

Sydney Conservatorium of Music Library Exhibition
Transcript – SCM Library Staff Presentation
Thu 27 May, 2pm

Influencers of Vienna: Reconstructing a bel canto scene

Acknowledgements and thanks

I would like to acknowledge the land on which we work, study and, of course, make music here at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music – Gadigal land of the peoples of the Eora nation. I pay my respects to the generations who have gathered on this site to share stories and knowledge, and develop skills and intellect to be creatives, expressed through many artforms and interconnected with a continuum of practice. This includes the handing down of information and unpacking the ideas from sources to build a sonic picture of moments from the past. The acknowledgement of the continuum of practice allows our artistic voices to have greater meaning, conveying in our own creative output, rich interpretations and passionate appreciation for what has come before, how we can broaden our perspectives here in Australia in the present, and understand what benefit this can have for the future as leaders in music research and classical performance.

I would like to express my hearty appreciation to Sineadh Boccalatte, here at the Sydney Conservatorium library, for her support preparing this exhibition to display my Doctorate of Musical Arts research. Similarly, many thanks to Anthony Chmiel for assistance with the preparation of key elements featured in this exhibition, such as the videos accessible via QR codes on display labels that provide information in parallel with the research associated with the ARC funded Discovery Project *Shock of the old: Rediscovering the sounds of bel canto 1700-1900*.

The foundational components in this library exhibition follow pathways from the earliest recorded evidence and travel back along investigative lines to seek sound worlds where no aural substantiation can be referenced. I sincerely thank Prof Neal Peres Da Costa (chief investigator of our Discovery Project) for his learned guidance, and professional support as a collaborative artist and expert supervisor throughout my doctoral study thus far. Equally, I am extremely grateful for Neal's generosity for sharing his wisdom to shape this exhibition and for the loan of many personal items to give it greater depth and context. I hope this exhibition will showcase all the fabulous work the Bel Canto research team has been doing. Additional thanks to Sarah Collins for adding so much content to belcantorediscovered.org (the discovery project's website) – I encourage you all to check out the website, and guide any exhibition visitors to listen and explore the extensive resources, musical examples and paper presentations from experts in historical performance from around the world.

This library exhibition has been a wonderful collaboration with the Conservatorium, providing an invaluable opportunity to share research knowledge through active

discussions and demonstrations and, though it has a focus on historical performance practice, presentations of our team's findings are for the benefit of all, here at the Conservatorium (the student body and staff), as well as the broader music community. It also aims at engaging modern vocal practitioners (in training and in the industry) to explore the process of embodiment through the study and appreciation of early recordings, encouraging the emulation of historical expressive practices of bel canto as a way to achieve greater creative scope. The uncovering of historical works and decorative practices of past artists (including early performances in Australia), for example, from the Museum of History NSW collections, showcases musical exemplars to a wide audience and engages the public, sensorily, providing informative context during visits to Sydney's historical houses and sites, like this building we occupy today.

Presenting and sharing sonic research results will hopefully engage the vocal and historical performance units in hearty and excited conversations about how we can utilise methodologies and processes in preparatory music training, particularly when investigating core Classical and Romantic repertoire, and continue to inform professional performance choices.

The three E's:

The processes of Emulation, Embodiment and Extrapolation, afford us, as modern trained practitioners, rich opportunities to expand the palette of expressive devices available to explore what these earlier practices feel like in our bodies. The visual and interactive elements of the items on display aim to bolster engagement and direct interest to areas underexplored and less appreciated, particularly the plethora of extraordinary early recordings to guide and inspire creative diversity in expression and interpretation.

- So, what do (research) pathways look like when attempting to retrace a sonic era of the 18th century?

