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## The Birth of ‘Modern’ Vocalism: The Paradigmatic Case of Enrico Caruso

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### ABSTRACT

In the decades spanning the turn of the twentieth century Italian opera singing underwent a profound transformation and became ‘modern’. I explore the formative elements of this modernity and its long-term effects on the way we sing today through the paradigmatic case of the tenor Enrico Caruso. I frame Caruso’s vocal evolution within the rise of *verismo* opera, comparing selected recordings, reviews and the rules and aesthetic prescriptions contained in vocal treatises to show how his new vocalism differed from that of the old *bel canto*. To set Caruso’s achievement in context I also analyse recordings of two other tenors of the era: Giovanni Zenatello and Alessandro Bonci.

Before Caruso came I never heard a voice that even remotely resembled his. Since he came I have heard voice after voice, big and small, high and low, that suggested his, reminded me of it at times even forcibly.<sup>i</sup>

With these poignant words, the American composer Sidney Homer sums up the contribution of Enrico Caruso (1873–1921) to the development of an innovative type of vocalism. But however remarkable Caruso’s achievement may have been, it was not an isolated phenomenon. He was both the figurehead and the paradigm of that profound transformation through which the Italian tradition of operatic singing became ‘modern’. In what follows, I seek to identify and explore the formative elements of this multifaceted ‘modernity’, a phenomenon that formed the basis for the way in which operatic singing has been understood and judged ever since.

The new aural dimension which Homer perceived in Caruso’s sound depends on a novel conceptualization of the operatic voice. Roger Freitas has clearly shown that a move towards darker and heavier systems of singing in contrast with a previous ‘timbral ideal [...] substantially brighter and thinner’ started in the final decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>ii</sup> In his exploration of essential technical and expressive procedures of Verdian singing style including timbre, agility, pronunciation and vibrato, Freitas was building on the groundbreaking work of Will Crutchfield, who in the 1980s first brought to the attention of scholars the profound differences between the performance practices of singers in Verdi’s time, as revealed in early recordings, and those of today’s singers.<sup>iii</sup> In the present article I argue that the changing aural conception of the operatic sound, as perceived by Homer in the voice of Caruso, was more significant than is generally thought.

My contention is that at the turn of the twentieth century operatic voices lose the *bel canto* ideal of ‘pure’ tone quality and take on an irreversible gendered connotation and an erotically charged expressive force. In this connection I also put forward the hypothesis that pivotal to all these changes (in terms of both the aural conception of the operatic voice and performance practices) was the preservation of the same timbral quality from the top to the bottom of a singer’s range (which I define as ‘total timbral consistency’). I suggest that all these elements in combination elicited those impressions of ‘naturalness’ and ‘spontaneity’ that were attributed to the singing of Caruso from the beginning. Although opera-goers today may not be aware of it, these are the criteria by which they

judge a voice every time they visit the opera house. And yet before this transformation, different criteria of vocal production held sway. As my close reading of a large number of late nineteenth-century vocal treatises suggests, a timbral divide between the different vocal registers was considered not only unavoidable but also desirable. In line with this conviction, early recordings evince that singers deployed a technique of different timbres for different registers, supporting the idea that audiences would regard the registral timbral divide as an ordinary feature of singers' performance.<sup>iv</sup>

This whole transformative process is entangled with the rise of *verismo*, which redefined the operatic and, more generally, the cultural landscape of *fin-de-siècle* Italy. The 'new' characters of *verismo* operas (a wide array of types, from the peasants of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* to the intrinsically bourgeois artists of Puccini's *La bohème*) differ from their Romantic counterparts in every possible way. While the personages of *melodramma* were caught in a continuous tension between moral values and personal desires, with the 'true-to-life' psychologies of *verismo* this conflictual dynamic disappears. The space left empty by lofty ethical ideals is filled with sensual love and brutal violence in the highly sexualized environment of *verismo* operas. These feelings cannot be expressed either through the florid style of singing or through the 'pure' tone quality in which singers of Caruso's generation were trained. In order to portray credibly onstage the new *dramatis personae*, turn-of-the-century singers needed to design an entirely new set of skills.

The collective efforts made by many prominent Italian singers of the period to achieve the 'modern shift' have long been overlooked by scholars. With this article I make a first attempt at filling this lacuna, which is a disabling limitation not only for musicologists with a specific interest in vocalism but also for historians who read musical events as 'signifiers' of a wider cultural context (and vice versa). I have reconstructed the journey of these turn-of-the-century singers by following the paradigmatic vocal evolution of Caruso, as revealed in his impressive recording legacy, critical reception and the various opinions expressed by his singer colleagues. In order to put this material into its historical context, I have both considered the role that *verismo* played in this important transition of Italian operatic singing and compared Caruso with two other outstanding Italian tenors of

the period, Alessandro Bonci (1870–1940) and Giovanni Zenatello (1876–1949). Finally, because the availability of a specialized and agreed lexicon is a precondition of any discourse of vocal performance, I have throughout interwoven ideas from historical treatises with those of modern voice science, in order to provide a set of reasonably consistent terms for the analysis of those aspects of the recorded performance which are essential to this discussion.<sup>v</sup>

### <A>The ‘natural’ singing of Caruso: some evidence

From the beginning of his career, Caruso’s singing was frequently described with words such as ‘spontaneous’ and ‘natural’. Giovanni Battista Nappi, a writer for the newspaper *La perseveranza*, commented, after Caruso’s début in Massenet’s *La Navarraise* (1897) at the Teatro Lirico Internazionale in Milan, on the tenor’s ‘homogeneous voice’ and his ‘penetrating, full and spontaneous timbre’.<sup>vi</sup> His interpretation of the role of Cavaradossi (in Puccini’s *Tosca*) was welcomed for his ‘marvellous voice, spontaneous, mellow yet powerful throughout his entire range’.<sup>vii</sup> The distinct nature of Caruso’s singing did not escape the critic of *Il gazettino*, who commented on the ‘new creation he made of the character of Cavaradossi’, a fact that was ‘realized by those who had heard *Tosca* sung by other tenors, such as Borgatti and Giraud’.<sup>viii</sup> Towards the end of 1899, the newspaper *Italia* compiled a detailed commentary on the characteristics that distinguished Caruso’s ‘natural’ and ‘modern’ vocalism from that of two other outstanding tenors of the era: the older Fernando De Lucia (1860–1925), who was by then something of a living myth, well known to contemporary audiences for both his *bel canto* and his *verismo* performances, and the young Giuseppe Borgatti (1871–1950), who was making a name for himself as a Wagnerian singer.<sup>ix</sup> Reviewing Caruso in the role of Osaka in Mascagni’s *Iris*, the journalist of *Italia*, after praising his voice as ideally suited to the modern operas, compared De Lucia and Borgatti in the same role:

The declamation of De Lucia – too mawkish to be suave, exaggerated in its affectation, making excessive use of falsetto, and creating explosive unbalanced effects in the middle range – recalled the other Osaka, that of Borgatti, to whom the part is so little suited because of the nature of his vocal organ, and who overplays the effects of falsetto and mixed voice.<sup>x</sup>

The image which these and many other reviews of the early Caruso might suggest is of a singer who may have been seeking a more chest-orientated way of uniting the lower and upper ranges of his voice. This tendency, however, could already be detected in several other tenors of the period, such as Eugenio Galli (1862–1910), Gino Martinez-Patti (1866–1925) and Mario Guardabassi (1867–1952), all a few years older than Caruso. All these singers displayed some of the characteristics that were attributed to Caruso’s singing, which this article will consider in detail. For instance, in Guardabassi’s recording of Mascagni’s *Siciliana* (from *Cavalleria rusticana*), some of his repeated Ab4s show the full-bodied tone quality of the mature Caruso – while the middle range (C3–F4) remains rather light and bright, a characteristic inherited from previous styles of singing, as we shall see. Similar observations could be made of Martinez-Patti’s recording of the same solo and Galli’s recording of ‘Miserere’ from Verdi’s *Il trovatore*.<sup>xi</sup>

The fact that at this early stage of Caruso’s career we cannot rely on any recorded evidence makes it difficult not only to reconstruct his early technical development but also to reconcile what we read in reviews, memories, biographies with what we can hear in Caruso’s very first recordings from a few years later. Many interesting hints about Caruso’s technical evolution before the advent of recording are contained in Pietro Gargano and Gianni Cesarini’s biography (see above, note 6), where unfortunately the authors rarely give sources for their quotations. For instance, we are told that during the rehearsals of *Fedora* in November 1898, Caruso seemed to have exclaimed ‘Aggio trovato!’ (‘I have found it!’) while singing his solo ‘Amor ti vieta’, in which the tenor line lies mostly around the *passaggio* (that critical area of the vocal compass where the singer has to negotiate the transition between registers).<sup>xii</sup> We can infer that he ‘found’ a way of blending the sounds of the middle range (the fifth A3–E4 in this specific aria) with the high G4s and the climatic A4, given

that the solo's tessitura moves constantly around this area of the voice. A testimony that could support this assumption comes from the soprano Luisa Tetrazzini, who met Caruso on stage for the first time at the end of 1898 in the imperial theatre of St Petersburg, where they were singing in the same cast of Puccini's *La bohème*. She tells us:

As a youth of twenty years [...] I recall the difficulty he had even with such ordinary notes as G or A. He always stumbled over these, and it annoyed him so that he even threatened to change over to [...] baritone [...] During an opera season in St Petersburg, I sang with him for the first time [...] I saw what progress he had made [...] The *impertinenza* with which he lavishly poured forth those rich, round notes. It was the open *voce napolitana*, yet it had the soft caress of the *voce della campagna toscana* [...] I placed him there and then as an extraordinary and unique tenor. From top to bottom his register[s] [were] without defect.<sup>xiii</sup>

The 'impertinent', 'rich, round' notes that were detected by Tetrazzini in 1898 had to wait four years (until April 1902) to leave a verifiable trace in the first ten wax discs recorded by Caruso in a hotel room in Milan. Among the 'round' pitches that can indeed be heard in these tracks, the contemporary ear is struck by too many notes which sound 'whitened' and excessively 'open' (two terms which critics indifferently associated with a colourless quality of the vocal sound, and that will be defined below in relation to the lexicon), such as those present in the starting phrases of the *Siciliana* from Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and several passages in 'Una furtiva lagrima' from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*.<sup>xiv</sup> In other words, these sounds are not yet completely developed, as Nellie Melba underlined in her memoir:

Though his singing was spontaneous and natural, I do not think that in those days [1902] he was so fine an artist as later on, when perhaps his voice was not so wonderful. It makes me sad to think that the culmination of his art should not have coincided with the greatest years of his voice.<sup>xv</sup>

The repeatedly expressed opinion that Caruso's singing was 'natural', at a time when he was still dependent on heady tones and light vocal production, may seem puzzling to us, and can be explained only through a comparison of his singing with that of contemporary tenors.<sup>xvi</sup> For instance, the use that Giuseppe Borgatti made of falsetto, *fioriture* (ornamentation) and *mezze voci* (half voice) in the *verismo* part of Osaka (one of Mascagni's more exacting roles) was considered perfectly appropriate in that context by the critic of *Il mondo artistico*, Nino Cresco, who praised the singing of the young tenor enthusiastically.<sup>xvii</sup> Notwithstanding the repeated references by critics to the falsettos of Borgatti, his first recordings from a few years later (1905) display a rather muscular approach to the upper range, comparable to that of Giovanni Cesarani in his 1900 recording of Puccini's 'Tra voi belle' (from *Manon Lescaut*) and to that of Fiorello Giraud's 1904 recording of 'La fleur' from Bizet's *Carmen*.<sup>xviii</sup> In all these recordings, the similarities with some features of Caruso's middle-period vocalism are evident. However, as will be argued in the final section of this article, the extent to which these singers embraced heavier models of vocalism was tempered by their loyalty to the long-established tradition of *bel canto*.

