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Barbra Streisand and the Theatricality of Popular Song: Vocal Technique and a Director's Eye

Barbra Streisand has sustained an auspicious career as a popular song singer for more than three decades—a period that otherwise saw the flowering of rock and soul and their various branches. While much of her fame is inextricably linked to her Broadway roots of the 1960s and her film work, she also has a large and faithful following when it comes to record sales. Her success in the pop music world is remarkable considering the unusual path she has taken, having had few top-forty singles, limited music video production, and until recently, minimal live concert exposure. Nevertheless, her fiftieth album, entitled *Back to Broadway* was a top seller upon release in 1993.¹

Basic information on Streisand's life and career (as reflected primarily in film) can be found in standard references, such as *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, Stambler's *Encyclopedia of Pop, Rock, and Soul*, and several unauthorized biographies. But little has been written about the details of her repertoire, musical style and interpretation, and vocal sound production.² This study will illuminate specific characteristics common to her recordings over the years and suggest how these techniques and choices have contributed to her continued success. Her recent return to live touring gave the author the opportunity to attend two concerts, which has proved invaluable in arriving at a more complete understanding and analysis of her style and theatrical approach.³

Today Streisand's recordings often are placed under such catalog and sales headings as "Easy Listening" or "Middle of the Road." She excels in ballad singing,⁴ and even her most "rock oriented" albums of the 1970s included at least one ballad-like selection.⁵ But her repertoire is far from undifferentiated. It is useful for analytical purposes to divide her recordings into five categories (of the author's design) based on text, music, style, or use: 1) character songs, 2) love ballads, 3) belter or torch songs, 4) lyric songs, and 5) autobiographical or advocacy songs. Descriptions of these terms and appropriate examples will be discussed shortly; many selections certainly could be included in more than one category.

Streisand has said that she was somewhat disappointed when her recording career (based on show tunes and ballads) took off nationally in the mid-sixties after she had been playing small club dates and local New York television.⁶ She had relished a certain mysteriousness and actually seemed to enjoy being

misunderstood by the very masses to which she suddenly appealed. Nearly thirty years later (1991), having been so long in the spotlight, she chose to release a retrospective boxed set entitled *Just for the Record*, which, as the title implies, offers a documentary of sorts of her recording career, including some previously unreleased material and alternate takes of other tunes.

Streisand's own comments on literature selection and song arrangements are few, although she has fought for and received considerable control over repertoire throughout her career. She recounts that she delayed accepting her first recording contract, waiting for "the right to choose my own material. It was the only thing I really cared about."⁷ Later she apparently received substantial pressure from Columbia/Sony executives—she has been contracted to only one label, though under varying management, throughout her career—to try more rock-oriented pieces in the 1970s and took some flak again in the mid-eighties when she wanted to return to Broadway songs.⁸ Liner notes indicate that her first actual credit as record producer came in 1976 with the sound track for her remake of the film, *A Star is Born*. Since that date she has frequently received producer credit on individual recorded selections or whole albums.

She clearly prefers songs that tell a story or that show a character in development, and these types of lyrics can be found in all of the musical style categories mentioned above. Attention to the dramatisation of narratives points to her interests in acting and directing even when the focus is on her singing. Referring to "If I Loved You" by Rodgers and Hammerstein, released on *The Broadway Album*, she wrote, "What I loved about singing it was the subtext of the lyric, the multi-layers—the character's tentativeness while feeling great inner passion."⁹ She also likes texts or word phrases that change meaning as the song unfolds. The lyrics of "Answer Me," written by Streisand, Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher, and included on her *Streisand Superman* album, illustrate this point. The text of the solo song involves two primary characters, the singer and a recipient, who are lovers. The title words occur as a pair four times, asking the recipient to *answer* the singer's queries, full of insecurity and desire, with "patient eyes" and "restful sleeping." At song's end, in the fifth statement of the word pair, some slippage of meaning occurs. "If someone ask[s]/[who] touched your heart/perhaps you'll answer me." The grammar may be questionable, but the poetic ambivalence is rich.¹⁰ A similar device is heard in "By the Way" written by Streisand and Rupert Holmes and released on *Lazy Afternoon*.¹¹ On several occasions in the song, the prepositional title is used to suggest a conversational nonchalance, and as a link to connect thoughts about a wavering relationship: "and, by the way, . . ." At the end, however, a rhetorical question is posed, as if to reassure an otherwise close friend that the awkwardness of romantic love can be avoided between them: "why can't we make love *fall by the way*?"

But drama and narrative content are not Streisand's only criteria for choosing a song. She feels that the lyrics written by Barry Gibb for her *Guilty*



Figure 1. Barbra Streisand in a posed photograph taken before her New Year's Eve concert at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas, 31 December 1993. AP/Wide World Photos.

album were more “abstract than those that I usually gravitated toward, but the melodies were so compelling that I decided to go along with them.”¹² Harold Arlen and the Gershwins get credit as her favorite composers,¹³ and she works frequently with Alan and Marilyn Bergman, Stephen Sondheim, Marvin Hamlisch, and Michel Legrand.

