

The Vocality of Sibyl Sanderson  
in Massenet's *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Research Aims and Objectives

Sibyl Sanderson (1865–1903), a stellar American soprano with a turbulent story had a surprising impact on Jules Massenet’s operas *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*. This thesis examines the ways in which this lyric coloratura was responsible for the re-creation and co-creation of the title roles of these operas, in the context of current research into nineteenth-century performance practice.

Much has been written about Sibyl Sanderson. The present thesis aims to isolate the impact of her vocality on *Manon* and *Esclarmonde* as determined through study of annotated scores, reception history, vocal training, and correspondence during her professional career, from 1887 to 1903. She performed largely in France, with excursions to other European cities, where she championed these operas and performed several other roles. Sanderson also performed in the United States, where she had a considerable reputation, though not necessarily a positive one.

After Sanderson’s death, many original documents related to the soprano were relocated to the United States by her family, and through acquisitions by American collectors (i.e., Mary Flagler Cary and James Fuld). This not only facilitates viewing, but is also an opportunity for new discovery. Many of the sources, such as those housed at Stanford University and the Pierpont Morgan libraries, have received less attention in scholarly research than documents in Europe. The originality of this thesis comes in part from dividing research between French and American sources, because the most important work on Massenet to date has not focused so heavily on sources held in the United States, especially those from California. Massenet biographer Demar Irvine’s research contains American sources from the University of Washington library, but there is virtually no overlap between the press and correspondence he cited and the research presented here.

The same can be said of documentation referred to by Jack Winsor Hansen and Karen Henson. The main biographic and reference sources contain some commonalities, but reception and correspondence are, by and large, previously uncited. This research attempts to make an original contribution to existing knowledge surrounding Sanderson, since it is the first examination solely dedicated to the study of her influence on these operas from the perspective of vocality—a term which will be interrogated later. Performance and pedagogic observations have been made by practical engagement with arias from both operas.<sup>1</sup>

This body of work exhibits distinct, independent research and conclusions; and adds new insights into the field of study because of source material and practice. Regarding the usefulness of these conclusions as they relate to practice, Katherine Bergeron recognises the vital importance of looking to the performers in order to understand the changes in music. She also realised how valuable her own practice was to her research:

Unlike the poets, the composers tell us almost nothing about their change of heart, or the change in their art. But other witnesses are more forthcoming, a group whose language training could and did affect the sound the composers were now imaging. I am speaking of French performers. [...] I should also confess that one of the ways I have tried listening to these voices is by learning how to sing myself. Evidence of my own voice lessons may not be immediately obvious in the pages that follow, but the experience of singing has afforded me a unique perspective on my subject. [...] Before my lessons, I'll admit, I had trouble hearing what made these singers great. [...] Singing made me more physically aware of French resonance, and that sensation tuned my ear. [...] On these recordings, the sound of French has invaded the tone of the singing voice so completely as to produce a wholly new oral object. The sound is almost unheard of today. [...] The sound, in effect, *is* the history.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Research was also filtered through the lens of personal experience as a vocal pedagogue and professional performer who is versed in the creation and premiere of new works. Additional commonalities that exist between subject and researcher include being a lyric coloratura soprano from Northern California who relocated to Europe to pursue a career in vocal music; we both studied with teachers who advocated differing and opposing vocal strategies.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xi–xii. Kindle edition.

Bergeron was fortunate that recordings were made of the performers she studied. Such is not the case with Sanderson; she died before her voice could be immortalised in wax. In order to form an impression of how Sanderson sounded, looked, and acted, it is necessary to turn to documents and images because they are our only evidence. Common ground in those findings must be sought, although they are often more journalistic than precise.

### Key Definitions

- Vocality means the production of sound that is emitted from the human voice, often sung or spoken, and extending to audible utterance, such as laughing or crying.<sup>3</sup> Note: the term denotes technical aspects of sung performance, including elements related to breath, registration, and resonance.<sup>4</sup> Vocal performance encompasses more than vocally emitted sound; it also includes dramatic portrayal, choreography, physical deportment, and stage elements such as props, costumes, lighting, and more. These elements are addressed specifically and as necessary within the scope of Sanderson’s vocality.
- Interpretation refers to musical and dramatic communication of a role within an opera.<sup>5</sup> The term encompasses broader considerations of performance practice, including vocality, characterisation, acting, expression, movement, and dance.<sup>6</sup>
- Coloratura vocal writing:
  - It is a phonated collection of sounds (generally musical) containing ornamented, embellished, and florid groups of notes. A phrase may contain non-notated sounds such as laughter or sobs.
  - The phrases can include runs, trills, melismas, and cadenzas.<sup>7</sup>
  - It is generally marked by fast tempi, and extreme vocal agility.
  - Coloratura singing exists in each vocal category (*fach*), and there are different types within each *fach*, such as lyric or dramatic.
  - Lyric Coloratura Soprano—a *fach* that is typically light, fast, agile, and capable of singing the highest notes in operatic repertoire.<sup>8</sup> The distinction of *lyric* coloratura suggests a voice with lighter tone and vocal weight.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–3.

<sup>4</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 181–183.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck, and Laura Leante, *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 58–59.

<sup>6</sup> Helen M. Greenwald, “Introduction: Arguing about Opera,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris, “Coloratura,” *Grove Music Online*. 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Kloiber, *Handbuch der Oper* (Regensburg: G. Bosse, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8–9.

## Sources and Methodology

**Figure 1:** List of Sources

Types	Locations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libretti</li> <li>• Scores</li> <li>• Mises-en-scène</li> <li>• Visual art and photographs</li> <li>• Reception</li> <li>• Correspondence</li> <li>• Memoirs</li> <li>• Practical treatises</li> <li>• Recordings</li> <li>• Biographical Information</li> <li>• Musicological research</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bibliothèque nationale de France (<i>F-Pn</i>)</li> <li>• BnF - de l'Opéra (<i>F-Po</i>)</li> <li>• Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris (<i>F-Pbh</i>)</li> <li>• British Library (<i>GB-Lbl</i>)</li> <li>• Oxford Bodleian Library (<i>GB-Ob</i>)</li> <li>• New York Public Library (<i>US-NYp</i>)</li> <li>• Pierpont Morgan Library (<i>US-NYpm</i>)</li> <li>• Royal College of Music (<i>GB-Lcm</i>)</li> <li>• Stanford University (<i>US-SFsu</i>)</li> <li>• Saint-Étienne, France (Massenet conservatoire)</li> <li>• Sacramento, California               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ McClatchy High School archives</li> <li>○ Sacramento State University</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Hammond, Indiana (J.W. Hansen collection)</li> </ul>

Each source has advantages and disadvantages. Sanderson lived more than one hundred years ago, and there has been much written about her over time; many sources are available online. However, several crucial source materials, including music manuscripts and correspondence archives, have not yet been digitised. Some of the sources that are available in electronic versions have limitations. For example, in a digitised document it is difficult to decipher layers of paper to see the original version under a pasted correction. This is true of the annotated vocal score containing Sanderson's markings. A large number of tangible documentary sources are available for public viewing, such as autograph manuscripts, written correspondence, and photographs. Where necessary, details from my own examination of the original scores are included.

### Musical Scores

Each of the annotated *Manon* piano/vocal scores (VS) used for this research contains more than one hundred pages of revisions to the title role. The *Esclarmonde* (VS) contains more than one hundred ten pages of revisions. Only those that offer significant departures from

earlier editions are discussed in detail.<sup>10</sup> For example, many of the changes to melodic line or text received detailed exposition. In contrast, the addition of a *tenuto* may not warrant further exploration.

### *Esclarmonde*

- *Gallica*: IFN-8514385/*F-Po*: Rés A. 750 (I-IV). 1888. Autograph orchestral manuscript. One score in four volumes. 869 pages. 40.5 x 33 cm.
  - Signed by Massenet and Sanderson.
  - Various dates and locations indicated during composition in marginal notes.
  
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 1668. Annotated VS. 311 pages. 28 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1888.
  - Annotations in Massenet's hand and unidentified authors.
  - Cuts: pp. 263–266 and 276. (Accounts for 5-page discrepancy from published VS of 306 pages.)
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Orchestral accompaniment arranged for piano. Title and imprint statements taken from another copy of this edition. Engraved proof of the first edition, first issue, with some pencil corrections by the composer. Inscribed by the composer at the top of p. 1: 'Le Samedi 16 juin 1888, / la première épreuve de cette partition a été offerte à Mademoiselle Sibyl Sanderson la créatrice du rôle d'Esclarmonde / cet opéra ayant été écrit pour elle. le musicien: / J. Massenet.' On p. 1 the composer has also written: '1<sup>er</sup> répétition à l'op. comique / lundi / 17 déc: [18]88.'
  - Chromolithographic illustrations on p. [4] of cover and p. [16].
  - Engraved proof of the first ed., 1st issue.
  
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 1669. Printed VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1889.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Written by the composer on p. [1]: '1<sup>er</sup> exemplaire / lundi 13 mai 1889 / jour de la répétition générale / J. Massenet.' 'Personnages': p. [9]; 'Distribution,' etc.: p. [11]; 'Table': p. [13]-[15]. »
  - Chromolithographic illustrations on p. [1] and [4] of cover and p. [16].
  - First ed., 1st issue.
  
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 1670. Printed VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1889.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Personnages': p. [9]; 'Distribution,' etc.: p. [11]; 'Table': p. [13]-[15].'
  - Chromolithographic illustrations on p. [1] and [4] of cover and p. [16].
  - First ed., 1st issue.
  
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 1671. Annotated VS. 307 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1890(?).

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<sup>10</sup> Many more arrangements, editions, and selections were viewed. The items listed were the main sources used for research and analysis.

- Annotations in Massenet's hand and unidentified authors.
- Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'On an otherwise blank end-paper the composer has written: 'M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson / 1<sup>e</sup> répétition (à l'op. comique) / 17 décembre [18]88 / 1<sup>e</sup> représentation (à Paris) / mercredi 15 mai 1889 / 100<sup>e</sup> représentation / 6 février 1890 / reprise à Bruxelles (théâtre Royal de la Monnaie / Septembre 1890. / J.M.' Issued without title page or preliminaries and containing corrections, cuts, and revisions in the composer's hand.'
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 1672. Annotated VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plates: G.H. & Cie. 1921 and Heugel 20265 (p. 1 only). Paris: possibly uncirculated, 1901.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Hartmann's pl. no. appears throughout, Heugel's on p. 1 only. Library's copy is variously paginated; some pages have been excised and a new printed version pasted over the original, with some text and music in manuscript. Some changes may be in the composer's hand. Further alterations to the stage instructions and text are probably editorial. It is not known if this substantially revised version was ever published.'
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 0286. Printed VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1889.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Inscription: À Madame Napoléon Ney, hommage respectueusement sympathique, J. Massenet [musical quotation from the opera]. Paris juillet [18]89--Blank preliminary p. 'Personnages': p. [9]; 'Distribution,' etc.: p. [11]; 'Table': p. [13]-[15]. First ed., 1st issue.'
  - Chromolithographic illustrations on p. [4] of cover and p. [16].
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 0305. Printed VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1889.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Collation: 'Personnages': p. [9]; 'Distribution,' etc.: p. [11]; 'Table': p. [13]-[15]. First ed., 1st issue. From the library of Emmanuel Chabrier, with his signature on a preliminary leaf and annotations on several pages.'
  - Chromolithographic illustrations on p. [4] of cover and p. [16].
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music, PMC 0412. Printed VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1889(?).
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: 'Inscription to Sibyl Sanderson: p. [1]; 'Personnages': p. [9]; 'Distribution,' etc.: p. [11]; 'Table': p. [13]-[15]. First edition, second issue.'
  - Chromolithographic illustrations on p. [1] and [4] of cover and p. [16].
- *F-Pn*: VM BOB-14981. Printed VS. 306 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. et Cie. 1921. Paris: Hartmann, 1889.
- *F-Po*. Rés 16407/Rés A. 750(D). Printed VS. 306 pages. 19 x 27 cm. Paris: Au Ménestrel/Heugel, 1889 (1924).
  - Donated to *F-Po* by M. Raymon D. Rigué, 8 August 1925.
  - Includes letter from Rigué to *F-Po* on front flyleaf.

*Manon*

- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Music Collection, PMC Cary 64/Corsair 115238. Autograph manuscript (VS), 1882. 288 leaves. 35 x 27 cm.
  - Manuscript VS used for the 1884 published edition that was premiered by Heilbron.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: ‘On a preliminary leaf: ‘à mes amis de Passy, Monsieur Camille Claude et son épouse Mathilde Claude née Argillet. En reconnaissance de leur fidèle et affectueux accueil. J. Massenet. 19 Janvier/ 84. 1<sup>re</sup> représentation in l’Op. Comique.’ Dated numerous times throughout, from 15 May to 19 October 1882.’
  
- *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Music Collection, PMC0280/11523. Autograph selections, cuts and alterations, 1882. 6 leaves and 2 pages. 35.5 x 27 cm.
  - Addenda to 1882 VS manuscript.
  - Notes from *US-NYpm*: ‘Thirty-one measures in full score of cuts and alterations made for later editions of the opera. ‘Manon arrangement pour les traductions.’ At the bottom of the first leaf: ‘ces corrections ne regardent que les endroits où se trouvent des changements ou des coupures.’’
  
- *Gallica*: IFN-12148/ *F-Po*: Rés 541 (1–5). Autograph orchestral score, 1883. One score in five volumes with multiple page numbers. 36 x 30 cm.
  - Notes from *F-Po*: ‘Ms. autogr. à l’encre. - 1<sup>re</sup> représentation : Paris, Opéra-Comique, 19 janvier 1884. - ‘Alberard, mardi 21 août 83 // 6h du matin.’<sup>11</sup> - Sur la dernière page ‘Je termine l’orchestration complète // ce dimanche 15 juillet 1883 à 7h du matin.’ - Diverses autres indications de lieux et dates d’écriture.’
  -
  
- *GB-Lbl*: Music Collections. K.11. d.11. Printed VS. Inscribed to Mathilde Claude. 387 pages. 8°. Plate: G.H. 1386. Paris: G. Hartmann, 1883(?).
  - Notes from *GB-Lbl*: ‘Proof-sheets. Without title page. P. 1 bears a MS. inscription in the composer’s autograph.’
  - Proof sheets with one correction. Inscription reads, ‘à Madame Mathilde Claude, cette épreuve avec mes souvenirs bien affectueux J. Massenet.’
  
- *F-Po*: Rés 2194. Printed VS. 387 pages 8°. Autograph manuscript inserted at p. 54. Plate G.H. 1386. Paris: Hartmann, 1884 (1887).
  - Dated September 16, 1887–February 2, 1888 throughout the score.
  - Inscription on p. 54 in Massenet’s hand reads, ‘Changements proposés à M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson (Rôle de Manon 20 nov. matin /87.’
  
- *Nouvelle Édition*. Printed VS. 405 pages. (397 pages with 8 page annex) 29 cm. Plates: H et Cie 7067, G.H. 1386. Paris: Heugel, 1895.
  
- *F-Pn*: VM5-2870. Revised *Nouvelle Édition*. Printed VS. 405 pages plus 7 p. inserted ‘Fabliau.’ 28 cm. Plate: H19450. Paris: Heugel, 1898.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The transcription on Gallica is incorrect. Massenet completed *Manon* in Allevard, a small commune in the Rhône-Alpes in southeast France. Alberard does not exist.

<sup>12</sup> Jules Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*. Paris: Hartmann, 1895.

- Notes from *F-Pn*: ‘morceaux détachés. Oui dans les bois et dans la plaine. (Fabliau ; 7p.)’
- *US-NYp*: Harry G. Schumer Collection JOF 76-6. Printed VS with autograph annotations dated June 1895. 391 pages. 29 cm. Plate: G. H. 1386. Paris: Heugel, 1895.
  - Notes from *US-NYp*: ‘On half-title page, in ms.: Partition avec les récentes modifications de l’auteur (Juin 95). Includes numerous ms. additions and revisions, some in the composer’s hand. From the library of Harry G. Schumer.’
  - Notated recitatives/annotations in Massenet’s hand and two others who appear to be Sibyl Sanderson and an unidentified copyist.
  - This vocal score was re-discovered in 1986 in the home of a Massenet family member.
- *Édition Originale avec récitatifs chantés*. Printed VS. 405 pages. 28 cm. Plate: H et Cie. 7067, 1988 (1999).
  - Published version of the annotated VS at *US-NYp* (HOF 76–6) that was premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in February 1987.
  - Recitatives were transcribed by Manuel Rosenthal, at that time a conductor at the Met.

Several annotated vocal scores, such as those held at *F-Po*, *US-NYpm* and *US-NYp* contain markings by ‘unidentified’ participants. Some researchers, including Hansen and Henson believe that a number of the revisions were written into the scores by Sanderson herself.

One of the reference notes in Henson (2015) clearly identifies her assertion:

Notes to pages 88–91:

5. Jules Massenet, *Manon* (Paris: G. Hartmann, n.d. [1884]), copy with autograph annotations by Massenet and Sibyl Sanderson, 1887. *F-Po* Rés. 2194, here p. 236. Sanderson’s other markings consist of what could be described as ‘doodles’ of her and Massenet’s names — for example, on p. 85 ‘Massenet, Hôtel du Lac, Genève. Sanderson. Ill in bed.’<sup>13</sup>

Research and analysis appearing later in the thesis suggest that this is a plausible conclusion based on several factors. These include handwriting comparisons, the fact that most of the annotations were written into the vocal lines of *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*, and the fact that the timeframe in which these annotations appear to have been made coincides with Sanderson’s partnership with Massenet.

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 201. Nook edition.

## Mise-en-scène

Extant production materials are invaluable in illuminating the various elements apart from the actual sound which were an integral part of Sanderson's performances, including dramatic portrayal, choreography, physical deportment, and stage elements. In *Esclarmonde*'s Act I aria, 'Esprits de l'air,' Sanderson sang from the top of a platform (platform) during the 1889 Opéra-Comique premiere and subsequent performances. This elevated position likely affected other aspects of her performance, such as her head position, gestures, and deportment as she mounted the structure in her long and ornate costume and are thus directly relevant to the actual sound production. The applicable *mise-en-scène* and *livret de mise-en-scène* documents have thus been consulted in an attempt to build a more complete picture of Sanderson's vocality.

The sources below indicate what the Association de la régie théâtrale has on file, and these documents align with the list created by Cohen and Gigou. The manuscripts are housed in the *Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris*. The *mise-en-scène* and *livret de mise-en-scène* sources are currently being updated by Michela Niccolai for the *F-Ph*.<sup>14</sup> Each of the available sources at *F-Ph* and *F-Po* were photographed for use in this study.

### *Manon*

- P. Callais, régisseur, 1884.<sup>15</sup>
- Charles Ponchard, régisseur, [n.d.]<sup>16</sup>

### *Esclarmonde*

- Charles Ponchard, régisseur, 1889.<sup>17</sup>
- Anonymous transcription of Charles Ponchard, régisseur.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> H. Robert Cohen and Marie-Odile Gigou, *Cent ans de mise-en-scène lyrique en France (env. 1830-1930) [One hundred years of operatic staging in France]: Catalogue descriptif des livrets de mise-en-scène, des libretti annotés et des partitions annotées dans la bibliothèque de l'association de la régie théâtrale (Paris)* (New York, NY: Pendragon Press, 1986), 79–80, 155–156.

<sup>15</sup> P. Callais, régisseur, *Manon par Massenet: mise-en-scène*, Autograph manuscript, 1884, *F-Ph*: 8-TMS-02666 (Rés).

<sup>16</sup> Charles Ponchard, *Manon: mise-en-scène (F-Po: C4904(6))*. [n.d.]. Autograph Manuscript.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Ponchard (régisseur), *Esclarmonde: mise-en-scène par Ch. Ponsard (F-Ph: 8-TMS-02760 (Rés))*, 1889). Autograph manuscript.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Ponchard, "Mise-en-scène," *Esclarmonde* by Jules Massenet. Trans. Anon. (Paris, *F-Po* C4888 (2) [n.d.]). Autograph manuscript.

### **Sibyl Sanderson: *dossier de presse***

Sanderson received press coverage even before her professional career began. This was due in part to her father's public position as a California Supreme Court Justice. The social standing enjoyed by the Sanderson family because of Judge Sanderson, in concert with his daughter's audacious interactions with San Francisco's elite society, caused her to receive regular mentions in local newspapers during the years 1881–1885. Her pre-career notoriety increased during the summer of 1882, when she became engaged to publishing mogul William Randolph Hearst against the wishes of both sets of parents.<sup>19</sup>

Beginning with Sanderson's *début* in Massenet's *Manon* in 1888, critics from most of the major Western publications persisted in writing about her, even years after she died. Parisian periodical writers in particular were fascinated with her, and American journalists were quick to either criticise or claim the diva as one of their own. The mixed reviews offer clues about Sanderson's vocality, including her technical execution and artistic style. Biases, extenuating circumstances, and one-time occurrences could skew reviews, thereby calling the credibility of the information into question. Nonetheless, the sheer quantity of press coverage Sanderson received, especially during the years 1887–1902, allows for an adequate sample set on which to draw conclusions.

For the purposes of this thesis, a matrix of terms has been created, and contains more than five hundred terms or phrases used to describe Sanderson's vocality. The information is categorised into common attributes, in both French and English, from reviews, memoirs, and correspondence. Multiple ways to categorize aesthetic information exist, each with inherent strengths and weaknesses. The classification processes employed in this thesis align with methods used by musicologists who have published work in the area of aesthetics, such as Nicolas Cook, Philip Gossett, Hilary Poriss, and Clair Rowden.

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<sup>19</sup> Ben Proctor, *William Randolph Hearst: The Early Years 1863–1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.

Where language issues arose, such as translation and word/music relations, both close reading and techniques adopted by scholars including Mylène Dubiau-Feuillerac, Michael Allis, and Peter Dayan were used to guide analysis.

The data provided were not intended to be empirical studies, or all-inclusive catalogues of descriptive terms. Rather, the matrix helped in building a profile of how Sanderson sounded, looked, and acted. Information retrieved from data collection revealed patterns and trends in Sanderson's performances, as well as some general changes in public and critical reaction.

Both *Manon* and *Esclarmonde* received a considerable amount of press coverage during Massenet's lifetime and Sanderson's period of influence. After this time, opera houses of varying size and importance continued to stage *Manon*, but *Esclarmonde* has not built a similar legacy or following. There are few performances of the opera in recent history, and it seems that public interest in the two operas diverged early, as noted by critic Hugues Imbert (1897):

*Manon* has certainly won more favour with the public; but has the subject not been a large part of its success? *Manon* is to Massenet what *Mignon* has been for Ambroise Thomas. *Esclarmonde* reached a higher level of art.<sup>20</sup>

## Correspondence

Much of the communication surrounding Massenet has been compiled, and is now managed, by a member of his family. Anne Bessand-Massenet edited a biography based on Massenet's letters (*Massenet en Toutes Lettres*) [Massenet through his letters], which is a large collection of letters to and from the composer.<sup>21</sup> The same is not true of

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<sup>20</sup> Hugues Imbert, "Jules Massenet," in *Profils d'Artistes Contemporains* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1897), 210.

Manon a certes conquis davantage la faveur du public ; mais le sujet n'a-t-il pas été pour une grande part dans le succès ? Manon sera pour Massenet ce que Mignon aura été pour Ambroise Thomas. Esclarmonde a atteint un degré plus élevé de l'art.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Bessand Massenet and Jules Massenet, *Massenet En Toutes Lettres* (Paris: Fallois, 2001). Whether her transcriptions qualify as critical is unknown; primary sources have been consulted whenever possible.

Sanderson's communication dossier. In addition to problems of inaccessibility and disorganization of her archives, there are other challenges. Much of the handwriting is difficult to decipher, which leaves intended recipients, text, context, dates, and locations difficult to determine with precision. Even when these key identifying elements are known, factors such as intended audience (public or private) and agenda (marketing, criticism, etc.) require careful consideration and often remain indeterminable.

### **Practical Treatises**

Educational instruction manuals can provide historical understanding of the techniques, practices, and pedagogic traditions promoted at a particular period of time. Writers of vocal treatises often expounded on topics such as posture, breathing, registration, placement, and resonance. These guides offer a combination of written discourse and practical tools (e.g., vocalises) that correspond to a particular principle or area of vocality.

Bergeron uses similar sources in her research on the vocalism associated with *mélodie*:

I consider not only singers, but actors, and not only sound recordings, but also written records: the treatises, memoirs, self-help manuals, and musical scores that offer another angle on the object of performance. Here I am interested as much in what the historical performers were doing, as in what they said *about* what they were doing or, to put it another way, in what their training might reveal about their culture. And it turns out, it reveals quite a lot.<sup>22</sup>

These 'training manuals' are quite valuable in the exploration of Sibyl Sanderson's vocality because those written by her voice teachers offer documentary evidence of what she was likely to have been taught while under the tutelage of that teacher. The most replete group of musings and treatises of all Sanderson's pedagogues were written by Mathilde Marchesi. In a similar vein, though Jean De Reszké never published a treatise, some of his students took it upon themselves to write detailed recollections of his teaching methods and vocal principles. The numerous available sources that offer proverbial

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<sup>22</sup> Bergeron, *Voice Lessons*, xii.

windows into her teachers' studios aid in reconstructing how Sanderson might have performed.

Several factors limit the usefulness of treatises in determining the vocality of a given singer or the intentions of a pedagogue. For example, the author may have been writing to a narrow audience or from a particularly specialised set of experiences.

Musicologist and performer Colin Lawson commented on the dangers of relying too heavily on treatises:

Instrumental and vocal treatises offer the most direct access to fundamental technical instruction, interpretation and more general matters such as notation, music history, expression, taste and aesthetics. However, their value as sources must not be exaggerated, for most present the fruits of many years of thought, experience and observation, and incorporate instructions that may lag well behind actual practice. [...] Many treatises have led performers to devise theories mistakenly, make inferences from sources too hastily, and use performing conventions erroneously. [...] Performers should be wary of allowing primary sources to lead them blindly. They should guard against using specific information from a treatise too generally, thereby assuming that existing conventions were universally valid, and venturing beyond its legitimate field or period of pertinence.<sup>23</sup>

Lawson made a valid point when he suggested that attempting to recreate the past based solely on a pedagogic treatise produces practice that may lack several dimensions or, worse, be an inaccurate representation of what actually occurred at the time. Some caveats to his points deserve mention. The quotation, within the context of the whole essay, refers to an earlier period in music history and seems to have been targeted more on instrumental than vocal treatises.

In Sanderson's case, the treatises and other writing by and about the numerous teachers with whom she studied provide valuable insight into the differing, and often opposing, techniques to which she was exposed. These teaching manuals are useful, especially for comparative analysis between the various 'schools' of voice such as the *Bel Canto* teachers and those who claimed to sing and teach 'French' vocal traditions. It is

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<sup>23</sup> Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell, "The Application of Primary Sources," in *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22–23.

worth noting that among those claiming to have belonged to the *Bel Canto* school, there were many shades of variation within the technical principles being propagated by the various teachers. This is true even between a teacher and former student (Giovanni Sbriglia and Jean De Reszké), where one asked for an open, broad chest and lifted chin, while the other asked for a more collapsed posture with level or lowered chin.<sup>24</sup>

These treatises remain relevant because many continue to be used today. Mathilde Marchesi's etudes, for example, can be found on the syllabi of numerous university-level vocal courses. As Lawson pointed out, when material factors related to Sanderson's specific teachers diminish the reliability of the information in the work, such as the amount of time elapsed between her training with the teacher and the publication of the treatise or recollections, the appropriate disclaimers have been made.

### Literature Review

The body of research surrounding Massenet is comprehensive and continues to grow. Sanderson, on the other hand, has not received much scholarly attention until recent years, and what has been done is mainly biographical. Jean-Christophe Branger and Hugh Macdonald have studied the revisions made by and for Sanderson to the *Manon* score, and most scholars (including Massenet himself) agree that the composer and the soprano made the changes to suit her voice and interpretive style.<sup>25</sup> There is some recent research by Karen Henson (discussed below) and Malou Haine, but little published work has focused on the vocality of Massenet's singers as an inspiration for changes to the manuscripts and as a reason to cite them as co-creators.<sup>26</sup> With *Manon*, for example, scholarly research has

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<sup>24</sup> Sanderson studied with both Sbriglia and Jean De Reszké.

<sup>25</sup> Jules Massenet, *Manon: Opéra-Comique en Cinq Actes et Six Tableaux* (VS. Dedication to Sanderson.) Paris: 16 September 1887, Bibliothèque de l'Opéra: Rés 2194.

This dedicated VS includes a few manuscript pages in Massenet's hand that match the more formal revisions present in the *Manon* VS NYPL JOF 76–6.

<sup>26</sup> Massenet collaborated with singers other than Sanderson on the creation and re-creation of his operatic repertoire, including Mary Garden, Georgette Bréjean-Gravière, and Ernest Van Dyck.

noted *that* the score changed; writers have cited altered passages but provided little or no discussion of the possible artistic reasons for the changes, such as the strengths and weaknesses of a particular voice, technical considerations of vocal strategies and staging, or the effects the changes may have had on subsequent performers.

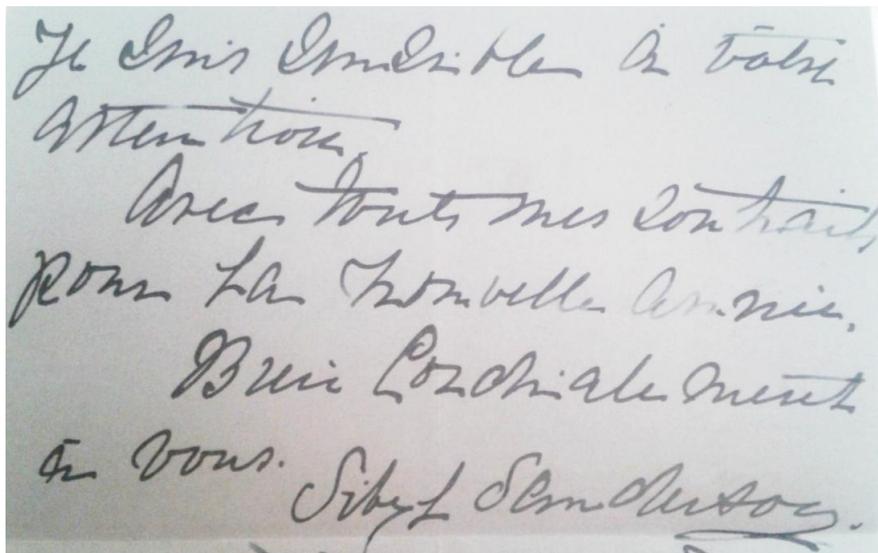
An area of particular interest and richness has come to the forefront of this work, which is access to a large number of American press articles and books that have been largely unrepresented in prior research. These relatively obscure articles that were once housed in the archives of smaller local newspapers and libraries have been digitised, allowing them to become fruitful resources for the present thesis. Newspapers such as the *Sacramento Daily-Record Union* and the *Lewiston Evening Journal* and books including *Fantastic City: A Memoir of the Social and Romantic Life of Old San Francisco* add crucial insights into the American reception of Sanderson.

Correspondence holds an important place in this work, and access to American sources such as those available at Stanford University has helped to build a more complete picture of Sanderson's vocality; these letters do not appear to have been consulted in prior research. One obstacle in utilising Sanderson's letters for research is her nearly illegible handwriting, especially in the later years of her life. The majority of her accessible correspondence could be categorised as business-related, such as letters to opera management asking to be excused from rehearsals, to arrange contracts, etc. In addition, she often wrote notes of gratitude to various influential members of the public and press. A specific achievement that occurred during the completion of this work with her correspondence relates to an undated letter written from Sanderson to critic Édouard Noël of *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique*, which is held at the Morgan Library. In this letter she thanks him for his favourable review of her interpretation of *Manon*. As a result

of my research, a strong case has been made for dating the letter to January or February of 1892, based on the following reasons:

1. Sanderson reprised *Manon* in Paris in 1891, and the periodical is Parisian.
2. Volume 17 reviewed the musical events of 1891 and was published in early 1892 (close to New Year). In the final sentence of her letter Sanderson wished Noël a happy new year:

**Figure 2:** Letter excerpt



‘Avec tout mes souhaits pour la nouvelle année.’ [With all my wishes for the New Year.]

3. She thanks him for his positive remarks. This appears to be the only issue in which Noël offered an opinion of her singing. The other times he mentioned Sanderson’s interpretations of *Manon*, he cited facts and circumstances and did not critique her performances. For example, in the 1889 issue that reviewed 1888 performances, he mentioned her (Palmer-Sanderson) at The Hague, but offered no opinion of her performances.
4. Because the critic offered positive remarks, it was probably not in reference to her London *Manon* in spring 1891, which was not well received.<sup>27</sup>

Compared to Massenet, Sanderson’s correspondence seems rather paltry. In the composer’s case, much has been written by and about Massenet, including his 1912

<sup>27</sup> Sibyl Sanderson, “Letter to Édouard Noël,” in Morgan Library: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection (MFC S216.N766. Paris, n.d.). Autograph Letter.

autobiography, *Mes Souvenirs*. It is a functional and fascinating read, but its contents have become notoriously unreliable.<sup>28</sup> Macdonald is more forgiving of the composer's whitewashed version of history than many other historians, yet he still acknowledges its flaws:

Despite many omissions, inversions and errors of detail, the book is a convincingly true record of his thoughts and memories, generous to a fault, touchingly grateful for the kindness of fate, yet conscious of the inexorability of death.<sup>29</sup>

Probably a better gauge of Massenet's contemporaneous activities can be understood from his letters, which were compiled into what family member, Anne Bessand-Massenet claims to be a comprehensive volume, *Massenet en toutes lettres* (2001). This resource could be considered a more credible edition of what Demar Irvine came close to, but did not achieve, with his *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times* (1994). Bessand-Massenet's collection is also more reliable than Massenet's own 'recollections.' In terms of Irvine's American sources, he consulted the University of Washington library archives, but it appears that he did not utilise the materials housed at Stanford or the complete offerings available in the New York City libraries. Additionally, Irvine's work focused on Massenet, and the author gave only an ancillary 'nod' to Sanderson in terms of biographical information; much less attention was paid to her input on the roles she sang for Massenet. What Irvine did offer were several unsupported conjectures that bordered on gossip, such as:

On the evening of 30 August there was a 'painful' scene between Massenet and Miss Sanderson. He was probably pushing her rather hard in her rôle (Esclarmonde), and she resigned. But then he persuaded her to resume it: 'rôle rendu, puis repris.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rodney Milnes. "Jules Massenet," in *The New Grove dictionary of opera*. (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), 681–703.

<sup>29</sup> Hugh Macdonald, "Massenet, Jules," Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed October 13, 2015,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51469>.

<sup>30</sup> Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1994), 160.

Whereas Irvine offered copious footnotes and citations for mundane and even irrelevant details related to Massenet's life throughout the book, the statement above is just one example of the information he recorded as fact without citing sources. Perhaps methods have progressed since the publication of Irvine's work, but it remains a starting point and contains several obscure sources.

### **Flawed biography: the work of Jack Winsor Hansen**

Jack Winsor Hansen (b. 1928), an American vocal coach, wrote the only full-length biography of Sibyl Sanderson published to date. In addition to the 2005 biography, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva*, Hansen also wrote one article for *Opera Quarterly*, titled "Sibyl Sanderson's influence on *Manon*."<sup>31</sup> Hansen's writings about Sanderson are problematic on several fronts; the most grievous matter is what appears to be imprecise information related to biographical details about the singer, her relationship with Massenet, and even incorrect dates and facts (e.g., stating that a change to the *Manon* score occurred after 1891, when it was actually proposed in 1887).<sup>32</sup> Beyond blatant inaccuracies, reviewers criticised his writing, complaining that it was too editorial and sensational:

1. Hansen is fortunate in his subject, because the sheer drama of Sanderson's life story redeems a number of flaws, among them his flat-footed style. [...] Hansen's approach to his subject's psychology is another weakness. [...] Hansen did fundamental research for this book nearly fifty years ago, interviewing Sibyl's stepdaughter and niece, and he had been given access to private family documents. His analysis of her emotional makeup has a somewhat quaint air, as if it, too, dated from the early 1960s. Finally, Hansen is a tremendous Sanderson partisan, which leads him into implausibility. [...] The most astonishing plot point offered by the author involves a strange 'Madame X' whom Massenet recruited to seduce Sanderson into lesbianism so that she would not marry and leave the operatic stage. Most writers who handle this kind of material work for soap

<sup>31</sup> Jack Winsor Hansen, "Sibyl Sanderson's Influence on *Manon*," *Opera Quarterly* 15 (1999): 42.

<sup>32</sup> Massenet, *Manon* (VS. Dedication to Sanderson), 54: manuscript addendum.

operas, but Hansen's careful documentation includes twenty-four pages of footnotes and seven pages of bibliography.<sup>33</sup>

2. Mr. Hansen is a friend of the Sanderson family. Hansen brings people, events, and geographical and historical sites to life most vividly, but there are instances in his writing where I suspect he is making wild guesses as to what was said and done.<sup>34</sup>
3. Hansen's prose is repetitive and too often spiced with dramatic insinuations and heavy-handed foreshadowing. And though the text is rarely interrupted either by musical examples (there are only four), or by copious endnotes, sometimes the lack of specific documentation gives the impression that Hansen is carefully controlling the reader's access to documents in order to support his own romantic versions of events. [...] That Hansen is enamoured with Sanderson is apparent in his portrayal of her as a larger-than-life talent moving in the highest echelons of musical society. [...] Moreover, though the reasons Hansen gives for Sanderson's alcoholism and forced early retirement, such as early overuse of her untrained voice and a predilection for socializing, may indeed be a part of her story, it is also true that the genre to which Sanderson dedicated her career--French grand opera--was not championed in her day (nor is it today). [...] Thus, her choice of roles limited her potential for popularity and fame outside the Opéra-Comique or the Opéra, just as much as mismanagement and greed destroyed her voice.<sup>35</sup>

Wallace makes some important points in her review. First, she questions one of the most sensational claims in Hansen's work: his 'Madame X' theory. He believed that Massenet hired elusive 'Madame X' to lure Sanderson into a bi-sexual relationship in an attempt to sabotage her nuptials with Antonio Terry. Support for this claim has not been found in any sources related to Sanderson's life including correspondence, memoirs, or press.

Next, Wallace aptly points out that Hansen conducted his research and interviews more than fifty years ago, but his findings were not published until 1999 and 2005. It is also necessary to mention that his interviewees, such as Sanderson's step-daughter Natividad Terry and violist Pierre Monteux, recalled events that would have occurred

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<sup>33</sup> Carol McD Wallace, "Review of *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva* by Jack Winsor Hansen. 528 pp," *Opera News* 70 (2005).

<sup>34</sup> Michael Mark, "Review of *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva* by Jack Winsor Hansen. 528 pp," *American Record Guide* 69 (January 2006): 300-301.

<sup>35</sup> Megan B. Jenkins, "Review of: *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva* by Jack Winsor Hansen," *Opera Today* 6 (April, 2005). Accessed October 2, 2014, <http://www.operatoday.com/content/000668print.html>.

more than fifty years earlier. Therefore, the occurrence of events surrounding Sanderson's life and Hansen's book were separated by over one hundred years, and the sources were at least twice removed from the soprano. Hansen himself disclosed that sixty-eight years had passed since Monteux's interactions with Sanderson and Massenet, but he cast the passed time in a more nostalgic light rather than as a cause for concern in terms of the reliability of Monteux's recollections.<sup>36</sup>

With regard to Hansen's documentation, many sources he cited were his own transcriptions from scores and letters he claimed that he viewed during his only trip to Paris in the 1950s, as well as from meeting(s) with Sanderson's niece Margaret Sanderson Nall.<sup>37</sup> Much of the correspondence and sheet music he cited appears to have belonged to Nall's private collection. If the collection remains intact, it has either become irretrievable or inaccessible to the public and researchers. Hansen alleged that he transcribed Massenet and Sanderson's annotations from an *Esclarmonde* vocal score that pre-dated the autumn 1889 manuscript that is now held at the BnF. The earlier vocal score was said to be part of Nall's private collection, but because the source document is unavailable, in some cases the validity of his claims could not be determined.

Beyond objective imperfections in Hansen's work, reviewer Michael Mark casts doubt on Hansen's theories from the standpoint of bias, and the review by Jenkins highlights some inherent subjective problems with the claims made in Hansen's biography of Sanderson. Jenkins offers a broader view of the era in which Sanderson and Massenet lived, and her opinions take into account some of the external factors that may have affected Sanderson. Hansen, on the other hand, operated with a narrower, even accusatory,

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<sup>36</sup> Jack Winsor Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2005). Loc. 1995. Kindle edition.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 59.

view of the correlations and causations for the circumstances of Sanderson's life, career, and early death.

Hansen granted me an interview and access to some of his Sanderson documentation in September 2014. The location of our meeting was his suburban Indiana home near Chicago, Illinois. Our conversation and the articles in his home suggested that Sanderson was still a source of fascination for Hansen, perhaps qualifying as one of his muses, similar to the position she was purported to have held with Massenet. Hansen appeared to be an opera fanatic; his home contained a large collection of photographs of opera singers, musical scores, and other musical memorabilia, many of which he claimed were signed by the artists. In particular, one opera singer besides Sanderson captivated his attention based on the number of mementos littered throughout the living room of Hansen's house: American soprano, Renée Fleming. In interviews Fleming has admitted to a fascination with Sanderson, so perhaps the shared interest between Fleming and Hansen facilitated the pair meeting in the past.<sup>38</sup> Hansen claimed that he and Fleming became friends many years ago and that the pair remains in contact. There is a photograph of them displayed near Hansen's piano, but his claim that they are friends was not verified. Given the inaccuracies found in other areas of his work, the veracity of his claim should be questioned. It should also be remembered that Hansen is a voice coach and devoted opera fan; he is neither an academic researcher nor a musicologist. His work does provide a powerful starting place for gathering details of Sanderson's life and circumstances, both objective and subjective (e.g., psychological reasons for her behaviours).

Moving on from Hansen, and his possible psychological 'whys' behind some aspects of Sanderson's story, it appears that much of the 'what?' and 'who?' of the Massenet/Sanderson collaborations have been addressed. Yet, opportunity still exists for

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<sup>38</sup> Renée Fleming, "Feedback," *Bon Appétit* (December 2006).

study of the scholarly ‘whys’ and impacts that the musical changes may have had on performance practice. The amount of research surrounding Sanderson has increased in recent years; some examples of recent work related to her include the 2014 unveiling of photographs from the Lady de Grey collection at the Royal Opera House,<sup>39</sup> and the 2015 release of Karen Henson’s research on Sanderson’s physiognomy and physicality.<sup>40</sup>

Henson asserts that Sanderson occupied a rare position as co-creator alongside Massenet:

The relationship between Massenet and Sanderson which, in spite of documentary traces and the kind of free and creative, even pre-1850 style singer-composer interaction they call to mind, was far from charmingly old-fashioned. A Handel, Mozart, Bellini, or Donizetti rarely if ever had singers co-sign or in other ways annotate their scores, but the Massenet autographs evoke this earlier period of operatic history, when the singer was a powerful influence, collaborator, and even pseudo-author. [...] Massenet’s ‘S’s, for example, are as much signs of the hours of individual coaching he insisted on for Sanderson—each ‘S’ coinciding with a coaching session or time they spent together—as they are of influence or collaboration.<sup>41</sup>

Henson’s conclusions are well founded and her documentary interrogation is thorough.

However, she focuses on the psychological and emotional interplay between composer and muse, rather than truly vocal aspects and impacts of Sanderson’s influence.

*L’Avant-scène opéra* has published specific guides to *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*, which are both compilations of articles written by scholars on the subject matter. These publications are ripe with musical analysis, history surrounding the productions, details about Massenet, and a fair amount of information about Sanderson; they also feature content related to more recent productions such as the 1992 Saint-Étienne production of *Esclarmonde*. However, neither publication discusses the vocality required for the roles, nor do they consider how Sanderson specifically influenced the design and re-design of vocal lines. Content related to Sanderson is more biographical and social in nature.

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<sup>39</sup> Ruth Styles, “Royal Opera House Unveils Rare Collection of Photos Featuring Victorian Dancers and Singing Stars of the Early 20th Century,” *Daily Mail Online*, January 17, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 88–121.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

In terms of Sanderson's contemporary notoriety, professional journals continue to publish articles that reference Sanderson. This excerpt from a 2011 interview with musicologist Jean-Christophe Branger may offer clues to why Sanderson's vocality has received diminished attention in recent years as a part of what he sees as decreased interest in Massenet's music:

Laurent Bury: So, why is so little Massenet played today?

Branger: Mostly for the wrong reasons. One can, of course, criticize his eclecticism, certain simplicities, and his constant desire to please, which pushed him to submit to the whims of singers.<sup>42</sup>

Branger is correct that if Massenet is somewhat neglected, it may be for invalid reasons. However, his supposition that Massenet was simply bending to the 'whims of singers' is inaccurate and could be considered condescending to the artistic input of his singers. Rather than being manipulated by performers, Massenet was engaging in an important collaborative process. Branger's comment, besides being inaccurate, borders on establishing the composer as superior and the singers as inferior. Massenet's engagement with his singers is similar to Benjamin Britten writing specifically for Peter Pears' voice, or Francis Poulenc tailoring *mélodies* for Denise Duval. On the point of eclecticism, Bach was profoundly eclectic, yet performance of his music has not necessarily waned. There may be myriad reasons that Massenet's music is staged less regularly than other composers who belong to the canon of Western classical music, but Branger's conclusions are editorial and insulting to the integral role of singers in the composition process. Bergeron's overall view that 'the sound is the history' is more accurate and underscores the tenet of the present thesis.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jean-Christophe Branger, "Il Reste Beaucoup à Faire Pour Rendre à Massenet la Place qu'il Mérite," in Laurent de Bury, *Forum Opéra: Le Magazine de Monde Lyrique*.

LB: Alors pourquoi Massenet est-il si peu joué aujourd'hui ?

JCB : Surtout pour de mauvaises raisons. On peut bien sûr lui reprocher son éclectisme, certaines facilités, un constant désir de plaire qui l'a poussé à se soumettre aux caprices des chanteurs.

<sup>43</sup> Bergeron, *Voice Lessons*, xi–xii.

The creative impulses of performers may need to be balanced with aesthetic, technical, and logistical concerns for several reasons, including promotion of audience enjoyment, safety, and vocal preservation. However, changes to the vocal lines and/or accompaniment were made at Massenet's direction in the hope of providing optimum performance conditions. The interpreters' input was and is vitally important to the success of the piece, as noted by Julian Rushton, whose view of the contribution of performers, and composers' collaboration with them, is more accurate than Branger's:

An operatic role is a collaboration between poet, composer, and singer. If nowadays the singer feels less like the *raison d'être* of the enterprise and more like a cog in a machine, it is because the repertory is based on revivals; the singer's main work is re-creation. [...] The loss of the original singers who created great roles is not quite total. We have visual traces, including portraits, of many nineteenth-century singers. Moreover, much can be learned about the singer's potential from the music itself. The composer's job was to study their strengths—range, agility, power—in order to exploit them, and their weaknesses to avoid exposing them.<sup>44</sup>

Rushton's discussion encapsulates the focus of this thesis as it relates to vocal music: writers, composers, and performers share responsibility for the creation or re-creation of musical works. The topic continues to find its way into conversation, as in an interview with Dame Janet Baker at the Royal College of Music; she describes performers not as interpreters or creators, but as 're-creatives.'<sup>45</sup>

Phillip Gossett has researched the influence of singers on opera score revisions and performances. In his 2006 book, *Divas and Scholars*, Gossett describes changes made to the scores of several nineteenth-century Italian operas and notes that similar traditions

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<sup>44</sup> Julian Rushton, "The Prima Donna Creates," in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 117.

<sup>45</sup> Janet Baker, Interview with Norbert Meyn, *Singing a Song in a Foreign Land*, London: Royal College of Music, September 21, 2014; M. O. Lee, *First Intermissions: Commentaries from the Met Broadcasts* (New York, NY: Limelight, 2002), 168.

Another example of score-tailoring from nineteenth-century French opera is Bizet's *Carmen*. One of the composer's early biographers claimed Célestine Galli-Marié asked the composer to re-write the Habanera at least thirteen times.

existed in France during the same time.<sup>46</sup> He recognises that performers put their own mark on every role, even when attempting to create a historically-informed performance.

What would it mean, after all, to ask an artist to ‘sing only what’s written.’ Is there any evidence that performers in the nineteenth century strived to erase their personality and individuality of tone? [...] That we can learn much by reconstructing mentally (or even physically) a nineteenth-century performance, analysing historical vocal technique, scenic design, stage direction, and instrumental practice seems self-evident, and this knowledge has implications for modern performance. [...] The straw man of authenticity simply gets in the way of a reasoned approach to the complex interactions of theory and practice, history and contemporaneity, tradition and innovation.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to Sibyl Sanderson and her interactions with Massenet *vis-a-vis* the alterations to *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*, Gossett’s statement about asking an artist to ‘sing only what’s written,’ might be flipped around to Sanderson intimating to Massenet, ‘write only what’s sung.’

#### Why *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*?

These operas were chosen for the current exploration because the proximity of Sanderson’s *début* in 1888, the reprise of *Manon* in 1891, and the premiere of *Esclarmonde* in 1889 facilitate an examination of specific qualities of her vocality over a focused period of time. This minimizes the effect of other variables, such as the aging process, additional training, and environmental factors. While it is true that Sanderson premiered other operas that were written for her, including Massenet’s *Thaïs* and Saint-Saëns’ *Phryné*, commentary on these pieces is reserved for those aspects that are directly

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<sup>46</sup> Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Location. 1697. Kindle edition; Richard Wistreich and John Potter, “Singing Early Music: A Conversation,” *Early Music* 41 (February 2013): 23.

The concept of co-creators, or, to use Baker’s term, ‘re-creatives,’ is not unique to late nineteenth-century French opera. It is a topic with which performing musicologists Richard Wistreich and John Potter have wrestled. Here, the two discussed the reciprocal creative relationship between Baroque composers and interpreters in *Early Music*:

*Wistreich*: I felt that a lot of the music-making that I found myself involved with was still stuck in [...] a poverty-stricken paradigm of ‘the performer as interpreter of musical scores,’ rather than as co-creator or re-creator.

*Potter*: The roles of composer and performer were much more blurred before the 20th century. [...] And the further back you go, the more equal becomes the creative relationship between composer and performer.

<sup>47</sup> Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, 175.

related to Sanderson's vocality and its effect on *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*. In addition, there was a period in 1890 during which Sanderson sang both roles concurrently.<sup>48</sup> The differing demands of the two roles may have had compounding effects on her voice at the time while also affecting her vocality in future performance seasons and works.

Whether Sanderson's artistic influence was fuelled by what Branger terms 'whims,' a 'quest for fame,' or by deeper artistic aspirations is a potential subject for debate. What is not in question is the combination of renewed interest in Sanderson, the rare qualities that she possessed as a performer, and the impact the American soprano had on these operas. These factors make Sanderson an ideal candidate for investigation.

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<sup>48</sup> Patrick Gillis, "Genèse d'Esclarmonde," in *L'Avant-scène Opéra: Esclarmonde/Grisélidis*, no. 148. (Saint-Étienne: L'Avant-scène Opéra, 1992), 28–29.

## CHAPTER ONE

SIBYL SANDERSON: *LA BELLE CRÉATRICE*Biographical Information

*I wish to know life from its heights to its depths.<sup>49</sup> I want to go on the stage. If they blame me for it, after I have succeeded I shall reply that success excuses everything.<sup>50</sup>*

**Figure 3: Sybil Sanderson<sup>51</sup>**



<sup>49</sup> Amelia Ransome Neville, *Fantastic City: A Memoir of the Social and Romantic Life of Old San Francisco* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 103.

“Sanderson made this proclamation at a dinner party leaving the guests astonished and her father embarrassed when he was told of his daughter’s scandalous ambitions regarding the operatic stage.”

<sup>50</sup> Jules Massenet, *Mes Souvenirs: (1848-1912)* (Paris: Éditions Pierre Lafitte et Cie., 1912), Kindle edition, Location 175; Massenet, *My Recollections*, 175.

Je veux aller (ainsi s’exprima-t-elle) au théâtre. Si, ayant réussi, l’on m’en blâmait, je répondrais que le succès excuse tout!

<sup>51</sup> Marion Derby, “Sybil Sanderson,” in *Early Sacramentans* (Sacramento, CA: McClatchy High School Press, 1947), 18.

Sibyl Sanderson (1865–1903) lived a short, turbulent life marked by soaring highs and desperate lows. She existed on an almost perpetual panic-euphoria cycle brought on by concurrent successes and failures in her professional and personal life. The American soprano became the muse of Jules Massenet in 1887 and spent the majority of her career singing at the Opéra-Comique in Paris; she also performed on the most important stages of the late nineteenth-century.

Silas Woodruff Sanderson (1824–1886) and his wife Margaret (1841–1915) welcomed the birth of the oldest of four daughters during the height of the California Gold Rush, an era of great opportunity, innovation, and prosperity. Her father served as a Chief Justice on the California Supreme Court in the capital city of Sacramento, and his public position and ample financial means made their family visible within the upper-echelon of social circles at the time. Following Silas’s term on the court, the family moved to San Francisco where he worked as a highly compensated legal advisor to the railroads. This pleased his wife Margaret who, though she was the product of a modest family that lived in a rural agricultural town about 100 kilometres north of Sacramento, came to enjoy navigating elite Bay Area society. Margaret worked to build her family’s reputation into one of sophistication and Euro-centric awareness. She ensured that the Sanderson daughters received private education with tutors who developed specific curricula tailored to each girl’s natural proclivities. Sibyl became a singer; Edith, a pianist; Marion, a painter; and Jane, a gourmet cook.<sup>52</sup>

After a holiday to Europe in 1877 Mrs. Sanderson became determined to secure a French education for her daughters; in her opinion, French instructional methods and opportunities were superior to those available in San Francisco. In addition, sending children abroad for studies had become popular among her peers. According to Elson:

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<sup>52</sup> “Sybil’s Sisters,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, 81, no. 157 (August 24, 1891): 2.

There were undoubtedly many excellent native voices before [the last quarter century], but their possessors did not go abroad to study, and the facilities for advanced vocal culture were but slight among us a half-century ago.<sup>53</sup>

Following four years of tutoring imbued with European influences, Mrs. Sanderson convinced her husband that Sibyl needed to further her musical study in London and Paris, which took place over the course of one year (1881–1882).<sup>54</sup> The eldest Sanderson daughter began to transform into a cultivated Parisienne. Her father may have consented in order to thwart his daughter's intention to marry multi-millionaire William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951). These two had carried on an intense, short romance prior to announcing their intentions to marry. The parents of both Sanderson and Hearst forbade the marriage, but the reasons for their unanimous disapproval remain conjecture. The engagement was called off and the romantic relationship ended before Sanderson departed for Europe in the autumn.<sup>55</sup>

Sanderson spent the majority of her year in Paris living in a *pension de famille* with the de Forcade family. She split her days between Mme Bazault's school for French language classes and the Paris Conservatoire where she studied voice and piano. In the evenings, she charmed her host family by conversing with them in French.<sup>56</sup> Throughout her life, it seems that she used her charismatic personality to win approval and divert consequences. During her year overseas she exhibited a propensity to mismanage finances, which developed into the reputation of a spendthrift.<sup>57</sup> Hansen has referenced some letters Sibyl wrote to Judge Sanderson requesting funds when she depleted her allowance through frivolous expenditures.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Louis C. Elson, "Our Uplift in Music," in *The World's Work: A History of Our Time*, Vol. 8, edited by Walter Hines Page and Arthur Wilson Page (New York, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904), 494.

<sup>54</sup> Sibyl Sanderson and Lucien Puech, "Les débutants: Mademoiselle Sibyl Sanderson." *Gil Blas*, May 16, 1889, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Ben H. Proctor, *William Randolph Hearst: The Early Years, 1863-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29–30.

<sup>56</sup> Hansen. *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location: 407–428.

<sup>57</sup> Percival Pollard, *Their Day in Court* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1909), 70.

<sup>58</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location: 460–465.

She returned to San Francisco in 1882 and made frequent appeals to her father for the means to return to Paris. In the meantime, she cultivated an active and at times controversial social life. Some of her decisions elicited fewer raised eyebrows among her parents' associates. For example, one evening at a party, she met Signor Cardinali, a tenor who visited San Francisco with a touring opera group, and immediately the pair became engaged. Judge Sanderson refused to give his blessing until Cardinali could prove his intentions with Sibyl were serious and that he had adequate financial resources to support her. The romance between Cardinali and Sanderson ended when Cardinali disappeared. Later reports claim that he eloped with a chorus girl while waiting for Judge Sanderson to approve of Cardinali's request for Sibyl's hand in marriage.<sup>59</sup>

Much of what is known about Sanderson's life in the 1880s comes from the writing of Gertrude Atherton (1857–1948), an author and journalist who maintained a close friendship with the singer which began in San Francisco and lasted until Sanderson's death. The pair spent some years networking in the San Francisco social scene as well as passing time alone together. Atherton recounted details of their adventures in articles and in her autobiography. She offers her impressions of Sanderson's voice and tenacity:

I have never known anyone quite so poised, so self-possessed, so sure of herself, as Sibyl. She had the lightest of lyric voices; she knew no one of influence in Paris; [...] and yet she had no more doubt of conquest than if her voice had been as great as Patti's and impresarios were scrambling for her favour. 'I shall succeed,' she said, as she stood there calmly. 'I shall be the rage of Paris. All I have to do is to find a composer who needs my voice, and the rest will follow.'<sup>60</sup>

Atherton's motives may have been a questionable mix of altruism and opportunism. By her accounts, their loyalty to each other never wavered; however, she also reaped financial benefits from her writings, while also keeping San Francisco concert-goers

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<sup>59</sup> "Cardinali, the Tenor," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 27, 1885, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Gertrude Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932), 124.

apprised of and titillated by the soprano's activities.<sup>61</sup> Both women had sufficient impact on San Francisco history to be commemorated in architectural memorials. In 1912, for example, the 'Native Sons of the Golden West' dedicated their new building to notable San Franciscans, including Sanderson and Atherton. The building remains in use more than a century later.

**Figure 4:** Native Sons of the Golden West Building - past and present<sup>62</sup>



In late 1885, Mrs. Sanderson and her four daughters travelled to France to enhance the young ladies' scholastic and cultural awareness, but Judge Sanderson remained in San Francisco due to declining health. When he died in 1886, his family returned to California to memorialise him and settle the estate. Within months, the women relocated to Paris

<sup>61</sup> Atherton visited the Sandersons in 1889 and attended the premiere of *Esclarmonde*, returning to California in 1890. The details Atherton recorded of her time in France provide windows into the non-public sides of Sanderson and her family's lives, even if her writing was editorial in nature. On that point, the author did not express intentions to write a biography of Sanderson; rather, Atherton conveyed stories about the diva and herself with the goal of entertaining readers. A biography of Sibyl Sanderson would not be published until more than one hundred years after her death.

<sup>62</sup> Righetti and Headman, "NSGW Building 414 Mason Street," Etching, Native Sons of the Golden West, San Francisco, CA: 1912; ARTANDARCHITECTURE-SF.COM, NSGW Building 414 Mason Street. Native Sons of the Golden West, San Francisco, CA. Photograph.

permanently. One California music critic reflected later on the loss of yet another talented singer to the lure of the European opera houses:

It was the young Sacramento girl, Sibyl Sanderson, who inspired Massenet. [...] The pathetic thing about it is that these wonderful artists always leave us and exploit their art in other parts of the world. If we had an operatic stock company, or a light opera company after the type planned by Frank Healy, this talent could be employed at home and we would not be forced most of the time to live musically on the benefactions of strangers.<sup>63</sup>

In light of the performance career Sanderson maintained from 1888–1902 (as represented in Table 1 below), it is fair to assume she would not have had similar opportunities to appear in such roles and premieres had the family remained in California.<sup>64</sup> When the Sanderson women returned to Paris after finalising Judge Sanderson’s estate, Sibyl re-enrolled at the Conservatoire, but she stopped attending within a few months because she felt impatient with the pace of progress and wanted to debut on professional stages as quickly as possible.<sup>65</sup> The driven young woman made her desires known, and it did not take long for her devoted mother to activate her social network of expatriates to secure the best teacher and performance opportunities for her eldest daughter. Whether her success can be attributed to this particular choice to leave institutional education in pursuit of a career or some combination of training, talent, resources, and making sure she was visible in the right networks cannot be said with certainty. In whatever way it came about, Sanderson built an impressive list of international appearances. Table 1 is a broad representation of Sanderson’s professional career organized chronologically. Most of the

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<sup>63</sup> “The Musician and Publicity,” in *History of San Francisco Music VII* (San Francisco: City and County of San Francisco Works Project Administration, 1942), 316.

<sup>64</sup> The San Francisco opera is now one of the premier companies in the world with an annual budget of over US\$70 million (2012 Annual Report), compared to the Royal Opera (over £110 million, 2012/13 ROH Annual Review), Paris Opera (over €200 million, 2013 Annual Report) and the Metropolitan Opera (over US\$325 million, 2013 Annual Report). Compare these figures with a smaller regional company such as Sacramento Opera, Sanderson’s hometown opera, at less than US\$1 million. During Sanderson’s career the San Francisco Opera did not compete in budget or fame with Paris or New York companies. The state of California was still in its infancy at the time, having been born out of the 1849 Gold Rush.

<sup>65</sup> Sanderson and Puech, “Les débutants,” 3.

roles and concerts she performed, along with the cities where the performances occurred, are represented.<sup>66</sup>

**Table 1: Sanderson's performances**

Year	Role	Opera	Composer	City	Notes
1888	Manon	Manon	Massenet	Brussels	Début
1889	Cantata	Gallia	Gounod	Paris, Conservatoire	
1889	Concert	Ministry of fine arts		Paris	Premiere "Pensée d'automne"
1889	Esclarmonde	Esclarmonde	Massenet	Paris, Opéra-Comique	Premiere
1890	Concert	4th of July - Whitelaw Reid gala		Paris	
1890	Concert	December Gala		Brussels	
1890	Concert	De Blowitz Home		Paris	
1890	Esclarmonde	Esclarmonde	Massenet	Paris, Opéra-Comique	
1890	Esclarmonde	Esclarmonde	Massenet	Brussels	
1890	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	Brussels	Début
1890	Manon	Manon	Massenet	Brussels	
1890	Marguerite	Faust	Gounod	Brussels	Début
1890	Queen of the Night	Magic Flute	Mozart	Brussels	Début
1891	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	Aix-les-bains	
1891	Lakmé	Lakmé	Delibes	Brussels	Début
1891	Manon	Manon	Massenet	Paris, Opéra-Comique	
1891	Manon	Manon	Massenet	London	
1891	Manon	Manon	Massenet	Aix-les-bains	
1891	Mireille	Mireille	Gounod	Brussels	Début
1892	Esclarmonde	Esclarmonde	Massenet	St. Petersburg	
1892	Gilda	Rigoletto	Verdi	Brussels	Début
1892	Lakmé	Lakmé	Delibes	Paris, Opéra-Comique	
1892	Marguerite	Faust	Gounod	St. Petersburg	
1892	Queen of the Night	Magic Flute	Mozart	St. Petersburg	
1893	Charlotte	Werther	Massenet	Nice	Début - sang only once
1893	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	Paris, Opéra	
1893	Phryné	Phryné	Saint-Saëns	Paris, Opéra-Comique	Premiere
1894	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	Paris, Opéra	
1894	Phryné	Phryné	Saint-Saëns	Paris, Opéra-Comique	
1894	Thaïs	Thaïs	Massenet	Paris, Opéra	Premiere
1895	Concert	Eleventh Grand Sunday Night		New York, NY	
1895	Manon	Manon	Massenet	New York, NY	
1896	Esclarmonde	Esclarmonde	Massenet	St. Petersburg	
1896	Gilda	Rigoletto	Verdi	Paris, Opéra	Début
1896	Manon	Manon	Massenet	Milan	
1897	Manon	Manon	Massenet	St. Petersburg	
1897	Marguerite	Faust	Gounod	Moscow	
1898	Phryné	Phryné	Saint-Saëns	Paris, Opéra-Comique	
1901	Concert	Gala		Vienna	
1901	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	Atlanta, GA	
1901	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	San Francisco, CA	
1901	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	New York, NY	
1901	Manon	Manon	Massenet	US tour + Montreal, Canada	
1901	Manon	Manon	Massenet	Rochester, NY	Lowest box office receipts in the Met's tour history
1901	Phryné	Phryné	Saint-Saëns	Paris, Opéra-Comique	
1901	Juliette	Romeo et Juliette	Gounod	Philadelphia, PA	
1902	Manon	Manon	Massenet	San Francisco, CA	
1902	Esclarmonde	Esclarmonde	Massenet	Nice	

<sup>66</sup> Table 1 is not to be considered an exhaustive list of Sanderson's professional activities. Rather, it provides highlights of her performance career.

## Personality

To know or understand Sibyl Sanderson completely may not be possible, but a feasible profile of her vocality can be built, and strong arguments can be made to support the idea that she helped to create and re-create Massenet's *Esclarmonde* and *Manon*, respectively. Moving on from the available biographical information, it is reasonable to explore those aspects of Sanderson's personality that may have affected her vocality. This is a difficult area to address, because it can be fraught with presumptions, biased perceptions, and psychological concepts that lay outside the scope of this research. The approach employed here attempts to work backward from documented behaviours attributed to Sanderson to arrive at possible motivations for her words and actions. That information will then be overlaid with data related to her performances in order to determine how or why she may have portrayed a character in a certain way. In viewing the annotations made to *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*, an attempt to understand her personal make-up and circumstances may aid in determining which score changes she suggested and perhaps some of the reasons behind those choices.

The quotations that open this chapter provide insight into her character. From them alone, a picture of Sanderson begins to emerge, painting her as driven, impetuous, and given to excess. The final section of this chapter addresses the soprano's vocality. It will illustrate that reviewers and close sources used similar adjectives in their descriptions of her voice and acting: penetrating, agile, and extreme. It is reasonable to believe she brought these traits into performance.

The issue of nature versus nurture carries significant weight in most discourse related to psychology.<sup>67</sup> Sanderson's innate personality, insofar as it can be determined,

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<sup>67</sup> Francis Galton, *English Men of Science: Their Nature and Nurture* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1847), 12.

“The phrase ‘nature and nurture’ is a convenient jingle of words, for it separates under two distinct heads the innumerable elements of which personality is composed. Nature is all that a man brings

coupled with trauma resulting from the unexpected death of her father, may have led to a state of stunted emotional growth. The choices she made in her personal life may have been fuelled by immaturity and lack of stability. The list of people who came in and out of her life is considerable. Along with major successes, she also amassed numerous failures in the domains of romance, friendship, and business decisions. Before the age of twenty she had broken two marital engagements, and exhibited poor financial management, a trait that emerged early and lasted until her death, as noted by multiple periodicals over the duration of her public life. It is believed that Judge Sanderson left a comfortable amount of wealth to Mrs. Sanderson at his passing, but the state of the family's financial affairs declined as the years passed. For a few years, monetary pressures were relieved when Sybil became romantically involved with Antonio Terry, a Cuban-American millionaire. The couple married in 1897, but when he died in 1899 from complications of alcoholism, the legal battles associated with his estate left Sanderson essentially destitute; the soprano was forced to return to the stage in order to survive.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately, her attempts at reviving her career failed. When, for example, Sanderson was hired for the 1902 Metropolitan Opera season, she appeared as Juliette just one time in the entire season. Fannie Edgar Thomas reported on that occasion:

At the Saturday matinee, 'Romeo and Juliet,' Sibyl Sanderson returned here after an absence of seven years, returned for one performance. She is a charming woman of the Phryn , Tha s, Esclarmonde type, not the type of Juliet, though her singing days are over. Of that sad fact there can be little doubt. [...] When Sanderson and Alvarez sang the 'No, it is not yet day,' even the nightingale sang off pitch.<sup>69</sup>

Thomas' blunt declaration signalled the ringing end of a once brilliant career, and, according to the recollections of Edwards some years later in 1913, Sanderson herself concurred:

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with himself into the world; nurture is every influence from without that affects him after his birth."

<sup>68</sup> E. J. Edwards, "The Brief and Pathetic Career of a Famous American Prima Donna," *The Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, March 8, 1913, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Fannie Edgar Thomas, "Raconteur," *The Musical Courier*, January 1, 1902, xxxiv–xxxv.

I congratulated her upon her appearance a few days earlier, as Juliet in the opera of 'Romeo and Juliet' at the Metropolitan Opera House. 'I am thankful for your courtesy,' she said. 'I presume you mean what you have just told me, but for me there is no reason for congratulation. I think it was my swan song. There is sorrow in the tones of my voice, and I fear that it will not be much longer in my possession.'<sup>70</sup>

Sanderson then shifted the blame; turning her vitriol on American critics and audiences:

Madame Sanderson [...] says that she is much pleased with the success of her recent season with *Grau* in the States, but that if she returns—as she would like to—she will not again sing 'Manon,' as she finds that American audiences do not like this work. Mme. Sibyl Sanderson would prefer to sing in 'Bohème' or 'Lohengrin.' Asked her opinion as to the musical critics, she said that the opera critics in San Francisco knew very little about either opera or criticism, and she is indignant at being thought nervous. Madame Sanderson gave it also as her opinion that: 'Some American audiences prefer quantity over quality; that is, they would rather listen to a voice with volume than to a smaller voice, but of better quality and cultivation.'<sup>71</sup>

Years of public reviews probably wreaked havoc on her nerves. It is evident that the performer battled anxiety throughout her adult life. Massenet and Sanderson's family documented this tendency toward stage fright. Sanderson disclosed this worsening propensity during an interview with Albert Dayrolles in 1894:

~A.D. Do you feel some emotion about your upcoming appearance on the stage of the Opéra?

~S.S. Certainly! Today I feel much more apprehensive about singing in front of a large audience than before. When I started in The Hague, I did not feel troubled. [But] I had this assurance provided by ignorance of the dangers! But it is even more now! I am aware of the many difficulties that I only suspected then. Since then more eyes are on me, it is more demanding for the creator of *Esclarmonde* and *Thaïs* than for the modest beginner who sang *Manon*, an inexperienced singer.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Edwards, "The Brief and Pathetic Career," 4.

<sup>71</sup> De Valmour, "Paris," *The Musical Courier* 44, no. 7 (February 12, 1902): 7–8.

Sanderson made similar remarks after her Covent Garden début, where reactions were similar: cool and unremarkable. Sanderson's Covent Garden failure is analysed in Chapter 4; one reason cited for her disappointing performance was the enormity of the stage, especially compared to the smaller Opéra-Comique theatre.

<sup>72</sup> Albert Dayrolles, "Sibyl Sanderson," *Revue Illustrée* 17, no. 193 (December 16, 1894): 236–241.

~A.D. Ressentez-vous quelque émotion au sujet de votre prochaine apparition sur la scène de l'Opéra?

~S.S. Certes! Aujourd'hui j'éprouve beaucoup plus d'appréhension à chanter devant un nombreux auditoire qu'autrefois. Lorsque j'ai débuté à La Haye, je ne me sentais nullement troublée. J'avais cette assurance que donne l'ignorance des périls! Il n'en est plus de même maintenant! Je me rends compte de bien des difficultés que je soupçonnais à peine alors. Puis on a davantage les yeux

Reviewers condemned her pinched tone and use of *tremolo* on several occasions over the years of her career.<sup>73</sup> Physical tension brought on by anxiety can affect the singing voice with the reported symptoms as well as other by-products such as dry mouth and sweaty palms.<sup>74</sup> It is possible Sanderson's upbringing fostered anxiety through inconsistency, lack of rules, boundaries, and limitations, followed by unexpected trauma. Judge Sanderson's letters to his daughter reveal that he tried to exert control by various means such as threatening to cut off financial support and forbidding her to marry Hearst and Cardinali. In terms of additional financial support, he would typically relent, thereby reinforcing that his daughter's tendency to cajole or complain until she got what she wanted.<sup>75</sup> Her father's death may have left an unexpected and unfillable void in Sanderson's life, and was possibly related to her subsequent substance abuse (alcohol, tobacco), extravagant expenditures, fatigue, impetuosity, and recurrent physical illness. These outcomes cannot be wholly blamed on her parents; by most accounts, Sanderson had an innate spirit of rebellion and lack of caution. Perhaps the most telling evidence of Sanderson's propensity for self-destruction is her death at age 38 due to pneumonia, cirrhosis of the liver, and eight other causes. She had been suffering from alcohol-related maladies for years before she died. For example, in 1898 while visiting Nice with her husband Antonio Terry (who died from complications arising from chronic alcoholism), it was reported that Sanderson was suffering from '*polynévrites des membres inférieurs*,' [polyneuropathy of the lower limbs] that was presumably alcohol-induced.<sup>76</sup>

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sur moi, on est plus exigeant pour la créatrice d'Esclarmonde et de Thaïs que pour la modeste débutante qui chantait Manon en cantatrice inexpérimentée.

<sup>73</sup> "Operas & Concerts," *The Monthly Musical Record* 21 (January 1891): 139.

<sup>74</sup> Glenn D. Wilson, *Psychology for Performing Artists: Butterflies and Bouquets* (London: Kingsley, 1994), 52.

<sup>75</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location 463. Quote from "Letter from Silas Sanderson to Sibyl Sanderson." August 11, 1882. From the collection of Marion Sanderson Nall.

<sup>76</sup> "La Scène," *La Presse* 65, no. 2130 (March 28, 1898): 3.

Despite some dysfunctional family dynamics, Sanderson's mother and sisters remained her main sources of strength and support. Her sisters may have harboured some resentment or jealousy about her fame, but there is little written evidence of this. Two of the Sanderson daughters eventually married American men and returned to the States; Jane settled in Minnesota and Marion in New York State, where they both raised children.<sup>77</sup> Edith took a different path, establishing a career translating books about the Baha'i faith; she eventually moved to Minnesota, near Jane.<sup>78</sup> Margaret and Sibyl resided in Paris for the rest of their lives. Sibyl Sanderson left the United States in disgrace in 1902, retired from the stage a second time, and attempted to marry a second time. Reports suggest that she planned to marry Count Paul Tolstoi, cousin of the Russian novelist, in the summer of 1903:<sup>79</sup>

Another illusion has vanished, i.e., that Sibyl Sanderson was ever a great singer. This lady shook the soil off her sandals last Saturday, sailing for Europe and another excursion into the realm of matrimony. We hope the Count and future husband will keep his wife off the operatic boards.<sup>80</sup>

The nuptials never came to fruition since she died just one year later. Her mother and sisters Marion and Edith were at her side when she died. Sister Jane and her husband, Roy Herrick, lived in Minnesota by 1903, but Marion kept them apprised of Sibyl's condition and death.<sup>81</sup> When Sibyl died, her ashes were placed in Paris' Père Lachaise cemetery, but were exhumed years later at the direction of Edith's family, and relocated to Lakewood cemetery in Minneapolis, Minnesota where Mrs. Sanderson and other members of the family are interred.

Knowing as much of the soprano's background as possible may help in building a more accurate picture of how she may have portrayed Manon and Esclarmonde. The

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<sup>77</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location 586.

<sup>78</sup> A.L.M Nicholas and Peter Terry, *A Prophet in Modern Times* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Publications, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> "Sibyl Sanderson Dead," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1903.

<sup>80</sup> "Letter to the Editor," *The Musical Courier* 44, no. 2 (January 8, 1902): 80.

<sup>81</sup> "Herrick Marriage," *Westfield Republican* 42, no. 51 (March 17, 1897): 5.

character traits that may have fed her impulsive decisions, irresponsible behaviours, frequent illness, and addiction to alcohol may have been qualities she brought out in the roles she played. The alignment with Manon's character is fairly obvious, with both Sanderson and the character being prone to impulsiveness, perhaps greed, and questionable integrity. Esclarmonde also used persuasion and rebellion with regularity, two qualities Sanderson exhibited throughout her life.

