

This *Tempest's* Hers: Metropolitan Opera's  
*The Enchanted Island* and the Feminism  
of *Bel Canto* Shakespeare Adaptation

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Abstract

This essay looks at the Metropolitan Opera's *The Enchanted Island* as a revision of *The Tempest* that subverts the gender politics of Shakespeare's play. The theory of transgressive adaptation behind this reworking of Shakespeare identifies the music as much as the libretto as the site for potential interpretive freedom, and hinges, in particular, on the voices of divas Joyce DiDonato and Danielle de Niese to articulate their feminist interpretations of their characters and to claim the improvisational liberties that *bel canto* opera provides to singers in performance.

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One does not have to be a scholar grounded in feminist and postcolonial theory to be frustrated by the power abuses in many of Shakespeare's plays; one only has to be an empathetic human being. All of us who study and appreciate Shakespeare have had moments when we are watching a performance or rereading the text of *Othello* or *Merchant of Venice* or *Taming of the Shrew* or *The Tempest*, and we find ourselves wishing with all our hearts that the play would turn out radically differently. Not just that Othello wouldn't strangle Desdemona or that Antonio wouldn't insist upon Shylock's forced conversion or that Petruchio wouldn't ask Katharina to deliver a speech in favor of women's subordination but, rather, that the power abuses would never even get to that point in the story. That somehow, some way, someone would advocate for these strong-willed but socially disempowered characters much, much earlier in the narrative; would descend from the heavens or enter from the wings or rise up from the sea and say, "There are times when the gods can stand no more"; would insist that Prospero stop defaming Sycorax, cease abusing Caliban, and give over threatening Ariel; would maybe even go so far as to insist that Prospero honor his predecessor's claim and return the island to Caliban in his mother's name. In The Metropolitan Opera's *The Enchanted Island* (2011), this is exactly what happens. In this article, I consider this

philosophies of adaptation behind this remarkably feminist, postcolonial, and ecocritical reworking of Shakespeare, considering not only the cultural politics at work in Jeremy Sams' newly crafted libretto but also the potential for interpretive agency found by divas Joyce DiDonato and Danielle de Niese in the *bel canto* devices of improvisation and ornamentation.

Not to be confused with Dryden and Davenant's comedy *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island*, first staged in 1667, or Shadwell's 1674 operatic treatment of the same adaptation by the same name, the 2011 *Enchanted Island* is a reworking of the basic plot and main characters from two Shakespeare plays — *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — into a new libretto, set to music from operas, oratorios and cantatas by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau, and Purcell. The opera opens with Prospero persuading Ariel to raise a tempest on his behalf in order to bring Ferdinand to the island. She agrees to do so, but because Sycorax and Caliban have switched out the crucial magic ingredient, substituting lizard's blood for dragon's blood, Ariel gets the spell wrong, and the tempest that she raises fastens upon the ship containing the couples from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rather than Ferdinand's ship. When the subsequent shipwreck leaves the newlywed couples separated and stranded, Ariel casts a spell so that Miranda falls in love with Demetrius, and then Lysander; meanwhile Sycorax casts a spell on Helena so that she falls in love with Caliban. *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are made to correspond seamlessly, with the opera's Ariel taking on the characteristics of Puck by messing up her spells and mistaking her lovers, and the power struggle between Oberon and Titania for control over human subjects being redirected here as the same type of battle for dominance between Prospero and Sycorax.

