



**European Research Council**

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## **London Voices (1820-1840)**

King's College London, 9-10 September 2016

Organizers:

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FRIDAY 9 SEPTEMBER

### **Session 1 (9:30-12:30)**

Introductory (Chairs, Susan Rutherford and Roger Parker)

*Coffee (10:45-11:15)*

(Chair: Flora Willson)

David Kennerley (University of Oxford): "Sounding feminine: singing and gender on London's stages, c.1813-30"

Mary Ann Smart (University of California, Berkeley): "Voices Bought and Sold: Italian Music as Social Currency in 1840s London"

### **Lunch (12:30-2:00)**

### **Session 2 (2:00-5:00)**

(Chair: Emanuele Senici)

Sarah Hibberd (University of Nottingham): "Luigi Lablache: 'The Essence of Nine Trombones'"

Matildie Thom Wium (University of the Free State, Blomfontein): "Adelaide Kemble and the Voice as Means"

*Coffee (3:15-3:45)*

(Chair: Ben Walton)

Kimberly White (McGill University): "Imports from the Parisian Boulevards: Jenny Colon and the 'French Plays' in London"

Oskar Cox Jensen (King's College London): "Finding the Ballad-Singer's 'real voice'"

### **Drinks**

**Dinner (River Room, King's College London)**

SATURDAY 10 SEPTEMBER

**Session 3 (9:30-12:30)**

(Chair: James Davies)

Sarah Fuchs-Sampson (Eastman School of Music): “The Castrato as Commodity: Velluti’s Voice in the London Sheet-Music Market”

Melina Esse (Eastman School of Music): “Vessels of Flame: Letitia Elizabeth Landon and the Improviser’s Voice”

*Coffee (10:45-11:15)*

(Chair: Laura Tunbridge)

Cormac Newark (Guildhall School of Music and Drama): “No possible occasion for her to go and die in Italy’: Social and Genre Parody in Gore’s *The Opera*”

Jo Hicks (King’s College London): “Performing Tourism in 1850s London: Albert Smith’s *Ascent of Mont Blanc*”

**Lunch (12:30-2:00)**

**Session 4 (2:00-5:30)**

(Chair: Irene Morra)

Wiebke Thormählen (Royal College of Music): “Emotionality, Spirituality and Edification: The Rise of Amateur Choral Singing in Early Nineteenth-Century London”

Claudio Vellutini (University of British Columbia): “Interpreting the Italian Voice in London (and Elsewhere)”

*Coffee (3:15-3:45)*

(Chair: Katherine Hambridge)

Diane Tisdall (King’s College London): “Trading in the Master’s Voice: The Violin Treatises of John Loder and Pierre Baillot”

Ellen Lockhart (University of Toronto): “Voice Boxes”

**Drinks and conclusions**

**Dinner at Strand Palace Hotel (Carvery)**

## Participants

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## Abstracts

### Oskar Cox Jensen: “Finding the Ballad-Singer’s ‘real voice’”

‘[I]t came from the mouth of an old, unshaven ballad-chanter . . . his voice was a real voice,—all that vulgarity, hoarseness and tobacco, could produce; and his prononnsation was of the same cast,—for Ome, sweet Ome, was so thundered in the tympanum, that it was enough to drive the hearer from his home, be it what it might, and to ruin forever all domestic harmony.’ – *Exchange Herald*, 1826.

For all their subjects’ obscurity, the number of recorded ‘notices’ London street-singers received is remarkably high. They require a different form of reading to stage reviews, as their negativity is as consistent as their rhetorical tropes: to borrow Robert Walser’s phrase, they require ‘accounting for taste’.

This paper takes as its basis the scores of accounts of nineteenth-century ballad-singers’ voices found in journalism, life-writing, anecdotes, antiquarianism, and beyond. While there is something to be gained from following Bourdieu in construing the bulk of these accounts as constructions of ‘distinction’, it attempts to move beyond that paradigm: both to uncover some sense of the ‘real’ voice of, if not ‘the ballad-singer’, then of individual singers; and also to locate further reasons for the aggressive tone of these descriptions, finding them in both the provocation of singer’s performances, and in issues of street repertoire.

