



The Forgotten Fach: The Sfogato in the Nineteenth Century

Katherine Skovira

“Oh! Mlle Falcon, with those black eyes of yours and the incisive voice you possess, there is no need to be afraid. Let your eyes flash and your voice ring out: you will be yourself.”

– Hector Berlioz to Cornélie Falcon, *Rénovateur* (March 6, 1834)

Introduction

In 1834, composer Hector Berlioz attended a dress rehearsal of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and later wrote to the Donna Anna: though he criticized the star singer -- something about her voice did not fit his expectations -- Berlioz described her as “the ideal Donna Anna.”¹

The singer in the production was Cornélie Falcon (1814-1897), then just twenty years old. Falcon’s large, resonant voice and exceptional range displayed an ability that already shone brightly, ultimately earning her not just fame and opportunity but also a unique quality, which inspired critics to designate her a “Falcon” voice, her very own voice type. With her dark, rich voice and upper extension, Falcon occupied a space outside of the traditional Fach system.² In another operatic center of the world, leading nineteenth century *bel canto* composers were writing for a unique operatic Fach, the sfogato, a dark, weighty yet agile, and powerfully emotive voice, whose very existence today is questioned and contentious, even as the female characters it voices continue to stalk our stages.

Today, we look back across several centuries of sfogato writing by white male-identifying composers of *bel canto* tradition, i.e. Luigi Cherubini (*Médée*, 1797), Gioacchino Rossini (*Armida*, 1817), Donizetti (*Anna Bolena*, 1830; *Elisabetta*, *Roberto Devereux*, 1837), and Bellini (*Norma*, 1831), and we can identify certain vocal consistency, evolutions, and clear gaps in our knowledge.

Like the sfogato, the music of nineteenth century female composers lived in hidden spaces, out of public view, a peripheral rather than main focus. These works are powerful tools to explore questions of vocal identity and female composers’ leadership in composition and vocal writing, in ways that new musicology is still uncovering.

The nineteenth century composer, pedagogue, and singer French-born Pauline Viardot (1821-1910), as a known sfogato, offers us a wonderful opportunity to look critically at vocal pedagogy and her treatment of the female-assigned voice.

The question is whether female composers of the nineteenth century hold the key for a contemporary understanding of this deviant, the sfogato, and what it has become or perhaps what might have been.

Who or what is sfogato?

“The voice was very different. She was really something unusual. And I remember that I was very young artist too, and I stayed near the radio every time that I knew that there was something on the radio by Maria.”

– Renata Tebaldi in John Ardoin and Franco Zeffirelli’s 1978 *Callas: A Documentary*.

The sfogato Fach is problematic: its definitions are imprecise, and we lack a clear way of identifying a sfogato voice in development. Past and current definitions and musicology perspectives have derived from a traditionally cisgender male perspective, further problematizing a pedagogic approach to a voice type already difficult to define.

The term *soprano sfogato* or “vented” soprano has been used interchangeably by some authors with *soprano assoluto* (“absolute”) voice and the *soprano drammatico d’agilità* (“dramatic soprano with agility”), among others.³ The sfogato voice is an entity unto itself - it shares characteristics across three voice types from contralto to soprano but is absolutely distinct.

Here, I use the terms “sfogato voice” and “sfogato” in an effort to shift this discussion to reflect 21st century and feminist perspectives, and illuminate a path for today’s sfogati that both connects with the great singers of the past and reflects the sfogato voice’s non-binary connection to three female-assigned Fachs.⁴

The sfogato space is difficult to define, for several reasons:

- 1) Its apparent overlap with other Fachs
- 2) Lack of research and pedagogy
- 3) A traditionally male perspective imposed on the voice itself.

The sfogato voice wears several names - the soprano sfogato or soprano assoluto. Referred to as the “assoluta” in Geoffrey Riggs’ *The Assoluta Voice in Opera* (2003), it has been defined as the “prima donna” and a distinct category and rare voice, “the perfect soprano who is capable of taking on roles only with the soprano range.”⁵ The term “soprano sfogato” or “vented” soprano has been used interchangeably with soprano assoluto, the “absolute” or “unlimited” voice (the word “assoluto” in Italian translates to infinity); the latter implies unlimited vocal capacity, an

infinitely pliable chameleon without a distinct identity or pedagogy, but as we will see this provides a cautionary tale.⁶

