



Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy

James Stark

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In this well documented and highly readable book, James Stark provides a history of vocal pedagogy from the beginning of the *bel canto* tradition of solo singing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to the present. Using a nineteenth-century treatise by Manuel Garcia as his point of reference, Stark analyses the many sources that discuss singing techniques and selects a number of primary vocal 'problems' for detailed investigation. He also presents data from a series of laboratory experiments carried out to demonstrate the techniques of *bel canto*.

The discussion deals extensively with such topics as the emergence of virtuoso singing, the castrato phenomenon, national differences in singing styles, controversies regarding the perennial decline in the art of singing, and the so-called secrets of *bel canto*.

Stark offers a new definition of bel canto which reconciles historical and scientific descriptions of good singing. His is a refreshing and profound discussion of issues important to all singers and voice teachers.

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