

***THOMAS
FILLEBROWN***



***RESONANCE
IN SINGING
AND SPEAKING***

Thomas Fillebrown

Resonance in Singing and Speaking

EAN 8596547171904

DigiCat, 2022

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PUPIL OF VANNUCCINI AND MY FIRST INSTRUCTOR IN VOICE CULTURE, THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

PREFACE

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EFFORTS to develop my own voice, and the voices of my patients after operations for cleft palate, aided by anatomical study, resulted in a plan for the focusing and development of the human voice quite different from any other yet published, or, so far as I know, yet proposed. This plan has proved so successful in my later life that I feel emboldened to offer it for the consideration of speakers and singers.

While twenty-five years ago few of the principles here described were acknowledged or even recognized, within the last decade almost all have been advocated separately by different teachers or writers. At the present time, therefore, originality consists only in the classification of the principles into a systematic, progressive whole, and in arranging a simpler and more practical method of applying them, thus making the desired results much more quickly attainable.

It is attempted in this volume only to describe the value of each element in the production of the perfect tone and to demonstrate the principles which, if properly and faithfully applied, will develop the best that is possible in each individual voice and prepare the pupil to enter upon the more advanced arts of speaking and singing.

In 1903 I prepared a series of papers on *The Art of Vocalism*, which were published in *The Étude* in May, June, and July of that year. These articles are incorporated in this work. In connection with different organs and conditions, important principles are stated and restated. This repetition is thought desirable in order that the fundamentals may be kept prominently before the mind and impressed upon the attention.

I believe that a careful study of this volume will prove of essential service to teachers and advanced pupils of singing and oratory, especially to young teachers just entering upon their duties. Its method will be found adapted to the instruction of pupils of all grades, from the kindergarten to the Conservatory of Music and the School of Oratory.

I shall be gratified if this outcome of years of experience, constant study, and tested methods shall prove helpful to those who seek mastery of the art of beautiful speaking and singing.

Thomas Fillebrown

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WHEN a youth it was my lot to be surrounded by examples of faulty vocalism, such as prevailed in a country town, and to be subjected to the errors then in vogue, having at the same time small opportunity for training in the application of principles, even as then imperfectly taught. At middle life I had given up all attempt at singing and had difficulty in speaking so as to be heard at any considerable distance or for any considerable length of time. Professional obligations to my patients, however, compelled me later to take up the subject of vocal physiology. This I did, guided by the ideas current on the subject.

About 1880 I became satisfied that many of the current ideas were incorrect, and determined to start anew, and to note in detail the action of each organ used in vocalization and articulation. To this end I sought vocal instruction and advice, which, modified by my own observations, have produced the most gratifying results.

Up to that time it had been held that the nasal cavities must be cut off from the mouth by the closing of the soft palate against the back of the throat; that the passage of ever so little of the sound above the palate would give a nasal twang, and that the sound was reinforced and developed only in the cavities of the throat and mouth. My practice in Oral Surgery, coupled with my own vocal studies

exposed this fallacy and revealed to me the true value of nasal resonance.

The late Mme. Rudersdorff had begun to recognize the effect of nasal resonance, but she left no published record of her conclusions. It does not appear that she or her contemporaries realized the true value of the nasal and head cavities as reinforcing agents in the production of tone, or appreciated their influence upon its quality and power.

There are perhaps few subjects on which a greater variety of opinion exists than on that of voice culture, and few upon which so many volumes have been written. Few points are uncontested, and exactly opposite statements are made in regard to each.

Formerly great stress was laid upon the distinction between "head tones" and "chest tones," "closed tones" and "open tones." The whole musical world was in bondage to "registers of the voice," and the one great task confronting the singer and vocal teacher was to "blend the registers," a feat still baffling the efforts of many instructors.

Many teachers and singers have now reached what they consider a demonstrated conclusion that registers are not a natural feature of the voice; yet a large contingent still adhere to the doctrine of "register," depending for their justification upon the unreliable evidence furnished by the laryngoscope, not realizing that there will be found in the little lens as many different conditions as the observers have eyes to see. Garcia himself, the inventor of the laryngoscope, soon modified his first claims as to its value in vocal culture.

On this point we have the testimony of his biographer, M.S. McKinley:

"As far as Garcia was concerned, the laryngoscope ceased to be of any special use as soon as his first investigations were concluded. By his examination of the glottis he had the satisfaction of proving that all his theories with regard to the emission of the voice were absolutely correct. Beyond that he did not see that anything further was to be gained except to satisfy the curiosity of those who might be interested in seeing for themselves the forms and changes which the inside of the larynx assumed during singing and speaking."