This exhibition is the uncovering of a *bel canto* time capsule. The inclusion of images and items reimagines the reconstruction of a musical scene, in this case, a parlour in the mid-to-late 1700s, Vienna, with particular focus on Marianna Martines and her contemporaries. The methodical steps back in time, however, could be utilised to recreate any historical scene with similar informed results. The guided listening event on Mon 7 Apr, 6pm, to be presented next door in the Music Café, will showcase music which correlates with items and pathways laid out in this exhibition, with the intent to sound examples over a 250-year period. Attendees will experience the evolution of the continuum of singing practice, albeit reverse engineered. I will play you a few examples today to highlight the steps that I have been taking and point to the links on labels to dive deeper into bel canto: from the earliest sound evidence of the late bel canto to what could discernibly sound as early bel canto in Martines' time.

In the reconstruction of a bel canto scene, I wanted to allude to a music salon similar to where Martines may have penned her compositions, practiced scales on her keyboard or passionately expressed her vocal bravura. The exhibition space has been arranged with the 'less concretely supported' research elements in the rear (concepts further away in time) but have the enigmatic Martines at the centre, as she is my core focus in reimagining the musical world of a significant circle of 18th century Viennese musicians.

Image:

Moritz von Schwind, *Schubertiade*, from 1868 is a depiction of a salon performance in Vienna from the mid-19th century, represented by an artwork on the wall of [this](#) salon.

Numerous individuals gather round a keyboard that Schubert plays, accompanying a favourite singer of his, Johann Michael Vogl, sharing his vocalism with what appears to be a swooning crowd of admirers.

Utilisation of an historical instrument in the guided listening experience will complement additional research aims to reimagine practices with appropriate keyboards exploring tones, textures and layers of sound (with the engagement of pedals and moderators) to inform practice-led sonic possibilities.

The featured portrait of Martines at the centre here provides further context—she is seen sitting at an historic keyboard.

Image:

Pietro Antonio Lorenzoni (1721-1782), Portrait of Marianna Martines at the Keyboard (mid-late 18th century).

The artist of this image, Lorenzoni, is believed to have painted several portraits of Mozart and his family between the 1740s and 1780s. Evidence suggests Martines sang at occasions in Vienna accompanied by the young virtuoso when Mozart came to town.

Item:

In the centre of the room is a *Dolmetsch Clavichord* (c.1920). Dolmetsch (1858–1940) could be considered the grandfather of the early music revival in the 20th Century. This instrument is similar to what may have been found in well to do homes in Martines' time. Dolmetsch built copies of almost every kind of instrument dating from the 15th to 18th centuries fuelling the resurgence of interest in early music.

Item:

A reproduction of a facsimile of the title page of Martines' chamber cantata 'La Tempesta' from 1778 (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Musiksammlung) sits ready for sonification.

Martines' beautiful handwritten scores unfortunately don't reveal how she decorated her music in performance or what she expected in terms of variety in vocal timbre (or tone

colour). To reimagine Martines' sonic world, we must make connections between early recordings and descriptions in treatises, and employ other extrapolative methods.

Firstly: what is bel canto?

On this label is a definition of bel canto (or beautiful singing) by James Stark (*Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (1999)) stating bel canto is:

"A highly complex way of singing ... in which the specific interaction of breathing, vocal fold oscillation and embouchure spaces gave rise to central vocal qualities such as register balance, suppleness of tone, sound intensity, a controlled vibrato or the play with timbres known as chiaroscuro. They form the basis for the use of means of shaping such as legato, portamento, crescendo and decrescendo, messa di voce and mezza voce, various forms of fluency and trills, and even the appropriate use of tempo rubato."

How can singers today effectively tap into *bel canto* with technical assurance and stylistic conviction?

What research pathways must be developed to reimagine how a singer of the 18th Century sounded?

The Discovery Project, *The Shock of the Old: (Rediscovering the sounds of bel canto 1700–1900)* aims at:

- recovering knowledge of *bel canto* practices through practical experiments,
- developing a model that informs future advancements in vocal performance,
- investigating how these sound effects and colours were achieved in practical terms

Specific investigations focus in on the varied notated and un-notated *bel canto* effects that can be achieved through practice-led methodology and extensive mining of written sources to gather historical descriptions detailing 18th and 19th-century usage.

