

# Rethinking the Italian Twenty-Four Songs and Arias: Exploring Classical Vocal Literature Selection Through the Lens of Bel Canto Technique

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The *Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* is perhaps the most recognized collection of Baroque piano-vocal music in the world. Voice teachers often assume these songs are appropriate for beginning singers. This article reevaluates this collection through the lens of *bel canto* training by outlining the congruent fundamental principles of some of the most important voice pedagogues of the *bel canto* era, reordering the twenty-four songs to match the pedagogic progression outlined in historical writings, and offering a supplemental list of twenty-four additional Italian pieces and etudes that exemplify *bel canto* training practices.

THE PUBLICATION *TWENTY-FOUR ITALIAN SONGS AND Arias of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* is perhaps the most well-recognized collection of Baroque piano-vocal music in the world.<sup>1</sup> It was originally compiled and arranged by Alessandro Parisotti (1853–1913) in the late nineteenth century as *Arie Antiche*, and has become a staple in the classical canon for beginning classical singers.<sup>2</sup> In the recent past, famed singers like mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli and countertenor Philippe Jaroussky have recorded some of these pieces with historic Baroque style in mind.<sup>3</sup> For many, these singers exemplify how truly beautiful these selections can be when performed by highly skilled vocalists who understand the style and technical skill of Baroque vocal performance.

Singer, voice teacher, and editor John Glenn Paton crafted a new edition in 1991 proposed to be more historically accurate; although some dispute this interpretation, this edition sought to correct the many stylistically romantic liberties found in the Parisotti arrangements.<sup>4</sup> Thus, one might believe that the Paton arrangements would be favored in current practice; still, many voice teachers return to the Parisotti collection, perhaps because of their accessibility, or perhaps due to familiarity, ease, or popularity. Whatever the reason, voice teachers often further assume that these arrangements are suitable for beginning singers, but the authors of this article propose reconsideration of this suitability.

One of the foremost conventions of the Baroque vocal style is to “color the voice ‘early Baroque’ to match instrumental colors and timbres” which the

authors believe is better suited for advanced singers.<sup>5</sup> One might ask, is it offensive to present-day Baroque singing artists to assume that these pieces, when sung correctly, are easy or suited for a beginning singer? Did Parisotti intend for voice teachers to use them as beginning vocal literature? Might it be more fitting for a beginning classical singer to begin with pieces from a time when instrumentalists were asked to imitate vocalists, and not vice versa?

To help answer some of these questions, this article outlines the congruent fundamental principles of the bel canto era pedagogues, re-orders the twenty-four Parisotti arrangements to match the pedagogic progression outlined in historical writings and treatises and offers a supplemental list of twenty-four additional Italian pieces and Vaccai etudes that exemplify bel canto training practices.

### CONGRUENT PRINCIPLES AMONG BEL CANTO PEDAGOGUES

Manuel Garcia II (1805–1906) wrote in his introduction to *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, “Voices in their natural states are nearly always unpolished, unequal, unsteady, even tremulous, and, finally, heavy and of short range; only study, but a well-informed and persistent study, can make firm the intonation, purify the timbres, perfect the intensity and the elasticity of the tone.”<sup>6</sup> In the same era, G.B. Lamperti lamented, “It is a pity that young singers, who are studying voice, immediately sing songs and arias, literally before they know how to open their mouths, instead of earnestly studying the real support of the voice (the mechanism of breath) in order to develop the voice and to make it smooth and flexible.”<sup>7</sup>

One could readily assume through these similar statements that Manuel Garcia II and G.B. Lamperti were most often in agreement regarding voice pedagogy and instruction. However, there were major disparities between the beliefs of these two influential pedagogues. It is outside the scope of this article to expand this further for, in spite of their passionate disagreements, the pedagogues of this era share the fundamental techniques and methodologies necessary to master the repertoire of the bel canto era properly. The authors of this article have highlighted the qualities held in common between

the major pedagogues of the era, including elements of alignment, inspiration, vowel purity, legato, and pedagogic progression from exercises to repertoire.