The opinion expressed by Cresco in relation to Borgatti's Osaka is not surprising if one considers that in the decades immediately preceding those under discussion here even Adelina Patti's singing, so profoundly different from that of Caruso, was described as 'natural' by critics and audiences alike.<sup>xix</sup> This fact reminds us that terms such as 'natural' and 'spontaneous' are value-laden and not simply descriptive, and therefore change their meaning as the tastes and values of a culture change. According to the tastes of a nineteenth-century audience, the singing voice was judged to be 'natural' if the vocal production was perceived as light and effortless. That perceptions of 'naturalness' were shifting in the period under consideration is also revealed by the opinions that American critics expressed in relation to Caruso's vocalism at his Metropolitan Opera debut (1903). For Richard Aldrich, the critic of the *New York Times*, Caruso's performance in the role of the Duke from Verdi's *Rigoletto*



made a highly favorable impression [...] His voice is purely a tenor in its quality of high range, and of large power, but [it is] inclined to take on a ‘white’ quality in its upper range when he lets it forth. In *mezza voce* it has expressiveness and flexibility, and when so used its beauty is most apparent.<sup>xx</sup>

William James Henderson, from *The Sun*, wrote:

Caruso, the new tenor, made a thoroughly favorable impression [...] He has a pure voice, without the typical Italian bleat. Caruso has a natural and free delivery and his voice carries well without forcing [...] His clear and peeling high notes set the bravos wild with delight, but connoisseurs of singing saw more promise for the season in his *mezza voce* and his manliness.<sup>xxi</sup>

Even allowing for the subjectivity which inevitably colours the act of criticism, such views provide evidence of a widespread and increasing approval of ‘chesty’ and full-bodied sounds. In this context a ‘white’ quality in the upper range, as it can be heard in many of Caruso’s early recordings, was regarded as displeasing, while ‘peeling high notes’ evoked a welcome impression of ‘manliness’ – the more dark and ‘virile’ the sound, the better. It is also worth noticing that critics allowed for national differences in the perception and appreciation of vocal quality. In a ‘pre-performance essay’ Aldrich discussed Caruso’s critical and public reception at the Metropolitan Opera House over the singer’s first two seasons in that theatre (1903/4 and 1904/5):

And is it not time to raise some sober-minded queries about the way Mr. Caruso is using his voice and the kind of art and expression he is employing in these days? It was noticed at his first appearances here two seasons ago that he showed sometimes a tendency to use the ‘open’ or ‘white’ voice that is beloved of Italian tenors and admired by Italian listeners. But it was not a fixed characteristic of his singing, and he very soon proved that he could produce tones in the

purser and better way that lovers of singing hereabout prefer. And how lovely they are when he so produces them!<sup>xxii</sup>

Only when comparing Caruso's first discs (April 1902) to his later recordings of the same material are we able to appreciate the long and continuous technical evolution he underwent. Caruso spent approximately 11 years (1895–1906) on the elaboration of his *passaggio* to the upper range.<sup>xxiii</sup> This process (and its result) not only shaped his vocalism and style, but also informed those ideas of 'naturalness', 'spontaneity', 'modernity' and 'manliness' which, as the evidence demonstrates, were attributed to Caruso's singing. In order to understand this important vocal evolution from a more analytical perspective, I will refer to a number of selected passages from Caruso's recordings. Because this discussion needs a specialized lexicon, I need now to introduce the reader to some key technical terms. This task has a more than merely taxonomic interest; it reveals the existence of widely shared tenets of good singing among vocal pedagogues in *fin-de-siècle* Italy.

## **<A>The vocal registers and the strategies for uniting them in turn-of-the-century pedagogical writing**

At the time of Caruso, there was widespread agreement that male voices consist of two registers: the 'chest' and the 'medium' (also variously named 'mixed', 'second' or even, as in the case of Manuel García II, 'falsetto').<sup>xxiv</sup> Voice teachers of the period generally assert that when a singer passes from one register to another the timbral quality of their voice changes. The numerous treatises that I surveyed (over 70 volumes) are adamant in this respect, and the idea that trained singers could preserve a seamless tone colour from the top to the bottom of their vocal compass is decisively excluded. The transition between registers must of course be even, and in the series of around three or four notes that constitute the border between registers (the *passaggio*) any possible break must be artfully smoothed over; nevertheless, a change in tone colour will inevitably occur at some point

while the singer ascends the scale. There are numerous examples of voice teachers preaching this fundamental tenet of vocal technique, but it is Francesco Lamperti who most clearly explained the different qualities of the sounds of different registers. Under the title ‘The Various Registers of the Voice’ in his practical method (set out in the form of a dialogue between teacher and pupil) he gives his view:

Q. Are all the notes of the voice of the same quality?

A. No; only those which belong to the same register; the others, no matter how even the voice may be, differ from each other, as does the mechanism of the throat in producing them.<sup>xxv</sup>

Lamperti noticeably associates the term ‘register’ with a ‘mechanism of the throat’, clearly drawing from the work of Manuel García II, the pre-eminent vocal teacher of the nineteenth century, whose writings on vocal physiology and singing pedagogy (prolifically produced and revised over a period of approximately 60 years, from 1841 onwards) constituted part of the basic shared knowledge of voice teachers by the latter part of the nineteenth century. It was García who famously first associated the definition of ‘register’ with a physiological action in a treatise of vocal technique (*A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 1841):

By the word register, we understand a series of consecutive and homogeneous tones going from low to high, produced by the development of the *same mechanical principle*, and whose nature differs essentially from another series of tones equally consecutive and homogeneous produced by *another mechanical principle*. All the tones belonging to the same register are consequently of the same nature, whatever may be the modifications of timbre or of force to which one subjects them.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The ‘mechanical principle’ is central to García’s definition, and was the determining factor in what David C. Taylor identified as the ‘mechanical’ turn of vocal pedagogy in the mid-nineteenth

century, when scientific knowledge of the vocal organs and their workings rapidly became the foundation of any method of instruction.<sup>xxvii</sup> The importance of this ‘turn’ did not escape the attention of post-García voice teachers, some of whom consistently acknowledged in their writings the groundbreaking contributions of the great Spanish pedagogue. For instance, Beniamino Carelli, one of Italy’s most respected singing teachers, claimed that García ‘dared to make a science out of the art of singing’.<sup>xxviii</sup> The adjustments of the vocal cords throughout the compass of the voice were established as the primary causes of vocal production and register formation.<sup>xxix</sup> Modern voice science has explained these physiological mechanisms with some degree of accuracy.<sup>xxx</sup> The pitch of a note produced by the voice is ‘determined by the tension (that is, the elasticity) and the thickness (the vibrating mass) of the vocal folds [...] thus, when a low-pitched sound is produced, the vocal folds are relaxed, thick and short. For high-pitched sounds they are tense, thin and long.’<sup>xxxi</sup> The pitch thus depends ultimately on the tension and thickness of the vocal folds, and the registers of the voice originate from the different ways in which vocal folds vibrate on a particular note. Referring to the results of investigations carried out in 1970,<sup>xxxii</sup> Johan Sundberg explains that the terms ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ for classifying the several vocal registers were justified on the basis of the different behaviours in the functioning of the laryngeal muscles when producing different registers.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In her study on register transition, Natalie Henrich describes in detail the different actions of the vocal folds in the several registers. The multi-layered structure of the folds – they consist of a cover (mucosa, epithelium and superficial layer of vocal folds), a transitional layer (intermediate and deep layers of the vocal ligaments) and the main body (vocal ligaments) – is observed to vary as follows:

[In heavier registers] the vocal folds are thick and they vibrate over their whole length [...] Vibrating mass and amplitude are important. The vocal fold body is stiffer than the cover and transition. Vocalis muscular activity is dominant over cricothyroid. Both activities increase with pitch. Closed phase is often longer than open phase [...] In lighter registers, instead,] the vibrat-

ing mass and amplitude are reduced [...] All the vocal fold layers are stretched, and the collagenous fibres in the vocal ligament are the stiffest of all the layers. Cricothyroid muscular activity is dominant over vocalis. The open phase is always longer than the closed phase.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

To put it simply, when a singer shifts from a heavy to a lighter register, not only does the thickness of the cords diminish but also a reduction of the overall laryngeal muscular activity is always evident. Because some of the pitches of the singer's compass are common to both registers (the notes of the *passaggio* area), they can be produced with either the heavy (chest) or the lighter (medium) register, extending the heavy system of vocal production of the lower sounds upwards to the higher notes (and vice versa). Therefore, the balancing and joining of registers can be achieved according to systems of heavier or lighter registration – where by the word 'registration' I mean the actual manoeuvre of uniting and balancing the registers. García's pivotal strategy for extending the heavier system of registration upwards is the technique he termed (in French) *sombre* (dark). In this technique, singers increase the roundness of the vowels as they ascend a scale and reverse this mechanism when descending it:

The apparent equality of the notes in the scale will be the result of actual but well-graduated inequality of the vowel sound. Without this manoeuvre, the round vowels which are suitable to the higher notes would extinguish the ringing of the middle and lower notes, and the open vowels which give *éclat* to the lower would make the higher notes harsh and shrill.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The *sombre* timbre is as an essential pedagogical aid which affects (and modifies) the shape of the pharynx, a tube-shaped section of the vocal apparatus extending from above the larynx up to the oral cavity. The pharynx,

being able to elongate or to shorten itself, to broaden or to narrow itself, to take

the form of a slight curve or to break into a right angle, and finally to maintain any of the numerous intermediary forms, fulfils wonderfully the functions of a reflector or a megaphone.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

If the singer rounds a vowel when ascending the scale, the pharyngeal tube becomes lengthened and (to use García's language) 'right-angle shaped', with a dropped larynx and a raised soft palate, resulting in the *sombre* timbre. The tube can assume many other shapes which allow for the different vocal timbres to be produced, but it is the bright (*clair*) one that, produced by a 'curvilinear form' with a higher laryngeal position than that described for the *sombre* timbre and a dropped soft palate, constitutes the other main timbre of the voice.

