

Rules established by Giovanni Battista Mancini's and Vincenzo Manfredini's treaties concerning the training process of the future singer

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Abstract: *Decanting and crystallising the pedagogical thinking in canto depended directly on the education development along the processes of humanization and civilising of the human being, all of this is accomplished by accumulating, preserving and transmitting information. In the history of the vocal music there is not a pedagogy, as a single method, but educators, who have in common only a part, more or less significant, of this set of values. The vocal education of the XVIII-ornamentth century becomes the cornerstone of the vocal technique, most of the international singing teaching relying on this bag of knowledge. Between 1774 and 1797, Giovanni Battista Mancini and Vincenzo Manfredini, two vocal educators, who influenced decisively and beyond doubt the art of singing with their published treaties, set rules that the singer must follow in their study in order to acquire the necessary qualities for a virtuous singing.*

Key-words: *the history of vocal music; vocal pedagogy; canto treaties; vocal technique.*

1. Introduction

Across time the educational experience, based especially on observation and experiment, highlighted several ideas and exercises, of undeniable value for the art of singing.² The novelty in the XVIII-th century, of utmost importance for the Italian vocal art,³ consists especially in a theoretical deepening concerning the training process of the future singer, with the publishing of several specialized treaties that contribute to crystallising the vocal technique and style.

The analysis of some pedagogical vocal principles in a time when the art of singing was defined by vocal perfection, serves us as support for discovering some methods which to be identified with the necessities of the present vocal education, thus the treaties of Giovanni Battista Mancini and Vincenzo Manfredini implemented rules which the singer had to follow in their study for acquiring some vocal qualities, needed in *bel canto*. Regarding the means suggested for the training of the future lyrical artist, they are structured in phases that contribute to the execution capacity, the technical preparation being of major importance in vocal education, thus the intention to outline the norms of perfect execution (stylistically and technically), then as well as now being highly appreciated the singers, capacity to sing as close to ideal, to perfection as possible.

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² „It is in the labors and the ideals of the singers and teachers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we find everything fashioned and defined that became the glory of the famous eighteenth century virtuosi. We cannot discover in the summaries of the teachings of the schools of the eighteenth century, as preserved in the writings of Tosi and Mancini, anything unknown to the masters of the period surveyed in this work.” Henderson, William James. 1921. *Early History of Singing*. New York: Logmans, Green and Co., p. 192-193.

³ „Le dix-huitième siècle est, pour le chant italien, une de ces époques principales qui font date dans l'histoire d'un art. L'explosion resplendissante de l'art vocal n'a pas été spontanée; il en a été de lui comme de toutes les manifestations artistiques, qui ne se produisent pas sans avoir été longuement préparées.” Lemaire, Théophile; Lavoix, Henri. 1881. *Le Chant, ses principes, son histoire*. Paris: Heugel et fils, p. 377.

2. Objectives

Involving the students in examining the historical sources, using the theoretical researches and instruments of theoretic-informative and practical-actional nature, through implementing a manner of training and, why not, in an aesthetic research, in a desirable development which points at the theoretical component as well as at the practical one.

3. Short description of the Italian vocal music pedagogy in the XVIII-th century

Regarding the vocal education of the XVIII-th century in Italy, the singing treatises and schoolbooks published in this century describe in detail stylistic norms (*buon gusto*, flexible, smooth singing, tension, *chiaroscuro*, types of ornaments), having attached to them numerous scales.

Together with the vocal agility the ornaments were highly appreciated, the maximum point being considered *messa di voce*, one of the dynamic elements most difficult to perform.⁴

The singing schools, existing even since the end of the XVII-th century, were searching for new manners of training, in order to perform the highly ornamented singing, a few cities from the Italic Peninsula benefitting from the most famous educators of those times: Bologna (Antonio Maria Bernachi, Francesco Antonio Pistochi), Milan (Giuseppe Ferdinando Brivio), Modena (Francesco Peli), Florence (Francesco Redi), Rome (Lotti, Gasparini and Giuseppe Amadori) and Naples (Nicola Porpora, Leonardo Leo and Egizzio).⁵

The century starts with Francesco Tosi's work (+1732), *Opinioni de cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna, 1723), continues with several translations and notes (John Ernest Galliard, in English and Johann Friedrich Agricola, in German) ending with the third revision of Giovanni Battista Mancini's work (+1800), *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Milan, 1777) with the commentaries written by Vincenzo Manfredini (+1799) to his treatise, *Regole armoniche o siene precetti ragionati per apprendere I principi della musica* (Venice, 1797).

