

# MY INTELLECTUAL TRAJECTORY

Ellen Rosand

To those many of you who have written histories of subjects or things, I imagine you're familiar with the feeling I had when I finished my first book, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre*. After drowning for a number of years in what I perceived as details, infinite amounts of data, documents, operas, literary evidence, and trying to rescue myself by fixing on various trends, comments, coincidences, and contrasts, I had finally managed to trace a coherent narrative. My book had a trajectory; it documented one view of the creation of the genre of opera. But this was evident only in retrospect, in the finished product, not during the process.

So it is with the intellectual trajectory you will hear about today. Despite the hugely varied, disparate, contradictory, messy experiences of my life and work, when viewed in retrospect my intellectual trajectory can actually be perceived as a straight line. It is only from this vantage point, now, that I can actually see it. From here I can see a short beginning, a longish middle, and a kind of culmination, if not yet an end. (Of course the beginning is much longer and less determined than I can remember, the middle probably more fraught, and the culmination still in flux.) There is something comforting about seeing my life and work this way. Certain themes stand out; others don't fit; some seem tangential but turn out not to be. On balance, though, up to now, the whole thing looks surprisingly coherent, much more so than it has felt. In the telling, however, I will no doubt have to interrupt to emphasize certain tangents and byways.

The theme that animates the straight line is my love of music, especially singing, which in some sense eventually led to everything else. Where did it begin? Would it be too reductively Freudian to ascribe its birth to the songs my father sang as he tried to calm his colicky baby daughter to sleep – when I got a bit older we called them patting songs, and they drew from his seemingly inexhaustible repertoire of what I think were World War I songs: the “Japanese Sandman,” “Show me the way to go home.” I still

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remember them – better than almost any other songs of my childhood or even adulthood. Patting songs, then the songs I learned from Mamie, the southern babysitter my parents hired to take care of me when my mother went back to work after my second birthday. To Mamie’s delight, I learned her songs and sang them to anyone who would listen, even on the street. Then came my grandmother’s Steinway baby grand, which, as a five-year old, I took possession of every Sunday when we visited. I cried so much each week when it was time to leave that my grandmother finally gave my parents the piano, much to the resentment of my cousins, a resentment that lasted for more than half a century (actually until five years ago, when my eldest cousin died at eighty-nine). She was practically on her deathbed the last time she mentioned it. There soon followed piano lessons with a loving, gifted piano teacher, a recent Austrian refugee, who made her living traveling around the city, going to her pupils’ far-flung homes for hour-long lessons, sometimes forty per week, as she later confessed to me. Our lessons lasted until I left for college at seventeen, though I had long since trekked to her house in Rego Park for them. I was an okay pianist but never really learned to sight-read, much to her dismay. She blamed herself for having played the new pieces to me before I began the heavy task of learning them myself from the music, so that I ended up playing them mostly by ear.

Another early landmark was Camp Deerwood, a music camp in the Adirondacks that I attended for six years, beginning when I was twelve, eventually ending up as a counselor. The experience was formative, primarily because of the extraordinary program of choral music. We learned a major choral masterpiece during each of the eight weeks of the camp season – rehearsing for three hours every evening, six days per week, and presenting the results in a concert at the end of each week. In my six years I learned, really learned, so that I still remember, Bach’s B-minor Mass, St. Matthew Passion, and several cantatas and motets, the Requiems of Mozart, Brahms, Verdi, and Fauré, Haydn’s Creation and Lord Nelson Mass, Mozart’s C-minor Mass, Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* and Ninth Symphony, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, Vivaldi’s Gloria, Puccini’s Stabat Mater, and many other works. Suffice it to say that with eight works per summer for six summers, the total was forty-eight choral works! These are some of the pieces I still know and love best. (Nothing like learning a lot of music when young.)

High school continued the same trajectory: I attended that famous New York cultural hothouse, the High School of Music & Art, where I first took voice lessons and encountered opera. I and my classmates engaged in all sorts of musical and artistic activities both in and out of school. We regularly lined up for standing room at the Old Met on Broadway at 39th Street and roamed all over New York to concerts and museums.