In his program note to the production, Sams explains that the idea for his opera started to take shape when he began to imagine Sycorax — a character only alluded to in Shakespeare's play — as the three-dimensional hero of Sams' new story. He writes,

My thinking was, simply put, that a new take on old music needs a new take on an old story. It's hard (at least for me) to think of stories without thinking of Shakespeare — and it was listening to Purcell that first brought *The Tempest* to mind. Dryden's version, with music by Purcell, was indeed called *The Enchanted Island*, a title too good to miss. Dryden, though, had spotted that a desert island is going, by definition, to be slightly devoid of love interest, and love is what fuels the aria-making machine that is Baroque opera. [...] Dryden's addition of a boy-mad sister to Miranda wasn't too inspiring. But his fleshing out of the sorceress Sycorax — Caliban's mother and Ariel's former mistress — was too good not to steal. It wasn't too much of a stretch to imagine her seduced, spurned, and then banished by Prospero to the dark side of the island. He steals her land, her son, her servant, her heart — all useful motives for revenge. (Sams 2011)

According to Sams, he went to Shakespeare's plays only for the storylines, not for the songs — an interesting point, considering that, as Daniel Albright points out in *Musicking Shakespeare* — in a chapter subtitled "*The Tempest* as Virtual Opera" — "the whole of *Tempest* is full of music" (10). In fact, in the press packet and other materials The Metropolitan Opera compiled on the adaptation and performance processes, Shakespeare is hardly named at all. Other than this brief reference by Sams, no other mention of Shakespeare is made. Instead, in their program notes and interviews, the director, conductor, and singers of *The Enchanted Island* repeatedly turn their attention to the music — focusing solely on the composers and the *bel canto* aesthetic in particular. And even in Sams's case, his note tells us, he approached the process of crafting his new libretto not by reading Shakespeare but by listening to Purcell. This new Shakespeare adaptation called *The Enchanted Island*, then — which, indeed, is not a "Shakespeare adaptation" to most involved but, rather, a Handel/Vivaldi mash-up or a *bel canto* pastiche — was achieved not via *text* but via *music* — even (this is my point) by the librettist.

Linda Hutcheon has recently argued that opera scholars need to pay more attention to the dramatic text, which, historically, musicians have treated as less important than the score — "the diminutive *libretto*," as Hutcheon believes the derivational suffixation itself implies (2006, 803). She notes with approval, however, that more opera scholars are beginning to engage with literary theory and textual analysis (804), quoting Haydn specialist Caryl Clark's characterization of musical scores as "*scripts* for performances" (Clark 2005, 199; quoted in Hutcheon 2006, 807).<sup>1</sup> At the same time that I agree that musicologists can only benefit from increased attention to the libretto, I would also argue that Shakespeareans who tend to rely solely on text-based analyses must also cultivate a fuller consideration of scholarship and disciplinary practices in the fields of theatre, film, and music studies. Certainly such interdisciplinarity is essential for those of us in Shakespeare adaptation studies. In this article, then, I offer my reading of both the libretto of and, as much as possible, the musical choices in *The Enchanted Island*, for in this case, it is the performance aesthetic that supplies that feminist interpretation as much as the text does.

## I

In crafting a "new take" on the "old story" of *The Tempest*, Sams created a libretto that foregrounds the importance of women's desires and dreams, their power of expression, their glorious moments of transgression, their individuality, and their freedom. We see this from the very opening of the opera, starting with the example of Miranda. Her first entrance finds her telling the audience, "Every morning I awaken to this strange longing. / Every night there is a face that I dream of. / I feel I've been suddenly hurled into a brave new world" (*Enchanted Island* 2011). Her

state of mind does not go unobserved by her worried father. Indeed, Prospero tells Ariel that he is bringing Ferdinand's ship to the island not because he wants to enact revenge upon his usurping brother but because he is worried about controlling Miranda's sexuality. "I see the fire in her eyes / Feel the heat in her blood," Prospero sings. When Prospero gives Ariel a potion to use on Ferdinand and Miranda, he claims that it is necessary since young men these days are no longer chaste. But his subsequent directive to Ariel — "See they both forsake and forget all others they have loved" — suggests that Miranda has already had similar experiences herself. In her scenes and duets with Demetrius and Lysander, Miranda is undoubtedly portrayed as the more assertive in all of her romantic relationships; she is the first to speak, the first to sing, the first to kiss (figure 1).