Her awareness of non-pop styles of music is sometimes evident in interviews and liner notes and can have a bearing on the final outcome of recordings. Commenting on her version of “Everybody Says Don’t” on *Back to Broadway* she wrote, “I didn’t hear this piece arranged in a conventional Broadway style, but more as the classical sound of anger often expressed in the music of Bartók and Stravinsky.” She then worked with arranger Bill Ross to get the effect she desired.¹⁴

Critics find fault with her repertoire choices when they feel that the lyric and theatrical content of a song are too small for her big voice and dramatic grandeur.¹⁵ Others seem to imply just the opposite by writing that Streisand gives so much in the way of dramatic interpretation that she prohibits listeners from discovering the emotion of the song in a more personal way.¹⁶

Returning to the repertoire categories enumerated above, “character songs” are those that she clearly approaches as an actress playing a specific role, whether or not the song is actually from a show. This broad category encompasses such diverse recordings as “Lover, Come Back to Me” on *The Second Barbra Streisand Album*; “Ding, dong the Witch is Dead” from *The Wizard of Oz* and included on the album titled *Harold Sings Arlen with Friend*; “Splish, Splash” by Bobby Darin on the *Wet* album; and “Adelaide’s Lament” from *Guys and Dolls* on *The Broadway Album*.¹⁷ Further evidence of her conscious “acting approach” comes from her comments about “With One Look” by Andrew Lloyd Webber on *Back to Broadway*, “When I first heard this song, I was immediately taken with its strong melody. I couldn’t wait to sing it—act it.”¹⁸ As early as 1963, composer Jule Styne called her a “great actress in each song,” writing that “Barbra makes every song sound like a well-written three-act play performed stunningly in three minutes.”¹⁹ Video-taped performances occasionally allow the listener/viewer to watch her “get into character;” her eyes and face usually get set as the orchestral introduction is heard. Clear examples occur at the beginning of “Send in the Clowns” on the *One Voice* video or “You Don’t Bring Me Flowers” on *The Concert* video.²⁰

There are a host of examples to consider for the love ballad category, several of which have been top-forty hits for her. These include “The Way We Were,” “Evergreen” (for which she composed the music),²¹ “You Don’t Bring Me Flowers” (done in a solo version and in a duet version with Neil Diamond), and her signature, “People.” Each of these songs appears on several Streisand albums (although occasionally they are simply re-releases of an earlier track), and a listener might find it instructive to compare different versions. As mentioned earlier, nearly every album contains at least one love ballad, and this

category is one in which she has recorded songs previously made successful by others: “I Won’t Last a Day Without You,” on her *Butterfly*, was a hit for the Carpenters; “Since I Fell for You,” on *Barbra Joan Streisand*, sold well for Lenny Welch in 1964 (the same year Streisand reached the top ten with “People”); and “Send in the Clowns,” on *The Broadway Album*, was a hit for Judy Collins. For her version of the last, Streisand requested and received a few minor rewrites from composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim to better enable the song to stand apart from its position in his show *A Little Night Music*. She has complimented Sondheim for his willingness to make these kinds of adjustments.²²

Several tunes spanning her career fit well under the belter or torch song heading—songs that require a fullness of tone and an attitude of defiance, sarcasm or triumph, often made musically clear by a loud, high-pitched, and sustained final note. “On a Clear Day” (found on several albums and CDs), “When the Sun Comes Out” on *The Second Barbra Streisand Album*, and “The Best Thing You’ve Ever Done,” on *Barbra Streisand The Way We Were*, all are representative of this style of “conviction” singing. The song “My Man,” from *Funny Girl* (film version), first popularized by Fanny Brice, can also be included within this group. Interestingly Streisand never recorded the full text of the Brice version, omitting lines that indicate the “man” of the song as physically abusive and unfaithful to the female singer. When belting, Streisand uses a full dynamic range and plenty of chest voice for intensity, but the songs are not laden with the pyrotechnics typical of, for example, a Mariah Carey or Whitney Houston rendition. Studying Streisand’s early and more recent recordings of the same piece (for example, “On a Clear Day” or “He Touched Me”) reveals a clear and startling contrast between the brightness of her earlier timbre and the darker, more refined tone of today. Other vocal techniques and idiosyncrasies have remained consistent over time in her presentation.

Streisand frequently sings songs characterized by unusual lyrics, of a form or length outside of the pop-music norm, or a melody requiring a more advanced singing technique than most popular songs. For purposes of this study, such songs will be termed “lyric” songs, as a means of pointing to their eccentric texts or declamatory innovations. “Jenny Rebecca” on Streisand’s first album *My Name is Barbra*, “Make It Like a Memory” on *Guilty*, “Honey, Can I Put On Your Clothes” on *Songbird*, and “Ordinary Miracles,” written for her recent tour by Marvin Hamlisch and the Bergmans, all fall into this category, as does the evocative and descriptive “Lazy Afternoon,” written for a 1954 Broadway show titled *The Golden Apple*. First recorded by Streisand in 1975 and included on *Lazy Afternoon*, a collaborative album, she also chose to add it to her spring/summer 1994 tour program (although it was not included on the Las Vegas New Year’s Eve and Day shows).²³

Most songs in the lyric category have not become commercial hits for Streisand (the exception being “Memory” from *Cats*), but she consistently includes this type of literature on albums. Perhaps such programming reflects

her interest in stretching her voice as well as her listener's thoughts. By this means she also challenges the knee-jerk tendency of producers to avoid songs that are too individualistic, and thus she repeatedly asserts her artistic independence.

The large and diverse number of Streisand's autobiographical or advocacy songs might easily fit, from a musical point of view, under one of the other headings already discussed. However, they deserve recognition as a group because of the special meaning the songs hold for her. Her use of song lyrics and performance venues as a platform for social commentary and personal statement is and has been significant throughout her career.²⁴ For example, "Not While I'm Around," from *Sweeney Todd*, was sung on tour for her son Jason, as was "The Best Gift" on her Christmas album, the year after his birth (December 1966). Other songs, such as "The Singer," recorded in 1970 but released on *Just for the Record* in 1991, and "Widescreen" on *Lazy Afternoon* express the frustrations a person can feel when living in the glare of the public spotlight. Many of the songs from her film *Yentl* touch on causes she actively promotes, such as education and the need for equal and diverse roles and opportunities for women in society.²⁵

A different type of personal statement is found in the rewrite of the song "I'm Still Here," included near the beginning of the 1994 tour program. In this case, the revised lyrics are used to illuminate her perception of her battles with the critics and her long absence from the concert stage. Her success as composer, actor, director, and producer are defiantly and proudly listed for those who might think those occupations the sole territory of men. She also emphasizes trademark physical attributes (long nose and fingernails) confidently and humorously.