### Physical Appearance

Details of the lyric coloratura's physique add valuable clues about her vocality. An interview from 1894 provides an array of physical details about Sanderson at age 29, including her mannerisms, habits, and the way she spoke French:

I chatted yesterday for about half an hour with Miss Sibyl Sanderson. [...] Without hardly any English accent, she briefly tells me her story, already well-known. [...] It is how I learned successively that her glove is 5 3/4, she measures fifty-two centimetres (20 1/2 inches) at the waist, her favourite flower is the violet, but she has no objection to a hefty rare steak and large roasts, she is usually up between nine and ten o'clock, but the days she has to sing she stays in bed until three in the afternoon and eats dinner at four o'clock; moreover, she has never thought of death nor suicide—for why?—these are things that do not preoccupy her; this admirable body refuses to choose between burial and cremation; she told me also that she likes painting, but she knows nothing about it; certainly she reads! a bit of everything, she quoted Musset and Maupassant, and also Bourget's *Le Disciple* which she has just finished and finds exquisite; I also know that she does not love the real world, but on the other hand she loves the theatre, the small gay theatres, where she goes very often; she is a subscriber at the Théâtre-Libre, moreover; her hand, I watched a moment, as if a palmist, is warm and the skin is dry, her fingers are short but sharp enough; yet it is the hand of a calm and confident woman the same, without a burst of passion, very wise, logical and reasonable. I also saw her foot; when I asked her size, she nimbly stretched her leg, and I saw in black silk stockings appear, a narrow little foot on the floor and the end of a suede shoe with a silver buckle.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Jules Huret, "Sibyl Sanderson: 16 mars 1894," in *Loges et Coulisses* (Paris: Éditions de la revue blanche, 1901), 129–134.

J'ai causé hier une demi-heure avec Mlle Sibyl Sanderson. [...] Sans presque plus d'accent anglais, elle me raconte brièvement son histoire déjà connue. [...] C'est ainsi que j'appris successivement qu'elle gante 5 3/4, qu'elle mesure cinquante-deux centimètres de tour de taille, que sa fleur d'élection est la violette, mais qu'elle ne déteste pas le copieux bifteck saignant et les larges rôtis, qu'elle se lève ordinairement entre neuf heures et dix heures, mais que les jours où elle doit chanter elle reste au lit jusqu'à trois heures après-midi et dîne à quatre heures ; de plus, elle n'a jamais songé ni à la mort, ni au suicide, — car pourquoi ? — ce sont là des choses qui ne la préoccupent pas ; ce corps admirable se refuse à choisir entre l'enterrement et la crémation ; elle

Sanderson's career was at or nearing its peak at the time of this interview. Her confident responses reflect her status as a successful and beloved diva, and she appears joyful, intelligent, and flirtatious. The words and actions she used created a feeling of charm, grace, and a bit of intrigue. There was no hint of insecurity; the author refers to her hand as one belonging to a 'calm and confident woman.' At that moment, she may well have been calm and confident; she had little reason to feel otherwise, since reviewers had declared her recent interpretations of *Thaïs* and *Juliette* triumphant. Only one year later (1895), the critics did not offer such accolades; that was the start of the downward spiral of her career.

The diva's physical attributes were frequently noted in reviews; she was petite: under five feet tall (152cm), with a miniscule waist (20.5 inches, 52 centimetres), and tiny hands and feet. In fact, her glove and shoe sizes were so small that in today's fashions, they would have to be purchased from a children's department. Likewise, her waist measurement does not appear on modern women's apparel sizing charts. Her trunk was probably smaller because of cinching and corseting. She had large breasts, upon which critics frequently commented. Her décolletage became the topic of controversy when, during a rehearsal of *Thaïs*, her breasts became exposed due to an apparent wardrobe malfunction. Critic 'Willy' (Henri Gautier-Villars) turned the mishap into a joke, calling her Mademoiselle 'Seinderson:'

We awaited, with impatience, the repeat of an incident, which had greatly enlivened the dress rehearsal, I speak of the failure of a clip that allowed the

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m'a dit aussi qu'elle aime la peinture, mais qu'elle n'y connaît rien ; elle lit, certes ! un peu de tout, elle m'a cité Musset et Maupassant, et aussi le Disciple, de Bourget, qu'elle vient justement de terminer, et qu'elle trouve exquis ; je sais aussi qu'elle n'aime pas le monde, mais qu'en revanche elle raffole du théâtre, des petits théâtres gais, où elle va très souvent ; abonnée du Théâtre-Libre, d'ailleurs ; sa main, que j'ai regardée un instant, en chiromancien, est chaude et la peau en est sèche, les doigts sont courts mais assez effilés ; pourtant c'est la main d'une femme calme et sûre d'elle-même, sans emportement de passion, très avisée, logique et raisonneuse. J'ai vu aussi son pied ; comme je lui demandais sa pointure, elle étendit prestement la jambe, et je vis apparaître, sur le bas de soie noire, un étroit petit pied chaussé d'un fin soulier de chevreau à boucle d'argent.

public to view, naked to the waist, Miss Seinderson, very tired of mishaps and scarcely knowing where [or, to which breast] to turn. The lovers of fresh meat got their money's worth and then had to settle for the seinphonique music accompanying Thaïs's aria, [which was] coaxingly ironic, 'Who made you so harsh?' [...]Her green cloak fell, and so did the curtain, unfortunately. It was starting to get interesting.<sup>83</sup>

Photographs reveal that she possessed a short neck, especially compared to other notable women who have played Massenet's heroines (e.g., such as Joan Sutherland who also interpreted Esclarmonde).

**Figure 5:** Sibyl Sanderson and Joan Sutherland as Esclarmonde<sup>84</sup>



Small stature and diminutive features such as a short neck suggest that Sanderson had compact vocal physiology as well, which helps to explain her extraordinary high notes.<sup>85</sup>

It may also explain, at least in part, how her voice may have been considered thin and

<sup>83</sup> Henri Gauthier-Villars, "Thaïs," in *Les Mouches des Croches* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1894), 230–231.

On attendait avec impatience le renouvellement d'un incident dont on s'était fort égayé à la répétition générale, je veux parler de la trahison d'une agrafe qui avait permis au public de contempler nue jusqu'à la ceinture mademoiselle Seinderson, très ennuyée du contretemps et ne sachant plus à quel sein se vouer. Les amateurs de chair fraîche en ont été pour leurs frais et ont dû se contenter de la musique seinphonique accompagnant l'air de Thaïs, câlinement ironique : « Qui te fait si sévère? » [...]Son manteau vert tombe, le rideau aussi, par malheur. Ça commençait à devenir intéressant.

<sup>84</sup> Reutlinger, "Sanderson, Sybil dans Esclarmonde," photograph, Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque de l'Opéra. Ph. 24 (8) Num. 11. 1889; R. Wilson, "Joan Sutherland as Esclarmonde," photograph, London: Decca Classics 478 3155, July 1975.

<sup>85</sup> Raymond H. Colton, Janina K. Casper, and Rebecca Leonard, *Understanding Voice Problems: A Physiological Perspective for Diagnosis and Treatment* (Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2006), 4.

lacking in volume as her body had less mass and resonant space to reverberate the sound. However, size of body and size of voice are not necessarily correlated; singers similar to Sanderson in physical make-up perform on large operatic stages to critical acclaim.

French soprano Natalie Dessay is an example of a coloratura who is neither tall nor stout, but her voice was able to fill larger stages such as Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera. Sanderson could not fill those cavernous venues, according to reviews from 1891 and 1895, respectively. What Sanderson may have lacked in decibel output, she seemed to make up for in beauty. Sanderson's overall attractiveness was frequently mentioned in reviews. Her life-long friend Gertrude Atherton describes Sanderson's appearance as follows:

Sibyl, although she had the reputation of a beauty, was not one in the strict sense of the word. The lower part of her face was too heavy, and her nose and mouth were indifferently modelled. But her large luminous blue-grey eye expressed all things, her skin was smooth and white and brilliantly coloured, her hair like burnished bronze, and her figure perfect; I doubt if a more beautifully formed woman ever lived. And she had style and a carriage both haughty and graceful. But I think her reputation for beauty was owing more to her calm assumption of indubious pulchritude than to any physical perfection.<sup>86</sup>

Atherton speaks of Sanderson's certainty regarding her feminine physical beauty ('indubious pulchritude'), even though hers was an atypical appearance. What Sanderson may have lacked in traditional attractiveness, she made up for with boldness and confident demeanour. Regarding Atherton's comments about the singer's facial features, late nineteenth-century critics often wrote on the subject of the physiognomy, the appearance and facial expressions, of performers.<sup>87</sup> As Henson points out, the fact that the critics paid so much attention to her actual voice could be considered extraordinary in a

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<sup>86</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 124.

<sup>87</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 27–32.

“A very old word, originally from the Greek, physiognomy in French, Italian, German, and English refers to the face, features, and overall physical appearance. In all except French it also refers to the study or pseudo-science of interpreting character or essence from the face, features, physical appearance, and even movement. In French, the different *physiognomie* (an added syllable) emerged from the pseudo-science, and perhaps because of this, but also because of the popularity of the science in France, the word became common in French.”

period focused more on visual display.<sup>88</sup> Sanderson may have exploited her physical advantages in both her professional and personal life; this can be seen in the coquettish flirtations she manifested during interviews and performances. Massenet and Saint-Saëns profited from her non-vocal assets, too, by writing (or revising) provocative roles for Sanderson such as Manon, Esclarmonde, Thaïs, and Phryné. Massenet and Sanderson partnered to tailor Esclarmonde and Manon to suit her abilities. Saint-Saëns also displayed understanding of the soprano's capabilities when he composed *Phryné* for her. Henson proposes that, as time wore on, Massenet increasingly focused his work on the physical attributes of his muse:

Even more troubling than Massenet's vocal writing, though, is his seemingly ever-greater preoccupation with Sanderson as a visual phenomenon, for over the course of their work together he seems to have become less and less interested in her vocally – or at least in the high notes and agility that were her special strengths – and more and more keen to exploit her as a source of visual spectacle, in a series of scenes in which she becomes ever more mute and sexualized and is eventually reduced to little more than striptease. [...] Even the one non-Massenet opera with which Sanderson was involved seems to have put her in the same situation. In Saint-Saëns' *Phryné* Sanderson played another alluring courtesan in an opera that, like *Esclarmonde* and *Thaïs*, centers on her character's beauty and unveiling.<sup>89</sup>

It is necessary to address a few of Henson's statements before moving on. Her use of the word 'troubling' to describe Massenet's compositions for Sanderson's voice is editorial, not factual. Indeed, Sanderson's vocal lines were virtuosic, but by way of *ossia* passages and her artistic input; Sanderson was not an unwitting bystander in the interpretation of these characters. With regard to Massenet's supposed 'exploitation' of her physical assets, as Atherton is quick to mention, ambitious Sanderson herself capitalised on her overall attractiveness. Henson's idea that focusing on female allure in opera was problematic or rare is incorrect; again, the author chose to write from a more editorial voice rather than deal with historical facts. The attractiveness of a character, whether female or male, lovely, homely, or horrible is part of nearly any operatic story.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>89</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 141–142.

There may be a more convincing explanation for the shift in emphasis from aural to visual elements in Sanderson's performances: the diminishment of her once-extraordinary voice. If the *Phryné* staging highlighted a seductive characterisation more than stratospheric vocal prowess, it may have been that Saint-Saëns and his *régisieur* were aware of the vocal maladies the singer battled. They did accentuate positive features of Sanderson's vocality as well. Saint-Saëns included some melismatic material, albeit less than existed in other roles. Most of the score sits in the middle register, an area of her voice that was considered weak. The fact that the composer chose two descending passages for the *fiorature* reveals that he had a familiarity with the soprano's vocal skills. Sanderson probably found greater facility crossing her *secondo passaggio* from above, a common condition for high soprano voice types.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 128.

Sanderson's *secondo passaggio* probably occurred at or near G5, based on commonalities among high soprano voices, and as suspected from the vocal writing for her.

Example 1: 'Je suis devant l'Aréopage.' mm. 54–62<sup>91</sup>

*dolce e leggiero* 125

*A tempo* (avec timidité)

*tenuto espressivo*

Sanderson debuted in the role of Phryné in May 1893. She may have been in vocal trouble when Saint-Saëns composed the opera for her in 1892, but by the time it opened, the soprano's voice was on the mend. In an interview with Albert Dayrolles, she discussed the vocal writing of Phryné:

~A.D. And you, are you satisfied with your role?

~S.S. Surely, because it is full of great charm.

~A.D. Is it written in a high tessitura? Will we hear some vibrant notes of your highest register?

~S.S. My role stands, in terms of singing, in a middle range. The feeling is very graceful at first; it comes alive progressively, becomes dramatic and contains very pathetic passages as we approach the conclusion.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns, *Phryné: Opéra-comique en deux actes* (Paris: A. Durand, 1893), 125.

<sup>92</sup> Dayrolles, "Sibyl Sanderson," 240.

~A.D. Et vous, êtes-vous satisfaite de votre rôle?

According to Dayrolles, just after Sanderson made that statement, her dog, Manon, burst into the room and diverted the conversation. The lengthy dialogue between Sanderson and Dayrolles illustrates her artistic intelligence, articulate communication style, and confident persona. Henson believes that the confidence she exhibited in photographs released for the premiere of *Phryné* correlated with an increase in her creative authority:

In Sanderson's case, when she extends her arms as Juliette, or raises one arm alluringly *en civile* as Phryné, are we seeing a singer who was growing in confidence physically and beginning, Verasis-like, to play an active and even creative role in her physical and visual representation? Did this active and even pseudo-authorial creativity extend beyond the photographic studio, to her work and representation on the stage? Is it possible, in other words, to make a connection between the photographic confidence and Massenet's compositional choices in the same years?<sup>93</sup>

It appears that Massenet and Saint-Saëns may have tailored their vocal writing for Sanderson for concurrent reasons: to highlight the best aspects of her voice and to respond to requests made by the singer. Sanderson collaborated with Massenet to create and re-create roles throughout their partnership. The coloratura with the pure, light voice and 'iron-jawed will'<sup>94</sup> was assertive, not submissive, in working with composers, and they were willing to comply. In fact, it is feasible to view Sanderson as the puppet master pulling the strings of willing marionettes. This is true with her vocal training, as evidenced by the large number of teachers she hired and then subsequently dispatched.

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~S.S. Assurément, car il est empreint de beaucoup de charme.

~A.D. Est-il écrit dans une tessiture très élevée? Nous ferez-vous entendre quelques-unes des notes éclatantes de votre registre suraigu?

~S.S. Mon rôle se tient au point de vue du chant dans une étendue moyenne. D'allure fort gracieuse au début, il s'anime progressivement, devient dramatique et contient des passages très pathétiques à mesure qu'on s'approche du dénouement.

<sup>93</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 146.

<sup>94</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 124.

## CHAPTER TWO

TRAINING *LA BELLE SIBYL*:  
THE ARTISTIC EDUCATION OF SIBYL SANDERSONConservatoire and California (1881–1885)

When you have selected a teacher place the utmost confidence in that teacher. [...] Give the matter careful thought and if necessary make a change. The matter of the right teacher is a very serious matter and may affect your whole career. It is right for you to be selfish,—that is to think wholly of your own interests. [...] Changing teachers frequently is of course a fearfully bad practice.<sup>95</sup>

So said Mathilde Marchesi, teacher of several famous operatic singers in France during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among her students was Sibyl Sanderson, but the soprano did not follow her teacher's advice. Sanderson's diverse musical education included twelve voice teachers in less than twenty years, beginning her private vocal instruction in Paris during her year of study overseas (1881–1882). When she returned to the United States, she took voice lessons with Zeïss-Dennis, Kelleher, and Galvani.<sup>96</sup>

**Paris Conservatoire (1881)***Saint-Yves Bax*

During Sanderson's initial year abroad, she lived in London for a short time and spent the remaining months in Paris, studying voice with Saint-Yves Bax (1829–1897) at the Conservatoire where he was *professeur de chant* for nearly thirty years. His *Bel Canto* methods seem to have been well-received by those involved in the Parisian vocal community, including notable pupils such as the Wagnerian heldentenor Ernest Van Dyck and baritone Jacques Isnardon.<sup>97</sup> Sanderson did not study with Bax for long either time she joined his studio. Regardless of the duration of their educational engagement, his

<sup>95</sup> Mathilde Marchesi and Blanche Marchesi, "Truths for Singing Teachers and Students," *Étude Magazine* (October 1913). <http://etudemagazine.com/etude/1913/10/truths-for-singing-teachers-and-students.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location 172.

Hansen claims that the Sanderson daughters had a private music tutor called Miss Morse, but supportive evidence has not been found.

<sup>97</sup> The professional relationships among Sanderson, Isnardon, and Van Dyck are discussed later in this work. Of particular importance is their involvement in the 1891 London production of *Manon*.

teaching techniques made enough of an impression on the young woman to cause her to discontinue studies with him.

From a young age, I had a great calling to singing and theatre, but my mom was not as enthusiastic as me. However, she conceded to my whim and was kind enough to accompany me to Paris. I then entered the Conservatoire into the class of Mr. Bax, but I was soon to see that I could spend all my time in that life, so it compelled me to come to classes regularly, since my intention was to start in a large theatre as soon as possible. [...] So I preferred to leave the Conservatoire immediately to take lessons from the Reszké brothers. M. Gounod was good enough to help me with his advice, and made me learn *Manon* and *Romeo and Juliet*, comic operas that I wanted to play, and I played, in fact, sometime later in The Hague and Amsterdam. [...] I returned then to Paris and met Mr. Massenet who became my teacher. For two years, I have received lessons from the master. It was he who taught me what I know. He completely changed my voice.<sup>98</sup>

The trajectory of her operatic aspirations could not be re-routed despite parental pressures and advice from those in the academic arena. If she aimed for international fame, she achieved her goal. Although much of her success can be traced to her association with Massenet, the other training she received would have had profound effects on her vocality regardless of method used or duration of studies. Each teacher had his or her own insights, preferences, and demands. The following section explores pedagogic influences Sanderson obtained from her teachers (excluding Massenet).<sup>99</sup>

Early on, Sanderson realised that she could have ‘spent a lifetime’ as a student rather than devoting her time to singing professionally. Pupils often feel as though they spend years working on vocal exercises and little else, and it appears that in Bax’s studio students worked at vocalises instead of repertoire, since his treatise contains close to fifty

<sup>98</sup> Sanderson and Puech, “Les débutants,” 3.

Toute petite, j’avais une grande vocation pour le chant et théâtre, mais maman n’était pas aussi enthousiaste que moi. Elle a cédé, cependant, à mon caprice et a bien voulu m’accompagner à Paris. Je suis entrée alors au Conservatoire dans la classe de M. Bax, mais je ne tardai pas à voir que je ne pourrais longtemps mener cette vie, m’astreindre à venir régulièrement aux classes, puis mon intention était de débiter dans un grand théâtre le plus tôt possible. [...] Je préférais donc quitter tout de suite le Conservatoire pour prendre des leçons du professeur des frères de Reszké. M. Gounod voulut bien alors m’aider de ses conseils et me faire apprendre *Manon* et *Roméo et Juliette*, opéras comiques que je désirais jouer et que je jouai en effet quelque temps plus tard à la Haye et à Amsterdam. [...] Je revins ensuite à Paris et fis la connaissance de M. Massenet qui devint mon professeur. Depuis deux ans, je n’ai reçu de leçons que du maître. C’est lui qui m’a appris ce que je sais. Il m’a complètement modifié la voix.

<sup>99</sup> Discussion of how Massenet impacted her vocality is contained in later chapters.

vocal exercises of varying length and complexity. In vocalises, teachers can assign exercises that address specific areas in the voice that may need improvement. However, a student can gain similar technical proficiency more efficiently than working on musical phrases that will never receive public performance. In addition to these exercises, a teacher can assign applicable repertoire that addresses the same gaps in vocal strategy and/or interpretation. In this case, the students benefit on two fronts at the same time: they can remedy technical deficiencies and become familiar with repertoire within their *fach*.

Conversations and scholarly writing on the use of vocalise in the studio continue today, with some experts championing the use of vocalises and others preferring repertoire options to promote professional preparation. Richard Miller was in the latter group:

Specific technical exercises (vocalises) [...] enable the singer to accomplish tasks encountered in the performance literature for voice. In addition, numerous examples of superb vocalization material taken directly from the several categories of soprano literature are incorporated into daily systematic technical work. It is essential that brief literature excerpts supplement technical exercises.<sup>100</sup>

Sanderson's primary complaint about the teaching of Saint-Yves Bax was that she wasted time working at exercises.<sup>101</sup> Bax may have utilised arias, oratorio, and *mélodie* selections to address specific vocal concerns, but his *journalier* leaves the matter unsettled.<sup>102</sup> While his writings offer explicit instruction for executing vocalises, such as how to approach breath management and rhythmic precision, he does not elucidate the purpose of each exercise, nor any intended benefits of mastering such exercises. His introduction suggests that the exercises could be used as warm-ups, especially to get the breath moving. He also acknowledges the large number of available vocal methods and refers readers to the methods of Manuel Garcia II for further study:

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<sup>100</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 14.

<sup>101</sup> Sanderson and Puech, "Les débutants," 3.

<sup>102</sup> Saint-Yves Bax, *Exercices Journaliers* (Paris: O'Kelly, 1875).

There exists a quantity of singing methods, many of which are excellent and contain precise indications. Unfortunately, one cannot learn to sing with books. In publishing this collection, which has no pretention of novelty, let alone composition, I simply proposed to make available to my students, in as small an amount as possible, the types of exercises I adopted in my teaching. The student will commence their studies each day by starting the sound, supporting each note in full voice. [...] When the sound is emitted perfectly and breathing becomes solid, it is time to combine the *étude* with sounds.<sup>103</sup>

While it is valid to assert that books cannot teach a person to sing, perfect emission of sound is an unattainable goal. With that mind-set, a student could spend an entire lesson (perhaps even a lifetime) seeking flawless phonation only to become discouraged and ignore other aspects of vocality that may need attention.

Given the large amount of material offered in the *journalier* (see example below—exercise 44 contains eleven four-measure coloratura passages), perhaps Bax did not intend singers to graduate from using the workbook while under his tutelage. It seems possible that students transferred to another teacher at the Conservatoire once they attained proficiency with the lessons Bax offered. His approach differs from other exercise books, such as Nicola Vaccai's '*Metodo pratico di canto italiano per camera: diviso in quindici lezioni*,' which contains fifteen exercises, each devised to address a particular aspect of *Bel Canto* technique, with a short description explaining the intention of the exercise (see example below).

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<sup>103</sup> Garcia, *École de Garcia*, xi.

Example 2: Exercice 44<sup>104</sup>

The image displays a musical score for Exercise 44. It consists of ten staves of music, each containing a series of rapid, repetitive sixteenth-note passages. The passages are organized into four measures per staff, with each measure containing a single melodic line. The notes are beamed together, creating a dense, rhythmic texture. The bottom staff is a grand staff, consisting of a treble and bass clef, and contains a few measures of music with chords and single notes, providing a harmonic accompaniment for the main exercise.

<sup>104</sup> Bax, *Exercices Journaliers*, 32.

**Example 3:** ‘La gioja verace.’ mm. 1–3<sup>105</sup>

## Lesson IX

### The Mordent

Of all the musical graces or embellishments the Gruppetto (or Turn) is, at once, the most varied and the most difficult, from the apparent ease and lightness with which it must be executed. It consists of 2 or 3 notes, and can impart great charm to the singing without influencing the due sentiment of the phrasing of individual passages, or the general intention of the composer. It is, therefore, the only licence that the singer may occasionally take on his own responsibility. The slightest appearance of effort or premeditation is fatal. We may add that modern composers write the notes they wish to have sung, and it is impossible to condemn too strongly the singer's use of any *Abbellimenti* or vocal ornaments that are not indicated in the music by the composer himself. We are thankful to say this abuse has long since gone out of fashion.

Rather than spending extensive time on the forty-four measures prescribed by her professor, Sanderson may have been better served by working on vocal agility with passages from an opera such as *Roméo et Juliette* instead:

**Example 4:** ‘Ah ! Je veux vivre.’ mm. 105–110<sup>106</sup>

To fully exploit the excerpt above for developing the student's voice, the coloratura passages can be practiced an octave lower than written, or transposed into other keys.

<sup>105</sup> Nicola Vaccai, *Metodo pratico di canto italiano per camera: diviso in quindici lezioni* (Milano: F. Lucca, 1832), 20.

<sup>106</sup> Charles Gounod, ‘Ah! Je veux vivre,’ *Roméo et Juliette: opéra en cinq actes* (Paris: Choudens, 1888 (orig. 1867)), 52.

This facilitates mastery of the fundamentals of musicianship such as tuning, rhythm, and characterisation without the added physical stress brought on by continual phonation in the high head register. Transposition and tempi alterations may also help with blending the vocal registers, practising dynamic variation, and honing diction.<sup>107</sup> One other benefit of repeated and varied attempts at the passage may be memorization of the music without directed effort.<sup>108</sup>

Cultivation of this habit (singing an octave lower than written) can begin at initial score review and continue through to the final dress rehearsal. It is common practice for singers to ‘mark’ in order to save their full-voice renditions for actual performance.<sup>109</sup> Documentary sources suggest that Sanderson did not employ this technique, despite singing roles with high tessitura and complex coloratura demands and maintaining an aggressive rehearsal schedule throughout her career. The work ethic she exhibited in her operatic pursuits began evolving at a young age and remained with her, despite the interference of internal and external forces. One example of her undeterred discipline is her immediate resumption of voice lessons upon returning to San Francisco in 1882, despite disapproval from her father and social distractions. Mrs. Sanderson played a persuasive role in the continuation of her daughter’s studies by ascertaining which teacher in their area would be most beneficial both in terms of her daughter’s ambitions and the instructor’s social standing.

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<sup>107</sup> William Vennard, “Coordination,” in *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (New York, NY: Carl Fischer, 1967), 219.

<sup>108</sup> Aaron Williamon, “Strategies for Memorizing Music,” in *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127–128.

<sup>109</sup> Barbara M. Doscher, *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 236.

### California (1882–1885)

Sanderson studied voice in San Francisco, but the exact timing of her lessons with the various instructors is unknown. Jack Winsor Hansen claims Sanderson studied general music with Miss Morse before her year abroad though documentation to support his statement remains elusive.<sup>110</sup> After returning from Paris, Sanderson and her mother set about finding a suitable voice teacher; between 1882 and 1885, she studied with at least three voice teachers.

#### *Carolina Zeïss-Dennis*

Sanderson took her first lessons in San Francisco with Carolina Zeïss-Dennis (?–1893), a Belgian contralto who performed in Paris for approximately three years and then relocated to California when she married San Francisco surgeon Frank Dennis. She then opened a voice studio and continued to perform casually until 1883, when the couple returned to Paris and Zeïss-Dennis resumed her stage career. Ten years later she died during a surgical procedure.<sup>111</sup>

Madame Zeïss-Dennis was the daughter of a music professor at the Brussels Conservatoire. She specialized in Italian repertoire, performing principal roles at the *Théâtre-Italien* in the 1860s. Her most noted role was Azucena in *Il Trovatore*,<sup>112</sup> and her colleagues included well-known interpreters such as Adelina Patti. In terms of public favour, few press articles offer opinions of Zeïss-Dennis as a singer or teacher, but those that do exist consistently describe her voice as strong and agile and her acting skills as superb. One reporter described her as ‘very large and very blonde,’ and her voice was deemed ‘sweet.’<sup>113</sup> San Francisco socialites considered Zeïss-Dennis to be a ‘living

<sup>110</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location 172.

<sup>111</sup> “Parisian Letter,” *Kilmore Free Press*, October 12, 1893, morning edition, 1.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> “Bay Breezes: The French Fourth of July at Woodward’s Gardens.” *Sacramento Daily-Record Union*, July 23, 1880, 1.

compendium of musical lore,’ and some claimed that ‘she had the most thorough musical education of any woman who ever lived in the city.’<sup>114</sup>

Like Saint-Yves Bax, Madame Zeïss-Dennis utilised the *Bel Canto* method and would have received the Italianate training during her conservatoire days in Brussels. In addition, she maintained an amicable relationship with Nicola Vaccai, an influential teacher in *Bel Canto* pedagogic history. The descriptions of her voice (strong, agile) agree with the priorities of *Bel Canto*, and she sang Italian operas associated with the method such as *Il Trovatore* and *Rigoletto*. Zeïss-Dennis did not limit her repertoire to Italian music; she also sang works by Meyerbeer and Handel.<sup>115</sup>

Zeïss-Dennis may have further engaged Sanderson’s interest in French music given her personal experience as a successful Parisian opera singer. She was also a member of the higher social class, which Mrs. Sanderson preferred.<sup>116</sup> Had Madame Zeïss-Dennis and her husband remained in San Francisco, rather than returning to Paris, Sanderson might have continued studying with her.

#### *Dennis ‘Denny’ P. Kelleher*

After Madame Dennis, Sanderson began voice lessons with Denny Kelleher, a baritone from Cambridge, Massachusetts.<sup>117</sup> Documentation about his career reveals that he performed choral and oratorio repertoire in trios and quartets rather than opera.<sup>118</sup> Information about his life is sparse, and it would seem that his influence on Sanderson was minor in the overall arc of her technical development.

<sup>114</sup> “The Late M<sup>me</sup>. Zeïss-Dennis: Sad Death Abroad of That Popular and Talented Lady,” *San Francisco Morning Call*, August 17, 1893, 6.

<sup>115</sup> “Musical Review,” *Sherman & Hyde’s Musical Review* (September 1876): 111, 265, 268.

<sup>116</sup> “Society,” *The Argonaut*, July 7, 1883, 4.

<sup>117</sup> “Christmas Joy in City Churches,” *San Francisco Call*, December 24, 1896: 8. Jack Winsor Hansen spelled Kelleher’s name wrong in his biography of Sanderson; he wrote the man’s surname as Kellcher.

<sup>118</sup> “North Cambridge Happenings,” *Cambridge Sentinel*, March 27, 1909: 4.

*Giacomo Galvani*

Following lessons with Kelleher, Sanderson worked with Giacomo Galvani (1825–1889), a retired Italian tenor who had performed at La Scala and London’s Royal Italian Opera.<sup>119</sup> Following his stage career, he taught voice at the Moscow Conservatory, then worked as an opera conductor in Europe.<sup>120</sup> He immigrated to San Francisco in late 1883.<sup>121</sup> Sanderson likely began lessons with Galvani in 1884, a few months after his arrival in the Bay Area; she remained in his studio until 1885 when Mrs. Sanderson and her daughters moved to Paris. Galvani in all probability followed *Bel Canto* traditions, based on his Italian vocal training and the repertoire he sang and conducted.<sup>122</sup> He was not the last *Bel Canto* teacher with whom Sanderson studied; there would be several more as she cycled through eight additional instructors in Paris between 1885 and 1896.

Paris (1885–1887)

Soon after relocating to Paris, Sanderson returned to the Conservatoire and resumed lessons with Saint-Yves Bax. Like her first instruction with Bax, this session did not last long. All pursuits were put on hold in 1886, when Judge Sanderson died unexpectedly, which called the women back to California. When Mrs. Sanderson finalized the estate, she and her daughters returned to France, and began searching for a suitable private voice teacher for Sibyl, rather than continuing at the Conservatoire:

Miss Sibyl Sanderson wanted to follow the course of the Conservatoire, but the laborious routine well-known in the life of a student of Ambroise Thomas’s institution could not agree with her proud and independent nature, Miss Sibyl Sanderson gave up sharing *café au lait* with her peers and became a private pupil of Mr. Massenet, who taught her to sing all music artistically and especially his.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> “Royal Italian Opera,” *The Morning Post*, April 19, 1852: 6.

<sup>120</sup> “Résumé of the Doings of Society for the Week,” *Oakland Tribune*, August 2, 1884: J7-A.

<sup>121</sup> Alexis Dupont, “Galvani, Giacomo (1825–1889),” in *Autographes musicaux provenant de Giuseppe et Fanny Persiani* (Paris: Trois Plumes, June 2014), 24.

<sup>122</sup> “Metropolitan Theater,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, April 3, 1884: 3.

<sup>123</sup> Charles Martel, “La soirée d’hier: Esclarmonde,” *La Justice*, 3409 (May 16, 1889) : 1.

Mlle Sibyl Sanderson a voulu suivre les cours du Conservatoire, mais la régularité laborieuse bien connue de la vie d’élève de l’institution Ambroise Thomas n’ayant pu convenir à cette nature fière

Mrs. Sanderson's inquiries among the ex-patriot community resulted in several referrals for her eldest daughter. American Miss Fanny Reid (or Reed), who dominated wealthy Parisian social circles, secured an audition with Mathilde Marchesi (1821–1913) in early 1887. The famous teacher said it would take two years to train Sanderson's voice properly.<sup>124</sup> Much to Miss Reid's chagrin (though it did not sour her advocacy for the young singer),<sup>125</sup> Sanderson refused Marchesi's prescriptions because 'the stage beckoned her as soon as possible.'<sup>126</sup> The viewpoints of the two women remained categorically opposed, so they did not enter into a pedagogic relationship at that time:

To sing well is the chief thing, but to do this much time is required, and time is what the student most begrudges nowadays. When parents bring their daughters to me, they generally ask: 'How long will you keep her?' or, 'Please make it as short as possible,' or, 'What is my daughter's voice worth?' or, 'Ought one to practise four or five hours a day?' or, 'Will she ever earn as much as Patti?' and so on. Art is now looked upon as a business which should give quick returns. But to become an exceptionally good singer, much time and study are required.<sup>127</sup>

Sanderson opted to reject Marchesi in favour of Jean De Reszké, the celebrated Polish tenor, though Madame Marchesi did play an important part in the restoration of Sanderson's voice years later.

### *Jean De Reszké*

Sanderson's attempts to shorten the distance between herself and the stage led her to enter the studio of the famous performer and teacher Jean De Reszké (1850–1925) in early 1887. She received only a few months of instruction before the operatic De Reszké family (Jean, Édouard, and Josephine) left Paris in order to perform in London.<sup>128</sup>

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et indépendante, Mlle Sibyl Sanderson renonça à partager le café au lait de ses camarades et devint élève particulière de M. Massenet qui lui apprit à chanter en artiste toutes les musiques et surtout la sienne.

<sup>124</sup> Mathilde Marchesi, *Marchesi and Music: Passages from the Life of a Famous Singing Teacher* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros., 1897), 289.

<sup>125</sup> Emma Eames, *Some Memories and Reflections* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 82.

<sup>126</sup> Sanderson and Puech, "Les débutants," 3.

<sup>127</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi and Music*, 248.

<sup>128</sup> Clara Leiser, *Jean De Reszké and the Great Days of Opera* (New York, NY: Minton, Balch, 1934), 194.

The techniques Sanderson learned from her fifth voice teacher likely differed from the Italianate methods she learned from previous teachers. De Reszké did not write a treatise, so there is little primary documentation on his pedagogical principles except for recollections of his pupils, in addition to published press. From this foundation, it is possible to make educated assumptions about the vocal instruction De Reszké provided. Although Sanderson only studied with him for a few months, the two performed together later, so his teaching may have had an ongoing influence on her vocality in direct and indirect ways from the studio to the stage.<sup>129</sup>

A short biographical sketch of De Reszké's musical history may prove useful in determining his pedagogic style. The Polish tenor came from a family of musicians and performed with his younger siblings, Édouard (1853–1917) and Josephine (1855–1891), throughout their careers:

His mother was his first music teacher, and when but 12 years of age he was a cathedral soloist. In his teens he studied under Cotogni, Ciaffei, and Sbriglia, but as he himself has confessed, took very little stock in music masters and learned most about his art by sitting and listening to great singers. This, perhaps, is why both he and his bass-voiced brother Édouard are devoted advocates and exponents of the 'natural' method in singing, by which they mean a method which follows the rationale of speech and adapts itself to the peculiar characteristics of each individual.<sup>130</sup>

This quotation may provide a clue as to why he fought vocal troubles throughout his career, including exhaustion, physical collapse, and loss of voice, namely the reference to the brothers' adherence to the 'natural method,' which will be explored later in this section. Although the De Reszké brothers deemed their methods 'natural,' examination of the teaching style suggests that the results sounded forced. Henson offers these suppositions about how the baritone may have sounded after converting to tenor:

In Reszké's case, the technical question is almost indecipherable. One extremely tentative hypothesis is that, on transforming himself into a tenor, Reszké did not

<sup>129</sup> "Metropolitan Opera Premiere: *Manon*," *Metropolitan Opera Family Archives*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Opera Company, January 16, 1895.

<sup>130</sup> Arthur J. Stringer, "Jean de Reszké: Famous Tenor," *The Day*, January 9, 1899, 2.

concentrate, as most former baritones would have done, on building strength and endurance in the upper register, but rather on developing an unusual flexibility and a range of vocal colors. [...] In other words, rather than approaching the more extreme demands of the tenor voice directly, Reszké had developed a technique that allowed him to negotiate them in a more indirect way, using flexibility, a range of colors, and more ‘physiognomic’ skills – the careful enunciation of text, the careful introduction of interpretive detail – as an *alternative* to lightness (and indeed heaviness). Regardless of the technique involved, a wide expressive range and an unusual lightness would be qualities Reszké would continue to be associated with during his time at the Opéra.<sup>131</sup>

Henson’s estimation of how Jean De Reszké sounded matches the descriptions left by his students, especially with regard to his diction and the notion that interpretation took precedence. As for his change of *fach*, one does not read about Jean De Reszké without encountering a reference to his conversion from baritone to tenor. That transformation came about when his brother Édouard convinced him to seek intervention from Paris-based voice teacher Giovanni Sbriglia, an Italian instructor who helped Jean De Reszké transition into an internationally acclaimed tenor. As Stringer has noted:

The brusque Jean thinks more about his throat doctor than of all the beautiful women who ever sat in the Metropolitan. [...] The young Jean himself made the mistake of choosing baritone instead of tenor [...] His voice never had the real resonance of a genuine baritone. On several occasions, despite his robust physique, he had fainted on the stage of the *Théâtre-Italien* in Paris from the strain of singing parts written too low for him. He took a long rest [...] and after two years’ study made his appearance as Jean de Reszké, the tenor, in Meyerbeer’s ‘Robert le Diable.’ His success was instant and unprecedented.<sup>132</sup>

However, though most reports claim that his change of *fach* in 1879 helped De Reszké as a performer, his vocal predicaments did not end as a result of moving to the higher roles, as evidenced by this report from 1900. In fact, his continued vocal problems forced him to seek medical intervention:

There have been many and absolutely contradictory reports as to the condition of M. Jean de Reszké’s voice, and diverse rumours as to whether the tenor [...] had or had not passed permanently from the stage. [...] His reappearance upon the Covent Garden boards early in the present season resulted in a disastrous breakdown. So unexpected was it, [...] that Mme. Melba, who was the Juliet to his Romeo, burst into tears. His voice suddenly failed during the performance, and the

<sup>131</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 165.

<sup>132</sup> Stringer, “Jean de Reszké,” 2.

tenor in alarm returned to his dressing room, not knowing whether he could struggle on to the end of the opera or not. [...] Dr. Holbrook Curtis, of New York, a well-known throat specialist, who had been M. de Reszké's medical adviser when in America, has just returned from Europe, having made a most careful examination of M. de Reszké. [...]<sup>133</sup>

The incident seems to have precipitated De Reszké's withdrawal for nearly a year before returning to the stage at Covent Garden. Dr. Curtis explained to the press that De Reszké's vocal failure occurred because of poor conditioning; he was not in shape to sing.<sup>134</sup> This particular story is consistent with a pattern that recurred throughout De Reszké's career; loss of voice forced him to cancel performances on numerous occasions. Emma Eames comments on his lack of dependability:

The only reason for this delay [referring to her début at the Opéra as Gounod's Juliette], however, was the repeated inability of Jean de Reszké to sing on account of throat trouble, which state of things, alas! recurred during his entire career. How many times afterwards did I pass agonized evenings singing with his substitute thrown in at the last minute!<sup>135</sup>

Sybil Sanderson did not escape the consequences of the tenor's vocal troubles either. Like Eames, she also performed with understudies because of De Reszké's indisposition.<sup>136</sup> De Reszké's students suffered the results of his flawed technique as well. Several English-speaking students who worked with him late in his career relayed technical ideas that he taught in his 'nature plus nothing' system of singing, as follows:

A further difficulty is that with him voice-production, diction and interpretation were inseparable. [...] The first step would be to secure the foundation on which everything was to rise, namely, the 'support.' To get this he would make the pupil sit down in an attitude of complete relaxation, round-shouldered, elbows on knees, hands hanging down (*asseyez-vous comme ça et puis méditez*) in order to relax all the muscles of the chest, and prevent the use of any others except those of the diaphragm. Then, in inhaling, the lower ribs were to be expanded without raising the chest. [...] But this was not to be confused with sticking the stomach out—abdominal breathing—the abdomen was to be kept up and in, to give greater support to the diaphragm. In singing, this expansion was to be kept as long as possible, and the lower ribs not allowed to collapse in order that the breath might

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> "Jean De Reszké's Voice Restored," *New Zealand Herald*, November 10, 1900, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Eames, *Some Memories and Reflections*, 82.

<sup>136</sup> "Sybil Sanderson Scores an Artistic Triumph as Manon in Massenet's New Opera of That Name," *The Washington Times*, February 24, 1895, 8.

be kept under compression to the very last. This was, in fact, the first step towards the legato style of the true *Bel Canto*. Trouble sometimes arose from beginners becoming frightened at the muscular fatigue this caused, if they had been brought up to think singing should be ‘easy and natural and effortless.’ [...] The position of the head was important also; he always said, ‘Sing to the gallery,’ with head slightly back, but not stiff, except when trying to get full mask tone.<sup>137</sup>

The final sentence causes confusion. Should the singers keep their heads stiff in that case? Or did he mean they should not ‘sing to the gallery’? It sounds as if he wanted singers to modify body and head position while at the same time increasing tension in the head and neck when singing in the mask.<sup>138</sup> Instruction to bring the chin down a bit could have been beneficial, because it could aid in alleviating tension, but singing with an elevated and protruding chin would add lateral strain to the vocal mechanism. If De Reszké meant the singer should have a stiff skull (and presumably, neck) in order to resonate in the mask, the results would likely cause fatigue and vocal strain brought on by excess tension.

### *Posture*

For body position De Reszké suggested, ‘The whole body was to be as though one was ‘settling down’ on the diaphragm, relaxed but ready to spring, as in tennis, golf, boxing, etc. rather than braced up and stiff as if ‘on parade.’<sup>139</sup> His description of proper posture aligns with a principle in the Alexander Technique called ‘a position of mechanical advantage,’ referred to by Alexander students as ‘Monkey.’ Singers may feel that, if they stand in that way, that they are ready to spring or jump at any moment.<sup>140</sup>

The head position De Reszké suggested shifts the rest of the posture equation out of balance, and much of the efficiency, or ‘mechanical advantage,’ created in the body

<sup>137</sup> Walter Johnstone-Douglas, “Jean De Reszké: His Principles of Singing,” *Music and Letters* 6 (1925): 203–204, 208.

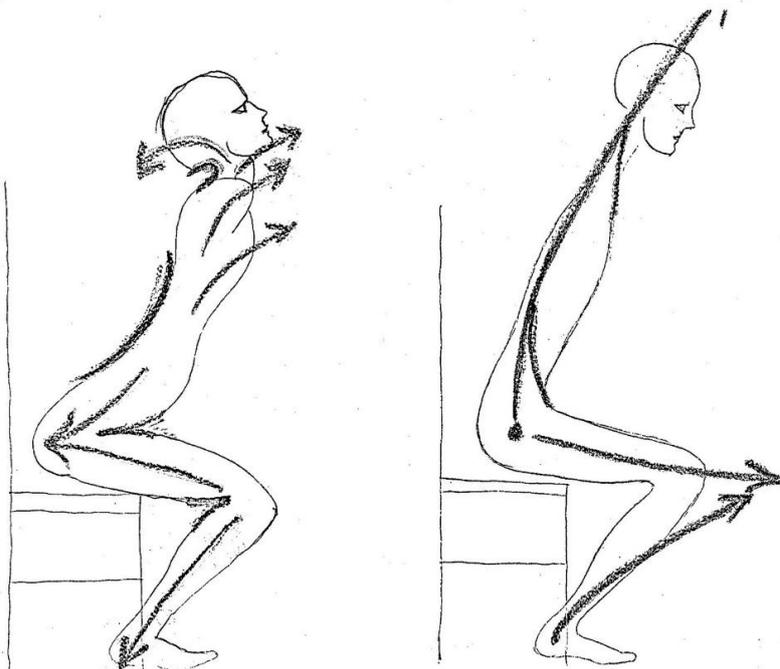
<sup>138</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 51. This refers to the notion of directing the tone to the bridge of the nose, the nasal pharynx, the sinuses or cheekbones, the back of the teeth, against the palate, etc.

<sup>139</sup> Johnstone-Douglas, “Jean De Reszké,” 203–204, 206.

<sup>140</sup> Judith Kleinman and Peter Buckoke, *Alexander Technique for Musicians* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

would be negated by ‘singing to the gallery’ with the head back. Having the body slightly rounded and leaning forward but the head tilted back and chin raised would cause the vocal mechanism to be out of alignment, similar to trying to water the garden when there is a kink in the hose. De Reszké’s recommended head position would cause dammed airflow and laryngeal tension, two conditions that could lead to physical exhaustion and vocal fatigue or even loss of voice.

**Figure 6:** The effects of head position on posture in the Alexander Technique<sup>141</sup>



### *Breathing*

The description of De Reszké’s breathing method deserves further exploration. First, Johnstone-Douglas contradicted his teacher’s stated priority in vocal strategy (that the method should be ‘natural’) when he said beginners would struggle if they thought singing ‘should be easy and natural and effortless.’<sup>142</sup> Perhaps De Reszké changed his mind and methods by the time Johnstone-Douglas studied with him, but the article cited earlier indicated that he subscribed to the natural method was published in 1900, well

<sup>141</sup> “RNLI Logo, Alexander Technique.” Cakechooser.com blog.

<sup>142</sup> Johnstone-Douglas, “Jean De Reszké: His Principles of Singing,” *Music and Letters*, 204.

over twenty years into the tenor's career. Another element of that quotation presents problems: 'Trouble sometimes arose from beginners becoming frightened at the muscular fatigue this caused...' <sup>143</sup> This is not surprising given the history of De Reszké's suggested over-exertion while performing, which seems to have resulted from excess tension.

The second problem with the techniques relayed by Johnstone-Douglas is the instruction to isolate and control the diaphragm while relaxing all chest muscles. This is physically impossible; the diaphragm is an involuntary muscle that cannot be controlled or isolated at will, but even today, voice teachers instruct students to perform all manner of feats with their diaphragm. Doscher dispelled the prevalent diaphragm myth:

Contrary to popular belief, we have little or no voluntary control over diaphragmatic action. The diaphragm has no proprioceptive [sensory self-awareness] nerve endings, and therefore it is impossible to experience any sensation of its position or movement. <sup>144</sup>

It is interesting that De Reszké sang with so much tightness that he collapsed, when the breathing method his student described—instruction to inflate and expand the lower ribcage around the mid-trunk without abdominal protrusion upon inhalation—is consistent with the *appoggio* breathing used in *Bel Canto* singing. Having completed inspiration, the singer maintains enough resistant pressure to keep the ribcage expanded, but it should not become rigid. De Reszké and his students most likely overexerted themselves attempting to keep the ribs inflated:

The *appoggio* approach to breathe management stands in opposition to techniques of 'breath support' that control breath exit through induced abdominal-wall movement (inward abdominal thrusting, known as the 'in-and-up method'), or, conversely, through outward pushing on the abdominal wall (the 'down-and-out method,' also termed 'belly breathing'). [...] During complete inhalation, with the thumbs placed at the twelfth rib (the costal that defines the base of the ribcage dorsally) and the fingers placed laterally below the frontal tenth rib (bottom of the thoracic cage anteriorly), the singer becomes aware of outward movement of the lowest ribs—both dorsal and anterior—but, more important, of expansion in the lateral abdominal and low dorsal walls of the torso. <sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>144</sup> Doscher, *Functional Unity*, 18.

<sup>145</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 42–43.

The *appoggio* method differs from other breathing styles, such as ‘belly breathing’ (*Bauchausenstütz* technique) associated with the German school of singing, in which the vocalist fills the front abdominal area which results in an outward protrusion of the belly. In another inspiratory style quite similar to belly breathing, singers are asked to focus expansion upon the inhale at the low pelvic level, thus causing abdominal protrusion that becomes most noticeable below the navel. The results of belly breathing and pelvic breathing include excess bodily tension, damming of airflow, and pulling the larynx down with inspiration.<sup>146</sup>

To summarise De Reszké’s breathing system, it seems that he may have suggested the *appoggio* method in word, but based on descriptions of his body while singing, combined with the vocal difficulties he faced, it is likely that he carried significant tension and impeded airflow. It is reasonable to conclude that he utilised low belly or pelvic breathing rather than *appoggio*. This is also supported by the fact that he promoted a low larynx position, as discussed later. Sanderson probably employed clavicular and pelvic breathing at various points in her training and career, because she wore corsets in performance, as she herself admitted during an interview in 1901:

An occasional correspondent writes me from Paris that a new style of corset called ‘La Veine,’ which every fashionable Parisienne now wears, has started again the old controversy as to whether the corset is a good thing. The leading actresses have been interviewed and they express the opinion that the reign of the corset is nearly at an end; that French ladies will soon cease to bruise their delicate forms, and that the instrument of torture will gradually merge into a waist-band. Madame Rejane said: ‘A corset? Well, yes, I suppose so, but as little as possible, if you please.’

Sybil Sanderson exclaimed: ‘Of course I wear one. Are not we all *moutons de Panurge*?’

Marie de Bovet said: ‘If a native of Laputa saw our stays she would believe they were invented by a cruel justice to punish women for their sins.’

‘How can a woman be coquettish,’ queried Mademoiselle Darland, ‘when strung like a Bologna sausage?’

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Miller, *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), xxii.

And now they are blaming Juno for having invented the corset, for Homer tells us that when she wished to become irresistible in the eyes of Jupiter she donned a ‘Castula,’ which was a mould designed to give new graces to the curves of her body.<sup>147</sup>

Her costumes for *Manon* featured boned corsets with cinched waists. The effect on breathing had more to do with the corset than the cinching; the corset’s boning continued upward to the ribcage, which would sabotage attempts at proper *appoggio* inspiration because of lateral constriction of the ribs and just below.

**Figure 7:** Sanderson corseted and cinched<sup>148</sup>



As with Massenet’s other Manons, Sanderson had a very late nineteenth-century body, which in the images is almost always foregrounded. Her ‘S-curves’ — [...] tiny waist but also full breasts and hips — are emphasized by the tight corsetry and deep décolletage. [...] Sanderson and other sopranos did wear corsets onstage and had long ago developed a technique of shallow or ‘clavicular’ breathing that even today is known as ‘corset’ breathing.<sup>149</sup>

As noted, this clothing style resulted in a high chest during vocal production because of the forced posture of the boning, shallow inspiration with points of protrusion resting in

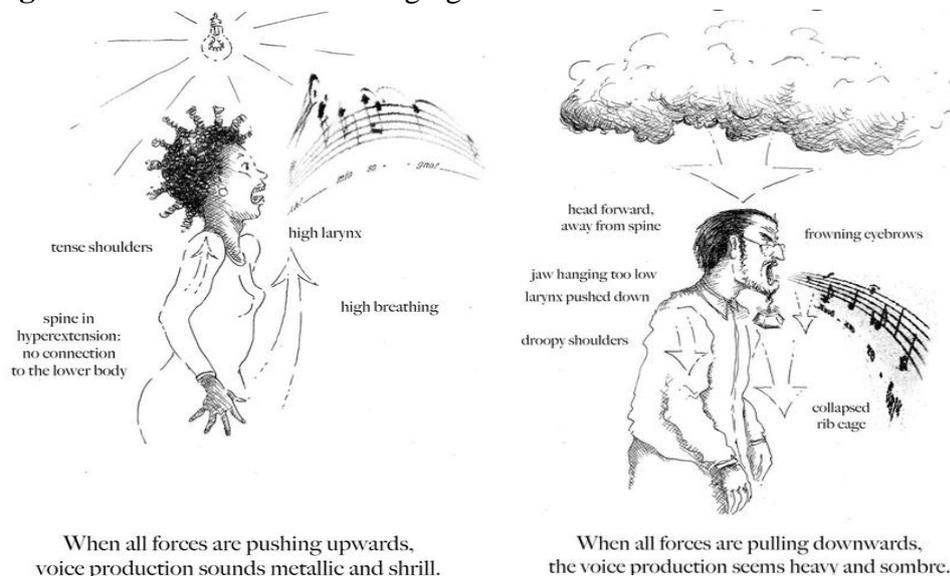
<sup>147</sup> Theo F. Bennet, “Town Talk: The Corset Must Go,” *San Francisco Daily Times*, June 8, 1901, 10–11.

<sup>148</sup> “Sibyl Sanderson: Tobacco Card,” Photograph, Paris: 1890, Ohio State University, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute: Charles H. McCaghy Collection of Exotic Dance from Burlesque to Clubs. Accessed June 7, 2014, <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/47731>; Wilhem Benque, Henri Meyer, and Narcisse Navellier, “Mademoiselle Sanderson, dans le rôle de Manon (Opéra-Comique),” photograph. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, département de la musique. Est.SandersonS.004. 1888

<sup>149</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 99.

the upper chest or lower abdomen to pelvis, and an affected laryngeal position. The cartoons below illustrate in a whimsical way the two breathing techniques Sanderson may have employed because of training as well as costume fashion.

**Figure 8:** Possible effects of singing while corseted and/or cinched<sup>150</sup>



Luisa Tetrazzini encouraged the use of specific corset styles in stage singing in order to maintain proper breath management:

From the girls to whom I am talking especially, I must now ask a sacrifice—the singer cannot wear tight corsets and should not wear corsets of any kind which come up higher than the lowest rib. In other words, the corset must be nothing but a belt, but with as much hip length as the wearer finds convenient and necessary. In order to insure proper breathing capacity it is understood that the clothing must be absolutely loose around the chest and also across the lower part of the back, for one should breathe with the back of the lungs as well as with the front. [...] Another word on the subject of corsets. There is no reason in the world why a singer should not wear corsets, and if singers have a tendency to grow stout a corset is usually a necessity. A singer's corset should be especially well fitted around the hips and should be extremely loose over the diaphragm. If made in this way it will not interfere in the slightest degree with the breath.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Emmanuelle Ayrtton, *Singing Without Airs* (Chalon-sur-Saône: Ars Burgundiaë, 2012), 56–57; Emmanuelle Ayrtton, *Le Chant sans chichis* (Chalon-sur-Saône: Ars Burgundiaë, 2010), 60–61.

<sup>151</sup> Luisa Tetrazzini and Enrico Caruso, *The Art of Singing* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Company, 1909), 4, 17.

This section paints a solid picture of the ways Sanderson might have stood and breathed while under the tutelage of De Reszké; the study moves on to a review of what he suggested in terms of vocal production.

### *Phonation*

Discussion of phonation is limited to specific areas of De Reszké's vocal strategy that may have caused Sanderson vocal trouble: laryngeal position and the controversial *coup de glotte*. The glottal attack was made famous by Manuel Garcia II (1805–1906), whom some call the father of nineteenth-century vocal pedagogy and science. Arguments about the benefits and dangers of its use began soon after Garcia II published his 1840 treatise, in which he promoted this technique. Members of various vocal circles continue to debate its use. Garcia II defined the process as follows:

It is necessary to prepare the articulation of the glottis by closing it, which accumulates momentary stoppage of the air passage; then, as if taking a breath, it opens with a vigorous rap, similar to the action of the lips energetically pronouncing the letter *P*.<sup>152</sup>

Many nineteenth-century sources include recommendations for its use or avoidance.

Opinions vary from praise to grave warnings threatening vocal destruction if used. Mary Garden, mentee of Sanderson and muse to Massenet, admonished readers to avoid the technique and anyone who taught it:

What should the girl starting singing avoid? First, let her avoid an incompetent teacher. There are teachers, for instance, who deliberately teach the 'stroke of the glottis' (*coup de glotte*). What is [it]? The lips of the vocal cords in the larynx are pressed together so that the air becomes compressed behind them and instead of coming out in a steady, unimpeded stream, it causes a kind of explosion. [...] This is a most pernicious habit. [...] It leads to a constant irritation of the throat and ruin to the vocal organs.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Manuel Garcia II, *École de Garcia: Traité Complet De L'art Du Chant* (Paris: Author, 1840), 11.

Il faut préparer l'articulation de la glotte en la fermant, ce qui arrête et accumule momentanément l'air à ce passage ; puis, comme s'il s'opérait une rupture au moyen d'une détente, on l'ouvre par un coup sec et vigoureux, semblable à l'action des lèvres prononçant énergiquement le P.

<sup>153</sup> Mary Garden, "The Know How in the Art of Singing," in *Great Singers on the Art of Singing Educational Conferences with Foremost Artists*, Ed. James Francis Cooke (Philadelphia, PA: Theo Presser, 1921), Location 1835–1837. Kindle edition.

Overuse of the *coup de glotte* and its associated excess tension has led to vocal pathologies such as hoarseness, loss of voice, and vocal nodules.<sup>154</sup> Note that Jean De Reszké and Sanderson experienced these problems. In some cases, the vocal damage is permanent.<sup>155</sup> Like the diaphragm, the glottis can operate without deliberate management by the singer. In this way, proper onset and articulation can occur without increased risk of irritation or injury. De Reszké determined that using the *coup de glotte* could elicit vocal faults and the student should only attempt it while under his supervision. He promoted gentle closure of the cords, as opposed to ‘striking’ the cords.

The *coup de glotte* was only allowed when working at getting the cords to work properly, and then only under his supervision. [...] The proper functioning of the cords means that they must be kept tense not flabby, hard not unsteady, and with their edges close together, kept straight, not ragged. He often used the phrase: ‘You should stroke your cords,’ meaning that you must not attack too violently so as to damage them. [...] The palate must be low. The difficulty here is to keep the larynx low without the palate rising. To obtain more *timbre* in this part of the voice, the palate was drawn back but not raised, and kept rigid. [...] As the pitch rises, above C, so the palate rises too, retaining its back position as in the lower medium. [...] Of course in everyday speech the larynx is high, but in acting big tragic parts it would be impossible to stand the strain unless the larynx were low. [...] He insisted upon the lowest possible position of the larynx for all heavy singing as the great protection against overstrain. The vocal cords were to do their work, as if the singer was speaking; one of his demonstrations was how the speaker’s voice gradually merges, imperceptibly, into the singing voice.<sup>156</sup>

To summarize his student’s recollection on the matter, De Reszké promoted a ‘stroke not strike’ version of vocal fold closure. Some doubt remains, however, because he and some of his students suffered from vocal problems that conform to those threatened by opponents of the *coup de glotte*, including hoarseness and loss of voice.

Another element of De Reszké’s phonation technique was the instruction to sing as if speaking. This idea is similar to a contemporary music industry system of vocalisation called ‘Speech-Level-Singing’ (SLS). According to its creator, Seth Riggs

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<sup>154</sup> Doscher, *Functional Unity*, 61.

<sup>155</sup> Heather Davis, “An Examination of Current Literature on Vocal Nodules” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2000), 7,

<sup>156</sup> Johnstone-Douglas, “Jean De Reszké,” 205.

(b.1930), ‘Singing is nothing more than sustained speech over a greater pitch and dynamic range.’<sup>157</sup> Like De Reszké, Riggs suggested a low laryngeal position across the registers. Given the posture (‘monkey’ but with the head back and chin up) and breathing (taut chest and belly/pelvic inspiration) De Reszké promoted, it would be difficult for Sanderson to sing without a low larynx because of the downward pull created by a slightly curved spine with opposing curvature of the neck, compounded by protrusion in the lower abdomen (‘corset breathing’) with inhalation. That he also suggested the soft palate remain down leads to the conclusion that De Reszké may have used terminology associated with *Bel Canto*, but he did not seem to model the method in his singing or teaching.

### *Resonance*

In terms of resonance,<sup>158</sup> De Reszké departed from *Bel Canto* technique by using modified vowel shapes, which leaned toward a brighter timbre than one would expect to find in Italian singing. Johnstone-Douglas comments:

In a course of purely mask singing *o* and *a* would become as French *on* and *an*, the open *ê*, as in *être*, became *aïñ*, and the closed *é* as in *été* was hardly placed in the mask at all, but was supported on the diaphragm. To get the maximum amount of ‘forward’ tone to the voice, which he deemed ‘essential,’ it was his plan to imagine that you were drinking in the tone, rather than pushing it out. This idea encouraged the palate to draw back and give *timbre* to the voice, while it helped the tone to find its way into the true mask, whereas an attempt to push the tone out often ends merely in a nasal tone, though when the voice is in the right place the tone seems to be resonating right on the hard palate, by the front teeth. This apparent paradox was often misunderstood by those who criticised his teaching without knowing it.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Seth Riggs and John D. Caratello, *Singing for the Stars: A Complete Program for Training Your Voice* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1998), 31, 76.

<sup>158</sup> James McKinney, *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1982), 125.

“The process by which the basic product of phonation is enhanced in timbre and/or intensity by the air-filled cavities through which it passes on its way to the outside air.”

<sup>159</sup> Johnstone-Douglas, “Jean De Reszké,” 207–208.

Creating these French sounds would lead to a more horizontal than vertical mouth shape, in direct contrast with the longer vertical spaces promoted in the German ‘school,’ for example.<sup>160</sup> Two points are noteworthy. Johnstone-Douglas advocated using the diaphragm to support, but, again, that is a misleading because a singer does not control the involuntary muscle. However, De Reszké was correct in suggesting an increase in breath-support as the vowels migrate toward more open shapes such as open E [ɛ]. Balancing an increase of air pressure as one moves toward less-focused vowels could help to avoid resonance falling down and back, which could lead to lack of vibrancy, brilliance, and penetration or volume. An increase in breath support could help an open vowel to continue resonating in the mask.

When Johnstone-Douglas referred to De Reszké’s suggestion of ‘drinking in the tone, rather than pushing it out,’ his description sounded like a concept known as ‘Yawn-Sigh’:

This exercise begins with the singer properly aligned, thinking about proper breathing, and with the oral space open, as if one is about to yawn. Then the singer sighs easily down from a high note and up from a low, while maintaining the feeling of openness. This can release tension if any has inadvertently crept in, ease the attack on a high note, and give singers the opportunity to focus on the space that the thought of a yawn creates. Throughout the sigh, the singers are able to use breath energy appropriately to explore resonance, encouraging and allowing the tone to fill the areas that the idea of a yawn opens up.<sup>161</sup>

If De Reszké and his students did sing with unnecessary tension and also desired to stroke the cords rather than strike them, using ‘yawn-sigh’ or ‘drinking in the tone’ could be a useful remedy. It might have helped Sanderson to mitigate her *tremolo* by balancing air pressure from the beginning to the end of a sung phrase.<sup>162</sup> Perhaps in the final years of his teaching career, De Reszké discovered healthier techniques to offer to students, and

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<sup>160</sup> Miller, *National Schools of Singing*, 47–48.

<sup>161</sup> Anne Howard Jones, “A Point of Departure for Rehearsal Preparation and Planning,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 275.

<sup>162</sup> Manuel Garcia II, *Hints on Singing*, translated by Beata Garcia (London: E. Ascherberg, 1894), 18.

later students would have benefitted from the positive results of decades of trial and error, when he honed his craft and changed his ways to achieve and maintain vocal health.

### *Characterisation*

De Reszké's theories on role interpretation received high priority in his own performing, and he went on to proselytize students about the importance of drama in singing. It seems that for De Reszké, *what* one sang held equal importance with *how* one sang. The discussion of 'which is more important—the words or the music?' continued throughout the twentieth-century with composers including Poulenc and others. Many French musicians and writers active in the years associated with the Third Republic (1870–1914) debated the topic; it was a time when language and its delivery took on greater importance.<sup>163</sup> Jean De Reszké placed high importance on the texts he sang and those he taught to his students, as Leiser notes:

In his teaching days he constantly urged his pupils to cultivate *l'amour de la parole.*' [...] He spent no end of time and care in getting exactly the right colour into every phrase. He would not be satisfied until he had succeeded in expressing the whole of the beauty which he felt to be inherent in both words and music. [...] During his last years he was as completely absorbed in his pupils as he had been in his own career.<sup>164</sup>

To aid in his students' engagement with the dramatic aspects of interpretation, according to Finck, De Reszké created a genuine performance space in his home to use for practice and concerts.

Jean de Reszké's studio is unique. He teaches in a theatre—his own little theatre, which he built in the rear of his residence. No. 53 rue de la Faisanderie, in Paris. There is room in this for an audience of about a hundred, and in the sunken pit for an orchestra of thirty players. On the stage there is a piano, on which are piled a number of opera scores. All the pupils are taught here, where they breathe the atmosphere of the theatre from the beginning.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Bergeron, *Voice Lessons*, xi.

<sup>164</sup> Leiser, *Jean De Reszké*, xiv.

<sup>165</sup> Henry T. Finck, "Jean de Reszké as Teacher," in *Success in Music and How it is Won*, 1909 (reprint, New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 388.

De Reszké may have considered his methods to be ‘natural,’ but ‘forced’ could be a more accurate description, or, perhaps, ‘passionate.’ The results of his zeal for the vocal arts may have produced the same or similar effects whether they came by way of excess tension or artistic fervour. The difference has to do with sincerity or what some might call ‘heart,’ which is what seems to have propelled De Reszké’s career, in spite of many challenges.

He was a performing teacher who strove for excellence in all he did, but as Holland notes, De Reszke was not always able to encourage the same level of performance in his students:

De Reszké’s relative shortcomings as a teacher are exposed through recognition of the fact that none of his students could approach him in comparison to his own unique charismatic integration of the elements of pure talent fused with the natural, inborn stage presence, musicianship, intelligence, and sheer beauty of voice that had distinguished his own career.<sup>166</sup>

Holland’s point could be strenuously argued; some of his students achieved remarkable international successes, including Claire Croiza, Maggie Teyte, and Bidu Sayão.

However, Sanderson may have left his studio in worse vocal condition than when she entered, having learned to sing with tension to the point of exhaustion, as noted by

Johnstone-Douglas:

If any damage was done to voices, it was done while they were practising misguidedly at something they had misunderstood. Those of his pupils who stayed several years, and came back frequently for more lessons, felt the full truth of this, and benefited by his acute diagnosis of the faults into which they had unconsciously fallen. He also taught by exaggeration—*il faut en avoir trop, pour en avoir assez* [it is necessary to have too much in order to have enough]—and in each point of his teaching insisted upon the supreme, cardinal importance of that particular point. [...] In this way his teaching seemed to contradict itself at times, and the stresses on one side of technique seemed to be too heavy, but to those who had patience and faith the kaleidoscope settled down to a clear picture.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> James M. Holland, “Singing Excellence and How to Achieve It,” Seminar transcript, Parowan, UT: The Marjorie Montell Memorial Society, 2005.

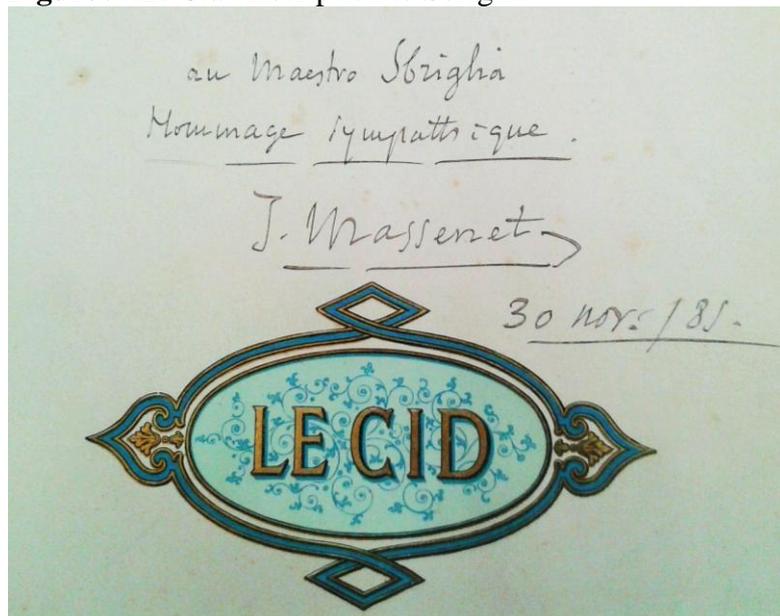
<sup>167</sup> Johnstone-Douglas, “Jean De Reszké,” 204.

There are many vocal strategies; one person may advocate singing with a high larynx while another, low; some prefer nasal resonance, though others abhor it. Which breathing technique is correct—*Appoggio*? *Bauchaussestütz*? Clavicular? Should a singer use a *coup de glotte* or not? The teacher-student relationship between Jean De Reszké and Sibyl Sanderson lasted a short time, and they later became colleagues. She consulted with him before he had established some of his more positive and successful approaches to singing. Had she been able to continue studying with him, it is possible that she would have found equilibrium in her body and voice. When De Reszké left Paris, Sanderson moved on study under the man who had helped De Reszké transition from baritone to tenor: a man most often referred to as simply ‘Sbriglia.’

#### *Giovanni Sbriglia*

Giovanni Sbriglia (1832–1916) was a Neapolitan tenor. In 1875, after a successful performance career that included tours of Europe, the United States and Cuba, he and his American wife settled in Paris, where he gave private voice lessons. His roster of students included many notable names: the De Reszké brothers, Pol Plançon (1851–1914), and Lillian Nordica (1857–1914). Sbriglia established himself in Parisian musical circles, and Massenet inscribed a copy of *Le Cid* to him (see below), possibly because the original cast featured three of Sbriglia’s students: Jean and Édouard De Reszké and Pol Plançon.

**Figure 9:** *Le Cid*. Inscription to Sbriglia<sup>168</sup>



It seems that although Sbriglia was well known, not everyone he met was impressed by him. In 1899, Perly Dunn Aldrich describes Sbriglia as follows:

M. Sbriglia is one of the most widely known of European teachers at present, through his pupils De Reszké and Plançon, and I think has on the whole the best following of any teacher living. The student will find him down near the opera house in a rather dingy apartment. [...] He teaches with a poor upright piano, which he plays with one or two fingers, striking an occasional chord with the rest, with a shockingly bad touch. [...] M. Sbriglia himself is a slender man with a bald head and a black moustache, which bleaches out by Saturday and turns up black again on Monday. [...] He is not a good musician. He cannot make a decent tone. He cannot play. His French is not good and his Italian is a dialect. But what has he got? You ask. Frankly, I do not know and I could not find out for sure, but I think he has an ear for vocal sound and a way of getting a concentrated upper voice that works wonders occasionally, and like other methods, fails frequently. He is a man of one idea—vocal sounds—and his way of getting them. Outside of this I should imagine he was not interesting. [...] It certainly appears to be Sbriglia has done a great deal for De Reszké; but, on the other hand, as the eminent tenor has been known to slyly remark, he has done a great deal for Sbriglia.<sup>169</sup>

Like Jean De Reszké, Sbriglia did not write a treatise, so it is necessary to rely on the recollections of students and journalists in order to ascertain his vocal instruction methods. Rather than subscribe to the ‘natural’ method promoted by his student Jean De

<sup>168</sup> Jules Massenet, *Le Cid: Opéra en Quatre Actes & Dix Tableaux*, Paris: Hartmann, 1885, Title Page (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, PMC 438). Au Maestro Sbriglia. Hommage sympathique. J. Massenet November 30, 1885.

<sup>169</sup> Perly Dunn Aldrich, “Few Prominent European Teachers of Singing,” *Music: A Monthly Magazine* 16 (May–October 1899): 171–173.

Reszké, Sbriglia favoured intentional physical involvement. According to Leiser, De Reszké disagreed with his teacher in some areas:

The facts are that Jean did sing his last baritone role in December 1876 and that he did study with Sbriglia intermittently for several years thereafter. But he did not by any means adopt all of Sbriglia's suggestions. He refused, for instance, to try to settle his head down into his shoulders in order to shorten the vocal column, because to do so would have interfered with his natural ease. Whenever Sbriglia suggested something that Jean could adapt to his needs he lost no time in doing so, just as he made use of hints from other sources.<sup>170</sup>

### *Posture and Breathing*

In addition to verbal instruction, Sbriglia also invented devices to assist his students in finding and maintaining proper stance, as did his predecessor, Manuel Garcia II, who invented the laryngoscope. As Chapman Byers notes:

The foundation of his teaching is a perfect posture. Foremost is a high chest (which nature gives every great singer), held high without tension by developed abdominal and lower back muscles and a straight spine—this will give the uplift for perfect breathing.[...] Sbriglia had belts made for both male and female singers to assist in holding up the abdomen. [...] This was the cornerstone of his method.<sup>171</sup>

Sbriglia's use of a belt is further described by Coffin:

The perceptive eye will note that the heroic singers are frequently belted or girdled. There is an historical background to this. [...] This causes a costal or thoracic type of respiration which increases the power and solidity of the voice. [...] [Sbriglia] designed a belt which he called the Sbriglia belt. I have never been able to find a picture or obtain a description of its design. I know the purpose of a belt and how it assists in singing. [...] I know of women artists who have said they have liked to sing with tight girdles, although their remarks are not in print. However, there are many pictures of the prima donnas at the turn of the century who were not only corseted but cinched. [...] Some singers feel that a belt reminds them of good posture and makes them 'feel like a singer.' [...] It is my belief that the use of a belt or elastic band around the body reduces the trachea pull and leaves the larynx in a better position for singing middle and high notes than does a deep breath without a belt. A belt is almost a guarantee that the breath will be thoracic. It seems that there is a mechanical advantage gained from its use by dramatic singers. Also, there is a possibility that the voice is slightly raised in tessitura.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Leiser, *Jean De Reszké*, 30.

<sup>171</sup> Margaret Chapman Byers, "Sbriglia's Singing Method," *Étude Magazine* 60 (May 1942): 308.

<sup>172</sup> Berton Coffin, *Coffin's Sounds of Singing: Principles and Applications of Vocal Techniques with Chromatic Vowel Chart* (Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 252–253.

The Sbriglia belt still exists, if not physically, at least in form and function. One need only visit [www.singingbelt.com](http://www.singingbelt.com) to purchase the latest model, which comes with an instructional video and a carrying pouch. The company also offers one-day voice classes to teach purchasers how to use the product (US\$99.95), after which they guarantee you will ‘Sing better in a day!’

**Figure 10:** The Singing Belt<sup>173</sup>



Sbriglia most likely fitted Sanderson with one of his belts during their lessons. Since she wore corsets and a cinched waist in many performances, the addition of a Sbriglia Belt would have sent her breath into her thoracic region and away from the lower abdomen, if it had any effect at all. The question remains whether the Sbriglia Belt was worn over a boned corset or in some other fashion. If Sanderson secured the belt over her corset, it seems the device would have little to no effect on her breathing. If the belt did work for Sanderson, then Sbriglia’s breathing method combined with his suggestions for posture might have caused her confusion, since these new ideas differed from what she had learned from De Reszké.

Sbriglia’s posture and breathing recommendations involved an upward shift to a higher place in the trunk than other *Bel Canto* teachers proposed. The elevation of the

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<sup>173</sup> [www.singingbelt.com](http://www.singingbelt.com)

chest and point of rib expansion would be closer to the thorax (central ribcage) in Sbriglia's method, whereas the *appoggio* method focuses expansion over the location of the diaphragm, which resides between the lowest rib and the navel. Sbriglia focused much of his technical attention on the thoracic region, especially chest position, and there are several references to his unconventional homework assignments, including his insistence that students 'build up their chests,' as Skiff notes:

Personally S. Sbriglia is very agreeable, a short man, with a very full chest, dark hair, and eyebrows. [...] He says very little during the lesson; his three great points being the extreme high chest, the voice placed entirely in the mask of the face, and the protruding of the lips. He places great stress on the very high, fully-developed chest, and the pupil's first lesson will in most cases consist partially in an admonition to at once procure a pair of dumbbells, and an oft-repeated expression is: 'Beaucoup de dumb-bells.' When asked how he teaches his pupils to breathe, he replied: 'I don't breathe; I build up the chest.' [...] If one wishes to know thoroughly all the resources of the master, one must be content to stay with him a long while, for he imparts his information very slowly.<sup>174</sup>

Sanderson studied with Sbriglia for just a few months in 1887. Similar to her complaint about De Reszké, she apparently left lessons with Sbriglia feeling exhausted.<sup>175</sup>

### *Phonation*

Some teachers and more singers believe that the secret of good tone lies in the pushing forward of the lips. The mouth is resolutely opened in the form of the letter O. Sbriglia of Paris is the most ardent advocate of this style, and yet Jean de Reszké... discarded it in the very beginning. Madame Nordica employs it and is a firm believer in it.<sup>176</sup>

He preferred French because the nasal quality put the voice, '*dans le masque*;' Italian, to develop a voice because of the round vowels; German is too guttural. [...] He always required his pupils to sing songs on vowels only [...] The consonants were then slipped in their proper places without losing the legato.<sup>177</sup>

Lip protrusion differs from the bright and horizontal mouth shapes De Reszké promoted.

The round mouth shape and protruding lips requested by Sbriglia can perhaps be explained in reference to his native language, because many Italian vocal sounds resonate

<sup>174</sup> Edmond Skiff, "Signor Sbriglia and Some of His Pupils," *Étude Magazine* (May 1902). Web.

