

CHAPTER 2

Affirming femininity: women singing, women enabling

DISPLAY AS A PART OF MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

In this section I will suggest that musical performance which takes place in full view of an audience normally contains an element of display. But first, I will present an interpretation of the nature of display itself, quite apart from music.¹ It is helpful to understand display as involving something metaphorically akin to wearing a mask. In these terms, the displayer can be seen as both presenting and protecting himself or herself by virtue of the mask. The mask is then that which is displayed. But display is not so much a single act by a displayer as a relationship, an exchange which is mutually constructed by both the displayer and an onlooker. The mask cannot be imagined by the displayer as something known only to him- or herself; on the contrary, the displayer must be aware of an other, the onlooker, who is also conscious of the mask. The presence and watchfulness of this other are a necessary part in what is a mutual construction of the metaphorical mask. For each participant – displayer and onlooker – the scenario cannot exist without the other. But this is not a mere truism: it is the essence of the relationship, its focal point and *raison d'être*.

The mask has an effect of splitting the displayer in two. From the point of view of the onlooker, the displayer takes on a double form, as both 'other' and 'mask'; from the point of view of the displayer, the self is doubled into 'self' and 'mask'. The mask is the central locus of the exchange. The participant, whether in the role of displayer or onlooker, is in some ways involuntarily captured by the imaginary mask as it is intended by the other; but in other ways, since he or she participates in the active construction of the mask, so can s/he 'play with the mask'

¹ The following discussion derives from a reading of Lacan (1979, pp. 106ff); and is also influenced by Hegel (1977, Preface and pp. 111–19), Marx (1977) and more recent feminist theorists, especially Mulvey (1975).

conceptually. Therefore, although the mask is mutually constructed by both displayer and onlooker, it does not represent any principle of equality between them. On the contrary, display involves the enactment of a mutual power differential. On one hand, the displayer is in the active position, and has the power of the lure, of spectacularity, the possibility of playing with the mask from that point of view; whereas the onlooker is passively in danger of becoming seduced and ensnared by the mask. On the other hand, the displayer is passive, weakened by the necessity to be partially concealed, to present a mask rather like a protective shield on which s/he must rely for the continuation of the relationship; whereas the onlooker has the panoptical, disarming power of the gaze, the possibility of playing with the mask from that point of view.

I wish to make a distinction between what I will call 'institutionalised display' and 'informal display'. By the former, I mean a scenario in which display itself is recognised as an integral part of a performance. Such display will usually take place on a stage or in some space with an equivalent symbolic separation between an audience and the displayer(s). By informal display, on the other hand, I mean a type of display that takes place all around us: in the streets, in the home, in places of leisure and places of work, through the variously suggestive adoption of particular postures, manners, glances, vocal tones, vocal inflections, clothing or other embellishments and accoutrements. Clearly, the two types of display will never be totally separate and are not opposed. Institutionalised display, in particular, may involve many of the nuances of informal display. But institutionalised display is nonetheless distinguishable in so far as it takes place in dedicated surroundings or particular contexts. In what follows, I will concentrate on institutionalised display.

Between the displayer and the onlooker in a musical performance there is not only the mask, but also the music. During the course of Chapters 2 and 3, I will argue that in the display of musical performance mask and music become entwined. In order to help think through this, I want first to posit display as involving two poles, between which we can map the degree of intention to display on the part of the displayer; and I will relate this to musical performance. On one pole is the full intention to display, where display is the sole object of the performance: the striptease, for example. It is not only the naked body² as a thing in itself,

² What exactly is included in the word 'body' is a moot point. When I use the term, I mean it to include the face and hair; and incidentally, in the case of sexual display involving other accoutrements such as underwear or make-up whose fetishistic role in the display may be crucial, these are also included in my use of the words 'bodily display'.

but the intentional act of revealing, the step-by-step construction of the metaphorical mask, that creates the lure here. A fully intentional act of display like this could hardly involve musical performance: the case of a singing strip-tease artiste (male or female), and even more so one who simultaneously plays an instrument is, I gather, rare, and this is undoubtedly because the stripper would be doing something other than displaying the body, thus throwing doubt on his or her full intention to display, distracting the spectator, diluting the mask. In general, a fully intentional act of display does not involve musical performance, and conversely, musical performance rarely has display as its *raison d'être*. Therefore this polar extreme does not itself enter into my discussion, but rather provides a point against which to measure different types of musical performance.

It might at first glance seem that at the opposite pole to the scenario of the striptease is that of the 'peeping Tom'. But this latter scenario does not in fact involve any kind of display at all, since there is no intention on the part of the person who is spied upon: no mask. Rather, at the opposite pole to the striptease, there is a type of display which is unintentional: the fact of inadvertently or even unwillingly putting the body in a position to be gazed at, not for the sake of inviting the gaze, but as a result of some other activity which cannot but involve the body in being looked at. Certain types of musical performance provide prime examples of this polar opposite. At the most extreme is a type of performance which takes place in front of an audience; which is intended to focus exclusively on musical inherent meanings; which is presented as being 'for the sake of the music'; and which participates in a discourse that raises inherent meanings to an autonomous level above social contexts. Even though such performance eschews explicit consideration of everything but inherent meanings, it always also implicitly involves the audience gaze on the body. Unlike the stripper's, the body of the performing musician in this kind of context is a mere off-shoot of the whole scenario: and yet as I hope to illustrate, its effects are never avoided. Every performer will be aware of these effects, as will every spectator, though they might not be involved in alluring or being lured themselves.

Clearly, within the view I have so far put forward, all musical performance in front of an audience would fall somewhere between the two poles, from near fully intended to near unintended display. In the middle, at various points between these two polar extremes, is a partly intended display in which for example a musical performer does intend to display his or her body, and at the same time aims to perform music

'for its own (inherent) sake'. Many nuances and ambiguities are possible, such as a display which is intended to appear unintended, a display which is denied but which is hypocritically and covertly celebrated. Mixtures of intended and unintended display are common in the case of a variety of musical styles and performance practices, the precise position of any one particular performance being determined by a variety of detailed factors which will be explored in the course of Chapters 2 and 3.

So far, I have put my case entirely in terms of live performance in front of an audience. But I now wish to suggest that the elements of display symbolised by the musical performer do not only form an integral part of the relationship between performer and audience in a live situation: they also enter and become intrinsic to musical meaning itself. Just as the type of concert venue, the clothes or the social standing of the audience, for example, contribute to delineated musical meanings, so the intended or unintended display of the performer becomes a part of the delineated meanings of the music he or she performs. Display therefore continues to be a delineation of the music beyond the live setting, entering into the musical experience even when the music is recorded, when the performer is concealed, or when we listen to music with our eyes closed. Then, just as all the abstract delineations of the music are still implicit in our conception, so is the type of bodily display of the performer: a delineation like any other. Furthermore, this display not only acts as an extra-musical association; it goes beyond that, entering into the delineations involved in the listening experience itself. The precise characteristics of the delineation and its effects upon our listening experiences will vary according to the performance and reception contexts, the style of the music and the subject-position of the listener.

One crucial factor which history has injected into the relationship of institutionalised display is an asymmetry according to the sex of the displayer. A male displayer and a female displayer are not the same. The understanding of display suggested above can clearly in theory operate on any axis, involving male or female in either the role of the displayer or that of the onlooker. But human history has dictated that different types of institutionalised display involve quite different connotations and gender-roles. On one hand, highly ritualised, institutionalised display of an intimidatory nature tends to be performed by males. It occurs particularly in pre-industrial communities, and is not merely rare but risqué in the West and many other parts of the world today. When industrial man has occasion to hint at it, in so doing he to some extent retrieves an element of lost masculinity from the recesses of mythology. The

unusualness of such display is dramatically brought home by the New Zealand All-Blacks rugby team in their ritual show of strength and aggression which takes place at the beginning of the match. Although such intimidatory display by males does, in rare circumstances such as this, occur in post-industrial society today, it has for a long time been virtually non-existent.

On the other hand, and in direct contrast, the institutionalised displaying act in the realm of sexuality has a high profile in Western society, not being limited to striptease joints, but encompassing a wide variety of performance rituals including musical performance. Sexual display may be enacted by a man or a woman, but in its more overt forms such as sex-shows, it overwhelmingly tends to be enacted by women. More significantly, in whatever form it occurs and regardless of the actual biological sex of the displayer, the symbolic resonances of overt sexual display connote 'femininity'.³ In sum, the most common institutionalised type of display and the most normal deployment of gender-roles within the relationship of display in the West involve an explicitly or implicitly sexual display in which the displayer is coded as 'feminine' and the spectator as 'masculine'.

It follows that male and female musical performers cannot have a symmetrical relationship to their audience. Indeed, the male performer has been implicitly or explicitly affected by the historical determinants which, I have argued, have made display a predominantly feminine act. The characterisation of musical performance as a 'feminine pastime' has for centuries negatively affected the availability of vocal and instrumental music education for boys, compared to girls, especially in families that had no need to earn their living; and as we will see, this characterisation still forms a considerable portion of contemporary attitudes amongst boys and girls themselves in schools. Furthermore, many writers have noted a tendency for music itself to feminise, and they have located a corresponding fear on the part of musicians, musicologists and music lovers. In an ideological conflation of effeminacy with homosexuality, this fear has surfaced in the form of homophobic denials and the writing-out of any hint of homosexuality in musical historiography or criticism. The extent of the fortifications defending the hegemony of

³ Robertson (1993) gives an interesting analysis of the fluid, ambivalent and androgynous sexualities that are available to Hawaiian people, and of ways in which these are enacted partly through musical practices. She suggests that there are also many other cultures without polarised sexual differentiation (p. 122). It is necessary not to override this or to overlook the presence of homosexuality in all cultures. My argument is that within the West, display is coded as 'feminine' as distinct from female, and that the position of spectator is a 'masculine', not necessarily a male, one.

male heterosexuality in musical patriarchy and the mechanisms which have kept at bay the threat of effeminacy and homosexuality in the world of music have been the topic of ground-breaking recent work.⁴

But the female musical performer has quite a different relationship to the feminising powers of musical display. Not for her is this the overt and contradictory problem that it can be for the Western male. The fact that girl and women musical performers are always to some extent close to being thrown into a world of feminine sexual display is not at odds with historically constructed definitions of their femininity. It is not a throwing out into something new, something contradictory, but a throwing back to where they have, discursively, originated. Indeed, this self-recurring cycle of reference from the female back to the feminine is one of the intrinsic and enduring symbolic elements of female musical performance which is so eloquently portrayed by Thomas Campion, in his poem reprinted in Chapter 1. To summarise my argument: whatever their intentions and whatever the performance situation, male and female musical performers are both thrown into a world of display. But for the male performer, this contradicts his discursive position as masculine; whereas for the female performer, it affirms her discursive position as feminine.⁵

⁴ On accusations of, and reactions against effeminacy in music, see for example McClary (1991), Walser (1993), Citron (1993), Tick (1993) and Chapter 4, pp. 89, 98f below. On expositions of homophobia in the musicological establishment see the powerful arguments in Brett, Thomas and Wood (1994), especially the introductory chapter by Koestenbaum (1994b), and the examinations of musicology's efforts to protect the hegemony of heterosexuality with reference to the musicological icons of Handel, Schubert and Britten, by Thomas (1994), McClary (1994) and Brett (1994) respectively.

⁵ Mulvey's (1975) seminal article, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', argued that women in Hollywood films functioned as the passive objects of the male gaze. Also see further critical work on this in Mulvey (1989), Kaplan (1984), de Lauretis (1987), Silverman (1988). Although her analysis has influenced my thinking and contains some points in common with the position offered here, there are some qualitative differences between the significance of display by actresses and actors on film and that of display by musicians, either live or on film. In the filmed scenario involving acting, the distribution of power between displayer and spectator is less dialectical than in the scenario of live musical performance. In films the camera intervenes between the displayer and the onlooker. The woman portrayed as Mulvey describes her, languishing passively in the film, has no control over that camera, its angles, its choice of focus. But in live musical performance, it is the music which intervenes, becoming entwined with the mask. The displayer, whether it is a man or a woman, does have a significant control over the music: the displayer is in fact the immediate source of the music. Live musical performance therefore affords a special type of power to the performer which is denied to the passive object of the film camera: the power of control over the music. I will say more about this later in the chapter.

In the case of filmed musical performance or music videos, there is a mixture of the two perspectives offered here. The display of the performer on film or video is more or less affected according to how much the performance appears to be live or to be dubbed. Where the performance is clearly live, as on a film of a symphony orchestra or a video of a heavy metal band on

MUSICAL MEANING AND THE DISPLAY OF THE WOMAN SINGER

In Chapter 1 (pp. 13–15) I put forward a view of patriarchy as involving a separation of the public from the private sphere, and as coinciding with a practical and symbolic tendency for not only men and women but also masculinity and femininity to be associated with the public and private spheres respectively. Masculinity tends to be defined as active, rational, inventive, experimental, scientific, unified, as a catalyst to culture and an emblem of the controlling powers of mind; femininity tends to be defined as passive, reproductive, caring, emotional, contrary, as a part of nature, controlled by the body. Men and women do not just adhere to immovable conventions: they both collude and resist in the adoption of practical roles and of symbolic gender characteristics. However, when they do cross over into the different spheres or adopt unconventional gender characteristics, they tend to carry with them residues of more normative associations. I now wish to suggest that women's singing, whether or not it crosses into the public sphere, largely reproduces and affirms patriarchal definitions of femininity.

