The Invention of the ‘Modern’ Voice: Changing Aesthetics of Vocal Registration in Italian Opera Singing 1870-1925.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract iii

List of Music Examples iii

List of Sound Excerpts vi

Note ix

Acknowledgements ix

### Chapter 1  Studying opera singing: approaches and methodology  1

I Framing an autoethnographic working hypothesis 4

II Sources 11

II.1 Vocal treatises 11

II.1.a Caveats on vocal treatises 14

II.1.b Rationale behind the selection of pedagogical writings 18

II.1.c Breathing techniques 21

II.2 Recordings 27

### Chapter 2  Operatic verismo  41

I Verismo opera: genuine operatic trend of ‘vogue’? 41

II Main elements of literary verismo 43

III Late nineteenth-century criticism of verismo 48

IV An historiographical conceptualisation of verismo opera 50

IV.1 Verdi, melodism and unconventional harmonies 51

IV.2 Connections with French opera 55

IV.2.a Effects on dramaturgy 57

IV.2.b Effects on librettos 61

IV.2.c A final consideration of French operatic repertoire 65

V Transformations in acting 66

### Chapter 3  The cultural debate around Italian opera  70

I The future of Italian opera in fin-de-siècle cultural discourse 70
### Chapter 4 Crucial changes in vocal registration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Defining the concept of vocal register</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II How many registers are there?</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.1 Survey of key historical vocal treatises</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Aesthetics of vocal registration in the latter part of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nineteenth century</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.1 Upper passaggio recorded</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 5 The tenor at the time of Caruso

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I The ‘natural’ singing of Caruso: some evidence</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II The finding of new balances: trial and error</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III The ‘natural singing’ of Caruso: some preliminary conclusions</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 6 Italian sopranos at the turn of the century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I The verismo sopranos Eugenia Burzio and Emma Carelli</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II The chest voice</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III The ‘excessively open’ middle register</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV The upper register</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.1 A comparative analysis</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Bibliography

Discography

Appendix A. Examples of Vocal Exercises from Historical Treatises
Abstract
At the turn of the twentieth century the Italian tradition of operatic singing became ‘modern’. My study seeks to identify and explore the formative elements of this multifaceted ‘modernity’; a phenomenon which laid the basis for the way operatic singing worldwide has been understood and judged ever since.

The crucial element of this revolutionary transformation consisted of a new conceptualisation of the operatic voice that progressively eschewed the bel canto ideal of ‘pure’ tone quality, acquiring instead an irreversible gendered connotation, and an erotically charged expressive force. Pivotal to the achievement of these results, was the idea that the singing voice should preserve the same timbral quality from top to bottom (‘total timbral consistency’), an aesthetic principle completely alien to the voice culture of the previous centuries, when a timbral divide between the different vocal registers was considered not only unavoidsable but also desirable.

Using my training as an opera singer, I have built a methodology which, as illustrated in Chapter 1, brings an autoethnographic perspective to bear on two key sources: recordings from the pre-electrical era and vocal treatises of the mid- and late-nineteenth century. In Chapters 2 and 3, I offer an overview of the wider socio-cultural context which determined this radical ‘shift’ in voice culture, paying specific attention to the conflagration of literary and musical verismo in turn-of-the-century Italy. Chapter 4 places early recordings and vocal writing in a mutual dialogue, through which vocal treatises explain what is heard in early recordings, and the aural evidence sheds a new light on the treatises. In this chapter I also devise a lexicon of terms that enables the analysis of 103 recorded excerpts, contained in the last chapters of my thesis. Here, the case-studies of three tenors (Chapter 5) and three sopranos (Chapter 6) reveal the crucial role that some Italian singers born in the 1870s had on the ‘invention’ of the ‘modern’ operatic voice. Their decisions reflected and also helped to shape broader aesthetic shifts in post-unification Italy, in an inextricable tangle where causes and effects cannot be ultimately distinguished.

List of Music Examples
Chapter 4:
Example 4.1 Luigi Lablache, L’arte del canto, 8
Example 4.2 Luigi Lablache, L’arte del canto, 8
Example 4.3 Luigi Lablache, L’arte del canto, 11
Example 4.3 William Shakespeare, The Art of Singing, 46
Example 4.5 Beniamino Carelli, *L’arte del canto*, 1: 12
Example 4.7 Puccini, ‘Vissi d’arte’, bars 833–836
Example 4.8 Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*, ‘Siciliana’, bars 2–10
Example 4.9 Mascagni, ‘Siciliana’, bars 11–16
Example 4.11 Leoncavallo, ‘Prologo’, bars 110–119
Example 4.13, Verdi, ‘Ah fors’è lui’, bars 52–65

Chapter 5:
Example 5.2 Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’, bars 198–200
Example 5.3 Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’, bars 208–209
Example 5.5 Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’, bars 50–63
Example 5.6 Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’, bars 68–74
Example 5.7 R. Leoncavallo, *I Pagliacci*, ‘Vesti la giubba’, Act I, Scene IV, bars 41–42
Example 5.8 Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’, bars 16–23
Example 5.11, C. Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila*, ‘Vois ma misère hélas’ Act III, Tableau 1, Scene 1, bars 55–64
Example 5.13 Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’, bars 20–22
Example 5.14 Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’, bars 15–17
Example 5.15 Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’, bars 32–40
Example 5.16 G. Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, ‘Di quella pira’, Act III, Scena e aria, bars
101–108
Example 5.17 Verdi, 'Di quella pira', bars 127–130
Example 5.18 Verdi, 'Di quella pira', bars 136–138
Example 5.19 G. Donizetti, La Favorita, 'Spirto gentil', IV Act, Coro, Recitativo e Romanza, bars 186–191
Example 5.20 G. Verdi, Rigoletto, 'Questa o quella', Act I, Scene I, bars 112–127
Example 5.21 Donizetti, 'Spirto gentil', bars 213–214
Example 5.22 Donizetti, Elisir d'amore, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 10–13
Example 5.23 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 40–41
Example 5.24 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 10–17
Example 5.25 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 24–25
Example 5.26 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 29–30

Chapter 6:
Example 6.1, P. Mascagni, Cavalleria rusticana, Romanza 'Voi lo sapete', bars 13–16
Example 6.2 Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete', bars 22–24
Example 6.3 Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete', bars 62–70
Example 6.4. Amilcare Ponchielli, La Gioconda, Aria 'Suicidio', Act IV, bars 78–80
Example 6.5 Ponchielli, Suicidio, bars bars 81–84
Example 6.6 'Voi lo sapete', bars 11–14
Example 6.7 'Voi lo sapete', bars 27–30
Example 6.8 Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete', bars 46–62
Example 6.9 Verdi, La forza del destino, 'Madre pietosa Vergine', Act II, Aria, bars 66–71
Example 6.10 F. Cilea, Adriana Lecouvreur, 'Io son l'umile ancella', Act I, bars 36–38
Example 6.11 Cilea, 'Io son l'umile ancella', bars 38–39
Example 6.12 Ponchielli, 'Suicidio', bars 85–88
Example 6.13, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio', bars 95–96
Example 6.14 Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete', bars 33–38
Example 6.15 Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete', bars 59–61
Example 6.16 Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete', bars 71–77
Example 6.17 Ponchielli, 'Suicidio', bars 103–104
Example 6.18 Cilea, 'Io son l'umile ancella', bars 42–46
Example 6.19 Cilea, ‘Io son l’umile ancella’, bars 46–47
Example 6.20 Cilea, ‘Io son l’umile ancella’, bars 50–52
Example 6.21 Verdi, ‘Madre pietosa Vergine’, bars 60–68

List of Sound Excerpts
Excerpt 1 Emma Carelli, G. Puccini, Tosca, ‘Vissi d’arte’ (1906) 0:15
Excerpt 2 Carelli, Puccini, ‘Vissi d’arte’ (1906) 0:14
Excerpt 3 Nellie Melba, Puccini, ‘Vissi d’arte’ (1907) 0:09
Excerpt 4 Melba, Puccini, ‘Vissi d’arte’ (1907) 0:14
Excerpt 5 Enrico Caruso, P. Mascagni, Cavalleria Rusticana, ‘Siciliana’ (1904) 0:20
Excerpt 6 Caruso, Mascagni, ‘Siciliana’ (1904) 0:15
Excerpt 7 Caruso, Mascagni, ‘Siciliana’ (1910) 0:24
Excerpt 8 Caruso, Mascagni, ‘Siciliana’ (1910) 0:17
Excerpt 9 Mattia Battistini, R. Leoncavallo, I Pagliacci, ‘Prologo’ (1911) 0:22
Excerpt 10 Pasquale Amato, Leoncavallo, ‘Prologo’ (1911) 0:20
Excerpt 11 Battistini, Leoncavallo, ‘Prologo’ (1911) 0:47
Excerpt 12 Pasquale Amato, Leoncavallo, ‘Prologo’ (1911) 0:47
Excerpt 13 Melba, G. Verdi, La traviata, ‘Ah fors’è lui’ (1907) 0:20
Excerpt 14 Luisa Tetrazzini, Verdi, ‘Ah fors’è lui’ (1908) 0:22
Excerpt 15 Melba, Verdi, ‘Ah fors’è lui’ (1907) 0:45
Excerpt 16 Luisa Tetrazzini, Verdi, ‘Ah fors’è lui’ (1908) 0:48
Excerpt 17 Battistini, W. A. Mozart, Don Giovanni, ‘Canzonetta’ (1902) 0:34
Excerpt 18 Titta Ruffo, Mozart, ‘Canzonetta’ (1912) 0:34
Excerpt 19 Caruso, Puccini, Tosca, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1904) 0:12
Excerpt 20 Caruso, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1904) 0:16
Excerpt 21 Caruso, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1904) 0:10
Excerpt 22 Caruso, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1909) 0:12
Excerpt 23 Caruso, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1909) 0:14
Excerpt 24 Caruso, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1909) 0:09
Excerpt 25 Caruso, G. Verdi, Aida, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1908) 0:23
Excerpt 26 Caruso, Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1908) 0:45
Excerpt 27 Caruso, Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1911) 0:43
Excerpt 28 Caruso, Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1911) 0:41
Excerpt 29 Caruso, Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1908) 0:37
Excerpt 30 Caruso, R. Leoncavallo, *I Pagliacci*, ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1909) 0:09
Excerpt 31 Caruso, Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1909) 0:17
Excerpt 32 Caruso, G. Bizet, *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, ‘Je crois entendre’ (1916) 0:30
Excerpt 33 Caruso, J. Massenet, *Le Cid*, ‘O souverain’ (1916) 0:17
Excerpt 35 Caruso, G. Donizetti, *Elisir d’amore*, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1902) 0:06
Excerpt 36 Caruso, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1902) 0:10
Excerpt 37 Caruso, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1902) 0:09
Excerpt 38 Giovanni Zenatello, Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1905) 0:28
Excerpt 39 Caruso, Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1902) 0:26
Excerpt 40 Caruso, Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1907) 0:27
Excerpt 41 Zenatello, Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1905) 0:06
Excerpt 42 Zenatello, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1912) 0:14
Excerpt 43 Zenatello, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1912) 0:17
Excerpt 44 Zenatello, Puccini, ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (1912) 0:09
Excerpt 46 Zenatello, Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1905) 0:29
Excerpt 47, Zenatello, Verdi, ‘Di quella pira’ (1912) 0:10
Excerpt 48, Zenatello, Verdi, ‘Di quella pira’ (1912) 0:14
Excerpt 49 Zenatello, Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’ (1905) 0:11
Excerpt 50 Alessandro Bonci, G. Donizetti, *La Favorita*, ‘Spirto gentil’ (1905) 0:33
Excerpt 51 Bonci, G. Verdi, *Rigoletto*, ‘Questa o quella’ (1905) 0:26
Excerpt 52 Bonci, Donizetti, ‘Spirto gentil’ (1905) 0:15
Excerpt 53 Bonci, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1912) 0:24
Excerpt 54 Bonci, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1912) 0:08
Excerpt 55 Bonci, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1912) 0:40
Excerpt 56 Bonci, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1912) 0:13
Excerpt 57 Bonci, Donizetti, ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ (1912) 0:08
Excerpt 58 Emma Carelli, Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*, ‘Voi lo sapete’ (1905) 0:11
Excerpt 59 Celestina Boninsega, Mascagni,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Carelli, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1905) 0:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Carelli, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1905) 0:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Eugenia Burzio, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1908) 0:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Carelli, A. Ponchielli, La Gioconda, 'Suicidio' (1906) 0:08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Carelli, A. Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (1906) 0:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Burzio, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1914–16) 0:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1905–09) 0:08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1905–09) 0:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Burzio, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1914–16) 0:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (between1905–09) 0:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Burzio, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1908) 0:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Carelli, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1905) 0:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Carelli, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1905) 0:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Burzio, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1908) 0:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Burzio, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1908) 0:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (between 1905–09) 0:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (between 1905–09) 0:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Burzio, Verdi, 'Madre pietosa Vergine' (1910) 0:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Verdi, 'Madre pietosa Vergine' (1906) 0:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Carelli, F. Cilea, Adriana Lecouvreur, 'Io son l'umile ancella' (1906) 0:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Carelli, Cilea, 'Io son l'umile ancella' (1906) 0:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Burzio, Cilea, 'Io son l'umile ancella' (between 1913–1914) 0:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Burzio, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1914 and 1916) 0:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Burzio, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1914 and 1916) 0:08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Carelli, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (1906) 0:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Carelli, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (1906) 0:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1905–09) 0:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Ponchielli, 'Suicidio' (between 1905–09) 0:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (between 1905–09) 0:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (between 1905–09) 0:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (between 1905–09) 0:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Carelli, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1905) 0:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Burzio, Mascagni, 'Voi lo sapete' (1908) 0:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excerpt</td>
<td>Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Carelli, Mascagni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Burzio, Mascagni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Burzio, Ponchielli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Carelli, Ponchielli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Carelli, Cilea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Burzio, Cilea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Burzio, Cilea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Burzio, Cilea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Carelli, Cilea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Burzio, Verdi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Boninsegna, Verdi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note**

The sound files have been uploaded to SoundCloud, and can be accessed online (hyperlinks are provided at the relevant position in the text). N.B. There are two potential issues with Soundcloud. One is that you may find that when you click on the link, you will hear an advertisement before you hear the vocal excerpt. If you encounter this problem, sign in with the following username: barbara.gentili@rcm.ac.uk, password: Fiordiligi19. The second problem is that once you have played your chosen track, another track, chosen at random from the list by the software, will begin to play automatically. Unfortunately, automatic follow-on is a function that cannot be disabled on SoundCloud, but it can be stopped immediately using the play/pause button. It is possible, however, to click again on this button and listen to each track as many times as needed. The reader is also advised to use good quality headphones.

**Acknowledgments**

The first person I would like to thank for his support, assistance and encouragement in pursuing this project is my supervisor, Richard Wistreich. His expertise as both an historian of vocalism and a singer has constantly prompted and stimulated my work. I am also indebted to a number of other scholars. Some of them have been actively involved in the earlier stages of my study, including Mary Dullea (Royal Holloway, University of London) and Cesare Orselli (Florence University). Others are almost certainly unaware of the role they played in directing my work at some crucial stages, such as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Nick Morgan.
Most of the recorded material included in this dissertation comes from the National Sound Archive at the British Library, to whose staff I am very grateful, particularly to the Sound and Vision Reference Specialist, Vedita Ramdoss. Over two years, she provided me with most of the 78 rpm discs I requested from the Archive, and also gave whole days to playing this material for me on the turntables of the SA. Other libraries and institutions have given me access to their collections of rare recordings and publications. Among these I would like to thank the staff at the Music Library of the Milan Conservatoire and also at the International Centre of Research on Music Periodicals (CIRPeM) in Parma. In the US, the brilliant staff of the Metropolitan House Archives, especially John Pennino and John Tomasicchio provided me with contracts and other paperwork relevant to several operatic celebrities treated in this study, opening completely different perspectives on issues of repertoire and performance. From America I also received invaluable gifts from Ward Marston and Scott Kessler, who sent to me the complete recording output of both Mattia Battistini and Emma Carelli, a five-cd and three-cd sets respectively, produced by Marston Record Company. The private collector David Sulkin, and Michael Hunter, who hosts David’s impressive collection (in his no less impressive house in Hastings) deserve a special mention. It was David who opened up to me the fascinating world of early recordings and old gramophones. In front of his massive EMG Handmade Gramophone, I sat for several sessions while he would play his 78 rpm discs, often adjusting speeds at my annoying requests: a mesmerising experience which, in some respects, matches that of sitting in an opera house for the first time.

Singing teachers, colleagues and singer friends have been of indispensable help to my project, offering their ‘expert ear’ and providing a feedback which was essential to this kind of study. I cannot name them all and will only mention Rosalind Plowright and Fiorena Cedolins for their expert insight on the repertoire I tackled in my work, and Fairouz Oudjida who underwent the same training in singing as myself, in Milan. I also must especially thank Joe Parks at the Royal College of Music for transcribing the music examples into Sibelius.

Last but not least, I want to thank my husband, Ivan Hewett, whose material, emotional and psychological support throughout this long journey has been vital. He encouraged me at every stage of this long and sometimes frustrating project, always focusing on the bright side of the experience, always insisting that it would lead ultimately to a deeper, more dynamic and rounded view of the way I think about music, opera and performance – something that has indeed happened.
Chapter 1 Studying opera singing: approaches and methodology

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Italian tradition of operatic singing underwent one of its most spectacular transformations; it became ‘modern’. The exploration of this multifaceted ‘modernity’ forms the primary subject of my work and prompts the fundamental questions: what are the critical vocal-technical elements out of which this ‘new’ idea of vocalism was moulded? Who were the main protagonists of this epochal transition; and why did they embark on such an enterprise? Finally, what survives of their radical innovations in the way singers perform nowadays?

I must at the outset point out that this project is, broadly speaking, autoethnographic. At first, I was unaware of my own autoethnographic stance, but as the research proceeded, the application of self-reflexive modes to the objects of my inquiry progressively revealed itself, as will soon become clear. This may explain, in the first place, why recordings rather than scores occupy centre stage in my thesis. I am a singer who uses her ‘professional ears’: that is, my processes of thought are conditioned by my expert understanding of vocal techniques, and this is the ‘technology’ I adopt to decode what I hear in recorded ‘acts of singing’.

The singers on whom this study is focused belong to the generation born primarily in the 1870s. They initiated a transition that went beyond well-known changes in vocal performance style such as tempo, rubato, portamento or vibrato, which have already been widely discussed by scholars.\(^1\) These singers transformed the very idea of what constitutes ‘beautiful’ singing, changing for the first time in centuries the basic answer to the question ‘what are the qualities that are deemed to be attractive and worthy of praise in a singing voice?’ They were raised in a vocal culture which still celebrated an ideal of ‘pure’ tone quality, pursued by voice teachers with an almost religious dedication to the aesthetic belief that expressivity was indissolubly linked to the ‘true’ nature of the individual vocal sound. However, in the ‘real’ world in which these stage artists had to build their careers, an entirely new conception of vocal expressivity was emerging. It sprang from a new imperative association between vocal sound and the dramatic feelings that the characters were to express on stage. Moreover, the intensity of these ‘dramatic feelings’ had substantially risen in temperature over the second part of the nineteenth century, with an increasing taste for plots of heightened realism and bourgeois subjects

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\(^1\) I discuss some leading contributors to these debates in section II.2.
drawn from everyday life which, in the space of four decades, brought about the advent of verismo opera, first in Italy and, later, world-wide.

My study establishes that this ‘modern’ singing consists primarily of a new conceptualisation of operatic vocal sound over the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, and that this became irrevocably gendered, adhering to ideals of ‘total vocal consistency’ throughout the entire compass of a voice. By this, I mean the now almost universally prevalent concept that the operatic singing voice should preserve the same tonal quality from top to bottom. As I show in my thesis, before this paradigmatic shift in singing aesthetic, singers and voice teachers of the early- and middle-nineteenth century had subscribed to the very opposite idea, that a timbral divide between the different vocal registers was not only unavoidable, but also desirable. This reformulation of vocal aesthetics was profoundly influenced by changing perceptions of gender in post-unification Italy, troubled by the struggle to define a national identity as well as by competing notions of female and male subjectivity. Although I touch upon the question of gender when discussing the realistic nature and characteristics of the ‘modern’ voice, it must be clearly stated that this fascinating issue falls outside the limits of my investigation, though it certainly offers much scope for future research.

The collective efforts made by many prominent turn-of-the-century Italian singers to achieve the ‘modern shift’ have been long overlooked by scholars and critics alike. This lacuna is a disabling limitation not only for musicologists with a specific interest in vocalism, but also for the historian who reads musical events as ‘signifiers’ of a wider cultural context (and vice versa). Thus, in Chapters 2 and 3 I frame the creation of the ‘modern’ voice within its historical landscape, exploring verismo as a wide philosophical, cultural, artistic, literary and musical movement, and considering its connection with French naturalism and, more in particular, French opera. In Chapter 3, I consider the early reception of Wagner in Italy to highlight, in the violent nationalist reaction to the Nordic world of the German’s operas, what were perceived as traditional Italian cultural values. From this perspective the opinions of singing pedagogues are also evaluated, especially when they oppose bel canto singing and repertoire to the declamatory style of the new German school.

Chapter 4 deals with the important question of terminology. Here I define the key terms which will be used in the analysis of the recordings, following a complex methodology that will become clear through the present chapter. Finally, in Chapter
5 and 6, I consider three tenors and three sopranos respectively, chosen on the basis of their substantial recording legacy, their training in (what can still be considered as) the bel canto tradition, and the extent of their familiarity with operas composed by their contemporaries (which included, but was not limited to, the operas produced by the group of composers known as ‘giovane scuola italiana’). Chapter 5 compares selected examples of the recordings made by the tenors Enrico Caruso, Giovanni Zenatello and Alessandro Bonci, while Chapter 6 deals with recordings made by the sopranos Eugenia Burzio, Celestina Boninsegna and Emma Carelli. Each sound excerpt is accompanied by the corresponding section of the vocal line only which, in turn, is transcribed (into Sibelius) from a variety of sources, as I have based my transcriptions on both critical and non-critical editions. Although the critical editions should generally be preferred for the accuracy of the text, turn-of-the-century singers prepared their roles using the vocal scores published by Ricordi and other Italian publishers. These latter editions, therefore, open a significant window on the way singers read the musical material and translated it into sound.

In the course of this research project I have listened to contemporary recordings of many more singers than those named above, including those with other voice types (Chapter 4, for instance, includes references to recordings by three baritones). Nevertheless, I decided to restrict my principal case-studies to tenors and sopranos only for a number of practical reasons. First, my personal experience as an opera singer in soprano roles made this voice type a default choice. As for male voices, I chose the tenor as the perennial counterpart to soprano characters, and because one tenor in particular, Enrico Caruso, was a crucial figure in this development. Secondly, this thesis happens, especially in the three chapters where recordings are analysed, to deal with detailed observations of very specific elements of singing technique. In order to recognise the very subtle differences which I point out to the reader in these examples, I decided to focus on the specific timbre of just two voice types, which throws these differences into sharp relief. Finally, choosing to investigate examples of both male and female voices had the advantage of highlighting the fact that, while some elements of ‘modern’ vocalism were being developed by female and male singers at the same time, other characteristics remained clearly gendered and, at times, followed sometimes antithetical routes. The fascinating world which I reveal in the following pages will repay the reader for the effort of listening carefully to the many short excerpts that provide us with such
an extraordinary set of aural traces of the past. These traces not only provide the
critical listener with extraordinary testimony of substantial turn-of-the-century socio-
cultural changes, but also help to tell music historians, singers and the general
attentive listener something essential about their own identity today.

I Framing an autoethnographic working hypothesis

The question of whether autoethography can be considered as a viable route for
academic research in music studies was raised at an international conference
hosted by the Institute of Musical Research (IMR) in London early in 2018.² The
idea of applying to musicological research modes and tools conceived for social
science should not surprise us, considering the breakdown of traditional boundaries
between musicology and other disciplines in recent decades.³ However, as the lively
discussion at the IMR conference highlighted, autoethography is a new approach
which is opening musicology to a wider multidisciplinary discussion. This is due to
the discipline’s particular character of engaging with personal experience (auto) as
a crucial key to the understanding of cultural experience (ethno).⁴ Therefore,
musicologists who do autoethography systematically analyse and describe
personal experience, adopting a self-reflexive approach, which is proving to be
extremely fruitful in the fields of performance, education, composition and historical
musicology.⁵ Autoethographers openly recognise that research is value-centered

² Beyond ‘mresearch’: Autoethography, self-reflexivity, and personal experience as academic
research in music studies, Institute of Musical Research, Senate House, London, 16–17 April 2018,
organised in association with the School of Advanced Study, University of London and the
University of Surrey.
³ For a complete overview of this trend, see Paul Forman, “On the Historical Forms of Knowledge
Production and Curation: Modernity Entailed Disciplinarity, Postmodernity Entails Antidisciplinarity”,
Osiris 27 (2012), 56–97; Robert Frodeman, Julie T. Klein and Carl Mitcham, Oxford Handbook of
Interdisciplinarity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Julie T. Klein, Creating Interdisciplinary
Culture: A Model for Strength and Sustainability (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010). For a
discussion of the importance of interdisciplinarity for musicology, see Georgina Born, “For a
Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn”, Journal of the
⁴ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, “Autoethnography: An overview”, Forum:
research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095. In all autoethnographic research, personal
experience is used to analyse or criticise cultural experience in a variety of approaches; the
autobiographical element can be overtly represented or even performed (see Johnny Šaldaña,
framed within more traditional methodologies (such as in Heewon Chang, Autoethnography as
Method (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008).
⁵ At the IMR conference, papers and discussion groups made many strong contributions to all
these subjects, including insights on the relevance of the ‘physical experience’ in performance in
rather than objective (or value-free), and that personal experience has a
determinant impact on the research process.\(^6\)

It is from this viewpoint that the concept of ‘epiphany’ is central to
autoethnographic investigation. As fundamental experiences that are felt to have
determined the trajectory of a person’s life, epiphanies are key to the work of
autoethnographers, who build their narratives through a retrospective selection of
the epiphanies themselves. These ‘remembered moments’, moreover, ‘stem from,
or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular
cultural identity’.\(^7\) This precise theoretical context frames my own first aural
experience of an early recording; the epiphanic event of listening to an old 78 rpm
disc of Adelina Patti played on a restored portable gramophone in an environment
profoundly evocative of historical and personal interconnections, determined the
future course of my research.\(^8\) Because of my own cultural identity of ‘Italian opera
singer’, I was enabled to instantly recognise that the medium I was listening to could
clearly highlight some technical features of Patti’s singing and, therefore, that I could
rely on it in order to investigate the transformations of turn-of-the-century Italian
operatic vocalism.

Autoethnography worked as an essential aid in the process of building up my
methodology and freed me from the anxieties that, to a certain extent, I experienced
at the beginning of this project. In order to analyse the pre-electrical recordings
which form the backbone of my study, I devised a standardised method of critical
listening, as this chapter will show. However, when I set out on this task, I felt
somehow uncertain of the objectivity of my process; I became progressively more
aware of the fact that it was something unusual: subjective and thus open to
question. What if the elements of tonal quality which I analyse in a vocal recording

\(^6\) Arthur P. Bochner, “Perspectives on inquiry II: Theories and stories”, in *Handbook of
Interpersonal Communication*, edited by Mark L. Knapp and Gerald R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA:
Sage, 1994), 21–41. From the 1980s, scholars in the field of social sciences began to highlight that
race, class, sexuality, gender identities, emotions and lived experiences had a strong impact on the
way of conducting research; all these aspect were completely overlooked or consciously silenced
in the research process and in its outcomes, see Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: The

\(^7\) Ellis, Adams and Bochner, “Autoethnography: An overview”.

\(^8\) On this occasion (2015), I was undertaking research at the International Centre for the Musical
Periodicals (Cirpem) in Parma, a city not only associated with Giuseppe Verdi, but also where I had
done my first year of professional training many years earlier (2003) at the Accademia di Voci
Verdiane.
are heard only by me and escape the perception of my reader? What if the reader hears what I describe, but has a different idea about the vocal mechanism which creates the specific vocal sound listened to in a recording? In order to overcome these doubts, I carried out various strategies, the first of which was to test the recordings by playing them to colleagues who were trained singers.

Before starting any systematic listening to original 78s and their transfers to different formats, I spent the summer of 2016 playing some of the CD transfers realised by the American sound engineer Ward Marston to singer friends who trained with me at the Milan conservatoire, or who had sung with me in the same touring company for which I worked in Lombardy (As.Li.Co.), and to other British singer friends, whom I had met in the UK after moving there the previous year. It was immediately clear that the very specific elements of vocal technique which caught my attention while listening to the recordings were also instinctively detected by my fellow singers. We identified as particularly interesting the different vocal behaviours that each recorded singer enacted in the passage from one register to another. We described to each other the ways in which we came to a judgement that the various singers were blending or uniting the vocal registers; surprisingly (or perhaps not) we used very similar terms and expressions to refer to these behaviours. Notwithstanding the many limitations of the pre-electrical recording system, the technical aspects which my listeners and I discussed were clearly audible and, importantly, understandable to us, as we were working with ‘insider knowledge’.9 As one of the main purposes and drivers of autoethnography, ‘insider knowledge’ is the ontological premise of my work, and represented a first step to getting over the worries of hyper-subjectivity.

By the time I undertook these informal experiments, I had already gained a considerable knowledge of the history of middle- and late-nineteenth-century vocal pedagogy in the Italian singing tradition, having spent a good portion of the first year of my doctoral work studying vocal treatises and singing methods both at the

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9 Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis, “Introduction: Coming to Know Autoethnography as More than a Method”, in Handbook of Autoethnography, edited by Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis (London & New York: Rutledge, 2016), 17–47: 33, 34. At this level, I am only trying to convey the complex web of issues arising from the application of autoethnographic strategies to problematic sources, such as early recordings. This topic will be more extensively discussed in the section of this chapter which deals with recordings.
British Library and at the Music Library of the Milan conservatoire. The wealth of notions and concepts contained in this literature has been crucial to the definition of a vocabulary which has enabled the description of what we hear in early recordings. In this sense, my work draws heavily upon the study of Rebecca Plack on early recorded vocal style and technique. In her dissertation, Plack suggests that the availability of a specialised and agreed-upon lexicon is a precondition to any discussion of vocal performance. But because there is an endemic lack of agreement on even the most essential terms of such a lexicon, she had to build her own vocabulary in order to discuss stylistic gestures in the vocal recordings which she examined. In Chapter 4, following this logical premise, I set out to fix the meaning of key terms whose definitions are based on a variety of sources: historical vocal treatises, contemporary vocal methods, my own training and work in voice science. Deprived of these terms, I could not possibly discuss any of the aspects which I consider when analysing the recordings that form the basis of the case-studies in Chapters 5 and 6. In this way, the detailed descriptions of vocal behaviours heard in the audio excerpts which I provide are rooted in this purpose-built lexicon, leading the listener to reflect together with me on the elements which interact in the production of the vocal sound. This is not to say that the reader will necessarily agree all the time with my explanations of how each vocal sound is created in the recorded performance, but it does enable me to show clearly that the framework on which my analyses are based is solid and consistent.

Plack’s work has also influenced the present study through her important insight that the substance of style lies in a set of vocal behaviours which are habitually performed by singers. There is a relation of causality which connects stylistic gestures with ‘what performers do’. They repeat these behaviours every day for many years while practising, rehearsing or performing, and the embodiment of such behaviours conditions the stylistic gestures that they are able to make, or not. Therefore, what the listener perceives as the style of a specific singer is, in fact, the result of her or his ‘habitual vocalism’ or, put more simply, the result of a specific

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10 I visited the latter institution as part of my first ‘field’ research in Italy in the spring of 2015. I was again able to work at the Milan conservatoire music library on another three occasions in 2016 and 2017. My reading of vocal treatises and singing methods forms part of a separate section of this chapter.


12 Plack, The Substance of Style, xxv. In Chapter 2, Plack argues thoroughly this crucial hypothesis.
vocal technique. From this perspective, I consider the elements of style of a particular recorded vocal performance as traces (or symptoms) of specific and changing technical behaviours, each of which will be discussed in the case-studies. Furthermore, I am interested in what these transforming vocal habits (or vocal techniques) reveal of wider socio-cultural shifts; in other words, why were some turn-of-the-century singers modifying their techniques of voice production? In this sense, my analyses of recorded vocal behaviours provide ‘thick descriptions’ of cultural experience on which I want to shed light.

The number of factors which bear on the changing vocal habits of opera singers over this period are touched upon in Chapters 2 and 3, as above mentioned. Nevertheless, I consider one of these factors of particular relevance and direct impact, and worth pointing out here. The choices that these singers made in order to create a ‘modern’ vocal sound were inextricably intertwined with the rise of realism, which characterised not only Italian opera but more generally Italian culture over the later part of the nineteenth century. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the penetration of French naturalism in Italy had a strong impact on literary verismo in the 1870s. The relationship between literary and musical verismo is problematic, as demonstrated by the intense scepticism with which scholars treated verismo opera and the very possibility of transferring the characteristics of literary verismo to music. More recently, Andreas Giger, building on the wider perspective of late-nineteenth-century criticism, has proposed an entirely new view of musical verismo, advocating its existential ‘autonomy’ as a long-term movement which promoted a complete renovation of Italian opera through its departure from the structures of Romantic melodramma. Giger’s proposition goes hand-in-glove with my own hypothesis of ‘modern’ vocalism as a transformative process and progressive departure from the bel canto vocal tradition.

Having successfully overcome some of my worries about an overly personal response, relying on the fact that my fellow singers and I shared essentially the

\[13\] In her thesis, Plack redefines vocal technique as the ‘singer’s habitual vocalism’ as she deals with some issues regarding ‘vocal technique’ as a category opposed to ‘interpretation’. She refers to the distorted use that some lieder singers made of the expression ‘vocal technique’ to suggest emotional detachment; see Plack, The Substance of Style, 44–54.

\[14\] The term ‘thick description’ was introduced into anthropology by Clifford Geertz in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 9, 10.


\[16\] The limits within which I discuss bel canto as a vocal tradition will become clear in the next section on vocal treatises.
same view on some specific points of vocal technique as heard in some old recordings, I had also fixed a suitable lexicon with which to shield myself from accusations of uncontrolled subjectivity. In the advanced phase of my research, I repeated the ‘pilot’ experiment with my supervisor, who is a singer himself. This time I could rely on an agreed lexicon, as clarified above, and I also selected some of the recordings that I wanted to use in my case-studies. I shared the detailed ‘unmodulated’ close-listening analysis of these recordings and he confirmed that he could clearly hear what I was describing. However, not satisfied yet, I wished to test my detailed analyses beyond members of the profession. I wondered whether a different kind of listener, a non-singer for example, would be able to hear what I was pointing out in my descriptions. So I put the question to a musician who is, nonetheless, far from a connoisseur of nineteenth-century vocalism. Although he was not always immediately able to recognise the specific differences that I was highlighting, after a second listening he could recognise and identify the points I was making.

With this short autobiographic narrative, I hope to have conveyed some basic information about the nature of my work. In my project, the tools and modes of ‘classic’ autoethnography are tweaked in specific ways in order to build an effective methodological system. Thus, personal documents, normally central to autoethnographic data collection, were the daily notes I wrote in my diaries, or the annotations I made on vocal scores while listening intensively to early recordings over the course of two years (from 2016 to 2018).17 Interviews with opera singers of older generations, such as Biancamaria Casoni and Annamaria Pizzoli, or relatively younger ones who are still more or less actively performing, such as Fiorenza Cedolins and Rosalind Plowright, helped me to reflect on those elements of bel

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17 Typical personal ethnographic documents (diaries and letters) have been used in sociological research, such as in Plummer’s contemporary life-story narratives. See Ken Plummer, Documents of Life (London: Sage, 2001). Many autoethnographic researchers in music performance or music education extensively rely on these tools, writing about their daily teaching experience or rehearsal activity. However, autoethnographic inquiry resorts to a large range of personal documents, ideally extending to any ‘document or artifact [which can] either open the researcher to deeper reflection on relevant experiences and relationships or … to evoke compelling images, emotions, or understanding in other readers’, Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin, “I Learn by Going”, in Handbook of Autoethnography, 68. One type of personal documentation widely used, especially by performers, is recording. In both its audio or video format, recording can shed light on what performers perceive to have experienced at some specific moment while practising or rehearsing. They might run the recording to the point where they reckon that something ‘different’, ‘relevant’ or ‘revelatory’ has happened – which they have perhaps reported in their diary – and find out whether this ‘something’ is perceptible in an aural or visual form or not.
*canto* tradition which are still preserved or, vice versa, completely erased in contemporary vocal practice, and furthermore, on how these contemporary techniques relate to the ‘modern’ vocalism discussed in my thesis.\(^{18}\) The narrative approach of this introduction is, again, one of the preferred modes of autoethnography, tapping into the essence of the discipline by putting its two main poles, the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, into dialogue as seen above.\(^{19}\) Through this brief autobiographical story, I situate my personal experience within the description and analysis of others’ experience: singers who lived more than a hundred years ago, and whose vocal behaviours had an important bearing on our contemporary ones. Along the way I have relied on the experience of people who share a similar life-path to my own, made up of years of training, professional stage life and emotional investment. As is hopefully now clear, the implications of the cultural experience about which I am digressing here are stratified into several different chronological layers.

The process of constructing a methodology has proved to be a challenging and ambitious task in itself, as it resulted from the close examination of two very different species of sources and their dialectical interaction:

- vocal treatises from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries;
- recordings from the pre-electrical era.

In order to work in synergy at their maximum efficiency, though, these sources have to be managed through a very precise analytical tool, the professional ‘ear’ of the expert singer. An inquiry led by other kinds of technologies, such as sonic visualisation software, tends to produce poor results when detailed examinations of very subtle differences in vocal timbre are investigated, as happens in this study. This kind of software is only able to represent the frequencies and dynamics of an

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\(^{18}\) I have not used material from these interviews in my thesis. Regarding the conversation which I had with Bianca Maria Casoni, though, I must underline that her teaching of the onset is still closely related to García Manuel II’s idea of the *coup de glotte*, a concept which prompted much heated debate throughout the nineteenth century and well into the following one, with most vocal methods of the period discussing the merits and dangers of this teaching tool. See, for instance, Beniamino Carelli, *Cronaca d’un respiro* (Naples: Tipografia dell’Ariosto, 1875), 55, 56; and Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, *L’odierna scuola di canto in Italia* (Rome: Tipografia Metastasio, 1886).

\(^{19}\) Jones, Adams and Ellis, “Introduction: Coming to Know Autoethnography as More than a Method”, 29.
incoming sound within a range set by the analyst, displaying, therefore, only gross differences in the loudness of different frequencies.\(^{20}\)

II Sources

II.1 Vocal treatises

Four key monographs contain large-scale overviews of historical pedagogical and scientific writing on singing:

Victor Alexander Fields' pioneer work, *Training the Singing Voice*, aimed primarily at singing teachers, which covers the period 1928–1942;

The follow-up study in John Carroll Burgin's *Teaching Singing*, which extends the investigation to the years 1942–1973;

Philip A. Duey's *Bel Canto and its Golden Age*, which touches upon voice culture throughout an exceptionally long period of time (from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages and Early Modern period), and deals in detail with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries up to Mancini's *Riflessioni pratiche sul canto figurato* (1777);

Brent Jeffrey Monahan's *The Art of Singing*, which selects and collects the writing of one hundred authors from the period between 1777 and 1927.\(^{21}\)

Since my work focuses on early recordings made by singers of the Italian operatic tradition who were trained in the later part of the nineteenth century, the vocal treatises directly relevant to my investigation are those written between the 1840s and the 1920s, and specifically in the context of Italian pedagogical tradition.\(^{22}\)

Nevertheless, because the treatises written in the middle and late nineteenth century contain the fundamental principles for the instruction of the recording

\(^{20}\) As confirmed by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson in a private email, dated 21/07/2016. The specific software discussed on this occasion was Sonic Visualiser, which was developed for the AHRC project, CHARM, (Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music 2004–2009), [https://www.sonicvisualiser.org](https://www.sonicvisualiser.org).


\(^{22}\) This time limit allows for the fact that singers generally wrote methods after the end of their active singing careers, such as in the case of Enrico Caruso's *The Art of Sining* (1909), or Nellie Melba's *Melba Method* (1926).
singers I consider in this study, this pedagogical writing has to be my focus, rather than the many treatises written after the beginning of the twentieth century. This explains why these treatises are not discussed exhaustively, although several of them are still included. For the same reason, even early twentieth-century treatises accompanied by recorded examples, such as Hermann Klein’s *Phono-Vocal Method*, do not form part of the pedagogical writing which is central to this thesis.23

Because of the chronological limits of my study, the most important of the four key works on which I initially relied to direct my investigation was Monahan. Following the format proposed by Field, Monahan divides up the source materials for topics of vocal training such as ‘Breathing’, ‘Phonation’, ‘Resonance’, ‘Diction’, and so on. For each topic, he quotes the relevant sections of the sources which he has selected, but in an uncritical way. As the author clearly states: ‘No attempts have been made to assess the validity or the evaluate the opinions of those authors selected for this study’.24 Nevertheless the selection of sources is severely restricted, and Monahan ended up considering the writings of only a hundred authors from the period 1777–1927, chosen on the basis of their ‘popularity’ and ‘availability’.25 Another criterion, however, was used to select the sources which form the body of this study: Monahan only considered those written or translated into English. This means that Italian pedagogical writing which had not been translated in English was excluded or not even acknowledged by the author. In the absence of any similar publication which specifically surveys Italian treatises, I had to rely on as many primary sources as I could possibly find. In this way, I became acquainted with a large number of invaluable, but little-known works written by the major singing teachers of the period, such as Antonio Cantelli, Beniamino Carelli, Luigi Celentano, Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, Francesco Lamperti and Heinrich

23 Hermann Klein, *The Phono-Vocal Method, based upon the famous School of Manuel Garcia. Contralto (Bass, Tenor) voice* (New York, 1909). This important source is perhaps more significant as a testimony of late nineteenth-century vocal practices rather than as a method of teaching singing. The recorded examples were of limited use to the student, as their rudimentary technology made them liable to deteriorate rapidly when subjected to the repeated playing that singing students would require.


25 The representativity of these authors is established on the basis of the following criteria: the presence of their publications in six main USA libraries where the author conducted his research (Boston Public Library, Indiana University School of Music Library, New York Public Library, Princeton University Library, Rutgers University Library in New Brunswick, Westminster Choir College in Princeton), the number of existing printed editions, the number of languages into which these writings were translated, and the celebrity of the authors as singers or singing teachers. See Monahan, *The Art of Singing*, 7.
Panofka. Gemma Bellincioni’s singing method and the important _Relazione della sezione V Canto_ (Report of the fifth panel on ‘Singing’) from the first Italian music conference (1864) are two other relevant publications. Bellincioni’s book contains almost no instructional section, but consists instead of sets of exercises, which reveal an unusual approach to singing pedagogy. The report of the fifth panel, which was working on the topic of practical singing pedagogy, apart from summarising the anxieties of Italian singing teachers about the declining status of the art and the profession, refers to some important traditional principles of vocal training. Unfortunately, the names of the singing teachers who took part in the conference are not recorded in the _relazione_, with the exceptions of D. Scafati and Luigi Celentano, who, as president and secretary to the panel, signed the report itself.

Pedagogical writing was usually the result of years of teaching experience, as in the cases of the noted pedagogues Francesco Lamperti, Mathilde Marchesi and Beniamino Carelli. In other instances, working singers wrote their own vocal methods or articles on singing technique (e.g., Melba, Lehnmann, Tetrazzini). The

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26 These sources are held at the Milan conservatoire music library. Among the many works by the singing teacher and composer Beniamino Carelli which are held at the Milan Conservatoire Music Library, three deserve special mention for their theoretical value: _Cronaca d’un respiro_ (Naples: Tipografia dell’Ariosto, 1875). _Torniamo a cantare_ (Naples: F. Bideri, 1891) and the colossal theoretical-practical method in seven volumes, _L’arte del canto: Metodo teorico-pratico_ (Milan: Ricordi, 1905–1909), which was first published in 1898 (Naples: Società Musicale Partenopea). Luigi Celentano’s oft-quoted _Intorno all’arte del cantare in Italia nel secolo decimomano_ (Napoli: Stabilimento Tipografico Ghio, 1867), Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, _L’odierna scuola di canto in Italia_ (Rome: Tipografia Metastasio, 1886), Antonio Cantelli, _La corretta emissione della voce nella parola e nel canto_ 3rd edition, (Palermo: Tipografia F. Barraeccia e Figgio, 1886) and Heinrich Panoftka’s _Voci e Cantanti, Ventotto capitoli di considerazioni generali sulla voce e sull’arte del canto_ (Florence: Tipi di M. Cellini e C., 1871) all contain important rules and reflections on the teaching of singing. Surprisingly enough, while several of Francesco Lamperti’s _studi_ and _solfeggi_ are hosted at the Milan conservatoire music library, none of his influential theoretical works is present. Both the _Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto_ (Milan, Naples: R. Stabilimento Ricordi, 1865) – which in its 1877 English translation by J. C. Griffith becomes _A Treatise on the Art of Singing_ – and _The Art of Singing According to Ancient Tradition and Personal Experience_, trans. by Walter Jekyll, (London: G. Ricordi & Co., 1884) are instead at the British Library.

27 Gemma Bellincioni, _Scuola di canto_ (Paris & Berlin: Fürstner, 1912) and _Primo Congresso Musicale Italiano, Relazione della sezione V Canto_ (Naples: Tipografia Carluccio, 1864) are both held at the Sormani public library in Milan.

28 Unlike the vast majority of the vocal treatises of the period, many of these exercises are built on arpeggios and other wide intervallic patterns, see Appendix A, examples 17, 18. The structure of vocal treatises and their tenets will be discussed in this section and, for the relevant topics, in Chapters 4 and 6. Bellincioni, as we shall see, was one of the first singers to approach _verismo_ roles and this could explain why the exercises in her treatise partially differ from those we find in the major pedagogical publications of the period.

29 Some of these names, however, are mentioned by Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti in his _La moderna scuola di canto_, (30); these are: Quercia, Caiano, Bisaccia, Lombardini, Fonari, Carelli and Sarria.
expressed or inferred thoughts of others on the subject of singing might be collected by an acquaintance, as in the case of P. M. Marafioti’s, Caruso’s Method of Voice Production.\(^{30}\) Were these ‘methods’ serious works of pedagogy or rather merely memoirs of eminent opera singers written for their fans? Answering this question is complicated by the fact that, for some voice teachers, teaching was a parallel activity to conducting, composing or playing another instrument. They could network within the community of professional musicians and were able to attract young and ambitious students looking for a way into the profession. Some of these teachers also published vocal methods, as this was made commercially feasible by their professional reputation.\(^{31}\) Even in such cases, these writings are relevant for my study, as they attest to the existence of widely shared tenets of vocal technique, or portray certain attitudes prevailing within the teaching community. As Monahan suggests, the usually short ‘methods’ by such ‘part-time’ vocal pedagogues, where traditional rules of vocal production are followed by standard and endlessly repeated sequences of graded exercises, can be read as symptoms of a deeply conservative belief that the peak of vocal art and vocal instruction had been reached in the previous century, and needed only to be reproduced and preserved.

**II.1.a Caveats on vocal treatises**

A number of questions are raised by the extensive and varied body of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vocal pedagogical writings.\(^{32}\) First, how much of the vocal pedagogy of the late nineteenth-century can be inferred from reading them? Since at that time, as now, most of what constitutes vocal pedagogy was transmitted orally rather than through writing, the majority of singing teachers never went so far as to publish vocal methods, advice, daily practice exercises or tips.\(^{33}\) How can we know the substance of their teaching? With reference to the Italian pedagogical writing that I have studied, the existence of a ‘traditional Italian

\(^{30}\) Pasqual Mario Marafioti, Caruso’s Method of Voice Production: The Scientific Culture of the Voice (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1937). This was, according to Michael Aspinall, the method of Dr Marafioti who claimed to have studied the Caruso vocal phenomenon during the years of their personal and medical relationship. See Pietro Gargano, Carlo Cesarini, Caruso, with a contribution by Michael Aspinall (Milano: Longanesi, 1990), 244, 245.

\(^{31}\) Monahan, The Art of Singing, 223.

\(^{32}\) The number of treatises that I have studied encompasses seventy-six volumes and the majority of them are included in the Bibliography.

\(^{33}\) Although the majority of singing teachers did not write vocal methods, from the middle part of the nineteenth century – with the beginning of the so-called ‘scientific era’ of vocal instruction, whose approach reached universal acceptance by the turn of the twentieth century – the quantity of writings on vocal technique and vocal physiology increased exponentially.
way’ of teaching singing does, in fact, clearly emerge. This Italian ‘school’, which
proudly claimed its links with a system of teaching developed over the preceding
two centuries, was apparently based on widely shared tenets of ‘good’ singing.
These will be discussed in the present chapter with reference to breathing, \textit{messa
di voce} and \textit{portamento}; in Chapter 4 with specific attention to registers and vocal
registration; and in Chapters 5 and 6 in connection with the concepts of ‘pure tone
quality’, ‘total vocal consistency’ and ‘timbral rupture’, as audible in surviving
recorded performances.\footnote{All these expressions result from my research and will be explained in the chapters which
specifically deal with them.}

The belief that they were part of the Italian ‘glorious tradition’ is confidently
expressed by the members of the fifth panel at the first Italian music conference,
mentioned above. The panel’s report emphatically states that there is no want of
good methods or capable singing teachers in Italy; on the contrary, ‘We still have
the books of exercises on which [the] famous singers [of the past] were trained,
reaching that perfection that made the name of Italy illustrious in the world…’\footnote{‘Noi abbiamo tuttora i libri scritti delle esercitazioni con cui que’ famosi cantanti si educarono e
pervennero a quella perfezione, che bastò a far suonare allissimo nel mondo il nome italiano.’, \textit{Primo Congresso Musicale Italiano, Relazione della sezione V Canto}, 4. Some of these books of
vocal exercises (so-called \textit{solfeggi} and \textit{vocalizzi}) are quoted, in passing, in some of the
pedagogical writing of the period. For instance, the exercises of Busti, Crescentinini, Aprili, Righini
and Bordogni are mentioned in Carelli’s \textit{La cronaca di un respiro} (86) and Bordogni are mentioned
in Carelli’s \textit{La cronaca di un respiro}, (86) as well as in Lamperti’s \textit{Guida teorico-pratica} (49), and
Giulio Marco Bordogni’s \textit{vocalizzi} are also recommended by Luigi Lablache to whoever wanted to
become a virtuoso (4). The syllabuses of Italian conservatories for undergraduate courses
prescribed some of these \textit{studi} and \textit{solfeggi} up to 2011, when the old programmes (\textit{vecchio
ordinamento}) were definitively abandoned. However, Italian singing teachers still make use of
these books of exercises, such as Concone, Vaccaj, Panofka.}

On the other hand, discussions regarding the emergence of specific ‘singing
schools’ are complicated by the realities of vocal training. Most singers will
acknowledge that any experienced singing teacher tends to have developed his or
her own individual system of teaching, and that this will differ, to a greater or lesser
extent, from the ‘system’ favoured by another teacher. On this basis, singing
teachers of any era have complained, as they complain nowadays, about the lack of
proper early training of the newly-acquired pupil.\footnote{According to Klein, even Jenny Lind had her voice ‘restored and properly “placed”’ by Garcia:
had developed no body prior to his arrival at his singing school, and used to call him the ‘tenore
vento’, a thin, reedy tenor, See Luisa Tetrazzini, \textit{How to Sing} (London: Pearson, 1923), 30.} When singing teachers raise
this sort of criticism, they are implicitly charging other teachers with incompetence
or ignorance. From this perspective, where everyone criticises the methods of
everyone else, it is hard to believe that a single authoritative schooling tradition, laying down uniform principles and rules, ever really existed. Therefore, the reader might wonder how the same pedagogues could assert such self-contradictory thoughts (as if referring to a tradition which had no other exponent than themselves). Nevertheless, the fact that a vast body of works lays down a similar set of principles, drafts similar exercises, and refers to the same repertoire, makes it plausible to infer that such a ‘tradition’ had some kind of historical autonomous relevance. In this sense, the possibility can be entertained that the pedagogical writings of the late nineteenth-century fixed sets of rules and principles that were largely accepted by teachers, and were therefore taught with greater or lesser degrees of standardisation to most budding professional singers in Italy in this period.

Secondly, to what extent do the writings left by vocal pedagogues describe the entire system of learning and daily practice to which pupils had to submit? If it is true that pedagogical writings can reveal a more variegated teaching tradition, it is also evident that they can hardly account for the whole content of the exercises, approaches and individual curricula taught by singing teachers in any given age, not least because, just as today, much of singing pedagogy was oral, and based on an empirical process of demonstration, modelling, trial and error. Today, students can and do very easily record and preserve their lessons and practice sessions, and a study based on these recordings might potentially stimulate illuminating reflections in the future on the different situation of past ages of vocal training. But for the period under consideration, the only recordings are of ‘finished’ singers and therefore any information about the pedagogical methods and learning process that lie behind the preserved performances has to be inferred.

This brings me to my final question: whether it is possible to show a correlation between particular performance practices and specific vocal treatises or, in other words, does a treatise have the potential to tell us something about how the singers of more than a century ago performed on stage in a particular repertoire or genre? One great advantage to the scholar of late nineteenth-century vocal pedagogy who wishes to investigate such questions is the existence of early recordings. This is an unprecedented opportunity, as this option is of course excluded in the case of

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37 A possible explanation lies in the extremely subjective perceptions of the singing body. Since singing, at its very core, is something only physically processable and ultimately indescribable, it may well be, then, that singing teachers and singers had attempted, each in their own methods, to put down a ‘rational’ synthesis of how voice works from their perspective and in their own bodily experience.
pedagogical literature of previous ages. As it turns out, and this dissertation will elucidate, early recordings – provided they are considered both critically and in statistically significant number – have the potential at least to attest to the pedagogical traditions of the middle and late nineteenth-century in surprisingly detailed and analysable ways. Some of the oldest singers whose vocalism was captured in the earliest years of recording were born as early as the 1830s. For example, the voices of Charles Santley (b. 1834), Adelina Patti (b. 1843, who sang the title role in La Sonnambula in New York in 1851 at the age of 16), Emma Albani (b. 1847), Francesco Tamagno (b. 1850), Pol Plaçon (b. 1851), Marconi (b. 1853), Mattia Battistini (b. 1856), Fernando De Lucia (b. 1860) and Nellie Melba (b. 1861) are today still audible on numerous recordings made in the early years of the twentieth century. Their vocal style is certainly very different from that of the subsequent generations of singers born in the 1870s and 1880s. Recordings of Patti or Battistini offer strong evidence of what is found in vocal treatises of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, while the singing preserved in recordings of Emma Carelli, who was born in 1877, appears to corroborate the anxieties about an imminent disintegration of the bel canto vocal system expressed in Lamperti’s and Shakespeare’s influential treatises written in the later part of the century.\(^{38}\)

As will be seen in the detailed discussion of recorded registration (Chapter 4) and in the chapters (5 and 6) devoted to case-studies of individual performances on record, recordings do offer significant perspectives on the connection between pedagogical writing and performance practice, as well as explaining aspects of contemporary published vocal treatises. Similarly, writing about singing technique offers physiological, theoretical, mechanical and empirical explanations of what exactly we hear in early recordings. Thus, when the two classes of sources are set in dialogue with one another, they can be reciprocally illuminating. Within specific limits that will be explored further in the discussion of the epistemological frame in which recordings are used in my work, and the autoethnographic premises of this project, recordings are vital additional tools in the process of hearing and understanding vocal technique of the past. Recordings are not simply self-evident ‘texts’ for a musicology centered on performance. They also have the capacity to help reveal the meaning of other classes of text, including a variety of written

discourses. Vocal treatises certainly fall into this category and they repay being read through the lens of the aural evidence of early recordings.

II.1.b Rationale behind the selection of pedagogical writings

Most of the pedagogical writing considered in this thesis expresses a bias in favour of the modes which presided over the training of the art-singing voice during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This historical period was originally defined as the era of bel canto by late nineteenth-century voice teachers, who consciously began to identify this past era with the idea of a ‘golden’ age of singing, when the art was believed to have reached its peak. With this specific period classification, the term bel canto appears in much fin-de-siècle Italian pedagogical writing. For Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, bel canto is understood as depending on clear and precise intonation of all intervals, strength and flexibility of the vocal organ, smooth passage between the registers, and control over the mezza voce. Luigi Celentano identifies the pedagogy of the scuola del bel canto with the process of perfecting individual tonal quality, developing flexibility and agility, and controlling volume and colour (‘modulazione della voce’). Virginia Boccabadati uses the expression ‘Scuola di Bel Canto’ in a letter of commendation to another voice teacher, Antonio Cantelli, who had also been a successful singer. Boccabadati highlights the pedagogical value of providing the pupil with practical examples which should be directly demonstrated by the teacher. Nevertheless, she warns that in

39 Before the 1860s the term bel canto was not used with reference to a specific music period or style and, therefore, it did not have autonomous conceptual existence during the age with which is more frequently associated (the seventeen and eighteenth centuries). On the retrospective nature of the term see Duey, Bel Canto and Its Golden Age, 5–12; John Potter, Vocal Authority (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 62, 63; Sarah Potter, “Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2014), 66. Accessed May 2017, http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/8345/.

40 Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, L’odierna scuola di canto in Italia, 21. Through all these means ‘[the old schools had produced wonderful singers, who granted the supremacy of Italy, while the modern schools have given many mediocre singers. . .’ (‘Le scuole antiche ci diedero cantanti meravigliosi, che conquistarono il primato all’Italia, le scuole moderne diedero molte mediocrità.’), 22.

41 Luigi Celentano, Intorno all’arte del cantare in Italia nel secolo decimono, 36.

42 Cantelli, La corretta emissione della voce nella parola e nel canto, 3rd edition (Palermo: Tipografia F. Baravecchia e Figlio, 1886), vii. Several letters of appreciation are reproduced in this section of Cantelli’s method, among which those of Lauro Rossi, director of the Milan conservatoire, and the tenor Roberto Stagno deserve special mention. Stagno did not make any recording but his flexible singing attained through a diffuse use of falsetto and his frequent addition of embellishments, seem to be confirmed by the first recording artists, such as Francesco Zenatello and Enrico Caruso. They appropriated some of these Stagno’s signature features in their recorded renditions of the Brindisi (a drinking song), one of the solos for Turiddu, the main tenor character of Mascagni’s Cavalleria Rusticana, which Stagno created in 1890.
order to produce the desirable result of a perfect vocal production, these examples have to be given by teachers who have been themselves trained in bel canto’s ‘purest traditions’. This token of appreciation, which might appear to have been directed ‘just’ to Cantelli, is, in fact, self-referential. Virginia was herself raised in the ‘purest traditions’ in an exemplary bel canto school by her mother Luigia Boccabadati, one of Donizetti’s prima donnas and a pupil of the famous castrato Gaspare Pacchiarotti.43 Meanwhile, invoking ‘science’ in support of the concept of bel canto Beniamino Carelli declared in the dedication of his volume Cronaca di un respiro (‘Chronicle of a Breath’):

With the Chronicle of a Breath, I attempted to focus the attention of the bel canto scholars on the vocal mechanism in the act of phonation, and based the study [of singing] on the achievements of science.44 Carelli directly links traditional training methods to the scientific advancements of voice science, replicating a widespread tendency of the fin-de-siècle, first inaugurated by García Manuel II more than three decades before.45 Over and above this, though, it is interesting to notice here that Beniamino mentions a category of people who study and preserve the traditions of bel canto. His seven-volume vocal method L’arte del canto is addressed to ‘To the scholars of bel canto’ (‘Agli studiosi del bel canto’) as well as ‘teachers of bel canto’ (‘i Professori di bel canto’).46 This seems to suggest that, by the end of the century, a well-defined notion of bel canto was not only shared among many voice teachers, but also treasured and practised with the intention of its being preserved and transmitted.