The sfogato space is deviant and contentious: it has distinct characteristics that overlap with three separate and clearly defined Fachs, the contralto, mezzo, and soprano. The sfogato often originates out of a lower voice that may appear to identify as a mezzo soprano or contralto; with time and training, the singer may demonstrate an upper extension up to Db6, perhaps even transitioning into soprano repertoire, while maintaining the lower contralto range (F3 or G3), all the while maintaining a mezzo color and passaggio closer to that of a dramatic soprano.⁷ The sfogato's resonance includes a particularly strong high-middle resonance in the second passaggio around a mezzo and zwischenfach's second passaggio (Eb5-E5-F5) and a soprano's second passaggio at F#5 or G5.⁸ The voice is particularly adept at coloratura and melisma, and the characters frequently center on overly ambitious or opinionated women whose aspirations for power, freedom or sex lead to tragedy and death, a rumination on the dangers of pursuing too hard the things they desire most.⁹

It is important to note that the voice type of “mezzo soprano” went unmentioned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the term “mezzo soprano” appearing only in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ These terms came not from the singers but from music critics and instructors leading the public perception and pedagogy of the day. The terms “mezzo” or “seconda donna” remain problematic, translating to “half” or “second woman,” perhaps too easily read or misconstrued as secondary, inferior, half-woman.¹¹ They point us further towards the negative space the words describe.

Thus, the sfogato emerges as an undefinable half-woman, half-monster, even as historic accounts and the Fach system threaten to resubmerge it. Is the sfogato's definition too nebulous to allow it to occupy space in the repertoire? Are the powerful sfogati women of the stage too deviant? The intent to “define and control” such a deviant further helps us to clarify our pressing need to name it.¹² Some of the most dangerous and beloved women of the stage, the Normas, Toscas, Medeas and Lady Macbeths take up the sfogato's call, not the silenced Carmens and fainting Mimis, but the women who cast themselves into space and claim their fates, echoing Foucault's ruminations on madness and deviance and Clement's troubled ode to opera.¹³ If this call for a clearer road forward begins to address the dangers of running too hard at the things we desire the most, this work will not be in vain.

Yet no voice is unlimited, no woman survives who leaps into space, and many of the singers who have identified as sfogati have met with vocal troubles across the centuries. This emerges in two ways: first, either in established professional voices who decline due to dysphonia and other medical issues (including but limited to the careers of Isabella Colbran, Cornélie Falcon, Pauline Viardot, Maria Callas, Shirley Verrett, Christa Ludwig, and Sondra Radvanovsky, all of whom have reported dysphonia and voice loss at some point in their careers, and/or were obsessively

meticulous about their instruments), or second, out of research driven by young emerging professionals and students who do not fit the mold of soprano or mezzo and have a personal stake in the matter of understanding their vocal identity.¹⁴¹⁵ In the current model, singers struggle with how to identify across the mezzo or soprano binary and judges refuse to accept young *zwischen* voices' existence in favor of easier, streamlined casting.¹⁶

Much of the research on such deviant voice types as sfogato, Falcon, Dugazon, *zwischenfach* and others exists in only students' work (female-assigned, embodied), whereas much of the pedagogy, music criticism and casting are determined by an outdated social reality (male-identified, male-assigned), superimposed traditionally on women by individuals who do not embody or engender this voice. Therefore, every pursuit of understanding the sfogato is socially and pedagogically essential, what Susan McClary described for Lucia as a "revolt against patriarchal oppression and musical conformity, [as] a romantic hero whose energy defies stifling social convention".¹⁷ Must we all be Elektra, Medea, Tosca in a persistence of "historic undoing"?¹⁸

Despite this clearly present binary and intentional dismissal of the sfogato's existence, persistent examples from the nineteenth century (Viardot), twentieth century (Callas) and twenty-first century (Verrett, among others) illuminate the inevitability that there is a clear pedagogic path for developing this voice type, which is encouraging for future composition and instruction. Thus, operating outside the Fach system, the sfogato falls into a no-man's land, unclassified. This is the sfogato's realm.

Context

"I remember once asking my dear Viardot why she had not written, for the benefit of future generations, something about her distinguished career and interesting life. Her answer was, "If my life has been worth recording, others might do so."
– Anna Eugenia Schoen-René, on Pauline Viardot¹⁹

Viardot's *Cendrillon* offers a novel opportunity: in Pauline Viardot, the composer, educator, and singer, we have a wonderful clue from a known sfogato who put elements of her voice into each female character. This gives us one of the clearest pictures of a sfogato, hints to help us decipher its qualities and development in the nineteenth century.

A peripheral glance at *Cendrillon* affirms strict adherence to a traditional cast of singing actors: the central title character (soprano) falls in love with the prince (tenor) but various elements, namely circumstances and barriers thrown up by the villains (soprano, alto, baritone) complicate the match. Through a more nuanced lens, Viardot's own embodiment and experience emerge: the sfogato voice is actually spread across every female-assigned character in the chamber opera,

including the villains. It is an elegant reimagining not just of character connections but of Viardot's voice itself.

