

Franz Wilhelm ABT

Practical Singing Tutor for All Voices

Soprano or Tenor

Op. 474, Part I



TREATISE ON THE ART OF SINGING.

This text-book has been received with such marked favor by the foremost musicians and singing teachers, and has attained such popularity, that a new and thoroughly revised edition has become a real necessity. This method not being intended, as is often wrongly supposed, for self-instruction, but assuming the careful guidance of an experienced teacher, this Preface will contain a series of important theoretical and practical suggestions which have in all cases proved to be an admirable basis for instruction in singing, and are recognized as such by the most eminent authorities, like Lamperti, Garcia, Panseron, and Sieber, to whose opinions we have also occasionally referred for the following.

ATTITUDE OF THE BODY.

The pupil should always stand while practising, and (if possible) be accompanied by another person, so that he may not only give his entire attention to his singing, but also become familiar with the capacity of his breath. It is evident that in a sitting posture the chest is more or less contracted, which must in turn restrict and impede inspiration and expiration. Hence the voice of a seated person is sure to lose materially in strength and volume. The head should not be bent forward, but raised so that the tone may not sound forced and stifled, or the flexibility of the larynx be hampered; on the other hand, it would be a mistake to raise it as high as possible, for such a stretching of the neck-muscles would prevent the production of a good tone.

THE MOUTH.

Even a person who knows little or nothing about singing will probably see at once that the *form* given to the mouth in singing must exert the greatest influence on the quality, volume, and expression of the tone. Yet even the first and simplest rule in singing, that the mouth must be *opened*, is often ignored by many singers in an incomprehensible manner. Others fall into the opposite error of stretching their mouths to the fullest extent; this lends to the tone a harsh, rough quality, the mouth and pharynx being subjected to an undue strain. Generally speaking, the extent to which the mouth should be opened depends on its conformation, the mouth of one singer requiring to be opened more or less wide, as the case may be, than that of another in order to produce pure and beautiful tones; nevertheless, the theory of singing prescribes an approximate normal form to be observed, which the common experience of the greatest masters shows to be highly conducive to euphony of tone. The mouth should be opened about far enough to let the middle of the thumb pass between the upper and lower teeth. This opening has the form neither of a circle (○) nor of a vertical oval (◊) but of a horizontal oval (◌). In singing, the upper teeth should be visible about half way up, and the lower teeth scarcely at all; thus the upper lip is raised a trifle, while the under lip is kept on a level with the edge of the under teeth, though without covering them, for that would decidedly muffle the tone. The *position of the tongue* is of the highest importance. It must lie flat and perfectly quiet in the mouth, gently touching the back of the lower teeth, to allow the rising waves of sound to issue freely. So soon as the tongue is arched or its tip raised or is pressed back on its root, or is moved about uneasily in the mouth in any way, the tone loses its beauty, and bad habits are acquired which can be got rid of only at the expense of much time and trouble. To accustom the pupil to keep his tongue in its proper quiet position, the first studies are usually sung only to the vowel A, which is the best for getting the desired position or form of the mouth. For in singing with words, one and the same position cannot be retained, as not only the different consonants call at each instant for different movements of the separate parts of the mouth, but even the other vowels (E, I, O and U) bring about changes in the position of the lips, the teeth and the tongue. We therefore designate the form of the mouth just described as the *normal one*, to be taken as a starting-point, and returned to as often as the form of the words permits.

ON TAKING BREATH.

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Expertness in taking breath at the right time is one of the most essential points for a singer, if not "*the Basis of the entire Art of Singing.*" Inexperienced teachers, wrongly supposing that for drawing breath no special instruction or practice are needed, often pay no