From a broad historiographical point of view, late nineteenth-century vocal treatises could well be considered an integral part of the bel canto vocal tradition, especially because many singing teachers active in this period clearly stated a link between their vocal methods and that tradition. The historiography to which I refer is represented by the stories that these vocal pedagogues passed down through their writings. This approach reveals the perspectives of an important sector of the vocal profession on what bel canto singing, bel canto style and bel canto roles, with

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43 Donizetti wrote five main roles for Luigia: Amelia in Elisabetta, o Il castello di Kenilworth (1829), Cristina in I pazzi per progetto and Sela in Il diluvio universale (1830), La Contessa in Francesca di Foix and Chiarina in La romanze e l’uomo nero (1831).
44 ‘Con la Cronaca d’un Respiro tentai popolarizzare, fra gli studiosi del bel canto, il meccanismo dell’organo vocale nell’atto della fonazione, e basare gli studi sulle conquiste fatte dalla scienza’, Beniamino Carelli, Cronaca d’un respiro, (Naples: Tipografia dell’Ariosto, 1875), Dedication. The volume is dedicated to the minister of education, Onorevole Ruggiero Bonghi.
45 This scientific or ‘mechanical turn’ of vocal pedagogy will be examined in detail in Chapter 4.
46 Beniamino Carelli, L’arte del canto: Metodo teorico-pratico, 1: 2.
all the performer's associated skills for enacting them, were considered to be at the particular point in history when *verismo* began to predominate. The discussion of these important topics runs throughout this thesis, and attention is focused on each of them, depending on the relation they bear to other issues which form the object of single chapters. So, the tenets of *bel canto* technique are considered in the next sub-section and also in Chapter 4, where the complex matter of registration comes into focus. *Bel canto* style is discussed in Chapter 3 in connection with the general debate around the state of crisis of Italian opera, while *bel canto* roles themselves belong naturally in Chapters 5 and 6, where the relationship between ‘new’ roles and the ‘new vocalism’ is discussed.

Having framed this body of pedagogical writing within its specific historical context, I must also stress the fact that the selection of ten core vocal treatises was necessary in order to build the lexicon which, as explained above, enables a structured analysis of vocal recordings. Because Chapter 4 deals specifically with this task, the list of these treatises as well as the reasons for their selection are given there.

Finally, it is important to remark that these treatises (and the pedagogical writing in general that is central to this thesis) are linked to one another through a shared cultural identity which is consciously and strongly asserted. This sense of communal belonging to a specific tradition is not only clearly expressed by vocal pedagogues (as seen above from the remarks of Boccadati and Cantelli), but also displayed in the substance of their methods. Only two of them (García, 1841 and Lablache, 1842) fall into the first part of the nineteenth century, whereas most of the others were published considerably later in the century. Despite this chronological gap, they share goals, language, inner structure, and even the layout of their vocal exercises, which are organised in a progressive order of difficulty, with the aim of developing very similar sets of skills.47

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47 For example, see the sequence of García’s, Lamperti’s, Carelli’s and Marchesi’s exercises from treatises, books of daily practice and *solfeggi*. Progressing from smaller to wider intervals (see examples 1–7 in Appendix A), from long-note values to runs, from diatonic to chromatic scales (examples 8–13), from sustained to swelled sounds, from small notes to turns, and the various typology of trills or shakes (examples 14, 15), from legato to portamento, any topic is almost religiously treated in a separated and gradual order. See also Chapter 4 on registers and registration and the consistency of the views of singing teachers on the nature of registers and on the rules for blending them.
II.1. c Breathing techniques
Breathing is a crucial technical element against which the continuity between vocal treatises of the earlier and later parts of the nineteenth century can be tested. Both García and Lamperti consider breathing in its practical application to singing, rather than as a mere mechanical function (i.e., the way in which the breath is expelled). In other words, one ‘discovers’ how to breathe while singing, and not by means of specific breathing exercises disconnected from actual singing.  

This was a typical manner of vocal pedagogy in an age when ‘voice culture … was purely empirical,’ and well before its ‘mechanical’ turn, as David Taylor has defined it. Lamperti touches on the theme of breathing when he deals with messa di voce, appoggio, portamento and legato, but also vocalisation and agility, all topics which are directly connected with the act of singing.

In terms of the breath mechanism, the vocal treatises under examination mainly adhere to the costal-diaphragmatic system of bel canto. García explains breathing as the simultaneous contraction (and descent) of the diaphragm and the lateral distention of the ribs. The idea of abdominal breathing with a displaced stomach

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48 This consideration does not exclude the possibility that breathing exercises might be suggested as learning tools by these voice teachers; nevertheless breathing is always considered in relation to the actual process of singing, more than as a complex muscular mechanism to be analysed. As late as 1933, Blanche Marchesi, daughter of the influential pedagogue Mathilde Marchesi, still underlines the importance of this distinction, and asserts that ‘breath expenditure’ depends on the precise and effective management of all the parts of the vocal mechanism: in other words the balance achieved in the very act of singing. ‘Breathing … becomes second nature and need not be preached by a special gospel … When at last the vocal cords and the whole vocal organ have been fully trained, the breath required to sustain the voice will appear to have been bettered; but it is in reality the refined and perfected work of the instrument that will by and by need less breath to put it into action’, see Blanche Marchesi, The Singer’s Catechism and Creed (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1932), 7, 8.

49 David C. Taylor, The Psychology of Singing (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), 324. According to Taylor, the empirical phase of vocal culture dated from the period 1600 to 1741, before the French physician Ferrein published a treatise on vocal organs (De la formation de la voix de l’homme, 1741). For Taylor the ‘mechanical’ turn in vocal pedagogy was ultimately brought forth by García with the idea that the results of laryngoscopical investigation (1855) could be used for the teaching of singing. See Taylor, ibid. 10–19 and 320–340. This topic will be systematically discussed in Chapter 4.

50 Francesco Lamperti, A Treatise on the Art of Singing, trans. by J. C. Griffith (Milan, Naples, Rome, Florence and London: Ricordi, 1877), 20–25. This is the translation that Griffith, one of Lamperti’s student, made of his Guida teorico-pratica (1865) and it is not the other treatise by Lamperti, L’arte del canto, as the title of the English translation might mistakenly induce the reader to believe.

51 García-Paschke, A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing, First Part, Complete and Unabridged. The editions of 1841 and 1972 collated, edited and translated by Donald V. Paschke (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 33. The result of it is the typical shape of an expanded chest diaphragmatically supported in a convex-shaped abdomen. A more exhaustive explanation, however, can be found in his later Hints on Singing published for the first time in 1894. Here he distinguishes between an abdominal inspiration, considered partial, and in which the ribs do not play any role, and a complete respiration (defined as thoracic or intercostal) where the diaphragm
was quite alien to vocal breathing techniques up until about 1855. This is the year when the physiologist Louis Mandl published an article in the *Gazette médicale de Paris*, arguing on an anatomical basis that the flat stomach of the old school compromised the diaphragmatic function, limiting the amount of air which could be inhaled. Mandl pointed out that proper diaphragmatic respiration consists of the complete descent of the diaphragm. The latter, exerting a pressure on the abdominal organs (liver, stomach and viscera), creates an ample space for lungs to expand and take in the largest amount of air. In this process, whereas the larynx assumes an unconstrained position, the abdomen protrudes, enlarging forward and outward. At this stage the *lutte vocale* begins, a ‘vocal struggle’ which consists of a balanced opposition between inspiratory and expiratory muscles. While the latter struggle to exhale the air which is necessary to the production of sound, the inspiratory muscles struggle to keep the air in the lungs; comfortable singing depends on the preservation of this balance.

Mandl’s theory had a major impact on vocal pedagogy, with prominent singing teachers praising his work, and quoting his writings in the sections of their treatises devoted to breathing, or in introductions and appendices. For example, Lamperti concluded the instructional part of his treatise with a note reporting unspecified ‘passages’ from Mandl’s volume on the maladies of the larynx. However, it is

contracts entirely, the ribs rise and ‘the stomach is drawn in’, *Hints on Singing* (London: Ascherberg & Co., 1894), 4.

52 Louis Mandl, “De la fatigue de la voix dans ses rapports avec le mode de respiration”, *Gazette médicale de Paris*. (Paris, 1855). At the beginning, Mandl’s theories met general consensus within scientific and larger cultural communities, as two popular books of the era testify. They are Emil Bhenke, *The Mechanism of the Human Voice*, (London: J. Curwen and Sons, 1881), 14–16, and Lennox Browne, *Medical Hints on the Production and Management of the Singing Voice* (London: Messers. Chappell & Co., 1876), 14–17. Browne’s writing, however, is plenty of confusions; he recommends, as ideal for singing purposes, the abdominal breathing advocated by Mandl, but then suggests that this is the method taught by the old Italian school with wrong references to Shakespeare and Lamperti.

53 Mandl’s idea of abdominal respiration, however, affects the ability to fine-control sub-glottal pressure necessary for coloratura. As Stark highlights, the abdominal struggle calls for an overall balance of respiratory and laryngeal muscles, see James Stark, *Bel canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 100. Subsequently Mandl’s theory was questioned by another physiologist, Morrell Mackenzie (1886) who, in the seventh edition of its *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs*, claimed to offer mathematical evidence that the *bel canto* system of breathing, with its concave abdomen and the marked expansion of the lower ribs, was the most effective in terms of amount of breath intake. See Mackenzie, *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs*, seventh ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 7th Ed., 1890), 94–96.

doubtful that Lamperti ever actually taught the breathing system prescribed by Mandl, a fact which was openly questioned by Henry Holbrook Curtis and, indirectly, by Shakespeare and even the younger Lamperti. Curtis asserts that many pupils of Lamperti senior, such as Jean de Reszke, Campanini and Clara Heyen, when directly questioned on the specific matter of respiration, confirmed that Lamperti taught the respiration method with the abdominal wall slightly retracted (so-called costal-diaphragmatic breathing). Moreover, Shakespeare, who was one of Lamperti’s pupils, defended the costal-diaphragmatic respiration of bel canto tradition with an open chest, especially expanded in the region immediately under the sternum. Gian Battista Lamperti, the son of Francesco, also claimed to adopt Mandl's abdominal breathing but, in fact, described something rather different in a drawing contained in his method, which describes the ‘Action of the Diaphragm’. The drawing basically shows, in the act of inspiration, a retracted abdomen which goes back to its normal position (more forward) while exhaling the air. Again this is not the Mandl depiction of a displaced abdomen, but rather the opposite.

Another eminent singing teacher who largely subscribed to the García method of breathing (and was also one of his pupils) was Mathilde Marchesi. Despite defining her breathing technique as abdominal, Mathilde maintained that during inspiration the ribs move outward and the chest can expand ‘at its base, summit and sides’. The same belief is expressed by a student of Marchesi, the celebrated soprano Nellie Melba. She stated that the air should be taken in by expanding the ribs and ‘allowing the front of the body to expand at the same time’, clearly pointing out that

55 Henry Holbrook Curtis, Voice Building and Tone Placing, (London: J. Curwen & Sons Limited, 1909), 59. Curtis also highlights that simple observation of the finest singers of his days offers sufficient evidence to argue Mandl’s theory of a displaced abdomen. Skilled singers never bulge their abdominal walls in taking a deep breath, on the contrary they retract the stomach and expand the chest in order to control the breath during the expiratory phase. He defines this respiration ‘inferior costal or diaphragmatic’ and asserts that the inferior ribs are elevated together with the inferior part of the breast-bone, while the diaphragm is flattened in a retracted abdomen. He also remarks, like Shakespeare and Mackenzie, that this kind of respiration was the type taught by the ‘old Italian school’ which prescribed ‘slightly drawn-in stomach’; see ibid., 57, 58.

56 Shakespeare, The Art of Singing, 13. For Shakespeare the most effective type of breathing for singing purposes is costal-diaphragmatic, in line with García. The complete descent of the diaphragm and the expansion of the lower part of the abdomen are prevented by the rising of the lower ribs, to which the diaphragm itself is attached through sets of inspiratory muscles (10). Shakespeare also tellingly suggests substitution of the expression ‘diaphragmatic breathing’ used by Lamperti in his method with that of ‘right breathing’ as explained in his own method, hinting to the fact that Lamperti had scarce acquaintance with anatomy (20, 21).


in respiration ‘the tension must be on the rib muscles’. The list of eminent singers who were preoccupied with the topic of breathing will be limited here for reasons of economy to the names of Enrico Caruso, Luisa Tetrazzini and Lilli Lehmann. Caruso, concerned with the necessity of thoroughly filling the lungs in order to support the sound, comments that a full breath can be achieved by raising the chest ‘at the same moment that the abdomen sinks in’. Tetrazzini describes the feeling of a constant pressure against the chest during expiration, which is a primary effect of costal-diaphragmatic respiration. Finally, Lilli Lehmann states that during the phase of inspiration, the chest is not raised but merely distended through the action of the lower ribs, which work like pillars, and that the abdomen and diaphragm are immediately released after having assumed an initial retracted position. Lehmann introduces several misconceptions, such as the idea of ‘drawing-in’ the diaphragm, which contradicts the laws of anatomy, given that the diaphragm is only raised or depressed through the action of inspiratory and expiratory interrelated muscles.

It should be clear by now that singers’ explanations and even linguistic expressions rely heavily on the subjective sensations experienced during the act of singing. Their treatises, even when genuinely preoccupied with pedagogical issues, reveal the obvious imbalance introduced by the individual self-referentiality of their approaches, which is also sometimes hidden behind the rules of voice science and avowals of objectivity. Treatises produced by singing teachers at least have the advantage of being rooted in the observations of many individual pupils as well as the teachers’ own subjectivity. Nevertheless, because ‘[m]uch of what is learned [and taught] must be done by inner sensations, governed by subjective evaluations’, the whole approach of both singers and teachers is to instinctively measure every

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61 “This feeling of singing against the chest with the weight of air pressing up against it is known as “breath support”, and in Italian we have even a better word, “apoggio”, which is breath prop’, Luisa Tetrazzini, *The Art of Singing* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 15. This is a reprint of the 1909 edition published by The Metropolitan Company, New York. In abdominal respiration the air pressure does not continuously insist on the chest region as in this breathing system the rib cage is less involved.

action on their own selves, without generally reaching the next step up of critical thinking and self-reflexivity.  

Another criticism raised against treatises as trustworthy witnesses to contemporary practices is that vocal pedagogy seemed not to have been responsive to the changing repertoire of the late nineteenth century. As Potter and Sorrell put it:

...the didactic literature taken as a whole retains many of the concepts that would be familiar to a singer of the seventeenth century. These writings are inevitably conservative and are unlikely to reflect the actual state of singing with 100 per cent accuracy.

This position deserves careful evaluation, which suggests adopting a more nuanced approach to the problem of assessing the pedagogical value of the writing under examination. The conservative character of vocal methods can hardly be demonstrated merely by the presence of exercises for agility and coloratura, or messa di voce and portamento. As with any other art, the art of singing cannot flourish without a thorough command of its material and mechanical bases. Therefore, given that flexibility is an essential skill for the singer who wants to preserve a healthy voice over a long time, daily agility exercises cannot be expected simply to disappear from vocal treatises because of the changed repertoire, any more than pianists who play modern repertoire would abandon their scales. As will be seen in Chapter 3, singing teachers were perfectly aware of the fact that repertoire was changing; still, they claimed that the longer training traditionally employed for the cultivation of healthy and well-refined voices was unavoidable. Therefore, the fact that singing teachers kept paying scrupulous attention to coloratura, portamento and messa di voce is an inevitable consequence of the basic and unchanging needs of controlling the vocal instrument, rather than necessarily being a sign of conservative attitudes.

Portamento and messa di voce are, in effect, crucial devices for mastering both breath and registration events. Portamento, even when considered as an ornament, can be attained only through perfect control over the breath pressure. The passage from the first to the second pitch of an interval implies a gliding of the voice through all the intervening notes, avoiding any pause or accentuation upon any of them in particular; a result which depends on a continuous and steadily graduated breath

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63 Monahan, The Art of Singing, 1.
pressure. If portamento is considered in its original meaning of going from one note to another ‘on the breath’, then its connection with breath management is even more evident, and is achievable only through the efficient command over the air flow needed to connect two pure and perfectly tuned pitches. Similarly, the messa di voce requires complete control of registration as well as breath pressure, where all the different gradations of power depend on combinations of these two basic elements of the vocal mechanism.

On the other hand, less self-evident aspects of the pedagogical writing betray the conservative stance noted by Potter and Sorrell. Perhaps one of the most significant (if not the most significant) of them concerns the ways of balancing and blending the vocal registers, so-called ‘registration’, which is a concept crucial to this study. By the end of the century modes of ‘uniting’ vocal registers were in dramatic transformation. Nevertheless, as late as 1898, Shakespeare describes a system of register division and modes of register union which are suspiciously similar to those recommended by García more than half a century before. This anachronism is made even more evident when one listens to the recordings of the 1900s, which clearly demonstrate how singers were experimenting with different techniques in order to achieve registration, making viable the inference that some major transitions were happening at the turn of the century. This fundamental element of sound vocal pedagogy and its dramatic transformations are audible in recordings from the pre-electrical era, and will form the primary object of my analyses.

65 Portamento is considered as ‘portare la voce’ (passing the voice) from a note to another on the breath by both Tosi and Mancini. For an overview of the concept of portamento in the pedagogical writing of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Richard Wistreich’s “Reconstructing Pre-Romantic Singing Technique”, in The Cambridge Companion to Singing, edited by John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 185, 188, 190. The same concept is repeated in many mid- and late nineteenth-century vocal treatises, such as Vaccaj’s Practical Method of Italian Singing (London, 1834) or Carelli’s L’arte del canto, 2: 12, demonstrating the continuity of these writings with the earlier traditions. In Lesson XIII of his method, Vaccaj underlines that ‘by carrying the voice from one note to another, it is not meant that you should drag or draw the voice through all the intermediate intervals, an abuse that is frequently committed – but it means to unite perfectly the one note with the other’, See Vaccaj, Practical Method, 30.

66 The first edition of Manuel García II’s treatise (1841) was published more than fifty years before Shakespeare’s The Art of Singing (1898). Another striking similarity is represented by the music examples that Shakespeare provides in his treatise; they are ‘Una voce poco fa’ from Rossini’s Il Barbiere di Siviglia and ‘O del mio dolce ardor’ from Gluck’s Elena e Paride. These scores are barely dissimilar to, or even less updated than those that we find in García’s first edition of the second part of his treatise (1847) and which include arias from Cimarosa’s Matrimonio Segreto, Rossini’s Semiramide, Crescentini’s Romeo e Giulietta, other than many other examples given for specific topics (such as articulation, phrasing, ornamentation, recitatives, florid style, declamatory singing an so on), and taken from operas of composers including Handel, Gluck, Mozart, Bellini, Donizetti and Mercadante. See, García, The Art of Singing, Part II (1847).

67 The recordings made by Adelina Patti (1905/06) show registration choices which are worlds apart from those made by the much younger Emma Carelli in the same years.
II.2 Recordings

Anyone who sets out to use early recordings as source material for scholarly research is faced with a series of theoretical and practical issues which involve, but are not limited to, basic archival challenges of which recordings survive and where they are located, and also the more complex question of what they might potentially tell us about the ‘original’ performances they purportedly present. These questions are not an exclusive concern of those who deal only with original pre-electrical discs or cylinders, as digital recordings also prove to be complex epistemological objects. Technical issues, such as playback speeds, types of sonic distortions, frequency limitations and time constrains are, however, especially relevant to early recordings.68

Due to the relatively recent recognition of recordings as fundamental archival resources, processes of cataloguing and recording of metadata are not yet systematic in the way that bibliographical sources are.69 The investigator of recordings, therefore, has to depend on disparate resources ranging from recording catalogues produced by commercial record companies to individual discographies, and from specialist journals to critics’ reviews. From the very early days of recording, there were many publications aimed at record-buying enthusiasts, such as the *Gramophone Company Magazine*, which catered for a readership comparable, say, to that of the huge array of ‘hobby journalism’ resources devoted to computers, cameras and other recreational technologies available today.

There are already important digital resources including online catalogues such as [world.Cat.org](http://world.cat.org), [ArkvMusic.com](http://www.arkivmusic.com) and CHARM (Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music).70 The latter includes links to digitised versions of much of the Gramophone Company’s 78 rpm output and some LP series from numerous other US, UK and other European companies, including Columbia and Decca, and the *World’s Encyclopedia of Recorded Music* (WERM).71 The Rigler Deutsch Index is

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68 On these questions, which will be shortly examined, see *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, edited by N. Cook, E. Clarke, D. Leech-Wilkinson, and J. Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
70 [http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/discography/search/disco_search.html](http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/discography/search/disco_search.html)
71 WERM is not directly relevant to my research as it lists electrical recordings of classical music and only includes some acoustic recordings when the authors feel that either the music or the performance warrants inclusion.
the primary catalogue specifically for pre-electrical era recordings research. It includes what were, in 1985, listings of the complete known acoustic and electrical coarse-groove discs in American sound archives, found at the Library of Congress, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, and the University Libraries of Yale, Syracuse and Stanford.\textsuperscript{72}

The best discography of vocal recordings from the pre-electrical era is Roberto Bauer’s \textit{New Catalogue of Historical Records 1898–1908/09}, which lists alphabetically the recorded output of celebrated and less popular singers.\textsuperscript{73} For individual discographies, the encyclopedia \textit{Le grandi voci} provides biographical notes on the major international celebrities and many less well-known Italian singers up to the 1960s, including critical appraisals and a complete list of recordings.\textsuperscript{74} Another useful source in the category of individual discographies is \textit{The Record Collector} magazine, published monthly in the UK since 1980. It presents, in addition to lists of published discs and cylinders and comments on specific recordings, extended articles on the careers of renowned historic singers.

Critics’ reviews and evaluations of historical recordings contained in major publications, such as \textit{The Record of Singing} by Michael Scott and J. B. Steane’s volumes \textit{Singers of the Century},\textsuperscript{75} as well as Herman Klein’s collection of essays for the \textit{Gramophone}, edited by William Moran,\textsuperscript{76} provide valuable guidelines for the listener to navigate the massive quantity of available material. In particular, Scott’s work focuses on pre-electrical recordings and is accompanied by sets of recordings, intended to explain his often strongly expressed critical views. Although one may not share Scott’s opinions, his vast knowledge of repertoires and performance trends constitutes an invaluable aid to addressing questions of style, and in subdividing the pre-electrical period of the history of recorded sound into well-defined phases. Klein, meanwhile, generally expresses his critical evaluations in a

\textsuperscript{72} Originally published on microfiche, its contents are now included in RILM.


\textsuperscript{76} Hermann Klein, \textit{Hermann Klein and the gramophone}, edited by William E. Moran (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1990). Although the \textit{Gramophone} magazine started publication in 1924, in his articles Klein makes references to recordings from earlier periods realised by the prominent operatic stars of the pre-electrical era.
milder manner. As a singer and voice teacher himself, this perhaps allows him a more sympathetic view of his topic. As the musical advisor for Columbia, Klein was in effect the ‘in-house’ voice, and Columbia’s commercial interests may well have influenced his writing. Nevertheless, his insights into singing techniques and styles run all the way from the florid singing of García, with whom he studied, to the mid-twentieth-century ‘modern’ and declamatory style. This gives his critical views the weight of a highly credible historical perspective.

Having established the existence of a particular recording, it is necessary to locate an example to study. Physical access to historical recordings presents a second challenge to the researcher. My work has relied on two large national archives and a private collection: the Discography of American Historical Recordings (DAHR) at the Library of the University of California and the Sound Archive at the British Library (BLSA), and the private collection of the British collector David Sulkin. The DAHR is a very large database of master recordings (78 rpm discs) hosted at the Library of the University of California at Santa Barbara, and consists mainly of recordings made by Victor Talking Machine, Columbia Records and Berliner Gramophone Co. All of the items which comprised the former Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings database have been incorporated in the DAHR, which provides information concerning the recording activities of all the above-mentioned American record companies.\(^\text{77}\) Recordings at the DAHR have been accessed remotely through the digitised online transfers of gramophone recordings.\(^\text{78}\) The BLSA generally allows listeners to access the original 78 rpm discs which, played remotely from the archivist’s office on a turntable, can be listened to through headphones in a small listening room. This procedure is followed when more than one copy is held by the archive. In the case that just one copy is present in the archive, which means that every time it is played the risk of wear is increased, the sole option available to the researcher is to request digitisation of the disc.\(^\text{79}\) The SA has been an invaluable resource for my study and I have been

\(^{77}\) This information is obtained from consultation of publications of the companies and original documents (such as session sheets) contained in the archives of Sonic Music Entertainment in NYC.

\(^{78}\) This source allows quick and easy access to a conspicuous number of recordings, and has been extremely useful for preliminary surveys of singers, such as Enrico Caruso, Pasquale Amato, Antonio Scotti, Titta Ruffo and Luisa Tetrazzini.

\(^{79}\) The transfer of the original disc, however, is automatically carried out at the standard speed of 78 revolutions per minute, making the entire operation all but pointless, for reasons that will shortly be explained.
continually interrogating the recordings hosted there over almost two years, starting from LPs and CDs. However I very quickly moved onto the original 78s for two reasons.\footnote{I must thank the tireless archivist Vedita Ramdoss at the BLSA for her generous availability and supportive collaboration; for months, she spent a considerable amount of her working hours playing over and over the scratchy recordings I requested, often experimenting with different playback speeds at my request.} First, the vocal sound retains much more clarity when listened to through the original source; although the background noise is louder, differences in tonal colour are more strikingly evident.\footnote{Noise can be reduced somewhat by using a filter to remove all the frequencies that could not have been recorded on the disc. For practical purposes, for most 78s until quite late on, any signal above about 5000Hz is almost certainly noise and not content. Cutting it out should produce an immediate improvement in the sound. Unfortunately, it doesn’t, partly because the brain tends to assume that if it can hear high frequencies in the hiss it can hear them in the music too. So when one cuts off all high frequencies the music sounds dull…Much of the noise we’d like to remove, however, lies within the same frequency band as the musical sounds on the disc…Clearly noise-reduction changes the information taken off the original disc in a big way.’ Leech-Wilkinson, The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance (London: CHARM, 2009), chapter 3.2, paras. 44, 45, accessed January 11, 2017, \url{http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html#d4965e8531}.} Secondly, any issues relative to copyright clearance, which arise when the copy of a recording is requested from the Archive, are easily overcome.\footnote{I have not been able to obtain any copy from CD transfers made by companies which, although extinct, still retain the copyright on their recordings. All my efforts to get in touch with some ex-representatives of such companies in order to obtain a declaration of clearance have been unsuccessful. I managed, instead, to have digital copies of some 78s and cylinders which were transferred into two LPs; one by Emma Carelli, 1976 Club99, CL99-100, and the other by Celestina Boninsegna, 1954 Eterna Eipo 0-468. The latter was itself out of copyright, being produced before the year 1962; for the Club99, the private American collector Joe Pearce was kind enough to put in writing for me the history of the recording company, convincingly explaining that a declaration of copyright clearance would be virtually impossible to obtain.} The items in David Sulkin’s collection, meanwhile, have the added advantage that they can be played on an original 1928 gramophone within a ‘natural’ domestic acoustic space, providing the closest one can probably come to listening to an unmediated original pressing.\footnote{I am most grateful to David Sulkin for making available his wonderful collection to me and sharing the information on reproduction techniques on which he has first-hand experience. Many of the 78s that I first heard by Caruso, Melba, Frances, Battistini, Ancona, De Luca and other first-rate singers of the era were played by David Sulkin on his sizable EMG Handmade Gramophone.} The flaws and limitations of the pre-electrical recording process are discussed to varying degrees in many monographs, academic theses and journal articles which deal with the history of recorded sound.\footnote{For an exhaustive overview on the topic see: Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance (London: CHARM, 2009), Chapter 3, accessed January 11, 2017, \url{http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html}. Simon Trezise deals with limitations of pre-WWII recordings in “The Recorded Document: Interpretation and Discography”, in Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music, 193–96. For academic dissertations, see Susan Schmidt Horning, “Chasing Sound: The Culture and Technology of Recording Studios in America, 1877–1977”, (PhD, Case Western Reserve University, 2002), 14–50, and James Alan Williams, “Phantom Power: Recording Studio History, Practice, and Mythology” (Brown University, 2006), 20–72. For a historical overview of matters related to the}
technical standards was alien to the pre-electrical era (1900–1925), we have no precise idea of the exact number of revolutions per minute at which recordings were made. Discs labelled as 78 rpm were recorded at a variety of different speeds ranging from c.60 to c.90 rpm. Moreover, the speed of a recording could change even during the time it took to cut the disc itself (sides generally lasted from two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half minutes) due to the effects that different atmospheric conditions had on the hard wax used in the recording process.85 The revolving speed of a disc (or cylinder) naturally determines the pitch of the recorded sound: in practice, a variation of four or five revolutions per minute alters the pitch by about half a tone. This variation, in turn, can have dramatic effects on the recorded voice’s tone quality (timbre). To put this into context, if a recording is played back at a speed slower than that at which the original matrix was recorded, it might make a bright voice sound somehow dull and muffled. On the other hand, if the playback speed is faster than that used during the recording session, it will yield a voice with an unnatural or improbably fast vibrato. Additionally, because the pitch at which singers recorded was not necessarily the written pitch of the score, and because in any case the modern international A=440Hz was not standardised until 1939 and pitch until that time varied, sometimes markedly, from city to city, and even from piano to piano, the complicated matter of playback cannot be resolved simply by adjusting the speed of the turntable until the ‘written pitch’ is reached. Occasionally, the label of a disc may indicate the pitch or the speed at which a recording was made, but this fragmentary information does not offer secure answers to matters such as the ‘true’ timbre of a singer’s voice or such qualities as his or her vibrato. Because no-one now living heard the recorded voices of the pre-electrical era live in

85 ‘Heat made the grease used in early recording machines runny, while cold temperatures congealed it slightly; consequently, playback speeds varied by as much as 10 rpm or even more.’ Plack, The Substance of Style, 3; ‘In a very warm studio it was inevitable that pitch would rise during a session. The machinery driving the cutting turntable […] could change speed in different atmospheric conditions and over time. Even the cooling and hardening in the wax during recording, slowing the progress of the cutting head, could make a difference. Consequently there can be not only problems in establishing the correct speed at which to play a disc, but there can also be changes of pitch during playback.’ See Leech-Wilkinson, The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance, Chapter 3.1, par. 22, accessed January 11, 2017, http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html#par22.
performance, any conclusions we might draw about these issues will always be open to uncertainty.\textsuperscript{86}

In his doctoral thesis,\textit{ Phantom Power}, James A. Williams argued that the range of frequencies captured by the recording horn was limited, the background noise omnipresent, and the continuous rustling and other accidental forms of distortions that cylinders and flat discs produce when played back are unnerving. In practice, the sound projected by the singer into the recording horn is, in turn, transmitted to a diaphragm attached to a stylus. The latter cuts the groove of a flat disc revolving on a turntable and produces, therefore, the immediate impression of the sonic wave on the blank wax disc.\textsuperscript{87} Paradoxically, and within specific boundaries, these recordings represent perhaps the most high-fidelity traces of a singer’s performance.

The pre-electrical era recording process might explain the impression the listener can in fact have of listening to a live performance when a 78 rpm disc is played back on a good acoustical gramophone. Although the sound quality suffers from a lack of upper harmonics, the impression that the singer is actually present in the room where the disc is being played cannot be denied.\textsuperscript{88} It might be because such ‘extra-musical’ signifiers as vividly audible breaths, or that technical imperfections or even plain mistakes are preserved on the matrix, that the ‘authentic’ intensity of the recorded performance can, at first, be overwhelming. This sort of reaction to the listening experience has, nevertheless, a particular level of intensity for a specific category of listeners: those who have experimented with the mechanics of singing through their own larynxes and breathing muscles and, particularly, those who have themselves advanced experience of singing. This assumption can be tested against the following observation by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson:

\textsuperscript{86} Even if one listens to all the recordings made by a singer, reads all the available press reviews of performances and recordings, carefully traces the phases of the singer’s training and personal life, studies the writings that the singer may have left on vocal technique and singing styles, this still cannot reveal a complete record of a singer’s vocalism.

\textsuperscript{87} James Allen Williams, “\textit{Phantom Power: Recording Studio History, Practice, and Mythology}”, 40. If the decades between 1925 (the beginning of electrical recording) and 1940s (when the system of tape recording took over) may have established the closest relationship between live performance and recording, from the 1990s, with the advent of digital technology, most parameters of sound can be manipulated or built from scratch. In the latter case, the performance itself becomes more or less irrelevant or, rather, it becomes the concern of the producer and the sound engineer, together with computers and integrated interfaces for sound design.

\textsuperscript{88} The human ear can detect frequencies from c. 20 to 20,000 Hz. and pre-electrical limits seem to be 5,000Hz. In acoustical recordings the upper harmonics of a voice are removed above 3,500 cycles (Hz), and this heavily affects the sound quality. On these topics see Simon Trezise, “\textit{The Recorded Document: Interpretation and Discography}”, 193, 194.
We can’t listen to [early recordings] and hear the sounds an audience at a live performance would have heard then. What we may be able to do, knowing enough about what happened between performer and disc, is to begin to imagine the sorts of sounds that would have given rise to what comes off the discs, given that means of recording. It’s very hard to do … we have to fall back on our imaginations and try to listen through the noise and through all the other distortions of pitch and colour. While wholly unscientific, it’s surprisingly helpful. I can’t demonstrate it, so I can only seek to persuade you that with practice one does begin to find early recordings much easier to listen to.89

The argument that the results of the acoustical process of recording are subject to many limitations indubitably stands; but Leech-Wilkinson’s comment that ‘I can’t demonstrate it’ is telling: the shortcomings of recordings which he identifies are much more easily overcome by the expert ear of the professional singer, as demonstrated by the shared listening experiences which I recounted at the beginning of this chapter. The kind of listening experienced by professional singers is based on an empirical knowledge of what the recorded voice is ‘doing’, so that the vocalism heard on the disc (or cylinder) is physically decoded by the singer during the listening process. In other words the singer listens and understands via the body, an ability which itself develops in time and through practice. ‘Insider knowledge’ is not a pre-experiential ‘given’, something that the ‘insider’ knows to be there a priori; it emerges progressively through self-reflection. When, for example, I heard an original disc of Adelina Patti for the first time, an experience defined above as 'epiphanic', I did not know what exactly to do with this ‘old’ scratchy material. It took months and several listening sessions, first at the house of David Sulkin and later at the British Library Sound Archive, before I realised that my own knowledge as a singer was causing me to engage deeply with the listening process in a complex and embodied manner. In time, I was able to perceive ‘physically’, for example, how the deep breath was functioning, the larynx being lowered and the pharynx raised by the singers whose recorded sound I was listening to. This decoding process can enable the listening singer to go beyond a pre-electrical recording’s flaws which, in many respects, are in fact less deceptive than those present in digital recordings, on the grounds that modern recordings are, ironically,

mediated by technology and the manipulation of acoustic and other parameters to a greater extent than pre-electrical recordings. In the limited sense explained in these few paragraphs, early recordings can be described as ‘high-fidelity’, especially so to the subtle ear of the professional singer.

The various problematics concerning early recordings inevitably impinge on the process of transferring them to LP or CD. Simon Trezise underlines how, in commercial transfers of 78 rpm discs, the many aspects which affect vocal timbre – upper frequencies, quality of the horn, unsteadiness of the cutter, the condition of the disc after many playings – are generally treated by sound engineers with an insufficient level of documentation.\(^\text{90}\) It should be apparent, at this point, that the choice of playback speeds is of vital importance, as it very profoundly affects the timbre of the recorded voice. On this specific point, commercial transfers sometimes contain gross mistakes.\(^\text{91}\) Nevertheless, some of the sound engineers who have been making commercial transfers do know their craft in great detail. They have, for instance, inferred the pitch at which a singer might have recorded in a specific session by studying the timbral quality of their voice on other records, drawing from the known speed of adjacent recordings, considering the singer’s age or the aria’s tessitura. The excellent results achieved by outstanding sound engineers such as Ward Martson or Roger Beardsley cannot be dismissed as ‘commercial products’ realised outside the specialised area of academic expertise.\(^\text{92}\) Moreover sound engineers have privileged access to copies preserved in much better condition than those in most public collections.\(^\text{93}\)

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\(^{90}\) Trezise, “The Recorded Document: Interpretation and Discography”. 195.

\(^{91}\) For instance A Record of Singers was realised in 1982 by Keith Hardwick for EMI with the specific intention of correcting pitch errors made in some 68 bands of the 1977 first edition issued with the different title The Record of Singing vol. 1. Despite the stated motivation of this second edition, incorrect pitch decisions are still present.

\(^{92}\) … just as the editor of a manuscript may be exceptionally knowledgeable, far more so than the user, so a really good transfer engineer – a Roger Beardsley, a Ward Marston, a Mark Obert-Thorn – may be far better able than most academics to make the best judgements about speeds and equalisation. Not all modern transfers are that good, but in cases like these it can sometimes be appropriate to value the best CD reissues as highly as the original disc’, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance, Chapter 3.2, par. 50, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html#par50.

\(^{93}\) Keith Hardwick states that he obtained new vinyl pressings from original metals for some of the recordings contained in the second issue of EMI’s A Record of Singers (1982) – formerly known as The Record of Singing (1977); see the “Producer’s Notes” in A Record of Singers. Part 2, EMI RLS 7706, 6 LPs. When Ward Marston issued his The Edison Legacy, vols. 1 and 2, he had exclusive access to over a hundred of wax disc masters housed at the sound archive of the Thomas Edison National Historical Park which had never been published; see The Edison Legacy, vol. 2, Marston Records 53014-2. 3CDs.
Considered epistemologically, the question of what a specific recording stands for unveils complex issues of content and representation. Simon Trezise suggests that:

A recording does not ‘show’ a performance to us, for the performance that generated the recorded artifact is hidden… The record and associated equipment are telling us about a performance, but it is not the performance itself; it is filtered through a large number of processes and contexts with which the original performer has nothing to do.\(^{94}\)

In the case of early recordings, the associated equipment posits a number of potentially problematic issues, as we have seen in the discussion of the limitations of pre-electrical recordings. The ‘number of processes and contexts’, which are not related to the original performer’s physical activity, range from the way in which the sound has been captured and dealt with by the recording, mastering and pressing apparatus, to the listening conditions under which it is experienced. Finally, there are considerable matters of ‘agency’ to be explored, including how the commercial interests of recording companies determined the selection of music to be recorded, and where and how it was marketed and distributed.

In addition, there are other issues which bear on how the listening experience affects the listener.\(^{95}\) The way in which recordings ‘both reflected and shaped music throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first’ has only become the concern of musicology in relatively recent times.\(^{96}\) In this respect, it is fair to say that music critics were for a long time far ahead of musicologists. For critics and scholars such as Scott, Stein and Celletti, early recordings were much more than an object of antiquarian interest. These aficionados studied early recordings in order to try to reconstruct historical vocal traditions and the phases of stylistic trends in different national repertoires, both operatic and non-operatic. Their motivations may have

\(^{94}\) Simon Trezise, “The Recorded Document: Interpretation and Discography”, 207.

\(^{95}\) And this includes the reactions of the original performer who made the recording, each time he or she listens to the recording itself. Here I especially refer to the dramatic, and sometimes traumatic, psychological impact that the listening experience had on those opera singers who first made recordings at the beginning of the twentieth century. For a discussion on this topic see Barbara Gentili, “Early 78s, Celebrities of the Italian Operatic Tradition, and Audiences”, in *Listening to Music: People, Practices and Experiences*, edited by Helen Barlow and David Rowland (The Open University, 2017), accessed May 21, 2018, [http://ledbooks.org/proceedings2017/2017/02/27/early-78s-celebrities-of-the-italian-operatic-tradition-and-audiences/](http://ledbooks.org/proceedings2017/2017/02/27/early-78s-celebrities-of-the-italian-operatic-tradition-and-audiences/).

been so intertwined with the commercial interests of those record companies both large and small, which saw the market potential in transferring and issuing a large number of acoustical and electrical recordings as LPs and later CDs from the 1970s onwards, that their ‘scholarly independence’ may be questionable. Nevertheless, their achievements in tracing careers and recording legacies of great singers at the beginning of the recording era have proved an invaluable source for researchers, as will become apparent in the discussion of discographical sources.

Musicology’s interest in recordings, in effect, developed only when scholars seriously started to investigate music ‘as performance’. Once musicology began to challenge the prevailing concept of music as an autonomous object disengaged from the social context within which it was conceived and consumed (a process which, although associated with the last fifty years, in fact has its origins much further back in time) the notion of a hierarchical relationship between the musical work and its execution (performance), was also called into question. In the 1990s a new trend began of re-conceiving music as rooted in its performance, encouraged on the one hand by ethnomusicology, and on the other by a growing tendency within ‘new musicology’ to widen the limits of the discipline in terms of genre with the

97 EMI’s The Record of Singing is one of the most ambitious projects of this sort. The two-volume book by Scott, The Record of Singing, was intended to accompany the listening to these discs offering stimulating essays on the singers included in the collections. Many other recording companies, such as Olympic, EteRNA, Club99, Nimbus, Naxos, Symposium, Pearl, Romophone, Pavilion GEMM and Marston Record just to name a few, have made transfers from 78 rpm discs and, less frequently, from cylinders from the 1970s to the present day.

98 Lydia Goehr, The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), Richard Taruskin, Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). The subordination of performance to the ‘sacrality’ of the musical text was confidently affirmed by traditional musicology, which conceived performance as mere reproduction of the composer’s original idea – as embodied in an authoritative text: the critical edition. As Nicholas Cook underlines in his article “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance”, that musicology built the relationship between text and performance all in favour of the text is a consequence of the nineteenth-century origins of the discipline; see, “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance”, Music Theory Online 7 (2001), par. 5, accessed October 22, 2017, http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.01.7.2/mto.01.7.2.cook.html. Musicology adopted, in effect, the methodologies and approaches of philology and literary scholarship for the study of literary texts. On the other hand, Karol Berger underlines not only how Dahlhaus’s formula of history of music as a history of musical facts (Foundation of Music History, 1977) already implied a ‘hermeneutical turn’ in musicology – where cultural practice and social facts may illuminate musical ones – but also that the divide between positivistic and interpreting tendencies within the discipline cannot be rigidly separated at any given stage of musicology’s history. See Karol Berger, “Musicology According to Don Giovanni, or: Should We Get Drastic?”, The Journal of Musicology 22 (2005), 490–501: 492, 494. In effect, as Karen Henson points out, the late nineteenth-century performer-oriented vision of opera and classical music existed alongside ‘ideals’ of the subserviency of interpreters to composers (while the ideal of sacrality of the score was becoming dominant, especially in Austro-German instrumental music); see Henson, Opera Acts, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.
inclusion of jazz, rock, pop and remix.  

For example, in Christopher Small’s seminal vision, music is conceptualised as an activity rather than a thing and, although musical works are an important part of the performance, they are ‘only a part’.  

Furthermore Richard Taruskin wonders for what reason a performer should perform if he ‘did not have the urge to participate in the music and, yes, to contribute to it’.  

As Cook points out, the result of this process can lead from a fetishism of the musical text to an equally problematic fetishism of the performance.  

A rapprochement between text and performance has been attempted by highlighting the essentially performative nature of the musical act. Music is a performative art, in the sense that it enacts today, as it did in the past, a constant activity of negotiation between composer and performer, between performers, between performances as existent in a specific point in history (and/or retrospectively), and between performer(s) and auditor(s). In an ‘invention in two voices’, the musical work, especially when it is intended more as a script than a text, enables performances and, consequently, in Small’s terms the ‘celebration’ of relationships, and the interaction of these two components both creates and reflects social meanings.  

As Karol Berger underlines, musical facts, even when considered as ‘individual actions [e.g. performances] can make sense only within a broader context of premises and constrains established by social practices’.  

For Carolyn Abbate, though, this kind of hermeneutic in which performance is acknowledged as a generator of social meanings, still misses the point. In effect, she argues, what musicology fears (and

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100 Christopher Small, Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening, (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 2, 11. The term ‘musicking’, created by Small, includes any form of participation in a musical event: performing, listening, rehearsing, practising, composing, dancing, even those who facilitate the performance. Small also considers listening to recorded music as ‘musicking’ (9).


102 Being the latter ironically intended as another product. See, Cook, “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance”, paras. 12, 13. For Peter Kivy the performance is the ‘interpretation’ of the performer and therefore, instead of a process, again a product; see Kivy, Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 127.

103 Small, Musicking, 13, 133, 138–140.

104 Karol Berger, “Musicology According to Don Giovanni”, 492. Berger goes further, pointing out that ‘to a number of our colleagues today it is no longer as obvious as it was to Dahlhaus in 1977 that they must use nonmusical facts to illuminate the musical ones, not the reverse’, Berger op. cit., 493. Here Berger refers to those colleagues in the field of ‘cultural studies’ who use musical facts in order to explain something of the culture they study.
consequently avoids), is the essence of the musical act, the ‘phenomenal explosion’ of it as experienced in space and time.\textsuperscript{105} Furthermore, this ‘drastic’ approach is even more suited to revealing the cultural practices within which music takes place, as the emphasis on the reality of performance corresponds to the emphasis of ‘the phenomenal world and its inhabitants’\textsuperscript{106}

As part of this new focus on performance, then, recordings have been co-opted as new ‘texts’ for analysis and with a variety of purposes, including studies in reception, sociology, cultural and media theory, and the history of technology.\textsuperscript{107} Various kinds of empirical approach to the analysis of recordings that have been devised over the last few decades apply to the different parameters within which a recorded performance might be studied. In the 1990s, for example, Robert Philip broke considerable new ground in his re-evaluation of early twentieth-century recordings as an invaluable resource for the history of performance, inasmuch as the live performance of canonical music has inevitably been influenced by recording ever since it became ubiquitous in musical culture.\textsuperscript{108}

The elements of performance style on which Philip concentrated his attention in his book \textit{Early Recordings and Musical Style}, were essentially comparative: questions of performers’ approaches to tempo, rubato, vibrato, and \textit{portamento}, all aspects of performance which underwent major transformations during the first fifty years of the twentieth century. When other scholars began to treat early recordings as historical documents, they largely borrowed from Philip’s framework while developing, across a span of several years, a variety of computational and quantitative systems of analysis.\textsuperscript{109} For example, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson considers the singing style of Elena Gerhardt in her Schubert recordings under the same categories of timbre, vibrato, \textit{portamento}, rubato and loudness, looking to these as

\begin{itemize}
  \item[107] For a consideration of the interdisciplinary interactions that working on recordings is bringing about, see Cook, Clarke, Leech-Wilkinson and Rink, Introduction to \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music}, 1–9.
  \item[109] For the UK, this kind of computational analysis was especially the focus of CHARM. Its three analytical projects led to an extremely varied number of contributions. Among the analytical projects, the \textit{Expressive Gesture and Style in Schubert Song Performance} project used spectrographic analysis and computer-assisted methods of listening for assessing timing, loudness and frequency in Schubert songs and for showing how their combination generates emotional responses; see Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, \textit{Gesture in Schubert}, accessed March, 9, 2017, http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/projects/p2_2.html.
\end{itemize}
key markers of her ‘personal style’. In discussing vibrato, for example, he is able to measure in numeric values its speed (cycle length) and width (range of pitch variation), applying a system of computer-assisted analysis.\textsuperscript{110} On the topic of computational and visual analysis of recordings, Nicholas Cook explains how technologies have opened up new ways of working with recordings – ways that make it much easier than before to manipulate them, in the sense that we are used to manipulating books and other written sources.\textsuperscript{111}

The assumption here is that the software (in this case Sonic Visualiser) offers a visual representation that enhances the aural perception of what we hear while a recording is being played. In this way we can compare a large number of recordings of different interpreters in order to describe individual stylistic elements and produce generalisations from them.

As clarified at the outset of this discussion on methodology, my study deals with the analysis of often very subtle differences in the timbre of the recorded voices and cannot, therefore, benefit from the application of current computational systems of analysis, which are (as yet) only capable of showing relatively crude differences between the loudness of different frequencies. Furthermore, even if a software that works on individual voice identification were developed (and such research were not classified), precisely how and exactly what would we be analysing or understanding? When we analyse performance style as a set of expressive choices made by performers (the soloist, the conductor, or a combination of people) concerning musical parameters, we are overlooking a fundamental element which lies at the heart of musical praxis. All these choices, as seen above, are primarily the effect of the individual abilities of a specific performer while interacting with the musical score, and are not just cases of unmediated ‘personal taste’. All musical performance depends on a mass of complex technical skills. In the case of a particular singer, their vocal training in conjunction with the personal adjustments and solutions elaborated in the moment of performance of a range of diverse vocal scores, is built up over many years during which that singer’s personal system of vocal projection has been developed.


\textsuperscript{111} Nicholas Cook considers the meaning of analysing performance style on the basis of empirical methodologies, “Methods for Analysing Recordings”, in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music}, 221–245: 221.
Operatic singing is, in some ways, an incredible feat: a combination of physical strength, intellectual finesse, self-preservation instinct and inexhaustible will power, and one which cannot be adequately captured by the habitual terms employed in musicology such as ‘personal style’, or ‘aesthetic choices’. Whatever expression we use to define this personal system of vocal production – ‘a singer’s vocal technique’ or ‘a singer’s habitual vocalism’ – while it certainly provides a generalised ‘thumbnail’ character, it also, of course, constrains the singer’s stylistic palette. The ‘pure’ tonal quality versus the full-bodied roundness of a recorded voice, the consistency of the tone colour throughout the vocal compass versus marked variations in timbre as the voice passes from one register to another, neat legato versus the perception of gliding in the passage between two pitches, are not ‘just’ aesthetic choices, but rather depend on specific technical behaviours which are consciously enacted by the performer, as my thesis will exhaustively demonstrate.

We should now be aware of the inherent ‘filtered’ nature of recordings. A recording is a technological product, subject to the various constraints of the recording process and to the many factors involved in the final phases of preparation and consumption of the listening experience. But, notwithstanding these factors, it is also a record (in the broadest sense of the term) which, if examined in the right way, has the potential to attest with remarkable precision to a singer’s habitual system of vocal production or technique. For this reason, it is early recordings that form the objects of my investigation of the birth of ‘modern’ Italian operatic vocalism.
Chapter 2 Operatic Verismo

I Verismo opera: genuine operatic trend or ‘vogue’?

Scholars who have explored the topic of operatic verismo have experienced two challenges: the first is posed by the large variety of works that the expression ‘musical verismo’ encompasses, and the second regards the problematic transferability of the term verismo to music per se.

The first of these is exemplified by Jay Nicolaisen who, in his influential study, Italian Opera in Transition, warns

...[verismo] is a term that must be handled with greater care [than in the past] if it is to be used at all, and with a rather more precise idea of the implications its use carries. Otherwise we shall continue to face the curious situation in which the musically primitive Cavalleria rusticana (1890), a one-act opera based on a violent play by Giovanni Verga, and the musically sophisticated Turandot (1924), a four-act opera based on an exotic fairy tale by the eighteenth-century Italian Carlo Gozzi, are lumped willy-nilly under the same convenient heading.... If Mascagni had not set Cavalleria a few years after its appearance as a play, it is questionable whether the term “verismo” would have been transferred to the operatic sphere at all.¹

Meanwhile Matteo Sansone remarks:

In most cases, the use of the expression ‘operatic verismo’ has proved unsatisfactory and misleading. It can at best identify the minor genre which originated from Cavalleria rusticana and had some bearing on the evolution of Italian opera in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth.²


The second issue – the application of the term verismo to opera – has been the concern of a number of scholars who in recent years have analysed the characteristics of literary verismo and their fundamental incompatibility with the use of the term in opera. Dahlhaus doubts that ‘musical verismo is a genuine analogue of its literary counterpart’ and, siding with Eugen Voss, maintains that ‘the differences between them are so glaring that one can doubt whether…it is meaningful at all to speak of verismo in opera’.³ Where Sansone states that ‘[t]he essential features of literary verismo did not pass into Mascagni’s Cavalleria’,⁴ Adriana Corazzol, in more general terms, affirms:

Although the term ‘verismo’ emerged in both literature and opera during roughly the same period (in novels and spoken theatre around the 1870s, in opera around the 1890s), the modern tendency has been to regard this as a coincidence of little consequence.⁵

With this premise, the suspicion that musical verismo is just a conventional term and that such an operatic trend never had an existential ‘autonomy’ is established as a matter of fact. If Mascagni had missed the opportunity of using a contemporary play (1884) by Giovanni Verga (1840–1922) as the source for an operatic libretto, and if Mascagni’s one-act opera had not been awarded first prize in Eduardo Sonzogno’s second competition for young composers, the critics would not even have used the term verismo in their reviews of Mascagni’s Cavalleria rusticana.⁶

There is a trend in historical musicology to narrow down the notion of musical verismo in the belief that scholarly perspective is clouded by a far too broad concept of verismo (as in Nicolson and Sansone above). The question is not so straightforward, though. In a recent study, Andreas Giger has pointed out that, in

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⁴ ‘Verga’s formal restraint and impersonality were incompatible with the emotional subjectivity of operatic singing. … The operatic transposition of Cavalleria rusticana thus effaced the non-melodramatic, veristic peculiarities of the play and emphasized the easily apprehensible universal feelings of love, jealousy and revenge, capitalizing on the novelty of the low-life “exotic” environment’, Sansone, “Verga and Mascagni”, 201.


fact, late nineteenth-century literary and music criticism presented a substantially broader idea of verismo. The lack of ‘an easy access to many of the nineteenth-century sources’, Giger suggests, misled Nicolaisen and his predecessors, \(^7\) but also, I would add, his successors such as Hans-Joachim Wagner, who in 1999 stated: ‘How the term verismo – the literary or musical one – should be defined is not certain’. \(^8\)

Before engaging with the late nineteenth-century critical debate around verismo as a creative movement, I will briefly discuss literary verismo as defined in standard histories of Italian literature. It is these definitions that have led musicologists to rule out the transferability of the term verismo to music, and it is therefore important to understand the origins of this evaluation.

II Main elements of literary verismo

In the preface to his short story L’Amante di Gramigna (1880), the great novelist and playwright Giovanni Verga theorises the concept of impersonality, so crucial to recent studies in literary verismo\(^9\). Verga’s assertion is that the verismo author tries to eliminate the authorial voice from the text he or she is writing. The aim is to allow the story to speak for itself, through the perfect cohesion of all its narrative elements. \(^10\) In order to achieve this result the social, cultural and political landscape in which the characters act and think must be recreated through meticulous observation, exactly as it is in reality. If the author is successful, he cannot be identified, as he tells the story from the same point of view of his characters, ‘never going beyond or above their culture and ideology, never saying anything they might


\(^9\) Luigi Russo’s study of Verga, published in 1920, linked the impersonal style with the substance of verismo, although his view seemed not to have been shared by critics of his age. This suggests that up to that date verismo had not traditionally been associated with the impersonal style and that Russo’s essay marked a turning point in the critical reception of verismo. See Luigi Russo, Giovanni Verga, first edn. (Naples: Ricciardi, 1920).

\(^10\) In Verga’s own words ‘Io credo che il trionfo del romanzo…si raggiunga allorchè l’affinità e la coesione di ogni sua parte sarà così completa che il processo della creazione rimarrà un mistero…e la mano dell’artista risulterà assolutamente invisibile…e l’opera d’arte sembrerà essersi fatta da sé…’, ‘I believe that the novel’s triumph is achieved when every part has such deep affinity with every other that the process of creation will be impossible to detect, and the hand of the artist will remain absolutely invisible.. and the work of art will appear as to have been made by itself…’ from the Preface to L’amante di Gramigna, in Vita dei campi edited by Carla Ricciardi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1987), 92.
not have said themselves or mentioning things they would have not known. The
authorial adoption of the internal viewpoint of those represented has been also
defined as the ‘regressive point of view’. For example, in her lengthy discussion of
the concept of regression, Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol suggests an affinity between
Verga’s method of lowering his linguistic level to that of his characters, in effect
renouncing his own literary sophistication, and Leoncavallo’s musical practice:

[His] so-called endemic triviality … for example, may well have been a
deliberate attempt at veristic impersonality: we should recall that
Leoncavallo, far from being ‘trivial’, was in fact the most literary of the
verismo composers.

In all these respects, both similarities and differences with French naturalism can be
observed. Verga pays homage to the ‘scientific rigor’ with which Zola treats his
‘human cases’ but, unlike Zola, Verga is not indifferent to his characters.

[He] assumes a tone of impassibility that is not one of indifference but
which hides the suffering. This ethical attitude generates exactly the kind
of art – a representation of life – that is at once scrupulous and heartfelt:
scruple and deep feeling, impersonality of style, and ethical interest
merge in narration.

Naturalism focused the attention of writers on the ‘human facts’ as they are and can
be observed. In this new narrative theory, the role of imagination loses its raison
d’être as all the novelist needs to do is observe the ‘real’ and describe the human
story, or just the segment of it which he has chosen to recount. In order to achieve

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11 Giovanni Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy: Verga, Capuana, and verismo”, in The
Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel, edited by Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ceccarelli

12 Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of

13 French naturalism’s major exponents were the brothers Emond (1822–1896) and Jules de
Goncourt (1830–1870), Emile Zola (1840–1902), Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897) and Guy de
Maupassant (1850–1893). A ‘pre-naturalism’ movement began to spread through most of the
Northern European countries from the middle nineteenth-century onwards, but the existence of
strong cultural connections between France and Italy determined the particular influence on Italian
writers of French ones. French ‘pre-naturalism’ writers include Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) and
Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880).

