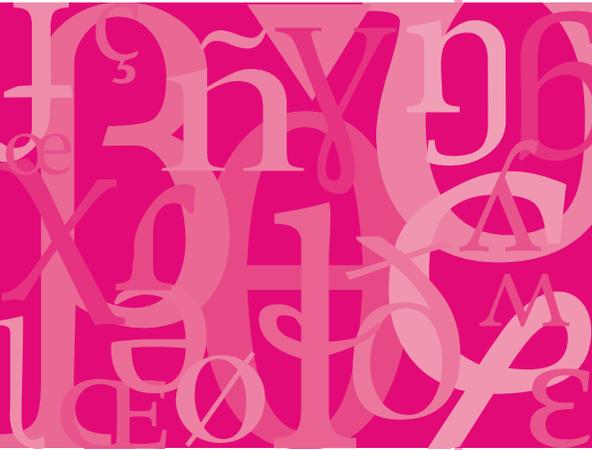


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Parr, Sean M. *Vocal Virtuosity: The Origins of the Coloratura Soprano in Nineteenth Century Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. E-book, xvii, 301 pp., \$48.99. ISBN 978-0197542644; Paper, \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-1975-4264-4 www.global.oup.com

For centuries, audiences have thrilled to the sounds of coloratura. From the earliest appearance of florid passages in medieval liturgy to the roulades of Rossini, melismatic singing has captivated listeners. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, the use of coloratura changed. The vocal virtuosity that characterized the operas of Bellini and Donizetti is absent from the late operas of Verdi, and composers such as Puccini and Bizet eschewed it completely. Musicologist Sean Parr explores the origins and history of the modern coloratura soprano, including when the *Fach* was established and how its development was influenced by exponents of French opera. He avers that coloratura was not anachronistic

in nineteenth century opera; instead, it was an indicator of new expressive and dramatic directions. Parr also explores the social and cultural significance of coloratura and demonstrates that *fioritura* had implications well beyond the footlights.

The chronicle begins with an overview of changes that occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1798, Pope Pius VI revoked the ban against women appearing on stage; eight years later, the French emperor forbade castrati. Parr explains that the resulting increase in opportunities for women necessitated changes in voice pedagogy models because the master teacher paradigm that required students to live with their instructors was deemed inappropriate for female singers. This shift solidified the importance of formal music schools, such as the Paris Conservatory. Founded in 1795, the institution was influential in standardizing music education, even publishing a treatise that codified the curriculum of voice pedagogy. The structured approach to technique (which included an emphasis on the whistle register) and the influence of pedagogues Laure Cinti-Damoreau (1801–1863), Gilbert-Louis Duprez (1806–1896), and Manuel Garcia II (1805–1906) enabled sopranos to develop the skills required for melismatic singing. Parr cites pedagogic treatises of the era to demonstrate the widening rift that developed between melismatic and sustained singing styles as evidenced in the writing of Francesco Lamperti (1813–1892) and Julius Stockhausen (1826–1906).

There was also a shift along national lines. Parr details how Italian opera began to move away from coloratura, as exemplified in the middle period operas of Giuseppe Verdi. The author

postulates that the *fioritura* serves as an omen of impending doom for the character who sings it; for instance, Gilda's elation in "Caro nome" is artificial and the melismas serve as an ominous warning. The author draws the same parallel for the arias "Sempre libera" (*La traviata*) and "Merci, jeunes amies" (*Les Vêpres siciliennes*). The dark subtext of these arias contrasts with the joyful or exuberant mood usually associated with coloratura, and Parr contends the mood reflects Verdi's opinion of melismatic singing.

Despite its disappearance from Italian operas, coloratura remained a mainstay in the stage works of French composers. There were several important exponents of the *Fach*, but the most significant of the era was soprano Caroline Carvalho (1827–1895). Born Marie Félix-Miolan, she created sixteen roles in the span of seventeen years. Five were leading roles in operas by Charles Gounod, including Marguerite in *Faust* and Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette*. (She also premiered Gounod's setting of "Ave Maria" based on the first keyboard prelude by J. S. Bach.) Parr proffers a detailed portrait of the noteworthy performer and *créatrice*. In regard to the latter, Carvalho possessed formidable skills in performing variations as exemplified by her performance of the aria "Carnaval de Venise" (*La Reine Topaze*) by Massé. Her marriage to Léon Carvalho in 1853 increased her sphere of influence. As an opera director who worked at several theaters, including the Théâtre-Lyrique and Opéra-Comique, Léon exhibited an astute ability to recognize operas with potential. In addition to presenting the premieres of many of Gounod's operas, he oversaw the first performances of *Les Pêcheurs de perles* by Bizet (1863), *Les Troyens* by Berlioz (1863), *Les Contes*

