

# *Bel Canto des Wortes*—The Pedagogy of Cornelia (Cornelie) van Zanten

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The Neapolitan School is well-known for its superb pedagogues who shaped the art of bel canto singing, one of whom was Cornelia van Zanten (1855–1946). Her 1911 treatise *Bel Canto des Wortes*, with its many voice exercises and an overview of the history of the bel canto movement, reveals Zanten as a superb pedagogue whose work deserves more exposure. Zanten's methods were forged by her own operatic career, which spanned both Europe and the United States, her studies with Francesco Lamperti and Julius Stockhausen, and her many years teaching in both Germany and The Netherlands.

“The word should no longer be the destroyer of bel canto, but its promoter . . . The speaking and singing apparatus are the same, therefore all mistakes in speaking take their revenge on the singing.”

—Cornelia van Zanten, *Bel Canto des Wortes* (1911)<sup>1</sup>

**M**ANY RENOWNED VOICE TEACHERS HAVE PUBLISHED treatises detailing the training of the classical voice, the very first of which was Pier Francesco Tosi's *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* in 1723. Tosi's student, Niccolo (Nicola) Porpora (1686–1768), is considered to be the father of the Neapolitan School.<sup>2</sup> Many famous singers and teachers whose pedagogical lineage traced back to Tosi and Porpora went on to write their own influential treatises, including Manuel Garcia II (1805–1906);<sup>3</sup> Francesco Lamperti (1813–1892);<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1839–1910);<sup>5</sup> and Mathilde Graumann Marchesi (1821–1913).<sup>6</sup> While these names are widely known in the classical vocal realm, that of another prolific descendant of the Neapolitan School, Cornelia van Zanten (1855–1946) does not share the same renown.<sup>7</sup> Zanten's landmark treatise *Bel Canto des Wortes* (1911) reveals a master teacher who not only had a clear and detailed understanding of vocal anatomy, but a multi-faceted, successful method with which to train classical singers that was rooted in the unhindered production of vowels and consonants. Indeed, she believed that words should carry emotional expression, and that expression could not achieve its optimum beauty and clarity if a singer did not first focus on the production of vowels and consonants in speech. The method targeted the many catalysts of muscle interference that can have detrimental effects on a singer's tone quality, resonance, and diction through a series of exercises that were assigned at specific times during a singer's training. Although she published other books and articles about the training of the classical voice, *Bel Canto*

*des Wortes* was undoubtedly her crowning achievement, and reveals Zanten as a gifted pedagogue whose concepts and methods deserve to be more widely known.

Cornelia van Zanten was born in Dordrecht in the Netherlands on August 2, 1855. As a child, she became a member of an amateur singing club in Dordrecht called “Amicitia,” in which her alto voice quickly excelled and garnered attention. She therefore began studies with conductor Henri Geul and soprano Wilhelmina Gips; at age seventeen, she enrolled in the Cologne Conservatory, where she studied with Carl Schneider.<sup>8</sup> Her dedication to her art, coupled with her intelligence and talent, led to her completing the three-year course of study in only a year and a half, after which she moved to Italy to study with famed bel canto teacher Francesco Lamperti.<sup>9</sup> The young mezzo-soprano did not have long to wait for her operatic debut, which was in Turin in the role of Leonora in Donizetti’s *La Favorita* in 1875.<sup>10</sup> In the early years of her performing career, she appeared in many productions in Turin and Barcelona in both soprano and mezzo-soprano roles; she garnered particular fame for her portrayal of the title role in Donizetti’s *Lucrezia Borgia*.<sup>11</sup>

Zanten’s growing interest in the operas of Richard Wagner prompted a relocation to Germany in 1879, where she performed with the Breslau Opera until 1882.<sup>12</sup> She then performed with the Hoftheater in Kassel from 1882–1885, a time when Gustav Mahler served as conductor. The pair developed a close friendship, and Zanten followed Mahler to Hamburg in 1885 to continue working with him. The partnership was fruitful, as Zanten performed many works at the Stadttheater under his baton.<sup>13</sup>

Zanten’s career finally took her from Europe to the United States in 1886, where she became a lead mezzo-soprano at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.<sup>14</sup> She toured with Theodore Thomas’s National Opera Company in 1886 and 1887 where she was best known for her portrayals of Orfeo in Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice*, as well as the title role in Bizet’s *Carmen*. During her time in the United States, for unknown reasons Zanten began to refer to herself as “Cornelie” rather than Cornelia. Her ensuing publications used the latter name.<sup>15</sup>

Following the bankruptcy of Thomas’s company in 1887, Zanten moved to Hamburg, and shortly thereafter, realized her dream of performing the music of Richard

Wagner. Under the direction of Carl Muck, she performed a complete Ring cycle in Moscow, which marked the first performance of Wagner’s epic work in Russia.<sup>16</sup> Her constant pursuit of knowledge and dedication to the perfection of her vocal technique led her to study with Julius Stockhausen at the Cologne Conservatory in 1893. This decision was due to her belief that Lamperti’s teachings concentrated on the higher part of the voice and did not dedicate enough attention to the lower part of the instrument. She also sought out Stockhausen’s expertise on articulation, which, as is discussed later in this article, had a profound effect on her own pedagogy.