15 [Verga] assume un tono di impassibilità che non è indifferenza, ma sublimata sofferenza.
Questo atteggiamento etico genera appunto quell’arte, che è rappresentazione della vita,
scrupolosa e commossa a un tempo: scrupolo e commozione, impersonalità di stile e interesse
etico, si fondono nel racconto’, see Luigi Russo, Giovanni Verga, 8th edn. (Rome: Laterza, 1979),
66. With Luigi Russo’s study of Verga the impersonal method started to be seen as the core
principle of verismo, although this vision was not immediately embraced by critics in the 1920s (see
above footnote 9).
this result, he adopts the approach of an anthropologist in the field: he goes and lives for months among the people whose story he has decided to record, learning their ideas, ways of thinking, mores and language. Nevertheless, he remains an observer, never merging with the characters of his story and always avoiding any emotional commitment to them.\footnote{16} Veristi, on the other hand, write about their own region or province, with which they are already deeply familiar. Although the verista author studies his characters objectively, he has an emotional bond with them and with the land which they inhabit. Because they share the same memories from childhood, the writer empathises with his character’s sufferings and aspirations.\footnote{17}

The links between verismo and French naturalism, however, cannot overshadow the fact that the roots of verismo are to be found in the long-lasting Italian tendency towards realism. The Europe-wide literary realist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century found fertile soil in Italy. Already in the eighteenth-century, the theatrical works of Carlo Goldoni redefined Italian comedy through the depiction on stage of ‘real’ life and characters.\footnote{18} Elements of an aspiration towards realism are already present in Alessandro Manzoni’s (1785–1873) writings, as underlined by some of the later nineteenth-century critics.\footnote{19} Manzoni had already drawn fully-rounded real people, both humble and powerful, relying upon a magisterial use of the spoken language.\footnote{20} Nonetheless he was the major exponent of Italian Romanticism, an idealist and a Catholic, and inevitably became the target of the positivist, secular, anti-Catholic and disenchanted youth of the Milanese

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\footnote{16} Gorizio Viti, *Verga verista* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1994), 9, 10.
\footnote{17} Viti, *Verga verista*, 14, 15.
\footnote{18} Goldoni’s reformation of the Italian theatre encompassed both aesthetic and social elements. With the elimination of the masks of *commedia dell’arte* and their vulgar humor, he created a more realistic theatre, more appealing to wider middle-class audiences; while through his criticism of society – where the sterile and arrogant nobility was opposed to industrious and productive bourgeoisie, which cherished the values of family, thrift and prudence – he claimed a new, more respected role for Venetian bourgeoisie. See Ted Emery, *Goldoni as Librettist* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).
\footnote{19} Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy: Verga, Capuana, and verismo”, 63 and Viti, *Verga verista*, 13.
\footnote{20} In 1868 the eighty-three year old Manzoni was appointed as president of the commission which the Minister of Education Emilio Brogliò instituted for the dissemination of a ‘universal’ Italian among ‘all orders of population’. The question of a common Italian language was a crucial political issue to the new born Italy. Manzoni proposed the adoption of ‘fiorentino’ (Florentine language) as the standard idiom of the new Italy, but the members of the Florentine commission did not share his view (Manzoni was part of the Milanese commission created specifically for him given that he was too old to travel to Florence, at that time capital of the Kingdom); Manzoni resigned shortly afterwards.
The scapigliati (literally, 'disheveled') lived in an age of transition and shared a profound disappointment with what they perceived as the bourgeoisie betrayal of the great expectations of the Risorgimento. Once unified, the country remained deeply divided (as we will see in the next chapter), and the bourgeoisie – nascent leading class of the new nation – disengaged from the social and political issues that troubled the young Italy: public education, military organisation, political corruption and the problem of the South (mezzogiorno), to name just some.

The expression of disappointment with the painful condition of the post-unification state took the shape of a protest against the cultural movement which brought it into being: Romanticism. Manzoni had not only been the major representative of Romanticism, but had become the living embodiment of the new nation’s aspirations, and a touchstone for the education of the Italy of the future. His masterpiece, I promessi sposi, was introduced as ‘the’ textbook in every public school in the kingdom.

The reaction of the scapigliati against Romanticism led to the rejection of its traditional contents and linguistic formulas. For instance, the poet Emilio Praga progressively abandoned the rhythmic regularity of versification and substituted the grandeur of Romanticism with simpler conversational modes taken from spoken language. Objects of everyday life entered the reign of poetry, conceived as ‘painting from the true’ (pittura sul vero): from the railway locomotive, symbol of the mechanised era and of the positivistic symbol of human ‘progress’, to the potatoes and onions served in the taverns where the scapigliati spent much of their disordered lives.

The scapigliatura, however, remains a complex artistic movement which, notwithstanding all its criticism of tradition, Romantic models and catholicism, failed to articulate a constructive programme of viable alternatives to the reality that they criticised. If realism is just one of its many facets, its linguistic experimentalism would

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21 The term is for the first time adopted by the journalist, novelist and playwright Cletto Arrighi (1828–1906) in his novel La Scapigliatura e il 6 Febbraio (1861). The most significant exponents of the movement were the poet Emilio Praga, the poet, composer and librettist Arrigo Boito, the composer Franco Faccio, the poet and novelist Iginio Ugo Tarchetti and the poet Giovanni Camerana.


23 The scapigliati embodied two contrasting souls: optimist, full of love and hope in the path of humanity towards progress on one hand (positivism); obscure, pathological, painfully lost, sinfully desperate on the other (symbolism connected with the French poètes maudits).
also exert a strong influence on the next generation of *veristi* and on the language of opera librettos.

Standard literary histories also underline the focus of *verismo* on the lower social classes, particularly in the non-industrialised southern regions of Italy, who were depicted in their everyday life. This seems due more to the fact that the major *veristi* were from the South (Verga, Luigi Capuana, Federico De Roberto, Matilde Serao and Salvatore Di Giacomo) than to a predetermined choice of specific geographic areas.\(^\text{24}\) Nevertheless the South was unquestionably the more backward area of the newly unified country and the miserable condition of its population (which prompted the so-called *questione Meridionale*) was a painful weight on the conscience of the young Italy. The forgotten people of the South whose unchangeable destiny of failure features in Verga’s novels and short stories justifies his intrinsic pessimism. In the introduction to his masterpiece *I Malavoglia* (1881) he lays out a plan for a cycle of novels which is tellingly entitled *I Vinti* (‘The Vanquished’). As Verga explains, the human struggle for progress leaves by the wayside the weak, who entered the competition because they were pushed by their own passions and aspirations. The mechanism of the passions is simpler in the lower social strata and becomes progressively more complex and sophisticated as the types observed ascend the social ladder. In this way, what in *I Malavoglia* is a struggle for material needs, in *Mastro Don Gesualdo* becomes a struggle for accumulation of goods, in *La Duchessa di Leyra* aristocratic vanity, ambition in *L’Onorevole Scipioni*, until in *L’uomo di lusso*, all these ambitions climax to destroy the human being. As we can see, Verga’s original plan included a complete portrayal of humanity depicted in every social circle, and was not exclusively focused on the lower classes.\(^\text{25}\)

The introduction of lower class characters represented one of the most original traits of musical *verismo* as well, although the sensationalist treatment of their psychology has been considered another sign of the mismatch between literary and musical *verismo*. Egon Voss evaluates the absence of social criticism, the elevated language of the libretti, the lack of psychological development, and the theatricality of *verismo* operas as important elements which highlight the profound disjunction

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\(^{24}\) The better known novels take place in Sicily, Sardinia and Campania (although in the latter case, it would be more accurate to specify Naples). But regionalism was already a widespread characteristic of Italian realism; for instance, Francesco Dell’Ongaro (1808–1873), Verga’s Florentine mentor, was an exponent of Friulan realism.

\(^{25}\) *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro Don Gesualdo* are the only novels completed by Verga. Sketches, the first chapter and a fragment of the second one remain of *Duchessa di Leyra*, whereas *L’Onorevole Scipioni* and *L’uomo di lusso* were never realised.
between literary and musical verismo. Dahlhaus adds that in Cavalleria rusticana
the lack of social criticism is linked ‘to a dramaturgy deriving from the opera seria
tradition as founded by Rossini’. Most important of all of the considerations above, though, is the difficulty in
transferring the ‘impersonal’ literary verismo style to opera. In drama, whether
literary or musical, the author disappears by default. We hear (or rather, we seem
to hear) characters speaking to us directly in their own voices, with the virtual
exclusion of an obvious narrator. The complex system of narrative techniques to
which the novelist resorts in order to hide his or her presence are of little use to the
play writer. In any case, the concept of impersonality is a red herring from a
historiographical point of view. As we shall see, this concept, so crucial to more
recent studies in literary verismo, is practically absent from the perspective of late
nineteenth-century criticism.

III Late nineteenth-century criticism of verismo

The adjective ‘veristi’ was first used by the critic Guido Guidi, who in 1867 reviewed
a painting by Antonio Pulcinelli, Cosimo Pater Patriae riceve i letterati e gli artisti del
suo tempo. With this adjective Guidi opposed, in a rather inconclusive manner, the
verista writer who ‘loathes what was and wants only what is’ and the idealisti, who
‘cherish [those subjects] that have already passed into the domain of history and
ancient history’. He disavows this simplistic binary opposition, and insists that,
whether historical or contemporary, a work of art must both arouse strong feelings
and be the expression of a methodological or ‘concrete’ observation of reality. Guidi’s thoughts seem to echo the ideas of literary and artistic realism put forward

26 Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo”, 49.
27 Carl Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 351.
28 ‘Cosimo, Father of the Fatherland Receives the Scholars and Artists of His Time’, Guido Guidi,
“Della statua del Sig. Salvini da erigersi sulla Piazza dell’Indipendenza di Firenze e del quadro del
Sig. Prof. Puccinelli,” Gazzettino delle arti del disegno 1, no. 26 (1867): 202, quoted in Giger,
“Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term”, 279.
29 “… coloro che, banditi i soggetti contemporanei accarezzano quelli che passarono già nel
dominio della storia, e della storia antica, né a quella che schifa di ciò che fu e vuole soltanto ciò
che è … senza entrare nel gineprato delle disquisizioni estetiche dei precetti accademici, delle
dottrine degli idealisti e dei veristi…”; see Guidi, Gazzettino delle arti del disegno 1, 202, 203.
30 ‘In art, I am glad to confess, I… belong neither to the group of those who, once they have done
away with all contemporary subjects, cherish those that have already passed into the domain of
history and ancient history, nor to [the group] that loathes what was and wants only what is. For
me, any subject is acceptable as long as the concept manages to stir memories of glory or
misfortune, a throb of joy, a sentiment of mercy, of terror, of admiration, and so on; the expression
should be the result of logic, possible if not [necessarily] true, the fruit of a profound observation of
the time and place in which the depicted people lived and worked’. Guidi, ibid. (my emphasis).
a decade previously by the French theorist and publicist Jules Champfleury. For him the representation of social reality, when it is set in the past, must likewise be 'concrete'. In other words, historical subjects must possess historical substance and realise the aim of realism, which is the objective representation of social reality. Guidi’s review already outlines the basic elements on which late nineteenth-century Italian criticism would dispute verismo. In effect, the struggle between idealism and realism, the essence of realism and its artistic merits each became points in the critical debate. Giger traces the historical development of this complex debate and groups the ideas which were circulating on the controversial topic into three main streams:

1. **Verismo** as a reaction to crude realism. By relying only on the perception of reality as an observable phenomenon, the creative freedom of the artist was severely limited. Among the supporters of a middle-way between idealism and realism was Francesco De Sanctis, Italy’s most eminent literary critic. De Sanctis advocated the true nature of both the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal’, and bitterly criticised the realists who, in his view, looked ‘for art in the mud’ and gave to ‘the lowest social classes … [the status of] artistic topics’.

2. **Verismo** as an exaggeration of realism. Criticised for its focus on the ugly aspects of reality by many authors, it was hailed as a means of social denunciation, the ‘bill of rights’ for the low-life, vulgar, trivial subjects whose representation in artistic forms had traditionally been rejected. For the publicist and theorist Lorenzo Stecchetti, pseudonym for Olindo Guerrini, one of the most widely read fin-de-siècle poets, this operation would have corrected the unbalanced notion of idealism, focused exclusively on the positive sides of life, leading in turn to social action and, eventually, to progress. The anonymous author of *Un lepidottero in aspettativa* clearly roots the ideological basis of this kind of literature in socialist thinking:

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31 Jules Champfleury, *Le réalisme*, (Paris: Michel Levy frères, 1857). Other criteria listed by Champfleury were the inclusion of areas previously excluded from art on the ground that the representation of their subjects was considered artistically unsuitable and broke classicist rules of stylisation by introducing stylistic mixture through the depiction of such subjects.

32 Sansone asserts that ‘veristi…reassessed the link between art and reality, established by Zola as a fundamental aesthetic premise, to allow greater freedom to the imagination.’ Sansone, “Verismo” Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. This might be also due to the strange mixture of realism and idealism which characterised this stream of Italian verismo.


34 For Stecchetti, the antagonists of verismo ‘do not realise where we [veristi] want to go, do not feel that we are destined to see very different triumphs than those of the Church and Manzoni! They do not understand that the schools of positivism, both in science and art, aim towards social renovation while they still dream the resurrection of catholicism and metaphysic’. Stecchetti, *Nova
For us [veristi], the philosophy that inspires us is socialism. We are the singing vanguards of the mob, [which is] filthy, shaggy, bloody, infected by pellagra and scrofula, enslaved by starvation, drunk due to misery, a prostitute pregnant with lightning bolts. With satire, disobedience, [and] bohemian anarchy, we are sweeping the path to the future, a future [that is] no longer bourgeois or political, but social and humanitarian.\(^\text{35}\)

3. **Verismo** as an art-historical genre reacting against idealism which, in late nineteenth-century Italian criticism, was seen as the guardian of conventional models in content, form and language. As the *scapigliati* insisted, the tidy formalities of literary and artistic models had to be swept away by the depiction of reality in all its untidy richness and complexity.\(^\text{36}\)

As this brief overview reveals, late nineteenth-century criticism was unfamiliar or at least unconcerned with the concept of impersonality and linked the term *verismo* with the introduction of new subject matters, to which *veristi* were in no way exclusively committed, and the consequent renewal of linguistic styles. Therefore, having these categories in mind, critics might well have applied the term *verismo* to the operatic context. The breezy dismissal of any link between literary and operatic forms of *verismo* that historical musicologists have expressed in recent years now seems less plausible, once we adopt this historiographical approach to literary criticism. Given that fact, we should surely revisit the question as to whether, and to what extent elements of *verismo* did, in fact, transmigrate into opera.

**IV An historiographical conceptualisation of verismo opera**

The 1860s mark the beginning of critical discussion of *verismo* on one hand, and the departure of opera from the conventions of *melodramma* (i.e. Romantic opera) on the other. As Giger suggests, this ‘break with convention [could work as] a useful

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\(^\text{35}\) Il verismo... respinge [la bandiera intollerante dell' *Arte per l’Arte*] e ne innalza un’altra più simpatica e più grandiosa: *L’Arte per il meglio*. ... Per noi [veristi], la filosofia che ci ispira è il socialismo. Noi siamo le vanguardie canore della canaglia, sucida, insana, sanguinosa, infetta di pellagra e di scrofola, serva perché famelica, briaca perché misera, prostituta gravida di fulmini. Noi colla satira, colla disobbedienza, coll’anarchia boema le spaziamo la strada all’avvenire. Avvenire non più borghese, né politico, ma sociale, umanitario*, *Verismo di un lepidottero in aspettativa* (Milano: Bignami & C., 1879), 66, 67, 95, quoted in Giger, *“Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term”*, 283

\(^\text{36}\) For the reaction against the ‘classics’, the whole Romanticism/Risorgimento literature which had been determined by a specific political agenda and was not seen, therefore, as the expression of a ‘true art’, see Vittorio Spinazzola, *Verismo e positivismo*, (Milan: Arcipelago, 1993), 12–18.
periodic designation of Italian opera. As a working hypothesis, let us begin with the idea of verismo as a gradual process of renovation – renovation of structures, forms, language, subject matters – which, within the span of several decades (from the 1860s to the 1890s), pulled Italian opera gradually away from the conventions of Romantic melodramma. This was a long-term process shaped by the dominating influence of Giuseppe Verdi on one hand, and French cultural hegemony on the other. The topic of the reception of Wagner’s operas and theories in post-unification Italy is another important factor in this process, but this properly belongs together with the broader political debate around the future of Italian opera, which forms the subject of the next chapter.

IV.1 Verdi, melodism and unconventional harmonies

The conservative stance adopted by Verdi every time that the sacrality of tradition was questioned perfectly matches his condemnation of the veristi. In a letter addressed to Giulio Ricordi in 1880, the composer complained about the self-consciousness of veristi as well as their recourse to harmonic formulas:

I don’t have such a horror of cabalettas, and if a young composer were to appear tomorrow who could write any as worthwhile as, for example, ‘Meco tu vieni o misera’ or ‘Perché non posso odiarti’, I would listen to them…and renounce all the harmonic sophistries, all the affectations of our learned orchestrator. Ah, progress, science, realism! … Shakespeare was a verista, but he did not know that. He was a verista by inspiration; we are veristi by project, with premeditation. Then it’s all the same,

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37 Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term”, 289. Giger warns that the categorisation cannot be too strict as ‘... an opera may be more or less veristic, depending on the number of abandoned Romantic conventions (Cavalleria rusticana is more veristic than Otello in subject matter, Otello is more veristic than Cavalleria in formal continuity)’ , 289, 290.

38 ‘Let us return to the past: it will be a step forward’, (“Torniamo all’antico: sarà un progresso.”), Letter to Florimo, 4.1.1871. edited by Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio, I Copialettere di Verdi, (Milan: Tip. Stucco Cerretti & Co., 1913), 233. This invariable attitude is also apparent in another episode: in 1871, Verdi was asked to become a member of a ministerial commission with the task of restoring the poor state of conservatory music education. His suggested remedies were confined to the study of harmony, counterpoint and classics. As Julian Budden points out, the request was motivated by the decadence and provincialism into which the majority of Italian conservatories had fallen since the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1870, the death of Mercadante, director of the Naples conservatoire, seemed to offer the opportunity to reform conservatoire teaching in Italy. See Julian Budden, The Operas of Verdi, 3 vols. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,1992), 3: 265, 266.
system by system, cabalettas are still better. ... An art which lacks spontaneity, naturalness, simplicity, is no longer art.\(^{39}\)

In 1884, commenting on Puccini’s *Le Villi*, Verdi blamed the young Tuscan composer for following modern tendencies [even though] he remains attached to melody, which is neither modern or old. However, it seems that the symphonic element predominates in him! ... Opera is opera: symphony is symphony, and I don’t believe that it is a good thing to insert a symphonic piece into an opera just for the pleasure of making the orchestra dance.\(^{40}\)

Again in 1892, Verdi judged Catalani’s *Wally* a ‘counterfeit German’ opera, useless to Italian audiences that call for ‘something other than the music of the future’.\(^{41}\)

Only Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) gained the unconditional approval of the maestro who recognised the theatrical effectiveness of the work. In essence, Verdi accused the young composers of ‘Germanising’ a national art form and betraying its Italianess.

Concerns regarding the increasing use of unconventional harmony in operatic music were a widespread issue in late nineteenth-century critical discourse. In 1883 the philosopher Antonio Velardita claimed that:

[Verismo] has destroyed everything, including the melodrama, where there is an abundance of effects, dazzling scenes, choruses, and dances

\(^{39}\) ‘Io però non ho tanto orrore delle cabalette, e se domani nascesse un giovane che me ne sapesse fare qualcuna del valore per es: Del “Meco tu vieni o misera” oppure “Ah perché non posso odiarti” andrei a sentirle ... e rinuncerei a tutti gli arzigogoli armonici, a tutte le leziosaggini delle nostre sapienti orchestrazioni. Ah il progresso, la scienza, il verismo... Verista finché volete, ma... Shakespeare era un verista ma non lo sapeva. Era un verista d’ispirazione; noi siamo veristi per progetto per calcolo. Allora tanto fà; sistema per sistema; Meglio ancora le cabalette. ... L’Arte che manca di spontaneità, di naturalza, e di semplicità, non è più Arte’, Letter to Giulio Ricordi 20.11.1880, *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi 1880–1881*, edited by Pierluigi Petrobelli, Marisa Di Gregorio Casati, and Carlo Matteo Mossa (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiiani, 1988), 70. ‘Meco tu vieni o misera’ is the cabaletta for Vaileburo’s aria ‘Si, li sciogliete, o Giudici’ from Act 2 of Bellini’s *La straniera*, and ‘Ah perché non posso odiarti’ is the cabaletta to Elevino’s aria ‘Tutto è sciolt’ from *La sonnambula* by again Bellini. Both cabalettas are functional to the plot’s development and do not represent examples of bel canto florid style.

\(^{40}\) ‘Segue le tendenze moderne ... ma si mantiene legato alla melodia che non è né moderna né antica. Pare però che predomi in lui l’elemento sinfonico! ... L’opera è l’opera: la sinfonìa è la sinfonìa, e non credo che in un opera sia bello fare uno squarciò sinfonico, pel sol piacere di far ballare l’orchestra.’ Letter to Arrivabene, 10.6.1884, in Annibale Alberti, *Verdi intimo. Carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il conte Opprandino Arrivabene, 1861–86* (Verona: Mondadori, 1931), 311–313.

interwoven with song, all designed to strike the senses; but [now] the old melody can no longer be found, only harmony.\textsuperscript{42}

The vocal pedagogue Leone Giraldoni argued that Italian composers were emulating types of music alien to their natural environment. He added that if advances in symphonic music had been achieved by Germans, Italians might well take advantage of these developments, but only for the exaltation of melody and not to bring about its disappearance inside the harmonic texture.\textsuperscript{43} The composer and theorist Cesare Dall’Olio shared the same preoccupations when he proclaimed the death of melody and the domination of symphony in Italian music.\textsuperscript{44}

The departure from the traditional harmony of Romantic \textit{melodramma} lamented by Verdi was, perhaps unsurprisingly, in fact being experimented with by the composer himself who, despite presenting himself as a traditionalist, was always extremely alert and receptive to what was going on not only in the musical world, but also in the theatre. As Budden observes, non-functional harmonic progressions occur in the scene between Leonora and her father at the beginning of \textit{La forza del destino} (1862) and in the storm scene from \textit{Otello}.\textsuperscript{45} Giger highlights another example of daring harmony in the duo between Rodrigo and King Philip in \textit{Don Carlo} (1884 version).\textsuperscript{46}

The violations of musical grammar in late nineteenth-century Italian operas have been highlighted by scholars such as Budden and Vlad. The latter saw in the truly innovative harmony of \textit{Cavalleria rusticana} anticipations of Debussy.\textsuperscript{47} The unconventional use of harmony was also noted by critics of the time who considered it a sign of the veristic nature of an opera. This implied that an opera which obeyed conventional harmonic grammar lacked one of the essential markers of \textit{verismo}.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Il [verismo] tutto ha distrutto, anco il melodramma, ove si abbonda di apparenze, di scene smaglianti, di cori, e di balli intrecciati fra il canto, di tutto insomma atto a colpire i sensi, ma l’antica melode più non ritrovi; sola armonia}, Antonio Velardita, \textit{Verismo in filosofia, letteratura e politica}, (Piazza Armerina: Pansini, 1883), 242.


\textsuperscript{44} Cesare Dall’Olio, \textit{La musica e la civiltà: pensieri di un musicista}, (Bologna: Tipografia G. Cenerelli, 1897), 11.


For this reason, for instance, Hanslick did not regard Bizet’s *Carmen* as a *verismo* opera.\(^{48}\)

It is doubtful whether the critic of the *Perseveranza*, who reviewed the Roman premiere of *Cavalleria rusticana*, even noticed the non-functional use of harmony in the new opera. The element that he chooses to praise in Mascagni’s music is its original melodic invention, to which the success of *Cavalleria* is ascribed:

The music of this score maintains the praiseworthy idea of melody, in a way which is often lively and dramatic. The orchestration is soft and does not overcome the singing with deafening sonorities: on the contrary, the voices move in their natural register and soar above the orchestral mass with limpid clarity… Under the glorious sun of melody a valuable creation of art was born yesterday night, in which … inspiration circulates freely and the musical ideas do not emerge out of chaos.\(^{49}\)

Melodic invention, a plain orchestration which allows the voices to resound naturally, and a clear direction of the harmony (i.e. the opposite of ‘chaos’) are the elements singled out and which account for the success of the new opera. Dahlhaus observes that the ‘onstage music’ contained in *Cavalleria* provides a number of closed forms (Serenade, Stronello, drinking song) to counteract the ‘arie d’urlo’ (‘Voi lo sapete’, or ‘Mamma quel vino è generoso’) where the formalism of traditional *melodramma* is broken in favour of dramatic continuity.\(^{50}\) This could justify that feeling of a

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\(^{49}\) “La musica di questo spartito … si mantiene nullameno nel grato campo della melodia che è spesso viva e drammatica. La strumentazione è piano e non schiaccia il canto con sonorità clamorose: anzi, le voci possono muoversi nel loro registro naturale, e si alzano come in rilievo sull’insieme orchestrale, con limpida chiarezza…Sotto il gran sole della melodia, è dunque jersera spuntata una notevole opera d’arte, nella quale … l’ispirazione circola liberamente, e il pensiero musicale non esce dal caos’, *Gazzetta Teatrale Italiana* 19/16, (1890), 2. The review is taken from *Perseveranza*, another Milanese journal.

\(^{50}\) Carl Dahlhaus, *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*, 70. This was an element underlined by the critic Amintore Galli at the Milanese premiere of the opera where he states that ‘Mascagni has completely renounced to the forms of the classic recitative: he keeps with a melodic and dramatic declamatory style, which has a strong and profound effect on the audience’, ‘Il Mascagni ha interamente rinunciato alle forme del recitativo classico: egli si attiene ad una declamazione melodica e drammatica che ha forte e profonda presa sull’animo del pubblico’, Galli, *Il Teatro Illustrato e la Musica Popolare* 121 (1891): 7–9, 7.
pervasive melodism which, hiding and making less evident the innovative harmonic grammar of *Cavalleria*, the critic of the *Perseveranza* instantly noted on the night of the opera’s premiere.

The future of melodism was a topic which much preoccupied Italian critics and pedagogues from the later part of the nineteenth-century and will be discussed in the next chapter. The new dramaturgy to which Dahlhaus refers was, rather, prompted in Italy by philosophical, cultural, theatrical and musical trends in mid- and late-nineteenth-century France. It is essential, therefore, to explore in more depth French influence on Italian culture.

### IV.2 Connections with French opera

From the middle of the nineteenth-century, Paris had become the nerve centre of European culture: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi lived and worked in the French capital at the peak of their careers, and the following generation of composers (Boito, Catalani, Faccio and Leoncavallo) spent longer or shorter periods of training or professional life in Paris.\(^{51}\) Whereas before Rossini, Italian librettists found material for their plots in dramas by Ariosto or Tasso and composers reutilised the same Metastasian librettos at their convenience, from Rossini onwards the situation changed dramatically. The sources of the subjects of Italian librettos increasingly became French plays and novels, with Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini basing a significant number of their operas on French works.\(^{52}\) Verdi’s *Rigoletto* and *Ernani* were both based on Victor Hugo’s dramas; Alphonse Daudet provided the subject for Cilea’s *Arlesiana*; Piave drew the plot for Verdi’s *La traviata* from Alexandre Dumas fils’ *La Dame aux camélias*; Henry Murger’s novel *La vie de Bohème* inspired both Leoncavallo’s and Puccini’s *Bohèmes*, and the dramas of Victorien Sardou were the source for Puccini’s *Tosca* and Giordano’s *Fedora*.

The appreciation of French culture increased with unification (1861) and, despite its political independence, Italy remained in the words of the poet Giosuè Carducci

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\(^{52}\) For a survey of the sources of subject matter from Rossini to Puccini see Daniele Pistone, *Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera from Rossini to Puccini*, trans. by E. Thomas Glasow, (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1995), 8. Pistone includes a table of the sources – English, French, German, Italian, other/uncertain – of the operas composed by Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi and Puccini.
‘a French départememt’. The bourgeoisie, composed of high functionaries, lawyers, notaries, other professionals and wealthy merchants, increasingly took the lead in the political and economic life of the Italian kingdom. This new class absorbed the positivistic philosophy of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) as an integral part of the political agenda for the process of national identity-construction. In Comte’s perspective, human progress follows a necessary path of three different stages: the first stage is represented by the theological state which is the realm of religions, the second consists of the metaphysical state dominated by speculation, and the last is the positivistic state ruled by science. Once it had reached this ultimate dimension dominated by scientific knowledge, humanity could rid itself of the uncertainties and fantasies created by, respectively, theology and metaphysics. Clearly the bourgeoisie was attempting to disentangle itself from the pervasive hold that the Catholic church had been exercising for centuries on the pre-unification states of the peninsula. The influence that this philosophy exerted on the arts and literature, as already seen, shifted the focus of observation towards reality.

It should not be forgotten that French cultural penetration was also favoured from the 1860s as result of the increased exposure of Italian audiences to French opera. Although the bulk of the operatic repertoire within national limits was still largely Italian, works by Gounod, Meyerbeer, and to a lesser extent Thomas, became a steady and consistent part of Italian theatrical seasons during the 1870s. By 1875, the operas maintained in the repertoire of Italian opera houses incorporated seminal works by Rossini (five), Bellini (four) and Donizetti (eight), a substantial presence from Verdi (seventeen), a few operas by composers forgotten today, such as the Ricci brothers, Rossi, Cagnoni, Campana, Marchetti, Petrella and Pedrotti, and French works by Meyerbeer (five), Gounod (Faust), Auber (La Muette de Portici) and Halévy (La Juive). Meyerbeer’s operatic works were especially favoured by Italian audiences in an age that particularly welcomed the five-act grand opera. Since the authority of Italian opera was unquestionable during the first decades of

53 Cited in Alexandra Wilson, The Puccini Problem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18. With this expression Carducci expressly referred to literature, but French dramas also were (and were to remain) at the peak of their popularity in fin-de-siècle Italian literary theatre.
55 An idea of the number of French operas performed on the stages of Italian opera houses until the middle of 1875 is offered by the table contained in Pistone, Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera, 92, 93; whereas Mallach, in The Autumn of Italian Opera, 15, offers a statistic relative to the presence of French operatic repertoire in the economically active but culturally conservative city of Livorno over the last four decades of the nineteenth century.
the nineteenth century, it can be appreciated that the dissemination of Meyerbeer’s operas in Italy only began long after the composer’s death in 1864. Roles in his operas formed an integral part of many great Italian singers’ repertoires, although obviously performed in Italian translations from the original French. While Stagno, Masini and Gayarre contended for the favour of Italian and international audiences with their interpretations of Meyerbeer’s Les Huguenots in the highly competitive atmosphere described by Gemma Bellincioni, Tamagno, De Lucia and Caruso also included arias from French operas in their recordings.

IV.2.a Effects on dramaturgy

If Gounod, Halévy, Meyerbeer and Thomas were extremely popular in the 1870s, during the next decade the works of Bizet and Massenet appeared on Italian stages. Their impact on the composers of the giovane scuola was influential, especially with regard to psychological characterisation and rhythmic articulation. A focus on individual characterisation was shared by many of the French operas of the period: Bizet’s Mireille (1863) and Carmen (1875), Gounod’s Roméo et Juliette (1867), Massenet’s Manon (1884) and Werther (1887 was the date of completion although its Viennese premiere was not until 1892, and in a German translation), just to name only a few examples. French composers, working along the lines of the character’s psychological development, created a musical dramaturgy in which ‘natural’ dramatic continuity was met by self-contained moments of melodic-harmonic

56 The implications of the grand opera delayed success in late nineteenth-century Italy are clarified by Fabrizio Della Seta. He explains that this art form was generally accepted only in its more exterior and flamboyant elements, such as dances and scenographic effects, while the dramatic and lyrical moments were literally expunged from the performance. This phenomenon was a direct consequence of the different tastes of the post-unification opera audiences, which were increasingly formed by members of the middle and lower classes, thanks to the fast economic growth of the country, especially in the northern regions. See, Della Seta, “Italia e Francia nell’Ottocento” in Storia della Musica 12 vols. (Torino: EDT, 1995), 9: 279, 280.


58 Caruso recorded ‘Quis sotto il ciel’ (AICC, Milan, 1900) and ‘Bianca al par di neve alpina’ (Victor, New York, 1905) both from from Les Huguenots; and from L’Africane ‘O Paradiso’ (Victor, New York, 1907 and Camden 1909, 1920). De Lucia recorded from L’Africane ‘O paradiso!’ (Phonotype, Naples, 1917) and ‘O Selika, io t’adoro’ (Phonotype, Naples, 1917); Tamagno recorded ‘Sopra Berta l’amor mio’ and ‘Re del Cielo’ from Le Prophète (Gramophone&Typewriter Co., Ospedaletti, 1903).

59 Giger highlights the fact that the impact of French meter on Verdi, Boito and the progressive Italians can be seen from the 1860s. Examples are given in Boito’s Mefistofele as well as in Boito’s libretto for Amleto, which was set to music by Faccio, and in Verdi-Giulianzoni final duet of Aida: ‘a particularly interesting sequence of lyrical verse, which broke with the basically regular stanzas of nineteenth-century Italian opera’, Giger, “Verismo”, 298.
expressivity. And this was the legacy that Puccini, for instance, inherited from Massenet.

When psychology broke into the operatic world, the rigid structure (formulas) of melodramma was put into question. Verdi made the very first attempt at this psychological approach with his Violetta (La traviata, 1853), but he was a traditionalist and the journey towards the unknown and untried could not have been a straightforward one for him.\(^6^0\) In the melodramma system the possible interaction between characters was already predetermined by their archetypal functions: the hero, the rival, the wicked, the victim and so forth. Their unambiguous and predictable behaviours gave life to a dramaturgy which, in turn, justified a standard set of solos and ensembles all conveniently articulated in the ‘cantabile-cabaletta’ formula. When characters began to develop individual psychological traits, however, the traditional scenes of melodramma broke down into smaller sequences that could trace this development more closely.

The long duet between Violetta and Germont père in Traviata’s second act, for example, formally adheres to the cantabile-cabaletta framework, presenting the formula twice in both the first part, where nevertheless the normal tempo scheme is inverted with the Allegro moderato of ‘Pura siccome un angelo’ (cavatina) followed by the Andante piuttosto mosso of ‘Un di quango le veneri’ (cabaletta), and in the second part with ‘Dite alla giovine’ (cavatina) and ‘Morrò la mia memoria’ (cabaletta). Nevertheless, this macro-structure is subdivided into smaller fragments which are produced by the rapid and continuous changes in the flow of the characters’ emotions. Thus, we are confronted with a string of different tempos: Allegro moderato (‘Pura siccome un angelo’), Animando a poco a poco (‘Ah! comprendo’), Vivacissimo (‘Non sapete quale affetto’), Ancor più vivo (‘Ah il supplizio è si spietato’), Con la parte (‘E’ grave il sacrifizio’), Andante piuttosto mosso (‘Un di quando le veneri’). In the cabaletta of the second part (‘Morrò la mia memoria’) Verdi has a different strategy for subverting the formula. Instead of concluding the form with a stretta, he introduces another short sub-episode in the shape of an Adagio coda where the sobbing farewell of the protagonists can be encapsulated.\(^6^1\)

\(^6^0\) In the journey which leads to the conflagration of verismo, Carmen (1875), Giroonda (1876), and Marion Delorme (1885), are considered crucial steps.

\(^6^1\) For an analysis of the realistic elements in La Traviata see Dahlhaus Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music, trans. by Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 64–68. Compared with the cabalettas of Rigoletto duets (for instance ‘Addio speranza ed anima’ between the Duke and Gilda or ‘Sì! Vendetta’ between Rigoletto and Gilda) the realism of La Traviata also emerges in the number of formal criteria which Verdi abandons for the sake of the dramatic truth.
The final scene in Verdi’s *Otello* (1887) is a sequence of duets which underlines the continuous emotional transformation of the protagonist’s soul. Here the structure of Romantic opera with its quintets, sextets and concertati is eventually turned into a series of extended dialogues for the purpose of achieving dramatic realism. Before *Otello* we find Verdi experimenting with the concertato in *Traviata*. If we compare the deaths of Leonora (*Trovatore*) and Violetta, the elements of divergence from traditional formulas emerge. Leonora dies lengthily and beautifully. Her gorgeous melodic line ascends in long legato phrases on which Verdi moulds the desperate interjections of the other protagonists. Dramaturgical rhythm (the rhythm of the action) and rhythm of reality are completely at odds in order to prepare audience and the characters themselves for the final catharsis which is, again, a fundamental element of Romantic *melodramma*. In stark contrast, Violetta’s nervous mix of spoken and sung passages propels the fast conclusion of the drama without allowing any time for emotional detachment and spiritual reflection. She dies in a realistic way, with an emotional impact very different to the long-drawn-out catharsis of *Trovatore*, and far more powerfully. The realistic pace of the action (which will speed up in *verismo* opera with the fast-approaching final catastrophe) together with the presence of extended dialogue forms constitute the characteristics which we will find completely developed in operas from the 1890s onwards. *Pagliacci* (1892) is an almost unbroken sequence of duets and *Cavalleria rusticana* ends with dialogical formulas, first between Mamma Lucia and Turiddu and later between the latter and Compar Alfio. Butterfly’s final solo is essentially a ‘dialogue’ with her little son, and Pinkerton’s desperate closing cries are in solitary ‘dialogue’ with the dead body of Cio Cio San. In *Bohème* the final duet between Rodolfo and Mimi is followed by a sequence of scattered phrases between the other characters who, again, dialogue between one another.

There is, however, another element which contributed to the erosion of the traditional structure of *melodramma*. Beginning with *Traviata* and then even more so with *Carmen*, the social milieu of the opera ceased to be a background element of little interest whose function consisted in providing the characters’ story with a social and historical context, and became one of the essential elements of the plot. Bizet broke with tradition when he decided to bring on stage factory workers,

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Similar observations could be applied to the third of the operas belonging to the popular trilogy, *Il Trovatore*. Traditional caballetas are here employed for any aria (both Leonora’s, Azucena’s, the Count’s and Manrico’s) and all duets.
soldiers and gipsies, ordinary folk and low-life people, and make of them the protagonists of a tragedy.\(^\text{62}\) This was an act of rebellion against the rule of stylistic class distinction that went back to the Greeks, according to which tragedy cannot be inhabited by anyone other than gods, heroes, kings and knights. The ‘plebeian tragedy’ of Bizet substituted the confrontation of personages within the ‘acts’ of melodramma with the portrayal of characters within a social milieu in ‘tableaux’.\(^\text{63}\) In the tableau the characters function in order to depict the social milieu, rather than the social milieu functioning as a background setting for the action of the characters. The creation of local colour through the quotation of Spanish-style music (Carmen’s Habañera, Seguidilla and castanet song, Escamillo’s toréador song) is intended as an aid for the shaping of the tableaux. At the same time, these ‘quotations’ are interwoven with characteristic operatic style (Michaela’s lyrical cavatina, the gypsy ensembles, and Carmen’s and Don José’s proto-verismo confrontations).\(^\text{64}\) In turn, the dramaturgy is clearly affected by this inversion of focus and the musical work presents ‘a “free” form with a loose-knit structure instead of a tight-knit “closed” form’.\(^\text{65}\) Following this path, Mascagni’s Cavalleria will interweave the closed form of ‘onstage music’ (drinking songs, serenades and stornellos) with loose arioso and declamatory styles in order to counterbalance the loose-knit structure created by the latter with the closed forms of the former.\(^\text{66}\)

\(^{62}\) Notwithstanding the official classification of Carmen as an opéra comique, which depended on the fact that its original version contains spoken dialogue, the opera is a tragedy. Verdi tried a similar experiment only once (with Traviata) twenty-five years earlier, and never repeated it.

\(^{63}\) Arthur Seidl set the antithesis between acts and tableaux as a criterion for differentiating Wagnerian music drama from the realistic ‘musical novel’. See Neuzeitliche Tondichter und zeitgenossische Tonkünstler (Regensburg, 1926), 1: 61, 62, quoted in Dahlhaus, Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music, 92.

\(^{64}\) For Thomas Grey, the success of Carmen lies in this happy coexistence between local colour pieces and more conventional operatic numbers. Because between the 1860s and the 1880s, the qualification of drame lyrique was loosely applied to any opera with dramatic, pathetic and passionate sentiments, Carmen could be included in this genre classification. See, Thomas Grey, “Opera and Music Drama”, The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music, edited by Jim Samson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 371–423, 407, 408, 410. The recreation of local colour or ‘sense of ambiance’ is achieved in Act III of Aida without recourse to ‘quotations’ but simply through Verdi’s virtuoso treatment of the orchestra. David Kimbell, Italian Opera, 558.

\(^{65}\) Dahlhaus, Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music, 94.

\(^{66}\) The loose-knit structure of Cavalleria is determined by what Dahlhaus calls ‘arie d’urlo’ (Dahlhaus, Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music, 70) and for Grey, it is ‘literary flow’, (Grey, “Opera and Music Drama”, 407). Dahlhaus also states that in Cavalleria, Mascagni keeps ‘the basic outline of Italian opera intact and [adds] a few dashes of naturalism as picturesque elements to enhance interest without endangering convention’, see Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, 352.
IV.2.b Effect on librettos

As described above, the psychological individualisation of operatic personages was growing in complexity. It is, therefore, no surprise that Italian composers increasingly asked their librettists to emulate the fluidity of the French poetic meter, which was better suited to follow the emotional volatility of the new characters who populated the operas of the last part of the century. From Massenet’s Manon, who moves between voluptuousness and naivety, to Bizet’s Carmen, who sparks flashes of wildness and sexual power, the French language subtly highlights their temporary and changing states of mind. On the contrary, Italian, with its heavier accent and the symmetrical organisation of its librettos shows a sort of rigidity and stiffness once the florid style of singing is abandoned. Verdi was closely implicated in this search for rhythmical variety and he burdened his long-suffering librettist Ghislanzoni with endless requests on this topic.  

Giger points out that the sequence of verses in the last duet between Aida and Radames breaks the rule of regular stanzas in late nineteenth-century Italian librettos. Boito, who supplied the librettos for Verdi’s last two operas (Otello and Falstaff), was to play a significant role in the modernisation of Italian prosody in terms of both versification and renovation of the operatic vocabulary. All his librettos (other than those for Verdi, Amleto for Franco Faccio and his own Mefistofele need to be mentioned here) display this aspiration to escape ‘the unbearable boredom of cantilena and symmetry …. of Italian prosody, which almost inevitably generates poverty of rhythm within the musical phrase’. The obsession of Puccini with metrical variety is well known. His need for a fluid musical phrase that only the casual rhymed or unrhymed mixture of irregular line length –

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67 In the writing of the third act duet between Radames and Amneris in Aida, Verdi at first freed Ghislanzoni from any preoccupations regarding musical form (in order to develop the dramatic situation as well as possible), but later ended listing the number of different meters he needed in order to create a beautiful melody for Radames: three lines of settenari, a quinario and two endecasillabi. See the excerpts of the correspondence sent by Verdi to Ghislanzoni and quoted in Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 548, 549.

68 Giger, “Verismo”, 298. In effect, ‘O terra addio’ is written in endecasillabi, a meter reserved until then to recitative. Kimbell shows that during the composition of Aida Verdi not only defined the concept of parola scenica but also pressed Ghislanzoni in order to get rid of any remaining formalism which constrained his creative freedom, Kimbell, *Italian opera*, 548.

69 Il Figaro, 11 February 1864, quoted in Tutti gli scritti di Arrigo Boito, edited by P. Nardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1942), 1119. The innovative influence of Boito on Italian opera (which is hardly surprising when one considers his connection with the scapigliatura, of which he was a major representative, and his relentless criticism of the Romantic ‘models’, such as Manzoni and Verdi) is not limited to the language, but extends to musical dramaturgy. For him I. the complete obliteration of formula; II. the creation of form; III. the realisation of the most immense tonal and rhythmical development possible today; [and] IV. the supreme incarnation of the drama’ were all crucial elements to the renovation of opera. Il Figaro, 21 January, 1864, quoted in Tutti gli scritti, 1107, 1108.
*quinari, senari, settenari, ottonari, decasillabi* and *endecasillabi* – could allow,
induced his librettist, Luigi Illica, to create the *‘illicasillabi’,* a word invented by
Giuseppe Giacosa, Puccini’s other librettist, as a joke.70

The renovation of the operatic libretto also involved a gradual transformation of
the language, although this aspect was not an immediate consequence of the new
character-types who were portrayed on stage, as one might expect. The peasants
in *Cavalleria,* for instance, do not necessarily speak in everyday language. In the
stanzas of the opening chorus, high-brow vocabulary is used throughout. The
women, for instance, sing that *‘gli aranci olezzano sui verdi margini’* (‘the scent of
oranges spread throughout the green borders’) – where the archaic *olezzano* (smell
or perfume) replaces *profumano* – and *‘cessin le rustiche opre’* (‘let’s cease the
rustic work’) – where *opre* is the archaic form for *opere* and *‘rustic’* is similarly
outdated. Turiddu’s sentence *‘invan tenti sopire/ il giusto sdegno con la tua pietà’*
(‘in vain do you endeavor/ My righteous anger thus to subdue!’) still presents the
markers of an elevated and stylised construction, whereas Santuzza’s *‘quella cattiva
femmina’* (‘that bad woman’), although lowbrow, is more mild than the reiterated
epithets thrown against Nedda by Tonio and Canio in *Pagliacci:* *‘squaldrina’,*
*‘meretrice abbieta’, ‘svergognata’* (all variants of slut). The degree to which the
pompous language of *Risorgimento* operas and everyday language of real people
is mixed, varies from case to case. In Cilea’s *Adriana Lecouvreur* (1902), which
resurrects an eighteenth-century aristocratic setting, the insertion of the everyday
language of ordinary folk is only sporadic. Its presence in the opening scene, where
the actresses and actors of the *Comédie Francaise* interact with fast paced
dialogues, is remarkable:

Quinault – Michonnet, il mio manto! (Michonnet, my cloak!)
Michonnet – (running from one to the other)
Ecco qua, miie signori… (here you go, my good sirs)
The two women – Spicciatevi! (Get a move on!)
Michonnet – (humbly) Ho soltanto due mani! (I only have two hands!)

An analysis of the libretto, though, highlights its fundamental adherence to
conventional syntax and archaic vocabulary. For instance, in Maurizio’s solo *‘La
dolcissima effige’* nominative and accusative phrases are continually inverted within
every sentence, which is completely typical of melodramatic librettos:

La dolcissima effige sorridente (The smiling image of my dear mother)

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in te rivedo della madre cara; (in you I see again)
nel tuo cor della mia patria, dolce, preclara (in you the sweet, clear air of my fatherland)
l’aura rievo, (I breathe)

Whereas the non-poetic order of the world would be:

‘In you I see again/the smiling image of my dear mother/ I breathe the sweet, clear air of my fatherland in you’.

Even the word immagine (image) is substituted with the archaic effige and in the following stanza we find pugne (battles) instead of battaglie.

Where the high-flown jargon of conventional librettos seems to be largely overcome is in Puccini’s La bohème (1896). The simple phrase ‘che m’ami di’ – ‘you love me, speak!’ – with which Rodolfo sweetly commands Mimi, represents the truncated version of the elaborate, rhymed lyrics finely sung by tenors of a previous age. For instance, the troubadour Manrico – in Verdi’s Il Trovatore – links the spasms of death with the ecstasy of love in his cantabile ‘Ah sì ben mio’:

Fra quegli estremi aneliti (as I draw my last breath,)
a te il pensier verrà (my thoughts will come to you)
e solo in ciel precederti (and only preceding you to heaven)
la morte a me parrà (death will seem to me).

And for Otello, the ideas of immense love and immense fury of the battle are still closely associated, even though Boito’s syntax is essentially ‘modern’, with the nominative/accusative inversion suppressed – unlike in the Manrico cantabile described above.

Tuoni la guerra e s’inabissi il mondo (Let cannons roar and all the world collapse)
se dopo l’ira immensa (if after the immeasurable wrath)
vienn quest’immenso amor! (comes this immeasurable love!)

But many examples in La bohème attest to the complete renovation of operatic vocabulary: from the incidental episodes in the light-hearted bohemian atmosphere of the second act, such as Rodolfo’s introduction of Mimi to his companions (‘Questa è Mimì gaia fioraia/ il suo venir completa/la bella compagnia’; ‘This is Mimi, happy flower-girl/ Her presence alone/ makes our company complete’), to the most tragic moment of the drama, the death of Mimi: ‘Sono andati? Fingevi di dormire/ … ho tante cose che ti voglio dire/ o una sola ma grande come il mare/ …sei il mio amor e tutta la mia vita’ (‘Have they gone? I pretended to sleep/…I’ve so many things to
tell you./ or just one thing but huge as the sea/...I love you...you’re all my life’).
Mimi’s simple language echoes the simple (and realistic) dynamics of human relationships on which the drama is built.

The lovers in Bohème meet, and in the space of a conversation, have direct physical contact – Rodolfo holds Mimi’s hand – before exchanging a declaration of love during the final act duet. In Verdi’s Traviata, which has claims for being considered the first ‘realistic’ opera, the leading tenor Alfredo reveals a love matured within the space of months for the prima donna Violetta, a prostitute, and addresses her with a poem. At a party of questionable morality, he does not dare to touch her, and she gives him a rose to fix their next date, which will be when the flower has withered (the day after as Alfredo suddenly realises; Alfredo: ‘O ciel, domani!’; ‘Oh heavens, tomorrow!’).

In the approximately forty years that separate these two operas, an epochal social transition had taken place and the leading class of the new Italy, the bourgeoisie, looked at life through the lens of the more advanced social patterns of northern European countries. The shape of Italian society was moulded on the French idea of domesticity built in turn on the concepts of home and family.71 This social influence appears, for example, in both La traviata and La bohème: the setting of both operas is urban Paris, and both plots focus on the personal vicissitudes of the main characters. At moments of crisis, personal, sentimental feelings take precedence over older structures of feeling to do with social position or outraged honor. A good example is provided by the confrontation between Germond père and his son Alfredo in the second act of La traviata. Here the precipitating cause of the quarrel is the potential damage to the family’s honour caused by the son’s scandalous liaison, but at the point of greatest emotional intensity it is personal, sentimental factors (such as the memory of Alfredo’s childhood home in Provence: ‘Di Provenza il mare il suol’) which loom largest.

The sentimental Romanticism of Gounod and Thomas played an important part in defining the bourgeois drama. In Massenet’s operas Wether and Manon the feelings of domestic contentment represent a characteristic dramaturgical touch.72

72 In line with the current musicological approach of narrowing down the meaning of musical verismo, Corazzol defines the term as ‘a historically delimited “vogue” encompassing – as in the spoken theatre – various types of subject (low-life dramas, historical costume dramas, bourgeois comedies’), Corazzol “Opera and Verismo”, 41. In this context, the bourgeois comedies enrich the
The intimate domestic elements frame the meetings between Werther and Charlotte, while Manon’s farewell is centered on the ‘petite table’ which symbolises the familiar felicity she has enjoyed with des Grieux. In Cilea’s Arlesiana, Mascagni’s Amico Fritz, Puccini’s La bohème, and Leoncavallo’s Zazà, this domestic idyll can be pervasive (Arlesiana, Amico Fritz), or hinted and episodic (Zazà), or merely implied (La bohème). Even in Bohème, as Mallach notes, it is not difficult to imagine bohemians like Marcello the painter and Rodolfo the poet transformed twenty years later into respectable professionals, married to respectable wives, taking their children to the opera and silently lingering on the happy memories of their youth spent with some other Musetta or Mimì. Rarely before Puccini’s La bohème had the bourgeoisie been put on the stage as central protagonist, its bohemian personages being essentially the same people sitting in the theatre’s stalls or balconies. This sort of identification between character and listener was a novelty and a distinctive characteristic of the new Italian opera. Moreover, the plots of all these operas are reduced to exploration of the private feelings of human beings; there is no commitment to noble, ethical ends, no political and moral battles to fight, as in the Risorgimento works of Verdi (Nabucco, I Lombardi, La battaglia di Legnano, Giovanna D’Arco, I due Foscari, Simon Boccanegra).

IV.2.c A final consideration of French operatic repertoire

If, for all these reasons, the essential characteristics of French opera were progressively absorbed into the Italian operatic tradition during the second half the nineteenth century, its exploitation within national borders was also affected by the commercial venture of the casa musicale Sonzogno. Founded in 1874 by Edoardo Sonzogno, it was part of a publishing empire that comprised two music periodicals, Il teatro illustrato and La musica popolare, one of the most widely distributed newspapers, the republican and radical Il Secolo and the popular La biblioteca del popolo (The People’s Library). This latter released inexpensive editions of classical and modern authors for the middle classes, who were becoming far more literate in the decades after unification. Due to the fact that Ricordi owned the publishing rights to the standard Italian repertoire, Sonzogno’s only chance of gaining a position

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social canvas of operatic verismo adding to its typical ‘veristic subjects’, which are constituted by rustic or urban ‘low-life’ dramas, ibid., 40.

Mallac, The Autumn of Italian Opera, 130.
inside the national opera industry was to rely on works by foreign composers. For this reason, he acquired the Italian rights to contemporary French composers such as Bizet, Massenet and Thomas, whose works were systematically translated and performed in Italian. In order to expand the repertoire available for performance in the theatres controlled directly or indirectly by his firm, Sonzogno launched a one-act opera competition as early as 1883. This initiative was a huge commercial success which led Sonzogno to own virtually the entire repertoire produced by a new class of composers. In fact, with the important exception of Puccini, who was under contract to Ricordi, the other exponents of the giovane scuola were all controlled by the Sonzogno firm.

V Transformations in acting

The new streams of characters brought onto the stage in late nineteenth-century operas could not but affect acting and singing styles. Some singers, more attuned than others to the new tendencies of contemporary theatre, welcomed with great enthusiasm the insurgent naturalistic aesthetic, deprived as it was of any mannerism. Gemma Bellincioni was among them, ‘given that [she] felt the musical drama very differently from the traditional ways of that time’. Bellincioni incidentally hints at the traditional manner in which the representation of characters on stage had hitherto been dominated. Throughout her youth, until the premiere of Cavalleria rusticana (at which point she was only twenty-six but had already been active on European and international stages for a decade), she was basically unable to ‘distance [herself] from the rancid traditions of the lyric stage’. In the prose theatre

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74 The first Italian laws on the copyright (1865) were the result of a campaign energetically propelled by Tito I Ricordi following the French example, which in 1851 brought to the creation of the French society of authors and publishers. While until 1865 Italian publishers had earned only from the selling of printed music, from that moment onward the publishing rights granted them the right to be paid every time a work belonging to their catalogues was performed.

75 The birth of giovane scuola operatic movement is specifically linked with the second edition of this competition (1888) with Mascagni’s prize-winning opera Cavalleria rusticana (first represented in 1890). As clarified by Sansone, the term scuola ‘should be understood as a conventional grouping of composers with different training and cultural background’, nevertheless this denomination is ‘one of the most comprehensive and the least compromising, since it is mainly based on a historical criterion’. Sansone, “Verga and Mascagni: The Critics’ Response to Cavalleria rusticana”, 198 (footnote 1).

76 “… dato che io sentivo il dramma musicale ben diversamente dal modo tradizionale di allora.’ Bellincioni, Io e il palcoscenico, 42. She describes here her hopelessness in impersonating the passive characters of Meyerbeer’s queen roles, such as Isabella in Roberto il Diavolo, Regina Mayt (sic!) in Ugonotti, Ines in Africana, and Berta in Il Profeta, see Bellincioni, ibid., 41.

77 “L’animo rude e semplice della contadina siciliana … mi apparve un tutto omogeneo espresso nella musica di Mascagni a permettermi di palesare al pubblico il mio vero ideale d’arte. E senza timore mi distaccai da ogni rapida tradizione della scena lirica’, ‘The rough and simple soul of the
of those years the great Italian tragedienne Eleonora Duse (1858–1924) was promoting an ‘authenticity’ revolution. She was the first interpreter of the role of Santuzza in the eponymous play (1884) that Verga himself adapted from his short story Cavalleria rusticana. In the words of the critic Eugenio Torelli-Viollier, Duse ‘remaining all the time quiet, restrained, simple, without ever a shout, without ever a violent gesture, [...] produced highly moving effects and made the spectators shudder and weep’. Duse tells us herself that she abandoned all that was conventional in acting, such as rhetoric gestures and poses, well-projected utterance of the words, even make-up. ‘When I must express violent passion, when my spirit is gripped by pleasure and sorrow [...] I often am silent, and on stage I speak softly, barely murmuring.’ She would research her characters, knowing them deeply, moving on stage like them and without self-consciousness or formalisms.

The profound impression that Duse’s acting left on Emma Calvé (1858–1942), the first interpreter of the operatic Santuzza for the French premiere of Mascagni’s Cavalleria (1892), is testified in her own words. Duse’s impersonation of Marguerite in La Dame aux camélias in Florence is remembered in enthusiastic terms: ‘Quelle révélation! Voilà l’art auquel il faut aspirer … Elle semble appartenir à une humanité plus vibrante que la nôtre. Quels accents! Quelle émotion communicative!’

Critics of the period sometimes stressed the measured quality which at times characterised the acting of singers such as the French mezzo-soprano Célestine Galli-Marié (first interpreter of Carmen) and Bellincioni. Hanslick wrote about the latter on the occasion of a production of Tasca’s A Santa Lucia:

> With Bellincioni, it borders on the miraculous how word and gesture, sound and facial expression inseparably converge in most convincing truth, in most touching emotion. Not the slightest conventional gesture, everything is so natural and characteristic as if it could not be otherwise at all! And in

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Sicilian peasant ... seemed to me a coherent whole expressed in the music of Mascagni, which enabled me to show the audience my true artistic ideal. And without fear, I distanced myself from every rancid tradition of the lyric stage’ Bellincioni, lo e il palcoscenico, 108.


79 Helen Sheehy, Eleonora Duse: A Biography, (New York: Knopf, 2003), 32. Her acting style was at odds with that of her contemporaries such as, to name the greatest of them, Sarah Bernhardt.