But if this is an opera about female desire and women's dreams, Miranda is really the only woman who is portrayed as being motivated by the stereotypical female desire for all-consuming romance. Helena is an interesting counter-example. On the one hand, she is similar to Titania in that she falls in love with a "monstrous" creature (in this case, Caliban) while under a spell. On the other hand, Helena has a thoughtfulness and depth akin to Hamlet. What Helena desires in this opera is not love but, rather, death — an end to her suffering. "I long to sleep forever / Then all of oblivion will be mine" (*Enchanted Island* 2011), sings the suicidal Helena upon her first entrance. When she does fall in love with Caliban, she spends her time with him teaching him the names of the flowers, some in Latin, explaining the etymology of the names and pointing out tiny differences between specimens, as though she were a natural philosopher. "[There are] so many multicolored miracles in Nature's treasure trove," she instructs Caliban. Helena's mind is so strong that when Demetrius crosses her path, she overcomes the spell that she is under and "awake[s]" her memories on her own, without anyone else reversing the spell (figure 2).

It is no accident that Helena expresses such a deep understanding of the natural world — the title character is, after all, nature itself — the island — which is, throughout the opera, coded as female, and associated in particular with Sycorax. The opera leaves no doubt that Sycorax is the rightful ruler of what she calls her "paradise," her "island divine," and no doubt that Prospero is guilty of having "stole[n]" Ariel from Sycorax and "[en]slaved" Caliban, her "only son" (*Enchanted Island* 2011). From her very first aria, Sycorax decides that "the hour is coming when we must turn full circle in time" and vows to "match" Prospero "crime for crime." Indeed, the opera puts Sycorax in the position that Shakespeare puts Prospero in at the beginning of the play: nearing old age and seeking retribution for having been usurped in his younger days. "I'll take my vengeance [. . .] for the wrongs from the past," Sycorax promises, "[Prospero] will know how it feels when you are old and all you have known has been taken." Looking like a cross between Grizabella and Fantine, Sycorax reminisces upon her past "strength and splendor":

Once at my command eager ghosts would appear  
 And would bow and wait for their orders from me.  
 In my beautiful days there was fire in my eyes.  
 I'd sport a crown of gold and wield a scepter of ice.

She prepares to "forge wonders" with her "meager magic" that remains. "Still I can conquer / Still I can strike," she decides, and she drinks a potion to renew her "you[th]" and "glory." One component of her plan to wrest power from Prospero is to have Caliban marry and produce an heir, and it is not surprising that she chooses Helena for her would-be daughter-in-law; given the latter's strong mind and inclination toward natural philosophy, Sycorax might well see in Helena a younger version of herself.

But if Sycorax shares Helena's affinity for nature, she also has something in common with Hermia, whose chief complaint is not that a man has *stolen* from her but, rather, that a man has stolen *away* from her. From her first appearance onstage, Helena laments having been "left" by Lysander. "You said you'd never abandon me," Hermia sings to her absent husband, "Where are you now?" (*Enchanted Island* 2011). When Helena enters the scene, the two women commiserate that "[their] husbands do not really want [them]." "O my sister," they sing to each other, "men are fickle, always plotting and deceiving. / First they love you, then they leave you." The trope of the deceptive, inconstant man connects back to Sycorax's own story, for, as we find out early in the opera, Prospero wrested control from her by stealing her heart as a means to steal her island. "Prospero found me, wooed me, maybe even loved me," Sycorax tells us, "First he loved me / Then he left me." Sycorax describes the days in "springtime" when Prospero courted her:

First he smiled at me,  
 Then he turned from me,  
 Leaving me dying,  
 Nursing a broken heart.

