

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to bridge the gap between musicological theory and methodological practice in the study of singing. This singing method explores the “Italian tradition”, an idea to which we will make constant reference in the chapters that follow. We begin with a discussion of terms and their meanings, and go on to develop a teaching course in which vocal practice is based on exercises and *solfeggi* from historical sources, correlated with live testimony from those who were present at the time. It goes without saying that the full extent and complexity of this subject cannot be exhausted in the pages of a single volume. For this reason, the contents of this method should be seen as an introduction to the fundamental principles of the *antica scuola italiana*, the ancient Italian school of singing, which we examine from *Le Nuove Musiche* by Giulio Caccini<sup>1</sup> up to *bel canto* singing of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The sources used to trace the development of this tradition are many and varied: correspondence between musicians; the review pages of contemporary periodicals; treatises on singing with their related musical exercises; down to what today we might consider, given their structure, out-and-out singing methods. As a general rule, the further we go back in time, the more essential it becomes to make a comparative study of the sources – even the most heterogeneous of sources – in order to bring into sharper focus the features of what we could broadly define as *canto antico*. More often than not, this ancient tradition was passed on by word of mouth from master to apprentice, unsupported by written, documentary evidence.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an intense revival of interest in the teaching methods of the foregoing Schools. In terms of the way it combined both theory and practice in a progressive and rational manner, the Singing Method of the Paris Conservatoire<sup>2</sup> can be considered the first complete teaching manual. Two Italians were involved in drafting the treatise: the composer, Luigi Cherubini, who was then the Conservatoire’s Inspector, and the tenor Bernardo Mengozzi,<sup>3</sup> who was its singing teacher.

We have chosen to use a portion of the exercises contained in the MCP because, by adopting a method which was still based on the dynamics of emission and evenness of timbre throughout the registers, singing teachers can acquire an awareness of at least the following points:

- 1) the registers must never be forced;
- 2) homogeneity of timbre is the result of daily exercise with the singing teacher;
- 3) acquiring top notes and full vocal extension is the fruit of several years of study.

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<sup>1</sup> Giulio Caccini, *Le Nuove Musiche*, Maescotti, Florence 1601 (facs. repr. S.P.E.S., Florence 1983).

<sup>2</sup> *Méthode de Chant du Conservatoire de Musique*, M.me Le Roy, Paris 1804. Henceforth referred to in the text as MCP.

<sup>3</sup> Bernardo Mengozzi, who came from Bernacchi’s school, was the link between the famous Bolognese school of Pistocchi, from which Tosi and Mancini derived their teaching, and the MCR.

Another significant work, albeit much less known, is *Grammatica o siano Regole per bene cantare* by Anna Maria Pellegrini Celoni.<sup>4</sup> Known as *la Romana*, she was considered by Manuel García the Younger as being among the best teachers of the ancient method. The last in a long line of celebrated Roman singers, Pellegrini Celoni was active in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and appears to have collected and handed down the precepts developed by Tosi<sup>5</sup> and Mancini.<sup>6</sup>

The scales contained in the *Grammatica*, designed to “firm and form”<sup>7</sup> the voice, are a precious tool which responds to the teacher’s need to exercise the student’s voice on various notes of the scale. These exercises, combined with those for agility, when performed slowly, are still an excellent training ground for achieving an even timbre throughout the registers.

An essential feature of the exercises in both the *Grammatica* and the MCP is their two-part structure: the ascending progression is followed by a descending progression that begins on the top note of the former. This exercise makes the student aware of the need to maintain evenness throughout the voice and to create a seamless whole between one register and another. From the second part of Anna Maria Pellegrini Celoni’s method, which deals with “figured singing and the manner of flowering the music”, we have extracted some model cadenzas and crowns, which are composed in a delightful classical style.

The method compiled by Luigi Lablache<sup>8</sup> is also in line with the teaching principles presented in the MCP, and there are references and recommendations which reflect the taste of the ancient Italian school.

Manuel García the Younger,<sup>9</sup> on the other hand, reflects the tendency to cross-refer the principles of the ancient school with more modern precepts based on scientific observation of the physiology involved in vocal production. The Preface contains some pertinent comments:

It would be interesting to know about the technique used in the art of singing as practised from remotest times up until today, and particularly useful to study in its particularities the teaching method followed in the XVII and XVIII century by the schools of Fedi, Pistocchi, Porpora, Egizio, Bernacchi etc., which produced so many and such flattering results. A real pity that this period handed down nothing on the tradition apart from vague and incomplete documents.

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Maria Pellegrini Celoni, *Grammatica o siano Regole per bene cantare*, Piale e Martorelli, Rome 1810.