<sup>175</sup> Arthur Meyer, "Bloc-Notes Parisien: La nouvelle étoile," *Le Gaulois* 28, no. 5117 (March 16, 1894): 1.

<sup>176</sup> W. J. Henderson, *The Art of Singing*, 1938 (reprint, New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1978), 63.

<sup>177</sup> Chapman Beyers, "Sbriglia's Singing Method," 308.

through a round mouth with puckered lips. In terms of placement, this is one topic on which Sanderson's two teachers agreed. Based on reviews of Sanderson's vocality, it seems she excelled at singing in the mask. Sbriglia's vocal strategy could be summarized as 'up and out' (i.e. breathe high in the thorax, resonate high in the mask, with chest built up and pushed out, and lips puckered). It seems that Sanderson left his studio because he was known to require that students dedicate an entire year to doing nothing but strengthening their chest.<sup>178</sup>

### Composers as Coaches (1887–1892)

#### *Duglé and Gounod*

Sanderson secured yet another teacher soon after leaving Sbriglia: Angèle Duglé (1848–1929), niece of Charles Gounod. Soon after Duglé and Sanderson met, the teacher presented her new pupil to her aged uncle. Gounod and Sanderson began frequent and exclusive coaching sessions that lasted until Massenet came into the picture in late 1887. It is not clear if Duglé continued working with Sanderson after introducing the young American to her uncle, but seeing a chance to study under a master of French opera, Sanderson seems to have re-allocated time and resources away from Duglé in favour of Gounod.<sup>179</sup>

Gounod and his coaching appear to have made a significant impact on Sanderson. She likely viewed Gounod as her entrée to an operatic début, and that did prove to be the case. Gounod coached her in the lead roles of his own operas, such as Marguerite from *Faust* and Juliette from *Roméo et Juliette*. He encouraged Sanderson to address the music as an actress first by employing feeling and expression, not just technique. Gounod

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<sup>178</sup> Emma Thursby, "Singing in Concert and what it means," in *Great Singers on the Art of Singing Educational Conferences with Foremost Artists*, edited by James Francis Cooke (Philadelphia, PA: Theo Presser, 1921), 274.

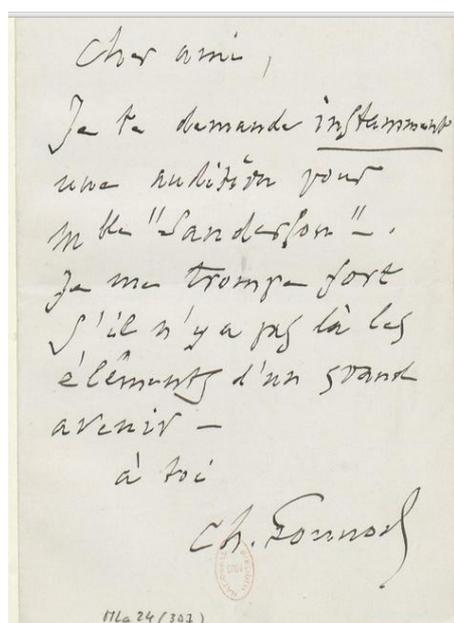
<sup>179</sup> Meyer, "Bloc-Notes Parisien," 1.

cultivated what the French called ‘the singing-actress,’ eschewing the technical acrobatics taught in the *Bel Canto* tradition:

Gounod did not favor what he conceived as the Italian method of singing. He had a feeling that the Italian school, as he regarded it, was too obvious, and that French taste demanded more sincerity, more subtlety, better balance and a certain finesse which the purely vocal Italian style slightly obscured.<sup>180</sup>

Gounod also chose to help Sanderson with the business aspects of her career and became an advocate and marketer for her performing. For example, he wrote to Jules Barbier on her behalf:

**Figure 11:** Charles Gounod letter to Jules Barbier<sup>181</sup>



Dear Friend,

Of you I demand earnestly an audition for Mlle ‘Sanderson’—.  
I am strongly mistaken if she does not have the elements of a great future —  
To you,  
Ch. Gounod

<sup>180</sup> Emma Eames, “How a Great Master Coached Opera Singers,” in *Great Singers on the Art of Singing Educational Conferences with Foremost Artists*, edited by James Francis Cooke (Philadelphia, PA: Theo Presser, 1921), 121.

<sup>181</sup> Charles Gounod, lettre de Charles Gounod à Jules Barbier, Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France: Gallica IFN- 53090363/MLA 24 (307), 1889.

Cher ami,

Je te demande instamment une audition pour M<sup>lle</sup> “Sanderson”—.  
Je me trompe fort s’il n’y a pas d’un les éléments d’un grand avenir.

A toi,

Ch. Gounod

*Massenet*

One dinner party in 1887 re-routed the course of opera history: Massenet met his American muse. He reported that Sanderson captivated him that night, and the fascination continued, in ebbs and flows, until the singer's death. Many consider Massenet's autobiography to be an unreliable source, because he wrote it at the end of his life and chose to include details that fed his reputation.<sup>182</sup> Nonetheless, it is instructive to review the composer's recollections of his first encounter with Sibyl Sanderson:

What a fascinating voice! It ranged from low G to the counter G three octaves in full strength and in pianissimo. I was astounded, stupefied, subjugated! When such voices occur, it is fortunate that they have the theatre in which to display themselves; the world is their domain. I ought to say that I had recognized in that future artiste, together with the rarity of that organ, intelligence, a flame, a personality which were reflected luminously in her admirable face. All these qualities are of first importance on the stage.<sup>183</sup>

Like Gounod, who had inspired Sanderson with his 'drama first' teaching approach, Massenet also placed high value on the visual and dramatic aspects of performance. By all accounts, she was as captivated by Massenet as he was by her. It could have been his charisma or the deft way he lavished praise upon her, or, once again, the fact that he had the power to put her on the stage. Sanderson remained devoted to 'the master,' as she called him, for the next decade; theirs was the longest and most consistent relationship the soprano ever maintained outside her family.

Several people have described the partnership between composer and artist as something more akin to master and puppet, a relationship often tainted by emotional and physical abuse. Atherton and Eames expressed their criticism of Massenet's treatment of

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<sup>182</sup> Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle*, 245.

<sup>183</sup> Massenet, *Mes Souvenirs*, Location 175 ; ; Massenet, *My Recollections*, 175.

Quelle voix prestigieuse ! Elle allait du sol grave au contre-sol, trois octaves en pleine force et dans le pianissimo ! J'étais émerveillé, stupéfait, subjugué ! Quand des voix semblables se rencontrent, il est heureux qu'elles aient le théâtre pour se manifester ; elles appartiennent au monde, leur domaine. Je dois dire que, avec la rareté de cet organe, j'avais reconnu en la future artiste une intelligence, une flamme, une personnalité qui se reflétaient lumineusement dans son regard admirable. Ces qualités-là sont premières au théâtre.

Sanderson.<sup>184</sup> Much has been written about Massenet and his muse in the past 125 years, and while recent writings such as those by Karen Henson, William Albright, and Jack Winsor Hansen, range from blatant accusations to suggestions that Massenet's behaviour was 'exploitative but understandable for the time,'<sup>185</sup> it seems the relationship was voluntary. Whether their partnership was marred by dysfunction or not, many other people profited from the fruits of their joint labour, including publishers, opera houses, and other artists.

Massenet recorded aspects of his relationship with Sanderson in score margins, noting with diligence the dates, times, and locations of their private rehearsals. He also added information about Sanderson's physical condition and his own moods or health (e.g. 'Mme S. malade'), as shown below:

**Example 5:** 'Adieu, Parséis! Ô sœur qui m'es chère.' mm. 17–20<sup>186</sup>

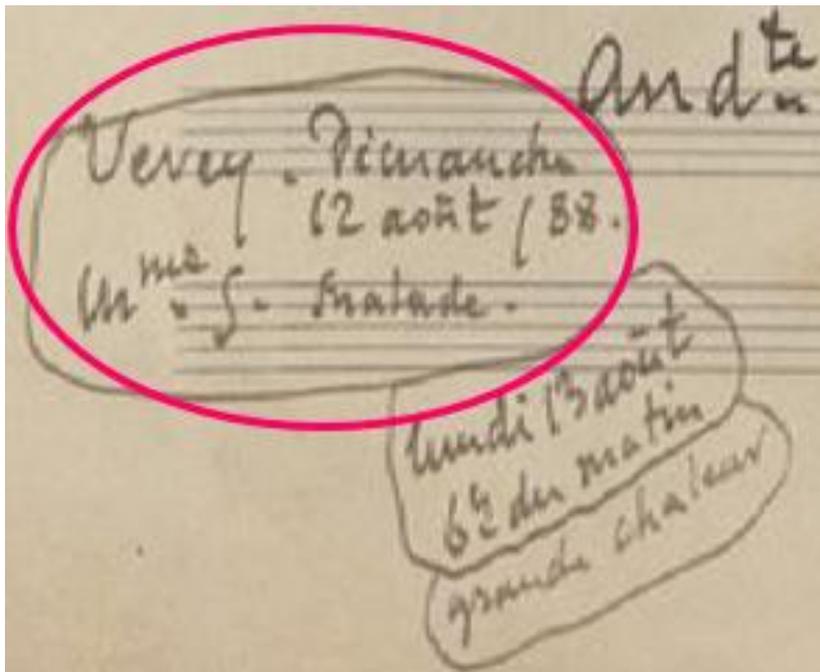
The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation. At the top, there are staves for Soprano (S.), Violin (Vcl.), and Cello/Double Bass (Cb.). The music is in a key with one flat and a common time signature. Below the staves, the text "fin du 1er acte." is written. To the right, there is a red circular stamp that reads "BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUSICALES DE L'OPERA". Below the stamp, there is a note in French: "Termini à Vervey. 4<sup>e</sup> Hotel Le diu anche 12 août / 88. 10<sup>h</sup> 1/2 du matin. Temp. spiritoso - trinitella Mme S. malade". This note is circled in pink. Below the main score, there is another line of handwriting: "Temp. spiritoso - trinitella Mme S. malade", which is also circled in pink.

The notes from 12 August 1888 show that Sanderson's illness occupied his thoughts enough that he noted her condition on two different pages of the score that day.

<sup>184</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 124; Eames, *Some Memories and Reflections*, 82.

<sup>185</sup> William Albright, "Review of: *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva* by Jack Winsor Hansen," *Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2005): 736.

<sup>186</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde* (F-Pn: Rés A. 750), 181.  
Weather splendid. Sad. Ms. S. ill.

**Example 6:** ‘Danse’ m.1<sup>187</sup>

What is known from Massenet’s entries is that the pair rehearsed together with great frequency and duration. They often met daily and each session could last for hours; production weeks brought an even more gruelling schedule, with rehearsals lasting into the early hours of the morning.<sup>188</sup> Probably the most important point to make here is that while Massenet was not a voice teacher, he knew what the human voice could do and wrote music that could take a voice to its limits. Temperance and moderation were not in his compositional vocabulary, and the demands he placed on Sanderson caused her to sing too often, too long, and too high. As a result, she battled illness, fatigue, and voice loss. This cycle lasted for five years (1887–1892), until Massenet enlisted the help of an older friend: Mathilde Marchesi.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 182.

Vevey. Sunday 12 August / 88. Ms. S. ill.

<sup>188</sup> Sanderson and Puech, “Les débutants,” 3.

Paris (1892–1896)

*Mathilde Marchesi*

Massenet called upon Mathilde Marchesi in 1892 to intercede in Sanderson's vocal health, which had deteriorated to a point that she cancelled performances. For instance, Sanderson could perform her role as Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* only one time at the Opéra-comique that year. Understudy Jeanne Leclerc (1868–1914) assumed the role for the remaining performances that season, receiving positive reviews for her interpretation.<sup>189</sup> Maybe the success of her understudy in the face of her own weaknesses motivated Sanderson to apply the techniques Marchesi proposed. Sanderson consented to Massenet's demand, and the formidable German Marchesi obliged Massenet's request despite the fact that the soprano had rejected Marchesi's tutelage years prior. Thus began a period of restoration and re-education that lasted almost two years.

Marchesi became one of the most famous voice teachers in the Western world. She continued in the footsteps of her teacher Manuel Garcia II by using a scientific approach to singing and teaching. Her students included some of the greatest names in opera history: Nellie Melba, Emma Calvé, Emma Eames, and Mary Garden. It was said that her teaching style and personality were definitive; she refused to mince words regarding the art of singing or the art of teaching voice. In interviews, she expressed complete confidence in her own pedagogic abilities and did not shy from criticising the methods of other teachers, declaring them mediocre, self-serving, and even injurious.<sup>190</sup> According to Marchesi, when Rossini tried to recruit her to teach voice at the Paris

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<sup>189</sup> L. D., "Nouvelles Diverses: Paris et départements," *Le Ménestrel*, no. 59 (1893): 32.

M<sup>lle</sup> Leclerc a chanté, cette semaine, à l'Opéra-Comique, le rôle de la Reine de la nuit dans la Flûte enchantée et bien qu'elle y succédât à M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson, y a obtenu un très grand succès. M<sup>lle</sup> Leclerc est une artiste de grand talent qu'on n'applaudit pas assez souvent dans des rôles importante.

<sup>190</sup> "A Chat with Madame Marchesi," *Daily Telegraph*, September 28, 1895, 6.

Conservatoire, she declined because she refused to adapt to the vocal methods the institution promoted at the time.<sup>191</sup> As she put it:

There are people at this day who talk eloquently about breathing, training and singing to such an extent that one cannot take the time to listen to all their dissertations. I would like to tell them all to remain perfectly quiet until they have produced one pupil to prove their own knowledge. [...] It is only fair that the teacher should be judged by the best voices she turns out, the successes. [...] One or two successful pupils mean nothing. [...] You should hear at least ten pupils and if they all have the one method, that is if they all sing uniformly well and are devoid of the common vocal faults,—if they have the one way of doing what they do, if they have the one voice production, the same beautiful even legato, the total absence from every indication of physical effort—then and only then can you judge the master.<sup>192</sup>

Marchesi's strong personality may have attracted the desperate star. The teacher's demeanour likely had not softened in the five years since their initial encounter, but by 1892 something in Marchesi's controlling, audacious, and direct approach helped Sanderson realise that her vocal strategy had become unsustainable. When Massenet demanded she study with Marchesi, Sanderson obeyed. Her concession led to the most successful years of her career, from the standpoint of vocal health and positive reception.<sup>193</sup>

During the Marchesi years (1892–1894), Sanderson continued to appear as Manon and Esclarmonde; she also added Lakmé and created two roles: Thaïs for Massenet and Phryné for Saint-Saëns. Reviewers offered more favourable opinions during this period than they had in prior years, and they began to focus more on her vocal prowess than on her attractive physical appearance. As Henson points out, given the general fascination with physiognomy and physical attributes at that time, the attention paid to her voice by

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Marchesi and Marchesi, "Truths for Singing Teachers and Students."

<sup>193</sup> Marchesi's training correlates with increased positive reception of Sanderson's performances, as shown later in this work.

the press was extraordinary.<sup>194</sup> This improvement in critical opinion stands in stark

contrast to the views expressed after her 1891 performance as Manon at Covent Garden:

Miss Sanderson had previously played Manon with much success in Brussels, and probably from this fact too much was expected of the young American. On the morning following the first performance at Covent Garden of ‘Manon’ the critics were found to have come to the conclusion that Miss Sanderson had hardly realized expectations, though she was warmly received on account of her clever and vivacious acting.<sup>195</sup>

The new *prima donna* has everything in her favour, and very soon she was in favour with the audience, but not in such high favour as was the tenor with the artistic name. [...] As for the new soprano SIBYL—more power to her organ! Her acting was good, but not great, and what ought to be her song *par excellence* went for nothing, or at least, it could have been bought very cheap. There is far more dialogue in *Manon* than a Covent Garden audience is accustomed to, and this superfluity is resented by those who come for the singing, and who, if any talking is to be done, like to do it themselves.<sup>196</sup>

After one year of lessons with Marchesi, reviewers in Paris and abroad began to rave:

The interpretation has been quite superior on the part of Miss Sibyl Sanderson and Mr. Delmas. The talent and the voice of the first seem to have doubled since Phryn . Her instrument which appeared thin at the Opera Comique, took on an unexpected dimension, and we can say that in this huge hall of the Opera we do not lose one of her notes, not one of her words. [...] As for the woman, [...] an elegance and irresistible seduction when she arrives at Chez Nicias, draped in her veils so supple that give the air of an exquisite Tanagra statuette; more beautiful when she removes her veils, a beauty to damn all the saints of heaven.<sup>197</sup>

Phryn , it is Miss Sibyl Sanderson, of the sculptured bust: she has striking personal beauty, to which she lends the powerful attraction of her voice, marvellously pure and easy. [...] The ensemble’s interpretation is perfect with Miss Sibyl Sanderson, the ravishing Phryn .<sup>198</sup>

<sup>194</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 27.

<sup>195</sup> “Foreign Theatrical Gossip,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1891.

<sup>196</sup> “Operatic Notes,” *Punch, Or The London Charivari* 100 (1891): 256.

The reviewer’s comment about dialogue represents the general consensus of the London audience. It was this performance that spurred Sanderson to demand that Massenet write sung recitatives to replace the spoken *melodrames* in the original score.

<sup>197</sup> H. Moreno, “Semaine Th trale: Tha s,” *Le M nestr l* 60, no. 11 (March 18, 1894). 83.

L’interpr tation en a  t  tout   fait sup rieure de la part de M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson et de M. Delmas. Le talent et la voix de la premi re semblent avoir doubl  depuis Phryn . Son organe, qui paraissait mince   l’Op ra-comique, a pris une ampleur inattendue, et l’on peut dire que dans cette salle immense de l’Op ra on ne perd pas une de ses notes, pas une de ses paroles. [...] Quant   la femme, [...] d’une  l gance et d’une s duction irr sistibles quand elle arrive chez Nicias, drap e dans ses voiles si souples qui lui donnent l’air d’une statuette exquise de Tanagra ; plus belle encore quand elle  te ces voiles, d’une beaut    faire damner tous les saints du paradis.

<sup>198</sup> Edouard No l and Edmond Stoullig, *Les Annales du Th  tre et de la Musique* (Paris: Librairie Paul Ollendorff, 1893), 116, 124.

Vichy - Tuesday night at the Casino, extraordinary performance of Manon, with the assistance of Miss Sybil Sanderson, of the Opera-Comique. Immense success, easy to predict, however, for the gracious performer who was covered with flowers. [...] The next day a veritable triumph for Miss Sanderson in *Romeo et Juliette*.<sup>199</sup>

We are, without reserve, able to applaud the interpretation of this remarkable work: Miss Sybil Sanderson [...] has excelled in the creation of the role of Thaïs. Her debut at the National Academy of Music has definitely cemented her as one of the greatest singers in the world. The timbre of her voice so charming, the volume seems to have increased in proportion to the size of the new vessel that she needed to fulfil, it has lost none of its purity, its clear youth and its penetrating height. The triumph of Miss Sanderson was complete and unquestionable.<sup>200</sup>

With regard to the first *Phryné* review and the *Thaïs* review, Moreno's and Bourgeat's comments about the increase in the volume of Sanderson's voice document the changes before and after her training with Marchesi.<sup>201</sup> Critics of her Covent Garden performance cited lack of volume as a chief complaint, and Sanderson reached the pinnacle of positive critical reception during the period when she studied with Marchesi (1892–1894).

The apparent magnitude of the vocal change begs the question: What did Marchesi teach Sanderson? Fortunately, sources abound for answering that query, including the writings of the pedagogue herself. Marchesi published more than ten treatises on singing, some of which included applicable exercises. She based her approach

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Phryné, c'est M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson, au buste sculptural: elle a l'éclatante beauté du personnage, auquel elle prête le puissant attrait de sa voix merveilleusement pure et facile. [...] L'ensemble de l'interprétation est parfait avec M<sup>me</sup> Sibyl Sanderson, la ravissante Phryné.

<sup>199</sup> J. D. "Province: Vichy." *Le Monde Artiste* 33, no. 29 (July 16, 1893): 506.

Vichy - Mardi soir, au Casino, représentation extraordinaire de Manon, avec le concours de M<sup>lle</sup> Sybil Sanderson, de l'Opéra-Comique. Immense succès, facile à prévoir, du reste, pour la gracieuse interprète qui a été couverte de fleurs. [...] Le lendemain, véritable triomphe pour M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson dans Roméo et Juliette.

<sup>200</sup> Fernand Bourgeat, "Théâtre: Thaïs," *L'Univers illustré*, 34, no. 2035 (March 24, 1894): 180–182.

On a, sans réserve, pu acclamer l'interprétation de cette œuvre remarquable : M<sup>lle</sup> Sybil Sanderson [...] s'est surpassée dans la création du rôle de Thaïs. Son début à l'Académie nationale de musique l'a définitivement consacrée comme une des plus grandes artistes lyriques du monde entier. Le timbre si charmant de sa voix, dont le volume semble s'être accru en proportion avec la dimension du nouveau vaisseau qu'il lui fallait remplir, n'a rien perdu de sa pureté, de sa claire jeunesse et de sa pénétrante élévation. Le triomphe de M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson a été complet et incontestable.

<sup>201</sup> 'H. Moreno' is the pen name used by Heugel, Massenet's publisher. It is not surprising that he would offer favorable reviews of Sanderson's performances, as doing such served to profit his publishing business directly. The Moreno reviews included in this thesis were chosen because of the specific information they provide about Sanderson's vocality, such as increased volume.

to the human voice and its use on science and sought to offer clear, simple solutions to the art of singing. For example, in one of her method books she identifies the three elements needed to produce sound: motor, vibrator, and resonator (i.e. air, vocal folds, and body).<sup>202</sup> This concise, scientific approach stood in stark contrast to the flowery, feelings-based techniques to which Sanderson had gravitated in the past. According to the regimented teacher, training itself offered no substitute for many years of hard work, but Marchesi seemed to channel Sanderson's impulsiveness and desperation to continue performing into nearly two years of diligent technical work. By most accounts, Marchesi was a tough teacher and a gracious woman. Her memories of Sanderson expose grace and humility as well as confidence in her pedagogical abilities, and the effusive soprano effused in response in an 1892 letter quoted by Marchesi:

For nearly two years Sybil worked diligently under my teaching, after which period she was particularly brilliant as Manon. [...] The Opéra Comique stage formed an admirable framework for her voice, as well as for her refined and graceful acting.

DEAREST MADAME, —I am, indeed, happy to be able to add my name to the long list of pupils who have profited by your previous counsels; but unlike them, I hope never to say adieu to my lessons from you. Shall always come to you, dearest of friends to me, for the guidance in my art which you have so generously given me, and which I so deeply appreciate.  
Ever yours, lovingly, and devotedly,  
Sybil Sanderson<sup>203</sup>

Extremes and excesses in emotion and personality may have marred Sanderson's voice and personal life up to the point of death. Marchesi did her best to temper the highs and lows in Sanderson's voice and for a short time, it worked. Massenet might have contributed to her instability with his seemingly hyperbolic and impatient ways. If that was the case, his behaviours may have sabotaged Sanderson's attempts to reach and maintain vocal health. For instance, the vocal demands of the role of Thaïs make it appear

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<sup>202</sup> Mathilde Marchesi, *Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method* (London: Enoch & Sons, 1900), xiii.

<sup>203</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi and Music*, 290.

as though he expected a full recovery of Sanderson's voice to its former height and agility in time for the opera's premiere (see example below).

**Example 7:** 'Qui te fait si sévère...' mm. 24–26<sup>204</sup>

Sanderson succeeded in *Thais*, and the composer expressed his gratitude to Marchesi, writing, 'Your pupil has triumphed. It is to you that I owe this success.'<sup>205</sup> Massenet's positive impression of Marchesi carried far enough that he wrote the introduction to her memoirs:

I beg to introduce to you Madame Marchesi to the American people; and I thoroughly believe I am telling them nothing new when I describe her to them as a professor of the highest rank [...] who has formed [...] admirable pupils who are now the glory of the lyric stage everywhere. [...] For this reason, one cannot do better than to invite all the girls and ladies to read this book with the utmost carefulness; for if the author has scattered here and there in its pages some of her best precepts on the art of *bel canto*, it might result, madame or mademoiselle, that you may wake up some fine morning and find yourself one of those great singers who have the aureated glory of being crowned with dollars—which in itself is not at all a bad thing.<sup>206</sup>

Himself a consummate businessman, Massenet perceived the entrepreneurial spirit of America's capitalist society, because he not only lauded Marchesi's pedagogic merits but also highlighted the positive financial return available to singers who would follow her

<sup>204</sup> Massenet, Jules, *Thais: Comédie Lyrique en Trois Actes* (Paris: Heugel & Cie, 1894), 245. Musical score.

<sup>205</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi and Music*, 290.

<sup>206</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi and Music*, vii–viii.

advice, as evidenced in the quotation above. While correlation does not mean causation, there seems to be a strong link between increases in the number of enthusiastic reviews (extolling vocality, not just physical beauty) for Sanderson following her work with Marchesi. When Lucy Berthet, Thaïs understudy, performed the role, attendance dropped and reviews lamented the loss of *la belle Sibyl*:

In the character of Thaïs in particular, written to suit Miss Sanderson, in this role where the voice of the latter was managed with great art and physical beauty, admirably developed, Miss Berthet cannot bear comparison. [...] She did not give off the same lustful and disturbing attraction as the bewitching Sibyl. [...] With the little she shows us of her chest and of her shoulders, unlike Miss Sanderson who made so bold an exhibition of her charms, seems to avow that she renounces trying to render this music well... With Massenet, a singer often has to show something other than voice.<sup>207</sup>

Jullien makes a valid point that Massenet's leading ladies brought more than voice to their roles, but without voice the rest becomes inconsequential. Sanderson had faced the possible loss of her most important asset when Massenet enlisted Marchesi's help, in the hope of restoring his muse to her former glory. It is worth considering some of the key precepts of the pedagogic techniques Marchesi may have employed with Sanderson.

### *Posture*

Marchesi offers the following advice for achieving her definition of proper singing posture:

The position of the body, while singing, should be as natural and unconstrained as possible. The pupil should stand straight, the head erect, shoulders drawn back without effort, and the chest expanded. All stiffness in the body must be avoided in order to secure the greatest possible freedom of action to the organs concerned in voice-production.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Adolphe Jullien, "M<sup>lle</sup> Berthet dans *Thaïs*," *Courrier Musical* 20, no. 3 (1894): 175.

Dans le personnage de Thaïs en particulier, écrit sur mesure pour M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson, dans ce rôle où la voix de celle-ci était ménagée avec un art extrême et sa beauté physique admirablement mise en valeur, M<sup>lle</sup> Berthet ne peut pas supporter la comparaison. [...] Elle ne s'en dégage pas la même attraction lascive et troublante qu'avec l'ensorcelante Sibyl. [...] Avec le peu qu'elle nous montre de sa poitrine et de ses épaules, à la différence de M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson qui faisait une exhibition si hardie de ses charmes, semble avouer qu'elle renonce à bien rendre cette musique... Avec M. Massenet, une chanteuse doit souvent montrer autre chose que de la voix.

<sup>208</sup> Mathilde Marchesi, *Marchesi's Method: The Art of Singing: a Practical Method in 4 Parts: Op. 21* (Boston, MA: Oliver Ditson, 1890 (orig 1884)), 1.

Marchesi's approach differed considerably from De Reszké's, who promoted a slightly curved body position, 'as if ready to spring,' and 'a tight chest.' De Reszké and his students sang with noted tension. Marchesi sought to eliminate tension and requested her students stand up straight. When she says that the head should be erect, she most likely meant lifted off the spine from the back of the head, not that the chin should protrude forward or up.

### *Breathing*

Normal respiration, characteristic of a healthy person, is diaphragmatic or abdominal. In the two other ways (which we reject), namely, clavicular and lateral respiration, the lungs are but partially filled, hence the necessity of breathing more frequently and the impossibility of singing long phrases in one breath.<sup>209</sup>

Marchesi taught *appoggio* breathing, which stands in direct opposition to the processes Sanderson had learned from her two previous teachers. Sbriglia's belief that all good singing starts with perfect posture has merit; without a balanced foundation, one cannot build a suitable and lasting instrument. Marchesi felt that breath management represents the most crucial and pivotal aspect of vocalism:

Breath management is the essential foundation for all skillful vocalism. [It] is best achieved by preserving a 'noble' position that permits interplay among the muscles of the upper chest, the ribcage area, and the anterolateral abdominal wall. Voice pedagogy of the historic Italian school [...] and modern scientific investigation both lend support to the notion that breath is the power source for the singing voice. The internationally recognized *appoggio* [...] is a form of breath-management coordination that must be learned if the singer is to unite energy and freedom for successfully meeting the tasks of professional vocalism.<sup>210</sup>

The conclusion to draw regarding Sanderson's increase in decibel level following commencement of study with Marchesi is that through properly executed *appoggio* breathing the soprano finally harnessed the 'power source' for her voice.

<sup>209</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi's Method*, 1–2.

<sup>210</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 32.

### *Phonation*

Marchesi advises the following regarding sound production:

The smiling mouth recommended by so many early and modern masters is entirely contrary to the laws of the formation of tone. The pupil should open the mouth quite naturally, lowering the chin, as though to pronounce the vowel A (ah) slightly darkened, and should keep it unmoved during the continuance of the emission of the tone.<sup>211</sup>

Sbriglia and De Reszké favoured brighter, horizontal vowels, typically identified with the smiling mouth. Both approaches (vertical and lateral) produce workable results; the mouth is flexible, and languages contain myriad variations of colour, shape, and placement. Marchesi's advice has more to do with relaxing the jaw and allowing the chin to drop. In other words, the method lets gravity and muscular release guide the mouth to a neutral open position. That notion is in sharp contrast with the tautness in the jaw and chin that would result from tension brought about by manufactured smile and/or a lifted, jutted chin.

In terms of internal structural engagement within the vocal mechanism, Marchesi expressed opinions regarding the *coup de glotte*:

It should be understood that the *Coup de Glotte* is a natural movement of the vocal organs, and that the pupil has only to bring under the control of the will this spontaneous action which has been developing since the first cry at the moment of birth. It is, in fact, the possession of this same natural faculty that enables us to form unconsciously all the vowels in speaking. [...] The firmer and more complete the approximation of the lips of the glottis, the more resistance they will offer to the air which escapes from the lungs, and the less air it will take to set the Vocal Cords vibrating.<sup>212</sup>

Marchesi supported her teacher's use of the *coup de glotte* and continued to teach the technique in her studio despite the controversial nature of the practice. She viewed it as a natural occurrence, because sub-glottal pressure mounted at the formation of sound,

<sup>211</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi's Method*, 1.

<sup>212</sup> Mathilde Marchesi, *A Theoretical and Practical Method of Singing: Op. 31* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1899), 9–10.

rather than a forceful closure of the vocal folds. Sanderson would have learned to use this technique from De Reszké and Sbriglia, if not from one of her teachers in California, such as Zeïss-Dennis or Galvani.

Marchesi and Massenet had conflicting beliefs regarding rehearsal practices, though it appears they did not express any disagreement in public. As noted, Massenet rehearsed his performers with great frequency and duration. He may have inflicted his own intense work ethic on no one more than his ‘M<sup>me</sup> S.’<sup>213</sup> In contrast, Madame Marchesi prescribed a few short sessions per day for young singers.

At the commencement of his studies the pupil should, therefore, not sing too long at a time, and during the first few days should not practice more than five or ten consecutive minutes. Practice thus limited may be repeated three or four times a day at long intervals. The time devoted to exercising the voice may be increased five minutes at a time up to half an hour. If, as happens frequently, the pupil, not taking these precepts to heart, practices at home longer than the teacher has sanctioned, the sad result, the overtaxing of the voice (of the vocal cords), will speedily ensue.<sup>214</sup>

Long rehearsals and an overtaxed vocal system were highlights of Sanderson’s professional life for years. Marchesi’s expectations for young singers were unrealistic, however, whether they studied at the Conservatoire or had embarked upon a professional career. Practising for ten minutes and returning to practise in a few hours to complete another ten minutes may work in private study if the student has no other obligations, but institutions cannot schedule ensembles based on this structure; it would be inefficient and ineffective. Perhaps Marchesi intended the student to spend time between intervals of vocalisation studying the score, music history, acting and movement, etc. If true, the idea has merit and, in effect, mirrors a modern opera rehearsal. While practice can last over three hours, performers sing for several minutes and then address other aspects of performance. One-on-one sessions between Massenet and Sanderson probably involved more vocalisation than Marchesi would have advised.

<sup>213</sup> Massenet, *Mes Souvenirs*, Location 854; Massenet, *My Recollections*, Location: 790.

<sup>214</sup> Marchesi, *Marchesi’s Method: Op. 21, 2*.

### *Interpretation*

When all mechanical difficulties have been overcome, from the formation of tone up to pronunciation, the pupil may pass on to the study of the Air with Recitative, and so enter upon the aesthetics of the art of singing. [...] Pupils can now give their attention exclusively to the sentiment and expression. [...] They should commence, therefore, by reading and translating the text, trying to get an idea of the character they have to represent, studying, at the same time, the dramatic situation in which this character is placed at the moment of singing the particular Air.<sup>215</sup>

In what might be called a ‘top-down’ approach, Gounod started from the story and the character, asking that the dramatic requirements inform the voice. Marchesi suggested the opposite, saying, ‘When *all* mechanical difficulties have been overcome...the pupil may pass on to the study of recitative...’ In other words, she had a ‘bottom-up’ system of interpretation that required singers to start from a place of optimal mechanical function and only move on to character work once the performer secured correct technical function.

In summary, the techniques Sibyl Sanderson learned from prior teachers led to vocal pathologies, whereas Marchesi’s methods helped to reverse the damage and promote vocal health. Reception and correspondence provide evidence of positive and negative results with different training approaches. Sanderson’s professional acclaim reached its zenith in 1894—nearly two years into training with Marchesi. Her career and vocal health started a slow descent soon after. Two events occurred that year that resulted in a souring of critical opinion toward Sanderson from which neither she nor her reputation recovered. First, Sanderson met her future husband—Cuban-American millionaire—Antonio Terry. Not long after their romance began, she stopped taking lessons from Marchesi. In 1894, Sanderson worked on the role of Thaïs with Edouard Mangin (1837–1907). He was a conductor of the Paris Opéra, professor at the

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<sup>215</sup> Marchesi, *A Theoretical and Practical Method of Singing*, 4.

Conservatoire, composer, and arranger. He counts as her eleventh teacher, but because their work was specific to *Thaïs* and lasted only a few months, his impact on Sanderson's vocal strategy will be considered negligible. In addition, Massenet attended most of these sessions, making a determination of Mangin's influence more difficult. Once Terry became part of her life, the old problems with her voice re-surfaced. It may have been a combination of the distraction he provided and their shared alcoholism that sabotaged her career.

On the heels of such triumphs as she experienced during the latter portion of her training with Marchesi came bitter disappointment for the star and her audience.

Sanderson had been engaged by Abbey and Grau to sing with the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York, and she sang on a group tour of several American cities.

Unfortunately, illness thwarted her homecoming:

One of our staff saw Miss Sibyl Sanderson in London yesterday morning [...] and he sends us by mail a few new details about the vocal health of the charming artist who is still suffering from a pernicious irritation of the larynx. Miss Sanderson, who left the Opéra last December to satisfy her engagement with the Metropolitan Opera Company was able to sing only three months in America; she was hit almost immediately by bronchitis that forced her to break her contract with Messieurs Abbey and Grau. It is then she came to live in London where experts advised her to take complete rest.<sup>216</sup>

The soprano returned to Paris to convalesce, as ordered by the doctors in London. To add to the stress felt by all involved, Opéra management required her to be examined by their medical team before they would allow cancellation of her Paris engagements. Her dismal failure in the States disappointed expectant audience members, and it would be years

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<sup>216</sup> Garnisonkirchenchor, "Procès d'Artistes," in *Le Monde Artiste* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1895), 359.

Un de nos collaborateurs a vu Mlle Sibyl Sanderson à Londres hier matin [...] et il nous envoie par dépêche quelques nouveaux détails sur la santé vocale de la charmante artiste qui souffre encore d'une pernicieuse irritation du larynx. Mlle Sanderson, qui a quitté l'Opéra au mois de décembre dernier pour satisfaire à son engagement avec la Compagnie lyrique du Métropolitan Opéra n'a pu chanter que trois mois en Amérique ; elle a été atteinte presque immédiatement d'une bronchite qui l'a forcée de rompre son contrat avec MM. Abbey et Grau. C'est alors qu'elle est venue s'installer à Londres où des spécialistes lui ont conseillé le repos le plus complet.

before she would return to her home country. One exception to the negative press about Sanderson's vocality surfaced following her performance in Baltimore:

Sybil Sanderson is rarely gifted as a lyric artist. Hers is a pure, high, bell-like soprano, ample in compass and abundant in volume. Her voice is so perfectly trained that the most exacting demands made upon it are responded to without any apparent effort. It is most pleasing, perhaps, in the middle register, but some of her high upper notes are as clear and sweet as the E string on the violin. Besides, Miss Sanderson is very handsome and has a fine figure thus being endowed with all the attributes to secure popularity. She was frequently and liberally applauded and called before the curtain.<sup>217</sup>

American journalist (and later-acclaimed novelist) Willa Cather did not have such kind things to say; she criticised Sanderson on numerous occasions, only rarely offering positive comments:

Last winter Sybil Sanderson, the fair Californian whose voice and acting and general ensemble drove Paris wild, [...] came back to astonish her native land. She did astonish us—by her complete and unqualified failure. She did not sing more than half a dozen times in America, and then she was always in bad voice. [...] The rest of the time she was busy making excuses to her managers as to why she could not sing.<sup>218</sup>

Having someone declare her performances 'complete and unqualified failures' did not help Sanderson's stage fright. Shortly after a successful run of performances and premieres abroad (1892–1894), her own countrymen showed no mercy when she sang on a depleted voice as she suffered from bronchitis.

Negative critical response took a further toll on Sanderson's career. First, her *Manon* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1895 failed, then the tour of several American cities fared no better. Critics complained about her small voice and claimed she did not deliver on the high expectations that preceded her American debut:

Of Miss Sanderson's performance, it is possible to speak with kindly recognition, if not with enthusiasm. Her voice is not one of the kind to be associated with serious opera. It is pure and true in intonation [...] but it is lacking in volume and in penetrative quality. It is pleasant in timbre and fairly equable throughout its natural register when not forced, but it becomes attenuated as it goes up and its

<sup>217</sup> "Sybil Sanderson Scores an Artistic Triumph as *Manon* in Massenet's New Opera of That Name," *Washington Times*, February 24, 1895, 8.

<sup>218</sup> Willa Cather, *Nebraska State Journal*, July 7, 1895, 9.

high tones are mere trickles of sound. It is afflicted, moreover, with an almost distressing unsteadiness and is deficient in warmth. [...] That she achieves much pleasure to the eye has already been said [...] she acts naturally, gracefully, and well. [...] At the end of the first act, there was a fine demonstration of enthusiasm, which was for her. The second neither invited nor received a repetition of the applause, but the third again called it forth, thanks to the impassioned singing of M. de Reszké.<sup>219</sup>

The persistent infection forced Sanderson to seek medical attention in London then return to Paris. Upon recovery, Sanderson began the hunt for her twelfth and final voice teacher.

### *Trabadelo*

Also on the American tour was Sanderson's friend and fellow soprano Emma Eames, who witnessed the diva's failed performances. Eames touts the brilliance of her own teacher Antonio, Marquis de Trabadelo (d.1917),<sup>220</sup> saying:

Mr. Trabadelo in Paris [is] not far from the Place d'Etoile. [...] His is the most elegantly appointed studio in Europe. [...] Trabadelo is a short and very little man, with what seems like some other fellow's voice. Where his magnificent tenor voice comes from is a mystery, for it certainly seems two or three sizes too big for him. He is an enthusiastic and painstaking teacher, exceptionally so for a man who sings so very well. [...] Trabadelo transposes accompaniments and plays them in time, like an orchestra, and gives his pupils continually the result of a practical experience in opera. His teaching is very direct and practical, i.e. a teaspoonful of theory and a barrel of practice. He talks very little but works the voice pretty hard and his only idea of singing is that which is adapted to the stage.<sup>221</sup>

Sanderson began lessons with Trabadelo in 1895. Once again, she gravitated to someone who focused on preparation for the stage and not on endless vocal exercises. Given the Spaniard's extravagant lifestyle, the pair shared an affinity for flamboyance and exaggeration. Regardless of whether his charisma or his pedagogic prowess drew pupils to his studio, he maintained an admirable list of students including Emma Eames, Mary Garden, and Geraldine Farrar.

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<sup>219</sup> Henry Krehbiel, "Manon," *New York Tribune*, January 17, 1895. From Metropolitan Opera Archives: *Manon*.

<sup>220</sup> The teacher's name appears in press spelled both as Trabadelo and Trabadello.

<sup>221</sup> Aldrich, "Few Prominent European Teachers," 169–171.

Trabadelo subscribed to *Bel Canto* traditions, specializing in Italian operatic repertoire. The ‘tenor robusto’ managed a full studio in Paris with a sizable waiting list, and he continued to perform in concerts and salons after retiring from the stage.<sup>222</sup>

Trabadelo’s pedagogic approach focused on two priorities: *appoggio* breathing and performance simulation. These practices may have been beneficial for Sanderson at any point in her career, but they were especially useful after the extended illness and dismal vocal results in America. For performance simulation, she tended to favour teachers who focused on interpretation and thus assigned applicable examples from repertoire, as Gounod had done. After working with many voice teachers, it would seem that breath management had become unpredictable. According to Mary Garden, Trabadelo taught that singing starts and ends with the breath:

Breathing is the be-all and end-all of singing. Go to a master who understands it: learn from him; watch him; study the subject for yourself. There are more triumphs in the diaphragm than in all the vocal cords on earth. Breathe; breathe; learn to breathe. To breathe is to sing.<sup>223</sup>

Trabadelo helped Sanderson prepare for her Opéra premiere as Gilda in *Rigoletto* in December 1895.<sup>224</sup> The master’s methods worked; Sanderson scored a ‘grand success’ in the Verdi role:

Yesterday evening, Friday, big day of ticket sales at the Opera, Miss Sybil Sanderson sang for the first time the role of Gilda in *Rigoletto*. It was sufficient with the name of the beautiful singer in the program to gather around her a select assembly. [...] Miss Sanderson appears. She is delicious in her simple dress and the eyes never tire of admiring her. She sings, and the ears are charmed. [...] She who is a pretty woman and a divine singer. There is an artist who plays, who lives the character [...] Miss Sanderson played this role, she sang with her delicious voice, with all her heart of an artist. It was much applauded. [...] It is a great success to record for the beautiful singer who, in recent months, started with the Professor Trabadelo.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>222</sup> “A de Lesseps musicale in Paris,” *Musical Courier* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 1902): 9.

<sup>223</sup> Mary Garden, “Your Career in Opera,” *Ladies Home Journal*, November 1921: 34.

<sup>224</sup> This was not the first time Sanderson sang Gilda; she also sang the role in 1892 in Brussels.

<sup>225</sup> E. N., “Courrier des Spectacles,” *Le Gaulois* 29, no. 5706 (December 28, 1895): 3.

Hier soir, vendredi, grand jour d’abonnement à l’Opéra, Mlle Sybil Sanderson chantait pour la première fois le rôle de Gilda, de *Rigoletto*. [...] Il avait suffi du nom de la belle cantatrice au programme pour réunir autour d’elle une assemblée selecte. [...] Mlle Sanderson paraît. Elle est délicieuse dans sa robe simple et les yeux ne se lassent pas de l’admirer. Elle chante, et les oreilles

Two weeks later, the Opéra replaced an ‘indisposed’ Sanderson with Lucy Berthet, who received complimentary reviews for her Gilda.<sup>226</sup> This time, Sanderson’s cancellation was more strategy than sickness. She chose to save her voice in order to sing Frida in Boyer’s *Mirka L’enchanteresse* with Adelina Patti in two days.<sup>227</sup> Sanderson made another uncharacteristic decision in spring 1896, when she travelled to Lake Como to rest her voice. She chose convalescent rest, rather than being forced to it. At that time, she was studying daily with Trabadelo and achieving gains in her vocality, especially in the areas of power and warmth. At the same time, Sanderson’s interactions with Massenet had all but stopped, with no upcoming performances on which they would collaborate. Jack Winsor Hansen claimed that Massenet created the chasm out of jealousy over her romance with Terry, but his conclusions may be dubious.<sup>228</sup> However, it would seem that Sanderson’s respite coincided with a lack of work pressure from Massenet.

Training with Trabadelo and his suggested period of rest at Lake Como brought about big enough gains in vocal power that Sanderson took on the role of Elsa in *Lohengrin*.<sup>229</sup> Then her personal life changed and the career that she had built and re-built came to a halt. Antonio Terry was granted a divorce from his first wife, and when he married Sanderson in 1897, she left the stage and Trabadelo’s studio.<sup>230</sup>

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sont charmées. [...] Elle qu’une jolie femme et une divine cantatrice. Il y a une artiste qui joue, qui vit le personnage [...] Mlle Sanderson a joué ce rôle, elle l’a chanté de sa voix délicieuse, de tout son cœur d’artiste. On l’a beaucoup applaudie. [...] C’est un grand succès à enregistrer pour la belle cantatrice qui, depuis quelques mois, tressaillait, avec le professeur Trabadelo.

<sup>226</sup> Turlupin, “Propos des coulisses,” *Gil Blas*, January 10, 1896, 3.

<sup>227</sup> Edouard Noël and Edmond Stoullig, “Théâtre municipal de la Gaité,” *Les annales du théâtre et de la musique 1896*, 22 (January 1897) : 279.

<sup>228</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Locations 3558, 5550.

The author formed his opinion, that Massenet’s jealousy caused him to attempt to sabotage Sanderson’s romance with Terry, from an undocumented interview between Mary Garden and Carl Van Vechten. Hansen apparently learned the details of the interview from private conversations with Van Vechten.

<sup>229</sup> Nicolet, “Dépêche de Saint-Pétersbourg,” *Le Gaulois* 31, no. 5579 (February 11, 1897): 6.

Sanderson had been contracted to perform the role in St. Petersburg, but Wagner’s opera was exchanged for additional performances of her French repertoire

<sup>230</sup> W. L. Hubbard, “Sanderson, Sibyl. 1865–1903,” in *The American History and Encyclopedia of Music* (Toledo, OH: I. Squire, 1908), 261–262.

Sanderson had fifteen years of sporadic and inconsistent training from twelve different teachers. Except for Massenet and Marchesi, she studied with each for less than one year. Impatience and distractions drove her to seek shortcuts in obtaining and maintaining a professional singing career. Through ambition and seized opportunities she earned a place at the pinnacle of late nineteenth-century French opera. The impact of Massenet on her career and her life both helped and harmed her. He gave her a platform for stardom and continued to build ever-higher platforms (literally and figuratively) in order to exalt her to prima diva. His keen business acumen, combined with a remarkable ability to tailor his vocal writing to suit the needs and abilities of his preferred interpreters, facilitated Sanderson's meteoric career. The question remains though: Did Massenet know how to request desired sounds in healthy ways? Further, did greed and his own insecurities cause him to exploit his beautiful songbird? It seems just to offer him the benefit of the doubt. Sanderson's own greed and anxieties drove her to keep singing, practicing, and maneuvering through backstage politics in order to achieve her dreams, but these same drives helped to destroy her career.

## CHAPTER THREE

VOCALITY: *LA VOIX EST UN RAVISSEMENT*

Considering the vocal attributes of Sibyl Sanderson reveals some challenges. On the positive side, the singer enjoyed immense popularity during her lifetime and has remained a topic of discussion for more than a century, leaving a paucity of information remaining for exploration. Sanderson's press dossier contains thousands of references to her vocality (the timbre of her voice), dramatic characterisation, physical appearance, and many pertinent personal traits. In addition, Massenet was a prolific communicator; he left many reports about Sanderson's vocality in the musical scores on which they collaborated. From his music, much can be extracted from the compositions themselves by examining his vocal writing, orchestration, and staging instructions as they relate to Sanderson. Within the scores, but beyond the musical writing, the composer wrote copious margin notes that address facets of the creative process and events surrounding the performances in which Sanderson appeared. Massenet also wrote comments about the soprano's health, demeanor, rehearsal times and locations, weather, and who attended various gatherings associated with the works.

Massenet sent correspondence to business associates and personal contacts regarding the progress and status of his muse. Other friends, colleagues, and family members wrote about Sanderson regularly. While some recollections left by those who knew her contain elements that could be viewed as hyperbolic, the use of a wide cross-section of commentators, in terms of style, and a large sample size overall, provide a suitable base from which to draw conclusions about Sanderson's vocality. In addition to musical and written sources, visual evidence is plentiful, including photographs, paintings, production books, caricatures, etc.

**Figure 12:** Caricature: Massenet and Sanderson<sup>231</sup>



The topic of Massenet and Sanderson seemed to permeate every aspect of public interest. Many lauded the brilliance of both, but there were some detractors. For instance, the caricature above depicts the duo atop a bland (out of date) cake made of Massenet's *Thaïs* and Sanderson herself. It suggests that the critic is shoveling the pair into the oven of the Paris Opera (besides meaning 'oven', the word 'four' is also translated as 'flop'), where the sugar-candy (oversweet) notes of Sanderson are past their prime. A suitable equivalent to this metaphor is the Christmas fruitcake; a gift that most do not want to ingest for it is too sweet, rather fake, and likely passed its expiry date two holiday seasons ago.

<sup>231</sup> Charvic, "Au four, la pâtisserie fade de M. Massenet et les notes en sucre-candy de Mlle Sanderson," *La Silhouette*, March 25, 1894, 4.

For further reading about Massenet and caricature, see Clair Rowden, "Memorialisation, Commemoration and Commodification: Massenet and Caricature." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25, no. 2 (July 2013): 139–163.

Perhaps by 1894, critics and the public were beginning to feel that Massenet and Sanderson were no longer offering substantive additions to the operatic canon. The trend of dismissing Massenet as an overly sentimental composer continued to build to its zenith in the middle of the twentieth-century. Branger comments on the shift in taste away from Massenet's music:

Beginning in the twenties, Poulenc's opinions stood out, because it was a particularly hostile environment for [the music of] Massenet, who was always appreciated as a composer by the public, but was now violently denigrated by most critics. After the First World War, admitting any fondness for his music would be considered 'of the worst taste' in the eyes of the intelligentsia: 'It was fashionable in some circles to despise him, and to deny him any value.' In this regard, Poulenc's inner circle remained particularly resistant to Massenet. The Polignac family never gave him a warm welcome, while Pierre Bernac tersely judged the composer's melodies, 'Massenet has abandoned his unique and easy gifts with his melodies; they border on an overly-sweet sentimentality. They cannot be recommended.'<sup>232</sup>

Public and critics were divided over Massenet's music, and the same was true of the ways Sanderson was received; she was both adored and despised. Unlike the music of Massenet, however, which can be heard in myriad recordings and live performances to this day, evaluating Sanderson's vocality brings its own set of challenges.

Possibly the most significant hurdle to a complete assessment of Sanderson's performance style is that she made no sound recordings. Second, the lack of medical data related to her voice limits the opportunity for empirical analysis. Sanderson faced several bouts of physical debilitation that affected her ability to perform at different times throughout her career, but no surgical records or otolaryngological reports have been

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<sup>232</sup> Jean-Christophe Branger, "Massenet, Miroir des Contradictions et des Doutes de Poulenc," *Revue Musicale de Suisse Romande* 55, no. 1 (March 2002): 1.

Entamée dans les années vingt, la réflexion de Poulenc apparaît toutefois plus singulière, car elle s'intègre dans un contexte particulièrement hostile à Massenet, compositeur toujours apprécié du public mais désormais violemment dénigré par la majorité des critiques. Au lendemain de la première Guerre mondiale, avouer un quelconque penchant pour sa musique relève du plus mauvais goût aux yeux de l'intelligentsia : « Il fut de mode dans certains milieux de la mépriser, de lui refuser toute valeur. » A cet égard, le cercle intime de Poulenc reste particulièrement réfractaire à Massenet. La famille de Polignac ne lui a jamais réservé un accueil chaleureux tandis que Pierre Bernac juge de façon lapidaire l'auteur des mélodies : « Massenet s'est abandonné à son unique don de facilité qui, dans ses mélodies, confine à un sentimentalisme sucré. Elles ne peuvent être recommandées.

located. For example, London physicians apparently examined her in 1895, following poorly received performances in the United States, but associated medical records either do not exist or remain inaccessible to the public.<sup>233</sup> Another medical incident occurred in 1901, when Sanderson could not perform because of ‘Singer’s Knot.’ It seems that she developed vocal nodules, or possibly vocal polyps, but there is only speculation about her diagnosis and treatment. At the same time, fellow soprano Emma Eames was also having vocal difficulties:

Sybil Sanderson was announced to appear in the role of Micaela with Calvé in ‘Carmen’ last evening, but early in the day a letter from her physician stated that it would be impossible for her to appear. [...] It is known that Miss Sanderson is suffering from what singers call a ‘knot in the throat.’ An operation will be necessary in the case, and while it will be painful for a while, there is no serious danger. She will not appear at any rate. [...] Mme. Eames is also suffering from a mild attack of bronchitis, and her physicians have ordered a rest for a week or two.<sup>234</sup>

Another challenge in evaluating Sanderson’s vocal characteristics and their possible causes is the number of variables that must be taken into consideration. In the case of the San Francisco cancellations, perhaps the cold and damp Bay Area climate weakened the immunity of both sopranos, resulting in illness for Sanderson and Eames. On the other hand, perhaps the busy social diaries of Sanderson and Eames, including late nights filled with alcohol consumption, invited illness. Eames and Heldentenor Ernest Van Dyck, who was also battling illness, recovered enough to continue performing in San Francisco, but Sanderson did not rebound.

Another consideration is whether or not the reported information was true.

Sanderson may have called in sick for a performance, claiming loss of voice or some other ailment, when in reality, she could have been facing the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. Or perhaps her reasons were more personal: the desire to spend

<sup>233</sup> Perdian, “Théâtres.” *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* 25, no. 8562 (June 25, 1895): 3.

<sup>234</sup> “Opera Stars Lose Voices,” *Pittsburgh Press*, December 8, 1901, 18.

‘Singer’s knot’ is a colloquial phrase that refers to a callous-like growth on the vocal folds. It was generally removed via surgical procedure during Sanderson’s time.

time with a romantic partner, for example. Correspondence among family and friends helps separate truth from fiction, but only to a degree. Bias may have affected the recollections of those close to Sanderson.

Massenet was reported to have been very concerned about maintaining a positive public image, so he might have held back details that would tarnish his or his star's reputation.<sup>235</sup> Based on letters, it appears that Mrs. Sanderson was prone to exaggeration and anxiety. Sanderson's friend from her adolescence in San Francisco, Gertrude Atherton, enjoyed a successful writing career, so she may have enhanced or highlighted the more marketable portions of her glamorous friend's actions and circumstances.

Furthermore, the language use and the time-periods of the correspondence should be considered. Since some of the research underlying this paper is from French-language sources, there is a danger of lost or missed intention in translation. A strong example of this possibility is the English word 'penetrating.' French journalists used words such as *pénétrante*, *éclat*, and *strident*, which denote shrill and piercing tones when they are referring to vocalism, but the term *pénétrante* may have had a different meaning when used in reference to characterisation; something more akin to 'moving' or 'touching'. Both English and French reporters used the term as either a positive or negative descriptor, depending on the context. On the one hand, they may have meant that her voice carried through the auditorium, soaring above the chorus and orchestra. On the other hand, at times they imply a strident, piercing sound. Therefore, translations must be considered not only literally, but also figuratively and contextually in order to glean what the reviewer was attempting to communicate about the performance.

The language must also be a function of the era in which it was employed, which includes the use of topical idioms and contemporary phraseology. For example, there was

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<sup>235</sup> Burton D. Fisher, *Massenet's Manon: Opera Journeys Mini Guide* (Boca Raton, FL: Opera Journeys, 2000), 9–10.

a preoccupation among late nineteenth-century journalists with physiognomy, so reports tended to focus on the visual aspects of singers rather than on their vocal qualities. The use of colloquialisms or jargon must also be addressed. For instance, when journalists used the term ‘young’ (*jeune*) to describe Sanderson, it is not clear if that meant she sounded young, looked young, or acted young. Did that mean that she performed like a young person (i.e., being not fully-developed, perhaps she sang with a quieter, breathy voice or a voice that lacked spectral compass)? At times, the adjective of choice was ‘naïve.’ In translation, it is not obvious if the term is meant in a positive, negative, or neutral sense. In view of these complications, the various elements of Sanderson’s vocality will be considered separately.

### Sound

In the early years of Sanderson’s career (1888–1890), the descriptions of her voice were generally consistent. As noted in the matrix of aesthetics included below, reviewers described her tone as clear, crystalline, and brilliant. Almost all focused on the extraordinary extension she possessed. In fact, this extreme high range became her signature vocal characteristic following the premiere of *Esclarmonde*, in which she sang a G6 (*contre-sol*) that soon came to be known as the ‘Eiffel Tower Note.’<sup>236</sup>

Critics enthused about her dramatic skills using words such as graceful, charming, and intelligent, as seen in the matrix of aesthetics. It seems that Sanderson’s physique and visage were attractive according to aesthetic standards of the time. On the less positive side, several critics expressed concerns that her voice was thin, lacked volume, and was especially weak in the middle register. While writers praised her acting and physical appearance, many found her vocal performance to be underwhelming.

Newspaper coverage of Sanderson’s personal and professional life intensified with each

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<sup>236</sup> Auguste Vitu, “Chronique Musicale,” *Le Figaro* 136 (May 15, 1889): 5.

success or new piece of gossip, as did the comments stating that her performances did not live up to expectations. Italian coloratura soprano Luisa Tetrazzini (1871–1940) described, in general terms, what seems to be true of Sanderson’s sound as well as some of her vocal faults:

There are quantities of wonderful natural voices, particularly among the young people of Switzerland and Italy, and the American voice is especially noted for its purity and the beauty of its tone in the high registers. But these naturally untrained voices soon break or fail if they are used much unless the singer supplements the natural, God-given vocal gifts with a conscious understanding of how the vocal apparatus should be used. [...] The singer must have some knowledge of his or her anatomical structure, particularly the structure of the throat, mouth and face, with its resonant cavities, which are so necessary for the right production of the voice.<sup>237</sup>

The terms that occur most often when people described Sanderson during the early years of her career align exactly with Tetrazzini’s quote; the American allegedly had a voice of purity and beauty, especially in the high register. However, neither the public nor Sanderson herself could predict what her voice might do on a given night. Inconsistency marred the makings of a stellar career. In a given month, she would perform well and receive positive reviews. Then in a matter of days, she would lose her voice and have to cancel performances. This same unpredictability occurred in other aspects of her life, including her vocal training, romantic relationships, and fiscal responsibilities. Also noteworthy is that reviews of Sanderson’s performances at times contain contradictory information or opinions. For example, of her *Esclarmonde*, one reviewer hailed her voice as ‘exceptionally rich,’<sup>238</sup> while others judged it to be ‘thin.’<sup>239</sup>

A chart of several hundred adjectives ascribed to Sanderson from 1888–1903 (plus posthumous remarks) can be found at the close of this chapter. The listing reveals trends over the years, most notably a bell-curve that shows a correlation between

<sup>237</sup> Tetrazzini and Caruso, *The Art of Singing*, 4.

<sup>238</sup> A. Landely, “Théâtre National de L’Opéra-Comique: *Esclarmonde*,” *L’Art musical revue bimensuelle: Musique Théâtres Beaux-arts* 10, no. 28 (1889): 73–74. ‘Exceptionnellement riche.’

<sup>239</sup> Camille Bellaigue, “Revue Musicale: *Esclarmonde* à l’Opéra-Comique,” *La Revue des Deux Mondes* 59, no. 93 (June 1, 1889): 690–698. ‘Peu mince.’

increased positive public reception during the years she studied with Marchesi and Trabadelo. A reporter for the *Musical Courier*, an American periodical, criticised Sanderson's vocal wobble, as heard in her début as Esclarmonde (1889):

Persons that read carefully the first telegraphed account of Miss Sanderson's début were disagreeably impressed by one line of the story—that referring to the soprano's *tremolo*, which, as usual, was ascribed to nervousness. If the songstress' *tremolo*, as the correspondent puts it, had been the outcome of trepidation, it would scarcely have endured throughout the evening; moreover, people that heard Miss Sanderson sing in San Francisco, long ago, noted that even then her voice was tremulous. Both Europe and America will gladly welcome new prima donnas, whatever their nationality, but the Italian saying, *chi va piano*, is a good one to bear in mind while building hopes on cablegrams that often emanate from irresponsible sources.<sup>240</sup>

Based on the documentation of Sanderson's vocal troubles prior to 1892, it appears that she struggled with technical faults compounded by overwork, though reviewers still complimented her physical appearance. Given the techniques she practised with de Reszké and Sbriglia, she likely employed excess tension by breathing with a high chest and then using tremendous force to expel the air. Pushing the sound like this could create a clear yet thin sound. Her weak middle voice was likely related to these factors; because she was in her early twenties when most of the reviewers made this claim, her voice was not yet fully developed. Young sopranos, especially lyrics and soubrettes, can exhibit weakness in the middle register, so it may have been a function of her age.<sup>241</sup> Her breath management probably did not help the situation either, as noted by Stoullig:

The high register is very pure, the middle does not exist, and the timbre we desire of our soprano, a bit guttural, could acquire the velvetiness it lacks.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> "Clippings from Sunday's 'Sun,'" *Musical Courier* 18, no. 22 (May 29, 1889): 437.

This is a partial quote of an Italian proverb: *Chi va piano, va sano; chi va sano, va lontano*. The literal translation is: He who goes softly, goes safely; he who goes safely, goes far. It is usually translated to mean "Slow and steady wins the race."

<sup>241</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 116.

<sup>242</sup> Edmond Stoullig, "Les premières," *Le National* (Paris), (May 17, 1889): 2.

Le registre élevé est très pur, le médium n'existe pas, et l'on doit désirer que le timbre de son soprano, un peu guttural, acquière le velouté qui lui fait défaut.

When Sanderson sang well in a performance, critics extolled the vibrancy and clarity of her voice. In general, though, Stoullig's description does well in summarising the sound of Sanderson's voice at that point in her career.

### Characterisation

Vocalists, teachers, audiences, and critics discuss the unaffected, innate sound of a singer's voice, as well as the technical and artistic ways the performer uses that voice. This includes description of vocal tone, timbre, inflection, volume, dynamics, and range. Beyond vocalization, much attention is also paid to the performer's dramatic characterisation when interpreting a role. For the purposes of this study, characterisation is defined as the dramatic and physical portrayal of an operatic role. The qualities of characterisation may include physiognomic elements (facial movements, expressions), deportment (gestures, prop use, stage blocking, choreography), spoken dialogue, vocal noises (e.g., sighs, throat clearing, etc.), and interaction with other players. The actor's emotional involvement feeds the physical manifestation of the character.

Sanderson's personal life may have provided sources of dramatic motivation and could have affected the way she physically embodied the roles she sang; however, those correlations can only be surmised, because Sanderson did not leave any record of her preparatory process for the dramatic aspects of the parts she played. She spoke of singing Thaïs in her interview with Albert Dayrolles but used blanket terms such as 'charm' and 'grace' to describe some of the characteristics she identified in the role.<sup>243</sup> Interestingly, the words 'charm' and 'grace' were used more than other adjectives to describe Sanderson's acting. That raises the question: What did critics mean when they deemed her acting charming or graceful?

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<sup>243</sup> Dayrolles, "Sibyl Sanderson," 236–241.

In nineteenth-century theatrical press as well as philosophy, English-speaking critics seemed to use the word ‘charm’ to describe attractiveness that interests, pleases, or stimulates. This more modern definition by Rothwell seems especially applicable to Sanderson:

The quality of charm is difficult to define. Someone who has charm possesses an elusive attractiveness, seems capable of making you feel that he or she is entirely delightful. [...] Less pleasantly, a witch may evilly put you under a charm so as to force you to do her evil actions. It is also a word for a flock of finches or other birds.<sup>244</sup>

Rothwell’s reference to the evil uses of charm recalls images of the Queen of the Night from Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*: a role Sanderson performed. The Queen’s vengeance aria was the first piece Massenet heard Sanderson sing on the night they met. It is also interesting that ‘charm’ refers to a flock of birds, because there is certainly a catalogue of writing about the correlation between birds and coloratura singing (e.g., Olympia’s aria, ‘Les oiseaux dans la charmille,’ from Offenbach’s *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*).<sup>245</sup>

In French, the term ‘*charme*’ was more often associated with sexual appeal, as in a person’s ability to lure or seduce another. The connotations of the French ‘*charme*’ are not the same as those ascribed to the English ‘charm.’ Baudelaire scholar Karen Harrington offers this take on the French use of the word:

In its etymological definition, ‘*charme*’ is analogous to a magical spell capable of exerting considerable influence over its subjects.<sup>246</sup>

In both languages, the word can connote something akin to enchantment, such as when it is used to refer to charming a snake or wearing a mystical charm. However, the French seemed to have placed added importance and depth of meaning on the notion of *charme*.

Twentieth-century philosopher and musicologist Vladimir Jankélévitch wrote extensively

<sup>244</sup> David Rothwell, “Charm,” *Wordsworth Dictionary of Homonyms* (Ware: Wordsworth Reference, 2007), 108.

<sup>245</sup> Katherine Blake Moore and Rachel DeVore Fogarty, *The Art of the Coloratura: Technique and Pedagogy Explored Through Bird Song* (Nashville, TN: Belmont University Press, 2013).

<sup>246</sup> Karen Harrington, “L’invitation au Voyage,” in *Understanding Les Fleurs du Mal: Critical Readings*, edited by William J. Thompson (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), 116.

on the topic. He believes that *charme*, when used in music criticism, is much more than attractiveness; it is an active form of beauty, a quality that emerges between the music and the ineffable. Carolyn Abbate notes the following:

This word is difficult to translate because *charme* suggests an almost audible quality, a sound that comes into being and produces effects. But one must discard whatever implications either of hypnosis or niceness that the word Charm may have in English, since *charme*—the summons made by enchantment—is an aesthetic phenomenon to which we react not passively but actively, by being changed, changing ourselves. Enchantment—the state engendered by Charm—is a state of continence and, often, of delight.<sup>247</sup>

Philosopher Matthew Del Nevo provides a useful description of *charme* that perhaps encompasses what Sanderson's critics might have meant when using the term to describe her acting style:

*Charme* is the active ingredient of beauty. *Charme* upon the Ladder of Eros is that which *heightens* sensibility. [...] Between the listener and the ineffable, there is a 'passing between.' *Charme* makes beauty not only actual but efficacious. Efficacious beauty is beauty that acts, that does, that affects, that generates.<sup>248</sup>

Probably the most significant element in Del Nevo's comment is, 'Efficacious beauty is beauty that acts.' Taken literally, that idea may encapsulate Sanderson's dramatic portrayals: beauty that acts. Her *charme* was seductive and enchanting; with it, there may have come a bit of coquetry and flirtation. The implication of the French *charme* carries a more sexual and magnetic innuendo than the simpler definitions of attractiveness or delight. There is deliberate intent and action from the charmer in order to lure the charmed. The seducer actively uses the ineffable or the 'passing between' to transport the recipient of her beauty.<sup>249</sup> It would seem to be in this space that Sanderson's acting elicited comment throughout her career.

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<sup>247</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, translated by Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), xviii, 99.

<sup>248</sup> Matthew Del Nevo, *Art Music: Love, Listening, and Soulfulness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 218–221.

<sup>249</sup> Del Nevo, *Art Music*, 220.

Along with the notion of *charme* comes a consideration of ‘grace’ (*grâce*). English-language journalists tended to refer to Sanderson’s acting as ‘graceful.’ Synonyms for their probable intent might include ‘elegant,’ ‘lithe,’ ‘believable,’ ‘beautiful in form and movement,’ ‘fluid,’ ‘at ease,’ and ‘attractive.’ These reviews frequently conflated descriptions of her graceful acting and physical attractiveness. Sanderson’s acting could be summarised as natural, charming, graceful, intelligent, elegant, and in the earlier part of her career, naïve.<sup>250</sup> During some portions of Sanderson’s life, her singing was described as lacklustre, although these comments would frequently co-occur with encouraging words about her beauty and acting. The majority of French press also made reference to her physical attributes and dramatic deportment.

Sanderson, who by most accounts possessed strong acting skills, used these non-vocal tools to engage audiences and critics. There is a question of motivational origin worth asking: Did Sanderson cultivate these actions on her own, or did she rely on score instructions left by composers such as Massenet and Saint-Saëns? With regard to Massenet’s music, in particular, the scores were quite explicit in requesting several qualities for which Sanderson became known: charm, grace, coquetry, naïveté, etc. These may have been elements inherent to Massenet’s music and were therefore manifested not by Sanderson’s will or intent but rather by delivery of the score *come scritto*. Georges Servières, a nineteenth-century French musicologist and critic, recognised these qualities in Massenet’s music and in 1897 wrote:

The charm, grace, caressing and feminine grace, is the merit that is most widely recognized of the music of Massenet. [...] The subject of his vocal poems, most of his melodies, his oratorios or operas, it is love, it is the woman, the woman forever. [...] The poems that the artist set to music are similar in almost every subject. Hence there is certain monotony, despite the diversity of rhythms.<sup>251</sup>

<sup>250</sup> The term ‘natural’ in this context infers vulnerability and believability through dramatic faithfulness to the roles interpreted by Sanderson. In other words, her acting was not judged as stilted or overdone.

<sup>251</sup> Georges Servières, *La Musique Française Moderne: César Franck-Édouard Lalo-Jules Massenet-Ernest Reyer-Camille Saint-Saëns* (Paris: G. Harvard fils, 1897), 207.

In 2005, Huebner responds:

[Servières] acknowledged that ‘charm, grace—feminine and caressing grace— are the most generally recognized merits of Massenet’s music.’ But Servières did not *really* mean this as a compliment. He observed that Massenet’s musical charm caused his success among women, but in his works ‘passion is more nervous than sanguine, more dreamy than sensual, more tender than ardent.’ [...] This much must be stressed: that Massenet appealed to women, or that his style might be described as feminine within the parameters for understanding that word at the *fin-de-siècle* (or in other cultures).<sup>252</sup>

Exploring some of the ‘feminine qualities’ that critics identified in both Sanderson and Massenet (a ‘sentimental’ composer) could prove valuable. It is likely that Massenet’s compositions and Sanderson’s performance style worked synergistically, resulting in the use of the same adjectives to describe her singing and his music. Terms that appear commonly in reviews of both Sanderson and Massenet are: feminine, beautiful, sweet, pretty, seductive, attractive, light, flowery, and intelligent.

Given the connotations of meaning associated with *charme*, it seems that Sanderson’s sexual allure remained at the forefront of critics’ minds, as suggested in the marix of aesthetics at the close of this chapter. This might be explained by trends that were common during her period of influence, namely, a focus on the physiognomy of singers.<sup>253</sup> It could also be that Sanderson exuded charm and grace, and reviewers were simply identifying the qualities exhibited during her performances. Both perception and reality may play a role here. Critics perceived physical manifestations of *charme* because they were looking for those qualities, and Sanderson may have been, in all reality, charming and graceful.

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Le charme, la grâce, grâce caressante et féminine, est le mérite le plus généralement reconnu de la musique de Massenet. [...] Le sujet de ses poèmes vocaux, de la plupart de ses mélodies, de ses oratorios ou de ses opéras, c’est l’amour, c’est la femme, la femme toujours. [...] Feuilletez ses recueils de mélodies. [...] Les poésies que l’artiste met en musique se ressemblent presque toutes par le sujet. D’où une certaine monotonie, malgré la diversité des rythmes.

<sup>252</sup> Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle*, 163.

<sup>253</sup> For more information on physiognomy, see Henson, *Opera Acts*.

Another possibility is that the composers who worked with Sanderson crafted roles that played to her natural proclivities. Massenet was fascinated by and dedicated to women, but he was also a keen vocal writer and intelligent businessman. Thus, his compositions were tailored to the artist for whom he composed, as Abbott notes:

He had a pretty trick of telling his fair companion that she suggested a melody, and he would go to the piano and improvise some honey-sweet strains that really did suit the personality of the one so highly complimented. With Massenet it was *‘toujours la femme.’*<sup>254</sup>

In other words, if Sanderson *was* charming and graceful, then Massenet may have created the roles of Esclarmonde and Thaïs to showcase those qualities. It is also feasible that Sanderson’s influence and position as co-creator facilitated the modification of particular roles to suit her own dramatic motivations and intentions for that character. It is harder to quantify how much a role was created *for* Sanderson versus how much a role was created *by* her in the roles she premiered (i.e., Esclarmonde, Phryné, and Thaïs). Because she *re-*created the role of Manon, it is fruitful to examine the evolution of the role pre- and post-Sanderson. Besides carving out specific attributes such as charm, which is explored in more depth below, it is interesting to quantify the increase in vocal demand within Manon’s role that resulted from Massenet/Sanderson score annotations. The following matrix shows the outcomes of the revisions and added *ossia*.

### Vocal Demands in *Manon*

**Table 2:** Vocal demands in *Manon*

Piece	Act	Page of VS	Total	Sung	1884 Original			1887 Sanderson revisions with Gavotte and <i>ossia</i>				1887 Sanderson Revisions with 1898 Fabliau and <i>ossia</i>					
					Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura
Je suis encore tout étourdie	I	50-55	60	56	10	25	1	60	56	12	25	3	60	56	12	25	3
Voyons, Manon	I	84-87	35	32	2	6	0	35	32	2	6	0	35	32	2	6	0
Adieu, notre petite table	II	166-168	26	25	0	7	0	26	25	0	7	0	26	25	0	7	0
Je marche sur tous les chemins	III	215-219	26	26	12	3	3	26	26	12	3	4	26	26	12	3	4
Gavotte	III	220-225	n/a			54	45	12	3	2	n/a						
Fabliau	III	398-405	n/a			72	65	34	10	16							
A nous les amours et les roses!	IV	330-337	138	125	35	22	0	138	125	37	22	4	138	125	37	22	4
		<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>27</b>
					22.3%	23.9%	1.5%			24.3%	21.4%	4.2%			29.5%	22.2%	8.2%
					<b>Extreme</b>	<b>47.7%</b>				<b>Extreme</b>	<b>49.8%</b>				<b>Extreme</b>	<b>59.9%</b>	

<sup>254</sup> Bessie Abbott, “Massenet: An Appreciation,” *New York Tribune: At the Theatres*, August 18, 1912, 2.

Sanderson's revisions increased the amount of extreme vocalisation from 47.7% to 49.8% overall, which is a material augmentation. What is quite telling is the percentages by which specific pieces changed, such as the examples below:

Je suis encore tout étourdie								
		Original			Revised			
Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	
60	56	10	25	1	12	25	3	
		17.9%	44.6%	1.8%	21.4%	44.6%	5.4%	
		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>64.3%</b>		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>71.4%</b>		

A nous les amours et les roses !								
		Original			Revised			
Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	
138	125	35	22	0	37	22	4	
		28.0%	17.6%	0.0%	29.6%	17.6%	3.2%	
		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>45.6%</b>		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>50.4%</b>		

The 'Gavotte' became a more challenging show piece when entrusted to Sanderson.

Based on the tables below, the virtuosity of the 'Fabliau' sets it apart as the most demanding aria in the opera.

