Ascending the Improbable Heights: An Examination of High-Pitched Male Heroism in Opera and Heavy Metal

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ASCENDING THE IMPROBABLE HEIGHTS: AN EXAMINATION OF HIGH-PITCHED MALE HEROISM IN OPERA AND HEAVY METAL

By

Jake A. Stricker

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
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ASCENDING THE IMPROBABLE HEIGHTS: AN EXAMINATION OF HIGH-
PITCHED MALE HEROISM IN OPERA AND HEAVY METAL

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Since the early nineteenth century, the sound of an operatic male hero has been the tenor. As such, countertenors reprising heroic castrati roles have been met with mixed reception, and puzzled response. There is at least one other genre, however, that utilizes heroic narratives, and has featured high-pitched male singing since its inception – heavy metal. Despite the prevalence of heroic narratives within metal and opera, little has been studied on precisely how those themes are constructed and negotiated by their respective performers. Certainly, less has been studied in regards to high-pitched male singers’ roles relating to heroism in these genres.

In this thesis, I examine the ways in which high-pitched male singers confront, appropriate, and at times problematize the standard notions of heroism within opera and heavy metal. This involves first, analyzing the socio/cultural factors surrounding notions of heroism within each genre and how they are constructed. The discussion then moves into an exploration of how high-pitched male singers are affected by such themes in their effort to convey heroism. Finally, I trace how these singers adhere to, or deviate from, the
hero’s journey as described by Joseph Campbell. In my analysis of works from opera and metal, I interpret the hero’s journey both narratively and musically regarding each singer’s lyrics, stage presence, and vocal melody. Ultimately, through demonstrating how high-pitched male singers influence, and are shaped by, notions of heroism, I help shed light on issues of violence, gender, and masculinity within these musics.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Within the world of Western music, the seemingly disparate genres of opera and heavy metal utilize both heroic narratives and high-pitched male singing. My thesis explores the ways in which such singing confronts, appropriates, and at times problematizes the standard notions of heroism within these two genres. This involves first, examining how those standard notions of heroism function in each genre, and second, exploring how high-pitched male singers deviate from the norms either within their own genre or society at large. Despite the prevalence of heroic narratives within metal and opera, little has been studied on precisely how these themes are constructed and negotiated by their respective performers. Indeed, little has been written about high-pitched male singers’ roles relating to heroism in any genre. For these reasons, I feel that this study opens new ways of seeing and hearing heroism from high-pitched male singing in and beyond opera and heavy metal.

What exactly defines a hero? If we take the late comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell’s view on the matter, there is a certain narrative trajectory that is more or less standard across different cultures (Figure 1). The path of the hero, according to Campbell, involves the protagonist being called to action in some way. This spurs the hero-to-be on a quest that involves a journey into unknown lands filled with dangers and trials. Upon surviving these trials and succeeding in his quest, the hero returns back from the far reaches to his home society in order to save the people from what had beset them.
at the start. The standardization of the hero’s journey has been somewhat contested since Campbell’s proposal. The folklorist Alan Dundes argues that attempting to create a universal outline either leaves the archetypes generated too vague to be of any theoretical use, or that the universality of myth and legend is in itself a fallacy as there are simply too many differentiating factors between cultures and peoples. Further criticism leveled against Campbell claims that his work misrepresents certain elements unique to different cultures in its standardization process and feeds into a hegemonic, Eurocentric narrative of what a hero is supposed to be, which then marginalizes those cultures and stories outside of that standardized realm.

Figure 1

3 Miller, Dean, The Epic Hero, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), VIII, 68.
In considering Campbell’s theory of the hero’s journey for tales and legends throughout Western culture, however, the similarities become much more evident. Many of the character sources he cites come from Greek and Western mythology and legend, such as Jason and the Argonauts, Achilles, and King Arthur. Indeed, his theory itself has influenced tales of heroes that have gone on to become indelible to Western culture, such as the original Star Wars saga.

While heroism and heroic characters have been studied at length within the realm of literature, heroism as it relates to music has not been studied as thoroughly. The idea that heroism has not been more developed in music research is all the more surprising for the fact that there exist at least two genres, opera and heavy metal, that feature overt narratives concerning such matters.

The world of opera deals with subjects of heroes explicitly in the librettos from its historical canon, most significantly from the Baroque era that drew influence from Greco/Roman history and mythology. The operas from this period employed a type of male lead that no longer exists today, the castrato. The castrato was, as the name implies, a male singer who was castrated before puberty to preserve a higher-ranged voice throughout his life. As time went on, and society eventually halted the practice, the castrato disappeared and with him, the opera roles written for him. That is, until a revival of Baroque opera in the United States and Europe in the middle of the twentieth century.

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4 Campbell (1968), 28, 135, 184,
5 Some notable contributions to studying heroism in music are Scott Burnham’s *Beethoven Hero*, described in more detail below, David Ake’s chapter “Being (and Becoming) John Coltrane: Listening for Jazz ‘Subjectivity’” from his book *Jazz Matters*, which traces a “musico-mythical” hero’s journey in Coltrane’s “Afro-Blue,” and Simon Williams’s *Wagner and the Romantic Hero*, which details Wagner’s influence and contribution to the idea of the hero in nineteenth century opera.
6 Examples of this are the eponymous role of Giulio Cesare and Rinaldo by Handel, Orpheus by Gluck, and Arabace from Hasse’s *Artaserse*. 
The main problem here was that although opera companies wanted to stage these early works in an effort to inject some new material into their seasonal programs, there were no castrati alive to sing those forgotten roles. This led to decades of having either women dress up as men to sing the roles in their original vocal range, or lowering it down an octave to have a baritone or tenor sing the part to have it agree with modern conceptions of gender.\(^7\) Examples of this are the eponymous role of Giulio Cesare and Sesto in Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, a new male vocal range called the countertenor was beginning to take shape. These were men who specialized in singing vocal parts above the chest range of a male opera singer by using their falsetto. The ability of countertenors to hit notes higher than had previously been thought possible made them an appealing choice for resurrecting Baroque opera roles. Countertenors’ musical and physical combination presented the opportunity for opera companies to stage these operas with vocal lines that would match the original notation, while at the same time placing a man in a male role to better fit modern audience's notions of gender. However, the countertenor appears to be at odds with the more conservative views on gender and sexuality within the genre as it relates to notions of the hero. The idea of the countertenor as an anomaly is present despite the fact that high-pitched male singing by way of the castrato actually predates the prevalence of the tenor as opera’s heroic male. Considering that the castrato has been scarcely used in opera since around 1820, however, and that the bulk of the modern opera canon was written just before and after

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this time, helps to explain why high-pitched male singing above the chest range is considered a somewhat odd choice for a hero today.

By contrast, high-pitched male singing has been present within heavy metal from its very inception in the late 1960s, with early singers in the genre operating in a falsetto range for much of their work. This element would not be so different from male singers in other popular genres such as gospel, disco, R&B, and blues, who all utilize falsetto singing in their own way, were it not for the fact that heavy metal has the unique distinction, along with opera, of promoting narratives of heroism. Moreover, heavy metal’s penchant for extravagant stage shows over the course of its history also places it in a striking juxtaposition to the revival of Baroque operas with its telling of heroic deeds set to the backdrop of technically involved stage sets and props.

Initially, my exploration of heroism in these musics was guided by a belief that their singers would exhibit conformity to the standard narrative of the Western hero as described in Campbell’s work. While I found this to be true to a certain extent, I was also troubled to find issues involving the dependence of heroism on a particularly violent form of masculinity. In the case of Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*, for example, the main protagonist is concerned with avenging the murder of his former rival Pompey. The same can be said of Judas Priest’s Rob Halford performing “All Guns Blazing,” which begins with a narrative centered around fevered survival, working its way toward the “bone-crushing god of salvation,” highlighting the struggle of the narrator from man to a vengeful god figure. To be sure, these extremes are not the only representations of heroes to be found within these genres; as I will show, there exist heroic narratives that wax and wane in their adherence to the traditional model of Joseph Campbell. Nevertheless, in the
variations of narratives covered throughout this thesis, including the examples mentioned above, issues of masculinity, power, violence, class, race, and sexuality are all involved in constituting the musical hero.

Structure and Methodology

In the subsequent chapters, I draw out notions of heroism as they are constructed and understood within the genres of opera and heavy metal. Furthermore, I analyze how those concepts of heroism within each genre impact the high-pitched male singers who go on to inhabit heroic roles. In chapter two I explore the phenomenon of countertenors performing castrato roles in opera. The study will involve both demonstrating the dissonance between established roles against which these singers are performing and examining critical and fan response to countertenor performances. Since this is, in part, an attempt to understand the heroic norm in music, and what is “normal” can only be determined by consensus, seeing what that consensus is will reveal much about the ways in which these countertenors confront standard notions of operatic heroism. One such point of confrontation could be seen as an attempt to complicate and expand traditional notions of masculinity, redefining what is considered to sound “manly” within the world of opera.

Chapter three will mirror chapter two to an extent, but focusing on heavy metal. The issue here is not so much about how high-pitched singing conflicts with performance practices within metal, but more so how singers are able to appropriate a singing style that is seen in other genres as being, on one hand, either effeminate or, on the other hand, reminiscent of a more gentle, seductive type of male. The seductive falsetto male singer
is in reference to certain R&B singers such as Marvin Gaye and Al Green, and even singers from the hair metal subgenre like Jon Bon Jovi or Bret Michaels, who present a stark contrast to the rougher, more unglamorous type of high-pitched male singer in metal that is occupied with heroic narratives.

The final chapter will analyze two performances each from opera and metal that feature high-pitched male heroism. The first example is “All Guns Blazing” by Judas Priest from a 1990 concert in Southern California, featuring singer Rob Halford, renowned within the genre for his ability to reach extraordinarily high notes. The second is a 2003 performance of “Hero’s Return” in Göteborg, Sweden by Hammerfall with singer Joacim Cans. The third piece is the aria “Va tacito” from act 1 of a 2005 Copenhagen production of Handel’s Giulio Cesare, featuring countertenor Andreas Scholl in the lead role of Caesar. Last is David Daniels as Rinaldo performing “Or la tromba” from the third act of Handel’s opera of the same name. Following these analyses will be a mediation of my findings from the performances as well as final thoughts about the results of this thesis. In order to cover all of the pertinent information from each of these pieces of music, the final chapter will be considerably longer than all of the others.

Considering that chapters two and three deal mainly with the socio/cultural themes and issues surrounding heroism and high-pitched singing in opera and heavy metal, moving the performance analyses to their own chapter at the end of the study seemed the best course of action. Combining the performance analyses together in one chapter also made it possible to utilize elements found in a metal performance, and apply those characteristics to a performance from opera, and vice versa. This combination represents the ultimate goal of my thesis, which is to understand how high-pitched male singers
convoy heroism in their own genres, and then use that information to help understand the
performance practice techniques of one another.

An overview of the works that have inspired my methodology must begin with
Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In his massively influential work,
Campbell assimilated scores of heroic tales, outlining the general themes that he saw
were inherent to all of those stories. The criticisms of his work have been addressed, but
as my research deals with distinctly Western genres of music and music-making, I
decided it relevant to the study as a framework for understanding the general trajectory of
heroic narratives. In addition, Scott Burnham’s landmark 1995 work *Beethoven Hero*
provided theory for understanding how heroism can be constructed on musical terms.
More than this, he offers an insightful examination on the philosophy behind why not just
Beethoven’s music, but Beethoven himself is considered to be a heroic figure. This
monograph is of most use in the final chapter that contains my performance analysis of
works from each genre.

Robert Walser’s *Running with the Devil* provided the theoretical basis for
understanding themes of power as they relate to heavy metal’s musical and social
landscapes. His theory that the distorted guitar represents the signature timbre of the
genre, and consequently defines almost every other aspect of it is a key component of my
analysis for how heroic narratives are created within metal. The call to power that
Walser suggests is endemic to the genre is also what I believe to be a driving factor in the
specific types of heroic narratives found within heavy metal.

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Susan McClary’s “Soprano Masculinities” from the edited collection *Masculinity in Opera*, examines the multi-faceted ways that masculinities are constructed and understood in different genres that utilize high-pitched male singing. The other aspect of McClary’s chapter that was an impetus for my thesis was her assertion that there is something inherently heroic about the act of a man straining to reach notes well above his natural vocal range. This idea became all the more enticing when paired with the realization that the genres of heavy metal and opera both deal in heroic narratives through their lyrics and librettos.

In an effort to uncover what specific elements go into constructing heroic male characters, it became clear that understanding gender constructs within both genres would be of equal importance to understanding the musical constructs of these heroes. Key works here include Freya Jarman’s “Pitch Fever: The Castrato, The Tenor, and the Question of Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century Opera,” Naomi Andre’s *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth-Century Opera*, “Metal, Masculinity and the Queer Subject” by Amber Clifford-Napoleone, and Niall Scott’s “The Monstrous Male and Myths of Masculinity in Heavy Metal.”

Last, musicologist Carolyn Abbate’s work “Music – Drastic or Gnostic?” was crucial in analyzing the concept that audiences can understand a singer as being at once simply the performer, and also the embodiment of the character he is enacting on stage. Her theory suggests that there exist simultaneously dual states for singers portraying roles of any kind, which audiences understand both as a singer giving a musical performance and as the narrative of the character they are embodying. A secondary aspect of this piece that has proved encouraging for my thesis is Abbate’s assertion that musicology should
reconsider focusing more of its analytical techniques on the act of musical performance itself versus thinking about works of music as abstract occurrences that exist out of time. In order to examine how high-pitched male singers convey heroism within their respective genres, I intend to do just that.

Issues regarding aspects of “normalcy” as they are understood within the worlds of opera and heavy metal need to be discussed. What is “normal” culturally speaking is only normal in so much as it has been generally accepted as such by the majority of its population. The social politics of music cultures are no different, and in my chapters, most prominently in chapter two, whenever I describe a man’s chest voice as relating to “normal” performance practice, for instance, it is in relation to concepts that represent long-held beliefs within the genre. Toward that end, I incorporate commentary from multiple sources throughout my thesis in an attempt to create a working pastiche of thoughts and ideas from people concerned with these genres. These receptions will help to illuminate what concepts are guiding the construction of heroic narratives in these musics. More than examining how heroic narratives are formed, a part of this thesis involves the study of how high-pitched male singers do or do not break away from “normal” performance practices within their respective genres. To come to a conclusion on whether these singers achieve that or not, an understanding as to what “normal” is for each genre must first be achieved.

The study of heroism in music has much to offer the field of musicology in understanding music cultures and their value systems. Analyzing what characters and themes pass for heroic in a specific musical community can reveal deeper meanings about what ideals that community holds dear. Along with the socio/cultural impact
involved, studying how heroism is conveyed combines the music, performance, and words within genres in a way that has the potential to open new methods of analysis which take into account multiple readings of the same piece in order to achieve a more fully realized picture of the work in question. Through this approach, it becomes possible to see that, despite certain musical differences, high-pitched singers in metal and opera might have more in common than advocates—or opponents—of either genre might suspect.
2
A Game of Throats:
Countertenors Vying for the Role of Heroic Male

In my final aria I sing 'Crown me and applaud me'
as the other characters die and turn to stone. This
sort of moment … is every countertenor's dream.
- Iestyn Davies, “The Golden Boy”

“Who can resist a man who sings like a woman?” This is the headline of a New
York Times article from 2010, written by Fernanda Eberstadt, about acclaimed
countertenor Phillipe Jaroussky and a recital he was giving in Amsterdam at the time.

From the beginning, Eberstadt is raising the issue of the gendered nature of Jaroussky’s
singing in opera. While she does not attack his abilities as a singer (even consistently
giving him high praise), she does set it up as something of an abnormality. The
countertenor is then presented as a novelty that is somehow equal parts perplexing and
awe-inspiring. At numerous points the author is keen to remind readers of how recent a
phenomenon the solo countertenor is, and how strange it seems to be to audiences: “The
countertenorial voice — a high girlish tone produced by using the outer edges of the

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vocal cords — is something of an acquired taste,” and “thirty years ago, [Jaroussky] would have been lucky to fill half a church on a Saturday afternoon.”

The views held by Eberstadt are not unique. A quick glance at YouTube comments of countertenor pieces and concert reviews reveal sentiments such as “[David Daniels] is a good singer but I have to be honest is very strange a man that size singing like a lil girl,” or “it’s often a Marmite voice, people either love it or hate it.” These comments and others like them serve to highlight the point that a man singing in a high-pitched voice in opera is not only out of the ordinary, but also gives the implication that he might not even be a real man. Indeed, the framing of the New York Times headline above invokes the idea that different vocal ranges carry specific gender assignments, and that crossing into the other is comparable to swapping out one’s gender. Jaroussky himself points to the complicated receptions of the male soprano voice, exclaiming, “it’s true that there is something potentially ridiculous about this voice coming out of a man’s body… People talk about the countertenor being a third sex, or something quasi female, but I think for me it’s more a way of staying a child.”