The concept of affirmation, as used in this context, contains a deliberate ambiguity. On one hand, if femininity itself is regarded only as oppressed, manipulated, or in other negative terms, then the 'affirmation of femininity' would always refer to an oppressive process, a manipulative tendency, and as such, it would be seen as an object of critique. On the other hand, if the furthering of oppression, manipulation or other negativities was the only implication of the concept of affirming femininity, this would suggest that femininity itself possesses no liberating potential, no positive attributes, no attraction, indeed, either for women or for men. But if that were so, we could never begin to think about why people should have gone to so much effort, historically, in their interactions and in their cultural products, to preserve and reproduce femininity. Far from having purely negative connotations, the concept of the affirmation of femininity also connotes positive aspects. In short, femininity (and masculinity also) has bad sides and good sides, both for those who adopt it and for those who contemplate it; therefore the concept of the affirmation of femininity, likewise, carries both negative and positive connotations.

stage, an element of musical power is retained, although it is diluted by the interjection of the camera. Where the performance is obviously dubbed, as on popular music videos in which band members are seen playing and singing in acoustics that are totally at odds with those of the sound-track, the power of the performers is accordingly reduced, and their passivity increased.

As with all musical performance, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the woman singer is on display and is therefore engaged in an activity which, I have argued, is already coded as 'feminine'. It is helpful to pinpoint four particular aspects of women's vocal display which make it particularly affirmative of femininity.⁶ First, display involves the construction of a metaphorical mask, a shield which both protects and draws attention to the body. As I mentioned earlier, the fully intentional displayer is unlikely to do anything other than display, unlikely therefore to sing and even less likely to play an instrument. Although not completely absorbed in display, the singer is, however, close to complete absorption, because of the intricate connection, indeed the unity, of the displaying body itself with the instrumental source of the singing. The voice is the one musical instrument whose sound-production mechanisms have no intrinsic links with anything outside the body. Rather, the voice springs from the body, entirely and (until modern amplification, which I will discuss later) without any extraneous aid. The body is the instrument. The singing woman is, literally and metaphorically, in tune with her body. At the same time, she is prey to its vicissitudes, which are dangerously present in the ready susceptibility of the voice. This embodied quality of vocal display is one reason for latitude towards the woman singer: embodied, she is no threat. But, contrastingly, as I noted earlier, danger lurks behind any mask. The woman singer, in her self-possessedness and her ability to lure, is invested with a power that is unavailable to onlookers, which becomes a threat that can only increase any potential fear and, therefore, aggression. This is one source of antipathy towards women singers, articulated as the habitual fear of the onlooker that s/he may become ensnared in the mask. In this typically contrary position, safely embodied yet dangerously alluring, femininity is affirmed.

The second way in which I wish to suggest that singing affirms patriarchal definitions of femininity is to do with the absence of technology in singing. Within patriarchy, man is constructed as being in control of nature through the harnessing of technology, woman as a part of the nature that man controls. No extraneous object to be controlled by the singing woman interrupts her construction of the metaphorical mask of display, since the musical sound-source of her performance remains

⁶ For alternative critical examinations of women's voices and their symbolic manifestations, see Wood (1994) and the collection edited by Dunn and Jones (1994). I will return to some issues raised by these later. For the symbolism involved in the displacement of the woman's vocal range into the body of the castrated male, see Dame (1994).

locked in the body. The sight and sound of the woman singing therefore affirms the correctness of the fact of what is absent: the unsuitability of any serious and lasting connection between woman and instrument, woman and technology. Although the woman singer's metaphorically masked body itself may be a threat, its lack of potentiality to act upon an other object in the world is a relief. Because the spheres of nature and the body are associated with femininity and divorced from masculinity, and because singing involves the intended or unintended display of the body with no interrupting technology, the scenario of a woman singing leaves this association firmly in place. In this way the woman singer can continue to appeal to nature, to be natural; and her real ability to manipulate technology is temporarily effaced.

Thirdly, along with this contrary but (commensurately) entirely feminine vision, the image of the paid female singer who puts body and voice on public display has inevitably been associated in practically all known societies with that of the sexual temptress or prostitute.⁷ Although not engaged in a fully intentional act of display, the singing woman in a public arena is dangerously, and tantalisingly, close to doing so. For this reason she is a threat and, as such, is open to abuse.

Fourthly, this very association with public sexual availability is opposed to an alternative face of woman which has always been present as the corollary of availability: the image of the mother privately singing to her baby, a practice which is allowed in all known cultures, and which must be one of the few universal customs of humanity. The connection between the public woman singer and her sexual availability has been made for millennia, just as has that between the private singer of lullabies and her maternal care. Thus the age-old dichotomy of woman as whore/madonna is reproduced in her musical practice as a singer.⁸

These four characteristics of femininity – the self-possessed yet alluring concentration on the body, the association with nature, the appearance of sexual availability and the symbolisation of maternal preoccupation – are affirmed and reproduced in the act of display

⁷ For a general discussion of the links between women musicians and sexual availability with reference to ethnomusicology, see Koskoff (1987c), as well as the other ethnomusicological sources cited in Chapter 1, note 8, p. 13 above. I have also been informed by Murphy (1993), Lamburn (1991) and Doubleday (1991); and I would like to thank Naseem Ahmed for doing some research into Islamic writings on my behalf, and submitting to a lengthy taped interview on the subject with special reference to Pakistan and the Pakistani diaspora. I am not saying that all female vocal performance is always associated with sexual availability, but that some of it inevitably is.

⁸ Again see the ethnographic literature and the references in note 5 above; see also Koskoff (1987b), (1993) who gives interesting analyses of a related range of issues as they emerge with relation to Hasidic Jewish culture in New York.

invoked by women's singing. The contradictions which they involve, far from representing logically alternative or mutually exclusive positions, actually go together, to articulate a space in which femininity is constructed as contrary, desirable but dangerous, sexually available but maternally preoccupied. When we hear music sung by a woman, amongst a multitude of delineations arising from the music's production, distribution and reception contexts, there will be a gendered delineation: a delineation of her display, her femininity.

The voice has a peculiar characteristic in respect of gendered delineation. Unlike instrumental musical sounds, the voice in practically all cases betrays the sex of its perpetrator. Voice and sex are immediately connected. In those few cases where a listener consciously cannot tell whether the singer is a man, woman, boy or girl, this in itself becomes a matter of a certain interest.⁹ Because of the apparently immediate connection between voice and sex, the sound of a voice always appears to participate in the construction not only of gendered delineations but also of somehow gendered inherent meanings. But in fact the participation in inherent meaning is no different from that of any other instrument. The sound of a singing voice, including the tessitura, the pronunciation of vowels and consonants, the technique of breathing, the use of the throat to affect tone-colour, the use of diaphragmatic support, the level of vocal flexibility and control over dynamics, rhythm, intonation, phrasing: all these factors that go to make up a vocal musical performance are judgeable or have meaning with reference to the norms and measures of excellence of the appropriate style of music, in so far as the listener is competent to make his or her judgement. As such the voice carries and participates in the construction of inherent meanings. The voice will also be judged or will take on meanings in accordance with the type of display which the song, its context and the listener are between them able to invoke, and it is with reference to such areas only that the voice transmits delineated meanings.¹⁰

The contradictions contained in the fourfold delineation of the woman singer, described above, have been translated into a continuing saga of controversy throughout the history of music, concerning

⁹ See Dame (1994) on voice, gender and sexuality with reference to castrati, and Castle (1993) on the subversion of vocal identity.

¹⁰ The cultural resonance of vocal quality has been the subject of a considerable amount of discussion, some of which has been sparked off by Barthes' celebrated essay 'The Grain of the Voice' (1977). Again see the references in note 6 above, plus: Middleton (1990, esp. pp. 261–6), Frith and McRobbie (1978, esp. pp. 384–5), Laing and Taylor (1979, esp. pp. 46–7), Frith (1985), Shepherd (1987, pp. 164ff), Moore (1993, pp. 41–7).

whether, how much, where and when women should or should not be allowed to sing. Women have at all times been more free to sing than to play, and considerably more free to sing than to compose, but not to the extent of being wholly licensed. On the contrary, the vicious circle of opposition that I highlighted in Campion's depiction of the singer Lawra in Chapter 1 expresses itself in the fact that, to differing degrees at various times in history, women have been allowed to sing and criticised for singing, admired and disdained. This history of allowance and refusal of the woman singer illustrates and informs our present-day constructions, in which we continue to reproduce affirmative feminine display-delineations.

Women singing in classical music

In ancient civilisation it seems that there was little or no prejudice against women musicians of all kinds.¹¹ However, this situation gradually changed, presaging a cycle which was to revolve throughout the remaining history of the woman singer: upsurges of antipathetic reaction at various times, giving way at others to greater leniency. During the fourth century women were discouraged and eventually prohibited from singing in church,¹² a fact which was to affect their vocal practices for quite a few hundred years to come. From that time nuns, who formed about 15 per cent of the cloistered community (Yardley 1986, p. 15), were allowed to sing in the chapel of the convent, even in mixed settings. At a time when male musicians were beginning to enjoy brilliant careers in church and court, the convent provided women with the only institutionalised career opportunity in music open to them, and it is typical that this centred around singing: the role of cantrix, which was equivalent to the monasteries' cantor.¹³

¹¹ On women and music in antiquity and beyond to the fifteenth century see Meyers (1993), Teeter (1993), Toulaitos (1993), Gergis (1993), Michelini (1991), Bogin (1980), Yardley (1986), Coldwell (1986), Marshall (1993a), Edwards (1991). In discussing women's musical history I am indebted to a number of sources for the factual information on which I draw. Information on the history of women in music has expanded rapidly in recent years and is now readily accessible. Amongst several other helpful publications, I would recommend the following as a balanced selection of starting-points for any interested reader new to the field: Ammer (1980), Block and Neuls-Bates (1979), Bowers and Tick (1986), Brisco (1987), A. Cohen (1988), Dahl (1984), S. Fuller (1994a), Gaar (1993), Handy (1981), Jezic (1988), Kent (1983), LePage (1980), Marshall (1993b), Neuls-Bates (1982), L. O'Brien (1994), Pendle (1991b), Placksin (1985), Sadie and Samuel (1994), Steward and Garratt (1984), Zaimont et al. (1984), (1987), (1991).

¹² Bowers and Tick (1986, p. 4), Neuls-Bates (1982, p. xii).

¹³ Yardley (1986), Kendrick (1993) Pendle (1991a).

Nuns may have been the only institutionalised quasi-professional musicians, but there were also bands of travelling musicians which included women singers, and there were singing slave girls working in courts in southern Spain (Coldwell 1986, p. 43). On the amateur side, noblewomen and wealthy women were highly cultured and domestically musically educated. Although they undertook household management as their main occupation, they learned music as an accomplishment, in which activity they enjoyed no greater conventional restrictions than did their male counterparts. Both noblewomen and noblemen performed simple vocal monodies, often accompanying themselves on a stringed instrument.¹⁴ From the fifteenth through to the eighteenth century all over Europe, nuns continued their vocal pursuits, and noblewomen continued to sing in domestic settings as a leisure activity. Travelling bands of musicians began to represent less of a social force, but the on-going trend of dramatic players lent a place to women, who began to sing on stage for the first time during the sixteenth century.¹⁵ Other women had vocal careers in music, mainly in courts, and increasingly in the opera house.¹⁶

The question of whether women and girls should be allowed to sing was the subject of widespread debate, which arose with particular concentration in the middle of the sixteenth century¹⁷ and continued to be a source of controversy for some two or three hundred years. The Council of Trent placed restrictions on the vocal practices of nuns, including banning them from singing polyphonic music.¹⁸ Following this, a series of regulations, particularly in Ferrara and Milan, offer an extraordinary history of seemingly frantic attempts on the part of clergy to prevent nuns from music-making outside the chapel, right into the eighteenth century, when in 1728 the force of continuing resistance to these rules by some nuns finally caused the Pope to intervene (Bowers 1986, pp. 139–45).

Amongst women outside the convents, one of the most notable breaks into professional singing since antiquity occurred in Italy in the 1580s, when the first group of women singers to be paid by a court was formed at Ferrara.¹⁹ This development was greeted with a mixture of disdain

¹⁴ Coldwell (1986), Brown (1986), Edwards (1991), Pendle (1991a).

¹⁵ Newcomb (1986, pp. 102f), Pendle (1991a, pp. 38f).

¹⁶ See Bowers (1986), Rosand (1986), Sadie (1986), Pendle (1991a), Jackson (1991), Ehrlich (1985).

¹⁷ Neuls-Bates (1982), Bowers (1986), Rosand (1986), Newcomb (1986), Brown (1986), Jackson (1991), Austern (1989), (1994).

¹⁸ Bowers (1986, pp. 141ff) dates this specific decree as 1563; also see Jackson (1991, p. 64, where the date is printed as 1553).