Much confusion has arisen from the fact that the original French term *clair* used by García in his *École de Garcia: Traité complet de l'art du chant* (1847) has been translated into English as 'open'. The adjective 'open' generally has a positive connotation for English-speaking voice teachers, who in current practice describe an open sound as characterized by a raised soft palate and a lowered larynx, creating an 'open' space at the back of the mouth.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Nevertheless, a vocal tract so shaped corresponds to what García defined as the dark (or *sombre*) timbre. To add uncertainty to the linguistic issue, the use that some English-speaking critics historically made of the word 'open', as we saw above, confirms that they, far from signifying an open space at the back of the mouth, indicated, in fact, quite the opposite. In the critical context, moreover, the term 'white' was frequently treated as synonymous with 'open'. Likewise, in Italian pedagogical and critical language, an open (*aperto*) timbre describes a raised larynx in a flat soft palate. I follow this latter usage when I analyse the recordings which are presented later in this article.

To summarize, while the vowel modification determines a progressive darkening of the voice as it ascends the scale, the dark (*sombre*) timbre which is obtained in this way elongates the vocal tract (lowered larynx and raised soft palate). In addition to these general rules, which can potentially be applied to the training of any singer, each voice presents a particular potential to be 'registered' in specific ways. This depends on a number of factors, including the weight of the voice (dramatic, lyric or light) and specific characteristics of the physical vocal apparatus. Moreover, the interaction

between innate and cultivated elements of vocal registration produces what is perceived as a singer's individual colour and can produce a wide variety of results. A heavy voice could therefore yield a dark colour because the singer consistently resorts to procedures of 'covering' (a term which I use as synonymous with García's 'darkening') or because that is the natural colour of that particular voice, or a combination of the two. If the singer deploys less intensive covering, the voice will keep its weight, but will sound brighter. The same applies to light voices, which can also possess an innate dark colour, a quality which may or may not be enhanced by specific registral choices.

In García's view, the dark timbre is only one of the possible colours to which the singer can resort for ensuring variety of expression in the musical phrase.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Consistently with this line of thinking, post-Garcían voice teachers also discuss other timbres of the voice, such as the *rotondo-chiaro* (bright-rounded) and *rotondo-scuro* (dark-rounded), considering the different lengths in which the vocal tract can be elongated by creating each of these timbres. Such different elongations depend, in turn, on the diverse degree by which the larynx is lowered and the soft palate is correspondently raised.<sup>xxxix</sup> The preference that vocal pedagogues express for systems of lighter registration is understandable when one considers the greater effort the singer must make when supporting the voice in the heavier registration. It is, therefore, not surprising that voice teachers would exhort the singer not to draw the heavy register (chest) continuously upwards (through procedures of laryngeal lowering and vowel modification), but rather to 'carry down' the lighter one (medium). Both Lamperti and Shakespeare suggest that male voices switch to the second register on relatively low pitches, and the same procedure is also recommended by Beniamino Carelli and Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti.<sup>xl</sup>

However, the different colours in the two registers which the application of this procedure would yield – and with it the impression that the light-weighted upper tones might lack manliness – is not perceived as an issue. Considered as physiological phenomena, unavoidable and immanent within the tonal nature of each register mechanism, timbral differences between registers were perceived as a resource which allowed the skilful singer to access a wider palette of colours. The comparative

reading of late nineteenth-century vocal treatises shows that singing teachers' primary aim was the cultivation of a 'pure' tone quality, where 'pure' stands for the proper character of a pitch produced only through the mechanism of the register to which it belongs. Moreover, the striving for this purity would reveal the unique tonal quality embodied in the physical and psychological makeup of a particular singer. This was rooted in the aesthetic belief that expressivity was indissolubly linked to the 'true' nature of the individual vocal sound. The voice is the expression of a person, not of a type. As Doria Lena Levine, one of the last pupils of Lamperti, underlines, the great Italian teacher

first of all [...] stood for purity of tone, and for never sacrificing quality for quantity [...] He believed that if modern music demands that tonal beauty shall become a secondary consideration, that it makes of singing a hybrid, inconsistent, degenerate art, and that the sooner we come down to plain speech the better.<sup>xli</sup>

In an age when the conceptualization of the vocal sound was not yet firmly tied up with rigid expectations of its gendered qualities, singers had greater freedom with respect to ways of registering the voice, which allowed for a lesser degree of standardization. In this sense Homer's remarks on the voice of Caruso, quoted at the beginning of this article, might signal the starting point of a process in which voices began to coalesce around a 'model'. This is not to say that after Caruso, tenors' voices were any less individual or distinct in sound, as their innate vocal timbre would of course distinguish them from each other; but it might suggest that at the level of voice production, the dominance of the Caruso model exerted a levelling or homogenizing effect on the individual vocal personality of the twentieth-century tenor, as compared with his historical predecessors.

With these basic terms defined, I turn now to the discussion of specific elements of the recorded performance. There are two essential points to be made at this stage. First, all recordings of the early Caruso (up to 1905) attest to the habit of producing the two registers with different colours, endorsing the content and recommendations contained in pedagogical writing.<sup>xlii</sup> Secondly, the



working out of an aesthetic of total timbral consistency which progressively erased previous practices seems to have been a conscious choice, which one can trace through a long process of trial and error, as the comments of the most attentive critics also indirectly confirm.

### <A>Overcoming timbral inconsistencies: how ‘modern’ singing was born

Caruso’s 1902 recording of ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ from Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore*, a lyric role that the tenor performed until the end of his career, reveals that the tone quality of the notes below the *passaggio* is generally much darker and fuller than that of the *passaggio* notes and above.<sup>xliii</sup> In some sections this is strikingly evident, such as at bars 20–2 (see Example 1 <place Examples 1 and 2 near here>), where the B $\flat$ 3 and the D $\flat$ 4 are considerably darker than the long F4s.<sup>xliiv</sup> Moreover, the quality of the latter changes throughout. The first F4 on the word ‘vo’ is attacked with a rather ‘open’ and light sound which is progressively modified as Caruso approaches the end of the note. It could be suggested that this adjustment is produced through a procedure of slight vowel modification which extends to the first syllable of the subsequent word ‘M’a-ma’. Again, the same effect of tonal divide is audible at ‘I palpiti’ (F4–C4) in the second verse, where the C4 is much darker than the F4s (see Example 2).<sup>xlv</sup>

In the 1904 recording of ‘E lucevan le stelle’ from Puccini’s *Tosca*, a similar approach to the *passaggio* notes is displayed.<sup>xlvi</sup> On the phrase ‘Oh! dolci baci, o languide carezze’ (see Example 3 <place Examples 3–5 near here>), Caruso does not even attempt to cover the E4–F $\sharp$ 4, but he releases the voice on the flow of the lighter registration, avoiding any elongation of the vocal tract.<sup>xlvii</sup> Where the ‘sweet kisses and languid caresses’ are – to use Aldrich’s expression quoted above – ‘white’, Caruso attempts the two ascents to the top A4s in a muscular fashion (see Examples 4 and 5).<sup>xlviii</sup> It seems that he was seeking a way of releasing more vocal power, but without success. In

1904, Caruso the singer fails to match the intentions of Caruso the creative interpreter, as he approached the top notes with a relatively lowered larynx but without elongating the vocal tract to its full capacity.<sup>xlix</sup>

This observation is confirmed when the 1904 recording of ‘E lucevan le stelle’ is compared with that made in 1909.<sup>1</sup> Here, Caruso seems finally to have found a homogeneous *sombre* timbre for his rising phrases moving across the *passaggio*. The first ascent to the F#4 (Example 3) is now executed by progressively darkening the D4, E4 and F#4 through a skilful recourse to well-graduated vowel modification, while drawing the weight of the heavier register upwards.<sup>li</sup> The runs to the top A4s (Examples 4 and 5) are assertively covered, stretching the vocal tract to its maximum. With the vocal tract fully elongated and widened, Caruso is now able to produce well-rounded, powerful and ringing A4s, where variations in vocal colour between the registers are effectively eliminated.<sup>lii</sup> This total vocal consistency is revealed even more clearly when Caruso leaves the top notes. From these impressively wide A4s, which fill the acoustic space like huge pillars of air, his descending sounds preserve the same ringing quality and ample resonance, sustained by a firm column of breath.<sup>liii</sup> Homogeneous timbre, though, comes at a cost – the loss, or at least the greater attenuation of, nuanced singing with all its variety of phrasing and shading. For example, the *messa di voce* on the first A4 of ‘E lucevan le stelle’, which Caruso attempts in the recording of 1904, is lost in 1909, when the tenor’s top note is straightforwardly *forte*.

This achievement took over 15 years of experimentation with laryngeal heights and breathing techniques.<sup>liv</sup> Caruso’s long process of trial and error was punctuated by alternate phases of progress and drawbacks, as an attentive reading of American reviews also reveals. In his article on the 1905 Met production of *La sonnambula* Aldrich wrote:

But it cannot be denied that he has recently done much to give his discriminating admirers uneasiness. He has been prone to let his voice fall into a throaty quality; his tones have sometimes sounded pinched. There has been more than suspicion of the ‘bleat’ that is generally associated with the idea of the Italian tenor of the lesser sort. In seeking for those exaggerated effects of

pathos and tears and superhuman passion, he has not infrequently, and more frequently than he used to, cast to the winds all thought of tonal beauty, of that smoothness, purity, translucent clearness and warmth that are truly the distinguishing marks of his wonderful voice.<sup>lv</sup>

And Henderson's verdict on Caruso's Enzo in Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* was that, 'The white voice is not a grace of song when it is overused, nor is a throaty quality of tone at any time desirable. Caruso is guilty of much whiteness and occasional throatiness.'<sup>lvi</sup> These criticisms might be explained in the light of Caruso's thorough-going exploration of a heavier system of vocal production. The 'throatiness' to which critics refer might depend on the progressive search for lower laryngeal positions, while his swapping between the extremes of 'white' voice, pinched sound and bleat might well be the result of faulty balances as he was experimenting along the way.

