

BOOK REVIEWS

THE OLD ITALIAN SCHOOL OF SINGING: A Theoretical and Practical Guide. By Daniela Bloem-Hubatka. ISBN: 978-0-7864-6153-0 \$65. 219pp. Published 2012 by McFarland & Company, Inc. Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640 2012 www.mcfarlandpub.com

This is a clever, careful and informative distillation of facts and helpful suggestions covered by so many treatises and books on the art of singing as taught by the *maestri* of the 18th and 19th centuries. In his foreword to the publication, Ward Marston comments on how singers of today seemingly sound radically different from those of even a hundred years ago. Daniela Bloem-Hubatka impressed him with her voice and technique, demonstrated on a CD she had sent him. When he met her she demonstrated a true knowledge and understanding of those special aspects that recapture the 'lost' art of singing.

The book is laid out clearly, covering chapters that highlight Attack, Breath, Resonance, Mouth position and Articulation, the Registers, Movement and Agility of the Voice, the use of Words in singing, Interpretation and Expression. At the end of the book there is a summary of *Essential Directions for Historical Singing* and four appendices: 1. *Staff notation of some of Jenny Lind's Solfeggi* 2. *Rossini Gorgheggi (vocalizes)* 3. *Cover: Airs Détachés d'Orphée et Euridice, par Gluck; Air J'ai perdu* 4. *The Singer's Assistant; "On the Formation of the Voice, General Directions to Singers"* The reader will find copious notes, a truly huge bibliography together, of course, with a comprehensive index.

There are some interesting insights as to why the older generation of singers sounded so individual, and she puts forward her theories as to why modern teaching methods seem to have eliminated them. I cannot agree that, in the aspect of florid music, the singer of today is not as adept as those of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In certain instances they may be thought to be even more talented. However, most record collectors, who have access to the recordings of *i grandi nomi*, made since the advent of sound recording, feel that certain aspects of personality have seemingly been lost. Certainly Ms Bloem-Hubatka is pragmatic enough when pointing out the need for robust health and for certain physical requirements, such as clear sinuses, that enable a pure and ringing tone to be emitted. Joan Sutherland, who suffered for years with chronic sinus problems, was still able to produce the most incredibly free head tones above the staff. (Bernardo de Muro, the dramatic tenor, also suffered from the same problem.) It only proves that so many great singers who suffered with problems, somehow managed to overcome them, either by dint of practice, or perhaps good fortune. The use of forward and chest tones is discussed and indeed all the numerous aspects required of a singer's technique are covered.

This is a really good treatise, not only for the teacher but also for anyone who is interested in the 'Art of Singing'. All the greatest pedagogues, including García and Marchesi, are referred to, as well as the special talents exhibited by many of the most famous singers, both past and present, most of whom will be known to the record collector. However, in my view, it is impossible to learn how to sing just by reading a book. Although certain singers have maintained that they are self-taught, in most cases it is surely necessary that to achieve positive results the

keen ear of someone who does understand vocal technique is on hand to advise. They also have to engender that vitally-necessary, special, individual relationship with the pupil. Without that, some students will not get to grips with what is being taught. Yet, with the very same teacher, others who find themselves on the 'same wave-length' will thrive.

Alan Bilgora

RICHARD TAUBER (1891-1948): A Chronology

by Daniel O'Hara. Soft-back, Published by the author.

The Chronology can be obtained directly from the author at 12 Eden Street, Saltburn, TS12 1JZ, UK at £8 (\$13.00; €10) per copy, plus £2 per copy for the UK, £4 (€5) for Europe and £6 (\$10.00) for the rest of the world for postage. PayPal accepted. Enquiries can be addressed to: daniel.ohara2@ntlworld.com or (0)1287 207208.

Although the author comments in his introduction that there have been eleven earlier versions of this chronology posted online, and that this one is still not to be considered complete, it is by far the most comprehensive to date and can stand as a tribute to some excellent research and brilliant analysis of the career of one of the most iconic tenors of the 20th Century.

It traces his family origins and, very interestingly, his singing ancestors and his early career as an international operatic tenor of distinction but it admits that some further research is still being undertaken about each of his Dresden Opera performances. However, it is impossible to imagine a more comprehensive analysis of his numerous roles as a singer. It gives in detail all his appearances in the opera house, theatre, on film and concert venues as a recitalist, and also as an orchestral conductor together with his radio broadcasts, with each date and location carefully annotated.

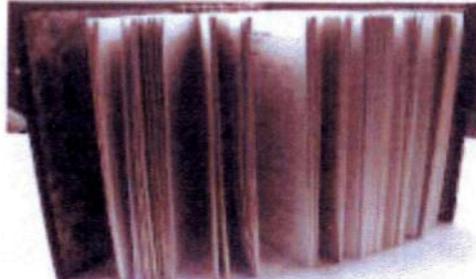
This is a major work of considerable and dedicated scholarship that is worthy of being on the bookshelves of anyone interested in the career of a major performer, whose fame transcended the confines of classical music and whose vocal individuality and creative talent as a composer reached the widest possible audience of his time.

Alan Bilgora

BINDERS FOR THE RECORD COLLECTOR

Each holds three whole volumes!!

Binders for *The Record Collector* now have a wider spine, making it much easier to fit in all twelve issues.



Each binder is excellent value at £7.00 (€8.50; \$12.00). Postage is £3.00 per binder in the UK; £4.00 (€5) to the European continent and £5.00 (\$9.00) to the US and rest of the world by air mail.

SPECIAL OFFER: Buy two and save 10% on the cost of each binder.

Most Helpful Customer Reviews

5.0 out of 5 stars **A Paradigm Shifter** January 10, 2013

By Anonymous

Format:Paperback|[Amazon Verified Purchase](#)

I purchased this book based on its description, as I thought it would be interesting to read the author's take on the definition of the "Old Italian School of Singing". Within the first pages of the Introduction, I was sold on her assessment of the old schooling.

The chapters are laid out in the order of progress of singing as defined by the writings, treatises, and music of the 1400s to the 1850s. She offers COPIOUS notes and footnotes to support her theories and assertions that the current methods of vocal technique are diametrically opposed to what the greatest teachers and writers on the voice have asserted for HUNDREDS of years: the importance of focusing on the laryngeal mechanism first and breath second.

Her chapters build logically on each other as the reader begins to understand how to approach training a voice in the Old School. The first chapter on the Attack sets itself in distinct relief from other writers (like Richard Miller). She asserts, similarly to Stark's "Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy" that today's ideas of attack are radically different from what is taught and understood today. According to her research, the "attack" was a precise start of pitch that tends to be glottal in nature. This is in contrast to Richard Miller's idea of "onset". After having daily practiced this newer maneuver for about a month, I can say that the vocal utterance is brighter and rounder, and the ease of singing with firm glottal closure has made singing a pleasure and lots of fun!

From there, she goes on to discuss breath (which can only be correct when the attack is correct), and delves into issues such as mouth position, agility, and registration.

This book has tipped me over into rejecting much of today's "breath-based" "placement" teaching, and I am convinced that this is the direction that I want to take my own singing and teaching. I would HIGHLY recommend this book to anyone that is interested in knowing what the consensus was on singing up to circa 1850.

I would also recommend reading as many of the books in her bibliography for confirmation of her research. It would also be helpful to have on hand a copy of Manuel Garcia's "Hints on Singing".

Overall, an INVALUABLE read, and I can't recommend it highly enough. THIS is what should be taught in EVERY Vocal Pedagogy course.