The view of Fernanda Eberstadt and others in the operatic world is complicated further by the fact that a large portion of the countertenor’s repertoire is comprised of heroic male roles, originally written for castrati in the Baroque and Classical eras. These roles feature characters pulled from Classical myth and history—Caesar, Rinaldo, Orpheus—who display characterizations commonly associated with masculine,

\[\text{References:}\]

11 Ibid.
13 Eberstadt.
oftentimes violent, heroics. Julius Caesar demonstrates his heroism in Handel’s opera by completing his quest to kill Ptolemy and avenge Pompey, and by establishment of his heterosexuality through his romance with Cleopatra. The only thing that appears to be out of place in the performance of such roles to today’s audiences is the tessitura of the hero himself in combination with the actor and character’s gender.

While having countertenors sing heroic roles is a more recent occurrence, the world of opera has featured hero narratives since its start. Considered one of the first operatic works, Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* from 1607 deals with the story of Orpheus’s journey to rescue his wife Eurydice from the underworld. Here, we have a story that follows Campbell’s outline of the hero’s journey almost beat-for-beat. A main character is called to action to save his wife from death, undergoing several trials as he makes his journey to the supernatural realm of the underworld to retrieve her. Upon Orpheus’s return with Eurydice, she is torn away at the last moment, and in this final grief he is invited by Apollo to join him in the heavens. Originally written as a tenor in the Monteverdi work, the myth of Orpheus would be reimagined a number of times by various composers. These include Cristoph Gluck in 1762, whose original composition cast Orpheus as a castrato, and Offenbach in 1858, who changed the libretto drastically by having Orpheus and Eurydice in an extremely unhappy marriage, both lusting after other people.

The continued success and renewal of the Orpheus myth gives certain credence to (and also makes one question) the supposed stability of the gender and sexuality of heroes throughout opera’s history. On one hand, it shows the continued theme of a man going on the hero’s journey in order to save his wife from death itself. Though he

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ultimately fails in that task, he is typically rewarded nevertheless. On the other hand, Susan McClary remarks that the ending of the Orpheus myth actually suggests Orpheus turns to homosexuality after his wife’s death. The ending of the Monteverdi work could be read in a similar fashion, as it involves Orpheus leaving his wife behind to join Apollo in the heavens. In addition, the changing of Orpheus from a tenor role in Monteverdi’s version to a castrato in Gluck’s shows a change in how male heroes were perceived musically.

Considering those points, this chapter will move into an exploration about the concepts and practices of heroism in opera, not as they were, but rather as they are in modern performance practice. More specifically, it is about how those manifestations of heroism, and perceptions concerning them within opera, are conveyed by, and impact, countertenors that perform heroic roles. Correspondingly, I will also argue how countertenors complicate and expand received notions of what a male hero in opera can be. The complication arises due to the fact that they are confronting long-held beliefs about gender that have been assigned to specific musical markers within the genre. And yet, despite these challenges to standardized concepts of musical meaning, violence is still the primary means relied upon to convey heroism narratively. The use of violence to achieve character’s goals is an issue that concerns heroism as well as masculinity. Due to the nature of this analysis, attention will be paid throughout the chapter to both countertenors as performers as well as the character roles they inhabit. As Carolyn Abbate notes, there are simultaneous narratives in motion about the character the singer is

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15 The ending of the Monteverdi work sees him join Apollo in the heavens. Eurydice is returned to life by the goddess Amore in Gluck’s version. And in Haydn’s version Orpheus himself is killed at the end (which could still be read as a reward since he may now rejoin his wife).

portraying, and even the composer of the opera itself that further affect the audience’s reception of them as heroic or not.\(^{17}\)

Exploring what it means for countertenors to perform Baroque hero roles leads to a discussion about gender, sexuality, class, and power in modern opera. These understandings set the stage for the cultural playground that countertenors enter when they perform. This chapter will focus on a more theoretical examination about the nature of the countertenor within the world of opera, and how the aforementioned elements of gender, sexuality, class and power contribute to the reception of the countertenor as a performer, and as a singer occupying typically heroic, masculine roles. (Analyses of specific countertenor performances will be utilized in the final chapter).

As of the writing of this thesis, there still appears to be a question as to how a “countertenor” should be classified. Musicologist Laura E. DeMarco suggests in her 2002 article “The Fact of the Castrato and the Myth of the Countertenor” that “the countertenor is the extreme of the upper range of a natural male voice,” and that “male altos are falsettists, and they sing in falsetto.”\(^{18}\) However, in the current article entry for “Countertenor” in *Grove Music Online*, author Peter Giles writes, “radiographic evidence has been presented to support the view that both ‘countertenors’ and ‘altos’ are ‘falsettists,’ in the sense that both produce their voices by the same physiological means.”\(^{19}\) Giles complicates the issue by stating, “the mainstream view is that the countertenor is simply the historical (male) alto who employs, almost exclusively, highly

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developed second-mode phonation, the pure head register.” The author then continues, "another view is that…the alto is merely a falsetto from a bass or baritone’s fundamental register, while the extremely rarely encountered ‘true’ countertenor has a tenor first-mode with an abnormally ultra-light, high range with no apparent register change.” For the purposes of this thesis, singers are referred to as countertenors if they are men who inhabit the range that sits above the tenor, regardless of their use of first or second-mode phonation in singing.

**Gender and Sexuality**

The countertenor role has gotten the reputation of being a voice that has a higher than average population of gay men in its ranks. Speaking on the prevalence of gay men being countertenors, Brian Asawa asserted in a 1998 interview that “heterosexual men don’t feel comfortable singing in a treble register because it’s not butch. Gay men feel quite comfortable singing in their falsetto voices.” Yet while Asawa and other singers do openly identify as gay, the claims of homosexuality also seem to emanate from latent homophobia that associates homosexual men with “effeminate” traits, like a high-pitched voice.

Gay or straight, countertenors across the board seem to be included in the implication that singing falsetto has a sort of emasculating quality to it, a perception

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
countertenors have been and are actively working to change. In an interview from 2001, David Daniels, an openly gay singer, talks about his desire for an American composer to write a countertenor part for him in an opera. “I ask too that the character be human - and a man. Not some sort of hermaphrodite or something extraterrestrial. Or a drag queen. The counter-tenor voice is a masculine voice, a male voice, and I want to portray a man.”25 Countertenor Andreas Scholl (who identifies himself as heterosexual) remarked, "especially when I sing in a high voice, of course I am being confronted with people who think that it's strange or it's girly or it's gay or whatever. I believe as a countertenor you need to have a stable psyche. If you have doubts about your sexuality or your sexual identity, one should not be a countertenor.”26 The countertenor role, by its nature, is complicating and expanding upon how audiences conceptualize heroic roles in opera. By stepping outside the realms of what audiences typically imagine the male hero sounds like, countertenors are providing alternative avenues for audiences to explore those themes.

The sexual ambiguity surrounding countertenors seems almost fitting, considering the majority of their repertoire comes from the early-Classical and Baroque eras that had more fluid ideas about gender and sexuality. In her chapter exploring the fall of the castrato and the rise of the tenor as the heroic male in opera, Freya Jarman asserts that during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, society did not see the sexes as inherently separate, but rather two sides of the same coin – each expressing varying

26 Dow, 22.
degrees of one sex.\textsuperscript{27} In \textit{Voicing Gender}, Naomi André argues that that gender fluidity was one of the driving factors for the castrato to thrive and be accepted as the hero since the roles of gender were not as strictly defined.\textsuperscript{28}

The strong reactions from people toward the high-pitched male voice today, like the quotes mentioned above, show that concepts of sexuality within the world of opera have become more entrenched than in opera’s earliest years. So much so, that David Daniels has stated even the opera-going gay community is “very, very conservative.”\textsuperscript{29} With operatic heroes since the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century having been relegated to the tenor’s “natural” chest voice, and the sound of the castrato having slowly been forgotten by audiences, the public at large has come to associate masculine heterosexuality with singing that comes from that familiar chest range. And who can blame them? “From the 1810s onwards, and by the 1840s it was commonplace for libretti, now adapted from contemporary literature rather than mythical and historic narratives, to center the story on one principal romantic couple and the overwhelming obstacles that prevent their final union.”\textsuperscript{30} The romantic couples in question were, of course, heterosexual. As the operas from that era established the canon for concert halls up to the present day, their views on sexuality have endured with them. That is not to say that there have been no new operas written since Puccini. Philip Glass’s \textit{Akhnaten} and the recent work by Theodore Morrison, \textit{Oscar}, about the famously gay Irish playwright Oscar Wilde, display types of


\textsuperscript{28} Naomi André, \textit{Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the second woman in early-nineteenth-century Italian opera}, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 47.

\textsuperscript{29} Kettle, accessed January 29, 2018.

\textsuperscript{30} Jarman (2013), 56.
sexualities that are new to the genre, but the predominance of the nineteenth-century remains.

What is more, the couples presented in these operas were aligned with musical markers that signified their gender as well as their sexualities. For at the same time that these more intimate types of couple-centered librettos were taking shape, so too was the rise of the heroic tenor.\textsuperscript{31} In the words of the musicologist Ian Biddle, “to put it more strongly, opera itself…especially in its later nineteenth century realist tradition…operates as a mode of production that produces gender according to a consistently conservative inclination.”\textsuperscript{32} Coinciding with this (and partly because of it, André argues), “male and female were no longer connected; they represented opposites. The decline of the castrati in opera at the end of the eighteenth century and disappearance from the stage at the beginning of the nineteenth century reflects the changing sentiments of the time.”\textsuperscript{33}

Gender coincides with the notions of sexuality surrounding countertenors in additionally polarizing ways. This is due in part not only for the fact that they share a vocal register typically occupied by women, but also because many have made the decision to sing female roles.\textsuperscript{34} A few examples are Andreas Scholl singing “Dido’s Lament” by Purcell, and Max Emanuel Cencic in a duet with Valer Barna-Sabadus as Mandane and Semira, respectively, from Vinci’s Artaserse. It seems that the aversion countertenors are often met with when occupying both male and female roles stems from their male gender versus their high register. That aversion brings issues of gender to the

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 56.
\textsuperscript{32} Ian Biddle, “Opera’s Unconscious, or what Men Don’t Say,” in Masculinity in Opera, edited by Phillip Purvis, 197-215 (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 199.
\textsuperscript{33} André (2006), 47.
fore for reasons argued in purely performance practice terms, but which carry with them
deeper implications about how audiences view gender in opera.

When women take on male roles in reproductions of certain Baroque and
Classical operas (garnering the nickname of “trouser roles”) they do not face similar
scrutiny about their gender as countertenors do in the reverse.35 This sort of double-
standard is all the more revealing considering that countertenors portraying male roles are
met with critiques of sounding “girly” and effeminate, whereas women playing male
roles are not ridiculed for being too “manly,” or macho. Andreas Scholl expresses his
consternation toward this double-standard in an interview where he states, “when I sing
Dido's Lament, people say, 'You can't do that, it was composed for a woman.' But, excuse
me, women sing the title role of Handel's Julius Caesar all the time, so what's the
difference? It's about the humanity of all this music.”36

As much as Scholl insists it should be about the “humanity” of the music, the
realities of gender roles and conceptions about how gender is supposed to function within
opera continue to impact the reception of countertenors. Opera audience’s desire for the
ideals and practices of the genre to seem eternal is summed up by Christopher Small
when he discusses opera fans idolizing past works and dead composers. “The dead
culture heroes are summoned up in order to give reassurance that the relationships they
encoded in musical sounds are abiding and permanent, that things are as they have been

35 Julian Budden, “Breeches part (opera) [trouser role] (Fr. travesti; Ger. Hosenrolle; It. travestito),” in
36 Tom Service, “Andreas Scholl and Philippe Jaroussky: pushing the envelope for countertenors,” The
Guardian (December 6, 2010). Accessed January 6, 2018
and will not change.” Opera fans’ steadfastness to the idea of permanence can be seen as part of the reason why understandings of gender within the genre remain so conservative, and perhaps why the rise of countertenors as heroes is all the more necessary to help revitalize the depth of this type of music. Indeed, whether necessary or not, it is clear that the presence of countertenor heroes is changing notions about gender in opera.

Musicologist Andrew Dell’Antonio discusses the problem of attempting to accommodate Baroque opera roles in the twenty-first century that were written for castrati. The first method utilized by opera companies was to simply lower the part by an octave to allow a baritone to sing the role and keep it in a musical range opera audiences would recognize as male and masculine. However, the quickness with which arias like those in Giulio Cesare move present a problem for baritones trained in nineteenth century styles, as they are accustomed to more lyrical, slow-moving lines. As a result, those more rapid sections, when sung by a baritone or tenor, often become blurred together, and the individual notes lose their clarity. More to the point, the original harmonies as envisioned by the composer no longer function the same when sung by a tenor. Another solution used by opera companies has been to cast a woman in the lead male role instead, so as to have a performer who can facilitate the nimble melodic lines. This has been the most popular method when staging operas with castrato leads, but still seemed unsatisfactory to those who would wish to have a man in a male role. In an effort to remedy this

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37 Christopher Small, Musicking: The Meanings of Performing of Listening, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 89.
39 Ibid.
situation, countertenors have begun stepping into such roles within the last couple
decades as more singers have cropped up who can meet the technical demands.

The argument over which avenue to take in these situations still goes on from
production to production, but the desire to have men playing male heroes in these operas,
despite the lessened dynamic power from a countertenor, I believe, underlines the
importance that traditional gender roles have in opera. Because of this debate, the
countertenor does live and die by his own merit with every performance for the fact that
he is not only singing for himself, but also for the justification of the countertenor’s very
existence as a professional. Comparing the two voice types, Susan McClary details the
potential heroism involved in a countertenor’s vocal production. “[T]he sonority
produced by a woman singing low in her range does not have the same effect as that of a
man singing high in his…The heroic quality of assailing the improbable heights…is
fundamental to the aesthetic.”

For all the debating about whether a female singer or countertenor is more
“historically accurate” to use in these instances, it has been shown that Handel himself
would use female singers for “male roles” when no castrati were available. Richard
Taruskin posits the belief that it is up to us to recreate early musics (indeed all musics)
how we see fit in the modern day. “What we call historical performance is the sound of
now, not then. It derives its authenticity not from its historical verisimilitude, but from its
being, for better or worse, a true mirror of late-twentieth-century taste.” He supports
this claim with the assertion that we may never know for certain all the details

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(Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 43.
surrounding performance practice of early music, and must be content to do what we think is best (or sounds the best). For many people, that means leaving women to sing castrati roles instead of countertenors, but for others, the supposed authenticity that countertenors bring gives them greater value in performance practice. In the eyes of the opera-going audience, this authenticity is due to the fact that countertenors offer the ability for the male hero role to match the gender of the person singing it.

Perhaps feeding the perplexity that greets most heroic countertenor performances are primarily, the ways that audiences are used to hearing their heroic males sound, but also, the ways they are used to their female heroines being treated. The sound of the heroic countertenor performing a castrato role features the male gender as well as the vocal pyrotechnics most commonly associated with leading females. Jarman argues that after castrato’s fall as the de facto hero, the musical and social characteristics of those roles were split between men and women, just as the views on gender began to see a split between the sexes. From that account, the florid lines of the castrato hero continued on in soprano roles, while the “natural” male sound was put in the lower register.

Those soprano roles for women did not retain the castrato’s heroic distinction, however, as the narrative trajectory of female leads often end in murder or suicide. When a man performs a heroic role in a register marked as sonically female, the disparity between his character arc and that typically assigned to women becomes evident. Those technical sopranos, performing graceful leaps and feats of vocal gymnastics, are set in operas like a jewel, a thing of beauty, which breathes artistic life into the show. In the same breath, they represent a certain kind of danger to the status quo. Catherine Clément

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43 Jarman, 62.
44 A few examples of these roles would be Verdi’s Lady MacBeth, Bizet’s Carmen, and
calls this “the great masculine scheme surrounding this spectacle thought up to adore, and also to kill, the feminine character.” Leading women in opera are often characters who wish to break free from the patriarchal bounds of society in some way, shape, or form, and their music expresses as much. But maintaining the status quo is seen as something that must be accomplished in these works. The system of tonality itself is built upon the desire for, and attainment of, resolution. Susan McClary cites Carmen as one such character whose melodic transgressions are required by design to be extinguished, resulting in her murder.

When sopranos such as Carmen exercise their musical virtuosity, then, it is an excitement that must be put back under control if the resolution – so desperately ingrained in this music, and its narratives - is to be found. This adds the final layer of complexity to notions of gender and sexuality concerning the countertenor portraying a hero, for not only do we have a man who “sings like a woman,” but he is singing like a woman and acting like a man. The countertenor displays those vocal fireworks often seen in performances by heroines who meet their untimely demise. Countertenors, but, after displaying that fevered virtuosity, are celebrated for it within their operas as heroes.

