

Vocal Repertoire  
The Origins of Classical Song  
The Italian Virtuoso Solo Voice

Elizabeth Brodovitch  
MA French Linguistics  
ARCT Royal Conservatory

<http://www.lyricdiction.com>

# Why do We Study Classical Vocal Repertoire?

Practically:

- To discover the singer's field of vocal performance: early music, art song in recital, opera, etc.
- To plan a program.
- To learn from the artistry of great singers, accompanists, composers, and poets.
- To deepen our knowledge of the artistry of poetry in musical settings.

Globally:

- For the pure pleasure of listening to wonderful vocal music and texts.
- To acquire and apply a knowledge of the *evolution* of vocal performance as we study and prepare a selection of songs from different writing periods. Where did "classical song" come from? Where is "classical song" going?

# Classical “Song” for Solo Voice

- Western *classical song* as we hear it today emerged out of 2000 years of curiosity and experimentation in writing for the human voice.
- *Song*: a short musical composition of words and music.
- *Art Song*: a song written to be sung in recital; that is, in performance, typically with piano accompaniment and set to a selected poem. In French, *mélodie*; in German, *Lied*.

# Overview of “Song” Composers

- Early Christian church ?-1000
- Troubadours 1050-1300
- Italian Solo Voice
- Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven
- Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Strauss, Schoenberg
- Berlioz, Gounod, Fauré, Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc
- Dowland, Purcell, Quilter, Ireland, Britten
- Spanish, Russian, Czech, Scandinavian, American, Canadian, World music

# Secular Solo Song

## Singing the Poetic Text

Troubadours  
1060-1300

**Canso**

Occitan/Old French

Dowland  
1563-1626

**Ayre**

English

Italian  
1600-1700

**Aria**

Italian

Purcell  
1659-1695

**Song/Aria**

English

Mozart  
1756-1791

**Romanze/Scena**

Haydn  
1732-1809

**Canzanetta**

Beethoven  
1770-1827

**Lyric scena**

Schubert  
1797-1828

**Lied**

Berlioz  
1803-1869

**Mélodie**

Quilter  
1877-1953

**Art song**

Schoenberg  
1874-1951

**Cabaret, Sprechstimme**

The term “art song” took a long time to establish itself.

# Terms

- *Aria* (“air”): a song (a musical composition for words and music) for solo voice in opera, cantata, oratorio, mass, zarzuela, operetta, or works entitled “concert aria.”
- *Art Song*: a song written to be sung in recital, typically with piano accompaniment and set to a selected poem. In French, *mélodie*; in German, *Lied*.
- *Cantata*: a musical work for voice(s) and instruments originating in Italy in the late 1500s, set to secular or sacred themes. Evolving to a fixed form: recitative/aria da capo, recit/aria da capo, etc.
- *Opera*: a musical drama for voice(s) and instruments originating in Italy in the late 1500s, in which vocal and instrumental music is essential and predominant. Opera dominates Italian composition, but note that many opera composers wrote songs (“arias”) as well.
- *Bel canto*: “beautiful song,” “art of beautiful singing,” emerging from the great advances in Italy on voice training.

# To Summarize

- From this introduction to the field of vocal repertoire:
  - Why we study vocal repertoire,
  - Overview of vocal repertoire from 1000 to present day,
  - Overview of composers,
  - Basic musical terms of the classical song vocabulary.
- We move to a brief look at the sacred origins of vocal repertoire and then to the study of Italian vocal repertoire.