Following performances with the Hollandsche Opera in Amsterdam and Nederlandsche Opera in Stadsschouwburg in 1894, Zanten retired from the stage in 1895 and began teaching at the conservatory in Amsterdam. She then founded the Meisterschule für Kunstgesang in Berlin in 1903, but due to the outbreak of WWI, she returned to the Netherlands in 1914 to teach at the conservatory in The Hague. After only a year, she decided to focus solely on a robust private studio until her retirement from teaching in 1940. One of her most significant activities in these final years of her teaching career was her direction of several operas that were performed entirely by her private students, including the premiere of Verdi’s *Falstaff* in the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> Her many years of teaching produced several well-known Dutch singers of the early twentieth century, including Jacoba Dresden-Dhont, Willem Ravelli, Theodora Versteegh, Henk Noort, Gerard Zalsman, Dora Zweers-de Louw, Julia Culp, Jacques Urlus, and Jo Vincent. According to Vincent, Zanten’s voice, even when elderly, was resonant and beautiful, and her spoken and sung articulation was impeccable. These facts certainly support her pedagogy as not only sound, but one that promoted beauty, strength, and longevity in the instrument.<sup>18</sup>

Zanten’s fascination with vocal technique and the teaching of classical voice is evident in the many articles and books that she wrote on the subject in both Dutch and German. Her first book, *Hoogere techniek van den zang* (*Higher Technique of Singing*) was written in 1899 and published in Amsterdam. *Leitfaden zum Kunstgesang* (*Guideline to the Art of Singing*) was published in Leipzig in 1903 and written while she was teaching at the Amsterdam Conservatory.<sup>19</sup> The cata-

lyst for writing the book came from an 1885 recital in Hamburg where she, along with other singers from the Stadtheatre, performed at the Thalia theatre. She was transfixed with a violinist who was also featured on the program, so much so, that she wondered why he was able to communicate so much emotion through the violin—an inanimate object—while she was not able to achieve the same expressive depth with her voice. She concluded:

It was clear to me that the singer lets himself be dominated by the word before he has paid enough attention to the tone and the interrelationship of the intervals . . . The connection between word and tone should not only be brought to greater perfection, but the word should only find its perfection in the perfect technique of tone. In other words, the word enveloped in the sound and the sound flowing through the right form of the word.<sup>20</sup>

It is apparent from this quote that the guiding principle of Zanten's work to come (*Bel Canto des Wortes*) was already firmly in place, a principle which held that each component of a word had to be formed in a way that optimized the beauty of the sound, which in turn influenced the communicative power of the word. One of the fundamental concepts of this practice was Zanten's belief that vowel sounds had two separate parts. The upper portion of the vowel was formed when the vibration of the tone met the arched soft palate, while beneath it, a secondary vowel encouraged a low laryngeal position coupled with a flexible tongue and jaw. Additionally, the palate was required to arch completely independently of the larynx and tongue. Zanten believed that this combination resulted in clarity of diction and beautiful tone, and that it could only be cultivated successfully with both speech and vocal exercises.<sup>21</sup> It is noteworthy that her two-part vowel concept coincided with her belief that the voice had two parts—an upper part that was supported by the position of the soft palate, and a lower that was supported by the breathing apparatus. This view is discussed in greater detail later in this article.

Zanten also co-authored another significant publication in 1903 entitled *Sprech- und Lese-Übungen für Sänger und Redner* (Speaking and Reading Exercises for Singers and Speakers). The exercises in this volume are based on the concept that the breath is the foundation

for beautiful, flexible sound, whether it be spoken or sung. The 56-page volume also focuses on proper formation of vowels and consonants which consequently promote clear diction and unhindered tone.

The concepts introduced in Zanten's 1903 publications were greatly expanded into what is undoubtedly her most significant volume—her 1911 treatise *Bel Canto des Wortes* (Beautiful Singing from the Word).<sup>22</sup> Zanten clearly stated the purpose for the volume in her introduction as “a systematic training of the oral cavity by speech, according to which the singing takes place above the larynx.”<sup>23</sup> The 287-page treatise is multi-faceted, encompassing detailed diagrams of vocal anatomy, an in-depth discussion of the pros and cons of the Italian, French, and German singing schools, a historical overview of classical singing methodology from the 15th through early 20th centuries, and singing voice and speech exercises. Without question, the volume is a treasure trove of information for teachers and singers alike.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the concepts outlined in *Bel Canto des Wortes* clearly illustrate why the treatise has this particular title—emphasis is not only placed on the formation and resonance of vowel sounds, but also on clear articulation. As previously discussed, this belief was also the catalyst for her previous publications. Indeed, according to Zanten, beautiful, resonant tone and expressive, clear diction needed to work together as a whole, a concept that was especially influenced by two of her former teachers—Francesco Lamperti and Julius Stockhausen—both of whom could trace their roots to Niccolò Porpora and the Neapolitan School.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the treatise, Zanten frequently mentioned the importance of not using a large amount of air to create a sound; she described Lamperti as becoming quickly angered when his students attempted to do so. Several other key concepts in Zanten's method were also championed by Lamperti:

1. A slim tone without force or pushing of air. Sounds should use very little air, which is not possible without careful strengthening of the abdominal muscles.
2. A precise mouth shape for every vowel. Zanten expands on this concept by insisting that the vowel (i.e., the word) is formed before the vibration of the sound occurs. In this manner, the breath support automatically engages, and the resonance spaces are shaped for the vowel.

3. No nasality in the sound, as it encourages a high laryngeal position. The singer should have the sensation that the sound is channeled up into the soft palate.<sup>26</sup>

By the time Zanten began to study with Stockhausen, she was thirty-eight years old and already had a successful performing career; her decision to seek further knowledge is therefore indicative of her curious mind as well as her commitment to her art. From Stockhausen, she not only became more focused on developing the lower part of her voice, but also became more attentive to articulation—particularly how speech habits affected singing and how the formation of clear consonants and resonant vowels required precision and flexibility of the articulators and oral cavity.<sup>27</sup> Zanten insisted that laryngeal position was not separate from the resonance chambers—in fact, it was directly affected by them. She even went as far as to declare, “In this book, the art of the oral cavity takes the place of the earlier art of the larynx.”<sup>28</sup>

*Bel Canto des Wortes* contains many speaking, breathing, and vocal exercises that develop the key concepts of Zanten’s method; they are designed for specific voice types and presented in a three-year course of study. Preceding these exercises, Zanten provided the following helpful guidelines to help teachers and students achieve the greatest amount of benefit.<sup>29</sup>

1. Great singing depends on great speech habits. The shaping of vowels and consonants in the oral cavity must begin with speech exercises. These exercises should also be used to strengthen the inspiratory muscles rather than emphasizing and over-engaging the expiratory muscles.
2. Breathing exercises are not to be used to create a large air supply. They must be used, rather, to create a calm response in the body. Singers only require a small amount of air, which in turn requires strong, supple inhalation muscles.
3. The lower instrument (from the diaphragm up to the tip of the tongue) and the upper instrument (the area above the tongue that includes the upper jaw, hard and soft palate, nasopharynx and the nasal cavities) can only be balanced through appoggio. Without appoggio, they are forced together.<sup>30</sup> If one sings from the larynx, the resonance cavities will not develop; the muscles of the lower instrument must release. Additionally, if the laryngeal position is not

determined by the oral cavity above it, vocal fatigue and inaccurate pitch will result.

4. Thinking of a “forward placement” is not helpful, as many singers will push too much air forward in order to feel vibrations in the front of the face. The resonance spaces will vibrate with the most freedom when only a small amount of air is used.
5. If singers sing like the larynx is in the throat rather than below the tongue, they will push the soft tissue in the back of the throat forward and will vibrate the sound behind the soft palate.
6. When the closure of a consonant happens at the same time as a vowel, the voice will be squeezed. The sound must always flow freely up the throat and into the soft palate.

The goal of the first year of study in Zanten’s method was for the student to recognize incorrect habits in breathing, vowel formation and articulation using speaking exercises before moving onto those that are completely sung.

#### A) Breathing Exercises

As previously mentioned, Zanten was adamant about using only a small breath stream for singing, and that large amounts of breath and breath pressure were the enemies of beautiful tone. For singers to turn away from the idea that they need to take in large amounts of air, she encouraged them to remember that breathing is a matter of replenishing the air supply and not of filling up an empty space.<sup>31</sup> She focused on the strengthening and increased awareness of the muscles of inspiration; her breathing exercises are not about “holding” the air or keeping it low, but about suspending the inhalation muscles without locking them to prevent the exhalation muscles from engaging involuntarily. The first exercise she suggested, which is designed to teach the difference between muscle action and air action, is particularly enlightening:<sup>32</sup>

1. Inhale rapidly through the nose.
2. Allow the inspiratory muscles, particularly the abdominals, to remain in the inspiration position until *they* feel the need to soften and release the carbon dioxide from the lungs.<sup>33</sup>
3. As you suspend the inspiration muscles, open the mouth as if you are about to speak. You will feel the





Im zweiten Jahre sind dann die komplizierteren Rhythmen zu üben:



Example 1.

word being held back because the inspiration muscles are preventing you from exhaling.