80 ‘What a revelation! This is the art at which to aspire … She seems to belong to an humanity more vibrant than ours. Such accents! Such a communicative emotion!’, Emma Calvé, Sous tous les ciels j’ai chanté, Paris, 1940, 41, quoted in Sansone “Verga and Mascagni”, 200. Calvé also saw the performance of Duse in Cavalleria in Bologna, see Sansone, ibid.
this realistic truth, even in passionate affects, Bellincioni keeps things within
measure and preserve a feeling of beauty’. 81

The realistic representation of characters ranged from gesture to the particular use
of the singer’s voice. For De Lucia’s ‘hazardous interpretation’ of Don José in
Carmen, the critic of Il pungolo observes how

The phrase is more spoken than sung; the gesture [is] nervous and his eyes
burst with dark sparks. You foresee the knife that will be extracted to kill,
and will receive the impression that it is an atrocious but true act. And after
the death of Carmen, the moral disintegration [of José] is translated into [De
Lucia’s] physical collapse … De Lucia … enters inside the character, in his
temperament, in his passion for disappearing in it. 82

Even if the new actor-singers (as they were to be called) displayed a certain ability
of not giving way to sensationalism, the urge for immediate expression nevertheless
led them to that constant nervous excitement which we can hear in their recordings.
The expression ‘attore-cantante’ (actor-singer) began to appear in the press in the
1890s. In the review of the Milanese premiere of Giordano’s Fedora (1898), Il
Cronista for the Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica adopts the terms ‘attrice-cantante’
and ‘attore-cantante’ (actor-singer) for both Bellincioni’s Fedora and the baritone
Menotti in the role of Sirìex. 83 It is noticeable that the stress is placed on the word
‘actor’ which precedes the qualification ‘singer’. Far from indicating less interest in
the aspect of singing, hardly imaginable in the land of bel canto, the term hints at a
new awareness of the specific characterisation of the dramatis persona. The age of
the great attrici-cantanti, such as Emma Carelli or Eugenia Burzio was soon to arrive
and those singers who, at the beginning of the new century, did not possess brilliant
acting skills or suitable physical attributes (the fisique du role) were destined to fail
the competition with colleagues maybe less endowed with vocal beauty but more
attractive on stage. 84 With all the pressure focused on a dramatic impersonation
which could bolster the verismo substance of the new roles, beauty of tone was
regarded as a less vital requirement than in the past. Pure vocal tone quality was in

82 “La frase più che cantata è detta; il gesto è nervoso e gli occhi scintillano cupamente. Presentite
il coltello che si snuderà a uccidere, e ne avete l’impressione di cosa atroce, ma vera. E dopo
la morte di Carmen, quale accasciamento fisico nell’annientamento morale!… De Lucia … entra nel
personaggio, nel suo carattere, nella sua passione e vi scompare’, Rivista Teatrale
Melodrammatica 28/1238 (1890), 3.
83 Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica 36/1647 (1898), 3.
84 In Chapter 6, the reception of the soprano Celestina Boninsegna at the Metropolitan Opera
House makes a significant case for this new trend.
fact often to be sacrificed by *verismo* singers, as will be seen in the next chapter and in the case-studies of Italian *verismo* sopranos.
CHAPTER 3 The cultural debate around Italian opera

I. The future of Italian opera in fin-de-siècle cultural discourse

Anxieties regarding the future of Italian opera had begun to preoccupy critics and others in cultural circles from the middle decades of the nineteenth century. These concerns arose from the fact that the authority of the Italian art form par-excellence was clearly declining both abroad and within Italy itself.¹ By the end of the 1860s, however, this discussion acquired a pointedly political tone, as Italian opera was to play an increasingly important role in the definition of an Italian national identity. As we shall see, the recently achieved political unification by no means immediately generated a unanimous idea of Italianness; rather it was gradually attained through a long and troubled process, and it is even disputable if such an idea has ever been fully realised in the subsequent history of post-unification Italy.

With a history dating back more than two-and-a-half centuries, opera attested to the existence of a particular Italian genius long before the political unification of the peninsula. The kind of rhetoric in which the origins of a shared culture were advertised as having existed long before the recent political event was critical to the formation of collective sense of Italianness. To this end, the Roman empire, the Catholic religion, the confected issue of an ‘Italian language’, and also opera were all enrolled in the process of inculcating in the population a sense of communal belonging, as this chapter will evidence.

On the other hand, the progressive but irreversible transformation of operatic conventions, examined in Chapter 2, showed the pressing need for a renovation of Italian opera. An untimely necessity indeed, but one which many intertwined forces were nevertheless prompting. Behind his stubborn and often self-contradictory defense of tradition, Verdi was simultaneously exerting a reformatory pressure on the ‘old’ operatic forms. If French literature, theatre and music were affecting the imagination of Italian composers, the impact of Wagnerism was soon to become both massive and irreversible. For evident political reasons, therefore, the strategy attempted by Italian composers of absorbing and elaborating foreign elements into a personal and hopefully characteristic ‘Italian’ style, was, at the very least,

¹ As seen in Chapter 2, foreign operas were increasingly performed in Italian theatres from the 1860s onwards; see Alan Mallach, The Autumn of Italian Opera, 14–20; Ceriani, “Romantic Nostalgia and Wagnerismo During the Age of Verismo: The Case of Alberto Franchetti”, 211, 212; Wilson, “Defining Italianness: The Opera That Made Puccini”, The Opera Quarterly 24, (2009), 82–92: 83, 84. At the same time, Italian opera was becoming less and less dominant abroad, due to the inability of Italian composers of keeping up with the innovations, especially instrumental and orchestral, experimented by their foreign colleagues.
problematic. The ‘uneasiness’ of this situation is exemplified in the content of two articles which constitute two of the most relevant episodes in the musical life of the period. The first is a programmatic article written by Antonio Ghislanzoni in 1866 for the *Gazzetta musicale*, the musical journal which Giulio Ricordi decided to resurrect after a number of years of silence.²

> We come to admire beauty in the immense variety of its manifestations, in all its forms … We start the mission without prejudices – unless the innate love for the nation which is our mother could be called a prejudice; for this reason we feel a modest pride in every great achievement which is ours… but we extend a hand to the geniuses of the other nations. Far from affecting a vain contempt or a snooty indifference for everything which is not Italian, we will not conceal a certain predilection for what is ours.³

This statement, which perfectly expresses the nationalist and conservative stance of Ricordi, is nevertheless somehow slightly ambiguous. By exalting Italian greatness (‘everything Italian’) it also claims to keep an open mind on the works of foreign ‘geniuses’. The second article comes from Sonzogno’s *Il teatro illustrato* and advertises the aforementioned competition for young composers in 1883, whose music

> will be inspired by the good traditions of Italian opera, but without renouncing the new principles of the contemporary science of sounds [harmony], both Italian and foreign.⁴

Although Sonzogno highlights the relevance of innovative harmonic elements in the writing of new Italian operas, he does not neglect to point out the link with ‘the good

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² The publication of the *Gazzetta musicale* was suspended by Tito I Ricordi, the father of Giulio, on the 28 December 1862, due to declining subscriptions. In the history of the journal, created by Tito in 1842 with the intention of promoting critical debate on music in Italy, this was the fourth suspension. Under Giulio’s capable management, the *Gazzetta* reached the peak of its cultural prestige and became, as predicted by Giulio himself, an instrument for shaping the taste of the nation. Ghislanzoni was the editor of the *Gazzetta* and it is worth mentioning that he also was the director of the cultural periodical *Rivista minima*, another publication of *Casa Ricordi*. For a detailed account on the history of the *Gazzetta musicale*, see *Casa Ricordi 1808–1958*, edited by Claudio Sartori (Milan: Ricordi, 1958).

³ ‘…noi veniamo ad ammirare il bello nella immensa varietà delle sue manifestazioni, nelle sue forme molteplici… Noi entriamo nella carriera col’animo affatto sgombro di pregiudizi – a meno che non si voglia chiamare pregiudizio quell’innato amore della nazione che ci è patria, per la quale ci sentiamo un po’ superbi di tutto ciò che è gloria nostra…. ma stendiamo la mano ai geni delle altre nazioni. Lungi dall’affettare il faturo disprezzo o la boriousa indifferenza per tutto ciò non sia italiano, noi non dissimuleremo una certa predilezione per le cose nostre’. Antonio Ghislanzoni, *Gazzetta musicale* 21/1 (1866), 1–3: 2.

traditions of Italian opera’. Certainly the scale of set values on which Ricordi and Sonzogno prioritise the relevance of national and foreign elements is remarkably different, with Sonzogno radical and progressive and more open to the absorption into Italian musical traditions of ‘the contemporary science of sounds’. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that both editors are preoccupied with putting themselves forward both as fundamentally open to non-Italian creative values but also as protectors of Italian traditions. It could not be otherwise, as whoever entertained a public relationship with music in Italy at the end of the century was bound to be extremely careful with their choice of words and the underpinning values that these words expressed.

II The reception of Wagner in Italy
Among those aware of this ‘sensitive’ state of things was, without doubt, Richard Wagner. At first it had been his theories on music drama that inflamed the discussion, which began in literary circles and only later spread to the opera-going public, when his operas began to be performed in Italian theatres. In a letter addressed to the mayor of Bologna, Camillo Casarini, the German composer was keen to defend his ‘Italian friends’ from accusations of anti-patriotism leveled at them for a misconceived sense of national pride. A year after the successful performances of Lohengrin at Bologna’s Teatro Comunale (1871), which for the first time introduced Wagner to an Italian audience, honorary citizenship of the city was conferred upon the composer, an act which was perceived by ‘sensitive compatriots’ as anti-patriotic.

That the controversy concerning Wagner amounted to a cultural clash between advocates and opponents of Italian traditional musical conventions and institutions is demonstrated by the events which took place on occasion of the La Scala premiere of Lohengrin. The Milanese performances of this opera followed only two

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5 Riccardo Wagner, Ricordi battaglie visioni, trans. by Ervino Pocar (Riccardo Ricciardi edizioni, 1955), 76–78, quoted in Barigazzi, La Scala racconta, 241, 242. The supporters of national honor had already started their anti-Wagnerian campaign during the preparation of performances for the Bolognese Lohengrin. Articles of the time in the local press exhort the rejection of prejudices against Wagner dictated by national pride, and rather to judge the performance for itself; see Anon., “Pensieri di un parziale”, Gazzetta dell’Emilia 30 Oct. 1871. Sangiorgi, the music critic for the weekly L’arpa, compared the revolutionary spirit of Wagner to that of Mazzini, in a clear attempt to counter the accusations of anti-Italianità which were raging against Wagner, L’arpa 28 Aug. 1871.
years after those in Bologna where Wagner had scored an unmitigated triumph.\textsuperscript{6} In Milan, the press fueled an increasingly febrile atmosphere before and during the staging of the opera. The liberal press, led by \textit{La perseveranza}, whose editor was Filippo Filippi, passionately advocated the Wagnerian cause and predicted that the works of the great genius would be acknowledged, in time, as masterpieces.\textsuperscript{7} Democratic journals, meanwhile, indulged in either anti-Wagnerian satire or encouraged tolerance, with the exception of Ricordi, who took the lead in attacking the German composer. It must be remembered that the Italian rights to Wagner’s works were owned by his competitor, the publisher Francesco Lucca, and were only eventually sold by Lucca’s wife Giovannina to Ricordi in 1888. The suspicion, therefore, that Ricordi was looking after his own economic interests, as the owner of the publishing rights to the operas of Verdi, Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, could legitimately be leveled. Such a suspicion, nevertheless, should not conceal Ricordi’s true ideological standpoint, which was deeply conservative, patriotic and nationalist, expressed through his defense of \textit{italianità} and his loyalty to Verdi.\textsuperscript{8} Further evidence in support of Ricordi’s genuine patriotic feelings is offered by the poignant episode which occurred in Turin in the year of Verdi’s death (1901). At that time, Turin was a major centre of Wagnerism and the local group of Wagnerians was able to plan the staging of the whole \textit{Ring} cycle. This important achievement for Wagner supporters was prevented only by the influence that Ricordi exerted on the mayor of the city. The publisher, who by this time had bought the rights to Wagner’s operas from Lucca, repeated his tribute to Verdi by suggesting that Wagnerians should wait for a more favourable time to perform the \textit{Ring} than the immediate aftermath of the death of the greatest Italian composer. Furthermore, in order to ensure that his

\textsuperscript{6} Bologna was competing with Milan in promoting its image as a cosmopolitan centre of culture. In 1871 the city hosted, besides \textit{Lohengrin}, an international conference on prehistory. The rivalry between the two communes did not end with unification. In 1914, when it was finally possible to represent \textit{Parsifal} outside Bayreuth (a veto imposed by the composer), the Bolognese production of the opera preceded the Milanese one by a week, with the critics underlining their respective merits and flaws. For the critic Eugenio Giovannetti the Milan production was ‘catholic and latin’ whereas that in Bologna was ‘christian and universal’; see Marion S. Miller, “Wagnerism, Wagnerians, and Italian Identity”, in \textit{Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics}, edited by David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1984): 167–197, 178.

\textsuperscript{7} Marion S. Miller, “Wagnerism, Wagnerians, and Italian Identity”, 175.

\textsuperscript{8} More than any other Ricordi before and after himself, Giulio was not only a man of universal cultural interests but also a genuine artist. Poet, painter, composer and journalist, he conceived his role of publisher as a mission whose function consisted of educating the taste of population. For an exhaustive discussion of his influence in the history of Casa Ricordi and the city of Milan, see Sartori, \textit{Casa Ricordi}, 63–73.
intentions were fulfilled, Ricordi doubled the price of the production rights for the
Ring.9

Regardless of Ricordi’s personal stance, in 1873 his patriotic views seemed to have been shared by the majority of the Milanese audience that disturbed the performances of Lohengrin with whistles, catcalls, shuffling feet and verbal protests causing sudden suspensions and, eventually, the cancellation of the final performances. The next presentation of a Wagner opera at La Scala had to wait until the 1888–89 season when another Lohengrin was prepared and, this time, more warmly welcomed.10 The cultural climate had substantially changed over the fifteen years which elapsed between the two productions of Lohengrin.11 Despite the opposition of the nationalist and conservative press, the Wagnerian cult had evolved, particularly through the activity of local organisations, among which those in Bologna and Turin led to the further dissemination of Wagner in Italy.12 The German’s operas circulated largely in the principal cities of Italy, where they received tolerant and, sometimes, enthusiastic acceptance, such as in the case of the first production of Lohengrin in Naples in 1881.13

The press wrangle around Wagner clearly involved more than the music itself, as Wagnerism was an extremely ill-timed phenomenon which reached Italy in the aftermath of the political unification. Nevertheless, the fact that the complex

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9 Turin attempted to mount the Ring again in 1911, and this time their expectations were again frustrated by another national anniversary: the fiftieth anniversary of Italy's foundation!
10 Both productions of Lohengrin at La Scala were conducted by Franco Faccio. Between 1888 and 1891 Lohengrin was given thirty-four times and other Wagnerian works followed in subsequent years, such as Dei Meistersinger von Nürnberg (1889), Tannhäuser (1891) Der fliegende Holländer and Die Walküre (1893), Gotterdammerung (1896), Siegfried (1899) and Das Rheingold (1903).
11 In 1883 the Austrian impresario Neumann, who was touring Wagner operas with his own company throughout Europe, brought the Ring cycle to several Italian cities (Rome, Venice, Bologna). One of the planned venues was Milan’s Teatro dal Verme but Giovannina Lucca succeeded in preventing the representation of the Cycle there. Enforcing her exclusive production rights to Wagner’s operas in Italy, she secured from the courts the confiscation of all scenes and costumes for the Ring as soon as they reached Milan central station. Neumann had to revert to a plan B and Beethoven’s Fidelio was given instead, noticeably for the first time in front of an Italian audience as late as 1883.
12 Bologna hosted the Italian premieres of the majority of Wagner operas with Der fliegende Holländer (1877), Tristan und Isolde (1888), and Parsifal (1914). The local Wagnerian organisation also published a journal between 1893 and 1895, the Cronaca wagneriana, with the purpose of documenting all events pertaining to the Wagnerian movement in Italy. On the occasion of her pilgrimage to Bayreuth in 1876, which followed the first Italian pilgrimages started in the late 1860s, Giovannina Lucca opened the season by crowning Wagner with a silver laurel wreath.
13 Lohengrin was defined as ‘Dantesque’ by one critic; see Mario Baccaro, “L’opera di Wager a Napoli”, in Cento anni di vita del Teatro San Carlo, 1848–1948, [Naples, 1948], 89, 90, quoted in Miller, “Wagnerism, Wagnerians, and Italian Identity”, 176. Rome was described as tolerant towards the music of Wagner; see Francesco D’Arcais’s review of Tannhäuser at Rome’s Teatro Apollo in Nuova antologia, 87, (1 June 1886), 553.
The harmonic language of Wagner and his theories on music drama had a massive impact on Italian composers is beyond dispute. The composer against whom accusations of Wagnerism were first leveled was Arrigo Boito. In effect, his *Mefistofele* (1868) is the first Italian opera to adopt large-scale recurring thematic material. As Nicolaisen has noted, the chromatic music which is first presented in the Prologue, reappears at the end of Part I with the death of Margherita (an eighteen-measure return) and at the end of the drama with Faust's death (a sixty-two-measure return). But these musical returns function more as mere repetitions than as symphonic elaboration of motives with dramatic potential in the Wagnerian fashion. The first studies of Wagner’s music in Italy were based on the analysis of reductions for piano and voice of the orchestral scores, certainly an inadequate medium for understanding Wagnerian language. Moreover, not all the relevant issues regarding the relationship between music and staging were put into proper focus by Italian critics and musicologists. It is not surprising, therefore, that misconceptions arose about what, exactly, constituted the Wagnerian quality of Italian operas. For instance, the habit of inserting dances or descriptive numbers written in a symphonic style was indubitably considered Wagnerian, without a consistent evaluation of the type of language employed.

14 Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition, 1871–1893* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 144. The Milanese premier in 1868 *Mefistofele* was hissed for its lack of melody and for its continuous dramatic form. In revising the opera for the (successful) Bolognese performances of 1875, Boito simplified, abbreviated, and restored tradition. No occasion was lost for including a closed form, and scenes which aroused hostility (such as the scene of the Imperial Palace and the Intermezzo sinfonico) were simply cut. The libretto too, which had been born as an ambitious condensation of Goethe’s masterwork and was circulated by Ricordi well in advance the premiere arousing general acclaim, became much more conventional once revised. The philosophical vision of Goethe was reduced to the antithesis between good and evil and the plot focussed on the romantic episodes of Faust’s female encounters. Faust himself even opportunely changed register, from baritone to tenor.

15 The accusations of Wagnerism were not entirely deserved. After an initial expression of enthusiasm for Wagner’s music, Boito acknowledged that the German composer had proved not to be the man ‘destined to fulfill the innovative mission’. See Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, edited by Piero Nardi (Verona: Mondadori, 1942), 1257. Moreover the use of leitmotivs, the renunciation of set pieces and the conception of poetry of form could also be linked to the ideas expressed by Mazzini in his 1836 *Filosofia della musica*. Here the republican theorist of *Risorgimento* and united Europe strongly advocated the reformation of Italian opera giving similar prescriptions to those that Wagner will expound in his theoretical writings much later (1849–1851). See Giuseppe Mazzini, *Filosofia della musica*, 2nd edn., with preface by Adriano Lualdi, (Milan: Fratelli Bocca, 1954), 154–186.


17 Consequently, the symphonic descriptive music in Catalani's prologue to *La falce* (1876) or the intermezzo and *tregenda* in Puccini's *Le vili* (1884), were labeled Wagnerian when, in fact, as Budden suggests, the early style of both these composers owes more to Massenet than Wagner. See Julian Budden, “Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera”, in *Music and Theatre, Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, edited by Nigel Fortune, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 299–332: 306.
In such a climate, anti-Wagnerist anathemas were launched against the composer Alfredo Catalani despite the presence in his works of genuine thematic elaboration. For example, the use of chromaticism in his operas before La Wally is introduced within a system which retains both the set piece (closed form) and diatonically conceived melody. Only with Wally do the scenes become thematically organised through motives and tonality loses its grip on the organisation of the musical material.\(^\text{18}\)

While Catalani emphasises chromatic harmonies by exposing them in the melodic line, Puccini smoothes over his chromaticism by ostensibly imposing diatonic melodies above it. Puccini’s loyalty to tonal ways of thinking is also confirmed, for instance, by the analysis that Allen W. Atlas conducted on the relationship between characters and tonal areas in Madama Butterfly. Atlas identifies G flat major and A major as the tonal areas in which Pinkerton respectively expresses his refusal for everything Japanese and his desire for Butterfly. These tonal relations followed a completely inverted logic when applied to Butterfly for whom G flat is the positive affirmation of her love for Pinkerton and her acceptance of a foreign culture, whereas A represents the negative renunciation of everything that is Japanese.\(^\text{19}\)

For Michele Girardi, Puccini mastered the leitmotiv technique without compromising on melodism, the pillar of Italian operatic tradition. As Girardi has noticed, in Manon Lescaut Puccini creates a system of relationships between characters, their experiences and the feelings which the latter aroused, through the development of motivic material. For example, the theme of Manon, which originates from the harmonies exposed when the carriage in which she is travelling stops at Amiens, is subsequently reprised by des Grieux in his solo. The same theme reappears, variously elaborated, throughout the opera (Manon’s aria in Act II; the duet between Manon and des Grieux who reads his destiny in the eyes on Manon in Act III, when the theme is subsequently passed into the orchestra during the Intermezzo; and finally in act IV where it reappears as an enchanted vision before the desolate last solo of Manon) to signal the inescapable fate that bounds the protagonists together.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{18}\) Nicolaisen analyses the motivic organization of La Wally through a chart which dissects the musical material of the first half of Act I; see Nicolaisen, Italian Opera in Transition, 178–185.


technique, Puccini distanced himself from other composers of the *giovane scuola* such as Giordano and Cilea. Their use of leitmotif might enhance with music an element (a feeling, an object or an idea) present in the text, but fails to function as the generator of musical continuity through harmonic elaboration of the motivic material.\(^{21}\) In their cases, the leitmotif appears at several points of the plot as it was first presented without enacting and ‘promoting’ the dramatic situation.\(^{22}\) This type of criticism very soon began to be leveled against Mascagni and his contemporaries. In the 1890s and for the following two decades Luigi Torchi, who in 1894 translated Wagner’s *Oper und Drama*, basically accused the young Italian composers of lacking any real understanding of the methods they were trying to apply.\(^{23}\) When Mascagni experimented with ‘free form’ in the Wagnerian fashion in *Parisina* (1914), his main preoccupation was to give melodic form to declamation. For him, only Wagner, in *Die Meistersinger*, was able to attain this result. For *I Medici*, the first opera of his planned tetralogy, Leoncavallo claimed to have followed the principles of the great German composer while attempting their translation into a national idiom. But these ‘principles’, notwithstanding the active role of the orchestra, translated into essentially vocal melody with accompaniment.\(^{24}\) These recurring observations on the alleged inadequacy of an entire generation of Italian composers, with the possible exception of Puccini, to assimilate the Wagnerian lesson and take it on from there – which has been held by many (especially in Italy) – might instead suggest the resistance of Italian opera to a *modus operandi* fundamentally disconnected from the core principle of its tradition: vocal melodism.

\(^{21}\) In mid-century Italian opera, thematic recurrences were largely adopted but they did not fulfill the requirements to be classified as Wagnerian leitmotif. For an examination of this specific point see Budden, “Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera”, 306.

\(^{22}\) The examples supplied by Geraldi comes from Andrea Chenier (1896) and Adriana Lecouvreur (1902.) The theme of Andrea Chenier after the *improvviso* is reintroduced, unvaried, in Act II as a reminder of the encounter with Maddalena, before the latter’s aria ‘La mamma morta’ in Act III with the same function and, finally, before Chenier presents himself in front of the popular court of justice in Act IV. For Cilea’s *Adriana Lecouvreur* (1902) the themes of Adriana and, I would add, Maurizio are reintroduced at several points, again without substantial elaboration, although Giraldi acknowledges the subtler refinement of Cilea in the use of orchestral colours and timbres. Giraldi, *Giacomo Puccini*, 91, 92.

\(^{23}\) Budden, “Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera”, 304. That Wagner exerted a potent influence on composers born in the 1850s and 1860s is beyond dispute. Mascagni, Catalani and Puccini expressed their enthusiasm for his music and Leoncavallo tried even to emulate the Ring with his projected Renaissance trilogy entitled *Crepusculum* (of which he completed only the first opera, *I Medici*, in 1893).

To Italians, the whole Wagnerian theorising of music drama sounded artificial; it killed spontaneity. This was the opinion not only of Verdi (as discussed in the previous chapter) but also that of Rossini who, in a letter addressed to the director of Milan’s conservatoire, Lauro Rossi, defended the ‘ideal and expressive’ essence of music, which could and must not be reduced to ‘a literary or representational art’. Rossini’s words are tellingly echoed by those of Lamperti, Giraldoni, Carelli and many other vocal pedagogues active in fin-de-siècle Italian music institutions.

The political climate which characterised post-unification Italy made unacceptable the idea that Italian opera could be reformed by a foreigner. Moreover, Wagner burst into Latin culture with the hugely innovative world of his Nordic myths. The Germanic tradition of giants, dwarfs and dragons from northern landscapes were completely unknown to Italians, who did not traditionally deal with magic and supernatural elements. Reviewing the Ring for the Rome performances of 1883, the critic Francesco D’Arcais reflected that

[while] Germans cherish traditions still lively in popular fantasies, the people of the Latin race find it hard to take seriously a supernatural world which cloaks itself in forms so different not only from the real world but also from that of Greek and Latin myth…This world [of Wagner] … is an art which does not respond to the spirit of the time.  

In this way D’Arcais elegantly summed up both the inclination of his countrymen toward what is ‘real’ and their cultural roots in a classicism constituted by Greek and Latin mythology. Although unrealistic themselves, these myths were acceptable to Italians inasmuch as they were part of a shared heritage and did not need to be learned from scratch.

Italianists, whose ranks were constituted by a substantial group of critics, cultural elite and the general public, perceived the Teutonic world of Wagner with its music from the ‘future’ as an attempt at corrupting national values and traditions at exactly the time when the nation builders were struggling with the definition of Italianess.

**III The reaction of vocal pedagogues to ‘modern’ operas**

The quarrels centered around Wagner did not leave Italian singers untouched. Supporting the anti-Wagnerian party, the baritone Eugenio Giraldoni complained of the dangerous tessituras of Wagner’s roles. The tenor Giuseppe Anselmi referred

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to the German composer as ‘prime assassin of voices’ while Giuseppe De Luca expressed his reluctance to study Beckmesser, a kind of part which, in his view, ‘ruins’ the voice. 27 Italian pedagogues did not directly attack Wagner’s music as such. They generally adopted a subtler strategy, blaming ‘modern’ composers for having embraced types of music alien to their traditions, or ominously substituted the florid style of singing with pure declamation. In his **Compendium**, Leone Giraldoni (the father of Eugenio) complains about the contemporary state of Italian opera which, stuck between past and future, attempts to find its way forward by emulating foreign musical languages:

> Indeed, I see that every foreign nation strives to create a Lyric Theatre which has a specific character corresponding to its own temperament. In France, Germany, Russia, Spain, England, the most severe and fervent music experts struggle to achieve this goal. Italy, instead of carrying on along the path opened by its own unsurpassable and unsurpassed geniuses, and enlarging its own aspirations, adapting them to the innovations of modern science, (read Wagnerian harmony), denies its own past and derides its own masterpieces … suffocates its own and enviable prerogatives attempting to shape itself on types alien to its sky, to its climate, as if changing one’s own nature was as easy as changing one’s own nationality. Italy, I repeat, [is] the land and cradle of melody at whose wellspring many foreign intelligences came to find inspiration … Let composers write as they used to in the past, taking advantage from the harmonic science, not to substitute for the melodic expression, but only to add valuable devices. 28

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27 **Letters in the La Scala archives by Giraldoni to Carlo D’Ormeville, 10 November 1899, Coll. Casati 605; Anselmi to anon., 9 February 1906, Coll. Casati 28; De Luca to Carlo D’Ormeville, n.d., Coll. Casati, 357, all quoted in Miller, “Wagnerism, Wagnerians, and Italian Identity”, 334, 335.**

28 “Difatti, vedo ogni nazione scalmanarsi in auditi sforzi per crearsi un Teatro Lirico che abbia un carattere particolare alla propria indole e nazionalità. In Francia, in Germania, in Russia, in Spagna, in Inghilterra, tutti i più severi ed ardentì cultori delle dottrine musicali, si sforzano a raggiungere tale intento. Che fa l’Italia, che non avrebbe che a proseguire sulla strada aperta da una pleiade di genii incontrastati quanto incontrastabili, coll’allargare la cerchia delle proprie aspirazioni informandole ai ritrovati della scienza moderna? Rinnega il suo passato e dileggia essa stessa i suoi propri capolavori … conculca le proprie ed invidiabili prerogative col tentare di foggarsi su tipi estranei al suo cielo, al suo clima, come se fosse così facile cambiare la propria indole, come lo è di cangiare la propria nazionalità. Sì, lo ripeto, l’Italia, terra e culla della melodia per eccellenza alla sorgente della quale vennero tanti ingegni stranieri ad ispirarsi … Scrivano i maestri come una volta si scriveva, profitando dei progressi della scienza armonica, non per sopraffare l’espressione melodica, ma solo per corredarla di valevoli artigli,” Leon Giraldoni, **Compendium. Metodo analitico analitico, filosofico e fisiologico per la educazione della voce** (Milan: Ricordi, 1889), 53, 54, 57.
The modern harmony to which Giraldoni refers, and under which spell Italian composers were turning away from the native melodic expression, is the harmonic language of Wagner. If advances in symphonic music have been achieved by Germans, then Italians might well take advantage of these developments but only for the exaltation of melody and not to bring about its disappearance inside the harmonic texture. In the words of Giraldoni, patriotic and nationalist tones are intertwined with the musical discourse, to the extent that he links geographic and climatic characteristics of a nation to the physical or psychological qualities of its people:

As every race receives from nature a physical type adequate to the sky and soil in which it develops, so the moral type receives from the same nature special characteristics which it seems to me madness to impose or deny.  

This kind of logic is pervasive in the writings of the period. The theorist Enrico di San Martino, while exalting Wagner’s greatness, attacks his entire project of reforming opera, which is seen as a vigorous act of reaction against the Latin genius. For di San Martino, Wagner is a proud advocate of German culture and has consequently produced works in which both idea (substance) and system (form or compositional technique) express the characteristics of his German genius. Italian composers have thought to use the Wagnerian system to their own advantage, without realising that they are not German. Their native national characteristics will prevent them from successfully exploiting a system which is the expression of the German population’s skills and qualities. If Italian composers continue on this route Italian music will continue to suffer.

Vocal pedagogues generally regard the quality of ‘modern’ operas as the major cause for the declining state of the art of singing. Francesco Lamperti sums up the issue as follows:

Vocal music, in order to assume a more dramatic style, is almost entirely despoiled of agility of every kind; to such a pitch is this carried, that by degrees it will become little else than musical declamation, to the total exclusion of melody. Without entering here into the question, whether or

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29 'Come ogni razza riceve della natura un tipo fisico adeguato al cielo ed al suolo in cui si sviluppa, così il tipo morale riceve della stessa natura, caratteri speciali che mi pare insania volere conculcare, o rinnegare’. Giraldoni, _Compendium_, 54.

not any advantage may accrue to musical science through these innovations, I shall only briefly observe that as the singing of melodies, though not absolutely true to nature, is yet productive of much pleasure to the audience, it seems to me a pity that the melodramatic system should be exchanged for one, perhaps more realistic, but which tends to the exclusion of melody, and is hence detrimental to the art of singing.\footnote{Francesco Lamperti, A Treatise on the Art of Singing, trans. J. C. Griffith, (Milan, Naples, Rome, Florence and London: Ricordi, 1877), 14. ‘La musica vocale per assumere un carattere più drammatico si è pressoché interamente spogliata di tutta l’agilità, a tal punto che per poco si prosegua di questo passo essa non sarà più che una declamazione musicale in perfetta contraddizione col vero metodo della declamazione puramente drammatica che impone ai vari attori l’esclusione di qualsiasi cantilena. Senza entrare ora in questione sul maggiore o minore incremento che la scienza musicale in sé stessa possa ritarre da tali innovazioni, mi farò lecito soltanto di osservare per incidenza, come convenutosi una volta che il cantare se non è verosimile però dilètta assai, non parmi conforme ai precetti naturali del melodramma l’abbandonarsi a un metodo che condurrà all’esclusione del canto, mentre è per il canto stesso che la forma melodrammatica fu creata’. This is the original Italian text by Francesco Lamperti, Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto, (Milan, Naples: R. Stabilimento Ricordi, 1865), Preface, V, which Griffith translated, with the new title A Treatise on the Art of Singing, as mentioned in Chapter 1.}

As Lamperti underlines, florid singing constitutes the pillar of the ‘melodramatic system’, which although less realistic than declamation, remains the best method for the cultivation of the voice. Lamperti was a strenuous advocate of the old Italian school of singing and he reacted fiercely to the shock wave produced by contemporary operas.\footnote{Lamperti was an organ scholar of the Milan conservatoire, a composer and conductor. During his early life he was associated with singers such as Rubini, Pasta, Crescentini, Velluti and with the composers of his age, including Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi.} His total disagreement with the direction taken by the lyric theatre can be judged from an article published in 1909 in the American journal The Etude and signed by one of his former pupils, Lena Doria Devine. In the words of Devine, the great Italian teacher

first of all […] stood for purity of tone, and for never sacrificing quality for quantity … He believed that if modern music demands that tonal beauty shall become a secondary consideration, that it makes of singing a hybrid, inconsistent, degenerate art, and that the sooner we come down to plain speech the better.\footnote{Lena Doria Devine, “Francesco Lamperti and his Methods”, The Etude 26 (1908), 259. Both Lamperti and Devine underline the fact that embellishments, roulades and coloraturas still appeal to the taste of contemporary audiences. Devine, in particular, mentions the earnest enthusiasm that singers such as Sembrich, Melba and Tetrazzini still arouse in London and American audiences.}

Giraldoni shares Lamperti’s thinking that in ‘modern’ operas tonal quality is exchanged for vocal power: in these conditions half-trained singers can still win the favour of an audience which demands no more than a warm, rich and strong voice.\footnote{Giraldoni, Compendium, 56.}
In the old days, the complex array of difficulties set in the vocal lines of the operas prevented singers from rushed preparation. Moreover, the delicate accompaniment which characterised old operas reveals all the faults of a singer’s technique. For this reason Lamperti exhorts the pupil to cultivate the old-fashioned repertoire on which the great singers of the past ages, such as Pacchiarotti, Crescentini and Velluti built their exceptional skills. The progressive disappearance of the castrati or musici at any level of the operatic scene (first from the stage and then from teaching) means for Lamperti the irrevocable loss of their unsurpassable expertise in the topics of breathing, pronunciation, expression, emission and intonation.

All vocal pedagogues agree that an incomplete training inevitably leads to ephemeral success and short careers. Mathilde Marchesi (1821–1913) points out that in order to sing the modern repertoire, vocal power is neither a sufficient requirement nor a substitute for serious training; both dramatic and florid singing require careful training through which flexible, even, durable voices are formed. Only the singer who can control breathing, the blending of the vocal registers, and the elastic use of larynx and glottis, will be able to adapt her or his voice to all the different degrees of dramatic expression. It is again Devine who insightfully links the quest for long and thorough vocal training with the specific ‘pure’ tone quality researched by Lamperti and his predecessors. This result is achieved, as Devine put it, by training

the vocal organ to respond to will, to tone conception and to breath release with absolute spontaneity and without conscious or visible effort.

Everything else, registers, resonance, tone locating, articulation, etc. is secondary and self-adjusting when the basic condition is right.

Total control over the breath release, a clean-cut attack of the sound, and perfect legato are the elements that Devine singles out as the fundamentals of tone building. Ability, patience and a teacher-student relationship based on reciprocal

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35 Regarding ‘modern’ operas, Marchesi goes as far as to assert that they have often been ‘written [in conflict with] the physiological laws by which the human voice is bound’; see Mathilde Marchesi, Marchesi and Music. Passages from the Life of a Famous Singing-Teacher (New York & London: Harper, 1898), 181, 182.
37 “In singing each tone must be separate and perfect by itself and yet join its neighbor like pearls on a string; no escape of breath in between; that is what is meant by legato’. Devine, ibid. The metaphorical language used by Devine discussing legato, and which she surely inherited from her teacher Lamperti, attests to the link between Lamperti and the eighteenth century Italian school of singing. The language used by Lamperti reminds the reader of the ‘old’ vocal pedagogy also in terms of language. He seems to belong to that tradition which preceded what Taylor defines as the mechanical turn in voice culture, for which see chapter 1. Lamperti himself suggests that his own
trust are the prerequisites of this process. It is time-consuming but cannot be rushed: shortcuts do not exist in the cultivation of an expressive voice. The progressive erosion of the melodramatic system is dated back by Lamperti to the works of Bellini, who is criticised for introducing the use of extreme tessituras and a syllabic style. The trend for increasing the presence of both these features in subsequent operas has caused, in the view of both Lamperti and Giraldoni, the alarming phenomenon of the spostamento della voce (displacement of the voice). Such displacement consists in making a higher voice, such as a soprano or a tenor, sing the part of a lower voice, respectively mezzo-soprano and baritone. This is caused, in turn, by the habit of pulling tessituras upwards and, especially for sopranos, constantly forcing the voice ‘on the highest notes of the soprano sfogato and on [a] few strong low ones’. As a consequence, the sounds of the middle range are irreparably weakened and the singing becomes forced and disagreeable. For Lamperti the mania of pulling tessituras upwards only demonstrates composers’ lack of understanding of vocal culture.

In *The Art of Singing*, William Shakespeare (1849–1931), the English tenor who trained in Lamperti’s school and who later became one of the most influential singing teachers in England, highlights that from the end of the eighteenth century the development of symphonic music led composers to neglect the study of the voice as an instrument. Therefore, ‘with the disappearance of that school of composition in which composers wrote specially for the voice, has likewise vanished, to a great extent, the successful cultivation of the art of singing’. These words are reminiscent of the discourses which we can find in other pedagogical writing of the period. For instance, Beniamino Carelli metaphorically exhorts composers to go

method may work ‘as a counsel, which, if wanting in scientific merit, will, as the fruit of my experience and study, be of some value’, Lamperti, *A Treatise*, 16.

38 It is extremely interesting to read the lines that Devine devotes to the concept of ‘voice placing’. Due to her knowledge of both Italian and Anglo-Saxon pedagogical lexicon, she seems willing to discard the expression ‘voice placing’ which can be misleading when the pupil directs the voice in a specific resonating ‘place’. See Devine, “What is Voice Placing?”, *The Etude* 26 (1908), 260. In effect, Lamperti, Giraldoni or Carelli do not use the expression ‘voice placing’. For them this concept is contained and inseparable from that of tone support where the placement is a consequence of effective breath release and controlled legato singing.

39 Bellini’s successors, for Lamperti, have followed his example exaggerating either the range of the vocal lines and syllabication on high tones which are both extremely fatiguing for the voice. Lamperti, *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare*, VIII, or *A Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 15, 16.


back to singing (‘torniamo a cantare’) as an escape from the contemporary ruination of the vocal art, while Giraldoni explicitly recalls that the older composers used to study singing themselves. This practice made them precisely aware of the ranges and tessituras of the various voice types.42

Drawing up a list of the works which could have fallen under the pedagogues’ indictment would turn out to be a difficult task, as singing teachers are in general extremely careful not to mention specific names.43 Clearly, in 1864, the year when Lamperti’s Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto was first published, the long transitional process which was to transform the conventional structures of Italian melodramma had only just begun. Lamperti could well refer to the works of Verdi and minor composers forgotten today but present in the mid-century schedules of Italian opera houses, such as Petrella, Pacini, Cagnoni and the Ricci brothers. Verdi himself clearly expressed some unsettling ideas about singing when he stated, with regard to his Lady Macbeth (1847) that he ‘would like the Lady not to sing’ and moreover that she should have a ‘harsh, stifled and hollow voice’.44 It was also from ideals of ‘non-singing,’ as Karen Henson has defined them, that the aesthetic of declamation progressively developed, within the Italian operatic tradition, during the later part of the nineteenth century.45

On the other hand, Lamperti certainly did not at that time have in mind Boito’s Mefistofele or Ponchielli’s La Gioconda, yet to be composed, or the French operas by Meyerbeer, Gounod, and later Bizet and Massenet which were to begin their Italian penetration during 1870s and 1880s.46 In his 8 Solfeggi secondo lo stile

42 Giraldoni, Compendium, 51. Beniamino Carelli dedicated a whole volume to the serious issue that ‘modern’ composers ignored the technical characteristics of the singing voice; see Carelli, Torniamo a cantare (Naples: Bideri, 1891).
43 Lamperti vaguely refers to Bellini and his successors, as seen above, while Giraldoni defends Verdi, as the only composer who always preserved his Italianness (‘seppe mantenersi sempre italiano’) while both consider Rossini as the high priest of the temple of the old school of Italian singing; see, Lamperti, Guida, VI, VIII, and Giraldoni, Compendium, 52, 55.
44 Letter of Giuseppe Verdi to Salvatore Cammarano, Paris, 23 November 1848, in Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano, edited by Carlo Matteo Mossa (Parma: Istituto nazionale di Studi Verdi, 2001), 84. Here Verdi complained that the gorgeous voice and figure of Eugenia Tadolini, cast for the role of the Lady in the Neapolitan performances of Macbeth at the S. Carlo theatre at the beginning of 1849, were utterly unsuitable to that role. ‘Brutta e cattiva’ (‘ugly and bad’) were the characteristics he wished to find in the singer who interpreted his Lady.
45 Karen Henson points out the ‘non-singing’ aesthetics translated into a ‘text-oriented approach to melody’ which in turn resulted in ‘overall vocal restraint and a prioritising of diction and textual expression over the melodic line’. Henson, Opera Acts. Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.
46 Nonetheless, Lamperti, who died in 1892, listened to all these works in a later stage of his professional life. He could have rightly said to have foreseen their arrival when in 1864, he predicted that opera would become dominated by musical declamation. To his bel canto ears the lines of Don Josè, Carmen or Gioconda must have sounded pretty much as vocal declamation.
modern for soprano e mezzo soprano, published by Ricordi in 1877, his concept of modern style includes embellishments (especially double appoggiaturas and acciaccaturas), passages of agility and vocal lines built on scale or arpeggio patterns. The ‘modern’ style of these solfeggi reminds us more of the modernity of Mercadante or early Donizetti than that of late or even middle-period Verdi.\(^{47}\) Surely the musicologist and composer Riccardo Gandolfi must have been pleased with them. Lamperti’s solfeggi displayed much of that national character which, as Gandolfi complained, was lacking in contemporary Italian operas. The foreign influence on Italian art after unification had deprived Italian opera of that genuine national character which was its true value before 1860.\(^{48}\)

IV ‘Modern’ operas and ‘modern’ singers

The erosion of florid singing and concomitant rise in declamatory style, bigger orchestras and dense harmonic textures, all had their effects on the idea of vocalism. The elaboration of this new vocal aesthetic could not possibly be limited to a simple quest for vocal power, as the advent of a realist theatre required that the ‘modern’ singer search for a new sound, with naturalistic timbral connotations. The many forces which were transforming the structures and conventions of Italian opera, and on which I hope to have offered a sufficiently clear overview in this and the previous chapter, also conspired to bring about a new conception of ideal voice quality. The purity of tone so patiently cultivated by the older Italian singing teachers was exchanged for the ‘carnal’ sound that singers born during the 1870s, such as Enrico Caruso, Titta Ruffo or Eugenia Burzio, were pursuing. As we shall see in the final chapters of this thesis, dedicated to case-studies, these and other singers of that generation experimented with new types of vocal registration (the ways of blending the several vocal registers) laying the basis of the ‘modern’ vocalism.

The stylised tone quality of bel canto roles suits the ideal world in which such characters live and love. Even their voice types are stylised and not naturalistic. The Rossinian contraltos, Bellini’s very high tenors and Donizetti’s mad coloratura

\(^{47}\) 8 Solfeggi secondo lo stile moderno for soprano and mezzo soprano (Milan: Ricordi, 1877). These exercises are dedicated to Baroness Clara von Schleinitz, a pupil of Lamperti and an distinguished dilettante, who nevertheless was apparently able to sustain florid singing and wide vocal leaps. It should also be emphasised that as late as 1878 Lamperti devoted an entire publication to the study of the trill, a fundamental topic of bel canto vocal technique; see Osservazioni e consigli sul trillo (Milan: Ricordi, 1878).

sopranos do not belong to the real world, as their vocal identities do not correspond to the common voices of everyday life. Verdi got rid of, or substantially reduced, some of these types (very high tenors, basses), kept other types for a long period (high soprano voices), created new ones (the high baritone completely distinct from bass-baritone). Moreover, with the advent of the giovane scuola operatic school, political and moral themes, such as Risorgimento and religion, which exerted on Romantic opera a prominent developmental force, were substituted by the pervasive subject of love, a tendency which was obviously reinforced by the sheer influence of French bourgeois and sentimental dramas. The ‘love’ of Mascagni or Puccini, though, bears a feeble relation to that ideal and inspiring sentiment exalted in the operas of Romantic composers, as veristi tend to exploit love in its sensual or even overtly sexual aspects. In terms of vocalism this choice translates into vocal lines centered on the medium voice range. As Celletti insightfully underlines:

Sensuality is especially expressed in the ‘medium’ range of the voice, and tends to dark colours. This was the reason which explains both the shortening of the upper range of the voice and the tendency to center the tessituras around the middle range. This was a general phenomenon … even though, for Mascagni’s tenors and sopranos this shift in the treatment of tessituras was quite abnormal.\(^{49}\)

The middle range of the voice offers a wide array of possibilities to the actor-singer as in this area he or she can transform, with certain degree of spontaneity, the flow of singing into sobbing utterance, shouts or whispers. The other element considered in the above quotation is the lowering of the upper limit of the vocal range. This procedure, as Celletti himself points out, does not, however, make the singer’s life easier. On the contrary, the tessitura gravitates around the high-middle range, which corresponds to the area of the passaggio critical to the production of top notes.\(^{50}\)

This poignant observation is corroborated by a generalisation added by Fedele D’Amico:

Personally I have always believed, not only that veristi had been always keen on this procedure [the passage from the medium to the upper range]


\(^{50}\) Celletti, “La vocalità mascagnana”, 42. Celletti specifically refers here to the tenor voice in the operas of Mascagni.
... but also that it represents the specifically 'veristic' feature of their style, in short that the musical verismo is defined by this proceeding ... Indeed that insistence on an area of the voice which is less natural and more problematic, demands an effort, a tension which turns singing towards a 'directly' passionate expression, similar to the excitement of a spoken language.\textsuperscript{51}

While Celletti principally refers to Mascagni's roles in his essay, D'Amico posits a question with which he also launches a kind of credo ('personally I have always believed') on what characterises verismo style. If the second passaggio becomes the focal area of verismo tessituras, as D'Amico suggests, the effort of sustaining the voice around this area evokes more the dimension of sexual excitement than that of spoken language. Given that the larynx is a secondary sexual organ, its manipulation, as when it has to constantly adjust to perform the span of sounds around the passaggio area, can be heard as translating into sexual arousal. This is exactly the impression which strikes the listener when confronted with the singing of characters as different as the peasant Turiddu (Cavalleria rusticana) and the aristocratic Loris (Fedora). The tessitura of the first insists on repeated f's and sometimes a\textsuperscript{i} flats, while that of the second plays constantly between e\textsuperscript{i} and g\textsuperscript{i}.

This new form of vocal aesthetic was also elicited by the highly tense phrasing characteristic of the new operas. The pure tonal quality of the old school was perceived as somehow passive when confronted with the nervous energy of the new characters. In order to be able to express with immediacy the passionate urgency of their modern roles, singers, particularly sopranos at first, broke into exacerbatedly 'open' singing, or pulled the chest voice up to frankly dangerous heights.\textsuperscript{52} All these elements will be explored in Chapter 6, which examines the registration strategies of three sopranos in detailed case-studies.

The profound transformations which affected Italian vocal tradition in the last decades of the nineteenth century are inextricably connected with political and social challenges faced by the recently formed united kingdom of Italy. An

\textsuperscript{51} 'Personalmente ho sempre creduto, non soltanto che questo procedimento [il passaggio dal registro centrale a quello acuto] sia stato caro ai veristi...ma che costituiscà il lato propriamente 'veristico' del l'ore stile, insomma che il verismo musicale consiste principalmente in questo procedimento ... Infatti quel poggiare su un settore della voce come quello, che è il meno naturale e il più problematico, richiede uno sforzo, una tensione che inclinano a volgere il canto verso un'espressione 'direttamente' passionale, assimilabile all'eccitazione d'un linguaggio parlato.' Fedele D'Amico from the conference proceedings which report his question/observation following the paper presented by Celletti.

\textsuperscript{52} Male voices broke into overly 'open-voiced' singing in the 1940s, whereas by this time the same tendency in the soprano voice had touched its peak and would progressively vanish.
investigation of the numerous and complex issues related to this topic obviously falls out of the limits of my thesis; it is, nonetheless, a topic which could offer exciting challenges to future scholars, especially once the basic relationship between ‘modern’ vocalism and giovane scuola operatic repertoire has hopefully been established with some clarity in this thesis. However, a brief overview of the main extra-musical issues intertwined with the creation of these vocal types may provide further understanding of the reasons behind the choices made by Italian singers born approximately in the 1870s.

V The roots of Italianness

Once political unification had been achieved in 1861, the nation builders were faced with the complex question of shaping a national identity. Its realisation was to prove extremely arduous as Italy was, in fact, a disparate collection of large and smaller local communities. Despite ostensibly adopting a common language, Italians shared almost nothing: they spoke dialects that were unintelligible to one another. Moreover, the economic and political structures in northern and southern states were completely at odds with one another, and such divergence of outlook extended to social habits and behaviours. These had been shaped by traditions formed during the medieval era and which originated from very different forms of cultural interaction. Furthermore, there was little accord between intellectual elites, who had built and articulated the idea of ‘nation’ during the decades of Risorgimento, and the rest of the population that was barely aware of being part of a new unified state.

In essence, Italianness was conceived as an aspiration not immediately available to the entire population. Vincenzo Gioberti, the leader of the Risorgimento’s moderate wing, believed that the only Italians worthy of the name were intellectuals, aristocrats and the middle classes: in other words, the circle of propertied men that differentiated themselves from the rest of the population by being literate, cultured, landlords, and heirs of that Italian universal civilisation which originated during the classical ages of the Roman Empire. Even the myth of Rome was exploited through three different perspectives: from the Catholic Rome of Manzoni and Gioberti, via the Mazzinian Rome as a symbol of brotherhood, to the classical Rome that the poet Carducci not only appropriated to inspire values of greatness, force, moral and political strength, but also identified as something purely Italian.53 Whatever vision

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53 For Carducci, Italian patriots had to be inspired by this ancient past and not from contemporary Italy which was ‘disgraceful, stupid, drunken, base, small, womanly…and anything but Italian’. 
of Rome was to be projected, the attitude of considering real Italians as of no particular account, and an abstract ideal of Italianness as the reality, was pervasive. Regardless of the expression chosen for indicating the partition of Italian society, its division was not a rigid one: Italianness could be achieved or lost on the basis of social, professional and military achievements, even though someone clearly controlled the inclusion and exclusion process. Underpinning this idea of Italianness was a political choice regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the population in the building up of the nation during the Risorgimento decades. The agreement reached by leading political groups tended towards the inclusion of that part of the population that in the age we are considering largely coincided with the agrarian class. Gioberti gave the blessing of moderates to the agrarian class's participation in the movement for Italian independence, and Mazzini, the leader of the democratic wing of Risorgimento, strove to instill in the lower classes a desire to renounce their petty local allegiances for the greater good of Italian unification.

The vision of Italy as an agrarian land not only corresponded to the real situation of the country's economy, but it was also an imaginative construct, an essential part of the political agenda to create a sense of communal belonging. The agrarian world was praised for its human and religious feelings, wisdom and nobility, all good values linked to a traditional, backward society; these beliefs identified Italians as a race with a common spirit and inner nature. For this reason, the preservation of such values was essential, even though it had to be harmonised with the spirit of renovation and modernisation. The process of making national identity required a double perspective: the inner and self-perceived image of itself, and the projection of this particular identity towards and in contrast to other national identities. Aiming to be a modern European state, and a power amongst other powers, the new-born Italy was supposed to become industrial; nevertheless an ideological stimulus favourable to the process of industrialisation was lacking in Italy, as Alexander Gerschenkron in his study of the cultural conditions that influence processes of

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54 Gramsci labelled this vision of a divided Italian society as the theory of the two races, one self-conscious of its superiority and considering the other one inferior, in Letteratura e vita nazionale, (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), 72. Angelo Camillo De Meis preferred the definition of due popoli – two populations in Il Sovrano (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1927), 10.

industrialisation points out. The backward status of the Italian economy represented, therefore, the result of a specific ideology, a sort of schizophrenic programme whereby the advocates of modernity wanted also to preserve the benefits linked with the agricultural structure of economy and society. This was essentially the ideal type of government dreamed of by the so-called 'Umbertian' era in Italian history (1878–1900) based on the power of the aristocracy. They were 'lords of the lands and lords of the war', upholders of traditional values capable of counterbalancing the bourgeoisie's fight for political power, and able, on the other hand, to promote the industrialisation of the country to forward long-term goals of colonial expansion and equality with the other great European powers. This vision of a modern Italy that nevertheless keeps the lustre of its great cultural and human traditions had to be packaged in terms of attractive human qualities that would appeal to the populace. So, according to the historian Giulio Bollati, inborn talent was considered superior to technique, creativity to study and laborious preparation, and instinct to organisation. The chasm between the truly backward situation of much of the country and the self-perceived greatness of Italy as a modern European nation apparently proved the success of this strategy.

To the number of imaginative fictions – the qualities which identified Italians as a race and a shared historical heritage – on which the sense of a communal belonging was built, the nature of the Italian language constituted one of primary importance. Literary or 'standard' Italian dating back to the Medieval Trecento, and established on the basis of fourteenth-century Tuscan by Pietro Bembo in his volume Prose della volgar lingua (1525), represented an invaluable 'source of Italianness', but it was just a literary entity and only accessible to literate people. The fact that Italian was not a spoken language amongst the huge majority of 'Italians', who conserved their dialects well into the twentieth century, and that half of the population was also illiterate were conveniently ignored.


57 Bollati, L'Italiano, 114, 115. This idea is reflected, for instance, in the biographical sketch of Puccini where Ferdinando Fontana states that the Tuscan composer 'learned music without even noticing, one might say, drinking his mother's milk', Fontana, “Giacomo Puccini”, Gazzetta Musicale di Milano 39/42 (19 October 1884), 381, quoted in Alexandra Wilson, The Puccini Problem, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26.
Into this picture of a conservative society strongly rooted in its agrarian traditions has to be placed the elaboration of effective family roles where the concepts of masculine and feminine found their definition and characterisation. During the decades of Risorgimento, Italian women’s leitmotivs are patriotism and motherhood. For Niccolò Tommaseo, Italian woman is capable of obedience as well as command and is morally stronger and less corrupted than men. Mazzini shared this belief and attributed to motherhood the power of inspiring moral regeneration and strong patriotic spirits. For Italians the identity of woman and mother reaches the level of a credo, a sort of religion of the family where the woman reveals her raison d’être.

Against this, manliness represented the intrinsic concept on which national identities were built in fin-de-siècle Europe. According to the scientist and physiologist Paolo Mantegazza (1831–1910), the characteristics that define the male psychological profile are ambition, courage, sense of justice, and a need to amass material possessions. Physical strength, the muscular, sculptured bodies of classical statues, the ideal expressed by the Latin saying mens sana in corpore sano, which would become one of the most successful mottos appropriated by the Fascist regime a few decades later, all combined to forge a link between physical exercise and spiritual strength, a conjunction that was itself promulgated as an essential ingredient of patriotism. The fin-de-siècle promotion of sport in Europe was a reaction to the widespread sense of spiritual and physical laxness, a consequence of the moral decadence that industrialisation and rapid technological progress were producing. A blind fear of anything that threatened the concept of ‘normality’ and the status quo, from homosexuality to feminism, from Judaism to socialism, underpinned scientific literature. This classified hybrid figures of feminised men (dandified), and masculinised women (narrow-hipped and flat-chested), where masculine aspects were signals of misconduct. Another example of this anxiety

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58 ‘… d’spirazione capace sapiente nell’ubbidire, sapiente nel comandare dove occorra è garantiglia a noi di men duro destino. Fin laddove gli uomini son più corrotti e più deboli, qui le donne son men deboli e men guaste di loro’ (‘…able to both inspire and obey, knowledgable in commanding when it is necessary, she guarantees us a less hard destiny. While men are corrupted and weak, women are far less limp and wicked than them’); see Niccolò Tommaseo, Le donna, scritti vari con aggiunte inedite (Milan: Tipografia e Libreria Editrice Agnelli 1872), 237.
59 Michela De Giorgio, Le Italiane dall’unità ad oggi (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1993), 10.
61 Wilson, The Puccini Problem, 16, 33.
62 See Weininger, Sex and Character, 73, cited in Wilson, The Puccini problem, 134; and Lombroso and Ferrero La donna delinquente (Turin: L. Roux, 1893), 95, 96, where relations between facial features or expressions and psychological or criminal traits are clearly established.
over the erosion of traditional male and female types was Nino Cirillo’s argument against the socialist ideas of emancipated women and the introduction of the divorce in Italy.\(^63\) The idea that only strong, powerful and socially successful men could attract the ‘normal’ woman was confidently expressed as if it were a scientifically proven fact.\(^64\)

The operatic manifestation of this discourse is revealed in a number of characters, including Compar Alfio and Turiddu in Mascagni’s *Cavalleria*, Scarpia in Puccini’s *Tosca*, Canio in Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci*. For the critic Torrefranca, nevertheless, these models are counterbalanced by the many male ‘medusas’ which he suggested were present in the *giovane scuola’s* gallery of characters.\(^65\) The violent attack of Torrefranca against the foremost Italian composer, who was accused of effeminacy, together with all the perceived flaws inherent in femininity – lack of originality and creativity, weakness, dependence, sickness and intellectual incapacity – confirms that any dilution of the idea of strong manliness was felt as an intolerable threat. Many of Puccini’s male characters seem unmanly, ambiguous, invertebrate men … transparent medusas, which suspended in the gentle water of the poetic pond … have a form that can be graceful and wandering, while, when removed from their natural environment … they become little more than a shapeless blob of gelatine.\(^66\)

More than being portrayed in the terms described by Torrefranca, the male characters had been transformed into fully-rounded human beings, as psychology had progressively broken into the operatic world since the mid-nineteenth century.\(^67\) Moreover, male singers used their roles as canvases for elaborating a vocal style that, according to the misogynistic rhetoric articulated by nation builders, sociologists and scientists, expressed those very qualities of power and strength through which the notion of manliness was articulated.

In such a political climate, composers drew characters whose features could not be delivered by means of coloratura or florid melody. Instead, declamation was the style adopted for the new roles, while power and a manly tonal quality is required. The ‘modern’ tenor, who had to be ‘modern’ in a particular Italian way, exchanges the fluidity of *bel canto* for the masculine sculptured singing of his ‘modern’ roles. In

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\(^{66}\) Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini*, 30.

\(^{67}\) As shown in the previous chapter.
line with the exaltation of the muscular bodies of classical tradition and their perceived connection with the spiritual strength of Italians, the use of ornamentation such as scales, trills, turns or effects such as the *messa di voce*, were expunged by modern composers. All this apparatus belonged to a different musical universe conceived for, and derived from, the singing of *castrati*, emasculated men *strictu sensu*, unacceptable to a modern, civil and progressive society.