# Origins of Classical Song

## Singing the Sacred Text: The Early Christian Church

- Singing existed to glorify God through the medium of the human voice.
- Singing the sacred word: a single melodic line, little or no accompaniment (a monochord or portable organ to train young singers). Passed along for one thousand years by memory and rudimentary notation.
- Singing tracts of the Dark Ages (850 - 1100): written by monks such as Aurelian of Réôme (850) and Hucbald of Flanders (890). They were experienced singers and choir masters, often struggling with a budget. These documents provide much useful information for modern singers on tuning, reading techniques, rehearsal practices, ornamentation.
- Language: Latin.
- Style: melismatic (one syllable set to several notes), modal, expansion with tropes (additional sections). For a single voice or two voices with the first voice singing the cantus and the second voice spontaneously improvising or embellishing.
- Examples: Fulbert de Chartres (960-1028): *Stirps Jesse* (1-1.30), *Aurea personet lyra* (45.24-47.50): **see texts**. Ensemble Venance Fortunat: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWuUEx8ELjY>



# Italian Song: The Virtuoso Solo Voice

- Mid 1500s: Polyphonic (two or more independent voices) writing of sacred texts leads, in Italy, to polyphonic writing of secular texts (the *madrigal*).
- Transitioning to the setting of a *single* vocal melodic line over an accompaniment sustained by the bass line.
- Result: the polyphonic madrigal will evolve into a virtuoso solo voice song.
- Leading to the publication of song collections called *madrigali ariosi* - vocal chamber music with freedom to *improvise* - which in turn encourages development and documentation of *new singing techniques*.
- Now musicians have an extensive musical notation system for composing, paper to write on and printing presses to publish, increasingly well-made instruments to compose for, financially wealthy patrons to support independent composition in secular life, and a wider audience for public concerts.

# New Singing Techniques: *Bel Canto*

## Sonorities and Technical Capabilities

### ***Bel Canto***

The seamless transition of vocal quality across the entire registers of the voice.

1. Technical points: *messa di voce*: “put forth the voice with perfect control.” The attack of a sustained vocal tone *pianissimo* with a swell to *fortissimo*, and slow decrease to *pianissimo* again. This emission/placing of the voice > tone quality.
2. Decorative points: *fioritura* (vocal embellishment of the melody- spontaneous, improvised) - appoggiaturas, trills, cadenzas, etc. A *bravoura* virtuoso performance > agility.
3. Interpretive points: portamento, appoggiatura, etc. conveying emotion: tenderness, love, pathos. The emotion of the voice and technical command of the voice > balance.

### ***Cantare come si parla***

What did the Italian teachers mean – “singing as if you are speaking” (we assume) Italian?

# Looking Ahead

- In the next three slides:
- A very brief overview of Italian diction: how the Italian language serves the idea of *cantare come si parla* (“sing as you speak”).

# *Cantare Come Si Parla*

## The Breath Flow of the Italian Speaker/Singer

- “All historical evidence regarding the development of the art of singing in Italy can only be understood with reference to the nature of the Italian language....the continuously flowing sounds of the language itself.” (Miller 177) In Italian, there are:
- Only 7 vowels [a e ε i ɔ o u]: fewer resonator adjustments than in English.
- Predominance of vowels: English judge. Italian giudicare
- More favorable conditions for consonant articulations, stop and continuants, which stop or constrict the breath.

Fewer syllables ending in consonants. Most Italian words end with a vowel unless apocopated: *come* > *com'*

Abundance of voiced continuant consonants (consonants where the vocal folds vibrate): *l* [l], *m* [m], *n* [n], *nc/nch*, [ŋk], *ng* [ŋg], *gn* [ɲ], *gli* [ʎ], *r* [r/ɾ]

- Examples: *alora*, *amore*, *ano*, *ancora*, *sangue*, *ogno/gnocchi*, *Pagliacci/gli altri*  
“Ma degli uomini il consiglio” (from *Se tu m'ami*).