¹⁹ Newcomb (1986, pp. 92, 95f), Pendle (1991a, pp. 39–44).

and admiration from different parties. In 1581 Duke Alfonso d'Este of Ferrara took the *concerto* to the court of Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga in Mantua. A witness wrote:

[Duke Alfonso,] having with great ceremony caused His Excellency [Duke Guglielmo] to hear the music of these ladies, was expecting to hear them praised to the skies. Speaking loudly enough to be heard both by the ladies and by the duchesses who were present [Duke Guglielmo] burst forth, 'Ladies are very impressive indeed – in fact, I would rather be an ass than a lady.' And with this he rose and made everyone else do so as well, thus putting an end to the singing. (Cited in Newcomb 1986, p. 92)

It is both despite and because of such antipathy in some quarters that the female singing group quickly became exceedingly popular in others. By 1600 every Italian court had one, and a woman could aim for a professional career as a singer, both in a vocal consort and as a soloist, commanding in some cases an extraordinarily high salary.²⁰ At the same time, women began to perform more widely on the operatic stage. Some of the women singers retained fairly respectable reputations, others did not. One of the most famous and notorious of them (who also achieved renown as a composer) performed in seventeenth-century Venice in a literary men's club with the backing of her father: Barbara Strozzi.²¹ Like many women singers, she suffered public abuse and accusations of sexual licence. She may indeed have been a courtesan of some sort (Rosand 1986, p. 172); but what is telling is that, had she been a non-singing courtesan, of whom there must have been hundreds, she would presumably not have inspired a public debate about her 'virtue'. When music enters the mask of display, it complicates the meanings of the relationship.

From the sixteenth right through to the twentieth century, it is no exaggeration to say that singing has continued to represent by far the greatest musical performance opportunity available to women, in both the amateur, domestic sphere and the professional, public sphere. Although the history of the woman singer has continued to be marked by controversy, overall the heat of the debate has gradually diminished. Today in the classical fields of opera and song as well as choral music, the woman singer is an unremarkable phenomenon who is granted due recognition for her ability to manipulate and interpret the inherent meanings of the music she sings, and who is able to operate without any

²⁰ Bowers (1986, p. 123), Newcomb (1986, p. 101), Jackson (1991).

²¹ See Rosand (1986); also Jackson (1991, pp. 51–4). See Ehrlich (1985) for notorious women singers in England at the time and later.

apparent restrictions or disapproval on grounds of her sex. However, it would be naive to view this situation as an unmitigated exception to the norms of patriarchy. It does not represent women's release from the mutually constructed power differential between women and men; rather, it re-enacts this differential symbolically in the delineations of the music.

Just as delineated meanings in the dominant discourse surrounding classical music have been denied in favour of raising supposedly autonomous inherent meanings to a transcendent and universal level over and above carnal and mortal life, so the discourse around classical music today involves a denial that bodily display is any part of the music's meaning at all. This situation has gone hand in hand with the development of a large cohort of women singers, who have carved out a position which occupies one of the furthest ends of the polar distinction that I drew earlier between different types of display. The inherent meanings of the music they sing, in accordance with the discourse surrounding the music, are at the forefront of their music's delineations. Any gendered delineations arising from their performance are hastily swept away in favour of their own and their music's commitment to inherent meanings. Classical music's delineated autonomy and its focus on inherent meaning mean that people are not supposed to go to classical concerts or operas in order to gaze at the body of the singer; indeed those listeners who subscribe to this classical discourse would probably deny it with a metaphorical wave of the hand if they found themselves gazing.

But even in cases where display might be unintended by the performer and unsought by the audience, and no matter how many screens and veils are placed in front of it, the display of the singing woman is inescapable. In the discourse of classical music, her display is at the least legitimated by a sheen of 'respectability' as in the adoption of 'dress codes'; it is very often highlighted by spotlights whilst the audience remains shrouded in darkness; and it can even go so far as to be risqué, particularly when an operatic character such as Carmen or Salomé provides a convenient justification. The symbolic resonance of the singing woman is inescapably gendered, and this gendered quality is affirmative of patriarchal definitions of femininity: femininity as embodied and alluring, in control of yet subject to the vicissitudes of the body, integral with nature, available and desirable yet preoccupied and maternal, unpredictable, contrary. It is precisely because singing reproduces 'femininity', I would suggest, that women singers have for so long been able to

occupy so prominent a place in the cultural sphere. Allowing women to sing in the home, in the convent or in public has never been a simple latitude. On the contrary, singing symbolically articulates and reproduces some of the enduring definitions of femininity which legitimate the very need for controlling women's activities in the first place. In a nutshell, allowing women to sing proves 'femininity', and thus justifies the need to control them.

If women's freedom to sing cannot be taken to represent any thorough challenge to patriarchy, neither should it be denied some powers of resistance. As I have already indicated, display invokes a mutual power differential between the displayer and the onlooker. The displayer is not merely a passive object but can gain an element of active control which is invested in the power of the lure. The display of musical performance also affords a different kind of power, through the control and manipulation of the music itself. Abbate (1993) argues that the woman opera singer derives a certain authority, and slips into a 'male/active/subject' position (p. 254), through being aurally resonant: 'her musical speech drowns out everything in range, and we sit as passive objects, battered by that voice' (p. 254). The phenomenology of live performance makes it possible for a singer, more than any other musical performer, she argues, to 'wrest the composing voice away from the librettist and composer. . . ' (p. 254). In its most excessive forms such a phenomenon can be metaphorically linked to the concept of display, as a 'display of virtuosity'.

The woman singer is also able to resist patriarchal constructions of femininity, and furthermore to articulate alternative constructions of femininity, in ways that are deeply plumbed by Wood's (1994) invocation of what she calls the 'Sapphonic voice'. This voice indicates more than 'overtones and resonances' of voice production and of the body, being rather a 'mode of' articulation, a way of describing a space of lesbian possibility, for a range of erotic and emotional relationships among women who sing and women who listen' (p. 27). Wood pins the voice on particular nineteenth- and early twentieth-century opera singers who articulated this possibility in multiple symbolic and practical ways: through the challenge their voices represented to normal vocal characterisations such as soprano or contralto, female-sounding or male-sounding; through the character of their voices, which were 'powerful and problematic, defiant and defective' (p. 28); through the sexual ambiguity or the feminine strength portrayed by their most hailed operatic roles; through the shrouded and suggestive secrecy or the lesbianism and passion of their private lives.

I call this voice Sapphonic for its resonance in sonic space as lesbian difference and desire . . . Its refusal of categories and the transgressive risks it takes act seductively on a lesbian listener for whom the singer serves as messenger, her voice as vessel, of desire.

Castle (1993) also writes revealingly of lesbian desire articulated in relation to the mezzo-soprano diva; and Pope (1994) indicates through her interpretation of George Eliot's verse drama *Armstrong* how Eliot celebrated both the real, economic power and the symbolic, musical power of the nineteenth-century diva. Equally fascinating recent writing by gay men reveals yet another area in which the woman singer wields power. In a mode of resistance and criticality towards the mainstream patriarchal discourse on opera, the gay response introduces the persona and voice of the diva in an act of 'worship' asserted against heterosexual or homophobic respectability.²² This dual power of display – both bodily display and the display of vocal virtuosity – creates a symbolic fissure in the affirmation of patriarchal definitions of femininity that, even in supposedly autonomous classical music, are otherwise produced and reproduced through women's vocal performance.²³

Women singing in jazz and popular music

Women's involvement with singing passes over into the realms of jazz, popular music and almost all other vocal forms that have developed in varying degrees of contradistinction to what has become known as classical music through the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Here, on most levels, the delineations of display operate in much the same way as in classical music, and for the same reasons. Thus, with reference to the four areas that I outlined earlier, in a nutshell: first, the woman singer continues to appear masked and enclosed in her body; secondly, this helps to affirm her closeness to nature and her alienation from technology; thirdly, public singing calls into question her sexual life; fourthly, she is contrarily counterposed as an image of maternal perfection in the domestic setting. As in classical music, there are also some ways in which she escapes patriarchal definition.

One of these ways is discernible in the source of a vast proportion of

²² See Koestenbaum (1994a), M. Morris (1993) for vivid examples of this. Also see Bradby (1993a), Mockus (1994) for accounts of different ways in which lesbians relate to the identity of pop performers.

²³ An engaging analysis of attitudes that prevailed towards the singing woman at the turn of the century can be found in Raitt (1992), which shows how three portraits of women singers by John Singer Sargent convey messages about their sexuality within the terms of the era.

jazz and popular music, which lies in the conjunction of European and African musical styles wrought by the slaves of the southern USA. The anonymous 'voodoo queens' of New Orleans, some of whom amassed considerable influence and fortune, were probably the most important transmitters of slave music during the nineteenth century (Dahl 1984, pp. 6f). Their singing fed into the women's blues and tent show traditions and beyond, in the persons of – for example – Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, later followed by Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and others. Black women also took an active role in domestic and church singing, eventually making gospel an area in which women have without question excelled.²⁴ The display-delineations of many of the women singers of this music seem to break out of patriarchal definitions of femininity's embodied yet threatening attractiveness. Contrasting with the affirmation of femininity enacted by women singers throughout history, the performance delineations of the blues women challenged the historically constructed submission of women to their bodies and to domesticity, highlighting instead their migrancy, their physical and their economic independence. The blues women mocked the virgin/whore dualism by standing altogether outside it: they were constructed as both sexually active *and* maternal, never counterposing sexual availability with the image of the perfect wife and mother; nor were they necessarily heterosexual.²⁵ Like their colleagues in classical music such as those located by Abbate, Wood and others mentioned above (pp. 35–6), they harnessed the power of the lure, of spectacularity, and the power of the voice to establish a control over their audience and to represent a position of feminine strength.

The moment of optimism which these singers helped to make possible was short-lived, as Southern Black people's visions of freedom and even integration faded into an urban nightmare. There are a host of complex political and economic reasons for this, among them reasons connected with a wider social framework of oppression that cuts across gender: race. In the blues woman's struggle for independence, dominant musical discourse finally forced her image to conform not only to patriarchal but also to hegemonic racial definitions: along with her display of strength came the inevitable corollary of atavism. The Black singer of both sexes has been eulogised as the essence of what makes humans human: close to nature, wounded, betrayed and abused, yet with a

²⁴ See Dahl (1984), Placksin (1985) for excellent standard histories of women in jazz.

²⁵ See Carby (1990), Antelyes (1994) for informative and critical appraisals of the social and musical significance and influence of Bessie Smith and other blues women.

'human spirit' that lifts above the carnal level, through which he or she issues forth a universal song. The Black woman in this role ends up in one of her most familiar symbolic positions, as Earth-Mother, goddess.²⁶

There are some further significant differences between the way that display functions in classical singing and the way it functions in non-classical singing (with gradations, of course, between the two). One difference is articulated by women singers such as the performance artist Laurie Anderson, who make use of technology as part of the inherent meanings of their music (see McClary 1991). They threaten in some ways to break out of definitions of femininity, by challenging women's alienation from technology. This puts them in a similar position to instrumental performers, who will be discussed in the next chapter. On the other hand, women whose voices are altered or otherwise alienated from their bodies through technology wielded not by the women themselves but by producers are in a quite different position. I will return to this shortly. In general, the amplification or recording of the voice does not interfere with the appearance of naturalness and bodily containment of the singer.

Another more thoroughgoing difference between display in classical and in popular singing involves those aspects of the discourse on music that arise from the relationship between inherent and delineated meanings. In the discourse that surrounds classical music, inherent meanings are lionised as having overriding importance. Display is made to operate as an inadvertent by-product of performance, and display delineations, like all delineations, are minimised, ignored or even denied. This lack of acknowledgement of display is symptomatic of the discursive construction of autonomy that accompanies the mediation of classical music. The same thing actually occurs in those styles of relatively autonomous popular music which delineate a high level of commitment to inherent meanings, such as various types of progressive rock, and also in some jazz. Differences between classical and non-classical music begin to arise most clearly with those styles of popular music in which delineations are unashamedly at the forefront of the musical meanings. Just as many

²⁶ An example of how this discourse runs is provided by Wilfrid Mellers (1986), who, for all his love and admiration, or more likely because of it, could not help succumbing. The history of the relationship between race and popular music and jazz is very complicated, and I have had to put it outside the bounds of this study. For a discussion of race and gender with reference to Billie Holiday see Brackett (1995), pp. 40ff. For an exhilarating polemic on the political implications of constructions of race and music see Tagg (1989); for a different enquiry into the links in the social construction of race and gender in music, Treitler (1993); for scholarly examinations of African American music itself, its effects and its social contexts, Floyd (1995), Maultsby (1990), Jones (1963). White women also sang jazz, one of the earliest respected and most famous examples being Connie Boswell. See Ammer (1980), Dahl (1984), Hassinger (1987).

kinds of popular music have for a long time worn their delineations on their sleeves, just as much popular music performance practice tends to make a great deal of display and spectacularity, so many popular musicians intentionally capitalise on it, and the discourse on popular music readily testifies to its importance. Indeed, as I noted in Chapter 1, typically the discourse on popular music – as it is found in rock journalism in particular – addresses itself to everything but the inherent meanings of the music, the topics of the body and corporeality being very much in vogue at the present time. Here, the delineation of display is no mere offshoot but frequently a central factor. With reference to women singing, the sorts of music that provide examples include that of girl groups and popular solo female vocalists.

