

Jenny Lind: A Tale of Two Narratives

This project addresses the general lacunae of women in music that has spawned the large-scale movement to supplement the study of canonical male composers with lesser known female musicians. More specifically, this paper examines the historical practice of fictionalizing female singers and musicians by focusing on the life of Jenny Lind (1820-1887). Lind is a woman that overcame the Victorian norms for women by embodying them. Lind was a musical prodigy that quickly became a singing sensation that was unrivaled in her time, while also serving as a model for the middle-class idealized angelic woman bent on charitable work. She commanded large fees and negotiated contractual terms for herself and her male counterparts. She was friends with the most influential composers and inspired much of their work, including Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann. And after Robert's death, Lind sang a concert to assist Clara Schumann, financially.

However, Jenny Lind is a woman of two narratives. First, the historical biography describes a woman that is pious and charitable. First, Lind became the a prima donna requested by notables such as, Queen Victoria and composers, Meyerbeer, Lindbald, and Mendelssohn. In fact, she would go on to create a role with the legendary Verdi, in *I Masnadieri*. After her retirement from the operatic stage she was approached for tours around the world, but famously decided to work with P.T. Barnum. During her American tour with Barnum, she secured a vast sum which was largely dedicated to charity. At the end of the tour, she married Otto Goldschmidt, who served as her pianist.

Yet, the life of Jenny Lind has been treated to countless fictionalizations. In 1845, Margaret Fuller published a review in the *New York Daily Tribune*, in which she hypothesized that George Sand based her *Consuelo* off of Lind (though it was more likely inspired by Pauline Viardot, a friend of Lind and Clara Schumann). Most recently, the fictionalized portrayal of Lind has devolved into blatant misrepresentation in *The Greatest Showman* (2017). According to the film, Barnum refused Lind's romantic advances, which prompted the prima donna to vengefully ruin the fortune of Barnum by ending their tour early. However, this farcical retelling goes against the historical record. In this presentation, I explain what could be the genesis of Lind's fictionalization and explore the repercussions of such a faulty narrative. Finally, I will extrapolate on these ideas and suggest a re-vision of the proto-feminism in which Lind was engaged.

Timothy Bostwick is a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in Performance and Literature with a cognate in Musicology. His dissertation, *The Nightingale's Voice: Exploring Jenny Lind as a Proto-feminist*, explores the famed singer as an example of a woman that transcended societal norms in Victorian England. He was also recently awarded the Kate Neal Kinley Fellowship and the Stotler Fellowship.

Additionally, as an avid performer, Mr. Bostwick, baritone, has been applauded as an "impressive and impactful voice" in *Hansel und Gretel* and described in his role as Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* as "Pure comic joy." Recent performances include; the titular roles, Falstaff and Gianni Schicchi, in addition, he is an avid recitalist including Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch*, an American Art Song recital, and Clara Schumann: A Life Remembered.