For a better understanding of the strict requirements that the students are expected to meet from the educators of those times, we shall take as an example the famous School of Nicola Antonio Porpora (+1768), Farinelli and Caffarelli being two of the his most well known students. The vocal virtuosity cultivated by his school may be defined by six elements: hedonism (the voice should offer sensual pleasures), virtuosity (the voice should achieve maximum speed and pitch, describing miraculous, fantastic worlds, torn from the terrestrial concrete), emblematic singing (the voice should perform unusual embroidery to outline the characters, status, so as divinities be superior to mortals), counterpoint and improvised singing (the voice should be able to perform trills, mordents, grupets a.s.o. and to immitate, based on a superior technique, animal or natural phenomena sounds), conceptual, abstract singing (the part did not correspond to the singer's sex, typical for the Baroque bel canto, played by the famous evirati cantori and by the transvestite contraltos), bizzare, strange singing (the taste for rare, stylised voices and surreal vocal pitches).

Due to the above mentioned educators and to the extraordinary singers they have formed (the *castrati* Farinelli, Senesino, Caffarelli, Guadagni, Pacchierotti, Marchesi, Crescentini and primadonnas Faustina Bordoni, Francesca Cuzzoni, Mara, Todi, Banti and Catalani), some coming from other parts of Europe to the Peninsula specifically, to perfect

⁴ „The messa di voce was often regarded as the most difficult vocal exercise, requiring a high degree of control of the breath. It was also considered an important stylistic and expressive device in vocal music.” Stark, James. 2008. *Bel canto: A History of Vocal pedagogy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 171.

⁵ Mancini, Giovanni Battista. 1774. *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato*, articolo II, *Delle diverse scuole, e dei Valenti Uomini, e Valorose Donne, che fiorirono nell'arte del Canto nel fine del passato secolo, e tutta via fioriscono nel presente*. Vienna: Ghelen, p. 10-34.

themselves with these great pedagogues, the Italian Singing School becomes famous all over the world.⁶

4. Giovanni Battista Mancini, notions concerning the training process of the future singer

Giovanni Battista Mancini (1714-1800), born at Ascoli Piceno, Italy, was a castrato singer, soprano, vocal pedagogue and author of a singing treatise. He studies with two of the greatest vocal educators of the XVIII-th century, at Naples with Leonardo Leo (+1744) and at Bologna, with Antonio Bernacchi (+1756), where he also perfected the composition and counterpoint, with Giovanni Battista Martini (+1784). At the age of sixteen he begins his career as a soloist, shortly becoming very successful, both in Italy and Germanic Europe.

Although a singer with real qualities, he is remembered by posterity as one of the greatest vocal pedagogues of the XVIII-th century, his work, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (published in 1774, in Vienna, with three revised later versions) being considered the main reference point for the vocal technique, until the issue of the outstanding singing treatise by Manuel Garcia the son, in 1840. He dies in Vienna, where he lived during the last part of his life, on the 4th of January 1800.

In the last chapter of the treatise, *About the just order, rules and phases which must be observed by the young apprentice in educating the art of singing*, Mancini enumerates the principles, norms and phases that should be followed when training a future singer. The space allows us only to outline them and offer a short analysis.

