

**ENRICO CARUSO, LUISA  
TETRAZZINI**

**CARUSO AND  
TETRAZZINI ON  
THE ART OF  
SINGING**

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**Caruso and Tetrizzini  
on the Art of Singing**

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# Enrico Caruso

## Caruso and Tetrzzini on the Art of Singing

### PREFACE

In offering this work to the public the publishers wish to lay before those who sing or who are about to study singing, the simple, fundamental rules of the art based on common sense. The two greatest living exponents of the art of singing—Luisa Tetrzzini and Enrico Caruso—have been chosen as examples, and their talks on singing have additional weight from the fact that what they have to say has been printed exactly as it was uttered, the truths they expound are driven home forcefully, and what they relate so simply is backed by years of experience and emphasized by the results they have achieved as the two greatest artists in the world.

Much has been said about the Italian Method of Singing. It is a question whether anyone really knows what the phrase means. After all, if there be a right way to sing, then all other ways must be wrong. Books have been written on breathing, tone production and what singers should eat and wear, etc., etc., all tending to make the singer self-conscious and to sing with the brain rather than with the heart. To quote Mme. Tetrzzini: "You can train the voice, you can take a raw material and make it a finished production; not so with the heart."

The country is overrun with inferior teachers of singing; men and women who have failed to get before the public, turn to teaching without any practical experience, and, armed only with a few methods, teach these alike to all pupils, ruining many good voices. Should these pupils change teachers, even for the better, then begins the weary undoing of the false method, often with no better result.

To these unfortunate pupils this book is of inestimable value. He or she could not consistently choose such teachers after reading its pages. Again the simple rules laid down and tersely and interestingly set forth not only carry conviction with them, but tear away the veil of mystery that so often is thrown about the divine art.

Luisa Tetrzzini and Enrico Caruso show what not to do, as well as what to do, and bring the pupil back to first principles—the art of singing naturally.

## LUISA TETRAZZINI



## **Introductory Sketch of the Career of the World-Famous Prima Donna**

Luisa Tetrizzini, the most famous Italian coloratura soprano of the day, declares that she began to sing before she learned to talk. Her parents were not musical, but her elder sister, now the wife of the eminent conductor Cleofante Campanini, was a public singer of established reputation, and her success roused her young sister's ambition to become a great artist. Her parents were well to do, her father having a large army furnishing store in Florence, and they did not encourage her in her determination to become a prima donna. One prima donna, said her father, was enough for any family.

Luisa did not agree with him. If one prima donna is good, she argued, why would not two be better? So she never desisted from her importunity until she was permitted to become a pupil of Professor Coccherani, vocal instructor at the Lycée. At this time she had committed to memory more than a dozen grand opera rôles, and at the end of six months the professor confessed that he could do nothing more for her voice; that she was ready for a career.

She made her bow to the Florentine opera going public, one of the most critical in Italy, as Inez, in Meyerbeer's "L'Africaine," and her success was so pronounced that she was engaged at a salary of \$100 a month, a phenomenal beginning for a young singer. Queen Margherita was present on the occasion and complimented her highly and prophesied for her a great career. She asked the trembling débutante how old she was, and in the embarrassment of the moment Luisa made herself six years older than she really was. This is one noteworthy instance in which a public singer failed to discount her age.

Fame came speedily, but for a long time it was confined to Europe and Latin America. She sang seven seasons in St. Petersburg, three in Mexico, two in Madrid, four in Buenos Aires, and even on the Pacific coast of America before she appeared in New York. She had sung Lucia more than 200 times before her first appearance at Covent Garden, and the twenty curtain calls she received on that occasion came as the greatest surprise of her career. She had begun to believe that she could never be appreciated by English-speaking audiences and the ovation almost overcame her.

It was by the merest chance that Mme. Tetrizzini ever came to the Manhattan Opera House in New York. The diva's own account of her engagement is as follows:

"I was in London, and for a wonder I had a week, a wet week, on my hands. You know people will do anything in a wet week in London.