Our first E: Emulation (historical sound evidence)

This is a novel, practice-led method imitating historical recordings. The emulation process uses performance body skills to reimagine musical practices from the past. Early sound recordings of late-bel canto singers (trained in the second half of the 19th Century) reveal such practices in abundance before the rise of modern style in the early 20th Century. These musicians' expressive traits were part of a continuum of practice going back several centuries.

Vocalists are asked to undertake close listening and detailed annotation of scores, as well as record their singing to come as close as possible to the vocal styles heard on historical recordings.

Here we have original items to use as tools for emulation:

Item:

A Thomas Edison (1847–1931) *Phonograph, (Edison Model A100) Diamond Disc Player* from around 1920.

And

Item:

A Gramophone record: 03062 of a setting of Thomas Moore's poem "The Last rose of summer"

Edward Cone: Patti quote (AP: Queen of Hearts)

I will now play and excerpt of the original recording from this disc

Audio example:

"The Last Rose of Summer" from *Martha* (1847) by Friedrich von Flotow (1812–1883). Recorded in 1905 by Adelina Patti (1843–1919), soprano and Landon Roland (1873–1938), piano.

The full recording and an emulation of the work is available in a video (*Emulation and Embodiment*) via a QR code

This book by

Item:

Maurice Strakosch (1825–1887), *The Ten Commandments of Music for the Perfection of the Voice* (1896) book, open to an image of Adelina Patti and a handwritten message with her signature states some key qualities to achieve success as a bel canto singer.

"Wishing you sincerely courage and patience, the two qualities indispensable to arrive at success

*Yours very sincerely
Adelina Patti"*

Strakosch was Patti's brother-in-law and managed her concerts.

Now, what do we learn from early recordings?

Another key figure in this exhibition is Manuel Garcia II (1805–1906) who provides us with pedagogical treatises and annotated examples and arias that describe how *bel canto* can be practically achieved. García successfully pinpoints a gap in understanding how to describe physically (with physiological diagrams), articulate instructively and, define tonally the common expressive and timbral vocal practices which we can identify in early recordings such as Patti's.

QR Code Links: *Watch a video explaining García's laryngeal positions and registral colours*

Physically embodying bel canto requires:

- the qualification of early recording artistic practices then a correlation with the definitions provided in García's treatises (publications from 1840 to 1901): descriptions of expressive effects, timbres and emotional states.
- García also describes in depth the mechanical construction of sound; how timbre is created with flexible laryngeal and pharyngeal positions.

Item:

Manuel García (1805–1906) *Hints on singing* (1894)

"The study of the physiology of the voice has been greatly facilitated by the use of the laryngoscope. This instrument, by laying bare the interior of the larynx, shows how the glottis proceeds to produce sounds and registers. It shows, also, the manner in which the ringing and veiled qualities are communicated to the voice. These qualities — produced by the glottis — are distinct from the characteristics of the voice called timbres, which are exterior to the vibratory organ and are originated in the pharynx by quite another mechanism." —Manuel García II, Preface, 'Hints on Singing'

The image on display, from García's *Hints on Singing* features simple cross sections of the vocal mechanism to indicate the shifts that occur during phonation for two timbres (*voix claire* (open and clear) and *voix sombre* (closed and dark)

Image:

"Timbre: Fig.12 Open–Timbre Clair (Vertical section from the front to the back of the head, showing depression of the soft palate and a high position of the larynx) Fig.13 Closed–Timbre Sombre (Diagram of the same parts, showing the soft palate raised and the larynx depressed)".

Extrapolative experimentation relies to a great extent on individual and intuitive artistic responses. It has been illuminating to sonify scores annotated with expressive verbal instructions by this celebrated 19th Century singing teacher.

An aria example by Francesco Morlacchi (1784–1841), takes into account García's detailed advice on vocal production and expressive performing practices.