### THE QUALITIES OF BEL CANTO STYLE

The overall vocal qualities associated with the bel canto singing style must be enumerated to better understand the methodology. This style features a smooth vocalization approach. According to Garcia II, “To sing legato is to pass from one tone to another clearly, suddenly, spontaneously, without interrupting the flow of sound, or allowing it to slur through any intermediate tones.”<sup>8</sup> Uniformity of tone should be present throughout all vocal registers. A byproduct of this technique is a voice capable of executing complex embellishments. The voice displays a clarity and lightness in tone while maintaining a resonance structure that highlights projection, especially in the upper register. The implementation of this technique also prevents singers from adding too much weight and darkness, vocal qualities which can be detrimental to developing voices.

As the nineteenth century progressed and romanticism accented high-drama and heavier voices, many pedagogues, including Francesco Lamperti, believed that the light and resonant sound of bel canto was abandoned for greater volume and fuller sound in upper registers. Francesco’s son, G.B. Lamperti, maintained that “By adhering to traditional voice training the singer could adapt to any style. It is wrong to believe that after studying the Italian method of singing (the one and only true method of good singing) it is impossible to interpret dramatic music.”<sup>9</sup>

### Posture

Assuming truth can be found in G.B. Lamperti’s argument that good vocal training begets healthy singing regardless of style, this article now turns to the congruent principles of the bel canto pedagogues. The importance of posture and alignment was well-established by the first golden age of *bel canto*, particularly noted by Pier Francesco Tosi in 1723 and Mancini in 1774. They recommended use of “the robust chest so as not to stiffen the muscles of the throat.”<sup>10</sup>

This idea was further described in the writings of Garcia II, Mathilde Marchesi, and Lamperti—empha-

sizing relaxation of neck musculature and a stabilized upper-thoracic cavity prepared to receive air during inspiration. Francesco Lamperti wrote, “How should the pupil stand while singing? He should hold himself erect, with the chest expanded and the shoulders easy.”<sup>11</sup> G.B. Lamperti focused both on chest and neck relaxation, saying, “Take care, above all, that the muscles of neck and throat are not unnecessarily tense,” and “No jumping of the throat, nor rigidity of neck muscles.”<sup>12</sup>

According to pedagogue Berton Coffin, Mathilde Marchesi’s first basic principle was that, “The attitude of the singer should be natural and as easy as possible with the body held erect.”<sup>13</sup> Marchesi also advocated for a relaxed neck to avoid laryngeal tension. Garcia II advocated against *le coup de la poitrine*, “the blow of the chest,” because of the excess motion of the chest wall.<sup>14</sup> Many studies in modern voice science support the relaxation of the *sternocleidomastoid*, *scalene*, and *splenius capitis* musculatures as a preventative therapeutic practice to avoid muscle tension dysphonia and hyperadduction.<sup>15</sup>

## Respiration

Moving from alignment to inspiration, the principle of noiseless inhalation was considered imperative to the singing methods promoted by these pedagogues. The origin of silent inhalation is noted in the work of Nicola Porpora (as well as Bovicelli and Garaudé) from the first golden age of *bel canto*, who trained Farinelli, the most famous castrato of his time.<sup>16</sup>

Pedagogue Richard Miller proposed that Farinelli’s outstanding breath control and silent, imperceptible renewal of breath are traditionally attributed to these exercises.<sup>17</sup> Later pedagogues continued this work both in treatises and practice. The Lampertis believed in a quiet breath, with G.B. Lamperti writing, “Draw breath deeply, but quietly. We breathe from the lungs, but not with the lungs.”<sup>18</sup> Garcia II agreed, writing:

In neither case should the passage of the air through the throat be accompanied by any noise, under pain of spoiling the song’s effect and making the throat dry and stiff. . . . Hold the chest erect, the shoulders back without stiffness, and the chest free. Lower the diaphragm without jerking, raise the chest by a slow and regular movement, and set the hollow of the stomach. From the

moment when you begin these two movements the lungs will dilate until they are filled with air.<sup>19</sup>

Garcia advised in his initial rules, “Never to commence singing in a hurry, always to take breath slowly and without noise, which would otherwise be unpleasant to those who listen and injurious to the singer.”<sup>20</sup> Speech pathologists also advocate for a silent breath as a therapeutic approach to prevent vocal fatigue. An audible breath is often a sign of hyperadduction, a known cause for other vocal pathologies, including vocal fold nodules.<sup>21</sup>