# *Cantare Come si Parla*

## Italian Single and Double Consonants

- As well as singing through voiced continuants, the Italian *singer* maintains breath flow singing through single stop consonants *b/p, t/d/, k/g*: *rupe* [ru:pɛ], *note* [nɔ:tɛ], *eco* [ɛ:kɔ].
- Only with Italian double consonants does the airflow stop. The breath implodes, “hesitates” and then releases: *ruppe* [rup:pɛ], *notte* [nɔt:tɛ], *ecco* [ɛk:kɔ].
- Explore: place your fingertips on the middle of your breastbone and feel the air move seamlessly from vowel to single consonant to following vowel as you speak or sing: *rupe* [ru:pɛ], *note* [nɔ:tɛ], *eco* [ɛ:kɔ]. (Double dots indicate a vowel long in duration.)
- Compare: with your fingertips in the same place, feeling the air stop and release as you speak or sing the double consonants of *ruppe* [rup:pɛ], *notte* [nɔt:tɛ], *ecco* [ɛk:kɔ].
- Remember: a difference in single/double consonant pronunciation is a difference in meaning:  

<i>rupe</i> [ru:pɛ] ( <i>rock</i> )	<i>note</i> [nɔ:tɛ] ( <i>notes</i> )	<i>eco</i> [ɛ:kɔ] ( <i>echo</i> )
<i>ruppe</i> [rup:pɛ] ( <i>he broke</i> )	<i>notte</i> [nɔt:tɛ] ( <i>night</i> )	<i>ecco</i> [ɛk:kɔ] ( <i>here</i> )

# *Cantare Come Si Parla*

- Listen, listen, listen to Italian singers.
- Listen to the *legato* of the language periodically interrupted by the air stopping only in double consonants.
- Listen to understand the continuity and elasticity of the Italian breath flow.

# Looking Ahead

- A survey of Italian vocal repertoire from the 1500s to the twentieth century: editions, composer overview.
- Four listening programs: song selections with accompanying texts in Italian and English translation.

# Italian Vocal Repertoire

## The First Collection of Solo Songs for Classical Voice

- Giulio Caccini (1546-1618): contemporary with John Dowland, publishes the first volume of arias and madrigals for *solo* voice, entitled *Le Nuove Musiche* (1602).
- *Le Nuove Musiche* is cited as “the earliest surviving collection of solo song, through-composed in the new monodic [that is: one melodic line predominates] Florentine style,” with codified ornamentation such as accentos or appoggiaturas, among others, to heighten emotional effect. Also running passages, trills, messa di voce...” (Kimball, 348).

In other words, a new *style* of singing for the solo voice, requiring specific vocal skills and training which Caccini presents in his introduction.

Caccini’s song *Amarilli* appears in *Arie Antiche (Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)*. A staple of teaching repertoire.



# Edition: *Arie Antiche*

- The repertoire of the edition *Arie Antiche* (*Twenty-Four Italian Songs and Arias of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*) should all be heard (recordings Bartoli, Gigli, Pavarotti, Bergonzi, etc.). Edited by Alessandro Parisotti in the nineteenth century. Re-edited by John Glenn Paton as *Twenty-Six Italian Songs and Arias* (1991). Paton reviewed the original scores and his edition is a fountain of information for program notes, Italian phonetics, and word for word translations.
- These editions are a primary source of recital choices as well as teaching material. Excellent songs. For beauty, technical development, and programming possibilities, they cannot be surpassed.
- Many selections in *Arie Antiche* were written for operas. *O cessate di piagarmi*, *Le violette*, and *Già il sole dal Gange*, composed by Alessandro Scarlatti about 100 years after Caccini's *Amarilli*, appear in the same edition.
- But whether opera arias or "simple song," all of this Italian repertoire is characterized as editor Parisotti wrote as "music ...informed by structural purity and simplicity, great emotion and a flavor of the sweetest serenity..." (Kimball, 348).
- And truly the vocal lines in this early Italian repertoire are sublimely beautiful, delivering the *bel canto* with the voice supreme, and they remain so into the twenty-first century.
- (Two hundred years later, Bellini's songs *Sei Ariette*, often chosen to open a recital, may be considered the 1800 equivalent in terms of melodic beauty and depth of expression.)