Viardot, who sang both Adalgisa and Norma and had a legacy with contemporary composers of her day, including Gluck, Bellini, and Meyerbeer, had immense presence in the operatic world. She was pivotal in bringing the mezzo-soprano and sfogato sound into the operas written by Berlioz, Gounod, Massenet, Brahms and other composers of her acquaintance.²⁰ Viardot followed in the footsteps of her sister: "Malibran had had a tough schooling at the hands of her father, and had hardened into a tenacious and 'fearlessly original' mezzo-soprano with a compass of more than two and half octaves....the end of the castrati did not mean the end of creative extravagance."²¹ Malibran and Viardot were what poet Alfred de Musset, later husband to Viardot, said the same voice: "Malibran and Viardot's virtuosity, dramatic singing and extensive ranges, instructed by the pedagogy of Garcia, indicate that both women were prime examples of sfogati of the nineteenth century.

Pauline Viardot was "an active pedagogue throughout her life...[and] taught more than three hundred aspiring prima donnas, leading men, and amateurs before and following her retirement from the stage."²² Both her performance and pedagogic experience informed her opinion of the importance of vocal health and fluidity of vocal characterizations, evinced in her own compositions and performance decisions, as well as her interactions with students. As opera singer Anna Eugenia Schoen-René (1864-1942), one of the most prominent vocal teachers of her generation, shared about her experiences as a Viardot student of eighteen years and a family intimate for decades.²³ Viardot was ambitious, with "unwavering determination" and exercised "musical intelligence of the highest order."²⁴ Her earliest work demonstrated the three-pronged approach of singer, pedagogue and composer that would infuse her work with a remarkable ability. Schoen-René spoke effusively about her many talents, saying,

Added to these natural gifts was the faultless grounding in vocal technique she had received from her father, and the wise guidance by her mother. Pauline's ambition was fixed from the start. She came from a family of singers, so a singer she would become -- one worthy of the name Garcia. With ardor she began to work on the solfeggi which Don Manuel had written out for his older daughter's training. When there was no more to be learned from these, Pauline composed others for herself on the same pattern.²⁵

Schoen-René shared that "Mme Viardot" opposed theories of vocal limitations and categories, aiming instead for equalized registration, flexibility, and strong characters: her pupils learned many things besides voice production...she wanted her pupils to appreciate art.²⁶

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young Viardot as ambitious, with “unwavering determination,” a youth who exercised “musical intelligence of the highest order.”²⁷ Schoen-Rene notes that Pauline and her older sister Maria shared many vocal attributes, and of Viardot’s older sister Schoen-Rene wrote,

Nature had not endowed Maria [Malibran] with a voice of first quality. Her natural voice before training was a mezzo-soprano, and especially in the middle tones, uneven and full of defects. Before every performance, she was obliged to practice exercises up to the very moment of going on stage, in order to keep it flexible. As a result of her father's rigid discipline, her range had been extended in both directions, until it was finally capable of executing three octaves, from soprano high D to contralto low D. Her whole voice became even, and the high notes gained a scintillating radiance, while the lower register was soft, sweet, and strangely thrilling.²⁸

Considering Viardot’s pedagogy and path as a sfogato, perhaps one of the most interesting and telling anecdotes is a story from Schoen-René’s first audition with Viardot:

She liked my interpretation, my good middle register, -- which she always considered the most important asset for a singer, and the quality of my voice. “A soprano with mezzo color -- a real Rhenish voice!” she exclaimed, greatly pleased. The fact that I was a ‘Rhenish girl,’ and from the same town as Henrietta Sontag, her colleague, delighted her.²⁹

This is clear both in Viardot’s decision to sing and instruct her students in a variety of soprano and mezzo-soprano roles, as well as in her composition style: her vocal writing, like her pedagogy, is intelligent and expressive, but not concerned with the boundaries of voice type. Examples of this include her treatment of Cendrillon’s vocal line, which generally lies lower than her soprano stepsister, yet jumps higher depending on Cendrillon’s emotional mood (Act 1 Trio). Similarly, in the Choeur de Dames (Act III Chorus), which employs three voice parts, Viardot challenges the contained sections of so many choral ensemble works, instead allowing the three parts to sing expressively and beyond the contained sections of the staff. Her pedagogy and delimitation of the staff indicate her thoughts on vocal range and flexibility as of greater importance than convention.