### Melina Esse: “Vessels of flame: Letitia Elizabeth Landon and the Improviser’s Voice”

1824 was the year of the *improvvisatori* (or Italian improvising poets) in London. Periodicals published histories of poetic improvisation and accounts of famous improviser Tommaso Sgricci’s success in Paris. The popularity of Madame de Staël’s fictional improviser Corinne opened up new possibilities for women authors; Letitia Elizabeth Landon (better known as L.E.L.) was only the latest to follow Corinne’s lead, publishing her long poem “The Improvisatrice” in 1824. Angela Esterhammer has argued that British interest in this southern phenomenon was characterized by acts of “remediation”—in particular, the translation of the improviser’s voice into print. Landon’s poem, for instance, could be thought of as a series of nested retellings of the improviser’s story. Not only is her improviser clearly based on Staël’s Corinne, but she also revisits, in a brief poem-within-a-poem, that most ancient improvising poet, Sappho. By 1825, when Sgricci himself arrived in London, his decision to recite from already published transcriptions rather than perform extempore might suggest that the textualization of the improviser’s voice was a *fait accompli*. But I argue that printed evocations of poetic improvisation also testify to the persistence of the improviser’s voice. This paper explores the repercussions of this (sometimes imagined) sound, carried not just across media (live recitation, transcriptions, published poems) but across geographical and gendered boundaries. Landon’s poem reads quite differently placed next to another “remediation” of the improviser’s voice: Giacomo Leopardi’s “Ultimo canto di Saffo” (1822). Leopardi’s version of Sappho’s final song was influenced by the Italian craze for translations of the northern bard Ossian, who was imagined as an anti-Homer capable of reinvigorating a hidebound Italian poetic tradition. The duelling images of Landon’s destroying flames and Leopardi’s unfeeling waves suggest forms of poetic inscription that are fluid, flickering, and maddeningly ephemeral. While they certainly serve as metaphors for mortality, they also, I would argue, urge us to understand the supposed textualization of improvised poetry as an equally risky, incomplete and impermanent undertaking.

### Sarah Fuchs-Sampson: “The Castrato as Commodity: Velluti’s Voice in the London Sheet-Music Market”

Following Giovanni Battista Velluti’s London debut at the King’s Theatre on June 30, 1825, piano-vocal and instrumental arrangements of the singer’s operatic numbers flooded the city’s sheet-music market. A striking number of these arrangements sought to reproduce the virtuosic embellishments for which Velluti had become famous across Europe, often distinguishing such additions to the score via smaller note-heads or *ossia*. In this paper, I argue that these arrangements contributed to a large-scale shift in Velluti’s reception in London, where, between 1825 and 1828, critics gradually began to deem the castrato’s

performances less sensational than familiar, even predictable. By examining Velluti's changing fortunes in London alongside the commodification of his voice, I intend not only to expand upon recent discussions of the castrato's late career, but also to consider how the sheet-music industry—and mechanical reproduction more broadly—affected nineteenth-century singers and their art.

### **Sarah Hibberd: “Luigi Lablache: ‘The essence of nine trombones’”**

“The power of this singer seems to come out of a body lined in brass. ... an elephant might sing like him. We fancy we see the inspired bulk open his mouth, and exhaling the mighty music, the essence of nine trombones.” “He seduces and captivates your imagination.” Luigi Lablache was celebrated across Europe in the second quarter of the 19C, and regularly declared the best basso cantante and/or primo buffo of his age. In this paper, I build on Susan Rutherford's explorations of the ways in which embodied voices produced ‘presence’, and examine the impact Lablache made on London audiences following his debut at the King's Theatre in 1830, as documented in the press. The starting point for all evaluations of Lablache's onstage presence and voice was his bulk: he was more than six foot tall, with a proud belly. Brillat-Savarin had been the first to categorise strictly abdominal excess as a male symptom in the mid-1820s, with connotations of both seductiveness and repulsiveness – a contradiction that is explored in literature of the period (e.g. *Pickwick Papers*), and was an important component of Lablache's approach to characterisation. Around the same time, new theories about voice and breathing were emerging: with developments in chemistry at the turn of the century (notably the discovery of oxygen), attention shifted away from the humours and nerves towards an understanding of the body as a ‘total machine’, whose unique force came from combustion. These cultural and scientific developments in understanding the body provide the context for an examination of the critical commentary on Lablache's unusually powerful voice and his empathetic approach to acting. His terrifyingly realistic portrayal of Henry VIII in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, one of his signature roles in London from 1831 though into the 1850s, exemplifies these qualities and provides the focus for my discussion.