Gavotte								
		Without <i>ossia</i>			With <i>ossia</i>			
Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	
54	45	12	3	0	12	3	2	
		26.7%	6.7%	0.0%	26.7%	6.7%	4.4%	
		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>33.3%</b>		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>37.8%</b>		

Fabliau								
		Without <i>ossia</i>			With <i>ossia</i>			
Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura	
72	65	34	9	16	34	10	16	
		52.3%	13.8%	24.6%	52.3%	15.4%	24.6%	
		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>90.8%</b>		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>92.3%</b>		

When *Manon* is produced with the 'Fabliau' and *ossia* passages sung, the overall percentage of extreme vocalisation jumps to 59.9%; that is an increase in demand of over 25%:

59.9% (Fabliau w/*ossia*)  
 - 47.7% (Original)  
 12.2% (Increase)

$12.2\% \text{ (Increase)} / 47.7\% \text{ (Original)} = \Delta 25.6\% \text{ (percent of change)}$

From a quantitative standpoint, the statistical materiality of added demand that comes with the ‘Fabliau’ makes the research question of, ‘For whom was the aria written? Was it for Georgette Bréjean-Gravière (Silver) or Sibyl Sanderson?’ all the more important. Regardless of Massenet’s intended recipient for the ‘Fabliau,’ one of the main research questions of this body of research overall is whether the vocal demands of singing the role of Manon increased as a result of Sanderson’s influence. The answer is straightforward: yes, the role became 4.4% more difficult because of the Massenet/Sanderson revisions:

$$\begin{array}{r} 49.8\% \text{ (Gavotte w/ossia)} \\ - \underline{47.7\% \text{ (Original)}} \\ 2.1\% \text{ (Increase)} \end{array}$$

$$2.1\% \text{ (Increase)} / 47.7\% \text{ (Original)} = \Delta 4.4\% \text{ (percent of change)}$$

The percent change associated with performance of the ‘Gavotte’ is less astonishing than that of the ‘Fabliau,’ but the delta is still material at 4.4%. Continuing in this line of analysis, Manon’s Act I aria, ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie,’ and her Act IV duet, ‘A nous les amours et les roses!’ both became about 11% more extreme as a result of the score changes:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{‘Je suis encore tout étourdie’} \\ 71.4\% \text{ (Revised)} \\ - \underline{64.3\% \text{ (Original)}} \\ 7.1\% \text{ (Increase)} \end{array}$$

$$7.1\% \text{ (Increase)} / 64.3\% \text{ (Original)} = \Delta 11.1\% \text{ (percent of change)}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{‘A nous les amours et les roses!’} \\ 50.4\% \text{ (Revised)} \\ - \underline{45.6\% \text{ (Original)}} \\ 4.8\% \text{ (Increase)} \end{array}$$

$$4.8\% \text{ (Increase)} / 45.6\% \text{ (Original)} = \Delta 10.5\% \text{ (percent of change)}$$

What does this tell us about Sanderson's vocality and her influence on the role of Manon?

It suggests that the role became more extreme (difficult) as a result of the 1887

Massenet/Sanderson revisions, and that the role reached a zenith in terms of vocal

demand with the 1898 'Fabliau.' This conclusion comes solely from objective,

measurable elements within the musical score. Other aspects of interpretation were

changed to fit Sanderson's proclivities, which may have served to add further challenge to

the role.

Returning to the notion of Sanderson's charm, for example, the *Manon* libretti generally contain greater than thirty occurrences or derivations of the word 'charm' and approximately ten appearances of 'grace.' The first instruction in Manon's famous aria, 'Je suis encore tout étourdie' [I am still completely dizzy], provides an example of Massenet's request that the role be imbued with charm. In this case, Massenet asked for charm and emotion in the original manuscript, which was destined for the first woman to play Manon, Marie Heilbron (1851–1886). The same instruction appears without alteration in the 1895 *Nouvelle Édition*. This is an example of Sanderson following established directions rather than initiating change.

**Example 8:** 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' mm. 1–2<sup>255</sup>

<sup>255</sup> Massenet, *Manon* (F-Pn: Rés 541 (1–5)), 343.

The annotated *Manon* vocal score provides clues, however, that Sanderson added to the composer's requests by choosing not to change position at this moment. She combined Massenet's original request, that Manon sing with charm and emotion, with her own creative impulse to remain stationary.

**Example 9:** 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' mm. 1–3<sup>256</sup>

The intelligence behind her margin note is elegant in its simplicity.<sup>257</sup> Sanderson may have chosen to stand still in order to align her physical actions with the text. Manon sings that she is 'still completely dizzy,' and a person who is unsteady would likely stand still until the vertigo passed. Were there to be deeper reasons behind her decision, considering the importance of physiognomy in that period, Sanderson may have chosen to eliminate extraneous movements in order to convey charm and emotion mainly via facial expression. The results of her choice to remain in one place while singing this section of the aria elicited numerous reviews that described her performance as charming, emotional, and naïve, such as this review by Jules Prével:

<sup>256</sup> Massenet, *Manon* (US-NYp: JOF 76-6), 50. 'Sans changement au position.'

<sup>257</sup> Sanderson wrote often in French once the family emigrated, so the fact that the note is not in English does not raise concern.

[Sanderson] exuded considerable charm, tenderness, strength, and youth in this superb role. [...] The charming performer was given prodigious ovations and flowers.<sup>258</sup>

Sanderson seemed to enjoy critical praise for her physical attributes throughout her career. In addition, it seems fair to say that even when she struggled vocally, the ‘charming interpreter’ exhibited poise and professionalism by staying in character and preserving a *plastique* of elegance. This is evidenced by reviewers’ comments extolling her physical and acting virtues while criticising her vocal prowess. A sign of her work ethic is that, regardless of the personal or vocal troubles she faced, she continued to attend most required rehearsals and performances. Perhaps it would have been better for her career if she had cancelled more performances or accepted fewer engagements for each season.

Sanderson’s rehearsal and performance schedules for *Esclarmonde* and *Manon* provide evidence that she probably worked too vigorously, too often, and for longer durations than may have been healthy for her voice. In the case of *Esclarmonde*, once the score was provided to the Opéra-comique, there were six months of company rehearsals beginning in late 1888 leading up to the work’s premiere at the Opéra-Comique in May 1889. That workload does not include the numerous private coaching sessions that Sanderson undertook with Massenet, first in Vevey (most evenings) while he composed the opera in 1888 and continuing when Massenet and Sanderson returned to Paris. Massenet faithfully recorded rehearsal dates and locations in the margins of the *Esclarmonde* orchestral manuscript. Other correspondence corroborates the records left by Massenet.<sup>259</sup> Sanderson sang *Esclarmonde* an astonishing one hundred times in just

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<sup>258</sup> Jules Prével, “Télégramme de La Haye,” *Le Figaro* 34 (February 3, 1888): 3.

[Sanderson] qui a déployé beaucoup de charme, de tendresse, de force, de jeunesse dans ce superbe rôle. [...] La charmante interprète à laquelle ont été prodigués les ovations et les fleurs.

<sup>259</sup> Massenet and Massenet, *Massenet En Toutes Lettres*.

under nine months (May 15, 1889–February 6, 1890). That averages one performance every two-and-a-half days, but, more often, she sang several nights in a row.

There are other factors suggesting the strain under which Sanderson operated, especially during these critical early years in her career. Esclarmonde is one of the most vocally demanding roles in the soprano repertoire. Below is a matrix of the vocal demands of the role of Esclarmonde, with specific quantitative analysis of the character's two main arias.

### Vocal Demands in *Esclarmonde*

**Table 3:** Vocal demands in *Esclarmonde*

		Entire score	Role of Esclarmonde							
Act	Page	Total measures	Measures sung	%	Above F4	%	Below G4	%	Coloratura	%
Prologue	1-21	61	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Acte I	22-70	558	282	50.5	61	21.6	34	12.1	16	5.7
Acte II	71-127	916	215	23.5	49	22.8	30	14.0	7	3.3
Acte III	128-225	953	103	10.8	40	38.8	31	30.1	23	22.3
Acte IV	226-289	780	202	25.9	69	34.2	33	16.3	0	0.0
Epilogue	290-306	149	20	13.4	9	45.0	1	5.0	0	0.0
		<b>3417</b>	<b>822</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>15.7</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>5.6</b>
					<b>Extreme</b>	<b>49.0</b>				

Esprits de l'air				
Number of Measures				
Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura
23	21	9	4	2
	91.3%	39.1%	17.4%	8.7%
		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>65.2%</b>	

Ah ! Roland !				
Number of Measures				
Total	Sung	Above F4	Below G4	Coloratura
54	37	20	5	23
	68.5%	37.0%	9.3%	42.6%
		<b>Extreme</b>	<b>88.9%</b>	

The interpreter who accepts the challenge must be able to sing nearly 25% of the opera, which means minimal recuperative time backstage. Of the number of measures in which Esclarmonde sings, nearly 50% could be considered extreme in terms of tessitura, meaning the registration is either in the head voice (above F5) or chest voice (below G4).

The coloratura passages take the soprano into stratospheric territory, including the much-discussed ‘Eiffel Tower note’ or *contre-sol* (G6). Esclarmonde’s arias, ‘Esprits de l’air’ and ‘Ah! Roland!’ illustrate that when Sanderson sang alone in this opera, the level of required virtuosity rose almost exponentially compared to the demands of the ensemble pieces, with the first aria being over 65% extreme, and her third act aria being nearly 90% extreme. In terms of duration, ‘Esprits de l’air’ is about two minutes long, but ‘Ah! Roland!’ lasts approximately five minutes. The aria’s location in the opera (about three-quarters of the way through the acts in which Esclarmonde sings), its length, and the level of difficulty combine to make it one of the most challenging pieces in coloratura operatic repertoire.

Adding to the demands of the role in general, Esclarmonde’s costumes featured large amounts of sound-absorbing fabric, not the least of which was the veil that surrounded her head and the sides of her face. Sanderson would have had to compensate for the decreased projection brought on by her costume and veil by phonating at a louder volume than normal, and oversinging might have resulted in a thin, strident vocal tone. Applying excess tension and pressure, especially for such a young singer, may have led to an exaggerated *tremolo*, hoarseness, and even loss of voice. These were precisely the vocal faults that critics cited after several of Sanderson’s performances.

It is likely that a singer would experience fatigue merely in maintaining a rehearsal and performance schedule like that of *Esclarmonde*, yet Sanderson had additional singing engagements in 1889 and 1890. She also sang *Manon*, Gounod’s *Gallia*, and performed in concerts and private events. Sanderson was still a young singer (under age 25), and had not yet obtained solid technical training. It is a wonder that she managed as well as she did, given the many factors that were not working in her favour. That is not to say she came out of this period unscathed. She battled several bouts of

infirmity in areas of her body related to her voice, such as tonsillitis and hoarseness, but despite setbacks, Sanderson exhibited resiliency and continued to keep a busy performance diary. Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964), an American writer and literary executor for Gertrude Stein, began a biography of Sanderson, but was not able to complete the text prior to his death. His reminiscences of Massenet, published the year of the composer's death in 1912, attested to Sanderson's aggressive schedule:

Of all the women, however, who have sung the Massenet rôles, the one most particularly identified with the composer was Sybil Sanderson. [...] *Thaïs*, the famous opera of the monk and the Alexandrian courtesan, was also written for Miss Sanderson. While Massenet was composing it, the singer was appearing three times a week at the Opéra-Comique in *Manon*.<sup>260</sup>

This description paints Sanderson as a busy artist at the time of the *Thaïs* premiere (1894), but, when viewed in combination with reports from the period of the *Esclarmonde* composition (1888), it seems clear that Sanderson maintained an intense work regimen for nearly six years. This conclusion is supported by the number of rehearsals and performances she completed during that time span. Therefore, it may be surmised that two constants in Sanderson were her ambition and a strong work ethic.

In terms of phonation, in the fifteen years of her professional career Sanderson's voice began weak, gained strength, and then unravelled back into weakness. Theatre critics in the 1880s expressed displeasure with the weakness of Sanderson's middle range, but the majority of opinions changed by the mid-1890s, as evidenced with more favourable reviews. Sanderson's audibility is another example of a technical quality that started and ended poorly but showed improvement during the middle of her career.

Reviews offer evidence that the soprano lacked necessary volume when she began to

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<sup>260</sup> Carl Van Vechten, "Massenet and Women," *The New Music Review and Church Music Review* 12, no. 133 (December 15, 1912): 69–71.

Jack Winsor Hansen alleges that Van Vechten's documentation and personal recollections were used in Hansen's biography of Sanderson.

perform publicly,<sup>261</sup> then became sufficiently loud once she started studying with Marchesi,<sup>262</sup> but her phonatory projection decreased again once she discontinued lessons, which coincided with the gradual deterioration of her physical condition until the end of her singing career (1902).<sup>263</sup>

In conclusion, Sibyl Sanderson possessed a light, lyric, agile, extremely high voice. She moved with grace and beauty and acted in an intelligent and alluring manner. Her beauty was often noted, and she had a seemingly innate ability to charm an audience. In a matter of just a few years, she had mastered the French language and was said to have sung and spoken without a trace of an accent. It seems obvious that Sanderson possessed determination and a nearly unbending will to succeed in French opera.

As evidenced by the matrix of aesthetics below, Sanderson's vocality, as well as her career, could be plotted visually as a bell-curve. Sanderson's performances started off weak and insecure yet full of promise; this period was followed by a rapid ascent to international stardom, which lasted several years. Eventually, however, her career ended in disappointment for singer and audience alike. Despite the once-brilliant prima donna's fade into the annals of operatic history, the impact Sanderson had on several works can still be felt today. The changes that were made by her and for her to Massenet's *Manon* and *Esclarmonde* underscore her influence and, ultimately, her position as co-composer, creator, and re-creator of the roles.

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<sup>261</sup> Gutello, "Musique," *Le Courrier du Soir*, May 16, 1889, deuxième édition, 3.

<sup>262</sup> H. Moreno, "Semaine Théâtrale," *Le Ménestrel*, January 7, 1894, 83.

<sup>263</sup> Fannie Edgar Thomas, "Raconteur," *Musical Courier* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 1902): xxxiv-xxxv.  
'Her singing days are over.'

**Table 4:** Matrix of aesthetic qualities from critical reception, 1888-posthumous

Critique: P = Positive N = Negative O = Observation								
Language: F = French E = English								
Role: M = Manon E = Esclarmonde O = Other G = General								
Category								
Word/Phrase	Critique	Vocalism	Characterisation	Physical Appearance	Personal	Lang.	Role	Year
Remarkable actress	P		Excellent			E	E	1889
Absolument supérieure	P		Excellent			F	E	1889
Grâce elle a dit	P		Graceful			F	E	1889
Ingénuité	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
Intelligence l'actrice	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
L'intelligence scénique	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
L'interprétation est bonne	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
Feelings always just	P		Intelligent			E	E	1889
True to nature	P		Intelligent			E	E	1889
Petits agréments exotiques	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
Correct accent	P		Intelligent			E	E	1889
Une souple et intelligente actrice	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
Une vraie magicienne	P		Intelligent			F	E	1889
La déclamation et le jeu pour être une tragédienne lyrique	P		Secure			F	E	1889
N'est pas embarrassée	P		Secure			F	E	1889
Calm	P		Secure			E	E	1889
Full of dignity	P		Secure			E	E	1889
Self-possession	P		Secure			E	E	1889
Vaillante	P		Secure			F	E	1889
Brilliant air	P		Vibrant			E	E	1889
Admiré ses bras d'un superbe galbe	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolie créature	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Yeux plus beaux	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Extraordinairement jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Rudement jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Fort jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Bras et des épaules superbes	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
L'adorable	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolie bouche	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Volonté	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Un logement épatant sur l'devant	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Très jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Taille souple	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Jolies mains	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Sans conteste, excessivement décorative	P			Attractive		F	E	1889
Fraîche beauté	P			Beauty		F	E	1889
Il n'est pas permis d'être aussi belle que cela	P			Beauty		F	E	1889
Beaux bras	P			Beauty		F	E	1889
Beauté	P			Beauty		F	E	1889
Ses beaux yeux seul suffiraient à faire des prodiges	P			Beauty		F	E	1889
Tête charmante	P			Charm		F	E	1889
Yeux limpides	P			Clear eyes		F	E	1889
Superbe saphyrs [yeux]	P			Excellent		F	E	1889
Grâce naturelle	P			Graceful		F	E	1889
Grâce particulière	P			Graceful		F	E	1889
Gracieuse	P			Graceful		F	E	1889
Apparition produit un effet énorme	P			Vibrant		F	E	1889
Joli nom	P				Attractive	F	E	1889
Remained out far too late	N				Destructive	E	E	1890
Refused to listen	N				Destructive	E	E	1890
Sa voix haut perchée	O	High				F	M	1890
Éclatants	P	Brilliant				F	E	1890
Pur cristal	P	Clear				F	E	1890
Ovation émouvante et acclamations	P	Excellent				F	M	1890
Voix étendue	P	Wide range				F	E	1890
Séduction plus capiteuse	P		Attractive			F	E	1890
Séduisante	P		Attractive			F	E	1890
Charmante artiste	P		Charm			F	G	1890

Critique: P = Positive N = Negative O = Observation								
Language: F = French E = English								
Role: M = Manon E = Esclarmonde O = Other G = General								
Word/Phrase	Critique	Category						
		Vocalism	Characterisation	Physical Appearance	Personal	Lang.	Role	Year
Charmante artiste	P		Charm			F	O	1890
Étourdissante dans le rôle	P		Excellent			F	M	1890
Émouvante au Ve acte!	P		Excellent			F	M	1890
Très vif succès	P		Excellent			F	E	1890
Réussi brillamment	P		Excellent			F	G	1890
Succès	P		Excellent			F	G	1890
Excellents moments	P		Excellent			F	O	1890
Fort bonne interprétation	P		Excellent			F	O	1890
Fort bonne interprétation	P		Excellent			F	O	1890
L'élégante artiste	P		Graceful			F	E	1890
Intentions bien comprises	P		Intelligent			F	M	1890
Nuances d'expression et sentiment	P		Intelligent			F	O	1890
Physionomie plus vivante	P			Attractive		F	E	1890
Beauté	P			Beauty		F	E	1890
Charme plus puissant	P			Charm		F	E	1890
Song went for nothing, or cheap	N	Unremarkable				E	M	1891
Tremolo - consequence defective intonation	N	Off pitch				E	M	1891
Lack of physical power	N	Quiet				E	M	1891
Want of greater volume	N	Quiet				E	M	1891
Physical powers heavily taxed	N	Quiet				E	M	1891
Acting good not great	N		Unremarkable			E	M	1891
Young	O				Young	E	M	1891
Young	O				Young	E	M	1891
Voix si souple	P	Facile				F	M	1891
Si sympathique	P	Facile				F	M	1891
Ample success awaits in smaller houses	P	Potential				E	M	1891
Sûre	P	Secure				F	M	1891
Agreeable acting	P		Excellent			E	M	1891
Graceful	P		Graceful			E	M	1891
Sympathetic	P		Intelligent			E	M	1891
Clever acting	P		Intelligent			E	M	1891
Intelligence	P		Intelligent			F	M	1891
Vivacious acting	P		Vibrant			E	M	1891
L'éblouissante	P		Vibrant			F	E	1891
Passion	P		Vibrant			E	M	1891
Pretty	P			Beauty		E	M	1891
Beautiful	P			Beauty		E	M	1891
Beauté	P			Beauty		F	G	1891
Éclatante	P			Vibrant		F	G	1891
Charming	P				Charm	E	M	1891
Clever	P				Intelligent	E	M	1891
Favour with the audience	P				Liked	E	M	1891
Qu'elle n'a pas produit...attentions	N	Unremarkable				F	O	1892
Malade	N	Weak				F	O	1892
Fatiguée	N	Weak				F	O	1892
étranglée par la peur	N				Stage fright	F	M	1892
Visiblement indisposé	N				Stage fright	F	M	1892
Joli timbre	P	Attractive				F	M	1892
Suffisante étendue	P	Audible				F	M	1892
Habilement dressée	P	Secure				F	E	1892
Jolie	P			Attractive		F	E	1892
Admirablement belle	P			Beauty		F	O	1892
Puissant attrait de sa voix	P	Attractive				F	O	1893
Merveilleusement pure	P	Clear				F	O	1893
Triomphé des difficultés et des excentricités vocales	P	Excellent				F	O	1893
Immense succès	P	Excellent				F	M	1893
Véritable triomphe	P	Excellent				F	O	1893
Facile	P	Facile				F	O	1893
Interpretation est parfait	P		Excellent			F	O	1893
Gracieuse interprète	P		Graceful			F	M	1893
Buste sculptural	P			Attractive		F	O	1893
L'éclatante beauté du personnage	P			Beauty		F	O	1893

Critique: P = Positive N = Negative O = Observation									
Language: F = French E = English									
Role: M = Manon E = Esclarmonde O = Other G = General									
Word/Phrase	Critique	Category						Year	
		Vocalism	Characterisation	Physical Appearance	Personal	Lang.	Role		
Ravissante	P			Beauty			F	O	1893
Far from perfect	N	Unremarkable					E	O	1894
Far from great as a singer	N	Unremarkable					E	O	1894
Mediocre actress	N		Unremarkable				E	O	1894
Organe suraigu...surnaturel	O	High voice					F	G	1894
Très bien entendue	P	Audible					F	O	1894
Voix - doublé	P	Audible					F	O	1894
On ne perd pas une de ses notes	P	Audible					F	O	1894
Pureté	P	Clear					F	O	1894
Art extrême	P	Excellent					F	O	1894
Très sensibles progrès	P	Excellent					F	O	1894
Qu'elle commence a savoir chanter	P	Excellent					F	O	1894
Chanté avec infiniment de talent	P	Excellent					F	O	1894
Toujours merveilleuse	P	Excellent					F	O	1894
Exquise harmonie	P	Intelligent					F	O	1894
Sensibles	P	Intelligent					F	O	1894
Attraction lascive et troublante	P		Attractive				F	O	1894
Charme	P		Charm				F	O	1894
Ensorcelante	P		Charm				F	O	1894
Charmes	P		Charm				F	O	1894
Idéale	P		Excellent				F	O	1894
Interprétation est supérieure	P		Excellent				F	O	1894
Talent - doublé	P		Excellent				F	O	1894
Vif succès	P		Excellent				F	G	1894
Tendresse	P		Graceful				F	O	1894
Gracieuse artiste	P		Graceful				F	G	1894
Exhibition si hardie	P		Secure				F	O	1894
Plus de vigueur	P		Vibrant				F	O	1894
Lovely shape	P			Attractive			E	O	1894
Adorable beauty	P			Attractive			E	O	1894
Combinaison agréable à l'œil	P			Attractive			F	O	1894
Séduction irrésistibles	P			Attractive			F	O	1894
Perfection de forme	P			Beauty			F	O	1894
Bonne part	P			Beauty			F	O	1894
Beauté physique	P			Beauty			F	O	1894
Belle	P			Beauty			F	O	1894
Beauté	P			Beauty			F	O	1894
Beauté sculpturale	P			Beauty			F	G	1894
Élancée	P			Beauty			F	G	1894
Distinguée	P			Beauty			F	G	1894
Irréprochable au point de vue plastique	P			Beauty			F	G	1894
Radieuse beauté	P			Beauty			F	G	1894
Plus de grace	P			Graceful			F	O	1894
Élégance	P			Graceful			F	O	1894
Complete and unqualified failure	N	Unremarkable					E	O	1895
Did not maintain in second act	N	Unremarkable					E	M	1895
Wooden	N	Unremarkable					E	M	1895
Vocal limitations	N	Unremarkable					E	M	1895
Voice not for serious opera	N	Unremarkable					E	M	1895
Forced	N	Unremarkable					E	M	1895
Faulty placing	N	Off pitch					E	M	1895
Sharp	N	Off pitch					E	M	1895
Distressing unsteadiness	N	Off pitch					E	M	1895
Strident	N	Off pitch					E	M	1895
Very light	N	Quiet					E	M	1895
Too small	N	Quiet					E	M	1895
Lacking in voice	N	Quiet					E	M	1895
Lacking in volume	N	Quiet					E	M	1895
High notes were trickles of sound	N	Quiet					E	M	1895
Colorless	N	Thin					E	M	1895
Lacks warmth	N	Thin					E	M	1895
White	N	Thin					E	M	1895

Critique: P = Positive N = Negative O = Observation									
Language: F = French E = English									
Role: M = Manon E = Esclarmonde O = Other G = General									
Word/Phrase	Critique	Vocalism	Category				Lang.	Role	Year
			Characterisation	Physical Appearance	Personal				
Thin	N	Thin					E	M	1895
Attenuated	N	Thin					E	M	1895
Deficient in warmth	N	Thin					E	M	1895
Lacking in penetrative quality	N	Weak					E	M	1895
Lacks emotional character	N		Unremarkable				E	M	1895
Not convincing	N		Unremarkable				E	M	1895
Wanting in passionate expression	N		Unremarkable				E	M	1895
Histrionic limitations	N		Unremarkable				E	M	1895
Speak not with enthusiasm	N		Unremarkable				E	M	1895
High	O	High					E	M	1895
Pretty	P	Attractive					E	M	1895
High note sweet	P	Attractive					E	M	1895
Ample volume	P	Audible					E	M	1895
Pleasant timbre	P	Beauty					E	M	1895
Charming cadences	P	Charm					E	M	1895
Pure	P	Clear					E	M	1895
Pure	P	Clear					E	M	1895
Bell-like	P	Clear					E	M	1895
High notes clear	P	Clear					E	M	1895
Pretty triumph in first act	P	Excellent					E	M	1895
Rarely gifted	P	Excellent					E	M	1895
Perfectly trained	P	Excellent					E	M	1895
Lyric artist	P	Graceful					E	M	1895
True Intonation	P	On pitch					E	M	1895
Effortless	P	Secure					E	M	1895
Upper middle register good	P	Strong middle					E	M	1895
Pleasing in the middle register	P	Strong middle					E	M	1895
Great range	P	Wide range					E	M	1895
Ample compass	P	Wide range					E	M	1895
Charming artist	P		Charm				F	O	1895
French - admirable, distinct	P		Excellent				E	M	1895
Acts naturally well	P		Excellent				E	M	1895
Graceful	P		Graceful				E	M	1895
Acts gracefully	P		Graceful				E	M	1895
Good comprehension of role	P		Intelligent				E	M	1895
Beauty	P			Beauty			E	M	1895
Fair	P			Beauty			E	M	1895
Pleasure to the eye	P			Beauty			E	M	1895
Handsome	P			Beauty			E	M	1895
Fine figure	P			Beauty			E	M	1895
Radiant vision	P			Vibrant			E	M	1895
Not a big voice	N	Quiet					E	O	1896
Flower-like youth	O					Young	E	O	1896
Ravishing	P	Attractive					E	O	1896
True	P	Clear					E	O	1896
No howling or scooping	P	Clear					E	O	1896
S'est vu applaudir	P	Excellent					F	O	1896
Changing hues	P	Intelligent					E	O	1896
Penetrated	P	Penetrating					E	O	1896
Wonderful improvement	P	Potential					E	O	1896
Even	P	Strong					E	O	1896
Brilliant	P	Vibrant					E	O	1896
Electric	P	Vibrant					E	O	1896
Sincere success	P		Excellent				E	O	1896
Carried the illusion of Rigoletto	P		Intelligent				E	O	1896
N'a pas tenu les belles promesses qu'elle avait faites	N	Unremarkable					F	E	1897
Compromit le succès de Thais	N		Failed				F	O	1897
Étrange	N		Unremarkable				F	E	1897
Remarquable plastique	P		Attractive				F	E	1897
Graceful acting	P		Graceful				E	G	1897
Refined acting	P		Secure				E	G	1897
Brilliant	P		Vibrant				E	M	1897
Seulement jolie dans Manon	P			Attractive			F	M	1897
Belle	P			Attractive			F	E	1897
Diligent worker	P				Excellent		E	O	1897
Superbe voix	P	Excellent					F	O	1901
Reçu du public le plus sympathique	P	Excellent					F	O	1901
Singing days are over	N	Unremarkable					E	O	1902
Sang off pitch	N	Off pitch					E	O	1902
Superbe	P		Excellent				F	O	1902
Charming woman	P				Charm		E	O	1902
Beauty was gone	N			Unremarkable			E	G	1903
Remarkable tones	P	Excellent					E	G	1903

Critique: P = Positive N = Negative O = Observation								
Language: F = French E = English								
Role: M = Manon E = Esclarmonde O = Other G = General								
Category								
Word/Phrase	Critique	Vocalism	Characterisation	Physical Appearance	Personal	Lang.	Role	Year
<b>Posthumous</b>								
Prestigieuse	P	Excellent				F	G	1912
En pleine force et dans le pianissimo	P	Excellent				F	G	1912
Trois octaves	P	Wide range				F	G	1912
Lightest	N	Quiet				E	G	1932
Heavy face	N			Unremarkable		E	G	1932
Nose mouth different	N			Unremarkable		E	G	1932
Lyric	P	Secure				E	G	1932
Beauty	P			Beauty		E	G	1932
Figure perfect	P			Beauty		E	G	1932
Graceful	P			Graceful		E	G	1932
Haughty	P			Secure		E	G	1932
Indubious pulchritude	P			Secure		E	G	1932
Smooth, white, brilliant skin	P			Vibrant		E	G	1932
Luminous, expressive eyes	P			Vibrant		E	G	1932
Audience was disappointed	N	Unremarkable				E	M	1947
Volume did not measure up	N	Quiet				E	M	1947
Dainty	N	Quiet				E	G	1947
Tremolo marred the effect	N	Shaky				E	M	1947
Weak	N	Weak				E	M	1947
Nervousness	N				Anxious	E	M	1947
High	O	High				E	G	1947
Ease	P	Facile				E	E	1947
Intelligently	P		Intelligent			E	M	1947
Forcibly	P		Penetrating			E	M	1947
Deep passion	P		Vibrant			E	M	1947
Most beautiful woman in France	P			Beauty		E	G	1947
Determined to be a prima donna	P				Excellent	E	G	1947
Worked hard	P				Excellent	E	G	1947
Loved	P				Excellent	E	M	1947
Courtesy	P				Attractive	E	O	1952
Innate grace	P				Graceful	E	G	1952
Real physical allure	P			Attractive		E	G	1999

## CHAPTER FOUR

*MANON*: SANDERSON'S RE-CREATION OF THE RÔLE*Manon*: History of the Opera

I start from the principle that every French musician has a little bit of Massenet in his heart, as every Italian owns a plot of Verdi or Puccini.<sup>264</sup> [...] The French lyrical repertoire is unimaginable without Massenet. Like the Eiffel Tower, *Manon* is part of the Paris skyline.<sup>265</sup>

**Figure 13:** Sanderson as *Manon*<sup>266</sup>



*Manon* is probably Massenet's best-known opera. The title role has been sung by numerous interpreters since its 1884 premiere, though the score received several rounds

<sup>264</sup> Francis Poulenc, "Interview" by Nicolas Southon, *J'écris ce qui me Chante: Écrits et Entretiens* (Paris: Fayard, 2011), 90.

Je pars de ce principe que tout musicien français a un tout petit peu de Massenet dans son cœur, de même que chaque Italien détient une parcelle de Verdi ou de Puccini.

<sup>265</sup> Francis Poulenc, "Notes sur Massenet," *Enciclopedia della Musica*, vol. 3, edited by G. Ricordi e Co (Milan: G. Ricordi e Co., 1964), 124.

Le répertoire lyrique français est inimaginable sans Massenet. Comme la tour Eiffel, *Manon* fait partie du ciel de Paris.

<sup>266</sup> Dupont, "Sibyl Sanderson as *Manon*," Photograph, May 30, 1891, Royal Opera House Archive: Lady de Grey Photographic Collection: ROH/GRE/1/037, London.

of revisions between 1887 and 1898. Much has been written about this opera, including numerous books, articles, and commentaries. Composer and critic Reynaldo Hahn notes:

It is believed that everything has been said about this masterpiece. That is a mistake. There are in *Manon* infinite details that are not perceived except at very close range, but that contribute obscurely, by their life-like qualities, psychological accuracy, the beauty of the ensemble, and that must be commented on.<sup>267</sup>

With so many ways of interpreting the role, the different voice-types that have sung it, and the wealth of changes made to the scores, there is no shortage of material for further research. In this case the scope is limited to the alterations made to the eponymous role during Sanderson's period of influence (1887–1895). Particular attention is paid to the impact that the changes, whether initiated by her or for her, had on the vocality of the role.

The revival and revision of *Manon* occurred in two phases. The original 1884 production starred Marie Heilbron (1851–1886), a Belgian soprano who had played 'Alice de Kerdrel' in Massenet's first opera *La Grand Tante* (1867). The composer cast Heilbron as Manon after coloratura soprano Caroline Carvalho (1827–1895) declined the role in 1883. Carvalho was 56 years old when Massenet played his new opera at a dinner party. According to François Heugel, Madame Carvalho expressed an enthusiastic desire to sing the part, if only she were 'thirty years old again.'<sup>268</sup> Massenet dedicated *Manon* to Carvalho, and Heilbron helped carry the opera to fame.

When Heilbron died in 1886, the grieving Massenet refused several requests to stage the opera with a different Manon. Until he met Sanderson, Massenet said no one could match Heilbron. He was captivated enough by Sanderson to end his public

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<sup>267</sup> Reynaldo Hahn, "Propos sur Massenet," *Le Figaro* 117, no. 108 (May 5, 1942): 3–4.

On croit que tout a été dit sur ce chef-d'œuvre. On se trompe. Il y a dans *Manon* une infinité de détails qu'on n'aperçoit que de très près mais qui contribuent obscurément, par leur apport d'humanité, de justesse psychologique, à la beauté de l'ensemble et qu'il faudrait pouvoir commenter longuement.

<sup>268</sup> MASSENET, Jules. *Manon: opéra-comique en cinq actes et six tableaux. Édition Originale avec récitatifs chantés*. Paris: Heugel & Cie, 1999. HE7067. Fly leaf 2. Musical Score.

mourning over Heilbron, remove the self-imposed sanctions on *Manon*, and stage a revival in Belgium.<sup>269</sup>

The first Parisian production (1884–1885) succeeded with 33 year-old Heilbron in the title role. Massenet originally composed the role to suit Madame Carvalho's mature voice. It is important to explore how these women might have interpreted the role, as well as how they were received by critics, in order to comment on the numerous revisions Massenet and Sanderson made to the score.

Carvalho sang many coloratura soprano roles during her career, including Marguerite, Mireille, and Juliette, plus a host of Mozart's characters.<sup>270</sup> By the time Massenet approached her about singing *Manon*, Carvalho had already retired from the stage. Critics said her voice lacked volume and richness, but that her taste, refinement, and characterisation were worthy of praise. According to Arthur Pougin:

The voice of Mrs. Carvalho is a *sfogato*<sup>271</sup> soprano, with a range of more than two octaves, marvellous timbre, surprising agility, flexibility and prodigious equality [register blend]. Volume and power are not the distinctive qualities of this magnificent instrument; rather it is because of her art, work, and taste that the singer achieves truly wonderful effects. The placement and delivery of the voice is superb, the style is very pure, the phrasing masterful, and one of the most powerful achievements of the artist for the public is the transitions from *forte* to *piano* and vice versa. [...] The only criticism is a certain hardness in the passage from the chest voice and to the head register. [...] Her voice, however, has never triumphed because of its power and strength; rather it has been quite thin and quite fragile, but she delivered it with a rare taste, and supplemented vigour by an excellent manner of phrasing and articulation.<sup>272</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Massenet, *Mes Souvenirs*, Location 1159; Massenet, *My Recollections*, Location 1278.

<sup>270</sup> Sean Parr, *Melismatic Madness: Coloratura and Female Vocality in Mid Nineteenth-Century French and Italian Opera*, (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2009), 99. See Parr's Table 2.1 for roles performed by Carvalho.

<sup>271</sup> *Sfogato* is an Italian musical term that is generally understood to mean 'light and airy.'

<sup>272</sup> Arthur Pougin, "Mme Carvalho," *Le Ménestrel* 44, no. 1 (December 1, 1878): 2.

La voix de Mme Carvalho est un soprano *sfogato* d'une étendue de plus de deux octaves, d'un timbre merveilleux, d'une étonnante agilité, d'une souplesse et d'une égalité prodigieuses. Le volume et la puissance ne sont pas les qualités distinctives de ce magnifique instrument, mais à force d'art, de travail, de goût, la cantatrice obtient des effets véritablement merveilleux. La pose et l'émission de la voix sont superbes, le style est très-pur, le phrasé magistral, et l'un des plus puissants moyens d'action de l'artiste sur le public est dans les oppositions du forte au piano et vice versa. [...] On peut lui reprocher seulement une certaine dureté dans le passage du registre de poitrine à la voix de tête. [...] Sa voix pourtant, qui n'a jamais brillé par la puissance et la force, était, alors bien mince et bien fragile, mais elle la conduisait déjà avec un goût rare et suppléait à la vigueur par une excellente manière de phraser et d'articuler.

Similar descriptions were applied to Heilbron's voice. Critics said it was delicate and light; several journalists noted that she gave priority to characterisation, not necessarily to precise vocal emission. De Lagenevais wrote a review in 1878 when she was 27 years old:

Miss Marie Heilbron is not content just to have youth; her soprano voice and delicate temperament, face difficult situations and conspire to achieve positive effects. Although very musical and very artistic, Miss Heilbron plays and sings by instinct, and the whole secret is in her soul where a real fire burns.<sup>273</sup>

Critic, composer, and librettist Raoul de Saint-Arroman (1849–1915) had been unimpressed with Heilbron's performance as Manon and following the 1884 premiere, he wrote:

At the Opéra-Comique, Miss Heilbron, adopted with a strange ease the indecisive character of Manon. She sang without brilliance, and without weakness, this indecisive and vital role, and it could be said that her impulsive nature gave certain passages a piquant flavour.<sup>274</sup>

The most provocative phrase in Saint-Arroman's review is '*Elle a chanté, sans éclat et sans faiblesse*' [she sang without brilliance and without weakness]. That could mean that Heilbron used a loud, straight tone that was lacking in vibrato, although it is difficult to confirm if that is exactly what Saint-Arroman meant. It seems as if Heilbron may have employed a strident, heavy sound, instead of a ringing, delicate, and detached tone. If she sang in such a manner, the review offers insight into possible reasons for the melodic choices Massenet made in the original score. Whereas the revised score incorporates florid coloratura passages that typically hover in the upper register, the Heilbron score employs far more middle voice and repeated notes, such as the 'Ah!' passages in

<sup>273</sup> F. De Lagenevais, "Revue musicale," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 3, no. 11 (1878): 214.

Mlle Marie Heilbron ne se contente pas d'avoir la jeunesse; sa voix de soprano, d'un tempérament délicat, affronte les situations fortes et même y trouve ses effets. Quoique très musicienne et très artiste, Mlle Heilbron joue et chante d'instinct, et tout son secret est dans son âme où brûle un real foyer.

<sup>274</sup> Raoul de Saint-Arroman, "Chronique musicale," *La Revue Libérale* 6 (1884): 587.

Donc à l'Opéra-Comique, M<sup>me</sup> Heilbron, s'est assimilée avec une étrange facilité le caractère ondoyant de Manon. Elle a chanté, sans éclat et sans faiblesse, ce rôle indécis et capital, et l'on peut dire que sa nature primesautière lui a donné en certains passages une saveur piquante.

Manon's Act I aria. These differences would likely suit a voice that matches the description of Heilbron's. Consequently, it may determine why many passages were revised to suit Sanderson's voice, which had quite different strengths than Heilbron's voice.

Manon's part in the original score shares several characteristics with the score of *La Grand' Tante*, the Massenet opera for which Heilbron created the role of Alice. Some of the similarities include extensive vocalisation in the middle register, shorter notes, and minimal intervallic challenges. The style is more declamatory, and there are virtually no coloratura passages, nor long, loud, or high notes for Alice's character. The 'Romance' shown below is more like a *mélodie* than Manon's aria, 'Adieu notre petite table' [Farewell our small table]. Similar vocal range, note lengths, dynamics, and moderate intervals are observable in both pieces. The *tempi* are somewhat similar with the 'Romance' at  $\text{♩} = 100$  and 'Adieu' at  $\text{♩} = 120$ .

**Example 10:** 'Romance.' mm. 4–9<sup>275</sup>

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece titled 'Romance' from Jules Massenet's opera *La Grand' Tante*, measures 4 to 9. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo markings are 'poco rit.' and 'a Tempo.'. The lyrics are: 'Je vais bientôt quitter pour me donner a dieu Cette retraite aimée où le calme respire Et je veux la re-'. The piano accompaniment includes markings such as 'Villes Soli.', 'p', 'f', 'Cres.', 'dim.', and 'Villes Soli.'.

<sup>275</sup> Jules Massenet, *La Grand' Tante* (Paris: Hartmann, 1867), 27.

Example 11: ‘Adieu notre petite table.’ mm. 1–6<sup>276</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'Adieu notre petite table.' from Massenet's *Manon*. It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line (soprano) and piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with 'Adieu, no-tre pe-ti-te ta-ble,' and the piano accompaniment has a tempo marking of 'Andte (Sans lenteur)' and a dynamic of 'pp'. The second system continues the vocal line with 'Qui nous ré-u-nit si sou-vent!... A-dieu,... a-dieu, Notre pe-' and the piano accompaniment. The vocal line has dynamic markings of 'mf' and 'pp', and the piano accompaniment has 'mf' and 'pp'. The score includes performance instructions such as 'expressivo' and 'sempre sostenuto'.

Considering Massenet’s melodic choices in the original score, the composer may have been aware of Heilbron’s failing health. Perhaps he tailored the lines to suit her declining physical abilities. Heilbron died in 1886, but she may have exhibited signs of infirmity in 1883 when Massenet finished composing *Manon* (by this point knowing that Heilbron would sing the role instead of Carvalho). According to Heilbron’s obituary, the soprano died after a ‘painful and protracted illness.’<sup>277</sup> If Massenet was aware of her illness, it could be for this reason that the original score contains less demanding vocal work for Manon than when Sanderson’s artistic collaboration was enlisted. In the original score, Manon sings fewer sections at a lower tessitura, and her songs contain fewer and less complex melodic lines.

Another explanation for the vocal writing associated with the original score is that Carvalho and Heilbron had the same voice teacher: Gilbert Duprez (1806–1896). He was a French tenor, who is alleged to be the progenitor of the operatic full-voice High C (*ut de*

<sup>276</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 166.

<sup>277</sup> “Obituary: Marie Heilbron,” *The Musical Times* 27 (May 1, 1886): 287–288.

*poitrine* [C, or solfege ‘do,’ in chest voice]).<sup>278</sup> In 1851, he retired from a successful performing career and began teaching at the Paris Conservatoire, though Duprez also ran a private studio. He was known for teaching students to sing in a sustained and connected style, rather than focusing on Italianate coloratura and melismatic passages.

Besides Heilbron and Carvalho, Duprez taught his daughter Caroline Duprez-Vandenheuval (1832–1874) and Pol Plançon (1851–1914). According to Duprez’s vocal treatise, his work focused primarily on *sostenuto* (sustained) singing rather than coloratura, which is interesting given that Carvalho, Heilbron, and Duprez’s daughter created many of the best-known coloratura soprano roles. Musicologist Sean Parr brought this contradiction to light in his writings about melismatic singing:

Coloratura is secondary in Duprez’s hierarchy of vocal technical skills. No longer is it the first and most important skill, as was in [...] nearly all singing treatises of the previous two centuries. Additionally, Duprez offers several allowances for the singer with a ‘heavy and rebellious voice’ (*‘lourde et rebelle’*), who should attempt some agility exercises to make her voice more flexible, but skip over others that are too difficult. [...] Duprez thus establishes that difficult coloratura passages are simply not the domain of singers with stronger voices. [...] Despite the fact that Duprez paved the way for the singer specializing in declamatory sustained singing, his most well-known and successful students were both singers of coloratura: his daughter Caroline Duprez-Vandenheuval (1832-1875) and Caroline Carvalho.<sup>279</sup>

It seems that a combination of the age of the singers (Carvalho and Heilbron), Duprez’s training, and Heilbron’s illness might have led Massenet to compose the original vocal part of *Manon* the way he did. Carvalho and Heilbron may have lost vocal agility; as a result, melodic lines such as the staccato, repeated notes in the original version of ‘*Je suis encore toute étourdie*’ [I am still completely dizzy] may have been a manageable vocal device for these women, whereas the coloratura passages in the *Nouvelle Édition*, might have been unachievable. When Sanderson revived and revised the role, she moved *Manon*

<sup>278</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 122.

<sup>279</sup> Parr, *Melismatic Madness*, 40–42.

out of the lyric soprano or mezzo-soprano *fachs*, and into a lyric coloratura soprano showpiece.

### **Sibyl Sanderson: The New Manon**

No voice had softer accents, no look more charming or more tender (quote from Act II of *Manon*) - opinion of the Press - and mine too –S [Sanderson] during this premiere was given a series of ovations.  
J. MASSENET<sup>280</sup>

Sanderson debuted as Manon on February 2, 1888 at *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie* in Brussels, Belgium under the stage name Ada Palmer. This was reportedly a tribute to a friend in Paris, American soprano Ada Adini (1855–1924).<sup>281</sup> Massenet insisted that Sanderson appear under an assumed name in case her performance was not successful.<sup>282</sup> However, critics responded positively to Sanderson, and her début at *La Monnaie* marked the beginning of her successful worldwide operatic career, as predicted by *Le Gaulois*: ‘Miss Sibyl Sanderson possesses a superb voice combined with a remarkable talent. She transported her audience. This is obviously the rise of a star that will shine brightly.’<sup>283</sup>

Her professional début in The Hague inspired critics’ comments that focused on her ease on the stage, beauty, quality acting, and high, light vocal tone. Massenet’s correspondence exposes another side of the story. In contrast to what she may have presented onstage, Sanderson suffered from physical illness and fear leading up to, and including, the opening night.<sup>284</sup> In addition to stage fright, which plagued Sanderson throughout her career, other evidence of vocal and emotional instability began to surface

<sup>280</sup> Bessand, *Massenet en toutes lettres*, 104.

Nulle voix n’a de plus doux accents, nul regard plus de charme avec plus de tendresse (citation de l’acte II de *Manon*) — opinion de la presse — et la mienne aussi —« S » pendant cette première soirée qui n’a été qu’une suite d’ovations.

<sup>281</sup> Laura Williams Macy, “Sbriglia, Giovanni,” in *Grove Book of Opera Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 427.

<sup>282</sup> H. Moreno, “Semaine théâtrale,” *Le Ménestrel Musique et Théâtres*, February 19, 1888, 59.

<sup>283</sup> H. De Pène, “Echos de Paris,” *Le Gaulois* 3, no. 1965 (January 15, 1888): 1.

Mlle Sibyl Sanderson possède une voix superbe unie à un talent remarquable. Elle a transporté son auditoire. C’est évidemment le lever d’une étoile qui va briller d’un vif éclat.

<sup>284</sup> Jules Massenet, “Letter signed by Massenet—unidentified recipient,” The Hague, January 28, 1888, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Gallica: IFN- 53054362.

during the show's run in Brussels. Although she had given successful soirées and recitals in Paris in advance of her début as Manon, Sanderson's nerves visibly and audibly affected her performance of the role.

In spite of her fears, the Belgians received 'Ada Palmer' (Sanderson's assumed name) with compassion.<sup>285</sup> It seems that on opening night her anxieties began to subside by Act II, which led to an encore, according to Jules Prével:

Telegram from The Hague: Last night, *Manon* was an immense success. The Opéra-comique by M. Massenet and Philippe Gille was a veritable revelation for Miss Ada Palmer who has a great deal of charm, tenderness, strength, and youth in this superb role. There was an encore in the second act; the Seminary act was recalled three times, and the charming interpreter was given a flurry of ovations and flowers.<sup>286</sup>

After the accolades and encores that night in Brussels, Sanderson continued to perform *Manon* for the rest of her life. She made the role her own, and the ways she did that are explored in the following sections. Probably the most notable performances, after her début at La Monnaie, were Covent Garden (1891), the Opéra-Comique (1891), and the Metropolitan Opera (1895). Revisions were made to the score for each of these productions. Like the changes to the score, it could be said that the roller-coaster life of Sibyl Sanderson mirrored the story and vocal lines of Manon Lescaut.

### Manon: How Story and Staging Inform Vocality

In order to create a foundation for studying Sanderson's impact on the role, it is necessary to explore the story and its interplay with the vocal lines. The following is an English-language synopsis from the 1885 British premiere, which will serve as a baseline from

<sup>285</sup> Dayrolles, "Sibyl Sanderson," 236–241.

<sup>286</sup> Jules Prével, "Télégramme de La Haye," *Le Figaro* 34 (February 3, 1888): 3.

On a joué, hier soir, *Manon*, avec un immense succès. L'opéra-comique de M. Massenet et Philippe Gille a été une véritable révélation pour Mlle Ada Palmer qui a déployé beaucoup de charme, de tendresse, de force, de jeunesse dans ce superbe rôle. On a bissé le deuxième acte; à l'acte du Séminaire on a rappelé par trois fois la charmante interprète à laquelle ont été prodigués les ovations et les fleurs.

which to measure Sanderson's effect on *Manon*.<sup>287</sup> This version is included in an attempt to provide some sense of what an audience may have been exposed to at the opera's English premiere. It must be noted that the style and content of synopses have changed many times since the 1880s for various reasons, including responses to trends and taboos of different periods and locations.

#### ACT ONE

The scene represents the courtyard of an Inn at Amiens. Guillot de Fontaine and Brétigny, together with other hungry guests, are shouting for the landlord to serve them their dinner. The landlord appears and glowingly describes the fine meal he has prepared for them, thereby appeasing his angry guests. It being time for the stage coach, the villagers gather to watch its arrival, amongst them Lescaut who has come to meet his cousin. The coach arrives and its passengers bustle about in search of their baggage. Manon emerges from the crowd and is greeted by Lescaut. The girl is all excitement over her 'first journey,' which she describes for the benefit of her cousin.<sup>288</sup> Lescaut leaves her to go in quest of her baggage and while she is alone Guillot tries to make love to her, arranging to have a carriage come for her later which she must take. Lescaut returns and cautions the girl against promiscuous acquaintances and bids her not to stir from the spot until he comes back from keeping an appointment with two of his friends. Manon, alone, regrets that she is being sent away to a convent and must leave the world and its pleasures behind her.<sup>289</sup> While she is in this mood, Des Grieux, a handsome cavalier, enters and falls in love with her beauty. Manon tells him her story. He will not hear of her burying herself in a convent and persuades her to elope with him. They go off in the carriage that Guillot has sent for Manon. Lescaut, coming back, finds his cousin gone and Guillot is laughed at by the villagers for the trick that has been played on him.

#### ACT TWO

Des Grieux and Manon are in their apartment in Paris. The lover is writing to inform his father that he has met Manon and that they love each other. The two read the letter together. This tender scene is interrupted by the entrance of Lescaut and De Brétigny. The cousin has followed the lovers to Paris and has come to take Manon away. His anger is appeased, however, after reading the letter Des Grieux has written and hearing that the young man intends to marry the girl. While he is reading the letter, De Brétigny tells Manon that, by order of his father, Des Grieux will be taken from her by force that night. He begs her to say nothing to her lover and promises that if she breaks off the attachment she will become the Queen of Beauty. Manon is distressed at the news, while at the same time she feels tempted

<sup>287</sup> Massenet, *Manon: An Opera in Five Acts: Argument and Libretto*, translated by George Bellingham and Joseph Bennett (New York: F. Rullman, 1885).

The first English version of *Manon* was staged in Liverpool by the Carl Rosa Company. Marie Roze sang the role of Manon, for whom Massenet composed the 'Gavotte,' one of Manon's Act III arias.

<sup>288</sup> Manon's aria, 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' Note: *tout* and *toute* have been used interchangeably throughout the aria's history, and does not seem to indicate any difference or significance.

<sup>289</sup> Manon's aria, 'Voyons, Manon, plus de chimères.'

by the picture De Brétigny has painted of her.<sup>290</sup> When the others have gone, Des Grieux tells her of his plans and dreams for their future together, but although she is touched by his tenderness, the girl still thinks of the gay butterfly life that has been promised her.<sup>291</sup> They are interrupted by a knock at the door and Des Grieux, going to answer it, is seized and carried off.

### ACT THREE

The first scene of this act is laid in the promenade of the Cours-la-Reine on a public holiday. Among the throng of merry-makers is Lescaut bent upon spending a gay night. Hearing from De Brétigny that he had refused to take Manon to the Opera, he conceives the idea of bringing the Ballet to the Cours-la-Reine and goes away on that errand. Manon, attended by her many admirers, enters in state and receives the homage of the crowd.<sup>292</sup>

While she is enjoying herself, she overhears a conversation between Count Des Grieux and De Brétigny and learns that her former lover, whom she has deserted, is about to renounce the world and retire into a monastery. Her gaiety vanishes and even the coming of the opera ballet does not interest her. She decides to go at once to the Seminary of St. Sulpice and there seek reconciliation with Des Grieux.

The scene changes to the Seminary of St. Sulpice. Des Grieux has just delivered an address that has aroused the admiration of his audience and all are praising his eloquence and saintly manner. The Count visits his son and tries to dissuade him from entering the church, but Des Grieux, broken-hearted at Manon's desertion, is firm in his resolve. Manon comes deeply penitent for her conduct and pleads with her lover for forgiveness. Des Grieux reproaches her for her conduct and tries to remain true to his determination, but he is overcome by his love for the girl and finally yields to her persuasion. The two leave the Seminary to resume their life together.<sup>293</sup>

### ACT FOUR

The card rooms of the Transylvania hotel crowded with people attracted thither by the fever of gambling. Lescaut and Guillot de Fontaine are there with their friends. Des Grieux and Manon also appear. They have lost their fortune and the young noble has been induced by the girl to try to redeem it at the gambling table. He is reluctant to play, but yielding to Manon's insistence he sits down to a game with Guillot, while Manon abandons herself to the gaiety of the place. Des Grieux's repeated success arouses the anger of his opponent, already jealous of him on Manon's account, and he accuses the young man of cheating. With a threat to be revenged on the lovers, he rushes out and before Manon can induce Des Grieux to leave the place, he returns with Count Des Grieux and the police. The father of the young man is shocked at finding his son in such a resort and reproaches him for the life he is leading with Manon. He will not listen to the pleading of the lovers and Des Grieux is arrested.

<sup>290</sup> Manon's aria, 'Adieu, notre petite table.'

<sup>291</sup> Des Grieux's aria, 'En fermant les yeux.'

<sup>292</sup> Manon's aria, 'Je marche sur tous les chemins!' Followed by the 'Gavotte' or the 'Fabliau.'

<sup>293</sup> Also known as the 'Saint-Sulpice Scene.'

## ACT FIVE

Time has passed and Manon has sunk lower in the social scale; she is about to be transported abroad to a penal colony. Des Grieux and Lescaut have arranged to rescue her and are awaiting the approach of the prison van on its way to the coast. Lescaut informs the young man that those they had hired to assist them have fled and that the task will be impossible. Des Grieux, in desperation, would attack the guards alone, but is restrained by the more prudent Lescaut, who proceeds to bribe the sergeant and thereby obtains an interview for the lovers.

It is a changed Manon who comes to meet the man whose life she has ruined through her fickleness and love of the world. Worn with sickness, she can hardly drag herself along. Des Grieux seeks to comfort her and pictures for them both a happy life in some distant country to which he will take her.<sup>294</sup> But Manon knows that her repentance has come too late; she reproaches herself for not having appreciated the loyal affection of her lover and tenderly recalls the days they had spent together. Her mind wandering amidst these dreams, she dies in the arms of the faithful Des Grieux.

There are noticeable attributes in the British synopsis, such as the preponderance of moral judgements. The writer points out the sexual nature of the story several times and in multiple ways. For example, he notes that Des Grieux tried to ‘make love’ to Manon and that Lescaut ‘cautions against promiscuous acquaintances,’ and he refers to Manon and Des Grieux as ‘the lovers’ in the paragraph about Act Two. Further, he says, Manon chooses a ‘gay, butterfly life,’ and that Des Grieux ‘yields to her persuasion’ (persuasion being synonymous with seduction). Finally, the writer places the blame of sin solely on Manon, the woman, and says her ‘repentance has come too late,’ which by default paints Des Grieux as the innocent victim of the wiles and charms of wanton Manon.

Act I introduces sixteen-year-old Manon as a chattering, naïve girl who will soon enter a convent against her wishes. Whatever happened in Manon’s past that led to this moment evolves into a curious series of events. The reasons behind the Lescaut family’s choice to send their daughter to a remote nunnery in Amiens, under the watch of an unknown cousin, raise questions. Was Manon in some sort of trouble at home? Perhaps she was rebellious and wild? Did she get pregnant? Maybe Manon had a difficult home

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<sup>294</sup> This is one example of the exotic themes that are present throughout the opera’s libretto.

life and managed to escape via the only route she believed to be available. The original novel by Abbé Prévost provides some clues:

She ingenuously told me that she had been sent there by her parents, to commence her novitiate for taking the veil. [...] I spoke to her in a way that made her at once understand what was on my mind; for she had more experience than me. It was against her will that she was consigned to a convent, doubtless to repress that inclination for pleasure which had already become too manifest, and which caused, in the sequel, all her misfortunes and mine. I combated the cruel intention of her parents with all the arguments that my new-born passion and schoolboy eloquence could suggest. She affected neither austerity nor reserve.<sup>295</sup>

The basis for the possible conclusions that Manon may have been in trouble, pregnant, or acting out in rebellion beyond what her parents were willing or capable of handling comes from the Prévost novel. The phrases ‘she had more experience than me. It was against her will that she was consigned to a convent, doubtless to repress that inclination for pleasure which had already become too manifest [...]’ tell readers that in Des Grieux’s opinion, Manon had previous sexual knowledge. It is possible that Des Grieux based his beliefs of her prior ‘experience’ on evidence that Manon had been sexually active prior to meeting him. There are at least three ways that Des Grieux could ascertain this knowledge. The first would be a visible pregnancy. Perhaps that is what he meant by ‘had already become too manifest,’ meaning that signs of the pregnancy were visible. The second way to read Des Grieux’s comments is to assume he realized she was not a virgin after their initial romantic encounter based on her physical actions, demeanour, and attitude. Finally, it is possible Manon simply told him about her previous sexual occurrences.

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<sup>295</sup> Abbé Prévost, *Manon Lescaut*, trans. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2004 (orig. 1731)), 15–16; Prévost, Abbé. *Manon Lescaut* (Paris: Chez les frères Constant, 1731), 13. Kindle File.

Elle me répondit ingénument qu’elle y était envoyée par ses parents pour être religieuse. [...] Je lui parlai d’une manière qui lui fit comprendre mes sentiments, car elle était bien plus expérimentée que moi. C’était malgré elle qu’on l’envoyait au couvent, pour arrêter sans doute son penchant au plaisir qui s’était déjà déclaré et qui a causé, dans la suite, tous ses malheurs et les miens. Je combattis la cruelle intention de ses parents par toutes les raisons que mon amour naissant et mon éloquence scolastique purent me suggérer Elle n’affecta ni rigueur ni dédain.

The link with Sanderson is also an important factor to explore. In the process of attempting to unpack how Sanderson could have dramatized the role, considerations such as these are valuable to investigate whether they can be proven or not. Because the novel offers more information about the events leading up to Manon's arrival, Sanderson may well have looked there for inspiration for her portrayal of the character. The specific passage cited above may have caught Sanderson's attention and elicited a sense of empathy with Manon's personality, especially because her behaviours point to similar traits for which Sanderson became known. These include a propensity for pleasure-seeking and a zeal for experiencing life starting from adolescence. The possibility for Sanderson finding commonalities between herself and Manon in terms of predilections and current predicament form the basis for the following interpretation.

Perhaps in reaction to the forced departure from her home, Manon seemed to develop a reliance on earthly treasures and monetary resources, rather than acting on faith. The most obvious evidence of Manon's lack of trust was her choice to follow De Brétigny, an older man with money, rather than remaining true to Des Grieux, the man she claimed to love. Tying this back to Sanderson's life story is simple. Her childhood was replete with wealth, privilege, and a reputation for rebellious and attention-seeking behaviours despite a very strong paternal presence. When Judge Sanderson died it was a crucial time in Sibyl's young life. She lost her father, she left her home, and was almost forced to perform in order to support her lust for luxury. Like Manon, Sanderson looked to men and money, but seemed to be insatiable.

Manon's desperation and manipulative tendencies colour Des Grieux's statements. Rather than avoiding her, he advanced the relationship. The Chevalier may have been blinded by lust or love for the young Manon. It was not until he reflected upon their affair that he could see her agenda:

Passionately in love as I felt with Manon, she knew how to convince me that she was equally so with me. [...] It is certain that with my easy and constant disposition, I should have been happy for my whole life, if Manon had remained faithful to me.<sup>296</sup>

It is fair to say that from the moment of their introduction, Manon was spinning a web of deception. Her beauty and intrigue veiled ulterior motives (even if the sole motivation was to survive); somewhat like her sacred vows may have been meant to veil more secular interests. The figurative cloak of charm and grace that Manon donned was very likely presented in physical manifestation in Sanderson's portrayal of the character. Accounts offered by those close to Sanderson, such as Gertrude Atherton and Massenet (his comments in the score margins), it seems her private persona was far-removed from the charismatic and unburdened version she often presented to the public, as in her interview with Puech.

The back-story of *Manon* likely informed Sanderson's vocality, including which singing techniques she applied and the dramatic tools she used, as well as deportment/staging and physical appearance (i.e. hairstyle, makeup, and costumes).<sup>297</sup> For example, when she disembarks at journey's end, her conservative dress is clean and provides more than enough cover for a soon-to-be nun, but she appears a bit dishevelled following the trip. Her shoes are appropriate: sensible, with a small heel. Sanderson's costumes, as created by couturier Jacques Doucet were more luxurious and expensive than what was considered typical for the time.<sup>298</sup> To that point, her Act I costume was fancier than what is commonly seen these days. More recently, Manon may be clothed in an understated dark suit constructed of heavy fabric, such as wool, worn over a simple,

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<sup>296</sup> Prévost, trans. by Tancock, *Manon*, 19; Prévost, *Manon*, 16.

Quelque passionné que je fusse pour Manon, elle sut me persuader qu'elle ne l'était pas moins pour moi. [...] Il est sûr que, du naturel tendre et constant dont je suis, j'étais heureux pour toute ma vie, si Manon m'eût été fidèle.

<sup>297</sup> See Nicole Wild, *Décors et costumes du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1987) for more information about typical costuming practices at the Opéra during Sanderson's career.

<sup>298</sup> Sidney Jackson Jowers and John Cavanagh, *Theatrical Costume, Masks, Make-Up and Wigs: A Bibliography and Iconography* (London: Routledge, 2000), 345; "The American Singers in French and Italian Opera," *Harper's Weekly* 39, no. 1922 (February 23, 1895): 176.

light, collared shirt when she arrives to meet Lescaut and Des Grieux, as was the case with the Laurent Pelly production starring Anna Netrebko (2010–2012).

**Figure 14:** Sanderson as Manon, Act I costume (1888) and Act III costume (1891)<sup>299</sup>



**Figure 15:** Netrebko as Manon, Act I costume (2012) and Act III costume<sup>300</sup>



<sup>299</sup> Reutlinger. “Sybil SANDERSON- Costume de Manon (Massenet),” Photograph, 1890. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Photograph with pastel ; NAVELLIER, Narcisse and Henri MEYER. *Mademoiselle Sanderson, dans le rôle de Manon (Opéra-Comique)*. Paris : Benque, 1888.

<sup>300</sup> Ken Howard, “Anna Netrebko in the role of Manon,” photograph (New York: Metropolitan Opera Company, 2012); Bill Cooper, “Anna Netrebko in the role of Manon,” photograph (London: Royal Opera House, 2010).

Sanderson wore the *Caraco à la française* pictured above left in a promotional photograph for *Manon*. This is probably her Act I costume from the 1888 performance at La Monnaie. She is wearing a light-coloured jacket with hood, adorned with a floral pattern. The colour in this photograph has been imposed using pastels, so it is unclear if the fabric was actually pink. There is youthful embroidery covering the garment, and the cowl on her head evokes a sense of naïveté and innocence. Fashion historians Cummings and Cunnington describe the piece:

Caraco – period ca. 1750 to early 19th century: A thigh-length, waisted jacket, either fitting at the waist or with a sack-back. A variant of this, called a short-gown, had a cross-over front and was the usual jacket for working women. It emerged as an informal style for fashionable French women in the late 1760s. [...] [It was] made of printed cotton or linen. In the 1840s a style of jacket bodice, sometimes called a caraco corsage, appeared, usually worn with a matching skirt.<sup>301</sup>

Sanderson's outer attire appears to be a short-gown with a *caraco corsage*. Similar to the ways in which music and text convey elements of the past, present, and future, Sanderson's Act I costume is a representation of her enigmatic persona. While a cloak of this sort was commonly worn by working women, it is exquisitely adorned and delicate, which goes against the notion of Manon being a member of the common working class. It illustrates a juxtaposition between the finery brought by wealth, and the practicality needed for survival. That encapsulates the story of Manon; a girl captivated by wealth, willing to use any means necessary to not only survive, but to thrive. There may be another layer to consider. Katia Johansen offers this description of the *Caraco à la française*:

It has the hood, sacque back, and short length of the Brunswick, but seems to lack the lower sleeves and is definitely worn over paniers. The extremely late date is also unusual; Brunswicks, or German habits, were most popular in the middle part of the century.<sup>302</sup>

<sup>301</sup> Cummings, Valerie, C. Willett Cunnington, and Phillis Emily Cunnington. 2010. *The dictionary of fashion history*. Oxford: Berg. 40.

<sup>302</sup> Katia Johansen, "Caraco à la française," *International Committee for Museums and Collections of Costumes*, Kent, OH, 2015. [www.clothestellstories.com](http://www.clothestellstories.com)

**Figure 16:** *Caraco à la française*<sup>303</sup>



Johansen’s comments are important because it appears that Sanderson’s costume was also very similar to a Brunswick (German habit). This adds another layer to the way her fashion represented the identity crisis Manon (and Sanderson, for that matter) battled until the end of her life. The conservative habit signals Manon’s lack of freedom due to bondage to the convent; the Brunswick is a travelling dress, which is straightforward; and the short-gown caraco corsage telegraphs that the girl is working class. However, the beauty and delicacy of the light, patterned fabric telegraph high socio-economic standing, as well as femininity and youthful naïveté. These opposing elements of piety, poverty, and prosperity added to the level of sophistication required of Sanderson in terms of her dramatic portrayal.

Beyond characterisation, there are technical aspects of the costume to consider. For example, wearing a hood onstage could have affected what Sanderson heard (or did not hear) from the orchestra and fellow singers, and it may have impacted what others heard from her. The billowy cowl may have muffled or deflected the tones that reached her. Thus, the music around her may have been quieter, and the pitches distorted by

<sup>303</sup> “Caraco à la Française, Silk Taffeta, Embroidery, c. 1790.” Photograph. Borås, Sweden: Textil Museet BM 27.738.

physical interference to the sound waves by the obstructive cloth. If the sound was impeded in this manner, the implications for the performer could include a tendency to over-sing in compensation for receiving fewer decibels of tonal input. In addition, she may have developed problems with intonation due the interference altering the pitch that reached her ears. This possibility is supported by reports of Sanderson singing off pitch at times.<sup>304</sup> This facetious suggestion by Bendt Nagel offers an illustration of the concept:

The frequency [*sent out or absorbed*] changes because of the Doppler Effect, with which we are familiar from acoustics. We can make an analogy with an absurd opera performance [...] where the opera star sings her aria while moving at great velocity around the stage, colliding with, and rebounding from her fellow actors. Visually this might be a spectacular performance, but acoustically it could be a disaster: the audience would think that the star didn't sing in tune. (If somebody would like to try this out, I can mention that if the singer moves with the speed of a good sprinter, the maximum variation in pitch would be half a tone interval.)<sup>305</sup>

As noted by Nagel, both the input and output of sound could have been altered by movement as well as by tangible interference from the cloak. It is likely that Sanderson was stationary though, based on her annotations '*Sans changement au position.*'<sup>306</sup> Because it was constructed of what looks like a porous fabric, it is possible that some of Sanderson's vocal volume would have been absorbed by the covering. This is in contrast to reflecting off a shinier, tightly-woven fabric, such as Manon's costume for the Act III '*Cours-la-Reine*' scene. One possible advantage of the costume shown above is that the cowl might have helped Sanderson to hear her own voice better than she could without it, because of the deflection of sonic waves in a more direct route for aural reception, analogous to cupped ears.

Beyond aural aspects, wearing the hood on her head may have obstructed visual cues from and to the conductor as well as her colleagues. This is an important

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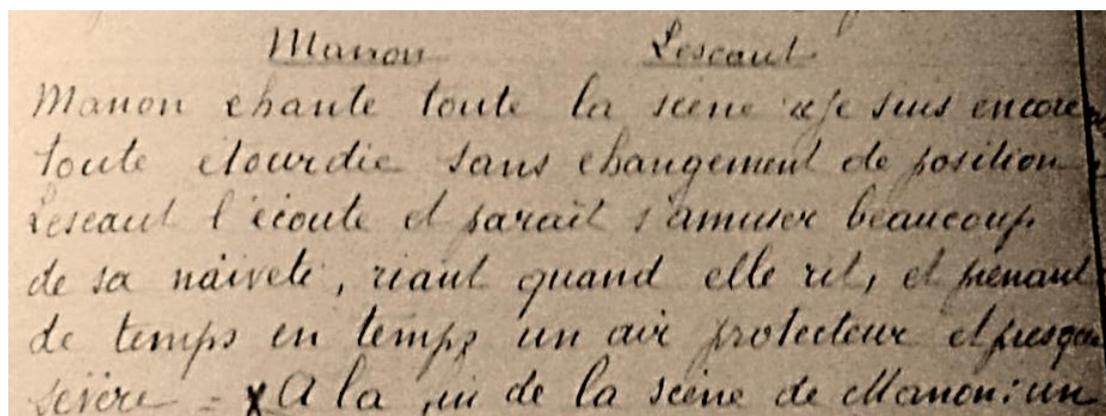
<sup>304</sup> Monthly Musical Record Staff, "Operas & Concerts," *The Monthly Musical Record* 21, no. 241 (January 1, 1891): 139.

<sup>305</sup> Bendt Nagel, "The Nobel Prize in Physics 1997: Speech by Professor Bengt Nagel of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences," in *Nobel Lectures—Physics: 1996-2000* (River Edge, NJ: World Scientific, 2002), 111.

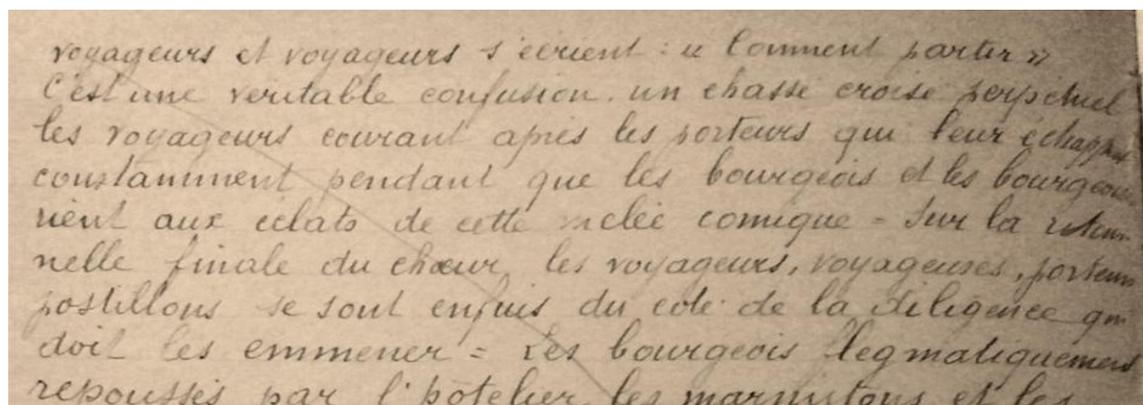
<sup>306</sup> Massenet, *Manon: US-Nyp*, 50.

consideration in light of the staging instructions contained in the *mise-en-scène*. The stage manual does not indicate how, or if, Manon wore the cloak for her Act I entrance. What it does specify is that she remains relatively stationary in the midst of a harried and confused crowd who were disoriented from the ride, trying to locate their luggage, and find family members.

**Figure 17:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ *Mise-en-scène*.



Manon sings the entire scene ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie’ without changing position. Lescaut listens to her and is very amused at her naïveté; he laughs when she laughs, and sometimes assumes an air that is protective and almost severe.<sup>307</sup>



[The] travellers exclaim ‘How can we leave?’ There is real confusion. A veritable chase ensues, the voyagers running after the porters who repeatedly avoid them while the middle-class emerges unscathed by this comic *mêlée*.<sup>308</sup>

<sup>307</sup> Callais, *Manon par Massenet*, 12.

Manon chante toute la scène « Je suis encore toute étourdie » sans changement de position.

Lescaut l'écoute et paraît s'amuser beaucoup de sa naïveté, riant quand elle rit, et prenant de temps en temps, un air protecteur et presque sévère.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Having Manon sing ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie’ without changing position was probably a beneficial staging choice for several reasons. As noted, the physical limitations of her costume would have made it necessary to minimize movement. From a dramatic standpoint, the lack of choreography may have conveyed what Massenet seemed to desire from the heroine based on the instructions he left in the score: an awestruck, wide-eyed young woman, full of wonder and a bit of anxiety. Upon arrival, Manon was overwhelmed and understandably brought to a standstill by all the sights, sounds, and commotion that developed as the crowds disembarked. Showing Manon surrounded by chaos could be viewed as foreshadowing the bedlam that eventually encompasses and overtakes her, as her life spirals into disgrace and, ultimately, death.

Another consideration is that, according to the original novel, Des Grieux’s retelling of his first encounter with Manon informs the reader that he considered her to be quite the opposite of naïve. If she was sent away from her parents because of pregnancy, the character may have chosen to remain still and let the other voyageurs attract attention, thereby downplaying her arrival and appearance. Perhaps she was ill with morning-sickness and needed to be motionless to fight nausea. This notion could correlate with the lyrics stating she is still ‘dizzy’ and ‘numb.’ If she was adversely affected by hormone imbalances, this might offer some reasons why later in the aria, she tells Lescaut that in one moment she was ‘sad,’ and in the next was ‘laughing.’ The bulky, loose cloak certainly would serve the purpose of disguising physical signs of pregnancy.

It seems likely that Sanderson read Abbé Prévost’s novel and would have been aware that her character became infatuated with Des Grieux before her cousin arrived. When Lescaut and Manon meet, she tells him she cannot enter the convent until the

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[Les] voyageurs s’écrient « Comment partir ». C’est une véritable confusion. Un chasse croise perpétuel, les voyageurs courant après les porteurs qui leur échappent constamment pendant que les bourgeois vient aux éclats de cette mêlée comique.

following morning, because she must have dinner with Des Grieux. The couple arrive within an hour at an inn owned by a friend of the De Grieux family, and the couple immediately make love. This may have been the moment De Grieux lost his virginity:

I soon learned that I was less a child than I had before imagined. My heart expanded to a thousand sentiments of pleasure, of which I had not before the remotest idea. A delicious consciousness of enjoyment diffused itself through my whole mind and soul. I sank into a kind of ecstasy, which deprived me for a time of the power of utterance, and which found vent only in a flood of tears. [...] Manon Lescaut (this she told me was her name) seemed gratified by the visible effect of her own charms. She appeared to me not less excited than myself. She acknowledged that she was greatly pleased with me, and that she should be enchanted to owe to me her freedom and future happiness. She would insist on hearing that I was, and the knowledge only augmented her affection; for, being herself of humble birth, she was flattered by securing for her lover a man of family.<sup>309</sup>

With this strategic mind-set, it seems unlikely that Manon would scurry around the stage like a ‘commoner.’ From the standpoint of aiding or hampering vocal technique, Manon’s Act I aria contains numerous difficult passages, including *fioriture* and a broad tessitura. Therefore, allowing the interpreter to minimize non-essential physical movement could facilitate the focus of energy on singing the piece, rather than having to consider vocal technique, acting, and complex blocking. By the *Cours-la-Reine* scene in Act III, Manon must deliver virtuosic vocal passages, act, and navigate the crowd onstage at the same time. It seems that Massenet and Sanderson’s score changes increased the difficulty of the aria in Act I, which made simplified blocking that much more necessary.

Another hypothesis to support the need for more static staging in Act I is that Sanderson suffered from stage fright at her début and for most performances thereafter.

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<sup>309</sup> Prévost and Tancock, *Manon Lescaut*, 16; PRÉVOST, Abbé. *Manon Lescaut*, 13.

Je reconnus bientôt que j’étais moins enfant que je ne le croyais. Mon cœur s’ouvrit à mille sentiments de plaisir dont je n’avais jamais eu l’idée. Une douce chaleur se répandit dans toutes mes veines. J’étais dans une espèce de transport, qui m’ôta pour quelque temps, la liberté de la voix et qui ne s’exprimait que par mes yeux. Mademoiselle Manon Lescaut, c’est ainsi qu’elle me dit qu’on la nommait, parut fort satisfaite de cet effet de ses charmes. Je crus apercevoir qu’elle n’était pas moins émue que moi. Elle me confessa qu’elle me trouvait aimable et qu’elle serait ravie de m’avoir obligation de sa liberté. Elle voulut savoir qui j’étais, et cette connaissance augmenta son affection, parce qu’étant d’une naissance commune, elle se trouva flattée d’avoir fait la conquête d’un amant tel que moi.

To help limit the effects of fear, Massenet and the stage director might have worked to mitigate as many variables as possible for Sanderson. Stage fright activates the fight-flight response in performers. Some of the physiological and behavioural symptoms of fear and stage fright include: shallow breathing, increased heart rate, dry mouth, raised body temperature, trembling, and loss of voice. Cognitive symptoms can include anxiety and memory loss.<sup>310</sup>

The effects brought on by fear may have been compounded by Manon's constricting costumes, which would exacerbate shallow breathing and increased body temperature.<sup>311</sup> A possible benefit of her decreased physicality is that it may have made her appear more charming and graceful, owing to the slow, deliberate movements that resulted from her confining costume and corset.