In the discourse surrounding a particular style or a particular performance of music, when inherent meanings are of less prominent importance and delineations are more overt, then it is more commensurate for the singer to pay relatively more attention to displaying the body. Like all other musical and general cultural meanings (including, therefore, those circulating around classical music), attractiveness is not something owned by the singer. Rather it is built up around singers, through their engagement with other networks of meaning including fashion, and of course through the type of display which they enact. Attractiveness is to some extent discursively constructed, not possessed. The degree of attention paid to displaying the body can be understood in terms of the construction of 'attractiveness'. As such, 'attractiveness' becomes part of the delineated meanings of the music. What often occurs in the sort of situation where display is forefronted is that the mere fact of the delineated attractiveness of the female singer causes listeners to downplay her ability and commitment with respect to the execution of inherent meanings. The more she goes in for displaying her body, the less likely it is that she is a 'good' musician. Likewise, the overt forefronting of display leads listeners to assume that the inherent meanings of the music are of relatively little importance or value. Listeners then hear the inherent meanings in a way which is influenced by their understanding of the delineated display. I will now indicate some of the ways in which these assumptions are played out.

Dating back to the beginnings of commercial white popular music in the Victorian music hall and musical comedy, some women's massive fame was partly due to the fact that 'the commodity being marketed was as much female sexuality as musical talent' (Russell 1987, p. 8). Jazz and blues women singers too have only in rare cases, such as those famous

names I have cited above, been respected, like their classical counterparts, for their ability to manipulate inherent meanings. In most cases, achieving respect for the control and interpretation of inherent meanings as a woman singer of any ethnic origin in jazz has been extremely difficult, not only for general widespread and ill-defined chauvinist reasons, but because of the display-delineations that accompany the fact of a woman singer. In the main, even the more professionally successful type of jazz women singers were most prominent as soloists (often called 'canaries'), dressed in party frocks, backed by male bands and receiving low pay and even lower respect.²⁷ As an example of the sort of terms in which they were understood:

Ask any ten bandleaders as to their pet headache . . . nine will answer 'girl vocalists' . . . Yes, girl vocalists are a nuisance. Too many of them are beautiful, and can't sing. Those who have talent are usually gobbled up by the movies or shrewd promoters who exploit them . . . [But] no matter what stand you take, you can't deny that a beautiful girl in front of a mike looks pretty good to the paying males. (*Swing* magazine, October 1938, cited in Dahl 1984, p. 124)

The mere familiarity of such talk, even despite or perhaps because of its vitriol, is enough to support my argument: the more that sexual attractiveness becomes part of the delineations, the less respect is paid to the singer's ability to manipulate and understand inherent meanings. The ability of the singer is judged, not in terms of her management or interpretation of inherent meanings, but in terms of her delineated display. Conversely, of course, the less 'attractive' the singer is deemed to be, the more listeners can suppose that she is 'good'. Otherwise, why else would she be standing there singing?

To be sure, it cannot always be the case that a woman is *unfairly* denigrated as a singer. Clearly there is relatively good and relatively bad singing by both men and women. Listeners will make judgements about this in terms of the music's style, in relation to their own knowledge of performance practice within that style. But what happens when the woman singer is judged to be musically incompetent, that is, unable to manipulate inherent meanings, independently of any judgement that she is indulging in overt sexual display? The signifying chain then simply occurs in reverse, a process which is poignantly portrayed in a scene of the film *Nashville* (Robert Altman, 1975). A rather weak and seriously deluded young woman with dreams of being a country and western star finally gets her chance to go on stage. But her singing is inadequate, and

²⁷ Dahl (1984, pp. 121, 122-3); also see Placksin (1985); and the discussion in Brackett (1995), pp. 40ff.

the jeers which soon begin to greet her make it apparent that her embarrassed and confused decision to change her act and take her clothes off instead was the right one from the audience's point of view. Not only do the display-delineations of women singers suggest that the singer is incompetent to the degree that her bodily display is forefronted; but the more incompetent she is taken to be, the more she must be forced to pay attention to displaying her body.

Girl vocal harmony groups have spanned the 1930s to the present, most notably the tradition that started in the 1950s with the Chantels, and led to the Ronnettes, the Supremes, the Three Degrees and beyond.²⁸ One response to the girls' implicit loss of respectability, on the part of record companies in the USA of the fifties and sixties, was to promote an appearance of super-respectability. The Chantels, for example, had tutors and a chaperone, whilst MoTown ran a complete 'charm school' for their girl groups (Grieg 1989, pp. 17, 121). But this is merely an affirmative response to the dualism of the madonna/whore: if the girl singer is not one of these, she must be the other. Moreover, the discourse surrounding girl groups furnishes particularly pertinent examples of my argument above: that overt display causes attacks to be made not only on the ability of the singer, but also on the inherent quality of the music itself. For example, Grieg (1989, p. 140) observes that the Three Degrees had a reputation for being one of the most 'sexy' girl groups in the seventies. This reputation was by the same token the cause of extensive ridicule by the (white, male) music press, including not only accusations that the women were incompetent as musicians, but also the rubbishing of the inherent meanings of their music. Delineations arising from the display of the singer actually enter into the listening experience and, most significantly, from there they affect our perception of and attitude towards inherent musical meaning. They thus colour our entire experience of the music as a whole. To put this in a nutshell, overt sexual delineations of display influence the way we hear the music's inherent meanings, causing us to dismiss or even recoil from them. A judgement that at first appears

²⁸ Grieg (1989) is an invaluable source which overturns many of the prejudices with which people approach girl groups, by showing them to be other than passive decorations called in by a male producer to realise his fantasies. Also see Betrock (1982) on girl groups. Gaar (1993), L. O'Brien (1994), Steward and Garratt (1984) also powerfully dispel any such illusions about women in rock. At the same time, all these writers illustrate again and again how the sexuality of women popular singers and other women popular musicians has been exploited by record companies, male instrumentalists, song-writers, producers and managers of groups. Other valuable sources focussing on the views of women popular performers themselves are K. O'Brien (1995), Evans (1994), Raphael (1995). For a critical analysis of constructions of masculinity and femininity around girl-group music see Bradby (1990).

to be about musical inherent meaning actually results from, and operates as a delineation around, the display of the singer.

In direct contradistinction to the discursive construction of autonomy, this is evidence of a type of musical fetishism which, as I suggested in Chapter 1, is a common characteristic that marks much of the discourse on popular music. In the discourse of musical autonomy, which tends to be posited around classical music, the unquestioned status of inherent meanings operates to deny the very existence of delineations. Thus, in the most highly autonomous music, the bodily display of the singer is supposedly dismissed from any judgement of the music (even though it may be covertly celebrated). But in the operation of fetishism, the music is judged according mainly to its delineations, and the inherent meanings are heard only as reflections of those delineations. Thus in highly fetishised music, the display delineations which the listener attributes to the singer actually become a major part of the listener's judgement on the music as a whole. The more sexually overt those delineations are, the less truck the listener will have with the inherent meanings of the music.

From the 1960s at various times a number of girl and women popular solo singers have risen to fame, and many more have had less auspicious careers. The association between female singers and loss of 'respectability' is still mythologised, as I was reminded by *The Guardian* (December 1993), which stated that disreputable entrants to the Miss World competition have periodically been ousted on the grounds of being film-actresses, the girlfriends of porn giants, or singers. Display-related delineation is very much part of musical meaning today in popular music of many sub-styles. Examples of how it operates can be found in countless well-known cases of singers who delineate a high level of 'attractiveness', and whose vocal abilities and music at the height of their record sales receive nothing but sneers from all but their millions of young girl fans – and even in the case of the more challenging Madonna, about whom there might not have been so many books and articles written if not for the fact that the sexual display of her music's delineations implicitly calls into question both her musician-ship and the inherent quality of her music itself, a quality which is, typically, nearly always ignored by commentators.²⁹

²⁹ See Bradby (1992) for an incisive critique of the way cultural theorists ignore the inherent meanings of Madonna's music or, in fact, ignore the music altogether, focussing on the visual accompaniment as if the music were entirely dispensable. Bradby shows how a close analysis of the lyrics in relation to the music can be very revealing in terms of an all-round understanding of the meaningful potential of the video. For a critique of academic writing on Madonna see esp. Kaplan (1993). For an appraisal of Madonna from the point of view of musicology see McClary (1991), and for a response to this (not from a musicological point of view) Born (1992).

As Bradby's analysis (1993b) shows, the continuing insinuation and reproduction of the affirmative feminine delineation of the singer is reproduced even in that relatively recent musical style which many have tried to claim transcends racial, cultural and class as well as gender differences: house. She describes a legal case over the sampling of a woman's voice, involving a producer group called Black Box who had a massive hit in Britain with the song 'Ride on Time'. 'The video that accompanied the song on television showed a tall, sexy model . . . Katherine . . . "performing" the passionate vocal line.' But the vocal itself had been sampled from a song by the American soul singer Loleatta Holloway.

People I spoke to at the time saw her as having been totally 'ripped off' by Black Box; and indignation centred around the cynicism of Black Box in 'fronting' her voice with the tall, slim, sexy model, Katherine, in the video, as if ashamed to show the 'real' singer's body (fatter, older looking, more 'maternal'). In effect, Loleatta Holloway had been doubly 'ripped off', since not only had her voice been stolen by others to make money, but her person had been usurped by Katherine Quinol's image. (Bradby 1993b, p. 170)

This exploitation was worsened by the music press, which printed excessive photos of Quinol, and an allegation by a producer that Holloway did not understand technology. (No doubt Quinol did not 'understand technology' either, but had no need to because she could concentrate on displaying her body instead!)

Despite the continuation of the age-old affirmation of femininity in this affair, Bradby also points to some new possibilities which she suggests it raises for women. Although the women's separate contributions were not credited on the sleeves of recordings, she came across a credit for a video clip shown on MTV which listed both the lead singer (a different one, Martha Walsh) and the 'body' (Quinol again). One aspect of this new practice that we should welcome, she argues, is that at least both women were credited for their separate contributions, which is better than having no credit at all. Furthermore, this dual crediting exposes the deception of juxtaposing the voice and the body of two women, questions the primacy of the visual, and acknowledges the interference of technology in the representation of women performers (pp. 171–2). Bradby also argues that although these videos betray the fact that the Black female body, 'as manifested in the "grain" of the voice, is still serving as a touchstone of authenticity' (p. 172), the voices of the older singers evoke strength, maturity and deep emotions, all qualities which can appear to empower the younger women who are miming.

Such images, she points out, by giving older women's strength to younger women's bodies, can in some ways challenge the divorce of motherhood and sexuality that marks white popular music.

There is another area which suggests that the original articulation of an alternative femininity that characterised the images of the women singers of the classic blues has not completely died out. Some of the associations and lyrics of dance music dating from the 1970s and 1980s, which are often sampled or re-issued today, can be interpreted as comparative implicit and explicit statements of feminine independence. Also girl rappers, or super-stars such as Tina Turner, in many ways present an image of outspoken femininity operating unhindered in the public sphere; whilst singer-songwriters such as Jane Siberry proffer challenges to patriarchal conceptions of heterosexual femininity.⁶⁰ The connotations of performances by such women can become a part of the delineations that accompany their music, joining with the power of the lure, and at best the power of the voice, to form channels that connect the symbolic power of women singers in classical music to that of women singers in blues, jazz and popular music today.

The gendered delineations of singing

It is not just women who become sexual objects as singers. The delineation of display operates with either sex playing either role, and also playing roles that counter biological sex, as I observed at the beginning of the chapter. Thus male singers can also become sexual objects. It is appropriate that commentators on gender and chroniclers of women in popular music do not obscure the huge number of 'boy groups' and male solo vocalists that have existed in gospel, jazz and popular music of all kinds. Many of the things that are said about the way girl groups and soloists have been disdained apply equally, if asymmetrically, to them. Nor, as with women's display, does this sort of thing only happen in popular music, although not insignificantly the example I am about to

⁶⁰ With regard to dance lyrics, for example, the female sexual assertiveness and pleasure expressed by the Pointer Sisters' (1989) 'Slow Hand' is comparable to the blues singer Ida Cox's 'One Hour Mama', cited by Carby (1990, pp. 247-8), or to the more aggressive sexuality of e.g. the rappers Oaktown 337's 'Juicy Gotcha Krazy' (cited in Berry 1994, p. 195). Song-lyrics are obviously out of my sphere of study; but I couldn't resist this small point. See Rose (1994) for a social analysis and a detailed discussion of rap and of women's position in it; or Berry (1994), for an informative shorter source on women in rap; Gaar (1993), K. O'Brien (1993) on Siberry, and for an analysis of one of her songs, 'Mimi On the Beach', D. Morris (1993). Also see Mockus (1994), Potter (1994) on k. d. lang. Amongst other things, the latter two briefly address the sound of lang's voice in ways that echo Elizabeth Wood's Sapphonics discussed earlier.

give is of a very popular sort of classical music: when the opera-singer Pavarotti performed to a quarter of a million in Hyde Park, London on the strength of his hit single of Puccini's 'Nessun dorma' during the World Cup in 1990, several female reporters writing in the tabloid press did their utmost to turn him into a sex teddy-bear. Male popular singers often have to contend with the general sexual overtones and, furthermore, the feminine ambience which, I have argued, surround the display of the singer. Some male singers seek ways to ride potential accusations of femininity. Many attempt to turn them to their advantage through harnessing the power of spectacularity on stage, whilst others respond by visibly asserting machismo in their publicised lives off stage: issues which are revealingly probed by Walser (1993) in his discussion of heavy metal musicians (not just singers). In Part II, I will return in more detail to the relationship between masculinity and singing, with reference to the very widespread labelling of singing as 'cissy' by girls and boys in schools today. For now, it is necessary only to observe that, to whatever extent they do have a problem, men have always taken up public singing roles at least as much as, and often more than, women.