4. Once the muscles decide *they* need to soften and exhale, you will feel the air flow out of the mouth.

Once the singer can distinguish between the muscle action and air action, the singer can progress to the following exercise (as the singer becomes stronger, the amount of time in each step can be increased):

1. Inhale for five seconds and feel the breathing apparatus expand.<sup>34</sup>
2. Stay in the suspended position for five seconds.
3. Exhale on a hiss for ten seconds.

Due to the fact that Zanten's approach to breathing is about muscle awareness rather than filling up with air, the singer becomes cognizant of the actions of the muscles through the body's natural response. By learning to work with the body rather than inflicting the idea of a "big breath" upon it, the breathing apparatus and the airflow it creates are far less likely to harbor unnecessary tension.

## B) Speaking Exercises

For singers' first year of study, Zanten provided speaking exercises which used different combinations of vowels and consonants in increasingly difficult rhythms, concentrating on words that emphasize specific vowels and consonants before moving on to recitations of entire poems in the second and third years. She paid special attention to the consonants that are formed by the tongue tip, particularly the [r], as many people create this sound by constricting the uvula and the back of

the tongue. She provided extensive lists of words and rhythms with which singers could practice shaping each vowel and consonant sound, believing that practicing these rhythms encourages both precision and flexibility in the tongue without losing the shape of the vowel in the oral cavity.

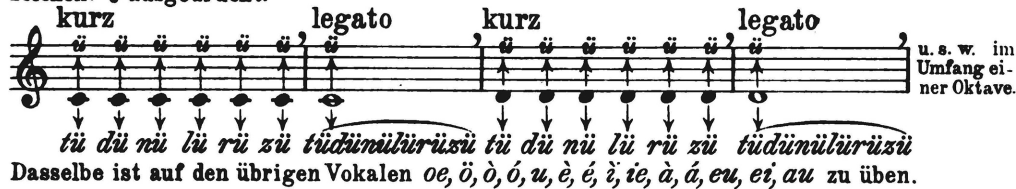
Zanten emphasized that each vowel must have a feeling that it is traveling upward toward the soft palate, even when it is preceded by a consonant. Simultaneously, the upper jaw should also have the feeling of moving upward, or as Zanten's described it, "the upper jaw should catch the vowels like a dome."<sup>35</sup> Zanten insisted that correct action of the palate must begin with speaking, believing that most people lower the palate in speech and allow consonants to pull vowels into the throat. She believed that if the singer is not aware of these actions, they will surely find their way into their singing.

All of the above concepts are clear illustrations of Zanten's "two instrument" philosophy. She was adamant that the "upper voice" (i.e., everything above the tongue) must never be allowed to squeeze into the "lower instrument" (i.e., everything below the tongue), as this action flattens the soft palate, narrows the oral cavity, and instigates tongue and laryngeal tension. Indeed, Zanten asserted that without flexibility in the tongue, jaw, and soft palate, singers will find it an impossible task to keep the two instruments both malleable and able to move independently of one another.

A sample of Zanten's speech exercises can be found in Example 1.<sup>36</sup> Here, the singer executes [i] and [I] vowels preceded by different consonants (note: Zanten

## 1.

Diese Übung ist in der Sprechtonhöhe zu üben (siehe Sprechübungen Seite 142). Man verfolge dabei die Hauptempfindungen des Vokals am Gaumen. Durch kurze Aussprache des Konsonanten soll der Vokal zum Aufwärtsschwingen gebracht werden; beim Legato soll er weiterklingen. ♪ bedeutet Atemzeichen; mezzo respiro wird durch ein umgekehrtes Atemzeichen: ♫ ausgedrückt.



Example 2.

specified that “ie” is to be spoken as in the German word “liebe,” while the [I] vowel is to be spoken as in the German word “immer”). The combinations of tie ti, die di, mie mi, rie ri, zie zi, and jie ji are suggested, with the instructions that when the singer moves between the [i] and [I] vowels, “the [I] should be spoken towards the tip of the tongue while maintaining the support of the [i] in the upper jaw . . . this system of internal shaping of the mouth cavity with the [i] can be transferred to all vowel combinations.”<sup>37</sup> She also stated that the [i] vowel is the best vowel sound to begin with because it encourages the sound to move towards the roof of the mouth while encouraging the jaw to swing back.<sup>38</sup> The singer is required to speak these vowel/consonant combinations to different rhythms; the horizontal lines in the exercise mark places where the singer is to take a quick breath.

### C) Vocal exercises

The first exercise in the treatise that transitions singers from speaking to singing is uncomplicated, yet highly effective (see Example 2).<sup>39</sup> Here, Zanten uses the [ü] vowel, which she believed encourages a high, domed soft palate and low larynx.<sup>40</sup> Singers begin the exercise speaking the [ü] with different consonants in front of it, the objective of which is to be able to let the tip of the tongue and the jaw be free to articulate the consonants without disrupting the [ü] shape in the oral cavity. Once singers can execute this task on detached sounds, they can speak all of the consonant combinations with the [ü] vowel in a legato line.