Audio example:

"Morir ciel qual contento" from *Teobaldo ed Isolina* (1834), Francesco Morlacchi (1784–1841). Annotations: García II, Manuel. *Ecole de Garcia, Traité complet de l'art du chant*, 2 vols, (Paris: L'auteur, 1847), vol.2, p. 100

QR Code Link: *Listen to a realised example of García's annotated aria by Morlacchi*

This item is a page from a journal

Item:

Manual García—A Hundred Years Old Today (March 18, 1905), featured as a ‘family tree’ in *The Sphere, An Illustrated Newspaper for the Home* (British newspaper published by London Illustrated Newspapers (weekly) from 1900–1964)

García’s lineage

Sound recordings of many singers from the early 1900s, offer representative outputs from García’s teaching lineage. Strong connections can be made with documentary evidence in published and unpublished annotated or instructive performance editions of García’s students, such as the ‘Swedish nightingale’, Jenny Lind’s (1820–1887) ornamented collection of songs, to better understand artistically-driven expressivity.

In the *Emulation and Embodiment*: video Neal and I have reimagined Jenny Lind’s decorated version (c. 1849) of the “Last Rose of Summer”. Emulation detail after Adelina Patti has been included in the rendition to inform the approach to tone colour, language, articulation, tempo rubato, dynamics.

Embodiment: Historical performance editions

This ornamented aria of “Una voce poco fa” by Rossini (an original score from the Museum of History NSW collections) includes original mid-19th Century handwritten ornamentation and performance annotations: providing an opportunity to sound a past era in time and space.

The Garcia connection to this work: Rossini wrote the leading role for Manuel Garcia senior (pictured here in the family tree) in 1816.

Item: “Una voce poco fa”, Cavatina from the opera *Il Barbier di Siviglia* (1816), by Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868). A hand annotated section of the score from the volume ‘Emma Joseph nee Chapman, volume of songs and music no. 5, circa 1810-1845’, Stewart Symonds Sheet Music Collection, Caroline Simpson Library. MUS/SS/19. First public Sydney performance of this aria, 1836.

Domenico Crivelli (1793–1856) was principal professor of singing at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), in London. Many of his students either toured Australia as performers or emigrated here to sing and teach. Emma Chapman commenced studying with Crivelli in 1842. Her collection of sheet music used at RAM arrived in Australia with her widower in the 1860s. The manuscript ornaments were likely to have been added by Crivelli himself. The score includes extensive annotated melismatic runs (ascending and descending) throughout the aria. This is evidence of the types of impressive and individualistic bravura singing that singers were expected to deliver at that time.

Embodiment: the utilisation of signs, symbols and sensations

“The concept of embodiment ... refers to the lived experience of engagement of the body in the world ... experiencing the world meaningfully ... through active engagement with the world, the body performs and enacts cultural norms and practices; in turn, the body can alter cultural practices. The embodiment term therefore refers concurrently to the breadth of lived experience as one engages with his/her body in the world, and to the shaping of these experiences by cultural forces.” — Niva Piran, ‘Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment’, (2017)

Embodiment is key to the process of ingraining another singer’s approach to sound production. This practice-led research establishes a richer palette of vocal approaches and defines more diverse performance outcomes for the modern vocal artisan. Additionally, building knowledge of forgotten traditions and sound worlds of the early *bel canto* period, embraces the resurrection of ‘lost’ works, for example Johann Anton André’s *Lieder und Gesänge mit Begleitung des Piano-Forté*. The little-known German publisher and composer provides us with an incredibly vital source of performing practice evidence about song performance in the early nineteenth century: 48 works in total, published in four volumes with 12 works in each volume. The collection is an instructive edition that provides an extraordinary level of detail of the types of expressive practices that singers and pianists were required to employ.