The intense vocal training. Based on scores written, among others, by Leonardo Leo, Niccolò Porpora, Johann Adolph Hasse, with different levels of difficulty, they are of true help in educating a refined aesthetic sense, just method in singing and correct style. He condemns the idea that this vocalising could be obsolete, „perché in oggi si canta d'un altro gusto” (because today they sing in a different aesthetic sense), saying they are useful for a desirable vocal career, not because the mentioned pedagogues were remarkable, but because they were written in a time when the principles of the vocal singing were based on perfect taste, rules and precision. In my opinion, the final argument given by Mancini has an unquestionable value: the large list of male and female singers that he mentions in the second chapter of his book, who, following the study described above, had brilliant careers.⁷

Progress fundamented by caution and ballance. Mancini requires, both from teacher and disciple, that the preparation exercises should to be adapted to the individual particularities, to be easily implemented and understood by the student, and not to become a source of exhaustion and stress regarding the vocal instrument. He closes with the warmful encouragement given to him by his maestro, Leonardo Leo: “...keep on studying methodically and patiently, and soon you shall catch up with your colleagues and equal them with even greater glory.”⁸

The education for the art of singing must be acquired at early age, because later it becomes more difficult.

The training will start with the study of the recitative, at the beginning with uttering the syllables and intonation, later focusing on declamation. Mancini makes a clear difference between the recitatives for the technique-stylistic study, with medium degrees of difficulty,

⁶ Ardelean, Nicoleta and Ioan. 2016. *Bel canto, origini și devenire până în secolul al XVIII-lea*. Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, p. 38-41.

⁷ Mancini, Giovanni Battista. op.cit., p. 178-179.

⁸ „... continuate pure a studiar con metodo e con pazienza, che fra qualche tempo raggiungerete i Compagni, e gli uguaglierete con maggior gloria.” Mancini, Giovanni Battista. op.cit., p. 180.

and those offered by the numerous compositions, out of which he suggests to be studied the ones belonging to Bonocini, Gasperini and Niccolò Porpora.

The melodic exercises, based on madrigals and duets, are considered vital, both for the technical training, of utmost importance in vocal education, and for acquiring expressiveness. The teacher must observe that the rules of a perfect technique-interpretative execution are respected, the capacity of a student to perform as close to the ideal of perfection as possible, being highly appreciated: "If the maestros, who are no less than the educators of this art, do not lead their disciples by efficient, gradual rules and do not give them the necessary time to evolve through study according to their age, the success of a proper training will always be imperfect."⁹

The vocal training must unfold throughout the entire life time. Mancini warns especially the singers at the beginning of their career, who possessing a beautiful natural voice and good looks, enjoy a temporary success, based mostly on encouragement than on abilities, abandon study, demonstrating that the long lasting triumph appears only after a long sustainable effort.

Mancini concludes that only ceaseless study, true and sincere flexibility, passion for a sustainable effort, true humility, a real christian life, are the qualities, the necessary virtues which make a professor to be remarkable.

5. Rules set by Vincenzo Manfredini concerning the training process of the future singer

Vicenzo Manfredini (1737-1799), composer, harpsichord player and music theoretician, was born near Florence. He starts his musical education guided by his father, then at Bologna and Milan. Around 1758 he leaves together with his older brother, Giuseppe, a castrato singer, on a tour to Moscow. There he becomes maestro di cappella at the Imperial Russian Court. In 1769 he returns to Bologna and after activating for a while as a composer, he dedicates himself mainly to musical pedagogy, his theoretical research resulting in the work called *Regole armoniche, o sieno precetti ragionevoli per apprendere la musica...*, published in Vienna, in 1775. For the art of singing, of great importance is the second edition, *Regole armoniche o sieno, Precetti ragionati per apprendere la musica di Vincenzo Manfredini, seconda edizione, corrette, ed accresciuta*, Venice, 1797, where he inserts a fragment concerning singing. In 1796 he receives the invitation to return to the Royal Court in Sankt Petersburg, he arrives in September 1798, but he does not fill any position since he dies the next year. His daughter, Elisabetta Manfredini-Guarmani (+cca 1828), was a succesful singer in the XIX-th century, being known mostly because Gioachino Rossini (+1868), composed four of his operas especially for her voice.¹⁰

For our study we highlight the third part of Manfredini's work, *Delle regole più' essenziali per imparare a cantare*, which is structured in four chapters.

