings include Bellini: *Norma* (1973), Verdi: *Aida* (1986) and Donizetti: *Lucrezia Borgia* (1989).

Table 7.1: A comparison of vocal, instrumental and production devices in repertory opera, *Barcelona* and ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’

Text	Repertory Opera (<i>bel canto</i> repertoire as performed by Caballé on recording)	‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ (1975 single release)	<i>Barcelona</i> (1987 performance and 1988 album)	<i>Barcelona</i> (2012 album reissue)
Vocal devices				
Vocal ornamentation (including embellished runs, trills, turns and slides)	✓	✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓ Frequent ornamentation throughout Caballé’s performance, particularly in the form of elaborate cadenzas	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓ Frequent ornamentation throughout Caballé’s performance, particularly in the form of elaborate cadenzas
Wide vocal range for lead performer (2.5+ octaves)	✓	✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓
Vocal chorus (defined as layered, multi-part accompanying vocals including vocal overdubbing)	Chorus and ensemble singing: ✓	Backup singers: ✓ Vocal overdubbing: ✓	Backup singers: ✓ Vocal overdubbing: ✓	Backup singers: ✓ Vocal overdubbing: ✓
Speech-level vocalities/devices (including belting, yelling, talking and intoned-speech inflections)	Rarely used	✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✗	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✗
Legato phrase shaping	✓	✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓

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Text	Repertory Opera (<i>bel canto</i> repertoire as performed by Caballé on recording)	'Bohemian Rhapsody' (1975 single release)	Barcelona (1987 performance and 1988 album)	Barcelona (2012 album reissue)
Accented vocal effects (including glottal stops, marked/ accented notes)	✓	✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✓
Vocal vibrato	✓	Present on sustained notes	Mercury: ✓ Present throughout on sustained notes but utilised more frequently in classically oriented songs particularly 'Ensueño' and 'La Japonaise'	Mercury: ✓ Present throughout on sustained notes but utilised more frequently in classically oriented songs particularly 'Ensueño' and 'La Japonaise'
Amplified vocal textures (including breath sounds, rasps and whispering)	Rarely used	✓	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✗ Microphone employed for amplification but not utilised to inflect vocal production	Mercury: ✓ Caballé: ✗ Microphone employed for amplification but not utilised to inflect vocal production
Performance languages	Various	English	English, Japanese, Spanish	English, Japanese, Spanish
Timbral complexity (complex overtones present in vocal tone)	High	Moderate (Mercury)	Caballé: High Mercury: Moderate	Caballé: High Mercury: Moderate

Text	Repertory Opera (<i>be/ canto</i> repertoire as performed by Caballé on recording)	'Bohemian Rhapsody' (1975 single release)	Barcelona (1987 performance and 1988 album)	Barcelona (2012 album reissue)
Instrumentation				
Dense orchestration/ instrumentation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Orchestral instrument timbres	✓	✗	Synthesised orchestral instruments dominate recorded version. A combination of synthesisers and live performers used in the Ibiza performance	Synthesisers replaced with orchestral accompaniment
Electronic and rock instrument timbres	✗	✓	✓ Most notably used in 'The Golden Boy' and 'How Can I Go On'. No electric guitars present	✓ Most notably used in 'The Golden Boy' and 'How Can I Go On'. No electric guitars present
Musical structure	Varied and complex. Often featuring through-composition. Typically encompass instrumental interludes, chorus, aria, recitative and ensemble sections	Varied and complex. Featuring through-composition, instrumental and vocal solos, overdubbed chorus parts, and recitative-like sectional joins	Various structural devices employed. Complex but some tracks oriented around song forms particularly in singles released from the album. Also features instrumental and vocal solos, overdubbed chorus parts, ensemble parts, and recitative-like sectional joins	Various structural devices employed. Complex but some tracks oriented around song forms particularly in singles released from the album. Also features instrumental and vocal solos, overdubbed chorus parts, ensemble parts, and recitative-like sectional joins

7. WHEN DIVAS AND ROCK STARS COLLIDE

Text	Repertory Opera (<i>bel canto</i> repertoire as performed by Caballé on recording)	'Bohemian Rhapsody' (1975 single release)	Barcelona (1987 performance and 1988 album)	Barcelona (2012 album reissue)
Production devices				
Inclusion of audible production effects and processing	*	✓	✓	✓
Mix spatialisation	Mediated but transparent	Heavily mediated and noticeably manipulated	Heavily mediated and noticeably manipulated	Mediated and noticeably manipulated — particularly evident on Mercury's vocals
Live performance amplification	Used occasionally and discreetly	✓	✓	N/A

The inclusion of synthesised orchestral parts in the 1988 *Barcelona* release occupies a kind of timbral middle ground, pointing towards classical music's orchestral colours, while retaining timbral associations more familiar to popular releases of the period. When synthesisers are replaced by orchestral recordings in the 2012 release, the feel of the record shifts towards classical music. Two factors influence this aesthetic reorientation. First, the orchestral recordings have been produced with a transparent, 'naturalistic' balance typical of classical music recordings⁶ whereby instruments are placed in a fixed location within the mix and clarity between instruments is emphasised. Second, when Mercury's voice—processed, layered and occasionally panned in different locations—is added to these parts, these production devices can sound over-emphasised because the treatment remains distinct from everything else in the mix. Therefore, the electronic synthesiser timbres in the 1998 release act as a kind of kludge, keeping timbral associations between classical and popular music in balance.