Act II offers another metaphor for Manon evidenced in the music, costume(s), and staging.<sup>312</sup> She is exposed, vulnerable, sincere, and transparent; the audience sees the *real* Manon in the second act. Regardless of her love for Des Grieux, it seems the troubles that resulted in her forced exile from home were not permanently subverted. She reaches a crossroads in this act and sets the path of destruction that ultimately brings her life to an end. Manon chooses De Brétigny and his money over Des Grieux and his genuine affection. The true nature of her character is exposed, and the associated music, characterisation, clothing, and choreography reflect this.

The artistic tools Sanderson employed in Act II probably differed from those used in the more grandiose scenes in Acts I and III. Sanderson likely allowed the music to inform her performances; with the vocal line she may have considered include tessitura,

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<sup>310</sup> Aaron Williamson, *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10–11.

<sup>311</sup> Martine Kahane, *The Magic of the Paris Opera: 300 Years of French Style* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1991), 13.

<sup>312</sup> Manon's Act II costume is often a light nightgown. Examples of various costumes styles over the years can be found in L'Avant-Scène's publication on the opera.

melismatic display, and text setting. While it is unnecessary to complete an in-depth analysis of Manon's aria at this point, some musical foundation may offer a primer for unlocking dramatic and vocal possibilities.

'Adieu notre petite table' contrasts with Manon's Act I aria 'Je suis encore tout étourdie' in tessitura, tempi, and overall mood. The registration of 'Adieu notre petite table' resides inside the confines of the staff for all but a few notes. The vocal range is just over one octave: D4 to F5. An interpreter would use her middle voice for most of the piece, since it only requires chest register a few times and head voice is not necessary. One effect that could be created by the moderate registration of the aria is a feeling of intimacy and sincerity, since Manon is not required to soar above the orchestra with high, ornamented passages that could seem to be more about vocal display than conveyance of character. Sanderson's middle register was quieter than her head voice, which may have drawn audience attention to the story as they focused on trying to hear her voice. The orchestral accompaniment is sparse compared to the music in Acts I and III, and Manon is alone on stage. The tempi are considerably slower, which provides an opportunity for listeners to fully comprehend the lyrics. These details add up to an unveiled Manon who no longer hides behind her naïveté; in this moment of truth, Manon opts for money over love.

The text is nostalgic and regretful. Manon remains rooted in the middle voice, with only a few descents below the staff to D4. These low notes generally occur on de-emphasised syllables such as *-ble* from *table*. The times she sings D4, the notes seem to suggest a feeling of despair. Manon is resigned to making the wrong choice, as if it were inevitable.

**Example 12:** ‘Adieu notre petite table.’ mm. 1–3<sup>313</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in soprano clef with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are 'Adieu, no-tre pe-ti-te ta-ble,'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The score is marked 'Andte (Sans lenteur)' and 'pp'. The final note of the vocal line is circled in red.

Sanderson may have used her chest voice for the lowest notes, though that probably would not have been necessary. Because the D4 usually coincides with de-emphasised syllables, and because she was young and inexperienced when she started performing the role, these notes were probably inaudible when Sanderson delivered them.

Act III is quite different from the previous acts. First, Manon is a few years older. Her clothing once again acts as an illustration of her status. Similar to Act I, Manon is covered, but this time she is draped in fancy and fantasy. Act I is about absorption, with Manon taking it all in. Act II is genuine, unaffected or vulnerable, and the audience meets the ‘real’ Manon. The beginning of the third act symbolises reflection and deflection. When Manon glitters and shines, she has become unreachable and untouchable. She is only transmitting and is no longer receiving.

The third act opens with the grandeur of the *Cours-la-Reine* scene, in which Manon sings, ‘Je marche sur tous les Chemins’ [I walk on all paths]. Following this piece, an interpreter may choose to sing either the ‘Gavotte’ or the ‘Fabliau.’ Manon has become De Brétigny’s woman of gold by Act III. Her finery is found in the social surroundings in which she now exists. She enters as queen of the elite social scene, but she has become untouchable. Manon’s luxuriant gown and accessories act as multiple layers of protection for the once-vulnerable young girl of Act II.

<sup>313</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 166.

**Figure 18:** Sanderson as Manon<sup>314</sup>



Manon's 'suit of armour' consists of a boned corset, layered skirts, an exaggerated bustle, and lace neckline and sleeves. The fan she carries can be used strategically to cover and protect her exposed décolletage, and, figuratively, to cover and protect her heart. It may be appropriate to equate her fan with a shield offering deflection of truth, shame, guilt, or reality. With its help, Manon can metaphorically whisk away pangs of sorrow and conscience brought on by her decision to eschew love for money.

<sup>314</sup> Dupont, "Sibyl Sanderson as Manon," photograph, The Metropolitan Opera House Archives. Brussels, 1891.

**Example 13:** ‘Je marche sur tous les chemins.’ mm. 13–14<sup>315</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Je marche sur tous les chemins'. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: 'bel\_le, je suis heu\_reu\_se! Je suis bel\_le!...'. The piano part has dynamics like *p*, *ff*, and *dim.*. There are performance markings: 'poco rall.' above the vocal line, 'ten.' circled in pink above a high note in measure 14, and 'vivo.' above the vocal line in measure 15. The piano part has 'sotto' and 'pp' markings.

*Manon*'s music contains melismatic passages, drastic dynamic changes, and the sort of coloratura fireworks that the crowd might expect, given her new social status. The orchestration consists of held chords, and the dynamics of the accompaniment mirror *Manon*'s, moving from *forte* to *pianissimo*. While *Manon*'s vocal line does not specify that she should end *pianissimo* at the D5 with fermata in measure 14, the intention seems to indicate that, because the previous *piano* dynamic is followed by a *diminuendo*. A small annotation exists in measure 14, adding 'ten' over the high B5. It is likely that Sanderson and Massenet chose to highlight and exploit Sanderson's high voice. Massenet and Sanderson made significant revisions later in this aria.

**Example 14:** ‘Je marche sur tous les chemins.’ mm. 1–2<sup>316</sup>

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the beginning of the aria. The tempo is marked 'Maestoso' and the performance instruction '(avec impertinence et gaieté)' is circled in pink. The lyrics are 'Je marche sur tous les chemins'. The score is in G major and 12/8 time. There are handwritten notes: 'Maestoso' at the top, 'Manon' on the left, and 'maestoso (un peu lent)' at the bottom.

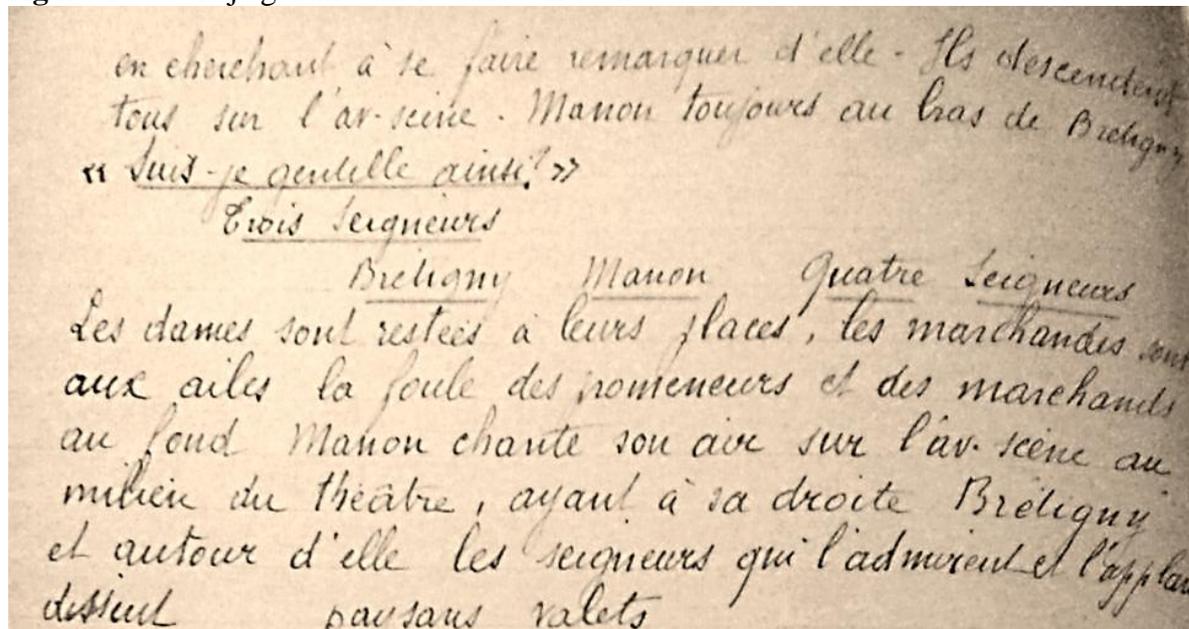
The score instruction states that *Manon* should sing ‘avec impertinence et gaieté’ [with impertinence and cheerfulness]. This request for imprudence supports the notion that

<sup>315</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 217.

<sup>316</sup> Massenet, *Manon manuscript: F-Pn*, 189.

Manon's internal motivation is to remain unreachable (to avoid revealing her true self). She should also sing 'gaily' to reflect an aura of joy and merriment.

**Figure 19:** 'Suis-je gentille ainsi?' Mise-en-scène.



Manon remains in the arms of Brétigny, 'Am I lovely then?' [...] Manon sings her aria at the beginning of the scene in the middle of the stage, with Brétigny on her right.<sup>317</sup>

The *mise-en-scène* places Manon front and centre for the entire aria. This makes the character the centre of attention, but it may also have facilitated better projection for Sanderson. She could have been vocally fatigued by this point in the production. There is minimal orchestral competition in the accompaniment, which might have allowed Sanderson more dynamic freedom to create nuance, especially with *piano* passages.

Sanderson would have sung the 'Gavotte' immediately after this aria at least until 1898. It is unclear if Sanderson sang the new 'Fabliau' after 1898 when Bréjean-Silver premiered the aria. With either aria, the atmosphere of joviality and adoration toward 'La belle Manon' continues until Manon encounters Le Comte Des Grieux. At that moment, Manon reacts with embarrassment and hesitation toward Le Chevalier's father. Her vocal

<sup>317</sup> Callais, *Manon par Massenet*, 45.

Manon toujours au bras de Brétigny, « Suis-je gentille ainsi ? » [...] Manon chante son air sur l'avant-scène au milieu du théâtre, ayant à sa droite Brétigny.

line descends to the middle register, and, figuratively, the shield she used in the previous scene drops in tandem with her voice. Le Comte, like her Le Chevalier, draws out the ‘real’ Manon.

At another crossroads, and again singing in her middle register, Manon goes to Des Grieux at the seminary. The couple solemnly perform the Saint-Sulpice scene, and their romance resumes. It is almost as if the call to the convent was inevitable despite Manon’s avoidance. Even after reconciling with the man she loves, Manon’s penitence does not last long and neither does her unadorned vocality.

Act IV brings a version of the *plastique* Manon similar to scene one of the previous act. She cavorts in grandiose fashion but, in desperation, enters into a gambling scam in an attempt to regain the fortune she and Des Grieux lost. In a broad sense, the music surrounding Manon is similar to Act III, but Manon herself no longer rises to the occasion of *la fête* with the coloratura passages and high extension that were present in the beginning of Act III. Once again, Manon’s deceptions bring her down, with her arrest and the detainment of Des Grieux.

On the road to Le Havre in Act V, Manon’s vocality is a combination of reality and dream-like escape. Her melodies frequently ascend into the head register and then descend to hover securely in the middle of the musical staff. Musically, Act V comes in stark contrast to what is heard in Acts II and III, with their respective complaints of love, lust, and large living. This alternation of tessitura could be said to represent Manon’s ambivalence as she approaches death, as well as a battle between acceptance and denial of the harsh reality of her present life. The *mise-en-scène* indicates that she is transported into a dream state as Des Grieux holds her in his arms.<sup>318</sup> It appears that Massenet and

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<sup>318</sup> Callais, *Manon par Massenet*, 73.

Sanderson did not make changes to Acts IV or V. The following chapters contain detailed analyses of the most-revised sections of the score, which reside in Acts I–III.

Manon: Score Annotations

**Example 15:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 42–47<sup>319</sup>

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the opera *Manon*, page 54. The score is written on five staves. The top staff is the vocal line for Manon, with lyrics in French: "l'instant d'après je le com-fer-ai, je te-rais!". The second staff is the piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are several handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the score, including "page 54. de la part de p. a. d.", "Cantate", and "Changements proposés à M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson". At the bottom of the page, there is a circular stamp and a signature: "Changements proposés à M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson (Rôle de Manon) 20 nov / 87. Paris".

Massenet made the first set of changes to *Manon* for Sanderson in 1887.<sup>320</sup> The second and third groups of revisions, which occurred in the 1890s, were intended to be sung by Sanderson. The majority of the alterations were made to Manon’s vocal part. At different points over the years she sang the role, Sanderson added her imprint to the composition through renewed dramatic characterisation and vocal strategy. More importantly, Sanderson changed the actual score with her own annotations. Jean-Christophe Branger addresses the initial round of score changes in his 1999 book on the opera:

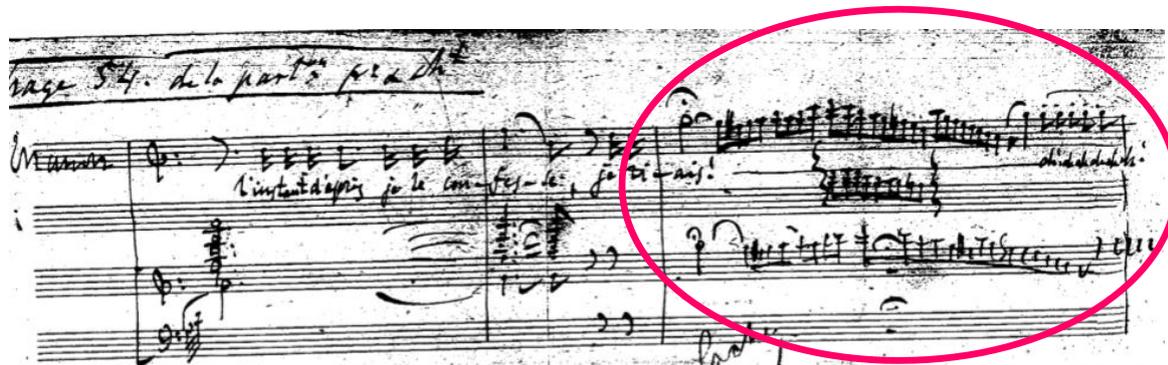
<sup>319</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript addendum F-Po*, 54.

Changements proposé à M<sup>lle</sup> Sibyl Sanderson. 20 nov / 87.

<sup>320</sup> Massenet added the Act III ‘Gavotte’ in 1885 for Marie Roze, who sang the title role at the English-language premiere of *Manon* in Liverpool.

The first evidence of joint work between the singer and the composer is observed in a dedication in Massenet's hand on a vocal score of *Manon*. [...] For this new voice, the score received minor - but numerous – changes of rhythm or melody, made by the musician on the singer's copy of the vocal score. [...] More important are the changes affecting the vocal line of the heroine, such as the vocalises added in the aria 'Je suis encore tout étourdie' (Act I) and 'Je marche sur tous les chemins' (Act III, 1<sup>st</sup> scene) that showcase the full range and possibilities of a coloratura soprano. For the first aria, an autograph manuscript is inserted into the score of the singer, entitled 'Changes proposed to Miss Sibyl Sanderson (role of Manon 20 Nov. Morning/87),' It reveals three stages of vocalise for the aria that introduces Manon.<sup>321</sup>

**Example 16:** 'Je suis encore tout étourdie: three stages of vocalise'



In addition to the manuscript at the Bibliothèque nationale de France archives, to which Branger refers, there is an annotated vocal score in the New York Public Library (NYPL) Special Collections that appears to contain modifications (inclusive of the 1887 changes) written in Sanderson's own hand. The other markings in the NYPL vocal score (VS) were likely made by Massenet and an unidentified copyist.<sup>322</sup> The example below illustrates an annotation that first appeared in the 1887 manuscript and was included in both the NYPL VS and the 1895 *Nouvelle Édition*. Of the three stages, or perhaps choices, that Massenet

<sup>321</sup> Jean-Christophe Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet, ou, le Crépuscule de l'Opéra-Comique* (Metz: Éditions Serpenoise, 1999), 100.

Le premier témoignage d'un travail commun de la chanteuse et du compositeur est donné par une dédicace de la main de Massenet sur une partition pour chant et piano de Manon [...] Pour cette nouvelle voix, la partition subit de légères — mais nombreuses — modifications d'ordre rythmique ou mélodique, portées par le musicien sur l'exemplaire de la cantatrice. [...] Plus importants sont les changements qui concernent la ligne vocale de l'héroïne, comme les vocalises ajoutées dans les airs « Je suis encore tout étourdie » (Acte I) et « Je marche sur tous les chemins » (acte III, 1er tableau), qui mettent en valeur toute la palette et les possibilités d'un soprano colorature. Pour le premier air, un manuscrit autographe est inséré dans la partition de la chanteuse. Intitulé « Changements proposés à Mlle Sibyl Sanderson (rôle de Manon 20 nov. Matin /87) », il révèle trois stades de composition de la vocalise pour l'air d'entrée de Manon.

<sup>322</sup> Massenet, *Manon: US-NYp*. This score was found in 1986 by a Massenet family member, and contains sung recitatives, which were previously unknown.



Massenet was not only an expert vocal writer; he was also a keen businessman, and he might have made reasonable changes to any score in order to insure the value of an investment. If Sanderson could not, or would not, perform, Massenet would lose money and face public embarrassment. The composer's interest in monetary and popular success seems to have held as much importance to him as artistic fulfillment. In fact, some argue that he valued profit and popularity more than musical integrity:

[Massenet] had a knack of knowing how to give the public what they wanted at the same time as pleasing himself. [...] People wonder how deep it goes (Massenet's music); endless charm brings about question of sincerity.<sup>324</sup>

Of course this composer was unusually aware of the market. An astute businessman (he has been compared to Strauss and Puccini in this respect), he believed in giving his audiences what they wanted to hear. As a result, he tended to stick to winning formulae once he had found them.<sup>325</sup>

Whatever the reasons for the evolution of the opera, many view the modifications as having added value, but not all agree on this point. For example, Reynaldo Hahn (1874–1947) disagrees with the changes made to Manon's Act I aria. He suggests that the original version offered more enjoyment for the listener. Thus, Massenet had not given his audience 'what they wanted to hear.'<sup>326</sup>

Hahn managed a successful career in music, having composed a large catalogue of well-received music, written numerous critiques, and developed popular vocal curricula. In general, he was respected by the concert-going public and the broader musical community. His opinions on the Sanderson changes, however, seem to neglect important considerations. The revised music, whether in 'good taste' or not, seems to fit Manon's character better than the original version because it is unpredictable, glamorous, difficult

<sup>324</sup> Graham Johnson, "The Master of Charms: Massenet," sound recording, Paris, 1974, London: British Library Sound Archive.

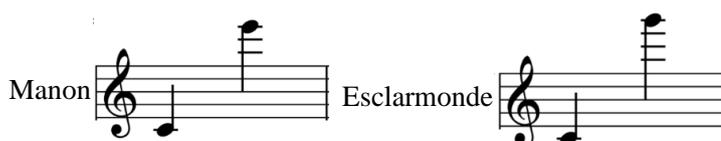
<sup>325</sup> Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 301-302.

<sup>326</sup> Reynaldo Hahn, *On Singers and Singing: Lectures and an Essay*, trans. Léopold Simoneau (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1990), 230–231; Reynaldo Hahn, *Du Chant* (Paris: P. Lafitte, 1920).

to pin down, and beautiful. If the listener is made a bit uncomfortable by some of the alterations in their audacity and complexity, it could be that Massenet and Sanderson intended that tension.

Forthcoming chapters address the score revisions in detail, but some overarching aspects of the annotations addressed here may aid in laying a foundation for those discussions. For example, the vocal range for Manon should be considered wide but not exceptional for a lyric coloratura soprano role. Esclarmonde, in comparison, shares the same lowest note, but her top note ascends a minor third above Manon's. The score changes brought increased demand in singing the role of Manon in terms of tessitura, intervallic leaps, agility, and broader dynamic spectrum.

**Figure 20:** Vocal Ranges: Manon and Esclarmonde



The majority of the material changes to Manon's part appear in her Act I aria, 'Je suis encore tout étourdie,' and in the Act III *Cours-la-Reine* scene, which contains 'Je marche sur tous les Chemins.' There is also the choice of singing the 'Gavotte' or the 'Fabliau.'

One interesting discovery made in the course of this research is a change to Act IV that did not transfer from the 1887 annotated vocal score to the 1895 *Nouvelle Édition*. There is a coloratura passage written for Manon in the changes Massenet proposed to Sanderson. However, the alternative melisma does not seem to have been included in any subsequent versions of the score, nor have any singers gone on record with the revised coloratura melody.

Example 18: 'A nous les amours.' mm. 89–94<sup>327</sup>

Musical score for Example 18, measures 89–94. The score includes vocal parts (M, P, J, R) and piano accompaniment. A pink oval highlights a passage in the vocal line starting at measure 89, marked with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *f*.

Example 19: Transcription of annotated passage. mm. 86–94<sup>328</sup>

Musical score for Example 19, measures 86–94. The score is for the character Manon. A pink oval highlights a passage in the vocal line starting at measure 89, marked with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *f dim.*

Example 20: 'A nous les amours.' mm. 86–94.<sup>329</sup>

Musical score for Example 20, measures 86–94. The score includes vocal parts (M, P, J, R) and piano accompaniment. A pink oval highlights a passage in the vocal line starting at measure 89, marked with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *f*.

<sup>327</sup> Massenet, *Manon*: manuscript addendum F-Po, 328.

<sup>328</sup> Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet*, 102.

<sup>329</sup> Massenet, *Manon*: *Édition Originale avec récitatifs chantés*, 334.

The standard 1895 *Nouvelle Édition* does not have the altered passage.

Branger discusses this annotation in his work, and he even transcribed it (see above), but he does not mention that the proposed passage had not been included in subsequent editions of the score. The reasons for its exclusion are unclear; it is possible that Sanderson herself declined the proposed change. If later Manons were aware of the optional melody, it appears none have incorporated it.

Though purely conjecture, exploration of the possible reasons why Sanderson may have deemed the line unfavourable could support analysis of the changes that were incorporated. This line of inquiry may also shed light on weaknesses in Sanderson's vocalicity by highlighting areas of the discarded melisma that might have been problematic. It may have been impossible to stay in time with the ascending chromatic scale that appears in the strings. To synchronise the melisma with the accompaniment, the scale would have to be suppressed and a held bass note added. It would also have to be *colla voce*.

To begin, the G-major *arpeggio* in measures 88–89 might have posed technical difficulty for Sanderson because it would require her to begin in the weaker middle register on an open Ah [a] vowel. A glottal or plosive consonant would have offered better opportunity for a resonant onset. On the other hand, the *arpeggio* offers certain advantages over the original G4. For example, the problem of Sanderson's weak middle register was more acute during the early years of her career, so it is possible that the original note would have been inaudible in the auditorium, in view of its location in the lower-middle voice. This is especially plausible because she would be required to sing the note over a *fortissimo* orchestra with a combination of high-pitch *tremolo* in the strings and a bold chromatic ascending line in the lower, louder instruments. In this case, Sanderson's best defence might have been her strongest offense: her high notes. If she had any chance of being heard over this orchestration, it would probably be the result of

singing in her head register. Further, the contrary motion of a descending chromatic scale would have allowed her to join the accompaniment on a more equal footing in terms of timbre, strength, and tessitura, rather than trying to fight against it on a low, weak note.

To execute the arpeggio, she might have employed a *coup de glotte*, letting the build-up of sub-glottal pressure act as a springboard to propel her voice through the ascending line. However, the faster loss of breath brought on by an explosive glottal attack might have left her lacking the requisite air supply to complete the descending chromatic scale that follows. Breathing between the High B5 and the B<sup>b</sup>5 would be less than ideal given the complementary ascending chromatic line in the accompaniment. It seems that the composition favours the singer and orchestra remaining together, and breathing would separate them at measure 89.

These sorts of melodic devices (wide *arpeggios* and descending chromatic scales) are common in coloratura roles, such as these excerpts from ‘Je suis Titania.’ It seems that the specific circumstances Sanderson faced in 1888 might have been the determining factors for this *ossia* passage not appearing in later versions.

**Example 21:** ‘Je suis Titania.’ mm. 27–30, 47<sup>330</sup>

The image displays a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It begins with a melodic phrase marked 'cresc:'. This is followed by a descending chromatic scale marked 'f' (forte) and 'dim:' (diminuendo). This descending scale is circled in pink. The bottom staff is an accompaniment line in treble clef, starting with the vocalization 'ah!' and a dotted line indicating a sustained note.

Sanderson most likely crossed the *secondo passaggio* to reach the G5 and high B5. Given the high registration of her voice, the G5 might have been the exact location of her ‘break

<sup>330</sup> Ambroise Thomas, *Mignon: opéra en trois actes* (Paris: Heugel & Cie., 1866), 224–225.

note': a common place for high sopranos to move into head register.<sup>331</sup> If this is so, she might have found it difficult to maintain correct pitch, resonance, and placement while singing a G5. A technical insecurity such as this, combined with nerves, may have caused Sanderson to harbour some trepidation in this tonal area, which may have made the proposed change undesirable. However, it is unclear whether Sanderson sang the original line or the new coloratura passage.

Consideration must also be given to the public persona that Massenet and Sanderson crafted for the singer's début. The young American soprano was said to be bright, bold, and attention seeking.<sup>332</sup> She seemed to delight in shocking, and, at times, offending polite society.<sup>333</sup> Reports describe her *joie de vivre*. Correspondence from friends, such as Gertrude Atherton, and interviews with Sanderson herself support the image of a woman who craved approval and praise. Replacing lines that she may have considered dull or lacklustre (e.g., the original G4 in measures 89–90), with coloratura splendour capable of provoking prodigious applause might have elicited enthusiasm from Sanderson and Massenet alike.

On the other hand, Sanderson was dealing with a young and immature vocal mechanism, (probably) under-developed technique caused by a lack of consistent professional training (i.e., poor breath management and register blending), as well as physical illness and stage fright. In addition, by Act IV, Sanderson may have been exhausted, vocally and otherwise. This would have been especially likely given the significant increase in the vocal demands of Act III, which came as a result of the annotations. If that were the case, she might have needed to conserve resources in order to complete the death scene in Act V.

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<sup>331</sup> Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

<sup>332</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 124.

<sup>333</sup> Amelia Ransome Neville, *Fantastic City: A Memoir of the Social and Romantic Life of Old San Francisco* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 103.

The text ‘de l’or !’ [Gold!], followed by the descending chromatic ‘Ah!’ may foreshadow her fall from grace as greed overtakes her. This ensemble piece appears in Act IV, when Manon and Des Grieux cheat at the casino because they have lost their fortune. It is as if the orchestra offers up the gold (ascending) and Manon loses it (descending). At this moment, she sings the highest note up to this point in the aria just after exclaiming about gold; this might suggest that money has become her idol. This notion is supported by the score instruction at measure 88, ‘avec exaltation’ [with exultation].

**Example 22:** ‘A nous les amours.’ mm. 89–94<sup>334</sup>



In measures 89–94 the lower accompaniment deviates from the rest of the piece with the two measure semi-quaver pattern. It is the only place that the orchestra strays from a consistent quaver pattern. As Manon gives the impression that she has recaptured control of the impulses drawing her toward money (beginning at measure 95), the orchestra commensurately returns to a more conservative musical landscape, meaning that they resume the stacked quaver chords instead of the running, leaping pattern in the previous measures.

<sup>334</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 334.

**Example 23:** ‘A nous les amours.’ mm. 95–100<sup>335</sup>

M.  
P.  
R.

mf

Chanter, aimer, sont douces choses!...  
Chanter, aimer, sont douces choses!...  
Chanter, aimer, sont douces choses!...

Massenet may have offered additional clues as to what would transpire soon in the foreboding walking bass accompaniment that is heard from essentially the start of Act IV until ‘A nous les amours.’ The troubling accompaniment seems to telegraph that despite Manon’s *joie de vivre*, she will soon tumble into unthinkable suffering and a painful death. Gavin Dixon in his review of the 2014 production at Covent Garden observes a similar juxtaposition between Manon’s melodies and the orchestral writing:

Curiously, Pelly does little here to underline Manon’s narcissism and vanity, despite the fact that her pride is clearly about to lead to a fall. Perhaps he is relying on Massenet, who fills the music of this act with dark undercurrents and accompanying figures that regularly oppose the two-dimensional jollity of the vocal writing.<sup>336</sup>

<sup>335</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 334.

<sup>336</sup> Gavin Dixon, “Manon, Royal Opera, 14th January 2014,” *Opera Britannia*, January 15, 2014.

**Example 24:** Example of ‘dark accompanying figures that oppose jolly vocal writing.’<sup>337</sup>

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opera *Manon*. It consists of several systems of music. The top system is for Manon, with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "Ces larmes, ses folles... C'est la vie, et..." and is marked with a forte dynamic (*f*). The piano accompaniment features a complex, dark texture with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and is marked with a fortissimo dynamic (*ff*). The second system is for Poussette, with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "Ah! c'est la vie, et... Ou du moins... C'est cet, le que j'" and is marked with a forte dynamic (*f*). The piano accompaniment is also marked with a fortissimo dynamic (*ff*). The third system is for Javotte et Rosette, with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "C'est la vie, et..." and is marked with a forte dynamic (*f*). The piano accompaniment is marked with a fortissimo dynamic (*ff*). The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Manon’s flippant text encapsulates Dixon’s point when she remarks, ‘C’est la vie !’ while the bass line sneakily tiptoes upward as if to say that trouble is afoot. Given that this music directly precedes the Act IV Sanderson revision, it is surprising that it was overlooked. While quantitatively, it only affects three measures, the qualitative impact it could have on the vocality of this part of the opera is substantial. Had it been included, the virtuosic display would have served to further separate Manon from reality.

<sup>337</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 329.

To date, most scholarly discourse has focused on the changes to Acts I and III. After 1887, Massenet and Sanderson revised the score again following Sanderson's 1891 *début* at Covent Garden, which was not well-received. After releasing the 1895 *Nouvelle Édition*, only one material change was made to the score when the 'Fabliau' was added in 1898 to replace the 'Gavotte.'

**Figure 21:** Sanderson's debut as Manon: Covent Garden, 1891<sup>338</sup>

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THIS PROGRAMME.



**ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA**  
COVENT GARDEN.  
SEASON 1891  
Under the Management of Mr. AUGUSTUS HARRIS.

THIRTY-EVENTH SUBSCRIPTION NIGHT.	THIRTY-NINTH SUBSCRIPTION NIGHT.																																												
<b>WEDNESDAY, MAY 20th, at 8.</b> Manon's Opera, <b>LES HUGUENOTS.</b>	<b>FRIDAY, MAY 22nd, at 8.</b> Second Performance of Manon's Opera, <b>MANON.</b>																																												
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 50%;">Tobacco ... .. Madame ALBANI</td><td style="width: 50%;">Manon Lenoir ... .. Miss STYL SANDERSON <small>(Her Second Appearance in England)</small></td></tr> <tr><td>Marguerite &amp; Yvonne ... .. Mrs. MEAVES <small>(From the Imperial Opera House, St. Petersburg. Her first appearance in England)</small></td><td>Françoise ... .. Mrs. BRIDGES &amp; SISKERY</td></tr> <tr><td>Chorus ... .. Mrs. GIULIA RAYOLI</td><td>Isabelle ... .. Mrs. GIBSON</td></tr> <tr><td>Desire's Sister ... .. Mrs. LATHAM</td><td>Leveson ... .. M. DEFFENSE</td></tr> <tr><td>Chorus &amp; Servants ... .. M. LARALLE</td><td>De Chastel des Ormes ... .. M. JERARD</td></tr> <tr><td>Musette ... .. M. EDWARD DE BRISSE</td><td>Guillemette ... .. M. JERARD <small>(From the Theatre de la Monnaie, Brussels. Her first appearance in England)</small></td></tr> <tr><td>Huguenot Soldiers ... .. Signor ICKO CORDI</td><td>De Bragely ... .. M. COUS</td></tr> <tr><td>Toussaint ... .. Signor BIELLETTO</td><td>Le Chevalier des Ormes ... .. M. VAN DUKE <small>(From the Imperial Opera House, Vienna. His first appearance in England)</small></td></tr> <tr><td>De Bois ... .. Signor MIRANDA</td><td>Conductor ... .. Signor MANCINI</td></tr> <tr><td>Musette ... .. Signor DE TASCHETTI</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>De Court ... .. Signor RINALDI</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Chorus &amp; People ... .. M. JEAN DE BRISSE</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Procurer Duressant ... .. Mrs. FALLARDI</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Conductor ... .. Signor SETONARI</td><td></td></tr> </table>	Tobacco ... .. Madame ALBANI	Manon Lenoir ... .. Miss STYL SANDERSON <small>(Her Second Appearance in England)</small>	Marguerite & Yvonne ... .. Mrs. MEAVES <small>(From the Imperial Opera House, St. Petersburg. Her first appearance in England)</small>	Françoise ... .. Mrs. BRIDGES & SISKERY	Chorus ... .. Mrs. GIULIA RAYOLI	Isabelle ... .. Mrs. GIBSON	Desire's Sister ... .. 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Sanderson had a successful performance career in Paris and abroad from 1888 until 1891, and her popularity among the press and public led to ever-increasing expectations. In May 1891, Sanderson débuted as Manon with the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden amid a flurry of pre-performance prognostications about ‘*la belle Sibyl*:’ the ex-patriate American-turned-Parisian diva who had become an international operatic sensation.

Unfortunately, the winds of good fortune changed for Sanderson with her first London production; this *Manon* was a professional failure and a source of personal sorrow for her. She sang opposite heldentenor Ernest Van Dyck (1861–1923), who reportedly triumphed as Des Grieux. The Belgian Wagnerian was said to have not only succeeded but eclipsed the rest of the cast, especially the over-lauded Sanderson. Several critics contrasted her mediocre performance with his stellar showing:

Much interest is of course attached to the two new comers, Miss Sybil Sanderson and M. Van Dyck, as both came with high credentials from the Continent. The lady, it is unpleasant to be compelled to say, was a failure. She is attractive in appearance, and she acts with intelligence, but her voice is thin and tremulous, her singing being indeed at times extremely unpleasant. On the other hand, M. Van Dyck made a striking impression, thanks to a fine presence, a distinguished manner, and a magnificent tenor voice of the robust order.<sup>339</sup>

Miss Sanderson has some excellent qualities. Her enunciation is admirable, and she is a sympathetic and graceful actress; but the apparent inability to emit a single clear note is a fatal bar to her success with audiences who look upon the *tremolo* as a fault and not a virtue; and furthermore, her voice is of a calibre quite unsuited to so large a stage and so large an auditorium as that of Covent Garden. M. Van Dyck seemed a little over-anxious to assert himself at the outset, but his merits are incontestable. [...] The voice is delightfully full and mellow, and is managed with consummate skill.<sup>340</sup>

One of the chief novelties of the season at Covent Garden was *Manon*. [...] The composer had superintended the rehearsals, and every care was given to the performance, which reflected great credit upon the theatre, although the *début* of Miss Sybil Sanderson was not quite so successful as was anticipated. Miss Sanderson is another of the pretty operatic Americans who have had French training. [...] She is young, clever, and beautiful. Miss Sanderson had met with great favour at the Brussels Opéra, but as is often the case when appearing in the larger arena of the Royal Italian Opera, the lack of physical power proved a great drawback. As the heroine of Massenet’s charming opera, she was graceful and

<sup>339</sup> ‘The Opera: *Manon*,’ *Musical News* 1, no. 12 (May 22, 1891): 235.

<sup>340</sup> “Royal Italian Opera: *Manon*,” *The Musical Times* 32 (June 1, 1891): 338.

sympathetic, but the want of greater volume of tone was sadly against her, and we fear will prevent Miss Sanderson from ever becoming entirely successful at Covent Garden. She has also adopted that Parisian vice, the *tremolo*, and in consequence is frequently defective in her intonation. These were faults which her agreeable acting did not atone for, and therefore the cordial greeting, the baskets of flowers, the wreaths, and all the outward show of success, must be set down to the kindness of friends who wished to give the charming young lady all the encouragement in their power. At the same time that we are reluctantly compelled to be somewhat severely critical in this instance, we have not the least doubt that an ample measure of success awaits Miss Sanderson in the opera-houses where her physical powers are not so heavily taxed. [...] The tenor was M. Van Dyck, who was more fortunate. In fact, this artist appears to possess every gift likely to place him in the front rank of operatic tenors. [...] In the bright and engaging music of *Manon* he proved himself as good a vocalist as in the more solemn strains of *Parsifal*, and his success at Covent Garden was more decided than that of any tenor we can remember for years.<sup>341</sup>

London, May 23. — At the Royal Italian Opera this week, a success was scored by Van Dyck, the new tenor from the Vienna Opera House [...] Miss Sanderson had previously played *Manon* with much success in Brussels, and probably from this fact, too much was expected of the young American. On the morning following the first performance at Covent Garden of ‘*Manon*’ the critics were found to have come to the conclusion that Miss Sanderson had hardly realized expectations, though she was warmly received on account of her clever and vivacious acting.<sup>342</sup>

The new *prima donna* has everything in her favour, and very soon she was in favour with the audience, but not in such high favour as was the tenor with the artistic name. [...] As for the new soprano SIBYL—more power to her organ! Her acting was good, but not great, and what ought to be her song *par excellence* went for nothing, or at least, it could have been bought very cheap. There is far more dialogue in *Manon* than a Covent Garden audience is accustomed to, and this superfluity is resented by those who come for the singing, and who, if any talking is to be done, like to do it themselves.<sup>343</sup>

This was not only Sanderson’s *début* at Covent Garden but also the first time British audiences heard *Manon* in French on their own soil.<sup>344</sup> That combination evoked tremendous anticipation, as evidenced by the content and quantity of pre-performance press coverage. The aftermath was at least as fervent as the lead-up.

Casting Sanderson with Van Dyck was an unusual pairing for many reasons. By most accounts, the singers were incompatible vocally, physically, and dramatically.

<sup>341</sup> “Operas & Concerts,” *The Monthly Musical Record* 21, no. 241 (January 1, 1891): 139.

<sup>342</sup> “Foreign Theatrical Gossip.”

<sup>343</sup> “Operatic Notes,” *Punch, Or The London Charivari* 100 (May 30, 1891): 256.

<sup>344</sup> The Carl Rosa Opera Company staged an English version of *Manon* in Liverpool in 1885.

Though both singers studied with Saint-Yves Bax at the Paris Conservatoire, their similarities appear to end there.<sup>345</sup> Sanderson possessed a high, light, and quiet voice, while Van Dyck sang with a loud, heavy sound. Physically, he was tall and quite stout. Van Dyck's body, like his voice, would have overshadowed the slight Sanderson. From a dramatic perspective, reports suggest that he had a 'commanding presence,' which may have caused him to perform Des Grieux as a stronger character than Sanderson might have experienced in prior productions.<sup>346</sup> This was not Van Dyck's first performance of the role. In November 1890, just six months prior to the Covent Garden production with Sanderson, he played Des Grieux in Vienna opposite Austrian mezzo-soprano Marie Renard (1864–1939)<sup>347</sup> in the German-language version of *Manon*.<sup>348</sup>

One particularly interesting aspect of the Van Dyck/Sanderson mismatch seems to have been previously overlooked. While there has been much discussion of Sanderson's faults and Van Dyck's virtues, there appears to be no mention of some possible reasons *why* the tenor out-shone his leading lady. Jack Winsor Hansen claimed that Van Dyck chose to upstage Sanderson, but this claim does not seem to be supported.<sup>349</sup> It is more probable that the strongest motivation behind Van Dyck's aggressive decibel level was a letter he received from Cosima Wagner.

Cosima Wagner wrote to Van Dyck to rebuke and admonish him for taking on the role of Des Grieux. She felt it was a waste of his time and voice to sing Massenet's music when he should spend his efforts preparing to sing Parsifal at Bayreuth in the summer of 1891.<sup>350</sup> Perhaps Van Dyck's enduring relationship with Massenet, which began during his composition studies at the Conservatoire, elicited a sense of loyalty that made him feel

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<sup>345</sup> Malou Haine, *400 Lettres de Musiciens: Au Musée Royal de Mariemont: Iconographie Rassemblée par Anne Meurant* (Liège: Mardaga, 1995), 469.

<sup>346</sup> Richard T. Soper, *Belgian Opera Houses and Singers* (Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Co., 1999), 330.

<sup>347</sup> Renard created the role of Charlotte in the German-language version of Massenet's *Werther* (1892).

<sup>348</sup> Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle*, 169.

<sup>349</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location 139.

<sup>350</sup> Cosima Wagner, "Lettre à Ernest Van Dyck," in *Ernest Van Dyck, un ténor à Bayreuth: Suivi de la correspondance avec Cosima Wagner*, edited by Malou Haine (Lyon: Symétrie, 2005), 39–40.

obliged to sing for his former maestro. Wagner was openly anti-French and known for her hatred of Chabrier.<sup>351</sup>

Van Dyck succeeded as Parsifal that summer in spite of Cosima Wagner's concerns. Perhaps this victory was helped by Van Dyck's decision to sing Des Grieux in a more Wagnerian style, which may have helped his voice maintain strength instead of lose fitness or increase tension by restricting himself to a lighter sound. This choice also might have aided Van Dyck's success in London. Clearly, he was better suited to manage the size and acoustics of Covent Garden than Sanderson was. Van Dyck's physique, training, and repertoire made it easier for him to fill the hall with sound.

Despite the Covent Garden debacle, Sanderson and Van Dyck maintained a fond friendship and even sang together again. Sanderson was supportive of Van Dyck's success, as evidenced by the note she sent him a few months after their London appearance, having attended a Paris performance of *Lohengrin*:

I truly send to you my congratulations, because with my bad French, I am unable to tell you how much I found you grand and superb tonight. [...] I want to tell you that no artist has given me the pleasure you have given me tonight.<sup>352</sup>

Rather than casting blame or choosing to grieve over the disappointing results from London's *Manon*, Sanderson used the events as a catalyst to ask Massenet for another round of revisions to the score. The new batch of alterations went missing until 1986, when they were discovered by a member of the Massenet family. What was found was a vocal score containing the 1887 revisions, but most importantly, the dialogue had been converted to sung recitative. Previously, lines were delivered in spoken French, as was

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<sup>351</sup> Johnson and Stokes, *A French Song Companion*, 63.

<sup>352</sup> Sibyl Sanderson, Lettre de Sibyl Sanderson à Ernest Van Dyck, [Paris, 16 septembre 1891] (Archives privées), in *Ernest Van Dyck et Jules Massenet : Un interprète au service d'un compositeur : lettres et documents*, edited by Jean-Christophe Branger and Malou Haine (Paris: Vrin, 2014), 27.

J'ai bien envie de vous porter mes félicitations, car avec mon mauvais français, je ne puis assez bien vous dire combien je vous ai trouvé grand et superbe ce soir [...] Je veux pourtant vous dire qu'aucun artiste ne m'a fait le plaisir que vous m'avez fait ce soir.

the tradition in opéra-comique.<sup>353</sup> The Metropolitan Opera Company premiered the new version with sung recitative in 1987, and Heugel published a new edition of the VS the following year called the '*Édition Originale avec récitatifs chantés.*' It is believed that Massenet composed the recitatives. There has not been any conjecture, to this point, that anyone other than Massenet wrote them.

**Example 25:** 'Récitatif avant: enfin les amoureux.'<sup>354</sup>

MANON (pensive) *Des Gri.* 171  
 Il ne te suffit pas de nous aimer? Non, je veux que tu sois ma femme! -Eule

**Example 26:** 1895 *Nouvelle Édition* with spoken dialogue.<sup>355</sup>

MANON (pensive) 151  
 - Il ne te suffit pas alors de nous aimer?.. (a ve chaleur) MANON. - Tu le veux?..  
 DES GRIEUX. - Non, je veux que tu sois ma femme!  
 And<sup>no</sup> appassionato. 63 = ..

<sup>353</sup> "The 148<sup>th</sup> Metropolitan Opera Production of Jules Massenet: *Manon.*" Performance Programme. New York, NY: Metropolitan Opera Company, February 14, 1987, 4.

<sup>354</sup> Massenet, *Manon: US-NYp*, 134.

<sup>355</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 131.

**Example 27:** 1897 *Édition Originale* with sung dialogue.<sup>356</sup>

There are many possible reasons Massenet and Sanderson converted the score to almost entirely through-sung. Musicologist Hervé Lacombe explains that this was a common practice when mounting productions outside France:

In its turn, the French repertory was translated for performance in foreign theatres. In Italy and in the many Italian opera houses in other countries, it was unthinkable to perform an opera with spoken dialogue, such as a French *opéra-comique*. That is why in the 1880s and 1890s, *Carmen* triumphed worldwide in the version that included the recitatives added by Ernest Guiraud. Massenet, who lived to see his music gain international success, was himself open to this sort of arrangement, and composed recitatives for the Italian performances of *Manon*.<sup>357</sup>

Massenet also composed sung narratives for the Viennese performances of *Manon*. It is feasible to conclude it would have been within his *modus operandi* to do the same for the French-language productions to be staged outside France, such as those at the Metropolitan Opera and Royal Opera. There may have been some advantages to sung dialogue as well; the auditoriums of other theatres, besides Paris' Opéra-Comique, tended to be larger, so sung recitative probably projected better into these larger spaces than

<sup>356</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Édition Originale avec récitatifs chantés*, 131.

<sup>357</sup> Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 29–30; Hervé Lacombe, *Les Voies de l'Opéra Français au XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 37.

Inversément, le répertoire français est traduit pour être représenté sur les scènes étrangères. Dans le cas de l'Italie et des nombreux Théâtres-Italiens d'autres pays, il est impensable de jouer un opéra avec des dialogues parlés, comme dans l'opéra-comique français. C'est pourquoi *Carmen* fait un tour du monde triomphal, dans les années 1880–1890, dans la version qui comporte les récitatifs ajoutés par Ernest Guiraud. Massenet, qui a pu de son vivant assister au succès international de sa musique, s'est lui-même prêté à ce type d'arrangement en écrivant des récitatifs pour les représentations italiennes de *Manon*.

spoken dialogue. Also, international audiences were more likely to have heard operas with sung conversations such as those found in the Italian repertoire. In some theatres, it was required by statute that an opera be through-sung, and the Opéra-Comique had a similar bylaw that required spoken dialogue. Whether sung or spoken is preferable or optimal was a point of discussion for theatre critic W. Davenport Adams who expresses his dislike of the spoken dialogue that was presented as far back as the Liverpool premiere:

Personally, I think it a pity that there should be any spoken dialogue, spoken though it be to orchestral accompaniment; but, that apart, the general effect of the music is very impressive. The vocal writing, though always characteristic of the individual and appropriate to the situation, is also, always melodious, and the orchestration varies, skilfully and delightfully, with the variations of the incidents enacted and the emotions portrayed. [...] The story, as set forth in it, does not bear much resemblance to the Abbe Prévost's famous romance, nor is the narrative as consecutive and intelligible as might be desired. [...] The desire, no doubt, has been to make the 'plot' of 'Manon' as acceptable as possible to English audiences.<sup>358</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed following the 1891 British premiere of the French-language version of the opera. A critic for the *Musical News* was more kindly toward Massenet, acknowledging that he was bound to use written dialogue for the Opéra-Comique:

In turning to examine the score, it is necessary to bear in mind that M. Massenet composed his work for the Paris Opéra-Comique, where, according to the stipulations which govern the subvention, spoken dialogue must be introduced, this being the main distinction between so-called 'Comic' and 'Grand' opera, in the latter of which elaborate ballet has to be interpreted. Resenting the interruption to the flow of music, the French composer has accompanied the dialogue by *melodrame*. [...] In brief, though by no means a great work, 'Manon' is a fresh and winning opera. [...]. It would be far more effective, however, in a smaller theatre than Covent Garden.<sup>359</sup>

Another factor that may have facilitated the transition from *melodrame* to sung recitative was that recitative versions in other languages were already in existence prior to 1891.

<sup>358</sup> W. Davenport Adams, "Our Musical Box," *The Theatre* 5 (February 2, 1885): 85.

<sup>359</sup> 'The Opera: *Manon*.' *Musical News* 1, no. 12 (May 22, 1891): 235.

Van Dyck and Renard had performed the German-language version with recitatives in Vienna, and the Italian version contained recitatives as well.<sup>360</sup>

As a result of his own experience or the advice of others, Massenet apparently understood the tastes of German and Italian audiences but misjudged British audiences. It could be said that London opera-goers disdained spoken dialogue but also disliked the vocal *tremolo* exhibited by Sanderson. Because both composer and artist were highly sensitive to public response, it is no surprise that they revamped the score. Along with the significant impact of converting to recitative, Massenet and Sanderson made numerous small changes throughout the opera, including breath marks, *tenuti*, and additional blocking instructions.

The *Manon* revisions are an area where the writings of Jack Winsor Hansen must be called into question. Hansen based a large portion of a 1999 article for *Opera Quarterly* on the changes made to *Manon* in response to the failures of the 1891 Covent Garden production. His comments about Sanderson's disappointment over the failure may have merit, but in terms of how the score was altered in the aftermath, Hansen's work shows inaccuracies:

The Covent Garden production was a frustrating experience for Sanderson, but after it was over she began to analyze her defeat. In the Low Countries she had sung the opera only with lyric tenors who blended their voices carefully with hers in observance of Massenet's fastidious dynamic markings. She speculated that in the future she might find herself again miscast with some Wagnerian tenor or engaged to sing *Manon* in another theatre as large as Covent Garden. Moreover, she had long felt that the vocal advantages in the opera fell to the tenor. That summer, after performing *Manon* and *Juliette* in Aix-les-bains, she asked Massenet to join her in Switzerland to make some major revisions in the heroine's role that were ultimately incorporated into the published score. In the first phrase of *Manon*'s opening aria, 'Je suis encore tout étourdie,' Sanderson wanted to lengthen the appoggiatura on the last syllable of 'étourdie' so as to better convey *Manon*'s naïveté. To sustain the *rallentando*, she requested a rest, for a new breath; just before the words 'tout étourdie' (see ex. 1).<sup>361</sup>

<sup>360</sup> Jules Massenet, "Jules Massenet à Ernest Van Dyck Bruxelles, 13 septembre 1890," *Le Ménestrel* 89, no. 5 (February 4, 1927): 45; Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet*, 105.

<sup>361</sup> Hansen, "Sibyl Sanderson's Influence on *Manon*," 42.

Example 1. First phrase of Manon's opening aria, act 1

Manon (charmingly, with emotion) *p* *rall. dolce* *a tempo* *rall.*  
 Je suis en-cor tout é-tour-di-e, Je suis en-cor tout en-gour-di-e!  
 I've seen so much that a-maz-es me, I've seen so much that it daz-es me.

Sanderson may have lengthened the *appoggiatura* on *-di*, as he claims, but she did not originate the rests before *tout étourdie*. They appear in the original 1883 manuscript:

Example 28: 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' mm. 1-2.

Manon  
 Descaut  
 (a part) *p* *a tempo* *avec charme et émotion!* *rall.* *dol.*  
 Je suis... en-cor... tout étourdi-e...

In addition, Hansen assigns an incorrect date to one of the score changes. While he suggests that an alteration occurred after 1891, the 1887 annotated score indicates otherwise:

In the middle of the aria Sanderson suggested the addition of coloratura passages to express Manon's laughter instead of the dull one-note series of 'Ah! Ah! Ah!' (See ex. 3). The composer also interpolated a higher ending to the aria for her.<sup>362</sup>

Example 3. Alternate coloratura passages in Manon's act 1 aria

Allegro subito *f* (changing her tone)  
 L'ins-tant d'a-près, je le con-fes-se, Je ri-  
 But all at once, a mo-ment af-ter, How I  
 (laughing)  
 ais, ah! ah! ah! ah!  
 laughed! ah! ah! ah! ah!  
 (bursting out into peals of laughter) *a piacere*  
 ais, Ah! je ri-ais! Mais sans sa-voir pour-  
 laughed! Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! Ah, How I laughed! But nev-er ask me  
 (tr) *f* *pp*  
 quoi! ah!  
 why! ah!  
 quoi! Ah!  
 why! Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

The basic premise of Hansen's article is valid: Sanderson had a far-reaching impact on *Manon*, and she deserves recognition for her position as re-creator of the opera. In the same way, Hansen deserves credit for taking on the task of researching Sanderson and the revisions to *Manon*. He shines a light on an influential artist who may have been under-represented in previous musicological writings. Unfortunately, Hansen's work lacks scholarly rigour; it contains factual inaccuracies, as well as a blatant bias toward Sanderson, a dislike of Massenet, and a penchant for hyperbole. Nonetheless, Hansen's work on the *Manon* score annotations can serve as a starting place for further investigation.

Hugh Macdonald, a British musicologist and French music specialist, analysed the *Manon* annotations, including study of the NYPL VS, the Yale archives, and the collections at the Morgan Library. He was instrumental in identifying which annotations were written in Massenet's hand. However, Macdonald seems to have believed that it was solely Massenet who shaped the opera scores, without the influence or talents of interpreters:

Massenet's understanding of the voice was a remarkable gift, and he insisted on conveying to his singers how every phrase should be turned, where every breath should be taken. There should be little space for individual interpretation, and although there have been great and individual interpreters of the major Massenet roles, they do not essentially differ in approach and they cannot fundamentally diminish or alter the characterisation that he intended. *Manon* remains distinctly and unalterably *Manon* no matter who plays the part.<sup>363</sup>

Macdonald is accurate in asserting that Massenet had a rare ability to compose brilliant lines for the voice. However, he also asserts that interpreters cannot add to or detract from the vocality of the role and that (colloquially speaking) 'if you have seen one *Manon*, you have seen them all.' While it is true that Massenet was meticulous at marking scores with vocal instructions, much of what went into his scores were the fruits of joint labour

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<sup>363</sup> Hugh Macdonald, "Massenet's Craftsmanship," in *Beethoven's Century: Essays on Composers and Themes* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 88.

between composer and artist. It is likely that Massenet worked with singers for weeks, if not months, prior to an opera's premiere. During these sessions, he and the vocalist could work through a piece and tailor it to suit the individual needs of the performer. These sessions were often one-on-one, as was typically the case with Sanderson, which may have provided ample time and space for artistic freedom and vulnerability. In other words, the singer could expose a weakness, ask for a change, or even demand a revision.

In addition to coaching sessions, Massenet attended most rehearsals for his operas, which could have yielded more requests from artists.<sup>364</sup> These circumstances may explain why many of the score markings appear as annotations in already printed vocal scores, as is the case with *Manon*.<sup>365</sup> To say that the characterisations of Manon by Mary Garden, Joan Sutherland, Natalie Dessay, and Renée Fleming are interchangeable seems short sighted and perhaps even disrespectful to the artist. Macdonald assigns a perhaps overly generous portion of credit for the opera's continued success to Massenet's initial brilliance. If that were the case, there would not have been subsequent revisions and certainly not multiple modifications. Put another way, if Massenet had envisioned *Manon* perfectly from the outset, why would he have composed the 'Gavotte' for Marie Roze and the 'Fabliau' for Georgette Bréjean-Silver?

Jean-Christophe Branger credits Massenet's maturation as a vocal composer as well as Sanderson's direct influence for the score revisions:

Massenet also revises the metronome markings, and his knowledge of the voice being strengthened, gives more attention to the vocal line of certain passages specifying or modifying their intentions, notably the roles of Manon and Des Grieux and, to a lesser extent to that of Lescaut. These alterations, made mainly in the arias or duets, confirm not only the prominent place given to these two vocal genres, but also emphasize the professional maturity of the composer and an attention to detail that leaves a bit of liberty to the interpreter. As such, the work of Massenet with Sibyl Sanderson is not without consequence since most of the changes proposed in 1887 are reprised. The spoken declamation of Manon at the end of Act II is completely abandoned for a sung phrase and a new vocalise is

<sup>364</sup> Massenet, *Mes Souvenirs*.

<sup>365</sup> Massenet, *Manon: US-Nyp*.

inserted into the heroine's first aria, in the spirit of those that the composer had submitted to the singer for performances in The Hague. However, like the cuts, the vocalises are offered *ad libitum*. The score offers the possibility for a lyric soprano to (re)interpret the role as was the case at its creation. [...] If all the proposed changes attributed to S. Sanderson are not retained, it is not that Massenet wished to confine the heroine [...]. When the role is entrusted to a coloratura, the ornamentation dulls the dramatic characterisation of the part. In a bright and artificial framework, the vocalise remains demonstrative and the action external, unlike *Lakmé* where it fits perfectly. [...] With extended vocal possibilities, the role of Manon becomes accessible to a greater number of singers [...].<sup>366</sup>

As Branger points out, many people have interpreted the role of Manon, and the broad cross-section of those performers do not fit into any one mould of vocal *fach*, physical appearance, or acting style. The diverse vocal demands of playing Manon as she ages and evolves (or devolves) over five acts are similar to singing the four different heroines of Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. The operetta offers interpreters the opportunity (or dilemma) of singing: Olympia, Antonia, Giuletta, and Stella. Each character differs in voice type, appearance, and personality. The difference between playing *Manon* and *Hoffmann's* heroines is that, most of the time, Offenbach's ladies are played by four different women; Manon is played by only one singer.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet*, 119–120.

Massenet revoit aussi les indications métronomiques et, sa connaissance des voix s'étant affermie, accorde davantage de soin à la ligne vocale de certains passages en précisant ou modifiant ses intentions, notamment pour les rôles de Manon ou des Grieux et, dans une moindre mesure, pour celui de Lescaut. Ces retouches, effectuées essentiellement dans les airs ou les duos, confirment non seulement la place prépondérante accordée à ces deux genres vocaux, mais soulignent aussi la maturité professionnelle du compositeur et un souci du détail qui laisse peu de liberté à l'interprète. A ce titre, le travail de Massenet avec Sibyl Sanderson n'est pas sans conséquence puisque la majeure partie des changements proposés en 1887 est reprise : la déclamation parlée de Manon à la fin de l'acte II est définitivement abandonnée pour une phrase chantée et une nouvelle vocalise est insérée dans le premier air de l'héroïne, dans l'esprit de celles que le compositeur avait soumises à la cantatrice pour les représentations de La Haye. Cependant, comme les coupures, les vocalises sont proposées *ad libitum*. La partition offre ainsi la possibilité à un soprano lyrique d'interpréter le rôle comme ce fut le cas lors de la création. [...] Si tous les changements proposés à S. Sanderson ne sont pas repris, c'est que Massenet n'a pas souhaité confiner l'héroïne [...]. Quand le rôle est confié à une coloratura, l'ornementation affadit la caractérisation dramatique du personnage. Dans un cadre brillant et artificiel, la vocalise reste démonstrative et extérieure à l'action, contrairement à *Lakmé* où elle s'intègre parfaitement. [...] Grâce à des possibilités vocales élargies, le rôle de Manon devient accessible à un plus grand nombre de chanteuses, aux dépens de l'esprit original du livret.

<sup>367</sup> American soprano Beverly Sills (1929–2007) sang three of the four roles (not Stella).

The interpreter who takes on Manon must arrive ‘dizzy and naïve’ in Act I; in a few years in Act II, must cavalierly break her lover’s heart and her own; must captivate the crowds with her fineries and sophistication in the first scene of Act III then return to a stripped-down vulnerable state in the second scene; must be driven to illegal acts by greed and desperation in Act IV; and die tragically in Act V. Manon goes from life’s beginning to death’s end in a matter of a few hours, and her vocalism and dramatic portrayal must evolve just as quickly. That maturation process in Manon is analysed in the following chapters in light of Sanderson’s plausible impact on the character’s main arias, beginning with her Act I entrance aria ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’

Musical Analysis: 'Je suis encore tout étourdie'

1 Je suis encor tout étourdie,	1 I am still completely dizzy,
2 Je suis encor tout engourdie !	2 I am still completely tingling!
3 Ah ! Mon cousin ! Excusez-moi !	3 Ah! My cousin! Excuse me!
4 Excusez un moment d'émoi!	4 Excuse a moment of excitement!
5 Je suis encor tout étourdie !	5 I am still completely dizzy!
6 Pardonnez à mon bavardage,	6 Forgive my chatter,
7 J'en suis à mon premier voyage !	7 I am on my first trip!
8 Le coche s'éloignait à peine,	8 The coach had barely left
9 Que j'admira de tous mes yeux,	9 Then I admired all with my eyes,
10 Les hameaux, les grands bois, la plaine,	10 The hamlets, large woods, plain,
11 Les voyageurs jeunes et vieux.	11 Young and old travellers.
12 Ah ! Mon cousin, excusez-moi,	12 Ah! My cousin, sorry,
13 C'est mon premier voyage!	13 This is my first trip!
14 Je regardais fuir, curieuse,	14 I looked to flee, curious,
15 Les arbres frissonnant au vent !	15 The trees shivering in the wind!
16 Et j'oubliais toute joyeuse,	16 And I forgot joyfully
17 Que je parlais pour le couvent !	17 That I was off to the convent!
18 Devant tant de choses nouvelles,	18 With so many new things,
19 Ne riez pas, si je vous dis	19 Do not laugh if I tell you
20 Que je croyais avoir des ailes	20 That I believed I had wings
21 Et m'envoler en paradis !	21 And would fly away to paradise!
22 Oui, mon cousin !	22 Yes, cousin!
23 Puis, j'eus un moment de tristesse,	23 Then, I had a moment of sadness,
24 Je pleurais, je ne sais pas quoi.	24 I cried, I do not know for what.
25 L'instant d'après, je le confesse,	25 The next moment, I confessed,
26 Je riais, ah, ah, ah.	26 I laughed, ah, ah, ah.
27 Je riais, mais sans savoir pourquoi !	27 I laughed, but without knowing why!
28 Ah, mon cousin, excusez-moi,	28 Ah, cousin, excuse me,
29 Ah, mon cousin, pardon !	29 Ah, cousin, sorry!
30 Je suis encor tout étourdie,	30 I am still completely dizzy,
31 Je suis encor tout engourdie !	31 I'm still completely tingling!
32 Pardonnez à mon bavardage,	32 Forgive my chatter,
33 J'en suis à mon premier voyage !	33 I am on my first trip!

First impressions are important in life, and they can be crucial in opera. This is true in the cases of Mimi in *La Bohème* and Carmen, for example, as well as with the characters Manon and Esclarmonde. Esclarmonde, the veiled empress, remains silent, allowing the majestic extravagance of her gowns and mysterious presence to 'speak' that which she

wishes to project. In an opposite fashion, Manon wastes little time making herself audibly known as a dazed and excitable teenager in her Act I entrance aria.

‘Je suis encore tout étourdie’ offers numerous possibilities for interpretation, especially with *ossia* passages that came as a result of the Massenet and Sanderson revisions. With these changes, the music and text became even more beautifully interwoven. Rowden describes the aria this way:

Over thirty distinct characteristic motifs and themes can be identified throughout the score, but a relatively small number play a prominent role in constructing the musical drama. [...] Manon’s arrival is announced by a clarinet motif that will shortly become the melody of her aria ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie,’ which immediately paints a picture of a spontaneous, not to say a light-headed (‘étourdie’) young woman. The accompanying harmony floats on a dominant pedal, equally evoking a mood of giddiness and expectancy, in both dramatic and harmonic terms. The aria’s unusual structure, passing through sections of all the different types of vocal writing, adds to the portrayal of the impetuous, irrepressible and even febrile character of Manon.<sup>368</sup>

Rowden’s translation of *étourdie* as ‘light-headed’ is helpful, and could be combined with an adjective such as ‘overwhelmed’ or ‘dazed,’ and is synonymous with ‘wide-eyed.’

This is just one example of the depths that can be mined within the text of this aria. There are several clever devices and many layers to the lines that provide ample material for dramatic and vocal delivery of the piece. To build a base for examining the music, including the Sanderson score changes, some foundational elements of the piece will be examined first. This should not only increase engagement with the aria’s text and music in general; it will also facilitate a more thorough comparison of the pre- and post-1887 versions of ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’

Gille and Meilhac crafted the lyrics in such a way that even speaking this aria is orally and aurally satisfying, and it is even more so when sung. Aside from the meaning of the words, the combination of consonants and vowels provides a wide array of pleasing mouth shapes and a mixture of effervescent and sumptuous sound possibilities from

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<sup>368</sup> Clair Rowden, “Sentiment and reminiscence,” *Manon at the Royal Opera House*: January 2014. Programme.

which to choose. The phrases are replete with [s]s, [z]s, [m]s, and [ʒ]s, all of which are consonants that engage the lip and pucker. The vowels such as [ə], [ʏi], [i], and [e] promote continued protrusion of the lips and relaxed jaw or draw the mouth into a brighter sound brought on by a smiling mouth, such as is the case with [i]. The first syllable, *je* [ʒə] is a voiced palato-alveolar sibilant combined with a relaxed schwa vowel; it draws the lips into a soft pucker, and the vibrations of the initial consonant serve to tickle the sides of the tongue and hard palate. Next, the elision between *suis* and *encore* [sʏi zɑ̃kɔʁ] allows for a tenuto and a touch of added weight, as the singer leans in to the elided [z]. There is a similar invigorating vibratory effect from the [z] as the [ʒ] throughout the piece. Simply stated, the words are enjoyable to pronounce. When other aspects of interpretation are considered, such as the meaning of the text and its importance as the introduction of Manon, the aria begins to offer almost limitless possibilities for delivery.

Before an exploration of the aria's potential for 'vocal adornment' begins, it is wise to examine the architecture of the text. The poem consists of mostly octosyllabic lines grouped into quatrains, though some lines do not conform to the four-line pattern. The rhyme scheme generally follows an ABAB pattern, and Massenet's musical setting emphasises the clever syllabic pairings and attractive phrases. For example, *étourdie* [light-headed, dizzy, giddy, dazed] and *engourdie* [tingling, numb, asleep, struck] offer vivid meanings as well as a delightful aural and kinaesthetic feeling evoked by the two words that sound so similar. For example, *étourdie* means 'light-headed' (to borrow from Rowden) or dizzy, whereas *engourdie* translates literally as 'numb.' The meaning in this context is something more akin to the tingling or electrified numbness that results from lack of blood flow to a limb, such as having a leg 'fall asleep' after a long journey. Thus,

Manon is confessing that her mind has gone blank, and she cannot think straight because she is over-stimulated by seeing the world for the first time.

If the text was considered to be analogous to a race course, it would be most like an ‘out-and-back’ route. Manon begins with *je suis encore tout étourdie*, etc. and ends right back where she began. During this journey, little to no forward progress is made in the plot by the lyrics themselves. Rather, Manon sets the tone for the rest of the story by displaying from the outset that she is self-absorbed. Probably one of the most important aspects of the text is that it revolves entirely around Manon, and this assertion is quantifiably proven by the fact that she refers to herself in twenty-seven of the thirty-three lines. Considering this fact, it makes sense that her lyrics begin and end at the same place – ‘me.’

Manon is trying to convince Lescaut that she lacks worldly experience, but she may not be altogether psychologically present when her cousin arrives; rather, it is almost as if Manon cannot see past herself in this moment making the real world a bit fuzzy. Manon says she is dazed from her journey, and if the text is taken at face value, it is simply a recounting of what has occurred up to this point in her first voyage. However, the context and subtext at play offer other possible answers to questions of the meaning and resulting interpretive possibilities of the aria’s libretto.

The poetry and musical structure are typical of *fantasme*, which were somewhat common in the nineteenth century, and the tradition was continued by twentieth-century composers such as Francis Poulenc. His *mélodie* set to a text by Louise de Vilmorin, ‘Le garçon de Liège,’ is an example of *fantasme*. Songs of this type may appear to be frivolous in theme and composition but are often laced with deeper concerns about human experience, such as love, sex, death, nature, and hallucination.

*Fantasme*, whose spelling morphed from *phantasme* in the 1970s, dates back to the twelfth-century Latin *phantasma* and Greek φάντασμα [fán-taz-ma] meaning a vision (visual hallucination) of a phantom, spectre, ghost, or apparition. Someone under the spell of a *fantasme* believes that the being with whom they interacted actually exists and the events they perceived really transpired. Translating the word from French to English is not as simple as ‘*fantasme*’ meaning ‘fantasy’; there is inherent ambiguity, and, truly, no single English word provides an adequate match. A French speaker would likely be aware of the difference between *fantasme* and *fantaisie* and would be aware that the breadth of the meaning of *fantasme* is broader than a single-word translation such as ‘fantasy’ or ‘daydream.’ It could be considered similar to a mirage, but hallucination is probably the better description because, generally, the presence of an apparition or ghost comes into play. Conversely, a *fantaisie* plays in the mind in two dimensions, similar to viewing a film, unlike the more three-dimensional delusion associated with *fantasme*. Fantasy is a conscious product of imagination, whereas *fantasme* causes the player to wonder, ‘*rêve où réalité?*’ [dream or reality].<sup>369</sup>

If *fantasme* incorporates themes of nature, love, sex, and exoticism, this text offers multiple examples. In line 10, Manon sings of nature when she references ‘hamlets, large woods, and plains,’ while the travellers she mentions in line 11 represent the foreign and exotic. When Manon sings about shivering trees [*les arbres frissonnant au vent!*] in line 15, she is referring to nature and also speaking euphemistically about sexual climax, perhaps with an apparition.<sup>370</sup> Another example of this kind of *double-entendre* exists in

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<sup>369</sup> Académie Française, “Definitions: Fantasme et Fantaisie,” *Le Dictionnaire 9e édition*. Accessed May 6, 2013.

<sup>370</sup> Ted Morgan, *The French: Portrait of a People* (New York, NY: Putnam, 1969), 292. The common euphemism is ‘*le grand frisson*’ [the great shudder].

line 1, when she sings *je suis encore tout étourdie*. Manon may be light-headed from her journey, but dizziness also connotes a heightened state of arousal.<sup>371</sup>

Another common element in *fantasme* is a fascination with escape, especially to other realms. In this aria (as with Manon's other arias), the musical staff represents reality. When Manon sings above the staff, she symbolically enters another dimension of awareness, which is exemplified in measure 2 when she sings the G5 on the penultimate syllable of *étourdie*. The importance of this moment is emphasised by the *rallentando*; the fact that this is the first note in Manon's vocal line to fall outside the staff and that it is set to the word *étourdie* [dizzy or dream-like state] could mean that she is still under the effects of the *fantasme*, despite interfacing with Lescaut.

**Example 29:** 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' mm. 1–2.<sup>372</sup>

Manon's next line, 'je suis encore tout engourdie !' [I am still completely tingling!] may be an internal reflection or an aside. The music returns to the staff (and reality) as Manon takes a moment to self-assess following the encounter in which she has just participated. In that case, the phrase might be sung at a lower dynamic and physically staged as an aside. Since the melodic line resides well within the staff (middle register), it is likely that Sanderson's voice was quieter here by default.

<sup>371</sup> Joseph Lopiccolo and Leslie Lopiccolo, *Handbook of Sex Therapy* (Boston, MA: Springer, 1978), 148.

<sup>372</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript F-Pn*, 95.

**Example 30:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 3–7.<sup>373</sup>

Handwritten musical score for Example 30. The vocal line (Soprano) is circled in red. The lyrics are: 'Je suis... encor... tout engourdi-e... Ah! mon cousin!... ex-cusez-moi!... ex-cusez-'. The piano accompaniment includes markings for 'a tempo', 'rall.', 'piu f', and 'arzo'.

At measure 5, Manon exclaims ‘Ah!’ in a surprising leap of tessitura and dynamic, then fervently begs her cousin’s pardon. This measure was revised by Massenet and Sanderson. In the original manuscript (see above) a breath is not indicated after ‘Ah !,’ but one was added to the *Nouvelle Édition* (see below).

**Example 31:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 4–6.<sup>374</sup>

Printed musical score for Example 31. The vocal line (Soprano) is circled in red. The lyrics are: 'tout engourdi-e... Ah! mon cousin!... Ex-cusez-'. The piano accompaniment includes markings for 'rall.', 'piu f', 'espressivo', and 'suivez'.

The new breath is useful for reasons of vocality as well as drama. In terms of *fantasme*, the brief pause separates dream from reality; the G5 is outside the staff and the breath separates the hallucination from the reality represented by Lescaut (‘*mon cousin!*’).

Technically, the opportunity to breathe at this point may have eased demand on Sanderson’s voice by allowing her to switch from head register to middle register without having to descend through the *secondo passaggio*. It is easier to breathe than to navigate the transition between head and middle register.<sup>375</sup> Dramatically, the *tenuto* and breath

<sup>373</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript*, F-Pn, 96.

<sup>374</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 50.

<sup>375</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 119–120.

could facilitate a theatrical pause and reset for Manon, as she mentally returns to reality. This is supported by the fact that in the next moment, she physically turns and engages with Lescaut.

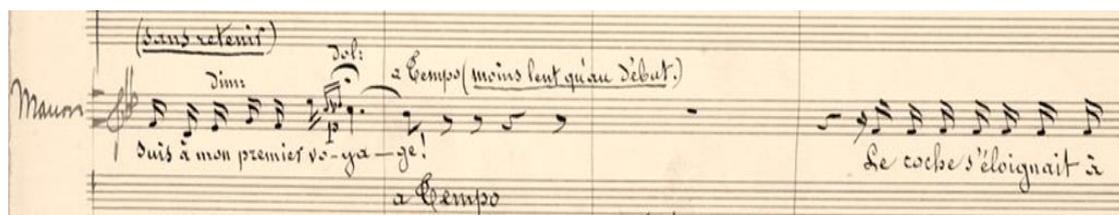
Lines 8–11 contain details of her journey, and the melody does not venture outside the staff. The accompaniment in measures 14–15, just prior to this text, offers an ascending and intricate melody, which may symbolise a moment of creative inspiration for Manon. The ascension could represent her thought process, and the *forte* trills could be akin to little ‘Aha!’ moments as she uses the brief pause to recall the next part of her tale.

**Example 32:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 13–15.<sup>376</sup>

There is another Massenet/Sanderson annotation at measure 16, which supports this supposition. In the revised edition, a score instruction has been added: ‘*en racontant*,’ which means ‘recounting’ or ‘telling.’ This marking does not appear in the original manuscript.

<sup>376</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 51.

**Example 33:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 13–16.<sup>377</sup>



**Example 34:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 16–17.<sup>378</sup>

The addition of *en racontant* is one of the ‘numerous little changes’ (to borrow from Branger) made to the score that could have had a profound impact.<sup>379</sup> There is a difference between singing lines 8–9 as a lyric, legato line and delivering them in a recitative style, as indicated by the new score instruction. From the perspective of characterisation, it might be a viable strategy to have Manon ‘tell’ her story, rather than ‘sing’ it, because words may be more believable to Lescaut if recounted or told as fact. This is also fitting with the tenets of an opéra-comique.

The effects of the new score instruction would likely change the inflection Sanderson used when enunciating each syllable. The consonants could become more prominent, and she may have inserted accents on *co-*, *-loi-*, *pei-*, *j’ad-*, and *tous*. It might also have been appropriate to employ a *coup de glotte* on the *à* of *à peine*. The result of these inflections would likely be increased audibility in an area of Sanderson’s voice that

<sup>377</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript, F-Pn*, 98.

<sup>378</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 51.

<sup>379</sup> Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet*, 100.

was said to have been thin and weak, as evidenced in the matrix of aesthetics. Perhaps her voice became percussive, enabling her vocals to soar above the accompaniment. Had she sung the lines with legato phrasing, it is probable that her story would not have been heard in the auditorium.

Manon returns to the *fantasme* in lines 18–21, as evidenced by both the text and the music. Perhaps the most significant note up to this point in the aria occurs at measure 34, when Manon ascends to an A<sup>b5</sup> on *ai-* of *ailles* in the phrase ‘*Ne riez pas, si je vous dis que je croyais avoir des ailes et m’envoler en paradis!*’ [Do not laugh if I tell you that I believed I had wings and would fly away to paradise!].

**Example 35:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 31–37.<sup>380</sup>

*bien chanté, en dehors.*

avant tant de choses nouvelles, Ne riez pas, si je vous dis Que je croyais avoir des ailes et m'envoler en paradis! Oui, mon cousin! Puis, Et m'envoler en paradis! Plus mosso. Un peu plus lent.

*Ped.*

*En animant*

*à volonté, léger.*

*poco rit.* *pp* *poco rall.* *mp*

*fp* *pp* *suivez*

<sup>380</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 53.

