

Reframing Bel Canto in the Twenty-First Century: Dovetailing Tradition with Science-Informed Pedagogy

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Author Matthew Hoch explores the meaning, context, and viability of the term “bel canto” in the third decade of the twenty-first century, using James Stark’s seminal 1999 book *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* as a starting point for reflection. Amplifying Stark’s desire to find common ground among various schools of historical pedagogy as well as the nexus between the master–pupil tradition and science-informed modern era, Hoch contemplates shifts that have occurred in the past quarter century while also highlighting some of bel canto’s timeless principles. Hoch suggests an expansion of Stark’s definition of bel canto adapted to the needs of the modern voice pedagogue.

IN A RECENT COLUMN I reflected on the ever-shifting nature of terminology in the field of voice pedagogy.¹ One of the most ubiquitous terms in our profession is also one that is multifaceted and perhaps the most difficult to define. The term “bel canto” means different—and sometimes *many*—things to different people, and there is no shortage of primary sources from various eras that use the term indiscriminately, often to describe seemingly conflicting concepts across a wide variety of contexts. Richard Miller acknowledged this lack of cohesion when he remarked that “there is no specific codified system of *bel canto*” and called the bel canto school of pedagogy “a modern-day shibboleth, with opposing methodologies staking out highly suspect claims for its possession.”² For those who ascribe their teaching to a specific school of bel canto pedagogy, there are also rival factions, such as those ardently devoted to the teachings of Manuel García II pitted against others who revere the maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti.³ Of the many books devoted to the teaching of bel canto principles, most adhere to one interpretation or another; there are comparatively few volumes that attempt to weave the disparate strands of bel canto into a cohesive whole.⁴

One such book, however, that acknowledges the complexities of bel canto and seeks to provide a comprehensive overview is the late James Stark’s *Bel Canto: The History of Vocal Pedagogy*.⁵ Published in 1999, *Bel Canto* turns a quarter of a century old this year. As much has changed in the world of voice pedagogy over the past twenty-five years, I thought it would be interesting and perhaps fruitful to reread *Bel Canto* through a 2024 lens of wisdom. I was curious to see which observations of Stark’s still ring true today as well as contemplate which need to be reconsidered. What impact have the past two decades of science-informed voice pedagogy had on our understanding of bel

Journal of Singing, March/April 2024
Volume 80, No. 4, pp. 417–428
<https://doi.org/10.53830/sing.00024>
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canto as Stark defined it? Perhaps most important, are any of the core principles of bel canto helpful and relevant to singing teachers who teach styles that fall outside of the classical canon? This article will consider these questions.

One of the most-cited passages in Stark's book occurs in the final chapter, which he titled "Bel Canto: Context and Controversy." Building upon his explorations of various concepts and schools of bel canto in the previous chapters, he attempted a comprehensive definition:

Bel canto is a concept that takes into account two separate but related matters. First, it is a highly refined method of using the singing voice in which the glottal source, the vocal tract, and the respiratory system interact in such a way as to create the qualities of *chiaroscuro*, *appoggio*, register equalization, malleability of pitch and intensity, and a pleasing vibrato. The idiomatic use of this voice includes various forms of vocal onset, *legato*, *portamento*, glottal articulation, crescendo, decrescendo, *messa di voce*, *mezza voce*, floridity and trills, and tempo rubato. Second, *bel canto* refers to any style of music that employs this kind of singing in a tasteful and expressive way. Historically, composers and singers have created categories of recitative, song, and aria that took advantage of these techniques, and that lent themselves to various types of vocal expression. *Bel canto* has demonstrated its power to astonish, to charm, to amuse, and especially to move the listener. **As musical epochs and styles have changed, the elements of bel canto adapted to meet new musical demands, thereby ensuring the continuation of bel canto in our own time.**⁶

When Stark wrote these words in the final sentence, "in our own time," he was referring to the last decade of the twentieth century. To say that much has changed in the past twenty-five years—in both our profession and society at large—is a harrowing understatement. Eurocentric classical voice pedagogy, while still very much alive (especially in conservatories and within the academy) has expanded to a more science-informed, functional approach and is less based on the classical repertoire and style in which previous generations, including my own, were trained. The question, then, is whether bel canto pedagogy has adapted to these trends (as Stark asserted) and thus has ensured its continuation and viability. In response to this, we have two choices: The first is to reject Stark's position and limit the use of the term "bel canto" to a specific style and epoch; I believe that angle could be successfully argued. This

article, however, will explore the second option. Can elements of bel canto pedagogy be adapted to meet the musical demands of 2024 and beyond?

This article is written in the same spirit as Stark's book, dissecting the elements of bel canto and discerning which are relevant to the current milieu in which singing teachers find themselves. After a discussion Stark's methodology, the author of this article will provide an overview of the content, objectives, and conclusions of *Bel Canto*, both explicit and implicit. Attempts will be made to separate "the wheat from the chaff," discerning which concepts of bel canto have weathered less well over time as opposed to which are still relevant. The article will conclude with a proposed expansion of Stark's definition of bel canto, one that is perhaps better suited to the professional needs of the twenty-first century singing teacher.