# Italian Song Composers

- Giulio Caccini 1546-1618 Florentine musician, employed by the Medici. Codified ornamentation in his first publication 1602.
- Claudio Monteverdi 1567-1643 Opera *Orfeo*, 1607. Synthesis of dramatic text and music. "Let the word be master of the melody, not its slave."
- Giovanni Stefani/no dates Published 4 volumes/anthologies of songs from 1618-1626.
- Giacomo Carissimi 1605-1674 Singer and organist, composer of choral works and 150 solo cantatas.
- Barbara Strozzi 1619-1664 100 published compositions in her life time, no opera: studied singing with Caccini's daughter Francesca.
- Alessandro Scarlatti 1660-1725 Over 40 operas, four by the age of 22, and 600 chamber cantatas.
- Giovanni Bononcini 1670-1747 Composer, teacher, innovator. Worked in Vienna, Paris, Lisbon, London. More popular than Handel.
- Geminiano Giacomelli 1692-1740 Popular opera composer: nineteen operas in fourteen years.
- Giovanni Pergolesi 1710-1736 Attributed *Se tu m'ami*. Actually written by Parisotti, compiler and editor of *24 Arie Antiche*.
- Gioacchino Rossini 1792-1868 Songs of great variety composed late in his career for personal pleasure, including *Venetian Regatta*, three songs in the Venetian dialect.
- Gaetano Donizetti 1797-1848 Two hundred songs, some in the Neapolitan dialect.
- Vincenzo Bellini 1801-1835 Pure melody on a smaller scale: "arietti" or "romanze."
- Giuseppe Verdi 1813-1901 First published work: set of six songs including Italian translation of *Meine Ruh ist hin* (Goethe's *Faust*).
- Paolo Tosti 1846-1916 Hundreds of songs: attractive melodies coloured by Neapolitan popular song.
- Stefano Donaudy 1879-1925 Return to archaic forms and bel canto style of 1600's.
- Ottorino Respighi 1879-1936 Sixty songs. Settings of Italian contemporary poetry.
- 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Ildebrando Pizzetti, Francesco Santoliquido, Pietro Cimara, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Luciano Berio, etc.

# For the Listening Program

- NOTE: Selection links to youtube are active only from your downloaded file of this pdf presentation.
- Follow the Italian song texts with English translation for each of the listening selections. See Links page to download the texts in pdf file for printout.
- As exactly as possible, the English translations follow the Italian verse lines. An excellent way to acquire Italian vocabulary.
- Reminder: Listen to the singing Italian. Listen to the legato of the language periodically interrupted by the air stopping only in double consonants. Listen to understand the continuity and elasticity of the Italian breath flow.

# Listening Program 1

- **Edition Arie Antiche:** 1600-1750. Eighteen composers in the edition: Monteverdi, Caldara, Marcello, Lotti, Scarlatti, Durante, Pergolesi, and others.
- Originally composed with vocal melody and figured bass (musical shorthand telling the accompanist which chords to play).

• 1601	Caccini: <a href="#">Amarilli</a>	CD Bartoli	18	3.08
• 1621	Stefani (attributed): <a href="#">O leggiadri occhi belli</a>		11	2.01
• 1630	Carissimi: <a href="#">Vittoria mio core</a>		21	2.32
• 1680	Scarlatti: <a href="#">Gia il sole dal Gange</a>	CD Pavarotti	3	2.05
• 1722	Bononcini : <a href="#">Per la gloria d'adorarvi</a>		1	4.25

- 1770 Gluck: *O del mio dolce ardor*

From the opera *Paride ed Elena*. Aria intimately beautiful (with piano), dovetailing to Mozart. Gluck protested florid vocal pyrotechnics of contemporary opera showoffs. He called for a return in opera to simplicity in lyrical drama: “dramatic naturalness, integrated dramatic clarity,” purer melodic and declamatory lines.