In sum, singers cannot but help invoke some level of sexual display, which becomes a part of the delineated meaning of the music that they sing. But in the discourse surrounding highly autonomous classical music, such meaning is already denied, and the woman singer today working in that area is relatively free from definitions that accentuate her femininity rather than her musicianship. She can participate in the construction of the appearance of musical autonomy by being heard to be in control of the inherent meanings of the music she sings, whilst her gender can be almost forgotten. Nonetheless, the very fact that her role has been allowed through history to develop into the most common musical performance role occupied by women is bound up with the fact that the woman singer affirms and reproduces fundamental patriarchal definitions of femininity.

On the opposite pole, in highly fetishised kinds of popular music for example, delineation is not merely denied but often celebrated by the discourse on the music. In this sphere, it is commensurate for the woman singer to forefront the attention she pays to displaying her body, so that 'female sexual attractiveness' becomes a prominent part of the music's delineations. In such cases, the delineations of display can be so strong as to make it virtually impossible for listeners, especially those who are already critical of the music, to hear inherent meanings without being in some way negatively influenced by the delineations. Either the singer is

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³⁰ With regard to dance lyrics, for example, the female sexual assertiveness and pleasure expressed by the Pointer Sisters' (1989) 'Slow Hand' is comparable to the blues singer Ida Cox's 'One Hour Mama', cited by Carby (1990, pp. 247-8), or to the more aggressive sexuality of e.g. the rappers Oaktown 3 5 7's 'Juicy Gotcha Krazy' (cited in Berry 1994, p. 195). Song-lyrics are obviously out of my sphere of study; but I couldn't resist this small point. See Rose (1994) for a social analysis and a detailed discussion of rap and of women's position in it; or Berry (1994), for an informative shorter source on women in rap; Gaar (1993), K. O'Brien (1995) on Siberry, and for an analysis of one of her songs, 'Mimi On the Beach', D. Morris (1995). Also see Mockus (1994), Potter (1994) on k. d. lang. Amongst other things, the latter two briefly address the sound of lang's voice in ways that echo Elizabeth Wood's Sapphonics discussed earlier.

give is of a very popular sort of classical music: when the opera-singer Pavarotti performed to a quarter of a million in Hyde Park, London on the strength of his hit single of Puccini's 'Nessun dorma' during the World Cup in 1990, several female reporters writing in the tabloid press did their utmost to turn him into a sex teddy-bear. Male popular singers often have to contend with the general sexual overtones and, furthermore, the feminine ambience which, I have argued, surround the display of the singer. Some male singers seek ways to ride potential accusations of femininity. Many attempt to turn them to their advantage through harnessing the power of spectacularity on stage, whilst others respond by visibly asserting machismo in their publicised lives off stage: issues which are revealingly probed by Walser (1993) in his discussion of heavy metal musicians (not just singers). In Part II, I will return in more detail to the relationship between masculinity and singing, with reference to the very widespread labelling of singing as 'cissy' by girls and boys in schools today. For now, it is necessary only to observe that, to whatever extent they do have a problem, men have always taken up public singing roles at least as much as, and often more than, women.

In sum, singers cannot but help invoke some level of sexual display, which becomes a part of the delineated meaning of the music that they sing. But in the discourse surrounding highly autonomous classical music, such meaning is already denied, and the woman singer today working in that area is relatively free from definitions that accentuate her femininity rather than her musicianship. She can participate in the construction of the appearance of musical autonomy by being heard to be in control of the inherent meanings of the music she sings, whilst her gender can be almost forgotten. Nonetheless, the very fact that her role has been allowed through history to develop into the most common musical performance role occupied by women is bound up with the fact that the woman singer affirms and reproduces fundamental patriarchal definitions of femininity.

On the opposite pole, in highly fetishised kinds of popular music for example, delineation is not merely denied but often celebrated by the discourse on the music. In this sphere, it is commensurate for the woman singer to forefront the attention she pays to displaying her body, so that 'female sexual attractiveness' becomes a prominent part of the music's delineations. In such cases, the delineations of display can be so strong as to make it virtually impossible for listeners, especially those who are already critical of the music, to hear inherent meanings without being in some way negatively influenced by the delineations. Either the singer is

taken to be incompetent to handle inherent meanings, or the music itself is regarded as inherently lacking in value, or both. The more sexually 'attractive' the woman singer is constructed to be, the less seriously she and her music can be taken.

The woman singer who signifies a high degree of sexual attractiveness categorically affirms and reproduces those same patriarchal definitions of her femininity which the relatively subdued singer of 'autonomous' music more covertly conjures up. Whatever the quality of her musicianship and ability to control inherent meanings, she is judged by her display. Only in a few subtle ways such as I have indicated – in the spectacular power of the lure, the virtuoso display of the voice, and the appeal of a femininity which is not re-harnessed into the safe, 'natural', 'domestic' recesses of patriarchal definitions – can women's voices be heard to claim some unspeakable quality that suggests an alternative femininity, a different way for women to be.

WOMEN ENABLING

In the closing section of this chapter I would like to explore another nexus of musical practices in which women have taken part, which are connected to the arguments I have made above in that, like singing, they tend to affirm and reproduce patriarchal definitions of femininity. I have classed them together as 'enabling roles', for convenience, but also to indicate that they have in common the fact of enabling other people to hear, to learn and to make music, including the passing down of music from generation to generation. This is not to imply that men do not also have enabling roles in musical production and reception. It is merely that there is something in women's enabling roles that binds them together in a way which is of relevance to the arguments in this chapter. As with singing, I will argue that women's position in these roles enters through various channels into musical meaning.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women ran the numerous musical salons which provided venues both for amateurs and for flamboyant virtuosos to perform popular, romantic works.³¹ The distinct, serious, classical concerts of the Academy in Britain, in which the highest value was placed on what I have called inherent musical

³¹ See Ehrlich (1985), Weber (1975) for social histories of musical production and reception practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Citron (1993, pp. 104ff), S. Fuller (1992), for social-historical discussions of women's roles in the salons and of women composers of 'salon music'. See Whitesitt (1991) on Women's Music Clubs in United States concert life.

meaning, were run by men. These concerts, in the oft-cited words of William Weber (1975, p. 126) imposed 'a lofty intellectual definition through which – thanks to the traditional conception that men were more serious than women – they excluded the other sex from leadership, even though women attended classical music concerts just as much as men'. Women are still relatively absent from professional and influential positions in the management of autonomous music. Not surprisingly, the areas in which they have made the most notable mark continue to be in the popular realm, where women band managers have existed since the 1960s, growing in number particularly fast after punk. There are also increasing numbers of women producers, sound-engineers and music journalists, and a growth of women-only record companies and distribution networks.³²

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Italy and elsewhere, the main employers of musicians were the church, court, theatre, private house and town (Bowers 1986, p. 135). A few schools began to employ music teachers during the seventeenth century, and this became an increasing trend through the eighteenth century, but there were as yet no music colleges.³³ Bowers notes with respect to Italy that 'all institutions that hired musicians employed many more men than women musicians, and some employed no women at all' (1986, p. 135). It may come as a surprise then that by the late nineteenth century women outnumbered men as professional musicians: but this was because the vast majority of them were involved in private teaching, not performing (and even less composing). Altogether there were many more music teachers than performers, and of these, the vast majority were women.³⁴ Self-employed piano teachers were the largest category of musicians in England by 1900 (Ehrlich 1985, p. 70), and Ehrlich's meticulous account leaves us in little doubt that 'it is reasonable to assume that the great majority of female musicians enumerated in the census were wholly or primarily teachers, rather than performers, as classification up to 1861 and after 1911 indicates, and abundant other evidence confirms' (1985, p. 104). The growth

³² For information on women in the contemporary classical recording industry see Jepsen (1991); also Zaimont et al. (1987, pp. 120–77), (1991, pp. 321–71). With reference to the popular sphere, Steward and Garratt (1984), Gaar (1993), L. O'Brien (1994). There have been and are women-run distribution and recording networks, including Olivia Records, Women's Independent Label Distribution Network (WILD) and Redwood Records in the United States (see Gaar 1993, Petersen 1987).

³³ See Ehrlich (1985) for the general context of music education in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England; Rainbow (1989) for a thorough history of music education; Fletcher (1987) for some general information on the history of music education.

³⁴ See Ehrlich (1985, esp. pp. 52ff, 104–5), Ammer (1980).

of music teaching in the home and later in the school as 'one of the few respectable occupations open to women, outside domestic service' (Ehrlich 1985, p. 105) is still reflected in the fact that women have dominated music teaching in Britain, as in the USA and all other nations which provide systematic institutional and private music education, throughout the twentieth century.³⁵

Women have also passed down music in professional roles other than strictly teaching. I have already mentioned the anonymous singers of New Orleans who were transmitters of slave music (Dahl 1984, p. 6) and who thus safeguarded the roots of what was to contribute to some of the vital elements in the popular music of the twentieth century. The tradition of singing from which many of the 1950s and 1960s girl groups drew their inspiration and skill was not always gospel learnt in the church or family, or popular song learnt on the streets, but often ancient Catholic settings of the psalms passed on by nuns (Grieg 1989, pp. 11, 75, 112). Thus a link is forged over the centuries, right back to the establishment of the Church, cutting across chasms not only of time but of musical styles as well, in which women have passed on music through singing to girls.

Similarly the mother, whose role in music education has been considerable,³⁶ can fulfil her maternal musical duties in ways that affirm patriarchal definitions of femininity. The passing on of music through maternal lines occurs poignantly in the already-mentioned universally blessed practice of the mother singing to her baby. The strength and beauty of this womanly custom strike me when I remember my own maternal grandmother singing a lovely hymn-like wordless lullaby to me when I was a child, the same song my mother always chose and to whom her mother must therefore have sung it; which I sang to my children and which, when my daughter's other grandmother was dying, was the song the little girl spontaneously chose with which to wish her farewell. It is not because of mere whim that I have reverted to personal anecdote in order to illustrate this practice: its history is of course, unwritten. Not

³⁵ The younger and less specialised the pupils, the more women have tended to dominate; and they have entered music teaching posts at higher education level only relatively recently. For example the first ever female professor of music in Britain was appointed in 1994 (Nicola LeFanu at the University of York). For information on women's music teaching positions in the United States see Weaver (1994); also Ammer (1980); for further information on various countries see Zaimont et al. (1984), (1987), (1991).

³⁶ On the role of the mother in classical music education and informal musical perpetuation, see Citron (1993), Polk (1991). Regarding popular music, see Sara Cohen (1991, Chapter 8), who observes that mothers in 1980s Liverpool were (still) the main organisers and passers-on of music in working-class families. (Their sons then later joined bands that excluded girls, as will be seen in Chapters 3 and 7.)

only is a musical tradition of lullabies and children's songs passed down orally by the women of the family, but it is also women who pass down tunes in all kinds of folk music and in many forms that have entered into the popular sphere.³⁷ This kind of cultural perpetuation, ironically perhaps, contains unspeakable characteristics that are reminiscent of what is most deeply associated with a dubious notion of authenticity, the very condition which male-dominated rock music has striven to achieve. Femininity and musical authenticity are both, as always, the more desirable for being elusive.