BEL CANTO: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Before proceeding to the central arguments of this essay, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of Stark's treatise with particular attention paid to his methodology. I will not provide a point by point summary of his book here—for that, the reader is urged to read *Bel Canto* in its entirety. I will however, discuss Stark's major themes and objectives and discuss how his method of inquiry in this work can provide a blueprint for the exploration of bel canto in the third decade of the twenty-first century.

Methodology and Organization of Content

In addition to front matter and an extensive (and invaluable) bibliography, Stark organized his book into seven chapters and an appendix. The first five chapters are each devoted to a different aspect of bel canto pedagogy: the *coup de la glotte*, *chiaroscuro*, registers, *appoggio*, and what he called "vocal tremulousness" (an inclusive category that gave the author the opportunity to discuss vibrato alongside trills and glottal ornamentations).⁷ Although Stark made every effort to tease out these disparate strands of vocal technique, much overlap occurred—an unavoidable consequence he fully acknowledged. For instance, the discussion of *messa di voce* is stationed in the chapter on *appoggio* but also touched on registration, *chiaroscuro*, and expression. To cite another example, Stark inserted his principal discussion of *legato* into chapter 6 (which is devoted to

expression) even though this aspect of singing intersects with the *coup de la glotte* and (especially) breath management.⁸ These overlappings highlight the untidiness of bel canto as a subject of study and reveal the monumental challenge of writing a work that attempts to embrace the term fully and with all of its complexities. It also perhaps explains why even camps that thought they opposed each other found themselves occasionally occupying common ground, such as when a disciple of Lamperti found himself in agreement with García on certain aspects of vocal technique.⁹ A final chapter in Stark's book endeavored to tie everything together through a proposed comprehensive definition of bel canto and a historical overview of how its concepts were integrated distinctly and idiomatically into vocal performance and pedagogy over the course of many generations, in languages other than Italian, and in disparate regions of Europe and beyond.¹⁰

A Compendium of Primary Sources

One of Stark's major achievements was his meticulous gathering of early writings in voice pedagogy. These span from the sixteenth through the early twentieth centuries and numerous quotations (helpfully translated into English for the reader if they are from foreign-language sources) appear in every chapter of *Bel Canto*. García was placed at the center of his discussion, with the author noting not only the nineteenth-century pedagogue's technical writings about the voice but also his success—in Stark's unwavering opinion—as the preeminent singing teacher of the nineteenth century.¹¹ In addition to his obvious respect and reverence for García's teachings, Stark also viewed García as the origin point for a new kind of voice pedagogy, one that sought answers to the mysteries of singing through anatomical explanation and observation as opposed to imagery or idiosyncratic maxims that were often unsupported by evidence. The author cited notable writings on singing that occurred before García—such as those by Lodovico Zacconi, Giulio Caccini, Johann Andreas Herbst, and Pier Francesco Tosi—but acknowledged that what survives from this earlier time deals more with performance practice, style, and expression than vocal technique itself.¹² In addition, many of the great singing teachers prior to García (notably Niccolò Porpora) left no writings for future generations to study. Central to

Stark's exploration of bel canto principles in chapters one through five are the writings of García, Francesco and Giovanni Battista Lamperti, Giambattista Mancini, Alexis de Garaudé, Mathilde Marchesi, Hermann Klein, Julius Stockhausen, and William Shakespeare, as well as a plethora of minor figures, some of whom wrote more specifically—often on only one aspect of bel canto.¹³ While Stark was able to generate a relatively comprehensive discussion of vocal technique via these historical resources, this approach also reveals certain gaps; there is, for example, little discussion of the falsetto voice, since, according to Stark, falsetto was both “discouraged and disparaged” by pre-twentieth-century pedagogues.¹⁴

Examining Bel Canto Principles from a Scientific Perspective

In his preface to *Bel Canto*, Stark quoted the musicologist Carl Dahlhaus, who defined history as “memory made scientific.”¹⁵ In each of his first five chapters, Stark followed a standard format; after his exploration of a particular aspect of vocal technique via quotations from primary sources, he then shifted to examining the same technique—scientifically—through the lens of more recent studies. In this respect, he reaffirmed his loyalty to the García school of voice pedagogy, noting that scientific inquiry into the nature and function of the voice began with García's invention of the first laryngoscope in 1855.¹⁶ The scientific studies he cited, however, were not necessarily recent in 1999. The nineteenth-century observations of Hermann von Helmholtz, for example, figured prominently in Stark's discussion of resonance and registration.¹⁷ The writings of Janwillem Van den Berg, conducted in the 1950s and 60s were also favorites of his.¹⁸ In his discussion of vibrato, Stark cited Carl E. Seashore's textbooks, which date back even further—to the 1930s and 40s.¹⁹ Other scholars who are cited with frequency include William Vennard, Johan Sundberg, and Ingo Titze.²⁰ Consistent with our profession's increasing desire for science-informed pedagogic instruction, Stark had little time for obtuse imagery as a substitute for anatomical descriptions of vocal phenomena.²¹ In an appendix to *Bel Canto* (titled “The Gronigen Protocols”) Stark included measurements of his own voice executing various aspects of bel canto technique, but acknowledged that a single-subject study can only tell part of the story and that significantly more research

is necessary to draw satisfactory conclusions.²² He lamented the absence of professional singers' involvement with the scientific community and stated that many of our questions about the science of the singing voice "will be resolved only when opera singers are used more widely as subjects in laboratory experiments."²³