As Viardot’s presence in Western music history emerges in the presence of new musicology and research, there is pedagogic opportunity step beyond the shadow of her father’s Garcia Method and her brother’s pedagogy as well as the limitations of the Fach system’s approach to soprani.³⁰ Viardot’s approach to soprano and mezzo voices is infused with her own singing experience and pedagogy, and she cares less for adhering to each voice type. Her focus instead is on healthy vocal writing and on infusing each character with her voice, in this case, with the sfogato voice inherent in her family’s vocal pedagogy and in her own embodied voice. Like the negative space

in a painting, we find that the sfogato exists in Viardot's work when we de-center our focus on vocal categories and allow the sfogato composer to lead us in our analysis.

Summary of Analysis

Below I focus on three events in Viardot's *Cendrillon*, one per Act, from which we can draw a picture of the composer's vocal approach as singer and pedagogue.

Our main focus will be:

- Act I Trio (Cendrillon, Maguelonne, Armeline) and Chorus
- Act II Duet and Chorus (Cendrillon, Prince; Choeur de Dames)
- Act III Finale (La Fée, Cendrillon)

Act I's Cendrillon muses in long, legato line that are non-distinguishing vocally; Cendrillon is shrouded in soot and musical ambiguity in Scene 1. The appearance of a beggar, the Prince in disguise, catapults the household into a Trio between Cendrillon and her stepsisters, and Chorus, which reveal far more of Cendrillon's sfogato identity than first meets the eye.

In Act II, in which we ultimately meet our entire cast, Viardot hastens Cendrillon's evolution, with more animated vocal lines, a higher tessitura, and a distancing from her opening malaise. It is here that Cendrillon meets her true love, with love at first sight sustaining not just her most ornamented material, but also her vocal transformation. Cendrillon's sadness and discontent make use of the mezzo range that began Act I Scene 1, but her joy in her duet with the Prince moves her vocal line into la Fée's tessitura, with high notes and agility equal to her fairy godmother's coloratura. Viardot's use of a female chorus in a frenzied shoe fitting punctuates the operetta with both humor and further clarity of the composer's treatment of treble voices and tessitura.

It is the Finale of Act III that gives us the clearest picture of Viardot's presence in this opera: she leads us pedagogically as ably as the fairy godmother transports and sustains Cendrillon's ultimate triumph and arrival of her vocal identity. Here, Viardot reveals Cendrillon to be the chameleon sfogato that she is: whereas in Act 1 Cendrillon imitates elements of both her soprano and mezzo stepsisters, now she displays all the prowess and vocal agility of her fairy godmother, singing a vocal line in unison with la Fée in a Finale that cements Cendrillon's sfogato identity.

Analysis

Act I

Avec décision. (PARLÉ) Quelle drôle d'idée! pourquoi fallait-il
 qu'elle fut princesse, puisqu'elle le de-
 -viendrait en l'épousant?
 Il vou - lait u - ne prin - ces - se

Example 1: Act I, Scene 1³¹

At the top of Act I, Cendrillon introduces a fairy tale with spoken interjections, characterized by a low, circling, legato melody in Viardot's low-middle mezzo range (G-A-Bb-C). Her strophic, almost obsessive musings about a prince, a princess, and plant her solidly in the lower mid-range at the first passaggio, spiraling through a fairy tale that is about to become her own reality.

The musical score for Act I Trio consists of three systems of music. Each system includes vocal staves for Contralto (C.), Mezzo (M.), and Alto (A.), along with a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in French. The first system includes the lyrics: "De fai - re des heu - joie? Quel - leest oct - te joie?". The second system includes: "- reux et de s'en fai - reai - - mer! De fai - re des heu - De fai - re des heu -". The third system includes: "- reux Et de s'en faire ai - - mer". Performance markings include "Rit.", "En mesur.", and "a tempo.". The piano part includes the instruction "Suivez." and a dynamic marking "p".

Example 2: Act I Trio³²

Viardot interrupts Cendrillon's dreamy opening Scene 1 moodiness with the arrival of a beggar, the Prince, initiating a Trio between Cendrillon and her stepsisters, Maguelonne (soprano) and Armeline (mezzo-soprano). This scene provides hints of Cendrillon's true vocal identity.

Cendrillon's responses (Example 2) to her stepsister's insults catapult her into the topmost line, above both of her sisters' ridicule, notably above even her coloratura soprano stepsister, Maguelonne.

Cendrillon's Fach at this point in the operetta is neither distinctive nor expressly sfogato. Both Maguelonne and Armeline mock Cendrillon's goodness to the poor beggar at their door, and Cendrillon's assertions that her stepsisters are depriving themselves of life's sweetest joys with their vanity and selfishness elevate Cendrillon into the highest vocal line.³³ Notably, Viardot writes Cendrillon's voice part above Maguelonne's soprano, quickly introducing Cendrillon's several sfogato qualities (centering around E5; making use of the E6-F#6 brilliance of the sfogato as well as the upper extension A5), before returning her to her thoughtful theme from Scene 1. Cendrillon's vocal line hints at but does not maintain the sfogato qualities, leaving the voice type submerged in ambiguity.³⁴

Viardot's vocal writing for Maguelonne and Armeline's parts offer additional clues to Viardot's context for the sfogato, but Cendrillon's vocal identity remains shrouded in ambiguity and chromaticism, even as an agile ascent to a high C in the Act I Finale threatens to unmask her true vocal identity to the room.