I wish to suggest that women's prominence in the musical salons of the nineteenth century, their roles as amateur and professional concert organisers and musical administrators in the twentieth century, and their positions as formal and informal music teachers, in convent, school and home, have acted, like singing, to reproduce femininity. This reproduction has occurred as, within the concept of patriarchy outlined in Chapter 1, women have taken up position as home-keepers, carers of children and custodians of cultural tradition. In this role the woman of the salon, the female music administrator, the music teacher and the mother can fulfil all the marks of femininity assigned to their sex, engaging in musical performance only where it has appropriately 'feminine' delineations, and the problem of sexual display in a performance that anyway takes place in only domestic and educational settings need trouble no one. In a similar way to singing, the roles of teaching and passing on certain kinds of music involve the entrance of the woman, the entrance of the fact of femininity, into the music's delineations. The fine quality of a mother's rendition of a lullaby, of a teacher's demonstration of a song to a class of children or of a group of women singing together privately is not liable to be noticed in inherently musical terms: not least because there is no audience, or if there is one, it is made up of children who have no channels of power through which to articulate their responses; but also because even if adult observers are present, the performance situation and the fact of femininity in the delineations of the music distract attention away from the singer's ability to control the inherent meanings and also from the cultural value of the music itself. In such situations, many fine women musicians throughout the centuries

³⁷ In many communities of the world, women also commonly sing at births, funerals and weddings. See Post (1994, pp. 39–40), Tolbert (1994) and many contributions to the ethnomusicological literature, Chapter 1, note 8, p. 13 above. The celebration of the domestic caring work and the link of women to life and death are also thematic of definitions of femininity in patriarchy, as discussed in Chapter 1, p. 14.

have plied their skills to an audience very limited in size, very young or very indifferent. An example that springs to mind is the mother of the internationally renowned reggae musician Bob Marley, whom I saw on television demonstrating how he used to sing when he was a boy. The astonishing example of her talent flashed across the screen for a moment and disappeared without comment.³⁸

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have argued that the relative success of women singers throughout history represents no simple freedom, but, rather, reveals the proximity of singing to patriarchal definitions of femininity. I have attempted to identify some of the gendered connotations of singing, and to link them with an on-going development of a theory of gendered musical meaning. The bodily display of the singer, I have suggested, becomes part of delineated musical meaning, and from that position acts to affect the way listeners actually experience inherent musical meaning. The precise effects of this vary, depending on the historical era, the performance situation, the subject-position of the listener and, crucially, the style of the music involved. At one extreme, the delineated autonomy of much classical music has allowed the contemporary woman classical singer a position relatively free of gendered delineations, in which she has developed a high degree of recognition for her musicianship. At the other extreme, certain types of fetishised popular music have placed the display of the woman singer's body at the top of the delineated agenda, damaging the capacity of listeners to judge the skill of the singer, or to judge the inherent meanings of the music, independently of any idea of femininity. In the passing down of certain kinds of music by women

³⁸ 'Bob Marley and the Wailers', *Arena*, BBC2, 15 June 1986. I do not intend to idealise the relationship between Marley and his mother, but am merely describing what I saw on the programme. Marriage and child-rearing are themes which run throughout the musical history of women. There are a considerable number of cases in many countries from at least the sixteenth century onwards throughout the classical tradition, and from the beginnings of jazz and popular music, of women who gave up or appear to have given up their musical activities upon marriage. See Bowers and Tick (1986), Hand (1983), Ammer (1980), Pendle (1991), Ehrlich (1985), Grieg (1989), Dahl (1984), Steward and Garratt (1984), Gaar (1993) and many more. Interviewees in many sources (see e.g. Bayton (1990), Grieg (1989)) come back again and again to the stress invoked by trying to have children and hold a family and a marriage together whilst being an amateur or a professional musician. Obviously one never comes across men complaining about this. Many women musicians throughout history have succeeded in music apparently with the backing of their husbands, or, especially in the case of girls in popular music, brothers or boyfriends (as well as mothers and sisters). See Polk (1991), Bayton (1990), Steward and Garratt (1984), S. Cohen (1991).

from generation to generation, a similarly affirmative relationship between femininity and song has again enabled the woman's abundant fulfilment of that role. The gendered musical meanings that surround women's vocal performance and women's roles as music teachers are not merely wrong. They are discursive constructions which help us to interpret the musical world around us, and they are actively created and re-created not only by listeners and commentators but by male and female musicians and music teachers, in our musical practices and through our musical experiences.

From affirmation to interruption: women playing instruments

DISPLAY AS PART OF INSTRUMENTAL PERFORMANCE

The woman instrumentalist is on display, and she does to that extent participate in the same discourse as the woman singer. But in certain respects, her display takes on rather different connotations. The differences vary in degree according to the performance context, the instrument played, the subject-position of the listener and a variety of other factors. For example, in an early nineteenth-century domestic setting, from the perspective of most observers, a woman pianist would have given rise to display-delineations that were to all intents and purposes just as affirmative as those of a woman singer; whereas on a public stage of the same era, a female trumpeter sitting in the ranks of an otherwise entirely male orchestra would have incurred radically different display-delineations, and in fact was quite unheard of. Why is it that – like singing – some instruments have for centuries been welcomed by women, and have been seen as acceptable or even desirable feminine accomplishments, whereas – unlike singing – certain other instruments have at various times been shunned by women, frowned upon or even prohibited?

I will approach this question through suggesting some fundamental, qualitative differences between the kinds of display delineations that arise from women's singing practices and those that arise from women's instrumental practices. To begin with I will present the discussion through a comparison of extremes: between highly affirmative singing practices on one hand and prohibitive or very unusual instrumental practices on the other. Later I will go on to consider my arguments in the light of concrete historical examples, including instruments that have been common as well as those that have been unusual for women.

The extreme, qualitative differences between the display delineations of the woman singer and those of the woman instrumentalist can initially be broached through taking the four aspects of display that I

located with regard to singing in the previous chapter, and comparing them. First, I suggested that because the musical sound-source of the woman singer is her body itself, her vocal display appears to remain locked within a self-referring cycle from body to femininity and back again. The body is affirmed and celebrated. Contrastingly, the female instrumentalist, although her body is nonetheless either intentionally or unintentionally on display mediates the whole scenario through a piece of technology. The instrument which she wields or controls interrupts the centrality of the appearance of her in-tuneness with her body. This interruption also challenges my second category, the natural appearance of the woman, away from any associations with technology. Just as patriarchally defined woman is in tune with her body, so she is in tune with nature. Man, on the other hand, is defined as out of touch with his body and divorced from nature. Indeed nature is seen as a force which man controls, and the development of that control takes place partly through the harnessing of nature in technology. The necessity to control an instrument on the part of the woman player detracts from the affirmation of the association between woman and nature, for the woman player is clearly capable of at least attempting to control an alienated man-made object. No longer a mere part of the nature that man controls, she steps out, into the world, into the position of controller.

The instrument also has an effect on my third category, that of sexual licence. As I noted in Chapter 2, the fully intentional displayer such as a striptease artiste does not sing and is even less likely to play an instrument. The interruptive power of the instrument seriously detracts from the fullness of the intention to display. This in turn then detracts from the cogency of the accusation of sexual licence, making the sex-life of the woman instrumentalist less suspect, and her display less susceptible to interpretation as a sexual invitation, than that of the singer. Therefore my fourth argument must also be coloured by the case of the instrumentalist. I suggested that the image of the singing woman can represent the corollary of sexual invitation, becoming an idealisation of maternal perfection. But if the woman instrumentalist cannot be seen as 'whore', then neither can she be seen through a *trompe l'œil* as at one moment the whore, the other the madonna: she is neither.

In sum, women instrumentalists can engender display delineations qualitatively different from those that arise from women singers. They tend to be less 'feminine' than women singers in that they appear less locked into the vicissitudes of their bodies, less alienated from technology, less sexually available, and less the personification of the contrary

image of the madonna/whore. The erosion of these four categories in the act of instrumental performance by women threatens a disintegration of some of the fundamental characteristics of femininity as it is constructed and negotiated by men and women within the overall context of patriarchy. Unlike the singer, whose performance activities tend to affirm and even accentuate femininity, the woman instrumentalist can systematically call into question and interrupt those very reassuring signs of masked female sexuality upon which patriarchal definitions rely for their cogency. She is not then so much that object of desire which is both loved and feared as a slight irritation. The display she enacts, rather than that of a playful or alluring singing bird, is that of a more controlled and rational being who appears capable of using technology to take control over a situation. Whereas the display of singing reproduces femininity by locking the woman singer in an affirmation of the contrary definition of femininity as susceptible, natural, desirable and dangerous, women's instrumental performance threatens to break out of patriarchal definitions and offer a femininity which controls, a femininity which alienates itself in an object and impinges on the world.

As with the singer, the display of the female instrumental performer becomes a part of the delineations of the music which she performs. Performance-related gender delineation in fact arises whether it is a man or a woman performer. But the delineation operates differently when it is a male instrumentalist. Those very qualities of instrumental performance which for the female player are interruptive of her femininity are for the male player relatively affirmative of his masculinity. For male instrumentalists throughout history, the delineation of gender has been nearly always metaphorically transparent: it is there, but we do not see it, we see through it. If there were an equivalent word for the sense of hearing, it could be 'un-sounding'; implying that the delineation of gender is there, but that we do not hear it, we hear through it. There are exceptions to this. One example occurs when men or boys play in environments predominantly associated with females, such as many nineteenth-century salons or many twentieth-century school concerts.¹ Then, the normal masculine delineation is threatened by the overwhelming femininity of the performance context. This context combines with that element of display which is always latent in performance, and together these factors can proffer a suggestion that the male per-

¹ On the salon and on Women's Music Clubs again see Citron (1993), S. Fuller (1992), Whitesitt (1991), Weber (1975), Ehrlich (1985). On the school, see Part II below.

former is feminine or effeminate. Secondly, male performers may choose to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of their masculinity, by sporting overtly 'feminine', sexual aspects of display, such as make-up, high-heeled shoes or revealing costumes, as part of their stage-show and marketing strategy. Today the delineations of glam rock, some heavy metal and certain mainstream popular music are often bound up with the sexual display of the male performers.² But unless they are in a female environment, or unless they have consciously chosen to display signs of femininity, the gender of the male instrumentalist and its incorporation into delineation normally remain unquestioned and invisible within the heterosexual hegemony of patriarchy. It is counted as the norm, which means not counted, not apparently delineated at all. I will refer to it as the masculine performance delineation.

For women instrumentalists, such invisibility is not so easy. The interruptive potential of femininity arising from women's instrumental performance makes the femininity of the woman player into a noticeable part of the music's delineations. In becoming noticeable, the feminine delineation unveils the normally transparent, taken-for-granted masculine performance delineation. As this masculine delineation begins to be apparent, it acts as a filter, or as a measure against which we perceive and judge the new delineation of femininity. At a remove from the listening experience itself, this delineation of femininity occurs for example in contemporary discourse, as part and parcel of marketing strategies, in which the sexuality of the woman player is more or less accentuated. But gender is not merely an extra-musical association. It goes further than that, entering into delineation during the listening experience itself; and from this position, it acts without our conscious intention, to influence the ways in which we also hear and judge inherent meanings.

For example, the following comment was made in the context of a recent school concert, during a conversation which confirmed how rare it is to see a girl playing the drums:

There was this young girl on stage, and this enormous drum kit. I couldn't believe that she was going to play it: but she walked across the stage and sat down behind it, and she did play it – and she played it well too!

Behind the speaker's words is an indication that the idea of the girl's femininity, as well as other qualities such as her youthfulness and small size perhaps, had fleetingly become a part of the music's delineations.

² See esp. Walser (1993) on this, with reference to heavy metal.

But not only that: for beyond the level of delineation, when he listened to the music, he was 'listening out' to discover whether she could play well – that is, whether she could satisfactorily control or interpret the inherent meanings. Not only for this listener, but for all of us to some extent, I would suggest, the gender of the female instrumental performer, amongst other factors, enters into delineated musical meaning as an interruption to patriarchal definitions of femininity; and from there, it acts to affect our perception of inherent meanings.

Women's instrumental performance is therefore potentially interruptive in two ways: it can interrupt our common-sense patriarchal constructions of femininity through asserting new, abrasive display delineations; and it can interrupt our perception of musical inherent meanings by inserting these delineations into the filter of masculinity through which we normally listen. The presence of the delineations will affect our perception of inherent meanings, in such a way as to give the appearance that we countenance femininity, not merely in the knowledge that it is a woman playing, or the sight of a woman playing – that is, not merely in the music's delineations, but in the sound: in the inherent meanings, or in what we take to be the 'music itself'.³

For reasons indicated at the beginning of the chapter, the argument that women's instrumental performance is interruptive to patriarchal definitions of femininity must always be contextualised. The level of interruption varies at different times in history, as well as according to different performance practices, instruments, musical styles and, of course, the subject-position of the listener. Most importantly, instrumental performance has never been so interruptive as to prevent women from playing instruments altogether: on the contrary, if it was, we could not explain how women have become instrumentalists at all, let alone how some of them have achieved widespread recognition. In some circumstances the delineations arising from women's instrumental performance have been less interruptive than in others, and have even become relatively affirmative. In other contexts, the delineations have

³ Like singing, the display-related delineations of instrumental performance survive beyond the live setting. But by contrast with singing, it is impossible to tell whether an instrumentalist is male or female without being told or being able to see them. But we will discover that this impossibility is no deterrent for the construction of a plethora of arguments that women play instruments in inherently different ways to men. As with all discourses, there is a trace of 'truth' in this. It cannot be only listeners and critics who take on and reproduce delineated meanings; musicians themselves are no more able to escape them than anyone else. Therefore musicians can reproduce gendered delineated meanings in the ways that they approach and control inherent meanings. This is something that I wish to take up in Chapter 5 and in Part II.

been interruptive enough to operate as serious deterrents and even taboos. So as to explore different ways in which feminine performance delineations can be articulated, and in order to give a background to our present-day situation, it is again helpful to invoke some historical examples.

During any examination of the history of women's instrumental performance practice it must be borne in mind that any restrictions experienced by women can never have involved only one-dimensional assertions of authority by men over a protesting female mob. On the contrary, there has been collusion as well as resistance on the part of both men and women. In musical patriarchy, collusion involves women's consent to the terms of the restrictions placed upon their musical practices. Such consent surfaces in subtle and often unnoticeable ways, through willingness to conform, through reluctance to deviate, through embarrassment and, extremely, fear. As regards resistance, certain women throughout history have refused restrictions on their performance activities by breaking strictures and playing taboo instruments in public places. Often such resistance has been the harbinger of major social changes in women's instrumental practices. But often, as is characteristic of patriarchy, these same practices have also to some extent assimilated and perpetuated certain qualities drawn from women's roles in domestic music-making. Collusion and resistance are never clearly distinct, the one containing elements of the other to some extent.

THE SOLO INSTRUMENTALIST IN CLASSICAL MUSIC

In ancient civilisation women amateur and professional musicians played all kinds of instruments including plucked strings, woodwind and percussion.⁴ However, as with singing, this relatively unrestricted freedom closed in during the centuries following the birth of Christ, when the number of professional women musicians, the opportunities for women instrumentalists to perform, and the array of instruments available to women gradually shrank. This process gained momentum during the Middle Ages, coming to a head in the fourteenth century.⁵

⁴ See Meyers (1993), Teeter (1993), Toulaitos (1993), Gergis (1993), Michelini (1991).