Beginning in 1969 with the *What About Today?* album, political and social issues of concern to Streisand are blatantly reflected in song texts and in her selection of live performance settings. Her *Live Concert at the Forum* album was part of a fund raiser for presidential candidate George McGovern in 1972. More recent and well known are the *One Voice* album, taken from a live performance given at her Malibu home to raise financial support for Democratic political candidates in 1986, and her association with President Bill Clinton's Inauguration Day gala. Despite the probability of mixed political leanings within her 1994 tour audience—she, in fact, remarked on the "conservative" reputation of Orange County, California, in her concert banter at that venue—Streisand nevertheless stuck to her passion for making political statements. During her presentation of "Happy Days are Here Again," photographs and headlines related to the Clinton administration's successes and other world happenings (such as Nelson Mandela's election in South Africa) were projected on a screen above her. Her apparent confidence in her music's ability to transcend political division at least temporarily proved to be a provocative and a typical "I'll take the risk" Streisand stance. Additionally she has sung (live and on recordings) to raise

money for and promote her views on children's rights, AIDS research, and the environment.

Texts that have been eliminated from Streisand's repertoire over the years are those of a youngster trying to make it in the tough show-business world, such as "I'm the Greatest Star" from *Funny Girl* ("I'm the Greatest Star, I am by far, but no one knows it") and "I've been here" on *Je M'appelle Barbra* ("And when I've gone don't shed one tear, the world will know that I've been here").²⁶ She now also shies away from what she calls "dependent victim" songs, such as "It all depends on you" and even "My Man," with texts implying that the subject's happiness is contingent on another person's behavior.²⁷

In addition to popular songs, show tunes, and standards, Streisand also has recorded soft-rock and disco numbers. In the 1970s her "Stoney End" single and the theme from the film *The Main Event* did well commercially. Likewise, *Barbra Joan Streisand* was released in 1971 and was produced by Richard Perry, a figure associated with rock. The album contains material by John Lennon and Carole King, but also the more traditional pop teams of Bacharach/David and Legrand/Bergman(s). The album reached number eleven on the charts and was certified "gold."²⁸ Perhaps her most eclectic collection is found on the *Butterfly* album of 1974 where songs by David Bowie, Buck Owens, and Bob Marley appear. Panned by the critics, it nevertheless sold over a million copies and reached thirteenth place on the album charts.²⁹ Henry Pleasants noted in 1974 that Barbra could have become a competent "soul" singer had she wanted to. Her version of "Crying Time," recorded with Ray Charles and included on *Just for the Record*, provides a hint of what her sound might become in that arena.³⁰

Continuing in the experimental vein, she released an album of classical selections in 1976 (though it was recorded earlier in the decade), which received mixed reviews. One of the more interesting and insightful articles about the recordings appeared in *High Fidelity* from the pen of Glenn Gould.³¹ He found her effort problematic with respect to repertoire, but full of potential given that her voice "is one of the natural wonders of the age, an instrument of infinite diversity and timbral resource." She was nominated for a Grammy for that album in the "Best Classical Vocalist—Solo Performance" category. Ironically, she lost to Beverly Sills singing songs of Victor Herbert.³² Another exploratory approach can be heard on the soundtrack of her television special from 1973 called *Barbra Streisand and Other Musical Instruments*. Generally thought to be over-produced, it excited little commercial interest. But perhaps she was ahead of her time in stressing a multicultural angle: "Here the idea was to incorporate instruments and musical styles from all over the world" and apply them to her standard repertoire.³³

Streisand has recorded several duets with both male and female partners from Louis Armstrong to Frank Sinatra, Kim Carnes to Donna Summer. While some of these releases have been chart climbers (e.g., "Enough is Enough" with

Summer), others have been less successful. Her duo medley from *West Side Story* with Johnny Mathis, found on her *Back to Broadway* album, only projects the striking contrasts between their vocal skills and styles. On the other hand, her duet from *Phantom of the Opera* with Michael Crawford on the same album illustrates her ability to work comfortably with a singer who possesses a timbre and style much different from her own.³⁴ This knack has been noted by Henry Pleasants who writes, “She has many voices, almost, it seems, a voice for every song. When the song happens to be identified with another singer, or is conspicuously suited to the style of another singer, Barbra’s own singing is likely to recall that singer.”³⁵ On her recent tour she also sang duets as a means to achieve programmatic variety, and did so cleverly—without live partners: with Marlon Brando in a video segment from the movie *Guys and Dolls* and with herself on a video clip of the powerhouse finale from *Yentl*.³⁶

Streisand the composer has had one significant success, “Evergreen” from *A Star is Born*. In addition to the selections mentioned above in the discussion of lyrics, she also is credited as composer and/or lyricist on: “Ma Première Chanson” (*Je M’appelle Barbra*), “Lost Inside of You” (*A Star is Born*), “Two People” (*Till I Loved You*), “Wet” (*Wet*), and “You’re a Step in the Right Direction” and “Here We Are at Last” (*Emotion*).

With respect to her singing style and vocal technique, several characteristics have been persistent throughout her career. Her most distinctive stylistic trait is an approach to phrasing that does not necessarily respect normal punctuation. Some examples are suggested here for the reader’s listening with a few text fragments as cues; the ^ sign indicates where she takes a breath and the + sign indicates a carry-over with no breath. In “If I Love Again” from *Funny Lady*, Streisand sings “. . . If I love again,^though it’s someone new,+If^ I love again^it will still be you.”³⁷ During “On my way to You,” released on *Till I Loved You*, she sings “The smiles I never answered,^doors^perhaps I should have opened,+songs^forgotten in the morning.+I re-live.”³⁸ Printed in this manner or read aloud, these phrases and vocal punctuations can appear silly. But as part of her delivery, they make sense and allow her to highlight certain words or imply subtle meanings. While the casual listener might not want to analyze the sentence structure, those who listen repeatedly and intently recognize this as an interpretive, emotional trait central to Streisand’s style. A third interesting example can be heard in “I’m Always Chasing Rainbows” on *Just for the Record*. Simply observing where and when she breathes as the title words are repeated within the lyric is instructive for showing her ability to personalize and shape even minimal, repetitive lyrics.