Grappling with Terminology

Reconciling terminology in voice pedagogy has always been one of the central challenges within our profession, which lacks a universally adhered-to lexicon.²⁴ The study of bel canto via its primary sources reveals that the central challenge of dealing with terminology is not a recent dilemma but rather one that goes back centuries. The fact that pedagogic works were written in various languages and often disseminated through translation further complicates this issue.²⁵

In addition, sometimes various sources discuss similar phenomena without coalescing around the same terminology. García, for example, never used the term "chiaroscuro," but Stark noted that "his vocal ideal was nevertheless consistent with the definitions of chiaro-scuro found in manuals by Mancini, G.B. Lamperti, and other advocates of the old Italian school of singing."²⁶ What we now call vocal fry or "pulse" was called *Stroh bass* by Germans in the nineteenth-century, and García referred to it as the *contre-bass* register.²⁷ One of the most contentious issues was the labeling of what many pedagogues refer to as "covering":

Covered singing has taken on a number of labels since Diday and Pétriquin first called it *voix sombrée ou couverte*. The Italians widely refer to it today as *voce piena in testa* (full head voice), while the Germans call it *Volton der Kopfstimme* (full tone of the head voice). Richard Miller calls it the "legitimate head voice." It has also been called the "male operatic head register." Despite this proliferation of names, the term "covering" seems to prevail in the parlance of most singers.²⁸

While things have improved somewhat in our time, reconciling terminology continues, and will continue to be a central issue for singing teachers and scholars of voice pedagogy.

Pedagogic Opinion

Throughout *Bel Canto*, Stark did not shy away from expressing his opinion. This approach articulates a

hierarchy to the reader and serves as a lighthouse as one oars through a vast sea of primary resources; Stark routinely made judgment calls regarding which sources he felt were most valuable and which, superfluous. For example, he disregarded Isaac Nathan's theory of registers and called his 1836 book, *Musurgia Vocalis*, "the work of a dilettante."²⁹ Additionally, he called Edgar Herbert-Caesari's concept of the "focus ball" "even closer to the twilight zone."³⁰ Stark frequently reaffirmed his reverence for García and did not shy away from superlatives when referencing him, calling his description of the *coup de la glotte*, for example, "arguably the single most important concept in the history of singing."³¹

Practical Application of Concepts

One of the most important values that Stark espoused is that technique only exists to serve the execution and expression of music. In this respect, he shares the same philosophy as many of the historical masters of bel canto:

Treatises by Caccini, Tosi, Garaudé, Garcia, and others have linked vocal techniques to the musical styles of the day and discussed how the singing voice could be made expressive. . . . Vocal technique was considered to be inseparable from matters of musical style.³²

The application of bel canto principles to artistic singing is an overarching theme of both *Bel Canto* and this article. It will be discussed to a greater extent below.

BEL CANTO'S TWENTIETH-CENTURY RELICS

Reading *Bel Canto* again twenty-five years later was an enlightening experience. Much of its content is still invaluable, but other portions of the book have inevitably become dated. Writing from the vantage point of 1999 or before, many of Stark's observations about "the present day" no longer hold.³³ Before affirming *Bel Canto's* more timeless traits, the following are three areas that need to be reassessed as bel canto enters the mid-twenty-first century.

Twenty-Five Years of Scientific Studies

In the spirit of García, one of Stark's primary goals was an attempt to reconcile historical writings with modern voice science. This presents a problem for the modern reader for the simple reason that *Bel Canto* was pub-

lished in 1999; over the past twenty-five years there has been an explosion of research published in the realm of voice science and its application to the pedagogy of singing. Many of these more recent studies have revealed new insights into breath management, *messa di voce*, and vibrato and would surely have been cited if *Bel Canto* were to be revisited and republished as a second edition today.³⁴ The number of resources Stark had at his disposal was also a limiting factor; the first edition was based on a relatively small amount of studies and Stark would have had much more to work with if he had used the same methodology today. Technology has also made great strides forward, resulting in numerous advances for the instrumentation utilized in outcome-based voice studies. Stark therefore found himself facing some of the same dilemmas as García (i.e., the lack of scientific wisdom to which future generations would have access), albeit stationed further down the road. Science aside, this datedness also applies to musicological resources as well; for instance, Stark referenced Manfred Bukofzer's *Music in the Baroque Era*, a 1947 Norton textbook that has twice been replaced by the publisher.³⁵