⁵ There is evidence of professional women musicians in fourteenth-century France and Italy. A Paris record of 1321 includes the names of eight women in the register of the guild of minstrels (Coldwell 1986, p. 46, Edwards 1991, p. 17), and there are other documents showing payments to women musicians (Yardley 1986, Coldwell 1986, Brown 1986, Newcomb 1986, Edwards 1991). But in general, professional women musicians were in decline.

Part of the reason for this was undoubtedly, as Newcomb (1986) and Edwards (1991) make clear, the increasing technical demands which accompanied the advent of polyphony. Whilst the most prominent effects of these demands were on composition, which I will discuss in Chapter 4, the intertwining of composition with performance in those days meant that performance practice was concomitantly affected. Amateur men and all women except for the most privileged nuns were unable to keep up with musical developments, as they did not have access to the training which increasingly became a prerequisite for this more complex procedure. This training took place in the cathedral school, church or university, institutions from all of which women and girls were banned. It was also available through the court, where women were not paid as musicians for another two hundred years, and even then, as the previous chapter showed, they were paid mainly as singers.⁶

Just as the voice represents the least interruption to patriarchal constructions of femininity, so the biggest, loudest and most technologically advanced instruments represent the greatest interruption; and the history of women's roles in musical patriarchy reveals the fact that unwieldiness, high volume or technological complexity tend to characterise those very instruments from which women were originally and have been most vehemently discouraged or banned.⁷ For example, by the fifteenth century debate about whether women and girls should play instruments at all was keen (Newcomb 1986). A social commentator whose views are taken as a classic statement of the times summarised his position thus:

And, to repeat in part and with few words what has been said thus far, I want this lady to know something of letters, of music, of the visual arts, and to know how to dance and be festive. (Castiglione, *Il cortegiano*, Book 3, Chap. 9, translated by and cited in Newcomb 1986, p. 101)

However her involvement with music was to be limited, as elsewhere in the same text he writes:

⁶ The Venetian *ospedali* of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (see Baldauf-Berdes 1993, and pp. 55–6 below for further discussion), were the first exception to the rule that girls did not receive institutionalised music education. Both the church and the university, and by the mid nineteenth century also the military (Ehrlich 1985, pp. 96f) had musical training institutions which were solely the province of boys or men. Apart from convents and the *ospedali*, only private or family instruction was available to girls and women until schools began to incorporate music during the nineteenth century. Schools for 'young ladies' began to include singing and piano lessons, but boys' schools at first did not follow suit: music was frowned on for wealthy boys, who were discouraged from it, especially, as Ehrlich drily points out, if they were good at it (1985, p. 71).

⁷ In 'unwieldiness' I include the distortion of the face, as in woodwind or brass, and 'ungainly' or sexually suggestive posture, such as the cello. Neuls-Bates (1982, p. xiii) notes this.

Imagine yourself what an unsightly matter it were to see a woman play upon a tabour or drum, or blow in a flute or trumpet, or any like instrument; and this is because the boisterousness of them doth both cover and take away that sweet mildness which setteth so forth every deed that a woman doeth. (Castiglione 1928, p. 194, cited in Dahl 1984, p. 39)

There is one particularly obvious exception to my suggestion concerning the size, complexity and loudness of instruments: this is the case of keyboards. These instruments, which have always been played abundantly by women, are indeed usually large, technologically complex and in some cases loud. But, as is characteristic of musical patriarchy, women's access to them was initially restricted to the private sphere of the home, and later, the religious sphere of the church.⁸ Furthermore; keyboard instruments are played in a demure, which is to say 'feminine', seated position. They have commonly been used by women, in order to accompany that prime, affirmative musical practice in which women have always engaged: singing. For that reason, and also because they are capable of providing autonomous renditions of any music from two-part inventions to symphonic arrangements, keyboards have been indispensable aids to entertainment in the home; and their capacity to provide melody, harmony or counterpoint with the greatest of readiness has made them invaluable resources for the tuition of children. As I argued in Chapter 2, involvement in all these practices – that is, singing, domestic musical entertainment and children's music education – has not only been common for women, but is also on a symbolic level affirmative of femininity. Another main category of instruments for women is that of plucked strings, which are of course usually small and relatively quiet, and which can also be played demurely. As with keyboards, women have played these instruments largely in domestic settings to accompany the voice. These affirmative practices on keyboard and plucked string instruments date back to the dawn of history, survive through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and play a major part in the image of the accomplished young lady in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Incidentally keyboards and plucked strings continue to be women's

⁸ I have already argued that occupation of the private sphere by women musicians is a defining characteristic of musical patriarchy (Chapter 1). For interesting discussions of women's roles as keyboard players see Loesser (1954), Leppert (1987). As regards the church, it has a symbolic position outside the public/private dichotomy; allowing women a performance space whose appeal to spirituality escapes some of the contradictions otherwise associated with women's practices outside domesticity. See Post (1994, p. 43), who notes that more work on the position of the church in this dichotomy is needed. Also, as Philip Tagg pointed out to me, church organists are usually screened off, which therefore reduces the display element.

prime instrumental outlet, even to the popular music of the 1960s and beyond.

In Europe from the sixteenth century, and in America from the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, amateur women instrumentalists became increasingly common (although they remained far fewer in number than singers), continuing to play keyboards and plucked strings mainly to instruct, entertain and accompany singing in the home. Gradually, these amateur, domestic musical roles were carried over into the professional, public realm, a transition which is characteristic of women's roles within patriarchy generally. I will discuss women orchestral players in the next section; for now, my discussion will focus on public-sphere, professional soloists. A few individuals became known as professional solo instrumentalists, especially as pianists during the late eighteenth century, and by the mid-nineteenth century some such women were able to command the highest respect. Clara Schumann (1819–96), perhaps the first woman to be accorded credit in contemporary musical discourse, was the acknowledged peer of the top male performers of the day. She premiered works by Chopin, Schumann and Brahms, and brought many of Beethoven's sonatas to public attention for the first time. She was the first concert pianist to play from memory and without supporting artists, her standards and programming acting to change the character of the solo piano recital (Reich 1986, 1989). Women soloists on other instruments, most notably the violin, appeared towards the end of the century, when conservatories including the Royal College of Music in London and the Boston Conservatory of Music began to encourage them.⁹ How can such public-sphere successes be

⁹ See Ehrlich (1985), Bernstein (1986), Tick (1986) on conservatoires in London and Boston respectively. Also see Eaklor (1994) on the development of music education in Boston's public schools, 1838–1911. The Royal Academy of Music (RAM) in London was established in 1822 and straight away took an equal number of men and women, becoming a haven for women performers (Bernstein 1986, Ehrlich 1985). But it was considered deficient compared to the Paris or Leipzig conservatoires (Ehrlich 1985, p. 83). By the 1880s and until at least the 1930s, very few professional musicians had attended the RAM. Over 90 per cent of professional musicians had learnt their craft through apprenticeship, family connections, private tuition or self-tuition (Ehrlich 1985, p. 99). So women were being allowed into the conservatoires, but the conservatoires were not leading to inclusion in the profession. The Royal College of Music (RCM) was established in 1882 and had standards that were consistently recognised as better. The women students were still by far mainly pianists and singers, but the RCM women violinists began to make their mark slowly (Ehrlich 1985, pp. 112, 157f), as did women string players at Julius Eichberg's school in Boston (also see Ammer 1980). After 1870 music colleges grew in number, and gradually began to affect supply, especially through their external elementary exams. By 1890 in Britain, Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) candidates comprised 80 per cent elementary pianists, and 90 per cent girls. Most students at the conservatoires were women, and most became teachers (Ehrlich 1985, pp. 119ff).

explained, within the terms suggested by my identification of the interruptive delineation of femininity in instrumental performance?

It is necessary to acknowledge the overall context of a wider political situation that embraced upper- and middle-class women's resistance to their incarceration in the home, and expressed itself in many fields, of which music was only one. Clearly, as a few women became increasingly successful in openly resisting restrictions on their performance practices, the sight and sound of a professional woman instrumental soloist became more common, by dint of sheer force. The interruptive potential of femininity in the act of performance must gradually lose its potency as the listener becomes more accustomed to the delineation. Listeners are more able to listen attentively to inherent meanings the less distracted they are by interruptive delineations. The force of normality which gradually became invested in the increasingly common instance of a woman player was therefore both a cause and an effect of its own growing acceptability. Secondly, as with singing, the level of autonomy which the music delineates, operates to diminish and mollify the degree of attention paid to bodily display by the discourse surrounding the music. The more that the inherent meanings of the music are held to be autonomous essences, and the more committed to inherent meaning the woman instrumentalist is heard to be, the easier it is for the discourse on the music to dismiss any gender delineation out of hand. It is no coincidence that Clara Schumann was one of the most serious performers of the most autonomous music of her day.

In sum, I would suggest that the increasing normality of the delineations arising from the woman soloist, combined with her commitment to the autonomy of the inherent meanings of the music she played, provide two related reasons why those women who achieved excellence on their instruments to the level required of a professional classical soloist were tolerated, and why extraordinary women like Clara Schumann were not merely tolerated but celebrated at the pinnacle of their profession. But this does not mean to say that such women can be understood as free from the effects of interruptive feminine delineations arising from their performance. On the contrary, they had to rise above these delineations, to disprove them, to present an alternative to them, to achieve the highest level of what was agreed to be excellence, before they could be deemed even eligible to be judged on the same platform as their male counterparts: to be judged as 'musicians' rather than 'women musicians'.

Classical music that is mediated as highly autonomous has always existed in conjunction with less autonomous, more popular sub-styles. In

the nineteenth century such relatively popular music was performed largely in the female-controlled, essentially private realm of the salon. Among male instrumentalists it involved flamboyant virtuosi such as Franz Liszt; and among women it included a number of very successful professional performers such as Cécile Chaminade.¹⁰ The role of such performers in the delineation of femininity is, I would like to suggest, slightly different from that of their colleagues in highly autonomous music. The performance of relatively popular music in the domestic realm carries certain delineations which make possible a retrieval of some of the patriarchal constructions of femininity that mark the affirmative connotations of women's singing. Where the music lacked any claims to high autonomy, this meant that feminine delineations could more readily enter into the listening experience. But the interruptive aspects of these delineations could be diluted to some extent by various factors. For one thing, where the music was virtuosic, this enabled an enactment of a musical display, the connotations of which are not far removed from the affirmation of femininity which, I have argued, is contained in the very notion of display itself. For another thing, the hiving off of the performing scenario into the private realms of the salon, often containing an entirely female audience, legitimated the display by taking the sting of sexual availability out of it. In place of that was a connotation of feminine 'innocence', based on the assumption of female heterosexuality, which further bolsters up the ramparts of patriarchy. Popular women instrumental soloists, I suggest, were thus increasingly able to enact something closer to an affirmation of femininity than were their colleagues in the more public, male-dominated circuits of autonomous music.

In the first three-quarters of the twentieth century a great deal of classical music has continued to delineate a high level of autonomy. This autonomy has preserved a space in which women solo instrumentalists have been able to pursue musical careers without being repeatedly judged according to interruptive delineations of patriarchally defined femininity. Amongst pianists for example, performers such as Wanda Landowska, Myra Hess and Annie Fischer have followed Clara Schumann in the pursuit of highly committed and greatly respected careers. However, as the production world of classical music has increas-

¹⁰ Although salons often involved large numbers of audience members of both sexes, their connotations included notions of domesticity, social 'connections' and privacy. On salons see Citron (1993); S. Fuller (1992); Whitesitt (1991); Weber (1975); Ehrlich (1985); on Chaminade, Citron (1993); on Liszt and effeminacy, Walser (1993).

ingly found itself to be in a commercial, competitive market, so it has been forced to develop marketing strategies, which of course by implication reduce the music's appearance of autonomy. This erosion of autonomy is partly decipherable in the display-delineations of many contemporary solo women players, where delineated femininity is more forefronted. For example, there is currently one relatively mild type of display which I have seen in a large number of photographs on recordings, posters or advertising fliers. The woman classical soloist has her back turned to the camera and is often wearing a low-cut back neckline. In this pose she can present a modest sexuality, not the cleavage but the spine, the one bringing to mind the other; whilst at the same time, having her back turned, she is apparently (and tantalisingly), besides having her photo taken, 'doing something else' which stands for 'playing her instrument'. This pose therefore to some extent retrieves an affirmation of her femininity, and allows her instrumental activities to be blessed; whilst inversely the amount of autonomy of her music that is salvaged contradictorily assures us of the lack of display-delineations. Desire is flattered, and delineation is at least reduced.