Caruso's journey towards 'total timbral consistency' continued despite setbacks and uncertainties. His issues with the high notes (recalled above by both Tetrazzini and Melba, but also discussed in critics' reviews) could easily have been overcome by sticking to the traditional rule of 'carrying down' the light register. Nevertheless, if it is true that – notwithstanding the timbral inequalities in his voice – his singing was considered more 'natural' and 'spontaneous' than that of both Borgatti and De Lucia, it is difficult to resist the impression that he decided to embark on a different path.

Why did Caruso sound more natural and spontaneous? The answer is a complex one. In line with changing tastes during this dynamic era of transforming operatic style, timbral differences between registers were apparently still acceptable as part of the idea of 'spontaneous singing'. On the other hand, the abuse of falsetto was criticized. The most plausible hypothesis is that Caruso was struggling with the issue of extending the quality of his rather weighty first tenth to the *passaggio* and upper notes, arousing impressions of a 'bodily' singing in tune with the characteristics of the new *verismo* roles which populated the lyric stage of his time. The progressive erosion of timbral inconsistencies prompted by this process elicited those new evaluations of such long-standing terms of critical discourse as 'natural' and 'spontaneous'. As was the rule in his era, Caruso was singing a contemporary repertoire (the older operas in which he sang dated back at most 70 years), including

roles that he created on several occasions. He clearly had the right voice for this repertoire: his  *morbidezza*, the full-rounded, dark timbre of the middle range and the mellow and suave delicacy of the  *mezze voci* all gave his singing the ‘carnal’ quality of a sensual and masculine type which so much appealed to the taste of his contemporaries. But, ultimately, it was only by abandoning the aesthetics of a timbral divide between registers that a ‘modern’ conceptualization of the operatic voice could emerge.

### <A> *Verismo* and ‘modern’ singing

Why would singers make the effort to conceive a ‘new’ vocal sound? The short answer is: because of the rise of  *verismo* opera. To define this operatic movement has proved a difficult task, as is demonstrated by the intense scepticism with which scholars have treated  *verismo* opera and the very possibility of transferring the characteristics of literary  *verismo* to music. ‘Operatic  *verismo*’, wrote the musicologist Matteo Sansone, is a ‘misleading expression’, as it encompasses too large a variety of operas.<sup>lvii</sup> Jay Nicolaisen drew the borders of a vast territory that spans ‘the musically primitive  *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890), a one-act opera based on a violent play by Giovanni Verga, [to] the musically sophisticated  *Turandot* (1924), a four-act opera based on an exotic fairy tale by the eighteenth-century Italian Carlo Gozzi’.<sup>lviii</sup> Carl Dahlhaus asks whether musical  *verismo* has anything to do with its literary counterpart, given that ‘the differences between them are so glaring that one can doubt whether [...] it is meaningful at all to speak of  *verismo* in opera’, a question echoed rhetorically by Adriana Guarneri Corazzol, David Kimbell and Hans-Joachim Wagner.<sup>lix</sup> These scholars instanced the absence of social criticism, the sensationalistic treatment of the characters and their lack of psychological development, the incompatibility between the principle of impersonality (elimination of the authorial voice from the text) and the theatricality of  *verismo* operas as important elements which highlight the profound disjunction between literary and musical  *verismo*.

In recent years, Andreas Giger, building on the wider perspective of late nineteenth-century criticism, has proposed an entirely new view of musical *verismo*, advocating its existential ‘autonomy’ as a long-term movement which promoted a complete renovation of Italian opera through its departure from the structures of Romantic *melodramma*.<sup>lx</sup> From the 1860s, literary and art criticism linked the term *verismo* with the introduction of new subject matters (low-life, vulgar, trivial subjects, whose representation in artistic forms had traditionally been rejected), to which *veristi* were in no way exclusively committed, and a consequent renewal of linguistic styles. More importantly, the representation of both contemporary subjects and historical ones must be the expression of a methodological or ‘concrete’ observation of reality, which is the result of an attentive depiction of the environment in which the recounted stories take place.<sup>lxi</sup> With these categories in mind, critics might well have applied the term *verismo* to the operatic context. The breezy dismissal of any link between literary and operatic forms of *verismo* that music historians have traditionally expressed seems less plausible once we adopt this historiographical approach to literary criticism.

In opera as well as in literature and the fine arts, *verismo* prompted a gradual process of renovation: renovation of structures, forms, language and subject matter which within the span of several decades (from the 1860s to the 1890s) changed the face of Italian opera. One of the most striking elements of friction with the previous conventions of the Romantic *melodramma* was a search for dramatic continuity, although many other ingredients contributed to this process: the harmonic texture of the ‘new’ operas, their quasi-symphonic traits (so fiercely criticized by, among others, Verdi), a gradual reconsideration of the lexicon and syntactic structures of librettos and a new shape and articulation of the vocal line.

The renewal of dramaturgy was a direct effect of the interaction with French opera that reached its peak in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the works of Meyerbeer, Gounod and Thomas first (in the 1870s), and those of Bizet and Massenet later (in the 1880s), became a steady and consistent part of Italian theatrical seasons.<sup>lxii</sup> Their impact on *verismo* composers was considerable, especially with regard to psychological characterization and rhythmic articulation. A focus

on individual characterization was shared by many of the French operas of the period: Bizet's *Mireille* (1863) and *Carmen* (1875), Massenet's *Manon* (1884) and *Werther* (completed in 1887, although its Viennese première – in a German translation – did not take place until 1892), to name only a few examples. French composers working along the lines of the character's psychological development created a musical dramaturgy in which 'natural' dramatic continuity was met by self-contained moments of melodic-harmonic expressivity. And this was the legacy that Puccini, for instance, inherited from Massenet.

When psychology broke into the operatic world, the rigid formulas of *melodramma* were put in question. In that system the possible interaction between characters was already predetermined by their archetypal functions: the hero, the rival, the villain, the victim and so forth. Their unambiguous and predictable behaviour gave life to a dramaturgy which, in turn, justified a standard set of solos and ensembles all conveniently articulated in the 'cantabile-cabaletta' formula. When characters began to develop individual psychological traits, however, the traditional structures of Romantic opera with its quintets, sextets and concertatos broke down and eventually turned into a series of extended dialogues for the purpose of achieving dramatic realism. Verdi's *Otello* (1887) marked a significant move in this direction, and even more so *I Pagliacci* (1892), which displays throughout an almost unbroken sequence of dialogical exchanges and confrontations. In *Cavalleria rusticana* the closed form of 'onstage music' (drinking songs, serenades and stornellos) is interwoven with what Dahlhaus called the 'arie d'urlo', where the formalism of traditional *melodramma* is broken in favour of dramatic continuity.<sup>lxiii</sup>

As the psychological individualization of operatic personages was growing in complexity, Italian composers increasingly asked their librettists to emulate the fluidity of French poetic metre, as this was better suited to follow the emotional volatility of the new characters who populated the operas of the last part of the century. From Massenet's *Manon*, who moves between voluptuousness and naivety, to Bizet's *Carmen*, who sparks flashes of wildness and sexual power, the French language subtly highlights their temporary and changing states of mind. By contrast, Italian, with its heavier

accent and the symmetrical organization of its librettos, shows a sort of rigidity and stiffness once the florid style of singing is abandoned. Verdi was closely implicated in this search for rhythmical variety, and he burdened his long-suffering librettist Ghislanzoni with endless requests on this topic.<sup>lxiv</sup> Boito, who supplied the librettos for Verdi's last two operas (*Otello* and *Falstaff*), was to play a significant role in the modernization of Italian prosody in terms of both versification and renovation of the operatic vocabulary. All his librettos display this aspiration to escape 'the unbearable boredom of cantilena and symmetry [...] of Italian prosody, which almost inevitably generates poverty of rhythm within the musical'.<sup>lxv</sup> Puccini's obsession with metrical variety is well known. His need for a fluid musical phrase that only the casual rhymed or unrhymed mixture of irregular line length – *quinari*, *senari*, *settenari*, *ottonari*, *decasillabi* and *endecasillabi* – could allow, induced his librettist, Luigi Illica, to create the *illicasillabi*, a word coined by Giuseppe Giacosa, Puccini's other librettist, as a joke.<sup>lxvi</sup>

The renovation of the operatic libretto also involved a gradual transformation of the language, although this aspect was not an immediate consequence of the new character types portrayed on-stage, as one might expect. The peasants in *Cavalleria rusticana*, for instance, do not necessarily speak in everyday language. In the stanzas of the opening chorus, high-brow vocabulary is used throughout. The women, for example, sing that 'gli aranci olezzano sui verdi margini' ('the scent of oranges spread throughout the green borders', where the archaic *olezzano* – smell or perfume – replaces *profumano*) and 'cessin le rustiche opre' ('let's cease the rustic work', where *opre* is the archaic form of *opera*, and *rustiche* is similarly outdated). Turiddu's sentence 'Invan tenti sopire / Il giusto sdegno con la tua pietà' ('In vain do you endeavour / My righteous anger thus to subdue!') still presents the markers of an elevated and stylized construction, whereas Santuzza's 'quella cattiva femmina' ('that bad woman'), although lowbrow, is milder than the reiterated epithets thrown at Nedda by Tonio and Canio in *I Pagliacci*: 'sgualdrina' and 'meretrice abbietta' (both variants of 'slut').

Where the high-flown jargon of conventional librettos seems to be largely overcome is in Puccini's *La bohème* (1896). The simple phrase 'che m'ami ... di ...' – 'Tell me that you love me!' – with which Rodolfo sweetly commands Mimì represents the truncated version of the elaborate, rhymed lyrics finely sung by tenors of a previous age. For instance, the troubadour Manrico in Verdi's *Il trovatore* links the spasms of death with the ecstasy of love in his cantabile 'Ah sì ben mio', and even for Otello the ideas of immense love and immense fury in battle are still closely associated. But many examples in *La bohème* attest to the complete renovation of operatic vocabulary – from the incidental episodes of light-hearted bohemian life to the most tragic moment of the drama, the death of Mimì: 'Sono andati? Fingevo di dormire / [...] ho tante cose che ti voglio dire, / o una sola ma grande come il mare / [...] sei il mio amor ... e tutta la mia vita' ('Have they gone? I pretended to sleep / [...] I've so many things to tell you, / or just one thing – huge as the sea / [...] You are my love and my whole life'). Mimì's simple language echoes the simple (and realistic) dynamics of human relationships on which the drama is built.