Streisand often employs a fast vibrato around a generally solid pitch center, although she can glide in and out of pitches when the style or her interpretation calls for it. Glenn Gould specifically mentions her version of Carl Orff’s “In Trutina” on *Classical Barbra* as having the former trait.³⁹ The fast vibrato comes into play most prominently at the end of long-held notes of considerable volume.

The listener might tune in the end of “On a Clear Day” or other songs mentioned in the torch song category above, although the vibrato is evident on soft notes as well.

Streisand has a remarkable ability to hold notes with solid breath control over lengthy time spans, and she understands this skill to be among her most potent. One of the few technical comments she made after the 1994 tour was: “It’s very exhausting physically. It’s a lot of breathing; you have to be in pretty good shape. And I don’t work out vocally. I don’t practice. . . .”⁴⁰ As compared with earlier video-taped performances, she now seems to have developed a better or at least a more standard vocal posture. In the earlier settings, she often appears to be curved inward at the shoulders and slightly hunched, either to strike a dramatic pose or reflecting a self-protective shyness—one can’t quite say which. In any case, it does not seem to have adversely affected her control and, as mentioned above, her tone was naturally much brighter and more nasal then. Nowadays she projects a more regal carriage, yet also greater physical relaxation.

Of course Streisand is acutely aware of rhythm and tempo. In some instances she sings standards in tempos at odds with ones traditionally expected. For example, among her signature songs is “Happy Days are Here Again,” originally a sunny, up-tempo, ditty associated with Franklin Roosevelt and Democratic political rallies. She has transformed it into a slow and hopeful ballad. Likewise, her rendition of “Silent Night,” sung in June of 1967 and included on the *A Happening in Central Park* album, is slower and more dreamy than most other versions. She consistently begins concerts and shows with a slower tune rather than the expected upbeat attention-getter.

Streisand sings back-beat rhythms that cause her to struggle with a harder rock style. According to Streisand, Richard Perry, the producer of her *Stoney End* album, tried to get her to sing on the beat, “which I found hard to do.”⁴¹ Almost instinctively, she avoids rigid on-the-beat singing, and her rhythmic maneuvering is conspicuous on “The Man I Love” from *Back to Broadway*, especially when compared to Gershwin’s published notation. Film composer Paul Chihara gives her high marks for this kind of “back singing.” He notes that the bridge of the song starts on the beat but that she puts her entrance off the beat. At other times she creates a triplet feeling within a duple meter or drags words of one (printed) measure into the next, always able to adjust to the harmonic rhythm without unduly altering the melody.⁴² A similar styling can be observed when watching the lead sheet and listening to the Ogden Nash/Kurt Weill song “Speak Low” on the same compact disc.⁴³ While such extensive and expressive pauses are integral in the style for many pop artists (Frank Sinatra and Sarah Vaughan are just two of many who come to mind), they are especially marked in Streisand’s case.

Streisand possesses a fine-tuned sense of timbre and dynamic control for word painting. Her ability to adjust her timbre to meet the interpretive needs of a text or even a single word is exceptional. Her approach to text painting is

evident clearly in “Lazy Afternoon,” which appears on the album of the same name and as part of the 1994 tour soundtrack. The song’s picturesque words, such as “lazy,” “hazy,” “fat, pink clouds,” and “daisies running riot,” are ripe for coloring effects achieved through floating and breathy tone color, volume and pitch variance, ornamentation, or rhythmic delay. Songs with repeated choruses show how Streisand varies the reprises to extraordinary effect. In “I Won’t Last a Day Without You” on *Butterfly*, for example, she decorates the successive repetitions in order to drive up the emotional temperature.

On the other hand, her style is not dependent on constant variation or mere surface effect. She consistently exhibits strong vocal production throughout her entire range with use of chest voice and vocal growl for special effect. She generally works within a two-octave range (starting upward from the F below middle C) and, unlike many pop singers, is able to make a smooth transition between vocal registers. She uses her chest voice less today than when she was younger, but in the duet with Michael Crawford, “Music of the Night,” mentioned above, and on the song “Comin’ In and Out of Your Life,” on *Memories*, a chest voice is employed where it would not necessarily be expected. This technique adds the strength and intensity of her high register singing to the sound of moderate range notes. While today she still uses a vocal growl for special coloring, her overall tone is darker and less nasal than it was during the 1960s. In an interview with Steve Kmetko in 1991, Streisand said that she prefers the mellow sound of her voice in the 1990s compared to years ago, noting that formerly it was brash and laden with a Brooklyn accent.⁴⁴

She approaches diction from what she calls a “natural” point of view, and many songs reveal an almost recitative-like delivery, in which words are gently crammed together at the beginning of a phrase and rhythmic time is made up at the end. Still, Streisand indulges a few idiosyncrasies that mark many of her recordings, some even dating back to her teen years.⁴⁵ These include making octave leaps on a single word or note, adding little ornaments and inflections at the beginning of longer notes,⁴⁶ and using an “h” sound before some mid-word vowels. She also frequently goes quickly to the “e” vowel in the second half of a diphthong, such as occurs in the word “day.” Her subtle diction is enhanced by her effective use of the microphone.⁴⁷ In live performance Streisand does not use just her arm to pull the microphone in toward or move it away from her mouth. She moves to and from the mike with her body and head. This technique makes mike placement for volume and certain consonants less obvious, and her movement becomes part of the blocking or acting. It is also possible to observe, when comparing early films of live singing with current videos, that her ability to control dynamics with breath has improved over the years. Many dynamic changes now require few or no adjustments in mike placement. This control is particularly evident on the tour video rendition of a medley of Disney songs.⁴⁸ She holds the last phrase and note a full twenty seconds at a minimal dynamic setting with secure tone and pitch. However, on loud endings she typically

pulls the mike away with a dramatic arm gesture to create a decay before her vocal steam runs out.