## Vowels

Another principle receiving resounding approval is the insistence of Italianate vowels in the teaching of classical singing. Italianate vowels are free from diphthongs and, as exemplified in the quotes below, intelligible and clearly identified. Bel canto-era pedagogues (including Tosi, G.B. Lamperti, and Francesco Lamperti) emphatically affirmed the introduction of vocalises and etudes using intelligible vowels. Tosi wrote, “The teacher should have his students clearly pronounce all vowels so that they are heard for what they are.”<sup>22</sup> G.B. Lamperti continued, “Language and Song rarely go hand in hand. The Italian language is the chief exception to this rule . . . Most Italians naturally pronounce the open vowel “a” (ah) correctly, whereas other nationalities have to make a special study of it.”<sup>23</sup>

Francesco Lamperti further elaborated on the necessity of vowel clarity: “I would recommend him to pay attention to the purity of vowels in order to avoid singing *Fua* for *Fa*, or *Lor* for *La*, and to begin consonant and vowel together; he would do well also to study the vowels *A, E, I, O, U*, either alone or preceded by a consonant.”<sup>24</sup> Manuel Garcia the Senior (1775–1832) preceded his exercises with a recommendation: that all exercises were to be sung distinctly and without staccato first on [a], [e], and [i] before proceeding to [o] and [u] without aspiration or consonant.<sup>25</sup> Many great contemporary vocal pedagogues continue to recommend beginning exercises and pieces on vowels before adding text.

The next major concept the bel canto era pedagogues shared was the need for legato, beginning in exercises before continuing into repertoire. The pedagogues of this era linked a noiseless inhalation and breath manage-

Example 1. Vaccai

ment with the mastery of legato singing. G.B. Lamperti explained, “Once one becomes master of the organs of breathing, one can begin the study of legato.”<sup>26</sup> Francesco Lamperti asserted, “Why the Legato in preference to the others? Because Legato is the predominating quality, not only of all agility, but of good singing in general; so the singer would do well not to study the others until he shall have mastered the art of singing Legato,” and “He who cannot sing Legato cannot sing well.”<sup>27</sup>

The art of singing legato was featured in Garcia II’s last rule before he enumerated his 340 exercises, including two figures detailing the correct and incorrect ways to use *portamento* in Italian legato. The Italian language is uniquely suited to the proper execution of legato, in part, because it contains unaspirated stops like [p], [k], and [t] which allow the vocal folds to maintain oscillation.<sup>28</sup>

In a comparison of English, German and Italian by linguist William Styler, aspirated stops (or as some call them, “plosive stops” in German and English), have a delayed voice onset time of one hundred milliseconds compared to Italian which has zero (or close to it).<sup>29</sup> For singers, this means that more time is spent singing vowels in Italian than in English and German, therefore one can conclude that a vowel to vowel approach, associated with legato, is easier to accomplish in the Italian language.

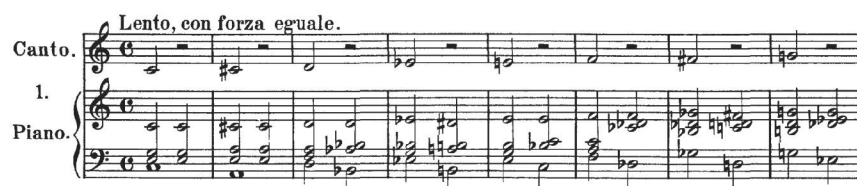
The last common principle to be discussed is that of the natural, pedagogical progression from simple exercises to more difficult ones. The practice of increasing difficulty as a student progresses was mentioned by many bel canto pedagogues, including Tosi, who first suggested, “Once the student, through this practice, shows a marked increase in his ability, the teacher should then make him acquainted with the first ornaments of the art.”<sup>30</sup>

Certain exercises in *The Practical Method of Italian Singing* by Nicola Vaccai and *Opus 21* by Mathilde Marchesi exemplify these concepts in practice.<sup>31</sup> In Vaccai’s “Manca sollecita,” (see Example 1), the melody is exclusively in stepwise motion, both ascending and descending. His second exercise, “Semplicetta Tortorella” contains both thirds and steps, providing an increase in difficulty and complexity musically.