Stylistic Bias

One of the greatest hurdles in assessing bel canto's relevance to today's pedagogic world is the fact that it is almost inextricably tied to a certain style and time—i.e., opera (and usually *Italian* opera) spanning from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. It is fruitless to accuse García and the Lampertis of bias toward classical styles because the musical theatre and commercial industries as we know them today did not yet exist. More concerning are the biases of Stark that creep in here and there—usually around the edges and between the lines—and often through his choice of quotations to affirm his numerous assertions. For example, Stark seemed to agree with Mathilde Marchesi (a student of García) when she wrote that “[t]he García family were the founders of the singing school in which knowledge of the physiology of the voice goes hand in hand with *all* the great traditions of style.”³⁶ And jazz and Renaissance choral singers may feel left out in the cold when he reminded us that Seashore “found that ‘the vibrato was present in the voices of *all* great artists.’”³⁷ While Mancini's declaration that portamento is necessary “in every style of singing” may have been true in 1774 (although I am skeptical

that it was), that statement is unequivocally less than truthful in 2024.³⁸ Finally, García's paradigm of only five forms of vocalization heralded by Stark—legato, marcato, portamento, staccato, and *aspirato*—might not be an ideal rubric for a contemporary commercial singer.³⁹ If we are to adapt bel canto, in Stark's words “to meet new musical demands, thereby ensuring [its] continuation . . . into our own time,” we must awkwardly confront these obstacles that the author unwittingly placed in our path.⁴⁰

The Master–Apprentice Model

One major shift that has occurred in recent decades is the departure from a master–apprentice model toward one that is more community based and student centered. In a previous article, I noted that there has been shift away from the era when a recognized “guru” dispenses “truths” from a higher pedestal, to a more enlightened approach in which a community collectively seeks knowledge from each other, coalescing around the shared value that “all of us are smarter than any one of us.”⁴¹ Research in the voice pedagogy world also has become increasingly peer reviewed, marking a departure from previous decades when authorities in our field made claims without the modern expectation of basing those assertions on credible evidence.⁴² It is the responsibility of every generation to question and reassess what we think is true. While *Bel Canto* spills much ink over the generations-long rivalry between the disciples of García and the Lampertis, I hope that we as a profession are past the point where we feel the need to “pick sides” between two opposing views of voice pedagogy. It is along these lines that science-informed pedagogy can be the great mediator. There has also been a pedagogic shift away from the master–apprentice model to a more student-centered one that considers evidence-based theories of teaching and learning, culturally sensitive instructional environments, critical thinking, autonomy, and student–teacher rapport. Research into these pedagogic reforms is still emerging.

BEL CANTO'S ENDURING THEMES

Despite the shortcomings enumerated above, Stark's book nevertheless retains considerable value. The following themes in particular serve as timeless reminders for our profession.

Dialogue between Tradition and Voice Science

Central to Stark's thesis is the idea that singing teachers must be relentless in their quest to learn more about the science behind the singing voice. This hunger for inquiry is the primary reason why Stark viewed García (as the "inventor of the laryngoscope") as the first modern singing teacher. García was shackled by the scientific limitations of the nineteenth century; however, his spirit is the same as those of us who continue to actively study voice pedagogy in the hopes of further unraveling the remaining mysteries and wonders of the singing voice. If García were alive today, I suspect he would be regularly attending NATS conferences and the Voice Foundation's annual symposium; I likewise muse that he would be thrilled by the pedagogic advances that have occurred in recent decades and will likely occur for many decades to come.

The Complexity of Terminology

Over the course of the 2021–2022 academic year, I cochaired (with Ken Bozeman) one of the NATS working groups that prepared the science-informed voice pedagogy resources unveiled at the 2022 NATS National Conference in Chicago.⁴³ The task of our focus group was to develop a core list of essential terms for singing teachers, all of which were decided upon by committee and through discussion. Finding consensus was difficult despite the fact that we were all NATS members who shared the common goal of developing a lexicon of science-informed terminology. Even though we were more similar than different in our pedagogic opinions, many compromises had to be made. Rereading *Bel Canto* in preparation for writing this article reminded me that these kinds of conversations have been taking place for hundreds of years and will likely continue for many decades to come. Even if we as an organization come to a consensus—as we did in 2022—and affirm a standard terminology, there are many other stakeholders in our larger ecology, such as our fellow voice professionals in the musical theatre and commercial industry (to name only two of the most prominent cohorts). The more we strive toward speaking the same pedagogic language, the more productive our collaborative relationships are likely to be across the profession.