In conclusion, the attempt to define a notion of *italianità* within modern operas produced new vocal types which were ‘modern’, declamatory and powerfully realistic. The hostility expressed by the most authoritative vocal pedagogues to the distortions of *bel canto* that this demanded illuminates the revolutionary impact of these stylistic transformations on vocal technique, whose decline was mainly attributed to ‘modern’ operas. On the other hand, the compromises made by Italian singers in order to perform this new repertoire led them to shape a vocal style that could potentially ‘export’ the new notion of Italianess. Finally, the obstacles that Italian composers had to overcome in order to realise the transition of Italian opera from a set of formulas into a more fluid dramatic form redefined its shape. This transition preoccupied critics, the musical press and opera administrators, as well as singing teachers, singers and musicologists, in a new-born nation concerned with the definition of its self-created image. The result of such a complex process eventually harmonised the symphonic elements and rhythmic articulation absorbed from French and German music with the inner melodic instinct of Italians, offering an up-to-date vision of *italianità* in tune with contemporary European cultural developments.
Chapter 4 Crucial changes in vocal registration

I Defining the concept of vocal register

Singing jargon is likely to be considered as something mysterious and esoteric by the non-singer musician. This surely extends to the subject of vocal registers, whose very definition is lacking in standard musicological dictionaries.¹ The origins of the term ‘register’ are also uncertain. Where the theorist Conrad von Zabern, writing in the late fifteenth century, relates the human voice to the alleged three sizes of an organ’s pipes, Thomas Galliard, in his 1743 English translation of Pier Francesco Tosi’s seminal singing treatise (1723), clearly suggests that ‘register [is] a term taken from the different Stops of an Organ’.² Most medieval authors of music treatises that deal with the voice, meanwhile, adopt variations of the terms ‘chest’, ‘throat’ and ‘head’ to describe what are perceived as different ranges of the voice; but they do not use the word ‘register’.³ Even when the term ‘register’ started to be explicitly and extensively used, such as in the eighteenth-century practical singing treatises by Tosi and Mancini, its meaning remains fundamentally confined to the idea that the voice has several ranges which have different tonal qualities. As Monahan effectively sums up:


³ In the thirteenth century, John of Garland, Jerome of Moravia and Marchetto of Padua agree on three partitions of the singing voice; see Joseph Dyer, “The Voice in the Middle Ages,” 168, 169. The three voices individualized by Jerome of Moravia were: the vox pectoris (chest), the vox gutturis (voice of the throat) and the vox capitis (head). According to E. De Coussemaker, John of Garland followed the same classification: ‘Si sit pectoris, tunc se habet in gravibus...Si sit gutturis, mediocriter... Et sicut vox pectoris tantummodo se habet in gravibus, ita vox capitis tantummodo se habet in superaculis; et sicut modi cantus, voces pectoris debent ordinari cum suo proprioc, scilicet in fundamento, et voces gutturis semper in acutis medium locum debent tenere.’ (‘If it is a chest voice, then [the voice] is in the low notes. If it is a throat voice, it is in the middle...And just as far down, the chest voice is in the low tones, so the head voice is high in the upper notes. And, in regard to the way of singing, chest voices ought to be placed in their proper space: that is, the lower part; throat voices also ought always to have the middle place in the upper section when [the voice is] high’) see Coussemaker, Scriptorum de Musica Medii Aevi Nova Series, IV vols., (Parisii: A. Durand et Pedone-Lauriel, 1846), vol. 1: 158. Garland seems to refer here to voice types and their ability to sing low, middle or high notes comfortably.
the old masters did not refer the registers to changes in the laryngeal action. They were treated simply as different qualities of tone, each quality best adapted to be sung only in a portion of the voice’s compass. It is not until Manuel II García’s the younger’s *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing* (1841) that a definition of register contained in a treatise of vocal technique is actually associated with a physiological action:

By the word register, we understand a series of consecutive and homogeneous tones going from low to high, produced by the development of the *same mechanical principle*, and whose nature differs essentially from another series of tones equally consecutive and homogeneous produced by *another mechanical principle*. All the tones belonging to the same register are consequently of the same nature, whatever may be the modifications of timbre or of force to which one subjects them [my emphases].

The reference to a ‘mechanical principle’ in García’s definition is identified by David C. Taylor with the ‘mechanical’ turn taken by vocal pedagogy in mid-nineteenth century. The importance of this ‘turn’ did not escape the attention of post-García voice teachers, some of whom consistently acknowledged in their writings the ground-breaking contributions of the great Spanish teacher. In modern times, the

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4 Brent Jeffrey Monahan, *The Art of Singing* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: the Scarecrow Press, 1978), 133. See Tosi for whom the term register indicates both a range and a specific tone quality, Tosi, *Observation on the Florid Song or Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, 23, 24. He distinguishes between ‘the feigned and the natural Voice’ which he defines also as Registers. In the previous paragraph 18 he mentions also a *voce di Testa* (22). The same idea is expressed by Domenico Corri in *The Singer’s Preceptor* ((London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1810), 66, 67.

5 Manuel García, Extract from the *Mémoire on the Human Voice* contained in *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing* (New York: Da Capo press, 1984), First Part, Complete and Unabridged eds. 1841 and 1872 collated, edited and translated by Donald V. Paschke, xli. This is the principal edition of García’s treatise used in this thesis, unless a reference to a specific topic is missing, making necessary the recourse to other editions. This definition is not far from that given by the voice scientist Johan Sundberg, who defines register as: ‘a phonation frequency range in which all tones are perceived as being produced in a similar way and which possess a similar voice timbre’; Sundberg, *The Science of Singing Voice* (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern University Press, 1987), 49.


7 Frequent references to the body of García’s principles and rules are contained in Italian pedagogical writing of the late nineteenth century. For instance, Beniamino Carelli claimed that García ‘dared to make a science out of the art of singing’ (...osò tentare di far dell’arte del canto una scienza). See Beniamino Carelli, *Cronaca d’un respiro* (Naples: Tipografia dell’Ariosto, 1875), 33, where he also attributes to the physiologist Segon the statement that ‘on the anatomical and physiological knowledge of the vocal organs, García founded the mechanics of singing’. Beniamino does not supply any source for the latter quotation.
impact of García’s anatomy-based studies on the history of vocal pedagogy is revealed in the different ways contemporary writers have interpreted his insights. Nevertheless a connection with Taylor’s idea of a ‘mechanical turn’ is a persistent view, even if the writer does not state it openly. John Rosselli, for example, observes not only that with García vocal technique began to ‘rest[ed] on scientific knowledge of the vocal organs’ but also, and even more importantly, that he wanted his pupils to ‘acquire that knowledge for themselves’. In other words, in García’s system the pupil must be aware of the mechanics of the vocal apparatus and acquire them in a conscious way. Perhaps David Mason’s perspective on García as the voice teacher who linked eighteenth-century teaching precepts to modern voice science sums up best the discussions around his historical role in the most convincing way.

He attempts to present a comprehensive method of voice training based on his observations and scientific studies of the voice. The belief that one could exercise some direct control upon [the larynx] represented quite a radical change of philosophy in vocal pedagogy... However, in many ways García’s teaching was quite traditional, although presented in a more systematic way, in keeping with his ‘modern’ approach. Again, though, the link between singing and voice science suggested by Mason prompts the pupil to reflect on the mechanical aspects that put in motion the entire system of voice production, which in turn is mechanically conceived. Before García, voice teachers of the ‘old’ Italian singing school based their methods on the ‘purely empirical system of instruction’ by imitation. For Taylor, the Méthode de chant du Conservatoire de Musique (Paris, 1803), which contains only a few references to

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10 Taylor, The Psychology of Singing, 326, 327. It must not be thought, however, that such an approach was alien to late nineteenth-century Italian voice teachers. Beniamino Carelli, describing his normal daily practice of teaching singing, complains that: ‘Il Professore canta e suona l’esercizio; l’allievo lo ripete per eco e questo è il solo mezzo di trasmissione...’ (‘The teacher sings and plays the exercise; the pupil repeats it as an echo and this is the only means of instruction’). Carelli concludes that in this way the pupil never links mental processes with the work of the vocal organs. Carelli, L’arte del canto metodo teorico-pratico, 1: 1. Another example of the empirical approach to teaching is that of Guagni-Benvenuti. He highlights the need to adapt the method of teaching to the individual characteristics of the pupil by closely observing him or her and correcting every small imperfection as it presents itself. Only the experienced teacher will be able to craft the voice of the pupil, never losing faith that the expected results will one day be achieved if both pupil and teacher keep working with rigour. Here even the language suggests the approach of instruction by imitation as practiced in the eighteenth-century singing schools and described, for example, by Mancini. See Guagni-Benvenuti, L’odierna scuola di canto in Italia, 22, 23.
physiological mechanisms, represented probably the last significant exemplar of such methods in the training of professional singers. In fact, Domenico Corri’s *The Singer’s Preceptor*, published in 1810 and aimed at amateur singers, still exhibits such an ‘empirical approach’, together with a complete indifference towards the concepts of vocal physiology.\(^{11}\) Corri belongs to the long tradition of *bel canto*, having himself been a pupil of the famous composer-castrato and immensely influential singing teacher Nicola Porpora (who had also taught Farinelli, Caffarelli and Salimbeni). It is notable, therefore, that Corri does not even use the word ‘register’ in his method and refers to the two principal ranges of the voice as Natural and Feigned voices, a terminology which, as we shall shortly see, was used by much earlier singing pedagogues such as Giulio Caccini (1602). The awakening of a generalised interest in the physiological scientific aspects of the vocal mechanism in pedagogical writing in the early nineteenth-century that was prompted by García, by no means implies that there was not scientific research on the physiology of the human voice before him, or that no voice theorist before García had engaged with these issues.

On the contrary, García was building on numerous scientific studies going back at least to Denis Dodart and Antoine Ferrein.\(^{12}\) In 1741 the French anatomist Ferrein realised that in order for the human voice to phonate, the lips of the glottis have to come together, and furthermore that different tensions at the edges of the glottis produce changes in pitch. Because the vibratory system of the glottis lips resembles that of vibrating strings, Ferrein called them *cordes vocales* (vocal cords). Ferrein’s

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\(^{12}\) Although anatomical and physiological investigations of the voice started in Classical times with Hippocrates and Aristotle, the physician Galen (130–200 A. D.) is justly considered the father of laryngology. He described the principle cartilages, their musculatures and also gave to the vocal cords the name *glottis*. However he believed that the edges of the glottis only came into close approximation during phonation without actual adduction – the contact between the vocal cords. Medieval authors uncritically relied on the esteemed authorities of the past, although in the thirteenth century ‘the pseudo-Aristotle’ (in reality, a monk named Lambertus) added the epiglottis to the description of the vocal apparatus, acknowledging its principal role in vocal production. It was not until the sixteenth century that active anatomical research was resumed with Berengarius of Pavia, who realised that the arytenoid cartilages were two and not one as believed by his predecessors, and Fallopius of Padua, who named the cartilage previously called ‘innominata’ (unnamed), ‘cricoid’. In the seventeenth century four important publications were produced by Battista Codronchi, Hieronymus Fabricius, Caspar Bauhinus and Julius Casserius which added new important details on the larynx structure. However it is only with Antoine Ferrein’s (1693–1769) first acoustic experiments on the natural larynx – of both humans and animals – that Galen’s theory on phonation was overthrown. For a survey of the historical work on laryngology, see Philip A. Duey, *Bel Canto in Its Golden Age*, 13–24. The most complete historical account of the anatomical investigation of the voice is that compiled by Gordon Holmes, “History of the Progress of Laryngology from the Earliest Times to the Present”, *The Medical Press*, July 15, and September 9, 1885.
classical theory of phonation was followed by the studies of Johann Müller (1837 and 1839) in the same field and Charles Wheatstone (1837) in acoustics. However it was with García’s *Mémoire sur la voix humaine* that the concept of register as the product of laryngeal action becomes a staple of vocal methods. With this study García accounted for the results of observations made on his own pupils while singing different sounds belonging to different registers, mainly in terms of laryngeal positions. Then in 1855 he published the results of laryngoscopic investigations of the actions of the vocal cords in the different registers.

Post-García pedagogical writing was much influenced by the definition of registers that the eminent pedagogue had elaborated; meanwhile physiologists acknowledged the scientific soundness of García’s theory. The adjustments of the vocal cords throughout the compass of the voice were established as the primary causes of vocal production and register formation. Nevertheless, a great deal of continuing confusion about the topic of registers has its roots in long-inherited habits of voice teachers. For a long time teachers associated the physical events which take place in the larynx, and which were the focus of modern voice science, with the different phenomenon of a perceived point of resonance in some parts of the body. That ‘[t]eachers learned to associate various vibratory sensations in the local areas of the chest, neck and head with different pitch levels in the singer’s compass’ has a long pedigree; as we have seen, medieval theorists defined the several ranges of the voice by the names of ‘pectoris’, ‘gutturis’ and ‘capitis’.

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13 Müller associated pitch with the tension of the vocal cords, while Wheatstone formulated a theory of vowel formants.  
14 García’s *Mémoire sur la voix humaine* – which was incorporated in his *Treatise on the Art of Singing* (1841) – were presented to the Parisian Academy of Science in 1840.  
15 This paper, with the title *Physiological observations of the human voice*, was presented to the Royal Society of London on 24 May 1855, and published in the seventh volume of its proceedings; see García-Paschke, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, Preface, viii.  
17 Contemporary research in the field of voice science supports these ideas. Johan Sundberg quotes Hollien (1974) who defines register as ‘a totally laryngeal event; it consists of a series or a range of consecutive voice frequencies which can be produced with nearly identical phonatory quality’, Sundberg, *The Science of Singing Voice*, 49, 50.  
18 Monahan, *The Art of Singing*, 161. Likewise contemporary vocal pedagogy displays a similar approach. Richard Miller, for example, states: ‘Registers are experienced by the performer as vibratory sensations located in the chest or the head’, Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27. Although Miller insists that the phenomena of vocal pitch and timbre are rooted in vibrations of the vocal ligaments, he cannot resist the temptation to link phonatory aspects with the proprioceptive sensations experienced by the singer.
part of the nineteenth century, however, the link between phonatory event and resonance became totally ingrained in teaching practices and pedagogical writing as a result of the ever-increasing emphasis placed on resonance and vocal power. Alberto Randegger puts together both these elements and makes up the concept of register from them:

The distinctive character assumed by the voice, according to the particular action of the vocal organs and the particular cavity employed as its ‘resonance chamber’ constitutes what is called ‘register’.\(^{19}\)

Salvatore Marchesi also expresses the same idea when he explains that the differences in colour between registers depend not on the ‘vibrator’ (the vocal cords or glottis) but rather on the ‘resonance-chambers’:

Now, if what we call register consists in a series of homogeneous sounds which are essentially different in timbre from those of succeeding higher or lower registers, it follows that the vocal apparatus must contain as many distinct special resonance-chambers as there are registers. These various cooperative resonators, built of different organic texture (hard or soft) impart, by reason of their physical properties, a characteristic, distinct color to each series of sounds contained within the limits of each register.\(^{20}\)

Someone who strongly objected to this sort of ‘empirical wisdom’, was the voice scientist Morell Mackenzie. In his book *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs* (1890), he points out that the perception of the voice as resonating at some specific points in the body, although accurate within a subjective point of view is, from a scientific standpoint, incorrect. Therefore, he argues that just as ‘the evil that men do lives after them’, misleading terminology continues to work havoc in the minds of learners long after its incorrectness has been recognised by teachers, who, however, adhere to it from a mistaken notion of its practical usefulness … The larynx is the organ of the voice just as the eye is the organ of the sight, or the ear of the hearing. Everyone would laugh at a man who should pretend to smell

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\(^{20}\) Salvatore Marchesi, *A Vademecum for Singing-Teachers and Pupils* (1902), 26, quoted in Monahan, *The Art of Singing*, 137. In this case Salvatore also confounds registers with ranges and associates the resonance-chamber to the different ranges. In effect, as the physician Morell Mackenzie underlines, there is confusion in the way of understanding the word register, as it has been used to indicate the pitch of a given note as well as its ‘particular mode of production’. Mackenzie, *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs* (London & New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 39.
with his lips or see with his fingers; yet such claims are not one whit more absurd than those of singers who profess to fetch their voice from the back of the head, the roof of the mouth, the bottom of the chest, or anywhere else that their misinterpreted sensations lead them to fancy. As a *basso profondo* is sometimes figuratively said to ‘sing out of his boots,’ we may perhaps be grateful that there is no *voce di piede* among the acknowledged registers.  

The ironic tone of Mackenzie’s writing certainly highlights the fact that more than a hundred years of history seems have changed little in contemporary mainstream vocal pedagogy. If, in the meantime, the vocabulary has been slightly updated, the basic metaphors remain the same today. So while ‘the roof of the mouth’ has become ‘the soft palate’, expressions like ‘the back of the head’ or ‘the back of the throat’ have survived unchanged. Instead of condemning the inertia of institutions and voice teachers, I would underline that these expressions represent an essential feedback for the singer. The fact that they might not explain the physiological process of sound production in no way detracts from their proprioceptive effectiveness. Mackenzie clearly stated that the larynx is the sole organ where the voice is primarily produced and that registers are ‘the series of tones of like quality producible by a particular adjustment of the vocal chords’. This ‘particular adjustment’ depends exclusively on two physiological mechanisms, which Mackenzie originally defines as ‘long-reed’ and ‘short-reed’; modern voice science has explained these physiological mechanisms with some degree of accuracy. Because the pitch of the voice is

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22 Studies in the field of acoustics have demonstrated that registers are mechanisms which depend on the conditions of the vocal folds. Changes in resonance are a consequence of the loading on the vocal cords. For a complete overview of the acoustic aspects implied by modal registers, see Brian White, *Singing Techniques and Vocal Pedagogy*, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989), 60–121; and Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 93–133.


24 Therefore for Mackenzie only two registers exist, ibid., 41. Mackenzie underlines how the topic of registers has been complicated by ‘the fantastic terminology which has come down to us from a prescientific age, and by erroneous observations of incompetent persons’, 40. Again he underlines that the old Italian masters – Tosi and Mancini – spoke of only two registers and that with the invention of the laryngoscope the whole subject of registers has been thrown into chaos by the erroneous observations of what is supposed to be seen happening inside the larynx, 235–238.

determined by the tension (that is, the elasticity) and the thickness (the vibrating mass) of the vocal folds... Thus, when a low-pitched sound is produced, the vocal folds are relaxed, thick and short. For high-pitched sounds they are tense, thin and long.\textsuperscript{26}

This fact was clearly observed by García, who explained that in the chest register vocal ligaments vibrate over their entire length and at the greatest breadth, whereas in the head register it is only the membraneous part, or, using García’s own words, ‘the tendinous portions of the vocal ligaments’ which are set in vibration and only at their inner margins.\textsuperscript{27}

As we have seen from the examples above, in trying to ‘define’ registers, vocal pedagogues and theorists not only confused the matter by considering phonatory and acoustical aspects simultaneously, but also by adopting acoustical terminology for their definitions and classifications. This leads us to the complex topic of register divisions and the different terminology by which singing teachers indicate the various registers.

\section*{II How many registers are there?}

If confusion surrounds the question of what registers are, a Babel of theories has been formulated on the number of possible registers and their classification. Moreover, on this intricate matter, a definitive agreement has not been reached even today.\textsuperscript{28}

As discussed in Chapter 1, my study considers the vocal treatises of the Italian operatic tradition written between ca. 1840 and ca. 1920. From my overview, I have noticed that the majority of treatises subscribed to a rather specific version of the three-register theory, as will be shown in the following section.\textsuperscript{29} Furthermore, a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{26}] Johan Sundberg, \textit{The Science of Singing Voice}, 51. The lengthening of the folds is managed by the cricothyroid muscles which in contracting provoke the backward and upward tilting of the cricoid cartilage. This movement, given the position of the vocal folds within the larynx, increases the distance between the the posterior and anterior attachments of the folds and provokes their stretching and lengthening. For a detailed description of the lengthening and shortening of the vocal folds see Sundberg, op. cit. 15–18.
\item[\textsuperscript{27}] García-Paschke, \textit{A Complete Treatise}, 25. Similarly, Sundberg observes that the vocal folds can be both lengthened and stiffened (through the contraction of the vocalis muscles) and that their stiffening together with the lengthening determines the rising of the pitch, Sundberg, \textit{The Science of the Singing Voice}, 53.
\item[\textsuperscript{28}] On the topic, Sundberg sums up that ‘we are unfortunately still far from a complete understanding of the physiology of register function’, \textit{The Science of the Singing Voice}, 53.
\item[\textsuperscript{29}] For a summary of the various three-registers theories see White, \textit{Singing Techniques and Vocal Pedagogy}, 53. For a wider historical overview on the number and classification of registers see Monahan, \textit{The Art of Singing}, 143–148.
\end{itemize}
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divide between female and male voices was also generally accepted, with a two-register theory for male and three-register theory for female voices. Monahan states that this latter division had ‘greater acceptance during the nineteenth century’ as well as surviving well into the twentieth century. In previous ages vocal pedagogues had variously adhered to different register-division theories. For instance, Pierfrancesco Tosi’s Opinion de’ cantori antichi e moderni and Giovanni Battista Mancini’s Riflessioni pratiche sul canto figurato, probably the most authoritative pedagogical sources of the eighteenth century, both supported the two-register division. These two teachers were castratos who nevertheless taught female, uncastrated male, and castrato singers, although the latter constituted the main focus of their teaching, and this needs to be borne in mind perhaps more carefully than is usually the case in studies which cite these two influential writers. In both Tosi’s and Mancini’s treatises the term ‘register’ is used explicitly and repeatedly. Tosi writes:

A diligent Master, knowing that a Soprano, without the Falsetto, is constrained to sing within the narrow compass of a few notes, not only helps the student to attain it, but also tries out any tools in order to unite the feigned and the natural Voice, in such a way that they may not be distinguished; for if they do not perfectly unite, the voice will be of different registers, and will consequently lose its Beauty.

Giovanni Battista Mancini (1774) went further to explain in great detail the methods he follows for achieving the unification of the chest and head voices. Carefully adapting his methods to the individual characteristics of the pupil whom he is instructing, Mancini aims to strengthen the sounds that belong to the register which is naturally weaker in the pupil’s voice, while holding back the tones produced in the register naturally stronger. The approach of both voice teachers highlights a

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30 Monahan, The Art of Singing, 146.
31 The reading of the original Tosi makes clear that he does not mention a third register, which is instead introduced by Galliard, his English translator, with the name of ‘head’ register.
32 Un diligente istruttore sapendo, che un Soprano senza falsetto bisogna, che canti fra l’angustie di poche corde non solamente procura d’acquistarglie lo unica alla voce di petto in forma, che non si distingua l’uno dall’altra, che se l’unione non è perfetta, la voce sarà di più registri, e conseguentemente perderà la sua bellezza’, Pierfrancesco Tosi, Opinion de’ cantori antichi e moderni o sieno Osservazioni sopra il canto figurato (Bologna, 1723), 14, my translation. Galliard added a footnote in his 1743 translation of Tosi’s treatise which specifies that the term register is derived from the stops of an organ (see above), but this information is not contained in Tosi’s original text.
33 Giovanni Battista Mancini, Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774), 89.
A profound change of perspective from the hitherto accepted aesthetics of Renaissance vocal music, which largely favoured the chest range over the falsetto (although falsetto singing was nevertheless also practised professionally throughout Europe). The range of the vocal parts in many sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century vocal scores is generally limited to around a tenth. Therefore, the reminder given ‘to singers in treatises to stick to the chest register as much as possible’ is self-evident.34 In Le nuove musiche (1602) Caccini, after having opposed the ‘voce finta’ (feigned or head voice) to the ‘voce naturale’ (natural or full or chest voice) in a two-register theory division, clearly expresses his preference for the voce naturale:

The nobility of good singing cannot arise from the feigned voice: it can be born only from a natural voice comfortable on each tone, which one can manage according to his own talent, and using the breath only for achieving the best effects.35

In the same terms Giovanni Camillo Maffei (1562) praises the ‘nobility’ of singing in the chest voice, while Lodovico Zacconi (1592) clarifies that when singers cannot comfortably reach the high notes of their parts in the chest voice, they should then ‘fingerle, o [di] taccerle’ (‘sing them in falsetto or omit them altogether’) rather than singing them unpleasantly (that is, forcing the chest voice upwards).36 Moreover, changing the overall pitch of the music to suit the singer’s range was commonplace in this period, so that ideally every vocalist could sing within the range in which it could easily be sung in the chest voice without recourse to a register change. During the seventeenth-century operatic repertoire came of age, and the ever-increasing complexity of vocal music with its highly ornamented lines and extended tessituras made it impossible for singers to cover the full range using only the range of the ‘natural’ or chest voice; there was a marked change, and the question of passing from one register to another in the same piece became critical for virtuoso singing.

35 Ma dalle voci finte non può nascere nobiltà di buon canto: che nascerà da una voce naturale comoda per tutte le corde, la quale altrui potrà maneggiare a suo talento, senza valersi della respirazione per altro, che per mostrarsi padrone di tutti gli affetti migliori,’ Caccini, Le nuove musiche, (Florence: Marescotti, 1602), Preface, my translation. In effect, Caccini seems to associate breath pressure with the falsetto voice; for him falsetto requires more pressure of breath in order to hide the ‘false’ nature of the voice or its forced production. He exhorts to sing in the compass where the singer can comfortably use his natural voice and avoid the ‘voce finta’ (Preface).
The generally accepted idea that the voice was basically divided into two registers started to be questioned during the eighteenth century, as the translated versions of Tosi’s treatise demonstrate. Both J. E. Galliard (1743) and Johann F. Agricola (1757), respectively the first English and German translators of Tosi, introduced the concept of a third register, variously derived from the concept of ‘falsetto’ voice. A three-register theory for female (especially sopranos) and a two-register theory for male voices was also supported, among others, by the singers and voice teachers Bernardo Mengozzi (1803) and Jean-Paul-Egide Martini (1792). The three-register theory of the nineteenth century has survived to our day, and the majority of scientific papers subscribe to it. Johan Sundberg warns that he only adheres to this division out of convention, as objective evidence for it is still lacking. Ever since the nineteenth century, pedagogues have tended to maintain a standard vocabulary of chest, middle (or falsetto or mixed) and head, even though some terms might vary from treatise to treatise.

Before I proceed to the survey of a selected number of key vocal methods in order to demonstrate all the points I have made (regarding register-division and register-classification), I need briefly to recall two issues already encountered in Chapters 1 (Methodologies) and 3 (‘Modern’ vocalism).

First, my assessment of vocal pedagogy in the context of the Italian operatic tradition is essential preparation to the analysis of early recordings which will form the object of my case-studies. Because the singers I will be considering in these studies were brought up within the same post-Garcían pedagogical tradition, it is vital to understand the kind of training they had, and in particular, which vocabulary their teachers will have used. I draw, then, upon both modern voice science and contemporary vocal pedagogy to explain what the earlier vocabulary used in historical vocal treatises signifies for singers today.

Second, the changing aesthetics of vocalism which prompted the ‘modern’ turn in Italian voice culture at the turn of the twentieth century needs to be appreciated

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37 Galliard considered head and falsetto as two separate registers: the ‘Voce di testa comes more from the Throat, than from the Breast … [while] Falsetto is a feigned Voice, which is entirely formed in the Throat’: Galliard, Observation on the Florid Singing, footnote 18, p. 22. Also Agricola distinguishes head register from falsetto (Fistestimme) but for him the latter could be produced in both registers (chest and head), see James Stark, Bel Canto A History of Vocal Pedagogy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 64, 65.
38 For an overview of the opposition to the two-register theory over the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see James Stark, Bel Canto, 64–67.
39 Sundberg, The Science of the Singing Voice, 51. This sort of ‘accomodation’ that voice science has operated on traditional vocal terminology demonstrates not only the extreme complexity of vocal phenomena, but also the ultimate inadequacy of verbal language to describe them.
in terms of specific technical aspects before embarking upon wider cultural and sociological discussions.

Any understanding of general historical shifts which affected the production of the singing voice such as, for instance, bigger orchestras, choruses and theatres; the transformation of the Italian system of opera production; or the advent of the phonograph, must be primarily rooted in the analysis of vocal recordings, which alone have the capacity to attest to changes in the singers' vocal techniques at an empirical level. This analysis can be safely undertaken only if there is an agreement on a terminology which, for the above-mentioned reasons, links an old-fashioned lexicon of historical treatises to that of contemporary ones.

II.1 Survey of key historical vocal treatises

In this section I consider the division of registers in female and male voices, and the terminologies by which voice teachers refer (and referred) to them. I will also touch on the concept of register transition (the so-called *passaggio*) which takes place across the series of around two to four notes that span the borders between registers, although the implications of this topic for the concept of registration will be also discussed separately in the following section. I interweave ideas from historical treatises with those of modern voice science and contemporary vocal pedagogy, as I have done for the definition of register, in order to provide a set of reasonably consistent reference points for the discussion.

From the many vocal treatises surveyed (see Chapter 1), I focus here on ten, selected on the basis of at least one of the following criteria:

1. Their significant impact on future developments of voice teaching (García) together with their strict links with eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century vocal pedagogy (both García and Lablache);

2. The key position occupied by their authors in major Italian institutions by the later part of the nineteenth century (Lamperti, Carelli, Guagni-Benvenuti) or in the wider European context (García, Shakespeare, Marchesi and again Lamperti);

3. The direct link between the authors of some of these treatises and their students, whose recordings have been examined. This link exists, for instance, between Virginia Boccabadati and Celestina Boninsegna, Mathilde Marchesi and Nellie Melba, Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti and Eugenia Burzio, and Beniamino Carelli and his daughter Emma Carelli.
I start with one of the older treatises of this group, written in 1842 by the renowned bass Luigi Lablache.\(^4^0\) It is strictly linked to the vocal tradition of the previous century and Lablache followed the generally agreed terminology of the earlier period by dividing the male voice compass into two registers: *petto* (chest) and *testa* (head), with the transition, or *passaggio*, between the lower and the second register, beginning on a\(^1\) for tenors and f\(^1\) for baritones (Example 4.1).

![Example 4.1 Luigi Lablache, L’arte del canto, 8.](image)

The use of head voice is excluded for the bass voice, whose chest is considered too heavy and strong to be united to any other register. Women, meanwhile, are said to have three registers, called *petto*, *mezzo* and *testa*, respectively (Example 4.2).

![Example 4.2 Lablache, L’arte del canto, 8.](image)

The method of passing from one register to another, to which Lablache devotes three sub-sections, is based on the idea that some tones, common to both of the registers to be ‘united’, can be sung using either one or the other register mechanism. Following this premiss, Lablache prescribes specific exercises which must be practised repeatedly in order to attain a smooth transition between registers (Example 4.3).

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Lablache aims to ‘unite’ the two different registers avoiding the break between them by blending the ‘passage’ between them on the tones they have in common. This idea closely resembles that of Mancini: as noted above, he advised balancing the registers by holding back the stronger register on the passaggio notes while increasing the power of the weaker register.\footnote{In this way, if the aspiring singer presents a strong chest voice and a feeble head voice, the teacher would ask him to hold the chest tones back as much as possible while strengthening little by little the tones of the head in order to render the latter equal to the former. A similar but inverted process takes place if the weaker tones belong to the chest and the stronger ones to the head. After some time spent trying to balance the registers on the basis of these very precepts, teacher and pupil can attempt to release the natural vocal power of the stronger register and evaluate if the two registers appear to be smoothly united. If not, the same process needs to be patiently carried out again until the expected result is achieved. See Mancini, \textit{Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato}, 89–91.}

Example 4.3 Lablache, \textit{L’arte del canto}, 11.
As seen in the definition of vocal register, the pitch of a note depends ultimately on the tension and thickness of the vocal folds. Therefore, the registers of the voice also originate from the different ways in which vocal folds vibrate on a particular note.\textsuperscript{42} Referring to the results of investigations led by Hirano et al. in 1970, Johan Sundberg explains that the terms ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ introduced by these authors for classifying the several vocal registers were justified on the basis of the different behaviours in the functioning of the laryngeal muscles when producing different registers.\textsuperscript{43} Put simply, when a singer shifts from a heavy to a lighter register, not only does the thickness of the cords diminish but also a reduction of the overall laryngeal muscular activity is always evident. The exercises in Example 4.3 demonstrate that, for Lablache, certain small groups of neighbouring pitches could be produced with the heavy (chest) as well as with the lighter (head) register, extending the heavy system of phonation of the lower sounds upwards to the higher notes (and vice versa). However, this mechanism has to cease once the voice reaches a certain range, where the lighter (head) mechanism will be forced to take over. In other words, for Lablache, the heavy mechanism cannot be drawn upwards to the upper limits of the voice’s compass, just as the lighter register could not be ‘pulled downwards’ beyond a certain limit.

García establishes three registers, which he called chest, \textit{falsetto} and head, for both men and women.\textsuperscript{44} He specifies that the chest is the principal register for men, and that they cannot use the head voice in artistic singing.\textsuperscript{45} García seems to identify two pivotal strategies for carrying out the \textit{passaggio} between registers. Like Lablache, he recommends passing from one to another within the bordering tones, producing them alternately with both mechanisms.\textsuperscript{46} The second option indicated by García when he deals with women’s weak lower notes (\textit{d}–\textit{f}) and men’s medium

\textsuperscript{42} Sundberg explains that ‘the variations in voice timbre in different registers occur because of changes in the voice source. Therefore, we may expect differences in the way vocal folds vibrate in different registers’, Sundberg, \textit{The Science of the Singing Voice}, 51.

\textsuperscript{43} Sundberg, ibid., 53.

\textsuperscript{44} García calls the middle register, somewhat confusingly, \textit{falsetto}. In his table of registers, he indicates \textit{a} as the upper limit for tenors chest voice, see García-Parschke, \textit{A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing}, First Part, 22. Nevertheless, he recommends tenors to limit the use of this register to the \textit{f} when practising exercises, while their \textit{falsetto} – which generally starts on \textit{d} – will extend to \textit{c} (48). Above this tone, the table of registers for the tenor voice (22) assigns the third between \textit{d} and \textit{f} to the head register.

\textsuperscript{45} García states that the head sounds are ‘a remnant of boy’s voice...The Italian public attach no value whatever to them; nor can they be employed, unless in exceptional cases by very high tenor voices ... All other male singers do wrong to use them’, \textit{New Treatise on the Art of Singing} (London: Cramer, Beale & Chappell, 1857 and London: Cramer & Co., 1870 editions), 4.

\textsuperscript{46} See Gracia-Paschke, \textit{A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing}, 50–53.
tones (a–c' *sharp*), is to either darken or round out the timbre of the sounds belonging to both registers.\(^47\) This latter procedure (known as ‘mixed voice’) is explained more in detail by García when he suggests that singers increase the roundness of the vowels as they ascend a scale and reverse this mechanism when descending it. The apparent equality of the notes in the scale will be the result of actual but well-graduated inequality of the vowel sound. Without this manoeuvre, the round vowels which are suitable to the higher notes would extinguish the ringing of the middle and lower notes, and the open vowels which give éclat to the lower would make the higher notes harsh and shrill.\(^48\)

Vowel modification is a principle that is also generally asserted by contemporary vocal pedagogy. For example, dealing with the soprano voice, Richard Miller claims that in ascending the scale, the mouth progressively opens and allows for the gradual migration of the vowels toward a point of neutralisation. Although this process ‘must never occur abruptly [its avoidance] will produce shrill, edgy timbre’.\(^49\) Finally it should be noticed that, in this system, the process of increasing the roundness of the vowels is connected with the ‘covering’ of the upper sounds. For García, the shape assumed by the pharynx during phonation fundamentally affects the timbre of the voice. The pharynx is like a tube which,

- being able to elongate or to shorten itself, to broaden or to narrow itself, to take the form of a slight curve or to break into a right angle, and finally to maintain any of the numerous intermediary forms, fulfills wonderfully the functions of a reflector or a megaphone.\(^50\)

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\(^{47}\) Discussing the female voices, García states that the weakness of their lower notes can be overcome through the use of sombre timbre if ‘the quality of the tone is …infantile’, while for the male voices he suggests to round the tones common to the two registers, García-Paschke, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 45, 47, 48.


\(^{50}\) García-Paschke, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 28. Beniamino Carelli’s *Cronaca d’un respiro* repeats the same concept. In rising notes, the soft palate takes the shape of a lengthen arch (volta allungata) while the larynx descends. With regard to the position of the larynx, Beniamino highlights that only a handful of singers can maintain the lower position of the larynx on high sounds of the second register (for him the registers are only two for both female and male voices, making an important exception to the prevalent opinion which subscribes three-register theories), 44, 45.
If the singer rounds a vowel when ascending the scale, the pharyngeal tube becomes lengthened and, using García’s language, ‘right-angle shaped’, with a dropped larynx and a raised soft palate, giving way to what he calls the sombre timbre. Butenscho and Borchgrevink explain that a relatively lowered larynx – which descends when the trachea is pulled downwards by the dome of the diaphragm during inspiration – produces a ‘resonance ... richer and more full-bodied’. Summing up, García’s mixed voice is obtained through vowel modification which, in turn, determines a progressive darkening of the voice as it ascends the scale. The dark (sombre) timbre obtained in this way stands in opposition to the bright (clair) timbre which originates from a ‘curvilinear form’ of the vocal tract where the larynx raises towards a dropped soft palate. Much confusion has arisen from the fact that the original French term (clair) used by García in his École de Garcia: Traité complet de l’art du chant (1847) has been translated in English with the word ‘open’. The adjective ‘open’ generally has a positive connotation for English-speaking voice teachers who, in current practice describe an open sound as characterised by a raised soft palate and a lowered larynx, creating, in other words, an ‘open’ space at the back of the mouth. Nevertheless, a vocal tract so shaped corresponds to what García defined as the dark (or sombre) timbre. To add uncertainty to the linguistic issue, the use that some English-speaking critics historically made of the word ‘open’ confirms that they, far from signifying an open space at the back of the mouth, indicated, in fact, quite the opposite. Likewise, in Italian pedagogical and critical language, an open (aperto) timbre describes a raised larynx in a flat soft palate. I followed this latter usage when I analyse the recordings which are presented later in this chapter and in Chapters 5 and 6. It is essential that readers remember this caveat when they encounter the terms ‘covered’ and ‘open’ for the description of different tonal qualities in the recorded voices.

51 Sine Butenscho and Hans Borchgrevink, Voice and Song. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 27. This phenomenon is due to the lengthening of the vocal tract, which also acquires an extra resonance chamber above the glottis (the piriform recess). These authors interrelate coverage, transition and yawn. Because the ‘yawn muscles’ (upper pharyngeal constrictor) are connected to the jaw and the back of the tongue, when we yawn ‘a chain reaction is initiated: breathing muscles, trachea, lowering of the larynx’, Butenscho & Borchgrevin (28).

52 I am not asserting that this idea is universally accepted by singing teachers, who instead follow a number of different approaches, but it is nevertheless widely shared among those who belong to the English-speaking world.

53 Contemporary critics are not immune from such a use of the term ‘open’ as we will see in Chapter 6 discussing the ‘open’ voice of verismo sopranos.
Mathilde Marchesi, meanwhile, deals exclusively with female voices, and names their three registers as chest, medium and head. She explains that her choice of the term ‘medium’, rather than *falsetto*, is justified by the natural position that this register occupies in the vocal compass and, most importantly, the fact that *falsetto* applies only to men’s voices. The limit of chest is fixed at $f'-f''$ *sharp* and the limit of the middle register on the $f^2$. The rule for blending the registers is to ‘slightly close the two last notes of the preceding register in ascending, and open them in descending’. Again, the idea of ‘covering’ the sound is suggested in her recommendation of notes which are to be darkened (‘slightly close’) when ascending the scale and opened when descending it (‘open’).

Francesco Lamperti and his pupil William Shakespeare adhered to García’s and Lablache’s two-register division for men, whose higher register is called ‘mixed’ by Lamperti and ‘medium’ by Shakespeare, and the three-register division for women, traditionally named chest, again respectively ‘mixed’ or ‘medium’, and head registers. On the issue of *passaggio* both teachers give the pupil general advice to carry the upper registers down rather than extending the lower upwards. Shakespeare points out that while the experienced singer may skillfully draw the low register upward, ‘it would be well for the student to spare the voice and carry down the registers, rather than the contrary’. In other words, the passage to the next register up needs to be achieved before the upper tones of the previous register, which are common to both registers to be united, have been reached. Lamperti indicates $a$ as the pitch at which male voices could start the transition to the mixed register, while Shakespeare gives a table of registers for the different voices (Example 4.4).

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54 On this point, Mathilde interprets the term falsetto as ‘false voice’, used by tenors to create piano effects on high tones, see Marchesi, *The Marchesi School: Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method* (London: Enoch & Sons, 1896) iv.


56 These expressions are the translations of the original French ‘sombrer légèrement’ and ‘ouvrir’; see Mathilde Marchesi, *Ecole Marchesi: Method de chant théorique et pratique* (Paris: L. Grus, DATE), vi.


From this, we can observe that producing notes above a' in the medium register is considered hazardous for tenors. Like Lamperti, Shakespeare suggests that male voices switch to the middle (second) register on relatively low sounds and warns in
particular against the tenor’s practice of carrying the chest voice up to $f'$, ‘putting on a bigger voice than is natural to him’.  

Shakespeare also echoes Lamperti when he complains that sopranos and mezzos abuse the middle register when they drag it up to $f^2$ or $f^2$ sharp. Notwithstanding his own remark on the mania for fixing the pitch at which the register should be changed, Lamperti advises sopranos to settle the head register as soon as the $e^2$ is reached. The rule of carrying the upper limits of registers down seems to be one of bel canto technique’s golden principles. Also Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, another eminent singing teacher of late nineteenth-century Italy, exhorts singers never to push the upper limits of the chest register upward, as this will cause the loss of the lower tones and would compromise the clarity and spontaneity of the top notes. If Lamperti’s teaching was imbued with this long-established vocal tradition, then Shakespeare, who studied with Lamperti in Milan, solidified many of his teacher’s beliefs. Although Shakespeare belongs to that host of vocal pedagogues well acquainted with the principles of the ‘new’ vocal science, he nevertheless advocated a teaching method still largely based on traditional schooling precepts.

For Beniamino Carelli there are only two registers, and the tripartition of the vocal compass into petto, medio or falsetto, and testa is just the result of confusion. A mechanical principle (registro) is mixed up with the different concept of timbre (colore). He defines the registers, which are produced by two exclusively physiological mechanisms, as primo registro (first register) and secondo registro (second register). The third register in between them represents only ‘a section of

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60 Shakespeare, *The Art of Singing*, 38. The transitions between registers ‘has never been clearly defined’ Butenschoen and Borchgrevink, *Voice and Song*, 26.

61 Shakespeare, *The Art of Singing*, 43. In effect, in his ‘Table of Registers’ Shakespeare considers hazardous even the $e^2$ when it is carried out in the medium register.


64 For example, even while agreeing with Mackenzie’s theory of registers, Shakespeare underlines that he will stick to the three-register theory which, although less scientific, is more useful for pedagogical purposes. Shakespeare, *The Art of Singing*, 36. The scientific soundness of Shakespeare’s teaching is revealed in numerous points of his treatise, such as when he suggests that the vocal cords will somehow spontaneously adjust to a new register as long as the breath support is efficient and the throat well open. This explanation reminds us of the much more recent contribution of Butenschoen and Borchgrevink, who explain the transition between registers as a spontaneous adjustment of the thorax, larynx, jaw and tongue. ‘This must be at first done consciously and must be practised methodically until the transitions can be mastered quite automatically’, *Voice and Song*, 27.
the second register modified in colour’ which, as we shall briefly see, controls the mechanism of *passaggio*\(^6\)5. Counteracting Beniamino’s view, Virginia Boccabadati, who will be introduced fully in the next section, stated:

For us of the old school, the registers are three; whereas the illustrious and talented doctors (Moleschotte and Mackenzie) affirm that there are only two registers, and some singing teachers even admit five of them (M. Melia).\(^6\)6

In Boccabadati’s perspective, the ‘old school’ represents the tradition of *bel canto*, as established in Chapter 1. It is interesting to note that in the vocal treatises of the *bel canto* period, when the term did not yet exist, the voice compass was instead generally divided into only two registers. Boccabadati’s claim, nevertheless, constitutes further evidence of the fact that the three-register theory was well-established during the first half of the century to which she refers (‘For us of the old school…’).

The first wave of singers whose voices are preserved on early recordings (between c.1900 and c.1920) had learned within the systems of register division traced back to the middle and later part of the nineteenth century.\(^6\)7 As will be seen, they displayed different attitudes toward long-established ‘rules’ concerning *passaggio* and registration. The next section, then, seeks to define registration and outline its implications for vocal aesthetics as conceived by the pedagogues of the later nineteenth century.

III Aesthetics of vocal registration in the latter part of the nineteenth century

In her doctoral thesis, Rebecca Plack refers to registration as:

...both innate and cultivated. Every voice possesses a naturally occurring potential to be ‘registered’ in certain ways. The terminology is awkward: to ‘register’ a voice means not to create registers, which are innate, but

\(^6\)5 Beniamino Carelli, *Cronaca di un respiro*, 34. The working of the ‘voce mista’ will be examined in the next section which deals with registration more in depth.

\(^6\)6 ‘Per noi della vecchia scuola i registri sone tre; mentre valenti medici (Moleschotte e Mackenzie) asseriscono esservene due, ed alcuni maestri di canto ne ammettono perfino cinque (M. Melia), *Osservazioni pratiche per lo studio del canto*, 3rd edn., Virginia Boccabadati, (Pesaro: Federici, 1893), 10, [italics are in the original]. Notice the similarity of Boccabadati’s claim with that Sundberg when he admits to adhere to the three-register division out of convention.

\(^6\)7 As pointed out in Chapter 1, singers who recorded in the pre-electrical era could be roughly divided in two groups: born up to the 1860s and after 1870. The latter group constitutes the focus of the present study.
to develop a balance between registers – in other words, to cultivate registration.\textsuperscript{68}

Insofar as registration concerns ways of balancing the several vocal registers, it also embraces the concept of the \textit{passaggio} that links them. Although the aesthetics of registration varied widely throughout the history of classical singing pedagogy, the goal which vocal pedagogues of the late-nineteenth century seem to have shared was the ideal of achieving a smooth transition between registers. This aesthetic proposes that the listener should not be able to perceive any ‘breaks’, or changes of intensity across the entire compass of the singer’s voice. Nevertheless, the various methods by which this aim might be achieved in practice reveal a range of different ideals of registration and, therefore, of art singing in general.\textsuperscript{69} In fact, as the crucial fulcrum of any vocal technique, the way in which the \textit{passaggio} (the part of the voice that bridges two registers) is treated is fundamental to a singer’s habitual system of vocal production and associated technique.

In common with voice teachers in all ages, middle and late nineteenth-century vocal pedagogues each held their own particular views on how to approach such matters as the \textit{passaggio}. Nevertheless, in their writings, they seem to have established broad agreement on the topic, which is that the uniformity of the vocal colour can be attained only within the compass of each register, and that this colour will inevitably change to a certain degree when passing from one register to another.

As already seen, Luigi Lablache devoted three sub-sections of his treatise to his method for blending the registers. He recommends as a first step lightening the upper tones of each register and reinforcing the lower tones of the one above. He warns the student

\begin{quote}
not to change the voice abruptly on the first note of the new register, but instead, to continue the voice of the previous register as much as possible, in order not to damage the homogeneity of the sounds.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Although an abrupt change of voice colour should be avoided while passing from one register to another, this timbral change is bound to occur, as the recommendation to maintain an even tonal quality ‘as much as possible’ suggests.

\textsuperscript{68} Rebecca Plack, \textit{The Substance of Style}, 27.

\textsuperscript{69} Otherwise there would be hardly any difference from the method of uniting the registers prescribed by Mancini or Tosi in the previous century.

\textsuperscript{70} ‘non cangiar la voce di botto alla prima nota di un registro ma bensì continuare il più che sia possibile quello in che si trova, onde non guastar l’equabilità dei suoni’, Luigi Lablache, \textit{Metodo completo di canto}, 13.
The similarity between Mathilde Marchesi’s ideas on registration and those of Lablache is evident when she, too, warns against the danger of reinforcing the upper sounds of each register. She says that such an action would increase the difficulty of developing the power of the lower notes of the following register, eventually leading to the impossibility of blending them without an audible break.\textsuperscript{71} Marchesi refers, then, to the specific quality of the sounds belonging to each register and asserts that ‘homogeneity in the nature of the sound [exists] throughout the particular compass of each register’\textsuperscript{72}. In the course of her argument, she makes the point that whereas the three registers need to be carefully joined, the quality of the sounds belonging to any one register differ from the quality of the sounds belonging to another. But it was Francesco Lamperti who most clearly explained the different qualities of the sounds of different registers. Under the title ‘The various registers of the voice’ in his practical method (set out in the form of a dialogue between teacher and pupil) he gives his view:

Q. Are all the notes of the voice of the same quality?

A. No; only those which belong to the same register; the others, no matter how even the voice may be, differ from each other, as does the mechanism of the throat in producing them.\textsuperscript{73}

Beniamino Carelli agrees with Lamperti and highlights the need for the student to produce the notes belonging to each register with their own timbre, in order to avoid ‘the risk of destroying the vocal organs or stopping the development of the top notes’.\textsuperscript{74} Moreover, the exhortations of both Lamperti and Shakespeare to ‘carry the upper register down’ is echoed by Beniamino, who warns the pupil not to draw the first register (chest) upward to its upper limits.\textsuperscript{75} For Carelli, however, the fulcrum of

\textsuperscript{71} Mathilde Marchesi, \textit{The Marchesi School. Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method}, iv.

\textsuperscript{72} Marchesi, \textit{The Marchesi School}, v.

\textsuperscript{73} ‘D. I suoni che la voce può produrre dal grave all’acuto, sono egli della stessa natura? R. No, soltanto quelli che appartengono allo stesso registro sono della stessa natura; gli altri, quantunque siano omogenei per tutta l’estensione della voce, differiscono essenzialmente a norma che varia il meccanismo della gola che li produce’; Francesco Lamperti, \textit{A Treatise on the Art of Singing}, 17.

\textsuperscript{74} ‘Ciò che vi dovete fissare bene in mente fin da ora ... se non volete correre il rischio di distruggere l’organo vocale od arrestare lo sviluppo degli acuti, si è la necessità ... che i tuoni de’ singoli registri vengano emessi COL PURO LORO CARATTERE’, [emphasis in the original text]; Carelli, \textit{Cronaca d’un respiro}, 22.

\textsuperscript{75} Carelli, ibid. It should be noted that while Lamperti advises the student to swap to the lighter registration well before the last note producible in the heavy register is reached, Carelli recommends that the heavier registration should not be extended upwards beyond the last pitch which can be comfortably produced in that registration. This apparently irrelevant difference might have implied that Carelli allowed the student to carry the limit of the heavier register slightly higher than that accepted by Lamperti.
registration lies in what he calls 'voce mista' (mixed voice), which results from the combination of the qualities of the notes of the first with those of the second registers.\textsuperscript{76} It will be remembered that Carelli excludes the existence of a third register. Therefore the 'voce mista' coincides with the lower section of the second register. Over this range the first register is still operating, working together with the second register in a variety of balances. Ascending towards the higher tones, the first register releases control over the vocal production by degrees, allowing the second register to take over by degrees, and vice versa (Example 4.5).\textsuperscript{77}

![Example 4.5 Beniamino Carelli, L'arte del canto Vol. 1: 12.](image)

Beniamino warns that, at the join between the last note of the first register and the first note of the second register, an evident shift in tone quality occurs. This shift can be attenuated but not erased 'when the note which follows the last one in the first register is produced with the mixed voice'.\textsuperscript{78} Explaining in detail how to achieve a smooth transition between the first and the second registers within the mechanism of the \textit{voce mista}, Beniamino clarifies that, in fact, this transition should be gradual. It begins on the two or three tones (i.e. $d'$ and $e'$ for the soprano voice) which precede the junction between the two registers, and is obtained by both decreasing the intensity of the sound and changing the vowel (from /ah/ to /o/) while approaching the second register.\textsuperscript{79} While male voices adopt the \textit{voce mista} extensively, singing their entire top range in this system of voice production, female

\textsuperscript{76} It should be noticed that by using this language, Beniamino treats registers as acoustic realities instead of as physiological mechanisms which operate at a laryngeal level only, falling into contradiction with his own statements as expressed, for instance, in \textit{Cronaca d'un respiro}, 34.

\textsuperscript{77} Beniamino Carelli, \textit{L'arte del canto metodo teorico-pratico} 1: 12.

\textsuperscript{78} 'Questa disparità appare meno sensibile quando la nota che segue l'ultima del 1\textdegree{} registro viene emessa in timbro misto'; Carelli, \textit{L'arte del canto metodo teorico-pratico}, 1: 51.

\textsuperscript{79} Carelli, \textit{L'arte del canto metodo teorico-pratico}, 1: 52. See in Appendix A, Example 16, the exercises that Beniamino suggests in order to bring out the \textit{passaggio} through the \textit{voce mista}. 118
voices carry the *voce mista* up to $f^2/f^2$ sharp where they switch to the second (head) register.\(^80\)

Another important testimony on the topic of timbral inequalities between registers is contained in Virginia Boccabadati’s small work *Osservazioni pratiche* (1893). The direct link of Boccabadati with the castrato vocal technique has already been highlighted in Chapter 1.\(^81\) Boccabadati was a singing teacher at the Liceo Musicale in Pesaro at the time when Mascagni was director, and her most distinguished pupil there was Celestina Boninsegna, whose outstanding voice is preserved in many valuable recordings of the pre-electrical era. On the topic of registration, Virginia Boccabadati writes:

The expert teacher guides [the pupil] to achieve a balance in the critical *passaggi* between the notes of the first register, the chest, and sounds of the second, the head, via a third register which simply joins the previous ones … the lower notes in the young female pupil must not be forced: the first register cannot go further than Fa [$f^1$] (1st space in the treble clef) for the soprano voice. In some unfortunate cases it is impossible to sing even Mi [$e^1$] in this register. Between Fa# [$f^#1$] and Sol [g¹] a slightly mixed sound should be the goal. La, Si, Do and Re [a¹, b¹, c², d²] are the real middle notes. From Re (4th line in the treble clef [d²]) to Mi (on the 4th space in the treble clef [e²]) the *passaggio* must be practised that leads to the head sounds, which lie (lean), as is said in the vocal methods, on the frontal cavities.\(^82\)

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\(^80\) Carelli, *L’arte del canto*, 1: 12. For male voices the system of register division fundamentally aligns with that of Lamperti and Shakespeare, although Carelli does not consider extreme top notes produced in the mixed voice by male singers as hazardous. Female voices, on the other hand, were apparently in the habit of pushing the mixed voice up to $f^2$ sharp, which is a practice condemned by both Shakespeare and Lamperti. Carelli’s concept of ‘*voce mista*’ corresponds, in essence, to what other voice teachers call ‘middle’ or ‘medium’ or ‘mixed’ register, although Carelli denies the nature of ‘register’ for the ‘*voce mista*’.

\(^81\) I remind the reader that Virginia was the daughter of Luigia Boccabadati, a student of the castrato Gaspare Pacchiarotti. We are also informed by Virginia that her sister Augusta was taught the part of the protagonist of the opera *Maria di Rohan* by Donizetti himself. Virginia Boccabadati, *Osservazioni pratiche per lo studio del canto*, 29.

\(^82\) *L’orecchio esperimentato di chi insegna e la continua pratica aiutano e guidano ad ottenere l’equilibrio di questi delicati passaggi fra il primo registro, coin quello delle *note gravi* o di *petto*, e il secondo delle *note acute* o di *testa* con un *terzo* che con dolce transizione unisce le note dell’uno con l’altro… le note gravi non vanno forzate nelle giovinette: il primo registro non oltrepassa per lo più il Fa (1º spazio in chiave di Sol) per la voce di Soprano. Sovente per sfortuna non si ottiene neppure il Mi (1 riga in chiave di Sol). Fra Fa diesis e Sol si deve ottenere un suono delicato, leggermente misto. La, Si, Do, Re sono le vere note medie. Da Re (4 riga in chiave di Sol) a Mi (4 spazio id.) si studia il passaggio che porta alle *note di testa* appoggiate, come suole dirsi nei Metodi, ai *seni frontali*; si sentono infatti risuonare fra il naso e la fronte.’ Boccabadati, *Osservazioni pratiche per lo studio del canto*, 10, 11. The explanation could result in some
Two conclusions can be drawn from this passage:

I) The limit that Boccabadati assigns to the chest voice (with reference to sopranos only) is the standard pitch traditionally indicated in bel canto vocal treatises: García, Lamperti and Marchesi, to name only a few, consistently mention the same notes. Interestingly though, Boccabadati adds that mixed sounds should ideally start between $f'$ sharp and $g'$; meaning that the lower sounds up to $f'$ or $f'$ sharp should be sung in the pure chest voice; in fact, ‘unfortunate cases’ are those in which the chest register does not reach $e$ on the first line in the treble clef ($e'$). As we shall see, this assumption is confirmed by the recordings left by her pupil, Celestina Boninsegna, whose singing shows a marked use of the chest register, sometimes even above $f'$ sharp. Moreover, Boninsegna is not an isolated case. Numerous early recordings demonstrate that singing the lower notes in the pure chest voice was a common practice among sopranos at this time. Singers from earlier generations and diverse pedagogical traditions demonstrate this feature in slightly variable patterns, including Adelina Patti, Nellie Melba, Luisa Tetrazzini and Marcella Sembrich. This practice induces a marked change in timbre when the voice switches between chest and middle register, as recordings clearly display. The idea of different colours for different registers reinforced in Boccabadati’s writing is strongly confirmed by phonographic evidence. This point will be exhaustively illustrated in Chapter 6, which deals with Boninsegna and her contemporary soprano colleagues Eugenia Burzio and Emma Carelli. Recorded examples of the soprano chest voice will be included.

II) On the issue of the second passaggio – where the notes around $d^2$ and $e^2$ start to be ‘directed toward the head cavities’ – instructions contained in vocal treatises do not always align with the evidence of recorded examples of registration. On this point, in fact, the recorded evidence highlights a disjunction/gap with the norm, largely advertised in vocal methods, of avoiding to draw the heavier register upwards; or, perhaps, it could be more precisely maintained that recordings show a plurality of approaches and solutions depending on:

   a) the pedagogical tradition in which singers were trained;
   b) changing repertoire, with related issues of the size and progressively increasing volume of orchestras and choruses;

confusion as Boccabadati defines the middle register as the ‘third register’. Nevertheless, she underlines the existence of two passaggi between each of these three registers, and the role of the singing teacher in helping the pupil to unite the intermediate sounds.
c) the changing world of Italian opera production, where the lead, including decisions on the casting of singers, was taken over by the publisher (Ricordi, Sonzogno, Lucca), who in many ways replaced the traditional figure of the impresario.