In Marchesi’s method, according to Coffin, she steadfastly maintained that “the method of study was based on the principle that a singer can think of only one thing at a time.”<sup>32</sup> Her first exercise (see Example 2) exclusively focuses the student’s attention to breath and onset to a single note and vowel in a chromatic scalar pattern with rests between each note.

Marchesi’s second exercise (seen in Example 3) proceeds onto a two note portamento, allowing the student





Example 2. Marchesi

M. Marchesi — The Art of Singing — Book 1, Opus 21

Example 3. Marchesi

to carry the voice upward before resting and executing the same idiom at a new pitch level on the same vowel.

Although these teaching principles are not exclusive to the *Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias*, they are presumptively introduced when a pupil is learning their first piece.

### THE TWENTY-FOUR PARISOTTI ARRANGEMENTS RE-IMAGINED

Tosi, in his *Introduction to the Art of Singing*, observed that the teacher:

... should obtain good practice exercises in various styles, which proceed gradually from the easy to the difficult, in accordance with the increasing ability of the student. But

even the more difficult exercises should always be natural and tasteful in order to stimulate the student to study with pleasure and learn without boredom.<sup>33</sup>

Established earlier in this article, the traditional Italian method observed the progression from simple exercises to difficult ones before studying art song or vocal concert works. This methodology was practiced by Arrigo Pola, Pavarotti's first teacher, who "adhered to the old-style craft of not teaching his pupils to sing particular repertoires, but rather of teaching them the art of good singing."<sup>34</sup> Pavarotti's foundational training was dedicated solely to exercises and skills without repertoire. He became widely regarded as one of the greatest tenors of the twentieth century.

Most US academic institutions demand strict repertoire requirements for the training of singers in the classical and musical theater traditions. If teachers from these institutions wish to practice bel canto techniques, how do they resolve the conflict between academic expectations and traditional bel canto practices? Many who wish to instill these practices and the congruent principles of bel canto pedagogues look to the etudes of Vaccai and Marchesi to begin their studies. Both of these resources follow the progressive methodology (easy too hard).

The authors of this article have created a system and a repertoire list to assist voice teachers in using bel canto etudes and songs in a gradual developmental fashion. These lists break repertoire into four groups that allow the voice teacher to instill bel canto principles and follow the progressive nature of the Vaccai and Marchesi exercises:

- I. Slow Tempo, Legato, Limited Range, Short Phrases, Stepwise motion, No Ornamentation.
- II. Slow-medium Tempo, Legato, Expanded Range, Longer Phrases, Larger Intervals, and Limited Ornamentation.
- III. Varied Tempi, Expanded Range, Long Phrases, Larger Intervals, and Florid Passages free from a set Tempo.
- IV. Varied Tempi, Expanded Range, Long Phrases, Large Leaps and Intervals, and Florid Passages that are in a strict tempo.

The Parisotti arrangements, when viewed with this scope, clearly lack pieces congruent with the aforementioned bel canto pedagogic progression for beginning singers. Consider the pieces “Amarilli mia bella,” and “Se tu m’ami,” seen in Examples 4 and 5. Each of these pieces begins with a simplistic melody containing mostly stepwise motion and small intervals.

## THE RE-ORDERED TWENTY-FOUR ITALIAN SONGS AND ARIAS

- Group I.

  1. O cessate di piagarmi

Group II.

  1. Lasciatemi morire
  2. Caro mio ben
  3. Come raggio di sol\*
  4. Tu lo sai
  5. Sebben, crudele
  6. Vergin tutto amor\*

Group III.

  1. Che fiero costume\*
  2. O del mio dolce ardor
  3. Non posso disperar
  4. Se Florindo è fedele

Group IV.

  5. Per la gloria d'adorarvi
  6. Nel cor più non mi sento
  7. Amarilli, mia bella

Group IV.

  1. Nina
  2. Già il sole dal Gange
  3. Se tu m'ami
  4. Danza, danza,  
fanciulla gentile
  5. Alma del core
  6. Il mio bel foco\*
  7. Pur dicesti, o bocco bella
  8. Pietà, Signore
  9. Le violette
  10. Vittoria\*

\*The authors recommend that the instructor delay the instruction of these pieces based on fluidity of Italian text or linguistic ability.