Sycorax describes herself in the same terms as Hermia — "*abandoned* and forsaken" — and she vows, in reference to Prospero, "He will learn!" Her vengeance, then, stems from a desire to reclaim not just her island but also her identity, having lost herself and given up her power to Prospero when she fell for his lies. And indeed, Sycorax begins to grow younger and more beautiful and to return to "the long forgotten glory of long, long ago" (figure 3). She sings:

My strength is coming back to me.  
 I feel it grow unstoppably.

A raging sea in side of me, a flood.

...

I feel it deep inside of me,  
Like thunder underground.

As powerful as her aria is, one gets the impression that Sycorax's real healing starts to begin, and her real power starts to manifest itself, when she sees that her love spell is useless against true emotions. Her gorgeous, gentle, empathetic response to her son's pain from having been rejected by Helena serves as her own object lesson. "Hearts that love can all be broken," Sycorax tells Caliban, "[N]othing can be done" (*Enchanted Island* 2011). Sycorax asks Caliban's "forgive[ness]" for not being able to "spar[e]" him from "or prepar[e]" him for the pain of unrequited love and for having used a spell in the first place. As Sycorax sings, Caliban cries himself to sleep. The slave's chain around his neck — put in place by Prospero — has inched up around his mouth so that he cannot breath. Sycorax moves her son's chain so that he can sleep safely. It is a compelling gesture, to say the least. Moments like these suggest that Sycorax's power comes from her humanity: her ability to ask for forgiveness from her child for having tried to use magic to arrange a spouse for him.

Sycorax also succeeds because she has a strong ally in Neptune, god of the sea, who possesses many of the same characteristics as Sycorax. Like Sycorax, Neptune has also experienced natural losses at the hands of mortal men. While Sycorax has lost a body of land, Neptune has lost a body of water. He sings:

My ocean, my deep blue heaven, my real apart.  
When I think of how it's gone forever,  
My perfect sea, it breaks my heart.  
My perfect sea, my ocean,  
Once upon a time, how sublime it used to be.  
My gift from god to mortal.  
They destroyed the gift I gave.  
Gone forever, my perfect sea. (*Enchanted Island* 2011)

Like Sycorax, Neptune asserts that he should be "fear[ed]" and "respect[ed]" because he can "in [his] wrath do wonders" — this is the same language used by Sycorax. And like Sycorax, Neptune complains that it is mortal men who have abused his domain. It is no accident that Lysander's first words are "Curse you, Neptune. / I have conquered sea and tempest. / I have tamed the raging sea!" and that Demetrius, similarly, claims that he has "conquered the ocean" as well.

And certainly *The Enchanted Island* grounds its critique of Prospero in Neptune's arias as well. In the penultimate scene, when Sycorax attempts to "take [her] vengeance" on Prospero "at last" and Prospero responds with the haughty line, "In whose name do you defy my will?" (*Enchanted Island* 2011). Neptune appears, and answers on Sycorax's behalf. The diatribe he delivers contains virtually every complaint against Prospero that has been articulated by postcolonial, feminist Shakespeare critics:

You stand there proud and free,  
 With no vestige of conscience,  
 With no shame for what you've done  
 To this woman and her son.  
 . . .  
 You have stolen the land  
 That was rightfully hers and mine.

"There are times when the gods can stand no more," Neptune proclaims, explaining to Prospero that he has come "To shame you / And to name you / As the man that you are" (figure 4).

Even before Neptune's intervention, however, Prospero has been experiencing an awakening and slowly coming to the realization that in meddling with nature, he has only caused problems. The curtain closes on the first act of *The Enchanted Island* with the "frail" Prospero dissolved into tears, wondering, "What have I wrought here? What have I done? / I have sown discord where there was none" (*Enchanted Island* 2011) (figures 5 and 6). By the end of the play, when Neptune presses him on having mistreated both Sycorax and the island, Prospero responds with contrition, having learned his lesson. His subsequent aria is directed to Sycorax. "Lady," he tells her, "this island is yours."