As my principal focus is on the technical and musical factors affecting the changes in vocal aesthetics over this period, my thesis deals with point c) only marginally, as a full consideration of this latter factor is beyond the scope of the present study.\textsuperscript{83} Point a), which is crucial to my study, has been considered from a variety of perspectives in both Chapters 1 and 3. When dealing with Italian \textit{bel canto} pedagogical traditions I showed that turn-of-the-century vocal treatises still relied heavily on concepts, methods, exercises and repertoire samples going back at least to the age of Rossini. Then, in Chapter 3, it became clear that point b) – the repertoire produced from the 1870s up to the \textit{giovane scuola} composers – constituted the bone of contention for voice teachers who questioned its fundamental suitability for the training of young singers.\textsuperscript{84}

\textbf{III.1 Upper passaggio recorded}

I have already outlined (Chapter 1) the methodology through which singing treatises and vocal recordings can fruitfully be placed in dialogue: concepts, ideals and aesthetics expressed in vocal methods can be confirmed or contradicted by early recordings. In the present section I aim to offer some recorded examples of registration. I want especially to focus on the \textit{passaggio} between middle and high notes. The reader should note that, consistent with the methodology explained in Chapter 1, I do not make use of data extrapolated from methods of computer-based analysis. I rely, instead, on intensive acoustic listening, based on my own practice-based knowledge as an opera singer, in line with an autoethnographic perspective. This empirical approach, however, is by no means the exclusive attribute of singers, as it can clearly reveal differences between registration types to the general listener who has some degree of familiarity with western classical art singing. As we listen to the recordings, readily identifiable registration choices will be audible. My function is to highlight these differences using the lexicon I have built throughout this chapter,

\textsuperscript{83} In Chapters 2 and 3 I briefly touched upon the theme of the role and influence of publishers in connection with the commissioning of new works, scheduling operatic season of theatres and orientating the responses of audiences.

\textsuperscript{84} See on this point Lamperti, Marchesi, Giraldoni and Beniamino Carelli as discussed in Chapter 3.
and by attempting a rapprochement of the concepts taken from both voice science and historical vocal treatises.

Two last caveats for the reader:

1) In the present section I am not following any particular historical criteria of voice type classification. Excerpts of the recordings made by three sopranos (Emma Carelli, Nellie Melba and Luisa Tetrazzini), a tenor (Caruso), and three baritones (Pasquale Amato, Mattia Battistini and Titta Ruffo) are examined. It is interesting to notice that these singers could be divided into two groups according to a chronological criterion: Battistini and Melba, born respectively in 1857 and 1861, reveal a strong connection with the old-fashioned ideals of ‘pure’ tonal quality, effortless vocal production and marked changes in timbral quality when passing from one register to another. The others, all born in the 1870s, display much weaker links with the precepts of bel canto. Their vocal production, far from being effortless, is generally characterised by over-the-top emotional outpouring with a tendency, at times, to force the vocal sound, rather than making it ‘float on the breath’. 

2) As will be shown, the ‘new’ conception of what the singing voice ‘should’ sound like, especially at the crossing of the upper passaggio into the top notes, soon began to be transposed into the operatic repertoire of earlier ages, provoking its so-called veristizzazione (i.e. giving verismo qualities to non-verismo repertoire). For instance, Luisa Tetrazzini, who hardly ever performed verismo opera, can quite justifiably be included in the list of verismo singers. In effect, while singing bel canto roles of earlier periods, she fully applied the ‘modern’ system of vocal production which her contemporaries were shaping, in order to cope with the demands of ‘modern’ scores – thereby taking the lead herself in the process of veristizzazione.

The passaggio to the top notes is undeniably one of the most critical areas of the operatic voice, both female and male, and nineteenth-century singing teachers devoted much effort to equalising the sound across the series of notes which span the join between the middle and the high range. As has been shown, though, the idea of reducing the timbral differences between registers was alien to late nineteenth-century vocal pedagogues. By contrast, we are extremely familiar with this idea, to the point that Sundberg can assert that ‘a classic aim of singing

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85 What they rarely fail to provoke is a strong emotional response of the listener to their electrifying impersonations, even in the two and a half minutes of a 78rpm side.
pedagogy is to reduce or even eliminate timbral variation between registers'. The process for integrating the upper notes with the rest of the vocal compass undertook a dramatic transformation at the turn of the twentieth century, and this might well have initiated that process, which led to the elimination of timbral variety between registers described by Sundberg in his extensive studies of modern, trained singers.

The first excerpts which I consider come from two recordings of *Tosca*’s aria ‘Vissi d’arte’ by Emma Carelli and Nellie Melba, made respectively for Fonotipia in 1906 and for Victor Talking Machine in 1907. A forty-six-year-old Melba (1861–1931) is therefore compared to a much younger (twenty-nine-year-old) Carelli (1877–1928). The substantial age gap between the singers cannot be disregarded, as the effect of aging is crucial to the sound of the singing voice. Nevertheless, Melba’s recordings attest to the almost perfect condition in which she preserved her wonderful instrument well into her sixties, while Carelli had a relatively short career and was more or less retired as a stage singer by the time she reached her forties. There are two points in this aria where the second *passaggio* comes into play, illustrated in Examples 4.6 and 4.7:


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86 Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 51. On this point Sundberg highlights that the shifts between registers should ‘be accompanied by the smallest possible timbral differences’ and that vocal training potentially erases ‘not only register breaks but also clearly audible register shifts … Under such conditions the differences in the register of a skilled singer will be hard to define perceptibly, although they may, of course, still exist at a laryngeal level’, (51).

87 Details for these and all the recordings used in this thesis are contained in the Discography.

In both cases, Carelli draws the heavy registration upwards in the attempt to depict an impassioned Tosca through full-weighted vocal sound. Renouncing any pretense at stylistic elegance, Carelli sighs the desperation and anger of the outraged Tosca until the last notes of her ‘prayer’ to God. In Example 4.6 (Excerpt 1 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/carelli-tosca-i), Carelli ascends the major third $e^2$ flat–$g^2$ progressively elongating and widening the vocal tract (covering). Avoiding a switch to the head register on $g^2$, she keeps the phrase within the heavy registration and achieves a very natural crescendo effect from $mf$ to $f$. After the $g^2$ she takes a non-written breath and in a free allargando decreases the following $f^2$ to $pp$. This floating effect is essentially achieved by decreasing the breath pressure through a procedure which is called ‘filatura’ or ‘filare il suono’ by Italian singing teachers, and ‘spinning’ the sound by English ones. In Example 4.7, while Carelli avoids a marked vowel modification on the two /eh/ vowels of the second ‘per-chè’ leading to $g^2$, she nevertheless keeps the voice within the heavy (middle) register. Carelli modifies the distribution of the text and interjects the exclamation ‘oh’ on the $f^2$ in order to elongate the vocal tract as much as possible, preparing for the jump from $d^2$ to $b^2$ flat. In this way, she ensures a totally consistent vocal colour at the final climax of her ‘Vissi d’arte’ (Excerpt 2 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/carelli-tosca-ii).

By contrast, Nellie Melba sings her upper notes in the lighter registration. Melba’s control over the breath is outstanding, and she never exerts more air pressure than is precisely required to support and link the sounds in a perfect, legato line. Moreover, the articulation of the vowels is so smooth that it never interferes with the continuous flow of her pure vocal tone. This being the case, her Tosca lacks the ebullient temperament of the character. In Example 4.6, Melba switches to the head

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89 ‘Spinning’ the sound might imply that the sound is made thinner and thinner, although teachers can use the term to mean keeping the sound alive in the breath (in the sense of ‘spinning top’). It is clear that Carelli performs this effect on the premise that the tempo is freed from any metronomic regularity. Such an idea would be today considered as a total violation of the score.
voice on $f^2$ and there she locks the entire phrase, singing it in the prescribed single breath (Excerpt 3 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/melba-tosca-i). In Example 4.7 (Excerpt 4 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/melba-tosca-ii) she follows the same manoeuvre, and the second ‘perché’ leans on the head register with a perceptible change of the tonal quality, which becomes even more of a shock to the ear when the singer goes from $d^2$ (in the middle register) to $b^2\ flat$ (switched into the head register). Here the flute-like quality of the top note is sharply dissonant with the passionate and, at times, wild nature of Tosca, portrayed at the peak of her emotional turmoil at this very moment. Because Melba sings in pure head register above $f$, her top notes lack body when compared to the ringing tones produced by Carelli. Melba pursues registration in the single way prescribed by bel canto pedagogical tradition: she carries the qualities of the head register down into the middle register. This practice produces a modification in the quality of the voice (timbre) as the singer passes between registers. Therefore, the golden rule of carrying registers down squares with the other principle of late nineteenth-century vocal pedagogy: that a consistent vocal colour can be attained only within the limits of each register. We would expect that Carelli, the daughter of a strong advocate of the bel canto tradition, managed registration following the very same rule exemplified in the singing of Melba; but as will be seen in Chapter 6, Carelli displays a number of features which are in contrast with the precepts of bel canto. The totally consistent timbral quality between middle and head register is one of the most striking elements of discontinuity with that previous tradition.

The recordings of the ‘Siciliana’ from Cavalleria rusticana made by Caruso in 1902, 1903, 1904 and 1910 respectively, show the several stages through which he achieved a progressively more consistent tone quality. I only consider the recordings made for the Victor Company in 1904 and 1910, as they exhaustively demonstrate this evolution. In the opening phrases of the first recording, Caruso chooses a light registration (bright or clear timbre) for the sections which overlap the passaggio area and a heavy registration (dark, covered, sombre timbre) for the sections ranging below this critical zone (Example 4.8).
This practice could be understood as deriving from the aesthetics of *chiaroscuro*, a concept which survived throughout the nineteenth century and had been conceived by voice teachers as a device to ensure variety of expression. Such was the perspective of García, who suggested applying two contrasted timbres of the voice (bright or *clair* and dark or *sombre*) according to the different passions expressed by the music. 

Bach (1883) discussed a semi-dark timbre and Carelli a timbre *rotondo chiaro* (rounded-bright), terms which highlight a recourse to a variety of timbres still in *fin-the-siècle* performance practices. In the present recording, however, the main effect is that of a simple timbral divide between open sounds, pitched between $c^1$ and $f^1$, and darker sounds on notes below $c^1$ (Excerpt 5 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-siciliana-i-1904).

The first $f^1$ which Caruso clearly sings with a dark timbre leads to the short sequence of three $a^1$ flats, a pattern which will be extended later in the ‘Siciliana’ (Example 4.9).

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91 As Sarah Potter points out, ‘García’s published works as a body do not suggest continual larynx-lowering’. See “Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., University of Leeds, 2014), 35. Therefore, the use of the dark timbre is also not intended to be continuous.

92 For Bach, see Sarah Potter, “Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century”, 40; Carelli discusses the ‘bright-rounded’ timbre in both Cronaca d’un respiro, 47 and L’Arte del canto, 1: 46.
The need to cover the top note of the minor third interval (f'–a¹ flats), which results in a blending of the timbre of the two sounds, necessitates the heavy registration of this f'. It is rather strangely preceded by another f' sung with such an open timbre that the sound of the vowel /u/ of the word 'risu', almost becomes an /ah/ vowel. Although in the interval f'–a¹ flats Caruso maintains a consistent tonal quality, the g¹ to which he descends after three repeated a¹ flats has a darker quality and more laryngeal depth than the preceding notes, even though it is sung on the front vowel /ee/ (Excerpt 6 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-siciliana-1904-ii) 93. It seems, therefore, that at this stage Caruso approached the top notes with a relatively lowered larynx but without maximising the effect of tracheal stretch. This observation will be confirmed when I return to considering Caruso’s singing in Chapter 5, where the tentative hypothesis that Caruso’s breathing system shifted from intercostal to abdominal respiration in the years 1906/7 is evaluated. Here it will be sufficient to note the effect of lowering the larynx, which stretches ‘the pharyngeal sidewall tissues ... so that the lower pharynx is widened’. 94 This widening of the bottom part of the pharynx is not audible on Caruso’s a¹ flats, as the comparison with the same notes recorded in 1910 clearly demonstrates.

In the recording of the ‘Siciliana’ made in 1910, Caruso seems finally to have found a homogeneous sombre timbre for his opening phrases both when they insist on, and also when they move below, the passaggio. The only exceptions to the choice of a consistently darker vocal colour are the first four f's in ‘Lola ch’hai’, sung again with an open (or clear) timbre, in what could be a sort of hangover from his

93 Back and front vowels are defined according to the position of the tongue hump when pronouncing them. ‘Front vowels [/ee/ and /eh/] have the hump well forward resulting in larger rear vowel space. These vowels feel more forward, but the major resonator is the throat! [Meanwhile] back vowels [/ah/, /o/ and /u/] have the dominant resonance space to the mouth because the tongue hump is in the throat’; see Dan H. Marek, Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors (Lanham, Toronto and Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 286. The vowel /ee/ is naturally articulated on a higher laryngeal position than that of the vowel /u/ although the training of professional singers strives to establish a specific articulatory habit which enables a comfortably low laryngeal position on each and every vowel; see Sundberg, The Science of the Singing Voice, 113.

94 Sundberg, Science of the Singing Voice, 114. Sundberg also says that, in contrast, ‘when the larynx is raised, the wall tissues must pile up and fill part of the lower pharynx. In addition, the lower and middle constrictor muscles may be important. These constrictor muscles originate at the cricoid and thyroid cartilages and at the hyoid bone, run upward and posteriorly, and insert in the median raphe of the back pharynx wall. By contraction they would contribute to a rising of the larynx and thereby constrict the pharynx’, 115.
own earlier habit. Caruso switches colours at the end of the vowel /ah/ of ‘hai’, from open to dark timbre (Example 4.8), also causing an erroneous accentuation on the second vowel of the diphthong ‘ai’. (Excerpt 7 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-siciliana-i-1910)

His first ascent across the passaggio from f' to a' flat (Example 4.9) starts from an f' whose registration is much heavier than that which he had adopted for the same note in the previous recording. In order to cover the upper a' flats satisfactorily from this markedly lower laryngeal position, Caruso now stretches the pharyngeal constrictors to their maximum. With the vocal tract fully elongated and widened, he is able to produce well-rounded, powerful and ringing a' flats, where variations in vocal colour between the registers are effectively eliminated (Excerpt 8 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-siciliana-ii-1910).

A third example of different registration choices is offered by two recordings of the ‘Prologo’ from Leoncavallo’s I Pagliacci, both made in 1911 by the baritones Mattia Battistini (1857–1928) and Pasquale Amato (1878–1942) for the Gramophone Company and Victor, respectively. Their fundamentally different approaches to registration, evident throughout the two performances, is especially clear when Battistini and Amato produce piano and forte effects in the upper range.

The first long legato phrase, where the character of the music changes to a moving piano, starts with the words ‘Un nido di memorie’ (Example 4.10).


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95 There is another explanation: it seems that the first interpreter of Turiddu, Roberto Stagno, created a sort of stylistic standard for this role which was long perpetuated by tenors after him. These stylistic reminiscences are also audible in the recordings of the role (especially in the Drunken Song ‘Brindisi’, in the second part of the opera) which survive by, among others, Caruso and Zenatello.

96 This happens also in the recordings of 1902 and 1904, as also on those other occasions when Caruso produces the same change in the vocal color on the same diphthong.

97 This phenomenon is known as ‘the singer’s formant’ which, as Sundberg explains, ‘is produced by a clustering of the third, fourth and fifth formant frequencies. An important articulatory means for achieving such a clustering is the shape of the larynx tube and a wide pharynx, often produced by a lowering of the larynx’; see Sundberg, “Where does the sound come from?”, in The Cambridge Companion to Singing, 231–247: 242.

Battistini passes from $b$ to $e'$ above the stave very cleanly, without any audible gap (Excerpt 9 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/battistini-prologo-i). He places $b$ and $e'$ in the middle and head register, respectively, in order to obtain a soft, tender piano on the upper tone, which he reinforces briefly after its approach. On the same $e'$, Amato sings a real mezza voce as he carries the same tonal quality from $b$ to $e'$, both pitches kept within the same heavy registration (Excerpt 10 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/amato-prologo-i). The procedure is made particularly apparent by the use of an expressive portamento between these two notes. The piano effect is obtained exclusively through the action of breath pressure, avoiding the bel canto mechanism of switching registers.

Similarly, when the dynamic climax is reached in the andante cantabile at the end of the aria (Example 4.11), both singers make their way to the top $f'$ and $a'$, again adopting different registral balances.


In both occurrences of the rising interval (the second one is not in the score, but is added by the large majority of baritones), Battistini darkens the notes preceding top $f'$ and $a'$ (respectively two $e'$ flats, and $c'–d'$) without lowering the larynx completely. The high-placed top notes to which critics often refer when discussing his recordings, are a result of this procedure (Excerpt 11 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/battistini-prologo-ii). In particular, Battistini’s top $a'$ in this recording, although bright and ample, possesses a certain edgy quality when compared to the ravishing velvety tone produced by Amato. Certainly, we have to take into
consideration the different ages of the singers, who both made the recordings in 1911, when Battistini was fifty-four, while Amato was only thirty-three. As noted above when discussing the recordings of Melba and Carelli, aging affects the singing voice, and even experience and a refined technique cannot make up for the effects of time. Nevertheless, in this recording, Battistini still exhibits an instrument in good condition, the only real flaw being a lack of body in his lower notes, but no detectable weaknesses in the top notes. Moreover, Battistini’s approach to the top of his range was exactly the same ten years earlier, as we will shortly see. The factor which makes Amato’s upper notes sound so different from those of Battistini is rooted in the same principle illustrated in the case of Caruso’s top a¹ flats, although it is managed according to Amato’s own individual vocal and physical characteristics.

First, Amato covers his high notes with a clearly audible maneuver: when he reaches top f¹, the intelligibility of his vowels, clear on the preceding e¹ flats, vanishes. This reminds us of that ‘point of neutralisation’ discussed by Richard Miller and illustrated in the previous section of this chapter. On the word ‘p⁹ichè’, the /o/ vowel is so covered that it sounds almost like /u/. The same effect occurs later on the top a where, like Caruso, Amato fully elongates the vocal tract and stretches the pharyngeal walls in order to achieve total timbre consistency throughout the compass (Excerpt 12 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/amato-prologo-1911-ii). Amato’s heavy registration is the result of both innate and cultivated aspects of his vocalism: his voice was more dramatic than that of Battistini, and his vocal technique was based on a generally lower placement of the larynx. This ‘cultivated’ element is symptomatic of a general shift in vocal trends primarily rooted in the changing operatic repertoire of fin-de-siècle Italian opera.99

That the generations of Italian singers born after 1870 were elaborating new aesthetics of registration can also be demonstrated, as mentioned above, in the kind of vocalism they brought to their performances of pre-verismo repertoire. In the following excerpts from the grand aria of La traviata, ‘Ah fors’è lui’, representatives of the old and new guards are again compared. Nellie Melba’s and Luisa Tetrazzini’s (1871–1940) different registration choices determine the way in which they pass from pitch to pitch. It is not only the timbral differences that reveal how the two singers are shaping their respective vocal tracts in the passaggio area, but also a

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99 The case studies of Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss in great detail the many aspects of this phenomenon.
temporal factor: the perceived space, or time taken, between two pitches of a rising or falling interval. There are several ways in which singers can shift between pitches that span an interval: sometimes it can be immediate, with an almost total absence of any gap between the notes; in other cases, when the singer preserves the body of the first sound across the transition to the second pitch, the temporal space is perceived as longer.\footnote{100}

In the course of the ascent from $c^2$–$a^2$ flat, Melba moves from the lower to the top note with such an immediacy that the gap is barely audible (see Example 4.12, Excerpt 13 \url{https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/melba-traviata-i}). The quality of her timbre changes drastically in the course of this passage, and while the $c^2$ is broad and bright, the $a^2$ flat is a flute-like sound which has lost much of the body of the preceding note. Melba, as we have already seen above in her Tosca recording, does not draw the heavy register upwards where her $c^2$ lies but, in order to accomplish registration, she sings the $a^2$ flat in pure head register, as we would expect her to do in accordance with the precept taught by Mathilde Marchesi, her Paris teacher.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example4.12}
\caption{Example 4.12 Giuseppe Verdi, \textit{La traviata}, ‘Ah fors’è lui’, Act I, \textit{Scena e Aria}, bars 36–43.\footnote{101}}
\end{figure}

In the same passage, Tetrazzini takes a slightly longer fraction of time to leap up to the $a^2$ flat, while her vocal colour remains much more alike on the two notes (Excerpt 14 \url{https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/tetrazzini-traviata-1908-i}). Like Carelli, Tetrazzini seems to drag the heavier mechanism of her middle register upwards and therefore her top note comes out with that ‘sort of electric force’, which Mary Garden singled out as the most striking characteristic of Tetrazzini’s personality.\footnote{102}

\footnote{100} Although this is a matter of subjective perception, as in reality the time taken corresponds to microseconds. This aspect has been noted above in Amato’s recording of the ’Prologo’, where a pronounced \textit{portamento} is often used in leaps made according to the second method.\footnote{101} Giuseppe Verdi, \textit{La Traviata}, opera in three Acts, libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, vocal score, edited by Mario Parenti (Milan: Ricordi, 1966).\footnote{102} ‘The most important thing one feels on meeting Mme Tetrazzini is her personality… There is something present when she is near which has a sort of electric force.’ Mary Garden interview of Tetrazzini, in \textit{The World}, (1908), quoted by Michael Aspinall, liner notes to \textit{Luisa Tetrazzini: The Complete Zonophone (1904) and Victor Recordings (1911–20)}, Romophone, CD 81025, 1999.
Tetrazzini passes from the lower to the higher pitch, doing her best to reduce the timbral variety between registers. In the course of this interval, the colour of Melba’s voice in the transition $c^2-a^2$ flat is less consistent than that of Tetrazzini. Although the latter rarely sang roles in verismo opera, her registration aesthetic largely borrows from the features elaborated by Italian singers during the heyday of the giovane scuola.

Where the weightier voice of Melba appears to ‘beat’ Tetrazzini’s smaller instrument is in the phrases of ‘Alfredo’s motif’, marked con espansione (example 4.13).


Melba sings these tones in a bright middle register, and only the lower $f'$ falls in the chest. Her voice is broad, luminous and unconstricted on the notes lying within the compass of her middle range and before she leaps to the $a^2$ of the florid passage which she adds at bar 56 of the example 4.13, and again on the word ‘croce’ (bar 64). At these points, once again, any mixing with the heavy register is excluded. Melba reaches the upper tone without apparent vocal effort and avoids any audible vowel modification, which is, in turn, produced by a pronounced covering of the upper tones (compare Melba and Tetrazzini on this passage of Violetta’s aria in Excerpts 15 and 16). In the pre-electrical system of recording, this kind of registration produces a drastic loss of the upper partials, especially on top notes. Melba is not the only singer to suffer from this effect. Emma Eames, Marcella Sembrich, Alma Kurz, Frances Alda, to name only a
few, display a similar apparent poverty or absence of upper partials in their recordings, to various degrees.\textsuperscript{103}

Another example of how the new aesthetics of registration were applied to earlier repertoire is found in two recordings of Don Giovanni’s ‘Canzonetta’ made by two baritones, Mattia Battistini and Titta Ruffo (1877–1953). In one of his earlier recordings for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company, dated 1902, Battistini plays with registration in the pre-\textit{verismo} fashion of high-placed upper tones and long breaths.\textsuperscript{104} He manages to sing two-thirds of the last verse of the ‘Canzonetta’ in one breath, ignoring in his seemingly endless air flow even written rests (example 4.14, Excerpt 17 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/battistini-don-giovanni-i).

\begin{music}
\begin{musicexample}{Example 4.14}{W. A. Mozart, \textit{Don Giovanni}, ‘Canzonetta’, Act II, Scene III, Canzonetta, bars 34–42.\textsuperscript{105}}
\end{musicexample}
\end{music}

But on the added ornamental flourish on the final word ‘amore’ he goes from heavy to lighter ($d'\textsuperscript{1}$ to $f'$) and from lighter to heavy registration ($g'/f'\textsuperscript{sharp}$ to $e'$) and,

\textsuperscript{103} Melba was troubled by this issue throughout her entire recording career. Only with the advent of the microphone did she feel that a fairer representation of her voice was captured by the recording machine.

\textsuperscript{104} Battistini made recordings between 1902 and 1924 and, although his style allowed for some adjustments to the changing fashion of singing during these two decades (as, for example, in the 1924 recording of the ‘Canzonetta’), his system of vocal production remained thoroughly imbued with the technique of the pre-\textit{verismo} style of singing.

although he manages a smooth transition between registers, the timbre of his voice changes substantially. He gives the impression of having fully absorbed Lablache’s principles of register transition. One could even imagine Battistini practising the exercises prescribed by the great bass in his room, swapping from heavy to lighter registration on the bordering notes. In the case of this recording, the bordering note is an $f^\sharp$ sharp which he produces at first in the head voice, and then in the heavier mechanism when the note is sung again in the second double acciaccatura.

Ruffo’s recording, meanwhile, which was made in 1912 with orchestral accompaniment, allows less in terms of ornamentation. He breathes in the middle of every single phrase, in contrast to Battistini, who manages to sing each phrase in one breath. Although Ruffo’s tempo is slower, the use that Battistini makes of rubato also in fact stretches his phrasing. Ruffo surely lacks the subtlety and nuanced phrasing of Battistini, but he continuously supports the whole body of a voice throughout his singing. For example, his upward portamento from $g$ to $c^\prime$ on the words ‘mia con’ is done with a seamless tonal quality (see Example 4.14). Battistini produces the same $c^\prime$ in a lighter registration, switching between pitches with an almost total absence of any temporal space. Even when he decides to sound more weighty, his lighter registration sets his voice in a higher placement which prevents him from achieving a complete laryngeal drop and a thoroughly widened pharyngeal cavity. Thus we can observe that the sort of total timbral consistency adopted by Ruffo is more taxing in terms of breath support. Covered sounds are harder to sustain, and Ruffo adheres to an aesthetic of registration which is focussed on the ideal of an intense and uniform coverage of the entire compass of the voice.\footnote{This is especially evident when compared with the ideal of lighter registration adopted by Battistini.} In line with this aesthetic of ‘total timbral consistency’, Ruffo maintains the heavy registration for the last top note ($f^2$ sharp) of the ‘Canzonetta’ (Excerpt 18 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/ruffo-don-giovanni-i).

Battistini’s singing results in a sound both brighter and lighter than Ruffo’s continuous vocal fullness of tone. His darker and ringing colour (voce brunita) is one of the more blatant features of the Italian vocal style demonstrated by the generation of singers born after 1870.\footnote{It could be argued that my general criteria of dividing generations of singers as born before or after the year 1870 is overly dogmatic and generic. Obviously Patti and Melba do not belong to the same generation in strictly chronological terms, as Boninsegna and Farrar are not part, and for the same reason, of the same generation. My point is that the existence of several generational ‘layers’ does not detract from the clearly observable fact that Italian singers born after 1870 by large progressively worked to establish a ‘new’ aesthetic of vocal registration.} It led to the creation of more standardised vocal types,
where the particular colours of individual voices emerged less and less. The skills involved in playing with registration at will were progressively lost or forgotten. The freedom of swapping registers on high notes might well have been seen as an obsolete practice: for example, the kinds of sound produced in this fashion did not align with the new ideals of a masculine and muscular singing of the ‘realistic’ theatre. In other words, the taste for ‘heady tones’ in male voices, so characteristic of bel canto, lost its grip on Italian audiences, while changing preferences that favoured the verismo gusto of powerful and full-bodied voices eventually led to a positive dislike of the broader palette of timbral qualities so highly regarded in earlier ages.
Chapter 5 The tenor at the time of Caruso

In this chapter I analyse and compare a selected number of recordings made by three outstanding turn-of-the-century Italian tenors: Alessandro Bonci (1870–1940), Enrico Caruso (1873–1921) and Giovanni Zenatello (1876–1949). The wealth of recorded material which they left made it necessary for me to listen to approximately one hundred discs. From them I have selected nineteen recordings that encompass not only verismo repertoire but also arias by Donizetti, Verdi, Massenet, Bizet and Saint-Saëns. My principal aim has been to highlight the dramatic impact of specific registration choices on other parameters of vocal expression, such as legato, portamento and vocal phrasing. Moreover, contemporary critics’ generalised recourse to more or less identical expressions when comparing Caruso’s vocal features to those of other singers still depended on these ‘new’ ways of achieving vocal registration.

The profound transformation which characterised, in particular, the vocalism of Caruso throughout his career has been the object of extensive and insightful discussion.¹ Nevertheless many important points have remained unnoticed. Above all, there is the crucial role that Caruso’s registration choices played in the achievement of such a radical transformation: that he was the first example of an Italian tenor paving the way towards a brand new conception of ‘total vocal consistency’ is evident when his recordings are compared with those of his contemporary colleagues. Perhaps another route to evaluating this transformation is offered by the critical reception of Caruso’s performances at the time. Articles in the Italian and international press strikingly singled out ‘spontaneity’ and ‘naturalness’ as the qualifying characteristics of the young Caruso’s singing. As we shall briefly see, these expressions are problematic, value-laden and not simply descriptive. While here they depend on the different – national or even regional – tastes of turn-of-the-century audiences and critics, more generally, their meaning profoundly changes as the tastes and values of a culture change over time. This can be tested against our contemporary aesthetic preferences when listening to the early Caruso on record (1902–1905): what sounded ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’ to the ears of an early twentieth-century public now seems somehow mannered and stylised to ours. Nonetheless, it is again the comparison with other tenors of the age

which puts the opinions expressed by critics and audiences more than a century ago into perspective.

During the early years of his career (1895–1898), Caruso was depicted by critics as a tenor of *mezzo carattere*, a voice-type ideally suited to lyric roles characterised by a sweet or mellow timbre and the refined use of *mezze voci*. The most appealing traits of his vocalism were considered to be delicacy, warmth and purity of tone. If in the *Gazzetta dei teatri* he is defined as ‘un incantevole tenore di grazia’ (an enchanting *di grazia* tenor), 2 the *cronista*, writing in the *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica*, confirms that this ‘delicious singer’ is at his best in the old *bel canto* repertoire. Here Caruso, ‘the sweetest of the voices’, reveals his most suggestive qualities in ‘the exquisite suavity with which he embroiders his singing’.3 Notwithstanding the sombre quality of his lower tones, Caruso was able to produce the upper range of his voice in the lighter registration, conferring on it a certain crystal suppleness, the typical *morbidezza* of Italianate singing.4 This manner of approaching the upper tones was nevertheless a consequence of the practical difficulties he experienced in those initial years with such notes.5 There were some, indeed, who warned him against the danger of embarking on the more dramatic roles which were increasingly being performed on Italian stages by the 1890s. For instance, the anonymous critic of the *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* implored Caruso to restrict himself to the

*bel canto* repertory, such as *La Favorita, La Traviata, Lucia* and *Rigoletto*, instead of expending [his voice] on the invective of the third act of *La Bohème*, in which the exacting demands of the most dramatic declamation, one in which Caruso gives his all, could cost him his career if he does not… abandon this opera and others like it.6

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2 *Gazzetta dei Teatri*, Spring 1897, quoted in Rodolfo Celletti “Enrico Caruso”, in *Le grandi voci*, 137.
3 This ‘free’ translation by Scott brilliantly captures the meaning of the many expressions with which the cronista describes Caruso’s vocal persona: ‘Il cantante delizioso’, ‘dolcissima voce’, ‘il dicitore simpatico, il modulatore aggraziato’, ‘giovane cantante dalla voce morbida e duttile’, *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica*, 36/1614 (15 March, 1898), 2.
4 Rodolfo Celletti confirms, quoting several reviews relative to the early years of Caruso’s career, that critics catalogued him as a *tenore di grazia*. See Celletti, “Enrico Caruso”, 136–139.
5 According to many accounts he was troubled by notes as low as *a♭* flat or even *g♭*, considered ordinary for a male high voice.
6 ‘Ma quanto farebbe meglio se fra il repertorio cosiddetto lirico, scegliersse quelle del vecchio *bel canto* e se ne facesse specialistà. Se la *Favorita*, la *Traviata*, la *Lucia*, il *Rigoletto*… L’invettiva del terzo atto della *Bohème*, contro Musetta, che esige una declamazione la più drammatica e che il Caruso dice con tutto l’impegno.. può costargli la carriera, se non accetterà il mio consiglio di abbandonare quest’opera ed altre di genere enfatico’, *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica* 36/1614.
The *La bohème* mentioned here was Leoncavallo’s opera (1897) written in the vocally hazardous *verismo* style whose demands were considered taxing for a tenor of *mezzo carattere*. The protagonist of the more famous *La bohème* by Puccini, on the other hand, was considered a suitable choice for the young Caruso. It might well be that such initial critical appraisals of Caruso’s vocalism stemmed, as mentioned earlier, from his approach to the high notes which, judging from critics’ reviews and colleagues’ narratives, were not fully developed until at least 1898. This was the year when Caruso created the role of Loris in Umberto Giordano’s *Fedora* opposite the soprano Gemma Bellincioni in the title role. Bellincioni was an eminent representative of the new operatic style, having created the first ever *verismo* role as Santuzza in Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890). She was directly responsible for the casting of Caruso in the principal male role (Loris Ipanoff), having previously made the journey to Livorno to hear Caruso sing the role of Canio (*I Pagliacci*) at the composer’s request. The great prima donna was deeply impressed with the ‘beauty and the spontaneity’ of the young tenor’s voice. Although the very different nature of the roles of Canio and Loris Ipanoff made it extremely difficult to predict how successfully Caruso would be in the task of bringing to life a prince of Czarist Russia, Bellincioni expressed her opinion as follows:

I expressed to Giordano my impression [referring to the contrasting characteristics of the two roles], but I also said that Caruso’s vocal gifts

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(1898), 2. Notwithstanding the opinion of the critic and also apparently of Caruso’s teacher himself – Guglielmo Vergine, who warned Caruso against the opera when he first performed it in Genoa a few months earlier – the audience’s reaction was enthusiastic. See Scott, *The Great Caruso*, 31.

7 The list of ‘new’ operas which, without belonging to the ones ‘messe all’indice come vecchioni’ were considered suitable for Caruso, includes Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, Boito’s *Mefistofele* and Thomas’ *Mignon*. *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica*, ibid. As is well known, the Leoncavallo-Puccini feud over Henry Murger’s novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* had started in 1893 and was soon to appear in newspaper articles (Il *Secolo and Corriere della Sera*) other than in the personal correspondence of all personalities involved such as, among others, Ricordi, Sonzogno, Puccini, Illica, Giacosa and obviously Leoncavallo himself. It seems, however, that it was the latter who had first the idea of setting Murger’s novel to music. For a detailed account, Konrad Dryen, *Leoncavallo: Life and Works* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 44–47.

8 Some of these accounts will be given in this chapter. In the above-mentione review of *La Gioconda* from the *Gazzetta dei teatri*, the critic confirms that the romanza ‘Cielo e mar’ was transposed down by a semitone and the high notes in the duet ‘Deh! non turbare’ were also lowered. *Gazzetta dei teatri*, 3 June 1897, quoted in Scott, *The Great Caruso*, 26.

9 This role was originally conceived for Roberto Stagno, Bellincioni’s partner. After Stagno’s death, an attempt to secure the engagement of Fernando de Lucia in the part failed due to his previous commitments, as Bellincioni informs us in her autobiography *Io e il palcoscenico* (Rome: Quintieri, 1921), 125.

10 ‘La voce mi fece subito una grande impressione per la bellezza e la spontaneità’ (The voice made on me an immediate effect for its beauty and spontaneity), Bellincioni, *Io e il palcoscenico*, 125.
already made his success practically assured, and moreover, as an actor
he had a dramatic temperament.\footnote{11 \textit{Scrissi a Giordano la mia impressione, ma dissi pure che con i mezzi vocali di Caruso, il successo era quasi già assicurato, tanto più che anche come attore aveva del temperamento drammatico}}, Gemma Bellincioni, ibid. 126.

Bellincioni’s portrayal of the singer tellingly links her expectation of a ‘practically assured’ success to his ‘spontaneous’ vocalism, together with his dramatically compelling temperament. This remark suggests that the naturalistic delivery of a character in both physical appearance and vocal utterance (spontaneous singing) were crucial ingredients for the effective rendition of a ‘modern’ role, a rendition which could make understandable to the audience what the composer had written. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the concept of an inextricable link between these two essential aspects of the performing act had come to be increasingly perceived and expressed, as scholars have recently started to underline.\footnote{12 Karen Henson, \textit{Opera Acts, Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15, 22–25, 36.} Furthermore, in this perspective Caruso would make a perfect case, as his astonishingly artistic eye, exemplified in hundreds of sketches and caricatures which he drew in the most disparate occasions, undoubtedly informed his stage movements, facial expressions and, more generally, the entire bearing of the character he was impersonating.\footnote{13 Caruso’s drawings are among the few personal items regarding the tenor which have been published. I have also seen a number of sculptures in bronze that Caruso made out of some of his self-caricatures at the Archives of the Metropolitan Opera House. It has always provoked a certain puzzlement, in effect, that press reviews, letters, cards – to which he was apparently addicted, sending them daily from wherever part of the globe he was in to sweethearts, relatives and friends – were never completely or even partially released in any sort of publication.} However, these aspects, no matter how intriguing and thought-provoking they might be, and even considering the influence that they might have in turn exerted on Caruso’s singing, fall outside the scope of this investigation.

I must also emphasise the point that the analysis of early recordings, conducted within the parameters of the methodology outlined in Chapter 1 and through the lexicon established in Chapter 4, makes possible new perspectives on the evolution of the tenor voice over the course of the preceding half-century. This is a period which has been associated by a number of scholars with the so-called ‘invention’ of the tenor top C from the chest, a crucial development in the history of vocalism. As we shall see, for Marco Beghelli, one of the most authoritative Italian historians of vocalism, this crucial event functions as a landmark for all voice types, when he states that the vocal evolution of contraltos and mezzo-sopranos was delayed
compared to developments of the tenor voice in the 1830s. On the basis of my research, I would dispute this claim. Recorded examples of the tenor voice highlight the fact that the mastery of high C from the chest during the second half of the nineteenth century – and arguably, therefore, even during the 1830s – was far from universal. Even the top notes which pre-verismo tenors such as Francesco Tamagno (1850–1905) or Francesco Marconi (1855–1916) left on recordings are projected from a laryngeal position which is relatively high and display a certain lack of timbral homogeneity with the lower notes. These tones are certainly not the full-bodied top notes of the mature Caruso (1909–1921) whose darker and rounded ringing tone was to be heard in nearly all operatic tenors of following generations – Aureliano Pertile, Mario Del Monaco, Franco Corelli, Placido Domingo, Giuseppe Giacomini or Jonas Kaufmann, to name just some. In the course of this chapter I also aim to use the enlightening potential of early recordings in order to make sense of what contemporaries (singers, conductors, composers, journalists, detractors or admirers) wrote and thought about Caruso’s vocal personality.

I The ‘natural’ singing of Caruso: some evidence

From the beginning of his career, the singing of Caruso was frequently described with words such as ‘spontaneous’ and ‘natural’. Nappi, the writer of the Perseveranza, commented on the tenor’s ‘homogeneous voice, penetrating, full and spontaneous timbre’, after his debut in Massenet’s Navarraise (1897) at the Teatro Lirico Internazionale in Milan.\(^\text{14}\) His debut in the role of Cavaradossi was welcomed ‘for his marvelous voice, spontaneous, mellow yet powerful throughout his entire range.’\(^\text{15}\) The distinct nature of Caruso’s singing did not escape the notice of the critic of the Gazettino, who commented on the ‘new creation he made of the character of Cavaradossi. This fact was realised by those who had heard Tosca with other tenors, such as Borgatti and Giraud’.\(^\text{16}\) Towards the end of 1899, the

\(^{14}\) Voce omogenea, timbratura squillante, piena, spontanea’, Perseveranza, November 1897, quoted in Gargano and Cesarini, Caruso, 42.

\(^{15}\) ‘...meravigliosa voce, spontanea, che ha tutte le pastosità, tutta la gamma in suo potere, tutte le espressioni’ in Il Mondo artistico 34/48 (11 November 1900), 11, which transcribes a review published in the newspaper Adriatico. On this occasion Caruso was singing Cavaradossi at the Teatro Sociale in Treviso.

\(^{16}\) ‘Del personaggio di Mario Cavaradossi egli fa una creazione del tutto nuova; di ciò si sono convinti coloro i quali assistettero as esecuzioni di Tosca, con altri tenori, come il Borgatti e il Giraud’. This review from the Gazettino is also reported in Il Mondo artistico (11 November 1900), 11. Moreover, Michael Aspinall quotes the content of another article from l’Avanti! (11 November 1899) which reviewed Caruso’s Enzo Grimaldo from La Gioconda: ‘Caruso, who proved himself to be excellent in Iris, showed also great aptness in this other repertory opera. He remains, however,
newspaper *Italia* compiled a detailed commentary on the characteristics which distinguished Caruso’s ‘natural and modern vocalism’, from that of two other outstanding tenors of the era: the older Fernando De Lucia (1860–1925), who was by then something of a living myth, well known to contemporary audiences for both his *bel canto* and *verismo* performances, and the young Giuseppe Borgatti (1871–1950), who was making a name for himself as a Wagnerian singer.  

Reviewing Caruso in the role of Osaka in Mascagni’s *Iris*, the journalist of *Italia* compares the two of them in the same role as Caruso:

> the declamation of De Lucia, too mawkish to be suave, exaggerated in graces, making excessive use of *falsetto*, and bursting with an effect of overall vocal imbalance between the middle and upper range; [.... and] the vocal qualities of Borgatti, who overplays the *falsetto* effects [*effetti falsi*] and the mixed voice [*voce mista*] ...  

The image which these and many other reviews of the early Caruso reveal is of a singer who was possibly seeking a new kind of vocal registration, progressively distanced from the *falsetto* and mixed-voice effects, which I defined in Chapter 4 as ‘heavier’ registration. The fact that, at this early stage of the singer’s career we cannot rely on any recorded evidence, makes it hard not only to reconstruct his technical development but also to reconcile what we read in reviews, memories, biographies with what we can hear in Caruso’s very first recordings from a few years later.

Many interesting hints about Caruso’s technical evolution before the advent of recording are contained in Pietro Gargano’s biography where, unfortunately, the author rarely gives sources for his quotations. For instance, Gargano tells us that during the rehearsals of *Fedora* in November 1898, Caruso seemed to have exclaimed ‘*Aggio truvato!*’ (‘I have found it!’) while singing his solo ‘Amor ti vieta’, in

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17 It was owing to Borgatti’s indisposition that Caruso made his earlier-than-anticipated debut at La Scala on the 26th December 1900. On the opening night of that season Borgatti was scheduled to sing Tristan in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. With Borgatti indisposed, the general director of La Scala, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, decided to replace Wagner’s opera with Puccini’s *La bohème*, in which Caruso was cast as Rodolfo.

18 ‘...la declamazione, troppo sdolcinata per essere soave, di De Lucia; esagerata in leziosaggini, abusante dei falsi, erompente con stacco notevole negli effetti dei medi; ha ricordato il secondo Osaka, il Borgatti, al quale si adattava così poco la parte, per la natura del suo organo vocale, tetragono agli effetti falsi, della voce mista.’ *Italia*, November 1899, quoted by Aspinall in *Caruso*, 241. This article reviews Mascagni’s *Iris* at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna.
which the tenor line lies the whole time around the second *passaggio*.\(^{19}\) We can infer that he ‘found’ the way of blending the sounds of the middle range with the high g’s and the climatic a¹, given that Loris’s solo moves constantly around this area of the voice. This assumption is strengthened by two testimonies. The first is by the soprano Luisa Tetrazzini and, the second by one of the most authoritative critics in Naples, Saverio Procida. Tetrazzini met Caruso on stage for the first time at the end of 1898, in the imperial theatre of St. Petersburg where they were singing in the same cast of Puccini’s *La bohème*. She tells us:

> as a youth of twenty years… I recall the difficulty he had even with such ordinary notes as G [g¹] or A [a¹]. He always stumbled over these, and it annoyed him so that he even threatened to change over to … baritone …. [D]uring an opera season in St Petersburg, I sang with him for the first time … I saw what progress he had made. … [T]he *impertinenza* with which he lavishly poured forth those rich, round notes. It was the open *voce napolitana*, yet it had the soft caress of the *voce della campagna toscana*. … I placed him there and then as an extraordinary and unique tenor. From top to bottom his register[s] [were] without defect.\(^{20}\)

In 1902, the year of Caruso’s first recordings, Procida gave his verdict on Caruso’s performance in the role of des Grieux in Massenet’s *Manon*:

> It is a beautiful voice in every way, fully equalised and warm throughout its range. But that is not enough … the voice is too throaty, with insufficient head register, and passages of *mezza voce* are too often sung loudly and without polish. The ear is surprised, taken aback by crude sounds, yet in the midst of these are some of the most limpid tones that I have ever heard … To the character [des Grieux] he should give more elegant gestures, a more gentlemanly manner and more vivacious expression. He thunders out the notes in a Tamagno-like fashion.\(^{21}\)

\(^{19}\) Gargano and Cesarini, *Caruso*, 44.


It seems that Procida mainly associates the lack of elegance in the portrayal of an aristocratic character such as des Grieux with Caruso’s attempt to develop a heavier registration, defined by the critic as throaty, loud and deprived of ‘sufficient head register’. For Procida, Caruso is basically an unfinished singer who ‘still needs discipline, refinement and self-criticism’; endowed with a truly outstanding instrument, he remains the exponent of a vulgar art. It is striking indeed to read these lines, written in January 1902, and compare them with the first tracks that Caruso recorded less than three months later in Milan. To the contemporary ear, too many sounds on these recordings appear open, ‘white’, and approached with an insufficient elongation of the vocal tract. In other words, these sounds are not yet completely developed, as Melba underlined in her memoir.

Though his singing was spontaneous and natural, I do not think that in those days [1902] he was so fine an artist as later on, when perhaps his voice was not so wonderful. It makes me sad to think that the culmination of his art should not have coincided with the greatest years of his voice. Recurring opinions expressed on the spontaneity of Caruso’s singing, at a time when he was still generally dependent on heady tones and light registration, can be explained only through a comparison of his singing with that of contemporary tenors as mentioned above. For instance, the use that Borgatti made of *falsetto*, *fioriture* (ornamentation) and *mezze voci* in the *verismo* part of Osaka (from Mascagni’s *Iris*) seemed not to have bothered the critic of *Il mondo artistico*, Nino Creso, in the least; in fact, he praised the singing of the young tenor enthusiastically. This attitude is not surprising if one considers that in the decades immediately preceding those in discussion here, even Adelina Patti’s singing, so profoundly different from that of Caruso, was described as ‘natural’ by critics and audiences alike. In her day, as Roger Freitas points out, Patti’s naturalness was synonymous with artlessness and

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22 See, in the same review, the reference that Procida makes to the execution of a *gruppetto* (turn) ‘that a finer artist would merely suggest, but Caruso seems more concerned to secure the utmost applause and give an encore.’, *Il Pungolo parlamentare*, 17–18 January, 1902, quoted in Scott, *The Great Caruso*, 53.


24 Because of our different historical perspective, when we listen to the early recordings of Caruso, the characteristics of ‘spontaneous’, ‘natural’ and ‘modern’ singing which were immediately and consistently recognised by his contemporaries remain quite elusive to our ears.

25 ‘In the remainder of the opera he has been delightful. All the *fioriture*, *mezze voci*, falsettos that progressively became full, ringing, powerful sounds…’; ‘Nel resto dell’opera [Borgatti] ha deliziato. Tutte le fioriture, le mezze voci, i falsetti che diventavano grado a grado note piene, squillanti, potenti…’, Creso, *Il Mondo artistico* 34/48 (1900), 7.
uncontrived expressivity, which she realised always by prioritising the needs of the speech (dramatic declamation) over those of the score.\textsuperscript{26} It is this intimate relationship to the text that, Freitas argues, created that impression of ‘naturalness’ in her contemporaries.\textsuperscript{27} In the case of Caruso, by contrast, it is the shift towards a bodily and homogeneous vocal sound that is associated with the idea of ‘natural’ singing. The meaning of the term ‘natural’ clearly underwent a rapid transformation over these decades, as the naturalistic aesthetics inherent to verismo opera (as seen in Chapters 2 and 3) favoured the gendered and carnal vocal colour of its ‘true-to-life’ characters over the effortlessly ‘pure’ tonal quality of the stylised and non-naturalistic bel canto roles.\textsuperscript{28}

Further evidence of a profound aesthetic shift in the ways of perceiving ‘naturalness’ is provided by the discrepancy between Procida’s above-mentioned critique and the view expressed by American journalists at Caruso’s Metropolitan Opera debut in 1903, almost two years later than Procida’s harsh judgment. For Richard Aldrich, the critic of The New York Times, Caruso’s performance in the role of the Duke from Verdi’s Rigoletto

\ldots made a highly favorable impression… His voice is purely a tenor in its quality of high range, and of large power, but [it is] inclined to take on a ‘white’ quality in its upper range when he lets it forth. In mezza voce it has expressiveness and flexibility, and when so used its beauty is most apparent.\textsuperscript{29}

William James Henderson, from The Sun, wrote:

Caruso, the new tenor, made a thoroughly favorable impression… He has a pure voice, without the typical Italian bleat. Caruso has a natural and free delivery and his voice carries well without forcing. \ldots His clear and pealing high notes set the bravos wild with delight, but connoisseurs

\textsuperscript{26} On the approach of Patti to tempo, rubato and portamento and their relationship with the meaning of the words, see Roger Freitas, ‘The art of artlessness, or, Adelina Patti teaches us how to be natural’, Word, image, and song, edited by Rebecca Cypess, Beth L. Glixon, and Nathan Link (Rochester, New York, 2013), 213—242.
\textsuperscript{27} Roger Freitas, ‘The art of artlessness, or, Adelina Patti teaches us how to be natural’, 218.
\textsuperscript{28} Speaking voices are not immune from shifts in this respect. As an example, the reader is invited to consider how dramatically different are the voices of two BBC Radio presenters widely separated in time but performing the same role of explaining music to the listener: Walford Davies in the long-running series beginning in 1926 ‘Music and the Ordinary Listener’, and Tom Service’s present-day series ‘The Listening Service’.
\textsuperscript{29} The New York Times, 24 November, 1903.
of singing saw more promise for the season in his *mezze voce* and his manliness.\(^{30}\)

What at the beginning of 1902 was apparently unrefined and not sufficiently heady singing for Procida, by the end of 1903 actually appeared to Americans as an incompletely developed upper range, with a displeasing ‘white’ quality.\(^{31}\) This despite the fact that Caruso’s vocal power had by then arguably been further developed, and his high tones were developing into even more ‘chesty’ and full-bodied sounds. Furthermore, his *mezze voci* and his ‘manliness’ appear to be more promising qualities of the tenor, whose lack of head voice does not bother the Americans: the more dark, covered, and ‘*virile*’ the sound the better. This discrepancy of perception might well be the result of a cultural difference between the more progressive and modern New York society and the more conservative preferences of southern Italy, a land with a substantial and long-established operatic tradition. That American critics were aware of the existence of differences in national tastes is confirmed by the comments found in contemporary articles, such as the following ‘pre-performance essay’ signed by Aldrich, discussing Caruso’s critical and public reception at the Metropolitan Opera House over the singer’s first two seasons in that theatre (1903/04 and 1904/05):

> And is it not time to raise some sober-minded queries about the way Mr. Caruso is using his voice and the kind of art and expression he is employing in these days? It was noticed at his first appearances here two seasons ago that he showed sometimes a tendency to use the ‘open’ or ‘white’ voice that is beloved of Italian tenors and admired by Italian listeners. But it was not a fixed characteristic of his singing, and he very soon proved that he could produce tones in the purer and better way that lovers of singing hereabout prefer. And how lovely they are when he so produces them!\(^{32}\)

Only when comparing Caruso’s first discs (April 1902) to the later recordings of the same material are we able to appreciate the long journey of continuous technical

\(^{30}\) *The (New York) Sun*, 24 November, 1903. Here again a reference to Caruso’s ‘natural and free delivery’.

\(^{31}\) A year later Aldrich would write of Caruso ‘resonant purity, ... lyrical beauty and full-throatedness’ in the tenor’s rendition of Radames for the Metropolitan Opera House’s opening night, *The New York Times*, 22 November 1904, but again in 1905 the accusations of white and open singing reappear (*The New York Times*, 15 December 1905); for both these articles see Scott, *The Great Caruso*, 81, 89.

evolution the singer underwent. Of the ten tracks that Caruso recorded in his first recording session, only Mascagni’s ‘Serenade’ from Iris was never re-recorded, while the other nine solos were recorded several times. These include ‘E lucevan le stelle’ from Tosca and ‘Celeste Aida’ from Aida, recorded five and six times respectively.

Caruso spent approximately eleven years (1895–1906) on the elaboration of his passaggio to the upper range. My assumption is that this process (and its result) is not only the cardinal element which determines and characterises his vocalism and style, but also informs those ideas of ‘naturalness’, ‘spontaneity’, ‘modernity’, and ‘manliness’ which, as we have so far seen, were attributed to Caruso’s singing. In order to understand this process from a more analytical perspective, I will refer to two of the five recordings Caruso made of Cavaradossi’s aria from the third act of Tosca in 1904 and 1909.

The first recording belongs to the first session that Caruso made for the Victor Company in 1904, from which date he would be bound to the company by an exclusive contract. The ‘white’ voice that the New York critic Aldrich mentioned almost a year before (November 1903) in connection with the tenor’s upper range is here very clearly audible as low as a f¹ sharp. On the phrase ‘O dolci baci o languide carezze’ (Example 5.1), Caruso does not even attempt to cover the e¹–f¹ sharp, but he releases the voice on the flow of the lighter registration, avoiding any elongation of the vocal tract. 33 (Excerpt 19 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-i-1904).

Example 5.1 G. Puccini, Tosca, ‘E lucevan le stelle’, Act III, bars 196–197.34

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33 For the definitions of covering, lighter registration and elongation of the vocal tract see Chapter 4.
34 Giacomo Puccini, Tosca, Melodrama in three acts, libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, vocal score based on the edn. by Roger Parker (Milan: Ricordi, 1995).
We might infer that this kind of approach to the *passaggio* area was perfectly consonant with the taste of Italian critics, as they had defined Caruso’s singing as natural and spontaneous well before this time (although not yet as ‘manly’). Would Procida, who complained of the lack of head voice in Caruso’s singing, have approved of it? This is hard to say, but what can be guessed is that the American critics would almost certainly have objected to it, if it is true that this kind of ‘white’ production was criticised by the end of 1903. Where the ‘sweet kisses and languid caresses’ are ‘white’, Caruso attempts the two ascents to the top a’s in a muscular fashion (see Example 5.2 combined with Excerpt 20 [https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-ii-1904](https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-ii-1904), and Example 5.3 with Excerpt 21 [https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-iii-1904](https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-iii-1904)).

![Example 5.2 Puccini, 'E lucevan le stelle', bars 198–200.](image)

![Example 5.3 Puccini, 'E lucevan le stelle', bars 208–209.](image)

It seems that he was seeking a way of releasing more vocal power, but without success; in 1904 Caruso the singer fails to match the intentions of Caruso the

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35 This again highlights the subjective nature of such attributes and judgements which are a matter of fashion and taste.
creative interpreter. He did not find a way to achieve an overall balance between breath support (appoggio), activation of the pharyngeal constrictors and lowering of the larynx (elongation of the vocal tract). Where the balance is realised and, so to say, the throat can finally follow the brain, is in the 1909 recording of this solo. Here, all fundamental elements of the singing mechanism come together, with different parts of the phonatory system cooperating harmoniously. The first phrase, ascending to the f¹ sharp, is now executed by dragging the heavier mechanism upwards (Excerpt 22 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-i-1909); moreover the runs to the top a’s are assertively covered. This total vocal consistency, as I defined it in Chapter 4, is revealed even more clearly when Caruso leaves the top notes. From these impressively wide and still top a’s, which fill the acoustic space like huge pillars of air, his descending sounds preserve the same ringing quality and ample resonance, sustained by a firm column of breath (Excerpts 23 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-1909-ii and 24 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-e-lucean-1909-iii). Because of his consummate command of breathing technique, we can also argue that Caruso has probably given up the over-energetic phrasing displayed in the previous recording (1904) that is not very eloquent in this dramatic context: after all, Cavaradossi expects to die within a few moments at this point of the drama.

II The finding of new balances: trial and error

On the subject of the evolution of Caruso’s breathing technique, Michael Aspinall offers an insightful hypothesis. He assumes that, while in the recordings of 1902 Caruso’s breathing is somehow instinctive and not fully controlled, in the phase 1904–1906/7 he practised intercostal respiration, the only kind of breathing which produces the effect of a sound ‘floating on the breath’.\(^{36}\) From 1908 onwards, Caruso departed from the breathing system of the old bel canto school and embraced so-called ‘abdominal breathing’. This would also be due to the fact that, after two bouts of throat surgery (in 1907 and 1909) for the removal of several nodules on both vocal cords, he lost the skill of modulating his voice in the mezza voce and in pianissimo effects.\(^{37}\) As was seen in Chapter 1, intercostal breathing was not only a defining element of the bel canto school, but was also Caruso’s own

\(^{36}\) Aspinall, op. cit. 247, 248.

\(^{37}\) Cesarini, Michael Aspinall in Gargano and Cesarini, Caruso, 247.
preferred breathing technique, as he himself stated in his short method, *The Art of Singing*.\(^{38}\) By 1908, according to Aspinall, Caruso would have shifted to abdominal breathing. It cannot be denied that comparison of a set of Caruso’s recordings made between 1907 and 1911 demonstrates several features which support Aspinall’s theory. The recordings whose analysis I suggest as revelatory of the shift in Caruso’s breathing technique during the period of his mature vocalism are ‘Vesti la giubba’ (1907) from Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci*, and ‘Celeste Aida’ (1908 and 1911) from Verdi’s *Aida*.

Caruso recorded ‘Celeste Aida’ six times (April and November 1902, 1904, 1906, 1908, 1911), and particularly clearly reveals a trend towards deepening the breathing support. In the 1908 recording, the connection of the voice with the breath flow seems to determine the entire technical organisation of the vocal production, as well as to occupy all of the singer’s mental space. Every time Caruso finishes a phrase, the background noise of a seemingly profound ‘hiccup’ can be heard, as the following excerpts demonstrate. (Excerpt 25 [https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-celeste-aida-i-1908](https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-celeste-aida-i-1908) offers a selection of these phrases, reproduced in Example 5.4).

\[\text{Example 5.4 Giuseppe Verdi, Aida, Romanza ‘Celeste Aida’, Act I, bars 27–32.}\(^{39}\)\]

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\(^{38}\) See Chapter 1, section II.1c

Although Caruso’s phrasing manifests an impressive vocal authority, the audible presence of a ‘living breath’ is disturbing and, in the long run, unnatural.\(^{40}\) In the recording made in 1911, where for the first and only time the recitative is also included, he tries to reduce the obtrusive presence of the breath. Although Caruso’s voice has become more dramatic, he is able partially to soften this ‘hiccup’ effect, which nevertheless is still present throughout the solo in this less accentuated form.