Moderato affettuoso  $\text{♩} = 66$

Voice

*p*

A - ma - ril - li, mia bel - la, non ere - di, o del mio  
A - ma - ril - li, my fair one, Canst thou thine heart to

Piano

*p* *dolcissimo e legato sempre*

*più f*

cor dol - - ce de - si - o, d'es - - ser tu  
doubt e'er sur - ren - der, Doubt of my love,

**Example 4.** *Amarilli, mia bella.*<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, these simplistic opening passages are not indicative of the more difficult instrumental idioms found in subsequent passages within the same arrangements, as shown in Examples 6 and 7.

While some of the Parisotti arrangements appear simplistic, only *O cessate di piagarmi* fits the beginning criteria of a pedagogic progression parallel to the exer-

Andantino ♩ = 58

Voice

Piano

*mf*

*p*

Se tu  
If thou

*cresc.* *rit.*

m'a - mi, se tu so - spi - ri Sol per me, gen - til - pa - stor,  
lov'st me, and sigh - est ev - er But for me, O gen - tle - swain,

*cresc.* *rit.*

Example 5. Se tu m'ami.<sup>36</sup>

Voice

Piano

*assai legato*

*rit.*

*colla voce*

ril - li - è il mio a - mo - re.  
ril - li, my be - lov - ed!"

Example 6. Amarilli, mia bella.<sup>37</sup>

*cresc.*

Voice

Piano

*cresc.*

Fa - cil - men - te a t'in - gan - nar. Fa - cil - men - te a t'in - gan - nar.  
Prone thy - sens - es - to be - guile, prone thy - sens - es - to be - guile.

Example 7. Se tu m'ami.<sup>38</sup>

cises of Vaccai, Marchesi, Manuel Garcia II, and the Lamperti school. As there are many disparities between the Parisotti arrangements and pedagogical teachings, the authors of this article question whether voice teachers should habitually use these arrangements for the developing singer. If voice teachers choose to select these songs as beginning literature, we recommend the aforementioned listing as a guide.

## A NEW TWENTY-FOUR ITALIAN SONGS AND ARIETTE OF THE BEL CANTO ERA

The authors propose repertoire different from that collected in the standard *Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias* that better addresses both the teachings of the bel canto pedagogues and the developing skills of a beginning singer. The authors have gathered these pieces from numerous sources and compiled them in an order

representing two groups organized by ascending difficulty. A thorough study of these pieces following the pedagogic progression from beginning to advanced will accelerate a student's mastery of legato singing and best prepare them for legato technique in singing florid passages from any era. The authors recommend the following list broken into two groups that emphasize the aforementioned principles in order of ascending difficulty:

**1) Group 1 pieces: Slow Tempo, Legato, Limited Range, Short Phrases, Stepwise Motion, No Ornamentation**

1. Manca sollecita (Vaccai #1)
2. Semplicetta Tortorella (Vaccai #2)
3. Sento nel core (Donaudy)
4. L'ora è tarda (Tosti)
5. Sorge il sol! Che fai tu? (Donaudy)
6. Quando ti rivedrò (Donaudy)
7. Dolente immagine di Fille mia (Bellini)
8. Malinconia, Ninfa gentile (Bellini)

\*The tessitura for individual voice parts must be considered to best suit the needs of each student. The authors recommend transposition as a solution for tessitura concerns.

**2) Group 2 pieces: Slow-Medium Tempo, Legato, Expanded Range, Longer Phrases, Larger Intervals, Limited Ornamentation**

1. E Filli m'ha detto... (Donaudy)
2. Il giglio e la rosa (Donizetti)
3. 'A Vucchella (Tosti)
4. Malìa (Tosti)
5. L'ultimo bacio (Tosti)
6. In van preghi (Donaudy)
7. Date abbiento al mio dolore (Donaudy)
8. Perduta ho la speranza (Donaudy)
9. Me voglio fa' 'na casa (Donizetti)
10. Amore e morte - (Donizetti)
11. Sull'onda cheta e bruna (Donizetti)

Example 8.