Not Losing Sight of Practical Application

After introducing what he considered to be the most essential concepts of bel canto in chapters 1 through 5, Stark devoted an entire chapter to the application of these principles to expressive singing.⁴⁴ In some of his most engaging and convincing writing, the author offered two contrasting perspectives of Christoph Willibald Gluck's aria "Che farò senza Euridice" from the 1762 opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*.⁴⁵ The first was from a cohort of musicologists and critics, all of whom were resoundingly negative in their critique of the aria and vehemently critical regarding Gluck's choice of a major key and upbeat tempo at such a tragic moment in the opera (when Orfeo has lost his beloved Euridice forever); to these scholars, Gluck's aria represented a failure to depict the text with dramatic realism and is thus an abject failure as a piece of music.⁴⁶ Stark then made an important observation about these commentaries:

The common element in the criticisms of Hanslick, Cooke, Einstein, Kivy, Donington, and Kerman is *the absence of any mention of the singer's role in projecting the sentiments of this aria*. If, as Hanslick maintained, "thousands were moved to tears by this aria," then the expression of grief and despair was indeed communicated by singers who knew how to overcome the apparent weaknesses of the music by expressive use of the voice.⁴⁷

Stark then pointed to the audiences' reception of the aria upon attending live performances of *Orfeo et Euridice* in various eras. One of the most adulatory assessments was written by Hector Berlioz, who heard Pauline Viardot sing the role of Orpheus.

To speak, now, of Madame Viardot is to approach what forms a study in itself. Her talent is so complete and varied; it touches so many points of art; and is united to so much science, and to such entrancing spontaneity, that it produces, at one and the same time, both astonishment and emotion; the result being that it strikes, yet appeals to the heart; it overawes, and yet persuades.⁴⁸

It is therefore ultimately the *singer* who, through their technique, is empowered to artistically express the drama and passion of the text. More important, it is the trained *singer* who has the greatest power to move the listener. Perhaps Stark communicated this best when he wrote the following passage:

There is an expressive power in the trained singing voice that I like to refer to as the “vocal aesthetic.” This is the power of the singer to astonish, charm, or move an audience in a way no other instrument can. . . . Despite the best vocal training and the best understanding of musical styles, truly expressive singing is ultimately a matter of the heart, and in this lies its mystery and its beauty.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION: REFRAMING BEL CANTO

Toward the conclusion of *Bel Canto*, Stark wrote the following:

There is one further aspect to the question of the preservation of *bel canto* which should be mentioned here. With the establishment of a “great repertoire” in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, in which musical works from earlier periods found a permanent place in the operatic repertoire alongside newly composed works, singers were faced with a new problem: how to deal with a wide range of musical and vocal styles, both old and new. Whereas previous generations of singers had largely sung the music of their own day, in their own language, singers were now required to seek a technique that would serve equally the several historical styles in which they might sing.⁵⁰

In this passage, Stark was primarily referencing the stylistic shifts that were occurring in opera, away from the lighter, more lyric singing of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Gioacchino Rossini and toward the more robust and full-throttle singing of the mid-nineteenth century, most readily exemplified by the works of Giuseppe Verdi. This in part explains the García/Lamperti divide—with García seeking to preserve the past and the Lampertis favoring the newer style. As Stark observed, “It is important to remember that García lived at a time when operatic styles were gradually turning away from vocal agility in favour of vocal strength.”⁵¹ But then he continued:

The problem has now become further exacerbated. Today’s aspiring singers must decide whether to pursue “classical” singing (which requires long, rigorous, and expensive training) or seek the rewards of vernacular styles of singing. At the end of the twentieth century, a new plurality exists in the world of singing. Some singers specialize in the opera of just one era, or just one style or even just one composer. Some cultivate floridity over strength, or vice versa. Some are versatile enough to be considered “all-purpose” singers who can perform in

various operatic styles. The phenomenon of “cross-over” singing, in which classically trained singers perform in vernacular styles (most crossover singers move from classical to popular music, not vice-versa) is another aspect of this plurality. But amidst a plethora of vocal styles, whenever a singer sings with *chiaroscuro*, with *appoggio*, with equalized registers, with flexibility and a pleasing vibrato, we immediately identify this with *bel canto* training.⁵²

We therefore return to where we began, contemplating *bel canto*’s applications to what Stark referred to as our “new plurality.” Reframing *bel canto* within this contest, I thus propose the following expansion to Stark’s definition, an addition that I have indicated in bold, below.

Bel canto is a concept that takes into account two separate but related matters. First, it is a highly refined method of using the singing voice in which the glottal source, the vocal tract, and the respiratory system interact in such a way as to create the qualities of *chiaroscuro*, *appoggio*, register equalization, malleability of pitch and intensity, and a pleasing vibrato. The idiomatic use of this voice includes various forms of vocal onset, *legato*, *portamento*, glottal articulation, crescendo, decrescendo, *messa di voce*, *mezza voce*, floridity and trills, and tempo rubato. Second, *bel canto* refers to any style of music that employs this kind of singing in a tasteful and expressive way. Historically, composers and singers have created categories of recitative, song, and aria that took advantage of these techniques, and that lent themselves to various types of vocal expression. *Bel canto* has demonstrated its power to astonish, to charm, to amuse, and especially to move the listener. As musical epochs and styles have changed, the elements of *bel canto* adapted to meet new musical demands, thereby ensuring the continuation of *bel canto* in our own time.⁵³

While the modern voice pedagogue recognizes that the specific techniques and terminology traditionally associated with *bel canto* are directly tied to a specific historical style, certain core principles—such as the quest for a more science-informed approach to singing, a continually refined lexicon of terminology, and the overarching value that technique is only useful if it serves to facilitate expressive singing—are timeless and empower the singing teacher to meet the ever-expanding needs of the twenty-first century student of singing.