Where do these techniques come from? Composer and film musician Paul Chihara suggests that part of her vocal skills were developed from her early years on Broadway where performers often have to work closely with composers and arrangers as a show is being solidified.⁴⁹ Certainly much of her ability in sound production seems to be natural and unconscious. Streisand has sufficient internal space to make resonant, soft sounds without opening her mouth widely. In other instances, she uses a very open mouth, jaw, and throat with a flat tongue.⁵⁰ Throughout her career, many comments have been made about the size of her nose, but equally important to her singing is her large mouth with a high and wide roof allowing for fullness of overtones and timbre. Borrowing terms from vocal pedagogy, her working range or tessitura could be described as alto or mezzo; her voice quality is “lyric” but with a “coloratura-like” lightness and agility. Finally, her understanding of the scientific properties of her voice is largely intuitive. Her approach to editing her recordings is apparently a hit or miss, tactile method; she knows her own capabilities and the sound she wants, and experiments until that is achieved. She claimed early in her career not to be able to read music, a peculiar notion to associate with someone with such legendary concern for detail and thirst for knowledge, though perhaps it played up to public expectations about the myths surrounding her. In more recent material written by Streisand and in television interviews, she does use some technical recording and music terminology, especially related to key, tempo, and orchestration, and she admits to having learned to play a bit of guitar and piano for the film *A Star is Born*. To date the only significant glances offered the public into her studio rehearsal process are found on the video about the making of the *Broadway Album* from CBS Music Video and the private release on the Kismet label of some studio rehearsal tapes.⁵¹

In addition to these technical aspects, the importance of her use of facial and body language and physical blocking in live or visual performance cannot be overstated. The opening of her tour program serves as a classic example. She opened with the slow song, “As If We Never Said Goodbye” from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Sunset Boulevard*, but with lyrics rewritten to apply to her music tour. She entered upstage left on a balcony, slowly making her way toward the center of the stage, lingering briefly next to other props (furniture) along the way. As the musical line and the text reached their climax on “I’ve come home at last,” Streisand stood front and center singing in full voice. The “director” had given the “singer” a grand moment, and two minutes into the program the audience was on its feet with enthusiastic applause. The message was received.

During the concert, one could observe, on the one hand, remarkable attention to detail, but on the other, a sense of “less is more,”⁵² a sort of studied simplicity. Streisand made only one costume change between the two fifty-minute halves, used lighting and stage backdrops subtly, and omitted all dancers

and back-up singers. Her costuming was used to good effect—her dresses usually having empire waists with flowing skirts that served occasionally as props or brief choreographic aids. She also used a large video screen above her to help with comic or chit-chat segments and the two duets mentioned above. The show was accompanied by a full orchestra, a rarity in today's touring world.⁵³ In all, there was a sense of completeness in the show package: the first half was somewhat autobiographical in several short but continuous scenes; the second half more concert-like. This is much the same format as was seen on her early television specials where the show began with a story-like scenario or theme and the last segment was a concert- or club-like setting. Certainly her theatrical and film storytelling experience has influenced her approach to concert formats, and it has heightened her director's awareness of the total event.

Streisand has mentioned Helen Morgan, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald as great singers of their day and recalls listening to "Your Hit Parade" as a youngster, but she seems never to have commented on any direct influence or inspiration. Early in her career she likely was influenced by Judy Garland, especially with respect to her emotional style and bright, forward timbre. But history has shown Streisand's abilities in stylistic range and interpretation to have exceeded those of Garland, and Barbra's vocal health and technical control have remained strong.⁵⁴ In light of Streisand's subsequent career, it is informative to listen to the legend and the soon-to-be-legend sing together on a video tape from one of Garland's television shows in 1963, and even more interesting to compare Garland's recordings of "Over the Rainbow" and "The Man that Got Away" with Streisand's as found on the latter's *One Voice* and *The Concert* respectively.⁵⁵

It is more difficult to identify pop singers of the younger generation who clearly follow in the Streisand stylistic tradition and who base their careers on similar repertoire. Occasionally a new singer is promoted as the "new Streisand," but thus far none seem to have lived up to that billing in vocal ability, versatility, or longevity. One singer who seems to use some of the same techniques and has a similar timbre in her middle range is Linda Eder who can be heard on the *Jekyll and Hyde* soundtrack released in 1990 by RCA Victor. A listener might take particular note of the song "Someone Like You" while keeping in mind the Streisand traits outlined above: recitative-like delivery (heard especially at the beginning) and vibrato, octave leaps, and dynamic contrasts (at the end). Several singers over the years, including Marilyn Michael and Sandy Patti, have done "imitations" of Streisand as part of their stage shows. A singer named Hynden Walch also did an imitation of Streisand (and Garland and Piaf) in a Chicago stage show called *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*. In an article about that show, Walch stated, "I'd never imitated anybody. What I learned is that it involves a switch in what singers call placement, Streisand's is actually the healthiest sound, very consistent, coming through her nose finally, but starting down deep, in her diaphragm, a good way to sing."⁵⁶

Marketing strategies, of course, have played an important role in Streisand's career. It appears that she, partly out of desire for privacy and partly out of business savvy, follows the "keep them wanting more" philosophy. She seems to know the importance of drawing the listener in to herself, but has remarked that she resists giving her whole self away for fear of the consequences that have plagued other well-known performers. Her recordings are often released at times of potentially high visibility, such as the Christmas shopping season, or in conjunction with the release of one of her films. She also has been criticized for releasing "new albums" that contain only a limited amount of new material among re-releases of previously-recorded works. (See, for example, her 1989 album called *Barbra Streisand, A Collection: Greatest Hits. And More.*) Likewise, a substantial amount of ink has been spilled commenting on the merchandising associated with her concert tour.⁵⁷ Shirts, jackets, posters, and other memorabilia were offered for a time on one of the cable home shopping channels and Sony advertisements provided a special phone number for mail-order customers who either did not attend the concert or were unable to get all the souvenirs they wanted at that time.