The Role of Virtuosity

Virtuosity also has the potential to demonstrate musical heroism, as it signifies an individual with exceptional ability. The origin of the word itself derives from the Latin

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46 McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 62.
47 See how the endings of *Giulio Cesare, Rinaldo, Orfeo ed Euridice*, and others end in victory, love, and happiness for the countertenor leads.
word “virtus,” which denotes a “warrior-like capability,” or being capable of victory.\textsuperscript{48}

When dealing with tales of heroes, “the adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades.”\textsuperscript{49} However, it seems that passing beyond the veil of the known (in this case, standard forms of tonality) is much more perilous for female characters than male, as outlined by McClary. “[I]t is only by advancing beyond those bounds…that the individual passes, either alive or in death, into a new zone of experience.”\textsuperscript{50}

The experience in question is the hero’s journey. While there exist virtuosic displays from tenors, countertenors, and sopranos, it appears as though the tenors are the only ones (typically) who complete the ordeal of the heroic journey, even if it sometimes results in a glorious death. Naturally, the countertenors arrive at the end of the libretto triumphant as far as their characters are concerned, but the critical reception is not as embracing of their heroic displays. The sopranos as well, while being cheered and loved by audiences for their virtuosic performances in notorious arias like “Les oiseaux dans la charmille,” from \textit{Les contes d’Hoffmann} by Offenbach, or Mozart’s “der Hölle rache” from \textit{Die Zauberflöte}, find their character dead or defeated by the end of the show. Once again, this supports Abbate’s theory that opera singers and their roles exist on simultaneous, yet distinct levels that impact audience’s perceptions of them. For countertenors, that theory can be applied to them being understood as heroic through the roles they inhabit, or just as easily not by virtue of the timbre and location of their voice.

\textsuperscript{49} Campbell, 76.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 75.
If a standard criterion of the hero is the necessity to “advance beyond the bounds” of the known into the unknown, it would seem the countertenor fits this description. Some of the biggest critiques against countertenor voices stem from the idea that they simply sound strange based on modern conceptions of operatic singing – neither quite masculine nor feminine (although David Daniels would argue otherwise). Though this pseudo masculine/feminine quality may go against the ideas of gender and sexuality that were discussed earlier, it does align with the concept of travelling beyond the veil in the tradition of the heroic journey. Cultivating the virtuosity required to perform castrati hero roles adds to the projection of musical heroism for the fact that one is distinguishing himself apart from and above his peers. Blues/Jazz scholar Albert Murray also relates virtuosity to heroism: “the master craftsman is…one who, as the hero in combat and the blues musician in a jam session, can maintain the dancer's grace under the pressure of all tempos.”

Furthermore, “[the hero] exposes himself with such graceful disdain for his own limitations and safety that the tenacity of his courage is indistinguishable from the beauty of his personal style and manner.” Murray’s description of heroic feats in blues artistry could just as easily translate to a countertenor performance where the singer is likewise exposing his voice with graceful disdain for its limitations. The metaphor of a master craftsman who must maintain composure under pressure is similarly applicable to the countertenor who must keep control of his voice during demanding arias written for castrati with much larger chest cavities and nimbler voices.

What has been valued in virtuosity has not remained constant throughout the ages, however. And even though the Baroque era favored seemingly inhuman feats of technical

52 Ibid, 43.
mastery from its singers (most especially the castrati), the nineteenth century gradually saw a shift away from valuing that kind of shock and awe in technical wizardry toward embracing lyricism, and of conveying the truest, most accurate representation of the sublime musical text.\textsuperscript{53} In place of coloratura and rapid melismatic lines, the new standards of virtuosity were transferred to things such as sheer dynamic power and endurance.

\textbf{Aspects of Power}

In order to convey heroism effectively singers must project certain aspects of power, including those emanating from musical, as well as social markers. Power is both conveyed by and bestowed upon operatic heroes from their surroundings, including the stage, the orchestra, the concert hall, and ultimately, the audience. To put it another way, as anthropologists Frances Henry and Carol Tator argue, “opera…is not simply an aesthetic form produced by the great European composers, but rather a nexus of social groups that include opera patrons, cultural critics, boards of governors, funding agencies, and other arenas in which power is produced.”\textsuperscript{54}

Musical power in opera exists in the size of the orchestra, the theater, but most important, the volume of the sound coming from the singers themselves. Due to the size of modern opera halls, singers of all vocal types must project a substantial amount of dynamic power through their voices to fill the space and be heard over the orchestra. And while many Baroque operas today are staged in smaller venues, there are still a fair


amount of productions performed in the world’s great opera halls. Just as the countertenor must contend with a host of assumptions having to do with gender and sexuality based on standard performance practices, they must also contend with an expectation of power when in those larger venues. Those expectations then contribute to the perception of what an operatic hero should sound like. When one hears Siegfried, for example, or Don Carlo, one expects their heroic male leads to perform with powerful dynamic force that shakes the hall. When countertenors perform their own heroic roles, however, they cannot hope to match that dynamic power with their voice type. They may still fill the room, but it will not be as bellowing a sound as a tenor or baritone. As such, the difference in vocal production may signify another aspect of the countertenor challenging and changing musical preconceptions in opera, this time about power.

The musical power felt from the performance of a superb singer is heightened by the harmonic motions that underpin it. Through centuries of refinement, Western classical music has developed specific musical designs used to signal heightened drama, leaving one with a sense of inescapable force that pushes ahead to its inevitable conclusion. The harmonic push toward an imminent end is, of course, obfuscated by modernist opera compositions (Berg’s Wozzeck being a prime example); but the operas and the music in discussion here are centered on the Baroque and Classical traditions where tonality is very much in force. The overwhelming sense of musical drive that has been cultivated in Western art music reached its height in the operas from the nineteenth century, which make up the majority of performed operas today. Susan McClary cites the harmonic trajectory of Carmen (1875) in a study of how Bizet’s music manipulates

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55 For example, see: Handel’s Giulio Cesare at The Met on April 27th, 2013, and Rinaldo at Carnegie Hall on March 25th, 2018.
audience’s pre-conceptions about the characters, specifically Carmen herself, and ultimately leads “the listener not only to accept Carmen's death as ‘inevitable’” but actually to desire it.”56 The search for harmonic resolution was perhaps utilized most extensively by Richard Wagner in works like Tristan und Isolde (1859), which spends almost the entirety of its run time delaying resolution to the implied tonic. While the harmonic tensions may not be as drawn out in Baroque pieces as Romantic, there is still a strong pull towards resolution and the tonic in its music.

Power does not merely reside within the music and story of opera, but also in the design of the very concert halls themselves, as Christopher Small explains:

The grandeur of [the concert hall] is something else, and it tells us loudly and clearly that the performances that take place here are an important social activity in their own right… It tells us also that those who consider them important have the confidence and possess…the wealth and the power to actualize that belief in architectural form…Once built, it then has the power to impose those assumptions on what goes on within it…But it also enforces those assumptions, making difficulties for those who might have different ideas.57

In short, the design of opera halls ensures that the performances therein, as well as the attendees themselves, will align to an upper-class code of social cues and behaviors.58

The design of concert halls and the sources of wealth that have built them bring issues of class to bear in this discussion. In order to continue its large-scale productions in

56 McClary, Feminine Endings, 62.
57 Small,19-21.
lavish opera houses, modern opera requires the patronage of wealthy donors since selling tickets is not enough to sustain these organizations. Opera and Western art music on the whole has, for a majority of its history, relied on wealthy patrons for the survival of the art. Its reliance on patrons has given opera an association with the upper class. While the architecture of the concert hall may dictate the will of upper class codes of behavior on its attendees, so too does the support of wealthy patrons affect the type of music presented on stage and the connotations it carries.

The grandeur presented by the size, scope, and design of opera halls gives a sense of legitimacy to the stories and myths performed there. In this way, the position of operatic heroes in the cultural hierarchy is elevated by opera’s association with the upper class. Those heroes are then able to subsume the power constructed musically and socially through opera. For a genre that has been so closely associated with social power and the upper class throughout its history it is no surprise that opera gravitates toward heroic representations of the extreme in its librettos. And what are heroes, really, but examples of life’s extremes that people wish to emulate in their own way? Christopher Small perhaps describes the phenomenon best when discussing the reception of figures like Mozart and Beethoven as heroes to the Classical music audience: “Like all myth, its function is to provide present-day people with models and paradigms for values and behavior— for relationships, in fact.”

An analysis of power within opera halls also involves a discussion about culture and ethnicity as it concerns the location of power narratively, specifically regarding which characters hold the power. An example of how ethnicity functions amidst Baroque characters is Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*. In *Cesare*, there is a characterization of Egypt

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59 Small, 89.
through Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy, depicting both the feminine “exotic” other, and a sneaky warmonger who beheads Caesar’s rival Pompey. The protagonist, Julius Caesar, is seen as distinctly European in contrast to the Egyptian “other” of Ptolemy and Cleopatra. In an exchange that occurs between Caesar and the Egyptians in this opera, one can observe an exploitation of “cultural differences between conqueror and conquered.” Julius Caesar is an immensely popular role for countertenors to reprise today, and as such it is important to acknowledge the characterizations of the heroes and villains being portrayed. Along these lines, depictions of non-European characters as powerless when in confrontation with Europeans perpetuates Eurocentric views about what kind of person has power within society, and who gets to be a hero. This is important to keep in consideration when deciding what kinds of roles are called heroes in opera.

**The Role of the Countertenor**

The hero is one who stands alone, as the soloist does. He may receive aid of some kind from outside sources (the orchestra/choir), but ultimately every man must face his trials and live or die by his own merit. The rise of the countertenor as a performing soloist gives an apt depiction of such an occurrence. In the past, musical heroics in opera have conformed more or less to public sentiment, and composers wrote to please their audiences to the best of their ability. When castrati were en vogue, composers would write for them (or substitute with women if there were no castrati available). In time, the divergence of musical heroism was transferred, first to the soprano by way of the

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60 Henry and Tator, 244.
castrato, before ultimately falling to the tenor, which would carry through to the modern day. In each of these instances, the role of the hero was one that was commonly accepted by the viewing audience. But countertenor soloists attempting hero roles present audiences with a different paradigm, these are voices that were brought about by the resurgence of early music and the need of singers who could perform those forgotten roles.

Resulting from the search for newness in opera, musicians and program directors found works requiring a heroic voice in a context people had not been familiar with for centuries. True, there have been women in “trouser roles” taking up the heroic mantle on occasion, but as noted above, notions of gender within opera have been shaped such that when audiences see a man on stage (and not just a woman in drag) they expect to hear a tenor sonority or lower. Thus the countertenor, answering the call of those forgotten operas by Handel, Hasse, Vivaldi and the others, ushered in a type of musical heroism that seemed to have no correlation to what audiences were prepared for. In fact, the majority of countertenor roles written up to the end of the twentieth century had been for otherworldly or effeminate characters such as Oberon the fairy king from Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or Phillip Glass’s androgynous pharaoh Akhnaten. By this aspect alone one could forgive all of the detractors in online comment threads, or opera column interviewers and *New York Times* reviewers who exclaim(ed) the overwhelming strangeness of what they had witnessed.

Performing despite claims that they are unnatural or strange is perhaps the greatest testament to the idea that countertenors truly *do* convey a sense of heroism through their high-pitched singing. Countertenors thus entered into an operatic world still
largely dominated by nineteenth-century conceptions of heterosexual-dominant relationships, where men are often the protagonist and women either the love interest or the out-of-control fury. Using their high clarion voices in heroic male roles can be seen as another instance of countertenors journeying beyond the boundaries of what is known within opera, to forge new ideas about how heroic males can sound, and expand conceptualizations of heroism within opera.

Overcoming listeners’ prejudice represents heroic victory in a real-world sense, but drawing back to the cycle of the hero, one can see those themes played out musically as well. By the nature of an aria’s design, countertenors go through their musical ordeals alone, aided only by the support of the orchestra to help them get through. Though Baroque operas also use choruses, they are not typically present in solo arias in order to feature the singer more prominently. And while this may be the same as any soprano or tenor in a challenging role of their own, the added social pressures from operatic subculture come to bear on the countertenor.

As noted above, modern opera singers need to project a substantial amount of dynamic power to fill the concert hall and sound above the orchestra. Now, it must be clarified that not all countertenors are performing those Baroque operas in full-size concert halls. There might only be one fully staged Baroque opera with a countertenor lead during a season. Full-scale productions are still put on, however, and can be said to represent the pinnacle of countertenor heroism.\(^61\) When countertenors are put in this same position and asked to perform in venues suited for larger nineteenth century works, it

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\(^61\) A few examples of countertenors leading Baroque operas are Andreas Scholl in *Giulio Cesare* at the Royal Danish Theatre in 2006, a production of *L’incoronazione di Poppea* at the Teatro Real in Madrid in 2012 featuring two countertenors Philippe Jaroussky and Max Emanuel Cencic, and David Daniels also playing Julius Caesar at The Met in 2013.
makes their victory all the more impressive when they are able to fill up the concert space. For instead of being able to incorporate their diaphragm, the majority of countertenors rely on falsetto to achieve their demanding high notes. Since countertenors cannot project the same amount of dynamic power as male tenors or female sopranos, they need to work harder to overcome the orchestra. Comparing countertenors and other male voice types, one can see the heroic attributes mentioned by McClary about “climbing the improbable heights” enacted in two ways. The most obvious is the heights countertenors achieve in reaching notes above what people have thought possible for men. The other is being able to successfully climb the dynamic heights above the din of the orchestra, and be heard by the audience.

Though the countertenor is seen as a musical anomaly to audiences, the narrative trends they inhabit in Baroque roles rely on just as much violence as more widely performed operas. Narrative violence is one component that benefits the countertenor’s attempts at being taken seriously as a masculine hero by opera audiences. As the majority of opera seria libretti were based on historic generals, emperors, knights, and mythological heroes, the narratives focused heavily on traditional notions of a protagonist versus an antagonist. Oftentimes the antagonist would have to be dealt with by violent force. Handel’s Giulio Cesare returns as a prime example of violence in Baroque opera. Over the course of the work, Caesar goes from being a stranger in a strange land to killing Egypt’s co-ruler Ptolemy in battle. This narrative is centered on Caesar as the protagonist and as such, we are meant to root for his victory. Through portraying a role like Caesar, countertenors may blend their high-pitched voice with character traits seen as traditionally masculine by the operatic world.
In this chapter I have shown how long-held notions about what heroism means musically within opera are being confronted and expanded by countertenor performances. At the same time, however, countertenors must still conform to certain social conventions if they are to be accepted as masculine heroes. Through stories such as Julius Caesar’s violent elimination of Ptolemy, or Rinaldo’s taking of Jerusalem, countertenors are adhering to what a masculine hero in opera is narratively, while at the same time forcing audiences to reconsider what a “masculine hero” is supposed to sound like musically. But just as the character Orfeo went through several alterations since the dawn of the genre, so too, has the sound of a hero changed throughout the centuries. The rise of the countertenor hero suggests that the operatic world is due for yet another change of character. For although a bulk of their repertoire stems from reclaiming Baroque era operas, as noted by Taruskin, the countertenor’s steadily growing popularity indicates that they are not the sound of then, but rather the sound of now.62

In the following chapter I will examine how high-pitched male singers convey heroism in heavy metal. The difference is that, as opposed to the countertenor in opera, high-pitched metal singers’ position as masculine heroes is not questioned. In fact, the high-pitched male voice is the preferred sound to convey fantasy hero narratives within the genre. The question to explore then, is why high-pitched singing is not only accepted as masculine, but as a representation of the aggressive hyper-masculinity prevalent in heavy metal.

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62 A search on Worldcat for Countertenor sound recordings between the years 1968-1993 yielded 2,169 results, however, a search for the years 1993-2018 yielded 5,307 results.
Chapter 3
Defenders of the Faith:
Forging Heroism out of High-Pitched Male Singing

Planet’s devastated
Mankind's on its knees
A savior comes from out the skies
In answer to their pleas
- Judas Priest, “Painkiller”

Heroic narratives and images abound within heavy metal. The cover of Manowar's 1988 album *Kings of Metal* features a heavily muscled figure resembling Conan the Barbarian, standing, sword in hand, in a victorious pose atop tattered flags. More recently, Hammerfall’s 2016 album *Built to Last* displays a caped figure resembling the comic book depiction of Thor (complete with an electrified hammer) positioned on the battlements of a castle. Metal is a varied landscape, however, and there are dozens of different (sometimes contradictory) subgenres within it. The subgenre I am dealing with is power metal, which typically draws its influences from fantasy narratives, such as *Lord of the Rings* and Arthurian legend. As such, it utilizes representations of violence and war that are depicted as seemingly “noble” compared to violent themes in death metal and other subgenres.

Though the concepts of battle displayed in power metal are seen as noble within the genre, its narratives become problematic when equating certain kinds of violence to masculinity and heroism. Beyond the fantasy themes, distorted, punchy guitars, a moderate-to-fast tempo, an emphasis on melodic riffs, and an overall high volume typify power metal. More to the point of this thesis, there is also an established tradition of high-
pitched falsetto singing within the subgenre, and metal at large, used by singers to
describe and even embody the heroic. This may seem at odds with the violent, hyper-
masculine themes in the genre, especially when considering the effeminate labels tacked
onto high-pitched male singers in similar situations (such as countertenors), but within
metal, the falsetto singer is a part of the sonic landscape and the genre’s legacy. And
unlike countertenors, who embody/occupy a sustained role over the course of an opera,
metal singers may change from song to song in a performance, as there is not usually an
overriding narrative for a concert. On top of this, many power metal narratives depict the
heroic figure from a second or third-person view. In lieu of occupying the role directly,
singers will often make an effort to embody characteristics of the hero in performance.