### **Jo Hicks: “Performing Tourism in 1850s London: Albert Smith's *Ascent of Mont Blanc*”**

An 1858 issue of the *New York Musical Review* lists “European Items” of interest to American readers: among announcements of a London *Don Giovanni*, a one-act Meyerbeer opera, and a Viennese *Lohengrin*, is a mention of Albert Smith, who “has ascended the Mont Blanc for the last time, after having done so (in Piccadilly) about two thousand times.” Although the operas in question remain firmly in the scholarly canon, Smith's hit show has received only passing attention. Yet his one-man performance of Alpine tourism, dubbed a “monopolylogue” in the tradition of Charles Dibdin and Charles Matthews, was central to the exhibition culture of the mid-century metropolis, and provides a rich case study of the uses of music in Victorian stage entertainment. Of course, much of the interest was visual: the first act featured a series of paintings by William Beverley depicting tourist sights en route from London to Chamonix (a destination newly accessible by passenger train); the second boasted a vertically-scrolling backdrop that effected the illusion of ascent. But audiences also heard Smith accompany himself in comic songs at the piano, with an alpine horn and mule bells offered as audible markers of his mountain journey. Using contemporary programmes and press reports, I seek to recover the sonic qualities of Smith's performance, and then to consider how music in lectures and exhibitions contributed to shaping the popular imagination of European travel.

### **David Kennerley: “Sounding feminine: singing and gender on London's stages, c.1813–30”**

This paper is a case study of the careers and public images of two prominent female singers of the 1810s and '20s, Catherine Stephens and Eliza Vestris. It seeks to demonstrate how audience attitudes towards gender and femininity influenced the structure of female singers' careers and the reception of their performances in early nineteenth-century London. It maps how different venues for professional vocal performance, notably London's various concert halls and theatres, became associated with different types of female singer

who inhabited and projected varying styles of femininity. Building on the work of Christopher Small, Georgina Born and other theorists of the relationship between musical performance and wider social constructs such as gender, it demonstrates how singers' styles of performance and public images were specifically designed and tailored to suit and to reflect the widely varying gender ideals of the specific type of audience at each theatrical or concert venue. Furthermore, it draws upon the insights of John Shepherd and Suzanne Cusick to argue that these different styles of femininity were reflected in different types of vocal technique and, as a result, the sound of the singer's voice. Nationality and class form key prisms through which contemporaries detected, explained and justified these different styles of musical femininity. Sounding feminine, in the way your audience desired, was a, if not the, key challenge for female singers, which helps us to understand just how important gender was in demarcating and delineating London's widely varying cultures of musical performance.

### **Ellen Lockhart: "Voice Boxes"**

This paper takes as its point of departure a historical coincidence, taking place in 1835: the first recorded instance of the term *voice box*, to denote the larynx as a discrete cartilaginous container of something called *voice*, in the same year that London-based scientist Charles Wheatstone presented his newly invented free-reed speaking machine to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. This coincidence draws together multiple concurrent discourses on the voice, circulating within London during the 1830s. Of key importance was the popular analogy between human vocal production and musical reed instruments. As James Davies has recently suggested, Wheatstone's free-reed vocal synthesiser -- an apparatus consisting of a vibrating reed within a wooden box, a bellows, 'nostrils', rubber lips, and leather resonator -- may be linked to the contemporary interest in tongues within operatic vocal practice, as well as the fetish for the 'reedy' singing of such star performers as Henriette Méric-Lalande and Giovanni Battista Rubini. As a new coinage, 'voice box' joined a host of other terms denoting new means of vocal-material enclosure, including 'jury box', 'witness box', and 'letter-box'. Here, the emergence of such 'voice boxes' becomes an incentive to meditate on the practices of bounding, reproducing, and commodifying *voice* and the verbal utterance in London circa 1835.