The highly ornamented vocal lines of *bel canto* are clearly out of place in such context. The declamatory style, whose predominance in the 'melodramatic system' Lamperti had feared, finally 'despoiled [the vocal line] of agility of any kind'.<sup>lxvii</sup> This result was to be blamed on the harmonic texture of the 'modern' operas, as the vocal pedagogues defined them when debating their terrible flaws and negative effects on the cultivation of healthy and long-lasting voices. In the opinion of the prominent baritone and influential voice teacher Leone Giraldoni, 'modern' composers, stuck between past and future, attempted to find a way forward by emulating foreign musical languages. 'Let composers write as they used to in the past, taking advantage from the harmonic science, not to substitute for the melodic expression, but only to add valuable devices.'<sup>lxviii</sup> This invective, as many others of the period, was directed against the operas (and theoretical works) of Wagner, whose well-known controversial reception in post-unification Italy did not diminish the enormous influence of the German's complex harmonic language on young Italian composers.



The erosion of florid singing and the concomitant rise in declamatory style, bigger orchestras and dense harmonic textures all had their effects on the idea of vocalism. The elaboration of this new vocal aesthetic could not possibly be limited to a simple quest for vocal power, as the advent of a realist theatre required that the ‘modern’ singer search for a new sound, with naturalistic timbral connotations. The purity of tone so patiently cultivated by the older Italian singing teachers was exchanged for the ‘carnal’ sound that singers born during the 1870s, such as Caruso, Titta Ruffo and Eugenia Burzio, were pursuing.

The stylized tone quality of *bel canto* roles suits the ideal world in which such characters live and love. Even their voice types are stylized and not naturalistic. The Rossinian contraltos, Bellini’s very high tenors and Donizetti’s mad coloratura sopranos do not belong to the real world, as their vocal identities bear no relation to the common voices of everyday life. Verdi got rid of some of these types (very high tenors), progressively relegated others to secondary roles (basses and contraltos), kept other types for a long period (high soprano voices) and created new ones (the high baritone, completely distinct from the bass-baritone). Moreover, with the advent of *verismo* opera, political and moral themes such as Risorgimento and religion, which had exerted a prominent developmental force on Romantic opera, were replaced by the pervasive subject of love, a tendency which was obviously reinforced by the sheer influence of French bourgeois and sentimental dramas. The ‘love’ of Mascagni or Puccini, though, bears a feeble relation to that ideal and inspiring sentiment exalted in the operas of Romantic composers, as *veristi* tended to exploit love in its sensual or even overtly sexual aspects. In terms of vocalism, this choice translated into vocal lines centred on the medium voice range. As Celletti insightfully underlined:

Sensuality is especially expressed in the ‘medium’ range of the voice, and tends to dark colours. This explains both the shortening of the upper range of the voice and the tendency to centre the tessituras around the middle range. This was a general phenomenon.<sup>lxix</sup>

The middle range of the voice offers a wide array of possibilities to the actor-singer as in this area she or he can transform, with certain degree of spontaneity, the flow of singing into sobbing utterance, shouts or whispers. The other element considered in the above quotation is the lowering of the upper limit of the vocal range. This procedure, as Celletti himself pointed out, does not, however, make the singer's life easier. On the contrary, the *tessitura gravitates* around the high-middle range, which corresponds to the area of the *passaggio* critical to the production of top notes.<sup>lxx</sup> This poignant observation was corroborated by a generalization added by Fedele D'Amico:

Personally I have always believed not only that *veristi* had been always keen on this procedure [insistence on the *passaggio* from the medium to the upper range] [...] but also that it represents the specifically 'veristic' feature of their style, in short that the musical verismo is defined by this procedure [...] Indeed that insistence on an area of the voice which is less natural and more problematic demands an effort, a tension which turns singing towards a 'directly' passionate expression, similar to the excitement of a spoken language.<sup>lxxi</sup>

While Celletti principally refers to Mascagni's roles in his essay, D'Amico posits a question with which he also launches a kind of credo ('Personally I have always believed ...') as to what characterizes *verismo* style. If the *passaggio* becomes the focal area of *verismo* tessituras, as D'Amico suggests, the effort of sustaining the voice around this area evokes the tension of that sexual excitement which can be heard in the singing of characters as different as the peasant Turiddu (in *Cavalleria rusticana*) and the aristocratic Loris (in Giordano's *Fedora*). Although nineteenth-century writings had referred to the masculinity of *spinto* tenor voices in particular, the idea of an overt exploitation of the singing voice's erotic characteristics was not entertained. Discussing the various types of tenors, the voice teacher Heinrich Panofka repeatedly associated the *tenore di forza* with notions of 'masculine power' as well as 'heroic' or 'chivalrous' sentiments and defined its chief quality as a 'noble temperament, capable of loving in a tender, but worthy manner'.<sup>lxxii</sup>

The new form of *verismo* vocal aesthetic was also elicited by the highly tense phrasing characteristic of the new operas. The ‘pure’ tonal quality of the old school was perceived as somehow passive when confronted with the nervous energy of the new characters. In *I Pagliacci*, Canio’s sorrow, as expressed in one of the best-known *verismo* arias, ‘Vesti la giubba’, is not the intimate outpouring of his betrayed heart, but a furious and bitter burst of torment (‘ridi del duol che t’avvelena il cor’) so acutely painful that he – an elemental man moved by his basic instincts – has no idea how to deal with it. This neurotic intensity, in order for the audience to believe it and empathize with it, needed that visceral sound which was epitomized by Caruso. In the concluding part of this discussion, the comparison of Caruso’s recordings with those of two other tenors of the era should heighten their rather different ideas of tonal quality and (consequently) vocal phrasing. The following analysis should put in sharp relief those elements which, displayed in a scattered and incompletely developed manner by some of Caruso’s predecessors and contemporaries, were brought together by him in order to shape a highly characterized type of vocalism.

### **<A> Giovanni Zenatello and Alessandro Bonci: late *bel canto* systems of uniting and balancing the vocal registers**

I begin with a comparative analysis of Zenatello’s and Caruso’s recordings of ‘Vesti la giubba’ (from *I Pagliacci*) made in 1905 and in 1907 respectively.<sup>lxxiii</sup> These two renditions exemplify the heavy (Caruso) and lighter (Zenatello) strategies for achieving vocal registration (the equalization of registers). Zenatello approached the *passaggio* and upper notes within the traditional rules of the *bel canto* school; thus, his way of blending the various registers was based much more on the principle of ‘pulling down’ the medium register than on that of ‘drawing up’ the chest.

In Zenatello's recordings, his tonal quality is similar to that which can be heard in recordings made by the robust tenor voices of the previous generations, such as Francesco Tamagno or Francesco Marconi, both born in the 1850s. These tenors achieved an even registration across the range by keeping the whole area around the *passaggio* light and bright. They were extremely careful whenever singing in this range because high notes occurred far more abundantly in pre-*verismo* scores. Therefore, in that repertoire, exemplified by the operas of Verdi and Meyerbeer, they had to focus on keeping their weighty voices as light and bright as possible in order to be ready for the sudden and frequent jumps to the upper range.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

This is exactly what happens with Zenatello when he is singing in the *passaggio*. The held F#4 which precedes the passage 'Ridi Pagliaccio' (see Example 6 <place Example 6 near here>) is sung with lighter registration and bright timbre. Caruso, on the other hand, covers his F#4 by drawing up the heavier registration.<sup>lxxv</sup> In the remaining part of the phrase – with the insertion of a ritual double acciaccatura between the exclamation 'Ah!' and the first syllable of 'Ri-di' – the step F#4–G4 is completely smoothed over and gives the listener an impression almost of singing in slow motion.<sup>lxxvi</sup> The difference with Zenatello's registration choices is again clearly audible in the way in which he projects the G4 and the A4 of the following bar; here I would suggest that his peeling top notes spring out from a vocal tract which is less elongated than that of Caruso. Owing to the dramatic weight of his voice – Zenatello first trained as a baritone and then switched to tenor (1899) – he is capable of obtaining a convincing tone quality.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Nevertheless, his struggle with the breath, clearly audible both at the end of every phrase and on each in-breath, is eloquent; it highlights the fact that a tense long-legato line which moves within the middle–high range but avoids the extreme top reaches of the voice, is not ideal for a singer who relies on a lighter type of registration. This *bel canto*-like approach to vocal registration (with a bright and ringing quality) works extremely well with tenor roles of the heroic type such as Verdi's Manrico (in *Il trovatore*), as Zenatello's recordings demonstrate, but is less suitable for the sensual, dark, passionate, erotic and even sometimes degenerate characters of *verismo*. The aptness of lighter

systems of vocal registration to Verdian roles can be appreciated also by listening to Giraud's recording of 'Quando le sere al placido' from Verdi's *Luisa Miller*. Here Giraud approaches the top notes in the fashion of Zenatello with a partially elongated vocal tract, as I have just attempted to define it. The same procedure is audible in Borgatti's rendition of 'E lucevan le stelle', where he similarly ascends to the top A4s.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

One singer who seems to have had no recourse to the bright (*clair*) timbre is Alessandro Bonci. Three years older than Caruso, the two tenors shared a similar repertoire, particularly in the first phase of their careers, a fact which encouraged the press to foster the antagonism between the two.<sup>lxxix</sup> While Bonci retained his roles and the typical traits of his vocalism consistently over the years, Caruso started his transformation into a dramatic tenor from 1907/8 onwards. Ultimately, this process allowed him to cope with heavy roles, such as Samson in Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1915), Flammen in Mascagni's *Lodoletta* (1917), Jean in Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* (1918) and Eléazar in Halévy's *La Juive* (1919).

In his 1912 recording of 'Una furtiva lagrima', Bonci sings the first two phrases of both the first and second verse in a real *mezza voce*.<sup>lxxx</sup> Avoiding recourse to the lighter registration, Bonci achieves his *piano* effects through breath pressure alone, and seems to follow the route of consistently covering the *passaggio*. Bonci's characteristic vibrato makes it harder for the listener to follow clearly how he manages the leaps to the A<sub>b</sub>4 of 'festose' (see Example 7) or the A<sub>b</sub>4 of 'di più non chiedo', which he adds to the score (see Example 8).<sup>lxxxi</sup> <place Examples 7 and 8 near here> However, I would suggest that what we hear at these points is another example of the *bel canto* approach to vocal registration, with a vocal tract which is not completely elongated and expanded (that is, a partially lowered larynx in a not fully raised soft palate). Whatever opinion one decides to adopt about Bonci's way of balancing and uniting the registers, his phrasing and rubato, not to mention his use of *fioriture* and his diction are certainly not an example of 'modern' singing. The idea of flexible tempos is so inextricably part of Bonci's phrasing that the initial attacks of Nemorino's introspective solo are held as if a fermata were written above them. While in the first two phrases

the basic rhythmic pulse is almost completely slackened, from the third phrase ('quelle festose giovani') Bonci speeds up the tempo, as the very concept of rubato suggests. Nevertheless, here he modifies the note values at will, to the point of introducing sounds where rests are written: 'giovani' is restricted to the note value of a crotchet and the attack on the following 'in-' of 'invidiar' is anticipated in the last quaver of the first beat (where the syllable '-ni' of the word 'giova-ni' is written), while the tempo is slowed down again in a big *allargando*.

