

## Rediscovering Florimo's *Breve Metodo di Canto* for Contemporary Singing Pedagogy

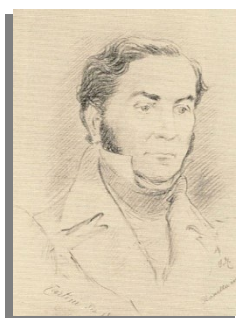
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### NOTES ON *BREVE METODO DI CANTO*

*Breve metodo di canto* (see Figure 2) holds historical significance in the field of vocal pedagogy. This treatise was published<sup>2</sup> during the life of its author, Francesco Florimo<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 1), one of the most representative figures of the so-called 'Neapolitan school of music'<sup>4</sup> (Basso, 1985; Libby & Rosselli, 2001), student of Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli and close friend of Vincenzo Bellini (Florimo, 1882; Megali del Giudice, 1901; Miozzi, 2001; Tedesco & Seminara, 2004). Florimo was a pupil of the singer Girolamo Crescentini and dedicated *Breve metodo di canto* to his master.

This treatise remains somewhat underestimated (Branderburg, 1999) in contemporary singing pedagogy, even if it gained an extraordinary success in the 19th century. For instance, *Breve metodo di canto* was praised by Gioacchino Rossini—the dedicatee of the fourth part of the treatise in the second version. The book also received an award at the Universal Exhibition of Paris (1877) and at the National Exhibition of Milan (1881). While the local music journal *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* considered Florimo's treatise one of the best works on singing at that time,<sup>5</sup> *Breve metodo di canto* was officially included in the teaching programs in France, thanks to a resolution adopted by the Conservatory of Paris on March 6, 1866.



**Figure 1.** Lithograph of Francesco Florimo, based on a drawing by Giuseppe Tartine (1882).



**Figure 2.** Title page of *Breve metodo di canto*, first edition, preserved at the New York Public Library, under the shelf mark \*MLD (Florimo).

The first part of the work consists of 30 lessons aimed at training the student on agility, intervals, and intonation, following a similar structure as Vaccai's *Metodo pratico di canto Italiano*, published in London in 1833 and divided into 15 progressive lessons. *Metodo pratico di canto Italiano* is a collection of arias (Uberti, 2004): it is different from Florimo's treatise, which includes short pieces, exercises and *solfeggi* with piano accompaniment.

The second part of the treatise consists of:

- a) Twenty exercises on scale *volate* (see Figure 3), which should “be sung quickly and with extreme agility” by the singer (Carugno & Patturelli, 2019);
- b) Two exercises on *arpeggios* (Exercises no. 21 and 22). As Florimo highlighted, playing *arpeggios* comes naturally to instruments, but not to the voice. Performing these exercises allows the singer to practice producing soft sounds (Florimo, 1840, p. 82);
- c) Nine *solfeggi* with different types of musical ornaments (appoggiatura, acciaccatura, trillo), staccato (Solfeggio no. 7) and syncopation (Solfeggio no. 8), followed by nine exercises on chromatic scales. Florimo (1840) stated that he did not use examples to explain how to sing the musical ornaments. Instead, he preferred to compose *solfeggi*, in line with the tradition established by other Neapolitan composers, to make the singing practice more enjoyable for the students.

**Figure 3.** An extract from exercise no. 7, part II, on *scale volate*.

The third part of *Breve metodo di canto* is a collection of 24 *solfeggi*, some of which were composed using tunes from popular traditions of different geographic areas (Russia, England, Circassa, Spain and Naples respectively for *solfeggi* n. 6, 8, 12, 18, and 24).

The piano accompaniment was commended by Crescentini as suitable for beginners and relatively easy to play, since it does not include thorough-bass symbols,<sup>6</sup> like other singing methods of the mid-19th century, such as Heinrich Panofka's *Vocalizes*. Another aspect in common with Panofka's work is the fact that Florimo proposed vocal exercises that all follow the same pattern in sequence: ascending to a note and then

descending. This approach aims to develop agility and breath control for both low and high notes. The aim is to make the voice consistent across all octaves.

In the introduction of his treatise, Florimo took into account several performance practice elements, including vowel production, resonance placement, and diction clarity. These elements could be beneficial for the training of a proficient singer (Florimo, 1840, pp. 2-7) and were often taught orally by the teacher (Beghelli, 2013), without being documented in a treatise until the publication of *Breve metodo di canto*. After the introduction, Florimo provided two tables: a vocal range chart (*soprano, mezzosoprano, contralto, tenore, baritono, and basso*) and a list of musical symbols used to describe sound intensity.

One of the key features of Florimo's method is its emphasis on the connection between vocal technique and musical expression. He believed that a singer should not only focus on producing a beautiful sound but also convey the emotions and meaning of the music (Florimo, 1840, p. 6).

Florimo's approach to interpretation is rooted in the *bel canto* tradition, which emphasises the importance of phrasing, dynamics, and ornamentation.