Much has been written regarding issues of power in metal, how it is created, and
what it means to the artists and its fans, as well as how gender plays and is understood
within the music. But for a genre that deals so heavily in heroic figures and narratives,
little has been covered about how heavy metal forms heroism, and what it means for
singers to use these narratives while singing in a high-pitched register. I argue that it is
ultimately not a question of why high-pitched male singing is accepted as masculine and
heroic within heavy metal, but rather how metal singers are able to take that practice and
forge it into something that is then viewed as inherently heroic. Questions that are raised
in arguing this point are, how did high-pitched singing come to be a sign of heroism and
masculinity within metal, as well as what factors have contributed to its longevity?
Behind that examination lays notions of power, gender, masculinity, class, race, and

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63 See: Robert Walser’s *Running with the Devil*, Susan McClary’s “Soprano Masculinities,” and *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality* edited by Florian Heesch and Niall Scott.
sexuality, which are integral to the construction of heroism in metal and will be discussed throughout the chapter.

Concepts of Power

As a preface to discussing power in metal, the element of sonic distortion needs to be explained and understood. The importance of distortion within metal cannot be overstated; it is entwined into every aspect of the genre. Indeed, as the musicologist Robert Walser noted in his groundbreaking study of metal culture, *Running with the Devil*, “the most important aural sign of heavy metal is the…distorted electric guitar.” The sound of guitar distortion stems from the act of overloading an amplifier to the point where it cannot handle the entire signal being sent through it and begins to “distort” the sound wave. This overload causes the trademark “crunch” heard from electric guitars in metal and is a cornerstone of the genre's sound.

The metaphor that distortion creates is similarly imperative to the heavy metal ethos. Within metal’s distortion lies the implication that there is too much sound being produced for the listener to handle, unless those listeners are heavy-metal fans. For these audiences, the sound of the distorted guitar is a sign of sonic power. That is, the very power that is causing the amp to overload is then taken on by metalheads as part of their identity. As Walser put it, “since sustaining anything requires effort, the distorted guitar sound signals power, not only through its distorted timbre but also through this temporal display of

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unflagging capacity for emission.\textsuperscript{65} The “unflagging capacity for emission” Walser speaks of refers to the feedback from an amplifier that electric guitars use to sustain their tones long beyond the normal dynamic decay the instrument would have.

This display of power found within the sound of the distorted guitar is heightened by the use of the so-called power chord in heavy metal music. Created from playing a root note and a perfect fifth or fourth above it, the power chord creates resultant tones that sound at octaves below the notes of the power chord. In combination with this harmonic effect, the distortion utilized in creating the heavy metal sound complicates the signal and increases the energy of its higher harmonics. In this way, the guitar can fill out the soundscape both above and below itself.\textsuperscript{66} As audio engineer Mark Mynett explains “the increased spectral energy and density resulting from the guitar signal’s harmonic distortion casts a sonically dense blanket over the majority of the other instruments and sounds involved.”\textsuperscript{67}

The guitar’s sound expansion contributes to the idea of “size” as it relates to the genre’s notion of power in its social consciousness. That is, the size of the sound translates to the act of one becoming a larger-than-life force through the power of the music. In an article analyzing the trends of heavy metal lyrics, sociologist Adam Rafalovich found that “songs describing a helpless and defeated self are often compiled with songs thematically centering on the conquering of others and the cultivation of inner strength.”\textsuperscript{68} This sentiment is expressed directly in the lyrics to Pantera’s song

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 42.
\item\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 43.
\end{itemize}
“Becoming” which says “no more the small one, the weak one, the frightened one…I’m becoming more than a man, more than you ever were...Becoming Godsize.” Alternative rock band Jane’s Addiction’s song “Ocean Size” presents a useful juxtaposition to Pantera’s “Becoming.” The lyrical theme is almost the same, stating, “[I] Wish I was ocean size. They cannot move you. No one tries.” The difference being that, while Phil Anselmo from Pantera is becoming godsize, Jane’s Addiction’s Perry Farrell only wishes he could be ocean size. The narrative difference here highlights the distinction between seeking out power, and simply acknowledging its absence. The difference in attitudes toward power is noted between the guitar tones as well, with Pantera’s having a crisper, punchy tone to it, and Jane’s Addiction’s sounding more open and wet, spilling over into itself. From the lyrical and sonic differences, one can see how acquiring power is key within metal, and a distinguishing feature between it and other rock-based genres.

By “distorting” their voices through slight growls (even when singing quite high) metal singers adopt that same power for themselves. Throughout the genre's history, singers of all ranges have used vocal distortion. In one sense, this technique appropriates the power evoked by the distorted guitar, and in another, to give their singing a harder sounding edge, evoking connotations of masculine aggression. Almost explicitly highlighting this relationship between vocal distortion and guitar distortion, one can see that over the course of metal’s chronology, as guitar distortion grew ever more distorted, so too did the voices of metal singers. Increasingly, vocal distortion has trended toward the lower-end of the voice, utilizing a more guttural growl timbre. An example of such a chronology is moving from Iron Maiden’s “The Trooper” (1983), to Metallica’s “Master

of Puppets” (1986), then on to Pantera’s “Walk” (1992), before reaching Lamb of God’s “Ruin” (2003). Of course, these bands and the variations in metal they represent existed simultaneously in many cases, but the increasing distortion among their guitars and vocals holds true.

**High-Pitched Power**

Despite this general trend in metal’s vocal production, there still exists significant numbers of metal singers today who use their extreme upper range. Above all, power metal has continued the tradition of high-pitched singing, while furthering its fantasy warrior themes. One example is Iron Maiden’s “Flash of the Blade.” As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the heroic character emerges on two fronts within the performance, both lyrically, and performatively from the singer. Throughout this song, lead singer Bruce Dickinson describes the progression of a heroic warrior from when he was a boy to that of a man: “as a young boy chasing dragons with your wooden sword so mighty. You're St. George or you're David and you always killed the beast.” Then later: “[the fencing master] taught you all he ever knew, to fear no mortal man. And now you'll wreak your vengeance in the screams of evil men.” Interspersed between these episodes is the chorus “you’ll die as you lived in a flash of the blade. In a corner, forgotten by no one. You lived for the touch, for the feel of the steel. One man and his honor.”

Musically, the song oscillates between A Phrygian in its intro and A Aeolian during its verse and instrumental interludes. During the chorus, the guitars shift toward E minor in a descending line from C – G – F-Sharp - E. Dickinson’s vocal line remains in a

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moderate range around B3 during the verses and generally follows the guitar parts in unison at a higher octave. However, during the chorus, he ascends immediately up to G4, working his way up through A and then climaxing the chorus on C5. Ultimately, he accompanies the guitar’s E power chord by singing a G4 at the first ending of the chorus, and then finishes on a B4 for the second ending, creating minor third and perfect fifth intervals respectively. During the chorus, Dickinson ascends to a higher range while at the same time breaking away from the unison lines with the guitar in the verse.

Susan McClary has remarked on “the heroic quality of assailing the improbable heights.” At the core of this metaphor lies the idea of struggle. It is struggle that marks a hero’s journey, both in the traditional sense and also in music. The hero is a character who must overcome those improbable odds in order to win the day (or die trying). The element of struggle is a defining feature of metal narratives. Linking back with the idea of distortion and the empowered self, the struggle in pursuit of that power becomes another theme that characterizes metal music and lyrics. Struggle comes across musically as the attempt to put forth a tremendous amount of effort, and manifests in a variety of ways for metal vocals. There is the now-widespread use of the “screaming,” guttural style by singers, in part to convey as much primal energy as possible. High-pitched singing also represents its own kind of struggle in vocal production.

The choice to sing high can be read as a pronouncement that the themes put forth in their lyrics are indeed “higher” in a certain sense, than the “baser” notions expressed by low, guttural screaming. Power metal utilizes narratives that it sees as seemingly “noble,” and have to do with glorious battles and medieval knights. These lyrical themes

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are contrasted with the kinds of narratives typically found in the lower-pitched screaming camp that gravitate toward more “real-world” concerns, featuring themes about violence for violence’s sake, inner turmoil, and death. Some examples from the power metal subgenre in regards to high-pitched singing are “Highlander (The One)” by Lost Horizon, Dragonforce’s “Through the Fire and the Flames,” and “The Power of Thy Sword” by Manowar. By contrast, examples from death metal and other “heavier” genres include “Hammer-Smashed Face” by Cannibal Corpse, “Laid to Rest” by Lamb of God, and “Choke on It” by Death.

Throughout both of these narrative trends, however, struggle in vocal production is still apparent. In the higher-pitched singers, it comes through in the effort to climb those “improbable heights,” as McClary calls them. In the lower-pitched singers, the struggle is present in distorting one’s voice. An aspect of the metal aesthetics for screaming also requires (at least the appearance of) a great amount of effort involved in one’s vocal production to sound as though they are distorting their voice whilst projecting with their full dynamic power.

**Violence and Masculinity**

A significant part of the equation for heroism in metal relates to performance visuals, and over time the expression of struggle and heroism in performance became highly gendered. Performance practices ultimately set in motion a division between different camps of metal bands in the 1980s. The bifurcation originates from the varying ways in which gender was portrayed by bands, on stage, album sleeves, and promotional material. In this dynamic, the more traditional metal bands, which would give rise to
“thrash metal” as the ‘80s went on, displayed a hyper-masculine type of identity, while those involved in what came to be known as “hair metal,” adopted a more androgynous approach, coalescing into performance practices that were coded as less or more masculine than the other. Tellingly, the presentations that displayed more warrior-like, hyper-masculine traits were also those that were focused more on heroism and were resultanty seen as being more heroic. However, as philosophy and social science scholar Niall Scott suggests, those hegemonic masculinities should be understood “as being mythical rather than experienced in the heavy metal scene for itself… They express widespread ideals, fantasies and desires.”

Sociologist Deena Weinstein traces heavy metal’s heroic archetypes back to the gender-power plays of the early bands within the genre such as Black Sabbath and Judas Priest. “Their focus was on good and evil … these men were black-clad and stern visaged. They were men’s men in a medieval male-bonding mode, playing to a mainly male, mainly working-class audience… These masculinists focused on serious issues, issues of good and evil, life and death.” With this being the case for heroic, masculine representations within metal, the characterization of the reverse becomes that of a more feminine gender identity – often being labeled as too weak and soft by the traditional masculine sect. Testimony from prominent figures from the more characteristically masculine thrash metal subgenre demonstrates this notion.

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In a 2007 set of interviews, Scott Ian of Anthrax says, “God, we hated those bands. We hated Quiet Riot, and Poison, and Warrant, and Bon Jovi, and Mötley Crüe. I mean *hated* those bands.”\(^75\) Lars Ulrich of Metallica states, “We despised it. Everything at that time was very black and white.”\(^76\) And Kerry King of Slayer exclaims, “I never understood it. It seemed like all the guys did everything they could to look more feminine. I come from a family where men are men, and women are women, and there ain’t no middle ground.”\(^77\) Ironically, even though the traditionalist side of metal claimed itself to be the province of “real” men, the hair metal subgenre typically had higher numbers of female fans. Walser suggests the gender disparity between hair metal and the rest of the genre at the time was due to the fact that “[hair] metal androgyny presents…a fusion of the signs specific to current notions of femininity with musically and theatrically produced power and freedom that are conventionally male.”\(^78\)

Underneath that current of gendered performance differences lay differences in mainstream appeal. In her article, Weinstein extrapolates the gender configurations throughout metal’s history as a dichotomy between the mainstream and non-mainstream sides of the genre. This dichotomy adds to the conflict seen between bands that align themselves with one side or the other. The “black-clad masculinists” would be categorized as “non-mainstream.” The other, which she refers to as “lascivious, and sexually aroused and arousing,” comprise hair, or “glam” metal.\(^79\) Although hair metal is a part of heavy metal's broader history, this subgenre and other mainstream variations

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\(^{76}\) Ibid.

\(^{77}\) Ibid.

\(^{78}\) Walser, 131.

\(^{79}\) Weinstein, 12.
like it do not concern themselves with narratives and images of the heroic male; instead, the focus is on sex, romance, and a “good time.” In fact, it is Weinstein's contention that the commercial success of these "softer" depictions of masculinity within metal in the '80s led to the rest of the genre pursuing an even more over-the-top, hyper-masculine approach.  

That approach often goes hand-in-hand with images of violence. Considering that the element of struggle is a key theme throughout metal narratives, the scenario requires something to fight against. In many cases, this manifests itself in narratives of violent aggression. In the words of sociologist Adam Rafalovich, “as is reflected in heavy metal songs, suffering and domination exist in a dialectical relationship, where the former often gives rise to the latter.”  

These narratives can take many forms, but at their core, they typically involve retribution against some external aggressor. “This dominance narrative either describes violence against others or articulates an emergent and galvanized self that ‘rises above’ hardship.” In more extreme areas of the genre, violence is enacted lyrically for the sheer sake of violence, as witnessed in many death metal lyrics like those of Cannibal Corpse.

Violence is equally prevalent among heroic power metal narratives. As mentioned above, these themes are viewed as seemingly “noble” depictions of violence and may be justified within the song’s narrative to facilitate the deed being heroic. The justification often involves the enemy “other” portrayed as evil, again, echoing The Lord of the Rings’ notions of good versus absolute evil. Here, the foe is an element that must be eradicated through physical force, and it is achieved through “the power of thy sword,” to quote

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80 Ibid, 15.
81 Rafalovich, 20.
82 Ibid, 22.
Manowar. Following the fantasy tropes that inspire the power metal subgenre, one of the most popular antagonists is the dragon. If the dragon itself is not present as the ultimate trial, the thematic environment itself is of a medieval inclination. This environment sets the stage for songs that feature battles between knights, elements of magic, and stories of triumphant victory.\(^3\)

Throughout all of these narratives, violence is written in as a sign of masculinity relating to the hero. And although they claim to do so in the name of honor and glory, they are still predicated on violent acts. This presents a potentially problematic relationship that first, sees “real” masculinity as inherently associated with physical displays of force and two, that being a hero necessitates the use of violence. Ultimately, the dependence on violence suggests that only conflict that is resolved physically is worthy of being deemed “heroic.” In this world of fantasy lyrics there is little room for gradation and nuance, and in matters of good versus evil, the evil must be vanquished.

**Gender and Masculinity**

To be sure, there is no single way of being a man in Western society. The term "masculinities" itself implies that there are multiple forms of masculinity, and many possibilities for expressing oneself as "masculine." Within heavy metal, however, certain manifestations of masculinity are more prized than others. Communications scholar Paula Willoquet-Maricondi claims that “the ‘enemy’ within the self is an ‘other’ that does not

conform to the definition of masculinity associated with the war and western hero.”

This analysis is indicative of how masculinity is viewed at large within metal society and helps to explain the conflation between masculinity and violence, feats of strength and aggression. Viewing masculinity as violent does not apply to just men, either, as Susan Fraiman elucidates in her monograph *Cool Men and the Second Sex*. Here, when reviewing and analyzing the description of female boxers by Judith Halberstam in her article “Between Butches,” Fraiman notes that the celebration of “female masculinity” on display is not so much about celebrating athletic violence as anything feminine, rather it is concerned with furthering the notion that athletic violence is indeed a masculine trait in which women are now taking part. This kind of identification not only bolsters the concept that femininity is associated with domesticity and tenderness, but it also helps to solidify masculinity as stemming from a place of violence, strength, and aggression.

Similar trends are observed in metal. As anthropologist Amber Clifford-Napoleone suggests, even though masculinist themes pervade the genre they need not be solely for the use and consumption of straight men. Indeed, women and non-hetero fans are able to take in and adopt metal's hyper-masculine aggression to suit their own needs, fantasies, and desires. From Fraiman’s analysis, it becomes clear how female singers are able to project metal masculinity in their own right. The appropriation of masculine, metal aggression can be witnessed in female singers across metal subgenres and vocal

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styles, from the low, guttural screaming of Angela Gossow and Mallika Sundaramurthy, to others in power metal such as Noora Louhimo from Battle Beast.

Just as in Fraiman’s argument, however, the women adopting aggressive metal tropes in their singing to convey strength (and in the case of Louhimo, even heroism) are doing so according to the rules of masculinity set forth within the genre. Those rules dictate that strength, power, and heroism itself are features that must be attained through violent acquisition. While these themes occur most noticeably in the lyrics, they are also apparent in the choice of clothing by the performers, such as Alissa White-Gluz from Arch Enemy, who utilizes a version of the standard black leather look predominantly used throughout the genre, for example, a metal-studded black leather corset in lieu of a leather jacket. Again, some scholars, like Clifford-Napoleone, might look at these appropriations of heavy metal masculinity by female guttural singers as an indication of them taking on and using those markers of power for themselves. But as Fraiman points out, this kind of power appropriation is doing just as much to reinforce the stereotypical notions about masculinity being inherently violent and aggressive as it does to put forth the claim that if women want to appear strong and capable in their own right, they have to do so according to the rules of masculinity set forth in heavy metal.

Nevertheless, it remains apparent that whosoever wishes to appear masculine (and heroic) must do so in a way that signifies to everyone that these individuals are legitimate according to the established codes of the community. As has been mentioned, this masculine legitimacy comes in the form of violent lyrical themes, but in power metal, it also occurs through performance attire that suggests an element of battle-preparedness.
The power metal “look” is formed by its uniformity amongst the band, and its resemblance to a fantasy style of leather armor adorned with spikes.