Compared with the liquid phrasing of this 1912 Bonci recording of Nemorino's aria, Caruso's recording of 1902 seems to have been conceived in a relatively strict tempo. If Caruso occasionally adds some *fioriture* or makes use of some heady *mezze voci*, his idea of tempo is nevertheless more rigorous, and the many concessions he makes to rhythmic flexibility do not obscure the perception of a basic rhythmic pulse.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Far from embarking on an exploration of these stylistic gestures *per se*, a task already brilliantly carried out by several scholars, I consider them in the singing of Bonci and Caruso in order to establish the extent to which these elements of style were determined by the changing aesthetics of tonal production.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> In other words, the specific manner in which pre-*verismo* singers conceived rubato, portamento, diction and coloratura was bound to be transformed and progressively disappear, because *verismo* singers – Caruso above all – were working out how to achieve total timbral consistency.

This new notion was completely at odds with the older style, with its extremely flexible tempos, frequent *fioriture*, endless diminuendos on high heady tones and neat vowel articulation. The complete equalization of the vocal compass within a heavy system of voice production implied an inevitable loss of both timbral variety and flexibility of the vocal mechanism. Reaching the top notes is harder from the elongated vocal tract favoured by Caruso than from the comparatively higher laryngeal position of (for example) Zenatello. Moreover, with the erosion of timbral inconsistencies the idea of a 'pure' tone quality progressively lost its grip on singers' imagination, and the highly individualized voices of the past gave way to the more standardized types of the present. Trained within traditional schools which shared several fundamentals of *bel canto* (costal-diaphragmatic breathing,

timbral register divide, preference accorded to lighter types of registration, ‘pure’ and ‘true’ vocal colour, pure and neat legato line ensured through the scrupulous study of portamento, *messa di voce* and a massive diet of graded exercises and *solfeggi*), turn-of-the-century singers built up their new set of vocal technical skills from this common background.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> From this perspective, the acknowledgement of some sort of continuity between the vocal tradition of *bel canto* and the nascent *verismo* singing is hardly questionable. In line with the above-mentioned hypothesis of Giger, who interprets *verismo* as a progressive renovation of the forms and structures of the Romantic *melodramma*, the evolution of a ‘modern’ vocalism also results from a progressive revisitation of *bel canto* concepts, such as timbral divide and ‘pure’ tonal quality.

An essential driver of this entire process is represented by the appearance on stage of the new *verismo* characters which, with their sheer erotic energy, called for a gendered, carnal, earthy vocal sound. With vocal lines centred on the critical area at the junction of the registers (the *passaggio*), they put on the singer a strain which evoked that of sexual arousal. The sparse use of top notes and the general avoidance of the most extreme high pitches also favoured systems of heavier registration, bringing the elongation of the vocal tract to its extreme limit. The substance of ‘modernity’ lies, therefore, in this new way of uniting and balancing the vocal registers which, in turn, depended on a profound reconceptualization of the vocal sound. The process that I have reconstructed here in relation to the example of Caruso defined a ‘modern’ type of vocalism. This type has since then set the bar of the international standard in mainstream operatic repertoire, with a longevity probably unequalled in the history of Western classical art song.

## <Captions for Music Examples>

Example 1 Gaetano Donizetti, *L'elisir d'amore*, *melodramma* in two acts, libretto by Felice Romani, vocal score (Milan: Ricordi, 2005). Romanza, 'Una furtiva lagrima', Act 2, bars 20–2 (vocal part only).

Example 2 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 34–6 (vocal part only).

Example 3 Giacomo Puccini, *Tosca*, *melodramma* in three acts, libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, vocal score based on the edition by Roger Parker (Milan: Ricordi, 1995). 'E lucevan le stelle', Act 3, bars 196–7 (vocal part only).

Example 4 Puccini, 'E lucevan le stelle', bars 198–200 (vocal part only).

Example 5 Puccini, 'E lucevan le stelle', bars 208–9 (vocal part only).

Example 6 Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Pagliacci*, *dramma* in two acts, libretto by Leoncavallo, vocal score, ed. Giacomo Zani (Milan: Sonzogno, 1981). 'Vesti la giubba', Act 1, scene iv, bars 32–40 (vocal part only).

Example 7 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 10–17 (vocal part only).

Example 8 Donizetti, 'Una furtiva lagrima', bars 40–1 (vocal part only).



## <Footnotes>

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I am very grateful to the staff of the British Library Sound Archive, in particular the sound specialist Vedita Ramdoss and the sound engineer Tom Ruane, for their assistance in finding, playing and digitizing the original 78 rpm discs from which excerpts have been used in this article. I must also thank the reviewers for *JRMA* who offered many helpful comments on my original draft. Thanks also to Joe Parks for assistance with the music examples. Translations from Italian are my own unless otherwise stated.

## <half-line space>

- <sup>i</sup> Sidney Homer, *My Wife and I* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 191.
- <sup>ii</sup> Roger Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing: Emancipation from Modern Orthodoxy', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 127 (2002), 226–57 (p. 235).
- <sup>iii</sup> William Crutchfield, 'Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi: The Phonographic Evidence', *19th-Century Music*, 7 (1983–4), 3–54. Crutchfield paid particular attention to the topic of vocal ornamentation and demonstrated its survival into the performance practice of the early twentieth century. In his study he relied on early recordings as an essential medium for the reconstruction of past performance practices.
- <sup>iv</sup> The idea that each register of the vocal compass yielded a different colour is confidently asserted in over 70 volumes of vocal pedagogy written between the 1840s and 1930s that I surveyed, including vocal treatises, singing methods and exercises of daily practice. Vocal pedagogues' traditional advocacy of a 'consistent' transition between the registers should not be confused with the idea of 'timbral consistency'; these are two separate notions which coexisted in the pedagogical discourse well into the twentieth century.
- <sup>v</sup> Rebecca Mara Plack complains about the endemic lack of agreement on even the most essential terms of such a specialized lexicon, which compelled her to build a tailor-made vocabulary in order to discuss stylistic gestures in the vocal recordings that she examined. See Plack, 'The Substance of Style: How Singing Creates Sound in Lieder Recordings, 1902–1939' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2008), 16.
- <sup>vi</sup> 'Voce omegenea, timbratura squillante, piena, spontanea'. *La perseveranza*, November 1897, quoted in Pietro Gargano and Gianni Cesarini, *Caruso*, with a contribution by Michael Aspinall (Milan: Longanesi, 1990), 42.

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- <sup>vii</sup> ‘Meravigliosa voce, spontanea, che ha tutte le pastosità, tutta la gamma in suo potere’. *Il mondo artistico*, 34/48 (1900), 11. On this occasion, Caruso was singing Cavaradossi at the Teatro Sociale in Treviso.
- <sup>viii</sup> ‘Del personaggio di Mario Cavaradossi egli fa una creazione del tutto nuova; di ciò si sono convinti coloro i quali assistettero as esecuzioni di Tosca, con altri tenori, come il Borgatti e il Giraud.’ *Ibid.*, reporting a review first published in *Il gazettino*.
- <sup>ix</sup> It was owing to Borgatti’s indisposition that Caruso made his début at La Scala earlier than anticipated, on 26 December 1900. On the opening night of that season, Borgatti was scheduled to sing Tristan in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. With Borgatti indisposed, the general director of La Scala, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, decided to replace Wagner’s opera with Puccini’s *La bohème*, in which Caruso was cast as Rodolfo.
- <sup>x</sup> ‘La declamazione, troppo sdolcinata per essere soave, di De Lucia; esagerata in leziosaggini, abusante dei falsi, erompente con stacco notevole negli effetti dei medii; ha ricordato il secondo Osaka, il Borgatti, al quale si adattava così poco la parte, per la natura del suo organo vocale, tetragono agli effetti falsi, della voce mista.’ *Italia*, November 1899, quoted by Aspinall in Gargano and Cesarini, *Caruso*, 241.
- <sup>xi</sup> Both Guardabassi and Galli trained first as baritones before transitioning into dramatic tenor roles. They made only a few recordings, among which Guardabassi’s *Siciliana* was recorded for a minor label, the Lyrophon Record (Matrix J 403), while Galli’s *Miserere* was a Gramophone & Typewriter Company (G&T) disc, Cat. 52408 (1902). Martinez-Patti’s substantial recording legacy deserves much more attention than it has actually received; his recording of the *Siciliana* mentioned above was made for Pathé, Matrix 84500, Cat. 10156 (1908).
- <sup>xii</sup> Gargano and Cesarini, *Caruso*, 44.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Frederick William Gaisberg, *The Music Goes Round* (New York: New York Times Company, 1977), 50.
- <sup>xiv</sup> The first ten tracks made by Caruso, which were recorded by Frederick William Gaisberg in April 1902, have been transferred by Ward Marston for Naxos Historical CD 8.110703. Later in this article some of the relevant passages from ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ will be considered together with the associated audio excerpts.
- <sup>xv</sup> Nellie Melba, *Melodies and Memories* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1925), 130. To be noticed again are the adjectives ‘spontaneous’ and ‘natural’, used by Melba in describing Caruso’s singing.

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<sup>xvi</sup> Because of our different historical perspective, when we listen to the early recordings of Caruso the characteristics of ‘spontaneous’, ‘natural’ and ‘modern’ singing which were immediately and consistently recognized by his contemporaries remain rather elusive to our ears.

<sup>xvii</sup> ‘In the remainder of the opera he has been delightful. All the *fioriture*, *mezze voci*, falsettos [...] progressively became full, ringing, powerful sounds’ (‘Nel resto dell’opera [Borgatti] ha deliziato. Tutte le fioriture, le mezze voci, i falsetti [...] diventavano grado a grado note piene, squillanti, potenti’). Nino Crespo, in *Il mondo artistico*, 34/48 (1900), 7. About *mezza voce*, James Stark underlines that this technique ‘is [generally] taken for granted’ in both pedagogical literature and voice science, and is ‘not explained’. Stark suggests, on the basis of his own interpretation of Manuel García’s definition, that *mezza voce* can be obtained by ‘disengaging the vocal tract to make it as passive as possible, thereby reducing the resonances of the vocal tract, while keeping airflow rates low’. Stark, *Bel canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 247.

<sup>xviii</sup> In 1905, Borgatti recorded a number of titles for Fonotipia, including ‘E lucevan le stelle’ from Puccini’s *Tosca*, Matrix XPh 1516, Cat. 39406, and (in Italian) ‘Deh non t’incantan’ from Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, Matrix XPh 1517, Cat. 39407. In 1900, Cesarani (c.1860–?) recorded Puccini’s solo, together with 14 other tracks, for Berliner Records in Milan, Matrix 2883, Cat. 52585, while the recording by Giraud (1868–1928) of the aria from *Carmen*, sung in Italian as ‘Il fior’, was made for G&T, Matrix 272i, Cat. 052069.