My own research has led me to develop symbols representing transitory timbral effects with the aim to ‘repurpose’ distinctive tonal qualities (identified in early recordings) in my own musical reimaginings. Many *bel canto* expressive devices come into play to broaden the embodied knowledge including improvisational expressive practices. André provides explanatory remarks for the various signs and symbols he used in the collection. Of particular interest is André’s obvious regard for declamatory principles of tempo modification. André also gave frequent indications of dynamic shading and accents, such as small accents (>) and double hairpin signs (<>), which surely carried implications for both dynamics, agogic accentuation, and tempo modification depending on context. Such a level of interpretative detail was considered only a starting point in building an appropriately stylish interpretation.

Item:

Johann Anton André (1775–1842) *Lieder und Gesänger mit Begleitung des Piano-forte* 1817-22. Four volume collection and title page for two individual lieder scores: No. s 22 and 23 No.6 (Heft 1)

Audio example:

“Sehnsucht“ from *Lieder und Gesänger mit Begleitung des Piano-forte*, vol. 3, op. 39 (1818), Johann Anton André (1775-1842)

Such engagement has also facilitated extrapolation back to earlier eras. Sonifying annotated scores by the vocal pedagogue Domenico Corri (1746–1825), who studied with the famous eighteenth-century pedagogue Nicola Porpora (1686–1768) with decorated examples by Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) and W.A. Mozart (1756–1791) provides ample research opportunities, with identification of a gap in knowledge regarding the actual timbral sound

production possibly utilised by 18th-century singers. All these individuals are directly linked to Marianna Martines and her own extensive creative output.

Achieving the 'Perfect Art'

Item:

Domenico Corri (1746–1825) *The Singers Preceptor or Corri's Treatise on Vocal Music* (1811) Book, comprised of two volumes, published by Chappell & Co, London.
Bound facsimile

"The Promethean fire of eloquent expression, as the soul to the body intuitively guides and directs the whole, while the latter, the mere agent of its will, when thus inspired, conveys with grace and truth every sentiment and every passion." – Domenico Corri, 'The Singers Preceptor' (1811)

Image:

Prof Clive Brown (Emeritus Professor of Music, University of Leeds) perusing his original Corri editions at his home, outside of Vienna, December 2024

What techniques can be used to achieve a reimagining of what 18th Century performing artists may have sounded like?

Exploratory emulation experiments imitating expressive choices and tonal colours heard in Adelina Patti's 1905 rendition of "Voi che sapete" (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), combined with ornamental practices (leaping graces, turns, and additional breath marks) as outlined by Corri, can be achieved through a realisation of a Mozart aria. A Corri decorated version of the vocal score was 're-found' in the mid-20th Century by Sir Charles Mackerras that facilitates a sound world arguably closer to that of the era of the Porpora tradition. Allowing the expressive tonal qualities of Patti to dictate the vocal approach and present a sound world already over 100 years old, Patti's own interpretation is layered on top of an ornamented vocal line. This leads to the alteration of other aspects of performance, such as tempo rubato and registral shifts, underlining the aria's text.

Audio Example:

W.A. Mozart (1756–1791): "Voi che sapete" from *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786).
Annotations by Domenico Corri (1746–1825) overlaid with emulation annotations from the 1905 recording of Adelina Patti (1843–1919)

QR Code: *Listen to a reimagining of the sound world of Corri of a Mozart favourite*

The acknowledgment of the continuum of practice (we see in the opening paragraph of Corri's treatise) means that Corri's explanations and ornamented scores of 18th-century composers (such as Hasse, J.C. Bach, and Haydn), suggest the use of common expressive bel canto practices and could provide connections to Martines' own creative choices. They were part of the continuum, but evolved in various ways (i.e. changing in terms of quality and quantity). Patti's recordings preserve the practices of this earlier bel canto traditional.

Ongoing emulations of early recording artists brings our awareness closer to the possible intent behind the utilisation of fluid, decorative and emotionally considered expressive techniques. The implementation of additional written source concepts establishes connections with the continuum of pedagogical and comparative artistic choice evident in an astoundingly rich and rapidly evolving 200-year period.