

Re: "Owning" a role

Source: <http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Rec/rec.music.opera/2005-08/msg02903.html>

- *From:* "david7gable@xxxxxxx" <david7gable@xxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 17 Aug 2005 15:24:25 -0700
-

Joining the war against the deadly figurative usage "to own [a role],"
La Donna writes:

>I don't think that such a question can be answered on the grounds of personal likes and dislikes; possibly on the basis of a sufficient consensus of opinion.

A consensus of opinion is still opinion, and my opinion may or may not accord with the consensus. No matter: the figurative usage "owned" can be used in either case. You can make statements taking any of these forms:

1. In my opinion, Rysanek owned the role of Senta.
2. By consensus, Melchior owned the heavy Wagner roles.
3. By consensus, Tebaldi owned the role of Desdemona, but I disagree: if anybody owned the role, it was De los Angeles.

>it's a stupid question and a nihilist concept, because [...] most of the singers are either no longer alive, or no longer singing, or not singing those particular roles

The fact that a question only applies to singers alive during the period when the speaker regularly attended performances of opera and not to all of the singers from the dawn of time until the sun burns out in the distant future does not mean it's a stupid question. In any case, the limitation to singers of the past is a function of the tense, not of the usage "to own."

Compare these two statements:

1. Siepi owned the role of Figaro.
2. Terfel owns the role of Figaro.

The first applies to the past, the second to the present.

In any case, we can generally make tacit assumptions about what the other guy is saying when we engage in conversation, and you are safe in making the tacit assumption that the speaker's remarks are confined to the singers he's heard.

Re: "Owning" a role

>the logical conclusion is that if you ever in the future see that role essayed by someone else [...] you will see an imposter going through the motions

That may be the logical conclusion, but it is also an absurd one. You can only arrive at this "logical" but entirely absurd conclusion by insisting on treating casual figurative language used in conversation as if it were the formal language in a legal or scientific document. One thing the usage "owned" is not, and that's formal language.

In any case, when somebody tells you that "Rysanek owned the role of Senta," he or she isn't saying that she still owns it: he or she is saying that she owned it in the past. Get it? Past tense?

>Perhaps [expressing such opinions of "ownership" is] just self-indulgence for archivists

This isn't a specific objection to the usage "owned." This is an objection that can be raised to 99% of the posts on the internet.

You aren't attacking the usage "owned" by calling the OP's question "stupid." You're attacking the old timers for reminiscing about the good old days.

–david gable

.

• *Follow-Ups:*

- ◆ ***Re: "Owning" a role***
◇ *From: La Donna Mobile*

• *References:*

- ◆ ***"Owning" a role***
◇ *From: The Totally Innocent Handelmaniac*
- ◆ ***Re: "Owning" a role***
◇ *From: La Donna Mobile*
- ◆ ***Re: "Owning" a role***
◇ *From: REG*

• Prev by Date: ***Re: BRUNNHILDE PREGNANT***

• Next by Date: ***Re: "Of all the ways in which the invention of the phonograph changed the culture of classical music, perhaps the most fateful was that it turned a local craft into an international trade, thereby attracting the attention of entrepreneurs who were more interested in money than art."***

• Previous by thread: ***Re: "Owning" a role***

• Next by thread: ***Re: "Owning" a role***

• Index(es):

- ◆ ***Date***
- ◆ ***Thread***