<sup>xix</sup> For contemporary observations regarding the naturalness of Adelina Patti’s singing, see Roger Freitas, ‘The Art of Artlessness, or, Adelina Patti Teaches Us How to be Natural’, *Word, Image, and Song*, ed. Rebecca Cypess, Beth L. Glixon and Nathan Link, 2 vols. (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 213–42.

<sup>xx</sup> *New York Times*, 24 November 1903.

<sup>xxi</sup> *The Sun* (New York), 24 November 1903. Note the reference to Caruso’s ‘natural and free delivery’.

<sup>xxii</sup> Pre-performance essay by Richard Aldrich on the Met’s production of Bellini’s *La sonnambula*, *New York Times*, 10 December 1905.

<sup>xxiii</sup> This date range can be estimated by considering the beginning of his active stage career together with the chronological analysis of his recorded legacy. Post-1906 recordings demonstrate that Caruso was able consistently to control heavier systems of voice production and display a departure from his previous practice of producing some of his top notes in a sort of reinforced falsetto. This observation also aligns with Michael

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Aspinall's theory of a change in breathing techniques in the period 1906/7, namely, from intercostal respiration to abdominal breathing – the latter favouring more deeply set laryngeal postures. See Aspinall in Gargano and Cesarini, *Caruso*, 247.

<sup>xxiv</sup> A distinction between male and female voices, with a two-register theory for male and a three-register theory for female voices, was generally accepted. Brent J. Monahan states that this latter division had 'greater acceptance during the nineteenth century' as well as surviving well into the twentieth century; see Monahan, *The Art of Singing* (Metuchen, NJ, and London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 146. The terminology adopted for register classification was admittedly confusing, with voice teachers making their personal choices of lexicon. For instance, what Luigi Lablache (1842) defined as the 'head' register is described as the 'mixed' register in Lamperti's treatise (1877), while both William Shakespeare (1898) and Mathilde Marchesi (1896; she, however, dealt exclusively with female voices) used the term 'medium'. Beniamino Carelli (1875) would refer to the *secondo registro* ('second register') and *voce mista* ('mixed voice') in a confusing way, and García (1841) preferred the term 'falsetto' – for which he was criticized by his pupil Marchesi.

<sup>xxv</sup> Francesco Lamperti, *A Treatise on the Art of Singing*, trans. J. C. Griffith (Milan, Naples, Rome, Florence and London: Ricordi, 1877), 17. This belief is unanimously shared among the voice teachers of the period, including Virginia Boccabadati in *Osservazioni pratiche per lo studio del canto*, 3rd edn (Pesaro: Federici, 1893), 10–11; Beniamino Carelli in *Cronaca d'un respiro* (Naples: Tipografia dell'Ariosto, 1875), 22, and *L'arte del canto: Metodo teorico-pratico*, 7 vols. (Milan: Ricordi, 1905–9), i, 52; Alessandro Guagni-Benvenuti in *L'odierna scuola di canto in Italia* (Rome: Tipografia Metastasio, 1886), 43–4; Mathilde Marchesi in *The Marchesi School: Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method* (London: Enoch & Sons, 1896), p. iv; and William Shakespeare in *The Art of Singing* (London: Metzler & Co., 1898), 36–46.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Manuel García, *Extract from the Mémoire on the Human Voice*, in *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing: First Part*, complete and unabridged edns 1841 and 1872, ed. and trans. Donald V. Paschke (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), p. xli (emphasis added).

<sup>xxvii</sup> David C. Taylor, *The Psychology of Singing: A Rational Method of Voice Culture Based on a Scientific Analysis of All Systems, Ancient and Modern* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 16–17.

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<sup>xxviii</sup> ‘Osò tentare di far dell’arte del canto una scienza’. Carelli, *Cronaca d’un respiro*, 33, where he also attributes to the physiologist Segon the statement that ‘on the anatomical and physiological knowledge of the vocal organs, García founded the mechanics of singing’. In modern times, the impact of García’s anatomy-based studies on the history of vocal pedagogy is revealed in the different ways in which contemporary writers have interpreted his insights. Nevertheless, a connection with Taylor’s idea of a ‘mechanical turn’ is a persistent view, even if the writer does not state it openly. On this topic, see David Mason, ‘The Teaching (and Learning) of Singing’, *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 204–20.

<sup>xxix</sup> Contemporary research in the field of voice science supports these ideas. Johan Sundberg quotes Harry Hollien, ‘On Vocal Registers’, *Journal of Phonetics*, 2 (1974), 125–43, who defines register as ‘a totally laryngeal event; it consists of a series or a range of consecutive voice frequencies which can be produced with nearly identical phonatory quality’. Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (Dekalb: Northern University Press, 1987), 49–50.

<sup>xxx</sup> See Brian White, *Singing Techniques and Vocal Pedagogy* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989), 59. Meanwhile Johan Sundberg points out, ‘Voice science has not developed to the point of any complete understanding of the glottal mechanism and its voice quality aspects.’ Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 50.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 51. The lengthening of the folds is managed by the cricothyroid muscles which in contracting provoke the backward and upward tilting of the cricoid cartilage. This movement, given the position of the vocal folds within the larynx, increases the distance between the the posterior and anterior attachments of the folds and provokes their stretching and lengthening. For a detailed description of the lengthening and shortening of the vocal folds, see *ibid.*, 15–18.

<sup>xxxii</sup> See Minoru Hirano, William Vennard and John Ohala, ‘Regulation of Register, Pitch and Intensity of Voice’, *Folia phoniatica et logopaedica*, 1 (1970), 1–20.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 53.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> See Natalie Henrich Bernardoni, ‘Mirroring the Voice from García to the Present Day: Some Insights into Singing Voice Registers’, *Logopedics Phoniatrics Vocology*, 31 (2006), 3–14 (p. 9). Following current

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linguistic usage, Henrich labels these registers as M1 and M2, terms which I avoid for reasons of consistency as I put in dialogue late nineteenth-century vocal pedagogy with early recordings.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Manuel García, *Hints on Singing*, 2nd edn (London: Ascherberg, Hogwood & Crew, 1911), 16–17.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> García, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing: First Part*, ed. and trans. Paschke, 28.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> I am not asserting that this idea is universally accepted by singing teachers, who actually follow a number of different approaches, but it is nevertheless widely shared among those who belong to the English-speaking world.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> As Sarah Potter points out, ‘García’s published works as a body do not suggest continual larynx-lowering.’ See Potter, ‘Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century’ (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Leeds, 2014), 35. The use of the dark timbre is not intended to be continuous.

<sup>xxxix</sup> See Carelli, *Cronaca d’un respiro*, 46–8. Carelli also provides the reader with drawings of the vocal tract’s different shapes.

<sup>xl</sup> Lamperti, *A Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 17; Shakespeare, *The Art of Singing*, 36–46; Carelli, *Cronaca d’un respiro*, 22; Guagni-Benvenuti, *L’odierna scuola di canto*, 43–4.

<sup>xli</sup> Lena Doria Devine, ‘Francesco Lamperti and his Methods’, *The Etude*, 26 (1908), 259.

<sup>xlii</sup> The ability of Caruso to handle elements of the older singing style is debatable, as his early recordings are already littered with his attempts towards shaping a new type of vocalism, as we have seen. Reviews of his 1890s performances, however, praise the suppleness of his singing and the light vocal weight of his upper range, supporting the idea that he could have carried on with the old school of singing, had he wished to do so.

<sup>xliii</sup> This recording was made for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company (G&T), with Salvatore Cottone at the piano, Matrix C-18822-3, Cat. 88580 (1902).

<sup>xliv</sup> A sound clip of the relevant passage from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 1>.

<sup>xlv</sup> A sound clip of the relevant passage from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 2>.

<sup>xlvi</sup> This is a Victor recording, Matrix B 998, Cat. 81028 (1904).

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<sup>xlvii</sup> A sound clip of the relevant passage from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 3>.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Sound clips of the two relevant passages from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 4> and <sound clip 5>.

<sup>xlix</sup> As the discussion above regarding the various possible shapes of the vocal tract demonstrates, different laryngeal heights and configurations of the soft palate were known and formed an essential part of late nineteenth-century singers' training.

<sup>l</sup> This recording was made for Victor, with orchestra, Matrix A 8364, Cat. 7-52002 (1909).

<sup>li</sup> A sound clip of the relevant passage from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 6>.

<sup>lii</sup> This phenomenon is known as 'the singer's formant', which as Sundberg explains 'is produced by a clustering of the third, fourth and fifth formant frequencies. An important articulatory means for achieving such a clustering is the shape of the larynx tube and a wide pharynx, often produced by a lowering of the larynx.' See Johan Sundberg, 'Where Does the Sound Come From?', *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. Potter, 231–47 (p. 242). Also to be noted: in the second ascent to A4, Caruso applies vowel modification on the second vowel of the word 'amato', which is sung on the G4 preceding the top note. This procedure is also audible in the 1904 recording, although it comes across in a much milder manner.

<sup>liii</sup> Sound clips of the two relevant passages from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 7> and <sound clip 8> respectively.

<sup>liv</sup> If the issue of the *passaggio* to the upper notes was resolved in the period 1895–1906, the recording evidence seems to indicate that experimentations with the various breathing systems continued until much later. As mentioned above (n. 23), Aspinall discusses the evolution of Caruso's breathing technique, and identifies the years 1906–7 as the turning point towards abdominal respiration. My own chronological listening to Caruso's recordings led me to think that in the years after 1906, Caruso continuously swapped between different combinations of abdominal and intercostal breathing, thus continually varying the dynamic interaction of the different parts of the vocal mechanism. Although an overall shift towards prevalent abdominal breathing and heavier registration choices is confirmed by the majority of the 1911–21 recordings, many sections of solos and ensembles are still managed within the intercostal system.

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<sup>lv</sup> *New York Times*, 10 December 1905.

<sup>lvi</sup> *The Sun* (New York), 21 November 1905.

<sup>lvii</sup> It should, according to Sansone, be applied only to the subcategory of the ‘plebeian tragedy’ first exemplified by *Cavalleria rusticana*. Matteo Sansone, ‘Verga and Mascagni’, *Music and Letters*, 71 (1990), 198–214 (p. 198).

<sup>lviii</sup> Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition 1871–1893* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 243–4.