In his opinion, the main reason for which more and more singers alienate from perfection was the lack of a **correct method and of a singing teacher able** to conduct the vocal training. Manfredini's ideal of perfection, called by him *cantar di maniera*, does not restrain to vocal technique, to the decorative art, because " producing the notes as they are

⁹ „Se i Maestri, che altro non sono che Direttori di quest'arte, non conducessero i loro discepoli per le dovute, e graduate regole, e non dassero il dovuto tempo, che di necessità conviene per perfezionarle con lo studio, e con l'età; la riuscita d'un buono scolare faria sempre imperfetta, ed infelice.” ibidem, p. 184.

¹⁰ Forbes, Elizabeth. 1992. „Manfredini-Guarmani, Elisabetta”. *The Grove Book of Opera Singers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 300.

written and performing them with artistry and expression are two different things, or in other words, to sing with style, with manner.”¹¹

After a series of technical advice (intonation, portamento, registers, breathing, agilities, ornaments, diction) and style advice (expressiveness, recitatives and how to perform them), he returns to the training process and, in the last chapter, named *Avvertimenti per quelli che insegnano e per quelli che imparano il Canto*,¹² he mentions a few rules the singer should follow in their vocal study.

The first one refers to **the study of scores and vocalising**, which has to be adapted according to age and vocal capacity, in order to acquire the vocal qualities necessary to the virtuous singing. In his opinion studying the scores and vocalising should last at least two years, period after which there can be introduced **musical fragments with text** in the vocal training. He recommends compositions belonging to Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (+1736), Domenico Scarlatti (+1757), Francesco Durante (+1755), Niccolò Porpora (+1768), Johann Adolph Hasse (+1683), Benedetto Marcello (+1739) and Giovanni Clari (+1754). In Manfredini's opinion no sooner than three years of study was it possible for the student to sing *all'improvviso*. Improvisation represented the decoration of musical fragments, respecting the style, through intentional alienation from the original score. In the Baroque opera, the exact performing of the score was considered to be lacking in artistic value.¹³ He concludes by saying that it is hard enough to sing in the right style and with the proper method, without being gifted from nature, that is: beautiful, flexible voice, musical ear, disponibility and the chance to be guided by a worthy professor.

6. Conclusions

The XVIII-th century may be characterised, regarding the Italian singing school, as being an impressive one, which inspired and touched across time the history of this art, but the explosion of singers with extraordinary technical characteristics was not spontaneous, and it happened after a long and sustainable preparation.

The writings of the two singing educators, extremely valuable, include essential aspects concerning the vocal art of the XVIII-th century, representing two treatises important for the theory of singing. Nevertheless we shall outline that Mancini's treaty is by far the most useful for the contemporary pedagogy and thus fundamental for a correct information regarding the particular aspects of the training process and its results. Mancini did not have the conscience of a writer mastered by the desire to publish in order to become famous, his intention being concentrated on the idea of conserving the principles of the correct singing, which, from his point of view, were lost more and more in the egocentrism of the contemporary singers.

The idea that there is not a pedagogy of singing but methods which have in common only a part, more or less significant, of vocal education values, is available also in the case of those two. Although we are aware of the conflict between Mancini and Manfredini, the purpose of the present study was not to outline this fact, but to highlight their opinions regarding the training process of the future singer, both of them emphasizing the importance of phasing the study, determination and perseverance, all of this under the careful supervision and guidance of the singing teacher.

It is generally acknowledged the fact that achieving a perfect volume of preparation is determined essentially by the necessity of accumulating a volume of technical actions which

¹¹ „... è cosa assai diversa, eseguir le note come sono scritte, dall' eseguirle con grazia ed espressione, lo che dicesi cantar di maniera.” Manfredini, Vincenzo. 1797. *Regole armoniche o sieno, Precetti ragionati per apprendere la musica di Vincenzo Manfredini, seconda edizione, corrette, ed accresciuta*. Venice: Adolfo Cesare, p. 57.

¹² *ibidem*, p. 74-75.

¹³ Duțescu, Mircea. 2002. *Voci mari, voci bizare*, Bucharest: Protel, p. 97.

must be used in the different conditions of the several vocal genres. This study is also desired to be a warning signal about the nowadays situation of the vocal art. In my opinion we should ask ourselves, observing the contemporary training process, how can a student hope to have a complete training with only one or two hours of singing per week?

7. References

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