The author also offers unvarnished evaluations of ebbs in the trajectory of the genre in Britain. He describes the years between 1920 and 1950 as “disappointingly conservative” (73) and characterizes the musical *Twang!!* as “the super-flop that destroyed Bart’s career and impoverished him” (147). Perhaps his most biting criticism, however, is directed at the outsized influence of the through-composed form that dominated British musical theatre after the premier of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. The allure of international success led songwriters to target a global rather than merely a British audience. “After pop opera got through with it, the musical as a form simply lost its nationality” (186), the author laments, contrasting it with *Oliver!*, which celebrated uniquely English qualities.

Mordden masterfully chronicles British musical theatre and its fascinating cast of characters, from Polly Peachum to the title role of *Everybody’s Talking about Jamie*. Those who are unfamiliar with the history of the genre will enjoy this overview of the repertoire, while aficionados of the repertoire will appreciate the knowledgeable and detailed narrative.

Montgomery, Cheri. *Spanish Lyric Diction Workbook*. Nashville, TN: STM Publishers, 2022. Instructor’s Manual, paper, viii, 154 pp., \$32.50. ISBN 978-1-735211473; Student Workbook, paper, \$30.00. ISBN 978-1-735211497 www.stmpublishers.com

Cheri Montgomery has authored a substantial catalogue of diction workbooks for singers, including manuals for English, French, German, Italian,

Latin, and Russian. The collection is now rounded out with the publication of a workbook devoted to Spanish lyric diction. Like the other workbooks in the series, the volume is designed to provide tutelage and practice opportunities in rules of lyric diction. It includes exercises for enunciation and transcription into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Introductory material includes a pronunciation guide that lists the IPA symbol for each Spanish sound, along with an English word with the same (or similar) sound. The workbook is divided into twelve units; three are devoted to enunciation exercises, while the others focus on transcription. Each unit presents transcriptions of songs texts and QR codes that direct the student to recommended performances. The words are drawn from both solo and choral repertoire; Montgomery selected common words from more than 1,000 song texts and organized them in frequency of occurrence.

The workbook is designed to be used in conjunction with existing diction textbooks, including *A Singer’s Manual of Spanish Lyric Diction* by Nico Castel and *Spanish Diction for Singers* by Patricia Caicedo. Montgomery consulted Spanish lyric diction specialists Pablo Willey-Bustos, instructor of Spanish lyric diction at Eastman Community Music School, and tenor Isaí Jess Muñoz, Chair of the Voice Department at Boston Conservatory, to address the differences in transcription among the lyric diction texts.

An invaluable feature of the workbook is the simultaneous discussion of European Spanish and Latin American Spanish.

This most recent publication is another notable contribution to the canon of pedagogic materials for

lyric diction. The volume is meticulously researched, well organized, and eminently useful. It is highly recommended.

Siemens, Sandi. *The Business of Teaching Music: A Guide for the Independent Music Teacher*, 2nd edition. San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2023. Paper, xxii, 150 pp., \$59.99. ISBN 978-1-63550-400-2; e-Book \$59.99. www.pluralpublishing.com

In 2010, voice pedagogue Sandi Siemens offered guidance on the creation and maintenance of a successful studio to independent music teachers in a book entitled *The Business of Teaching Music* (reviewed in *JOS* 69, no. 5 [May/June 2013]). The second edition of the volume, presented by Plural Publishing, updates and refines the advice. Siemens, who has maintained a successful private studio for fifty years, offers practical advice for beginning music teachers.

The intent of the guide remains intact. The volume is addressed to teachers of voice and other instruments who instruct students at any level. Siemens provides resources for independent studio teachers, from finding students to filing taxes. The content of the book, however, has been expanded. Four chapters have been added to the second edition; unsurprisingly, in the wake of a pandemic, one focuses on online lessons. This section also offers information about creating a website and maintaining a professional online presence. Another new chapter addresses auditions, including how to prepare for different types (college, professional groups, and musical theatre) and how to make a favor-