CENDRILLON. *Vivace 144=♩*

Si je n'y ve.nais pas qui
Si je n'y ve.nais pas qui

PIANO. *f* *p*

done le ba.laie_rait? Qui donc de fraiches fleurs ain_si le gar.ni_
done vous coiffe_rait? Qui donc de fal.ba_las vos ro_hesgar.ni_
_rait? Qui le ca_fé bien chaud i_ci vous ser_vi_rait
_rait? Qui sur la man.do_li_ne Vous ac.com_pa_gne_rait?

red. *

Example 3: Act I, Scene 5, Cendrillon's response³⁵

Cendrillon begins Act I with a low dirge of a melody, but her sisters quickly animate her, drawing her up into her middle register, situating her between the two sisters' tessituri from the Trio. Her vocal line continues to center around E5, making expressive use of F#5. This is not an explicitly sfogato range, nor does it identify Cendrillon as a particular soprano or mezzo – it remains ambiguous in this excerpt and in Cendrillon's opening theme which voice type she is.

Vous au-rez rai-son Oui, prin-
 -son? Dis-moi donc Je serai prin-ces-
 Je serai prin-
 ces-se peut ê-tre Mes sœurs, vous au-
 -se A moi la no-bles-se Dis-moi, Cen-dril-
 ces-se A moi la ri-ches-se Dis-moi, Cen-dril-
 -rez vous au-rez rai-son Vous au-rez rai-son!
 -lon! dis-moi donc Cen-dril-lon! N'ai-je pas rai-son!
 -lon! dis-moi donc Cen-dril-lon! N'ai-je pas rai-son!

Example 4: Act I Trio, with Cendrillon in the topmost vocal line³⁶

Cendrillon makes use of generally wider intervallic leaps and chromaticism in the Trio, singing in a higher tessitura with heightened emotion as her vocal line ascends to assert against her stepsisters' insults. Eventually, Cendrillon and Maguelonne's lines are in unison during the argument, indicating their competing perspectives while also hinting at Cendrillon's transformation to come.

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Elargissez.

C. *ff* à - me à ja - mais

M. *ff* fé - e u - ne fé - e Est-ceune *pp*

A. *ff* fé - e u - ne fé - e Est-ceune *pp*

le P. *ff* à - me à ja - mais Est-ceune *pp*

B. *ff* fé - e u - ne fé - e? Est-ceune *p*

P. *ff* fé - e u - ne fé - e Est-ceune *p*

ff *Tremolo*

Red.

C. *Rit.* *ff* à ja - mais

M. *pp* *Cresc.* fé e u ne fé e? un sylphe? un dé - mon

A. *pp* rei ne? u ne fé e? un sylphe? un dé - mon

le P. *pp* rei ne? u ne fé e? un sylphe? un dé - mon

B. *pp* rei ne? u ne fé e? un sylphe? un dé - mon *ff*

P. *pp* rei ne? u ne fé e? un sylphe? un dé - mon

f *f* *f* *ff*

Con 8^a

Example 5: Act I Chorus, with Cendrillon on high C

In this Act I ensemble, all the main characters except for la Fée appear. Viardot situates Cendrillon's voice in the topmost line, above that of Maguelonne (coloratura soprano) and Armeline (mezzo-soprano). The Prince (tenor), his good friend Comte Barigoule (tenor), and the Baron de Pictordu (baritone) fill out the lowest voices. Due to la Fée's absence in this ensemble, we cannot draw a comparison here between Cendrillon's voice and her fairy godmother's lyric coloratura. Here, in the absence of the fairy godmother but thanks to her magical intervention, Cendrillon occupies the highest vocal space, with notes as high as la Fée's in Act II.

Viardot writes melismatically for four characters (the Prince, la Fée, and Maguelonne, and Cendrillon); the title character's motion is more functional, stepwise and could be categorized as melisma but not coloratura, unlike her stepsister, the fairy godmother, and the Prince.