Massenet used correlative text painting for this passage. When Manon sings about having wings and flying to paradise, the vocalist sings a long, *forte* high note, followed by a short ornamented melisma. This combination could represent the bird soaring, then swooping up through the air to paradise. The vocal ‘flight path’ routes Manon outside the staff; the bird escapes from reality and finds freedom. The associated score instruction, ‘*à volonté*’ [freely], may reinforce the sense of liberation. While the musical staff could symbolise moral restraint, reality, and restriction, her melodic escape above the staff may represent freedom from these restraints. The tessitura of this passage may suggest freedom from societal norms and moral expectations.

In order to maintain the octosyllabic structure of line 20, the *-les* [lə] of *ailes* could be de-emphasized or dropped. Enough of the closing syllable would be implied simply by a flick of the tongue to articulate the [l] prior to inhaling for the next phrase. A practical reason to ignore the schwa of *-les* is breath supply. Having held the *forte* A5 followed by the high coloratura melismatic passage, and having taken liberty with the tempo, the singer may have become short of air and might need to close the phrase quickly, rather than phonating the final note. The score instruction *léger* [light] supports this suggestion of backing off the final syllable.

The word *ailes* is important from the standpoints of poetry and vocality. On the mechanical front, the interpreter sings the A5 on an [a] vowel, which mirrors the mouth shape and tessitura associated with pleasure, including states of sexual arousal: high-pitch tone and dropped jaw.

**Figure 22:** Pronunciation of [a].<sup>381</sup>

The A5 crosses the bar and is followed by what could be considered the poetic and musical climax of the aria: the B5 and the sum of measures 34–36. There is a *tenuto* over the pitch. In closing the melisma, there is a seductive quality involved in using the tip of the tongue to pronounce the [l]; it provides oral satisfaction when the tongue glides across the hard palate and the back of the teeth.

**Figure 23:** Pronunciation of [l].<sup>382</sup>

Manon could still be in an aroused state as she enters the B section at measure 37. The transition brings changes of key, mode, tempo, dynamics, and tessitura. She descends more than an octave to sing in middle and chest voices as she tells Lescaut about her inexplicable tears.<sup>383</sup> The orchestration changes from dense flurries of moving staccato lines to low, slow, connected, and sparse passages. The idea of weeping fits especially well with Manon's next reflection 'je ne sais pas quoi' [I do not know for what], because

<sup>381</sup> Rebecca R. Orton, *Iranian Linguistics*, April 30, 2011. Accessed June 27, 2013, <http://www.oocities.org/marylee1717/IranLing.htm>.

<sup>382</sup> Rachel's English, "English: How to Pronounce L Consonant: American Accent," Youtube video, posted March 23, 2011. Accessed June 27, 2013. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pejo6YC\\_BnM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pejo6YC_BnM).

<sup>383</sup> Napoléon Caillot, *Grammaire, générale, philosophique et critique de la langue Française* (Paris: Boulevard du Temple, 1838), 168.

it correlates with loss of emotional control. In reality, Manon has limited control; she was dominated by her parents, and is now under the guardianship of Lescaut. The dynamic on ‘je pleurais’ is *piano*, which Sanderson may have sung at a near whisper given the weakness in her middle voice.

**Example 36:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 38–40.<sup>384</sup>

Perhaps the dynamic was quiet to imbue the line with a bit of tension between her sadness and weeping. Her emotional discord may be symbolically represented in the intervallic leap of a sixth from D4 below the staff to B4, such that *tristesse* refers to a moment of melancholy that is eventually released rather than to lasting sadness.

**Example 37:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 41–42.<sup>385</sup>

Release of that tension does occur in measures 41–46; laughter is the antidote to Manon’s melancholy. Musical titillation from the orchestra helps to break the spell of gloominess.

<sup>384</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 53.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*



and crying) and so are her musical lines. The amplification of Manon's ups and downs appears to be Sanderson's imprint on the role and her way of heightening the character.

Given the material augmentation Sanderson made to the role both vocally and dramatically by way of these annotations, it must be said that Branger was incorrect when he remarked:

When the role is entrusted to a coloratura, the ornamentation dulls the dramatic characterisation of the part. In a bright and artificial framework, the vocalise remains demonstrative and the action external [...].<sup>387</sup>

For Branger to proffer the idea that the 1887 coloratura passages narrow the spectrum of Manon's emotive range by moving her out of believability and vulnerability into a showy *façade* reflects at best his lack of experience with vocal performance, and at worst, an underlying contempt for the interpreter. On the contrary, the coloratura passages reveal numerous avenues for dramatic expression because the ways in which the complex lines can be sung are nearly limitless. With the revised version, the nuance available to an interpreter through the combination of an increased number of pitches, registration changes, and dynamic variation makes the original vocal line seem 'dull' or 'flat' to use Branger's idea.

The verb *rire* has more than one meaning in French. Besides the literal translation of 'to laugh,' it can also mean 'to have fun,' and 'to scream (with delight).' French poets used the word euphemistically to for orgasm.<sup>388</sup> Employing the additional definitions helps these measures, especially as changed by Massenet and Sanderson, to come into focus. The orchestration in measure 41 offers the musical build-up to Manon's climax and also aids in changing the tone, as instructed at measure 42 with '*changeant de ton.*' Once

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<sup>387</sup> Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet*, 119–120.

Quand le rôle est confié à une colorature, l'ornementation affadit la caractérisation dramatique du personnage. Dans un cadre brillant et artificiel, la vocalise reste démonstrative et extérieure à l'action [...].

<sup>388</sup> W.D. Redfern, *French Laughter: Literary Humour from Diderot to Tournier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.

Manon confesses that she laughed, she bursts into illustrative high-pitched *fiorature*, which leads her to the pinnacle note of the piece: an E6 nearly an octave higher than the original.

The musical aspects of the run probably eased the vocal demands on Sanderson, rather than added challenges. The original G5 ‘Ah!’ series would likely have been at her break note between middle and head register, which would have made singing the repeated note unpredictable and could have caused fatigue due to the extra breath support necessary to maintain resonance; the extra physical demand may have made Sanderson more tense. In addition, her vocal technique may not have been trustworthy at the *secondo passaggio*. In the revised version, the G5 at the end of measure 45 is marked staccato, which might have been helpful to Sanderson if she were running out of air.

Given the new runs, Sanderson probably had an easier time negotiating her breaks and managing the release of breath on descending lines. This conjecture is based on two premises. First, the majority of the *Manon* score revisions that include coloratura patterns contain descending passages as opposed to ascending passages.<sup>389</sup> Second, it is not uncommon for young sopranos to find it easier to blend registers by coming from the head voice down to the middle voice.<sup>390</sup> The descents also tie in well with the text in terms of Manon’s ‘coming down’ after heightened excitement and climax, as is the case in measure 46.

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<sup>389</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript addendum*, F-Po.

<sup>390</sup> R. Miller, *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 130.

**Example 39:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ m. 45–46.<sup>391</sup>

Another technical observation about measure 46 is that it contains a descending B major scale with a dynamic marking of *pianissimo*, which suggests that Sanderson had very good dynamic control because the *pp* dynamic is an annotation that did not appear in the original manuscript. ‘À *volonté*’ was added during the revisions as well. Having this section scored without orchestra would have allowed Sanderson to sing very quietly without interruption or interference from chorus or orchestra. It would also allow Sanderson to take liberties with the tempi if she chose to do so.

**Example 40:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ m. 44–46.<sup>392</sup>

Manon finishes her exuberant outbursts and returns to reality (the vocal line residing within the staff), when she sings, ‘*Ah! mon cousin... excusez moi...*’ in measures 47–49. The score instruction (*confuse*) at the end of the measure may be used to guide vocal technique and musical interpretation, and the confused feeling could be helped by exploiting the tenuto over ‘Ah!’ in measure 47. With the next three notes (*mon cousin...*), a light detachment between each note may have helped convey her state of confusion; it could be considered akin to a musical stutter.

<sup>391</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 53.

<sup>392</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript*, 106.

**Example 41:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 47–49.<sup>393</sup>

The image shows a musical score for measures 47-49. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 2/4 time and includes the lyrics: "ah! Ah! mon cou - sin... excusez - moi... ah! mon cou -". The piano accompaniment is also in 2/4 time and includes the marking "Allegro." and "mf". The score includes dynamic markings such as "sans retentir", "mf (confuse)", and "dim.".

After the transition from *fantasme* back to *réalité* when Manon again asks Lescaut's pardon in measures 48–52, the music returns to the A section in measure 53, where the opening phrases are repeated. Sanderson's revisions in measures 57–58 include a breath mark in measure 57 and Manon's new long note of an F5 on the [a] of *voyage*. As a result of the change, she would have sung the root of the chord in unison with the accompaniment, which was probably beneficial for Sanderson's audibility. The added breath would have added power to the pitch also.

<sup>393</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 54.

Example 42: 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' mm. 56–60.<sup>394</sup>

The image shows a musical score for Example 42, consisting of two systems. The first system features a vocal line (M) and a piano accompaniment (P). The vocal line is marked 'a Tempo. (vivement déclamé)' and 'f'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'f'. The second system features a vocal line (M) and a piano accompaniment (P). The vocal line is marked 'All<sup>o</sup>' and 'tr.'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'ff'. A red circle highlights a note in the vocal line of the first system.

The original C5 might have been difficult to hear for two reasons. First, C5 would have been one of the notes in Sanderson's weaker middle register. Secondly, without other Cs in the chord, Sanderson would not have had orchestral doubling to aid in bringing her note to prominence in the soundscape. It is logical that a higher note reinforced by accompanying instruments would have been more audible and possibly more satiating because of the inherent melodic resolution.

Sanderson's particular vocal characteristics might have been better highlighted with the new note and with the addition of a breath mark in measure 57 between *premier* and *voyage*. The *voy-* (G5) allows the interpreter to descend to an ornamented resolution to the F5. Again, the descending pattern was probably better suited to Sanderson's

<sup>394</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 55.

technical strengths at the time. She could have initiated the phrase by placing the tone in head voice then increasing air pressure as she descended to the F5. The language would help with placement, onset, and projection of the G5 because the [v] of *voy-* is a voiced fricative. With this type of consonant, the vocal folds would begin to vibrate prior to Sanderson opening her mouth for the vowel. The voiced fricative would also allow relief from using another glottal attack, and the [v] would promote resonance in the upper lip and mask because the consonant is created by the vibration of air between the upper teeth and lower lip. For Sanderson, the visceral feeling of resonance at the front of the mouth may have boosted her confidence in terms of intonation and placement; it is common for resonance to help singers to feel more secure.<sup>395</sup>

The consonant and vowel combination [vwa] of *voy-* might have aided the singer as well; [w] to [a] offers forward mask placement with the [w] and then a balanced [a] vowel, which lies between a fully opened and closed mouth positions. The front, forward placement coupled with gentle initiation of airflow at the beginning of her head register could have resulted in ease for the singer and a pleasant sound for the audience. The final syllable *-ge* [ʒə] would probably have been de-emphasised or dropped according to French declamation protocols, allowing more aspiratory energy to be budgeted for the G5 and the longer, ornamented F5 in measure 57. Sanderson would have been able to end her first aria of the night resonating well, and, potentially, with a wealth of energy and voice for the next four acts. However, not everyone preferred the many alterations of updated aria. Reynaldo Hahn, for example, felt the original version was more enjoyable for audiences:

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<sup>395</sup> Hilda Deighton, Rudolf Steiner, Gina Palermo, and Dina S. Winter, *Singing and the Etheric Tone* (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1991), 61.

This is a collection of essays from Gracia Ricardo (1871–1955), who studied singing with Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). The essays date from the early twentieth century to the year of Ricardo's death.

**Example 43:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 11–12.<sup>396</sup>

Added crescendo      Added tenuti      Added breath

tout é - tour - di - e... Par - donnez à - mon ba - var - da - ge J'en  
 a Tempo.  
 suivez.  
 G. II. 1586.

Then a Manon might sing without affectation: ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie’ (‘I am still quite dizzy’), with only a very slight *ritenuto*, but not ‘tout étourdie----e’ to flaunt her lovely and soft G. Instead of holding the syllable ‘Par’ for a full second (a second is too long!) then sputtering incomprehensibly: ‘donnezamonbavardage’ and ending (as Massenet imprudently tolerated in the second edition) with, ‘J’en suis à mon premier (stop and breathe) voyage,’ she would go on at a rapid but even and reasonable tempo with these very ordinary words: ‘Pardonnez à mon bavardage, j’en suis à mon premier voyage’ (Pardon my chattering, this is my first trip’). Thus she would end the musical phrase as written in the first edition, the one that good taste suggests as being the most sincere.<sup>397</sup>

As Hahn suggests in his discussion, Manon runs through ‘donnezamonbavardage’ in the revised score. This change seems appropriate in terms of dramatic portrayal because it could be considered unsurprising behaviour and speech for a sixteen year-old who has just arrived in a new city. In addition to the life change of moving to an unknown and remote small town, Manon is being forced to enter a convent against her wishes, and she must meet her cousin-turned-guardian for the first time. She has been cooped up on a long journey and may feel as though she is about to burst.

When Lescaut arrives, it is as if Manon’s pressure valve releases and the syllables come pouring out in unbroken succession. Catching herself, she breathes before ‘*J’en suis à mon premier voyage.*’ This reaction of halting and regrouping could be attributed to two

<sup>396</sup> Massenet, *Manon: US-Nyp*, 50.

<sup>397</sup> Hahn, *On Singers and Singing*, 230–231; Hahn, *Du Chant*, 229.

or more factors. The character may have realised that she was carried away with excitement and feels the unstoppable urge to explain her odd behaviour. She may have been flustered by post-coital excitement and fearful that Lescaut, her parents, and the Church would learn of her indiscretions. The descending melodic line in measure 12 could be considered symbolic of Manon falling into disgrace. If Manon is trying to convince her cousin that she is still naïve, pure, and innocent, the hyperbole that results from condensing the words in such an immature fashion serves her agenda to deceive Lescaut.

Musical aspects of the revised version that aid in portraying Manon as innocent include the ornament and *tenuto* on the syllable *-da* of *bavardage*. This could be a moment where Sanderson may have offered a bit of coquetry with the ornament then used the brief hold both to re-group and to allow Lescaut time to react. After completing the phrase, she is also afforded similar space during the rests in measures 14–15. The contrary motion of the ascending accompaniment may symbolise the return of Manon's internal balance. If singing within the confines of the staff represents the real Manon, balance may be restored as she begins to sing again at measure 16.

**Example 44:** 'Je suis encore tout étourdie.' mm. 13–15.<sup>398</sup>

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle is the right-hand piano accompaniment, and the bottom is the left-hand piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics 'suis à mon premier voy- a - ge!'. A red circle highlights a specific note in measure 14, which is marked with a *p dol.* dynamic and an ornament. Above this note, the tempo marking 'a Tempo (moins lent qu'au début)' is written. The piano accompaniment features an ascending melodic line in the right hand and a more static line in the left hand.

<sup>398</sup> Massenet, *Manon*: US-Nyp, 51.

While Hahn may prefer the original version, there are compelling reasons why the revised ‘*Je suis encore tout étourdie*’ would have been better-suited to Sibyl Sanderson’s vocality. The revisions show attention to detail on both the composer and the performer’s part, as noted in the significant changes, such as the coloratura vocalises, as well as the minute modifications, including the addition of *tenuti*, new dynamics, and breath marks. All of these revisions created an aria tailor-made for—and by—Sibyl Sanderson, and the work continued with her Act III aria, the ‘Gavotte.’ While most believe that the added ‘Fabliau’ was intended for another singer, similar analysis follows to compare it with the ‘Gavotte.’

Musical Analysis of 'Gavotte'

MANON

1 Obéissons quand leur voix appelle,  
 2 Aux tendres amours, toujours;  
 3 Tant que vous êtes belle,  
 4 Usez sans les compter vos jours, tous vos jours !  
 5 Profitons bien de la jeunesse,  
 6 Des jours qu'amène le printemps;  
 7 Aimons, rions, chantons sans cesse,  
 8 Nous n'avons encor que vingt ans !

BRETIGNY et JEUNES GENS

Profitons bien de la jeunesse !

MANON

Profitons bien de la jeunesse,  
 Aimons, rions, chantons sans cesse,  
 Nous n'avons encor que vingt ans !  
 Ah ! Ah !

JEUNES GENS

Profitons bien de la jeunesse !  
 Rions ! Ah ! Ah !

MANON

9 Le cœur, hélas ! Le plus fidèle,  
 10 Oublie en un jour l'amour,  
 11 L'amour, et la jeunesse  
 12 Ouvrant son aile a disparu  
 13 Sans retour, sans retour.  
 14 Profitons bien de la jeunesse,  
 15 Bien courte, hélas ! Est le printemps !  
 16 Aimons, chantons, rions sans cesse,  
 17 Nous n'aurons pas toujours vingt ans !

JEUNES GENS

Profitons bien de la jeunesse !

MANON

Profitons bien de la jeunesse !  
 Aimons, chantons, rions sans cesse,  
 Profitons bien de nos vingt ans ! Ah ! Ah !

JEUNES GENS

Profitons bien de la jeunesse !  
 Rions ! Ah ! Ah !

MANON

1 Obey when their voices call  
 2 To tender loves, always;  
 3 As long as you are beautiful,  
 4 Use your days without counting, all your days!  
 5 Let us profit well from youth,  
 6 The days that spring provides;  
 7 Let us love, laugh, and sing without stopping,  
 8 While we are still twenty!

BRETIGNY, YOUNG MEN

Let us profit well from youth!

MANON

Let us profit well from youth,  
 Let us love, laugh, and sing without stopping  
 While we are still twenty!  
 Ha! Ha!

YOUNG MEN

Let us profit well from youth!  
 Let us laugh! Ha! Ha!

MANON

9 The heart, alas! The most faithful  
 10 Forgets in a day the love,  
 11 The love and the youth,  
 12 Spreading its wings disappears,  
 13 Never to return, never to return.  
 14 Let us profit well from youth  
 15 Very short, alas! Is the springtime!  
 16 Let us love, sing, and laugh without stopping,  
 17 We will not be twenty forever!

YOUNG MEN

Let us profit well from youth!

MANON

Let us profit well from youth!  
 Let us love, sing, and laugh without stopping.  
 Let us profit well from our twenty years! Ha! Ha!

YOUNG MEN

Let us profit well from youth!  
 Let us laugh! Ha! Ha!

Massenet wrote the 'Gavotte' for Marie Roze (1846–1926) to sing for the English-language premiere of *Manon* at Her Majesty's Theatre, London in 1885, but the aria was sung in French. He added the aria to the *Cours-la-Reine* scene in Act III, following 'Je

marche sur tous les Chemins.’ Sanderson sang the ‘Gavotte’ in French, but because she had a different type of voice than Roze, there are places in the original aria that would have both highlighted Sanderson’s strengths and challenged her weaknesses. It is not surprising that Massenet and Sanderson revised this aria prior to Sanderson’s 1888 début at La Monnaie. Documentation about the two singers tells us that their voices were dissimilar. Beyond variances in tessitura and vocal colour, it is probable that Roze formed the French words in a different manner than Sanderson based on their cultures of origin and subsequent professional experiences.

Roze attended the Paris Conservatoire and spent two years studying voice in England. She returned to Paris, débuted with the Opéra-Comique when she was nineteen years old, and went on to tour with the British Carl Rosa Company for a large portion of her career. Roze made a name for herself singing Carmen, a role usually sung by a mezzo-soprano or sometimes a more dramatic soprano. This difference in *fach* between Roze and Sanderson is important for more than technical reasons, such as audience expectation of dramatic portrayal for both the character’s and interpreter’s credibility.

Christine Rodriguez comments:

At the opera, voice-type determines the roles, and this nomenclature of voices creates a dramatic system: a voice type (soprano) corresponds to a type of social character (the young girl), which itself symbolizes a kind of passion (love). [...] The vocal and dramatic system of opera is based, it seems, on typical character traits. The timbre of the high voice most often signifies youth, in the same way that passionate feelings most often signify the characteristics of youth. [...] The voice types that could be used in the nineteenth century fall, in effect, to the roles of masculine and feminine, low and high, allies and opponents, in perfect symmetry. Voices clearly identify the criteria of age, social status or character. The older the person, the lower the voice, but one can also find a distinction between the light soprano and the dramatic soprano, which progresses from the soubrette role to the grand dame. Thus, the range and power of the voice also symbolise character. [...] A whole array of characters can be signified by the range and register of the voice. This establishes a system of relatively fixed roles where the character, by virtue of its psychological aspects and so-called socio-vocal class, becomes a stereotype.<sup>399</sup>

<sup>399</sup> Christine Rodriguez, *Les passions du récit à l’opéra: rhétorique de la transposition dans Carmen, Mireille, Manon* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2009), 221–224.

Roze garnered critical acclaim for her interpretation of Manon. The following review by William Beatty-Kingston is representative of the positive comments she received following her London appearances, during which she sang the new ‘Gavotte’:

Of the performance of ‘Manon’ by the Carl Rosa opera company, I am able to speak in terms of almost unqualified praise. The selection of Madame Roze to impersonate the affectionate, light-hearted, pleasure-loving heroine of Prévost’s ‘moral tale’ has proved an exceptionally happy one. Except Adelina Patti, I know of no other prima-donna capable of looking, acting, and singing this particular part as effectively or as charmingly as Marie Roze. She interprets the character with enchanting sprightliness in its frivolous phases, and with touching tenderness throughout its sentimental and passionate episodes. The music allotted to her is no less copious than difficult [...] ‘Manon’ being what is technically called a ‘two-part piece.’ She renders it to perfection, with true intonation and excellent expression; her voice was never better than it is this year. [...] When I heard her sing the part she fairly took the house—a crowded one—by storm, [...] notably with the interpolated Gavotte (Act III), incorrectly stated to have been written expressly for her in the ‘Manon’ role by M. Massenet [because it was] borrowed from *Sérénade de Molière*. [...] Sung by Madame Roze, it has obtained triple encores at every one of the eight performances.<sup>400</sup>

British audiences, including the Queen, were impressed by the new aria and its interpreter. Beatty-Kingston reports a second time, and W. Davenport Adams comments:

[Marie Roze] was in excellent voice, and that her rendering of the pretty Gavotte from Massenet’s ‘Manon’ elicited the rare compliment of an *encore* from the Queen, who personally redemanded that particular morceau.<sup>401</sup>

If Manon charms at present, it is because Madame Roze looks, acts, and sings the part with so much power and vraisemblance. In person she realizes Manon to the life; she plays throughout with grace, finesse, and, when necessary, with force and pathos, and vocally the part is quite within her means. She sings the song specially

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À l’opéra, la typologie vocale détermine les rôles et cette nomenclature des voix induit un système dramatique : à un type de voix (soprano) correspond un type de personnage social (la jeune fille) qui lui-même symbolise un type de passion (l’amour). [...] Le système vocal et dramatique de l’opéra repose, on le voit, sur la généralisation de traits caractérisants. Le timbre aigu de la voix désigne « le plus souvent » la jeunesse, de même que les sentiments passionnés sont « le plus souvent » aussi le propre de la jeunesse. [...] Les typologies vocales qu’on pouvait utiliser au XIXe siècle répartissent en effet les rôles masculins et féminins, graves et aigus, auxiliaires et opposants, dans une parfaite symétrie. Les voix déterminent clairement les critères d’âge, de statut social ou de caractère. Plus le personnage est âgé, plus la voix est grave, mais on peut aussi trouver une distinction entre le soprano léger et le soprano dramatique, qui oppose en général la soubrette au grand rôle féminin. Ainsi, l’étendue et la puissance de la voix sont également utilisées pour la symbolisation. [...] Toute une grille de caractères se signifie dans l’étendue et le registre des voix. Elle détermine un système de rôles relativement fixe où le personnage, par sa classe psycho et socio-vocale si l’on peut dire, devient un stéréotype.

<sup>400</sup> William Beatty-Kingston, “Our Musical Box: Manon,” *The Theatre* 14 (June 1, 1885): 292–293.

<sup>401</sup> William Beatty-Kingston, “Our Musical Box,” *The Theatre* 15 (August 1, 1885): 317.

composed for her with brilliancy and effect, and in the really powerful scene with Des Grieux, at the close of the third act, her vocalization and acting are alike full of verve and passion.<sup>402</sup>

By the time Roze sang Manon for Massenet in 1885, many critics referred to her as a mezzo-soprano rather than as a soprano. A sense that she sang with vocal weight can be gleaned from Adams' review, which notes that she sang with 'force,' 'verve,' and 'passion.' Adjectives such as these typically are not associated with lyric coloratura sopranos. Critics tended to use words such as light, agile, and pretty to describe the vocality of the higher voice types during the late nineteenth-century. This likely meant that Roze had a lower, heavier, and probably louder voice than Sanderson. As Rodriguez writes regarding voice types, audiences probably granted Roze more authority from the outset solely because of her vocal weight. Additionally, Roze was nearly forty years old when she sang Manon and had been singing professionally for twenty years. Presumably, she had age and experience over Sanderson, not just a bigger voice.

With these factors in mind, it comes as no surprise that Massenet and Sanderson embellished the 'Gavotte' to tailor the piece to Sanderson's voice. The revised aria contains three coloratura *ossia* passages that are part of the 1887 Massenet/Sanderson changes. In the annotated VS, page 220 is marked with '*hier ici*' [yesterday here] in the place that the Gavotte was inserted. It is unclear what exactly this comment or instruction means, but it is fair to say that it relates to insertion of the 'Gavotte' at this point in the score, since no other changes have been made to this portion of the score.

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<sup>402</sup> Adams, "Our Musical Box," 83.

**Example 45:** ‘En maintenant...restez seul un instant...’ *Manon*. mm. 1–2.<sup>403</sup>

The image shows a musical score for Example 45. It consists of a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is circled in red and has handwritten notes 'bien' and 'ici' written in black ink. The piano part is in the lower register. The score includes the tempo marking 'a Tempo 1<sup>o</sup> Allegretto' and the lyrics 'Et maintenant... restez seul un instant...'. The number '88' is written above the vocal line.

All three of the alternative melodies would have suited Sanderson’s vocalty better than the original melodies, for multiple reasons. The first change added vocal interest that could be described as ‘shimmer,’ because of the trill and *gruppetto*. Besides adding audience appeal due to increased vocal acrobatics, this change probably eased vocal demand for Sanderson.

**Example 46:** ‘Obéïssons quand leur voix appelle.’ *Manon*. mm. 41–43.<sup>404</sup>

The image shows a musical score for Example 46. It consists of a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is circled in red and has a trill marked 'lent.' and 'rall.' above it. The piano part is in the lower register. The score includes the tempo marking 'a Tempo' and the lyrics 'Ai...mons, chan...tons, riens sans ces...se, Nous n'aurons pas toujours vingt...'. The number '41' is written above the vocal line.

By adding a trill in measure 43, Sanderson would have started on the B4 on –*jours* or *toujours* instead of the original A4.<sup>405</sup> Re-sounding the B4 from *tou-* and then descending

<sup>403</sup> Massenet, *Manon: manuscript addendum*, 220.

<sup>404</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 223.

<sup>405</sup> It is legitimate to assume that Sanderson would have approached the trill from above, as was the custom until the nineteenth-century, for two reasons. *Bel Canto* vocal technique continued in the tradition of starting from above, despite the change in technique of starting on the written pitch that came into vogue around the time of the opera’s release. *Manon* is set in the eighteenth century with neo-classical style, which means that using associated classical techniques would have been an appropriate choice.

to the A4 would allow Sanderson to keep her soft palate lifted, thereby maintaining resonance and intonation. On the other hand, dropping to the A4 immediately could have resulted in a loss of breath support and lowering of the soft palate, leading to flat tuning and a dull sound. Re-sounding the B4 would also make it easier to maintain a more frontally placed [u] vowel without dropping the jaw between *tou-* [tu] and *-jours* [ʒu]. The tendency, when descending in pitch, would be to lower the jaw a bit. That would add the hint of a schwa prior to the second [u] vowel, further increasing the likelihood of singing slightly under pitch.

The trill (if executed in accordance with *Bel Canto* principles) may have made Sanderson's voice more audible to listeners, because the air would have been expelled at a rapid rate, the vocal folds would have closed fully, and the larynx would have remained in a stable position. In addition, the dynamic is *forte*. These conditions would combine to create a loud and articulated couplet of notes with some nasal (mask) resonance. The trill would have remained on pitch and more effectively projected into the auditorium than a single held A4, with its lowered larynx and soft palate.

The *gruppetti* are a significant addition as well. The change would have given Sanderson freedom to end the phrase according to her desired tempo, because she could cue the conductor with her voice, and possibly with a breath after the turn, precisely when she would resolve the passage. The added *fermata* and '*lent*' also suggest that Sanderson desired more time and control at this moment in the aria. Moving her voice through several notes would make it easier for the conductor to follow her lead, which differs from the original version, in which Manon phonated a single-held pitch and indicated a breath before '*vingt*.' The breath mark does not appear in the alternative melody.

**Example 47:** ‘Obéissons quand leur voix appelle.’ *Manon*. mm. 47–49.<sup>406</sup>

The image shows a musical score for Example 47. At the top right, there is a 'Variante' section circled in red, with the word 'léger.' written above it and a '3' below it, indicating a triplet. The main vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The lyrics are: 'Pro-fi-tons bien de la jeu-nes-se, Ai-mons, chan-'. Below the vocal line are two piano accompaniment staves, one in treble and one in bass clef, both marked with a piano 'p' dynamic. The piano part consists of chords and arpeggiated figures.

Similar conditions apply to the second *ossia* melody. Sanderson would have been able to cue the conductor with her planned tempo for the subsequent phrase by singing the three-note ornament at the new speed. The descent to, and re-sounding of, F#5 suggests that Sanderson started *chan-* of *chantons* on the second F#5 instead of the G5 (as indicated in the score). The breath mark between *Aimons* and *chantons* was omitted, which probably allowed Sanderson to convey the text in a more conversational manner. Manon sings, ‘*Aimons, chantons, rions sans cesse*’ [Let us love, sing, and laugh without stopping], so it makes sense that Sanderson would want to sing the entire phrase in a single breath. If the line were to be spoken, it is doubtful that anyone would breathe within the sentence. This version supports the text connection between loving, singing, and laughing. As if to say, the three activities are inseparable for Manon. Singing the phrase without a breath underlines ‘*sans cesse*’ [without stopping].

<sup>406</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 224.

The third variation is the most substantial in the aria. In the span of three measures, there is a change of text, an insertion of a two-octave ascending run, an elevated final note, and an addition of audible laughter. The lyrics changed from '*Nous n'aurons pas toujours vingt ans*' [We will not be twenty forever] to '*Profitons bien de nos vingt ans*' [Let us profit well from our twenty years], turning the sentiment from pessimistic to optimistic. '*Nous n'aurons...*' laments that youth will be lost, whereas the active command of '*Profitons...*' brings hope of present gratification. Both versions give a sense of fatalism, but the new line casts off resignation related to the inevitability of aging. Moreover, it may forecast Manon's impending death because she is suggesting that they seize the day but excluding herself from the future 'we' (who are no longer twenty) that was implied in the original version. The whole poem could be considered a subliminal swansong, since it seems to foreshadow Manon's passing. With this change comes an urgency in language and an intensity of vocal line that fosters a sense of 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' Manon seems to be subtly suggesting that she has discarded her hopes for a long and happy life.

**Example 48:** ‘Obéissons quand leur voix appelle.’ *Manon*. mm. 50–54.<sup>407</sup>

The musical score consists of several systems. The first system shows the vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'tons, ri - ons sans ces - se. Pro - fi - tous bien de nos vingt'. The tempo/mood is 'léger et vite.' and the dynamics are 'ff'. The second system continues the vocal lines with the lyrics: 'la - - - - - jeu - - - - - nes - se! Ri - -'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The third system shows the vocal lines with the lyrics: 'ans! Ah! ah!' and '(en riant)'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The fourth system shows the vocal lines with the lyrics: 'ons! Ah! ah!' and '(en riant)'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The fifth system shows the vocal lines with the lyrics: 'ons! Ah! ah!' and '(en riant)'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern.

If changing the lyrics brought the poetic theme to a more heightened present state, so did the new melodic line. Continuing with the notion that middle register represents reality, the original melody suggests that ‘we will not be twenty forever.’ The tessitura

<sup>407</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 225.

supports it, but, on the other hand, the new melody traverses a challenging two-octave run to soar outside reality, and the musical staff, to a D6. *Vingt ans*’ has been transposed completely to head voice; Manon remains outside the staff and inside her *fantasme*.<sup>408</sup>

From a technical perspective, this annotation may be the most significant of the score changes in terms of showcasing Sanderson’s vocal strengths. From a dramatic perspective, it would have kept focus on Manon rather than diffusing audience attention to the crowd and ancillary characters. In Manon’s original vocal line, there are several places where her pitches are lower than the chorus sopranos’ notes. In view of Sanderson’s weak middle range, her voice was probably inaudible from the end of measure 50 through measure 52 where she sang below the chorus sopranos’ notes. Another consideration is the softness of the original lyrics’ consonants and vowels. For example, the [n] consonants of *‘Nous n’aurons’* offer less projection assistance than the plosive [p] and flapped [r] of *‘Profitons.’* While the [n] consonants might have aided nasal resonance, the increased air pressure and propulsion of [pr], [f], and [t] in *profitons* likely enhanced the audibility of Sanderson’s voice. In addition, the harsher consonants very likely allowed Manon to command the scene with more authority than the low tessitura and passive consonant/vowel combination of *‘Nous n’aurons.’*

Vowel changes created additional opportunities for Sanderson’s voice to be heard. The original line, *‘nous n’aurons pas toujours,’* contains five closed vowels [u, o, õ, u, u] and one open vowel [a]. Because of the closed vowels, Sanderson’s oral aperture would have been small when she sang these words, which would have resulted in decreased decibel levels. The new line, *‘profitons bien de nos,’* provides three open vowels [ɔ, ɛ, ə], one bright or spread vowel [i], and two closed vowels [õ, o]. Combined with the added

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<sup>408</sup> Elements of *fantasme* are most obvious in lines 9–17. For example, lines 12–13 refer to the fleeting nature of birds (*ouvrant son aile a disparu*). Birds are often linked to the apparition present in a *fantasme* and can symbolise the soul or heavenly realms. These lines contain several links to *fantasme*, including birds, disappearance without return, youth, nature, and uncommitted romance.

alveolar consonants, the extra space fostered by additional open vowels likely helped the audience to hear Sanderson's voice, while using 'nos' for the demanding run allowed her to increase oral space as she ascended. Sanderson probably employed vowel modification (*aggiustamento*) in two tranches during the melisma. To aid in resonance and placing the tones in the mask, she may have started 'nos' with a closed [o] vowel and a hint of nasality. At approximately E5 she might have transitioned to an open [ɔ] to create enough space to manoeuvre through the *secondo passaggio*. Finally, her jaw most likely dropped to the lowest point in its range of motion at approximately A5 to an open [a] vowel, which would have allowed her to sail up to the D6 unimpeded by tension from a partially-closed jaw.<sup>409</sup>

The change applied to the final pitch of 'ans!' from G4 to G5 allowed Sanderson's voice to remain front and forward instead of simply folding in with the altos. Sanderson would have been able to exploit the combination of descending from A5 to G5 with the elided alveolar (perhaps dentalized) [t] from *vingt* and the nasal [ã] to launch her last note into the hall. Because she descended from A5, her palate would have remained lifted, thus leaving ample space for the head-voice G5. The nasality of the vowel provided ideal conditions for mask resonance.

Even with three revisions, Massenet (and possibly Sanderson) was still not satisfied with the 'Gavotte.' He composed a new aria, the 'Fabliau', in the 1890s, which was meant to replace the 'Gavotte,' but even today either aria may be sung. Most people believe that Massenet composed the 'Fabliau' for coloratura soprano Georgette Bréjean-Silver, but there is speculation that he actually wrote it for Sanderson. There is insufficient evidence to support or disprove this claim. In-depth analysis of the 'Fabliau' may help to prove or disprove this notion.

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<sup>409</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 45–47.

Musical Analysis: 'Fabliau'<sup>410</sup>

Fabliau—récitatif  
(On peut chanter ce Fabliau à la place de la Gavotte)

BRÉTIGNY  
(À Manon)  
Ah ! Vous êtes vraiment la reine des amours,  
Ô Manon, qui riez toujours !

MANON  
1R Toujours ?  
2R Vous vous trompez !  
3R Peut-être mon cœur est-il moins gai  
4R Qu'il ne le veut paraître !

Fabliau—aria  
(Alerte et léger)  
1 Oui, dans les bois et dans la plaine  
2 Rien que pour rire et sans raison  
3 Manon riait jadis ! Et de sa voix lointaine  
4 L'écho son compagnon riait avec Manon du rire de Manon !

(En riant)  
Ah ! L'écho riant ainsi du rire de Manon  
Ah ! Ah !

LE FOULE  
L'écho riait du rire de Manon !

MANON  
5 Parfois voyant des colombes fidèles  
6 Manon les admirait et pensait à leurs ailes !  
7 Et le soir qui tombait souvent la retrouvait  
8 Pensive encor ! Manon rêvait !

(Soupirant)  
Ah ! Pensive encor, Manon rêvait ! Manon rêvait !

(Vif, alerte et léger)  
9 Bientôt fuyait le rêve.  
10 Et dans les airs passait le son d'une chanson !  
11 Et comme l'alouette pour saluer la vie,  
12 Alors Manon chantait l'amour et la jeunesse !

(Sans respirer)  
Alors Manon chantait ! Ah !

LA FOULE  
Manon chantait l'amour !

MANON  
Manon chantait l'amour !  
L'amour et la jeunesse ! Ah !  
Manon chantait la jeunesse !

LA FOULE  
Manon chantait !

Fabliau recitative  
(You can sing this Fabliau instead of the Gavotte)

BRÉTIGNY  
(To Manon)  
Ah! You are truly the queen of love,  
O Manon, who always laughs!

MANON  
1R Always?  
2R You are mistaken!  
3R Maybe my heart is less gay  
4R Than it wants to appear!

Fabliau-aria  
(Alert and light)  
1 Yes, in the woods and on the plain  
2 Just for laughs and without reason  
3 Manon laughed once! And of her distant voice  
4 Echo her companion laughed with Manon, Manon's laugh!

(Laughing)  
Ah! The echo laughed Manon's laugh  
Ah! Ah!

THE CROWD  
The echo laughed Manon's laugh!

MANON  
5 Sometimes seeing the faithful doves  
6 Manon admired them and thought of their wings!  
7 And as the evening fell often found  
8 Pensive again! Manon dreamed!

(Sighing)  
Ah! Pensive again, Manon dreamed! Manon dreamed!

(Lively, alert and light)  
9 Soon fled the dream.  
10 And in the air passed the sound of a song!  
11 And as the lark greets life  
12 So Manon sang of love and of youth!

(Without breathing)  
So sang Manon! Ah!

THE CROWD  
Manon sang of love!

MANON  
Manon sang of love!  
Of Love and of youth! Ah!  
Manon sang of youth!

THE CROWD  
Manon sang!

<sup>410</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Édition Originale avec récitatifs chantés*, 398–405.

Example 49: 'Fabliau: Le rire de Manon.' mm. 1–9.<sup>411</sup>

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the aria 'Fabliau: Le rire de Manon.' from Jules Massenet's opera *Manon*. The score is written on three systems of staves. The first system is marked 'M. (u)' and 'allargo. (alente et léger)'. The lyrics are 'oui dans les bois et dans la plaine ne rien que pour rire et'. The second system is marked 'M.' and 'allegro.'. The lyrics are 'sans raison manon riait jadis! et de sa vois lointai'. The third system is marked 'M.' and 'a tempo (bien chanté)'. The lyrics are 'ne l'écho son compagnon riait a vue Manon du rire'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics.

Discussions of the changes made to *Manon* usually include the late-addition aria 'Fabliau,' which is also known as '*Le rire de Manon*' [Manon's laughter]. The aria received its public premiere in 1898 sung by coloratura soprano Georgette Bréjean-Silver (1870–1951), also known as Bréjean-Gravière. Massenet's publisher, Heugel, included

<sup>411</sup> Jules Massenet, 'Fabliau,' *Manon: opéra-comique en cinq actes et six tableaux*. 1894. 2. Autograph manuscript. From *Musique – Manuscrits Musicaux et lettres autographes*– Salle des ventes Favart, jeudi 21 juin 2012. Paris: Ader Nordmann, 2012. 65.

the sheet music in the 1898 revised *Nouvelle Édition* vocal score. The music was also included in the 1988 HE7067 VS (recitative version). Rather than inserting the aria into the main body of the score, it was instead located in *Annexe A*. The score instructions read, ‘*On peut chanter ce Fabliau à la place de la Gavotte*’ [You can sing this Fabliau instead of the Gavotte.].

Musicologist Gerard Condé writes:

Psychologically, this aria [the Gavotte] is more interesting; musically, it is extremely original, yet it is only half satisfying, and that is undoubtedly the reason Massenet wrote the second aria [the Fabliau]. He first composed a Gavotte intended for Marie Roze, and a very brilliant Fabliau for Mrs. Bréjean-Silver. It is almost always the Gavotte that is sung, although the Fabliau is not without value. The Gavotte is both simpler and more ‘fitting,’ its neoclassical style is better-suited to this situation than the more colourful Fabliau.<sup>412</sup>

Indeed, the Fabliau offers more colour and interest for listeners as well as for vocalists who seek virtuosic melismas. For example, this passage offers two options for a coloratura to show off her *fiorature* and her upper extension to D6.

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<sup>412</sup> Gerard Condé “Introduction et guide d’écoute” in *L’Avant-Scène Opéra : Manon: opéra-comique en cinq actes et six tableaux; musique de Jules Massenet (1842–1912)*, no. 123. 2011 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Paris: Éditions Premières Loges, orig. 1989), 42.

Psychologiquement, cet air est donc intéressant, musicalement il est extrêmement original ; pourtant il n’est qu’à moitié satisfaisant, et c’est sans doute la raison pour laquelle Massenet l’a fait suivre d’un second air. Il composa d’abord une Gavotte en demi-teinte pour Mme Marie Roze puis un Fabliau très brillant pour Mme Bréjean-Silver. C’est presque toujours la Gavotte que l’on chante, quoique le Fabliau ne soit pas sans qualités. La Gavotte est à la fois plus simple et mieux « trouvée », son style néoclassique est davantage en situation que celui, plus bariolé, du Fabliau.

Example 50: ‘Fabliau.’ mm. 51–55.<sup>413</sup>

Supposedly, Massenet wrote the aria in 1894 to showcase the coloratura virtuosity of Bréjean-Gravière, with whom Massenet had become acquainted when she sang *Manon* at the old Opéra-Comique in 1894. However, it was not until four years later in 1898 that Bréjean-Silver brought the *Fabliau* to prominence first as a concert piece, then at the Opéra-Comique’s reprise of *Manon*. Most, but not all, music historians believe that Massenet wrote the ‘*Fabliau*’ for Bréjean-Gravière, even though she was the dedicatee.<sup>414</sup>

<sup>413</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 343.

<sup>414</sup> Thierry Bodin, “Item 134. Jules Massenet. Manuscrit musical autographe signé, *Fabliau*, *Manon*, [1894] ; 1 f. de titre et 8 pages in-fol.” *Musique – Manuscrits Musicaux et lettres autographes – Salle des ventes Favart, jeudi 21 juin 2012*. Paris: Ader Nordmann, 2012. 66.

When an autographed manuscript of the aria sold in 2012, the auction house stated in the advertisement that it was written for her:

“It is for the singer Georgette Bréjean-Silver that Massenet wrote the *Fabliau*. When Massenet heard the singer perform *Manon* in 1894 [...] he was impressed by her talent with coloratura, and composed, for her début in this role in Brussels, this aria that highlighted her gifts, with virtuoso traits, and ultra-high laughs. [...] At the re-opening of the Salle Favart 16 December 1898, Ms. Bréjean-Silver sang *Manon* with the *Fabliau* in place of the *Gavotte*, and it is then that Massenet published the *Fabliau* through Heugel, by inserting it into the score as a separate aria. For a long time, the tradition continued at the Opéra-Comique to sing the *Fabliau* rather than the *Gavotte*. Adding to this, Ms. Bréjean-Silver recorded the *Fabliau* in 1905, and this interpretation leaves us a valuable record of her talent. [...] He (Massenet) also included detailed instructions for the engraving in “song detached” (including the suppression and re-arrangement of the first measures), adding, ‘But, for the theatre, for addition to the score of this special piece nothing changes; leave everything, Brétigny, chorus & etc...’ [...] The manuscript, in brown ink on 20-line Lard-Esnault paper, has many corrections, including scraping,

Branger believes the piece was first performed November 17, 1898 at a private concert and that the public premiere followed at the re-opening of the Opéra-Comique less than one month later:

The 1898–1899 season is an important step in the work’s history. For its new production, Albert Carré gave the role to Georgette Bréjean-Gravière who, justifiably, earned the appropriate title of the ‘Third Manon.’ On this occasion, Massenet composed an alternative aria to the Gavotte that *Le Ménestrel* published December 11, 1898 in the form of a musical supplement. It is titled ‘Fabliau – Le rire de Manon’ [Manon’s laughter]. This aria was set to a text by Philippe Gille, and was given its premiere performance by G. Bréjean-Gravière, with the composer at the piano at a gala dinner at L’Elysée on 17 November 1898. The printed edition of this piece—for voice and piano and voice and orchestra—appeared shortly after. It was probably at this time that the Fabliau was added to the vocal score as an annex, in order to eventually replace the Gavotte.<sup>415</sup>

The programme to which Branger refers and the press release in *Le Ménestrel* suggest that the concert was held at L’Elysée by request of President Félix Faure and was attended by admirals, government officials, and members of Paris’ elite society.

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erasures and some additions, as well as *collette* for the last two measures; he delivered it for engraving for the edition by Heugel in 1898.”

« C’est pour la cantatrice Georgette Bréjean-Silver que Massenet écrit ce Fabliau. Lorsque Massenet entendit en 1894 la cantatrice chanter Manon [...] il fut impressionné par ses talents de colorature, et composa, pour ses débuts dans ce rôle à Bruxelles, cet air qui mettait en valeur ses dons, avec des traits virtuoses et des rires en aigus piqués. [...] Lors de la réouverture de la salle Favart le 16 décembre 1898, Mme Bréjean-Silver chanta Manon, avec le Fabliau en place de la Gavotte, et c’est alors que Massenet fit publier le Fabliau par Heugel, en l’intercalant dans la partition, et sous forme d’air séparé. Longtemps, la tradition subsista à l’Opéra-Comique de chanter le Fabliau plutôt que la Gavotte. Ajoutons que Mme Bréjean-Silver enregistra le Fabliau en 1905, et cette interprétation nous laisse un précieux témoignage de son talent. [...] Il inscrit également des instructions détaillées pour la gravure en « morceau détaché » (notamment la suppression et l’arrangement des premières mesures), ajoutant : « Mais, pour le théâtre, pour l’addition à la partition de ce n° spécial ne rien changer : laisser tout, Brétigny, chœurs & a »... [...] Le manuscrit, à l’encre brune sur papier Lard-Esnault à 20 lignes, présente de nombreuses corrections par grattage, des ratures et quelques additions, ainsi qu’une collette pour les deux dernières mesures ; il a servi pour la gravure de l’édition par Heugel en 1898. »

<sup>415</sup> Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet*, 122.

La saison 1898–1899 représente une étape importante dans l’histoire de l’œuvre. Pour sa nouvelle production, Albert Carré confie de nouveau le rôle à Georgette Bréjean-Gravière qu’il qualifie, à juste titre, de « troisième Manon ». A cette occasion, Massenet compose un air de substitution à la Gavotte, que *Le Ménestrel* publie le 11 décembre 1898 sous la forme d’un supplément musical. Intitulé Fabliau – Le Rire de Manon, cet air écrit sur un texte de Philippe Gille est donné en première audition par G. Bréjean-Gravière et le compositeur au piano, lors d’un gala à l’Elysée le 17 novembre 1898. L’édition de ce morceau – chant et piano et orchestre paraît peu de temps après. C’est probablement à cette époque que le Fabliau est annexé à la partition pour chant et piano afin de remplacer éventuellement la Gavotte.

Figure 24: 'Fabliau' World Première.<sup>416</sup>



<p><b>PREMIÈRE PARTIE.</b></p> <p>Duo de Carmen..... Bizet. M<sup>me</sup> GUIRAUDON.   M. MARÉCHAL.</p> <p><b>SAMSON ET DALILA</b> De M. Camille SAINT-SAËNS. (2<sup>e</sup> acte.)</p> <p>Dalila... M<sup>me</sup> HÉGLON.   Samson... M. ALVAREZ. Le grand prêtre... M. BÉNAUD.</p> <p>Danse: } M<sup>me</sup> TORRE.           } M<sup>me</sup> H. RÉGNIER, BEAUVAIS, IXART, MORLET.</p> <p>Vieilles chansons. — M. FUGÈRE.</p> <p><b>Air de Manon (1<sup>re</sup> audition)..... MASSENET.</b> M<sup>me</sup> BRÉJEAN-GRAVIÈRE, accompagné par l'auteur.</p> <p>Monologues. — M. COQUELIN CASSEY.</p>	<p><b>SECONDE PARTIE.</b></p> <p><b>UN CAPRICE</b> Comédie en un acte d'ARRAZU et MUSSET.</p> <p>Mathilde... M<sup>me</sup> BARETTA.   Charizny... MM. WORMS. M<sup>me</sup> de Léris... BARTET.   Un domestique... G. BERR.</p> <p>Danses grecques, reconstituées par M. HASSEN, Musique de M. BOURGAULT-DUCOUDRAY, accompagnées par l'auteur.</p> <p>Danse: M<sup>me</sup> SANDRINI.   Crayé: M. BARTET.</p> <p>Tyrolienne de Guillaume Tell..... ROSSINI. M<sup>me</sup> SUBIRA, ZAMBELLI, LORSTEIN.</p> <p>PREMIÈRE REPRÉSENTATION: <b>L'AMOUR DES BÊTES</b> De M. HENRI LAVEDAN. Jeanette... M<sup>me</sup> YAHYE.   La tante... M<sup>me</sup> SOBEL. L'oncle... M. CHELLES.</p>
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*L'Orchestre sera dirigé par M. MANGIN. — Le Piano sera tenu par M. PAUL VIDAL.*

<sup>416</sup> Georgette Bréjean-Gravière, "Air de Manon (premiere)," Concert Programme, L'Elysée Palais, Paris, November 17, 1898, Comp. Jules Massenet, New York: Pierpont Morgan Library: James Fuld Collection. FULD 231646.

Figure 25: Press release.<sup>417</sup>

3533. — 64<sup>me</sup> ANNÉE — N° 50.      PARAIT TOUS LES DIMANCHES      Dimanche 11 Décembre 1898.  
 (Les Bureaux, 2<sup>me</sup>, rue Vivienne, Paris)  
 (Les manuscrits doivent être adressés franco au journal, et, publiés ou non, ils ne sont pas rendus aux auteurs.)

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MUSIQUE DE CHANT

Nos abonnés à la musique de CHANT recevront, avec le numéro de ce jour :

LE RIRE DE MANON

fabliau de J. MASSENET, poésie de PHILIPPE GILLE, nouvellement écrit pour la reprise de *Manon* au nouvel Opéra-Comique et qui sera chanté par M<sup>me</sup> Bréjean-Gravière. — Suivra immédiatement : la *Sérénade de Milenka*, arrangée pour chant par JAN BLOCKX sur des paroles de GUSTAVE LAGYE.

il gagna quatre jours sur le temps qu'il s'était donné — et sa salle était superbe!

Mais passons, et cessons les récriminations. Aussi bien, n'avons-nous pas trop de temps pour visiter avec quelque attention le nouveau monument que M. Louis Bernier vient d'élever à notre seconde scène lyrique. Je n'ai pas à m'occuper de la scène, que je n'ai point vue, non plus que des reproches qu'on lui fait et qui, malheureusement, semblent un peu trop motivés. C'est à l'usur qu'on verra ce qu'il en est. Pour le moment je ne veux envisager que l'ensemble de l'édifice et la partie consacrée au public, c'est-à-dire la salle.

La façade principale, sur la place Boieldieu, a vraiment grand air, et les lignes en sont d'une noble élégance. On accède au rez-de-chaussée par un perron de six marches qui mène aux trois portes d'entrée. Les trois grandes baies cintrées du

News coverage surrounding the gala reveals that there was enthusiasm about the opera's reprise, the new aria, and Massenet's 'Third Manon.' These reports are representative:

Ms. Bréjean-Gravière will sing at the Elysée Palace this Thursday night, an unpublished Fabliau that Massenet wrote especially for her, which will be inserted into the third act of the reprise of *Manon* that Mr. Albert Carré is preparing for the Opéra-Comique. It is a premiere that the invitees of the President of the Republic will hear tonight.<sup>418</sup>

The Fabliau that Ms. Bréjean-Gravière sang last Thursday evening at the L'Elysée that Massenet, as we have said, wrote expressly for her, for her introduction as *Manon*, will be introduced into the third act of this work, the act of the *Cours-la-Reine* for the opera's reprise at the Opéra-Comique.<sup>419</sup>

<sup>417</sup> 'Musique de chant: Le rire de Manon,' *Le Ménestrel* 64, no. 50 (December 11, 1898): 1.

<sup>418</sup> Aimée Tessandier, "Courrier des théâtres," *Le Figaro*, November 17, 1898, 4.

Mme Bréjean-Gravière chantera à l'Elysée, ce soir jeudi, un fabliau inédit que Massenet; a écrit spécialement pour elle et qui sera intercalé au 8e acte de la reprise de *Manon* que M. Albert Carré prépare à l'Opéra-Comique. C'est donc une primeur que les invités du Président de la République auront ce soir.

<sup>419</sup> André Halen, "Echos de Théâtres," *Le Radical* 18, no. 326 (November 22, 1898): 4.

Le fabliau que Mme Bréjean-Gravière a chanté jeudi dernier à la soirée de l'Elysée, et que Massenet, comme nous l'avons dit, avait écrit tout exprès pour elle, sera introduit dans *Manon*, au troisième acte de cet ouvrage, l'acte du *Cours-la-Reine* lors de sa reprise au nouvelle Opéra-comique.

Some other well-known singers were on the roster for the 1898 concert, including Fugère and Maréchal, but the remaining performers seem to have been working artists who were not yet famous. The timing, order, content, and individuals involved in the evening's entertainment suggest that the concert might have been part of a marketing campaign by Massenet and his promotional entourage to increase ticket sales for the reprise.

Scheduling a world premiere, booking renowned performers, and holding an exclusive event supported by the President probably resulted in several positive outcomes. The gala likely increased the appetites of attendees for the forthcoming *Manon* scheduled to open the following month. For those who were not invited to attend, the exclusivity of the event and conjecture about the new aria apparently helped to increase audience and critical interest. In turn, that probably helped drive ticket sales.

Another possibility is that Massenet might have used the gala to audition the new piece and his new soprano, as opposed to waiting until opening night at the Opéra-Comique to test the pairing of the 'Fabliau' and Bréjean-Silver. Employing this sort of 'test marketing' would have been analogous to having Sanderson début in Brussels under the stage name Ada Palmer. Similar to what happened with Sanderson, Bréjean-Silver's stellar performance at the concert and at the re-opening of Salle Favart in Nice in 1899 increased the soprano's fame. Critical response to the 'Fabliau' was positive in both Paris and Nice:

The reprise of *Manon* is decidedly a big success. [...] The choirs take part in the action, and the *Cours-la-Reine* scene is particularly lively. The crowd scene promenade is joyous, boisterous, and characteristically amusing. The artists, Mr. Maréchal and Mrs. Bréjean-Gravière, were applauded at length.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Memento, "Notes et informations," *Le Monde Artiste* 38, no. 52 (December 25, 1898): 827.

La reprise de *Manon* est décidément un gros succès. [...] Les chœurs prennent part à l'action, et le tableau du *Cours-la-Reine* est particulièrement animé. La foule s'y promène joyeuse, turbulente, amusée d'incidents caractéristiques. Les artistes, M. Maréchal et Mme Bréjean-Gravière sont longuement applaudis.

Ms. Bréjean-Gravière recently sang *Manon* at the Casino, with great success. The Fabliau she sings in the *Cours-la-Reine* scene was met with acclamation. She was recalled four times after the Saint-Sulpice scene.<sup>421</sup>

Ms. Bréjean-Gravière is scheduled to return this week, having completed her leave at the Municipal Casino at Nice, where she sang *Lakmé* and *Manon* with great success. In this work by Mr. Massenet, she received acclaim at each performance, and encoed for the new Fabliau.<sup>422</sup>

Since the aria premiered in 1898 to critical and popular acclaim, it seems odd that

Massenet waited four years to premiere the piece. Bréjean-Gravière had been successfully singing *Manon* since 1894, as noted by critic Fernand Bourgeat:

Monday we were called to attend an excellent reprise of *Manon* at the Opéra-Comique. The delightful score by Massenet, once again, charmed the public and served as part of the début of three artists who are quite remarkable. Mrs. Bréjean-Gravière, who came to us preceded by a reputation like those of the Bordeaux dilettantes—grand connoisseurs, as is known—believed, from first glance, that she would conquer the Parisian public. She is a consummate and charming artist, knowing how to ‘phrase’ and is endowed with an exquisite voice. She was acclaimed, encoed, and recalled enough to make her understand that henceforth, she should not leave the fine theatre of the Opéra-Comique, where her place at the top is secured.<sup>423</sup>

Perhaps Massenet would not allow the aria to be performed until he believed Bréjean-Gravière to be sufficiently capable of singing the piece. This review may shed some light on the mediocrity felt by some critics in 1894 toward the ‘Bordelaise chanteuse’:

If you desire to know my concise opinion, I would say that the protagonist, Ms. Bréjean-Gravière knows her métier as a light singer, but I refuse to make any comparison between her and her predecessor, Miss Sibyl Sanderson, who through

<sup>421</sup> Jules Huret, “Courrier des Théâtres,” *Le Figaro*, March 3, 1899, 4.

Mme Bréjean-Gravière vient de chanter *Manon*, au Casino, avec un grand succès. Le fabliau qu’elle chante au Cours-la-Reine a été bissé d’acclamation. On l’a rappelée quatre fois après la scène de Saint-Sulpice.

<sup>422</sup> “À la Opéra-Comique,” *Le Ménestrel* 65, no. 11 (March 12, 1899): 87.

Mme Bréjean-Gravière doit faire sa rentrée cette semaine, ayant terminé son congé, qu’elle a passé au Casino municipal de Nice, chantant avec très grand succès *Lakmé* et *Manon*. Dans l’ouvrage de M. Massenet, à chaque représentation on lui a bissé d’acclamation le nouveau Fabliau.

<sup>423</sup> Fernand Bourgeat, “Théâtres,” *L’Univers Illustré* 37, no. 2062 (September 29, 1894): 615.

Lundi nous avons été appelé à assister à une excellente reprise de *Manon*, à l’Opéra-comique. La délicieuse partition de Massenet a, de nouveau, charmé le public et a servi de pièce de débuts à trois artistes tout à fait remarquables. Madame Bréjean-Gravière, qui nous arrivait précédée de la réputation que les dilettantes bordelais, — grands connaisseurs, comme on sait, — lui avait faite, a, du premier coup, fait la conquête du public parisien. C’est une artiste consommée et charmante, sachant « phraser » et douée d’une voix exquise. On l’a acclamée, bissée, rappelée de façon à bien lui faire comprendre que, désormais, elle ne devrait plus quitter le beau théâtre de l’Opéra-comique où sa place est marquée au premier rang.

patient study, and by constant progress, achieved a true embodiment of the character. Regarding Miss Sanderson, listening to the really best of voices, she has returned to the youthful beginnings of her fame. Until Miss Sanderson listens to the best advice and returns to the cradle of her fame.<sup>424</sup>

In 1898, critic A. Boisard comments on the improvement he witnessed in Bréjean-Gravière's voice:

As for Mrs. Bréjean-Gravière, she had already sung *Manon*. [...] Once again, she delivered a less than desirable performance for this type of heroine [...], but her progress as a singer is evident. Regarding the music, there is a supplement added to the exciting third act; the composer wrote a new piece for this reprise, 'le rire de *Manon*,' in which the interpreter received praise for her truly exceptional virtuosity.<sup>425</sup>

It would come as no surprise if Massenet would not premiere the piece until he felt Bréjean-Gravière was sufficiently ready to sing it according to his standards. Or perhaps he chose to wait until she had achieved a higher level of fame. She did enjoy a successful performance career, but her success does not seem to have equalled the stardom attained by her contemporaries, including Sanderson, Calvé, and Garden. Nonetheless, she appears to have been popular and sufficiently respected to continue working, and her marriage to a composer, Charles Silver, also increased her profile. In 1905, Bréjean-Gravière made a landmark recording of the 'Fabliau,' which also helped to keep her name in the press.

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<sup>424</sup> Tic-Tac. "Chronique musicale," *Le Monde Artiste* 34, no. 38 (September 16, 1894): 523.

Si vous désirez connaître mon opinion concise, je vous dirai que la protagoniste, Mme Bréjean-Gravière sait son métier de chanteuse légère, mais je me refuserai à établir le moindre point de comparaison entre elle et sa devancière, Mlle Sibyl Sanderson qui, par une patiente étude, par un progrès constant, était arrivée à une véritable incarnation du personnage. En attendant que Mlle Sanderson, écoutant les voix réellement dévouées, revienne au berceau de sa jeune renommée.

<sup>425</sup> A. Boisard, "Chronique musicale," *Le Monde Illustré*, December 31, 1898, 538–539.

Pour Mme Bréjean-Gravière, elle avait déjà chanté *Manon*. [...] La voici de nouveau, réalisant moins que jamais le type de l'héroïne [...], mais en progrès évident comme chanteuse. Outre la musique d'un pas supplémentaire ajouté au divertissement du 3e acte, le maître a écrit pour cette reprise une page nouvelle « le rire de *Manon*» où l'interprète a fait applaudir sa virtuosité vraiment exceptionnelle.

**Figure 26:** Bréjean-Silver, Georgette. *Manon*. ‘Fabliau.’<sup>426</sup>



Despite critical acclaim, her marriage to a public figure, and having played an important part in the history of recorded music, Bréjean-Gravière’s legacy is somewhat obscure now. However, during her career, which was most vital at the turn of the last century, critics wrote about her frequently. Therefore, it is understandable that Massenet would have entrusted the newest addition to his most-famous opera to the ‘Third Manon,’ but only when he felt the timing was ideal. The fact that he dedicated the piece to her lends credence to the assertion that the ‘Fabliau’ was written expressly for Bréjean-Gravière, regardless of when it was first performed.

Jack Winsor Hansen does not believe that Massenet intended the aria for Bréjean-Gravière, and he tries to build a case that the piece was composed for Sibyl Sanderson:

Massenet may have added the Fabliau (‘Oui, dans les bois’), a difficult coloratura aria, for the bicentennial performance. [...] However, Bidu Sayão told me that according to her teacher, Jacques Isnardon, who often sang the Comte Des Grieux opposite both Sanderson and Bréjean-Silver, that the Fabliau was composed expressly for Sibyl. French soprano Alice Verlet, who coached the role of Manon with the composer, told the late American painter Carroll Kelly that the Fabliau was written for the bicentennial performance at Sanderson’s request. Jean-

<sup>426</sup> Jules Massenet, “Fabliau,” Autographed sound recording performed by Georgette Bréjean-Silver, Paris: L’Opéra-comique, 1905. Accessed July 7, 2015. [http://assets.rootsvinylguide.com/pictures/brejean-silver-manon-fabliau-la-boheme-on-m-appelle-mimi\\_2379140](http://assets.rootsvinylguide.com/pictures/brejean-silver-manon-fabliau-la-boheme-on-m-appelle-mimi_2379140).

Christophe Branger, in his recent book ‘Manon de Jules Massenet,’ disputes Irvine’s statement that Bréjean-Silver premiered the Fabliau in Brussels. According to him, she first performed the aria on 17 November 1898 in concert in Paris with Massenet at the piano, and *Le Ménestrel* published a concert version of it for voice and piano a month later. It had, however, already appeared in the appendix of the revised 1895 edition of *Manon*.<sup>427</sup>

Hansen’s final statement is not accurate. While the aria was included in what is called the ‘1895 Nouvelle Édition’ vocal score, Heugel published it for the first time in the ‘1898 Revised Nouvelle Édition.’ It seems that if Massenet wanted Sanderson to sing the ‘Fabliau,’ the aria would have been included in the c.1895 New York Public Library (HOF 76–6) annotated vocal score, which contains the Sanderson revisions and sung recitatives. However, the changes appear to have been completed after Sanderson’s disappointing 1895 New York Metropolitan Opera début.

Hansen cites Bréjean-Gravière’s use of *ossia* passages throughout the aria as one reason he believes that Massenet did not write the ‘Fabliau’ for her. Rather, he holds that it was composed for Sanderson.<sup>428</sup> His basis for this conclusion is that if the aria had been composed for Bréjean-Gravière, the notes she sang on the 1905 recording would have been printed as the primary vocal line in the sheet music, rather than relegated to *ossia*. However, this argument is easily refuted; Massenet gave Sanderson three variations—one primary line and two *ossia*—from which to choose in the 1887 revision of *Manon*’s ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ That is to say, Massenet composed three different melodic options for just one singer (the variations of ‘Je suis encore...’ for Sanderson) and allowed her to choose which line she preferred to sing. Additionally, that preference may have changed from day to day depending on external circumstances, such as performance venue or vocal health. In 1894, Massenet gave Sanderson melodic options in the opera *Thaïs* as well:

<sup>427</sup> Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story*, Location 6050–6056.

<sup>428</sup> Hansen, “Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence on *Manon*,” 45.

**Example 51:** ‘Le mort de Thaïs.’ mm.51–53.<sup>429</sup>



Massenet wrote both primary and *ossia* lines for Sanderson in *Manon* and *Thaïs*.

Therefore, it is feasible that he offered Bréjean-Gravière more than one melodic option in the ‘Fabliau’; her use of *ossia* does not indicate that the aria was meant for someone else.

Hansen also claims that Bréjean-Gravière was unknown when Massenet composed the piece, which was not the case:

Two years later, some time before the bicentennial performance of 16 October 1893, Massenet may have indulged his protégée again by adding the Fabliau [...] Demar Irvine has written that this piece was composed for Georgette Bréjean-Silver. In 1893, however, Bréjean-Silver was an unimportant provincial singer with whom Massenet would not have troubled himself. [...] After much research, I have found no mention in the Parisian press that any special aria was written for her, whereas several Parisian papers had announced [...] that Massenet was composing a special aria ‘bristling with all kinds of difficulties’ for M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson. It may have been the ‘Fabliau.’<sup>430</sup>

Documentation to support Hansen’s claim (that ‘several Parisian papers’ wrote about Massenet composing the ‘Fabliau’ for Sanderson) has not been located, and he does not provide sources for this assertion. There was press coverage in 1893 about Massenet writing a new piece for Sanderson, but it was about *Thaïs*, not the ‘Fabliau.’ Hansen also asserts that the Parisian press did not write about a new aria composed for Bréjean-Gravière, which also appears to be inaccurate; reviews included the premiere.

Massenet composed *Thaïs* for Sanderson in 1893. The title role lends further support to the notion that Manon’s ‘Fabliau’ was not written for Sanderson. When compared, Thaïs’s music is quite different from the melodic content of the ‘Fabliau.’ Thaïs is typically associated with the lyric soprano voice type, unlike Manon, which is

<sup>429</sup> Jules Massenet, *Thaïs: Comédie Lyrique En 3 Actes* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. A665a), 703.

<sup>430</sup> Hansen, “Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence on Manon,” 45.

more often played by a coloratura soprano. This excerpt from *Thaïs* is representative of the lower tessitura (mostly middle register) and legato lines present in the opera.<sup>431</sup> When compared to the melismas of the ‘Fabliau,’ it is difficult to imagine that Massenet composed the ‘Fabliau’ and *Thaïs* for Sanderson at essentially the same time.

**Example 52:** ‘O mon miroir fidèle, dis-moi que je suis belle.’ mm. 32–35.<sup>432</sup>

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system is for the vocal line, starting with the instruction '(Se calmant peu à peu)'. The lyrics are 'Non! Non! je n'y puis croire,'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active treble line. The second system is also for the vocal line, with the instruction '(s'adressant à Vénus) *expressif*'. The lyrics are 'Toi, Vénus, Réponds-moi de ma beau-'. The piano accompaniment includes a 'cresc.' marking in the bass line. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

<sup>431</sup> Sanderson premiered *Phryné* by Saint-Saëns in 1893. It also has a lower tessitura and legato lines.

<sup>432</sup> Massenet, *Thaïs*, 88.

Example 53: ‘Fabliau.’ mm. 10–15.<sup>433</sup>

Beyond a lack of documentary and musical evidence, Hansen seems to relate what could be called second-hand ‘gossip’ from two unrelated sources: opera singer Sayao and painter Kelly. Some credence could be lent to the claim that Massenet wrote the ‘Fabliau’ for Sanderson if the gossip were true, since Jacques Isnardon did appear alongside Sanderson in both the 1894 and 1898 productions of *Manon* at the Opéra-Comique starring Bréjean-Gravière. However, the credibility of the assertion must be questioned because Hansen also writes that Isnardon ‘often sang Comte des Grieux opposite Sanderson and Bréjean-Silver,’ but Isnardon did not appear as Comte des Grieux; he played Lescaut. Lucien Fugère played Comte des Grieux in the productions under Hansen’s consideration. The critiques by Bourgeat and Boisard underscore these facts:

Finally, Mr. Isnardon proved in the role of Lescaut, as good an actor as a singer.<sup>434</sup>

<sup>433</sup> Massenet, *Manon: Nouvelle Édition*, 339.

<sup>434</sup> Bourgeat, “Théâtres,” 615. Enfin M. Isnardon s’est montré dans le rôle de Lescaut, aussi bon comédien que chanteur agréable

Mr. Isnardon immediately succeeded Taskin in the character of Lescaut, to which he added all his artistic skills; his inspiration was unexpected and original.<sup>435</sup>

Hansen's conclusion (that Massenet wrote the aria for Sanderson) is possible, but remains unsubstantiated. Regardless of the intended recipient, the 'Fabliau' has not, to date, overtaken the 'Gavotte' in popularity. Coloratura Beverly Sills (1929–2007) enjoyed singing both arias, and in the 1971 San Francisco Opera production of *Manon* she sang the 'Gavotte' followed by the 'Fabliau' during the Act III *Cours-la-Reine* scene.<sup>436</sup> It is interesting that even though Massenet indicated that the 'Fabliau' was meant to replace the 'Gavotte,' it is still more common to hear the 'Gavotte' performed in a production of *Manon*. Perhaps if Sanderson had performed the 'Fabliau,' the 'Gavotte' might have become a piece of the past. *Mais, c'est l'histoire de Manon Lescaut.*

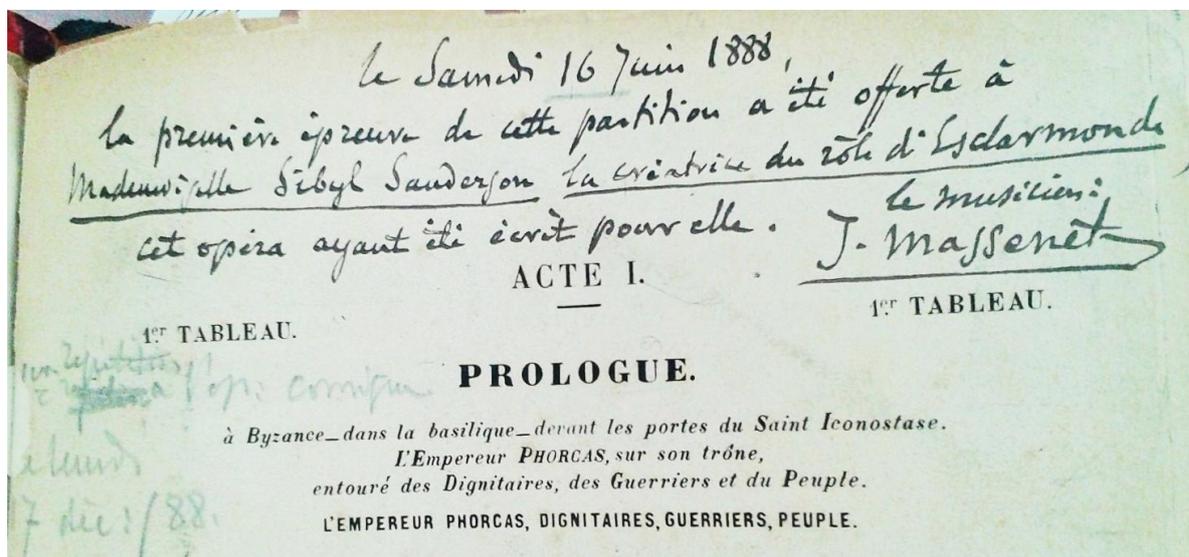
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<sup>435</sup> Boisard, "Chronique musicale," 538–539.

M. Isnardon qui succéda immédiatement à Taskin dans le personnage de Lescaut y'a ajouté tout ce que son tempérament artistique lui inspire d'imprévu et d'original.

<sup>436</sup> "Press Packet," *Manon* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Opera, 1971), 2.

## CHAPTER FIVE

*ESCLARMONDE*: SANDERSON'S CREATION OF THE RÔLE*Esclarmonde*: History of the Opera and Sanderson as *la créatrice*

Saturday June 16, 1888, the first proof of this score was offered to Miss Sibyl Sanderson the creator of the role of Esclarmonde, this opera was written for her. The musician: J. Massenet.<sup>437</sup>

*Esclarmonde* is a 'romanesque' opera consisting of four acts with prologue and epilogue. Huebner describes opéra romanesque as 'an adjectival form of medieval roman, that is, chivalric romance implying multifarious and colourful adventures, with 'chivalric romance' meaning a narrative poem marked by fantasy, adventure, and romantic pursuits. 'Romanesque' can also refer to a type of medieval architecture.<sup>438</sup>

It premiered 15 May 1889 at the Opéra-Comique and coincided with the opening of the Eiffel Tower during the Exposition Universelle. Numerous critics commented on the simultaneous opening of Massenet's new opera and the architectural addition to the Parisian skyline, and many members of the public and press believed the premiere of

<sup>437</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*. US-NYpm: PMC 1668. 1.

Le Samedi 16 juin 1888, la première épreuve de cette partition a été offerte à Mademoiselle Sibyl Sanderson la créatrice du rôle d'Esclarmonde, cet opéra ayant été écrit pour elle. le musicien : J. Massenet.

<sup>438</sup> Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 88.

*Esclarmonde* was meant to concur with the World's Fair, but the opera was neither commissioned nor written for the event.

Massenet is believed to have received the *Esclarmonde* libretto, written by Alfred Blau and Louis Ferdinand de Gramont, in early 1886; he began composing the music for the opera in late 1886.<sup>439</sup> Blau and Gramont based the libretto, originally titled *Pertinax*, on a twelfth-century metrical prose poem entitled 'Partenopaeus de Blois.' This tale may have been written in approximately 1150 by Denis Pyramus, a Benedictine monk, but that remains unproven. It is believed, however, that Blau first read the chivalric romance in 1871 at the library of Blois during the Paris commune.<sup>440</sup> Its plot shares many common traits with the story of Cupid and Psyche but with the roles reversed: *Esclarmonde* pursues Roland, and Melior pursues Partenopaeus.<sup>441</sup>

While it was not the first medieval operatic adaptation, it was one of the earliest from that period.<sup>442</sup> Massenet received the *Pertinax* (Partenopaeus) libretto from his publisher Hartmann, changed the title to *Esclarmonde*, and began composing the music, though progress stalled while the composer diverted his attention to other projects. Similar to several of his other operas, Massenet featured the female lead as the name of the opera (e.g., *Esclarmonde*, *Manon*, *Thaïs*, *Sapho*, etc.). Massenet met Sanderson in 1887 and chose the coloratura for the title role of *Esclarmonde* in early 1888, following her successful début as *Manon* in Brussels' *La Monnaie*. The composer returned to the unfinished score and commenced writing the title role specifically for Sanderson's high, light, coloratura voice. Regardless of when Massenet received the libretto or began writing the music, the timing of the premiere is a valuable example of the composer's oft-

<sup>439</sup> Gillis, "Genèse d'*Esclarmonde*," 23.

<sup>440</sup> "Esclarmonde," *La Grande Revue* 113 (1923): 41.

<sup>441</sup> Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle*, 164.

<sup>442</sup> Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle*, 74, 78.