Zanten believed that during this exercise, singers are also able to feel which muscles of the breathing apparatus are engaged and how only a small amount of breath is required. Zanten emphasized that following the

consonant, the vowel should vibrate upwards into the palate. Once singers master the exercise on the [ü] vowel (i.e., the vowel shape in the throat is not disrupted by the consonant, the tongue and jaw create the consonants in small, precise movements, and the breathing apparatus is flexible), singers can move onto the other vowels listed beneath the exercise. It is important, however, that the high palate/low larynx shape of the [ü] vowel be carried into these vowels. Once singers have mastered these skills in a spoken tone, they may then practice this exercise on a sung tone.

Notably, Zanten stated that when singers ascend in pitch, “the diaphragm expands downwards,” and when they descend in pitch, “the sensations in the mouth move more strongly towards the palate while the diaphragm remains quiet.”<sup>41</sup> As seen in Example 3, Zanten indicated the increased awareness of the doming of the soft palate with an upward arrow, while what she believed to be the downward release of the diaphragm is indicated by a downward arrow (one can also see this practice in Examples 4–8).<sup>42</sup>

This example also shows how many of Zanten’s vocal exercises not only use multiple consonants, but [ö] in addition to [ü]. As previously mentioned, Zanten believed the [ö] vowel also encourages a high palate and low larynx. Zanten frequently moved from umlauted vowels into others with no umlaut, while also employing consonants. The aim of these exercises is to prevent the consonants from stopping the sound in between vowels, and to not allow vowels to pull the palate down or raise the larynx. The instructions Zanten provided in Example 3 (the original German text can also be seen in the example) are to perform the first version of the exercise with “easy pronunciation” and the second with a “quiet mouth posi-

6. 1. mit lockerer Aussprache, 2. mit ruhiger Mundstellung (bocca ferma) zu üben.

1. da-dö-da-dö-da ra-rö-ra-rö-ra ma-mö-ma-mö-ma fa-fö-fa-fö-fa  
2. da - - - rö - - - ma - - - fö - - -

sa-sö-sa-sö-sa la-lö-la-lö-la sa-sö-sa-sö-sa - - - sö.  
sa - - - lö - - - sa - - - - -

da-dö-da-dö-da sa-sö-sa-sö-sa la-lö-la-lö-la sa-sö-sa-sö-sa  
da - - - sö - - - la - - - sö - - -

fa-fö-fa-fö-fa ma-mö-ma-mö-ma ra-rö-ra-rö-ra - - - rö.  
fa - - - mö - - - ra - - - - - -

Example 3.

a. Für Sopran und Tenor.

lu - - a lu - - a lu - - a lu - - a

lo - - a lo - - a le - - a le - - a

\*) — = Geben der Luft (für die Brusttöne). — = Zurückhalten der Luft (für Mittellage und Höhe).  
V. 1029

Example 4.

tion” or “bocca ferma,” which encourages a small mouth opening without over-engaging the jaw.

Once a low larynx and raised palate were consistently executed by the singer, Zanten moved on to exercises that transfer from dark vowels (i.e., [o] and [u]) into neutral and bright vowels (i.e., [a], [i], [e]). The objective of these exercises (see Example 4) is to keep the low laryngeal position of the dark vowel in the bright and neutral vowels.<sup>43</sup> Rather than the larynx adjusting for the higher pitches, the inner mouth cavity, especially through the arching of the soft palate, should grow larger without pushing more air and by using a small mouth position. The expansion of the space should therefore be an inner rather than outer phenomenon.

Once these concepts were ingrained, Zanten moved the singer onto exercises that require more flexibility (see Example 5); however, it is imperative that the singer execute these exercises with proper vowel shapes that include a low larynx and raised palate, along with clearly articulated consonants that do not disrupt these shapes.<sup>44</sup>

Among the exercises suggested for the second year of study, Zanten made interesting use of the hum function and its relationship to vowels. Zanten praised the ability of the hum to help singers feel the “sensations of resonance in the upper jaw,” which she called “a roofing sensation.”<sup>45</sup> In these exercises, encouraged by the use of the [ö] vowel, singers are instructed to feel the same low laryngeal position on the vowel as they do on the

**11. Die Triole** ist genau auf demselben Vokal weiterklingen zu lassen, ohne daß nach dem Ansatz Luft angedrängt wird.

*wi - wa - wi    wo - wa - wo    wu - wa - wu    wü - we - wü*  
*we - wö - we    wö - wò - wö    wò - wu - wò - wu*  
*wi - wa - wi    wo - wa - wo    wu - wo - wu    wü - we - wü*  
*we - wö - we    wö - wò - wö    wò - wu - wò - wu.*

Auch mit anderen Konsonanten zu üben.

Example 5.