At the core of Florimo's teaching philosophy were specific techniques aimed at developing singers' technical skills. To instill these principles, Florimo employed vocal exercises tailored to address individual students' needs. He required the singing teacher to adopt a student-centered approach, by adjusting the timing and the range of each exercise to the abilities of each pupil.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Florimo's teaching methodology involved selecting appropriate repertoire for his students. He recognised that a well-chosen repertoire played a vital role in developing singers' expertise as well as nurturing their artistic growth.<sup>8</sup>

By customising his instruction to the students, any teacher would have been able to foster growth and technical refinement. In this perspective, Florimo paved the way for a personalised teaching style.

*Breve metodo di canto* demonstrates Florimo's deep commitment as a singing teacher and his expertise in the vocal apparatus. The treatise focuses not only on singing in the strict sense of the term but also on the importance of voice building, which includes posture, articulation, and sound emission exercises (Florimo, 1840, pp. 3-5). This work appeared during a time of new and increased interest in the study of human voice physiology, following

Garcia II's presentation of the laryngoscope at the Parisian Académie des Sciences in 1840, which "effectively established an alternate track in the world of elite vocalism, a scientific track that was to grow in importance and influence from that moment on" (Helding, 2007, p. 141). From then on, singers and medical specialists showed great interest in vocal education. This revolution led to the development of new methodologies for teaching singing, based on scientific principles (Patturelli, 2021).

The treatise combines traditional vocal techniques with scientific knowledge, providing a well-rounded approach to vocal training. It incorporates elements from contemporary vocal science, acknowledging the importance of vocal resonance and discussing the various resonating spaces within the body. This integration of scientific knowledge with traditional vocal techniques demonstrates Florimo's forward-thinking approach and his ability to adapt his method to the evolving understanding of vocal production. By emphasizing both technical proficiency and musical expression, Florimo's method offers a comprehensive approach to singing that remains relevant in contemporary vocal pedagogy. This premise shows that even nowadays, it might be beneficial to include Florimo's exercises in a singing training programme.

### Florimo's Exercises in the Singing Class

Using *Breve metodo di canto* can enrich contemporary singing lessons designed for beginners. An example of a singing lesson plan that incorporates the principles and exercises from Florimo's exercises would include:

- A brief historical explanation about Francesco Florimo and his treatise *Breve metodo di canto*.
- Breathing exercises.
- Exercises from *Breve metodo di canto*, based on a principle of gradual progression, taking into account specific learning goals, technical challenges and student's difficulties.
- Study of an aria and/or a romanza.

A hybrid approach that combines traditional and contemporary techniques could be used when instructing students on *Breve metodo di canto* exercises. Each student should be encouraged to sing, starting with labio-vibration and humming, and then progressing to different vowels, with or

without the consonant [m]. This includes the vowel [a], as suggested by Florimo.

Where singers prepare for the study of the repertoire by engaging in Florimo's exercises, the exercises should be selected in strict accordance with the chosen repertoire. The chosen repertoire should enhance students' motivation to study works from the past, particularly those created for musical theatre/opera, and assist them in improving their vocal technique. For example, by practicing the recitativo from Susanna's Deh, *vieni non tardar*, (from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*) the singers can work on articulation and projecting their voice by using intonated speech.

Appendix 1 illustrates how Florimo's exercises may be combined with a variety of works from the 18th and 19th centuries. It is followed by a music example from Exercise n. 5, part I, of *Breve metodo di canto*.

Figure 4. An extract from the exercise no. 5, part I, on the intervals of fifth.

### SUMMARY

Florimo's *Breve metodo di canto* serves as a testament to the author's expertise and dedication to the art of singing. Even in contemporary vocal pedagogy, the exercises laid out by Florimo in his pioneering work could continue to have a significant influence as *Breve metodo di canto*, remains pertinent in training vocalists across various genres, from classical to contemporary popular music. Therefore, rediscovering the past

by introducing *Breve metodo di canto* in the singing class would enhance students' curiosity about 19th-century history and repertoire.

It would arguably also be relevant to consider the wide array of recommendations regarding the importance of personalised and student-centered methods in fostering excellence in singing, for instance the importance of cultivating a positive relationship with the students, ensuring that they feel at ease during the singing lesson, understanding any challenges they may face, and providing solutions based on a comprehensive understanding of vocal pedagogy.

In conclusion, the singing class should become a comfortable space, without forgetting that singing is an artistic expression that thrives on emotions, as observed by Florimo (1840, p. 6): "the source of true expression lies in the sensitivity of the soul, and only the genius can fully develop it".

