

Abt
 Practical Singing Tutor for All Voices
 (Mezzo-Soprano or Alto), Op. 474
 Part I

TREATISE ON THE ART OF SINGING.

This text-book has been received with such marked favor by the foremost musicians and singing teachers, and has attained such popularity, that a new and thoroughly revised edition has become a real necessity. This method not being intended, as is often wrongly supposed, for self-instruction, but assuming the careful guidance of an experienced teacher, this Preface will contain a series of important theoretical and practical suggestions which have in all cases proved to be an admirable basis for instruction in singing, and are recognized as such by the most eminent-authorities, like Lamperti, Garcia, Panseron, and Sieber, to whose opinions we have also occasionally referred for the following.

ATTITUDE OF THE BODY.

The pupil should always stand while practising, and (if possible) be accompanied by another person, so that he may not only give his entire attention to his singing, but also become familiar with the capacity of his breath. It is evident that in a sitting posture the chest is more or less contracted, which must in turn restrict and impede inspiration and expiration. Hence the voice of a seated person is sure to lose materially in strength and volume. The head should not be bent forward, but raised so that the tone may not sound forced and stifled, or the flexibility of the larynx be hampered; on the other hand, it would be a mistake to raise it as high as possible, for such a stretching of the neck-muscles would prevent the production of a good tone.

THE MOUTH.

Even a person who knows little or nothing about singing will probably see at once that the *form* given to the mouth in singing must exert the greatest influence on the quality, volume, and expression of the tone. Yet even the first and simplest rule in singing, that the mouth must be *opened*, is often ignored by many singers in an incomprehensible manner. Others fall into the opposite error of stretching their mouths to the fullest extent; this lends to the tone a harsh, rough quality, the mouth and pharynx being subjected to an undue strain. Generally speaking, the extent to which the mouth should be opened depends on its conformation, the mouth of one singer requiring to be opened more or less wide, as the case may be, than that of another in order to produce pure and beautiful tones; nevertheless, the theory of singing prescribes an approximate normal form to be observed, which the common experience of the greatest masters shows to be highly conducive to euphony of tone. The mouth should be opened about far enough to let the middle of the thumb pass between the upper and lower teeth. This opening has the form neither of a circle (○) nor of a vertical oval (◊) but of a horizontal oval (◌). In singing, the upper teeth should be visible about half way up, and the lower teeth scarcely at all; thus the upper lip is raised a trifle, while the under lip is kept on a level with the edge of the under teeth, though without covering them, for that would decidedly muffle the tone. The *position of the tongue* is of the highest importance. It must lie flat and perfectly quiet in the mouth, gently touching the back of the lower teeth, to allow the rising waves of sound to issue freely. So soon as the tongue is arched or its tip raised or is pressed back on its root, or is moved about uneasily in the mouth in any way, the tone loses its beauty, and bad habits are acquired which can be got rid of only at the expense of much time and trouble. To accustom the pupil to keep his tongue in its proper quiet position, the first studies are usually sung only to the vowel A, which is the best for getting the desired position or form of the mouth. For in singing with words, one and the same position cannot be retained, as not only the different consonants call at each instant for different movements of the separate parts of the mouth, but even the other vowels (E, I, O and U) bring about changes in the position of the lips, the teeth and the tongue. We therefore designate the form of the mouth just described as the *normal* one, to be taken as a starting-point, and returned to as often as the form of the words permits

ON TAKING BREATH.

Expertness in taking breath at the right time is one of the most essential points for a singer, if not "*the Basis of the entire Art of Singing.*" Inexperienced teachers, wrongly supposing that for drawing breath no special instruction or practice are needed, often pay no

attention at first to the way in which the pupil draws or expels his breath. They set him to singing before he knows how to control his breath; they expect him to sing long-sustained tones or long passages in one breath, without his knowing in the least how to set about it. Yet taking breath *while singing is a totally different thing* from doing so while *speaking!* When a speaker draws breath he does so quite regardless of making provision of a certain amount of breath for uttering a certain series of words; he inhales as much or as little air as happens to suit him, because he will have sufficient opportunity during the course of his speech to get a fresh supply; besides, he is bound to observe neither a fixed duration of the words nor a fixed tempo in their delivery. Nor does a speaker make a sharp distinction between the action of inspiration and that of expiration; he speaks while still drawing breath, and has sometimes already expelled the greater part of the air taken in, before he begins to speak.

In singing this is quite different. The supply of air which a singer takes in must be distributed in such a manner that it will hold out for the delivery of a certain number of tones, each having a fixed duration, and all being ordered in a certain tempo. For a singer can stop and take breath only where the musical phrase or the sense of the words allows. Further, in singing, the act of *inspiration* is exclusively a preparatory one, and *song must and can begin* only with the beginning of *expiration*. In giving exact rules for drawing in and expelling the breath, we shall assume that the pupil invariably and carefully follows our directions concerning the position of the body, etc.

When *taking breath*, be careful to fill the lungs abundantly, though quietly and without haste, with air; during inspiration the chest steadily rises and expands, while the abdomen recedes. But take care to draw breath neither overslowly nor too hastily; for in the first case the chest would be greatly strained and tired, whereas in the second the lungs would be rendered unable to retain the air for any length of time. One should never take breath *audibly*, but without any exertion and in a scarcely perceptible manner. Now, in order to be able to take in and retain a sufficient amount of air, the pupil must above all things avoid breathing merely with the *upper part of the lungs* (expanding the higher ribs only); the chief work in breathing should be assigned to the diaphragm and the abdominal muscles; he must also take care not to contract the glottis during inspiration, but to leave it wide open for the free ingress of air; it must not be used as if it were an active organ of breathing, for this brings laryngeal muscles into action which have very different work to do. On taking a deep breath the larynx sinks down, while the soft palate rises, and at the same instant the diaphragm is forced downward.