Maguelonne as coloratura offers another interesting perspective on Viardot's soprano, as a foil to both Cendrillon and la Fée: Viardot writes Maguelonne's part with a particular need for agility and coloratura, but also dramatic weight – both Maguelonne and Armeline have angular, accented lines that intentionally challenge legato. In this way, Viardot means to contrast Cendrillon's grace with Maguelonne's ugly assertiveness, and la Fée extraordinary, magical nature with Maguelonne's worldly, selfish focus. We are not meant to emulate the stepsisters or trust their vocal direction, even as their vocal writing makes use of the same range, agility and intervallic leaps as Cendrillon's and coloratura that mimics but falls short of la Fée's motion. Maguelonne's coloratura is comparatively as intricate as la Fée's until Act III, when la Fée's triumphant cadenza at Cendrillon's shoe fitting precipitates a lively gavotte and ensemble Finale, as well as the strongest hints towards who Cendrillon and the sfogato really are.

Act II

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The musical score is arranged in three systems. Each system contains a vocal line (C) and a piano accompaniment line (P). The lyrics are in French and are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *f*, and *Surtout*. The score is marked with *Cresc.* and *ff* throughout. The piano accompaniment includes a *red.* marking and an asterisk (*) at the end of each system.

Cresc. *ff*

di - re Je voudrais lui di - re mon â - - me ra -

vis Je vous donnai ma vi - e mon â - - me ra -

ff

red. *

f

- vi - e ra - yon - ne de bon - heur Depuis que je vous

- vi - e ra - yon - ne de bon - heur Depuis que je vous

f

red. *

f *ff*

vis Je vous donnai ma vi - e mon - - â - - me ra -

vis Je vous donnai ma vi - e - mon - - â - - me ra -

Surtout *ff*

red. *

Example 6: Act II Duet with Cendrillon and the Prince³⁷

In Act II, Cendrillon has arrived at the ball, after la Fée has magically dressed and transported her to the palace. The Prince recognizes Cendrillon from her kind attentiveness to him in Act I, when he was disguised as a beggar; now he approaches her disguised as his valet. Her elation at their meeting, and their resulting duet, alters more than Cendrillon's text voicing her disbelief into joy and unison declamations: it moves Cendrillon's vocal line ascends into the upper soprano passaggio, shifting Cendrillon's tessitura a third to a fifth higher than her normal median range. She scales an octave with an arpeggio in a single measure (p. 54), asking if this is a dream, and spends much of the duet in the mezzo range, echoing the Prince's emotionally charged elation.³⁸ Then, wider intervals carry her line into an upper middle tessitura, with quick ascents to climactic, ornamental G5, A5 and B5 above the Prince's evenly mid-range vocal line "my soul" ("mon âme").³⁹ In the final measures of their duet, Cendrillon and the Prince unite ultimately on the word "soul" (Cendrillon A5 / Prince C5), their promises of lifelong devotion finally bringing their lines into synch, rhythmically and harmonically in their final shared phrases.⁴⁰

Act III

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SCÈNE III
CHŒUR DES DAMES

RÉPLIQUE. — J'entends ces Dames qui arrivent. Cédons la place.

Allegretto

PIANO

CHŒUR DES DAMES

Quelle drôle d'aventure.

- tu_re! Essayez u_ ne chaus_su_re!

d'aventu_ re u_ ne chaussure!

Example 7a: Act III Chorus⁴¹

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Et mon sang se pré-ci - pi - te je voudrais prendre la

pré-ci - pi - te je voudrais prendre la

fui - te, je voudrais prendre la fui - te, je voudrais prendre la fui - te..

fui - te, je voudrais prendre la fui - te, je voudrais prendre la fui - te..

Mais la rai_son me dit non, non, non, non, non!

Mais la rai_son me dit non, non, non, non, non!

Attacca marc.

Example 7b: Act III Chorus⁴²

The mysterious woman at the ball has disappeared, leaving the women of the kingdom (Examples 7a-7b) eager to try on the slipper she has left behind. Their chattering vocal lines (“*Quelle drôle d’aventure, essayer une chaussure!*” / “What a silly adventure, trying on a shoe!”) describe Viardot’s own pedagogy and sense of how the chorus parts separate into voice types: the soprano I and IIs center at C5 and F4, with stepwise and arpeggiated movement.⁴³ A third part echoes the first two with a generally lower, weightier line, with intervallic jumps that require both leaps into the passaggio and present low notes.⁴⁴

In the Act III Chorus, Viardot is not overly concerned that the lowest female part (alto), often leaps above the first and second soprano – the writing is pedagogically sound, allowing the voices to operate within an expressive yet accessible range, and in varying the pitches the singers sing rather than locking them into contained sections of the staff, Viardot allows for greater flexibility and interaction between the vocal lines.

ENTRÉE DE CENDRILLON

Quelques arpèges mi bémol puis ;

Essayage de la pantoufle de Cendrillon.

PIANO.