<sup>5</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de’ Cantori Antichi e Moderni*, Della Volpe, Bologna 1723; nuova ed. con note ed esempi di L. Leonesi, F. di Gennaro & A. Morano, Naples 1904 (facs. repr. Forni, Bologna 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Battista Mancini, *Pensieri e Riflessioni sopra il Canto figurato*, Galeazzi, Milan 1777 (facs. repr. Forni, Bologna 1970).

<sup>7</sup> [Translator’s note: “Fermare e formare” in Italian, like many of the terms cited in this volume to describe the mechanisms of vocal production, is ambiguous. The word “fermare” means to “stop” or “arrest”, but also evokes the idea of “giving solidity to” (Cf. terra ferma – dry land). “Formare”, which means “to shape”, “form” or “mold” also means “to train” or “educate”. Since many secondary and tertiary meanings will be lost in translation, the author has allowed me to append a glossary to the English version of this work to dispel confusions which result from the way key terms in the Italian are reduced in the English. Where translating a key term would mean adding to the confusion, I have opted to leave it in Italian.]

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Lablache, *Metodo completo di canto*, Ricordi, Milan n.d. (but 1842).

<sup>9</sup> Manuel García, *Traité complet de l’Art du Chant*, Schott, Paris 1844/1847.

We owe García a debt of thanks for recovering exercises based on the repeated note as well as those designed to join the registers. He also reconfirmed the importance of the *messa di voce* (even if it was considered an effect and no longer an integral part of emission) as well as the use of agogics and *tempo rubato*.

For the 18<sup>th</sup> century Neapolitan school, on the other hand, teaching solfeggio was the foundation. Most of the *solfeggi* are of extreme difficulty, and are thus intended for trained singers. We have chosen only a few of the 36 *Solfeggi* by Giuseppe Aprile,<sup>10</sup> of medium difficulty and intended to foster a gradual mastery of breathing, intonation and emission. The revision of the 19<sup>th</sup> century edition by J. Consul replaces the original figured-bass accompaniment with a new one in notation. This allows students to accompany themselves more easily while they perform the exercise. Some exercises have been transposed to avoid forcing the voice at the top. We have insisted on the practice of those exercises which form the “vocabulary” of the Italian technique in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The section devoted to 17<sup>th</sup> century singing opens with the preface to Giulio Caccini’s *Nuove Musiche*. The plates with his examples, which are essential for understanding how dynamics, emission and agogics were used, supply all the details needed to interpret correctly the *Madrigali* composed by Caccini himself. Some of the most noteworthy of them are reproduced here.

The teaching of diminution, for which we have used the method by Giovan Battista Bovicelli,<sup>11</sup> is tackled in association with interval technique. The plates of *Passaggi* by Francesco Rognoni<sup>12</sup> can be studied as more complex vocal exercises in which trills, groups and passages appear, which must always be articulated with attention to dynamics.

We recommend daily performance of the “scales for firming and forming the voice” by Anna Maria Pellegrini Celoni, which are ideal for working on emission. Pellegrini Celoni’s exercises can also benefit performers of the more ancient repertoire, as for example Caccini’s *Nuove Musiche*, where all forms of *messa di voce* are required to highlight the so-called “poetics of the affections”.

We commend to the reader’s attention the exercises for “making the voice agile” (Pellegrini Celoni once more) which, if opportunely transposed, offer excellent study material for acquiring, at the same time, agility and homogeneity throughout the registers. They are just as suited to the 17<sup>th</sup> century repertoire as they are to *bel canto* singing.

We recommend daily study of the trill and repeated or hammered notes, as well as the exercises from García for consolidating evenness of timbre throughout the registers. The portamento exercises from the MCP should be performed with caution, increasing the duration of the semibreve gradually, until it reaches the duration of 20 seconds recommended in the text. If the student does not already have breath enough to sustain the long notes, it is advisable to study the interval exercises first.

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<sup>10</sup> Giuseppe Aprile, *The Modern Italian Method of Singing With a Variety of Progressive Examples and Thirty Six Solfeggi*, Birchall, London 1795.

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Battista Bovicelli, *Regole, Passaggi di Musica, Madrigali, e Mottetti passeggiati*, G. Vincenti, Venice 1594 (facs. repr. Bärenreiter, Kassel 1957).

<sup>12</sup> Francesco Rognoni Taeggio, *Selva de’ varii passaggi secondo l’uso moderno per cantare e suonare con ogni sorta di strumenti*, F. Lomazzo, Milan 1620 (facs. repr. Forni, Bologna 1970).

From among Aprile's *Solfeggi* we suggest number 8, which is particularly suited to working simultaneously on evenness of timbre throughout the registers, interval singing (*cantar di sbalzo*), ductility and flexibility of emission.

Though we have given various examples, we have preferred at this stage to avoid suggesting cantatas and arias, which deserve to be treated separately.