It was before I came here, and so it remains.  
 And my magic, that is yours too.  
 Who knows how long I will live?  
 One thing remains that only you can give.  
 Forgive me.  
 Pardon the wrongs I have done.  
 Yes, I was heartless.  
 I brought despair and heartache on you and everyone.

The aria ends with Prospero on his knees, reaching for Sycorax's hand in supplication. When Neptune asks Sycorax to "proceed with mercy and love," she does. Sycorax sings to Prospero, "I forgive you." As she does so, she extends her hand and caresses his face. And then, remarkably, she leaves. The opera does not insist that they reunite as a couple.

If the libretto were not enough to encourage audiences to see *The Enchanted Island* as a decidedly feminist retelling of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, the paratexts that accompany the screen versions of the performance, and especially Deborah Voigt's interviews with the singers, make the opera's intentions — and especially the divas' intentions — quite clear. It is during these interviews with Voigt, for instance, that Joyce DiDonato lays out her reading of Sycorax as "sort of an Everywoman," explaining that Sycorax is like all women who "hit their mid-forties and early fifties" and realize they have "given their life away to their kids, to their jobs" (DiDonato 2012). Like Sycorax, DiDonato explains, all women have "a moment when they say, 'You know what? Enough! I'm going to take my power back!'"

But in addition to functioning to solidify a feminist reading of *The Enchanted Island*, the interviews also establish a particular philosophy of adaptation. Interestingly, the philosophy of adaptation that emerges in these interviews locates the potential for adaptation not necessarily in the reinterpretation of the *story* but, rather, in the reinterpretation of the *score*. In the interview with William Christie, for instance, the renowned conductor identifies the music, rather than the libretto, as the site of malleability, acknowledging that his "orchestra is incredibly adaptive" because they are "doing things that aren't in the score" (Christie 2012). The music, then, the suggestion is, has the potential to function as a space of freedom for performers. It is during the overtures that the orchestra is able to be adaptive. And it is during the arias that the singers are able to take liberties — liberties with the *notes*, and the *delivery* of the notes, if not the words.

The two interpretive points established during the interviews are interrelated, for the philosophy of adaptation that emerges during the interviews foregrounds women in that it stresses the potential for the singers to take liberties with the arias. The interviews show, in one moment, Plácido Domingo pouting that as Neptune he has few arias in comparison to the women "diva[s],"<sup>2</sup> and, in the next moment, Danielle de Niese responding to Deborah Voigt's question about what she's looking forward to in the second half of the opera by talking about how fantastic her songs are and exclaiming, "I'm just waiting for my freedom aria!" (de Niese 2012). It is in this interview that de Niese explains that in her portrayal of Ariel she seizes upon the potential of "Baroque music," which offers the opera star "a real chance to create a character," as opposed to, for instance, Wagner, which allows no such avenue for reinterpretation. Here de Niese is talking about *bel canto*



opera, and virtuosity in particular, which endorsed the frequent use of the device of ornamentation. Understanding the aesthetics and performance practices of *bel canto* opera is, I would argue, absolutely crucial to understanding the philosophy of adaptation at work behind *The Enchanted Island*.

## II

*Bel canto* opera developed in the seventeenth century, growing out of what Bruce Dickey calls a "revolution in musical style" that valued *sprezzatura*, or "natural speech rhythms" and that encouraged singers to achieve such *sprezzatura* by paying "greater attention to the sentiments of the text" and incorporating "a whole range of [. . .] devices" (Dickey 2012, 293), including ornamentation — moments in the performance during which the singer embellished the score by improvising various musical choices — trills, runs, tonal dissonances, changes in pacing or volume. Ornamentation was, in fact, crucial to the singer's performance, since this form of improvisation "represented an essential means of expressing the sentiments of the text[,] displaying grace," and "expressing all the passions of the soul" (294, 301). Baird explains that, following this "seventeenth-century aesthetic," "the finest singers could alter their technique and their sound in order to adapt to the musical or dramatic context," thereby "allow[ing] for a demonstration of harmonic intelligence and expressivity" (2012, 38). The goal was for the *bel canto* singer to embellish the score as she saw fit, in order to, as Francesco Lamperti put it in the nineteenth century, "convey the emotions of the [character's] soul" (1966, 14). Henry Pleasants explains that "[M]ost, if not all, the devices of *bel canto* originated in an expressive purpose," including those that "lent themselves to the expression of fury, rage, vengeance and resolve, or [. . .] jubilation and satisfaction" (21).

