

# LEGATO THROUGH THE AGES

Let him learn the Manner to glide with the Vowels, and to drag the Voice gently from the high to the lower Notes, which, thro' Qualifications necessary for singing well, cannot possibly be learn'd from Sol-fa-ing only, and are overlooked by the Unskilful.

(Tosi: *Observations on the Florid Song*, 1723)

By this portamento is meant nothing but a passing, tying the voice, from one note to the next with perfect proportion and union, as much in ascending as descending. It will then become more and more beautiful and perfected the less it is interrupted by taking breath, because it ought to be a just and limpid gradation, which should be maintained and tied in the passage from one note to another. The portamento cannot be acquired by any scholar who has not already united the two registers, which are in everyone separated.

(Mancini: *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*, 1774)

Through some disjunct intervals [the singer] will carry the voice with such an inflection that it will pass by way of an indefinite number of sounds of which one cannot specify the pitch.

(Asioli: *Scale e salti per il solfeggio, Preparazione al canto ed ariette*, 1814)

By carrying the voice from one note to another, it is not meant that you should drag or drawl the voice through all the intermediate intervals, an abuse that is frequently committed - but it means to "unite" perfectly the one note with the other.

(Vaccai: *Metodo Pratico di Canto Italiano per Camera*, 1833)

Carrying the voice (port de voix - portamento di voce) is leading from one pitch to another passing through all the intermediary pitches possible. The portamento can include everything from the semitone to the biggest range of the voice. Its length is taken on the last portion of the note that is left. The speed depends on the character of the music to which it belongs.

Connecting pitches (vocalisation liée - agilita legata e granita) is passing from one pitch to the other in a clean, subtle, spontaneous way, without letting the voice be interrupted or tarry on an intermediate pitch...So that legato coloratura shows all the characteristics of perfection, it is necessary that the intonation be irreproachably just; it is necessary that all the notes have an equality of value, sound, and color, and finally that all the pitches be equally legato. We can hardly achieve this goal after a year and a half of study.

(García: *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing Part I*, 1847)

Without legato there is no singing; and, the two things that render the human voice superior to every other instrument are the power of legato, and the variation in colour.

(F. Lamperti: *The Art of Singing According to Ancient Tradition and Personal Experience*, 1884)

The pupil must observe a strict legato, a smooth and unbroken passage from one tone to the other. The breathing must not be interrupted between the tones, but flow evenly as if a single tone were sung.

(G.B. Lamperti: *The Technics of Bel Canto*, 1905)

Legato was often taught by first rehearsing deliberate, audible, portamenti between pitches, which were subsequently reduced in duration to the point of imperceptibility. Voice in this regard is analogous to a string instrument on which pitch is changed with the tuning key, not on the fingerboard, and for which the bow continues while the string is being retuned. It involves very rapid changes in vocal fold tension from one sustained, vibrant pitch, to the next, rapidly moving through the intervening micro-pitches too quickly for them to be perceived.

(Kenneth Bozeman: *Kinesthetic Voice Pedagogy 2*, 2021)