Huebner claims that Reyer's *Sigurd* (1884) was probably the first French opera in the late nineteenth-century based on medieval themes.

discussed business savvy; he was able to exploit the publicity campaigns surrounding the exposition, and in turn supplement his own marketing resources. Annegret Fauser underscores this point:

Visitors and critics could not fail to understand *Esclarmonde*'s quasi-official status as the great French musical creation for the Exposition, a high-profile response to the cultural challenges posed especially by Imperial Germany, symbolized in the figure of Richard Wagner. This was a 'modern' work, dazzling like the Eiffel Tower, showing that France was at the forefront of artistic creation. [...] The link between the Exposition and *Esclarmonde* was exploited by critics who tried to evaluate the opera's importance and meaning within this context.<sup>443</sup>

In perfect parallel to the début of the latest technological marvel, the soaring and lovely Eiffel Tower, Massenet and his production team prompted a considerable amount of interest in the scale and beauty of Sanderson's voice. Both 'belles' promised to be like nothing the people of Paris and the world had ever seen or heard. It was an interesting juxtaposition of timeless qualities, intended permanence, and 'modern' features, to use Fauser's word. With *Esclarmonde*, Massenet set a medieval tale to music that was considered part of the newer operatic style (Wagnerian). The staging and visual marvels such as electric lighting made it a technological wonder, which only added to the modernity of the spectacle.<sup>444</sup>

Sanderson excited the press as a fresh-faced young American with a classic Parisian beauty and an extraordinary voice. She was set apart almost in an iconic manner like the Eiffel Tower: representative of the Parisian landscape but certainly not an average member of the operatic milieu. These reactions to Sanderson may have been exactly the outcome Massenet desired. Her close friend, Gertrude Atherton, recalls the marketing campaign surrounding the opera's premiere:

In a few short weeks, Sibyl would make her début in grand style and after much heralding, little else was talked of. [...] Sibyl's [voice] was a light lyric; it was of an unusual timbre and range. Massenet had trained it up to high G! To be sure, it

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<sup>443</sup> Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 62–63.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

was so far off when it got there that you couldn't hear it, but as publicity, it was unique. [...] And her publicity had been admirably managed. Great things were expected of her. Her beauty was extravagantly admired. She looked the Parisian born. She had that air of *autorité* that on the French stage is one of the essentials of success. Above all, Massenet, the most eminent French composer of his day, had written a new opera for her début. He had been enchanted to find a phenomenally high voice once more, for Heilbron, upon whom he had relied for years, had died shortly before Sibyl's arrival in Paris. Such voices—high, sweet, true, poignant—were rare; rarer still were they accompanied by those other advantages possessed in so generous a measure by 'la belle Sibylle.'<sup>445</sup>

Atherton's memoirs provide valuable insight into the events of Sanderson's life and very useful descriptions of her vocality. There are two items of particular interest in the quotation above. When the author writes that Sanderson's voice was one of 'unusual timbre and range' and that her high G was 'far off,' it suggests that Sanderson probably phonated her highest notes in flageolet (whistle) register as opposed to singing them with full voice. This conclusion is supported by Auguste Vitu's 1889 review of Sanderson's performance, wherein he describes her high G as a 'véritable note de petite flûte' [a veritable piccolo note].<sup>446</sup> If Sanderson used whistle register, it could have resulted in a 'strange' and distant-sounding tone; Atherton describes the sound as 'far off.' Voice scientist James Stark explains that the aural results are a function of resonance:

The high soprano voice also has an auxiliary register, which is known by various names such as 'flageolet,' 'whistle,' 'bird-tone,' or 'flute.' [...] This register is characterized by its resonance, not by a change in the sound source. [...] Physiologically, *flageolet* is characterized by minimal/reduced vocal fold oscillation and no apparent phase of complete closure. [...] The singer may experience this as a sense of disengagement of the vocal muscles, due to the reduction in the effort to raise F<sub>1</sub> [First formant].<sup>447</sup>

Sean Parr offers insights based on research by Richard Miller that are of particular relevance to Sanderson and her portrayal of both Esclarmonde and Manon; the use of *flageolet* seems to correlate with emotional outbursts:

Before the mid nineteenth century, operatic treble voices performed only up to high C for the most part, and rarely, to high D. At mid-century, sopranos regularly

<sup>445</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 154–155.

<sup>446</sup> Auguste Vitu, "Chronique Musicale," *Le Figaro*, May 16, 1889, 3.

<sup>447</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 89–90.

sang higher than this, presumably employing what we now call *flageolet*, or whistle voice. Neither this voice, nor this range extension, is mentioned in contemporary pedagogical treatises. Nor is it mentioned or explained in today's didactic manuals, and is never approached as a technique that is learnable. Teachers most often assume that it is an extension that is either innately present—or not—in the female voice. [...] The extension can be developed, but only via what could be described as exercises in emotional abandon. It is interesting that today's scientific explanation for whistle voice, and its technique, involves a self-conscious detachment from physiological control.<sup>448</sup>

Flageolet requires aesthetic risk-taking and the letting go of all conscious control. Practicing the flageolet brings freedom to the entire upper range and eases the tasks a soprano later encounters in high-lying pitches of the performance literature. Flageolet timbre is best accomplished in an almost child-like manner, executing rapid patterns imitative of hilarious laughter.<sup>449</sup>

Parr balances accounts of the history and national styles of the whistle register with explanations of the physical process required to access this range. The musicologist notes that extremely high soprano pitches (E6-G6) appear in scores prior to the nineteenth-century (i.e., Mozart's compositions for the Weber sisters), but, he points out, this upper range became a more common musical device beginning in the mid-1850s:

The register is acknowledged by all schools of singing, but used primarily in French and Italian methods. Extension of the head voice can reach an octave above high C. The physical events that produce the head voice are so acute in this upper register that a change of timbre is perceived and a change in sensation is experienced by the singer. The whistle voice is clearly in use for high D and above. [...] The technique of the Franco-Italian school of singing manifests physically—the shape of the mouth is drastically altered, open wide almost to an exaggerated smile (incisor teeth showing prominently), with elevated cheeks. Sound perceived in this range has a heavy concentration of upper partials, and can sometimes sound brittle and dry. Indeed, timbral brilliance is the goal. Rapid vibrato is another hallmark of the Franco-Italian technique in coloratura sopranos. In the German school, the timbre of whistle voice seems disembodied, unlike the Franco-Italian. In more purely French coloratura technique, the whistle voice is brought down into the head register, adding further brightness to the tone. Brilliant, but sometimes small and thin, the sound can give the impression of a chime or sharply-rung bell<sup>450</sup>

Sanderson, it seems, was a typical coloratura soprano from the French school. Many critics wrote that her voice was thin and cold in the upper realms; these words sound

<sup>448</sup> Parr, *Melismatic Madness*, 99.

<sup>449</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 137.

<sup>450</sup> Parr, *Melismatic Madness*, 99.

synonymous with ‘brittle’ and ‘dry.’ Moreover, the soprano received a large amount of criticism for her tremolo (rapid vibrato). Nonetheless, as Parr points out, beginning in approximately the mid-nineteenth century, sopranos who sang in whistle register drew considerable interest from opera-goers. It should be noted that this trend dismayed Hector Berlioz, who sarcastically likens singing in this range to crushing a small dog, and he even called it ‘*l’école du petit chien*’ [the lapdog school].<sup>451</sup>

Sanderson and Massenet began collaborating on the partially-composed opera in spring 1888. Composition, audition, and score revisions continued for nearly a year.<sup>452</sup> It is reasonable to believe that Massenet had ascertained that Sanderson could sing a high G, because she sang one of the Queen of the Night arias (ascending to high F) for Massenet at their first meeting. Therefore, Atherton’s assertion that Massenet ‘trained her voice up to G’ is probably inaccurate.

During composition and rehearsal, Massenet probably asked Sanderson to sing passages in certain ways, and she likely experimented with different styles and sounds in order to arrive at what the two believed to be an optimal combination of orchestration and melody. There is little doubt that with the number of rehearsals she attended prior to opening night, Sanderson would have had opportunities to experiment with diverse vocal and dramatic effects. Musicologists Ghristi and Auclair (2011) discussed the exhausting rehearsals, supporting their claims with this quote by Albert Carré (1938), which he made after Massenet’s wife died and shortly before he himself passed away:

From his first creations, the composer was extremely assiduous in attending rehearsals. Indeed, he felt real pleasure in turning up in the theatre – he frequently recalled in his Memoirs his emotions when he observed from the wings in such

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<sup>451</sup> Hector Berlioz, “L’école du petit chien,” *A travers chants: études musicales, adorations, boutades et critiques*, 2<sup>e</sup> edition (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1872), 349; Hector Berlioz, *The Art of Music and Other Essays*, edited and translated by Elizabeth Csicsery-Ronay (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 69.

Aussi agréable que le cri d’un petit chien dont on écrase la patte, cela suffit pour que la salle retentisse d’acclamations.

<sup>452</sup> Sanderson and Puech, “Les débutants,” 3.

places – he always wanted to supervise the and control each scene so that each scene would be as perfect as possible and be as successful as possible. Thus, Massenet attended almost all ninety-seven rehearsals of *Esclarmonde* that preceded the premiere of this work at the Opéra-Comique on the 15 May 1889. Without doubt, his passion for Sibyl Sanderson, who made her début in the title role, gave him an additional reason to be even more assiduous than usual. The director of the Opéra-Comique, Albert Carré, mocked and ridiculed the jealous passion of his friend Massenet (as cited by Ghristi):

It is no secret for anyone- and I want to talk about it without embarrassment now that Ms. Massenet has just died at the age of 98 years - that Massenet was madly in love with the ravishing American singer. For her, he wrote *Esclarmonde*, in which she created the title-role in Paris. [...] Massenet was insanely jealous *vis-à-vis* Sibyl Sanderson and when, at that same moment in *Esclarmonde*, the heroine disappeared with her lover behind the curtain of foliage which fell on the sleeping couple, the tenor Gilbert recounted to me that Massenet never failed to hide himself in the wings to ensure that the performers did not take advantage of the situation.<sup>453</sup>

If Carré's recollections were true, Massenet cast himself in the role of Sanderson's guardian by chaperoning the two leads in the brief break. He did not trust that Gilbert and Sanderson would be capable of refraining from getting involved in a real-life romantic interlude while they were behind the curtain in the famous nuptial scene between Act I and Act II. There may have been more realistic reasons for Massenet to go backstage at that point in the opera, but Carré's tale is certainly more intriguing. Perhaps he used those

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<sup>453</sup> Christophe Ghristi and Mathias Auclair, *La Belle Époque de Massenet* (Montreuil: Gourcuff Gradenigo Éditions, 2011), 43; Albert Carré, *Souvenirs de Théâtre* (Paris: Plon, 1950).

Dès ses premières créations, le compositeur se montre d'une grande assiduité aux répétitions. En effet, s'il éprouve un plaisir non dissimulé à se rendre dans les théâtres – il rappelle fréquemment dans ses Souvenirs son émotion à fréquenter les coulisses de ces lieux -, il souhaite surtout tout superviser et tout contrôler pour que son œuvre connaisse la réalisation scénique la plus parfaite et remporte le succès le plus accompli. Ainsi, Massenet assiste-t-il à la quasi-totalité des quatre-vingt-dix-sept répétitions d'*Esclarmonde* qui ont précédé la création de cette œuvre à l'Opéra-comique, le 15 mai 1889. Sans doute sa passion pour Sibyl Sanderson, qui fait ses débuts à la scène dans le rôle-titre, lui donne-t-elle un argument supplémentaire pour être plus assidu encore que d'ordinaire. Le directeur de l'Opéra-Comique, Albert Carré, se gausse de la passion jalouse de son ami Massenet et persifle.

Ce n'est un secret pour personne – et je veux bien en parler sans gêne maintenant que Mme Massenet vient de s'éteindre à l'âge de 98 ans – que Massenet fût éperdument amoureux de la ravissante cantatrice américaine. Il avait écrit pour elle *Esclarmonde* dans laquelle elle se révéla à Paris. [...] Massenet était d'une jalousie malade vis-à-vis Sibyl Sanderson et lorsque, dans cette même *Esclarmonde*, l'héroïne disparaissait avec son amant derrière le rideau de feuillage qui s'abaissait sur le couple endormi, le ténor Gilbert m'a raconté que Massenet ne manquait jamais de s'aller cacher dans la coulisse pour s'assurer si ses interprètes ne profitaient pas de la situation.

moments to deliver some mid-show advice to the performers or to verify that their needs were met before beginning the next act. During the rehearsals, these moments might have been an ideal time to get feedback from the performers; if so, Massenet could use that information to adapt the score.

It is difficult to determine which specific score instructions were generated by Massenet and simply followed by Sanderson, versus those which entailed Massenet simply 'taking dictation' as Sanderson worked out the details of the role. Regardless of genesis, it is clear that Massenet left explicit instructions so that future interpreters would be able to emulate Sanderson's vocality, should they choose to do so. Sanderson's specific vocal attributes and her artistic proclivities were integral to the composition process and can be seen throughout the score. As a result of her influence on the opera, Massenet insisted that Sanderson sign the manuscript. In a sense, this transformed her from interpreter to co-creator.

**Example 54:** ‘O divine Esclarmonde. O valeureux héros.’ mm. 5–9.<sup>454</sup>

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation, numbered 869 in the top right corner. The page contains several staves of music. A central section is highlighted with a red box, containing the handwritten text "Esclarmonde" and "Prière de Sanderson". To the right of this section, another red box highlights the name "J. Massenet" written vertically. At the bottom of the page, there is a signature "J. Massenet" and a red circular stamp.

There are two proofs of the vocal score housed at the Morgan Library in Manhattan, which contain handwritten revisions that appear to be in Massenet’s own hand. The majority of the changes were made to Esclarmonde’s part and thus offer further evidence of the tailoring that occurred in order to fit the role to Sanderson’s interpretive strengths and, most likely, her artistic desires. For example, this significant alteration to the

<sup>454</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*. *F-Pn*: Autograph manuscript. 869.

tessitura of Esclarmonde's vocal line shows off Sanderson's high notes. This would have made her easier to hear while singing with Roland over a robust accompaniment.

Sanderson was apparently amenable to the change, because it was incorporated into the published version of the vocal score.

Example 55: 'Le bonheur que rien n'achève.' mm. 84–94<sup>455</sup>

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (mm. 84-94) features two vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The tempo markings are 'poco rall.' and 'a Tempo.'. The lyrics are: 'moi, l'amante, et toi l'a.' and 'toi, l'amante, et moi l'a.'. The second system (mm. 95-100) features two vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The tempo marking is 'a Tempo animando.'. The lyrics are: '- mant!' and 'ESCLARMONDE et ROLAND vont fair. La foudre éclate - le tonnerre gronde -'. The piano accompaniment includes markings for 'cresc.' and 'sec.'. Two musical phrases are circled in red: the first is a melodic phrase in the Soprano part at the end of the first system, and the second is a melodic phrase in the Soprano part at the beginning of the second system.

<sup>455</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*. (VS with dedication to Sanderson.) *US-NYpm*: Mary Flagler Cary Music Collection Printed Music PMC 1671. Paris: Hartmann, 1890. 284. Musical Score; *Ibid.* Paris: G. Hartmann, 1889. 284. Musical Score.

Many of the annotations are found in Esclarmonde's first act aria 'Esprits de l'air' [Spirits of the air]. With regard to the changes that were made to the score, an element as simple as extending the duration of a note, or raising the pitch an octave, both evidenced in Example 55, may have made significant differences in the vocalism and showmanship of the piece. Example 56 below is from the initial proof of the VS and shows the change from a *staccato* quaver D6, which followed a crotchet D5, to a D6 with a fermata and slur lines to suggest lengthening the note.

In the original version, Sanderson could have used a *glissando* to connect the two notes, which are an octave apart, in a single breath. In fact, it would have behooved her to finish the passage in a single breath, both for ease of her vocal strategy and for continuity of sound. Technically, it would have been more difficult to breathe between the D5 and D6 because doing so would require Sanderson to attack the high D6 with another onset and to achieve brilliant resonance with essentially no orchestral support. It is fair to assume she would have moved off the D5 quickly because it was in her middle voice.

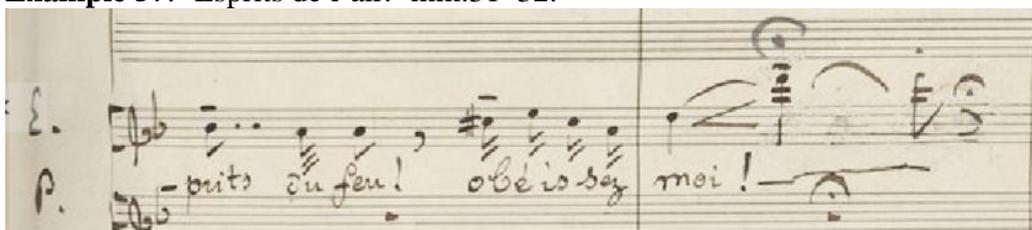
**Example 56:** 'Esprits de l'air.' mm. 29–32.<sup>456</sup>

The image shows a page of a musical score for the aria 'Esprits de l'air'. It consists of three staves: a vocal line (soprano clef), a piano accompaniment line (treble clef), and a bass line (bass clef). The vocal line contains the lyrics: '-prits de l'air! Es-prits de l'onde! Es-prits du feu! Obé-issez - moi!'. The final note of the vocal line is a high D6, which is marked with a fermata and a slur line above it, indicating it should be lengthened. The piano accompaniment features a series of chords in the left hand, with a fermata over the final chord. The dynamic marking 'fff sec.' is present in the piano part. The score is annotated with '8va' and '8va bassa'.

<sup>456</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*. US-NYpm: PMC 1668. 56.

Massenet's margin notes in several sources indicate that changes were made in collaboration with Sanderson. Therefore, it is quite possible that she held the high D longer than prescribed; this is supported by the short quaver in the orchestra followed by a rest with *fermata*. Based on the brilliance of Sanderson's upper extension, as heralded by audiences, friends, critics, and Massenet, the correction shows a deliberate move to emphasize her strengths by lengthening the note. The original manuscript, in fact, called for the longer duration of the final note. Perhaps the short note that appears in the initial printing was an error in transcription or typesetting. Alternatively, the publisher may have simplified the passage to create a more universally achievable effect for future interpreters, as opposed to transcribing Sanderson's rare gifts of vocal acrobatics.

**Example 57:** 'Esprits de l'air.' mm.31–32.<sup>457</sup>



**Example 58:** 'Esprits de l'air.' mm.29–32. Revised Edition VS.<sup>458</sup>

Lengthening the note impacted Esclarmonde's part in a several ways. As stated, the note would have highlighted Sanderson's best vocal attribute at the time: her high head register. In addition, coming into the D6 from D5 in the middle voice with a *glissando*

<sup>457</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde: F-Pn*, 144.

<sup>458</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 56.

may have aided in keeping resonance at the front of the mask rather than allowing the pitch to become less brilliant because of increased tension in, or a lower position of, the larynx. Vocal pedagogue Richard Miller addresses the issue of traversing from lower middle to high head register as well as vocalising from D5 to D6 specifically:

The approach to D6 (high D) in upper voice begins in lower middle register. Some sopranos will find this sudden upward leap from a low tessitura advantageous; others may consider it problematic. (An *appoggio* increase should begin just before leaving the low note, not when arriving at the high note.) In practice sessions, lateral and rounded vowels may be substituted for the vowel(s) of the text. [...] The best way to ensure vocal freedom throughout the soprano voice is to first establish unrestricted vocalism in the long middle register.<sup>459</sup>

Massenet used minimal orchestral accompaniment in this section, which would have helped to relieve some of the pressure on Sanderson to sing louder than may have been comfortable, in order to compete with the instruments. Having the orchestra drop out also correlates well with Esclarmonde's final text, wherein she basically screams '*Obeissez-moi!*' [Obey me!], and the high note may symbolise the spirit of the air, since it soars above the rest of the music and the staff. There is a wave-like aesthetic quality to the notes just prior to the D5 to D6 passage. To that end, perhaps the sliding ascent from D5 symbolises the spirit of fire, as the spark combusts into full-fledged flames. Finally, the fact that the *staccato* still appears on the final quaver should be considered significant because it may relate to her demand for obedience. This might have prompted Sanderson to end the high note in an abrupt and authoritative manner, as if to say, 'End of! There will be no further discussion. Choose now whom you will serve!'

Another score revision that may appear immaterial on the surface could have offered vocal benefits to Sanderson in terms of onset and placement (see example below). By changing the note on *ja-* of *jamais* [forever] from B<sup>b</sup>4 to G5, Sanderson would have

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<sup>459</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 135.

been able to phonate the pitch in her stronger head register and ultimately be heard better by the audience.

**Example 59:** ‘Chaque nuit...cher amant.’ mm. 12–14.<sup>460</sup>

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 116, for the opera 'Esclarmonde'. It features three staves: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), and Piano. The Soprano and Alto parts have lyrics 'te se-rai fi-dè-le...' and 'ja-mais!'. The piano part is marked 'avec la voix.' and includes a section with triplets. Dynamic markings include *dim.*, *pp*, and *f*. Tempo markings include *Piu mosso.*. The notes for 'ja-mais!' in both vocal parts are circled in pink.

The original B<sup>b</sup> might have allowed the G5 to go flat because of low placement; restated, there may not have been sufficient room in Sanderson’s resonant mechanisms to properly phonate the G5. If that were the case, the audience would hear a tense, possibly flat, lacklustre long note. The change mitigates those risks.

In addition, Sanderson could have chosen to breathe between *A* and *jamais* in order to begin the new word above the *secondo passaggio* (which likely began at or near G5 for Sanderson), rather than what would have been required in the original version: navigating from middle to head register in the short duration of a semi-quaver. Another possibility is that she chose to connect *A* and *jamais* by sliding from low to high. This solution seems to be indicated in the score by the *crescendo* from *pianissimo* to *forte* in measure 13. Depending on the breath control that Sanderson possessed, she may have required a breath between the two words in order to marshal the requisite stamina to hold the note as long as indicated, especially given the decrease in tempo.

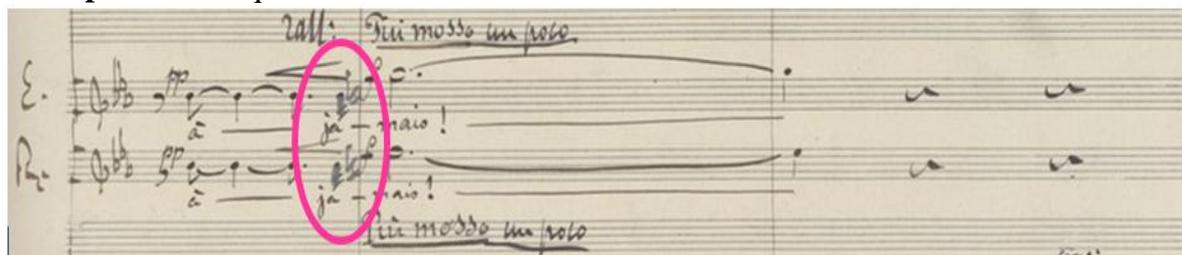
<sup>460</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*. US-NYpm: PMC 1668, 116.

Chaque nuit...cher amant. [Each night...dear lover.]

(Qui), te serai à fidèle...À jamais ! [Yes, I will be faithful to you...forever !]

Finally, the voiced, open-mouth initial consonant of the *ja-* [ʒa] would provide an easier entrance into the new tessitura (head register) compared with the inherently weaker, closed-mouth [m] of *–mais*. Sanderson might have used a brighter [a] for *jamais* in order to retain brilliance via mask resonance. As with the change in ‘Esprits de l’air,’ the autograph manuscript indicates that Massenet wrote two notes for *ja-*, but the copyist or printer included only the lower note. The higher note appears in the published version that is still in use.

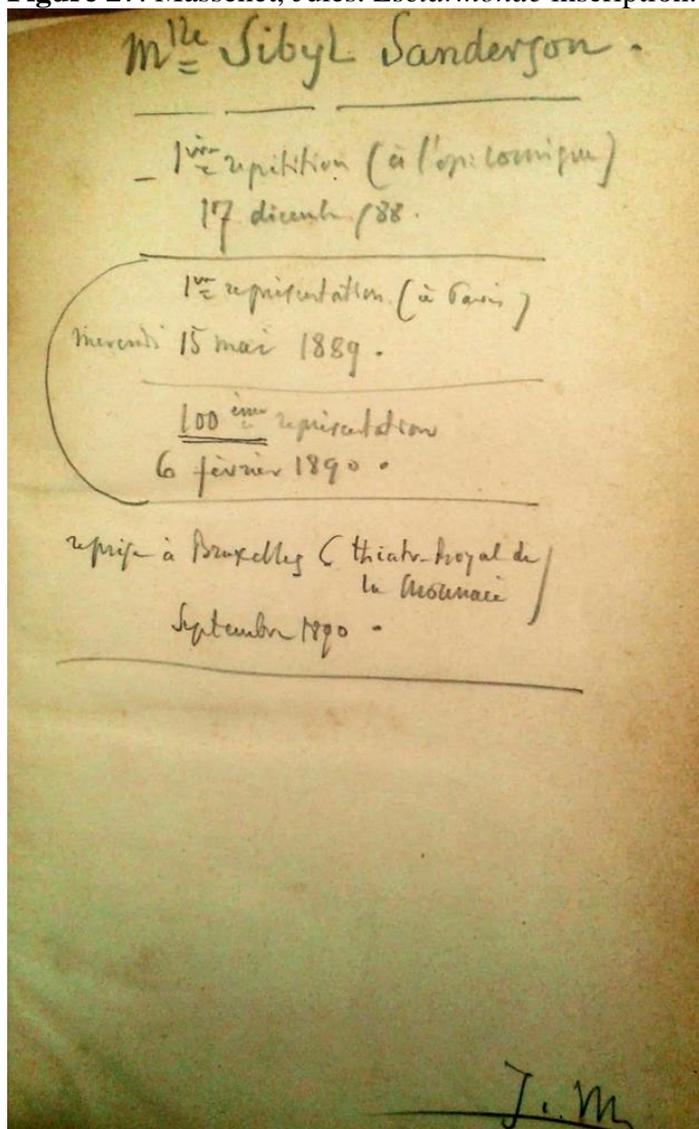
**Example 60:** ‘Chaque nuit... chère amant.’ mm. 13–15.<sup>461</sup>



These revisions point to Sanderson’s position as ‘*la créatrice*’ of *Esclarmonde*. Her influence could be counted as one of the most important factors in the success of the opera, because the acclaim and popularity she received for her performances have not been repeated by subsequent interpreters. Likewise, the role propelled Sanderson into the public spotlight for the remainder of her life. Without her exceptional voice, it is possible the opera would not have been completed much less have experienced such great success, including an astonishing initial run of 100 performances in the first nine months. The image below (from one of the annotated vocal scores) shows Massenet’s hand-written record of important milestones related to Sanderson’s involvement with the opera.

<sup>461</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde: opéra romanesque en quatre actes et huit tableaux, dont un prologue et un épilogue*. Bibliothèque nationale de France: Gallica: IFN- 8514385/Rés A. 750. Paris, 1888. 341. Autograph manuscript. Web. (screen 701)

Figure 27: Massenet, Jules. *Esclarmonde* inscription.<sup>462</sup>



Gérard Condé asserts that *Esclarmonde* represents the pinnacle of the composer's creations, and that many accolades for its success belonged to Sanderson:

*Esclarmonde* is certainly the most brilliant work of Massenet, at least in the first half, because we discover the marvels of orchestral invention. The magical effects of the staging, the burning sensuality of certain passages, and the interlude with closed curtain especially, where we are intended to believe that an act of lovemaking transpires, the disturbing beauty and vocal prowess of creator Sibyl Sanderson, ensured the success of a hundred performances.<sup>463</sup>

<sup>462</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, US-NYpm: PMC 1671. Dedication on flyleaf.

<sup>463</sup> Gérard Condé, "Manon... *Esclarmonde*... *Werther*... Un vent de passion à l'Opéra-Comique," @analyses: *Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 218.

*Esclarmonde* est certainement l'œuvre la plus brillante de Massenet, du moins dans sa première moitié, car on y découvre des merveilles d'invention orchestrale. Les effets magiques de la mise-en-scène, la sensualité ardente de certains passages, de l'interlude à rideau fermé, surtout, où l'on croyait entendre une transposition de l'acte amoureux, la beauté troublante et les prouesses vocales de la créatrice, Sibyl Sanderson, assurèrent le succès d'une centaine de représentations.

Sanderson may have been the most important reason for the opera's initial success. The popularity of *Esclarmonde* waned after its first year, and it has remained more or less dormant ever since, save for a few important revivals. This is interesting, because it has been said that this opera was Massenet's favourite work, as noted by Brancour in his review of the 1923 revival of the opera:

*Esclarmonde*, which was Massenet's preferred work, forms a kind of synthesis that joins all the elements likely to delight the public. Do you like religious scenes, chivalrous adventures, and fantastic events? They are here, in profusion. Are you partial to a somewhat tempered Wagnerianism that exercises the ear without straining the brain? [...] In this pleasantly eclectic work, the composer, one-by-one, imitates Wagner, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Verdi, Reyer—and Massenet himself.<sup>464</sup>

Massenet himself may be partially responsible for the lack of *Esclarmonde* productions in the twentieth century; he allegedly discouraged anyone from producing *Esclarmonde* after Sanderson's death in 1903.<sup>465</sup> Perhaps he could not bear to see his favourite opera produced without *la belle Sibyl*. The composer's reaction—withdrawing a role in response to the death of its creator—had been seen before, following the untimely passing of Marie Heilbron, the first Manon. It was not until Massenet met Sanderson in 1887 that the composer allowed *Manon* to be staged again.

*Manon* regained popularity after Sanderson's revival in 1888 and has held a position in the standard operatic repertoire ever since, but *Esclarmonde* has been produced few times in its century-long history. Years have passed without even one production of *Esclarmonde*, as the table below illustrates:

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<sup>464</sup> René Brancour, "Chronique Musicale," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (Paris), January 1924, 384–385. *Esclarmonde*, qui fut l'œuvre de prédilection de Massenet, forme une sorte de synthèse où se rencontrent tous les éléments susceptibles d'enchanter le public. Aimez-vous les scènes religieuses, les aventures chevaleresques, les péripéties fantastiques ? En voici à foison. Êtes-vous partisan d'un Wagnérisme tempéré, qui exerce l'oreille sans fatiguer le cerveau ? [...] Cette œuvre agréablement éclectique où le musicien imite tour à tour Wagner, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Verdi, Reyer—et Massenet lui-même. [...]

<sup>465</sup> David Johnson, "Esclarmonde," *Fanfare* 18, no. 6 (1995) : 237–239.

**Table 5:** List of notable performances.<sup>466</sup>

Day	Month	Year	Theatre	City	Esclarmonde
15	May	1889	Opéra-comique	Paris	SANDERSON, Sibyl
10	September	1889	Opéra-comique (50th performance)	Paris	SANDERSON, Sibyl
27	November	1889	La Monnaie	Brussels	NUOVINA, Emma & ZINAH, M.
6	February	1890	Opéra-comique (100th performance)	Paris	SANDERSON, Sibyl
20	February	1890	Théâtre de Lyon	Lyon	FIERENS, Caroline
14	January	1892	Grand Théâtre	Bordeaux	BRÉJEAN-SILVER, Georgette
16	January	1892	l'Opéra Impérial: Hermitage Theatre	Saint Petersburg	SANDERSON, Sibyl
10	February	1893	French Opera House	New Orleans	SANDERSON, Sibyl
13	December	1893	Théâtre des Arts	Rouen	PRIOLLAUD, Mme
30	January	1897	Grand Théâtre	Geneva	BRÉJEAN-SILVER, Georgette
19	December	1905	Salle Bauveau	Marseilles	BRÉJEAN-SILVER, Georgette
24	December	1923	L'opéra (Palais Garnier)	Paris	HELDY, Fanny
11	November	1931	L'opéra (Palais Garnier)	Paris	RITTER-CIAMPI, Gabrielle
1	January	1944	La Monnaie	Brussels	CLAIRBERT, Clara
19	November	1963	RADIO - RTF	Paris	BRUMAIRE, Jacqueline
23	October	1974	War Memorial Opera House	San Francisco	SUTHERLAND, Joan
19	November	1976	Metropolitan Opera House	New York	SUTHERLAND, Joan
28	November	1983	Royal Opera House	London	SUTHERLAND, Joan
	Oct-Nov	1992	Massenet Festival	Saint-Étienne	MAZZOLA-GAVAZZENI, Denia PENDATCHANSKA, Alexandrina
6	June	1998	Chelsea Opera Group	London	FARMAN, Raphaëlle
8	April	2005	Washington Concert Opera	Washington DC	SHAFER, Celena

Massenet's embargo on staging the opera was respected until 1923, when Fanny Hedy (1888–1973) led the cast at the Palais Garnier. The new interpreter of *Esclarmonde* received favourable reviews from critics such as Henri de Curzon:

Mrs. Fanny Hedy reappeared with all her resources, and finally we have the *Esclarmonde* we have been waiting for. [...] Massenet's work had so much success during the 1889 World Fair, but was not seen again. [...] Fanny Hedy performs the role with a fierce and brilliant voice, which earned her the greatest success. It could not be sung with more candour and enthusiasm, or such seductive colour.<sup>467</sup>

There are commonalities in the descriptions of Sanderson and Hedy's portrayals of *Esclarmonde*. For example, both sopranos dealt with health issues throughout their careers. There was a point when Hedy became too ill to sing, and it took nearly two months for her to return to the stage, as reported in *Le Ménestrel* in 1924:

<sup>466</sup> "Esclarmonde," *L'Association L'Art Lyrique Français*, July 21, 2014.

<sup>467</sup> Henri de Curzon, "La Musique," *La Nouvelle Revue* 46, no. 4 (1924): 362.

M<sup>me</sup> Fanny Hedy a reparu, avec tous ses moyens, et nous avons enfin l'*Esclarmonde* que nous attendions. L'œuvre de Massenet qui avait eu tant de succès pendant l'Exposition universelle de 1889, mais n'avait, ensuite, jamais reparu. [...] Fanny Hedy l'évoque avec une fierté de jeu et un brillant de voix qui lui ont valu le plus vif succès. On ne peut chanter avec plus de franchise et d'élan, une couleur plus séduisante.

Suffering from the early stages of flu, Miss Fanny Heldy really wanted to sing *Esclarmonde* well the evening of the first performance, where she had obtained a triumphal success. Despite her courage, she had to bow to her illness and obey doctors' orders, and stay away from the stage for some time.<sup>468</sup>

At the Opéra: Miss Fanny Heldy made a triumphant return in *Esclarmonde*, thus contributing to the increasing success with which Massenet's beautiful work sustained his career.<sup>469</sup>

One reason for the infrequent productions of *Esclarmonde* these days (compared to some of Massenet's other operas, such as *Manon* and *Werther*) is the extreme difficulty of the title role. The virtuosic vocality that is required to sing the role and extravagant staging requirements may serve as deterrents to the opera regaining popular success. Tim Page notes:

*Esclarmonde* is gigantic in every way: long, ambitious, both adventurous and highly formal. It is also completely insane. [...] The prime madness is to be found in the title role, which is written for a voice type that doesn't really exist -- a heroic coloratura soubrette. If you can imagine the same soprano singing Susanna in '*Le Nozze di Figaro*,' Brunnhilde in '*Siegfried*' and Oscar in '*Un Ballo in Maschera*' all at once, you will have some idea of what Massenet wanted from his *Esclarmonde*. [...] He may have found it in the woman for whom the role was written, Sybil Sanderson [...] There have been precious few singers willing to risk taking on *Esclarmonde*.<sup>470</sup>

When two of the strongest advocates for Massenet's operas, Richard Bonyngue and Joan Sutherland, first staged *Esclarmonde* in 1974 at the San Francisco Opera, they brought the piece out of the dark corners of under-represented French opera and into the public's awareness. Bonyngue and Sutherland's venture succeeded, and they subsequently remounted the production at the Metropolitan Opera in 1976 and at Covent Garden in 1983.

<sup>468</sup> "Échos et Nouvelles," *Le Ménestrel*, January 18, 1924, 31.

Prise par un commencement de grippe, M<sup>lle</sup> Fanny Heldy avait bien voulu chanter *Esclarmonde* le soir de la première représentation où elle obtint un succès triomphal. Malgré tout son courage, elle doit s'incliner devant le mal et les prescriptions des docteurs, et rester éloignée quelque temps de la scène.

<sup>469</sup> "Échos et Nouvelles," *Le Ménestrel*, March 21, 1924, 36.

Mlle Fanny Heldy a fait, dans *Esclarmonde*, une rentrée triomphale, contribuant ainsi au succès de plus en plus vif avec lequel la belle œuvre de Massenet poursuit sa carrière.

<sup>470</sup> Tim Page, "Demanding 'Esclarmonde' Gets Vigorous, if Dubious, Workout," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2005, C05.

Very few companies have produced the opera since 1983. Bonyngé could not convince his own organization, the Australian Opera Company (AOC), to stage the opera. It is rumoured that his resignation from AOC coincided with the management's resistance toward presenting *Esclarmonde*. There may have been several factors at play beyond the extreme vocal demands of the title role. First and foremost, the plot could be judged as overly convoluted, and the music may seem too sentimental for contemporary tastes:

A health warning should accompany these items; one could laugh oneself into apoplexy at the ludicrous, unmotivated, all-effect-no-cause goings on. [...] It takes a prologue, four acts and an epilogue for Massenet to deliver this nonsense. [...] Massenet's melodic inspiration didn't blossom as lyrically as in his more famous scores, but his gift for orchestral colour gets a full workout. [...] So, depending on one's appetite for high-fat, low-protein musical concoctions, this *Esclarmonde* will either delight or revolt.<sup>471</sup>

Mullins' assertion that the work lacks substance may reflect a general change in the tastes of the opera-going public since *Esclarmonde* premiered. This notion is partly supported by the low number of productions in its history. In 1889, however, critics predicted that it would earn a place in the regular rotation of operatic repertoire. A *New York Times* critic in 1889 commented that the complexity of the fanciful tale and musical score were the precise reasons he felt the opera was destined for continued success:

‘Esclarmonde’ is long and very much cut up, for there are eight tableaux in four acts. The composer has called upon all the resources of the scenic art, and the costumes are bewildering and fascinating. The opera is entirely intellectual; even the lore is graceful, tender, and never gross, and the spectacular fairy developments add to this shading. There is a decided abuse of the brass instruments and they do not always appear to be necessary, but this is hypercriticism, for page after page is one long, exquisite delight. It will soon be classical and form the daily part and portion of every instrumental concert.<sup>472</sup>

The critic's prophesy did not come true, and this may, in part, be due to Sibyl Sanderson. When she no longer sang the role, public and critical interest in the opera may have waned; as a result, opera management withdrew support. Similarly, Sanderson's fame

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<sup>471</sup> Chris Mullins, “Reviews - MASSENET: Esclarmonde,” *Opera Today*, May 30, 2007.

<sup>472</sup> L. K., “Miss Sanderson in Massenet's Opera,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1889.

was never greater than when she appeared in *Esclarmonde*. Writer and critic Eugène de Solenière (1897) offers this opinion:

Miss Sanderson did not keep the promises she made; exotic in *Esclarmonde*, she was only pretty in *Manon*, and compromised the success of *Thaïs* at the Opéra. Maybe she will yet deliver. On the eve of *Esclarmonde*, Massenet wrote her the letter below; would he write it today?

‘To Miss Sibyl Sanderson:

Dear Miss Sanderson,

You showed that I was right, since it is for you that I have written *Esclarmonde*; I had faith and you proved at the public rehearsal today, Saturday, May 11, 1889, that I have bequeathed my rôle, unique in its many kinds of difficulties, to a unique artist. This is only your début, but I predict for you an equally distinguished future. Later, when people speak of theatrical glory, they will utter the name: ‘Sanderson.’

‘Yours with the highest appreciation,

‘Massenet.’<sup>473</sup>

Massenet predicted correctly that Sanderson’s future would be unique; her legacy, which included ‘theatrical glory,’ lived on well after she did. She was remembered primarily as *Esclarmonde* and *Manon* and also as *Thaïs*. That begs the question about *Esclarmonde*: what was Sanderson able to bring to the opera that subsequent interpreters could not? Or, one might ask, what was it about *Esclarmonde* that afforded Sanderson a success that has

<sup>473</sup> Eugène Solenière, *Massenet: Étude Critique & Documentaire* (Paris: Bibliothèque d’art de “La Critique,” 1897), 143. As quoted in Henry T. Finck, *Massenet and His Operas* (New York: John Lane, 1910), 65.

Mademoiselle Sanderson n’a pas tenu les belles promesses qu’elle avait faites ; étrange dans *Esclarmonde*, elle fut seulement jolie dans *Manon* et compromit le succès de *Thaïs* à l’Opéra. Peut-être se révélera-t-elle encore. Massenet lui écrivait la veille d’*Esclarmonde* la lettre ci-dessous ; l’écrirait-il aujourd’hui ?

« À Mademoiselle SIBYL SANDERSON

« Chère Mademoiselle,

« Vous me donnez raison, puisque c’est pour vous que j’ai écrit *Esclarmonde*, j’ai eu foi et vous avez prouvé dans la répétition d’aujourd’hui, samedi 11 mai 1889, que j’ai confié le rôle, vraiment unique comme difficultés de toutes sortes, à une artiste unique. Vous débutez, mais je vous prédis un avenir unique aussi. On dira plus tard en parlant des gloires du théâtre : Sanderson.

« A vous de haute reconnaissance,  
Massenet »

not been repeatable? Perhaps it is fair to say that singer and opera became inextricably linked.

**Figure 28:** Sanderson as Esclarmonde<sup>474</sup>



Sanderson sat with reporter Lucien Puech (1889) for the interview below. It provides first-hand insight into the soprano's work ethic, loyalty, and the intense rehearsal demands levied by Massenet:

LP: M. Massenet, did he not write the role of Esclarmonde especially for you?

SS: Yes. He could not find anyone, how do I say, anyone who fitted the role better than I... I can sing very high notes...

LP: And you studied the role with him?

SS: Completely.

LP: Have you been satisfied with this rehearsal?

SS: Everything went well; if a bit slow at times. We stayed until two (in the morning).<sup>475</sup>

<sup>474</sup> Antonin Marie Chatinière, "Sanderson dans le rôle d'Esclarmonde," Lithograph, Paris, 1889. New York City: Pierpont Morgan Library, James Fuld Music Collection 248171, August 2014; Wilhelm Benque, "Sibyl Sanderson as Esclarmonde," photograph. Paris: Benque & Co., 1889. US-NYp: New York Public Library Digital Collections.

<sup>475</sup> Sanderson and Puech, "Les débutants," 3.

LP: M. Massenet, n'a-t-il pas écrit le rôle d'Esclarmonde spécialement pour vous ?

SS: Oui. Il ne pouvait trouver quelqu'un, comment dirais-je, quelqu'un à qui le rôle convienne mieux qu'à moi. J'ai des notes très élevées...

LP: Et vous avez travaillé votre rôle avec lui ?

SS: Complètement

LP: Vous avez été satisfaite de cette répétition ?

Although the opera has not become part of the standard repertoire, it seems to have left an indelible mark on Sanderson both physically and emotionally. After helping to shape the opera to suit her artistic proclivities, she performed the role more than one hundred times at the Opéra-Comique in addition to other venues. She received mostly positive reviews for her portrayal, and the public responded with enthusiastic praise. One evening in St. Petersburg, the soprano received forty curtain calls.<sup>476</sup> The character may have become linked with aspects of Sanderson's sense of identity, and it initiated her international operatic career: a dream she had pursued since childhood. The importance of the role to the singer was underscored in 1898 when the soprano became ill with what doctors and press called a form of 'brain fever' that left her paralysed for several months. The American press wasted no time reporting the dramatic scenes as relayed from Europe:

Antonio Terry, the Cuban millionaire, and Sibyl Sanderson, the American prima donna, were married in Paris on Dec. 1 [1897]. They went for their honeymoon to Nice. [...] When they had been at Nice three days, the bride was taken suddenly ill. At first her malady appeared to be brain fever. She had extraordinary mental hallucinations. She believed that she was on the stage once more, and sang the part of *Esclarmonde*, in which she had once achieved a brilliant success.<sup>477</sup>

Later, while recuperating at home, she asked to hear *Esclarmonde*, and her new husband obliged:

The prostrate singer said she wished she could hear the opera once more. Without a moment's delay, her husband gathered a miniature company of the best singers and they gave a performance of *Esclarmonde* in the invalid's room. It was a reminder of her most brilliant triumph and it made her happy.<sup>478</sup>

Examining pertinent aspects of *Esclarmonde's* story and libretto, as well as the music, will help to determine possible reasons the critics' predictions that it would become a part of the standard repertoire did not come to fruition. Employing what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called a 'thick description,' will reveal a more thorough understanding of

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SS : Tout a bien marché, un peu lentement pourtant. Nous sommes restés jusqu'à deux heures.

<sup>476</sup> "Dramatic Notes," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, March 5, 1892, 12.

<sup>477</sup> "Love Battles with Death," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 19, 1898, 4.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

Sanderson's vocality as well as her position as co-creator.<sup>479</sup> In addition, analysis of the architecture of the opera may provide explanations of the reciprocal influence of the opera *Esclarmonde* and the singer Sibyl Sanderson.

#### *Esclarmonde: How Story and Staging Inform Vocality*

The art and craft of synopsis-writing has changed over the centuries of opera's history; synopses have presented stories in different ways, and *Esclarmonde* is no exception. Between the opera's premiere and recent productions, different readings from different eras have shown an evolution in word count, the slant given to the story, and the perspective on the characters. Visually, the originals were formatted in such a way that they looked like news articles from that period. By contrast, modern synopses tend to use a neat, outline style, as exhibited by the English-language version below.

These differences may signify a shift in the ways the public engages with opera's tales, which might be summarised as a move from a literary interpretation to a literal one. The amount of plot minutiae and writer opinion included in recent synopses has decreased, as if the readers' attention spans have decreased in favour of reading only the prominent facts of the story. The move toward more efficient printed writing could be a question of economics; it costs less to print less. Additional details and reviews probably exist on the internet. According to Lacombe, nineteenth-century French opera synopses took on a style and set of expectations quite separate from the operas they were meant to summarise:

Aside from the images they conjured up to illustrate an aural impression or evoke a musical emotion, it was in the synopsis of the libretto that journalists were best able to exercise their style and their wit. A musical column had its own high

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<sup>479</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books—Perseus, 1973), 9.

Geertz proposed to study a subject from as many 'angles' as possible in order to understand not only behaviour or a list of facts, but also to understand the context. The elements create a layered effect, so that each facet might be subjected to interactional examination, in order to gain a deeper understanding, beyond a mere array of facts and observations.

points, and, like the work that was its *raison d'être*, it too had to respond to the expectations of an audience: its readers. These reviews developed into a genre with norms of its own.<sup>480</sup>

Two specific French synopses represent opposite ends of a polarized debate in response to the subject matter of *Esclarmonde*. According to Fauser, the substance and inferences of both the music and the libretto spark intense critical discussion, with Auguste Vitu and Camille Bellaigue on opposing sides of the argument.<sup>481</sup> Fauser's research focuses primarily on French nationalism and is particularly concerned with Wagner's influence on Massenet. The information gleaned from Vitu's and Bellaigue's synopses can shed light on Sanderson's vocality by triangulating commonalities in her performances despite differences of opinion and writing style.<sup>482</sup> In other words, though the two critics seem to oppose each other on many aspects of the opera's story and production, common traits as they relate to Sanderson are identified. For example, the singer had to wear a veil onstage for parts of the opera, she sings atop a platform, and her voice must be heard from the wings of the stage. All of these factors would need to have been considered by Sanderson, Massenet, and the crew and adjusted as necessary.

In order to understand the story, while avoiding some of the details debated by Vitu and Bellaigue, Fauser's English summary offers both brevity and clarity:

*Esclarmonde* tells the story of a Byzantine empress and sorceress, Esclarmonde, who loves the French knight Roland de Blois, whom she had seen when he was in Byzantium for a tournament. The empress must remain veiled until her twentieth birthday, at which point another tournament will decide her future husband. When she learns that Roland de Blois is about to marry, she has him abducted to an enchanted island where she becomes his wife on condition that he will never ask her name or see her face, to which he agrees. After a night of passion, Esclarmonde sends him back to a Blois beleaguered by Saracens. She provides

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<sup>480</sup> Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera*, 73; Lacombe, *Les Voies de l'Opéra Français*, 76.

Outre les images qu'ils recherchent pour traduire un phénomène sonore ou rendre une émotion musicale, c'est dans le résumé du livret que les journalistes peuvent déployer le plus aisément leur style et leur esprit. La chronique musicale a ses temps forts. Elle aussi, comme l'œuvre dont elle se nourrit, doit répondre à une attente du public (cette fois lecteur). Cette critique devient un genre en soi avec ses codes.

<sup>481</sup> Auguste Vitu, "Chronique Musicale," *Le Figaro*, no. 136 (May 15, 1889): 5.

<sup>482</sup> Bellaigue, "Revue Musicale: Esclarmonde," 698–699.

him with a magic sword which will make him invincible so long as he keeps his word, and she promises that she will see him every night wherever he is. Roland saves Blois and is offered the French king's daughter in marriage. He refuses without giving reasons, but the archbishop prises Roland's secret from him under the pretence of confession. Esclarmonde joins her husband/lover for the night. The archbishop enters the room and exorcises her. Roland tries to defend Esclarmonde, but the sword breaks. Rescued by spirits, Esclarmonde is brought before her father Phorcas, who declares that either Roland has to die or Esclarmonde must repudiate him. To save his life, she chooses repudiation. Roland is devastated and wants to die honourably in combat, and just at that moment, heralds announce the tournament for Esclarmonde's twentieth birthday. Roland wins the tournament, and thus the hand of his beloved—this time officially.<sup>483</sup>

Regarding vocality and receptions, Vitu's invaluable critique of Sanderson's voice is much more technical than many other reviews of the time:

[...] Of Miss Sibyl Sanderson. This young woman, with a candid look, and limpid eyes, who made her first public appearance tonight, has a crystalline voice, which is a little thin in the midrange, but which strengthens and swells as it rises to the upper regions. [...] I'm not talking about C and D above the staff, which she sings with admirable ease; but in the fourth act she ascends diatonically a fourth higher, that is to say, up to *contre-sol* [high G], a veritable piccolo note, which, I believe, has not until now come from the throat of any singer. At the beginning of the evening there was some trouble, which was increased by a slight vocal mistake in the first act. Miss Sibyl Sanderson promptly regained control of herself, and she sang with a magisterial simplicity, '*La plainte d'Esclarmonde*,' which merited long and appreciative applause, longer than the *contre-sol*, which has been jokingly dubbed the 'Eiffel (Tower) Note' of the Opéra-Comique. [...] Miss Sanderson was born to play a part in a show where magic holds an important place. She is called Sibyl.<sup>484</sup>

<sup>483</sup> Fauser, *Musical Encounters*, 67–68.

<sup>484</sup> Auguste Vitu, "Chronique Musicale," *Le Figaro*, no. 136 (May 16, 1889): 3.

[...] De mademoiselle Sibyl Sanderson. Cette jeune fille, au visage candide, aux yeux limpides, qui faisait ce soir sa première apparition devant le public, possède une voix cristalline, un peu mince dans le médium, qui s'affermit et s'arrondit à mesure qu'elle monte vers les régions supérieures. [...] Je ne parle pas des ut et des ré au-dessus des lignes qu'elle prodigue avec une facilité inouïe ; mais au quatrième acte elle arrive diatoniquement jusqu'à une quarte plus haute, c'est-à-dire jusqu'au contre-sol aigu, véritable note de petite flûte, qui, à ce que je crois n'était jamais sortie jusqu'à présent du gosier d'aucune cantatrice. Atteinte au commencement de la soirée d'un trouble qui s'est accru par un léger accident vocal au premier acte, mademoiselle Sibyl Sanderson est rentrée promptement en possession d'elle-même, et elle a chanté avec une simplicité magistrale la plainte d'Esclarmonde, méritant assez des applaudissements plus enviables et plus durables que ceux du contre-sol, plaisamment baptisé la Note-Eiffel de l'Opéra-Comique. [...] Mlle Sanderson était prédestinée depuis le baptême à jouer un rôle dans une pièce où la magie tient une si grande place. Elle s'appelle Sibyl.

Bellaigue writes more artistically and creatively but with more judgement and conservatism. The critic hardly disguises his disdain for some of the more ‘voluptuous’ plot elements, writing them off as ‘lustful desires of the flesh,’ rather than ‘holy love.’<sup>485</sup> Because of this, Bellaigue’s opinions about the story and the staging are coloured by his own moral convictions about the exotic themes and powerful feminine voice of Esclarmonde.

Critics were quick to choose sides in the moral debate that surrounded the opera’s plot, especially the invocation scene between Acts I and II. Esclarmonde uses magic to summon Roland to an enchanted island in order to have sex with him. Auguste Vitu and Camille Bellaigue represent the opposite ends of the argument, as Fauser notes:

Not only were [Massenet’s] Wagnerian procedures in the score seen as dangerous; for several critics, such as Camille Bellaigue, the opera also ‘seemed to lack simplicity, unity, and elevation.’ [...] While for conservative critics such as Camille Bellaigue and Simon Boubée, too much of the Orient and too much sex infused the music of this medieval opera for it to be hailed as a model for future French music theatre. The modernity of Massenet’s sensual sound world was celebrated by other writers, such as Charles Demestre and Auguste Vitu.<sup>486</sup>

An obvious link to exoticism is the opera’s Byzantine setting, part of the Orient. Another factor, noted throughout the libretto, score, and staging, is the powerful feminine voice of Esclarmonde as sorceress. Her alter ego adds to the element of ‘otherness’ because the demonstration of female dominance was outside the norm of a nineteenth-century bourgeois woman. According to Susan McClary, the exotic represented a shift in culture toward the end of the century toward ‘sexually assertive, self-willed women’ such as the ‘Oriental,’ ‘Jew,’ and ‘gypsy.’ She also linked exoticism with ‘otherness’ and *fantasme*.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Camille Bellaigue, “Revue Musicale: Esclarmonde à l’Opéra-Comique,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 59, no. 93 (June 1, 1889): 699–700, 702.

<sup>486</sup> Fauser, *Musical Encounters*, 78.

<sup>487</sup> Susan McClary. *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 37–38.

Mireille Dottin-Orsini's 1993 book *Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale: Textes et images de la misogynie fin-de-siècle* explores how the powerful female figure existed in the arts for centuries, but that it became a sort of fascination to creators and their audiences at that time. The additional characteristic of mystery, dark magic, and even malevolence appeared more often approaching the turn of the century. Dottin-Orsini uses examples such as vampiresses, the characters of Herodias and Salomé, and even the guillotine ('a monstrous feminine entity') to exemplify ways in which dominant women were associated with destructive forces. The author also argues for the notion of a younger version of the *femme fatale*, and like McClary links 'her' with *fantasme* and 'l'Autre,' and with the masculine conscience.<sup>488</sup>

Huebner specifically considers that aside from the Act II interlude, *Esclarmonde* was not one of these women:

Despite her sexual impulses, *Esclarmonde* is no *femme-fatale*, no Salome with her seven veils. Although the music of the Act II orchestral interlude was risqué, perceptions of stylistic superficiality, the youth and inexperience of the empress herself, and, perhaps most important, the fairy-tale aspect of the entire opera functioned as a buffer. Manon also sings with '*la note voluptueuse*,' but now the frame of the orientalist fairy-tale quite obviously allowed a freer play of sexuality than the bourgeois morality tale. [...] Of course, for the sake of propriety, she enters into marriage by the end: how innocuous—and saleable—a little promiscuity and voyeurism along the way!<sup>489</sup>

While Massenet was concerned with saleability and propriety, the moral ending and naïveté of *Esclarmonde* do not exclude her from the notable list of *les enchanteresses de l'opéra*. Moreover, Salome is not the best example of a true *femme-fatale*, as Huebner asserts, because, like *Esclarmonde*, Salome was young and inexperienced. *Esclarmonde* acted upon her own sexual volitions, whereas Salome was coerced into doing the dance of the seven veils by her mother Herodias, who sought the head of John the Baptist. If

<sup>488</sup> Mireille Dottin-Orsini. *Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale* (Paris : Bernard Grasset, 1993). 282–284, 358–360.

<sup>489</sup> Huebner, *French Opera*, 87.

anything, Esclarmonde more closely fits the role of *femme-fatale* more than Salome; while Salome was a willing puppet, Esclarmonde was a veiled puppet-master.

The veil is a crucial part of the story. Because of Esclarmonde's aristocratic position, it would have been necessary for her to assume an alternate persona to separate her two roles of the polite empress and the powerful magician. The 'temple curtain,' as represented by her veil, is the physical representation of this separation, and it is torn by the end to offer the audience an acceptable conclusion to the sexually charged tale.

Huebner expresses a similar opinion:

Many *fin-de-siècle* critics could not resist alluding to Lohengrin as another lover who insists that his identity remain unknown. Heard against that Wagnerian backdrop, *Esclarmonde* becomes all the more erotically charged, not least because of the gender reversal of the unknown lover and the employment of the veil as a physical prop. [...] Esclarmonde and Roland [...] are both driven entirely by physical desire from the start. [...] Before Esclarmonde launches her incantation to draw him near in Act I, she voices confidence in the seductive power of her 'brûlantes caresses' (torrid caresses). Like mythical Psyche, Roland is brought to a magic garden, now surrounded by waltzing, Blumenmädchen-like, spirits. [...] Leaves and roses then cover the lovers while one of the most notorious passages in the score unfolds. [...] It occasioned a flurry of excitement in the contemporary press, and was encored at the première. [...] The much trumpeted beauty of Sanderson raised the erotic temperature. [...] Esclarmonde seems defined almost entirely by her physical desire. The veil is as critical as it would have been superfluous in *Lohengrin*. It suggests sexual secrecy and inaccessibility, the mysterious appearance of the Oriental woman that stimulated daydreams of Licentiousness within humdrum European bourgeois existence. [...] The veil, of course, hides Esclarmonde's origins. [...] To see her face is to begin to know who she is, to make her more than just a body. [...] The veil, then, marks the border between a relationship defined only by sexuality and one headed in a direction more profound (one way of putting it) or (alternatively) more acceptable to the bourgeois order.<sup>490</sup>

Nicolas Till writes about the shift in opera toward these themes of escape from 'humdrum European bourgeois existence.' Most aspects of *Esclarmonde* fit his description:

There is a further reason why exoticism should have become so particularly associated with opera: from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, composers started to characterize exotic subjects with 'exotic'-sounding music, including the use of exotic instruments, modal and chromatic harmonies, pentatonic melodies and melismatic vocal lines.[...] Combined with exotic stage and costume designs,

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<sup>490</sup> Huebner, *French Opera*, 83–86.

and exotic dances, opera was the perfect vehicle for conjuring all-embracing fantasies of alluring other worlds. In 1835, the Paris Opéra was described as an ‘open bazaar,’ full of the marvels of the Orient. And not only was opera the home of the exotic: the exotic had become inherently operatic.<sup>491</sup>

The score contains many of the elements identified by Till, including exotic-sounding music, an exotic instrument (see below), modal and chromatic harmonies, and melismatic vocal lines. The example below from *Esclarmonde*’s first act aria contains chromaticism, modality, and a melismatic vocal line.

**Example 61:** ‘Esprits de l’air.’ mm. 11–15.<sup>492</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Esprits de l'air' from the opera *Esclarmonde*. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line (Soprano) and a piano accompaniment (8ª bassa). The vocal line has the lyrics: '- prits de l'air! Es - prits de l'ou - de! Es - prits du feu!... ah! ...'. A melismatic passage in the vocal line, starting with a sixteenth-note run, is circled in red. The piano accompaniment features a chromatic bass line, also circled in red. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts, with the piano part marked *f* and *ff*.

With regard to instrumentation, Massenet utilised the uncommon double-bass Saxtuba in the orchestra and even composed a solo for the instrument in Act III.<sup>493</sup>

<sup>491</sup> Nicholas Till, “‘An Exotic and Irrational Entertainment’: Opera and our Others; Opera as Others,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 301–302.

<sup>492</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 55.

<sup>493</sup> Stewart A. Carter, “Brass Scholarship in Review,” Proceedings of the Historic Brass Society Conference, Cité De La Musique, Paris, 1999 (Hillsdale, N.Y: Pendragon Press, 2006), 138.

**Figure 29:** ‘Prologue.’ mm.1–3.<sup>494</sup>**Figure 290:** Saxtuba<sup>495</sup>

The novelty of the rare instrument and the exotic staging and costumes were topics of conversation. Visual aspects of the opera, especially the magic lantern scene and the electric lighting used in the original production, received a considerable amount of commentary both before and after the premiere:

‘Esclarmonde’ is not only a grand spectacular work,—that is to say, an opera having a splendid stage-setting and a large number of characters,—but a piece with changing scenes and costumes and full of ‘effects,’ the same as we see in the usual fairy dramas.<sup>496</sup>

Details of the aesthetic effects related to Sanderson as Esclarmonde are discussed in the case studies of her arias ‘Esprits de l’air’ and ‘Ah! Roland!’ In general, the costume most often seen in publicity for the opera was Esclarmonde’s ornate gown and crown that she wore in the prologue and epilogue: two acts in which her appearance is more important

<sup>494</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde. F-Pn*: Rés A. 750, 144.

<sup>495</sup> Adolphe Sax, “Bass Saxtuba in E-flat,” Photograph, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889. 89.4.1109. 1855.

<sup>496</sup> Charles Seymour, “European Correspondence: M. Massenet and his new opera,” *The Epoch* 5, no. 105 (February 8, 1889): 228.

than her voice.<sup>497</sup> This sorceress ensemble graced advertisements for the opera as well as the front of many vocal scores.

**Figure 31:** *Esclarmonde* advertisement.<sup>498</sup>



<sup>497</sup> *Esclarmonde* does not sing in the Prologue, and she vocalises in only 20 of 149 measures of the Epilogue.

<sup>498</sup> Georges Clairin, “*Esclarmonde* de J. Massenet, au Théâtre national de l’Opéra-Comique,” Lithograph, Paris: Hartmann, 1889. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Gallica IFN- 8422387.

**Figure 32:** Esclarmonde's costumes: Prologue and Epilogue (left) and Act I, Scene 2.<sup>499</sup>



The advertisement paints Esclarmonde as more foreboding and dominant, with her arms lifted and shrouded from behind by a black cloak. A comparison of the two Chatinière lithographs reveals that the ornamentation on the sorceress (Prologue/Epilogue) costume is more complex than Esclarmonde's empress costume from the first act. That distinction coincides with the vocalism and staging effects, which are also more ornate when Esclarmonde appears as sorceress. Regarding Romanesque structural design, Esclarmonde's costumes do have a distinctly architectural look about them with the parallel and perpendicular patterns, and mosaic-like ornamentation. The shape of her hat (above left) mirrors the rounded arches of medieval Romanesque churches.<sup>500</sup>

The illustrations of both costumes suggest that Sanderson was not wearing a corset, which may be a contributing factor to the greater success she gained from singing this role compared with other roles. Sanderson wore a boned corset when she sang

<sup>499</sup> Antonin Marie Chatinière, "Sanderson dans le rôle d'Esclarmonde," Lithograph, Paris, 1889. New York City: Pierpont Morgan Library, James Fuld Music Collection 248172, August 2014; Antonin Marie Chatinière, "Sanderson dans le rôle d'Esclarmonde," Lithograph, Paris, 1889. New York City: Pierpont Morgan Library, James Fuld Music Collection 248171, August 2014.

<sup>500</sup> Thomas Graham Jackson, *Byzantine and Romanesque architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913): 34.

Manon, and the constriction it probably caused would have affected her breathing and breath support. Singing *Esclarmonde* with an unimpeded ribcage would have helped her employ the *appoggio* method of breathing that she had learned from her *Bel Canto* teachers. It is also likely that the music of *Esclarmonde* was better suited to Sanderson's voice because it was written expressly for her. To put it simply, a portion of Sanderson's success in *Esclarmonde* could be attributable to her costumes affording her the freedom to breathe fully, and certainly to the fact that the music was written to show off the best qualities of her voice.

In order to contextualize the composition of and modifications made to *Esclarmonde*'s vocal line for Sanderson, it is useful to gain understanding of the musical structures and applicable elements of the *mise-en-scène*. Charles Malherbe (1853–1911) plots in detail the thematic architecture of the music in his 1890 book *Notice sur Esclarmonde*. Patrick Gillis calls Malherbe a Massenet zealot and the 'principal source of information.'<sup>501</sup> In his detailed report on the score and libretto, Malherbe identifies several recurring *leitmotifs*, charts their locations and use, and conjectures about the probable symbolic importance of each.

**Example 62:** Examples of *leitmotifs* in the Opera.<sup>502</sup>

Motif de la Magie.

M. I<sup>a</sup>

M. I<sup>b</sup>

Motif d'Esclarmonde.

M. II

<sup>501</sup> Gillis, "Genèse d'Esclarmonde," 22.

La principale source d'informations des commentateurs successifs d'Esclarmonde a été jusqu'à présent un opuscule de Charles Malherbe, zélateur de Massenet [...]

<sup>502</sup> Charles Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1890), 58–59.

Malherbe's work enables further study of Sanderson's vocality as Esclarmonde by uncovering a consistent framework by which to judge the timbre and tessituras associated with the two sides of the character: sorceress and princess.

The music of the prologue introduces several themes present throughout the opera, especially those of the Empress and sorceress (*Motif de la Magie I<sup>a</sup>* and *Motif de Esclarmonde*). This is particularly true from a rhythmic perspective because the patterns recur throughout the act, foreshadowing the duality of Esclarmonde's character. Emperor Phorcas, Esclarmonde's father, dominates the opening scenes, telling his army and dignitaries that he will relinquish the throne to his daughter in accordance with the mandates of destiny and of the Spirits of the air. Thus, in the prologue, the audience is introduced to Esclarmonde before she is seen or heard. This adds to the mystique and exoticism that surround her character.

**Example 63:** 'Dignitaires !...Guerriers !' mm. 32–34.<sup>503</sup>

The image shows a musical score for three parts: voice (PR.), piano (p), and orchestra (Orch.). The voice part is in bass clef and contains the lyrics "Entre l'em.". The piano part is in treble and bass clefs. The bass line of the piano part features a recurring rhythmic motif, which is circled in pink and labeled "Motif de la Magie I<sup>a</sup>". The piano part also includes dynamic markings such as "dim." and "p".

Phorcas sings 'Entre l'empire et l'art de la magie' [Between the empire and the art of magic] over the recurrent *Motif de la Magie I<sup>a</sup>*. The first mention of his daughter coincides with the introduction of her theme.

<sup>503</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 2.

**Example 64:** Dignitaires !...Guerriers !' mm. 47–49.<sup>504</sup>

The image shows a musical score for Example 64. It consists of a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. A pink oval highlights a specific motif in the piano part, labeled "Motif de Esclarmonde" in pink text. The lyrics "Jà bandon - ne mon trô - ne à ma fille Esclarmon - de" are written below the vocal line.

From a vocal perspective, it is likely that the music associated with the sorceress (*Motif de la Magie I<sup>b</sup>*), found in Esclarmonde's Act I aria 'Esprits de l'air' would have been easier for Sanderson to sing than Esclarmonde's own theme, for several reasons. First, the higher tessitura combined with melismas in the sorceress motifs would have drawn upon Sanderson's vocal strengths. Second, based on the vocal lines of this score and her score annotations in *Manon*, it is fair to assume that Sanderson excelled at descending vocal lines more than ascending. When Esclarmonde sings the *Motif de la Magie I<sup>b</sup>*, the lines tend to begin in the head register and follow a descending pattern; the magic motif often coincides with Esclarmonde's veiled appearance, which creates a thematic correlation between the music and staging. The tessitura of the vocal lines associated with her own motif, '*Motif d'Esclarmonde*,' which starts in chest register and ascends into middle voice, remaining generally lower than the sorceress's melodies. There is a counter-motion between Esclarmonde (chest to middle voice ascent) and the Sorceress (head to middle voice descent).

The donning and removal of her veil is a crucial element in the plot. Massenet and Sanderson supported its significance musically and vocally, lending it that much more credence:

<sup>504</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 4.

[...] A gesture that recurs throughout *Esclarmonde* and that is a kind of recurring physical and visual theme: the beautiful princess of the title has supernatural powers, but she can only use them if she remains veiled. She therefore only raises and lowers her veil on important occasions.<sup>505</sup>

Such ‘important occasions’ tend to coincide with appearance of the *Motifs de la Magie* (I<sup>a</sup> and I<sup>b</sup>), which appear extensively in *Esclarmonde*’s Act I aria ‘Esprits de l’air.’ The use of the *motifs de la Magie* versus the *Motif d’Esclarmonde* is symbolic of her as the veiled sorceress. The powerful enchantress wills the elements of nature—air, sea, and fire—to obey her voice and deliver Roland into her embrace. She must remain veiled and musically does not reveal herself by using her own *Motif d’Esclarmonde*:

Here, the Motif of *Esclarmonde*, reveals that it is no longer the veiled Empress who is locked up in a sanctuary; it is an imperial magician who mounts the platform. A horn, which responds to the English horn and flute, renders the Motif of Roland (m. IV), while *Esclarmonde* summons the spirits to make the hero appear to her. The magic chase finally ensues, distinguished, dazzling, passing through the same Motif that appears twice [...] and the second Motif of Magic (m. I<sup>b</sup>), combined together to expressively translate this phantasmagoria, musical moment of incomparable passion, and composed of a simplicity of line attached to an intensity of colour that few masters in theatre could match.<sup>506</sup>

The higher tessitura would allow Sanderson to offer a higher decibel level in two ways. Elevated notes would stand out better against the orchestra, and, because Sanderson’s head voice was her stronger register at this point in her career, she probably would have been able to produce more volume in the upper range than in her middle or chest voice. Beyond vocality, the loss of facial expression while she was veiled limited Sanderson’s ability to convey emotion and plot elements when she was not singing, though these could have been expressed by non-verbal means. As Kimball suggests, interpreters of

<sup>505</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 103.

<sup>506</sup> Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, 65–66.

Ici plus de Motif d’*Esclarmonde*, comme on le voit : ce n’est plus l’Impératrice voilée qui s’enferme dans un sanctuaire ; c’est la magicienne impériale qui monte sur le trépied. Un cor auquel répond le cor anglais, puis la flûte, ramène le Motif de Roland (m. IV), alors qu’*Esclarmonde* somme les Esprits de faire paraître le héros à ses yeux. La chasse magique se déroule enfin, prestigieuse, fulgurante, traversée par ce même Motif qui revient deux fois [...] et par le deuxième Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>b</sup>), combinés entre eux pour traduire expressivement cette fantasmagorie, tableau musical d’une fougue incomparable, et d’une simplicité de lignes jointe à une intensité de couleurs dont peu de maîtres au théâtre pourraient fournir l’équivalent.

Esclarmonde must meet the vocal demands of the role, while at the same time overcoming dramatic hindrances:

Although Esclarmonde is perhaps the most seductive and brilliant in Massenet's gallery of heroines, the part is a genuine *tour de force*, full of torturous vocalism not for the faint of heart or insecure of technique. (Because Esclarmonde remains veiled during much of the opera, it is incumbent on the singer to produce a great variety of nuance, colour, and downright gorgeous vocal sound.)<sup>507</sup>

While this is a fair statement about singing the role of Esclarmonde, it could be argued that the end of Kimball's parenthetical comment holds true for every operatic role. When is it not 'incumbent on the singer to produce nuance, colour, and gorgeous sound' in a given role? Perhaps if a role is considered an outlier (e.g., villainous or comedic), such as the witch in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, 'gorgeous sound' may not be necessary. However, such roles are atypical and may require even greater 'variety of nuance and colour.'

Perhaps Sanderson used greater inflection, enunciation, and physical pantomime to convey the story, so that when she was veiled, the memory of her previous dramatic deliveries lingered. Critical response from Bellaigue supports the notion that some of her expressions may have been a bit over-acted. He notes that her expressions were false and her gestures awkward.<sup>508</sup> This may have something to do with the limitations of her costume, such as the veil.

Massenet and Sanderson made intelligent decisions regarding the registration of the score, and the result was a successful opera with a strikingly difficult title role. The demands are quantifiable and reveal a correlation between Esclarmonde's sorceress persona and the higher number of measures containing pitches above F4. On one hand, the powerful sorceress is backed by a high vocal line (the strongest part of Sanderson's voice); on the other hand, the vocality of the Empress mainly resides in the middle voice,

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<sup>507</sup> Carol Kimball, "Recordings: Esclarmonde by Jules Massenet," *Opera Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (1996): 130–132.

<sup>508</sup> Bellaigue, "Revue Musicale: Esclarmonde," 706.

which was Sanderson's least developed register at this early point in her career. Not only was it less dazzling than her high voice, many critics judged Sanderson's middle register to be weak, as noted by Landely:

The weakness of the middle must be attributed mainly to pronunciation, [which is] very defective as soon as the voice enters the laryngeal register. Miss Sanderson, rather weak at the beginning of the work, who does not find herself until the great love scene on the enchanted island, but there she becomes a delicious mix of modest audacity and naive intoxication.<sup>509</sup>

There were probably many reasons for the lack of strength in Sanderson's mid-range, such as her youth. Another possibility is that she was simply following score instructions. The melodic line of the example below would have been sung in Sanderson's middle register. The score reads, '*avec la plus grande émotion, presque sans voix et comme anéantie*' [with great emotion, almost without voice and as if crushed].

**Example 65:** 'Regarde-les ces yeux.' mm.1–4.<sup>510</sup>

The musical score for Example 65 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the voice, and the bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the time signature is 6/8. The tempo and mood are marked 'Lento e cantabile.' with the instruction '(avec la plus grande émotion, presque sans voix et comme anéantie.)'. The vocal line begins with a long silence, indicated by '(long silence)' and a fermata. The lyrics are 'Re-gar - de-les, ces yeux — plus'. The piano accompaniment starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and ties. A tempo change is indicated by '126 = ♩' or 'ou 42 = ♩'.

The *pianissimo* dynamic, if observed, would have made the line nearly inaudible, which is what the instruction '*presque sans voix*' [almost without voice] suggests. It is

<sup>509</sup> Landely, "Théâtre National," 74.

La faiblesse du médium doit être attribuée principalement à la prononciation, très défectueuse dès que la voix prend le registre laryngien. M<sup>lle</sup> Sanderson, plutôt faible au début de l'ouvrage, ne se retrouve guère qu'à la grande scène d'amour de l'île enchantée, mais elle y est délicieuse d'audace pudique et d'ivresse naïve.

<sup>510</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 216.

understandable that critics would have found fault with Sanderson's mid-range, but she may have been harshly judged for accurately executing the score:

The middle of the voice can be a trouble-spot for many coloraturas, and Sanderson had been criticized in *Esclarmonde* for having a thin, 'reedy' (grêle), and even ugly middle, and so perhaps the leaps above and below this register were written with her in mind.<sup>511</sup>

Another factor to consider is that Massenet and Sanderson were aware of her weak middle range; with that in mind, Massenet may have written melodies to highlight the important plot points by setting them in her upper register and allow the more mundane elements of the story to reside in the middle register. This ties in well with the dramatic symbolism of the two 'sides' of *Esclarmonde*. The empress *Esclarmonde* has not yet come to power; her father reigns until she satisfies the condition of remaining veiled until age twenty. Having Sanderson vocalise in her weaker middle range may have been a ploy to symbolise the transitional status in which the character exists. While she is no longer a child, she is not yet an empress. She is in-between identities, and, appropriately, her vocal part is between the strength of her chest and head registers. Henson notes:

[Scenes] in *Esclarmonde* are kept distinct from the princess's tendency to express herself in extremely high notes: high Cs, Ds, and even a high F and a high G. *Esclarmonde* is either silent or remains in a middle or low register and expresses herself relatively naturalistically when she is being seductive and alluring. [...] *Esclarmonde*'s high notes are heard in other parts of the score and were probably performed in a special upper or female falsetto register, the 'flageolet' or 'whistle' register that many coloraturas can access. There are heard above all in a recurring, angular vocal 'spell' that *Esclarmonde* sings when she is using her supernatural powers.<sup>512</sup>

The example below illustrates the use of her middle voice, but the score instructions read, '*douloureusement et en sanglotant...d'une voix épuisée*' [sadly and in sobs...with a weakened voice].

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<sup>511</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 113.

<sup>512</sup> Henson, *Opera Acts*, 104–106.

Example 66: 'O Roland, tu m'as trahie' mm.1–8.<sup>513</sup>

ESCLARMONDE. (douloureusement et en sanglotant) *f*  
– O Roland...

*mf dim.*  
tu m'as trahi - e... et me voi - là... (d'une voix épuisée) *pp*  
sans voi - les!..