### **Cormac Newark: " 'No possible occasion for her to go and die in Italy': Social and Genre Parody in Gore's *The Opera* "**

As acknowledged doyenne of the so-called 'silver fork' novel c. 1820-1840, Catherine Gore wrote quite a bit about opera-going: the dandies and other elites that are the main focus of her works, not to mention the aspiring middle classes (both characters and readers) eager to rub shoulders with them, saw it as an essential part of how society (not to mention Society) worked. In her books, just as in the exactly contemporary fiction of Balzac, the auditorium of the opera house is as likely to be the scene of dramatic events as its stage. Sure enough, as the title suggests, *The Opera: A novel* (1832) features numerous significant encounters at the King's Theatre.

But whereas in Balzac the words of every aria and duet are certain to find an echo at some relatively superficial level of the novel in which they are cited, performances reported in *The Opera* (including of then-recent successes such as *Semiramide* and *Il pirata*) tend not to be legible in terms of local details of the plot. Rather, it is as part of a slightly deeper interplay, at the level of genre, that they are significant: the silver fork novel, notable for being contemptuously satirised in later fiction (most famously Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*) itself depended on parody to steer a course between entertaining mockery of the exaggerated behaviour of its foppish subjects and an appealingly authentic feel for aristocratic life. What makes *The Opera* especially interesting in this context (and above all that of *London Voices*) is how parody of opera in the denouement, and in particular the fact that one of the principal characters is a famous singer, collides with another classic feature of the genre, an ambiguous attitude to the changing social status of women.

### **Mary Ann Smart: "Voices Bought and Sold: Italian Music as Social Currency in 1840s London"**

In May 1839 Giuseppe Mazzini organized the first of what would become a series of concerts for the benefit

of Italian emigrés and exiles resident in London. At this benefit for the actor and political exile Gustavo Modena, the “*Puritani* quartet” and Fanny Persiani performed excerpts from Donizetti’s *Roberto Devereux*, interspersed with recitations by Modena himself, costumed as Dante. The financial success of this concert apparently inspired Mazzini to institute annual concerts for the benefit of the “Italian Free School” that he had established to educate young Italian street musicians and vendors of plaster figurines. Remarkably, proceeds from these annual concerts, featuring gratis performances by stars such as Giulia Grisi, Mario de Candia and Henri Vieuxtemps, generated fully one-third of the funds needed to run the school each year. Pupils at Mazzini’s school received evening lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and drafting, and attended weekly lectures by Mazzini on Italian history and literature, but were (not surprisingly) given no instruction in music. This paper will attempt to understand the cultural geography of the Italian community in London during this period by attending to the multiple Italian vocalizations that resounded through the city – from the songs of disenfranchised organ grinders to the oratorical tones of Mazzini and Modena and the familiar strains of Donizetti and Bellini as sung by Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini and Lablache.

### **Diane Tisdall: “Trading in the Master’s Voice: The Violin Treatises of John Loder and Pierre Baillot”**

John David Loder was the first Englishman to lead the orchestra of the Philharmonic Society of London; Pierre Baillot was one of the initial violin teachers at the Paris Conservatoire. In the late 1820s, the London press regarded their treatises – *A general and comprehensive instruction book for the violin* (1824); *Méthode de violon* (1803; English transl. 1823) – as the ‘two standard violin tutors before the public’ (QMMR, 1827). Written to bridge the gap between amateur and professional performance standards, the treatises have undergone thorough investigation in regard to their technical content (Loder: Golby, 2004; Baillot: Stowell, 1985). My interest in these treatises lies in what might be called each teacher’s written voice. I draw on Richard Sennett’s ‘language of instructions’ (2008) – the relationship between the activities of hands and the uses of language – in order to reassess the pedagogical ideologies of Loder and Baillot. By placing English and French violin pedagogy side-by-side, via the medium of voice, my aim is to initiate a broader discourse on nineteenth-century European music education.

### **Wiebke Thormählen: “Emotionality, Spirituality and Edification: the Rise of Amateur Choral Singing in Early Nineteenth-Century London”**

This paper investigates the role of music in establishing and shaping socio-political groups, and its strategic employment in binding individuals emotionally to these allegiances. In focussing on the founding ideologies of the Sacred Harmonic Society and bringing these together with the social, spiritual and domestic practices that enabled its formation, I argue that the manner in which music was received provided the key to its use as a political tool and as a tool for social stratification.