While 'Bohemian Rhapsody' appropriated opera irreverently, *Barcelona* is much more of an homage. This is partly due to Caballé's imposing vocal presence, but also because operatic devices are developed more carefully and accompanied by orchestral instrumentation. One example is the 'Ensueño' duet, which incorporates solos highlighting Caballé's *bel canto*⁷ vocal technique through sustained legato phrases. Mercury sings with markedly more classical inflections on 'Ensueño' by restricting the range of speech-level vocal devices, maintaining a more consistently lyric tone and incorporating more vibrato than is typical for his singing. Beyond rock and opera, *Barcelona* features an eclectic range of influences, with Mercury and Moran incorporating elements of gospel into 'The Golden Boy', and a flagrant exoticisation of Japanese traditional music in 'La Japonaise'.

6 See Klein (2014), Blake (2012, pp. 4611–4621).

7 *Bel Canto* is an Italian term for 'beautiful singing'. Stark (2011, p. xvii) considers that it is a term in search of meaning because it connotes 'many aspects of vocal history and pedagogy including several "golden ages" of singing, a number of specific techniques of voice production, and a variety of stylistic vocal idioms'. In the context of this article, the term *bel canto* is employed with a general usage application defined by Jander and Harris (2016b) as referring to 'the Italian vocal style of the 18th and early 19th centuries, the qualities of which include perfect legato production throughout the range, the use of a light tone in the higher registers and agile and flexible delivery. More narrowly, it is sometimes applied exclusively to Italian opera of the time of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. In either case, "bel canto" is usually set in opposition to the development of a weightier, more powerful and speech-inflected style associated with German opera and Wagner in particular'.

Structurally, *Barcelona* experiments with form and utilises through-composition. However, the single releases ('Barcelona' [1987], 'The Golden Boy' [1988] and 'How Can I Go On' [1989]) anchor themselves in popular music by incorporating verses and choruses along with repeated hooks to create points of interest. Operatic devices including recitative, aria and more complex orchestration are incorporated most prominently on the album-only tracks. Notably, 'Overture Piccante', which ends *Barcelona*, mimics the overture by drawing together key themes from each of the preceding album tracks. However, its location at the end of the album, rather than the beginning as would be typical in opera, is more reflective of a climactic rock concert finale, drawing together the most exciting musical themes for a grand finish.

Vocally, Mercury and Caballé exemplify virtuosity in their respective styles, demonstrating extremely wide vocal ranges, embellished vocal ornamentation, accented articulations, legato, huge dynamic variation and complex vocal colouration. Typical of operatic repertoire, the pair also sing in multiple languages: English, Spanish and Japanese. However, while Mercury seems to shift his vocal production more towards classical singing in 'Ensueño', 'La Japonaise' and (to a lesser extent) 'Guide Me Home', Caballé never compromises her classical technique.⁸ This means that despite microphones being employed to capture her voice, she does not utilise their possibilities for producing more intimate, speech-oriented vocal qualities. In the recording context, Mercury's performance reads as more nuanced than Caballé's because he employs every available vocal device towards wordpainting. Potter (1998, pp. 188–198) concurs with this analysis, considering Mercury's delivery 'much more dynamic' because Mercury 'does not have the ideological baggage of several hundred years to restrain him'. Additionally, Caballé's operatic vocal production, with elongated vowels, minimised consonants and emphasised vibrato, serves to blur English language lyrics to the extent that they frequently become unintelligible and the listener must rely upon Mercury's repetitions of text for meaning. The effect of this is to make Mercury the interpreter of Caballé's exotic and otherworldly voice. Despite this, the virtuosic command and mutual respect each singer demonstrates throughout *Barcelona* implies that they have reached a kind of equivalency or

8 Promane cites Moran as saying that Mercury and Caballé deliberately chose to maintain their distinct vocal techniques, and not swap vocal traditions for *Barcelona* (1992, p. 170). However, while not abandoning his rock vocality, Mercury modifies his vocal production for expressivity in certain *Barcelona* tracks, which brings their quality more in line with classical vocalities.

equilibrium between their respective vocalities. The metaphorical distance between rock and operatic singing seems very small when two such voices are paired.