Although M&A, as we called it, specialized in the arts, it was also rich academically, and the student body was intellectually quite advanced. Music was still central to my life, but I became interested in more academic subjects, to the point where I looked forward to studying literature, history, philosophy, and psychology at Vassar College,

where I matriculated in 1957. Remember that in my day, women undergraduates were excluded from most Ivy League institutions (Penn and Cornell were the exceptions.) Our Ivy League was the Seven Sisters colleges. Most of us simply accepted it and were grateful for the small classes, the individual attention we received, and the opportunities afforded us to study with women faculty at schools like Vassar. Indeed, it was one such faculty member who provided the next point in my trajectory, a young instructor, ABD, violinist and music historian Betty Churgin. Although I had thought music might become a hobby for me as I pursued my other interests at Vassar, that didn't happen. I was just not good enough at or passionate enough about anything else. And although I studied many aspects of music, including theory, composition, orchestration, and performance (singing), I was strongly drawn to the academic side, namely, to music history, influenced especially by Miss Churgin, as we called her, who was writing her Harvard doctoral dissertation while teaching four courses per semester at Vassar. (It didn't seem all that difficult at the time; only much later did I realize how exhausted and heroic she was.) I admired her knowledge, drive, and love of music and became her acolyte. I wanted to follow in her footsteps and do my graduate work at Harvard, even though there were other, better graduate programs around. (One of them was at Princeton, but women were not yet welcome there.) Churgin spent hours talking to me and critiquing my work (as well as that of many other students, some of whom also became musicologists). And I became obsessed with every paper I wrote, unable to think of anything else while I worked out the details of my musical analyses. The one way in which I didn't follow Churgin was in my musical preferences. While her passion was classic music, especially Beethoven (her dissertation was on Sammartini, an early classical composer), mine was music of the seventeenth century, especially Italian, and also Bach and Handel. While at Vassar I managed to sing as much seventeenth-century music as I could find – there wasn't much, just some examples in anthologies and what one could find in the various Complete Works editions. (The Vassar Music Library, by the way, was then, and remains today, one of the finest of its kind in the United States.) When I was admitted to Harvard, I resolved to study with Churgin's adviser, the distinguished Italian musicologist Nino Pirrotta, but to work in Italian seventeenth-century vocal music, which was one of his specialties.

I have to interrupt this narrative for a moment to explore a byway, a tangent which, in the end, is not a tangent at all but every bit as much a part of my trajectory as the patting songs – perhaps even more so. Soon after I was admitted to Harvard with a substantial fellowship, much to my and my mentor's delight, the young man I had been involved with since sophomore year, David Rosand, a graduate student in art history at Columbia, proposed to me. It was quite sudden, unexpected, and thrilling. He had no money and neither did I, but he had won a summer fellowship to travel in Europe for the first time and wanted me to come along. He thought we could make it on five dollars a day (for two)! Needless to say, this being 1961, my parents would hear nothing of it, so David figured if we were married they'd have no choice. Clever

boy. I, on the other hand, was worried about my graduate career, worried that Harvard wouldn't take me seriously if I were married, and I was seriously upset about it.

(At this point, another non-tangent raises its head, the issue of women/feminism, whatever we want to call it these days, which I'll discuss more fully later.) I was also worried that Miss Churgin would lose interest in me. Of course most of my Vassar classmates had been engaged at least since the beginning of senior year, so they thought it was fine, and about time. But I was worried. I think I was one of only a handful of students who had applied to graduate school in anything. This only became clear to me at our twenty-fifth reunion when the figures were toted up: Ph.D.s in the humanities numbered something like five – considerably fewer than M.D.s and lawyers, and a shocking percentage in a class of four hundred students. I decided to break the news of my impending marriage to Miss Churgin by taking her out to lunch and presenting her with a gift (it was a volume of Schopenhauer that I'd glommed onto for my most recent Wagner paper). I needn't have worried. She was fine about it (and still chuckles when she remembers the scene today), but I refrained from telling Harvard until I had already matriculated the following September.

It was a great summer of traveling – since my art historian husband had never seen the Louvre, the National Gallery, the Uffizi, or any other European museum, we did the Grand Tour, though I managed to continue my preparation for graduate school by taking a few weekly counterpoint lessons with Nadia Boulanger, again following Churgin's example, while we were visiting Paris. (At the suggestion of Miss Churgin, I had spent the previous summer as a student of Boulanger at her summer school at Fontainebleau.) David spent afternoons at the Louvre, while I spent some of them in our tiny dark hotel room (nine francs) doing counterpoint exercises in preparation for my next lesson. And in London, I spent two hours a day trying to read German with a dictionary while David was in the National Gallery.

That fall, David and I worked out the commuting issue between Harvard and Columbia. We lived in Cambridge and he drove to New York every Tuesday for a seminar, stayed at his parents' house overnight (much to his mother's delight), and then attended another seminar before returning to Cambridge late Wednesday night. Only once did his exhaustion lead to a wrong turn getting on the Mass Pike, resulting in a frantic phone call to a very worried spouse at two in the morning from Albany. (There were no cell phones in those days and certainly no GPSs.)

