



Bel Canto: A Performer's Guide

Robert Toft

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Bel canto, or 'beautiful singing,' remains one of the most elusive performance styles vocalists strive to master. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, composers routinely left the final shaping of recitatives, arias, and songs to performers, and singers treated scores freely so that inexpressively notated music could be turned into passionate declamation. In other words, vocalists saw their role more as one of re-creation than of simple interpretation. Familiarity with the range of strategies prominent singers of the past employed to unlock the eloquent expression hidden in scores enables modern performers to take a similar re-creative approach to enhancing the texts before them.

In this first ever guide to *bel canto*, author Robert Toft provides singers with the tools they need not only to complete the creative process the composer began but also to bring scores to life in an historically-informed manner. Replete with illustrations based on excerpts from Italianate recitatives and arias by composers ranging from Handel to Rossini, the book offers discussions of the fundamental principles of expressive singing, each section including a practical application of the techniques involved. Drawing on a wealth of documents from the era, including treatises, scores, newspaper reviews, and letters, this book captures the breadth of practices singers used in the *bel canto* period. Complete with six scores (recitatives and/or arias) for performers to personalize through the old methods, and a companion website offering demonstrations of the principles involved, *Bel Canto* is an essential resource for any singer or vocal instructor wishing to explore and master historical techniques of interpretation and re-creation from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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