<sup>lix</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. Bradford Robinson, California Studies in Nineteenth-Century Music, 5 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 351. For analogous views, see David Kimbell, *Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 621; Adriana Guarneri Corazzol, ‘Opera and *Verismo*: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation’, trans. Roger Parker, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 5 (1993), 39–53; Kimbell, ‘Opera since 1800’, *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 450–6; and Hans-Joachim Wagner, *Fremde Welten: Die Oper des italienischen Verismo* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 7.

<sup>lx</sup> Andreas Giger, ‘*Verismo*: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 60 (2007), 271–315.

<sup>lxi</sup> On the concept of the ‘concrete’ observation of reality, see Jules Champfleury, *Le réalisme* (Paris: Michel Levy frères, 1857). Another criterion listed by Champfleury was the inclusion of areas previously excluded from art on the ground that the representation of their subjects was considered artistically unsuitable and broke classicist rules of stylization by introducing stylistic mixture through the depiction of such subjects. On the influence of French naturalism on *verismo*, see Vittorio Spinazzola, *Verismo e positivismo* (Milan: Arcipelago, 1993), and Gorizio Viti, *Verga verista* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1994).

<sup>lxii</sup> An idea of the number of French operas performed on the stages of Italian opera houses in the 1870s is offered by the table in Daniele Pistone, *Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera from Rossini to Puccini*, trans. E. Thomas Glasow (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1995), 92–3. Alan Mallach offers a statistic relating to the presence of French operatic repertoire in the economically active but culturally conservative city of Livorno over the last four decades of the nineteenth century. Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 15.



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<sup>lxiii</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 70. This was an element underlined by the critic Amintore Galli following the Milanese première of the opera, in relation to which he stated, ‘Mascagni has completely renounced the forms of the classic recitative: he keeps with a melodic and dramatic declamatory style, which has a strong and profound effect on the audience’ (‘Il Mascagni ha interamente rinunciato alle forme del recitativo classico: egli si attiene ad una declamazione melodica e drammatica che ha forte e profonda presa sull’animo del pubblico’). Galli, in *Il teatro illustrato e la musica popolare*, 121 (1891), 7–9 (p. 7).

<sup>lxiv</sup> In the writing of the third-act duet between Radames and Amneris in *Aida*, Verdi at first freed Ghislanzoni from any preoccupations regarding musical form (in order to develop the dramatic situation as well as possible), but later ended listing the number of different metres he needed in order to create a beautiful melody for Radames: three lines of *settenari*, a *quinario* and two *endecasillabi*. See the excerpts of the correspondence sent by Verdi to Ghislanzoni and quoted in Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 548–9.

<sup>lxv</sup> ‘L’uggia della cantilena, della simmetria [...] della prosodia italiana, che genera quasi inevitabilmente nella frase musicale povertà e grettezza di ritmo’. *Il Figaro*, 11 February 1864, quoted in *Tutti gli scritti di Arrigo Boito*, ed. Piero Nardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1942), 1119. The innovative influence of Boito on Italian opera is not limited to the language but extends also to musical dramaturgy. For him, ‘I. the complete obliteration of formula; II. the creation of form; III. the realization of the most immense tonal and rhythmic development possible today; [and] IV. the supreme incarnation of the drama’ (‘I. la completa obliterazione della formula; II. la creazione della forma; III. l’attuazione del più vasto sviluppo tonale e ritmico possibile oggi; IV. La suprema incarnazione del dramma’) were all crucial elements to the renovation of opera. *Il Figaro*, 21 January 1864, quoted in *Tutti gli scritti*, 1107–8.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Julian Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), iii, 280.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Lamperti, *A Treatise on the Art of Singing*, 14.

<sup>lxviii</sup> ‘Scrivano i maestri come una volta si scriveva, profittando dei progressi della scienza armonica, non per sopraffare l’espressione melodica, ma solo per corredarla di vevoli artifici.’ Leone Giraldoni, *Compendium: Metodo analitico analitico, filosofico e fisiologico per la educazione della voce* (Milan: Ricordi, 1889), 57.

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<sup>lxix</sup> ‘La sensualità s’esprime soprattutto nel ‘medium’ della voce, tende ai colori scuri. Di qui, un accorciamento della gamma d’estensione in zona acuta e una certa centralizzazione delle tessiture. Questo fu un fatto generale.’ Rodolfo Celletti, ‘La vocalità mascagnana’, *Atti del Primo Convegno Internazionale di Studi su Pietro Mascagni*, ed. Fedele D’Amico (Milan: Casa Musicale Sonzogno, 1987), 39–48 (p. 41).

<sup>lxx</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. Celletti specifically refers here to the tenor voice in the operas of Mascagni.

<sup>lxxi</sup> ‘Personalmente ho sempre creduto, non soltanto che questo procedimento [il passaggio dal registro centrale a quello acuto] sia stato caro ai veristi [...] ma che costituisca il lato propriamente “veristico” del loro stile, insomma che il verismo musicale consiste principalmente in questo procedimento [...] Infatti quel poggiare su un settore della voce come quello, che è il meno naturale e il più problematico, richiede uno sforzo, una tensione che inclinano a volgere il canto verso un’espressione “direttamente” passionale, assimilabile all’eccitazione d’un linguaggio parlato.’ Fedele D’Amico from the conference proceedings which report his question/observation following the paper presented by Celletti (see above, n. 69).

<sup>lxxii</sup> ‘D’una tempra nobile e capace ad un tempo d’un amor tenero, ma degno’. See Heinrich Panofka, *Voci e cantanti* (Florence: Cellini, 1871), 89. More references to the masculine character of *spinto* tenors occur at pp. 37–8, 83, 91, 97.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> Zenatello recorded this solo for Fonotipia, Matrix XPH16111, Cat. 39243 (1905), while Caruso’s recording is a Victor, Matrix C-4317, Cat. 6001-A (1907). The age gap between Zenatello (born in 1876) and Caruso (born in 1873) was just three years. The ageing factor, which bears great relevance to the vocal performance, is not therefore considered when discussing these recordings, all made when the singers were in their prime.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Marconi’s freedom and easiness in reaching the upper notes struck J. H. Duval, while for Max De Schauensee the high placement of pre-*verismo* tenors’ upper range was the most distinctive characteristic of Marconi’s singing. See Michael E. Henstock’s liner notes accompanying the CD Symposium 1069, *Francesco Marconi, Antonio Cotogni*, The Harold Wayne Collection, 2 (1989). By contrast, when Caruso strikes his top B $\flat$ 4, the listener has the impression that such an explosive mass of sound could not easily be carried higher. A look at the short discography of Tamagno will reveal that the titles more often recorded were from Verdi’s *Il trovatore* or *Otello* and Meyerbeer’s *Gli Ugonotti* or *L’Africana*, all rigorously sung in Italian.

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<sup>lxxv</sup> Unlike Zenatello, Caruso also subtly recurs to vowel modification on the exclamation ‘Ah’ and in the ‘a’ vowels in ‘Pagliaccio’, on the G4, and ‘amore’, on the A4.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Sound clips of the relevant passage from these two recordings by Zenatello and Caruso may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 9> and <sound clip 10> respectively.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Zenatello possessed a dramatic voice and his career had begun as a baritone. In 1899, when he was only 23, he performed a tenor role (Canio) at the Teatro del Fondo in Naples. This was not a planned début, as Zenatello was covering for the indisposed tenor Sarcoli in the production in which he had played, until then, the baritone role of Silvio. Celletti, ‘Giovanni Zenatello’, *Le grandi voci: Dizionario critico-biografico dei cantanti*, ed. Rodolfo Celletti, Luisa Padovani, John B. Richards and Raffaele Vegeto (Rome: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1964), 906. In the same season, which according to Tom Hutchinson and Clifford W. Williams was hosted at the Teatro Mercadante and not the Teatro del Fondo, Zenatello sang the baritone roles of Lothario in Thomas’s *Mignon*, Tonio in *I Pagliacci* and Alfio in *Cavalleria rusticana* (all of them at the Teatro Mercadante). Two months after his début in a tenor’s role, he sang Manrico in Verdi’s *Il trovatore* (June, Teatro Mercadante), as well as the title role in Gounod’s *Faust* and Edgardo in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (both in August, at the Teatro Bellini, Naples). After this intense season he decided to take a break of a few months in order to retrain as a tenor under the guidance of Maestro Moratti in Milan. See Hutchinson and Williams, ‘Giovanni Zenatello’, *The Record Collector*, 14 (1961–4), 100–43.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Giraud’s ‘Quando le sere al placido’ was a G&T recording, Matrix 273i, Cat. 052070 (1904), which has been transferred by Marston in *Nineteenth Century Italian Tenors*, CD 53018-2, 2016. Borgatti’s ‘E lucevan le stelle’ was one of the Fonotipias which he recorded in 1905, Matrix XPh 1516, Cat. 39406, which can be heard in the CD transfer by Symposium in *The Harold Wayne Collection*, 29 (1997). In this aria Borgatti also displays a strikingly incisive pronunciation which, if not ideal in a cantabile by Puccini, made him an extremely suitable interpreter of Wagnerian roles – witness his Pathé recording of ‘Cede il verno’ from Wagner’s *Die Walküre*, Matrix 86684 (1916–19).

<sup>lxxix</sup> While both Michael Scott (in *The Great Caruso* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), 98–9) and John Potter (in *Tenor: History of a Voice* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 94) state that the antagonism was more fictional than real, a 1903 letter from Caruso to the Italian American banker and

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impresario Pasquale Spinelli seems to suggest that he actually feared and disliked Bonci. See

<<https://www.schubertiademusic.com/items/details/5205>> (accessed 20 May 2019).

<sup>lxxx</sup> Bonci's recording is a Columbia, Matrix 36460-1, Cat. A 5449 (1912).

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Sound clips of the relevant passages from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 11> and <sound clip 12> respectively.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> A sound clip of the relevant passage from this recording may be accessed in the Supplemental Material online at <sound clip 13>.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), broke new ground in its re-evaluation of early twentieth-century recordings as an invaluable resource for the history of performance, dealing with essential stylistic gestures such as rubato, portamento, tempo and vibrato. The AHRC-funded project CHARM (Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music, 2004–9) was preoccupied with, among other issues, the analysis of stylistic parameters as audible in early recordings. For the voice specifically, the studies of both Crutchfield and Freitas cited in nn. 2 and 3 above focused on the performance practice of the nineteenth century, relying on the support of the recording evidence among other sources.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> *Bel canto* was a term retrospectively created in the last decades of the nineteenth century by the vocal pedagogues who trained, among others, singers of Caruso's generation. With reference to the Italian pedagogical writing that I have studied, the existence of a 'traditional Italian way' of teaching singing does clearly emerge. This Italian 'school', which proudly claimed its links with a system of teaching developed over the preceding two centuries, was apparently based on widely shared tenets of 'good' singing.