Harvard did nothing for my singing career. There was no time to practice – and no recognition that performance had any redeeming value in the context of an academic music degree. The best I could do was to sing musical examples for class, since much of the music we studied was not available on recordings. But that allowed me to learn repertoire that I loved, including seventeenth- and eighteenth-century arias from abstruse Italian operas.

My Harvard days were numbered, though, because the following year David received a Fulbright and we were off to Venice for two years. My adviser, Pirrotta,

helped me make the most of the experience by suggesting a Venetian seventeenth-century topic for my M.A. thesis, which I undertook with great enthusiasm. The two Venetian years were absolutely crucial to my academic future in every way, mainly because I learned Italian well, became comfortable in the Venetian libraries and archives, and developed a lifelong passion for Venetian art and culture as well as some of my closest friendships. (I also learned to cook—each month I bought *La Cucina Italiana*, the slickest cooking magazine on the newsstand, and set myself the task of making the dish that was pictured on the cover. By the end of our stay, I could cook something like twenty elegant dishes.) I could say here (as I've been tempted to say elsewhere, and will be again), that the rest is history. I cite just one incident that to me encapsulates the Venetian experience. We changed apartments at the end of the first of our two years, and our belongings, including our rented upright piano, were transported by barge down the Grand Canal with me sitting at the piano and playing a Bach prelude. It was hilarious.

### **Excursis**

My husband and I were linked to Venice in a very special way: our work overlapped and intersected completely. We often presented lectures on Venetian art and music together; we read each other's work constantly; he often rewrote mine and I even typed his, until he realized that every time he wrote about altar painting I misspelled altar. We officially collaborated on only one publication, but it was very significant. Together we identified an anonymous portrait of a musician in the Dresden Gemäldegalerie as Barbara Strozzi, a singer and composer on whom I had been working for some time. (I'll come back to this.) Our link with Venice was institutionalized two years ago when, following David's death, I donated his library of 6,000 volumes to Save Venice, an organization with which he was closely associated, and which has established the Rosand Library and Study Center in Venice. My books will eventually end up there as well.

When we returned from Venice in 1964, David, having finished his dissertation, was appointed an instructor of art history at Columbia and I transferred to NYU for my Ph.D. I still wonder whether I would have done the same today: to leave Harvard for NYU just to live in the same city as my husband. In those days it was a no-brainer. Now, not so much. (Another part of the women problem that I'll get to in a moment.)

Two kids and one dissertation later—my subject, like that of my M.A. thesis, was Francesco Cavalli, the composer responsible for the establishment of Venetian opera—I finally entered the job market.

It was at this point that my experience with prejudice against women really began, and this is what I have been promising you. Again, this is not a tangent, though it requires an excursis to deal with. I had a difficult time landing a full-time job. Admittedly, my geographical range was limited to the greater New York area (it was the olden days, and I wouldn't have even considered commuting); for another thing,

though, my children were considered an impediment. In one interview, for a job at a junior college involving an hour-long commute, five courses per term, and occasional weekend commitments, I was asked by a dean—a woman, as it happened—what I would do if one of my children were sick. Would I stay home or come to class? Even then I was flabbergasted, though I had the presence of mind to say that my husband could stay home. That obviously didn't cut it. I didn't get the job. Instead, I continued working as an adjunct at two different institutions in New York City (occasionally at the same time), teaching two courses (at each) for \$2,500 per semester. One year I was teaching at two different institutions that were a subway ride apart and I had half an hour to get from one to the next. I usually made it, but I would be a wreck, and I didn't even have a desk at the second job. So when my teaching evaluations came in, one of the students commented that I was really a poor teacher because I never invited the students to see me after class. Well. I had nowhere to see them.

Six years after my Ph.D., having published three articles in major journals, when I finally received a serious tenure-track offer, from Rutgers, it was clear that they specifically *wanted* a woman. Times were changing and universities were finally waking up to the fact that their faculties were seriously lopsided. Of course I then had to endure the gossip of my competitors who were convinced that I'd gotten the job only because I was a woman. You could never win.

I spent fourteen happy years at Rutgers, though the final one was marred by my learning that the entire time I had been paid 20 percent less than all of my (male) colleagues at the same rank, but with many fewer publications. When I threatened to sue, I received a large check in the mail, bringing my salary up to par—but not beyond—and no reparations. It was during this period that I was appointed the first female editor-in-chief of the leading U.S. musicological periodical, the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, in which position I constantly felt that I had to prove myself, to do things better than my predecessors. It was a tremendous pressure. One nice thing, though, was that I could coopt my children in proofreading—and they charged only minimal rates and even learned something.