The *bel canto* tradition is ever-evolving; it meant something different in 1600, 1762, 1855, and 1999. It

deserves reconsideration again now that we are in the year 2024. Bel canto's malleable definition will continue to morph and evolve as the art of singing continues to be informed by science and the modern world in which we live and will continue to live, mindfully keeping one eye fixed firmly on the future. As a profession, may we always strive toward our shared goal: *beautiful singing*.

NOTES

1. Matthew Hoch, "Singing Redefined," *Journal of Singing* 80, no. 1 (September/October 2023): 43–50.
2. Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), xx–xxi.
3. Unless otherwise noted, "García" in this article will always refer to the baritone and pedagogue Manuel García II (*fiils*), not his father, the celebrated tenor Manuel García (*père*). I will, however, use the full names of Francesco Lamperti and his son, Giovanni Battista Lamperti to distinguish between the two pedagogues.
4. Selected examples include Daniela Bloem-Hubatka, *The Old Italian School of Singing: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012); Philip A. Duey, *Bel Canto in Its Golden Age: A Study of Its Teaching Concepts* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951); David L. Jones, *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing: Concepts of the Swedish-Italian and Italian Singing Schools* (New York: David L. Jones, 2017); William Earl Brown, *Vocal Wisdom: Maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti*, enlarged ed. (Marlboro, NJ: Taplinger Publishing, 1957); Lucie Manén, *Bel Canto: The Teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools, Its Decline and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Cornelius L. Reid, *Bel Canto: Principles and Practices* (New York: Joseph Patelson Music House, 1972); and Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
5. James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Throughout this essay (and to avoid confusion), the author will endeavor to use lowercase and standard formatting when referring to "bel canto" as a concept and capitalization and italics when referring to Stark's book.
6. *Ibid.*, 189. Italicization reprinted as originally published. Bold text is by the author of this article for emphasis.
7. The author of this article acknowledges Merriam-Webster's and others authors' (such as Vennard's) preference for "coup de glotte." However, *coup de la glotte* is not only favored by Stark but also seems to be more prevalent in the primary sources; thus this version of the term is retained throughout the present article.
8. Stark's rationale for addressing legato under "expression" is so that he can simultaneously discuss portamento. Throughout the text the author makes some surprising choices but always discloses the logic behind his organizational decisions. It is surprising (to the author of this article) that the concept of legato does not occupy a more central place in Stark's exploration of bel canto and is not written about more extensively; as Francesco Lamperti famously said, "Without legato there is no singing" (*chi non lega non canta*). *Ibid.*, 164–65. Stark's general preference for García's teaching may partially explain his weighting of the various aspects of bel canto throughout his book.
9. Stark notes that one of Francesco Lamperti's most famous students, William Shakespeare, made "statements on the *mesa di voce* [that] seemed to follow Garcia more than Lamperti," despite Shakespeare's claims to be espousing the Lamperti method. *Ibid.*, 105.
10. One of Stark's major themes in this chapter is the tendency for voice pedagogues to look backwards to a "golden age"—i.e., there seems to be pervasive opinion across centuries that the art of singing has gone downhill and there is a proverbial attitude that "things were always better in the past." Stark argues that it has always been this way, recounting at least four "golden ages" of singing: the first was established between 1720 and 1740 with the Neapolitan (associated with Niccolò Porpora) and Bologna (Antonio Bernacchi) schools of singing; the second occurred between 1770 and 1790 and comprised the Milan (Luigi Marchesi) and Venetian (Gaspere Pacchierotti) schools; the third spanned from 1825 and 1840 after the decline of the castrati and included Manuel García (*père*), his daughters Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot, and the "three" tenors of the 1830s: Giovanni Battista Rubini, Adolphe Nourrit, and Gilbert Duprez; and the fourth and last "golden age" stretched from 1880 until the First World War and is represented by the singers Victor Maurel, Francesco Tamagno, Jean de Reszke, Lillian Nordica, Nellie Melba, Marcella Sembrich, Emma Eames, and Ernestine Schumann-Heink, with Enrico Caruso, Luisa Tetrazzini, Amelita Galli-Curci, and Rosa Ponsel comprising "an Italian afterglow." *Ibid.*, 205–6. Stark credits the scholars Henry Pleasants and Franz Häböck in his establishment of this timeline.
11. Stark notes that "[García's] pupils included (in addition to his sisters Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot) Mathilde Marchesi, Charles Battaille, Julius Stockhausen, Sir Charles Santley, Henrietta Nissen-Saloman, Antoinette Sterling, Johanna Wagner (Richard Wagner's niece), Catherine Hayes, and the most famous of them all, the 'Swedish Nightingale' Jenny Lind." *Ibid.*, 6.

