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## The Evolution of the Bel Canto Technique Through the 20th and 21st Century: Annotated Bibliography

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## The Evolution of the Bel Canto Technique through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Annotated Bibliography:

The Bel canto technique is the quintessential technique of opera performance. Throughout history, it has adapted itself and survived through pedagogies, composers, influential artists, and scientific specialists from the field. Although the bel canto technique has a wide range of sources and complete history, this will focus more on the evolution occurring through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. How the bel canto technique has managed to survive is key to understanding its future.

- **Secondary or tertiary monographs**

1. Callas, Maria, and John Ardoin. *Callas at Juilliard: The Master Classes*. New York: Knopf, 1987.  
The acclaimed music critic of The Dallas Morning News for over three decades and his vast encyclopedic knowledge of the work of the famous opera soprano, Maria Callas, John Ardoin exposes the brilliant yet self-aware artist that was Maria Callas through this book. Maria Callas was one of the most influential opera performers of the last century. This Masterclass given at Juilliard in the 1970s by the late Maria Callas illustrates her vast knowledge of the bel canto technique and her concern to pass on her wisdom to the new generations. This becomes proof of how the knowledge, and interpretation of the bel canto technique endures through great singers and evolves through young performers.
2. Edgerton, Michael Edward. *The 21st-Century Voice: Contemporary and Traditional Extra-Normal Voice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central.  
Michael Edward Edgerton is a contemporary composer and researcher of voice, acoustics, and perception since the late 1990s. His work with the extra-normal voice is recognized internationally through compositions, performances, journal articles, and this book. The perception of the 21st-century voice is highly observed in this book. With its focus on the anatomical and acoustical framework, Edgerton explores the contemporary vocal technique and its components through the acoustical lens of the instrument. This illustrates how the bel canto technique is not the primary technique in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.
3. Franca, Ida. *Manual of Bel Canto*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1959.  
Ida Franca was a self-acclaimed artist and vocal pedagogy from the old Italian school of singing which included great singers and pedagogies from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ms. Franca divided this treatise into three parts: 1) Vocal Technique, 2) The Education of the Artist: The Study of Bel Canto, and 3) The Castrated Singers and their role in Bel Canto. However, there is a need to mention that there is a sub-division directly targeted to “Negro Singers” which is a transparent view into the bigoted and segregated society of the 1950s in the United States of America. Besides this disrespectful section, there is an in-depth dive into the origins, adaptation, and purpose of all the intertwining contents of the voice and how the bel canto term has been misused and misinterpreted. These contents are expositions of the bel canto technique and how it has been interpreted historically.

4. Manén, Lucie, *Bel Canto: The Teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools: Its Decline and Restoration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Lucien Manén was a singer and pupil of the renowned, soprano, conductor, and entrepreneur, Anna Schoen-René, who was a well-established musical figure in Minnesota during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Manén focuses on the physiological aspect of the instrument and how its ongoing discoveries have positively and negatively impacted the vocal instrument. She explains how its decline and restoration have been part of the survival of the art form. By creating an outline of the physiology of the instrument there is a better understanding of the bel canto technique and its evolution.

5. Talia, Joseph, *History of Vocal Pedagogy: Intuition and Science*. Samford Valley, Queensland: Australian Academic Press, 2017.

Dr. Joseph Talia, a noted tenor, pianist, music theorist, researcher, operatic director, and with tertiary studies in business administration with an emphasis on the arts is a respectable figure in the vocal pedagogical community. This second volume in his trilogy displays the long and extensive history of vocal pedagogy from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Dr. Talia utilizes a scientific and physiologic framework to analyze historical pedagogies of the Art of Singing. However, this text can serve as lively biography of the Art of Singing, not just a technical account of diverse pedagogies. With this said, to understand the root of the bel canto technique, one must know how the history of vocal pedagogy evolved and transcended through the centuries.

6. ——— *Italian Bel Canto in the Age of Vocal Science: The Evolution of the Art and the Science of Singing*. Samford Valley, Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press, 2019.

This last and third volume of Dr. Talia's trilogy focuses on the continuous development of vocal science and the critical evaluation of the modern Italian School of bel canto, its connection to the past, and the challenges for the future. A recognition of how the bel canto technique emerged from the Italian School of Singing and has adapted itself is key to understanding the survival of the bel canto technique and how, after centuries, it endures as the optimal technique for classical Western singing.

- **Journal Articles**

7. Ethan Sperry, and Mary Goetze. "Vocal Versatility in Bel Canto Style." *The Choral Journal* 55, vol. 13 no. 62 (2014): 61–65.

Dr. Ethan Sperry, Director of Choral Activities at Portland State University, Artistic Director and Conductor of the Oregon Repertory Singers, and the late Latin American composer, Professor Emeritis of Composition and Latin American Music at the Indiana University School of Music, Mary Goetze divide this article into 6 concise parts, 1) The Why, 2) The How 3) Laryngeal Position 4) Registration and Pitch 5) Resonance and 6) Special Techniques. These explain the bel canto technique and its elements in a digestible way to an average person. Thus, making an exemplary outreach and a new way of viewing the bel canto technique, making it more accessible and tangible.

8. Gregg, Jean Westermann. "On 'Bel Canto' Vocal Technique." *Journal of Singing- The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 52, no. 1 (1995): 59-63.

Jean Gregg Westermann was a beloved voice teacher, voice rehabilitator, and second female president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). Westermann exposes through her extensive expertise in vocal pedagogy how the teaching of contemporary vocal teaching is based on the "bel canto" method which evolved from the Italian methods of singing and how meets its challenges and alterations when it comes to English singers. This is a paradigm of how the bel canto technique needs to adapt to survive and transcend to new generations of singers, not concerning their linguistic background.

- **Dictionary and encyclopedia articles**

9. Gerstein, Christine Wondolowski. *Early Musical Training in Bel Canto Vocal Technique: A Brief History and Philosophy*. Research paper, Hofstra University, 1994. ERIC.

For the past decades, Cristine Wondolowski has been a collection development librarian at Hofstra University, New York, and a bibliographer of the Publications Prizes Committee of the American Musical Instrument Society. Through this article, she uncovers and offers a brief history and philosophy of the origins of the bel canto vocal technique. Wondolowski discusses the adoption and development of the bel canto technique and how it has advanced over the centuries. Understanding the philosophy of how and why the bel canto technique prevailed through the centuries is pivotal to its survival into the future.

- **Scores**

10. Bellini, Vincenzo. *I Puritani*. Prepared by Albert W. Berg. New York: Wm. A. Pond & Co., 1885.  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/sm1885.11968/>

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835) was an influential and prolific bel canto composer from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One can see through his melodies, the distinguished melodic lines, and phrases that separate the bel canto genre from others. This evidential proof of how the music was written and how it was meant to be executed is essential to the development of the bel canto technique.