

In the Wake of Covid and its Depredations: The Unsung Digital Annihilation of the Human Soul

How pitch-correction and autotuning practices in the music industry are creating a new mechanized reality

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Theme: [History](#)

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*When a new recording of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* was released in 1976, whose cast included the rising meteoric tenor Luciano Pavarotti, I listened with enthusiasm. I had heard the tenor several years earlier in concert at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, where he sang to a half-filled house. It was an exquisite recital by a singer who would soon thereafter become a dominant star.*

However I noted something a little 'off' in the aria 'Di Quella Pira', so I played it over and over until I had figured out that the high C had been spliced. (I may be wrong about this particular recording but I've learned since that keeping a bank of notes for a singer is now commonplace, to draw upon for insertion when needed.) At the time Pavarotti had been known as 'King of the High Cs' and I was tremendously disappointed. Fortunately, in the live performance of opera no splicing or alteration of anything is possible, and my affections returned to the great man after I had seen him in a wondrous performance of Puccini's *La Boheme*, also in Philadelphia, during which his bright high C rang out as the culmination of the famous aria 'Che Gelida Manina'.

Certainly we all knew that songs — particularly those that featured in the popular charts of the day — were mostly studio confections, and we accepted the tracks and inserts and modifications that made for the polished public production without a thought. But the incident in *Il Trovatore* had disturbed, had unsettled, had soured me, as if a rancid aftertaste persisted after a posh dining experience in one of the best and most expensive restaurants of the city.

Two decades later I purchased an orthophonic victrola — the last and best of the old-style playback machines manufactured by RCA Victor — principally because I loved Caruso and I wished to hear as near as possible what his great voice really sounded like. At the time he

recorded the process was analog and mechanical, and the machine I had used to play his heavy 78 rpm discs on was hand-wound. The voice that emerged from the large horn was immense, and although the clarity of electronic recording could not be achieved, one felt the power and strength of the core of the magnificent voice, even though that voice was veiled as if by a layer of cheese-cloth that had interposed itself between it and its full sparkling brilliance. When Caruso recorded it was impossible to interpolate anything into the 'take', so a 'take' was what we got, for good or ill, with every glory and imperfection. A 'take' was an honest and genuine reproduction of an undoctored moment of time.

Although I have been dimly aware of the practice of pitch-correction in the modern-day music industry — a process by which a singer's voice or an instrumentalist's notes are brought precisely in tune — I had had no idea of [the extent of its adoption and use and dissemination](#). It is a process which, thanks to progress in digitization and computing technology, is even applied to *live* performances!

I chanced in my YouTube meanderings upon the following video:

And if what I felt was distress after my experience with the Pavarotti *Trovatore* of 1976, what I feel now is a deepening sense of how the world around us — our world, the world, whatever — has become a duplicitous confection that is now shaping our minds, secretly and relentlessly.

To think that the human voice — the soul made sensible, the breath of our lives, the resonant expression of our complaints and our joys, our miseries and our delights, and infinite palette of our very essence — is being subjected to an artificial standard that fills our ears wherever we go.

In the wake of covid and its depredations and the logarithmic ascension of digital technology's sway over everything from banking and shopping to surveillance, this really should come as no surprise. But it did and it does. And this quest for pitch perfect perfection is anathema to genuine human expression. Musically speaking, the subtle play above and below a note, the minute changes in pitch that are inevitable from the human hand or throat, shed light and color and nuance and magnificence.

Compare for example the popular artist featured above, with her voice snapped artificially into line with a mechanic's notion of tune, with a singer who antedated our digital era with a voice that possessed an infinitude of expressive capabilities:

I grew up in the city where Lanza was born, and in fact my mother went to high school with this wondrous singer and told me a few tales about his powerful and beautiful vocal instrument. They both hailed from a neighborhood bursting with the energetic vitality of second generation Italian-Americans looking to make good in a new country of opportunity. Their parents weathered the Great Depression by working themselves to the bone so that their children might enjoy a less onerous life.

The South Philly of my growing up was a little easier but no less vital. Authority — and particularly the government, local or national — was an entity that everyone viewed with suspicion. Imagine yet another disappointment when, in correspondence with family members there during the covid incursion, I discovered that the army of rebels and

individualists who populated my youth had fallen in line like lemmings for the mask, and for the jab, and for every other insanely ridiculously oppressive covid measure meant to 'safeguard' their health. Mostly, but not entirely ... at least one of my cousins has had the great good sense to resist, which means that the embers of hope still glow.

And as for this subtly sneaky attempt to annihilate our voice(s) by mechanizing them and creating an aural firmament that surrounds and infects us with its concocted and sterile idea of music, I say I'll bring my own earplugs.

Yes, I know about the more glaringly terrible things going on, the murders, the wars, the forced slow-march to ill-health via a manufactured pathogen and its harmful manufactured 'antidote' ... but it's all of a piece, and the more aware we are the better.

Maybe what we need to do is sing, in real time, live, together, in or out of tune, and have some fun for the holidays and show these overlordlings just how empty their digital spaces really are.

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