"There were contracts from all over the Continent and South America pending. There was much discussion naturally in regard to settlements and arrangements of one kind and another.

"Suddenly, just like that"—she makes a butterfly gesture—"M. Hammerstein came, and just like that"—a duplicate gesture—"I made up my mind that I would come here. If his offer to me had been seven days later I should not have signed, and if I had not I should undoubtedly never have come, for a contract that I might have signed to go elsewhere would probably have been for a number of years."

Voice experts confess that they are not able to solve the mystery of Mme. Tetrizzini's wonderful management of her breathing.

"It is perfectly natural," she says. "I breathe low down in the diaphragm, not, as some do, high up in the upper part of the chest. I always hold some breath in reserve for the crescendos, employing only what is absolutely necessary, and I renew the breath wherever it is easiest.

"In breathing I find, as in other matters pertaining to singing, that as one goes on and practices, no matter how long one may have been singing, there are constantly new surprises awaiting one. You may have been accustomed for years to take a note in a certain way, and after a long while you discover that, while it is a very good way, there is a better."

## **Breath Control The Foundation of Singing**

There is only one way to sing correctly, and that is to sing naturally, easily, comfortably.

The height of vocal art is to have no apparent method, but to be able to sing with perfect facility from one end of the voice to the other, emitting all the notes clearly and yet with power and having each note of the scale sound the same in quality and tonal beauty as the ones before and after.

There are many methods which lead to the goal of natural singing—that is to say, the production of the voice with ease, beauty and with perfect control.

Some of the greatest teachers in the world reach this point apparently by diverging roads.

Around the art of singing there has been formed a cult which includes an entire jargon of words meaning one thing to the singer and another thing to the rest of the world and which very often doesn't mean the same thing to two singers of different schools.

In these talks with you I am going to try to use the simplest words, and the few idioms which I will have to take from my own language I will translate to you as clearly as I can, so that there can be no misunderstanding.

Certainly the highest art and a lifetime of work and study are necessary to acquire an easy emission of tone.

There are quantities of wonderful natural voices, particularly among the young people of Switzerland and Italy, and the American voice is especially noted for its purity and the beauty of its tone in the high registers. But these naturally untrained voices soon break or fail if they are used much unless the singer supplements the natural, God-given vocal gifts with a conscious understanding of how the vocal apparatus should be used.

The singer must have some knowledge of his or her anatomical structure, particularly the structure of the throat, mouth and face, with its resonant cavities, which are so necessary for the right production of the voice.

Besides that, the lungs and diaphragm and the whole breathing apparatus must be understood, because the foundation of singing is breathing and breath control.

A singer must be able to rely on his breath, just as he relies upon the solidity of the ground beneath his feet.

A shaky, uncontrolled breath is like a rickety foundation on which nothing can be built, and until that foundation has been developed and strengthened the would-be singer need expect no satisfactory results.

From the girls to whom I am talking especially I must now ask a sacrifice—the singer cannot wear tight corsets and should not wear corsets of any kind which come up higher than the lowest rib.

In other words, the corset must be nothing but a belt, but with as much hip length as the wearer finds convenient and necessary.

In order to insure proper breathing capacity it is understood that the clothing must be absolutely loose around the chest and also across the lower part of the back, for one should breathe with the back of the lungs as well as with the front.

In my years of study and work I have developed my own breathing capacity until I am somewhat the despair of the fashionable modiste, but I have a diaphragm and a breath on which I can rely at all times.

In learning to breathe it is well to think of the lungs as empty sacks, into which the air is dropping like a weight, so that you think first of filling the bottom of your lungs, then the middle part, and so on until no more air can be inhaled.

Inhale short breaths through the nose. This, of course, is only an exercise for breath development.

Now begin to inhale from the bottom of the lungs first.