The image shows a page of musical notation. At the top, the title 'ENTRÉE DE CENDRILLON' is centered. Below it, a bass clef staff contains the instruction 'Quelques arpèges mi bémol puis ;' followed by a series of eighth-note chords. The second system is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the instruction 'Essayage de la pantoufle de Cendrillon.' and the dynamic marking 'PIANO.' The music consists of flowing eighth-note patterns in both hands. The third system continues this pattern, ending with a fermata over a final chord.

Example 8: Act III, Scene 5

Act III, Scene 5 includes both a transformation of the Cendrillon theme and la Fée’s laughter and song, in a telling display of the vocal powers and prowess of both characters.

As Cendrillon tries on the slipper, there is a shimmering transformation (in the piano) of her main theme from a slow 2/4 in F minor into a flowing Ab major that mimics the waltz shared with the Prince.⁴⁵ Almost immediately, la Fée’s laughter introduces a lively Finale that concludes the opera.

LA FÉE

Ah!

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef. The title 'LA FÉE' is written above the staff. The vocal line begins with the exclamation 'Ah!' and features a trill on a note, followed by a series of eighth-note runs. The notation includes various ornaments and dynamic markings.

Example 9: Act III, Scene 6⁴⁶

In the Act III Finale (Example 9), la Fée begins a joyful gavotte that Cendrillon quickly picks up, with a subtle twist that signals Cendrillon's personal discoveries and her arrival at a distinct voice type. Cendrillon's is not direct repeat of la Fée's verse – instead, Viardot shifts Cendrillon's melody subtly lower than la Fée's version (Example 9)⁴⁷ – the starting note, tessitura and high notes are the same, but arranged differently, freeing up Cendrillon to new intervals and a weightier timbre. The melodies differ by one step in either direction, barely noticeable and in a subtle shift into Cendrillon's lower range. Without pulling attention away from the unfolding action, Viardot signals the independence of the sfogato's presence, distinct from her fairy godmother and the other treble voices in the cast.

FINALE

LA FÉE.

CHANT. Je viens pour la der-niè-re fois - Etre témoin de ton bon-heur, -

PIANO.

Ton doux re-gard — et ta candeur Ont enchainé ce no-ble cœur,

CENDRILLON.

Oh ma marai - ne Com - ment vous di - re

ce que le cœur pour vous m'ins - pi - re,

Example 10: Act III Finale, gavotte with la Fée and Cendrillon⁴⁸

Viardot places la Fée in the top line of the ensemble Finale, with Cendrillon and la Fée in unison (Example 10) for all but five measures in a sequential chromaticism that leads the others in the harmonic direction that la Fée and Cendrillon agree upon.⁴⁹ The only distinction in their parts (besides la Fée's farewell exclamation, "Je pars, Adieu!") are the closing calls of "Bonheur / Adieu!", which place la Fée (Bb5) and Cendrillon (G5) a third apart.⁵⁰ By making these subtle shifts, Viardot signals that Cendrillon is not a high lyric coloratura, but has come into her own space, a voice of substance and embodiment.

N.B. Le chœur doublera les parties.

LA FEE.
De leur bonheur dans le dé-li

CENDRILLON.
De leur bonheur dans le dé-li

MAGUELONNE.
De leur bon-heur dans

ARMELINDE.
De leur bon-heur dans

LE PRINCE.
De mon bon-heur dans le dé-li

BARIGOULE.
De leur bon-heur dans

PICTORBU.
De leur bon-heur dans

PIANO
P
Ped. * Ped.

Example 11: Act III Finale⁵¹

Here is another subversive but clear indicator of Viardot's own experience: she recognizes that both women occupy the soprano range, even sing the same notes, but the fairy and the servant-made-royalty embody different voices: the coloratura soprano and the sfogato, which Viardot spaces a third apart and separates with a slightly lower melody and weightier timbre in Cendrillon. *Cendrillon* tracks the journey of the lowly servant who sings lower than her mezzo

and soprano sisters into the highest magical reaches of the voice, literally off the top of the staff, into the high notes of a Norma or Lady Macbeth. Notable is how far Cendrillon's stepsisters have fallen, humbly occupying the very range that they had relegated their servant sister to in the opening of Act I. Now, Viardot constricts them to a mid-range supportive part, letting them stray no more than a second or third apart for the remainder of the scene and opera.