Recently a few women classical instrumentalists have begun to market their display-delineations in a more overt way. The cover of one of Ofra Harnoy's recordings of the Vivaldi cello concertos elicited criticism when it came out. Harnoy is pictured languishing in an exquisite ball gown with one hand resting on her hip, and the other on the cello, which lies against her body.¹¹ As she said on television (I am paraphrasing), 'If a man was pictured with his arm slung over his cello, no one would say anything about it.' But Harnoy cannot be free of the appearance that she or her record company were at least implicated in a marketing strategy designed to sell records. The process is no different from the management of delineations by Madonna, and it has similar effects on the musical meaning. The fact that it is even possible for a classical instrumentalist (and Harnoy is by no means the only one) to be marketed in such a way is symptomatic of wider cultural changes in the economic and cultural position of classical music. Just as contemporary musical reception practices are part and parcel of a certain breaking down of boundaries between the discourses surrounding classical and popular

¹¹ The record is the Vivaldi Cello Concertos, Vol. 2, with the Toronto Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Paul Robinson (RCA Victor/BMG Music, 1989, RD 60153). I came across information about reaction to the cover, as well as some interviews with Harnoy, in a television programme broadcast in London, c. 1990-1. I apologise for the fact that, even with the much appreciated help of the National Film Archive and the BBC Archive, I have been unable to trace details of the programme.

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music, so this overt appeal to the woman's body in the music's marketing delineations represents the adoption of a popular music discourse by classical music.

The danger is that such an adoption will cheapen the music. The purchaser of the Vivaldi cello concertos who wants a serious performance totally committed to inherent meaning will be put off the Harney recording because of the overt bodily display-delineations on the cover. It is not the image itself so much as the frisson between the delineations and the precious autonomy of the music that I would suggest initiated criticism of the cover, in a world where critics had only to walk into the popular music part of the store to see hundreds of far more explicitly sexual covers which it would not even have occurred to them to mention. These display-related delineations, whilst putting off the audience for autonomous classical music, will of course help to sell the record to a different, newer audience less persuaded by the discourse of classical music's autonomy.

At an even further extreme, a while ago I saw a poster advertising a recording of a Bach solo violin piece by Vanessa Mae.¹² She was photographed standing up to her naked thighs in water, with a suggested 'wet T-shirt' look, and playing a white electric violin whose colour matched her clothing. Stand in a pool of water and play an electric violin? This seems to me to be a rather dangerous activity! It must be the case that she was not in fact playing the violin, or perhaps it just wasn't switched on, whilst the photo was being taken. An image like this represents the complete translation of a classical music discourse into a popular music discourse; and it almost parallels the marketing of popular music through the use of sexy women *pretending* to play instruments, the delineations of which I will discuss later in the chapter.

Today the gendered delineations that arise from women's solo instrumental performance in the realm of classical music range from being subtle to being overt. But they are never so subtle as to be non-existent. Gendered delineations are intentionally or unintentionally present not only in the marketing of a woman's performance career, but in the very act of performance as a category of display. On one hand, feminine delineations act as an *interruptive* barrier which has been overcome only

¹² The record was a single entitled 'Toccata and Fugue in D Minor', and is now available on cassette single (EMI 881681 4) and also on a CD single called 'Red Hot' (EMI 1995, CDC 5 55089 2). There is a small picture of the cover (the same as the poster), and an article raising questions about Mae's image with reference to the pop/classical split, in *Billboard* (4 March 1995, p. 1 and p. 44); thanks to Dave Laing for searching this out for me and sending it.

by a small number of women recognised for their supreme musicianship. For these women, it has been the most committed pursuit of the most autonomous music that has enabled them to overcome the interruptive effects of feminine delineation arising from instrumental performance. They are perhaps able to represent a symbolic alternative to patriarchal constructions of femininity, a type of femininity that is different. On the other hand, a woman player can today retrieve an element of the *affirmation* of femininity in ways that remain largely within patriarchal definitions. Her presentation of her display in the delineations surrounding her music not only is relevant to her record sales or concert bookings, but also, like all delineations, becomes a part of delineation during the listening experience itself. The deep irony in this is that women have had to resist the interruptive effects of their femininity, by using their femininity in an affirmative way that places greater emphasis on bodily display; and that, once affirmed, femininity risks reducing the seriousness with which women's instrumental music-making is taken. A few women today seem to be able to achieve the highest respect as musicians, and at the same time to affirm their femininity. One example is Anne-Sophie Mutter, the violinist. Such women perhaps represent the strongest contemporary challenge to the contradiction that has for so long existed between femininity and instrumental performance. But like their predecessors they are, by definition, exceptional.

WOMEN ORCHESTRAL PLAYERS

The first significant developments for women instrumentalists revolved around solo performance. The field of orchestral or ensemble playing brings with it new implications. From the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century the only females who had relatively unrestricted licence to perform music publicly on a wide variety of instruments, in ensembles, were in the first place nuns and later on girls and women in the extraordinary Venetian *ospedali*. This is no coincidence: the hiving off of the image of a female playing an instrument, particularly some of the larger and more unwieldy orchestral instruments which of course become necessary in an all-female band, to groups of women who were self-proclaimedly celibate or groups of girls who were orphans under the care of the church acted, I would suggest, as a temporary solution to the interruptive potential of femininity that is delineated by female instrumental performance. In ways that are comparable with the domestic incarceration of women's musical practices, such confinement to the religious

sphere made their instrumental ensembles, at least for a while, relatively safe.¹³

Records of praise by contemporary witnesses did not disguise the unusualness of the sight and sound of women and girls playing certain instruments at all, or playing in ensembles. Even in these holy surroundings (or perhaps because of them) we can also detect signs of the sexual allure of singing and the assumed mismatch of female control over instrumental technology. For example:

I shall go on to say how in this our city almost all the convents of nuns devote themselves to music, both with the sound of many kinds of musical instruments and with singing; and in some convents there are voices so fine they seem angelic, and like sirens they allure the nobility of Milan to come to hear them . . . one hears select voices that are concordant in harmony, and minglings of divine voices with instruments, so that they seem to be angelic choirs that please the ears of the listeners and are praised by connoisseurs. (Paolo Morigia, *La nobiltà di Milano*, Milan: Pacifico Pontio, 1595, pp. 186–7; cited in Bowers 1986, p. 25)

The women and girls at the *ospedali* were said to

sing like angels, play the viola, flute, organ, oboe, cello, bassoon – in short, no instrument is large enough to frighten them . . . The performances are entirely their own, and each concert is composed of about forty young women. (Charles de Brosse in a letter, c. 1739–40; cited in Pugh 1992, p. 13)

As I have already mentioned in connection with singing, by the mid-eighteenth century music-making in convents had been reduced to the necessities required for worship, via a series of increasingly rigorous edicts. The *ospedali* underwent a slow decline, finally becoming bankrupt after nationalisation towards the end of the eighteenth century (Baldauf-Berdes 1993, *passim* and p. 246).

From the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century, women were not allowed to play in orchestras alongside men. Rank-and-file positions in all orchestras were male-only preserves from their inception, and in the case of top orchestras this situation prevailed until the 1910s, continuing in some cases into the 1930s and beyond. Women first appeared as members of male orchestras during the last part of the nineteenth century, and then only if they were playing the harp. This is a particularly rare orchestral instrument which, being plucked, quiet and requisite of a demure sitting position, allowed for relatively affirmative

¹³ On the Venetian *ospedali* see the scholarly account by Baldauf-Berdes (1993), or for a shorter version (1994). On nuns' instrumental activities around this time, see Bowers (1986).

feminine delineations. Aside from that role, women appeared on the orchestral platform only in front of a male orchestra as professional soloists, mainly on the piano or violin (Tick 1986, Ehrlich 1985). The female rank-and-file player has been less *allowable* than the instrumental soloist. Why?

Part of the reason, particularly clear in the first decade of the twentieth century, was, as Tick (1986, p. 333) and Ehrlich (1985, pp. 156ff) show, to protect men's jobs. Until 1904 in the United States it had been legal for the Musicians' Union to exclude women from union-controlled orchestras. But when the union became affiliated with the American Federation of Labor it could no longer do so (Tick 1986, p. 332). In response to what was a new threat of women entering male orchestras, there was a clear resurrection of what Tick (1986, p. 332) describes as the nineteenth-century ideology of feminine frailty. In Britain, similar objections were raised against women instrumentalists, who were kept out of male orchestras at first by a process of 'silent discrimination' and later by explicit claims that they lowered wages as well as standards, that they were biologically inferior and that they were hysterical (Ehrlich 1985, pp. 188–9). As an example of the terms of the debate, a 1904 issue of *Musical Standard* carried interviews of various New York conductors:

Women cannot possibly play brass instruments and look pretty, and why should they spoil their looks?

Woman, lovely woman, is always to be admired, except when she is playing in an orchestra.

In a little while men will wake up to find that they are closely and successfully being pushed in one more sphere by the fairer sex . . . fewer and fewer positions [will be] ready and waiting for them. . . (*Musical Standard*, 2 April 1904, cited in Tick 1986, p. 333)

In Britain Henry Wood was the first high-standing conductor to break with tradition, when in 1913 he allowed six women string players into the Queen's Hall Orchestra in London. The numbers of such players did not significantly increase until the Second World War, during which women were allowed to flood the major orchestras, for the ghastly reason that the ranks were depleted of men who were away fighting, or dead. After the war, however, many of the women were ousted. Sir Thomas Beecham justified this action, saying in 1946 that 'women in symphony orchestras constitute a disturbing element . . . If a lady player is not well-favoured the gentlemen of the orchestra do not wish to play near her. If

she is, they can't.¹⁴ The conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in the United States was moved to respond to that comment:

The women in the orchestras I have had the pleasure of conducting . . . all proved themselves to be not only fully equal to the men, but to be sometimes more imaginative and always especially cooperative.

Hence I think Sir Thomas's jibe . . . though funny is also slightly unfair, and, as far as American orchestras are concerned, quite untrue. If anything their ability and enthusiasm constitute an added stimulant for the male performer to do as well. And as they were a veritable godsend to most conductors during the war years, and I think to Sir Thomas as well, it doesn't seem quite 'cricket' (to use his vernacular) to drop them now. (Hans Kindler, cited in Neuls-Bates 1986, p. 364)

Although job-protection was clearly an important contributory factor in the antipathy to the woman orchestral player, I would suggest that there were also other more nebulous sides to it, connected with the interruptive effects of female instrumentalists' display-delineations. The woman rank-and-file performer was, and still is, more interruptive of patriarchal constructions of femininity than the soloist. On one hand, unlike the control of inherent meanings by her soloist colleagues in highly autonomous music, the individual execution of inherent meanings by the orchestral player is to some extent subjugated to the more mechanical requirements of the ensemble, and to the direction of the conductor. Her power to step outside delineation altogether and into a supposedly purely autonomous realm is concomitantly reduced. On the other hand, unlike her soloist colleagues in the more popular sub-styles of classical music, she does not engage in a relatively feminine act of solo, virtuoso display, and therefore cannot so easily be presented as a 'sexy image' that compensates for the threat of the instrument. A woman player sitting in the ranks, particularly when she is in a minority, must behave like and indeed must be like 'one of the men'. Furthermore, within a team made up largely of men, actively engaged in skilled work involving precise motor-coordination and control over technology, the participation of a minority of women represents a displacement beyond the bounds of the female, domestic environment and, as such, an intrusion.

In short, the possibilities for the woman player to affirm her femininity in an orchestra are negatively affected by her subjugation to the

¹⁴ Cited in Neuls-Bates (1986, p. 364) and also, differently worded, in Dahl (1984, p. 48), amongst other places.

collectivity; her reduced opportunity for virtuoso display; her demonstration of precise motor-control as teamwork alongside men; her departure from the private sphere into a male stronghold. As a result of these factors, the interruptive potential of the instrument in the act of performance is for the woman orchestral player a more serious obstacle than it is for the woman soloist. Unlike those men who do not excel as soloists, women rank-and-file players make visible the normally transparent masculine delineation arising from instrumental performance, inevitably falling back into an interruptive, relatively 'unfeminine' type of display.

In Europe and the United States from around the 1870s to the 1930s, musical life reached a peak in terms of performance opportunities (although this did not mean high pay or job security for anyone), and women were more active than ever before. This activity, combined with the orchestral closed shop described above, went hand in hand with the development and rapid growth of a multitude of all-women orchestras. Women's brass bands had first appeared in the States in the 1850s, and following a visit of the Vienna Damen-Orchester to New York and Britain in 1871, ladies' orchestras as well as chamber ensembles sprang up all over Europe and North America.¹⁵ This meant of course that women increasingly learnt to play instruments which had been taboo for them since the disbanding of the convent and *ospedali* ensembles, especially brass, woodwind and percussion. It also instigated the first professional women conductors. Although these orchestras presented opportunities to women players, they were mainly restricted to playing light music, rarely being taken seriously and, as Ehrlich puts it (1985, p. 159), often insulting the quite considerable abilities of many of their players.

This same period saw the instigation of literally hundreds of all-women popular bands which played mainly in pavilions, tea-shops and music-halls. Like their more classical counterparts, these bands were restricted in their performance opportunities, usually being presented in the form of a gimmick or an 'attraction'. The lack of any trace of autonomy in their music had implications for the display-delineations available

¹⁵ See Neuls-Bates (1986), Ehrlich (1985), Tick (1986) on women's orchestras and bands, and on their reception. In 1895 a USA journal, *Musical Courier*, noted that women orchestral players might make a success as long as they played a light repertoire and did not go on tour (Tick 1986, p. 339). But women had already defied this: the Boston Fadette Orchestra in particular tackled a repertoire of large-scale pieces, as well as touring extensively. As with the lighter bands, the derision with which it was at first greeted was gradually replaced by praise. Then came the backlash that I've already described.