In the pursuit of attaining such levels of masculine heroism, certain aspects of "otherness" must be purged. As mentioned by Willoquet-Maricondi, the creation of masculinity itself is often defined by the elimination of that which does not conform to the definition of masculinity associated with war and the western hero. The thing to be eliminated can be within an individual or applied to external forces. The wish to be rid of an “other” that threatens perceived masculinity may also help to explain some of the animosity expressed by veteran members of the metal community toward hair metal bands from the 1980s. Walser says as much when discussing the attitudes of the “harder” metal bands from this time toward hair metal that “both homosexuality and symbolic crossing of gender boundaries threaten patriarchal control, and they are thus conflated in the service of a rhetoric that strives to maintain difference and power.”

The divide between metal in the 1980s ultimately led to the triumph of the more “traditional” sect of metalheads, with their masculinist portrayals winning out over the opposition for cultural dominance within the genre. Granted, some of the more successful musicians from the hair metal subgenre (being more mainstream as indicated by Weinstein) achieved greater fame than the majority of "masculinist" metal musicians. Inside heavy metal, however, the influence of hair metal all but died out by the end of the 1980s, with the rest of the genre continuing on in the non-mainstream tradition. The animosity felt by those who were against hair metal and androgynous portrayals of gender and sexuality can be read as sensing a certain kind of "weakness" within those more feminine and androgynous sects of metal. At the same time, this “weakness”

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87 Walser, 130.
presented a threat to the supposedly stable notions of gender and masculinity to which the rest of the genre subscribed. As such, it needed to be safeguarded against and resisted at all costs. Consequently, strength, power, and violence are those things that are seen as masculine to the majority of metal.

**Class, Race, and Metal Symbolism**

As mentioned earlier, Scott’s theory for understanding the mythological and heroic narratives within metal posits that we recognize those hegemonic masculinities “as being mythical rather than experienced…[that] they express wide-spread ideals, fantasies and desires.” When deciphering these myths in metal, extracting meaning depends upon familiarity with the music and its traditional schema. As Deena Weinstein has mentioned, heavy metal fans are primarily (white) working-class men. Class is always at work within metal on some level, even when it is not being specifically addressed. Understanding the main demographic of metal society as working-class helps us to glean why certain types of metal heroes are regarded as such. In this sense, a grasp of what is idolized and praised as heroic within the working class will shed light on what these metal heroes represent symbolically.

With those analytical concepts in mind, a look at various heavy metal heroes will conclude that for all the depictions of medieval knights, renegades, and wizards, they represent ideals connected to stereotypical masculine forms among Western working-class communities. These symbolic ideals are concerned with an individualist attitude of

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88 Ibid.
89 Scott, 127.
one who possesses the strength to shape his own destiny, and also the capability of “controlling monsters and mayhem,” which all relate to “matters of freedom, independence, control/self-control as well as with a particular dichotomy of nature and civilization.”\textsuperscript{91} Notions of control and individualism echo the aforementioned occurrence of building the self into something greater. Themes of self-improvement are reminiscent of the working-class attitude that one is able to, through the sheer power of will, improve his standing in society and mold himself into the person he wishes to be.\textsuperscript{92}

Struggle, while inherent to the hero’s journey, is directly related to working-class ideals and metal singing, which are bound in notions of virtuosity. Assigned most typically to guitar players, who display impressive speed in their solos, virtuosity is well regarded as an indication of musical supremacy in all facets of the genre. Virtuosity and struggle are perhaps even more pronounced in high-pitched metal singers, who seem to make it a point to convey the struggle involved in their effort to reach mesmerizing heights. “Showing their work” so to speak, is a concept that underlines the fact that singing extraordinarily high is not a skill which is easily attained, at the same time, it demonstrates to the audience that the singer is working as hard as he can to put on a quality show for them. Exerting considerable effort, and the element of work is another respected quality in metal performance and one that is expected of performers, echoing metal's working-class demographics.

Identifying as working class and harboring individualist attitudes, accompanied by abrasive music and lyrical themes, leads metalheads to see themselves as a group of

outsiders to mainstream culture. Metal’s outsider mentality presents one of its great paradoxes: that the genre that strives to eliminate certain forms of "otherness" from its ranks in the pursuit of hyper-masculinity also prides itself in its own otherness from mainstream culture. Feelings of otherness are not without some merit, as the Parents Music Resource Center held congressional hearings in 1985 on whether to censor heavy metal or not. The zenith of this confrontation in the mid-1980s only helped to strengthen the metal community’s claim to outsider status. Parental groups’ push against metal echoes the attitude against other genres of music such as jazz, rock n’ roll, and hip-hop upon their formations based on a fear of the “noise” in new musics. In metal, the fans embraced that outsider status as a defining part of their sub-culture and took pride in the “fear” that their noise instilled in the mainstream.

Metal fans’ view of themselves as an outsider group contributed to Clifford-Napoleone’s theory that as much as a certain amount of uniformity is found in metal audiences, the constructed “otherness” still leaves room for marginalized people to adopt signs of heavy metal masculinity for their own needs and empowerment. She formulated this theory mainly in regards to the queer community and prominent gay metal frontman Rob Halford of Judas Priest (who will be discussed later in this chapter in regards to sexuality), along with the testimony of other gay fans and musicians.

The fact that the heavy metal community views itself as an outsider demographic might seem ironic, however, when considering its primary constituency are white men. Metal’s overwhelming whiteness of artists and their fans is something that cannot be

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93 Walser, 138.
95 Clifford-Napoleone, (2016), 45.
denied and has been discussed and written about across the field of heavy metal scholarship.\footnote{Walser, 17.} It is also possible to take Clifford-Napoleone's theory of metal as a sort of querscape and apply it to race. Hindrichs cites the emergence of Ice-T and the metal group he founded in the 1990s, Body Count, which featured explicit gangsta-rap style lyrics (most notably in the song “Cop Killer”) and mixed it with heavy metal. Hindrich suggests that Body Count represents a successful and effective appropriation of metal by black musicians, as well as a challenge to the white metal majority. More recently, ethnographer Magnus Nilsson, who has done fieldwork studying the burgeoning metal scene in Gaborone, Botswana, suggests that metal has developed into a globalized and postmodern phenomenon. He proposes that perhaps in this new era, which is witness to heavy metal scenes around the world, subcultural capital (borrowing from Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital) is more important than race.\footnote{Examples are the thriving metal cultures of Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, et al.} In this analysis, echoed by metal scholar Keith Kahn-Harris, a more holistic view of metal is to see these different international scenes on their own terms, and not as marginal to the more traditionally accepted ethnocentric view of North America and Western Europe as the core of metal.\footnote{Keith Kahn-Harris, \textit{Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge}, (Oxford: Oxford, 2007), 11.}

I agree with the notion that metal is an international phenomenon in the modern era, citing groups such as Wagakki Band from Japan, who mix traditional Japanese instruments and styles with metal instrumentation, metal veterans Sepultura from Brazil, who have successfully incorporated Brazilian rhythms into their music, and Botswana’s own Wrust, who discuss the injustices of everyday life. Bands like these, and many more, do not concern themselves with issues of fantasy heroes or heroism, however. That
lyrical trajectory is found mainly within power metal, and power metal as a whole is centered for the most part in Europe and the United States.

Thus, despite Nilsson’s contention that metal has become a globalized, postmodern music, it is still necessary to acknowledge the specific types of hero archetypes that permeate power metal. Power metal’s tropes are so ingrained in the subgenre that even Japanese power metal band Galneryus feature depictions of western dragons and knights on their album covers, despite the vast majority of their lyrics being in Japanese. And while Campbell would tell us that they are representative of mythological hero themes common around the world, the imagery used narratively, performatively, and on cover art depict a type of hero very much born out of Western European myth and legend. Reliance on Western European folklore and myth in song narrative is a result of, as Walser says:

[T]he genre’s history. For heavy metal began as a white remake of urban blues that often ripped off black artists and their songs shamelessly. If the motive for much white music making has been the imperative of reproducing black culture without the black people in it, no comparable reason exists to draw black musicians and fans into traditionally white genres…Moreover, it has been transformed into something quite different from its blues origins. Metal’s relatively rigid sense of the body and concern with dominance reflect European-American transformation of African-American musical materials and cultural values.  

Despite the erasure of blackness from metal over its history, Walser claims that “neither the lyrics nor the fans are noticeably more racist than is normal in the United States; in

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99 Walser, 17.
fact, the enthusiasm of many fans for black or racially mixed bands like Living Colour and King’s X, and their reverence for Jimi Hendrix suggest the opposite.”

Coinciding with metal’s “European-American transformation,” as Walser puts it, the lyrical themes followed suit, with heavy metal and power metal bands from England (Judas Priest, Iron Maiden), Germany (Helloween, Primal Fear), and America (Manowar, Dio, Kamelot) all relying on the medieval fantasy hero described earlier. So, even though the use of white, European hero archetypes may not have an explicitly malevolent or racist agenda behind it, it is still important to admit the potential problems and implicit racism and exclusion involved with putting such narratives of whiteness on a pedestal, certainly as it concerns identifying them as heroes. Again, this is not to say that there are iterations of heavy metal that do not correlate to non-Western cultures in other metal scenes, only that the predominant heroic narrative in power metal is of the traditional white, masculine hero.

**Sexuality in Performance**

As much as displays of gender affect the masculine identity of heavy metal performers, (and consequently, their heroic stature) so too does sexuality. Striving for heterosexual masculinity highlights the issues taken by many in the community, performer and fan alike, with the feminine stylings of hair metal, or “glam” metal as it is also known. For even though hair metal’s entire focus seemed to be on sex and drugs (from bands like Mötley Crüe, Poison, and others) the nature of their sexuality was still questioned due to their performance style. In a 2007 interview, Dave Mustaine of

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100 Ibid.
pioneering thrash band Megadeth stated “I had said a long time ago, ‘glam’ stood for ‘gay L.A metal.’”

The other irony in Mustaine’s quote is that for the perceived shortcomings in glam bands’ heterosexuality, much of the performance attire in “real” metal was taken directly from the gay leather bar scene. Of course, the “masculinist” metal style goes further back to the black leather outfits of outlaw biker archetypes established earlier in the twentieth-century by films like *The Wild One* and *Rebel without a Cause.* Nevertheless, these varying displays in metal performance are still understood as projecting definitive notions of sexuality, with many of the gay leather aesthetics having the connotation of supreme masculinity. And as has been shown, that which is not considered masculine within metal is then equated with all the diametrically opposed characteristics.

Diverging sexuality within heavy metal performance, then, points toward how heroism is employed within the genre in specific ways and disregarded in others. Sexuality’s relation to metal heroism plays a part in classifying high-pitched singing as heroic (or not), and shows why it is imperative to consider artists' presentations of themselves, as well as the subject matter of their songs. As problematic as it may be, if violence is indeed an indication of a specific brand of Western masculinity, then the use of aggression and violence within metal lyrics (either in heroic pursuits or otherwise) can be read as an attempt on the part of the band and singers to imbue themselves with those thematic tropes of masculinity.

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Pursuing a heterosexual hyper-masculinity becomes problematized when set in contrast to the idea of the high-pitched voice itself. From a purely biological standpoint, the male voice sits at about an octave below the female voice. One would expect musical performance to follow biology, and by and large, it does: men still sing at lower tessituras than women. However, there are instances across different genres of music where it is acceptable and indeed, even a part of the style, for men to enter into a higher register with their falsetto. Heavy metal is such a genre, but what complicates high-pitched male singing in regards to metal is the pains the genre takes to project an aggressive, hyper-masculine identity. In other such occurrences, like that of the countertenor in opera, the use of a higher register by male singers comes across as somewhat peculiar, perhaps akin to the Monty Python actors playing female characters in a high-pitched voice. But heavy metal singers are not looking for a comedic response from their fans.

A juxtaposition between performance accounts of Judas Priest’s Rob Halford and Aerosmith’s Steven Tyler will help clarify the role of sexuality in performance as it relates to the formation of the heavy metal hero. McClary, speaking on the high-pitched singing of Steven Tyler, goes on to say that he “occasionally flirts with drag in his videos and stage performances...play[ing] with gender in ways that characterized late-80s metal bands.” In so doing, the heroism that might otherwise be a part of Tyler’s vocal style is obfuscated by his more fluid gender and sexuality. And drawing from earlier discussion

104 McClary, (2013), 34.
106 Ibid, 39.
in this chapter, the ability to be perceived as masculine, along with all of the traits associated with that, are crucial in the ability to be considered heroic within heavy metal. With metal’s hyper-masculine perspective in mind, one can see how Tyler is casting aside the heroic potential of his singing by not seeking to personally occupy the heroic role himself, either in performance or song narrative.

Rob Halford of Judas Priest, by contrast, is placing himself directly in that position through lyrical content (as with songs like “One Shot at Glory, or “Leather Rebel”), and by adopting the leather and spikes attire from the gay subculture of the late 1970s with which he was familiar. Halford uses this look within metal and turns it into a sort of hyper-masculine armor that would become endemic to the style of the genre at large.  

The singer himself remarked that “there are still stereotypes that all gay men are effeminate and weak and queeny. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth, which is why I think it’s unfortunate that that type of portrayal is still given to the straight general public. In my world, you couldn’t have anything stronger or more masculine and intense.”  

Halford refers here to is his style of performance, which includes his particular brand of aggression and intensity in vocal delivery, and that within his world of heavy metal these musical and visual cues have been appropriated as and are understood to be of the hyper-masculine order.

Being a metal singer, then, brought Halford’s sexuality and masculinity together through his heavy metal identity in a way that his marginalized identities overlapped due to a genre that prizes its outsider status.  

Giving credence to Clifford-Napoleone’s assertion that metal aesthetics can be adopted by varying groups for their own

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107 Clifford-Napoleone, (2016), 44.
109 Clifford-Napoleone, (2016), 44.
empowerment, Rob Halford has molded heavy metal to fit his true self and vice versa. In so doing, he effectively projects the image of a metal hero through the requisite amount of masculinity in performance and lyrical content. Accompanying his metal hero persona, Halford’s voice, perched in the upper range for men, effectively conveys heroism as well when it is associated with a singer codified as sufficiently “metal” as he is. Once achieving this masculine, metal status, the pyrotechnic heights Halford is able to climb with his voice come across as heroic through the demonstration of struggle, along with the associated extra-musical content supporting that role. At the same time, Halford's impressive vocal ability can be said to add to his perceived legitimacy within the genre.

When Rob Halford came out as gay, in 1998, one would think that given the hegemonic masculinity shown in metal, this would have caused a problem for his reception portraying heroism in metal and as a metal singer. According to Halford, however, “there have been no repercussions, no hate mail. I think people have had so many good times with my music that my coming-out is easier for them to accept.”\(^{110}\) Halford’s quote seems to indicate further that when the heavy metal authenticity of a performer is established, he is allowed much more liberty in other aspects of their personal expression. However, if they are not deemed to have any authenticity (such as with hair metalists, many of whom are heterosexual), they are lashed out against by those who purport themselves to be “true” metalheads.

\(^{110}\) Judy Wieder, “Judas Priest’s Rob Halford is first heavy metal band member to say he is gay,” *The Advocate*, May 12, 1998, 58.
Forging a Metal Hero

The central issue of this chapter has been to examine why high-pitched male singing is accepted as heroically masculine in a genre that, from the outside, would seem to disdain such a practice. The answer appears to be that when so much energy is applied the construction of hyper-masculine narratives they begin to overshadow and map their heroic masculinity onto the high-pitched singing. At the same time, the distortion that singers inflect into their voice, even when singing high, signifies them as belonging to the heavy metal aesthetic. More to the point, the "struggle" involved in reaching those high notes further promotes the idea that the singers are conveying heroism through their musical ability. The staging and performance practice of metal bands solidifies the connection between heroism and their concert identity. Indeed, the aesthetics of metal, which are imprinted onto the music and performance, seem to supersede any other themes present that might otherwise detract from the portrayal of a heavy metal hero.

As long as the singer can align himself with the markers that constitute metal masculinity, then the use of secondary influences contesting that image might be forgiven. Here is where one can observe how the phenomenon of high-pitched male singing conveys heroism in metal. When projected by singers who display all of the proper codes of metal masculinity, high-pitched singing becomes a sign of heroism in its own right. Singers such as Rob Halford and Bruce Dickinson exemplify how one can bring seemingly non-metal qualities to bear, yet still successfully portray a metal hero. Halford, for instance, is able to adopt the hyper-masculinity of the heavy metal hero, and through that, combine it with his sexuality and his masculinity in a way that is accepted by the audience. Bruce Dickinson of Iron Maiden has a penchant for including historical
narratives such as the battle of Passchendaele and the conflict between Native Americans and Europeans during westward expansion in his lyrics. However, like Rob Halford, Dickinson projects enough metal masculinity in his performance that historical lyrics are not read as pretentious, or too intellectual, but rather are turned into a manifestation of heavy metal heroism.

The victory of high-pitched metal singers in conveying heroism occurs on one level through their on-stage portrayals in combination with the lyrics they sing. These portrayals project the larger-than-life aspect of the heavy metal identity, while at the same time contain the requisite amount of hyper-masculinity to be seen as “authentic” by the audience. Accompanying the lyrics and images, the technical skill required to sing as high and as forcefully as they do amplifies the heroic image of the singer in the way McClary described as “assailing the improbable heights.”¹¹¹ High-pitched singing, then, not only reads as a heroic feat in and of itself, but when observed by others who cannot reach such heights it makes the notion of heroism connected with high-pitched male singing all the more effective.