12. Early writings on singing by these figures include the following: Lodovico Zacconi, *Prattica musica utile et necessario si al compositore* (1592); Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (1602) and *Nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle* (1604); Johann Andreas Herbst, *Musica practica sive instructio pro symphoniacis* (1642); and Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra in canto figurato* (1723) and *Observations on the Florid Song* (1743).
13. Writings by these figures referenced by Stark include the following: Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Florid Singing* (1774/77); Alexis de Garaudé, *Méthode complète de chant* (ca. 1830); Manuel García II, *Traité complet de l'art du chant* (1847), "Observations on the Human Voice" (1855), and *Hints on Singing* (1894); Francesco Lamperti, *Guida teorica-practica-elementare per lo studio del canto* (1864) and *The Art of Singing according to Ancient Tradition and Personal Experience* (1884); Giovanni Battista Lamperti, *The Technics of Bel Canto* (1905); Hermann Klein, *Thirty Years of Musical Life in London, 1870–1900* (1903), *The Bel Canto, with a Particular Reference to the Singing of Mozart* (1923), and *Great Women-Singers of My Time* (1931); Mathilde Marchesi, *Méthode de chant théorique et pratique* (1877); Julius Stockhausen, *A Method of Singing* (1884); and William Shakespeare, *The Art of Singing, Based on the Principles of the Old Italian Singing Masters* (1899) and *The Art of Singing... Entirely Rewritten* (1910).
14. Stark, *Bel Canto*, 36.
15. *Ibid.*, xi.
16. *Ibid.*, 5. On this page, Stark acknowledges a caveat regarding this date: "While it is widely believed that García invented the laryngoscope in 1885, research Peek Woo maintains that Bozzini and M. Gagniard de la Tour had used dental mirrors to view the larynx in 1807 and 1829, respectively, and that in 1844 Mr Avery of London added a semispherical forehead reflector with a hole in the center. Woo concedes that García may have been the first to use autolaryngoscopy."
17. Hermann von Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, translated, revised, and corrected by Alexander J. Ellis (New York: Dover Publications, 1954). Originally published in German in 1862.
18. Janwillem Van den Berg's numerous articles are listed in the bibliography of *Bel Canto*. *Ibid.*, 296.
19. Carl E. Seashore's books cited by Stark are *The Vibrato* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1932); *Psychology of the Vibrato in Voice and Instrument* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1936); *Psychology of Music* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1938); and *In Search of Beauty in Music: A Scientific Approach to Musical Esthetics* (New York, Roland Press, 1947).
20. William D. Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technique*, revised ed., greatly enlarged (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967); Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 1987); Johan Sundberg, *The Science of Musical Sounds* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1991); Ingo R. Titze, *Principles of Voice Production* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994).
21. Stark recounts a humorous anecdote from the annals of nineteenth-century voice instruction: "Among the many examples of colourful and highly imaginative accounts of resonance imagery in the pedagogic literature there is one in particular that bears repeating here. It is Blanche Marchesi's most delightful story about the composer Charles Gounod, who apparently dabbled in voice instruction. 'He never taught singing, but was often approached to do so. His only daughter one day implored him to give lessons to a young girl friend of hers . . . Gounod put the girl in front of him, looked straight in her eyes and said: "Place your bow, let the urn of your voice pour out its contents, and give me a mauve sound, in which I may was my hands.'" Marchesi called this a 'poetical, but wholly unpractical, way of asking a pupil to make a sound.'" *Ibid.*, 55. The story itself derives from Blanche Marchesi's *Singer's Pilgrimage* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923), 287.
22. These studies were carried out in the Gronigen Voice Research Lab in the Netherlands under the supervision of Harm K. Schutte (director of the laboratory) and Donald G. Miller. The precise dates of the individual studies are not provided by the author.
23. *Ibid.*, 28.
24. See Matthew Hoch and Mary J. Sandage, "Working toward a Common Vocabulary: Reconciling the Terminology of Teachers of Singing, Voice Scientists, and Speech-Language Pathologists." *Journal of Voice* 31, no. 6 (November 2017): 647–48; Hoch, "Singing Redefined."
25. To cite one important example, *coup de la glotte* has been variously translated as "stroke of the glottis" and "shock of the glottis," connotating different interpretations of the technique and perhaps reflecting the bias of the translators. The terminology alone has fueled much debate about García's intentions behind this term and his beliefs about glottal onset. Stark, *Bel Canto*, 12–24.
26. *Ibid.*, 40.
27. *Ibid.*, 89.
28. *Ibid.*, 85. Stark's references in this passage include Y. R. Diday and Pétriquin, "Mémoire sur une nouvelle espèce de voix chantée," *Gazette Médicale de Paris* 8 (1840): 307–14; Richard Luchsinger and Godfrey E. Arnold, *Voice-Speech Language*, trans. Godfrey E. Arnold and Evelyn Rose Fink-