**a. Für Alt.**

*singen, summen, singen, singen..... u. s. w.*  
*mò - hm - ò    jö - ö - ö    mò - hm - ò    jö - ö - ö*  
*mò - hm - ò    jö - ö - ö    mò - hm - ò    jö - ö - ö    mò - hm - ò*  
*jö - ö - ö    mò - hm - ò    jö - ö - ö    mò - hm - ò    jö - ö - ö.*

Example 6.

hum (see Example 6).<sup>46</sup> The larynx should not rise when moving between the sounds; the shape of the oral cavity, though not locked in place, remains consistent.<sup>47</sup>

As expected, the exercises presented for the second and third year of study require more flexibility in both breath and voice. For instance, as seen in Example 7, the singer is required to keep the larynx in a low, stable position and to feel the gentle roll of the inspiratory muscles, particularly on the ascent as the soft palate

arches.<sup>48</sup> The singer is also asked to not collapse the palate on the descent.

In addition to these requirements in Example 8, the singer is allowed only quick breaths, which lessens the likelihood of taking in and using too much air.<sup>49</sup> Zanten instructed that the breath should be like a drop one hardly hears.

In the second and third years of study, Zanten also suggested several exercises that employ sustained tones,

37. Appoggioübung auf allen Tönen der Tonleiter (siehe Appoggio, Kap.VI. S.54).



Example 7.

38. Übung des Mezzo respiro innerhalb der Tonleiter.

Es soll nur wie ein Absetzen klingen, so daß man kaum hört, daß geatmet wird.



Example 8.



Example 9.

such as those found in Examples 9 and 10. Example 9 teaches what Zanten called “the art of the sound that lies between the tones” by first singing a legato third, and then a third with a portamento, with the goal of keeping the quality of the sound consistent by not impeding on the shape of the oral cavity.<sup>50</sup>

Example 10 exhibits a very effective way of teaching a singer how to execute crescendos and decrescendos.<sup>51</sup> As Zanten instructed (the original German text can be seen in the example), the singer first uses a succession of light and dark vowels to encourage the oral cavity to become larger. As this enlargement occurs, the singer will feel

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in two systems. The first system contains the first line of the melody, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. A slur covers the next four notes: G4, F#4, E4, and D4. The second system contains the second line of the melody, starting with a quarter note C5, followed by a quarter note B4, and then a quarter note A4. A slur covers the next four notes: G4, F#4, E4, and D4. The melody concludes with a quarter note C5. The lyrics 'The Rose Tree' are written below the first system, and 'The Rose Tree' is written below the second system. The tempo marking 'ritard.' is placed above the second system.

\* Bis hierher in einem Atem und von hier an bis zum Schluß wieder in einem Atem.

### 64. Silbenwechsel auf einem Ton. Alt fängt eine Terz tiefer an.

**65. Der Schwellton (messa di voce)** ist (1.) durch die Aufeinanderfolge der hellen und dunklen Vokalgruppe in steigender Vergrößerung der Mundhöhle (siehe Fig. 31) zu üben; danach (2.) auf einem Vokal. Die Vergrößerung der Mundhöhle bedingt eine zunehmende Tiefatmung; so entwickelt sich der Schwellton mittels zweier Atemtypen und zunehmender Mundmuskelfraft (siehe Kap. VIII, Seite 85).

zunehmender Mundumschärft (siehe Kap. VIII, Seite 65).

1. *i-é-è-a a-è-é-i ü-u-ö-ò ò-ö-u-ü i-é-è-a a-è-é-i ü-u-ö-ò ò-ö-u-ü.*  
 2. *ä - ä ä - ä ö - ö ò - ö ä - ä ä - ä ö - ö ò - ö.*

## 66. Verbindung des gehaltenen Tones mit dem Schwellton.

*mp*

*p*

*f*

*p*

1. u - - - ò - - - u - - - ò - - -  
 2. e - - - a - - - e - - - a - - -  
 3. ö - - - è - - - ö - - - è - - -

u - - - ò - - - u - - - ò - - -  
 e - - - a - - - e - - - a - - -  
 ö - - - è - - - ö - - - è - - -

u - - - ò - - - u - - - ò - - -  
 e - - - a - - - e - - - a - - -  
 ö - - - è - - - ö - - - è - - -

U.S.W.

V. 1029

**Example 10.**

the breath deeper in the body. This exercise, therefore, simultaneously encourages the soft palate to rise, insists that the larynx remains low, encourages a deeper muscle connection to the breath, and changes dynamics.

Cornelia van Zanten was clearly one of the great innovators of her time in the training of classical singers. Her prolific writings were an impressive feat that show her absolute dedication to the teaching and survival of

bel canto singing. Her innate inquisitiveness and desire for excellence not only served her own dynamic singing, but added to her reputation as a teacher with a method that addressed different voice types with exercises that targeted deficiencies in both speaking and singing. These attributes, combined with her unrivalled understanding of the vocal apparatus and the lineage of classical vocal pedagogy, make *Bel Canto des Wortes* a landmark publication of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is a valuable resource for teachers, singers, and scholars alike who seek to promote the art of bel canto and to understand it in a more profound way.