Excerpts 26 \(\text{https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-celeste-aida-ii-1908}\) and 27 \(\text{https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-celeste-aida-ii-1911}\) illustrate the patterns of the breath flow between the 1908 and 1911 recordings (see Example 5.5, the first excerpt is from the 1908 session whereas the second is extracted from that of 1911).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Example 5.5 Verdi, ‘Celeste Aida’, bars 50–63.}
\end{align*}
\]

My hypothesis is that in the years after 1906, Caruso experimented with different types of overall balance among the different parts of the vocal mechanism. In the specific case of the 1908 ‘Celeste Aida’ recording, for example, his attention is completely focused on a kind of lower *appoggio* that overcomes the other elements fundamental to singing, such as projection, *squillo*, and vertical elongation of the vocal tract.\(^{41}\) Consequently, as an extremely self-conscious technician – and apparently, we must infer, one who listened carefully to his own recordings – Caruso tries to adjust this overall balance in the recording of 1911. He does re-establish

\(^{40}\) The ‘hiccup’ effect is not atypical of today tenors’ phrasing, whereas it basically is absent in the recordings made by contemporary tenors of Caruso, such as Bonci and Zenatello, just to mention two names whose recordings will form the basis of this thesis.

\(^{41}\) The term *squillo* is difficult to translate into English; it indicates the ringing quality of the vocal timbre analogous to brass instruments. (The Italian verb *squillare* often refers to the sound of the trumpet or bells). Many English-speaker singing teachers refer to it as ‘twang’, see Janice Chapman, *Singing and Teaching Singing*, 97–99.
some proportions between *squillo* and *appoggio*, producing less enlarged middle and upper sounds. An example of this new endeavour is contained in the last section of the aria which prepares the final climax on the top *b♭* flat in a symmetrically organised score where the top *b♭* flat is both the point of departure and arrival (Example 5.6). The *b♭* flat from which Caruso descends in this 1911 recording is more ‘shiny’ and ‘slimmer’ than that contained in the 1908 recording, with marked attenuation of the ‘hiccup’ effect after *d¹*, following the descent *b♭* flat, *a¹*, *g¹*, *d¹*. The subsequent rise toward the *b♭* flat is kept open throughout, with the only exception of one *f¹* on the word *sol* in the first sequence of *un trono vicino al sol*, which is covered. The result of this procedure is the solid, ample ‘shining’ of the final *b♭* flat whose crescendo effect, nevertheless, is annoyingly spoiled at the very end of the note value by excessive breath pressure, applied to achieve the crescendo effect from *mf* to *ff* (Excerpts 28 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-celeste-aida-iii-1911 and 29 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-celeste-iii-1908 which are from the sessions of 1911 and 1908 respectively).

![Example 5.6 Verdi, 'Celeste Aida', bars 68–74.](image)

On the other hand, the effect of ‘voce che “galleggia sul fiato”’ (‘sound “floating on the breath”’), which Aspinall attributes to Caruso’s intercostal breathing, is still clearly perceptible in the 1907 recording of the *Pagliacci* solo – but also in the 1909 recording of ‘E lucevan le stelle’, as we have seen above. Here, again, the connection with the breath flow is so absolutely visceral and at one with Caruso’s voice that, whenever he descends from the top notes (the extreme ones are all *a’s* in these two scores) the breath seems materially to lead the lower sounds from one to another. Eloquent examples of this process are contained in two passages from ‘Vesti la giubba’:
1. In the final descending phrase ‘Ridi del duol’ which comes out of the long high-flying passage of ‘sul tuo amore infranto’ (Example 5.7, Excerpt 30 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-vesti-la-giubba-i-1909).

Example 5.7 Ruggero Leoncavallo, I Pagliacci, ‘Vesti la giubba’, Act I, Scene IV, bars 41–42.

Caruso’s legato is so magisterially sustained that the passage from pitch to pitch comes across as an uninterrupted flow of sound. The listener is unable to discern whether Caruso is even intentionally making portamentos (f¹–e¹ and e¹–c¹) or if the portamentos are simply a consequence of the way in which he sings legato.

2. The preceding phrase ‘e se Arlecchin t’invola Colombina’ (Example 5.8, Excerpt 31 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-vesti-la-giubba-ii-1909), where the smoothness of his vocal line peaks on the words ‘t’invola Colombina’. The portamento between e¹ (on the last syllable of invo-LA) and b (on the first syllable of CO-lombina) is, again, the consequence of a strenuous legato realised purely through the breath flow.

Example 5.8 Leoncavallo, ‘Vesti la giubba’, bars 16–23.

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43 In her thesis, Plack refers to something similar when she defines ‘passing portamento’ as the effect of a portamento almost in passing on slurred pair of notes which is produced by a singer ‘whose portamento di voce remains consistent’; see Plack, The Substance of Style, 65. Scott described ‘the perfection of the relationship between his legato and his portamento [as a] salient feature of his art ... It was crucial to his technique; it enabled his singing, one might say, to speak eloquently.’ The Great Caruso, 170.
As can be heard through listening to these recordings, in the years after 1906, Caruso continuously swapped between different combinations of abdominal and intercostal breathing, thus continually varying the dynamic interaction of the different parts of the vocal mechanism. This pattern is also confirmed by later recordings by Caruso (made in the period approximately 1911–1921). If an overall shift towards abdominal breathing and heavier registration choices is confirmed by the majority, many sections of solos and ensembles are still managed within the ‘floating on the breath’ singing system. This second decade of Caruso’s recording career could actually be subdivided into two further phases: from 1911 to 1914/1915 and from 1916 to 1920.

In the first sub-phase, the use of abdominal breathing and heavy registration is pervasive, as exemplified in recordings which include: ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ from *Elisir d’amore*, Leoncavallo’s ‘Musetta! O gioia della mia dimora! Testa adorata’ from *La bohème* (both recorded in 1911), the quartet ‘Bella figlia dell’amore’ from *Rigoletto* and the duet ‘O soave fanciulla’ from Puccini’s *La bohème* (both recorded in 1912), ‘Parmi veder le lacrime’ from *Rigoletto* and Mascagni’s ‘Addio alla madre’ from *Cavalleria rusticana* (both recorded in 1913), and the duets ‘Libiamo nei lieti calici’ from *La traviata* and ‘Sento uno forza indomita’ from Gomez’s *Il Guarany* (both recorded in 1914).\(^{44}\)

Recordings from after 1915 contain many sections which reveal the re-emergence of a less elongated vocal tract (and consequently a less lowered larynx and less widened pharynx) and an open timbre.\(^{45}\) I refer here to arias such as ‘Angelo casto e bel’ from Donizetti’s *Il Duca d’Alba* (1915), and ‘Ah la paterna mano’ from Verdi’s *I Lombardi*, ‘Je crois entendre encore’ from Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, ‘Vois ma misère hélas’ from Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila* (all dated 1916), the duet ‘Venti scudi!’ from *Elisir d’amore* with the baritone Giuseppe De Luca (1919), and ‘Deh ch’io ritorni’ from Meyerbeer’s *L’Africana* (1920).

\(^{44}\) I have listened to the majority of Caruso’s operatic numbers on original 78s made during this period and obvious reasons of word limit make it impossible for me to give further details about specific points of these recordings. The reader can listen to the easily available Naxos Historical volumes of the complete Caruso recordings, transferred to CDs by Ward Marston.

\(^{45}\) This does not mean that abdominal breathing and heavier registration have been *tutte court* abandoned, and they can be heard, instead, in many recordings made after 1915, such as Massenet’s ‘O souverain, o juge, o pere’ from *Le Cid* (1916), the songs ‘L’alba separa della luce l’ombra’ by Tosti (1917) and ‘Pietà Signore’ by Scarlatti (1918), and finally Halévy’s ‘Rachel! Quand du Seigneur la grâce tutélinaire’ from *La Juive* (1920).
The sheer variety of technical behaviours in three recordings of 1916 reveal the level of control that Caruso had acquired by this time over his entire mechanism. The recordings referred to are the solos ‘Je crois entendre encore’ from Les Pêcheurs de perles, ‘Vois ma misère hélas’ from Samson et Dalila (both recorded on the same session of the 7 December), and ‘O souverain, ô juge, ô père’ from Massenet’s Le Cid (5 February). Caruso’s choices seem to be determined by the specific characteristics of the vocal line with which he is presented each time. When dealing with the long cantilena-like phrases of ‘Je crois entendre encore’, where the vocal line permanently stretches around the passaggio area, he needs to sustain the lightness of the line throughout and, therefore, he primarily relies on the ‘floating on the breath’ singing. (Example 5.9 Excerpt 32 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-je-crois-entendre-encore).46

Example 5.9 Georges Bizet, Les Pêcheurs de perles, Romance ‘Je crois entendre encore’, Act I, numb. 2, 12–28.47

The solo from Le Cid, on the other hand, where a more declamatory style of singing produces a more fragmented vocal line, made of shorter phrases and continuous wide intervallic gaps, is fundamentally rooted in abdominal breathing. Here Caruso plays with registration in order to gain variety of accentuation; on the very first phrase of ‘O souverain, ô juge, ô père’, he continuously swaps between lighter and heavy registration, with the words ‘O souverain’ supported in light, ‘ô juge’ in heavy and ‘ô père’ again in light registration. (Example 5.10, Excerpt 33 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-le-cid-1916).

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46 He still switches towards a lower appoggio and a more elongated shape of the vocal tract when approaching the long a’s and b¹ flat.


Where the declamatory style is managed by relying on the heavy registration but escaping the uncomfortable side effects of deep abdominal breathing (namely the pervasive hiccup effect) is in the recording of Samson’s ‘Vois ma misère hélas’. This might be due to the middle-low *tessitura* of the solo (*g–f*) where top notes are briefly touched, such as an *a‘* flat reached in an ascending run, at the end of which the chorus promptly intervenes, and an *a‘* at another point (see Example 5.11). In both cases the hiccup effect connected to the deeper breathing system is greatly attenuated and barely audible ([Excerpt 34](https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-samson-1916)).

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Example 5.11, C. Saint-SAëNS, *Samson et Dalila*, 'Vois ma misère hélas', Act III,
Tableau 1, Scene 1, bars 55—64.⁴⁹

The period between 1904 and 1906/7 is vital, for it was then that Caruso built the core of his vocal technique. He found a way to direct his entire vocal mechanism solely through the breath, specifically, a more efficient elongation of the vocal tract with less expenditure of breath. This trial and error process was characterised by alternate phases of progress and drawbacks, as can also be witnessed from attentive reading of American reviews. In the above-mentioned article on the 1905 Met production of *Sonnambula* Aldrich wrote:

But it cannot be denied that he has recently done much to give his discriminating admirers uneasiness. He has been prone to let his voice fall into a throaty quality; his tones have sometimes sounded pinched. There has been more than suspicion of the ‘bleat’ that is generally associated with the idea of the Italian tenor of the lesser sort. In seeking for those exaggerated effects of pathos and tears and superhuman passion, he has not infrequently, and more frequently than he used to, cast to the winds all thought of tonal beauty, of that smoothness, purity, translucent clearness and warmth that are truly the distinguishing marks of his wonderful voice.50

And Henderson’s verdict on Caruso’s Enzo in Ponchielli’s *La Gioconda* was:

…the white voice is not a grace of song when it is overused, nor is a throaty quality of tone at any time desirable. Caruso is guilty of much whiteness and occasional throatiness.51

These criticisms might be explained in the light of Caruso’s full-length exploration of the heavy registration system of vocal production. His swapping between the extremes of throatiness, ‘white’ voice, pinched sound and bleat, might well be the result of faulty balances as he was experimenting along the way. After 1907, Caruso embarked on an ‘aesthetic journey’ in which he essentially dealt with matters of repertory choices and specific vocal characterisation as he progressively turned to the dramatic roles.52 Both phases (1904–1906/7 and after 1907) were critical to the creation of a homogeneous tone quality which gradually led to the idea of ‘total vocal

51 *The (New York) Sun*, 21 November 1905.
52 The development of a heavier vocalism was connected with Caruso’s being the voice of *verismo* on the one hand and the need of leaving up to the expectations created world-wide by his recordings on the other.
consistency’, something unconsciously embodying the concept of ‘modern’ and ‘masculine’ singing and increasingly vital to audiences and singers alike.53

III The ‘natural singing’ of Caruso: some preliminary conclusions

Homogeneous timbre and smooth line, though, came with a cost: the loss, or at least the greater attenuation of, nuanced singing with all its variety of phrasing and shading. For example, the messa di voce on the first a’ of ‘E lucevan le stelle’, which Caruso attempts in the recording of 1904, is lost in 1909 when the tenor’s top note is straightforwardly forte. (Excerpts 2 and 5). In Chapter 4, we saw that timbral differences between registers were considered as physiological phenomena, unavoidable and immanent within the tonal nature of each register mechanism. However, rather than being a limitation, this was perceived as a resource which allowed the skillful singer to access a wider palette of colours. In 1902 this is still apparently the case for Caruso. For example, in ‘Una furtiva lagrima’, Nemorino’s last solo in Donizetti’s Elisir d’amore – a lyric role that the tenor performed until the end of his career – the tonal quality of the notes below e’ flat is generally much darker and fuller than that of the passaggio notes (e’ flat/f’) and above. In some passages this is strikingly evident, such as in ’i palpiti’ (f’–c’ ) of the second verse, where c’ is much darker than f’ (Example 5.12, Excerpt 35 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-una-furtiva-i-1902).

Example 5.12 Gaetano Donizetti, Elisir d’amore, Romanza ‘Una furtiva lacrima’, II Act, 34–36.54

53 From the perspective of contemporary Western-classical song listeners, middle and late Caruso fixed the standard of operatic performance in the great opera houses for the reminder of the century. Post-Caruso tenors who performed his repertoire (or repertoires close to his) were all more or less indebted to Caruso’s creation of the archetypal ‘modern’ tenor.

54 Gaetano Donizetti, L’elisir d’amore, melodramma in two Acts, libretto by Felice Romani, vocal score (Milan: Ricordi, 2005).
Or, again, when he holds the long $f$ of ‘io vo’, which sounds rather light and colourless until Caruso finds a more round quality for the second $f$ of ‘m’a-ma’. The last $d'$ flat on the second syllable of ‘m’a-ma’, however, is again much fuller and darker than the $f$ on the first syllable of the word (Example 5.13, Excerpt 36 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-una-furtiva-ii-1902).


In other passages where the $f$'s and $e$'s flat are just passing sounds, such as in ‘invidiar sembrò’, Caruso shows that he can darken these pitches if he wants. Here the turn added on the last vowel of ‘invidiar’, which runs to $e'$ flat, is artfully executed in the lighter registration and the added notes ($c'$, $d'$ flat and $e'$ flat) certainly sound less dark than the lower tones for the word ‘sembrò’ (Example 5.14, Excerpt 37 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-una-furtiva-iii-1902).


In Chapter 4, discussing Caruso’s ‘Siciliana’, I observed the same tendency in the management of the passaggio area, with the timbral divide between phrases above and below the $c'$. However, this aspect of Caruso’s vocalism, which is potentially recognisable in every recording of the period preceding the year 1905, presents certain affinities with the registration characteristics of other voice types, among which contralto singers make a particularly striking case. Marco Beghelli and Raffaele Talmelli conducted a detailed joint study of contraltos, drawing the attention of scholars and more general readership to a number of quite striking recordings. The results of this research highlighted the fact that contraltos and mezzo-sopranos preserved a markedly different use of distinct vocal registers well into the twentieth century, with a ‘white’ and ‘fixed’ upper range resembling the timbral quality of a light
soprano, and chesty lower notes which sounded almost like those of a male voice. The authors take issue with the well-worn notion in historical musicology that by the 1830s the revolutionary transformation of the tenor vocal technique had taken place, with Duprez’s famous ‘invention’ of the high C (c¹) from the chest. Beghelli argues that in the case of the contralto vocal type, this transformation was actually delayed by several decades and took place around the turn of the twentieth century. But Caruso’s early recordings (from 1902 to 1905) attest to a markedly different use of registers, too. Nor does Caruso represent an isolated case. While it certainly cannot be denied that Duprez’s 1837 Parisian performances of Rossini’s Guillaume Tell signalled a crucial ‘moment’ in the development of modern tenor vocalism, I would suggest that this event marked only the beginning of a long-term process. Starting in the first half of the nineteenth century, this process was not completed before the first decade of the following century at the earliest.

My analysis of recordings made by contemporaries of Caruso, such as the tenors Alessandro Bonci (1870–1940) and Giovanni Zenatello (1876–1949) highlights those elements from which Caruso built a vocalism that before him simply had not existed. Using the words of the American composer Sidney Homer,

55 Marco Beghelli and Raffaele Talmelli, Ermafrodite armoniche. Il contralto nell’Ottocento (Varese: Zecchini, 2011), 91–93. For Beghelli, the tendency to smooth out the differences between registers was increasingly in evidence from the first decade of the twentieth century, when the upper range lost the fixed and white quality which contraltos used to produce these tones throughout the nineteenth century. Likewise, on the lower notes, contraltos avoided the recourse to their typical ‘masculine’ inflections, aiming at a more homogeneous vocal colour throughout the compass. Among the singers presented by the authors as examples of this process there are Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861–1936), Alice Cucini (1870–1949), Armida Parsi Pettinella (1868–1949), and Sigrid Onègin (1889–1943).

56 In recent years, scholars have largely questioned the narrative of Duprez suddenly performing the upper range of the tenor voice in a sort of extended chest register. See Micheal Lee Smith, “Adolphe Nourrit, Gilbert Duprez and the High C: The Influences of Operatic Plots, Culture, Language, Theater Design, and Growth of Orchestral Forces on the Development of the Operatic Tenor Vocal Production” (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, 2011), 8–25; John Potter, Tenor: History of a Voice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51, 53; Nicholas Clapton, Moreschi and the Voice of the Castrato (London: Haus Publishing, 2008), 50; John Potter and Neil Sorrell, A History of Singing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 117. Smith traced the Italian years of Duprez’s career and training, underlining his affiliation with the tenor Domenico Donzelli. Donzelli himself had started to develop a heavier system of voice production during the 1820s, to the point where Bellini seems to have refused him the role of Guadino in Il Pirata (1827). In a letter to Bellini, the Italian tenor stated that he could sustain the tones between c and g¹ in the chest register, and then he “had a further octave in head voice above that for ‘decoration’”, see Potter, Tenor, 50 and Injoon Yang, “The Castrati and the Aesthetics of Baroque Bel Canto Singing: Influences on the Romantic Tenor” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2008), 53, 54.

57 The tendency to develop a more even timbral consistency throughout the compass is detectable in all voice types at the turn of the twentieth century. Baritones, such as Titta Ruffo, Pasquale Amato and Giuseppe De Luca abandoned the so-called ‘high placement’ of the upper range in favour of more rounded, full-bodied middle and high notes, while sopranos of the like of Boninsegna, Tetrazzini and Carelli, although retaining the characteristic chesty colour of the lower notes, worked hard to smooth timbral differences between the middle and high ranges.
Before Caruso came I never heard a voice that even remotely resembled his. Since he came I have heard voice after voice, big and small, high and low, that suggested his, reminded me of it at times even forcibly.\textsuperscript{58}

In order to individuate the distinctive elements which account for the creation of this modern vocal archetype, I begin with a comparative analysis of Zenatello’s and Caruso’s recordings of ‘Vesti la giubba’ (\textit{I Pagliacci}) and ‘E lucevan le stelle’ (\textit{Tosca}), made in 1905 and 1912 by Zenatello, and in 1907 and 1909 by Caruso.\textsuperscript{59} Because the age gap between Zenatello (born in 1876) and Caruso (born in 1873) was just three years, I will not consider the aging factor when discussing these recordings, all made when the singers were in their prime.\textsuperscript{60}

The obvious element of the vocalism of Zenatello, which is immediately detectable in his 1905 recording of Canio’s solo, is a relatively high-laryngeal position: he avoids the complete lowering of the larynx. Zenatello possessed a dramatic voice; his career had begun as a baritone, and it was not earlier than March 1899 that he performed a tenor role (Canio) at the Teatro del Fondo in Naples.\textsuperscript{61} This was not a planned debut, as Zenatello was covering for the indisposed tenor, Sarcoli, in the production in which he had played, until then, the baritone role of Silvio. Zenatello approached registration (the equalisation of registers) within the traditional rules of the \textit{bel canto} school described in Chapter 4. Thus, his way of blending the various registers was based much more on the principle of ‘pulling down’ the middle register rather than ‘drawing up’ the chest register. His tonal quality in his recordings is similar to that which can be heard in recordings made by the robust tenor voices of the previous generations, such as Tamagno or Marconi, both born in the 1850s. These tenors achieved an even registration across the range by keeping the whole area around the \textit{passaggio} light and bright.\textsuperscript{62} They were

\textsuperscript{59} Sections of these recordings have already been considered for Caruso (see above).
\textsuperscript{60} Zenatello and Caruso were respectively 29 and 34 in the \textit{Pagliacci} recordings, while they were both 36 at the time of the \textit{Tosca} recordings.
\textsuperscript{61} Celletti, “Giovanni Zenatello”, in \textit{Le grandi voci}, 906. In the same season which, according to Tom Hutchinson and Clifford W. Williams, was hosted at the Teatro Mercadante and not the Teatro del Fondo, Zenatello sang the baritone roles of Lothario in Thomas’s \textit{Mignon}, Tonio in \textit{I Pagliacci} and Alfio in \textit{Cavalleria rusticana} (all of them at the Teatro Mercadante). After two months from his debut in a tenor’s role, he sang Manrico in Verdi’s \textit{Il Trovatore} (June, Teatro Mercadante), the title role in Gounod’s \textit{Faust} and Edgardo in Donizetti’s \textit{Lucia di Lammermoor}’s (both in August, Teatro Bellini, Naples). After this intense season he decided to take a break of a few months in order to refrain as a tenor under the guidance of Maestro Moratti in Milan. See Tom Hutchinson and Clifford Williams, “Giovanni Zenatello”, \textit{The Record Collector} 14 (1961–64), 100–143: 101, 102.
\textsuperscript{62} In Chapter 4, I defined this proceeding as ‘lighter registration’.
extremely careful whenever singing in this range because pre-verismo scores were far more abundant in high notes. Therefore, in that repertoire, exemplified by the operas of Verdi and Meyerbeer, they had to focus on keeping their weighty voices as light and ‘open’ as possible, in order to be ready for the sudden and frequent jumps to the upper range.63

This is exactly what happens with Zenatello when he is singing in the passaggio. The held $f'$ sharp which precedes the passage ‘Ridi Pagliaccio’ (written between $e'$ and $g'$, see Example 5.15), is sung with lighter registration and open timbre, which is exactly what Caruso did in his 1902 recording of ‘Vesti la giubba’ (Excerpts 38 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-vesti-la-giubba-i-1905, and 39 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-vesti-la-giubba-i-1902, first Zenatello then Caruso).


But by 1907, Caruso is covering his $f'$ sharp by drawing up the heavier registration. If in the 1902 recording the passage between $f'$ sharp and $g'$ is somehow nervously hurried – with the insertion of a ritual double acciaccatura between the exclamation ‘Ah’ and the syllable ‘ri’ of ‘ri-di’ – by 1907 the step $f'$ sharp–$g'$ is completely smoothed over and gives the listener an impression almost of singing in slow-motion (Excerpt 40 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/caruso-vesti-la-giubba-iii-1907). The difference with Zenatello is that a marked step effect is not audible in his recording as he projects the $g'$ and the $a'$ of

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63 Marconi’s freedom and easiness in reaching the upper notes struck J. H. Duval, while for De Schauensee the high placement of pre-verismo tenors’ upper range was the most distinctive characteristic of Marconi’s singing. See Michael E. Henstock’s liner notes accompanying the CD Symposium 1069, ‘Francesco Marconi, Antonio Cognani’, The Harold Wayne Collection vol. 2, 1989. By contrast, when Caruso strikes his top $b$ flat, the listener has the impression that such an explosive mass of sound could not be easily carried higher. A look at the short discography of Tamagno will reveal that the titles more often recorded were from Verdi’s Il Trovatore or Otello and Meyerbeer’s Gli Ugonotti or L’Africana, all rigorously sung in Italian.
the following bar from a higher placement, which rules out any maneuver of complete lowering of the larynx. Notwithstanding the fact that he avoids carrying up the heavier registration, producing a greater elongation of the vocal tract, Zenatello still obtains a satisfying tone quality due to the dramatic weight of his voice, wide and with plenty of squillo at the same time. That Zenatello’s elongation of the vocal tract is less accentuated than that of Caruso results not only from the quality of his \( f^1 \) sharp, \( g^\prime \)s and \( a^\prime \)s, but also from the way he realises the final portamentos on ‘Ridi del duol’ after the climax of the aria (see Example 5.7 above). Compared to Caruso’s phrasing of this passage, as seen above, Zenatello ‘spells out’ his portamentos, in the sense that they are the consequence of an expressive choice (Excerpt 41 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-vesti-la-giubba-ii-1905): he could, had he wanted to, have cut them off without damaging the effectiveness of his phrasing. By contrast, if Caruso had cut his, the effect would be extremely unnatural, as he would have had to interrupt the flow of the breath which inextricably carries those portamentos on the line of his legato. But this kind of line is, in turn, the consequence (and the cause) of an extreme elongation of the vocal tract achieved by the development of Caruso’s breathing system, as I demonstrated above (the deeper the breathing system, the more elongated the tract). In other words, legato, portamento and elongation of the vocal tract (covering) are the intertwined elements which interact through a specific breath management.

Other examples of Zenatello’s affiliation with the older-style registration of the pre-verismo singers are heard in his 1912 recording of ‘E lucevan le stelle’. Compared to the same sections analysed in Caruso’s 1909 recording (Examples 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3), Zenatello maintains the same lighter registration system that he already displayed in his recording of 1905, with the difference, here, that Cavaradossi is a role less congenial than Canio to this kind of registration. An analysis of the three points of the score already considered above for Caruso’s recording, shows that:

1. The phrase ‘Oh dolci baci, o languide carezze’ is executed with an open timbre, and the \( f^1 \) sharp, in order to be sung piano, is produced with the lighter registration (see Example 5.1 above, Excerpt 42 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-tosca-1912-i);

2. The first rise to \( a^\prime \) has a distinctly nasal quality, and the very top notes, deprived of sufficient elongation of the vocal tract, lack resonating space, resulting in a narrow
and harsh sound (see Example 5.2, Excerpt 43 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-tosca-1912-ii);

3. In the rising phrase ‘E non ho amato mai tanto la vita’, in order to find a lower laryngeal posture, Zenatello literally ‘digs into’ the tones while ascending, with an increasing effect of gliding between f⁰–g⁰ and g⁰–a⁰ (see Example 5.3, Excerpt 44 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-tosca-1912-iii). For all his efforts, Zenatello fails to achieve his goal, and the voice is trapped in a resonating space which is narrower than needed.

While the registration system to which Zenatello subscribes is not ideal for the core tessituras of either Cavaradossi or Canio, the emotional, psychological nature of these two characters accounts for the different degrees of credibility that he achieves in their portrayal. If Canio’s invectives may still be effectively delivered through the nervous energy of vibrant and bright high notes, Cavaradossi’s soft longing and elegiac tone in his last scene need that mellow, full-rounded suppleness which only Caruso with his broad, cantabile ‘floating on the breath’ could assure.

By contrast, the heroic roles of the late Romantic repertoire seem to be ideally suited to Zenatello’s registration-type. Reviewing Zenatello’s debut as Otello at the Manhattan Opera House in 1909, Henderson noted how the singer was endowed with ‘precisely the right kind of voice for this role – a hard, brilliant, pealing tenor with far-reaching high notes’.

We can form an idea of the ‘far-reaching’ quality of Zenatello’s high notes by listening to the Columbia 1912 recording of ‘Di quella pira’, (transposed down a tone), or the Fonotipia 1905 recording of ‘Celeste Aida’. In both solos the notes in the middle range are kept rigorously in the lighter registration, with an open and bright timbre. This tonal quality is blatant in Manrico’s athletic phrasing, which insists on the passaggio area, mainly between d’s and f’s given that the cabaletta is sung a tone lower than the original key in this recording (Example 5.16, Excerpt 45 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-pira-1912-i).

64 The review of Henderson refers to the performance of the 25th December 1908, according to Hutchinson and Williams, “Giovanni Zenatello”, 107.

The open singing is also noticeable in many of the *f’s* of Radames’ phrases built on arpeggios of F major, especially when the *f¹* is sung on an /ah/ vowel, given the fact that Zenatello generally avoids vowel modification (see Example 5.4 above, Excerpt 46 [https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-celeste-aida-i-1905](https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-celeste-aida-i-1905)). From this high placement Zenatello is able to produce comfortably his top notes (*b¹ flats* in these recordings) of which he also easily controls the volume (he generally attacks *mf* and subsequently increases to *ff*). Light registration of the middle-high range and volume control on high pitches are precisely the characteristics which he shares with the pre-*verismo* tenors. This way of approaching top notes is displayed in the leaps between *f¹* and *b¹ flat* in Manrico’s cabaletta and in the final leap *f¹–b¹ flat* of Radames’ solo. In the case of Manrico, he tunes the first of the two top *b¹ flats* presented in this severely cut recording, on a bright front vowel (/eh/ of te-co, Example 5.17 Excerpt 47 [https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-pira-1912-ii](https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-pira-1912-ii)) which is distinctly pronounced with total avoidance of vowel modification (see Chapter 4).


\(^{65}\) Giuseppe Verdi, *Il Trovatore*, opera in four Acts, libretto by Salvatore Cammarano, vocal score (Milan, Ricordi, 1974). The original key of the score is transposed down by a tone.
At the end of the solo, Zenatello reaches the second $b^1$ flat through a portamento ($f^1$–$b^1$ flat) realised on the back vowel /o/ (of the word ‘morrir’). Once he has reached the top note on the vowel /o/, Zenatello switches to the frontal vowel /ee/ with complete ease and increases the volume from $mf$ to $ff$. Again he avoids vowel modification with the connected rounding of the /ee/ vowel on the $b^1$ flat, a result which would be very difficult to achieve in a completely elongated vocal tract.66 (See Example 5.18, Excerpt 48 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-pira-1912-iii).

![Example 5.18 Verdi, ‘Di quella pira’, bars 136–138.](image)

As a result, Zenatello’s superbly precise diction makes the text perfectly intelligible and erases any trace of scooping in the attacks on the high tones (all features of the bel canto school of singing).67 In ‘Celeste Aida’s final passage leading to the top $b^1$ flat, Zenatello attacks the last ‘un tro-no’ with an open sound, suddenly covering the last syllable of ‘tro-no’. The following ‘vicino al sol’, after the breath, is again produced with an open timbre in order to avoid extreme covering of the $f$’s preceding the $b^1$ flat. This latter is the only note effectively darkened, again neatly reached without a complete lowering of the larynx, and in a $mf$ which is increased through a gradual crescendo to $ff$. (See Example 5.6 above, Excerpt 49 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/zenatello-celeste-aida-ii-1905). Recalling the adjectives used by Henderson, the ‘hard, brilliant and pealing’ quality of Zenatello’s vocalism is a consequence of his registration choices, for which the

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66 This is a way of proceeding to the high tones basically alien to and unreproducible by the majority of today’s tenors.

67 The ability to attack the tones neatly and precisely is one of the skills on which bel canto treatises insist the most. The kind of scooping audible in much of the late Caruso is essentially associated with his registration and his aiming at total vocal consistency.
options of rounding and darkening the voice are sacrificed to the penetrating power of ‘far-reaching’ tones.

Another characteristic aspect of Caruso’s vocalism is the continuous evolution which it underwent throughout his career. Although every singer obviously changes across the years for a number of reasons, which can be physiological, aesthetic, technical, stylistic or psychological, in the case of Caruso, this process is much more evident than in other contemporaries. For example, there is a gap of seven years between the two recordings by Zenatello which we just considered (1905 and 1912). Still, they do not show a substantial evolution of Zenatello’s vocalism in the way that the recordings of Caruso do, when analysed chronologically. A similar observation applies to the recordings made by Bonci, who started and ended his career as a light-lyric tenor. Bonci was three years older than Caruso and they shared a similar repertoire, particularly in the first phase of their careers, a fact which encouraged the press to foster a fictional antagonism between the two.\(^{68}\) While Bonci retained his roles and the typical traits of his vocalism consistently over the years, Caruso started his transformation into a dramatic tenor from 1907/1908 onwards. Ultimately, this process allowed him to cope with heavy roles, such as Saint-Saëns’ Samson, in *Samson et Dalila* (1915), Mascagni’s Flammen in *Lodoletta* (1917), Meyerbeer’s Jean in *Le Prophète* (1918), and Halévy’s Raul in *La Juive* (1919).\(^{69}\)

The notable lack of an evolutionary perspective in Bonci’s singing is revealed by examining the recordings of ‘Questa o quella’ from *Rigoletto* and ‘Spirto gentil’ from Donizetti’s *La Favorita* (both from 1905), and ‘Una furtiva lacrima’ from Donizetti’s *Elisir d’amore* (1912).\(^{70}\) In the 1905 recordings of ‘Spirto gentil’ and ‘Questa o quella’, Bonci does not sing any of his middle and upper tones with an open timbre.\(^{71}\) If the initial phrases of Fernando (*Favorita*), which orbit around the *passaggio* area, are produced with prevalence of heady tones, Bonci still manages a seemingly

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\(^{69}\) It is interesting to note that critics were very alert at Caruso’s changing vocalism. At the 1907/08 Met season, Caruso sang for the first time Manrico from Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*. In his review Henderson commented on ‘.. the robustness that he has of late cultivated…’, *The Sun*, 27 February 1908.

\(^{70}\) These are the same dates given for Zenatello but, Bonci being six years senior, his age at the time of these recordings was 35 and 42 respectively.

\(^{71}\) The 1905 Fonotipia recordings are the first recorded legacy of Bonci.
covered and rounded tonal quality (Example 5.19, Excerpt 50

Example 5.19 Gaetano Donizetti, La Favorita, ‘Spirto gentil’, IV Act, Coro, Recitativo e Romanza, bars 186–191.72

In ‘Questa o quella’, his Duke of Mantua (Rigoletto) fully projects tones in a virile style as demanded by his bursting masculinity – after all he is a supreme womaniser (Example 5.20, Excerpt 51 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/bonci-questa-o-quella-i-1905).

Example 5.20 Giuseppe Verdi, Rigoletto, ‘Questa o quella’, Act I, Scene I, bars 112–127.73

72 Gaetano Donizetti, La Favorita, opera in four Acts, versione ritmica italiana Fausto Broussard, piano score, edited by Rebecca Harris-Warrick (Milan: Ricordi, 2002).
It seems, therefore, that from its inception, Bonci’s system of vocal production displayed a ‘modern’ idea of registration, with a covered singing, completely deprived of open sounds and an *ad hoc* use of heady *mezze voci* for specific stylistic effects (such as in the case of *Favorita*). As he himself stated in an interview for the American magazine *The Etude*, his training with Felice Coen (a pupil of the baritone and singing teacher Enrico Delle Sedie) at the conservatoire of Pesaro consisted of two years without ever touching on the upper tones. Before dealing with them, Coen expected the range between c and g′ to be completely equalised and without any timbral difference between the lower notes and the upper fifth c⁵–g⁵.

It is worth speculating, though, to what extent Bonci’s covering is an effective elongation of the vocal tract, as it is heard in Caruso’s singing. In the case of Bonci, lack of both lowered larynx and effective activation of middle and upper constrictors are constantly audible. The obtrusive *vibrato*, which critics considered an intrinsic quality of Bonci’s voice (the characteristic ‘bleat’ of Italian tenors), is in reality the effect of an imbalance between the fundamental elements of voice production: breath support and elongation of the vocal tract. Bonci’s vibrato, therefore, leads the listener to question the effectiveness of his use of the heavier registration. For example, when Bonci ascends to the top of his range, such as in the case of Fernando’s c², he seems to be willing to draw up the middle register (Example 5.21, Excerpt 52 [https://tinyurl.com/y9z3dxwc](https://tinyurl.com/y9z3dxwc)).

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cresc._________________________rall.

lar - ve    d’a-mor    fug - gi - te    in    sie - me,
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75 Bonci recounts a telling anecdote on this topic. He arrived early to one of his lessons with Coen and the temptation of trying out his top notes was irresistible. He, therefore, went to the piano and softly sang the phrase leading to the high c² of Faust’s aria (Gounod) from the garden scene. Unexpectedly, at that moment Coen burst into the classroom, infuriated that his pupil had transgressed his command. ‘All sorts of abusive epithets did he hurl at me for daring to sing a high tone... I did not repeat the experiment, but waited until he gave me permission finally to sing the high tones’; see Bonci, “Lessons for Singers”, 587.
What casts doubt on the truly covered quality of Bonci’s sounds is the pervasive lack of space at the laryngeal and pharyngeal level (what a singing teacher would call a ‘not completely open throat’) which, moreover, spans his entire recording legacy. In the 1912 recording of ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ his attacks in the first two phrases of both the first and second verse are executed with a real mezza voce (Example 5.22, Excerpt 53 https://tinyurl.com/y7rka4ro).

Bonci does not exploit the head voice, but achieves his piano effects through breath pressure alone. Again, his sounds are deprived of sufficient pharyngeal space and laryngeal depth, and this situation becomes even more apparent when he ascends, for instance, to the a¹ of ‘di più non chiedo’ – which he adds to the score. (Example 5.23, Excerpt 54 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/bonci-una-furtiva-ii-1912).

If the concept of a ‘modern’ registration exemplified by the Bonci who covers his middle and upper range might seem doubtful, it surely cannot be applied to his phrasing and rubato, not to mention his use of fioriture and his diction. The idea of flexible tempos is so inextricably part of Bonci’s phrasing that the initial attacks of Nemorino’s introspective solo are held as if a fermata were written above them. While in the first two phrases the basic rhythmic pulse is almost completely slackened, from the third phrase (‘quelle festose giovani’) Bonci speeds up the
tempo, as the very concept of rubato suggests. Nevertheless, here he modifies the note values at will, to the point of introducing sounds where rests are written: ‘giovani’ is restricted to the note value of a crotchet and the attack on the following ‘in-’ of ‘invidiar’ is anticipated in the last quaver of the first beat (where the syllable ‘-ni’ of the word ‘giova-ni’ is written), while the tempo is slowed down again in a big allargando. (Example 5.24, Excerpt 55 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/bonci-una-furtiva-iii-1912).


Again, Bonci decorates the melodic line with a considerable quantity of fioriture, in the style of his bel canto predecessors.76 For example, his Nemorino sings an extended sequence of mixed acciaccaturas and appoggiaturas in ‘lo ve-do’ at the end of verse one, and adds an appoggiatura on ‘del suo bel cor sentir’ at bar 29 (Example 5.25, Excerpt 56 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/bonci-una-furtiva-iv-1912 and Example 5.26, Excerpt 57 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/bonci-una-furtiva-v-1912). In his Fernando, the doubling of all simple acciaccaturas in ‘Spirto gentil’ is the default procedure.


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Compared with the liquid phrasing of this 1912 Bonci recording of Nemorino, Caruso’s 1902 recording seems to have been conceived in a relatively strict tempo. If Caruso occasionally adds some fioriture or makes use of some heady mezze voci (especially in the final cadenza), his idea of tempo is nevertheless more rigorous and the many concessions he makes to rhythmic flexibility do not obscure the perception of a basic rhythmic pulse. What is important to underline here, though, is that I am not taking into consideration rubato, portamento, coloratura or diction as defining elements of style per se. When comparing these vocal elements in the singing of Bonci and Caruso – or in the singing of Caruso and Zenatello – this is in order to establish the extent to which all of these stylistic features were determined by the changing aesthetics of vocal registration. In other words, the specific manner in which pre-verismo singers conceived rubato, portamento, diction and coloratura was bound to be transformed and progressively disappear, because verismo singers – Caruso above all – were continuously working out the way of ‘drawing the heavier registration up’.

We have seen that in the earlier years of his career, Caruso struggled with his high notes and displayed obviously different colours in the different registers. The two elements are clearly connected, as he produced the middle-upper range in the lighter registration because this was the only way he was then able to reach top notes. For Caruso, therefore, the traditional route of lighter registration would have been an easier way out. Nevertheless, we must infer that he actually decided to embark on a different path, if it is true that, notwithstanding the timbral inequalities in his voice, his singing was considered more ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’ than that of both Bonci and De Lucia.77 The question, finally, is why Caruso sounded in that way; the answer is a complex one. In line with changing tastes during this dynamic era of operatic style at the turn of the century, timbral differences between registers were apparently acceptable as part of the idea of ‘spontaneous singing’. On the

77 The words of the critic who reviewed Iris in 1899 will be remembered. He compared Caruso’s ‘natural’ singing to those of both Borgatti and De Lucia whose singing was abusing of ‘falsi’ (falsetto).
other hand, the abuse of *falsetto* was criticised. The more plausible hypothesis is that Caruso was simply struggling with the issue of extending the baritonal quality of his first tenth (c–e¹) leading up to the upper register, as is also suggested by Melba’s comment, cited above. As was the rule in this era, Caruso was singing a contemporary repertoire (the older operas in which he sang dated back at most sixty years), including roles that he created on several occasions. He clearly had the right voice for this repertoire: his *morbidezza*, the full-rounded, dark timbre of the middle range, and the mellow and suave delicacy of the *mezze voci* all gave his singing the ‘carnal’ quality of a sensual and masculine type which so much appealed to the taste of his contemporaries. Bearing in mind that the *tessitura* of his contemporary roles was lower than that of the Verdi or Meyerbeer roles, some of which he also sang, as long as he could manage to pull the heavier registration (and the darker timbre) comfortably up to b¹ flat, he was safe.

In conclusion, the new conception of registration was completely at odds with the older style, with its extremely flexible tempos, frequent *fioriture*, endless diminuendos on high heady tones and neat vowel articulation. The complete equalisation of the vocal compass within a heavy registration implied an inevitable loss of both timbral variety and flexibility of the vocal mechanism. Reaching the top notes is harder from the elongated vocal tract favoured by Caruso than from the relatively higher laryngeal position of, for example, Zenatello. *Verismo* roles, on the other hand, encouraged heavy registration, as the use of high notes was not prevalent, and the most extreme pitches were almost always avoided: if b¹’s are rare for tenors in *verismo* opera, the top c² is practically absent, with only a few exceptions. The substance of ‘modernity’ lies, therefore, in this new way of achieving vocal registration: the process initiated in the 1830s with the creation of the Romantic tenor, is brought to its conclusion by Caruso, who defined a ‘modern’ type of singer. This type has since then set the bar of the international standard in mainstream operatic repertoire with a longevity which is probably unequalled in the history of western classical art song.
Chapter 6 Italian sopranos at the turn of the century

As we saw in Chapter 5, Caruso developed a personal ‘solution’ to the complex question of vocal registration, which turned out to be the key technical articulation of ‘modern’ singing. I suggested that the route chosen by Caruso was directed, on the one hand, by his particular vocal characteristics and, on the other, by the implications of specific elements of the ‘new repertoire’. Notwithstanding this somewhat singular case, the rise of verismo might be responsible for a more generalised adoption of heavier registrations, especially considering the general lowering of the tessituras and the relative paucity of extremely high notes in the new style of writing for the voice.

The examples of recordings made by sopranos such as Tetrazzini and Carelli examined in Chapter 4 show that these two Italian singers developed the ability to draw the heavier registration upwards. By contrast, Nellie Melba avoided this practice, or maybe she simply did not cultivate it.\(^1\) It is rather telling that Tetrazzini was not a verismo soprano; she mainly sang the old coloratura parts, with a few incursions into modern roles which were tried out and soon abandoned.\(^2\) Nevertheless Tetrazzini opted for registration choices which were not typical for sopranos trained in the older schools of the nineteenth century still connected to the bel canto tradition, whose unshakeable principle was bringing the lighter registration of the upper voice down into the middle range, rather than vice versa.\(^3\)

In this chapter I discuss three key elements of the verismo soprano’s vocalism:

1. the ‘new’ registrations of the second passaggio;
2. the habit of ‘whitening’ the voice quality, especially in the middle register;
3. the coexistence of two aesthetic ideals; one of timbral consistency, due to the adoption of heavier systems of registration, and the other of ‘timbral rupture’, connected instead with the use of ‘unmodulated’ chest voice and an exaggeratedly open middle register.

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1. In Chapter 4, I compared Carelli’s version of ‘Vissi d’arte’ with that of Melba. In the same chapter, the skill of dragging the heavier registration upwards was observed in Tetrazzini’s rendition of ‘Ah fors’ è lui’ from La Traviata, whereas Melba’s recording of the same aria displays the opposite tendency of pulling the lighter registration downwards.

2. Tetrazzini performed the role of Nedda from Leoncavallo’s I Pagliacci only once (in Warsaw in 1896), and both the leading roles in Puccini’s La bohème, with three performances of Musetta (1899, 1902, 1903) in St Petersburg, and one of Mimi in Havana, 1904. For a complete overview of the roles performed by Luisa Tetrazzini and a chronology of her appearances, see Charles Neilson Gattey, Luisa Tetrazzini, the Florentine Nightingale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 278–326.

3. The application to pre-verismo repertoires of verismo registration choices or, in other words, the making verista the non-verista repertoire, is also touched upon in Chapter 4.
In order to demonstrate that all of these elements were elaborated by verismo sopranos, I compare sets of recordings made by two authoritative exponents of the giovane scuola, Eugenia Burzio (1879–1922) and Emma Carelli (1877–1828), with those made by the pre-verismo soprano Celestina Boninsegna (1877–1947). In line with the general tenor of this thesis, which is an examination of the general shift in vocal registration at the turn of the twentieth century, these recordings reveal how Italian sopranos were articulating aesthetics of timbral consistency between the middle and upper ranges of their voices. In order to achieve this result, they experimented with alternative ways of blending vocal registers around the second passaggio.4

Nevertheless, the idea of ‘total vocal consistency’ (that is, the uniformity of vocal colour throughout the voice compass) was still far from being established, as it coexisted with an aesthetic of timbral variety, and even an openly ‘timbral rupture’. In effect, if preceding generations of sopranos had largely resorted to unmodulated chest voice for lower pitches, verismo sopranos variously applied a sort of ‘whitened’ voice inflection to the middle range of their compass.5 These features, which might arouse an impression of fragmented rather than varied singing to the ear of the contemporary listener, will constitute the specific object of my analysis in this chapter. The reasons for these vocal behaviours are complex and display how the principles of traditional vocal pedagogy and ‘new’ solutions elaborated by verismo singers are inextricably intertwined. I offer a whole new perspective on this intricate matter and, in line with my methodology, put recordings and pedagogical writings into dialogue from the (autoethnographic) singer’s perspective.

Before proceeding to close listening to these recordings, I must add a caveat. Because Italian sopranos born in the 1870s elaborated the method of blending middle and upper ranges to produce a more homogeneous tone quality as described above, the use of both unmodulated chest and ‘whitened’ voice (in, respectively, the lower and middle range) has the tendency to amplify changes in vocal colour. These, in turn, become even sharper and more obvious than the timbral changes which we hear, for instance, in sopranos of the previous generation, such as Adelina Patti, Marcella Sembrich or Nellie Melba, when they switch from the chest to the

4 Essentially pursuing a route not dissimilar from that followed by Caruso, as outlined in Chapter 5.
5 I use the term ‘whitened’ voice as the translation of the Italian negative notion of ‘canto sbiancato’ or ‘voce aperta’, literally ‘bleached singing’ or ‘open voice’. ‘White’ singing is rather thin and acidic. The contrasting idea of a balanced sound produced in a free vocal tract is expressed in Italian by the words ‘suono ben raccolto’ (‘well-collected sound’).
middle voice and vice versa. Notwithstanding this caveat, it is clear that so-called verismo sopranos developed a particular taste for singing notes lying in their middle range (f¹–e²) with an exaggeratedly open timbre, especially when these pitches were produced in the middle register. As we shall see, the habit of deliberately ‘opening’ middle tones within the vocal compass, which produces ‘whitened’ singing, was typical of both Burzio and Carelli, who were authentic verismo sopranos, whereas the pre-verismo soprano Boninsegna avoided this kind of vocal production.

I The verismo sopranos Eugenia Burzio and Emma Carelli

What exactly defines a verismo soprano? This appellation, which surely applies to both Eugenia Burzio and Emma Carelli, implies more than simply being associated with a specific repertoire or with the novelty of the ‘realistic’ singer-actress. In fact, the latter are the more obvious and extrinsic aspects associated with these singers, whereas the substance of their vocalism reflects more complex vocal-technical influences going back into the earlier nineteenth century.

Burzio and Carelli shared a similar path through life in that both had relatively short careers. Burzio formally retired in 1919 and her death shortly followed in 1922 when she was not even forty-three. Judging from her last Pathé and Phonodisc Mondial recordings, all dated between 1914 and 1916, her voice was at that time still in almost perfect condition, but the nervous illness from which she suffered led Burzio to abuse medications that eventually prompted kidney failure and her premature death. She spent three seasons at La Scala (1905/1906; 1906/1907;

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6 All of them were trained by teachers firmly associated with the bel canto tradition, such as Mathilde Marchesi and Francesco Lamperti. As Ward Marston notices, each of these sopranos resorted to the chest voice in low pitches (c¹–f¹ sharp). ‘The break between [chest and middle] registers – and they all had a break, even Melba – was proportionate to the size of [their] voice[s], and the intensity at which [their] repertoire demanded [the chest voice] be used’, see the liner notes of Celestina Boninsegna, GEMM CD 9980, Pavilion Records LTD, 1993.

7 As the recorded examples will show, a number of these notes, approximately from f¹ to b¹, were variously produced in the chest or middle register. It should also be recalled that, in Chapter 4, the three-register division adopted for the soprano voice was discussed. This division (consisting of a chest, a middle and a head register) was followed not only by the majority of nineteenth-century vocal pedagogues, but it has been adopted by contemporary voice science. See Chapter 4, section II.

8 Or not even forty, if 1882 is the accepted as her birth date as suggested by some sources.

9 Exceptionally little documentation exists on the life and career of Eugenia Burzio. The year 1882 given as her date of birth in the booklet published by the comune of Poirino, near Turin, Burzio’s birth town; see, Eugenia Burzio: tra romanticismo e verismo (Poirino: Assessorato per la cultura, 1982) is contradicted by sources that give 1879, such as Rodolfo Celletti, Le grandi voci, 104, and Stanley Henig in his liner notes to the CD for Symposium Record 1244, The Harold Wayne Collection vol. 37, 2000.
1911/1912). During the second season under the lead of Toscanini, Burzio revived *La Gioconda*, which had not been performed at La Scala for eighteen years due to the lack of a suitable soprano. In 1911 she was Puccini’s Minnie in the Italian premiere of *La Fanciulla del West* at the Costanzi theatre in Rome, again under the baton of Toscanini. These are the crucial points of her career, which flourished mainly within the borders of Italy, apart from appearances in a few South American venues, where first-rank Italian singers regularly appeared in this period, including Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Buenos Aires.

Carelli, meanwhile, retired in 1912 at the age of thirty-seven in order to take up her second career as impresario of the Costanzi theatre in Rome, which she directed for fourteen years, from 1912 until 1926. She inherited this position from her husband, Walter Mocchi who (like Mussolini) had been a fervent socialist journalist in the earlier part of his life. He subsequently moved into commercial business in South America, eventually becoming impresario of the Colón theatre in Buenos Aires; ultimately Mocchi became a fanatical supporter of the Duce. It is reasonable to infer that this many-talented husband did not play a proactive role in his wife’s career. Although she enjoyed an international stage career, singing in first-rank theatres in South America, Russia, Spain and Portugal, after her second and last La Scala season in 1900/1901, she was never able to secure a stable position within any of the major Italian theatres.

Just as their careers had been both brief and enclosed within similar geographical areas (which excluded the Anglo-Saxon regions), Burzio's and Carelli's vocal training also had many affinities. As was usual among singing teachers of the

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10 It is rumoured that this was the occasion of a second quarrel with Toscanini, the first being the stormy episode concerning *La forza del destino* at La Scala in 1907, on which see Lanfranco Rasponi’s *The Last of the Prima Donnas* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 190, 191. There is no evidence though, that Burzio was replaced by Carmen Melis in any of the Costanzi’s performances of *Fanciulla* as Celletti points out: see Celletti, “Eugenia Burzio”, in *Le grandi voci*, 105.

11 In 1926 the Fascist regime nationalised theatres and no role was offered to Carelli. By that date, though, the finances of the Costanzi were in deep deficit, owing to the combined effect of post-war crisis and changing conditions of the Italian system of operatic production. Keith Hardwick gives the figures for the Costanzi theatre; see “Emma Carelli”, *The Record Collector* 11 (1957), 172–183: 178.

12 Mocchi was involved in organising a general strike which spread throughout Italy in September 1904. The editor, publisher and impresario Eduardo Sonzogno was consequently forced to cancel his season at the Teatro Lirico in Milan, where Emma was to sing *Siberia*, the latest opera by Giordano, that had already premiered at La Scala on the 19th December 1903. Such was the misery that the strike caused many in Italy, and the determination of Mocchi in fomenting it, that Emma attempted to take her own life. The strike collapsed after four days and Emma, a woman of unremitting energy, recovered so promptly that she was able to sing her part in the rescheduled performance for the Lirico in October. Hardwich, “Emma Carelli”, 176.
previous eras, both Beniamino Carelli and Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, the teachers of Carelli and Burzio respectively, were composers whose outputs ranged from vocal exercises for singing methods and solfeggi to songs, and each played at least one instrument. Unlike many of their predecessors, though, they possessed detailed anatomic and scientific knowledge of the vocal mechanism, being up to date with the latest developments of voice science and acoustics.\(^{13}\) As with the majority of their contemporary colleagues, both Beniamino Carelli and Guagni-Benvenuti coped with the rapidly transforming reality of Italian opera of their day, adopting an ambivalent approach. On one hand, their life was spent grieving, perhaps at an unprecedented level in the history of singing, for what they perceived as the imminent and unavoidable dissolution of the ‘Art of Singing’, as they had inherited it from the previous century. This ‘Art’, originally defined as ‘bel canto’ by this generation of voice teachers, stood in opposition to the rising new repertoire which, from the 1860s, was clearly gaining momentum.

On the other hand, instead of writing vocal methods which could smooth the transition towards the ‘new’ declamatory style of singing, they strenuously fought against its affirmation. Perhaps the feeling of loss prompted by the end of the glorious Italian tradition of singing was ultimately unacceptable to them. In Chapter 1, I have already acknowledged the fundamental validity of their claims, when they insisted that the traditional studies of intervals, scales, coloratura, messa di voce and so forth needed to be maintained in vocal methods and in pupils’ training. Nevertheless, to these impressive traditional sets of esercizi and studi, they added almost nothing which could be useful to a singer trying to prepare a role in one of the new kinds of operas. Beniamino Carelli, who was Emma’s father and one of Italy’s prominent singing teachers (as noted in Chapter 1), strikingly exemplifies this paradoxical situation. Though some of the major singers who interpreted the roles in the ‘new’ operas were products of his school, Beniamino’s pedagogical writings demonstrate a strong continuity with the older Italian vocal tradition.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Beniamino Carelli quotes, among others, the writings of the physiologist Johann Müller, anatomist Heinrich August Wrisberg, as well as those of Manuel Garcia II, in La cronaca d’un respiro, 11, 21, 33; while Guagni-Benvenuti quotes extensively Mandl, in his L’odierna scuola di canto in Italia, 17–20.

\(^{14}\) Among the pupils of Beniamino Carelli, the baritone Pasquale Amato, whose ‘Prologo’ from Leoncavallo’s I Pagliacci I analysed in Chapter 4, must be remembered as an example of the ‘new’, lower-placed, many baritonal voices, which followed the aesthetic of ‘total timbral consistency’ as the concept defined in the same chapter. Among other celebrities trained at Beniamino’s school were Fernando De Lucia, Giannina Arangi-Lombardi, Francesco Maria Bonini, Maria Capuana, Riccardo Martin and Franco Lo Giudice. It also must be noticed that Beniamino’s
Beniamino Carelli still devoted the seven volumes of his vocal method (1898) to intonation, rhythm, *portamento*, agility and ornamentation. Among the many ideas that clearly highlight his direct link with the singing schools of the earlier part of the century (and, in some respects, with the previous century) were his scrupulous attention to intervallic intonation, *portamento* and trill. Beniamino claims that the intervals need to be conceptualised and practised from a purely horizontal, linear perspective rather than through their harmonic implications, and that the pupil must not be accompanied at the piano when studying them.\(^{15}\) Moreover, while Beniamino recommends practising graduated intervals (from the small ones, made of second and third, up to the eleventh) or diatonic and chromatic scales, he discourages the use of arpeggios in vocal exercises (‘pochi arpeggi’).\(^{16}\) *Portamento* is still conceived in its old meaning of ‘portare la voce’ (‘carry the voice’) from one pitch to another and is defined as follows:

> to carry the voice with a single timbre, neatly, without jerking, without gliding, without anticipating the following note; to form, finally, a chain of sound of the purest intonation, which preserves (allowing for the difference of colours between registers) the same vocal colour; [all this constitutes] the portamento, the fundament of the great Italian school.\(^{17}\)

The study of the trill is divided into three (out of the seven) volumes which, in stages, deal with the acquisition of this important technical skill. In the final phase of training, the trill is applied to the *messa di voce* and the scales, where it is executed on each single tone.\(^{18}\)

It would be unrealistic to think that Beniamino’s teaching did not influence his daughter’s vocal education. Notwithstanding the loving care and the efforts spent in shaping Emma’s vocalism on the model of the ‘classic’ *bel canto* parts, Emma

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compositions were rather ‘modern’ as compared to his vocal exercises. On Petrucci Music Library can be found two Neapolitan songs ‘Fa friddu’ and ‘Menella’ which offer clear exemplification of this ‘modernity’.

\(^{15}\) Carelli, *L’arte del canto*, 1: 2, 6.

\(^{16}\) Carelli, *La cronaca d’un respiro*, 87.

\(^{17}\) ‘Portar la voce con un solo timbro, nettamente, senza scosse, senza strascico, senza anticipare l’intonazione delle note successive; formare, in fine, una catena vocale d’intonazione purissima, la quale serbi (a parte la differenza dei registri) lo stesso colore vocale, costituisce il portamento, base della grande scuola italiana’, see Carelli, *L’arte del canto*, 2: 12.

\(^{18}\) See in Appendix A, Example 15, some exercises for the trill from Carelli, *L’arte del canto*, 5: 15, 16.
turned almost immediately to the ‘new’ roles. In some cases, she was the first interpreter of (and was renowned nationwide for) roles in operas which have long disappeared from the standard repertoire and are today completely forgotten, such as De Nardis’ Stella (1895), Floridia’s Colonia libera (1899) or Galeotti’s Anton (1900). At other times, although different singers gave the first performances of certain roles, it was Emma who became immediately associated with them in the audience’s imagination. This was the case for the title roles in Leoncavallo’s Zazà, Mascagni’s Iris and Giordano’s Fedora.