- beiner (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1965), 95; Richard Miller, *English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 113; Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), 118; and John Large, Shigenoba Iwata, and Hans von Leden, "The Primary Female Register Transition in Singing," *Folia Phoniatica* 22: 385–96.
29. Stark, *Bel Canto*, 66. *Musurgia Vocalis* was an expansion of an earlier book of Nathan's titled *Essay on the History and Theory of Music* (1823).
 30. *Ibid.*, 54.
 31. *Ibid.*, 32.
 32. *Ibid.*, 154.
 33. To cite one of numerous inconsequential examples, I am not sure that Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's *Songs of the Hebrides* are "still perennial favorites of recitalists." *Ibid.*, 43
 34. Some of the more recent studies directly relating to principles of bel canto that were not available to Stark include the following: Ingo R. Titze, Russel Long, George I. Shirley, Elaine Stathopoulos, Lorraine O. Ramig, Linda M. Carroll, and William D. Riley, "Messa di voce: An Investigation of the Symmetry of Crescendo and Decrescendo in a Singing Exercise," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 105 (1999): 2933–40; Christian T. Herbst, "A Review of Singing Voice Subsystem Interactions—Toward an Extended Physiological Model of "Support,"" *Journal of Voice* 31, no. 2 (March 2017): 249.e13–249.e19; Kate Emerich Gordon and Ona Reed, "The Role of the Pelvic Floor in Respiration: A Multidisciplinary Literature Review," *Journal of Voice* 34, no. 2 (March 2020): 243–49; Louisa Traser, Fabian Burk, Ali Caglar Özen, Michael Burdumy, Michael Bock, Daniela Blaser, Bernhard Richter, and Mathias Echternach, "Respiratory Kinematics and the Regulation of Subglottic Pressure for Phonation of Pitch Jumps—A Dynamic MRI Study," *Plos One* 15, no. 12 (2020): e0244539; André Almeida, Emery Schubert, and Joe Wolfe, "Timbre Vibrato Perception and Description," *Music Perception* 38, no. 3 (2021): 282–92; Joshua D. Glasner and John Nix, "Perception of Vibrato Rate by Professional Singing Voice Teachers," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 152 (2022): A54; and Yvonne Gonzales Redman, Joshua D. Glasner, Dario D'Orazio, and Pasquale Bottolico, "Singing in Different Performance Spaces: The Effect of Room Acoustics on Singers' Perception," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 154 (2023): 2256–64
 35. Manfred Buzkofer, *Music in the Baroque Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1947); John Walter Hill, *Baroque Music: Music in Western Europe, 1580–1750* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); Wendy Heller, *Music in the Baroque* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011). Stark's reference to Buzkofer occurs in *Bel Canto*, 176–77.
 36. Stark, *Bel Canto*, 266.
 37. *Ibid.*, 146.
 38. *Ibid.*, 165.
 39. *Ibid.*, 166. Interestingly, Lamperti described only four—legato, portamento, *picchettato* and *martellato*—with legato considered to be the most important.
 40. *Ibid.*, 189.
 41. Matthew Hoch, "Silent upon a Peak in Darien," *Journal of Singing* 79, no. 1 (September/October 2022): 43–47.
 42. In his chapter on registers, Stark shares the following anecdote: "Richard Miller, who visited numerous Italian voice studios, describes male voices as having a *primo passaggio* and a *secondo passaggio*, with a *zona di passaggio* in between them. However, he cites no published literature regarding this theory, and most written sources discuss only one *passaggio* in male voices (between the chest and falsetto registers) and two *passaggi* in female voices (one between the chest and middle, and one between [the] middle and head registers." *Ibid.*, 83. Stark references Richard Miller, *English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing*, 104, 117, 123.
 43. The "Science-Informed Voice Pedagogy Resources" are all available to NATS members at www.nats.org.
 44. Stark, *Bel Canto*, 153–88. Stark titles chapter 6, "Idiom and Expression: The Soul of Singing."
 45. *Ibid.*, 183–88.
 46. *Ibid.*, 185. The individuals whose writings Stark references include Eduard Hanslick (nineteenth-century Austrian music critic), Deryk Cooke (musicologist), Alfred Einstein (musicologist), Peter Kivy (musicologist), Robert Donington (musicologist), and Joseph Kerman (musicologist and critic).
 47. *Ibid.* Italics are by the author of this article for emphasis. The Hanslick quotation is taken from Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, trans. Gustave Cohen (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 32.
 48. *Ibid.*, 186; Hector Berlioz, *Gluck and His Operas, with an Account of Their Relation to Musical Art*, trans. Edward Evans and from Berlioz's *À travers chant* (London: W. M. Reaves, 1914), 14.
 49. *Ibid.*, 188.
 50. *Ibid.*, 224. Italicization reprinted as originally published.
 51. *Ibid.*, 168. Stark also writes the following supporting statement in the final chapter of his book. "As has often been noted, the strongest force in the world is inertia, and this is certainly true in singing. Many of the comments regarding

the decline of good singing are related to a time lag between a stylistic change brought about by composers and the ability of singers and singing teachers to adjust to that change.” Ibid., 216.

52. Ibid., 224–25. Italicization reprinted as originally published.

53. Ibid. 189.

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