

Jennifer Grotz

The Last Living Castrato

Difficult to believe, a knife insures the voice,
soprano notes proceed intact while chest hair and beard
accompany the new lower octaves, the voice expanding

beyond sex, limited only by lung. And now whole
operas composed for castrati are abstract and
unperformable, now whole species of off-humans who

were sacrificed for air, for air sinking and rising
in their throats, are extinct, now facsimiles
reproduce for our ears what is digital mastery,

bleeding soprano and counter-tenor. Except for
the brief miracle of Edison's recording:
the last living castrato's voice brimming through

static and hiss. Technology at its beginning and
old school opera at its decline, that cusp
between where a voice spanning five octaves sang

to give us proof of the voice, and of how
we doctored it to make it more whole, to widen
emotion's aperture. He holds it

in his mouth. Audiences would beg for
the aria to be sung over and over,
interrupting the story, which is only

an excuse for the voice. The voice is *how*,
rising, rising, so as to dive,
and he holds it in his mouth

releasing our cruel sacrifice, our gratitude
to hear it fall, driven to where
the voice takes us: silence, applause.