The contextual reading of Beniamino’s writings not only attests to the link between his teaching method and the bel canto tradition, but also highlights a certain hostility towards the contemporary repertoire and the demands it imposed on the singers. Like Guagni-Benvenuti, Beniamino was an advocate of the motto ‘let’s go back in order to go forward’, in both singing and composition. They claimed that in Italy there were plenty of reliable singing methods, good voices and capable teachers. That Italian vocal methods – with their sets of exercises, solfeggi and studi – were very valuable tools for the cultivation of the voice was a fact widely recognised. Nevertheless, since the middle of the nineteenth century, the teaching and learning of singing had progressively abandoned the ‘studì lunghi e severì’ (‘long and onerous studies’) which had constituted the basis of the pedagogical system for preceding generations. The new trend had been facilitated by the rise of ‘dramatic’

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19 Emma Carelli made her debut at the age of eighteen in Mercadante’s La Vestale (1895) and, shortly after, scored her first great success with the role of Romeo (written for mezzo-soprano) from Bellini’s I Capuleti e i Montecchi.

20 ‘Ed il pubblico romano che ormai non conosce una Iris senza la Carelli’, wrote the reviewer of the newspaper Italia, as quoted in Rivista teatrale melodrammatica 37/1695 (1899), 3.

21 The role of Zazà was first performed by Rosina Storchio, while Iris’ first interpreter was Ericlea Darclée. It was Giordano who apparently asked Carelli to sing the role of Fedora in Mantua immediately after that the first performances of the opera were given at the Teatro Lirico Milan with Gemma Bellincioni in the title role.

22 With the controversial booklet Torniamo a cantare (Let us go back to singing), he basically raised the same doubts regarding ‘modern’ operas which were shared by many vocal pedagogues of his age, a topic which has been treated in Chapter 3.

23 The reader will remember the similarity of this claim with that of Giuseppe Verdi seen in Chapter 2.

24 See Luigi Celentano, Intorno all’arte del cantare in Italia nel secolo decimomonaco (Naples: Stabilimento Tipografico Ghio, 1867), 18. On this point, Carelli, Guagni-Benvenuti and other Italian singing teachers of the period all recounted their version of the somehow legendary episode which happened between Porpora and Farinelli. Porpora gave to one of his students (Farinelli in some recounts and Caffarelli in others) a piece of manuscript paper containing a small number of exercises; these have been practised continuously for six or seven years by the pupil, either without ever singing a single musical phrase, or singing a very little actual music from time to time. After this time had passed, the discouraged pupil asked the teacher when he would be able to sing some proper music and, to his astonishment, the teacher declared that he was now ready to go and sing on stage as he had acquired the tools to become the greatest singer on earth.
music and the declamatory style which progressively replaced the embroidered vocal lines of the 'old' operas. For these the essential requirement was:

the patient search for the truest production of the sound, in which the held pitch or the messa di voce, that nourished and planted the most beautiful sound, also taught calm and deep breathing, sustaining and balanced breath.\(^{25}\)

As we have seen in Chapter 3, this aesthetic of the 'truly pure' vocal quality did not suit the changing tastes of turn-of-the-century audiences whose preference for a more realistic depiction of operatic characters, including the sound of their voices, had been especially encouraged by the rise of verismo. The 'pure' tone quality supported by vocal pedagogues largely resorted to the use of falsetto in order to widen the gamut of vocal colours or timbres, and produce the 'most exquisite modulations' ('le più squisite modulazioni').\(^{26}\) Such a tonal quality had been elaborated for a kind of music which, as vocal pedagogues themselves recognised, was not in pursuit of the 'sentimento drammatico' or, in other words, the true-to-life passion that the character was representing on stage. Therefore, the 'pure' tonal quality of bel canto was simply unsuitable to the new operatic characters for reasons which lay beyond the question of vocal power; they involved, instead, different qualities and characteristics in the vocal sound. Human passions needed to be embodied in the vocal colour, which might be velvety soft, ebulliently sensual, uncomfortably thin or edgy, plainly ugly, and so forth, depending on the dramatic situation ('sentimento drammatico'). This factor is crucial to understanding the reasons why singers such as Eugenia Burzio and Emma Carelli, trained in the bel canto tradition, constantly superimposed timbral inflections on that 'pure' vocal emission which they were clearly able to produce, as was recognised by contemporary commentators, and is audible in their recordings.\(^{27}\)

\(^{25}\) 'Dov'è la paziente ricerca della più vera emissione del suono, in cui la nota tenuta, o messa di voce, nell'atto che sceverava e piantava il più bel suono, insegnava la tranquilla e profonda respirazione, il sostegno ed equilibrio del fiato', Luigi Celentano as quoted in Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti, L'odierna scuola di canto in Italia, 29.

\(^{26}\) First Italian Conference of Music, Report of the V panel 'Singing' (Primo congresso italiano di musica, Relazione della V sezione Canto), 5.

\(^{27}\) In a collection of reviews on Carelli in the role of Iris, which the Rivista teatrale melodrammatica published in November 1899, the critic of the newspaper Fanfulla highlighted how her voice could produce tones of 'crystal limpidity' ('limpidezze cristalline') together with 'caresses, and tears, and smiles'; meanwhile the writer of the Neapolitan Pungolo Parlamentare defined her as a 'cantante squisita, intelgentissima, esperta di tutti i segreti dell'arte' ('exquisite singer, extremely clever and expert of every secret of the Art'). See Rivista Teatrale Melodramatica 37/1695 (1899), 3.
Eugenia Burzio is described by Celletti as a dramatic soprano who ‘fused the bel canto elements of the Romantic tradition with some of the most typical gestures of verismo’. Although this rather simplistic opinion cannot be endorsed by my thesis – as I am arguing that the way of achieving vocal registration in this period was in a process of complete transformation, put in motion by singers such as Burzio, and that therefore verismo, in my opinion, did not consist merely of exterior gestures, but rather in something much more radical, namely the birth of ‘modern’ singing – it sheds light on the background of a singer like Burzio, whose use of ‘modulazioni’ (the capacity of varying volume, timbres and colours at will), portamento and legato attest to her direct link with the singing pedagogy of the early nineteenth century.

In order to identify the characteristics which defined the verismo soprano, I have chosen to proceed in a particularly analytical manner. I follow the ‘standard’ nineteenth-century three-register division of the soprano voice: for each register I compare the sections of selected recordings which show the different vocal patterns of the singers considered in this chapter. Because Carelli and Boninsegna recorded very different operatic repertoires, there is a smaller number of recordings available with which to make comparisons between them. Nevertheless, it is possible to select two relevant arias which are common to all three singers: ‘Voi lo sapete’ from Cavalleria rusticana and ‘Suicidio’ from La Gioconda.

Il The chest voice
All recordings by Boninsegna, Burzio, and Carelli display what William Ashbrook has defined as ‘the emphatic use of the open chest voice’. They did not make any distinction between verismo, pre-verismo or Romantic opera: whatever the repertoire they were singing, their lower notes were invariably emitted in the chest register. As was already highlighted above, this specific feature was already typical in singers of the previous generation and the phonographic legacy of elderly sopranos displays the use of a pure chest register for lower tones. Here I refer particularly to the recordings made by Adelina Patti (b. 1843), Nellie Melba (b. 1861), Marcella Sembrich (b. 1858) and Emma Albani (b. 1847).

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28 ‘... la B. fuse gli aspetti belcantistici della tradizione romantica con alcuni dei più tipici moduli del verismo’, see Celletti, Le Grandi Voci, 106.
29 William Ashbrook’s liner notes in Verismo Soprano Eugenia Burzio. Complete Recorded Operatic Repertoire, Marston Record, CD 52020-2, 1999. In big and heavy dramatic voices the timbral shift between chest and middle registers is generally more evident than that audible in lighter ones.
30 Nor is the phenomenon limited to sopranos, as Beghelli and Talmelli demonstrates in the recorded examples which accompany their volume on the contralto voice.
Vocal treatises also seem to confirm the aural evidence. We saw in Chapter 4 that middle- and late-nineteenth-century treatises indicate a series of notes – between e' and f'/f' sharp – as the area of the soprano’s voice where the change-over between chest and middle register should be executed. In the same chapter I pointed out that earlier writers on singing, including Lodovico Zacconi, Giulio Caccini, Pier Francesco Tosi, Giambattista Mancini, and Domenico Corri considered the chest voice as the ‘natural voice’, tending to prefer it to the ‘feigned’ (falsetto or head) voice.

Most of these writers wrote with the baritone or castrato voice principally in mind, including Domenico Corri, who expressly states in *The Singer’s Preceptor* (1810):

> There are four sorts of Voices, Basso, Tenore, Contralto, and Soprano. The extent of the Natural Voice [chest voice] of either denomination, is in general no more than one octave and 2, 3 or 4 notes beyond…that part above the Natural is called the feigned or falsetto Voice, with which some effect of Pathos may be produced, but is not capable of energy: therefore the attention and practice of the Scholar ought to be chiefly to the attainment of as much of the Natural Voice as he can possibly acquire [my emphasis].

Corri not only affirms that the chest extends more than an octave into the soprano voice range, but he also encourages the scholar to attain the widest possible range in that register. Although he was referring to the male soprano, nineteenth-century voice teachers also insisted that female voices could also stretch the chest register high in the vocal compass. Beniamino Carelli, in particular, tells us that contraltos in his time used to carry the chest register up to c#‘con danno della voce e del buon gusto’ (‘offending against both their voices and good taste’), while mezzo-sopranos were guilty of the same abuse, reaching g' in the chest register.

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32 This exhortation recalls Virginia Boccadabati’s remark on the ideal extension of the chest register as being considered to be up to f' sharp noted in Chapter 4.
33 Both Manuel II García and Beniamino Carelli indicated the pitches between e#–d# as the range which is common to chest and falsetto (García-Paschke, *A Complete Treatise*, xlv) or to ‘first’ and ‘second’ registers (Carelli). Discussing this point, though, they meant to give an accurate observation of physiological realities and not to suggest that sopranos should carry the chest voice up to such altitudes. This is the limit around which contemporary pop belting techniques also extend the chest register (M1) for female voices; see Jo Estill, “Belting and Classical Voice Quality: Some Physiological Differences”, *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 3 (1988), 37–43.
34 Carelli, *L’Arte del canto*, 1: 11. Virginia Boccadabati also confirms this use of very extended chest register by the contraltos and mezzo-sopranos of her day, and recounts one of her memories as a teenager: in the presence of her mother Luigia, Marietta Alboni, one of Rossini’s favourite contraltos, was practising the union of first (chest) and second (head) register – for Alboni the
condemns this practice, and suggests that from e' the mechanism of the 'voce mista' (mixed voice, in which first and second registers operate together in various degrees of control, as explained in Chapter 4) should be regulating the passage between the first and second registers in female voices. It is startling, therefore, that his own daughter displays an exceptionally extended chest voice in her recordings. Such a wide chest voice range recalls the ideas expressed on the topic by Corri when discussing the male soprano almost a century before, rather than the recommendations of Emma's father. In her 1905 Pathé recording of Santuzza’s solo ‘Voi lo sapete’ from Cavalleria rusticana this use of the chest voice is particularly evident. In the lower-pitch sections of the opening phrases, on both ‘prima d’andar’ (f¹ sharp–b¹) and ‘aveva a Lola’ (f¹ sharp–a¹), Carelli keeps every sound rigorously in the chest register. (Example 6.1, Excerpt 58 https://tinyurl.com/ya36cld2).


This behaviour might have been inspired by the chesty resonances with which contraltos and mezzo-sopranos of this era coloured their lower notes. ³⁵ Nevertheless, Emma Carelli’s recourse to this kind of vocal production stood in open breach of the rules that her father, Beniamino, stipulated for the passaggio in his treatise. Compared to Carelli, even Boninsegna, whose chest voice is the most broad of the trio, sounds restrained, singing both sections within the middle register

registers were only two – using a specific vocalizzo. Alboni produced the last note of her chest register in mezza voce and bringing this delicate sound up to the first pitch of her head register, she then gradually increased the volume of this latter note. In the second part of the exercise, Alboni attacked the upper note pianissimo and descended to the lower note, applying legato while increasing the volume to a forte. See Boccadabati, Osservazioni pratiche per lo studio del canto, 12, 13. These kinds of exercises are not dissimilar to those that some singing teachers still make male singers practise today to strengthen the passaggio area.

³⁵ This practice of lower-voiced female singers has been exhaustively analysed by Marco Beghelli, (see Chapter 5). It would be reasonable to question whether the development of this kind of hybrid vocalism was related to the disappearance of male sopranos during the first half of the nineteenth century. Female singers could have chosen to deploy these characteristic chesty sounds in imitation of male sopranos’ extended chest voice. This perspective has received very little attention, with most scholars focusing almost exclusively on the link between the castrato and tenor voice; see Potter, Tenor: History of a Voice, 31–43; Micheal Lee Smith, “Adolphe Nourrit, Gilbert Duprez and the High C”; Jason Vest, “Adolphe Nourrit, Gilbert-Louis Duprez and Transformations of Tenor Technique in the Early Nineteenth Century: Historical and Pphysiological Considerations” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 2009).
(Example 6.1, Excerpt 59 [https://tinyurl.com/ybh52a9d]).\(^{36}\) This fact is all the more relevant when we consider that (the pre-verismo soprano) Boninsegna switched regularly from chest to middle register on \(f'/f\) sharp in accordance to the rules given by her teacher Virginia Boccabadati. On this premise, it seems reasonable to infer that Carelli was deviating from the traditional principles of ‘good’ singing and did so intentionally. In the case of Santuzza’s aria, she distorts the timbre that the voice would retain were it produced in the customary register for this kind of tessitura (the middle). Instead, Carelli pushes the chest register as high as \(b'\), which makes the voice sound forced and constrained, appropriately reflecting the emotional state of the character.\(^{37}\) In order to make this character credible on stage, or even on record, the ‘pure’ tonal quality of the bel canto tradition would have been most unsuitable, as Santuzza is not one of the idealised, angelic heroines of Romantic operas. She is, to borrow her own word, ‘scomunicata’ (excommunicated), a condition which, deeply rooted in Catholic morality, casts her out of the circle of respectable society in the little village where she lives.\(^{38}\) Therefore, Carelli does not pursue an ideal of tonal beauty; instead she exploits the chest voice for expressive purposes while avoiding any fixed technical procedure. For instance, the chest register emerges again as high as \(b'\) in ‘sposa’ at bar 24 (Example 6.2, Excerpt 60 [https://tinyurl.com/y6vejfew]), but in the following \(b’s\) on ‘rapito’, ‘mio’, ‘rimango’, Carelli always uses the middle register (Example 6.3, Excerpt 61 [https://tinyurl.com/y8hy5pjo]).

\[\text{Example 6.2 Mascagni, ‘Voi lo sapete’, bars 22–24.}\]

\(^{36}\) This recording is part of an Eterna LP which only indicates the range of years within which the transferred recordings were made. For the possible alternative dates in which this recording could actually have been made, see the Discography.

\(^{37}\) A victim of the chauvinist and aggressive society in which she has been raised, Santuzza is devoted by anxiety and oppressed by the belief of having brought shame on herself as a consequence of her ‘immoral’ actions – she slept with Turiddu without being married to him and, worse, he seems willing to leave her without rescuing her ‘honour’. ‘Turiddu mi tolse l’onore’ (‘Turiddu has robbed me of my honor’) sings Santuzza when she confronts Compar Alfio, the husband of Lola, whose affair with Turiddu will rapidly precipitate the catastrophic ending of the drama.

\(^{38}\) Santuzza forbids herself not only to enter the church where the Easter celebration is taking place, but also the house of Mamma Lucia, where she is invited in.
On the other hand, as we shall see shortly, Carelli applied this sort of over-extended chest voice even to arias whose *sentimento drammatico* does not justify or welcome a ‘distorted’ vocal quality, suggesting that this practice became, perhaps, a sort of stylistic signature that made the singer immediately identifiable by the audience.\(^{39}\)

Burzio, meanwhile, adopts a midway solution in her 1908 Fonotipia recording, keeping the first section (‘prima d’andar’) of Example 6.1 in strict middle register in common with Boninsegna, and adding more chesty resonances to the second (‘aveva a Lola’, Example 6.1, Excerpt 62 [https://tinyurl.com/ya4mfmce](https://tinyurl.com/ya4mfmce)).

Another example of this artful interplay between chest and middle register in the lower range of the soprano compass comes from Gioconda’s final aria ‘Suicidio’. In the 1906 recording made for Fonotipia, Carelli inextricably mixes chest and middle register throughout the phrase ‘In questi fieri momenti’. What is heard is a skillful use of the ‘mixed voice’ (*voce mista*) with chest and middle registers constantly gaining and releasing control over each other. If the first three *f♯* sharps (on the words ‘in questi fie-ri’) are produced by swiftly passing from one register to the other, the leap to *a♭* (on the word ‘fie-ri’) followed by the *g♯* sharps (on the syllables ‘mo-men-ti’) reveal again Carelli’s striking use of extended chest voice (Example 6.4, Excerpt 63 [https://tinyurl.com/y7hovc8w](https://tinyurl.com/y7hovc8w)): Carelli’s control over registration is highlighted by the close-interval structure of this phrase. If the vocal line proceeds by narrow intervals, concealing drastic changes of register is more difficult.

\(^{39}\) In the following section, we will see an example of this habit analysing Cilea’s aria ‘Io son l’umile ancilla’ from *Adriana Lecouvreur*. 
On the other hand, concealment is easier to achieve when the vocal line is built on broad leaps, such as in the following phrases of Gioconda’s aria. When leaps of descending whole octaves appear, the sudden changes between middle and chest registers can be more comfortably managed (Example 6.5, Excerpt 64 https://tinyurl.com/yargdwzf). Here, the sharp switching of registers is also justified by the dramatic context, as Gioconda is absorbed in dark thoughts, such as the idea that suicide may be the only escape from her situation.

Carelli’s exceptional degree of control over the lower passaggio is matched by Burzio. In attempting an analysis, I would suggest that Burzio’s registration varies as the vowels pass from one another.⁴¹ In Example 6.4, for instance, while the /ee/ vowels sit in the middle register, the /eh/ vowels of the diphthongs ‘que’ of ‘questi’ and ‘fie’ of ‘fieri’ display more pronounced chesty resonances and quality. After the leap to a’ on the second syllable of ‘fie-ri’ she passes to the middle register, from where she delivers the remaining section of the phrase (Excerpt 65 https://tinyurl.com/y76qjqfw).⁴² The comparison between Burzio and Boninsegna in

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⁴⁰ Amilcare Ponchielli, La Gioconda, opera in four Acts, libretto by Tobia Gorrio, vocal score, edited by Michele Saladino, (Milan: Ricordi, 1890).

⁴¹ Discussing the timbres of the voice, Beniamino Carelli claims that the vowels ‘I-A-U rappresentano tre tipi distinti di emissione; le altre due E ed O, non sono che intermediarie fra le prime accennate’ (‘I-A-U give way to three distinct types of vocal productions; the other two E and O, are just produced through the combination of the first three’), L’arte del canto, 1: 46. For ‘different types of vocal productions’ he meant that the student needed to be aware of the different mouth and tongue position in each of the principal vowels (I, A and U). From there, he instructed the pupil to produce clear (timbro chiaro) and dark colours (timbro scuro) alternatively on sequences of vowels (see ibid., 49–51).

⁴² This is a Pathé recording made between 1914 and 1916, with orchestra, matrix number 86424.
this passage highlights how the first singer retains a certain degree of timbral homogeneity in the passage between registers – while of the three, Carelli remains unparalleled in her ability to pass artfully from chest to middle register within an impressively wide portion of her middle range. In a 1909 Columbia recording, Boninsegna’s change of timbre as she passes from the chest to the middle register is so radical that the listener may have the impression of hearing two different singers. Boninsegna begins the phrase of Example 6.4 (‘In questi fieri momenti’) in the chest register and, like Burzio, she switches on the a’ to the middle register (Example 6.4, Excerpt 66 [https://tinyurl.com/y73egl4o]). What is different from Burzio, however, is that this a’ together with the next short g’ sharp (a semiquaver) sound weaker than both the previous f’ sharps and the following g’ sharp, which is set back in the chest register. Boninsegna’s habit of lingering on chest sounds produced at her maximum vocal power might explain the weakness of several middle notes audible in many recordings. Boninsegna herself considered these broad chest notes a distinguished element of her vocalism. ‘Erano la mia gloria’ (‘They were my glory’) she is said to have told to Max De Schauensee after having exemplified them in a phrase of the baritone character Amonasro in Aida (‘Dei Faroani tu sei la schiava’) with a tonal colour worthy of the vociferous Titta Ruffo. As seen above, this practice was related to the extensive use that contraltos and mezzo-sopranos made of chest voice, and gave way to what Beghelli has defined as ‘voce doppia’. This feature can be even better appreciated when sequences of leaps of an octave

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43 A phenomenon that Beghelli defines as ‘voce doppia’ (double voice), and associates with many famous singers of the nineteenth century, including Maria Malibran, Isabella Colbran and Giuditta Pasta, see Ermafrodite Armoniche, 8–17. In this book, the Italian laryngologists Paolo Paolillo and Franco Fussi contributed an interesting article which explains the dramatic shift in vocal colour between lower and upper range as being due to an ample and elastic crico-thyroid articulation (that determines a substantial change in the thickness of the vocal cords in low and high pitches), together with noticeable lowering and raising of the larynx inside the throat. Both these elements markedly modify the resonating space within the vocal tract; see Paolillo and Fussi, “L’aspetto fisiologico”, in Ermafrodite Armoniche, 169.

44 In Chapter 4, I showed that Mathilde Marchesi warned the pupil against the habit of reinforcing the higher tones of each register. This practice would render more difficult the smooth transition from these tones to the first notes of the subsequent register, which would inevitably sound much weaker. Similarly, Lablache recommended lightening the upper tones of each register and reinforcing the lower tones of the following one. For Lamperti, the habit of sopranos and contraltos of pushing respectively high and lower notes is the cause of weakness of the middle notes. See Lamperti, A Treatise on the Art of Singing, 12.

45 Max De Schauensee, “L’enigma della Boninsegna”, Il corriere della Grisi, accessed March 18, 2018, http://www.corgrisi.com/2017/06/enigma-della-boninsegna-seconda-parte/. According to De Schauensee, these events took place in Boninsegna’s Milanese apartment in the summer of 1937, long after the soprano’s retirement from the stage. They sang the duet from Tosca’s Act 1 together and he testifies that the voice of the sixty-year-old Boninsegna was still in almost perfect condition, apart from a certain forced emission and lack of roundness of the middle range.
appear, such as in Example 6.5 (Excerpts 67 https://tinyurl.com/y8mgtfpq and 68 https://tinyurl.com/ybewhman, first Boninsegna and then Burzio).

III The ‘excessively’ open middle register

The use of an exaggeratedly open middle register is an issue that needs to be distinguished from the question of the chest voice. Notwithstanding the individual vocal habits of each singer examined in this chapter, pre-verismo sopranos were unlikely to excessively open or whiten the sound produced in their middle register. The recording evidence highlights that this was a typical trait introduced by verismo sopranos, whose outcomes varied considerably, depending on the vocal weight of the singer who was resorting to this procedure. For instance, light voices such as Luisa Tetrazzini’s and, in the following generations, those of Lucrezia Bori (1887–1960), or Toti dal Monte (1893–1975) sound ‘infantile’ when adopting the ‘white’ inflection of the overly open middle register. This feature was instrumental in depicting the candour of supposedly fragile figures, such Puccini’s fifteen-year-old geisha, Cio Cio San in the preeminent rendition by dal Monte, or Mascagni’s Iris in the highly praised portrayal of Lucrezia Bori, just to mention two of the most famous examples. On the other hand, more heavy-weight voices cause only an impression of extreme timbral fragmentation when they whiten the middle register, due to the contrast between this colourlessly open sound and the natural warmth of their tonal quality. This practice gave way to the insurgence of an aesthetic of ‘timbral rupture’, which worked against the idea of total timbral consistency that (as mentioned at the outset of this chapter) was also cherished by verismo sopranos. In order to offer some aural evidence for what I am describing, I return to a comparative analysis of sections of Santuzza’s solo.

In the case of Boninsegna, if we exclude the unavoidable recourse to the chest register for the lowest notes, she generally maintains a consistent vocal colour throughout her middle range. Once the voice passes into the middle register, she avoids not only excessively open singing, but also sharply marked modification of the articulators (tongue, lips, soft palate, jaw, neck muscle) as she pronounces the different vowels. The line is managed within a rounded (arrotondata) but bright

46 Toti Dal Monte recorded the whole opera in 1939 with Beniamino Gigli as Pinkerton, under the baton of Oliviero De Fabritiis; while Lucrezia Bori made several recordings of the solos from Iris, ‘In pure stille’ and ‘Un di ero piccina’.
(chiara) tonal quality, to which Beniamino refers in his writings as ‘timbro rotondo chiaro’.\textsuperscript{47}

For instance, in the aria’s first line, ‘Voi lo sapete o mamma’, Boninsegna pursues a certain timbral homogeneity and, with the exception of an e\textsuperscript{♭} that is firmly in the chest, she keeps the same tonal quality on each different back and front vowel (Example 6.6, Excerpt 69 \url{https://tinyurl.com/ycupwudl}).\textsuperscript{48}

If we listen to Burzio’s and Carelli’s recordings of the same passage, a characteristic overly open sound is immediately audible on the /ah/ vowel of ‘mamma’, and the pattern is confirmed on the following /ah/’s of ‘d’andar’ (Example 6.6, Excerpts 70 \url{https://tinyurl.com/ya5gn922} and 71 \url{https://tinyurl.com/y9k88nt2}, first Burzio, then Carelli). In the upper part of the middle register (approximately $b^1$–$e^2$) this sort of ‘whitened’ singing elicits an impression of extremely fragmented phrasing. In ‘volle spegner la fiamma’ ($c^2$ sharp–$e^2$) Carelli’s voice sounds as sbiancata (bleached) as if she was almost belting (Example 6.7, Excerpt 72 \url{https://tinyurl.com/y989l4ks}).

Again, in ‘fiamma che gli bruciava il core’, Burzio blatantly whitens the /ah/ vowels of ‘fiamma’ and ‘bruciava’ (Example 6.7, Excerpt 73 \url{https://tinyurl.com/ya22op5v}). This pattern is repeated later, in the central section of the solo on the $b$’s and $d$’s of

\textsuperscript{47} Carelli, Cronaca d’un respiro, 47.
\textsuperscript{48} Clarity of diction (pronuncia) and exactness of inflection and accent were elements that Virginia Boccabadati considered as fundamental parts of vocal technique. She suggested that the teacher should repeatedly exemplify how to sing a musical phrase until the pupil could emulate it. See Boccabadati, Regole pratiche, 16.

In striking contrast, Boninsegna produces most of these sections of the upper middle range in an integrated ‘suono raccolto’ (‘well-collected sound’), with some exceptions in the middle section of the solo, where the extreme emotions of the character urge her to emphatically open some /a/ vowels or insert lots of sighs. (Examples 6.7 and 6.8, Excerpts 75 https://tinyurl.com/ycwjgeee and 76 https://tinyurl.com/ydhpv4y8). The ‘whitened singing’ of Carelli and Burzio can also be defined by a simple observation. When each singer uses this kind of colour and emission, the vowels lose their ‘natural’ quality which they retain in normal spoken language.50

The same traits are audible in Burzio’s and Boninsegna’s recordings of ‘Madre pietosa Vergine’ from Verdi’s La forza del destino made for Fonotipia in 1910 and the Gramophone & Typewriter Co. in 1906, respectively. On close inspection of bars 67, 69 and 70 of Example 6.9, it is clear that Burzio takes the vowels /eh/ and /ah/

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49 The final section does not make exception with ‘white singing’ on b² of ‘mio’, ‘rimango’.
50 This kind of singing is described by Italian singing pedagogues and critics as canto aperto, or sbiancato (literally ‘open’ or ‘whitened’ singing). In Italian, the expression suono aperto (‘open sound’) has, unlike in English, a negative qualification. When one sings aperto the smooth change of register on the passaggio areas becomes much harder. Meanwhile, in English ‘open singing’ has a positive connotation that describes an open throat and expanded pharyngeal cavity. It is necessary, therefore, to be aware of possible misconceptions that the translation of ‘open sound’ or ‘open singing’ might bring into this discussion.
of ‘Vergine’, ‘peccato’ and ‘quell’ingrato’ at first respecting their natural phonetical sound and almost immediately flaring it into a colourless and whitened quality, ‘creating the sensation that she was smiling – or, more likely, grimacing – as she sang’ (Excerpt 77 https://tinyurl.com/ycad8wny).

Boninsegna’s phrasing, once again, ignores such alterations of the Italian vowels’ phonetical values (Excerpt 78 https://tinyurl.com/y9b6h6a8).

Carelli, who recorded only one aria by Verdi (Aida’s ‘Ritorna vincitor’, Pathé 1905), offers a lesson in ‘whitened’ singing in her 1906 recording of Adriana’s ‘Io son l’umile ancilla’, one of the most lyrical pieces ever written by Cilea. It is interesting to notice that Carelli applies the ‘whitened’ tone to the middle sounds only when they do not precede higher notes. In the following phrase, where the $d^2$ is the starting note for a passage rising to $g^2$ flat (‘l’eco del’), she avoids whitening the sounds of the upper middle register, at least until the pitch rises (Example 6.10, Excerpt 79 https://tinyurl.com/y8y6rac3).


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52 Giuseppe Verdi, La forza del destino, melodramma in four Acts, libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, vocal score, edited by Mario Parenti (Milan: Ricordi, 1989).
In this region of the voice, Carelli needs covered sounds as she manages the second passaggio following a system of heavier registration, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This reasoning is also confirmed by the next descending phrase (from \( f^2 \) flat to \( a^1 \) flat) where she excessively opens the \( e^1 \) flats of ‘fragile’ – especially striking the vowel /ah/ on the first syllable – which are directed towards the lower middle register (Example 6.11, Excerpt 80 https://tinyurl.com/ybr9ddfb).


In her 1914 Columbia recording, Burzio follows Carelli’s technique with ‘white’ middle register sounds that are produced at times by even more marked flaring of the vowels, as in the descending section of ‘l’eco del drama u-man’ on the \( c^2 \) flat, and in ‘il fragile’ on the \( e^2 \) flats (Examples 6.10 and 6.11, Excerpt 81 https://soundcloud.com/user-872915847/burzio-adriana-i).

The recordings of La Gioconda already considered in the section devoted to the chest register confirm the different patterns followed in the management of the middle register by Carelli and Burzio on one side, and Boninsegna on the other. Each of the middle range sections sung in the middle register highlighted in the Examples 6.12 and 6.13 (‘Ultima voce del mio destino’, ‘E un di leggiadre’) are sung by Burzio and Carelli in what we can now identify as the typical verismo fashion of ‘white’ singing and altered phonetic quality of the vowels.

Burzio, in particular, excessively opens the /ah/ in ‘ultima’, the /eh/ of ‘voce’ and ‘del’ (Example 6.12, Excerpt 82 https://tinyurl.com/ya8q6wf2), and again the /ah/ and /eh/ of ‘leggiadre’ (Example 6.13, Excerpt 83 https://tinyurl.com/y9carw27), whereas Carelli whitens the /ah/ in ‘ultima’, several vowels of ‘mio destino’ (Example 6.12, Excerpt 84 https://tinyurl.com/y7ttjzm), as well as the /ah/ of ‘leggiadre’ (Example 6.13, Excerpt 85 https://tinyurl.com/y7j35tv5).

As in other examples presented above, even in this instance Boninsegna displays a more composed phrasing than the other two singers. In these middle-range sections, she plays more on a feeling of detachment from life than on the neurotic desperation that characterises the over-the-top emotionalism of the two verismo singers. As a result, Boninsegna once again reveals that she remained profoundly rooted to bel canto in the substance of her vocalism: the different vowels are blended in a homogeneous colour within the limits of their specific phonetical values (Examples 6.12 and 6.13, Excerpts 86 https://tinyurl.com/ycdlpre and 87 https://tinyurl.com/y86y22zu).

IV The upper register

More complex questions arise from those sections of the recordings by these three singers which involve use of the upper register. Trained in an age when the three-register division had become a firmly established doctrine in the education of the soprano voice, Boninsegna, Carelli and Burzio present noticeably different approaches to high notes. According to the vocal pedagogy of their era, they were ‘supposed’ to switch to the head register ideally between e² and f². Already in 1865 Francesco Lamperti, who considered e² to be the note at which the soprano had to pass to the head register, blamed the writing of ‘modern’ composers as the major factor responsible for the extension upwards of the middle register in the soprano voice. Lamperti considered the habit of drawing the middle register upwards greatly detrimental not only for the student but also for the professional singer. In the preface to his 1865 edition of the *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del
canto, he recounts an anecdote about one of his most distinguished students, Sophie Lowe (1815–1866), for whom Donizetti wrote Maria Padilla. Signora Lowe, who during her career performed dramatic operas written in the ‘modern’ style, was once visited by her old teacher Lamperti at the theatre La Fenice in Venice. He tried to get her to sing the cadenza from the Maria Padilla which many years before had gained Lowe great acclaim at La Scala. Apparently, after the vocal exertions caused by the declamatory style of the ‘new’ operas, Lowe’s throat had lost any flexibility, and she was unable to sing even a single bar from the famous cadenza.54

Later in the century, the position of most singing teachers concerning the pitch at which sopranos should pass from middle to head register did not change substantially.55 In Chapter 4, nevertheless, we had a glimpse of the ‘new’ ways in which Italian sopranos, trained in that very tradition, were approaching the second passaggio.

Boninsegna, for instance, does not blend middle and upper range in the way that Virginia Boccabadati seems to outline in her short guide. An appreciation of the direct link Boccabadati made with castrato singing technique is necessary in order to understand to what extent Boninsegna deviated from the rules of ‘good vocal registration’, imparted by her teacher, according to the long bel canto tradition.56 In effect, Boninsegna could switch to the head register on notes as low as F² but she rarely sang climatic top notes using this register. However, as we shall shortly see, the approach of Boninsegna to top notes avoids a radical subversion of the old-fashion procedure of blending middle and upper range, in the way that Burzio and Carelli did. This very element could explain why Boninsegna, unlike her colleagues examined in this chapter (who, though, on the whole had more successful careers than her both within and outside the national borders), was invited to sing in the United States (Metropolitan and Boston opera houses) and at Covent Garden.57 We could deduce a number of reasons why her vocalism was more appealing to Anglo-

54 Francesco Lamperti, Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto (Milano: Ricordi, 1865), Prefazione vii.
55 See Chapter 4 for the opinions of both Boccabadati and Shakespeare.
56 I remind the reader that Virginia’s mother, Luigia Boccabadati, was a pupil of the castrato Pacchiarotti.
57 Boninsegna was in London twice, for the autumn seasons of 1904 and 1905, receiving praise from the critics. Then she had a disappointing 1905/06 season at the Metropolitan Opera House, where she only performed the role of Aida (three times with a stellar cast composed by Caruso, Stracciari, Kirkby-Lunn and Plançon) and sang at two concerts. In 1909/10, Boninsegna spent an entire season with the Boston opera company, singing seven roles in Les Huguenots, Il Trovatore, La Gioconda, Mefistofele, Aida, Cavalleria Rusticana and Tosca. Notwithstanding the great acclaim received from both critics and audiences, Boninsegna was never to perform again at the Boston opera house.
Saxon audiences than those of her Italian verismo colleagues. The bright quality of her broad voice, the well-composed phrasing and balanced management of the vocal line (at least in the middle and upper range and in an age when the chest voice was still not frowned severely upon), and the relatively higher-placement of her top notes, were all characteristics which exerted (and to some extent still exert) a considerable fascination for audiences of the English speaking world. Differently nuanced, these features may have recalled the singing of Melba, Farrar, Alda and the many other prima donna favourites at the Metropolitan and Covent Garden. Even so, Boninsegna failed to win the lasting favour of these audiences, apparently because of an alleged lack of acting skills and personal glamour. Not only her vocal style, but also her aesthetic vision of the singer as a stage artist was considered ‘old-fashioned’. The gramophone recordings collector Leo Riemens suggested that ‘she was essentially a 19th-century artist lost in an unappreciative period’, namely the period of verismo, when good acting was demanded and expected by both the public and press.\(^5\) The baritone Riccardo Stracciari, who sang (in the role of Amonasro) with Boninsegna at her Aida Metropolitan debut commented:

> She had no charm, no elegance of person and when she appeared… her ample form swathed in chocolate-colored underwear, the New York public and critics would not forgive her, despite a voice which was unique in this role.\(^6\)

The unflattering review signed by Sylvester Rawlings, the critic present at her Aida debut, seems to confirm Stracciari’s view:

> She was a veritable topsy to look upon with kinky hair, her rolling eyes displaying wide expanses of white, her plain dresses and slavish demeanor; there was not a trace in her of kingly descent. How, one thought, could Rhadames prefer her to the princess?\(^7\)

However, there were reviews which recount a completely different view of the performance Boninsegna gave of Aida that night of the 21st of December 1905:

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\(^5\) Quoted in Clifford Williams, John B. Richards, “Celestina Boninsegna”, The Record Collector 12, (1958), 4–33: 13. Riemens also remarked that “singers steeped in Puccini and the other “moderns” were the successful ones, unavoidably referring to the names of Caruso, Farrar, Burzio, Labia, Destinn, Cavalleri and Muratore.


\(^7\) Quoted in Clifford Williams, John B. Richards, “Celestina Boninsegna”, 9.
Mme. Boninsegna disclosed powers that will make her a welcome and important addition to the company. Her voice is an agreeable and well controlled soprano, with an uncommonly rich and strong lower register which is not, however, well equalized with the middle and upper ranges of her voice. She sang the music with fervor and a dramatic accent, and she sang in tune. Her acting is well schooled and experienced, and there were not a few moments in it of strong and poignant tragic power.\(^{61}\)

Other reviewers almost unanimously outlined the oddity of Boninsegna’s make-up and costumes, strengthening the argument that her naive and inelegant look, at a time when Emma Eames was commissioning her costumes from the expensive and stylish House of Worth in Paris, and beautiful women such as Lina Cavalieri and Geraldine Farrar were appearing on the stage of the Metropolitan, ensured an unfavourable first impression which she never overcame.\(^{62}\) Rather than making a long digression into the American reception of Boninsegna, though, it is perhaps a comparative analysis of her treatment of the upper range with that of Burzio and Carelli which can shed light on the crucial element that made Boninsegna’s singing particularly appealing to some of the American and English audiences, whatever they may have thought of the visual impression she made on stage.

**IV.1 A comparative analysis**

In the role of Santuzza, Mascagni avoids the extreme high notes of the soprano range while restraining the *tessitura* within the middle range: these two characteristics allow all female voice types from lyric sopranos to mezzo-sopranos to sing the role comfortably. Here I focus on three moments in the aria that describe the passage into the upper range: the two progressive rises to a\(^2\)s and the jump to g\(^2\) (Examples 6.14, 6.15 and 6.16). As can be observed, these notes are not normally considered as the extreme ‘top’ for the soprano voice.

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\(^{61}\) W. R. Moran, “Celestina Boninsegna in the United States”, *The Record Collector* 12 (1960), 167–184: 268. In ‘an effort worthy of Sherlock Holmes’ skills’ (as he himself described his investigation), Moran collected all the available reviews from the night of Boninsegna’s Met debut. The one quoted here is by the critic of The New York Times.

\(^{62}\) See William Ashbrook’s liner notes to GEMM CD9980, Pavilion Records LTD, 1993. Right at the beginning of his liner notes, Ashbrook paraphrases the content of a conversation with the record collector Max De Schauensee commenting on ‘how the spectacle of Boninsegna in a wrinkled khaki body-stocking… convinced the then formidable social arbiters of New York that the debutante was a vulgarian’.
Boninsegna approaches all the three sections by avoiding either an extreme elongation of the vocal tract or switching into the head register (Excerpts 88 https://tinyurl.com/ybqytuhh, 89 https://tinyurl.com/y87ko9gf, 90 https://tinyurl.com/y9wn9nhz). She produces the middle-range pitches (those between $c^2$ and $f^2$ sharp) in the middle register and extends their tonal quality up to the top notes. These latter, compared with the preceding notes in the middle register, do not acquire the lighter timbre that I pointed out as being characteristic in Melba’s upper range, who, as I showed in Chapter 4, switches to the head register above

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63 This is again an example of Beniamino Carelli’s *timbro rotondo chiaro*. 
*e*², rather than using a darker colour. Likewise, Boninsegna does not resort to marked vowel modification but, as already shown when discussing her middle register, she sings /ah/ and /ee/ vowels on top *a*²s and *g*² within the *timbro rotondo chiaro*.⁶⁴

Compared to Boninsegna, Carelli and Burzio hit the top *a*²s from a lower laryngeal position and, therefore, their top notes acquire that darker, fuller quality that fills the acoustic space, familiar to contemporary listeners when listening to the professionally trained operatic voice. Example 6.14, Excerpts 91 [https://tinyurl.com/yccfl2ar](https://tinyurl.com/yccfl2ar) and 92 [https://tinyurl.com/y9fgtf78](https://tinyurl.com/y9fgtf78), and Example 6.16, Excerpts 93 [https://tinyurl.com/y9c6gl9g](https://tinyurl.com/y9c6gl9g) and 94 [https://tinyurl.com/yc52ts5z](https://tinyurl.com/yc52ts5z) (the first excerpt is always by Carelli and the second by Burzio). This effect bears no relationship to the ‘whitened’ singing that I showed had been widely adopted by *verismo* sopranos. Both Carelli and Burzio were extremely careful not to open up their middle notes too far when ascending to the upper range.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is not the variation in tonal quality, from the ‘whitened’ voice of the middle notes to the covered singing of the upper range that creates the effect of darker top notes; rather, they sound darker as a consequence of the complete lowering of the larynx with a simultaneous extreme elongation of the vocal tract. This feature is perhaps the crucial element which explains Boninsegna’s midway position between the older schools of mid-nineteenth century, still connected to the *bel canto* tradition, and what comes after. She certainly draws heavier registration upwards, but her laryngeal position is relatively higher than that of either Burzio or Carelli. Making a rough-and-ready parallel with the tenor voice, Boninsegna compares with Zena tenor as Burzio and Carelli with Caruso.

Correspondingly, the *verismo* style of both Burzio and Carelli is essentially connected to this ‘new’ and increasingly prevalent practice of fully extending the vocal tract. This technical maneuver enhances the sound of the soprano voice, giving the impression of muscular and more powerful singing which was also emerging as an ideal for the tenor voice at around the same time. Of the two, Burzio is the one who more consistently practises lowering of the larynx, combining it with

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⁶⁴ I explored the concept of vowel modification in Chapter 4. The adoption of the *timbro rotondo chiaro* (rounded-clear timbre) explains why Boninsegna does not need to modify the /ee/ and /ah/vowels in diphthongs such as ee/u or ah/u.

⁶⁵ This is examined further below.
vowel modification. In her La Gioconda recording she clearly produces inter-vowel sounds on all top notes (Example 6.17, Excerpt 95 https://tinyurl.com/y6u6a5jn).

A mixed o/u vowel is constantly audible behind the /ah/ vowel of ‘infausta’ and /eh/ vowel of ‘febbre’, both on g² sharp. Carelli, by contrast, appears not to have favoured vowel modification. Both her solo recordings from La Gioconda and Adriana Lecouvreur show that she keeps her front vowels crisp, if not pinched. In the same sections of the La Gioconda aria examined in the case of Burzio (Example 6.17), Carelli does not even attempt to round the /eh/ and /ah/ vowels (Excerpt 96 https://tinyurl.com/yacmnnpg). In Adriana’s aria the /eh/ vowel of ‘atrocce’ on the ff a² flat is so pinched and tightened that the climax so splendidly built in the previous two bars is completely spoiled (Example 6.18, Excerpt 97 https://tinyurl.com/y7zn4sor). This effect is a consequence of Carelli’s specific vowel registration.

As Sundberg explains, the phenomenon of vowel modification depends on the acoustic principle that vowels have their own formant frequency combinations. These are determined by the specific length and shape that the vocal tract takes

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66 As discussed in Chapter 4, vowel modification is functional to the elongation of the vocal tract and the achievement of a smooth transition between registers.

67 Carelli sounds half a tone higher in this section of the recording, whereas she is perfectly at pitch at the beginning of the solo. This is an example of variation in speed which could occur during the cutting of the recording itself, a topic discussed in Chapter 1, section II.2.
when the different vowel sounds are formed (so-called area function).

When the first formant frequency of the vowel is lower than the phonation frequency, the first formant is changed and tuned to a frequency near to the phonation frequency.

Meanwhile, drawing on Coffin’s work, Marek observes that because the vocal tract acts as a resonator for the voice,

vowels must be modified for the resonator to work efficiently, and vice versa; when the resonator adjusts to amplify the sung pitch, vowel are automatically modified.

Vowel modification can be seen, therefore, as the consequence of an acoustic phenomenon rather than its cause, although vocal pedagogy traditionally points to vowel modification as a useful aid for mastering the second passaggio and the top notes.

Compared to Burzio, Carelli seems to approach top notes with a greater variety of registration styles. In reality her freedom of choice in the management of registration is only apparent, as these choices are a consequence of the fact that she generally not only avoids vowel modification but also highlights the diverse articulatory combinations in each vowel. This practice might indicate a sort of neurotic emotionalism with which audiences associated her unique vocal persona. Consequently, Carelli bases her technique on using articulators to modify the position of the larynx, tongue and velum shape sharply and, presumably, also the opening of the lips and jaw. What we are able to hear distinctly in her recordings is that the shape of the vocal tract is dramatically changed when she shifts from /oh/ and /ah/ vowels to /e/ and /ee/ ones. In the last excerpt from Adriana above, Carelli sings the bars preceding the a² flat with a completely extended vocal tract as the notes around and above the second passaggio (c²–f²–g²–f²–c²–d²) are articulated on the /oh/ and /ah/ vowels of ‘gioconda’. The sharp timbral transition audible on

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70 Dan H. Marek, *Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors: History and Technique* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 280. And again ‘especially in the top of the voice, vowels must be modified so as to become harmonic with the musical pitch. As a result, the resonators amplify the voice instead of interfering with the vibration of the vocal cords’, ibid., 277.

71 On vowel modification, see Chapter 4 where the topic has been discussed in relation to passaggio.
the climatic $a^2$ flat is produced through a dramatic modification of the articulators, as Carelli spells out a distinct /eh/ vowel. In this same section Burzio applies slight vowel modification on the $a^2$ flat, achieving more timbral evenness and homogeneity throughout the passage than Carelli (Example 6.18, Excerpt 98 https://tinyurl.com/yalbnfor). The search for timbral consistency in the upper range does not, however, repay the listener for the wild fragmentation of tone quality that Burzio displays lower down. The following bar is made up of ‘whitened’ middle register tone on the first ‘mi chiamo’ followed by pure chest voice on the second ‘mi chiamo’, concluded with a ‘Fedeltà’ which is again split between chest and excessively opened middle registers (Example 6.19, Excerpt 99 https://tinyurl.com/ybj7tbj3).


mi chia-mo mi chia-mo Fe-del - tâ___

This veritable timbral pasticcio reinforces my hypothesis regarding the crucial role which, in the long run, heavier registration systems have played in the definition of ‘modern’ voice types. In effect, the essential element which today’s singers have inherited from the singing of Burzio or Carelli is certainly not the unmodulated timbral divide between chest and middle register or the habit of applying ‘whitened’ voice in the middle register. These characteristics flourished and vanished within the space of roughly two generations, reaching their peak with figures such as Toti dal Monte and her emulators up to the 1940s. What the first generation of verismo sopranos autonomously and originally developed, and which went on to constitute the specific quiddity of the ‘modern’ soprano voice, was the consistent practice of singing the upper range at any degree of power with a completely elongated vocal tract. The ending of Adriana’s solo again offers an example of this; the ascending leap of an octave ($g^1$–$g^2$ in Example 6.20) together with the last long $a^2$ flat is managed within a general idea of soft singing.

72 In Marek’s words, this proceeding makes ‘the voice run into and out of resonance points’. Marek, Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors, 280.
Although Burzio and Carelli choose different pathways for approaching the top note, both manage to sing it within an heavy registration system. Burzio leaps to the $g^2$, on whose Fermata she performs a long diminuendo, modifying the /ee/ vowel of the word ‘di’ and preparing a fully elongated vocal tract which facilitates the attack and sustaining of the $a^2$ flat (taken with a hint of humming instantaneously voiced into mezza voce, Excerpt 100 https://tinyurl.com/ybycbqhl). Carelli, meanwhile, avoids the custom of modifying the /ee/ vowel and, after a brief crescendo on the $g^2$, needs rather drastically to lower the larynx for the following sustained $a^2$ flat. To this end she uses the consonant ‘m’ of the word ‘morrà’ and creates the longer resonance space needed for a full, rounded mezza voce, which she sustains throughout the note value (Excerpt 101 https://tinyurl.com/yb2mqkzw).

Supporting evidence for the verismo soprano’s endorsement of heavier registration systems and of their generalised application to pre-verismo repertoire comes from the recordings of Leonora’s aria ‘Madre pietosa Vergine’ mentioned in the previous discussion of the middle register. The long arpeggio-like phrases which open the second section of the solo continuously range around the second passaggio (Example 6.21).

The pivotal note which regulates the interplay between lighter and heavier registration is the $d^2$ sharp. When this note represents the peak sound of the line,
as at bars 61 and 65 of Example 10, Burzio avoids both marked vowel modification and lowering of the larynx. The /ah/ vowels of ‘abbandonar’ (on the corresponding \(d^2\))s preserve, in both cases, their ‘natural’ phonetic quality. On the other hand, when the \(d^2\) sharp precedes the \(a^2\) sharp, as at bar 66 of Example 6.21, Burzio decisively lowers the larynx and darkens the /a/ vowel of the exclamation ‘ah!’, producing that greater elongation of the vocal tract that allows for darker and fuller sounds (Excerpt 102 https://tinyurl.com/y7fhewpl).

The essential difference between Burzio and Boninsegna in the management of this crucial area of the soprano voice is confirmed to be the constant relatively higher laryngeal position that Boninsegna allows for all her upper tones together with a general avoidance of the principle of marked vowel modification (Example 6.21, Excerpt 103 https://tinyurl.com/ybmsx6hf).\(^{73}\) These two features which, as has been variously demonstrated throughout this section, highlight in particular the strong bond between Boninsegna’s vocalism and the Italian singing schools of the mid-century were soon destined to disappear.

The new way in which verismo sopranos were negotiating the second passaggio lay behind the ‘revolution’ predicted by Lamperti and his colleagues. They feared the upwards extension of the middle register that was associated with the quest for vocal power in ‘modern’ scores. This kind of treatment of the middle register triggered types of vocal behaviours which are well exemplified in the recordings of Boninsegna. Nevertheless, what we hear in her vocalism was just the beginning of a process which, through maneuvers encompassing extremely lowered larynxes and highly arched pharynxes, extended the powerful middle register exhibited by verismo sopranos to the top of their ranges. This newly-shaped middle register progressively excised recourse to the pure head voice, opening the way to the ‘singing of the future’ which was simply inconceivable for late nineteenth-century singers and vocal pedagogues.

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\(^{73}\) Another striking difference is that Boninsegna does not ‘whiten’ any of the pitches in this passage, while Burzio excessively opens many notes in her middle range. This characteristic, however, is essentially related to the treatment of the middle register, as seen above.
Conclusion

The analysis of the many recorded excerpts discussed in this thesis has clearly shown that the radical transformation of turn-of-the-century Italian operatic vocalism arises principally out of the adoption of new and heavier systems of vocal registration. The deepening of breathing systems, lowering of the larynx and extreme elongation of the vocal tract were the main tools with which some of the singers born in the 1870s managed to blend the vocal registers together. The ‘modernity’ of figures such as Caruso, Amato, Ruffo, Tetrazzini, Burzio and Carelli depended, first of all, on these crucial vocal-technical elements that were both the cause and effect of unprecedented changes. While responding to the specific needs of the new verismo opera and trends in literature and theatre towards realism (which were themselves part of a vast cultural upheaval involving changing audience and critical tastes, enlarged dimensions of theaters and orchestras, and a revolution in the system of operatic production), these singers reshaped their basic bel canto system of vocal production, with unpredictable consequences. In the first place, a new type of vocal sound sprang up, which was ‘carnal’, earthy, deeply gendered, and that until then had never been heard in Italian opera. Through considerable effort and sheer force of will, then, these same characteristics were applied to each pitch of the singer’s vocal compass, creating that ‘modern’ aesthetic of ‘total timbral consistency’ which had been completely unknown (and, presumably, not desired either) in the preceding history of western classical art singing.

The voices produced according to this new aesthetic are fuller and heavier; and consequently, their portamento when they pass from one pitch to another is not as clean and neat as the portamento achieved by voices which resort to a lighter type of registration. In the same way, heavily registered voices cannot play with dynamics with the exceptional degree of freedom enjoyed by voices with lighter registration. This brings me to another, more profound consequence of adopting a heavy systems of registration: namely, a new singing style. The style of verismo singers is considerably affected by the consistent practice of drawing heavy registers upwards instead of carrying down the lighter ones, as demanded by the golden rules of bel canto. This factor made it much more difficult for the ‘modern’ singers, especially male ones, not only to embellish the vocal line or execute a trill, but also to play with tempos and maintain a certain fluid phrasing. In order to sustain the vocal line for a longer period of time within a phrase, it is essential to lighten up the registration, otherwise the singer has to face the effort of supporting the full vocal weight with
major consumption of breath. Therefore, long diminuendos on high notes (floating sounds) or a general supple phrasing style, as heard and presented here in excerpts of pre-verismo tenors and baritones, became effectively unsustainable.

Another important point that indirectly emerges from my study is that the generally accepted dichotomy of bel canto versus verismo needs to be questioned. The point of departure for all these turn-of-the-century singers was the ‘pure’ tonal quality of the bel canto tradition, in which they had been eagerly instructed by their teachers. The recordings of Enrico Caruso attest to his startling vocal transformation over an almost twenty-year career in the studios. Nevertheless, his early discs and cylinders prove that he was perfectly capable of producing the ‘pure’ tone quality which, even when his voice became completely equalised in colour and overwhelmingly virile, is still audible in the ample steadiness of his core sound. Similar skills were shared by the other operatic celebrities examined in this study, and it is tempting to think that they could have simply performed within the comfortable boundaries of what they had been taught.

Perhaps, though, so complex and profound were the cultural, social and economic changes experienced in post-unification Italy in the later part of the century that they were compelled to reconsider completely the way of performing their art. This is the argument of Karen Henson who, in her recent study (2015), counteracts the accepted view of late nineteenth-century opera singers as figures of diminished importance who were now ceding their creative power to the composer’s (and conductor’s) increasing authority. Henson suggests that, in fact, opera singers reclaimed their role within the operatic arena by means of acting, expressive diction, deportment and other media.

This thesis takes a rather different view, and shows how the role of the opera singer, far from being subservient, was essential to the creation of a new aural universe, without which the ‘modern’ characters of the ‘modern’ operas would not be credible on stage, and therefore not on recordings. The fact that the ‘modern’ singers were trained in the old bel canto schools means that they were the authentic creators of this new aural dimension. They moulded it from scratch, adapting the fundamental tenets of bel canto technique (costal-diaphragmatic breathing, timbral

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register divide, preference always accorded to lighter types of registration, ‘pure’ and ‘true’ vocal colour, pure and neat legato line ensured through the scrupulous study of portamento, messa di voce, and a massive diet of graded exercises and solfeggì to their own ends.

Why are all the innovations introduced by these exceptional figures relevant to us today? It should be sufficiently clear by now that the multiple implications of the ‘modern’ voice are all reflected in the way operatic singing is currently performed internationally in the standard operatic repertoire. In time, Caruso’s creation of the ‘modern’ tenor has produced, for instance, a standardisation of this voice-type, whose timbral characteristics have been endlessly reproduced by following generations of tenors. The same pattern has been reproduced by sopranos through a transformation which encompassed the equalisation of the second passaggio (between medium and high ranges) at first, and the balancing of the lower and middle ranges (first passaggio) later. This sort of frozen tradition, though, stands against the very idea of singing as a creative practice; in other words, what was an original creation in Caruso’s time is becoming more and more an insufferably dull reproduction of the ‘original’.

Today, the ever more adventurous and experimental new productions to which we are exposed at the opera house in attempts to sustain the original work of art and make it ‘contemporary’, are grotesquely juxtaposed with a set of rather fixed ideas about how the music and the singing should be ‘executed’. According to singing teachers in first-rate educational institutions in the UK, one of the biggest challenges they encounter is to persuade their students not to aim at a sort of ‘standard’ voice which makes them all sound alike. The fact that students are reluctant to search their own vocal identities and prefer instead to pursue a ‘congealed’ ideal of vocal beauty is another side-effect of the inexorable process of standardisation still in progress.

Considering this complex picture, I envisage two main directions in which my study could be taken further. In the area of cultural studies, my investigation could open up new perspectives on issues such as the formative process of Italian national identity, or the anxieties over the definition of gender in the new nation. In the field of opera studies, in particular, the scant level of attention that has been dedicated to male voice types, as compared to their female counterparts, makes their vocalism an ideal area for further research. The second route overlaps with practice research, and would be aimed at a rethinking and widening of the range of
possible performance practices for one of the most frequently and universally performed repertoires today – *versimo* opera. My findings could be used as a stimulus to enlarge the range of expressive possibilities for students and professional singers; to inspire that freedom of the singer as a ‘creative artist’ which can only be rooted in a familiarity with those alternative styles that actually existed, without seeking slavishly to copy them.
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Discography
Abbreviations
Matrix number = mat. n.
Catalogue number = cat. n.


Giuseppe Verdi, Rigoletto, ‘Questa o quella’ (with piano). Fonotipia 78 rpm disc, mat. n. XPH 1519, cat. n. 39239, 1905.


———Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*, ‘Siciliana’ (with Francis Lapitino,


Appendix A Examples of Vocal Exercises from Historical Treatises
Exercises for legato and agility on intervals of a second

Luigi Lablache, Manuel García II and Francesco Lamperti deal with intervals in a gradual order of difficulty from smaller to bigger ones, but stressing different elements. While Lablache recommends to increase the dynamic from pp to ff throughout each phrase, García and Lamperti highlight the difficulty of precisely pitching the notes of the same interval repeated several time. Lamperti applies the symbol ⁰ above the note which intonation is more difficult.

Example 1
Example 2

Example 3
Other intervals:

Example 4

Example 5
García, A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing, Part I, 64, Exercises 6 and 7.
Example 6

Example 7
Exercises for agility: diatonic scale

Example 8

Example 9
Example 10
Exercises for agility: chromatic scales

Example 11
Lablache, *Metodo completo di canto*, 72, Exercise 42.

Example 12
Example 13
Lamperti, A Treatise on the Art of Singing, 53, Exercise 16
Exercises for the trill

The study of the trill encompasses many stages and various styles of execution. Beniamino Carelli divides the training for the trill in several volumes of his *L’arte del canto*. The supreme level of control on this type of embellishment is achieved in the *scale trillo* where the trill is executed on each and everyone grade of the scale.

Example 14
Example 15
Beniamino Carelli, *L'arte del canto*, vol. 5: 15, Exercises 183, 184.

Beniamino Carelli: exercises for the ‘voce mista’.

Example 16
Carelli, *L'arte del canto*, vol. 1: 52.
Example 17
Example 18