The air thus quietly and abundantly inspired must be very carefully husbanded by the singer during *expiration*. The pupil must not *expel* the air in quantities, but let it *flow out* gently and very gradually, under complete control. *A proper distribution of the breath is the essential point in singing.* It is not so important always to have a great supply of air at command, as to know *how to manage a moderate quantity economically.* One must therefore be able to retain the air taken in as long as possible, and never to expend too much breath on the first tones, so that the air may be equally distributed among all the tones to be sung in one breath, and flow out quietly and noiselessly. Taking breath *too often* makes the voice unsteady; the pupil should, however, be equally cautious not to force the lungs to eke out the supply of air *excessively long.*

PRODUCTION OF A GOOD TONE.

This depends essentially upon the following fundamental conditions: Firstly, the quietly inhaled breath must always be *drawn* out, not *pushed* out; secondly, its whole mass must be set in musical vibration, which can be done only by constantly renewing in mind the vowel on which the tone is sung, and by transforming each air-wave into a tone-wave, so to speak; thirdly, the tone must be struck and sustained at precisely the true pitch; fourthly, the tone must be able to pass out freely, unhindered by any unfavorable position or motion of the tongue, pharynx, or cavity of the mouth; and finally, it must be directed against the front part of the roof of the mouth, on which it impinges and then be reflected at the **same angle**, leaving unchecked the correctly opened mouth.

PRODUCTION OF A FINE TONE.

But what is the distinction between a *good* tone and a *fine* tone? A tone is *good* which is true, bright, and free from any disagreeable by-tones (guttural, nasal, or palatal tone). A tone is rendered *fine* (beautiful) by its expressiveness, by its peculiar timbre. Thus a good tone has been called the *body* of song, and a fine tone its *soul*. A good tone by no means includes the idea of a beautiful one, whereas a beautiful tone is unimaginable without the foundation of a good one.

Beauty of tone is dual; a material, sensuous beauty, in and of the tone alone, and a spiritual beauty, giving it inspiration and character. But few chosen ones are gifted by nature with the dual beauty of tone in its fullest sense. Now, though either kind is properly a gift of nature, the sensuous beauty of tone may be acquired in perfection, even by mediocre talents, by good training and diligent study, and the way prepared for attaining even the spiritual beauty of tone. The essential element in all beauty of tone is its *swell* and *subsidence*, without which *not even a sensuous tone-value* can be conceded to song. The Italian, speaking of a rendering without life and warmth, says, "Quella voce non ha vibrazione!" The habit, so common nowadays, of imputing an entirely wrong sense to words from foreign languages, has unhappily not spared the word *tremolare*, which is continually confounded with *vibrare*. People say, "that singer's voice vibrates dreadfully," instead of saying correctly, "has a dreadful tremolo." For *vibrazione*, under which must be understood the swell and increase of the tone, together with its subsidence—its innermost life—is a *superiority*, not a *defect*, of the singer, while the *tremolo* is one of the most repulsive of vocal defects.

DURATION AND METHOD OF PRACTICE.

The main question in practising is not "*how much*," but "*how*" one practises. Above all things, the pupil must have a good and correctly tuned piano, otherwise his intonation will be endangered, however good his ear may be; he should practise with the closest attention; call to mind, before beginning, everything to which he ought to give heed during practice, and most carefully watch every tone and vowel-sound, so that it may be begun promptly and correctly, and sustained and finished at the right pitch. The pupil should begin practice one hour after breakfast or two hours after a heavier meal, contenting himself at first with singing not longer than ten minutes consecutively, then always pausing for five minutes. After the pause he may practise fifteen or twenty minutes with brief interruptions, then rest for half an hour, and then resume practice for thirty or forty minutes (with short pauses for resting). By repeating this scheme of practice twice or thrice daily, according as his strength or the teacher's instructions permit, he will practise in all about two or three hours every day, which must never be overstepped, and should be abbreviated by an hour on lesson-days. Of course, the teacher should pay careful attention to the pupil's health, and at lesson-time allow him short breathing spells, which may be filled up—to the pupil's great benefit—with useful observations on various points in the vast field of the art of singing, with explanations of the words, etc., etc. Finally, practice should not be omitted a single day, except in the case of an indisposition or hoarseness really necessitating such omission. *The first duty of the pupil is the utmost regularity in practice.*

In the above we have attempted to touch on the most indispensable points in the study of singing, at least for beginners, and will close our preface with Schubart's glorious tribute to song: "Song is indisputably the first Article in the whole art of music, the axis around which revolves all that is called melody, modulation, and harmony. All instruments are mere imitations of the singing voice. Song sits as a king upon his throne, while round about all the instruments bow as vassals. The human voice is in the nature of things the primitive tone, all other voices in the world being but a distant echo of this divine first voice. The human throat is the first, purest, and most admirable instrument of Creation!"

Part I.

Production of Tone.—Intervals.
Tonbildung und Treffübungen.

Edited by MAX SPICKER.

I.

SUSTAINED TONES OF UNIFORM POWER.
*GLEICHMÄSSIGES AUSHALTEN DES TONES.**)Diatonic Scale.—*Diatonische Tonfolge.*

Alto.(Contralto.)

1a

*)This exercise, like all following ones, is to be sung to the vowel "a", (-father). The tones are to be taken and sustained smoothly and evenly, the aperture formed by the mouth remaining unaltered. (See Preface.)