## NOTES

1. Cornelia van Zanten, *Bel Canto des Wortes* (Berlin: Chr. Friedrich Vieweg G.m.b.H, 1911), IX, 14. Original German text: *Das Wort soll nicht länger der Zerstörer des Bel-canto, sein, sondern sein Förderer . . . Sprechorgan und Gesangsorgan ist dasselbe, daher rächen sich alle Fehler des Sprechens beim Singen.*
2. For a detailed Neapolitan Bel Canto line that spans from 15th-century roots to modern teachers, please see Ewan Harbrecht Mitton, *Authentic Bel Canto: Vocal Training Vocalises* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2016), IX. Two of Porpora's most influential students were Francesco Lamperti (1813–1892) and Giovanni Ansoni (1744–1826). Among others, Lamperti taught his son, Giovanni Baptista Lamperti (1839–1910). Ansoni taught Manuel Garcia (1775–1832), who subsequently taught his son, Manuel Garcia II (1805–1906).
3. The first part of Garcia's treatise, *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, was published by Schott in 1840, followed by the second part in 1847. Both parts were published together in 1856. The most recent printing of the treatise is an English version by Legare Street Press in 2021.
4. Francesco Lamperti wrote many books about bel canto vocal pedagogy that were published by Ricordi. These include *Guido Teorico-Practica-Elementare per lo Studio del Canto* (1864) and *L'Arte del Canto* (1883). Collections of Lamperti's vocal exercises are published by Kalmus and Schirmer.
5. Giovanni Lamperti was the son of Francesco Lamperti. His treatise *The Technics of Bel Canto* was first published in 1905 by G. Schirmer.
6. Marchesi's vocal method, based on her studies with Manuel Garcia, was published in Paris in 1886. Her volume *Bel Canto: A Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method* was originally published in London by Enoch and Sons (publication date unknown) and reprinted by Dover in 1970. A collection of her exercises entitled *Ten Singing Lessons* was published in London by Harper and Bros. in 1898. She also published many articles about singing and vocal technique in *Etude Magazine* in the early twentieth century. For more information, see John Nix, "The Vocal Method of Mathilde Marchesi: A Modern Evaluation," *Journal of Singing* 52, no. 5 (May/June 1995): 3–8.
7. The author was made aware of Zanten's work through voice teacher David Jones. He received five pages of exercises from singer Jenny Nyland, who was a student of Jo Vincent. Vincent studied with Zanten in 1919 and passed the exercises down to her own students. The author would like to extend a warm thank you to David Jones for making her aware of Zanten's exercises.
8. A.W.J. de Jonge, "Zanten, Wijntje Cornelia van (1855–1946)," *Biographisch Woordenboek van Nederland* 4. (Den Haag 1994), latest update December 11, 2013, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn4/zanten>.
9. Ibid.
10. Aaron I. Cohen, *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers, Volume 2*, 2nd ed. (New York: Books and Music, 1987), 775.
11. Zanten's career consisted mainly of mezzo-soprano and contralto repertoire. Her most celebrated roles include Sesto in Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*, Azucena in Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, and Amneris in Verdi's *Aida*.
12. It should be noted that Zanten also composed a number of short songs during her time in Breslau, including *Mijn Moedertaal* (1881), *Wiegenlied*, and *Nebel*. The exact composition and publication date of the latter two songs is unknown.
13. Jonge, "Zanten," 1.
14. n.a., "Cornelie van Zanten Obituary," *The Musical Times* 87, no. 1236 (February 1846), 62–63.
15. Zanten's songs were written before she went to the United States and are published under the name "Cornelia van Zanten." Her pedagogical publications were written after her return to Europe and are published under the name "Cornelie van Zanten."
16. David Cummings, "Cornelie van Zanten," *Grove Music Online*, 2002. <https://doi-org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O002825>.
17. Jonge, "Zanten," 2.
18. Ibid.
19. In this 96-page book, Zanten outlines her concepts regarding registration and beauty of tone. She includes exercises that are to be spoken, as well as exercises that bring the concepts learned from these into a sung sound. All exercises encourage a low tongue root, low larynx, and high soft palate that

are completely flexible and independent of one another. All of these concepts are also promoted and expanded upon in her 1911 treatise *Bel Canto des Wortes*.