If most of Pleasants's checklist of emotions brings to mind the character of Sycorax, whose fury drives the plot of *The Enchanted Island*, certainly one of those emotions — the sense of jubilation that comes from achieving one's dream — receives its strongest expression in the character of Ariel, whose "heart's desire," as she puts it, is to realize her "freedom" from Prospero (*Enchanted Island* 2011). Granted, some could take issue with my choice to refer to *The Enchanted Island*'s Ariel as female; after all, Prospero clearly establishes the character's supposed sex from his first reference to the spirit as "my *boy*, my beauty." But in this production, there is nothing boyish about the woman playing Ariel — Danielle de Niese — in the least. Curvy, sultry, and costumed as Restoration-breeches-actress-meets-steampunk in this opera, she exudes the kind of female power of a seventeenth-century *frondeuse*, the likes of Marie de Medici or Mlle de Montpensier. One gets

the feeling that Danielle de Niese would come off as an amazon warrior queen no matter what she were wearing (figure 7).

Additionally, the early scenes with Prospero and Ariel — before Prospero frees her — are staged so that they give off the impression of a male boss harassing his female secretary or a male plantation owner abusing his female slave. Prospero's power over Ariel is very specifically portrayed as the ability to control her body, and the blocking frequently suggests that Prospero is a sexual menace to Ariel, forcing her to agree to "earn" her "freedom" by threatening to strangle her if she doesn't bend to his will. In their first scene together, Prospero puts a spell on Ariel with his magic rod. He threatens, "Perhaps I should teach you how to obey me" and takes total control over her body, singing,

If you would earn your freedom,  
Do as I command you.  
And in your fierce frustration,  
Do not forget your station. (*Enchanted Island* 2011)

Ariel bows her head and concedes, "Oh generous master, I'll do whatever you may ask." We then see Ariel use her physical charms and physical touch, against her true will, presumably, to calm her master. She holds his hand, leans her face against his body, and promises to bring Prospero "whatever [he] desire[s] from the heavens." She bargains with him, "It will be my last masterpiece, and then I will be free". But the threat of physical violence continues. When Ariel directs the tempest to the "wrong ship," Prospero calls her a "thankless wretch" and threatens to put her "back" in "the holly tree." There is no suggestion that it was Sycorax who enclosed Ariel in the tree originally, as in Shakespeare's play — indeed, the implication is that Prospero imprisoned Ariel once and can do it a second time. When Ariel arranges for Miranda to fall in love with Demetrius instead of Ferdinand, we watch her suffer for it again. Prospero shakes his staff at her, yells "Why did I decide to care for you at all?" and raises the back of his hand, threatening to hit her across the face. Ariel cowers. It is clear that this is an abusive relationship (figure 8).

Ariel's experiences at the end of *The Enchanted Island*, and the emotion underlying her new state of being, then, are in sharp contrast to the confinement and coercion she has experienced throughout the opera. In her final scene, she appears in an extraordinary beautiful and colorful costume — part peacock, part butterfly — a strong contrast to the belted, bolted, and locked wings that she wore earlier in the opera. "You're free now," Prospero tells her (*Enchanted Island* 2011). And then she sings. And when she sings, we understand exactly what Danielle de Niese means when she says, "I'm just waiting for my freedom aria." Ariel's voice creates a ripple effect on the sky

on the scrim behind her, and as she sings about the joy of "shooting stars," her voice explodes into rushing scales and arpeggios, as if the notes were themselves shooting stars. Behind her, Prospero's cave seems to be in motion, and the cave vibrates, and eventually melts, in sync with Ariel's vocal movements. As performed by de Niese, Ariel's aria is — there is no other way to put this — exactly what freedom *sounds* like (figure 9).