Jokes aside, the psychological pressure was intense. In addition to the journal, two hours per day on the New Jersey Turnpike, and a mad scramble to publish, kept me pretty busy. But I really enjoyed my teaching at Rutgers. Because my male colleagues wanted all the administrative jobs for themselves (they came with relief from teaching), I participated only minimally in departmental affairs, spending my free time writing. During this time, I had some very important academic mentors, all male, of course, who offered various kinds of encouragement and support, writing letters of recommendation, inviting me to conferences, and generally welcoming me into the senior ranks of the profession. Without them, the subsequent development of my career would have been impossible.

The years 1990–92 (around my fiftieth birthday), were banner ones. I received a Guggenheim Fellowship, my first book came out with University of California Press,

I was elected president of the American Musicological Society, and, best of all, Yale called. They too needed a senior woman, thank goodness. (Here, I'm being slightly facetious, what with Leon Plantinga in the room—one of the faculty members to whom I will always be grateful for hiring me.) Once again I'm tempted to say: the rest is history. I hit the ground running; threw myself into teaching and administration, first as director of graduate studies (in my first year!), and then as chair. The students, colleagues, and intellectual environment exceeded my fondest dreams. I felt that I had finally found a place where I could be myself, where my musical passions and drive were not threatening, but appreciated. And where my values as a scholar and teacher could make a difference. Teaching here allowed me to expand my horizons, not only in the classroom, but in advising dissertations. Interacting with other departments and programs—Italian, Theater Studies, Comparative Literature, Renaissance Studies—and collaborative teaching all allowed me to grow well beyond the limits I had accepted for myself.

In a way, my intellectual trajectory reached a climax, a point of arrival, in 2007, when my second book came out and when I was awarded a Distinguished Achievement Award by the Mellon Foundation, to be spent over a three-year period. You'll see why I say it was a kind of culmination. Stimulated by the only requirement of the award, that it be used to further my teaching and research, I decided to divide it into three parts: to subsidize a Critical Edition of the Operas of Francesco Cavalli (the subject, in some sense, of all of my work to that point: my Harvard M.A. thesis, my NYU dissertation, and my monograph of 1991); to fund five semester-long postdocs, mostly Italians, who would come to Yale to study Venetian opera and participate in a culminating international conference (all of this took place in 2009); and to support an undergraduate opera company that I called YBOP (the Yale Baroque Opera Project), which would be devoted to the performance of some of the works featured in the Cavalli edition, as well as other seventeenth-century Italian operas.

I could never have imagined YBOP if it hadn't been for the depth of musical talent of the Yale undergraduates, to which I was introduced by my colleague, the renowned performance guru and pied piper Richard Lalli. Lalli had already been cultivating that talent in his Collegium Musicum, his classes in vocal repertoire, and in various opera productions put on by the Yale College Opera Theater, which he founded. Fortunately, he agreed to be my collaborator on YBOP and instantly made a go of it. No one who witnessed his first two productions, a huge pageant of Monteverdi madrigals called *Ardo, Ardo*, and Monteverdi's opera *Orfeo*, will ever forget them. Several of the singers in those initial productions are on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera!

The Cavalli edition is still in progress. Six of the fourteen proposed volumes have been published, two more are in press, and five others will come out by 2021—god willing. More significantly, though, thanks first to a three-year renewal from Mellon, and then to the Yale administration, YBOP remains an ongoing activity on the Yale campus. At the end of this, our twelfth year, we will be presenting Cavalli's *La Doriclea*—actually our eighteenth production (initially we did two per year).

## Another Excursus

Barbara Strozzi. At one point in the early '70s, actually before Rutgers, I received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to study a topic that had emerged from my dissertation, the lament in the seventeenth century. My research involved combing the most important European libraries for as many examples as I could find and figuring out why they were so prominent in operas as well as chamber music of the period. In the process of collecting examples, the laments of one particular composer began to stand out for their frequency and eloquence. That composer was Barbara Strozzi. To be sure, the fact that Strozzi was a female composer was not irrelevant. Even in those pre-enlightened days (the late '70s), I knew a good thing when I saw it. Strozzi's laments led me into a whole new area of research, which brought together my interests in Venetian culture, singing, and vocal chamber music. It was certainly the right time to focus on a female composer whose output could compete with some of the most important (male) composers of her day. Once again, the rest is history. My exhaustive article on Strozzi, called "The Voice of Barbara Strozzi," published in 1978, not only earned me the bona fides of the nascent feminist musicology movement, but also spawned a virtual industry of performances and CDs. The fact that so many of the CDs bear the image of the composer that my husband and I identified in Dresden is a constant reminder of that exciting period of my career. (The article appeared in a reduced form in one of the first important volumes to be devoted to women composers, *Women Making Music*, edited by Judith Tick and Jane Bowers, which has just celebrated its silver anniversary.) And since writing this, Barbara Strozzi herself has even made it to the *New York Times*, where the four hundredth anniversary of her birth (a date I discovered) was celebrated with a major article in the Arts and Leisure section of 22 December, featuring a drawing based on "our" portrait.