Renata Tebaldi: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abbh1BK76\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abbh1BK76_o) 3.32  
 Teresa Berganza: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BU-a1aqXAcY>. 4.03

CD: Bartoli, Pavarotti: EB

# Listening 2

- **Vincenzo Bellini.** 1801-1835 *6 Ariette da camera* (1829) 10.00
- Bellini called his songs *Ariette* or *Romanze*. *Romance*: a song genre, more elegant than a ballad or a folksong, composed. A higher social level of the participants, a romantic little story. Examples: *Plaisirs d'amour* (Martini), *Dans un bois solitaire* (Mozart).
- The songs described as “Pure melody, the simple nobility and beauty of song” (LP notes Scotto). Classical eighteenth century themes of addressing classical beings such as the nymph Melancholy (*Malinconia*).
- The Rose theme, dying for love, of *Vanne*, is echoed for example in Berlioz’ *Spectre de la Rose* from *Les Nuits d’Été* (1841).

CD EB Pavarotti/James Levine

- No. 4. 2.30 *Ma rendi pur contento*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aReN\\_y7ItKY&list=PL62606214B487C0BD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aReN_y7ItKY&list=PL62606214B487C0BD)
- No. 6 1.45 *Malinconia*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fstr9a1Cwk0>
- No. 7. 2.45 *Bella Nice che d’amore*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY-WW2NS7JA>
- No. 8. 2.30 *Vanne, o rosa fortunata*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kr2RJQXEbvU>

# Listening 3

- **Paolo Tosti.** 1846-1916

“Italianate melody with a generous dash of Neapolitan popular song” (Kimball 363). But surprising depths of colour and emotion.

*La Serenata*: colour of Neapolitan song.

3.20 Pavarotti, with piano: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AnDogL2RPw>

3.20 With orchestra: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chKZ9TsFri8>

*Sogno*: intimate and lovely. Arpeggiation similar to Fauré.

3.00 Renata Tebaldi, with piano: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYM2BqhJ0Yoo>

3.12 Carlo Bergonzi, with orchestra (diction is clearer):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moaRnDFiFiw>

- **Stefano Donaudy.** 1879-1925

A return to archaic forms and bel canto style of the 1600's.

*O del mio amato ben* from *36 Arie di Stile Antico* (published 1922).

3.47 Bergonzi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKy3rvWzUys>

5.10 Arleen Auger: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2K7aDZVL3Y>

# Listening 4

- **Ottorino Respighi.** 1879-1936. Studies with Rimsky-Korsakov, impressionist influences, “classical structure....classical serenity....subjective and romantic.”

CD EB Pavarotti

2.25 *Nevicata*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFivLwlhR9s>

2.24 *Pioggia*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lymnl3uTld0>

3.05 *Nebbie*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfPQcROKxqw>

- **Final song presentation**

*Ombra mai fu* (Handel). Recorded 1955.

2.24 Beniamino Gigli: DVD EB No. 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbWtmlL8Onk>

*Ombra mai fu di vegetabile, cara et amabile, soave più.*

*Never was leafy shade more cherished: so gentle, so sweet.*

- **Conclusion**

Over 300 years - 1600-1900 - the glorious voice. What do you think *Bel Canto* is?

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# Cantata and Opera

## Additional Notes

- The term *cantade/cantata* appears around 1620 and development of the cantata continues into the 1700's, moving through various forms such as strophic, strophic variations, full and partial da capo arias, declamatory and free lyrical/arioso-like passages flowing freely into each other (eg. Purcell and Strozzi), refrain and rondo repetitions, etc., and written to secular and sacred texts.
- Ultimately the cantata took on the fixed form of recitative, aria da capo (ABA), recitative, aria da capo (ABA), etc., a formal structure gradually replaced by more through-composed song forms. However, many lovely recitatives and arias can be lifted from cantatas for a solo program.
- The cantata forms were countered by the stunning developments in opera composing in Italy, moving to virtuosity and vocal display, showcasing the dramatic and technical possibilities of the trained voice. The voice becomes the primary medium and the text of secondary importance. The text's job is to enable the voice to convey heightened emotion and drama. The development of ABA form with return to A showcased vocal versatility of ornamentation, and as well deeper expression. *Lasciatemi morire* (Monteverdi), though only one page, is an example.
- And as already noted, many of the selections of the *Italian Arias and Songs* repertoire were written for operas.