12. Luoghi sereni e cari (Donaudy)
13. Vaga luna che inargenti (Bellini)
14. La conocchia (Donizetti)
15. Per pietà bell'idol mio (Bellini)
16. Bella Nice, che d'amore (Bellini)

The authors have created a database of these selections in a variety of keys recommended by voice type.<sup>39</sup> They have annotated the scores with IPA, a literal translation, and editorial markings that coincide with bel canto pedagogy. The database offers recitation of the text by an Italian diction specialist and supplemental pedagogic materials. The following excerpts are representative of some of the information found in the database.

**Songs from Groups I and II**

**L'ora è tarda (Group I)**

Francesco Paolo Tosti (1846–1916) was a composer and voice teacher in Italy and England who wrote many pieces ideal for beginning singers. “L'ora è tarda” is a two-page song with a melody consisting of stepwise motion and small leaps (see Example 8 here; also found



in the anthology *Francesco Paolo Tosti: 30 Songs*<sup>40</sup>). Each strophe features three short phrases, ideal for students working on consistent breath management, consistent airflow, and legato.

The entirety of this piece lies below the passaggio of most voice types, making it ideal for students focusing

primarily on their tone quality. Also, the Italian language within this piece is largely accessible and devoid of many challenging elements for native English speakers. The dynamic markings of crescendo throughout the phrases also encourages students to avoid disconnecting between notes.

**High Key: E Major Range: E<sub>3</sub>-F-sharp<sub>4</sub> Low Key: C major Range: C<sub>3</sub>-D<sub>4</sub>**

**Text**

L'ora è tarda: deserto il mar si frange,  
E il gregge a 'l pian calò:  
Una tristezza grave in cor mi piange,  
E sovra il lito io sto.  
Io mi struggo d'amore e di desío,  
Ma tu non pensi a me:  
Tu sei partito senza dirmi addio:  
Perché, dimmi, perché?

**Translation**

The hour is late; the waves break on the empty shore,  
And the flocks have gone to the plain:  
There is great sadness in my heart,  
As I stand on the shore.  
I struggle with love and desire,  
But you do not think of me:  
You have gone without saying goodbye:  
Why? Tell me, why?

**Malia (Group I)**

“Malia,” also composed by Tosti, features stepwise melodic motion and a comfortable tessitura. The short phrase lengths allow students to maintain an efficient, dynamic breath to coordinate the voice throughout the four stanzas of this two-verse strophic piece. Due to the

simplistic melody and short phrase lengths the Italian language can become a major point of emphasis. This practice allows students to focus on their single and double consonants and the purity of the Italian vowels within the context of a legato line. This piece is found in *Francesco Paolo Tosti: 30 Songs*.<sup>41</sup>

**High Key: F major Range: F<sub>3</sub>-F<sub>4</sub> Low Key: E-flat Range: E-flat<sub>3</sub>-E-flat<sub>4</sub>**

**Text**

Cosa c'era ne 'l fior che m'hai dato?  
Forse un filtro, un arcano poter?  
Nel toccarlo, il mio core ha tremato,  
M'ha l'olezzo turbato il pensier.  
Ne le vaghe movenze, che ci hai?  
Un incanto vien forse con te?  
Freme l'aria per dove tu vai,  
Spunta un fiore ove passa 'l tuo piè!  
Io non chiedo qual plaga beata  
Fino adesso soggiorno ti fu:  
Non ti chiedo se Ninfa, se Fata,  
Se una bionda parvenza sei tu!  
Ma che c'è nel tuo sguardo fatale?  
Cosa ci hai nel tuo magico dir?  
Se mi guardi, un'ebbrezza m'assale,  
Se mi parli, mi sento morir!

**Translation**

What was in the flower you gave me?  
Was it a philter, a magical power?  
When I touched it, my heart trembled;  
Its perfume clouded my senses.  
What is it you have in the lovely way you move?  
Do you bring some enchantment with you?  
The air trembles where you pass,  
Flowers spring forth at your feet!  
I do not ask what blessed place  
Was once your home:  
I do not ask if you are a nymph, a fairy,  
A blond apparition!  
But what is it your fateful glance?  
What is it you have in your magical words?  
If you look at me, rapture takes hold of me:  
If you speak to me, I feel I may die!