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## BIOGRAPHY

**Cristina Patturelli** holds a master's degree in opera singing and choral and vocal chamber music from the Conservatories of Matera and Naples. She has extensively dedicated herself to the technical, educational, rehabilitation therapy, physiological, and phonological aspects of voice. She also earned master's degrees in dramaturgy and speech pathology at the University of Naples Federico II, where she delved into the fields of musicology and the pathophysiological aspects of performance. She serves as a part-time lecturer at the University of Cusano in Rome, teaching in the first level master's program in Speech Therapy and a specialised course on Stuttering and Developmental Disfluencies. Additionally, she is a vocal teacher at a music high school. Currently, she works as a freelance consultant, vocal trainer, and rehabilitator.

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<sup>2</sup> The treatise was published in 1840 by the Neapolitan publishing house Girard. It was subsequently reprinted by Ricordi between 1841 and 1843. In Italy, the printed sources of the first edition, divided into three parts, are preserved in Naples at the library of the Conservatory “S. Pietro a Majella” (shelf mark 1.6.5), in Rome at library of the Conservatory “S. Cecilia” (shelf mark 8.B.1) and at the library of the Accademia “S. Cecilia” (shelf mark D1 MUS G12 042), as well as in Palermo, at the library of the Conservatory “A. Scarlatti” (shelf mark MUS. 16 B 33). An early manuscript copy of *Breve Metodo di canto* can be found at the Conservatory “S. Pietro a Majella” library, shelf mark 32.1.8.

<sup>3</sup> Born in 1800 in San Giorgio Morgeto, Florimo received a musical training at the Conservatory “San Pietro a Majella” of Naples, under the guidance of renowned composers such as Nicola Antonio Zingarelli. After achieving success as a composer, Florimo transitioned into the roles of a singing teacher and librarian. Florimo’s entrance into the field of librarianship can be traced back to his initial position at the library of the Conservatory “Pietà dei Turchini” in Naples. From 1861, he served as the archivist and director of the library at the Conservatory “S. Pietro a Majella”.

<sup>4</sup> In his huge works *Cenno storico sulla scuola musicale di Napoli* (1861-1879) and *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi Conservatori, con uno sguardo sulla storia della musica in Italia* (1881-1883), Florimo described the characteristics of this ‘school’, geographically grounded in the Neapolitan area and

strictly linked with the activities of the Conservatories of music, as institutions that trained the students to become not only musicians, but also masters of the ‘school’ (Cafiero, 2005). Florimo offered a historical overview of that ‘school’, in comparison with different musical traditions, such as those of Venice and Rome, judging it superior.

<sup>5</sup> A review of *Breve metodo di canto* appeared in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* in December 1842 (issue n. 52).

<sup>6</sup> See Crescentini’s statement on piano accompaniment (Florimo, 1840, p. 1), in the dedicatory letter published after the title page of the first edition of *Breve metodo di canto*: “Molto è ben inteso l’accompagnamento che avete messo per intero in ogni lezione per facilitarne sempre più lo studio e togliere così ai principianti la vessazione de’ bassi numerati” (The accompaniment that you have included in every lesson is very helpful in facilitating the study and removing the frustration of figured bass for beginners).

<sup>7</sup> Florimo (1840, p. 10) observed: “L’esperto Maestro adatterà le seguenti lezioni a seconda de’ registri della voce de’ suoi allievi, togliendo, e aggiungendo come meglio crederà convenire a’ loro mezzi; prenderà nell’andamento di esse quel movimento che potrà tollerare la rispettiva respirazione di ciascuno di loro” (The experienced teacher will customize the lessons based on the vocal range of their students, making adjustments by removing or adding elements as they see fit to enhance their abilities. He will also consider their progress and adjust the tempo to accommodate their individual breathing).

<sup>8</sup> According to Florimo (1840, p. 7), “bisogna ... nel cantare scegliere quei pezzi di musica che sono adattati alle proprie voci ed a’ proprii mezzi ... l’avveduto Maestro accomoderà il pezzo da cantarsi ai mezzi del suo allievo” (it is necessary in singing to choose pieces of music that are suitable for one’s voice and abilities. The skilled teacher will adjust the piece to be sung according to the abilities of his student).

**APPENDIX 1: COMBINATION OF REPERTOIRE AND FLORIMO'S EXERCISE FOR SOPRANO AND TENORE VOICES**

Vocal range	Exercises	Repertoire
Soprano	Exercise n. 5, part I, on the intervals of fifth. Exercise n. 7, part II, on <i>scale volate</i> .	W. A. Mozart, <i>Deh vieni non tardar</i> .
Tenore	Exercise n. 3, part I, on the intervals of third. Exercise n. 7, part II, and exercise n. 12, II part, on <i>scale volate</i> .	W. A. Mozart, <i>Un'aura amorosa</i> . S. Gastaldon, <i>Musica proibita</i> .
Soprano	Exercise n. 2, part I, on conjunct intervals. Exercise n. 9, part II, on <i>scale volate</i> .	S. Gastaldon, <i>Musica proibita</i> . G. Giordani, <i>Caro mio ben</i> .