If it sounds like freedom, that's because it is. In *bel canto* terminology, de Niese's riffs are known as "*disposizione della voce*" — what Baird describes as "light, almost giggling technique" (2012, 38), and they are one of the ornamental devices that the *bel canto* singer can improvise and adapt as she chooses in the moment of performance itself. Martha Elliott explains that in *bel canto* opera, "the singer ha[s] more license to surge ahead if the text [becomes] excited or impassioned, or to hold the tempo back a bit if the dramatic situation [becomes] sad or tender" (2006, 133). The composer provides notation, Elliott explains, but the singer "often" chooses to "do exactly the opposite of what the notation suggests" (133). This "flexibility" of the *bel canto* singer "require[s] the accompanist or orchestra to adjust to the soloist" rather than the other way around (133). Indeed, Richard Bonyngue admits that when he was conducting the orchestra that accompanied the operatic performances by his wife, renowned dramatic coloratura soprano Joan Sutherland, "he was never sure exactly which embellishments she would use in any given performance" (quoted in Montgomery 2006, 103). Such power has not always set well with composers. Karen S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton reproduce the anecdote that "[w]hen Rossini heard Maria Malibran spinning improvised material around one of his pieces, he is said to have inquired, 'What a lovely aria, my dear. Who was the composer?'" (Gould and Keaton 2000, 144). The authors intend for this story to be evidence that "extended embellishment and improvisations" in *bel canto* opera "[do] not always result in the finest aesthetic result" (144), but surely, in actuality, this story points to the agency of the diva. Underlying Rossini's reply is his anxiety that during the performance the *bel canto* singer has the opportunity not just to interpret but also to invent. This is exactly what de Niese means when she says that *bel canto* gives her the opportunity to "create."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to encouraging interpretive "freedom" (Stark 1999, 163) and giving the singer license to "make the most" of her vocal "flexibility" (Garcia 1847, 192-93), treatises on *bel canto* style have always stressed the importance of the singer's imagination and intelligence. In the eighteenth century, Giambattista Mancini claimed that the *bel canto* singer needed to have "perfect judgment and understanding" and Johann Joachim Quantz stressed that the *virtuoso* must employ "feeling and judgment" in her performances (Mancini 1774, 53; Quantz 1725, 126), and a century later, Manuel Garcia explained that the *bel canto* style "permits the singer to display

the fertility of his imagination" (1847, 192-93). Music historians have also often stressed the *bel canto* singer's power. In the nineteenth century, George Hogarth employed the word repeatedly, as in his explanation of the various types of arias to "[give] the singer an opportunity of displaying all his powers of every description" (1851, 2:64). Similarly, Garcia wrote that *bel canto* requires "the addition of power and emotion" (1847, 198), and eighteenth-century composer Johann F. Christmann emphasized the importance of the singer's "boldness" in performance (1782, 242). Finally — and significantly — *bel canto* is musically transgressive by definition. From the earliest treatises, the *virtuoso* singer has been characterized as pushing the limits of what is considered correct and beautiful — as in Giulio Caccini's *Le Nuove Musiche* (1602), in which the author explains that the soloist will be "sometimes transgressing," creating "several dissonances" in order to "move the mind" of her auditors (1602, 44-45).