Score instructions such as these may have contributed to critics' negative comments about Sanderson's middle range, because the difference between her upper extension and this register was probably stark at the time. By the mid-1890s, however, critics reported improvement in her middle range. The change could be attributable to Sanderson's lessons with Marchesi or due to maturation. It is common for a voice to fill out as a singer (typically, 25 years of age) gains years and physical fitness.<sup>514</sup>

At the *Esclarmonde* premiere, a combination of youth and what appears to have been intelligent musicianship may have contributed to negative critical remarks about Sanderson. According to Gertrude Atherton, lack-lustre reviews adversely affected Massenet and Sanderson. Atherton claimed that the Sanderson household was in a frenzy the morning after the public dress rehearsal of *Esclarmonde*:

<sup>513</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 216. « Douloureusement et en sanglotant. D'une voix épuisée. »

<sup>514</sup> Garyth Nair, *The Craft of Singing* (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2007), 603–604.

‘Read these!’ [...] ‘This is the last of Sibyl!’

I snatched the papers from her and glanced hastily over the articles she indicated. Sneers. Ridicule. Pens tipped with venom. All expressed in the most perfect French but offering Sibyl up on a platter, disembowelled and dismembered. She had no voice. She couldn’t act.<sup>515</sup>

Atherton’s dramatic recollection of that morning may not have been completely accurate. The journalist exonerated herself from any possible lack of faith in her friend when she wrote, ‘Of course, there was no doubt in my own mind. It was unthinkable that Sibyl should meet with anything but uninterrupted good fortune.’<sup>516</sup>

A scan of Fauser’s 1889 *Esclarmonde: Dossier de Presse Parisienne* reveals that Sanderson’s performance was well-received overall. Contrary to Atherton’s assertion that critics were unimpressed with Sanderson’s voice and acting, both her singing and dramatic portrayal were often complimented. The only common criticism was the lack of power in her middle register. Other than that, most reports lauded Sanderson for her beauty, intelligence, and crystalline head voice. In fact, Massenet and Sanderson’s production was successful enough to result in an invitation for the creative team to attend a gala at the President’s palace:

Mr. Massenet has many friends and admirers worldwide. Also, the work of the young master has excited a lively curiosity. Miss Sanderson was, throughout the evening, the focus of the whole room. In her rich and beautiful costumes, she succeeded once again as a woman and an artist. One detail: the day after the first performance, the authors and the publisher received an invitation to the next ball of the Presidency.<sup>517</sup>

This was not the first or last time Massenet would be a guest of the President; Manon’s famous ‘Fabliau’ would receive its world premiere at the palace in 1898. Vitu’s review also illustrates the point that *Esclarmonde*, and Sanderson in the role, received acclaim

<sup>515</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 157.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>517</sup> Auguste Vitu, “Chronique Musicale.” *Le Figaro* 35, 139 (May 19, 1889): 1.

M. Massenet compte de nombreux amis et admirateurs dans le monde. Aussi l’œuvre du jeune maître excitait-elle une vive et sympathique curiosité. Mlle Sanderson a été, pendant la soirée, le point de mire de toute la salle. Dans ses riches et superbes costumes, elle a obtenu encore une fois un succès de femme et d’artiste. Un détail : Le lendemain de la première représentation, les auteurs et l’éditeur recevaient une invitation au prochain bal de la Présidence.

from audience members, some critics, and from the head of the nation. There was a general sense of excitement about her High G6 ‘Eiffel Tower’ note, and critics rhapsodised about Sanderson’s beauty and elaborate costumes. In light of the body of evidence, Atherton’s claim that Sanderson was served up ‘on a platter, disembowelled and dismembered’ may need to be considered mere literary sensationalism.

Many critics offered flattering reviews of Sanderson and even came to her defence when her voice became inaudible; instead, they blamed Massenet for orchestrating portions of the score in such a manner as to allow the Wagnerian brass to overpower Sanderson.<sup>518</sup> However, a number of reviewers pointed out areas where Sanderson’s performance was less than ideal; for example, Georges Street concurs with Landely that Sanderson’s voice was difficult to hear because of her inadequate French diction:

She has a voice, not always accurate, but very extensive. Miss Sanderson was very emotional last night. She took the opportunity to sing her role in an American accent, which was an unfortunate distraction because she cost us the pleasure of hearing the lovely lines that were entrusted to her. It seems, moreover, that at the final moment, Ms. Marchesi spread word around the room that Miss Sanderson was no longer her pupil.<sup>519</sup>

Others also reported that Marchesi created a distance between Sanderson and herself that night. It was not until three years later that Marchesi would proudly identify Sanderson as one of her students. The delay in Sanderson’s study with Marchesi could be considered unfortunate because if Sanderson had studied with Marchesi earlier and continually, she might have avoided many of the vocal troubles that plagued her career. Sanderson’s voice was a good fit for Marchesi’s studio, according to musicologist Peter Davis:

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<sup>518</sup> Gutello, “Musique,” 3. Several critics identified Massenet’s heavy use of brass as an homage to or impersonation of Wagner.

<sup>519</sup> Georges Street, “Esclarmonde: La première représentation de l’œuvre de M. Massenet,” *Le Matin* 6, no. 1910 (May 16, 1889): 2.

Elle possède une voix qui, pour n’être pas toujours très juste, n’en est pas moins très étendue. Mlle Sanderson était très émue hier soir. Elle en a profité pour chanter son rôle en américain, distraction fort regrettable, car elle nous a fait perdre le plaisir d’entendre les jolis vers qui lui étaient confiés. Il paraît, d’ailleurs, qu’au dernier moment, Mme Marchesi avait fait répandre dans la salle le bruit que Mlle Sanderson n’était plus son élève.» ; Georges Street also comments that *Esclarmonde* reminds him of *Lohengrin*.

Her voice had not a mellow, but a brilliant quality, and she could easily reach the G or A-flat in Alt without any special effort, these notes being even especially strong, not like the usual tiny little miserable squeaks. It was exactly the sort of brilliant, high-placed voice that Marchesi loved to work on.<sup>520</sup>

While Marchesi and Street are not enthusiastic about Sanderson's interpretation of *Esclarmonde* that night, this review by G. De Boisjoslin provides a markedly different impression:

The young debutante, Miss Sanderson, is one of the most agreeable artists we have had the opportunity to applaud. Fortunately, she does not seem to know the tricks and traditions; she simply sings with exquisite grace, and, listening to her, we were reminded of Hans Sachs, and the song of Walter, in Wagner's *Meistersinger*:

Instinct inspires and directs her voice,  
And puts the song on her lip.<sup>521</sup>

Similar incidents of diametrically opposed opinion about opera performance have occurred for centuries and continue to this day. More important to this research than the opinions of the reviewers is trying to determine how and why Sanderson interpreted the role and, thus, her impact on the score. To do so, the following section analyses *Esclarmonde*'s first act aria 'Esprits de l'air' as well as her third act aria 'Ah ! Roland !'

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<sup>520</sup> Peter G. Davis, *The America Opera Singer* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1997), 185.

<sup>521</sup> G. De Boisjoslin, "Revue musicale," *L'Observateur Français* 3, no. 137 (May 20, 1889): 2.

La jeune débutante, Mlle Sanderson, est une des plus sympathiques artistes que nous ayons eu l'occasion d'applaudir. Elle ne connaît pas heureusement les ruses et les traditions ; elle chante simplement avec une grâce exquise, et, en l'écoutant, nous pensions volontairement à l'appréciation d'Hans Sachs, sur le chant de Walter, dans les *Mâtres chanteurs* de Wagner :

L'instinct inspire et dirige sa voix,  
Et met la chanson sur sa lèvre.

Musical Analysis: Esprits de l'air'**Esprits de l'air***(éclatant et très énergique)*

Esprits de l'air !

Esprits de l'onde !

Esprits du feu ! *(en riant)* ah !

Hâtez-vous d'accomplir le vœu d'Esclarmonde !

Entendez ma voix !

*(avec tendresse)*

A mes yeux faites paraître

Celui que je veux connaître...

Celui pour qui brûle mon être !

Roland Comte de Blois !

Esprits de l'air !

Esprits de l'onde !

Esprits du feu !

Obéissez-moi !

*(Esclarmonde et Parséis suivent des yeux toute la fantasmagorie.)***Spirits of the air**

(bright and very energetic)

Spirits of the air!

Spirits of the wave!

Spirits of the fire! (laughing) ah!

Hasten to perform the vow of Esclarmonde!

Listen to my voice!

*(with tenderness)*

In my eyes appears

Him that I long to know...

Him for whom my soul burns!

Roland Count of Blois!

Spirits of the air!

Spirits of the wave!

Spirits of the fire!

Obey me!

*(Esclarmonde and Parséis watch the phantasmagoria.)*

Esclarmonde's first act aria 'Esprits de l'air' is important for many reasons. It is a pivotal moment in the plot, introduces the audience to the powerful sorceress Esclarmonde and reinforces musical themes. Vocally, the aria foreshadows the virtuosic vocal demands of the role that continue through the remainder of the show. The text is replete with commanding language and music that matches the passionate sentiments.

The text and associated vocal lines are quite bold and leave little room for question as to Esclarmonde's intentions: she wants Roland, and she will use all available resources to summon him to the enchanted island. Because of her sorcery, she has command over the elements: winds, waves, and fire. As is the case with *Manon*, many portions of *Esclarmonde* are based on exotic themes and *fantasme*. This aria includes components of *fantasme* such as references to the elements and to apparitions (spirits); the entire passage is shot through with sexual desire.

Exotic themes, often accompanied by or expressed through *fantasme*, are central to these pivotal scenes as well. Elements of 'alterity' include the unknown dominant

seducer represented by Esclarmonde's veil and the use of sorcery. The location offers another degree of separation from Parisian life, because the setting moves from the already exotic Orient to an even more remote fantasy location of the enchanted island. In addition, Roland is magically transported there, which draws on the apparition aspects of *fantasme*. Critics reacted to this fairy-tale scene in diverse ways; conservative Camille Bellaigue and liberal Auguste Vitu specifically address Esclarmonde's summons and subsequent seduction of Roland in disparate ways. For example, Vitu writes:

'Tonight, this very same night, Roland will belong to me. I will make him come to the magic isle, it is to him that I will be united! I want him to be mine, to love me.'

She mounts upon a platform, invokes the spirits who, obedient to her voice, make her appear as if in the moonlight, 'as if she was a reflection in a mirror.' Roland hunting in the forest of the Ardennes with King Cléomer, is guided by a white deer (instead of a boar), to the shores of the ocean, where he mounts a magic vessel that takes him to the Enchanted Isle. Esclarmonde comes to meet him, mounted upon a chariot to take him away, and one can hear her voice repeating, 'Spirits of the air, spirits of the wave, obey me!' as they become more distant. [...] The second act, on the enchanted island, contains two scenes separated by a symphonic interlude. Roland disembarks in the middle of a Spirit dance during which he falls asleep, like Renaud in the Gardens of Armide, then is awakened by a kiss; a veiled woman is beside him: it is Esclarmonde. [...] Intoxicated with desire and love, Roland accepts the pact [that she must remain veiled]. A huge tree lowers its branches and arranges them for the wedding night of the ecstatic lovers. When this shady arbour of modesty rises, the night of love is finished.<sup>522</sup>

Vitu's report conforms to his usual style, which is vivid but not judgmental. Bellaigue, in contrast, paints a wholly different picture of the story, focusing on moral failing and

<sup>522</sup> Auguste Vitu, "Chronique Musicale," *Le Figaro*, no. 136 (May 15, 1889): 5.

Cette nuit, cette nuit même, Roland m'appartiendra. Je le ferai venir dans une île magique, à lui je vais m'unir ! Je veux qu'il soit à moi, qu'il m'aime. Elle monte sur un trépied, invoque les esprits qui, docile à sa voix, lui font voir, dans la lune, « comme dans un miroir », Roland chassant dans la forêt des Ardennes avec le roi Cléomer, entraîné par un cerf blanc (au lieu d'un sanglier), jusqu'aux bords de l'Océan, où il monte sur le vaisseau magique qui le conduira vers une île enchantée. Esclarmonde va l'y rejoindre, montée sur un char qui l'emporte, et l'on entend dans l'éloignement sa voix qui répète. '« Esprits de l'air, esprits de l'onde, obéissez moi ! » [...] Le second acte, dans l'île enchantée, comporte deux tableaux, séparés par un épisode symphonique. Roland débarque au milieu d'une danse d'esprits ; il s'endort, comme Renaud dans les jardins d'Armide, puis se réveille sous un baiser; une femme voilée est près de lui, c'est Esclarmonde [...] Enivré de désir et d'amour, Roland accepte le pacte. Un arbre gigantesque, abaisse ses rameaux et les déroule pour la nuit nuptiale autour des amants extasiés. Lorsque cette couverture végétale et pudique se relève, la nuit d'amour est finie.

tawdry sexual exploits, rather than on the holy joining of two souls through wedded union and mutual bliss:

Esclarmonde is not in love with Roland, like Lohengrin is with Elsa, through compassion but rather by moral attraction. She loves him above all physically; she desires him, and does not hide it. She promises him burning moments of delirium, and with refined pleasures: she intends to educate this adolescent in matters of love. All these elements make us look at Esclarmonde as quite desirable, as she says herself, as desired, but only for sensuality. No one likes a woman who is too forward, who takes all the initiative in love: or rather we do love them: first out of politeness but also with considerable pleasure, provided they are beautiful. But, this is an incomplete love, and could be called inferior. Thus, all this sensuality is a cover for displaced mysticism. After spending a divine night under a bed of roses—even if diabolical—the devoted lover conjures angels with golden halos, rose-coloured wings, and piously folded hands, in order to lend an air of innocence and the tone of a minor saint. This amalgam of religion and lust is not felicitous. [...] The evocation of the spirits of the air, waves and fire is less powerful than shrill. For the first time (but not for the last), the composer takes advantage of the exceptional high notes that Providence unfortunately gave to the charming interpreter of the role of Esclarmonde. I would rather hear the elements evoked with more poetry and less sharpness. [...] Never before, I believe, has a musical description been so accurate, so detailed, in the physical manifestations of human lust (you see I am trying to express myself tactfully).<sup>523</sup>

Bellaigue makes some valid points about the text and music. The blunt language of the aria leaves little question as to the Sorceress' motives, and his use of the word '*acuité*' correctly encapsulates the general sentiment of the evocation scene; it is very direct.

Bellaigue expresses his displeasure with the events that transpired in a mode as equally

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<sup>523</sup> Bellaigue, "Revue Musicale : Esclarmonde," 699–700, 702.

Esclarmonde ne s'est pas éprise de Roland, comme Lohengrin d'Elsa, par compassion, par attrait moral. Elle l'aime surtout physiquement ; elle le désire, et ne s'en cache pas. Elle se promet avec lui de brûlantes ivresses, des raffinements voluptueux ; elle fera l'éducation amoureuse de cet adolescent ; et toutes ces perspectives nous font paraître Esclarmonde aussi désirable, comme elle dit elle-même, que désirante, mais pour les sens seulement. On n'aime guère les femmes qui font trop d'avances, qui prennent toute l'initiative d'amour : ou plutôt on les aime : par politesse d'abord, avec grand plaisir aussi, pourvu qu'elles soient belles, mais d'un amour incomplet et pour ainsi dire inférieur. Et puis, à toute cette sensualité se mêle un mysticisme déplacé. Après avoir passé sous des buissons de roses une nuit divine, ou diabolique, la dévote amoureuse convoque des anges aux nimbes d'or, aux ailes roses, aux mains pieusement jointes, pour prendre devant eux des airs innocents et le ton d'une petite sainte. Cet amalgame de religion et de volupté n'est pas très heureux. [...] L'évocation aux esprits de l'air, de l'onde et du feu est moins puissante que perçante. Le musicien abuse ici pour la première fois (ce ne sera pas la dernière) des notes exceptionnelles que la Providence en malheureusement données à la charmante interprète du rôle d'Esclarmonde. J'aimerais entendre évoquer les éléments avec plus de poésie et moins d'acuité. [...] Jamais encore on n'avait, je crois, fait une description sonore aussi fidèle, aussi détaillée, de la manifestation physique des tendresses humaines (vous voyez que je tâche de m'exprimer convenablement).

forthright and unequivocal as Esclarmonde's expressions of desire for Roland. Perhaps Bellaigue's review is one of the 'negative' reports that sent the Sanderson household into a frenzy the morning after the first performance, even though his harsh comments were more about the libretto and Massenet's choral writing than about Sanderson.<sup>524</sup> Atherton offered her recollections of the same performance:

The audience seemed interested, and responded obediently when the hired claque led the applause. [...] [The critics] sneered, they looked bored, and I feared for the morrow. I only hoped they would be more decent in their obsequies than my own batch. [...] Sibyl, always strikingly handsome, was breath-takingly lovely in a crown a foot high, and gowns as gorgeous as the scenery. There was not a tremor in her sweet, pure voice, and it soared like a bird's. I cannot say that it was a very interesting opera, and, in truth, it had but a short life. There was little plot, but I suppose the frantic and almost continuous love-making was relied upon to cover other deficiencies. Of course it was full of melody and even Massenet had never written more emotional music.<sup>525</sup>

The music of 'Esprits de l'air' could be described as bright, bold, and demanding. Sanderson was asked to sing extreme passages in nearly two-thirds of this aria, as illustrated by the chart below. The aria's vocal line sits above F5, below G4, and/or contains coloratura passages in 65% of the measures in which Esclarmonde sings.

**Table 6:** Measures sung by Esclarmonde

Esprits de l'air				
Measures				
Total	Sung	Above	Below	Coloratura
23	21	9	4	2
	91.3%	39.1%	17.4%	8.7%
65.2% Extreme passages				

This aria, like the majority of the score, took its toll on Sanderson's voice, leading to a total loss of voice by the end of the first night. It is remarkable that she went on to perform the opera ninety-nine additional times in the following nine months. Atherton

<sup>524</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 157.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-157.

recalls that Sanderson was ‘too nervous and exhausted to talk beyond asking me in a hoarse whisper to come over in the morning.’<sup>526</sup>

‘Esprits de l’air’ is undeniably an enormous challenge with its highs, lows, and melismatic calisthenics. The dynamics are challenging and the characterisation ranges wildly from the A to the B section. Sanderson was asked to maintain extreme boldness in the A and A<sup>1</sup> sections and then to transmit a portrait of tenderness in the middle of the aria. At the beginning and end of the piece, singing with brightness seems to have been the paramount aesthetic element desired by Massenet. This is evidenced by the instruction ‘*éclatant*’ [bright] appearing in the score, libretto, and *mise-en-scène*. Based on most reports, Sanderson met Massenet’s request. In fact, many reviews of her performance not only intimate that she sang with a bright tone, several actually used the word ‘bright’ in reference to her portrayal of Esclarmonde.

Beyond the specific instruction and possible dramatic intent, Massenet scored brighter vowel sounds in areas of registration that would have helped Sanderson’s voice to carry well in the Opéra-Comique auditorium. For example, the *–sprints* of the initial *Esprits* calls upon the soprano to sing an A5 on an [i] vowel, which would have helped to resonate the mask and to project Sanderson’s voice far better than an open, back vowel such as [a]. It is likely that Massenet employed these devices to ensure that Sanderson’s commands were understood throughout the A and A<sup>1</sup> sections of this crucial aria to solidify the character’s position of power and, in a sense, Sanderson’s dominance as well. The clarity of the text, vocal line, and Sanderson’s voice would have created a trifecta of strength that probably left no need for subtext, *double entendre*, or cloaked intent.

The music of the invocation scene, which includes this aria, contains several motifs identified by Charles Malherbe (1890), including the two *Motifs de la magie* (I<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 156.

and I<sup>b</sup>), *Motif de Roland*, and the *Motif d'Esclarmonde*. In 'Esprits de l'air' itself, the two magic motifs and Roland's theme are most prevalent:

**Example 67:** Motifs in 'Esprits de l'air'<sup>527</sup>

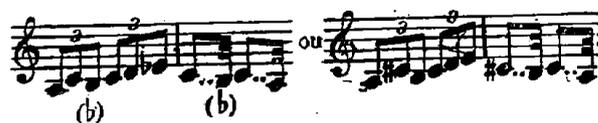
Motif de la Magie.



M. I<sup>a</sup>

M. I<sup>b</sup>

M. IV Motif de Roland.



**Example 68:** 'Esprits de l'air.' mm. 19–21. Motif de Roland (m. IV) and Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>a</sup>).



mon - de! entendez ma voix! A mes

*mf* (avec tendresse)

*cour.* 8<sup>va.</sup>

*ff* *sec.*

*p* *mystérieux.*

8<sup>va</sup> *bassa.*

<sup>527</sup> Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, 58, 61.

**Example 69:** ‘Esprits de l’air.’ mm. 11–13. Motif de la magie (m. I<sup>b</sup>).<sup>528</sup>

Malherbe offers musical explanations of the aria and the invocation scene as a whole:

The magician appears: (m. I<sup>a</sup>) the first Motif of Magic rises from low to high, as it launches in sparkling rockets, and prepares with a sinister outburst for the evocation of the Spirits, built on the second Motif (m. I<sup>b</sup>). No more of Esclarmonde’s motive for it is no longer the veiled Empress who is locked up in a sanctuary; it is an imperial sorceress who mounts the platform. [...] The second Motif of Magic (m. I<sup>b</sup>), combines to expressively translate this phantasmagoria, a musical tableau of incomparable passion, and of a simplicity of lines, coupled with an intensity of colour that few masters in theatre could match.<sup>529</sup>

The spirits obeyed Esclarmonde’s orders and, in the short entr’acte that precedes their dances, the violas and cellos sigh softly, and twice play the Motif of Hyménée (m. V), as if they want to suggest why the lovers are going to meet on the Enchanted Isle. Just when Esclarmonde joins the sleeping Roland, the same Motif, given to the violins, announces him, but preceded logically by the first Motif of Magic (m. I<sup>a</sup>): a sombre echo of his inner thoughts. Later, upon awakening, the knight sees before him this unknown woman whose face remains veiled, it is a solo violin which reflects his astonishment and admiration, playing the Motif of Esclarmonde (m. II), thus rendering the music more intimate and tender.<sup>530</sup>

<sup>528</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 55.

<sup>529</sup> Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, 65–66.

La magicienne se révèle: le premier Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>a</sup>) monte du grave à l’aigu, s’y répand en fusées étincelantes, et prépare avec un éclat sinistre l’évocation des Esprits, construite sur le second Motif (m. I<sup>b</sup>). Ici plus de Motif d’Esclarmonde, comme on le voit : ce n’est plus l’Impératrice voilée qui s’enferme dans un sanctuaire ; c’est la magicienne impérieuse qui monte sur le trépied. [...] Le deuxième Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>b</sup>), combinés entre eux pour traduire expressivement cette fantasmagorie, tableau musical d’une fougue incomparable, et d’une simplicité de lignes jointe à une intensité de couleurs dont peu de maîtres au théâtre pourraient fournir l’équivalent.

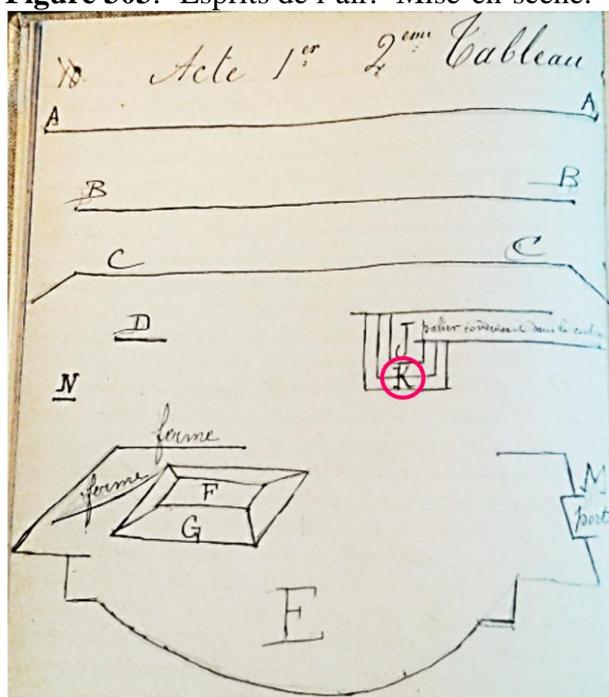
<sup>530</sup> Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, 66–67.

Les Esprits ont obéi aux ordres d’Esclarmonde et, dans le court entracte qui précède leurs danses, les altos et violoncelles soupirent doucement, et par deux fois, le Motif de l’Hyménée (m. V), comme s’ils voulaient donner à entendre pourquoi les amants vont se rencontrer dans l’île enchantée. Au moment où Esclarmonde vient rejoindre Roland endormi, le même Motif, confié aux violons, l’annonce, mais précédé logiquement du premier Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>a</sup>), sombre écho de son intime pensée. Plus loin, lorsqu’en s’éveillant le chevalier voit devant lui cette femme

It is interesting that Malherbe describes Roland's musical line as very intimate and tender when he sees her veiled. This reversal supports the idea of the dominant female voice of the sorceress. Massenet's use of Esclarmonde's theme coincides with Roland becoming emotionally vulnerable. It may show that Roland recognized, and already loved, the real Esclarmonde. Likewise, Roland's theme is used in 'Esprits de l'air,' but only in the B section when the audience hears from the real Esclarmonde.

Tension is evident in the music, especially in the disparate vocal lines of the A and B sections. The score instructions and *mise-en-scène* offer clues of Sanderson's vocality. The staging places her on an elevated platform (powerful position). She sings her commands in an elevated tessitura, dynamic level, and level of virtuosity as well:

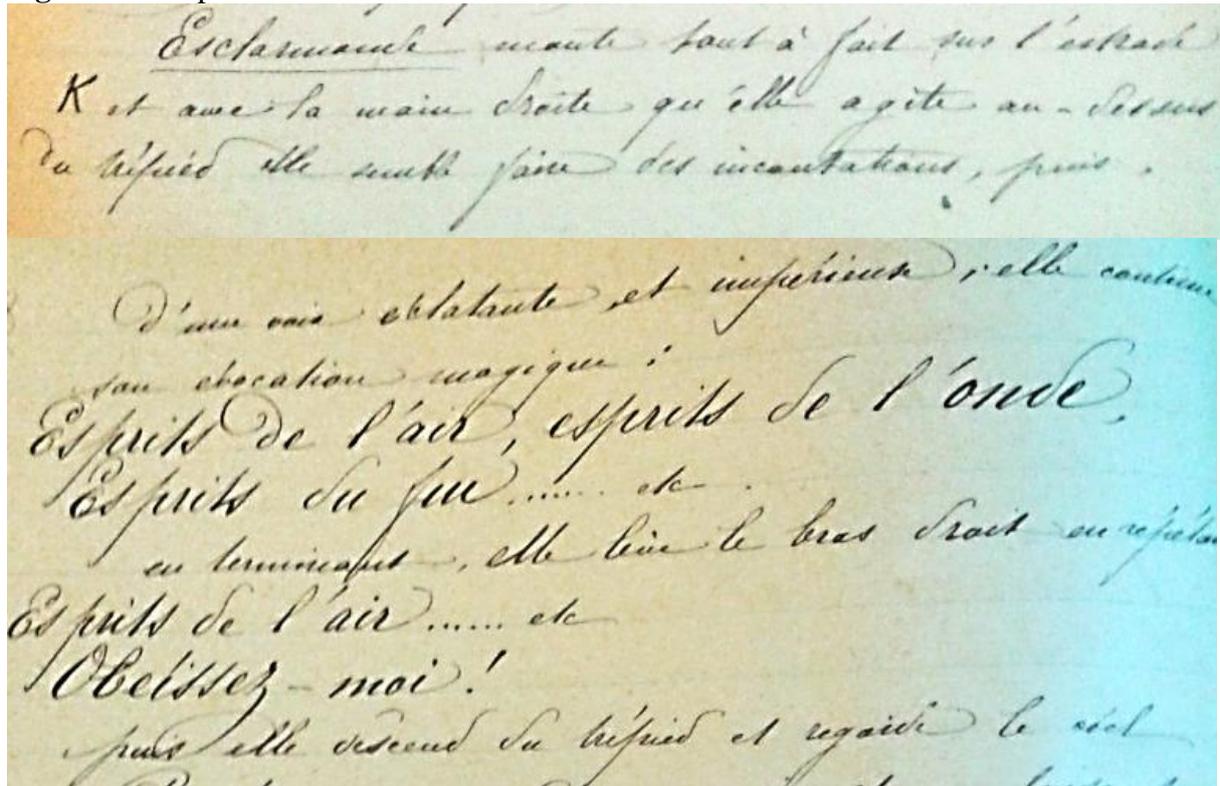
**Figure 303:** 'Esprits de l'air.' *Mise-en-scène*.<sup>531</sup>



inconnue dont le visage reste voilé, c'est un violon solo qui traduit son étonnement et son admiration avec le Motif d'Esclarmonde (m. II), ainsi devenu plus intime et plus tendre.

<sup>531</sup> Ponchard, *Mise-en-scène*: F-Po.10.

**Figure 34:** ‘Esprits de l’air.’ Mise-en-scène.<sup>532</sup>



Esclarmonde mounts ‘Stage K’ and swirls her right hand above the platform; she makes incantations, and in a bright and imperial voice, she continues to evoke her magic:

Spirits of the air, spirits of the waves, spirits of the fire ... etc.

At the end, she raises her right arm and repeats:

Spirits of the air ... etc.

Obey me!

Then she descends the platform and looks toward the sky.

Details in the staging instructions in the *mise-en-scène* support the idea that Sanderson vocalised differently through this scene than she might in a vocal studio or in a music-only rehearsal. She raises her arm twice, which probably resulted in an elevated point of inspiration. This combination of an upward arm extension and elevated gaze probably

<sup>532</sup> Ponchard, *Mise-en-scène*, 17–18.

Esclarmonde monte tout à fait du l’estrade K Et avec la main droite qu’elle agite au-dessus du trépied, Elle l’amble faire des incantations, puis d’une voix Éclatante Et impériale, Elle continue sou Évocation magique :

Esprits de l’air, Esprits de l’onde, Esprits de feu...etc.

En terminant elle lève le bras droit, en répétant :

Esprits de l’air...etc.

Obéissez-moi !

Puis elle descend du trépied et regard le ciel.



The juxtaposition of Esclarmonde's boldness with the sweetness of the accompaniment allows the vocal line to dominate rather than battling for position against the orchestra. The mid-range tremolo strings provide strong yet subdued support to the vocal line. The singer is requested to sing the passage *forte* and to end the section with a *forte-piano* high D6, which is sung virtually unaccompanied except for a short resolution chord. The lack of orchestral interference would have made space for Sanderson to execute the *fp* dynamic more effectively by allowing her to decrease her volume more than if she were required to sing over instrumentation. The result of the wider variation in decibel level was probably more satisfying, or at least more noticeable, to the audience. It is another example of the careful text painting for which Massenet is renowned. Esclarmonde sings, 'Entendez ma voix !' [Listen to my voice!] in measure 20; the composer set the line on a very high note, using an open [a] vowel preceded by a voiced fricative [v], which would have set Sanderson's voice well for the octave leap from D5 to D6 by employing a vowel that would create an openness in the trachea, throat, and resonators. The consonant would aid in placing the tone in a more frontal position, perhaps with a hint of nasality (a carryover from the bilabial [m]). Massenet also scored the word *voix* without orchestral accompaniment and then by way of dynamics (*fp*) drew the listener in by pulling back on the dynamic from loud to soft.

Example 71: 'Esprits de l'air.' mm. 16–21.<sup>534</sup>

The careful text painting and adept use of musical motifs continue in measure 21 with the appearance of the *Motif de Roland*, which could be considered musically symbolic of Roland's relative subservience in listening to Esclarmonde's voice. His obedience, by way of his musical theme, marks the beginning of the B section, and the revealing of Esclarmonde's true character. In the A section, she commands; at the start of B, Roland responds, and that in turn evokes a vulnerability (or *sincérité*) from Esclarmonde that continues until the recapitulation in A<sup>1</sup>, when the domineering sorceress returns.

Another point about this passage is the potentially difficult first note (A5) of 'Hâtez-vous' in measure 17. The note and word combination might pose some difficulty, because it is often challenging to begin a phrase in head voice, especially with an aspirated consonant. In Sanderson's case, the entrance may have been quite comfortable,

<sup>534</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 55.

and even beneficial, because of the high tessitura, which was her strongest vocal asset. Based on the *Bel Canto* training she had received from several teachers, it is fair to assume that she would have employed a glottal onset and a bright, Italianate [a] vowel for *Hà-*; the build-up of air pressure probably made the note easier for her to place, propel, and resonate into a higher, more forward position. The [a] vowel would have afforded her plenty of room to resonate the note, and the descending vocal line associated with the word was likely to have been made easier by the high placement and frontal resonance provided by the A5.

Some of the elements that might have eased demand on Sanderson in this passage are clear when compared to the opening phrase of Butterfly's aria 'Un bel dì, vedremo':

**Example 72:** Puccini. *Madama Butterfly*, 'Un bel dì, vedremo.' mm. 1–2.<sup>535</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the opening of the aria 'Un bel dì, vedremo' from Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system is the vocal line, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat major/D minor). The melody begins with a long note on 'Un', followed by a descending line. The lyrics are: 'One fine day we'll no - - tice A / Un bel dì, ve - dre - mo le -'. The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, starting with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). It is marked 'pp come da lontano'. The piano part features a descending line in the right hand and a more active line in the left hand.

While the first phrase of this aria also affords the singer an opportunity for a glottal onset with *un* [u], the commonalities seem to end there. Unlike the open [a] of *Hà-*, the first word *Un* is a closed back vowel [u]. Assuming the singer does not modify the vowel to a more open position, this is usually a difficult vowel to phonate in this part of the scale without sacrificing desired *chiaroscuro* balance. Puccini set the note on a G<sup>b</sup>, which for many sopranos is directly on the breaking note between the middle and head registers. In fact, the entire phrase works around the notes associated with the *secondo passaggio*,

<sup>535</sup> Giacomo Puccini, 'Un bel dì, vedremo,' *Madama Butterfly* (Milan: G. Ricordi & Co., 1904), 230.

which tend to elicit tension, occasional weakness, and can even result in the voice cracking or breaking.<sup>536</sup> To summarize, ‘*Un bel dì, vedremo*’ is a huge vocal challenge; it sits on and around the break between middle and head voice, begins with a problematic vowel, and calls for the entire phrase to be sung *pianissimo*. In contrast, Massenet and Sanderson’s levels of skill in the composition and interpretation of ‘*Esprits de l’air*’ are evidenced by the ways the piece seeks to mitigate unnecessary vocal demands while maintaining desired virtuosic elements.

In the B section, Esclarmonde, the young woman and empress to be, sings about her love of Roland; it is a tender moment in both the text and the vocal line. From the *fermata* in measure 20 through the remainder of the B section, the orchestra comes to the forefront and takes the lead from the vocal line, which may symbolise Esclarmonde’s lack of authority as young empress. This is suggested by the fairly static dynamic level of *mf* and narrow range (in middle voice) of Esclarmonde’s vocal line, juxtaposed with the stark dynamic contrasts of alternating *p* and *sf* plus the motion-oriented lines of the accompaniment. Roland’s theme starts this section, which may reflect Esclarmonde’s inability to remain in control in his presence; from a musical point of view, the orchestra could overpower Esclarmonde’s melody. According to Gutello, the Wagnerian brass-laden orchestra played with such vigour that Sanderson became inaudible at various points throughout the evening’s performance, except when singing in her head register:

Miss Sibyl Sanderson, whom we saw as Esclarmonde, is an attractive person endowed with a special voice possessed by singers of vocalises, without much volume, but agile, penetrating and with the ability to lose itself in previously inaccessible heights; thanks to this, she can be heard above the formidable brass, which the composer positively abused throughout his whole oeuvre.<sup>537</sup>

<sup>536</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 128.

Sanderson’s *secondo passaggio* probably occurred at or near G5, based on commonalities among high soprano voices and as suspected from the vocal writing for her.

<sup>537</sup> Gutello, “Musique,” 3.

Mlle Sibyl Sanderson à qui nous devons Esclarmonde est une jolie personne douée d’une voix spéciale aux chanteuses à vocalises, sans volume, mais facile, pénétrante et se perdant dans des hauteurs jusqu’ici inaccessibles ; c’est grâce à cela qu’elle peut se faire entendre au-dessus des cuivres formidables dont le musicien a positivement abusé dans tout son ouvrage.

Gutello's contention about the overuse of the brass is most identifiable in the B section of 'Esprits de l'air.' Massenet's use of tremolo strings for most of the A section accompaniment probably allowed Sanderson's voice to be showcased, but the orchestration of the B section arguably favours the instruments.

**Example 73:** 'Esprits de l'air.' mm. 22–25.<sup>538</sup>

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Esprits de l'air.' from Massenet's opera *Esclarmonde*, measures 22–25. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The lyrics are: 'yeux fai - tes pa - raî - - tre Celui que je veux con - naî - - tre... Ce - lui pour qui brûle mon é - -'. The piano accompaniment features a prominent tremolo in the right hand and a more active bass line. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *sf* (sforzando). Performance instructions include 'En animant.' (becoming more animated) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The score includes triplets and slurs over the vocal line.

In this portion of the aria, Esclarmonde's vocal line doubles the rhythm of the bolder accompaniment in several places. Those few sections could have aided the conveyance of text because the audience would not have had to listen as intently to hear Sanderson's voice over the denser orchestration and could focus their attention on the words. Perhaps the rhythmic doubling was not enough (as Gutello's review suggests), because she was difficult to hear. This was likely because the melody resides in what would have been Sanderson's weaker middle voice.

<sup>538</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 56.

Based on the tessitura of the B section, it is reasonable to conclude that Sanderson's second register extended to above G5 (the final note of measure 25), which is slightly higher than the majority of sopranos whose voices typically break between E5 and F#5.<sup>539</sup> This conclusion is based on the fact that G5 is the highest note in the B section, which appears to reside in what would have been Sanderson's middle register. Given that Sanderson was known for having an 'exceptionally high' voice,<sup>540</sup> it is fitting that she might have had a higher passage point into head register. It is understandable that a critic would feel that she had been overpowered by the orchestra, especially the brass section, given the combination of lower tessitura and more robust orchestration. Adding to the list of challenges with this passage, the initial score instruction to Esclarmonde as she enters this section is to sing '*avec tendresse*' [with tenderness]. The louder accompaniment and gentle singing would have exposed Sanderson's under-developed middle register.

The B section concludes with modified versions of the *Motif de Roland* and *Motif de la magie (I<sup>a</sup>)*. They are altered in such a way as to make them feel incomplete or in transition. Esclarmonde responds to the culmination of her successful sorcery and the promised appearance of her lover by singing his name and title, '*Roland Comte de Blois*,' on a descending D-minor scale in middle voice. It seems that her lover is *en route*, so she immediately dons her vocal veil and returns to the melodic architecture of the A section with the recapitulation of her incantation. Esclarmonde's softness vanishes. She returns as the commanding sorceress to once again seize control of the scene; the music and staging correlate with this shift in character out of the B section and into A<sup>1</sup>. The spirits of the air listened to her voice as instructed; this time, she commands them to obey her.

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<sup>539</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 128.

<sup>540</sup> Bellaigue, "Revue Musicale: Esclarmonde," 706.

Example 74: 'Esprits de l'air.' mm. 26–32.<sup>541</sup>

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "...tre!... Roland Comte de Blois! Esprits de l'air! Esprits de l'eau! Esprits du feu! Obéissez-moi!". The piano accompaniment has markings for "rall." and "1. Tempo.". The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "...prits de l'air! Esprits de l'eau! Esprits du feu! Obéissez-moi!". The piano accompaniment has markings for "cort." and "8va".

Beyond the obvious meaning of the text, there seems to be a play on words in the last line. The phrase '*Obéissez-moi!*' [Obey me!] is a close homonym to '*Oh baisez-moi!*' [Oh kiss me!]. Given the activities that ensue between Acts I and II, both of Esclarmonde's decrees are heeded: the spirits obey her, and Roland arrives on the enchanted island in time to see that Esclarmonde's carnal desires are met.

The intensity of the plot and music continue through the rest of the opera, although the nuptial scene was the most often discussed and debated portion. Vocally, the pinnacle of Esclarmonde's role comes in Act III with her aria, 'Ah! Roland!' The combination of virtuosic vocal demands and the presence of the 'Eiffel Tower note' (G6 above high C) sent the critics into a flurry of conjecture, opinion, and awe over the new American sensation with the highest voice any of them had ever heard.

<sup>541</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 56.

Musical Analysis: Ah ! Roland !

Ah ! Roland !	Ah! Roland!
Chaque nuit, cher amant,	Each night, dear lover,
Près de toi, tu me retrouveras !	Close to you, to me you will return
Oui, j'irai me livrer aux étreintes	Yes, I will throw myself into the embrace
De tes bras !	Of your arms!
Ah ! me voici !	Ah! Here I am!

Act III features a virtuosic and pivotal scene for Esclarmonde, which includes the famous 'note Eiffel' ('Eiffel Tower' note). The sequence of events that involves both Esclarmonde and Roland begins with, what is for all intents and purposes, a vocalise called 'Ah ! Roland !' of which musicologist Gerard Condé writes:

Here, the high-voltage moment for the singer is placed. We note that she performs these feats out of sight of the spectators. The advantage is threefold: she does not have to wear, in this perilous moment, the veil that hides her face onstage; second, the prolonged distance mitigates potential (vocal) harshness, especially if she sings in a place in the wings that is somewhat reverberant; finally, stage fright may be less paralyzing than under the bank of lights. Furthermore, these passages resemble exercises to develop the voice (vocalises); they ascend by degrees [...].<sup>542</sup>

As Condé notes, Esclarmonde is offstage in this display of coloratura melismas, and Roland hears her singing from afar (*'la voix d'Esclarmonde au loin'*).<sup>543</sup> Her alluring vocal line, combined with the return of the familiar second 'Magic Motif,' signals to Roland that his lover has finally arrived for their nightly tryst. Malherbe describes the scene this way:

The priest retires and the voice of Esclarmonde echoes in the distance. It is with the second *Motif de la Magie* (m. I<sup>b</sup>) that the enchantress announces herself, with variations in her *fiorature*, her lines and trills that draw out both the joy in her heart and the trouble she senses. [...] Moved, Roland listens and his concern is expressed by the juxtaposition of the two motives, the *Motif d'Esclarmonde* and the *Motif de l'Hyménée* (m. II and V). [...] Detail worthy of note, his first words:

<sup>542</sup> Gerard Condé, "Esclarmonde: Argument," *L'Avant-Scène Opéra: Esclarmonde/Grisélidis*, no. 148 (Saint-Étienne: L'Avant-scène Opéra, 1992), 56.

Ici se place le numéro de haute voltige de la cantatrice. Notons qu'elle exécute ces prouesses hors de la vue des spectateurs. L'avantage est triple : elle n'a pas à porter, en ce moment périlleux, le voile qui, en scène, lui cache le visage : en second lieu l'éloignement atténue d'éventuelles duretés, surtout s'il se trouve en coulisse un lieu un peu réverbérant. Enfin le trac peut être moins paralysant que sous les feux de la rampe. Ces traits ressemblent d'ailleurs à des exercices pour se mettre en voix ; ils montent par degrés [...].

<sup>543</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 208.

‘Look at them, those eyes’...  
are musically consistent with the words that she once used with pride in commanding the spirits of the air, of the waves and of fire. This is the second *Motif de la Magie* (m. I<sup>b</sup>), that by an ingenious application of *leitmotiv* serves as a point of departure for this lovely melody.<sup>544</sup>

These are pivotal and crucial moments in the opera, and the music exhibits the culmination of several *leitmotives* that represent the multiple forces that are at odds. This section proceeds from Esclarmonde the sorceress to Esclarmonde the empress, and from the priest motivated by agenda to Roland, the captivated lover. By the end of the scene, the amorous couple’s relationship is unravelled, but not before they scale the heights of arousal and satisfaction.

In an illustration of skillful vocal writing, Massenet set Esclarmonde’s ‘Ah !’ passages to exploit Sanderson’s brilliant head register. The lines traverse well into the upper extension of the soprano range (G6), the main vocal characteristic for which Sanderson was known. In terms of text painting, the extreme vocal lines indicate that Esclarmonde is operating as the alluring sorceress and using her powers to summon Roland for their nightly romantic interlude. Here, she reaches F6, which is higher than the top note in the average soprano vocal range (D#6).<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, 72–73.

Le prêtre se retire et la voix d’Esclarmonde résonne au loin : c’est par le second Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>b</sup>) que l’enchanteresse s’annonce, le variant par des fioritures, des traits et des trilles qui peignent à la fois la joie de son cœur et le trouble de ses sens. Ému, Roland écoute et son inquiétude se traduit par la juxtaposition des deux Motifs d’Esclarmonde et de l’Hyménée (m. II et V). [...] Détail digne de remarque, ses premiers mots :

Regarde-les, ces yeux...

sont musicalement conformes à ceux qu’elle lançait naguère avec fierté en commandant aux Esprits de l’air, de l’onde et du feu. C’est donc le second Motif de la Magie (m. I<sup>b</sup>) qui, par une ingénieuse application du *leitmotiv*, sert de point de départ à cette ravissante mélodie.

<sup>545</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 117.

**Example 75:** ‘Ah ! Roland !’ mm. 18–21.<sup>546</sup>

It is noteworthy that the B<sup>b5</sup> is trilled and then re-articulated several times before ascending a B<sup>b</sup> major arpeggio to arrive at the F6; having the vocal line pulse for a moment on the B<sup>b5</sup> might have allowed Sanderson to secure her breath, placement, and resonance before attempting the high F. It is no surprise that a descending chromatic scale follows the high note, and this combination of a sustained high note followed by a chromatic descent appears often in vocal writing for Sanderson (e.g., the *Manon* score revisions). It can be deduced that she excelled at singing patterns such as these.

**Example 76:** ‘Je suis encore tout étourdie.’ mm. 45–46.<sup>547</sup>

From the standpoint of vocal demand, this aria exemplifies virtuosity in the areas of tessitura, agility, and range. The vocal line sits above F5 nearly 55% of the time, and nearly 43% of the sung measures contain coloratura elements, which offered Sanderson virtually no relief from the difficulty of the musical notes. The range covers more than

<sup>546</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 209.

<sup>547</sup> Massenet, *Manon*. US-NYp: JOF 76-6. 54.

two octaves from E4 to G6 and includes trills, fast and difficult runs, and complicated articulation.

Beyond the extreme melodic elements, another intriguing aspect is the vast dynamic contrast required. Sanderson clearly had impressive control of vocal volume in her upper register if she was able to deliver what the score requests. For example, measure 19 (see example above) has an ascending chromatic passage marked with a *diminuendo* that leads to a trilled *piano* B<sup>b5</sup> in measure 20. In the next measure, Esclarmonde breathes and re-enters, still at *piano*, to sing three additional staccato B<sup>b5</sup> pitches before ascending to a *fortissimo* high F, then coming back down an octave and a half, only to leap an octave to return to the B<sup>b5</sup>.

There is much to say about the text ‘*Ah ! Roland !*,’ despite the fact that it is made up of only two words. Deliberate text painting is evident in Esclarmonde’s singing Roland’s name solely in her middle voice. This is the same symbolism found in the B section of ‘*Esprits de l’air*,’ in which the *real* Esclarmonde, the empress, is represented by melodic lines contained within the middle register. In addition to the symbolic meaning, the example below is also of particular importance in understanding Sanderson’s vocality because it offers further evidence that her middle register was extraordinary, extending above where most soprano voices pass into the head register (usually E5 to F#5).<sup>548</sup> As discussed in the analysis of ‘*Esprits de l’air*,’ it appears that Sanderson did not need to transition into her head voice until at least G#5 or possibly higher.

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<sup>548</sup> Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, 128.

Example 77: 'Ah ! Roland !' mm. 6–13.<sup>549</sup>

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the soprano line with the lyrics: "land! (ROLAND s'est redressé peu à peu et il écoute avec ravissement.) Ah!". The piano accompaniment is shown below. The second system shows the soprano line with the lyrics: "Ah! c'est el le! c'est el le!.. Ro land!". The word "Ro land!" is circled in red. The tempo markings are "Più mosso." and "1º Tempo.". The dynamic markings are "f" and "p".

The effect of singing the *-land!* of *Roland!* at the top end of her middle voice with the dynamic marking *più forte* [louder] is unusual and perhaps not so pleasurable for listeners. The sound of pushing the middle voice into this range may have been a bit piercing or harsh. Indeed, both French and English-language press described Sanderson's vocality in this way.

However, some factors operated in her favour. For instance, the [ã] vowel of *-land!* is conducive to loud, higher tones because it is open at the back of the throat and owing to nasality, would be sung in a brighter tone than a non-nasalised [a] vowel.<sup>550</sup> The nasalised vowel would have resulted in frontal resonance, which could have helped the pitch to resonate with more brilliance and better project into the auditorium. The final [d]

<sup>549</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 209.

<sup>550</sup> Jason Nedecky, *French Diction for Singers: A Handbook of Pronunciation for French Opéra and Mélodie* (Brampton: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 5–6.

of *-land !* is silent in French, so Sanderson might have used a slight head nod to cue the conductor of her cutoff. The silence of the consonant would operate in Sanderson's favour because she would not have had to close her mouth in this high range. Doing so might result in a pitch change as the air is depleted and the lower jaw rises.<sup>551</sup>

While there are some portions of this seemingly simple two-note, two-word phrase that likely eased Sanderson's vocal burdens, there are also some challenges that very likely required deliberate strategic choices in order to achieve optimal sound production. For example, the [l] of *-land !* could have been difficult to execute with brilliance unless Sanderson propelled the pitch forward with a flick of the tongue across the back of the teeth instead of allowing the consonant to fall into the back of the throat, which would produce a 'swallowed' sound.

The [r] of *Ro-* might have posed a similar strategic dilemma as the [l]. Were Sanderson to attempt a French, guttural [r], she probably would not have had enough resonant space or breath pressure to properly place the next syllable, because her soft palate would likely have remained in a downward position. A low soft palate would cause resonance to occur mainly in the mouth. The result of rearward placement and low soft palate might induce tension in the throat, restricted airflow, inaccurate pitch (flat), and additional fatigue to the vocal folds. This tightness could cause a forced sound as the melody transitions from C5 to G<sup>b</sup>5. Given the short duration of a semi-quaver for *Ro-*, the note was probably used more like a springboard to *-land !* rather than a note on which to linger. British baritone Simon Keenlyside describes his process for a similar registration and vowel combination:

I believe that the key to reliable high notes is in the middle register. That is the springboard that precedes those top notes. The position for me is almost a nondescript /ã/ nasal vowel, or /a/ placing. That catches the bony resonances of the head, but with an open throat. It encourages the larynx to stay low and the

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<sup>551</sup> Coffin, *Coffin's Sounds of Singing*, 314.

throat open. Hopefully, then the sound feeds back downward. If one uses, for example, an out-and-out /æ/ vowel up high, the sound might be in danger of being too horizontal, with the soft palate not sufficiently open so as to catch the head resonances.<sup>552</sup>

Considering the vocal pathologies with which Sanderson dealt during her performances as Esclarmonde, it is not out of the range of possibility that she made unwise decisions regarding these details. She may not have used the C5 as a springboard to the G<sup>b</sup>5, or she could have tried to use a guttural [r] or lingered too long on the [l], or she may not have created enough space for the high note. Some critics complained that Sanderson's voice was inaudible, and some went so far as to pinpoint her diction (pronunciation) as the culprit.<sup>553</sup> While Esclarmonde only exclaims Roland's name twice in this section of the music, similar observations can be made about other areas of the score that reside in Esclarmonde's middle register. It seems fair to say that an accumulation of poorly managed moments, rather than any one single note or passage, ultimately led to her vocal fatigue. Sanderson's longtime friend, Gertrude Atherton, recalls that on opening night the soprano was 'exhausted after the show' and only able to speak in a 'hoarse whisper.'<sup>554</sup> The vocal demands on Esclarmonde only increase as this scene continues with the high G and recapitulations of the melismatic passages. There is some relief in sight, however, since Act III contains the opera's final coloratura requirements for Esclarmonde.

Esclarmonde then sings 'Chaque nuit, cher amour' and then returns to the 'Ah ! Roland !' melismas. This creates a ternary ABA<sup>1</sup> architecture, with the B section being quite brief, yet still very challenging.

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<sup>552</sup> Donald George and Lucy Mauro, *Master Singers: Advice from the Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33.

<sup>553</sup> Landely, "Théâtre National," 73–74.

<sup>554</sup> Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 157.

Example 78: 'Chaque nuit, cher amant.' mm. 1–9.<sup>555</sup>

**Aud<sup>te</sup> (Mouvt du 2<sup>d</sup> Acte)**  
(La voix d'ESCLARMONDE) *p*  
Cha - que nuit... cher - amant.

*ffp dim.* *ppp*

(l'apparition d'ESCLARMONDE se dégage)

*più f.* *più p.* *f.* *p.*  
près - de toi... tu me retrouveras!... Oui, j'ai  
(Sur les derniers mots: *me voici!*... ESCLARMONDE est présente.)

*più f.* *cresc.*  
me - livrer aux é - trein - tes de - tes bras!

1<sup>re</sup> Sop.

LES ESPRITS. (Chœur invisible) *p*  
Hymen! - hy - mé.

2<sup>d</sup> Sop. et Contr. *p*  
Hymen! - hy - mé.

It is possible that the first measure that Esclarmonde sings was inaudible to the audience, since it was written in Sanderson's lower middle voice at a *piano* dynamic. The orchestra was scored *ppp*, but they still may have overpowered the soprano by sheer number of instruments alone. The dynamics in this section correspond with registration: the higher the notes, the louder the dynamics. This would have helped to build intensity in the scene, as Esclarmonde gets close to another climactic moment. It also suggests that Massenet and Sanderson wanted these higher passages to be heard and understood more than other phrases that are lower in pitch and volume.

<sup>555</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 211–212.

Measure 8 contains all three elements of extreme vocal demand included in the matrices of vocal demands contained in this body of work: notes higher than F5, notes lower than G4, and coloratura elements. This is the only time in the B section when Esclarmonde's vocal part breaks out of the middle register, and it occurs on the word *étreintes* [embraces], a physical, sensual word, which suggests the sorceress persona rather than the Empress version of Esclarmonde. The sensuality is underscored by her dip into chest voice with *tes bras !* Sanderson may have taken a breath before these words in order to start with a secure onset in chest register; doing so would have aided in emphasizing the masculinity of the text. Esclarmonde sings of Roland's arms in a low, assertive tone, the chorus chants, '*Hyménée !*,' and Esclarmonde, the sorceress, immediately reappears with the arrival of the A<sup>1</sup> section and the infamous Eiffel Tower G.

**Example 79:** 'Chaque nuit, cher amant.' mm. 10–12.<sup>556</sup>

The musical score for Example 79, measures 10–12, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is for Roland (soprano), the middle staff is for Esclarmonde (soprano), and the bottom staff is for the chorus. The music is in 2/8 time. The lyrics are: "Ah! me voici! O bien ai- né - e! hymé - né - e! à la vue d'ESCLARMONDE. ROLAND se précipite vers elle." The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *rall.*, and performance instructions like *ossia.* and *ROLAND (avec Escl)*. The bottom staff shows a piano accompaniment with a prominent bass line.

<sup>556</sup> Massenet, *Esclarmonde*, 212.

In both the text and subtext, this section is similar to elements of *Manon*. Esclarmonde's repeated exclamations of 'Ah !' may not represent purely sorcery, just as Manon's series of 'Ah !' melismas were not necessarily about lightness or laughter. The example below suggests that these coloratura passages could symbolise sexual arousal and climax for Esclarmonde, similar to the way the coloratura passages functioned in *Manon*.

Esclarmonde's vocal pinnacle occurs just after she appears to Roland for their romantic appointment. Prior to this moment, only Esclarmonde's voice was heard. The couple physically reunites and Esclarmonde responds to Roland in a series of coloratura passages that reach the height of passion with a G6, which is immediately followed by a symbolic physical collapse represented by the long, descending scale.

All signs indicate that the encounter is going as planned for the couple's nightly rendezvous, but in a very dramatic and negative turn of events, Roland sees Esclarmonde without her veil, and she is then exorcised by the Bishop, which breaks the power of her magic. Malherbe encapsulates the symbolism of the moment and its representation in the music:

Sorceress, she has ceased to be. Her ripped veil made her lose her power. The spirits no longer need to obey her, and her weakness is reflected in a brief allusion to that magic that had been her strength. Towards the end, alternating between major and minor modes, the phrase seems to oscillate and disappear like the dark echo of a power that is no more.<sup>557</sup>

Seeing Esclarmonde's face breaks Roland's vow, and this ends their romance. Critic

'L.K.' from the *New York Times* explains the order of events:

[Esclarmonde] is full of trust in [Roland's] vow never to betray their secret, and never to ask to see her face. The Saracens threaten to pillage the city of Blois, and Esclarmonde, unduly ambitious, bids her lover hasten to save the town, and he is, of course, the victor. Unfortunately, out of gratitude, the old King of France, Cléomer, offers him his daughter, and his refusal irritates the curiosity of the

<sup>557</sup> Malherbe, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, 72–73.

Magicienne, elle a cessé de l'être ; son voile arraché lui a fait perdre sa puissance ; les Esprits ne doivent plus lui obéir et sa faiblesse se traduit par une brève allusion à cette magie qui faisait sa force : vers la fin, tour à tour majeure et mineure, la phrase semble osciller et disparaître comme l'obscur écho d'un pouvoir qui n'est plus.

Bishop who bids Roland confess to God if not to man. At the midnight hour Esclarmonde comes, but as her lips touch his brow light fills the chapel, and the Bishop, the Court, and Roland see her beauty. The spirits of fire drag her away and the charm is broken.<sup>558</sup>

The audience knows that Roland did not betray her, but Esclarmonde's tearful sobs indicate that she does not. It was the Bishop who exorcised the sorceress and made the lights of the chapel shine upon her face. The tragic combination of broken spells and loss of power causes Esclarmonde to sing a heart-wrenching lament 'Regarde-les ces yeux' [Look at them, these eyes]. This dramatic aria differs in tone and vocal requirements from the preceding trio of phrases 'Ah! Roland...chaque nuit, cher amant...Ah!'

'Regarde-les, ces yeux' is somber and mostly set in the middle register. The combination of minor mode and lower tessitura calls for a weightier tone as the piece progresses, but the initial score instructions dictate that Esclarmonde is to begin the aria '*avec la plus grande émotion, presque sans voix et comme anéantie*' [with great emotion, almost without voice and crushed]. Once again, when Sanderson followed what was prescribed in the music, she received some poor critical reaction.

Reviews related to 'Ah ! Roland !' and the subsequent scenes were mixed. The response to Sanderson's high G was astonishment, but critics were not necessarily pleased with her singing. Henry Bauer of *L'Echo de Paris* complains that Sanderson 'lacked voice when it came from a distance, had weakness in the middle range, and defective vocal delivery.' He does, however, compliment her acting and her beauty.<sup>559</sup> Camille Bellaigue offers a kinder response to Sanderson's Act III than to her Act I aria 'Esprits de l'air' (and the associated love scene with Roland). Bellaigue was negative about Sanderson's musical interpretation of the invocation and consummation scenes but even more about the lack of moral fortitude in the story and its characters; the critic seemed to have been shocked at the blatant sexuality of the scene on the enchanted isle.

<sup>558</sup> L.K., "Miss Sanderson in Massenet's Opera," *New York Times*, Paris, June 17, 1889.

<sup>559</sup> Henry Bauer, "Les Premières Représentations," *L'écho de Paris*, May 17, 1889, 2-3.

Bellaigue responds more favourably to ‘Ah ! Roland !...Regarde-les ces yeux,’ especially in terms of the music:

The beautiful, very beautiful lament of Esclarmonde: *Regarde-les, ces yeux*, was written with profound, sincere feeling and sadness, and virginal shame. Yes, virginal; because this young woman, in spite of her various favours, exhibits surprising modesty. And in the Ardennes forest she will sing a sighing cantilena of exquisite purity: ‘*En retrouvant la vie et la pensée.*’<sup>560</sup>

Bellaigue’s assessment of Sanderson’s voice is similar to Bauer’s. Though dazzling, her exceptionally high voice felt ‘thin and piercing.’ He criticizes Sanderson’s weak middle voice, although he is impressed with the intelligence of her acting.<sup>561</sup>

There was a general consensus among the critics regarding this portion of Act III: Sanderson’s high G was extraordinary but thin; her high range was exceptional but piercing; and her middle voice was difficult to hear. Yet, she was a beautiful young woman and a respectable actress. To sum up, this aria—both its technical demands and its critical reception—offers an excellent exemplar of Sanderson’s vocality in general.

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<sup>560</sup> Bellaigue, “Revue Musicale: Esclarmonde,” 705.

La belle, fort belle plainte d’Esclarmonde : *Regarde-les, ces yeux*, écrite dans un sentiment très profond, très sincère, de douleur et de honte virginale. Mais oui, virginale ; car cette jeune personne garde malgré ses écarts des grâces étonnement pudiques. Elle soupirera encore dans la forêt des Ardennes une cantilène d’une exquise pureté : *En retrouvant la vie et la pensée.*

<sup>561</sup> Bellaigue, “Revue Musicale: Esclarmonde,” 699–706.

## CONCLUSION

### Research Questions and Answers

This thesis sought to identify and explore how Sibyl Sanderson influenced *Esclarmonde* and *Manon* from the perspective of vocality. It also aimed to determine the existence and extent of effects that performing these roles had on Sanderson. Research and analysis included the study of manuscripts, annotated scores, correspondence, memoirs, pedagogic treatises, reception history, and practice. The work led to several conclusions while at the same time raising many more questions to be addressed in future research.

Sibyl Sanderson holds an important place in operatic history as a successful stage performer and as one of Massenet's primary collaborators and muses. Their association transformed her from an interpreter to a co-creator and re-creator. Documents related to both *Esclarmonde* and *Manon* contain evidence of Sanderson's musical and dramatic prowess from gestures and costumes to stratospheric vocal lines. *Esclarmonde* was written and revised specifically for her voice; *Manon* was revised at least twice to highlight Sanderson's rare artistic attributes, which included an exceptionally wide range, unusual beauty, and intelligent acting.

The statement included herein, that Sanderson deserves credit as co-creator of *Esclarmonde* and re-creator of *Manon*, is based on several factors. The vocal writing of *Esclarmonde* was tailored to highlight her extraordinary high notes and virtuosic coloratura, and the visual aspects associated with the staging and costumes highlighted her beauty and intelligence. The demands of the role suggest that Sanderson had enviable stamina because she was required to sing approximately 25% of the entire opera; during her onstage time, the vocal line was extremely demanding in approximately half of the measures. Therefore, the role could be considered one of the most vocally demanding in the current operatic canon. The two strongest pieces of evidence that Sanderson could be

considered an equal partner in the creation of the opera are the following: First, she signed the orchestral manuscript alongside Massenet. Second, since her creation of the role, *Esclarmonde* has never had success equal to or beyond her performance.

*Manon* underwent significant revisions at the hand and voice of Sanderson. The first round of changes occurred in 1887 for the soprano's début in Brussels, where she transformed the role into a masterpiece of virtuosity with the addition of difficult melismatic passages, an increase in the quantity and length of high notes, and several other small, yet material, revisions. The new music not only increased vocal demand, but it also more sincerely aligned the vocal part with the character's personality and behaviours. This research uncovered a revision in the 1887 manuscript that was not included in the 1895 *Nouvelle Édition* printed score. Previous musicological discourse had not addressed this change.

The 1891 premiere of *Manon*, sung in French at Covent Garden, did not result in success for Sanderson. She was not well received by critics, the majority of whom complained that the size of her voice was inadequate for the size of the hall. This perceived failure elicited another round of changes, the most significant of which was converting spoken dialogue (as required in an opéra-comique) to sung dialogue. However, it is believed that Sanderson never sang these notated recitatives, and the manuscript did not surface until nearly one hundred years later (1986) when it was discovered by a member of the Massenet family.

There has been conjecture about the intended recipient of the 'Fabliau,' the third-act aria that Massenet wrote in 1894 to replace the 'Gavotte.' The aria premiered in 1898, sung by Georgette Bréjean-Gravière (later Bréjean-Silver). The current research has contributed to the body of evidence supporting the belief that the aria was not written for

Sanderson, as some have said, but that it was intended for the dedicatee, M<sup>lle</sup> Bréjean-Gravière.

Sanderson's influence is evident throughout both *Esclarmonde* and *Manon*, and Massenet afforded her credit as co-author on the former. It was easy to isolate her impact on the latter by comparing the role as sung by Sanderson to the vocal lines used by prior Manons, such as Heilbronn and Roze. Sanderson's imprint was also obvious when compared to the practice of subsequent interpreters, such as Bréjean-Gravière.

The demands of performing *Esclarmonde* and *Manon* seem to have had a notable impact on Sanderson, particularly when viewed over the span of her career. Singing *Esclarmonde* had a profound effect on her voice. First, the extremely difficult role was not appropriate for her at the time that she premiered it; her voice was under-developed due to young chronological age, lack of performance experience, and her pattern of receiving sporadic (often contradictory) vocal training. In addition, the schedule of mandatory rehearsals and performances to which she was expected to adhere proved to be too aggressive. Massenet and, presumably, the Opéra-Comique management held more than ninety rehearsals prior to opening night. Nevertheless, Sanderson went on to perform the role over one hundred times in the nine months following the premiere in May 1889.

Just as *Esclarmonde* did not regain the level of success it enjoyed when Sanderson was in the lead, it seems that Sanderson's voice and career may have peaked with *Esclarmonde*. During and after her performances as the Byzantine empress, she suffered from chronic vocal trouble and began to receive negative reviews on a regular basis. There were periods of success and 'resurgence' with subsequent operas, but her operatic career entered an overall downward trajectory after *Esclarmonde*, evidenced by a decline in the number of times Sanderson performed and increasing negativity in reviews from

1891–1903. In order to definitively prove this (well-supported) conjecture, further research and metrical analysis would be required in future work.

*Manon* served to bookend Sanderson's operatic career. Her first professional appearance in 1888 was as Manon, and she sang the role at her final public performance in 1902. Much like the melismatic lines of the opera, Sanderson's experience as Manon went up and down. She was well received when she sang the role in Brussels, Paris, and St. Petersburg, but critics in London, New York, and San Francisco were unimpressed by her interpretation. The negative press seems to have had a psychological impact on Sanderson, who admitted to suffering from performance anxiety that only worsened over the duration of her career. When she finally sang Manon in her hometown of San Francisco in 1902, the response to her operatic 'comeback' was so poor that she was forced back into retirement. Sanderson passed away less than a year later.

Other crucial factors contributing to the decline in Sanderson's vocal health include disparate and sporadic training. She studied with twelve teachers in fifteen years, and several of her voice instructors taught opposing vocal strategies. This may have caused confusion about how to approach the extreme demands of the repertoire she performed during her career. Costume constraints, such as corsets and Esclarmonde's veils and robes, may have added physical encumbrances for Sanderson to overcome (e.g., corset breathing). Finally, the variety of characters she played over the years may have taxed her unstable vocal technique. For example, the soprano who sang Manon and Esclarmonde, which are high coloratura roles, went on to attempt to sing Charlotte in Massenet's *Werther* and Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin*, which feature much lower and heavier vocal parts.

### Contributions to Knowledge

Original contributions to knowledge have been made with regard to Sibyl Sanderson, *Esclarmonde*, *Manon*, and Massenet. Perhaps the best way to quantify the value is by exploring what this research has added to currently available musicological literature. The oft-quoted sources range from a book that claims to be a biography (see Jack Winsor Hansen) but reads more like a novel, to a well-researched press dossier (see Annegret Fauser), to broader topical discourse about late nineteenth-century French opera.

Jack Winsor Hansen's 2005 biography, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva*, is probably the most specific source for the minutiae of Sanderson's personal and professional life. However, the work is filled with inaccuracies and sensational claims and is built upon unreliable methodology. Issues that were uncovered during interviews with Hansen and examination of his work include incorrect dates, reliance on hearsay and gossip, and questionable conclusions about the musical and biographical details of Sanderson's life. The egregious errors, coupled with the fact that nearly fifty years elapsed between the time of his primary research and the publication of his work, serves to discount the value of the biography. Hansen's work did provide a point of departure that led to one of the major contributions of this research, which was the development of a comprehensive chronology of Sanderson's vocal instructors and their disparate pedagogic approaches. Hansen's biography also provided information that facilitated the creation of a matrix of Sanderson's professional performances. Furthermore, during our interviews, Hansen provided access to his hand-copied facsimile of the alleged *Esclarmonde* vocal score manuscript, which also served as a starting point for further exploration and investigation. This questionable score raised valuable questions about Sanderson's vocality and led to securing reputable sources in order to address these doubts and concerns.

Karen Henson released her book, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth-Century*, in 2015. The author's theoretical approach to the topic focused on the visual aspects of operas and singers during that historic period, primarily issues related to physiognomy. Henson's work provides interesting perspectives on that period's operatic staging and marketing devices, such as cigar card design protocols. While she addressed the historical moment, her engagement with the material seems to lack two crucial elements: a compelling reason for musicological investigation and the applicability of her theories to current practice. The current thesis fills the gap between theory and practice left void by Henson's book. For example, Henson wrote about photographs and staging cues related to *Esclarmonde*, which depict Sanderson with raised arms. Henson's conjectures focused on what these photographs may have meant in terms of increasing the eroticism of marketing materials, but her work did not address how the racier images (which mirrored staging cues) might have affected performance practice.

An original contribution to knowledge in this thesis is the further analysis of these photographic images. Sanderson's raising of the arms would have impacted the vocal and visual aesthetics of the scene. Having a clearer picture of the possible results of the movement on Sanderson's vocality allows greater understanding of her critical reviews and offers insight into how Sanderson may have sounded and looked. Ultimately, this information can be used as the basis for creating historically informed performances of *Esclarmonde* and may facilitate similar practices for other repertoire. Finally, Henson, it should be noted, cited biographical details from Jack Winsor Hansen's work but made no apparent attempt to question the veracity of his claims. The lack of scrutiny raises doubts about the quality of Henson's other sources.

One of the most valuable sources encountered during this research was *Esclarmonde: Dossier de Presse Parisienne* by Annegret Fauser. The critiques featured in

the dossier provided a suitably robust beginning to the matrix of several hundred terms that were used to describe Sanderson's voice. While Fauser uses the reviews as a basis for her valuable historical, sociological, and political insights into the premiere of *Esclarmonde*, the current work added another dimension by interpreting the same critiques through the lens of vocality. The reviews by Bellaigue and Vitu and Fauser's associated analysis were especially useful in the creation of this original and complementary investigation. In addition, this work broadened the scope of critical reception beyond solely the Parisian press to include reviews of *Esclarmonde's* opening nights in the United Kingdom and the United States. This also expanded the time span considered from 1889 until Sanderson's death in 1903.

Fauser's book is a compendium of reviews and related discussion, and Charles Malherbe's musical guide to the opera, *Notice sur Esclarmonde*, proved invaluable for the current analysis. Malherbe provides objective, measurable data, such as the number of measures of music contained in each act of the opera. His data was used to create the matrix of vocal demands placed on *Esclarmonde* (e.g., total number of measures sung, which of those measures contain melisma or require the use of chest voice, etc.) that is included in the current work. Probably the most helpful element of Malherbe's book is his analysis of the opera's *motifs* and how each one related to a character or characters.

Using the *motifs* as a basis for exploring Sanderson's vocality resulted in several original and relevant findings, such as the notion that *Esclarmonde* is required to sing in the middle voice when she is acting as the empress and most often phonates in head voice when she embodies the sorceress. In view of Sanderson's struggles with audible projection in her mid-range, Malherbe's musical analysis provided a useful 'road map' to the sections that critics were likely to have found lacking.

The broadest overview of the opera's production elements such as makeup, history, and players, is the *Esclarmonde* issue of *L'Avant-Scène*. This wide-ranging publication spans artistic, technical, and historical aspects of the opera, including the genesis of the libretto, detailed musical analysis, and biographical and visual details about Sanderson and Massenet. The *L'Avant-Scène* contributors facilitated this investigation's development of a clearer picture of Sanderson's vocality and the role's effect on her. These conjectures can now be used to inform current performance practice. For example, determining where Sanderson might have chosen to breathe or where she chose to transition into her head voice may help future interpreters to build their own versions of the roles.

The same publishing group, *L'Avant-Scène*, released the *Manon* issue in 2011. The most valuable contribution of this research is the expanded analysis of the notated recitatives that were re-discovered in 1986. While *L'Avant-Scène* provides basic discourse on this anomalous music, the current research provides more detailed insight into possible reasons why the sung dialogue was substituted and also considered the notated version's effect on the role. As with the *Esclarmonde* issue, *L'Avant-Scène* addresses several facets of *Manon* that led to new ideas on historically informed performance. The assertions in the publication also led to stronger arguments to support the notion that Sanderson deserves credit as re-creator of the opera.

Jean-Christophe Branger contributed several articles to the *L'Avant-Scène* issue; much of the information also appears in his 1999 book, *Manon de Massenet: ou, le crépuscule de l'Opéra-Comique*. One of Branger's most useful analyses is the matrix and timeline of score revisions. The simple visual checklist for investigating each of the revisions that may have affected Sanderson helped to confirm the conjecture that Sanderson made some of the annotations herself. Branger addresses one particular 1887

Sanderson revision, but he either did not realise or failed to mention that it never went beyond the page of cahier that Massenet inserted into the vocal score. The current thesis not only addressed the ‘dropped’ melismatic line but also confirmed that it does not appear to have ever been recorded or performed. The analysis of this passage yielded additional indicators of Sanderson’s vocality.

Jack Winsor Hansen’s 1999 *Opera Quarterly* article, ‘Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence on *Manon*,’ was one of the more troubling documents consulted. Like the biography Hansen authored, this article contained inaccuracies and questionable methodology. One example of an inaccuracy is: Hansen claimed that certain portions of the score were revised at Sanderson’s request, but those items (e.g., the addition of *tenuti*) appear in the original 1883 manuscript intended for the first *Manon*, Marie Heilbronn. Similarly, Hansen claims that *Manon*’s third-act aria, the ‘Fabliau,’ was written for Sanderson, but evidence unearthed during current research suggests otherwise. Massenet very likely wrote the ‘Fabliau’ for the woman to whom he dedicated the piece, and the woman who premiered it: Georgette Bréjean-Gravière. In addition to blatant inaccuracies such as these, Hansen relies on the same hearsay, third-hand sources, and fifty-year-old research as he did in the full biography; these lapses call his entire output into question.

The main goal of this research was to make original contributions to existing knowledge, either by discovering new material or by examining available sources from a different perspective. One of the by-products of achieving that aim was a need to refute some existing thoughts and beliefs. It is possible that, as research continues, some of the conclusions offered in this body of work may need to be reconsidered, and so research proceeds and expands.

### Future Research Plans

The vocality of Sibyl Sanderson is a field with ample room for additional study. The soprano created several other operatic roles that are worthy of investigation, including characters in two more Massenet operas, *Thaïs* and Charlotte in *Werther*, and the title role in *Phryné* for Camille Saint-Saëns. She performed in *Thaïs* and *Phryné* in the mid-1890s, in close temporal proximity. Since the operas have different composers, comparing and contrasting the vocal parts may help to disambiguate the elements that may have been unique to Sanderson's portrayal versus the style and artistry of each composer. Sanderson only sang the role of Charlotte in *Werther* one time in Nice, and she allegedly refused to perform it again.<sup>562</sup> The juxtaposition of Charlotte (a mezzo-soprano role) with Esclarmonde could facilitate further exploration of elements that belonged to Massenet's vocal writing as opposed to Sanderson's artistic influence.

Sanderson was a frequent topic in the American press, yet this area of reception history appears to be under-represented. The current research yielded hundreds of articles about and reviews of Sanderson that were published in the United States during her life. One avenue that may be worth exploring is the creation of a *dossier de presse américaine* solely dedicated to reviews of Sanderson's performances. It might be useful to create a *dossier de presse: Sibyl Sanderson dans le rôle de Manon*, which would become a catalogue of reviews from Paris and abroad. It would be a logical outgrowth of the catalogue of American press and the research that has already been conducted for this thesis.

Another viable area for future exploration might focus on coloratura soprano Georgette Bréjean-Gravière (Bréjean-Silver), who has been called the 'Third Manon.' Research may include comparison and contrast of Bréjean-Gravière's vocality and

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<sup>562</sup> Huebner, *French Opera*, 78. Huebner cites 'Courier des théâtres,' *Le Figaro*, March 15, 1893.

Sanderson's in the roles of Manon and Esclarmonde. Studying Bréjean-Gravière may help separate the specific contributions of the interpreters to Massenet's work on the two operas. Regardless of future research plans, it can be said with more clarity now than before that Sibyl Sanderson and her vocality played an important part in the development and success of Massenet's *Manon* and *Esclarmonde*.

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