Metal’s methods of hero construction lead back to my initial point that it is not so much a question of why high-pitched male singing is accepted within metal, but rather how artists are able to take that practice and forge it into something that is then viewed as heroic. In that way, when a vocalist has properly demonstrated the socio/cultural aspects of metal heroism, his singing is then understood to be heroic as well. The fact that hair metal vocalists are not understood as heroic (despite their own use of high-pitched singing) highlights the idea that the construction of a heavy metal hero lies not just in the music itself, but also in the extra-musical features from attire to stage performance.

¹¹¹ McClary, (2013), 43.
Add to this conclusion the final notion that at its core, heavy metal is a genre of extremes. If we take the concept of distortion as a metaphor for metal at large, it represents a sound wave that has been pushed to its extreme. Similarly, high-pitched male singing can be viewed as a natural extension of that concept of extremes and adopted into the genre as such. Once adopted as something indicative of the metal genre (much like the leather look introduced by Rob Halford), high-pitched singing overdetermines understandings of the singer and the song as heroic. In the following chapter, I take the conclusions I have drawn here and in chapter two and apply them to four performance examples. The purpose of analyzing these four pieces is to help demonstrate specific ways that singers convey heroism in the course of their performance. Ultimately, the chapter will lead to a conclusion for the thesis, and point toward further avenues for research in the future.
Chapter 4
Ascending the Improbable Heights:
An Examination of High-Pitched Male Heroism in Opera and Metal

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won.  
- Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*

From the midst of a darkened concert hall, a lone figure steps forward. He is clothed in armor that is meant to pronounce his own masculinity as much as it is intended to intimidate his opponents. His shoulders are hunched forward like one stalking his prey; he seems ready to do battle with any foe that crosses his path. As the anticipation swells, our heroic protagonist readies himself to sing, and we are met with a clarion call. It does not sound from the depths of a chest voice, however, but instead, one that cries out from on high, shrill yet powerful, in a falsetto. He sings a warning to his rival standing across from him. He sings of unleashing total war on an external aggressor. He sings a rallying cry to his gathered troops, promising glory in battle. This scene could just as accurately describe Andreas Scholl as Julius Caesar on stage in Copenhagen as it could Rob Halford’s performance of “All Guns Blazing” with Judas Priest.

The primary point of comparison between singers from opera and metal is their use of high-pitched singing to portray a hero. And despite the more obvious musical and demographic differences between opera and metal, thematic similarities exist in their

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113 *Giulio Cesare*, directed by Thomas Grimm (Denmark: Danmarks Radio, 2005), DVD.
construction of heroes. In previous chapters, I have discussed the distinct ways in which heroism is understood and constructed in both opera and metal surrounding high-pitched singing in their respective genres. What follows is a textual analysis of how those themes manifest themselves and are negotiated in opera and metal. I argue that although the music may be different, the approaches to heroism remain largely the same, and that understanding how heroism has been successfully conveyed through high-pitched male singing in one genre will help illuminate its use in the other. Walser refers to this type of mediation as “interillumination” in his comparison of classical music to metal, because when two genres deal heavily in the portrayal of heroes, basic themes are put into practice in similar ways. Toward that end, I will first analyze Judas Priest’s performance of “All Guns Blazing” from a 1990 concert in Southern California, touring for what is now one of the most critically acclaimed albums of their catalogue, Painkiller. To show different variations of heroism in metal, I will also analyze "Hero's Return" by Hammerfall from a 2003 concert in Göteborg, Sweden. After that will be an analysis of Andreas Scholl’s performance of the aria “Va tacito e nascosto” as Handel’s Giulio Cesare from a 2005 production in the Royal Danish Theater in Copenhagen. And to show another dimension of heroic countertenors, I will examine David Daniels’s performance of the aria “Or la tromba” as the eponymous Rinaldo in a

117 One Crimson Night, produced by Mikael Thieme and Fredrik Nordström (Germany: Nuclear Blast, 2003), DVD.

118 Giulio Cesare, directed by Thomas Grimm (Denmark: Danmarks Radio, 2005), DVD.
2001 Prinzregenten Theater production. Here, Rinaldo represents a more merciful hero than that of Caesar and serves as a good juxtaposition to demonstrate varying degrees of heroic countertenors.

Before I begin my analysis, the methods employed by singers to construct heroism and the narratives that surround them will be summarized. One of the ways that both groups of singers achieve heroic portrayals in conjunction with high-pitched singing is through a process of othering some person or persons, real or imagined, in the name of creating a foil for the heroic protagonist. In metal, those who are seen as “not metal” or as threatening metal’s survival in some way (such as the hair metallists from chapter three) are common fodder to be used as enemies. In opera, there has been a long-standing tradition of othering non-Western cultures as a way to display its supremacy in juxtaposition to a supposedly inferior group. The othering process seen in opera is an extension of the type of Orientalism engaged in by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, described by Edward Said as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” One of the arias examined in this chapter, “Va tacito e nascosto,” depicts Caesar threatening the co-ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy. In this aria and the opera at large, the Egyptians, and Ptolemy, in particular, are prime examples of the othering process of orientalism in that their more emasculated characterizations serve to elevate the glory of Caesar and, by association, the West. The same could be said of the aforementioned enemies of metal.

The use of and battle against enemies within opera and metal reflects the problematic relationship between masculinity, violence, and heroism in these musics. As

119 Rinaldo, produced by Bayerische Staatsoper and directed by Brian Large (Germany: Arthaus Musik, 2001), DVD.
was covered in the previous chapters, to be considered a hero within either genre one has to exhibit a specific sort of hyper-masculinity that is often reliant upon depictions of violence. The othering process is then used to create enemies for the hero to defeat. The kind of masculinity that derives from physical force relates to basic notions of what Joseph Campbell described as “the ultimate pair in the imagination…male and female. The male being aggressive, and the female being receptive, the male being the warrior, the female the dreamer.”

Although there is an aspect of violence to be found in some of the heroes cited by Campbell for his monomyth, they employ violence more as a means to an end, which will save and/or help the people in their home society such as Jason and the Argonauts and King Arthur. Many of the heroes from opera, and the majority of those from metal, often turn to violence as a means for achieving personal glory or for overcoming obstacles that stand in one’s way, because proving heroic worth in metal and opera is so often about eliminating one’s enemies. The heroic act of saving others from those purported enemies becomes a by-product of the glorious battle won. The use of violence by the protagonists in these genres can be seen on the one hand as darker expressions of heroism that represent the social ideals within opera and metal, and on the other, their violence becomes a musical exhibition of the struggle inherent to the hero’s journey. My point here is not to excuse certain forms of violence, or to argue that some types are more defensible than others; simply that this is how heroes are formed in these genres. According to Joseph Campbell, who gets to be called a hero depends largely

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122 Campbell, (1968) 28, 184.
upon context. “Whether you call someone a hero or a monster is all relative to where the focus of your consciousness may be.”

Power, as well as violence, is needed to overcome enemies in opera and metal. The production of vocal power can be considered a demonstration of physical power, as well as a heroic struggle. The struggle in vocal production includes the countertenor’s efforts to overcome the volume of the orchestra as much as it does their attempts at reaching, what Susan McClary describes as, "the improbable heights." The effort of struggling for high notes is a display of power in metal as is the appearance of strife in overcoming the volume of the metal band, even if this is achieved for the most part with amplification.

Themes of social power also operate in the heroic displays of performers from either genre. These consist of a number of sources that include the hero role the singer is portraying or embodying on stage. For metal, elements of social power might entail the stage presence of the singer himself, as well as the narratives of the song and the style of clothes he wears. For opera, the presence and performance of the singer also contribute greatly to their successful portrayal of a hero. The burden does not lie so resoundingly with the opera singer in this case, as they are taking on a specific role, it also lies with the opera director and their vision for the character. It is true that more prominent metal musicians have people who help them build and design sets, the difference here is that the bands ultimately get to decide whether to use a certain design or not.

124 The documentary A Year and a half in the Life of Metallica, which surrounds the making of the band’s black album, shows scenes that involve the band deciding on what kind of cover art the album should have based on different designs. A Year and a Half in the Life of Metallica, directed by Adam Dubin (US & Canada: Propaganda Films, 1992), DVD.
Ultimately, it takes a combination of all of these elements to signify a vocalist as a hero or not. In opera, these factors are important to performing a heroic role, but even if all of the markers of masculine heroism are met, it may not always be enough for a countertenor to be perceived as a hero by audiences and critics. In metal, though high-pitched singing itself may not be atypical, a successful portrayal of metal heroism must contain the rest of the aforementioned socio/cultural factors.

Rob Halford: The Hero’s Apotheosis

In 2009, singer Rob Halford applied for the trademark “metal god” in reference to himself. The origins of this term date back to the 1980 Judas Priest album _British Steel_, which featured the song “Metal Gods.” Referencing the entire band at the time, Halford had since gone on to adopt the moniker for himself as leader of the band, and is considered one of the founding members of the heavy metal genre. Speaking on his decision to trademark, Halford said “I would never put myself on that pedestal. That’s the title the fans started to give me after the _British Steel_ album. It’s something I really cherish – I don’t want anybody else to be the metal god but me.”

While a god may not be a hero due to the virtue of being above humanity’s struggles, the journey of a man from human to god in order to return and save his people (in the case of Rob Halford - the metal community) from ruin does adhere to the hero’s quest. Campbell claims as much in _The Hero with a Thousand Faces_, “when [the hero] arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains

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his reward. The triumph may be represented as...his own divination (apotheosis).” Becoming a “metal god” also aligns with the lyrical themes endemic to metal, which involve overcoming positions of helplessness and molding oneself into a superior form.

The following analysis seeks to reveal Rob Halford’s musical and lyrical journey from survival to the role of god of salvation in a 1990 Judas Priest performance of “All Guns Blazing.” As Halford did not trademark the term “metal god” for himself until 2009, it can also be said that this performance exists at a time when he himself was still on the journey from man to metal godhood. Though Halford’s ego in self-identifying as a god may betray the designation of a hero, it does not diminish the concept that the journey to that station reflects a version of the hero’s path, a journey that is conveyed musically in the performance of “All Guns Blazing.”

The performance begins with the stage blacked out. Speaking to the dimly lit audience, singer Rob Halford calls forth the simple question, "You ready?" With a pale backlight on Halford, he screams into the microphone the opening refrain “twisting, the strangled grip won’t give no mercy. Feeling those tendons rip, torn up and mean.” A marked point of distinction here from the studio recording is that when Halford sings this, he is actually up a fourth from the record, which was already moderately high, centering around C-sharp 5. As the range of a male soprano varies somewhat from singer to singer, what is only moderately high to one singer might be more so to another. For Rob Halford, who has been documented hitting A5 on a number of occasions throughout his live career, the performance...
career, calling C-sharp 5 a moderately high note for him seems accurate, especially when he continuously hits a G5 in this performance.\textsuperscript{127}

With his diversion from the studio record, Halford is signaling to the audience that he intends to push this song, and his voice, to its absolute limits. Foregrounding the song in this manner sets the entire piece within the framework of high-pitched heroism. What is more, the meaning behind this change is telling in that for Halford to convey a heightened sense of intensity in his delivery, he needs to go higher than the record. Equating heightened pitch to intensity suggests the place that high-pitched singing has within the heavy metal community - that when attempting to sing a tapestry of fantasy warfare, higher is a better representation. This musical occurrence also highlights the concept of extremes within the genre. When pursuing the portrayal of a metal hero, taking a vocal line that was already moderately high and raising it a fourth sets an example of extremes from the very beginning. The lyrics of the opening line depict a scene of desperation. The lack of a clear subject suggests the possibility that it is Halford himself who is the victim of the “strangled grip.” The timbre of his vocal strain on F-sharp 5 further implies that he is the one being strangled. This near-death description sets a dire place for a hero to start from, but one that makes the ascension to a place of godhood all the more impressive.

Rob Halford’s body language in his delivery furthers the image of a metal hero on stage. In this opening line, he has the microphone gripped between both of his hands, with his body bent over it. Halford thus gives off the impression that he is focusing all of his bodily force and energy into delivering these words. Through that emphatic

intonation, he is conforming to the necessities of extremes in metal performance while at the same time displaying the struggle inherent to a heroic journey. A marked difference in his delivery as opposed to say, a punk singer of similar stature is the narrative paired with the singing. While a punk singer may depict the grit and aggression as much as Halford does, the lyrical narrative in punk is one centered on disruption and anarchy, different from metal lyrics involving a hero’s quest and the attempt to “rise above.” Musically, punk singers also tend to push their voices in terms of timbre and vocal “fry” whereas power metal singers test their limits in terms of pitch.

After Halford’s successful delivery of the opening lines, colored lights shine down onto the stage and the band comes in tutti, with the dual guitars from Glenn Tipton and K.K. Downing holding out a sustained power chord while drummer Scott Travis crashes his cymbals. All of this is a seeming exclamation point to Rob Halford’s forceful delivery. The band is affirming what Halford has just sung, while at the same time proclaiming their allegiance to him in this musical battlefield being constructed.

During this unison attack from the band, Halford adds to the projection of power and violence already on display by whipping his head back and thrusting his fists out to his sides in a movement indicating a readiness to battle. At the same time, connecting the nature of the opening lyrics and Halford’s body language in singing them, this snap back implies that Halford is resisting the "strangled grip" described by the introduction.

The band’s (and singer’s in particular) attire heightens the display of heavy metal heroism. Clad in black leather studded with metal, the uniformity of the band suggests a type of precision reminiscent of a fighting unit (Figure 2). More than this, the type of clothing displayed here has been more or less invented by Halford within the metal
community and has since been coded as a sort of hyper-masculine suit of armor by fans. This “armor,” when worn by every member of the band, transforms the leathers and spikes into a more cohesive whole that connotes a warrior posse in the fantasy sense. Compounding the idea that the attire acts as a kind of armor is the element of danger associated with the look as well. Outside of heavy metal, the majority of fans would have most closely associated the black leather outfit with the outlaw biker archetype established earlier in the twentieth-century by films like The Wild One and Rebel without a Cause. The fact that Rob Halford had appropriated the look from the gay scene was only apparent to other homosexual fans in the know at the time. To most metalheads, however, the look signified a kind of outlaw aesthetic. Combined with their view of themselves as outsiders, the attire takes on the quality of a lonesome knight who is properly armored to wade out “from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder.”

As Halford starts into the verse, he repeats the opening lines from before, now moved down an octave to F-sharp 4 as it is on the record. The lines that follow further a narrative of struggle, “blastmaster racks the ground, bent on survival. Full throttle hammers down, a deadly scream.” The vocal melody is sung in unison at a higher octave with the guitar riff down on F-sharp 2. The riff itself uses F-sharp Locrian mode, and journeys between E, F-sharp, and G. When placed in concert with the music of the band, the vocals (occupying mostly quarter and half notes) seem to have a restraint to them in comparison to the constant hammering of eighth notes from the guitars, bass, and kick drums. This sort of frenzied movement across the bottom end of the music (with the guitarists also playing on their bottom E and A strings) provides the underpinnings for the kind of heroic action in musical movement that Scott Burnham discussed in Beethoven’s Coriolan Overture. Burnham states, “perhaps the more important phenomenologically is
the impression of deep-seated momentum that the bass, as the bottom-most support of the
musical texture, can arouse when so moved.”

Halford’s voice is then able to sound over top of the band’s cacophony through a
seemingly heroic effort (with the aid of microphone amplification). His ability to rise
above the lower pitches the band is moored in and climb to soaring heights further
suggests heroism in the sense of the struggle to climb beyond one’s surroundings. Susan
McClary elucidates this notion of the inherent heroism of men singing high when she
states, “the sonority produced by a woman singing low in her range does not have the
same effect as that of a man singing high in his…The heroic quality of assailing the
improbable heights…is fundamental to the aesthetic.” The struggle to ascend those
heights occurs over the melodic contour of the entire song where Halford will sink back
down to his lower F-sharp 4 range in the verses, and then soar upward to G5 during the
chorus.

We reach an astonishing attempt to climb beyond the mire of lower pitches at the
end of the second chorus repetition. What sets this chorus apart from the first is Halford’s
addition before the solo begins. At the end of the chorus, he unleashes a blaring scream
on G5. Unlike the opening a capella section that moved somewhat quickly, this cry is
held out for roughly two and a half measures as the guitars begin the solo section,
centering around F-sharp. Halford’s sustain demonstrates an effort to remain in those
improbable heights as long as is humanly possible. As with the opening lines, his
interjection heralding the guitar solo does not appear on the studio version at all. In my
view, this musical moment underlines the significance of how high-pitched singing

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(Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 43.
conveys heavy metal heroism. Adding to the musical hermeneutics, Halford demonstrates and accentuates his leadership role in the band as the guitar follows his cue and begins a virtuosic exhibition on the upper end of the instrument.