The attributes of the women characters in *The Enchanted Island*, then, align precisely with the values that *bel canto* opera endorses in its singers — freedom, intelligence, power, and transgression. And, as we discover in the interviews that accompany the screen versions, the divas performing in *The Enchanted Island* demonstrate a keen sense of their own agency in performance, with DiDonato and de Niese in particular seizing upon the interpretive license that *bel canto* provides. Interestingly, in those same interviews, when asked about their process of creating *The Enchanted Island*, director Phelim McDermott and librettist Jeremy Sams focus their answers on the adaptation's source material, with McDermott identifying the opera as a "pastiche" of music from Handel and Sams identifying the opera as a "mashing-up of [the] two [Shakespeare] stories" of *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Sams 2011). DiDonato and de Niese, on the other hand, treat the opera as though it were, as interviewer and fellow diva Voigt terms it, "a brand new work" and "a novel piece."<sup>4</sup> Put more bluntly, DiDonato and de Niese treat the *The Enchanted Island* as though it belongs to them, as though they own it, rather than treating it as an inheritance that first belonged to someone else. In this way, each woman's relationship to the opera mirrors Sycorax's relationship to the island — it is, without question, decidedly hers.

### Notes

1. See, in particular, Tomlinson 1999 and Corse 2000. With regard to feminist approaches to opera, of the few book-length studies that exist, the most frequently cited is Clément 1988. See also McLary 1991, Smart 2000, and Kostenbaum 2001.
2. Voigt uses this phrasing in her interview with Domingo (Voigt 2012b). In the first edition of her interview with Domingo that was shown at intermission as part of the HD live broadcast, Domingo says that he wishes he had more arias. Domingo says, "*The Enchanted Island*

is a work-in-progress, so maybe when we do it again [I'll sing several more arias]." This conversation has been cut from the version of the interview that appears on the DVD.

3. It is worth considering that music by or attributed to Handel, as most of the music in *The Enchanted Island* is, might in particular lend itself to a strong sense of adaptorial license at this point in history. Ellen T. Harris analyzes recent Handel scholarship and notes that the composer's legitimacy has come under increased scrutiny in response to the "growing list of Handel's borrowings" (Harris 1990, 301). Harris points out that although Shakespeare borrowed from his source material with equal enthusiasm, his reputation as an artistic genius has never been threatened by his plagiarism whereas Handel, on the other hand, has been designated as "merely a 'Great Arranger,' not a composer in the sacred sense of the term" (302). But if it is true that Handel's lack of legitimacy means that, in the minds of musicologists and musicians, "ornamentation and improvisation do no harm" (302), then it allows for increased agency on the part of the musicians.
4. Voigt uses this phrasing in her interview with McDermott (Voigt 2012a).

### Online Resources

*The Enchanted Island: The Metropolitan Opera HD*. YouTube. 9 November 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-0LYy7kE20> [accessed 14 October 2013].

### Permissions

I would like to thank the Metropolitan Opera for providing me with a copy of *The Enchanted Island* press kit, access to video clips in advance of the release of the DVD, and permission to publish production photos.

Figure 1. "Every morning I awaken to this strange longing." Lisette Oropesa as Miranda in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 2. "Nature's Treasure Trove." Layla Claire as Helena the natural philosopher and Luca Pisaroni as Caliban in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 3. "My strength is coming back to me! / I feel it grow unstopably!" Joyce DiDonato owning it as Sycorax in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 4. "There are times when the gods can stand no more." Placido Domingo as Neptune in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 5. "What have I wrought here? / What have I done?" David Daniels as Prospero and Luca Pisaroni as Caliban in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 6. "I forgive you." Joyce DiDonato as Sycorax, Placido Domingo as Neptune, and David Daniels as Prospero in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 7. "It will be my last masterpiece, and then I will be free." Danielle de Niese as Ariel in *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 8. "Perhaps I should teach you how to obey me." Danielle de Niese as Ariel and David Daniels as Prospero in *The Enchanted Island*. Still photos captured by the author from the PBS screening/Metropolitan Opera.

Figure 9. "I'm just waiting for my freedom aria." Danielle de Niese (Ariel) in response to Deborah Voigt asking her what she most anticipates in second act of *The Enchanted Island*. Photo: Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera.

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