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Streisand's vocal success can be summarized briefly by stating that she naturally sings compellingly, and her acting enhances her singing. Many of her faithful long-time fans seem to be drawn to her seemingly effortless style and instinctive abilities, both technical and dramatic. They also sense, and probably admire, her gutsy, "I'll do it my way" attitude and personalized products, and revel with her in her success.⁵⁸ After the Las Vegas concerts were concluded and during subsequent tour concerts, Streisand commented on the warmth and affection she felt from her fans, many of whom had never heard her sing in person before. Even during the years that only studio-produced, non-visual recordings by her were available, the listener could still "hear the acting" in her singing. This explains, at least in part, her continued popularity without the usual live and visual commercial products.

NOTES

¹ Allison J. Waldman, *The Barbra Streisand Scrapbook* (New York: Citadel Press, 1995), 77. The album is a sort of sequel to Streisand's highly successful *The Broadway Album* (1985), hence the title of the later release. See the Appendix for the release dates of her albums and a list of videos containing concert singing.

² Many of her albums have been reviewed in *Rolling Stone* and other periodicals. Some information on recordings can be found in Waldman, *The Barbra Streisand Scrapbook* and in biographical/career sources, such as James Kimbrell, *Barbra, An Actress Who Sings*, vol. 2, ed. Cheri Kimbrell (Boston: Branden Publishing, 1992); James Spada, *Barbra the First Decade* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1974); and Spada, *Streisand, Her Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995).

³ Las Vegas, 1 January 1994 and Detroit, 17 May 1994.

⁴ This term has several meanings in music. Here it refers to what Marvin E. Paymer describes as "any slow, romantic song with a steady but unobtrusive beat." He offers "The Way We Were," a Streisand signature piece, as an example. See Paymer, ed., *Facts Behind the Songs* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 16.

⁵ For example, the Randy Newman song "I'll Be Home" released on her *Stoney End* album in 1971.

⁶ Barbra Streisand, "The Artist as Citizen," Speech for the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 3 February 1995, televised on C-Span 2; her first solo album, *The Barbra Streisand Album*, was released by Columbia in 1963. It received two Grammy Awards, for Album of the Year and Best Female Vocalist.

⁷ Barbra Streisand, accompanying booklet for *Just for the Record*, compact disc 44111 (Sony Music Entertainment, 1991), 17.

⁸ *Barbra Streisand Putting it Together, The Making of the Broadway Album* (Barwood Films with CBS Music Video Entertainment, 1986). The opening song on the album is Stephen Sondheim's "Putting it Together" from *Sunday in the Park with George*. At Streisand's request, Sondheim rewrote some of the original lyrics adjusting the story line—originally concerned with painting—to address the creative process of making a record. See the liner notes for *The Broadway Album*, compact disc CK 40092 (Columbia, 1985). Her choice to return to her Broadway roots was vindicated by positive reviews from the critics, a "triple platinum" sales record, and a Grammy for Best Pop Female Vocal Performance. See Waldman, 70. This album also is noted for its use of a live, full orchestra during the recording process. See David Patrick Stearns, "Barbra at \$350 a Ticket," *A & E Monthly* (August 1994): 29.

⁹ *Just for the Record*, 78.

¹⁰ "Answer Me" lyrics by Barbra Streisand, Paul Williams, and Kenny Ascher; copyright by Emanuel Music Corp. and 20th Century Music Corp. (ASCAP).

¹¹ "By the Way" lyrics by Barbra Streisand and Rupert Holmes.

¹² *Just for the Record*, 71.

¹³ *Just for the Record*, 8, 29.

¹⁴ Barbra Streisand, liner notes for *Back to Broadway*, compact disc CK 44189 (Columbia, 1993), 4. The importance of the arranger in her recordings is a subject for another study. For example, Peter Matz was the conductor and arranger on her early albums and was brought back to do *The Broadway Album*. Some authors have credited part of her success to his work. See Waldman, 38-39.

¹⁵ For example, see Henry Pleasants, *The Great American Popular Singers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 362-3; Aida Pavletich, *Sirens of Song* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 43; Jim Farber, "And if you can't fork over \$350. . ." *Entertainment Weekly* no. 218 (15 April 1994): 22.

¹⁶ Stearns, *A & E*, 30.

¹⁷ Songs will be suggested spanning Streisand's career, including those that became "hits" and those that did not. The purpose of the wide view is to show consistency over the years. However,

these repertoire categories and the techniques described shortly are evident, in part, on every album.

¹⁸ *Back to Broadway* liner, 8.

¹⁹ Jacket notes for *The Second Barbra Streisand Album*, CS 8854 (Columbia, 1963).

²⁰ The former was aired as a special on HBO (and later released as an album); the latter was released by Columbia Music Video. Even though I was seated a distance away, this also was noticeable in live performance during her tour by my careful observation of her "body language" with the help of a projection screen above the stage.

²¹ The reader might find it interesting to listen to a partial practice excerpt of her singing the melody with guitar accompaniment on *Just for the Record*.

²² *The Broadway Album* liner, 11; see note 8.

