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April 9, 2008

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Romantic and Modern Music Literature (MUSL 244)

In June 1993, five hundred thousand people – with millions more watching on television – gathered in New York’s Central Park to hear Luciano Pavarotti in concert; dubbed the “King of the High C’s” by critics, Pavarotti had achieved international stardom and in many ways was the face of opera to the outside world.¹ His ringing high notes and the heroic tenor he personified were a hallmark of opera by the recording age, but this was not always the case. The tenor voice of the early Romantic era would hardly be recognizable as a tenor to today’s audience. While changing tastes and values brought about the end of the castrato and opened the door for a new high-voiced leading male character, the major reason behind the change in the tenor voice was the collaboration of opera composers with their singers. The tenor’s journey from the *tenore di grazia* to the familiar *tenore di forza* can be traced as a gradual change from Rossini and Bellini to Donizetti and to the famous *di forza* roles created by Verdi; the result of these composers’ collaboration with their singers created what we know as the desired operatic tenor sound today.

By the end of the Romantic period, the tenor was the undisputed standard for romantic male lead, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the opera world was still heavily under the influence of the castrato.² While castrati themselves were gradually vanishing from the stage, the general feeling was that their style of ornamentation, timbre, and technique was still desired.³ Even in the wake of receding popularity, the only major schools of singing were conservatories dedicated to the

¹ John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 176.

² Rodolfo Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto* (New York: Clarendon, 1991), 157.

³ Ibid.

castrato school of singing.⁴ Where castrati could not be found or were shunned by the public, the female contralto, or *contralto musico* (those who specialized in roles originally written for castrati) saw immense popularity. Chief among these was Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865), who played Armando in Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto* (1824).⁵ New operas frequently had a leading male character written specifically for a female contralto, such as the characters of Encirco di Borgogna and Abenamat in Donizetti's *Zoraide di Granata* (1822). These were leading male characters written specifically for a female voice. Male singers were lucky to get a role at all, and usually the role they received was that of an old King or servant.⁶

One composer who understood the early bel canto prejudice against tenors was Rossini, who instead used the contralto as both the buffo prima donna and as a *musico*. *L'equivoco stravagante* (1811) is the first Rossinian opera with a buffo prima donna role in that of Ernestina, composed for the contralto Marietta Marcolini.⁷ The contralto was seen as ideal for portraying the entertaining, vivacious heroine of opera buffa as it was closest approximate sound of the castrato without resorting to castration.

Rossini's relationship with his singers was largely responsible for the emergence of the tenor in the role of the lover. Upon his relocation to the Teatro San Carlo in 1815, Rossini found that Isabella Colbran was the reigning diva at the house. Her influence pressured Rossini not to write more than one major female part in his operas, beginning with *Elisabetta* (1815).⁸ The male lead was written for a male singer, Andrea Nozzari

⁴ Ibid, 158.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 177.

⁷ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 158.

⁸ Ibid, 163.

(1775-1832), who played the role of Leicester, the lover opposite the title character.⁹ Rossini then wrote for Nozzari leading male roles such as the title role in Rossini's *Otello* (1816), Rinaldo in *Armida* (1817), and Osiride in *Mose* (1818). These parts were still very baritonal in nature, rarely singing above G4. Nozzari had a large voice and Rossini was careful not to give the tenor much coloratura or languid melody; he was expected to express virtuosity through great intervallic leaps and a robust tone.¹⁰

The emergence of the leading tenor created a problem where multiple tenors were written for the same opera (that is, the leading and supporting male were both baritone-tenors). Rossini solved this confusion by writing one part somewhat higher than the other, and in so doing created two types of tenor roles: the baritenor and the *contraltino* tenor.¹¹ The baritenor was written in a similar fashion to previous tenor parts, but the *contraltino* tenor was much higher and was given ample opportunity for ornamentation and coloratura.¹² The *contraltino* made his debut in *L'italiana in Algeri* (1817) in the character of Lindoro, created for Serafino Gentili (1775-1835). Gentili, along with Giovanni David (1790-1864), were Rossini's two principle *contraltino* tenors starting from Rossini's tenure in Naples.¹³ In *Otello*, the baritenor Nozzari held the title role, and Rossini wrote the role of the young lover Rodrigo for David.¹⁴ This formula of the *contraltino* in the role of the young lover and the baritenor cast as the rival, developed during Rossini's collaboration with the singers of the Teatro San Carlo,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 164.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Gioacchino Rossini, *L'italiana in Algeri: dramma giocoso in 2 atti di Angelo Anelli: opera completa per canto e pianoforte*, Libretto by Angelo Anelli. New edition by Mario Parenti (Milano: Ricordo, 1960).