I can't end this story without mentioning one final non-tangential tangent, the *Enchanted Island*. Some of you know that this was a newly composed operatic pasticcio based on the music of Handel, Vivaldi, and other eighteenth-century composers produced by the Metropolitan Opera in 2012 and 2014. Several years before that, I was asked by the Met to collaborate with the author Jeremy Sams, who had written a libretto based on the *Tempest*, in finding appropriate music. Not only did I spend more than two years listening to all the eighteenth-century operas available on CD, selecting those arias that I thought best suited the various dramatic situations outlined in the libretto – laments, mad-scenes, rage arias, love-duets: namely, those representing all the conventions of opera that I had studied for the past fifty years – but I had the opportunity of attending and even coaching at the rehearsals where the drama was worked out, with singers such as Joyce DiDonato, David Daniels, Danielle de Niese, and Plácido Domingo, to name only a few. And I was actually paid for doing this. I may not have ended up as an opera singer – I had long ago chosen another path – but the *Enchanted Island* was a perfect reward for that choice. Though completely unexpected, it fit perfectly within my intellectual trajectory.



I wonder if it's too cute as a final punctuation to the line of my intellectual trajectory if I mentioned the fact that Benjamin Rosand, the son of Jonathan Rosand, one of my erstwhile proofreaders from so long ago, is now a graduating senior in Yale College, and is sitting right here.

## Epilogue

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At this point, I feel that there is something missing from this picture. How actually does the nature of my work fit together? How might I characterize my interests beyond seventeenth-century vocal music? What have I been seeking as a scholar? In an attempt to answer this, I thought I would quote from a preface I drafted some years ago for a collection of my essays that was never published – or at least hasn't been yet. Writing that preface forced me to consider the ways in which my work has proceeded and hangs together. And it still seems relevant.

I've chosen seventeen articles that represent pretty much all the stages of my career – some are included especially because they are not easily available on JSTOR (several from *Festschriften*), others because they did not stand out in their original context (a review of a collection of essays by Nino Pirrotta, my Harvard thesis adviser), or might not be easily located on the basis of their subject matter (“Printed Singing Lessons”), or originally appeared in ephemeral publications (such as concert programs). Those few (four of them) easily available elsewhere – in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Ormindio, 1975, Strozzi, 1978), the *Musical Quarterly* (The Descending Tetrachord, 1976), and the *Cambridge Opera Journal* (Operatic Ambiguities and the Power of Music, 1992) – are included here because they were particularly important to me, either because they marked a special moment in my career (my first article, my most quoted article) or because the material did not find its way into my subsequent publications, namely my two books.

Having decided on the contents and the categories for this volume (Monteverdi, Cavalli, Venetian Opera, Baroque, Handel, and Vivaldi) it was not easy to come up with an overarching title, or a theme. I had to confront the question of what kinds of things interest me; what issues I have enjoyed exploring, how have my interests developed over the years. It seemed to me that, at least in some of the contents, my love of archival research and close reading of documents is evident; in others, my fascination with how music communicates is primary; while in still others, it's the operation of conventions. Most of the articles concern vocal music, and all of them are deeply committed to issues raised by text. My writings on music of the eighteenth century (Handel and Vivaldi), which come from later in my career, reveal an increasing focus on the “meaning” of music, especially instrumental music, an interest that had inspired my very early article on the descending tetrachord as an emblem of lament.

The title I chose, *Baroque Resonances*, refers to the fact that these articles resonate with central problems of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the problems of musical expression, and the development of strategies or conventions for communicating meaning. And they resonate too with the particular outlook toward music that saw it as a reflection of the society in which it was created. Finally, they resonate with one another in demonstrating that music became increasingly eloquent in expressing emotion as well as meaning.

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### **Future**

A couple of projects lie unfinished on my desk at the moment: the remaining volumes of the Cavalli edition, which may turn into a book on Cavalli's compositional process; a collection of essays called *Monteverdi's Venetian Operas: Manuscripts, Performance, and Interpretation* that resulted from a conference held in Venice in 2017 on that subject; and a sequel to one of the articles in *Baroque Resonances* on Handel's Time (this one is called Handel's Music, and involves "real music" in Handel's operas and oratorios, and will soon be ready for publication). Then we'll see.