Coming back from the solo, as if making one more valiant attempt to rise up, Halford unleashes another G5 before he is pulled back down into the verse, his struggle toward godhood not yet achieved. During the performance of the final verse, Rob Halford actually changes the set of lyrics from what they are on the recording in a way that now emphasizes heroic salvation. Originally, the lyrics were: “Cross-cutting thunder-charge, blade of destruction. Flame-throwing hurricane destroys the cage. Bone-crushing alien, god of salvation. Sad wings that heaven sent, wipes out in rage.” In the live performance, however, he switches the line “wipes out in rage” with “destroys the cage.” Now, instead of commenting on what appears to be the “god of salvation” wiping out in rage, we have a reversal trending toward the heroic where this god of salvation destroys the cage.

The exact nature of the cage is left open to interpretation. It could be a literal cage that was imprisoning Halford’s character from the beginning. The cage could also be metaphorical, in the sense of confining someone’s mind. Whatever the cage’s true meaning, its role as an external oppressor is clear enough, and the god of salvation asserts his place as the heavy metal hero through the destruction of that oppressive cage. This is not to say that Rob Halford is literally transforming into the god of salvation on stage, but through the lyrical narrative performed by him, in conjunction with the heroic attempts to reach his absolute vocal limits, he comes through as the one in the performance who is embodying that role to the audience.
To complete his ascension to the god of salvation in “All Guns Blazing,” a number of performative steps are taken during the finale of the song. It begins with the final iteration of the chorus. Upon uttering the last word, “blazing,” Halford extends the final syllable and pushes it back up to G5 as the guitars continue their F-sharp riff. The sustain Halford uses on the G5 highlights his final heroic ascension to godhood as he is finally able to withstand the dissonance from the guitars playing on F-sharp without sinking back down. Here, Halford is able to achieve his final victory in a real-world, performance aspect by having the last word. As opposed to the earlier sections where his high-pitched leaps continuously had to be mediated back down to F-sharp 4, the ending of the song poses no further restrictions, and the singer can finally break free of all obligations to the recorded version.

The concept of breaking free intersects with the god of salvation breaking the cage. As mentioned before, the nature of the cage is left vague and open to interpretation, but when connected to Halford’s final escape into the musical stratosphere with his voice, the image of a cage being broken becomes all the more salient. The cage-breaking narrative operates in conjunction with the idea that masculinity is tied to displays of violence within heavy metal, shown here through the act of breaking the cage, and also in the description of the god of salvation as “bone-crushing.” In “All Guns Blazing” there exists a joining of the violent and the heroic by putting that bone-crushing violence to use in the salvation of persons unknown.

Following the triumphant ascent on the final word of the chorus, Halford continues with intermittent cries sustained on that G5 during the outro. Refraining the strained exclamation "come on" from the end of the guitar solo, Halford blends this into his final
survey around the stage to engage with the audience. In that vein, calling on the audience to “come on” could act as a call for them to break down the cages in their own lives, following the example of the god of salvation.

Marking the end of the song, Rob Halford acts as a conductor concluding his symphony. He throws an arm up at the sounding of a unison hit from the band, accompanied by a pyrotechnic explosion above the drummer. Succeeding the initial detonation, all at once Halford raises his left fist in the air to be joined by another unison hit, as well as fireworks from the back left of the stage. Immediately, his right arm is thrown up to accompany the same effect. And at last, both arms are thrust upward in a victory pose signaling the final chord as well as a dual projection of fireworks shooting out from behind the band (Figure 3). Halford’s pose at the end of the song signals a celebration of the heroic victory achieved both narratively and performatively.
Like Burnham’s Beethoven Hero, Rob Halford is showing the audience the hero within, and the hero without, by offering his depiction of heavy metal heroism, which he demonstrates musically through his singing and lyrics. The heroic narrative exists in struggling from man to god of salvation as well as in what that ideal represents. Summarized by Burnham in discussing Beethoven’s role as a hero himself he states, “the primary experience is of an authoritative presence that becomes an internal voice.”\textsuperscript{132} In this regard, “the hero we identify with becomes the demigod we serve.”\textsuperscript{133}

**Joacim Cans: Out of the Darkness, a Hero**

Joacim Cans, of the Swedish band Hammerfall, enters the role of the hero similarly, though with a more human narrative in his lyrics. Whereas Rob Halford’s heroic journey in “All Guns Blazing” was centered on the man ascending to godhood, the narrative in “Hero’s Return” is more reminiscent of Campbell’s monomyth. Here, a person (typically male) is called upon to serve a great need in desperate times to save his people. The opening stanza of this song sets the stage for that scenario with the lyrics: “in a time of fear and confusion, silence charging the air. The sunlight is gone, darkness lives on in the heart of the dragon’s lair.”

Before the song begins, the stage setup foreshadows the coming darkness in the lyrics. The stage is blacked out, the only illumination now coming from a torch held by the drummer, who proceeds to light three more torches in front of his drum riser. During this lighting ceremony of sorts, there is orchestral music playing through the speakers.

\textsuperscript{132} Burnham, 166.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 157.
The guitars enter, thundering off the melody just heard from the strings. At the same time, the lights turn on over the stage, suggesting that metal is the source of light for people in dark times. Now the band members are visible and are seen clothed like the members of Judas Priest, in similar black leather and metal studded fashion. There is even what appears to be chain mail hanging from the front of the lead guitarist, again, as with Judas Priest, indicating that these musicians are ready to do battle (Figure 4). Once Joacim Cans arrives on stage, he adopts a typical masculine-metal posturing from the start with one leg up on a speaker, and a fist raised in exclamation of his delivery despite the grim narrative of the opening stanza. An image on the wall behind the band of a sinister-looking, hooded figure can also be seen. Fans familiar with Hammerfall might recognize it as the unnamed antagonist on the cover of their album Crimson Thunder. The presence of this ghoul behind the group creates a villain for them to defeat over the course of the concert.
Just as Halford was able to become both orator and hero over the course of the Judas Priest song, so too does Joacim Cans transform throughout this song’s narrative. After establishing the need for a hero lyrically, he then arrives in that role during the first chorus. The chorus combines a rising melodic line that climaxes on C-sharp 5 and lyrics that state, “for a hero’s return, our hearts still yearn. Rise and conquer let the infidels burn.” The struggle, and ultimate success, of Cans reaching the C-sharp 5 pronounces him as the hero needed in the opening lyrics, the one who will “rise up” and save the people from the darkness.

A part of that heroic journey in metal, however, does involve conquering one’s enemies. Common throughout heavy metal, even with this more human depiction of a hero, the overcoming of an “other” is vital to proving the hero’s worth. Upon the lines “rise and conquer,” Cans reaches out and grabs a prop skull adorned with chains as if it were a mic stand, signifying almost subliminally what it means to be conquered by this particular metal hero (Figure 5).
A deviation from the recorded version of the song must be addressed. In the chorus, the words "let the" before "infidels burn" has been omitted from the live performance. Whether the omission is due to a performance issue to take a breath before the end of the line or not is unknown. What it changes narratively in the live performance is place the burning of the infidels in a more direct connection to the call to conquer from the previous line. The omission of “let the” allows “infidels burn” to assume a state of multivalence that in one respect suggests the infidels burning is a natural by-product of conquering. In another, the pause still allows the line to have an almost command-like quality to it by following the affirmative phrase “rise and conquer.”

There is an issue of body language that is also significant to the final lines before the chorus. Prior to the first chorus, and shown more prominently before the second, the lyrics that exclaim “all our beliefs fading into ashes. Heed the words that we pray” are sung while Cans holds the microphone between his hands folded as if in prayer. Can’s act
of miming prayer with his hands while singing “heed the words that we pray” gives the impression of a noble knight to this character portrayal, fighting a holy quest. Framing the protagonist as a knight becomes particularly compelling with the mention of infidels burning in the chorus, which suggests a background based on the crusades.

The heroic transformation continues in the lyrics over the following set of verses. In order to illustrate the narrative trajectory of how Cans becomes the solo heroic figure here, I will discuss all remaining lyrics of the song. The lyrics are as follows:

Now we charge, the battle is raging,
Blood runs everywhere
Our anger is fierce, avenging the years
No time for a final prayer
Behold, the might of the hammer,
Elliptical bolts of fire
Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide
Down to the wire

All our beliefs fading into ashes
Heed the words that we pray

For a Hero's Return our hearts still yearn
Rise and conquer, infidels burn
[repeat chorus]

Now, I've returned from a place far beyond
My mission is set, let it be done

We still believe in a brighter future
The dreams are ours to fulfill
[repeat chorus]

One can see how the point of view shifts over the course of the song. In the middle set of verses the focus is that “we” are charging in, and how “our” anger is fierce. By the final set of lines, however, the hero of the song emerges as a solitary figure in
fulfillment of the original hope of the chorus – “for a hero’s return.” This turn to the first-person then shapes the narrative to reveal Cans as the returning hero of the song.

Musically, the vocal lines follow a common outline within the subgenre of power metal. The verses are sung in a more moderate range (this song centers around F-sharp 4 in its verse), then rises to its greatest heights in the chorus. Reaching into the vocalist's upper range during the chorus coincides with the typical structure that places the episodes of struggle, battle, and hardship primarily in the verse, while the moments of victory and overcoming adversity are often depicted in the chorus. This outline follows the hero’s journey narratively and gives credence to the idea that high-pitched singing has a heroic quality to it.

In an occurrence of life imitating art, at the end of this particular song in Hammerfall’s set singer Joacim Cans begins speaking to the crowd in Swedish. As the English subtitles indicate, Cans tells the audience how they have recently been touring for a few months around the world to the United States, Germany, France, and Spain, and how good it feels to “finally be back home in Göteborg again.” Cans’s description of his own happy homecoming at the end of “Hero’s Return” cements the singer’s portrayal of a victorious hero returning home and completes the hero’s journey both in song and in life.

Andreas Scholl: Hail! The Conquering Hero

Given the knowledge of his history, Julius Caesar may not be considered a heroic figure. However, Joseph Campbell reminds us that, “whether you call someone a hero or

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134 One Crimson Night, produced by Mikael Thieme and Fredrik Nordström (Germany: Nuclear Blast, 2003), DVD.
a monster is all relative to where the focus of your consciousness may be.” As a point of comparison to Caesar, Campbell discusses with Bill Moyers about Napoleon being a hero or not. “Moyers: Napoleon was a leader, but he wasn’t a hero in the sense that what he accomplished was grand for humanity’s sake. It was for France, the glory of France. Campbell: Then he is a French hero, is he not?” The same could be said of Caesar.

While he may not be a hero to us, he would be a Roman hero. Since Caesar is the main protagonist of Handel’s opera, our consciousness is geared toward taking his side in this story. Viewing Caesar as the protagonist illuminates the attributes that do still resonate as heroic, such as being an accomplished general, journeying beyond the everyday realms, and fighting for the “glory of Rome.” Coinciding with the character’s role as a war hero and leader, Caesar’s role in this opera specifically fits the concept of heroism echoed by Campbell in the quote at the head of this chapter. The plot of the libretto here involves Caesar leaving the everyday world (ancient Rome for him) to a region of supernatural wonder (ancient Egypt). And while traveling from Rome to Egypt may not be a journey into the extreme unknown, the opera, both its libretto and this Copenhagen production, make it a point to emphasize the drastic differences between cultures, thus enhancing the feeling that Caesar has, in fact, traveled beyond the realm of the ordinary. Putting Caesar in Egypt also paints him in a more human light, as he is in a seemingly strange land and beset by enemies on all sides, struggling to survive. That fight to survive is at the heart of the aria “Va tacito” discussed here. The piece finds Caesar in Ptolemy’s banquet hall, and although he is in the belly of the beast, so to speak, Caesar must keep his composure, and show enough strength to make it out alive.

135 Campbell, (1988), 127.
136 Ibid.
I will analyze how Andreas Scholl’s portrayal of Caesar conveys those traits necessary for a masculine countertenor hero during a scene in Act 1. Here, he is pitted against Egypt’s co-ruler and Cleopatra’s brother, Ptolemy, played in this performance by countertenor Christopher Robson. The aria that follows is Caesar’s retort to a threat from Ptolemy.\textsuperscript{137} To clarify my usage during this analysis of either the character’s names themselves (Caesar or Ptolemy), or the actors (Scholl or Robson), I will be referring to the characters when discussing aspects related to the nature of either character or their place in the libretto. Otherwise, I refer to the actors when it involves performance action they are taking during the aria. For instance, I begin with a description of Caesar and Ptolemy’s soldiers, as these men serve under the characters of Caesar and Ptolemy, I refer to the character names, however when discussing acting choices dealing with body language I refer to the actors as these are elements under their control.

The scene opens with one of Caesar’s soldiers cornering Ptolemy’s men up against a wall. With this encounter, cultural power plays are set in motion from the first. While Caesar and his men are dressed in a formal style of Western military uniform, Ptolemy’s men are wearing green jungle camouflage with white bandages wrapped around their heads, suggesting a Middle-Eastern terrorist organization. Ptolemy himself is in an open, leopard-printed bathrobe of sorts and a long white skirt covering his lower half.

The way Ptolemy’s men are dressed is meant to identify them at once as an “other” to the more Western depictions of Caesar’s. What is more, the wrapped heads further this narrative by painting them as more than just an “other,” they are depicted as an enemy that the modern world has come to recognize as stereotypical Middle-Eastern

\textsuperscript{137} Giulio Cesare, directed by Thomas Grimm (Denmark: Danmarks Radio, 2005), DVD.
terrorists. The choice of dress here is an important aspect of conveying heroism on stage because it creates the enemies that the hero needs to fight.\textsuperscript{138} The appearance of Ptolemy has a dual purpose to it as well. The leopard-print bathrobe connotes a sense of exoticism and otherness in a different manner than the jungle-green camouflage of his men. The secondary meaning the audience gathers is an element of femininity, especially when contrasted to Caesar’s very traditionally masculine military uniform. As the operatic world still operates, for the most part, under traditional notions of gender and sexuality inherited from its canonic nineteenth-century works, the classifications of “masculine” and “feminine” are used here with that understanding.

The supposed femininity of Ptolemy’s wardrobe attempts to play on the notion that a countertenor’s voice is particularly effeminate in some way. By not only having Robson dress in a floor-length skirt to accompany his leopard bathrobe but also using excessive amounts of black and gold eye makeup, the opera director, Francisco Negrin, is attempting to emasculate his character even more. His femininity is furthered by Ptolemy's seeming powerlessness at the hands of Caesar. Thus, it continues a stereotype that sees masculine as having to do with physical violence and power, and femininity as their antithesis.

Shortly after Ptolemy’s men are cornered, the music begins and Andreas Scholl enters the scene. His entrance is marked by a hunting call played on the horns. This bit of tone painting done by Handel relates to the upcoming text in which Caesar threatens Ptolemy by suggesting, “the wise hunter seeking prey goes silently and stealthily. And he

\textsuperscript{138} Campbell, (1968), 311.
who intends evil will not wish to show the deceit in his heart.” The veiled threats delivered here relate to the direct threat Ptolemy made against Caesar before this scene. So with Caesar's upcoming rebuttal, Handel paints him as the true hunter musically for the fact that the horns open Caesar's aria, and because the horn call used in this introduction resembles Caesar's vocal melody.

Upon Caesar's entrance, he makes a gesture to Ptolemy, inquiring as to whether they are free to discuss matters at hand or continue fighting. The core of Scholl's movement and body language during the introduction is reminiscent in a sense, of Halford’s during “All Guns Blazing.” In both settings, the performers are attempting to show dominance over an enemy. In Scholl’s case, his enemy as Caesar is standing directly across from him. The intensity and aggression in Halford's performance are much more subtle and subdued in Scholl's portrayal of Caesar. The body language of both Robson and Scholl reveal much about the power dynamic between them as the introduction leads to Caesar's part. Just before Caesar's line begins, they each take a glass from a tray delivered by one of Ptolemy’s men. Scholl then confidently raises his glass toward Robson, who answers in a feigned gesture indicating his displeasure for Caesar and for now being at his mercy in this exchange.

Caesar’s vocal line begins as the horn call did at the opening of the aria. And just as confidently as he raised his glass a moment ago, so too does Scholl approach the opening interval of a fifth rising up from B3 to F-sharp 4. Furthermore, despite being in this higher register as a man, Scholl is still able to project a forte dynamic in his delivery. The physical and social aspects of power in this scene help mark Scholl as the heroic

139 Translated from the Italian.
version of Julius Caesar operatic audiences would expect in a depiction of the historic general.

The opening syllabic lines of this aria, projecting a musical image of Caesar’s masculine power, give way to a melismatic run at the end of the first stanza on “cacciator.” Handel’s choice to add a melisma on cacciator (Italian for “hunter”) further suggests Caesar’s battle prowess by demonstrating his musical virtuosity on the word. The tone painting is an element of parallelism that does not go unnoticed by Robson, as he slowly turns his head in awed response to Caesar’s musical capability. To reinforce this image of Caesar, the horn that started the hunting call at the beginning of the aria returns at the end of Caesar’s melismatic passage in an echo of the line he has just sung.

The second stanza follows an identical rhyme scheme to the first. However, the middle of the phrase is accented up higher to B4. This rise demonstrates a trend throughout the aria, which is the upward push toward higher and higher notes for Caesar’s part. A side-glance from Scholl over to Robson follows the conclusion of the second stanza. Up until this point, Scholl had been singing toward the audience. His final glance illustrates that indeed, the suggestion of what a wise hunter should do has been directed toward Ptolemy all along. With a slight look of disapproval accompanying the glance, Scholl indicates that Ptolemy’s failure to abide by these words of advice is something reprehensible.