In total, la Fée and Cendrillon's parts differ by only six notes total in the post-gavotte conclusion to the opera.⁵² With la Fée bestows a final blessing "Soyez heureux!" on Cendrillon and the court bids her adieu, Cendrillon now permanently a third below her fairy godmother's sustained Bb5 (Example 11).⁵³ Viardot hides this in plain sight: the entire ensemble meditates on the fairy's magical power to reveal ("Oh my godmother/the good fairy in your/her power, watch over my/their happiness forever") as la Fée promises ever to protect Cendrillon, reveling in her power. Viardot uses the fairy godmother to unveil Cendrillon's vocal transformation, revealing what has been hidden from the onlookers, Cendrillon's vain-turned-penitent family: that Cendrillon is agile with a powerfully emotive voice and upper extension. She is the *sfogato* with the wide range, the voice that embodies a deeply felt, dramatic character that undergoes significant transformation, to display to audiences the powerful, grounded woman that Viardot was and the *sfogato* continues to be.

Example 12: Finale⁵⁴

Conclusion

The effects of cis male-centric, class-centric and ethnocentric policies that limited women and minority access in the professional sphere resonate across the art form, its history, pedagogy and future. Because female composers of the nineteenth century endured unequal access to performance of their works, opera and works of larger instrumentation prohibitively expensive. Works like *Cendrillon* are valuable indicators of how composers like Pauline Viardot questioned these power structures and negotiated for further nuance in the Fach system.

In *Cendrillon*, Viardot demonstrates a transformation of the title character through her interactions with others on stage and a revealing of Cendrillon's vocal identity. Rather than centering on one role, Viardot weaves her own dramatic and vocal experience as singer and pedagogue each of the roles, ultimately demonstrating the flexibility of each treble voice and solidifying the uniqueness of the sfogato through Cendrillon's agility to move between Fachs. Viardot accomplishes this without the violence, self-harm or dramatic loss that the industry has come to expect as the culmination of a plot concerning sfogati roles (i.e. Norma, Medée, or even Orfée, a role Viardot was so well known for), instead demonstrating the inherent connection between characters and with the composer herself, through her own embodied vocal experience.

Viardot's *Cendrillon* ultimately creates space for theorists and singers who question the Fach system's treatment of voice types that are discarded as deviant, "between" or nonexistent. Perhaps it is within our grasp to reimagine this corner of the Fach system and ways that it might better serve our pedagogy and vocal identities. The sfogato, which continues to assert its presence on stage and beyond the mezzo/soprano binary, is a testament to the future of opera, that many of our greatest explorations in pedagogy, history and music composition may be yet to come.

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² Warwick and West, *Oxford*, 230; Robinson, “Falcon,” 110.

³ Petsalis-Diomidis, *Callas*, 167; Questa, *L’Aquila*, 182; Riggs, *Assoluta*, 7; Snider, *Search*, 331.

⁴ Riggs, *Assoluta*, 6-7; Snider, *Search*, 333; Miller, *Training*, 92.

⁵ Riggs, *Assoluta*, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Snider, *Search*, 330, 332; Miller, *Training*, 25.

⁸ Miller, *Training*, 25; Weiss, “Zwischenfach”, 9.

⁹ Giddens, “Verdi’s Lady.”

¹⁰ Facci, “Canto.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 82-83.

¹³ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 2006; Clement, *Opera*, 78-79.

¹⁴ BBC, “Ludwig”; Bouvet, *Falcon*, 119; Clement, *Opera*, 78-79; FitzLyon, *Viardot*, 50; Kettle, “Norman”; Lebrecht, “Norman”; Maloney, “Voight”; Millington, “Ludwig”; Potter, *History*, 113; Tommasini, “Verrett.”

¹⁵ Cotton, “Classification,” 62; Weiss, “Zwischenfach”; Harris, “Zwischenfach”; Allen, “Analysis”.

¹⁶ Allen, “Analysis”, 59, 65.

¹⁷ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 98.

¹⁸ Clement, *Opera*, 76.

¹⁹ Schoen-René, 8.

²⁰ Potter, *History*, 113-114.

²¹ *Ibid*, 119.

²² Newark, “Oxford”, 376.

²³ Schoen-René, *Musical Inheritance*, 163.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 163.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 163-64.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 45, 163-64.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 163.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 153.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 44-45.

³⁰ Kloiber, “Handbuch”, 899-905; Zelukin, “Operetta”, 1.

³¹ Viardot, *Cendrillon*, 3.

³² *Ibid*, 11.

³³ *Ibid*, 5-9, 15-18.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 11-12, 15.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 18.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 56.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 54-55.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 56.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 74.

⁴² *Ibid*, 76.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 76.

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- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 74-75.
⁴⁵ Ibid, 79.
⁴⁶ Ibid, 79.
⁴⁷ Ibid, 80.
⁴⁸ Ibid, 80.
⁴⁹ Ibid, 81-85.
⁵⁰ Ibid, 85-86.
⁵¹ Ibid, 81.
⁵² Ibid, 81-86.
⁵³ Ibid, 85.
⁵⁴ Ibid, 85.