Exhale slowly and feel as if you were pushing the air against your chest. If you can get this sensation later when singing it will help you very greatly to get control of the breath and to avoid sending too much breath through the vocal chords.

The breath must be sent out in an even, steady flow.

You will notice when you begin to sing, if you watch yourself very carefully, that, first, you will try to inhale too much air; secondly, you will either force it all out at once, making a breathy note, or in trying to control the flow of air by the diaphragm you will suddenly cease to send it forth at all and will be making the sound by pressure from the throat.

There must never be any pressure from the throat. The sound must be made from the continued flow of air.

You must learn to control this flow of air, so that no muscular action of the throat can shut it off.

Open the throat wide and start your note by the pressure breath. The physical sensation should be first an effort on the part of the diaphragm to press the air up against the chest box, then the sensation of a perfectly open throat, and, lastly, the sensation that the air is passing freely into the cavities of the head.

The quantity of sound is controlled by the breath.

In diminishing the tone the opening of the throat remains the same. Only the quantity of breath given forth is diminished. That is done by the diaphragm muscles.

"Filare la voce," to spin the voice from a tiny little thread into a breadth of sound and then diminish again, is one of the most beautiful effects in singing.

It is accomplished by the control of the breath, and its perfect accomplishment means the complete mastery of the greatest difficulty in learning to sing.

I think one of the best exercises for learning to control the voice by first getting control of the breath is to stand erect in a well-ventilated room or out of doors and slowly snuff in air through the nostrils, inhaling in little puffs, as if you were smelling something.

Take just a little bit of air at a time and feel as if you were filling the very bottom of your lungs and also the back of your lungs.

When you have the sensation of being full up to the neck retain the air for a few seconds and then very slowly send it out in little puffs again.

This is a splendid exercise, but I want to warn you not to practice any breathing exercise to such an extent that you make your heart beat fast or feel like strangling.

Overexercising the lungs is as bad as not exercising them enough and the results are often harmful.

Like everything else in singing, you want to learn this gradually. Never neglect it, because it is the very foundation of your art. But don't try to develop a diaphragm expansion of five inches in two weeks.

Indeed, it is not the expansion that you are working for.

I have noticed this one peculiarity about young singers—if they have an enormous development of the diaphragm they think they should be able to sing, no matter what happens. A girl came to see me once whose figure was really entirely out of proportion, the lower part of the lungs having been pressed out quite beyond even artistic lines.

"You see, madam," she exclaimed, "I have studied breathing. Why, I have such a strong diaphragm I can move the piano with it!" And she did go right up to my piano and, pushing on this strong diaphragm of hers, moved the piano a fraction of an inch from its place.

I was quite aghast. I had never met such an athletic singer. When I asked her to let me hear her voice, however, a tiny stream of contralto sound issued from those powerful lungs.

She had developed her breathing capacity, but when she sang she held her breath back.

I have noticed that a great many people do this, and it is one of the things that must be overcome in the very beginning of the study of singing.

Certain young singers take in an enormous breath, stiffening every muscle in order to hold the air, thus depriving their muscles of all elasticity.

They will then shut off the throat and let only the smallest fraction of air escape, just enough to make a sound. Too much inbreathing and too violent an effort at inhaling will not help the singer at all.

People have said that they cannot see when I breathe. Well, they certainly cannot say that I am ever short of breath even if I do try to breathe invisibly. When I breathe I scarcely draw my diaphragm in at all, but I feel the air fill my lungs and I feel my upper ribs expand.

In singing I always feel as if I were forcing my breath against my chest, and, just as in the exercises according to Delsarte you will find the chest leads in all physical movements, so in singing you should feel this firm support of the chest of the highest as well as the lowest notes.

I have seen pupils, trying to master the art of breathing, holding themselves as rigidly as drum majors.

Now this rigidity of the spinal column will in no way help you in the emission of tone, nor will it increase the breath control. In fact, I don't think it would even help you to stand up straight, although it would certainly give one a stiff appearance and one far removed from grace.