20. Cornelia van Zanten, *Leitfaden zum Kunstgesang* (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1903), 1–2. Original German text: *Es stand bei mir fest, daß der Sänger sich durch das Wort beherrschen läßt, bevor er genügend auf den Ton und den Zusammenhang der Intervalle geachtet hat. Um dies zu ändern, war nach meiner Überzeugung technische Fähigkeit das einzige Mittel, und sollte der Verband zwischen Wort und Ton nicht nur zu größerer Vollkommenheit gebracht werden, sondern das Wort nur seinen Ausdruck finden in einer vollkommenen Technik des Tones, oder mit andern Worten: Das Wort gehüllt in den Klang und der Klang fließend in der richtigen Form des Wortes.*
21. Zanten, *Leitfaden*, 14.
22. Although *Bel Canto des Wortes* was Zanten's most extensive publication, she continued to publish other books. The volume was followed by *Het stemmen der stem* (*The Voting of the Voice*) in 1918 and *Het stemwonder in den Mensch* (*The Voice Miracle in Man*) in 1925, both of which were published in Gravenhage. *Das wohltemperierte Wort als Grundlage für Kunst und Frieden* (*The Well-Tempered Word as Basis for Art and Peace*) was published in Zürich in 1930, followed by *Het juiste denken bij spreken en zingen* (*Correct Thinking when Speaking and Singing*), which was published in Amsterdam in 1936.
23. Zanten, *Bel Canto des Wortes*, VIII. Original German text: *Eine systematische Ausbildung der Mundhöhle durch die Sprache, wonach sich der Gesang oberhalb des Kehlkopfes abspielt.*
24. Zanten's understanding of the vocal apparatus was so profound that in 1923, she produced a film about its function.
25. Zanten, *Bel Canto des Wortes*, 89. See note 2 for more detailed information about the Neapolitan School lineage.
26. *Ibid.*, 93.
27. *Ibid.*, 95–96.
28. *Ibid.*, 95. Original German text: *An die Stelle der früheren Kehlkopf-kunst wird nun in diesem Buche die Mundraum-kunst gestellt.*
29. *Ibid.*, 99–115.
30. Zanten's concept of appoggio not only included a strong, pliable breathing apparatus, but a firm yet flexible arched soft palate. The palate was the appoggio for the "upper instrument," and the breathing apparatus for the "lower instrument."
31. Zanten, *Bel Canto des Wortes*, 132.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Zanten did not specify what specific muscles do during inspiration—only that the singer should suspend the body, particularly the abdominal muscles, in the position they find upon inhalation.
34. In this exercise, Zanten does not specify the action of specific muscle groups, such as the intercostal muscles and diaphragm. She uses the term "breathing apparatus."
35. *Ibid.*, 136. Original German text: *Es sollen die rhythmischen Silben-Übungen so ausgeführt werden, dass der Oberkiefer die Vokale kuppelartig auffängt.*
36. *Ibid.*, 143.
37. *Ibid.* Original German text: *Nach der Zungenspitze hin zu sprechen, während die Stütze des ie im Oberkiefer beibehalten wird.*
38. *Ibid.*, 142.
39. *Ibid.*, 181.
40. In 1990, the author's teacher, David Jones, studied with Janny Nyland. Nyland was a student of Jo Vincent, who was a student of Cornelia van Zanten. Jones was introduced to Zanten's exercises that utilized the ü and ö vowels. According to Nyland, Zanten believed these vowels encouraged the larynx to release into a lower position. When switching from these to other vowels, the singer was to retain the same pharyngeal shape, which thereby aided in balancing registers and maximizing resonance. Zanten also asserted that when a singer retained the pharyngeal shape one achieved with the ö in his/her [a] and [o] vowels, the larynx was more stable and resonance was maximized.
41. *Ibid.*, 181. Although Zanten believed that the diaphragm released downward, science has since proved that the diaphragm contracts downward, and is coupled with the action of the external intercostal muscles; the extent of this downward movement is dependent upon the abdominal wall releasing while the diaphragm contracts. Original German text: *Beim Steigen des Tones dehnt sich das Zwerchfell nach unten hin aus. Beim Fallen des Tones festigt sich die Einstellung in steigender Richtung dem Gammen zu, während das Zwerchfell sich ruhig verhält.*
42. Zanten, *Bel Canto des Wortes*, 183.
43. *Ibid.*, 182.
44. *Ibid.*, 186.
45. *Ibid.*, 190.
46. *Ibid.*
47. According to Janny Nyland, Zanten's humming exercises were designed to teach the vocal cords to change pitch by stretching for higher pitches and shortening for lower pitches without abrupt and significant adjustment of the laryngeal muscles. While humming, the jaw was to be released back



and down and the singer was to avoid narrowing or squeezing in the area of the soft palate.

48. Ibid., 194.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 197.

51. Ibid., 205.

Saskatchewan native **Bonnie Cutsforth-Huber** is an active performer in oratorio, cantata, and opera. As a concert artist, she has performed in prestigious venues across the world, including New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, Cemal Reşit Rey Concert Hall in Istanbul, Turkey, Strasbourg Cathedral, and Vienna's St. Stephen's Cathedral. Highlights include Bach's *St. John Passion*, Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*,

Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Her operatic credits include Principessa in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, Dalila in Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, Marcellina in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Carmen in Bizet's *Carmen*, Judith in Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*, Isabella in Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, and Zita in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. She has several world premieres to her credit, including works by Robert S. Cohen, Martha Hill Duncan, and Timothy Melbinger.

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