¹³ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 169

¹⁴ Ibid

persisted in Rossini's subsequent productions, including *Ricciardo e Zoraide* (1818), *Ermione* (1819), and *La donna del lago* (1819). (see example 1 in appendix)¹⁵

Giovanni David was the quintessential *contraltino* tenor, with high, brilliant notes and a captivating persona.¹⁶ Like his castrati and contralti predecessors, the *contraltino* put great value on vocal agility, especially in the high range. Notes as high as D5 or E5 are not uncommon in his roles, which included Rodrigo (*Otello*).¹⁷ Through his high range and clear, controlled, agile singing, the *contraltino* tenor is very similar to what the French would call the *haute-contre*.¹⁸ Having premiered operas in Paris as well as Naples, Rossini clearly had a cosmopolitan goal in mind of opera that would speak to both Italian and French audiences, and the French were fond of neither castrati nor contralti. Rossini was fortunate to have had with a singer of David's talents; however, it is important to note that singers like David were not necessarily high-voiced anomalies, and that he was, in fact, employing falsetto as part of his range.¹⁹

An enormous difference between tenors of Rossini's period and tenors of Verdi's period is the legitimate use of falsetto. For Verdi and beyond, the answer is simple: there is none. Even today, falsetto is seen as having a use only in ensemble and pedagogical settings, and for the occasional comic or stage effect (except, of course, for countertenors). Its sound, according to twentieth-century tenor pedagogues, is

¹⁵ Ibid, 170.

¹⁶ James Radomski, *Manuel Garcia (1775-1832): Chronicle of the Life of a bel canto Tenor at the Dawn of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158.

¹⁷ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 165

¹⁸ Dent, J. Edward, *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, ed. Winton Dean (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 178.

¹⁹ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 165

“womanly” and “not heroic,” and any tenor that resorts to using it is merely lacking in talent, training, or both.²⁰

Rossinian tenors had an entirely different outlook on the use of falsetto. Not only was its use encouraged, the falsetto was highly prized for *contraltino* tenors.²¹ A newspaper of the day praised David for having a range of C3-E5, and was particularly complimentary of his “head tones.”²² These head tones, the range which extended from around A4 to E5, were apparently a specialty of his. A closer look at the music written for him reveals florid passages and a wide range. As his role of Rodrigo indicates, he usually climaxes phrases at or below A4 or much higher, indicating that this “head tone” was indeed falsetto.²³ The coloratura and careful ornamentation so highly valued in the bel canto period is practically impossible to perform in chest voice, and *contraltino* tenors learned to adapt by using a kind of reinforced falsetto to extend into the treble range (see ex.2 in appendix).

This does not mean that *contraltino* tenors were unique for their employment of falsetto. The falsetto was seen as being a part of the legitimate range of all male singers, and most chose to strengthen it.²⁴ The “baritenor” roles Rossini created differentiate from their *contraltino* counterparts in tessitura but not necessarily in range, and soar to C5 in roles such as Arnaldo in *William Tell* (1829, see ex.3 in appendix).²⁵ Unlike the *contraltino*, the baritenor was not necessarily a specialist in this technique,

²⁰ Richard Miller, *Training Tenor Voices* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 5.

²¹ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 166.

²² Radomski, *Manuel Garcia (1775-1832)*, 158.

²³ Rossini, *L'Italiana in Algeri*.

²⁴ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 167.

²⁵ Gioacchino Rossini, *William Tell: an opera in four acts for soli, chorus, and orchestra, with French and English Text*. Libretto by Etienne de Jouy and Hippolyte Bis (Miami: Warner Bros., 1990).

and even then would employ falsetto above G4 (compared to the *contraltino's* A4).²⁶ A prime example of a fine baritenor is Manuel Garcia senior (1775-1832), who premiered Rossinian roles such as Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816).²⁷ Garcia's roles tend to be lower than his colleagues', suggesting that he lacked a capable falsetto. While billing himself as a tenor, Garcia also played to great acclaim the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.²⁸ A role written for baritone, Don Giovanni would scarcely ever be among the repertoire of someone who billed himself as a tenor in the later Romantic period. This suggests that Garcia would probably be considered a baritone today, as it is not unheard of for baritones to be able to sing up to G4 or even higher.²⁹

Arguably the greatest tenor of the bel canto period was Giovanni Battista Rubini (1794-1854). Rubini was the first natural male voice to achieve international renown, and while one would expect him to have therefore been a major step toward the heroic tenor that would appear in the later Romantic period, he was in reality a manifestation of the ultimate tenor *di grazia*.³⁰ Rubini premiered the lead tenor role in eight Donizetti operas, including *Anna Bolena* (1830), and was Edgardo in the French version of *Lucia di Lammermoor*.³¹

It is with Bellini, however, that Rubini's abilities were able to truly shine. Rubini and Bellini worked very closely together in four operas: *Bianca e Gerardo* (1826), *Il pirata* (1827), *La sonnambula* (1831), and *I puritani* (1835). To finish the opera in a

²⁶ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 167.