In measure 17, Caesar’s melodic line moves into minor for a moment, with more embellishment strewn throughout. With the entrance to minor, the words transform from what sounded to be a friendly suggestion with potentially grave undertones into a serious threat from Caesar. The employment of greater embellishment emphasizes the point,
linking it to his real-world virtuosity in the art of hunting. Continuing, the embellishment used in this stanza still follows the arpeggiated nature of the horn call, building the size and scope of the eventual hunt for Ptolemy.

At the conclusion of the A section, upon Caesar's rising melody outlining an E major triad, Scholl lifts his drinking glass in accompaniment with the line, offering one final, joyous toast to the clearly despondent Robson. Not able to withstand this indignity any longer, as the music begins to exit the A section and enter the B, Robson makes his way to a chair seated in the center of the stage. This chair faces another, placed directly across from it, which Scholl then goes to sit in following Robson’s example. After both men are seated, however, Robson makes an epicene gesture over the arm of the chair, after which his seat begins to rise into the air on a column (Figure 6). Robson’s seated ascension can be seen as his wish to climb above Scholl physically. From a musical standpoint, it reflects an idea that these men “going high” translates to their position of power. Seeing as how Robson does not sing in this aria, the move to get higher than Scholl takes on greater significance, as he is not able to compete with Scholl musically.
Acting unfazed by this occurrence, Scholl makes his way over to the column as if to study its workings. Upon routing the structure, he begins to sing the B section. In true da capo fashion, this section has moved to the relative C-sharp minor from E major. The minor key change following Robson’s attempt at “rising above” Scholl in a literal sense suggests the implication that Caesar will not be daunted by such antics. The combination of stage direction and musical evolution throughout the aria brings together quite effectively the subtleties between Caesar and Ptolemy in the score. As the music stops in preparation for the cadential movement, Scholl pushes the initial G-sharp 4 lower and lower, until rising back up to B, diving to E, and leaping back up to C before finally adding an embellished vibrato that dances around the final G-sharp, signaling a half cadence of C-sharp minor.

Not willing to be outdone by Robson, Scholl makes his way back to the other chair. After stoically extending both of his arms to the sides of the chair, Scholl’s column
begins to rise just as Robson’s did earlier. Yet, whereas Robson gave a very slight, feeble
gesture for his order, Scholl’s is one that strikes an image of power. The fact that they are
both countertenors makes these performance differences so crucial to the characterization
of the two roles because it suggests that a substantial comparison is needed in order to
convey to the audience that a high-pitched Caesar is, in fact, masculine. The effort spent
to relay this message is done at the expense of Ptolemy's masculinity, for it can be
observed that for nearly every instance that Scholl presents us with displays of hyper-
masculinity from Caesar, it is answered in kind by equally unmasculine body language by
Robson.

The bolstering of Caesar’s powerful, masculine stature between the countertenors
on stage is not complete, however. For once Caesar’s chair rises to Ptolemy's level, with
a look of indignation on his face, Robson stands and lifts his arm high, causing his chair
to lift even farther, surpassing Caesar's level once again. As soon as this happens, Scholl
extends his arms out, causing his chair to rise once more and meet Ptolemy’s new level.
A wide shot of the stage during this exchange captures the power struggle being played
out here beautifully. In the wide shot, we have each column supporting its person at
either end of the frame, with Ptolemy rising up first on the left, and then Caesar meeting
him again on the right (Figure 7). Framing both chair columns against each other
expresses the hierarchy of the power struggle being conveyed in the scene, just as much
as it highlights the importance of being in a “high” position. Plot-wise, this battle for
height is related to power, but again, musically, one can extrapolate the battle for the high
ground as something that is concerned with the high-pitched element in countenori
singing. Juxtaposing a physical battle over height placement adds a connotation of importance and even power to the high-pitched effect of Scholl’s voice during the aria.

After a look of resigned hopelessness washes over Robson’s face as Scholl matches his level once again, Scholl returns to the A section of the aria. Following the Baroque da capo style, the repeated A section features a heavy amount of improvisation on the original melody. Though the outline of the melody is still present, Scholl begins to employ much more coloratura on the longer notes in the passage. If adding melismatic lines to the ending of “cacciator” in the first episode was meant to highlight Caesar’s proclivity as a hunter, this extended coloratura pushes that association even further.

The restatement of “va tacito e nascosto” features the ultimate demonstration of superiority, power, and authority on behalf of Caesar in this scene. Upon singing the first notes of “va tacito,” Scholl extends out his arm and turns his thumb down in the popularized fashion of Roman emperors casting judgement in gladiator matches. After
Scholl delivers this gesture, Ptolemy’s column immediately begins to lower back to the ground. The shocked Robson can do nothing but attempt to stand defiantly against Scholl’s now quite imposing presence across the stage, while Ptolemy’s soldiers swarm his column in an effort to raise it back up, but to no avail.

As he descends lower and lower, Ptolemy's platform eventually reaches back down to floor level, only to continue falling even more until the Egyptian ruler is now sunken below the stage floor apart from his head. The plunge is greeted with an uproar of laughter from the theater audience. The man with the high-pitched voice has now asserted his domination over his contemporary whose voice (and power) have been robbed from him. To increase his standing, Scholl continues singing his improvised coloratura embellishments from atop his high alter down at Robson. At the conclusion of his part in the aria, Scholl stands up on the column, looks down toward Robson and sings a melismatic cadenza, rising higher and higher until he reaches E5 (Figure 8). He sings this a capella at first, then is joined by the horn to make the full connection between the two musically and symbolically at last when all other instruments have left.
The final musical tirade directed at Robson represents, musically and visually, the defeat of Ptolemy’s character at the hands of Caesar. Though the battle is still to come two acts later, the outcome has already been foreshadowed by each character’s battle for the “high-ground.” Acknowledging that Caesar is the protagonist of the opera, his ultimate victory at the end certainly expands the glory of Rome, and by extension, the West. As mentioned earlier, Campbell considers Napoleon a French hero from a similar point of view. Furthermore, the idea that Caesar is in a foreign land and must battle his way out to victory aligns with traditional operatic notions of the heroic male. It is important to remember when understanding Caesar as the hero of this opera that he did not arrive in Egypt with the intent to conquer. He was tracking his enemy Pompey who had fled there, after which Caesar was beset by danger and intrigue. Caesar's struggle both musically and physically then help position him as a hero in the opera, if not in real life.
With Scholl's portrayal of Caesar, he secures the victory over not only his enemy but also a victory in effectively conveying a masculine hero with a high-pitched voice. Through the employment of extra-musical factors, such as his body language, mannerisms, and use of the stage, Scholl was able to depict the type of warrior masculinity needed for a heroic countertenor. The notion that a specific type of masculinity is needed to portray this role properly is echoed by a review from an opera blog online which states: “Andreas Scholl is simply ideal as Cesare. His coloratura technique is fabulous and his voice has the well-known white glow, even throughout the entire register. Most importantly, however, he is wonderfully masculine on stage.” Note the phrasing the author uses, that the most important thing is that he appears masculine. In his ability to accomplish this, Scholl has conquered not just Egypt as Caesar, but also the long-held assumptions of what a heroic male can sound like in opera. The thunderous applause from the audience following this performance would seem to agree.

David Daniels: Crusading Countertenor

Set outside Jerusalem during the Crusades, Rinaldo features a libretto that hits all of the marks of Baroque opera seria: a protagonist based in a historical setting (preferably in a foreign land), the intervention of supernatural beings (in this case, a sorceress), and a castrato in the hero’s role. Having Rinaldo in Jerusalem as a knight during the Crusades helps to establish him as a hero immediately according to Campbell’s monomyth by virtue of journeying to strange lands.

In the aria analyzed here, “Or la tromba,” the idea of a hero journeying to a foreign land is brought to the fore, and taken one step further in the operatic tradition of conquering that foreign land. This is where the difference between Caesar and Rinaldo lies, however, for, in Caesar's defeat of Ptolemy and capture of Egypt, Ptolemy is slain. Rinaldo, on the other hand, after defeating Argante and taking Jerusalem in the battle that follows this aria, spares Argante’s life. Though Rinaldo’s glory is still rooted in military victory, the mercy of Rinaldo depicts a variation to the type of operatic hero shown by Caesar. Another marked difference between Rinaldo and Caesar is witnessed in the B section of the text where Rinaldo identifies himself as both "a warrior, and a lover." Despite Caesar’s relationship with Cleopatra in Giulio Cesare, his primary identity is that of Caesar the general. Here, Rinaldo is still identifying himself as a knight and a warrior, but he also attempts to add a secondary layer with the inclusion of “amante” in the same breath that he calls himself “guerriero.” The full set of lyrics to this aria being:

Or la tromba in suon festante
mi richiama a trionfar.
Qual guerriero e qual amante
gloria e amor mi vuol bear.

Now the trumpet in festive sound
summons me to triumph.
As a warrior and as a lover
Glory and love will bring me joy

In service to the way the lyrics proclaim Rinaldo a lover and as a fighter, Daniels attempts to convey both sides of the character in this aria. As the horns triumphantly begin the introduction, Daniels walks determinedly around the stage in a similar manner to Rob Halford during “All Guns Blazing” and Andreas Scholl as Caesar. With his shoulders hunched forward and stern gaze, Daniels attempts to convey Rinaldo’s masculine warrior nature with full force. As soon as Daniels starts singing, however, he emotes a much more empathetic character, turning up his eyebrows and softening his

141 “Qual guerriero e qual amante”
face. Upon the final sounding of “mi richiama a trionfar,” he adopts a battle-hungry sneer that sustains the perception of Rinaldo as a warrior, eager for battle in spite of his other romantic characteristics. Daniels utilizes all of the facial acting at his disposal superbly throughout the aria in an effort to show multiple sides of this hero. He appears as a man at war with himself almost as much as his enemies, adding an inner turmoil for the character to overcome along with the Saracen army.

This production of Rinaldo has Daniels wearing a navy blue suit with matching hat in lieu of a more traditional plate or chainmail suit of armor (Figure 9). Despite the lack of battle armor, the choice to keep Daniels in a stereotypically masculine form of dress shows the degree to which operatic male heroes, especially countertenors, are reliant on social markers that signify them possessing a type of normative masculinity. In that regard, the countertenor is similar to high-pitched metal singers such as Rob Halford or Joacim Cans who derive part of their masculinity from costume image.
Just as the suit identifies Rinaldo as an important, successful man from a modern perspective, the depiction of his army works to show yet another side of the character. The army of crusaders Daniels is supposed to be addressing is represented by a line of Jesus statues (Figure 9). The choice to replace the army with statues in this staging, though not traditional, aids in furthering the notion that the army (and by extension Rinaldo himself) are crusaders of Christ here on a holy mission. The Christ association then paints a picture that the main hero is worthy of such a title, and that when he lays claim to glorious victory the audience understands his cause is (supposedly) just.

The final staging element to impact Rinaldo’s characterization is introduced during the B section of the aria. As the orchestra drops away and a harpsichord begins to intone the relative B minor key area, Daniels steps in front of his army to kneel down and lift up his sword from the ground. The sword discovery occurs during the verse that states, “as a warrior and as a lover glory and love will bring me joy.” While it is evident from the lyrics that Rinaldo is at once a hero who considers himself a lover and a fighter, the staging of the aria suggests his true nature lies with the sword. The fervor with which the horns enter the recapitulation echoes the grandeur of Rinaldo taking up his blade, celebrating his resolve to smite the Saracens.

Daniels himself adds to the celebration during the da capo section by unleashing a flurry of coloratura lines, embellishing on the original score. The vocal work suggests that finding his sword (symbolizing both his warrior spirit and his phallus) has greatly increased his musical virtuosity. As noted in the Andreas Scholl example, virtuosity can be directly tied to the perception of masculinity, and hence, his capability as a hero to operatic audiences. In an effort to convey his strengthened warrior spirit, Daniels decides
to end the recapitulation by ascending up to a D5 where the score had marked a D4. This choice is a demonstration of his heroic nature, indicated by the fact that the first time through the A section, Daniels had ended on the D4. However, upon finding his sword, and embracing his warrior spirit to fulfill the heroic quest, he then possesses the ability to climb up to and sustain that D5. But of course, Rinaldo is not just a warrior, and so it goes that the ultimate triumph of the opera is not necessarily Rinaldo returning with a defeated Argante, it is when Rinaldo and his fiancé Almirena rejoice in their love together. After which, Argante relinquishes his religion to become Christian and receives mercy from Rinaldo. Here, it is the victory of love, as much as the victory in battle, which marks the path of Rinaldo as the hero of this opera, and David Daniels as the purveyor of that heroism.

**Conclusions**

I set out in this thesis to explore how high-pitched male singers both in opera and metal convey heroism. The examination of these genres has entailed a study of the music itself, as well as those factors that constitute what a heroic male means in their respective worlds. I then examined how those factors act upon and are used by countertenors and high-pitched metal singers in their portrayals of heroes. In heavy metal, as well as in opera, high-pitched male vocalists must conform to the trappings of masculinity according to their genres, which involve depictions of violence suggesting a certain amount of battle-prowess. In this way, the singers are able to keep their projected masculinity intact as they portray heroes in a heightened vocal range. These singers’ general adherence to the hero’s journey in song and libretto narratives helps to identify
them more easily as heroes. All singers also journey to the lands of the supernatural to some degree. Metal singers arrive there lyrically through worlds painted in medieval fantasy tropes of good versus evil, countertenors arrive narratively in the librettos of the operas they inhabit, such as Julius Caesar journeying to Egypt, Rinaldo conquering Jerusalem, or Orpheus going to the underworld.

So even though metal and opera are distinct genres, they approach heroism in singing through similar methods. Both generally conform to the standard notions of what we hold to be heroic in Western culture, albeit in their own ways, which are reminiscent of a darker type of hero. Also similar in both genres, the singers must appear masculine in order to be taken seriously. In metal, it is black leather and the depiction of extremes, both visually and musically. In opera, it is the projection of a kind of masculinity that adheres to more standard conceptions of the heroic male. Though scores of examples abound for high-pitched male heroes in both opera and heavy metal, the four examined within this chapter represent certain thematic standards that can be extrapolated to the rest of their genres.

After analyzing the four performances in this chapter, one can observe that in opera and metal, the steward of the high-pitched male voice, in order to effectively convey heroism to his audience, must be surrounded by and embody distinctly hyper-masculine traits. Traits aligned with concepts of the warrior hero, of a man of action who seeks glory in battle, sometimes purely for its own sake. In the production featuring Scholl and Robson, this push to emphasize Caesar’s standing as a masculine hero comes at the cost of Ptolemy’s masculinity. That diminishment appears as much a way of raising up Caesar’s social standing (no pun intended) as it is a method of demonstrating what
Caesar was not. Indicative of the conclusions drawn in chapter two, the stereotyping of countertenor men as too effeminate (especially when portraying a male hero) needs to be tempered by extra-musical forces in performance if they are to effectively convey heroism. In accordance with this, I discussed the importance of extra-musical factors in the formation and appropriation of high-pitched singing as heroic within the world of heavy metal in chapter three.

The importance of extra-musical forces in singers' formations of heroes in metal and opera highlights the role that live performance plays in this process. I argue that while there is a heroic element involved in the physical production of the notes themselves, if those vocal qualities are not married to the socio/cultural factors signifying a masculine hero, the climb for the musical summit will fall short of conveying heroism, and be cast down as an effeminate "other,” just like Ptolemy in “va tacito.” For those who do match their singing with the signs of heroic masculinity, they may stand victorious with the likes of Andreas Scholl as the triumphant Caesar, or Joacim Cans as the returning hero. Even with recorded performances that have no set design or costuming to further a heroic image, there are often images on cover art for both opera and metal CDs that might supply a listener with enough extra musical material to still convey a heroic meaning. And as much as McClary has suggested that there is something for countertenors to take note of in the successful hyper-masculine displays from metal singers, the broadening success of countertenors playing masculine heroes might provide a source of inspiration for metal singers, being part of a genre that so prizes over-the-top live performances.142

142 McClary, 41.
The phenomenon of high-pitched male singers portraying heroic roles is a subject that I believe is still ripe for future study. Probing deeper with examinations into how we define and codify heroes in different musics has the potential to reveal much about the cultures that surround those genres. The research I have compiled in this thesis has helped to shed light on the social themes that count as, and are considered to be heroic in heavy metal and opera. More than that, the examination of how high-pitched male singers negotiate those themes underscores the notion that by attempting to expand upon what a musical community believes to be heroic, in the end, the singer must still conform to social conventions to be successful in their endeavor. In a broader context, understanding the themes underlying the construction of heroes in society at large will help illuminate the qualities that society holds in high esteem, as “its function is to provide…people with models and paradigms for values and behavior— for relationships.” This is all the more relevant in a modern popular culture that has witnessed a meteoric rise in the production of super-hero, anti-hero, and fantasy hero stories in all forms of media, but whose consciousness seems so mired in despair. Perhaps, in a certain way, people are looking for heroes in all parts of their lives, and music is one of them.

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