The founding of the Sacred Harmonic Society in 1832 was a key moment in the increasing delineation of a rising musical professionalism focussed on instrumental and operatic music and an amateur music culture focussed on large scale oratorio performances. Its emphasis on regular rehearsal and communality over performance inscribed in its founding document and early annals betray that this was rooted in a self-conscious ideology of group formation through participation rather than spectation or listening.

In class-specific courtesy as in spiritual discourses, this participation had been wedded to the emotional education of the individual and his/her sense of class belonging since the mid-eighteenth century: playing instruments and singing at home fostered a morally uplifting individual feeling if one engaged with the right type of repertoire. Communal singing as a regular exercise that aided spiritual health, on the other hand, had been the prerogative of particular religious factions. The Sacred Harmonic Society is the key moment at which this collective singing moved into a secular public arena dominated by a social class that had traditionally been less able to be involved in instrument-based music-making. The Society member’s self-conscious class allegiance supports revisionist readings of the Reform Act as the beginning rather than the end of a rise of the middle classes.

### **Claudio Vellutini: “Interpreting the Italian voice in London (and elsewhere)”**

An enduring and ever-changing trope, the notion of the “Italian voice” became a contentious subject in the opera discourse across Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century. While the dissemination of national ideas increasingly challenged the still ubiquitous presence of Italian singers, Italian vocal pedagogy was institutionalized in conservatories often with the overt intent of cultivating “native” professionals. Yet the extent to which vocal aesthetics of different national pedigrees could be reconciled in the operatic practice of the time remained a major point of debate. In this paper, I focus on how in London in particular discussions of the Italian voice often departed from close examinations of Italian singers of the time. I argue, rather, that they intersected with and informed opinions about how the development of a high-brow kind of English opera should be modeled upon the essentially lyrical nature of Italian opera. By drawing on a number of printed materials on vocal aesthetics, pedagogy, and opera genres, as well as on recent developments within voice studies, I aim to trace some of the ways in which the construction of the idea of the Italian voice in London participated in a rather fluid discourse that acknowledged the permeability of national and foreign cultures rather than treating them as mutually exclusive.

### **Kimberly White: “Imports from the Parisian Boulevards: Jenny Colon and the ‘French Plays’ in London”**

“The great strength, however, of the French must be considered to rest on their vaudevilles, and it cannot be denied that in these light and elegant productions they are unrivalled; the actors seem exactly fitted to their parts, and move in them with an ease and grace that seems like nature itself.” Thus a critic at *The Monthly Magazine* in February 1836 described the genre that formed the core of the “French Plays” staged during the 1820s and 1830s at the English Opera House (Lyceum Theatre), Olympic Theatre, and later at St. James’s Theatre from the 1840s. Imported along with the most celebrated French players from the Parisian boulevard theatres (Théâtre du Vaudeville, Théâtre des Variétés, Théâtre du Gymnase, Théâtres des Nouveautés), these light, popular pieces incorporated musical numbers, typically *couplets* with new text on preexistent music – including material drawn from contemporary *opéras-comiques* and even *grand opéras* – thus facilitating a network of rich intermusical and intertextual references. My paper explores the sounds and subjects of these Parisian imports, whose success necessarily depended on the strengths of the actors, through the performances of the Boulevard star, Jenny Colon (1808-1842), on her two tours to London in 1829 and 1834. Colon, who would famously become Gérard de Nerval’s muse and obsession, distinguished herself from her colleagues in a series of remarkable generic crossovers throughout her career, moving from *vaudeville* to *opéra-comique* and finally to *grand opéra*. An excellent musician and actress, praised almost unanimously in the London press for her natural and truthful style in “these pieces intended as moving pictures of the manners of the day,” Colon embodied at once the quintessential Frenchwoman and *vaudeville* actress, ineluctably coupled to her art.

### **Matildie Thom Wium: “Adelaide Kemble and the Voice as Means”**

What did a London-born opera singer like Adelaide Kemble (1815-1879) believe that she could achieve by means of her voice? What did others believe that her voice could be a means to? In this paper, I will suggest an array of answers ranging from independence, fame and love (Kemble herself), to transcendence (her fans), patriotic pride (some journalists) and women’s lib (other journalists). By exploring different ways in which Kemble’s voice was conceived of as a means to an end, I hope to help describe the meanings and functions of the trained singing woman’s voice in mid-nineteenth century London.