²⁷ Radomski, *Manuel Garcia (1775-1832)*, 111.

²⁸ Henry Pleasants, *The Great Singers: From the Dawn of Opera to Our Own Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 130.

²⁹ Miller, *Training Tenor Voices*, 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

³¹ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 194.

timely manner, it was decided that Rubini should take up residence with Bellini so the two could collaborate during the entire writing process.³² In his composition of *I Puritani*, not one note was to be written for the character of Arturo without Rubini's consent.³³ Arturo's famous (or infamous) F5 at the climax of "Credeasi misera" is the highest note ever notated for the operatic tenor voice.³⁴ A pupil of the castrato school of singing, Rubini had a voice that could sing in a captivating piano or a rousing forte, but did not have much room for dynamic contrast.³⁵ This, combined with a look at the ranges written for him, suggests perhaps a careful conscious effort to switch between falsetto and chest voice for artistic effect (see example 4 in appendix).

While modern tenors often attempt to sing his higher lines (even occasionally including E5's and the notable F5) in chest voice, it is certain that he, in fact, utilized falsetto extensively. Like Manuel Garcia, Rubini enjoyed critical acclaim for his portrayal of the title character in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.³⁶ The accepted use of falsetto for the tenor *dí grazia* explains the paradox of a tenor singer (premiering works going into the treble range) also specializing in baritone roles. Rubini proved to be the last great tenor of this school as the bel canto period came to a close, and a new kind of tenor came to the stage with Gilbert Louis-Duprez (1806-1896).

³² Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 134.

³³ Julian Budden, "Rubini, Giovanni Battista,"

Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 March 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

³⁴ Vincenzo Bellini, *I Puritani: melodramma serio in tre parti*. Libretto by Carlo Pepoli (Milano: Ricordi, 1967).

³⁵ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 133.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 162.

In his early career, Duprez was little more than just another lyric tenor in the eyes of the public, and a small-voiced one at that.³⁷ It was said that he could not truly fill up an opera house, but this is deceptive – perhaps he did not have a very strong falsetto, or he had a higher root voice that could not sustain volume in the lower passages. According to Duprez himself, when singing the character of Arnaldo in *William Tell* (1831), he was so worried that he would not be able to be heard throughout the hall that he resolved to sing everything with as much volume as he could muster. With this attitude, he sustained a high C in chest voice in “Asile hereditaire.” The audience response was electrifying, and Duprez was an overnight sensation in Paris.³⁸

Rossini's collaboration with another singer helped make Duprez's technique possible. Written for French *haute-contre* Adolphe Nourrit (1802-1839) at the Paris Opera, *William Tell's* tenor role of Arnaldo lacked much of the agile *fioriture* seen in his Italian operas in favor of simpler parts more suiting to the French taste.³⁹ Nourrit did not have the elaborate sense of ornamentation seen in Italian bel canto tenors, and was famous more for his clear, ringing tone.⁴⁰ This departure from castrato-like coloratura created repertoire that later assisted Louis Gilbert Duprez to achieve great success in the *do di petto* (high C) in chest voice (see example 3 in appendix)⁴¹

Unlike the aforementioned singers and composers, Duprez's high C in *William Tell* was a product of the singer with no composer input. In fact, Rossini hated Duprez's sound. Upon hearing the tenor, Rossini compared it to a bird's squawking while having

³⁷ Ibid, 166.

³⁸ Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 175.

³⁹ Rossini, *William Tell*.

⁴⁰ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 161.