²³ Lyrics by John Latouche. This song, as sung by Sarah Vaughan, also is included on the Smithsonian/CBS Records 1984 collection of *American Popular Song*. In the booklet, *Six Decades of Songwriters and Singers* that accompanies the recordings, James R. Morris makes some interesting comments about the "impressionistic" quality of the song (see p. 120).

²⁴ In December of 1995 Streisand was asked to sing at a memorial service for Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. She declined when the proposed appearance was opposed by Orthodox Jews who believe women's voices should not be heard by men (according to a report on National Public Radio's Morning Edition, 6 May 1996). Although Streisand usually does not shy away from a challenge or breaking tradition and has never attempted to disguise her Jewish heritage, in this case she chose not to create a controversy.

²⁵ This film, released in 1983, could be the subject of another study. It is important in her career because it represents her real-life struggle as producer, writer, star, and director, and the story is full of statements about Streisand's personal beliefs and feelings related to education, her father, etc. From a musical point of view, Streisand's character is the only "singer" in the film, and the singing is used to make the audience aware of Yentl's inner feelings and thoughts. This technique is appropriate since, during much of the story, Yentl is living a secret.

²⁶ "I'm the Greatest Star," lyrics by Bob Merrill; "I've Been Here," lyrics by Earl Shuman and Michel Vaucaire.

²⁷ Streisand nevertheless sang "My Man" on the tour (after a sort of disclaimer) to the delight of her fans.

²⁸ Waldman, *Scrapbook*, 81.

²⁹ This collection also directly shows the influence of her former paramour, Jon Peters, who produced and helped select the repertoire on the album. Her personal life sometimes is reflected on other albums and CDs, such as *Till I Loved You*, recorded at a time when she was involved with actor Don Johnson.

³⁰ Pleasants, *Popular Singers*, 364.

³¹ Glenn Gould, "Streisand as Schwarzkopf," *High Fidelity* 26 (May 1976): 73-75.

³² Waldman, *Scrapbook*, 55.

³³ *Just for the Record*, 55.

³⁴ Interestingly, both duets on the *Back to Broadway* album are from theater shows, but were not used as duets within the show. They have been arranged as duets for this album.

³⁵ Pleasants, *Popular Singers*, 362.

³⁶ As will be noted later, the tour concert was full of situations where technical glitches or overproduction could have marred the show. In the performances the writer attended, there appeared to be no such problems—the technical production was professional and elegant with close and appropriate coordination with the music. Some complaints were uttered in Las Vegas about the late start of the performance, which appeared to have as much to do with the new MGM Grand's parking arrangements and celebrity audience accommodations as anything Streisand could or should have controlled.

³⁷ "If I Love Again," lyrics and music by J. P. Murray and Ben Oakland (ASCAP), is perhaps a less familiar Streisand recording, but the same techniques can be heard on her hits.

³⁸ Music by Michel Legrand and lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman. Threesome Music Publishers (ASCAP).

³⁹ Gould, *High Fidelity*, 74.

⁴⁰ Michael Shnayerson, "A Star is Reborn," *Vanity Fair* (November 1994): 154. When a shorter version of this paper was presented in August 1995 at the "American Music, American Women" conference at the University of Colorado in Boulder, an audience member responded that her father had been a musician at one of Streisand's recording sessions in Los Angeles. The father felt that the singer did, indeed, practice, but did it in the recording studio. Streisand likes to do several versions and "takes" of each song.

⁴¹ *Just for the Record*, 45.

⁴² Paul Chihara, telephone interview by author, 21 January 1995; the listener also should notice Streisand's substitution of the word "we'll" in Ira Gershwin's phrase, "He'll build a little home just meant for two." Her interest in building and decorating homes is well known among her fans, and we no longer live in an age when men alone buy and build homes. See also comments below regarding musical devices related to her rhythmic style.

⁴³ Using a lead sheet and recording as suggested here can be effective in a music appreciation or music history class for showing the different expectations placed on singers in popular music compared to "classical" singers.

⁴⁴ Barbra Streisand, interview with Steve Kmetko, aired in segments the week preceding 25 December 1991 on *CBS This Morning*.

⁴⁵ She recorded "You'll Never Know" at age thirteen and finally released it on *Just for the Record*.

⁴⁶ In more precise terms she uses non-chord tones, anticipations, neighbor tones, appoggiaturas, suspensions, etc. Some of these are related to her rhythmic liberties noted above, others seem to be lyric improvisations. A listener might select "The Nearness of You" on *Simply Streisand* for an early example and "Somewhere," found on *The Broadway Album*, *One Voice*, and *The Concert* (CD). In the latter case it is possible to compare two different "live" versions with a studio version. Generally there seems to be a greater number of improvisatory moments of this nature on "live" versions as also can be heard in her various releases of "Send in the Clowns" or "Evergreen." The author wishes to thank Streisand aficionado and musician Jack Chan for his additional repertoire suggestions.

⁴⁷ Certainly credit must be given to the sound engineers on her tour. Readers interested in this aspect of her performance should refer to an article by Shaun Considine in the 20-26 August 1994 issue of *TV Guide*; to the liner notes from *The Concert* (tour) compact disc C2K 66109 (Columbia, 1994); and to James R. Morris, *Six Decades of Songwriters and Singers*, p. 121 (see note 23).

⁴⁸ There are actually three released versions of the 1994 tour video tape. The first two are taken from a July 1994 Anaheim, California show that was aired by HBO in August 1994. This tape was later released commercially by Columbia Music Video, but the copies sold by Blockbuster video contained a "Bonus Track" of "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life." A third version was presented later on CBS television, for which Streisand received an Emmy award in 1996. The CBS version contains the Disney medley done only during the Las Vegas New Year's shows but spliced in for this television airing. Likewise, the CD of the tour soundtrack is from a performance in New York City in June 1994. The release of various versions reveals clever marketing strategy—many devoted Streisand fans likely purchased more than one version in order to have as much repertoire as possible.