## Il giglio e la rosa (Group II)

Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848) was a composer of Italian opera and art song whose melodic lines demonstrate the repertoire of the bel canto era's sophistication and simplicity. "Il giglio e la rosa" features a stepwise melodic motion inside an octave range. The short phrase lengths encourage students to utilize the fullness of their breath

management. The phrases with long note values on higher notes encourage them to sing fully supported throughout the phrase, even when the notes descend as the phrase ends. This two-verse strophic piece also features an easy piano accompaniment that makes it ideal for teachers who may need to accompany their students. "Il giglio e la rosa" is available in *Gaetano Donizetti: 20 Songs*.<sup>42</sup>

**High key: B-flat Major Range: F<sub>3</sub>-F<sub>4</sub> Low key: G major Range: D<sub>3</sub>-D<sub>4</sub>**

### Text

Non sdegnar, vezzosa Irene,  
Questo giglio e questa rosa,  
Che l'aurora rugiadosa  
Di sue stille inumidi.  
L'uno è fior sacro ad Imene,  
L'altro piacque al dio bendato:  
Ambo nacquero in un prato,  
Ed un rivo ambo nudrì.  
L'uno è figlio del pudore,  
A beltade è l'altro caro,  
Ed olezzano del paro  
Ed han regno in ogni cor.  
L'un tu vinci nel candore  
Del tuo seno e del tuo volto,  
Ogni pregio all'altro è tolto  
Dal tuo labbro incantator.

### Translation

Do not scorn, lovely Irene,  
This lily and this rose,  
that the dawn rosy  
with its dewdrops moistened.  
The one is flower sacred to Hymen  
the other pleases to the god blindfolded:  
Both were born in one meadow,  
and one river nourished them both.  
The one is the son of modesty,  
to beauty is the other dear,  
and they are fragrant of equally  
And have rule in every heart.  
The one you defeat in the whiteness  
of your bosom and of your face;  
every prize from the other is taken away  
By your lips enchanting.

## Vaga luna, che inargenti (Group II) Pauline Viardot-Garcia Adaptation

"Vaga luna, che inargenti" by Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835) and arranged by Viardot-Garcia combines a legato vocal melody with a higher tessitura that makes it a challenge for students who are working on maintaining excellent voice-breath coordination through the passaggio. This two-verse strophic piece has a full four-bar interlude in between the verses that allows students to reset their breathing structure after the moderately high

tessitura tests their ability to release tension and maintain adequate coordination of the breath.

This piece has far fewer opportunities for students to catch relaxed breaths and is less forgiving of mistakes. Although it sits below the passaggio, it rises sufficiently to create issues for inexperienced singers and can lead to tension problems. For this reason, "Vaga luna, che inargenti" is located at the end of group II. This piece is available in the Bellini anthology: *Canzoni per voce e pianoforte*.<sup>43</sup>

**High Key: C major Range: E<sub>3</sub>-G<sub>4</sub> Low Key: A-flat major Range: C<sub>3</sub>-E-flat<sub>4</sub>**

### Text

Vaga luna, che inargenti  
Queste rive e questi fiori  
Ed ispiri agli elementi  
Il linguaggio dell'amor;  
Testimonio or sei tu sola

### Translation

Pretty moon, who silvers  
These rivers and these flowers  
and inspires the elements to  
the language of love.  
You alone are now witness

Del mio fervido desir,  
Ed a lei che m'innamora  
Conta i palpiti e i sospir.  
Dille pur che lontananza  
Il mio duol non può lenir,  
Che se nutro una speranza,  
Ella è sol, sì, nell'avvenir.  
Dille pur che giorno e sera  
Conto l'ore del dolor,  
Che una speme lusinghiera  
Mi conforta nell'amor.

To my fervent desire,  
and to her with whom I am in love  
Recount the heartbeats and sighs.  
Tell her also that distance  
cannot assuage my sorrow,  
that if I nourish one hope,  
It is only, yes, for the future.  
Tell her also that day and night  
I count the hours of sorrow,  
that a promising hope  
Comforts me in love.

The pedagogical principles of the bel canto era composers have always been integral to the advancement of healthy singing both in the singing treatises and manuals of the nineteenth century and continuing in articles, voice science, and publications today. The manuals of both Garcias, Marchesi, Vaccai, and the Lampertis' include a series of required skills needed to become a master of the bel canto technique.

Current research in voice science and voice pedagogy has only fortified the arguments of these ancestors of voice pedagogy. The authors of this article would therefore ask, how can we best serve our young university students in the formative years of their classical music education?