⁴¹ Ibid, 162.

its throat cut, and he remarked that, “Nourrit sang it in head voice, and that’s how it should be sung.”⁴² Despite Rossini’s confidence in Nourrit’s original Arnaldo, Nourrit lost a great deal of popularity after Duprez’s breakthrough, and faded into obscurity.⁴³

While Rossini did not care for Duprez’s technique, Donizetti was quite fond of it. One of the most famous characters written for Duprez is that of Edgardo in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835).⁴⁴ Edgardo’s lines, rather than leaving room for extended ornamentation, were meant to be performed practically as-written. He was meant to show vocal expertise through intensity and strength rather than in vocal agility and coloratura. For many years, Edgardo’s death scene (the Opera finale) was held as the crowning achievement of the opera, and audiences flocked to hear this new tenor sound.⁴⁵

Despite living to the age of eighty-nine, Duprez did not have a particularly long career – critics along with Duprez himself regarded his voice as “half gone” by age forty.⁴⁶ Duprez’s early vocal deterioration would lead one to believe that his manner of singing was damaging to the voice. While it is uncertain exactly how he produced his high notes – that is, whether he sang them using a technique similar to the way tenors sing now or whether he strained to get them out – Duprez did spark a new interest in hearing the male voice bring elements of chest voice into the high register instead of the traditional falsetto technique. While the ornamentation and coloratura of the castrati

⁴² Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 167.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 194

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 168.

was rejected in this new technique, the robust heroism was more apparent than it had been in the lighter tenor.

Duprez's style caused such positive reactions from audiences that many other tenors of the time tried to produce a sound similar to his.⁴⁷ In many cases these efforts proved fruitless, and some tenors who could not reproduce Duprez's sound quit the business or even committed suicide.⁴⁸ In the mid nineteenth century, vocal pedagogies began to surface to displace the castrato school. These came from Duprez himself (who had resigned to a life of teaching and composition after his singing career was cut short) and from Manuel Garcia (1805-1906), son of the Rossinian baritenor.⁴⁹ In 1840, Garcia published his *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, which became the new standard in vocal pedagogy.⁵⁰

Garcia was heavily influenced by his father who, despite being a student of the bel canto style, did not promote the use of falsetto.⁵¹ Garcia lived an exceedingly long life (dying in 1906 at the age of one hundred and one) and witnessed first hand the transition from bel canto tenor to high romantic tenor. He carefully mapped out registration in the voice, and claimed that the voice could be integrated in its entirety. Rather than the castrato-influenced portamenti and emphasis on points of registration, Garcia advocated that one bring elements of the falsetto down to one's chest, and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 189.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁰ "Manuel Garcia: The Centenarian." *The Musical Times* 46, no. 746 (April, 1905): 225-232.

<http://links.jstor.org>

⁵¹ Manuel Garcia, "Observations on the Human Voice," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London* 7 (1854-1855): 2, <http://links.jstor.org>

implement some characteristics of falsetto when bringing the chest up.⁵² Semantics are hotly debated, and even today the falsetto is an area of intense disagreement within the vocal pedagogical world; however, Garcia's teachings signifies a new school dedicated to the natural male voice and written by those experienced with it, rather than by those experienced with the castrato (see example 5 in appendix).

As the old bel canto stars died out, new tenors under this school appeared, such as Enrico Tamberlik (1820-1889). Tamberlik followed in Duprez's footsteps and, to Rossini's horror, sang a C#5 from the chest instead of the notated high A in *Otello's* finale.⁵³ Tamberlik requested that Rossini write for him, to which Rossini scoffed and said he can 'take his C# and get out.'⁵⁴

One composer that was taken with Tamberlik was Giuseppe Verdi, who needed a tenor who could carry over an orchestra well. Verdi wrote for Tamberlik roles such as Manrico in *Il Trovatore* (1853), the Duke in *Rigoletto* (1851), the title role in *Ernani* (1844), and Don Alvaro in *La Forza del Destino* (1862).⁵⁵ Tamberlik still took his liberties with Verdi, although he had the courtesy of asking Verdi first. One example is in the aria "Di quella pira," from *Il Trovatore*, which was originally written to go no higher than A4.⁵⁶ Tamberlik decided that this was not dramatic enough, and that he should show off his high C; Verdi gave him permission to add two high C's to it, one in the middle and one in the end—as long as he could do it well and consistently (since then, it

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 171.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 172.

⁵⁶ [Trovatore score when I get it]

has become customary for those performing the aria to add the C's) (see example 6 in appendix).⁵⁷

In his casting of the title role in *Otello* (1887), Verdi was looking for a specific kind of voice. Only a voice of immense proportions with a penchant for portraying extreme outrage and despair could accurately fit Verdi's vision of Otello, a "passionate man undone by a conniving adversary."⁵⁸ To fit this role, Verdi found the man said to have had the "strongest high C of any tenor before him," Francesco Tamagno (1850-1905).⁵⁹ The character of Otello demands a very strong upper register combined with great carrying power, and is seen today as the quintessential Italian dramatic tenor role (see example 7 in appendix).⁶⁰ Unlike most of his predecessors, Tamagno had little say in the music written for him; he simply sang, and Verdi coached him to create the sound that Verdi wanted. This would prove to be the new standard in opera composition, and individual singers would have less of an influence.⁶¹

The result of the collaboration between the aforementioned singers and composers was that there was a new level of expectation for the operatic tenor voice; it was understood by the end of the nineteenth century that any decent operatic tenor would be able to sustain a high tessitura in the *di forza* style. Puccini, who created beloved tenor roles (such as Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (1896) and Cavaradossi in *Tosca* (1900)) that have become the backbone of many-a-tenor's repertoire, often wrote roles

⁵⁷ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 172.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 253.