⁴⁹ Chihara interview; Streisand has commented about the pleasure she derived as a young star in the working out of the *Funny Girl* stage production. She loved "the process of rehearsal" (*Just for the Record*, 24).

⁵⁰ This observation was also noted by film critic Gene Siskel when reviewing the tour video for the *Today* television show in the fall of 1994. The author wishes to thank vocalists Sandra Whitaker and Judy Sadler for confirmation of ideas and terminology related to vocal production questions.

⁵¹ See *On Broadway* K-1016 (Kismet, 1985) and *Memories Are Made of This* K-1001 (Kismet, 1984).

⁵² Streisand has said that "excellence is in the detail" and that she feels no need to apologize for caring about details. (See an interview with Barbara Walters on *20/20* aired on 11 November

1993.) This attention to detail also can be seen in the packaging of her recorded material. As evidence, the four CDs of *Just for the Record* each picture a rose. CD 1 shows a bud, CD 2 a bud opening slightly, CD 3 shows some of the petals beginning to open wide, and CD 4 shows a fully blossomed rose. These photographic “excerpts” are parts of a complete photo seen on p. 1 of the liner notes booklet, and likely reflect the fact that the CDs are organized chronologically. Therefore, the bud represents Streisand’s career in the early and mid-1960s, while the fully-opened rose represents the mature flowering of her career in the 1980s.

⁵³ Streisand stated that the tour expenses were her financial responsibility and that they totaled \$20 million. The spring/summer tour is estimated to have grossed \$50 million, and Streisand reportedly received \$14 million for the two Las Vegas shows. See Shnayerson, “A Star is Reborn,” 156; Dana Kennedy, “Ticket Master,” *Entertainment Weekly*, no. 218 (15 April 1994): 15-19.

⁵⁴ See also Waldman, 34.

⁵⁵ In the 1980s Streisand recalled the 1960s guest spot on the Garland show. She noted that Judy held her hand very tightly when they sang together, and Barbra could not understand why Judy, the veteran, was shaking. Only later did Streisand finally come to appreciate the kind of “show-biz” pressure that Garland must have been feeling at the time.

⁵⁶ Sid Smith, “A Powerhouse,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 January 1994, section 5, 6. A number of female impersonators also do a version of Barbra—a phenomenon outside the scope of this study.

⁵⁷ See as examples: Waldman, 265-67 and *TV Guide*, 20-26 August 1994, 14.

⁵⁸ These very same characteristics sometimes are mentioned by her detractors. For further comment and information on her fan base, especially related to her 1994 tour and its merchandising, see, William Grimes, “She’s Worth Her Weight in Barbra,” *New York Times*, 3 April 1994, section 4, 4; “People Who Need Barbra” and “Singing Her Praises,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 August 1995, section 5, 1; and Bonnie Salomon, “The Way We Were,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 February 1995, section 6, 9.

APPENDIX: STREISAND RECORDINGS AND VIDEOS

Streisand can also be heard on a few collaborative albums, such as *Harold Sings Arlen with Friend*, but these are not included below. She sang the title theme, but did not appear in the film, *Eyes of Laura Mars*. She composed but did not sing the music for *Nuts*. An asterisk (*) indicates a show soundtrack album.

Recordings

*I Can Get It for You Wholesale 1962
 *Pins and Needles 1962
 The Barbra Streisand Album 1963
 The Second Barbra Streisand Album 1963
 The Third Album 1964
 *Funny Girl (Broadway) 1964
 People 1964
 My Name is Barbra 1965
 My Name is Barbra, Two 1965
 Color Me Barbra 1966
 Je M'Appelle Barbra 1966
 Simply Streisand 1967
 A Christmas Album 1967
 A Happening in Central Park 1968
 *Funny Girl (movie) 1968
 What About Today? 1969
 *Hello, Dolly 1969
 Barbra Streisand's Greatest Hits 1970
 *On a Clear Day You can see Forever 1970
 Stoney End 1971
 Barbra Joan Streisand [Barbara Joan Streisand] 1971
 Live Concert at the Forum 1972
 Barbra Streisand and other Musical Instruments 1973
 Barbra Streisand The Way We Were 1974
 *The Way We Were 1974
 Butterfly 1974
 *Funny Lady 1975
 Lazy Afternoon 1975
 Classical Barbra 1976
 *A Star is Born 1976
 Streisand Superman 1977
 Songbird 1978

*Eyes of Laura Mars 1978
 Barbra Streisand's Greatest Hits, Vol. 2 1978
 *The Main Event 1979
 Wet 1979
 Guilty 1980
 Memories 1981
 *Yentl 1983
 Emotion 1984
 The Broadway Album 1985
 One Voice 1987
 *Nuts 1987
 Till I Loved You 1988
 Barbra Streisand A Collection 1988
 Barbra Streisand: Just for the Record [boxed set] 1991
 *Prince of Tides 1991
 Back to Broadway 1993
 Barbra Streisand: The Concert 1994

Videos that Contain Concert Singing

My Name is Barbra. 1965 (TV special released in 1986 by CBS/FOX 3519).
Color Me Barbra. 1966 (TV special released in 1986 by CBS/FOX 3518).
A Happening in Central Park. 1967 (Taped for TV, released in 1987 by CBS/FOX 3520).
Barbra Streisand Putting it Together: Making the Broadway Album. 1985 (Barwood Films with CBS Music Video Entertainment).
One Voice. 1986 (HBO TV taping).
Judy Garland and Friends. 1991 (Warner Reprise Video, Warner Bros., 338293).
Grammy's Greatest Moments. 1994 (Vol. 1; A *Vision Entertainment 50740-3).
Barbra The Concert. 1994 (HBO TV taping, Columbia Music Video 29V-50117).
Barbra The Concert. 1995 (CBS TV special).