A singer should stand freely and easily and should feel as if the chest were leading, but should not feel constrained or stiff in any part of the ribs or lungs.

From the minute the singer starts to emit a tone the supply of breath must be emitted steadily from the chamber of air in the lungs. It must never be held back once.

The immediate pressure of the air should be felt more against the chest. I know of a great many singers who, when they come to very difficult passages, put their hands on their chests, focusing their attention on this one part of the mechanism of singing.

The audience, of course, thinks the prima donna's hand is raised to her heart, when, as a matter of fact, the prima donna, with a difficult bit of singing before her, is thinking of her technique and the foundation of that technique—breath control.

This feeling of singing against the chest with the weight of air pressing up against it is known as "breath support," and in Italian we have even a better word, "apoggio," which is breath prop. The diaphragm in English may be called the bellows of the lungs, but the apoggio is the deep breath regulated by the diaphragm.

The attack of the sound must come from the apoggio, or breath prop. In attacking the very highest notes it is essential, and no singer can really get the high notes or vocal flexibility or strength of tone without the attack coming from this seat of respiration.

In practicing the trill or staccato tones the pressure of the breath must be felt even before the sound is heard. The beautiful, clear, bell-like tones that die away into a soft piano are tones struck on the apoggio and controlled by the steady soft pressure of the breath emitted through a perfectly open throat, over a low tongue and resounding in the cavities of the mouth or head.

Never for a moment sing without this apoggio, this breath prop. Its development and its constant use mean the restoration of sick or fatigued voices and the prolonging of all one's vocal powers into what is wrongly called old age.

## The Mastery of the Tongue

The tongue is a veritable stumbling block in the path of the singer. The tongue is an enormous muscle compared with the other parts of the throat and mouth, and its roots particularly can by a slight movement block the passage of the throat pressing against the larynx. This accounts for much of the pinched singing we hear.

When the tongue forms a mountain in the back part of the mouth the singer produces what you call in English slang "a hot potato tone"—that is to say, a tone that sounds as if it were having much difficulty to get through the mouth. In very fact, it is having this difficulty, for it has to pass over the back of the tongue.

The would-be singer has to learn to control the tongue muscles and, above all things, to learn to relax the tongue and to govern it at will, so that it never stiffens and forms that hard lump which can be plainly felt immediately beneath the chin under the jaw.

It requires a great deal of practice to gain control of the tongue, and there are many different exercises which purport to be beneficial in gaining complete mastery over it. One, for instance, is to throw the tongue out as far forward as possible without stiffening it and then draw it back slowly. This can be done in front of a mirror by trying to throw the tongue not only from the tip, but from the root, keeping the sides of the tongue broad. Another way is to catch hold of the two sides of the tongue with the fingers and pull it out gently.

For my part, I scarcely approve of these mechanical ways of gaining control of the tongue except in cases where the singer is phlegmatic of temperament and cannot be made to feel the various sensations of stiff tongue or tongue drawn far back in other ways. Ordinarily I think they make the singer conscious, nervous and more likely to stiffen the tongue in a wild desire to relax it and keep it flat.

These exercises, however, combined with exercises in diction, help to make the tongue elastic, and the more elastic and quick this muscle becomes the clearer will be the singer's diction and the more flexible will be her voice.

The correct position of the tongue is raised from the back, lying flat in the mouth, the flattened tip beneath the front teeth, with the sides slightly raised so as to form a slight furrow in it. When the tongue is lying too low a lump under the chin beneath the jaw will form in singing and the tight muscles can be easily felt.

When the jaw is perfectly relaxed and the tongue lies flat in the mouth there will be a slight hollow under the chin and no stiffness in the muscles.

The tip of the tongue of course is employed in the pronunciation of the consonants and must be so agile that the minute it has finished its work it at once resumes the correct position.