⁵⁹ Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 179.

⁶⁰ Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello: a lyrical drama in four acts*. Libretto by Arrigo Boito. *English Edition* by Francis Hueffer. Arr. For voice and pianoforte by Michele Saladino (London: G. Ricordi, 1887)

⁶¹ Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 173.

while the casting was still uncertain, as was the case in *La Bohème*.⁶² In the aria “Che gelida manina,” Puccini wrote in optional parts should the singer not be able to sing the higher note (see example 7 in appendix). Puccini and other composers that followed Verdi did not have to cater as much to individual singers; the literature that came about from the singer-composer partnership that preceded them created tenors that specialized in certain roles and had certain voice types, or *fachs*. Instead of writing for a specific voice, new roles were then written for a specific *fach*, and old roles were associated with the new *fachs*.⁶³

According to Richard Miller, a celebrated vocal pedagogue of the late twentieth century, the tenor is subdivided into nine different voice types, the major ones ranging from lightest to heaviest: Tenorino, Tenore leggero, Tenore lirico, Tenore lirico spinto, Tenore robusto/drammatico, and Heldentenor. Miller explains each *fach* by associating them with operatic roles. For example, a leggero would specialize in bel canto roles; a lirico may choose a role such as Puccini’s Rodolfo, and a drammatico may play Otello or Calaf (*Turandot*, 1926).⁶⁴

Tenorino, a light tenor whose voice blends in with his falsetto (which would have been highly prized in Rossini’s day), is the only type of tenor to have no viable operatic potential today, according to Miller. The modern tenor shuns away from any sort of falsetto; in Rossini’s or Bellini’s operas, where performance practice would have been to use falsetto, most tenors choose to transpose arias down, change certain high notes (such as the infamous F5 in *I Puritani*), or take notes in full voice rather than sing what

⁶² Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 202.

⁶³ Miller, *Training Tenor Voices*, 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

would have been performance practice.⁶⁵ Audience expectations of what an operatic tenor should sound like have changed. People have come to expect that the Verdi tenor is how all operatic tenors should sound, yet the tenor that Rossini and Bellini (and early Donizetti) wrote for was not the tenor Verdi and his descendants had in mind.

Musical tastes have changed universally, and all voice parts were affected through composers' desires for greater orchestration. However, while all voices changed as far as their size, the tenor is unique in that he changed in timbre and range significantly. One humorous example of how concrete the change was in new Italian operatic tenor is the aria "Di rigori armato" from Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911). A magnificent aria, when taken out of context one would assume it to be sung by one of the main characters. In the opera, however, it is fittingly sung by "An Italian Tenor," who has no lines and is of no consequence to the story. "Di rigori armato" is in an extremely high tessitura that stays in the upper voice virtually the entire time; most phrases pass through the Ab4 region (passagio).⁶⁶ "Di rigori armato," written for "An Italian Tenor," exemplifies what has come to be expected from the modern tenor (see example 8 in appendix).

Upon analyzing the tessitura of tenor parts and their context, there is no question that what was expected of the operatic tenor by the twentieth century is not what was expected of him at the dawn of the nineteenth century. In comparing early Romantic roles with late Romantic roles, there is not a major difference in range (if anything, the

⁶⁵ Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 333.

⁶⁶ Richard Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier*. Libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (New York: H. Leonard Publishing Corporation, 1989).

range has gone down, likely a result of the discouragement of the falsetto); however, the tessitura and nature of his lines did change. Rossini and Bellini expected their tenors to display virtuosity through florid coloratura, ornamentation in the upper register, and a seamless blend of their falsetto with their chest voice. Duprez's high C and his collaboration with Donizetti started the tenor's journey that would culminate with Verdi, who redefined the tenor's role as a hero with a robust tone and high chest notes. In some cases the composer dictated what he wished, and in some cases the composer obliged the singer in writing what would best display his specific virtuosity. Through the collaboration between composer and singer during the Romantic period, the ideal operatic tenor gradually took on a transformation from the *tenore di grazia*, who was trained in the castrato style of agility and registration, to the *tenore di forza*, the robust, ringing tenor that is now associated with Italian opera.

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