The *Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias* are a staple of the modern voice teacher as some of the most recognizable pieces of Italian Art Song Literature. What they possess in familiarity, however, they lack in organization according to the skills needed to master the art of singing. The authors of this article believe that Baroque instrumental idioms do not realistically allow beginning students to sing most efficiently and healthily.

We suggest that there is a way to better serve young university students through evidence-based repertoire selection. By scaffolding skills in ascending difficulty through repertoire rather than familiarity, teachers can address the fundamentals of legato singing more effectively. In this manner, students will spend the vast majority of their time performing music that allows them to be successful and stylistically accurate in the vocal idiom, rather than instrumental ones.

In recent years, several additional publications have appeared, breathing new life into these well-known standards of the repertoire. For example, Paton's *Twenty-Six*

*Italian Songs and Arias* attempted to provide more faithful accompaniment to these Baroque pieces by largely removing the romantic era accompaniments which allowed the vocal line to be more apparent throughout these selections.<sup>44</sup> A further publication entitled *28 Italian Songs and Arias of the 17th and 18th Centuries* was published in order to provide an additional three keys for these pieces, increasingly the readily available keys for students singing this repertoire.<sup>45</sup>

These editions have helped pave the way for a new publication, one from the bel canto era that can be used as a pedagogical tool to help students master the art of legato singing. These works are available through the Canciones Project's website.<sup>46</sup> By providing the music in appropriate keys for a wide variety of voices, pedagogical research, performance annotations, translations, and native speakers demonstrating the diction, these pieces will be approachable to teachers and students alike. The authors therefore suggest that in the twenty-first century when repertoire and knowledge is instantly available and at our fingertips, the creation and usage of anthologies of these bel canto pieces within collegiate studios will significantly impact the efficiency and magnitude of student learning.

## NOTES

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**John Seesholtz**, baritone, is the cofounder and executive director of the nonprofit organization The Canciones Project, a Professor in Residence at CEMTA University in San Lorenzo, Paraguay, and former Director of Vocal Pedagogy at the University of Colorado at Boulder. His most recent operatic performances include Tío Sarvaor (Manuel de Falla's *La Vida Breve*), Germont (*La Traviata*), Sharpless (*Madame Butterfly*), Alvaro (*Florencia en el Amazonas*), Iago (Verdi's *Otello*), Silvio (*Pagliacci*), Verdi's Falstaff as Ford, and his favorite role, Gianni Schicchi (title role). Some of his solo concert performances include Carmina Burana, Brahms's Requiem, the Five Mystical Songs, Sea Symphony, and Dona Nobis Pacem by Vaughan Williams. He has published multiple articles and curated music collections including "Hyperadduction: A Pedagogic Approach for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voice Instructor"; "The AIDS Quilt Songbook and Its Uncollected Works"; "The Origin of the Verdi Baritone"; and "The Lost Songs of the AIDS Quilt Songbook." In August 2024, he began traveling throughout Latin America researching, performing and lecturing at multiple institutions including Conservatorio de las Rosas (Mexico), Facultad de Bellas Artes (Mexico), Centro Evangélico Mennonita de Teología Ascunción (Paraguay) and Ateneo Paraguayo (Paraguay).

**Steve Groth**, baritone, is a classical vocalist, teacher, and collaborative pianist currently residing in the metro-Milwaukee area. Recent operatic credits include Ford (*Falstaff*), Taddeo (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), Dandini (*La Cenerentola*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Alfio (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), and Count Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*). Recent concert performances include *Cinq poèmes Baudelaire* (Debussy), *Chansons gaillardes* (Poulenc), *I said to Love* (Finzi), *Le bal masque* (Poulenc), *Il tramonto* (Respighi), and *Let Us Garlands Bring* (Finzi). He has been a semi-finalist in the SAS Vocal Competition and the Jensen Competition, received the William Vennard Award with the NATSAA young artist awards, and won the second place Kenneth King award in the Denver Lyric Opera Guild competition. Currently, he is curating a collection of bel canto hits with Art Song Colorado for future publication. An active member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, New York Finger Lakes Chapter, Steve Groth is a voice faculty member of La Musica Lirica and Eastern Regional NATS.



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