Conclusion: Colliding Genres, Ruptured Authenticities

With *Barcelona*, two global superstars collaborated by bringing their divergent vocalities and musical traditions into dialogue. However, as icons of their respective genres, Mercury and Caballé were also asking their individual audiences to bridge a wide cultural and historical gulf that existed between opera and rock, or elite and popular music more broadly. In simple terms, Scott describes authentic music as ‘the music that has the effect of making you believe in its truthfulness’, a truthfulness that may be an ‘assemblage of signs governed by conventions’ (2009, pp. 3–4). Rock and opera construct authenticity in different ways, employing vastly different, and somewhat opposing, lexicons of signs that are received and ascribed meaning and value by their audiences. To understand how authenticities circulate across these two genres, we need to unpack the concept of authenticity as it might play out for the respective audiences, at the level of interpretation. Moore (2002) proposes a framework of authenticity that operates at three distinct yet interacting perspectives, which he describes as first-, second- and third-person authenticity. First-person authenticity, as an ‘authenticity of expression’, occurs when a composer or performer ‘succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience’ (Moore, 2002, p. 214). Second-person authenticity, as an ‘authenticity of experience’, occurs when ‘a performance succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that that listener’s experience of life is being validated, that the music is “telling it like it is” for them’ (Moore, 2002, p. 220). Third-person authenticity, as an ‘authenticity of execution’, occurs when ‘a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance’, such as successful reinterpretation of traditional music, or tribute band performances (Moore, 2002, p. 218). Through this model, Moore constructs a notion of authenticity, not as an embedded musical trait, but rather as something born of interpretation, ‘which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicised position’ (2002, p. 210).

To interpret *Barcelona*, we must consider the respective cultural and historicised position of the release within the milieus of rock and opera. McLeod (2001, p. 189) writes that rock has ‘traditionally resisted opera, a genre seemingly steeped in the divisions of class and high culture which rock music, ostensibly, rejects’. McLeod also notes that:

The audience and fans of each genre are often highly immobile in their tastes and often deeply suspicious—even resentful—of the opposing form. In broadly general terms, fans of rock music typically find opera to be highly contrived, confusing and convoluted, boring, elitist and arcane, while opera fans typically resent the perceived musical simplicity, loudness, commerciality and banality of rock music. (p. 189)

In the context of *Barcelona*, McLeod’s observations are particularly apt. Mercury’s virtuosic vocal style and approach to songwriting is not markedly changed from ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, marking a consistency in expression across his performances. However, Caballé’s presence in the *Barcelona* project renders *Barcelona* inauthentic for rock audiences because it made clear the correlation between Mercury’s musical proclivities and the operatic tradition, rupturing a distance that audiences may have preferred to keep separate. Her presence on the album, noted by rock reviewers as an oddity or, in the most extreme review, a ‘con’ (Farber, 1992), seems impossible to reconcile for critics and audiences familiar with Mercury’s Queen releases, thereby affecting their reception of its expression and experience. Applying Moore’s authenticity schema to this perspective reveals that in utilising a genuine operatic diva and by replacing guitars with an orchestra, the performance and aesthetics became too clearly aligned with opera for *Barcelona* to validate an experience of rock culture, or communicate with immediacy and integrity to a rock audience. Similarly, Caballé’s audiences were familiar with her as an exemplar exponent of *bel canto* repertory opera. However, in *Barcelona*, Caballé’s voice often occupied an accompanying role to Mercury and her vocal parts were simple compared to those in her operatic roles because of the condensed song format of the album. This brings her performance more in line with popera recordings, which tend to simplify and shorten arrangements of operatic repertoire while retaining operatic vocal timbre. Classical reviewers have equally struggled with this apparent simplicity, with Hensher (2006) commenting:

Barcelona may sound ‘operatic’, but it is only a three-minute song of banging and crashing—all climax and no crescendo. Some of Wagner’s single musical structures last over two hours—and no rock musician has a clue how to start constructing something like that.

Applying Moore’s authenticity schema to the operatic perspective, the failure of the *Barcelona* recording with classical critics leads back to embedded notions of how opera should be executed. Mercury and Moran’s composition and Cabellé’s vocal performance were too simplistic to effectively execute a rendering of opera that was palatable for its aficionados.

Ultimately, to understanding critical responses to *Barcelona*, we must consider the work in relation to its audiences, and move beyond a consideration of the musical outcomes and the artistic contributions of its lead performers. Despite the collaboration being original, despite both performers contributing virtuosic vocal performances and despite the music continuing a songwriting trajectory Mercury had commenced earlier in his career, *Barcelona* was received with a degree of incredulity by both serious rock and operatic critics. Though *Barcelona* sounds like a collision of opera and rock due to Mercury and Moran’s grandiose and eclectic songwriting, it *feels* too much like crossover music for opera and rock critics to find it palatable. Consequently, *Barcelona*’s reception has struggled because it antagonises multiple authenticity gaps between operatic and rock performance styles that have been rigorously maintained throughout the twentieth century by aficionados of both genres. This implies a larger struggle of execution, whereby each genre is effectively signified, but in ways that render both traditions of performance as inauthentic. Each genre has its own aesthetic, performative, cultural and social functions that generate value, but these were called into question when the two artists occupied the same creative space. Mercury and Caballé’s individual stardom was so great that the achievements of the *Barcelona* recordings struggle for traction against the genre cultures and iconographies each artist represented individually—the presence of the other de-authenticates the musical experience for their respective audiences. The pinnacle of their particular vocal and musical worlds, Mercury and Caballé’s collaboration is problematic precisely because it bridged the popular–elite divide from both directions simultaneously.

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