In ascending the scale the furrow in the tongue increases as we come to the higher notes. It is here that the back of the palate begins to draw up in order to add to the resonance of the head notes, giving the cavities of the head free play.

You can easily see your back palate working by opening your mouth wide and giving yourself the sensation of one about to sneeze. You will see far back in the throat, way behind the nose, a soft spot that will draw up of itself as the sneeze becomes more imminent. That little point is the soft palate. It must be drawn up for the high notes in order to get the head resonance. As a singer advances in her art she can do this at will.

The adjustment of throat, tongue and palate, all working together, will daily respond more easily to her demands. However, she should be able consciously to control each part by itself.

The conscious direction of the voice and command of the throat are necessary. Frequently in opera the singer, sitting or lying in some uncomfortable position which is not naturally convenient for producing the voice, will consciously direct her notes into the head cavities by opening up the

throat and lifting the soft palate. For instance, in the rôle of Violetta the music of the last act is sung lying down. In order to get proper resonance to some of the high notes I have to start them in the head cavity by means, of course, of the apoggio, or breath prop, without which the note would be thin and would have no body to it.

The sensation that I have is of a slight pressure of breath striking almost into a direct line into the cavity behind the forehead over the eyes without any obstruction or feeling in the throat at all.

This is the correct attack for the head tone, or a tone taken in the upper register. Before I explain the registers to you I must tell you one of the funniest compliments I ever received. A very flattering person was comparing my voice to that of another high soprano whom I very much admire.

"Her voice is beautiful, particularly in the upper register," I insisted when the other lady was being criticized.

"Ah, madame," responded the flattering critic, "but your registers give out so much more warmth."

I think this joke is too good to lose, also the criticism, while unjust to the other singer, is interesting to the student, because in the high register, which includes in some voices all the notes above middle C, the notes are thin and cold unless supported by the apoggio, the breath prop, of which I have told you so much. People ask whether there are such things as vocal registers. Certainly there are. There are three always and sometimes four in very high voices. The ordinary registers are the low, the middle, the high voice, or head voice, and sometimes the second high voice, which has been called the flagellant voice.

A vocal register is a series of tones which are produced by a certain position of the larynx, tongue and palate. In the woman's voice the middle register takes in the notes from E on the first line of the staff about to middle C. The head voice begins at middle C and runs up sometimes to the end of the voice, sometimes to B flat or C, where it joins the second head register, which I have heard ascend into a whistle in phenomenal voices cultivated only in this register and useless for vocal work.

Though the registers exist and the tones in middle, below and above are not produced in the same manner, the voice should be so equalized that the change in registers cannot be heard. And a tone sung with a head voice and in the low voice should have the same degree of quality, resonance and power.

As the voice ascends in the scale each note is different, and as one goes on up the positions of the organ of the throat cannot remain the same for several different tones. But there should never be an abrupt change, either audible to the audience or felt in the singer's throat. Every tone must be imperceptibly prepared, and upon the elasticity of the vocal organs depends the smoothness of the tone production. Adjusting the vocal apparatus to the high register should be both imperceptible and mechanical whenever a high note has to be sung.

In the high register the head voice, or voice which vibrates in the head cavities, should be used chiefly. The middle register requires palatal resonance, and the first notes of the head register and the last ones of the middle require a judicious blending of both. The middle register can be dragged up to the high notes, but always at the cost first of the beauty of the voice and then of the voice itself, for no organ can stand being used wrongly for a long time.

This is only one of the reasons that so many fine big voices go to pieces long before they should.

In an excess of enthusiasm the young singer attempts to develop the high notes and make them sound—in her own ears, at all events—as big as the middle voice. The pure head tone sounds small and feeble to the singer herself, and she would rather use the chest quality, but the head tone has the piercing, penetrating quality which makes it tell in a big hall, while the middle register, unless used in its right place, makes the voice muffled, heavy and lacking in vibrancy. Though to the singer the tone may seem immense, in reality it lacks resonance.

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