Of similar purport is the word of the eminent baritone, Sir Charles Santley, who, in his *Art of Singing*, says:

"Manuel Garcia is held up as the pioneer of scientific teaching of singing. He was—but he taught singing, not surgery! I was a pupil of his in 1858 and a friend of his while he lived;[\[1\]](#) and in all the conversations I had with him I never heard him say a word about larynx or pharynx, glottis or any other organ used in the production and emission of the voice. He was perfectly acquainted with their functions, but he used his knowledge for his own direction, not to parade it before his pupils."

The eminent London surgeon and voice specialist, Dr. Morell Mackenzie, says of the laryngoscope, "It can scarcely be said to have thrown any new light on the mechanism of the voice"; and Dr. Lennox Browne confesses that, "Valuable as has been the laryngoscope in a physiological, as undoubtedly it is in a medical sense, it has been the means of making all theories of voice production too dependent on the vocal cords, and thus the importance of the other parts of the vocal apparatus has been overlooked."

Not only in regard to "registers" but in regard to resonance, focus, articulation, and the offices and uses of the

various vocal organs, similar antagonistic opinions exist. Out of this chaos must some time come a demonstrable system.

A generation ago the art of breathing was beginning to be more an object of study, but the true value of correct lateral abdominal breathing was by no means generally admitted or appreciated. It was still taught that the larynx (voice-box) should bob up and down like a jack-in-a-box with each change of pitch, and that "female breathing" must be performed with a pumping action of the chest and the elevation and depression of the collar bone.

Fortunately, teachers and singers recognized a good tone when they heard it, and many taught much better than they knew, so that the public did not have to wait for the development of accurate knowledge of the subject before hearing excellent singing and speaking. Yet many singers had their voices ruined in the training, and their success as vocalists made impossible; while others, a little less unfortunate, were still handicapped through life by the injury done by mistaken methods in early years. Jenny Lind's perfect vocal organs were quite disabled at twelve years of age by wrong methods, and they recovered only after a protracted season of rest. As a consequence her beautiful voice began to fail long before her splendid physique, and long before her years demanded. Singers taught in nature's way should be able to sing so long as strength lasts, and, like Adelaide Phillips, Carl Formes, and Sims Reeves, sing their sweetest songs in the declining years of life. Martel, at seventy years of age, had a full, rich voice. He focused all his tones alike, and employed deep abdominal breathing.

The whole matter of voice training has been clouded by controversy. The strident advocates of various systems, each

of them "the only true method," have in their disputes overcast the subject with much that is irrelevant, thus obscuring its essential simplicity.

The "scientific" teachers, at one extreme, have paid too exclusive attention to the mechanics of the voice. The "empiricists" have gone to the other extreme in leaving out of account fundamental facts in acoustics, physiology, and psychology.

The truth is that no purely human function, especially one so subtle as singing, can be developed mechanically; nor, on the other hand, can the mere *ipse dixit* of any teacher satisfy the demands of the modern spirit.

PRINCIPLES ADVOCATED

The positions here advocated, because they seem both rational and simple, are:

1. That the singing and speaking tones are identical, produced by the same organs in the same way, and developed by the same training.

2. That breathing is, for the singer, only an amplification of the correct daily habit.

3. That "registers" are a myth.

4. That "head tones, chest tones, closed tones, open tones," etc., as confined to special parts of the range of the voice, are distracting distinctions arising from false education.

5. That resonance determines the quality and carrying power of every tone, and is therefore the most important element in the study and training of the voice.

6. That the obstacles to good speaking and singing are psychologic rather than physiologic.

7. That, in the nature of things, the right way is always an easy way.



CHAPTER I

THE VOCAL INSTRUMENT

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SINCE the vocal organism first became an object of systematic study, discussion has been constant as to whether the human vocal instrument is a stringed instrument, a reed instrument, or a whistle. Discussion of the question seems futile, for practically it is all of these and more. The human vocal organs form an instrument, *sui generis*, which cannot be compared with any other one thing. Not only is it far more complex than any other instrument, being capable, as it is, of imitating nearly every instrument in the catalogue and almost every sound in nature, but it is incomparably more beautiful, an instrument so universally superior to any made by man that comparisons and definitions fail.

ELEMENTS

The human vocal instrument has the three elements common to all musical instruments,—a motor, a vibrator, and a resonator; to which is added—what all other instruments lack—an articulator.

1. The respiratory muscles and lungs for a **motor**.
2. The vocal cords for a **vibrator**.
3. The throat, mouth, and the nasal and head cavities for a **resonator**.
4. The tongue, lips, teeth, and palate for an **articulator**.

These elements appear in as great a variety of size and proportion as do the variations of individual humanity, and

each element is, moreover, variable according to the will or feeling of the individual. This susceptibility to change constitutes a modifying power which gives a variety in tone quality possible to no other instrument and makes it our wonder and admiration. The modification and interaction of these various parts produced by the emotions of the singer or speaker give qualities of tone expressive of the feelings, as of pain or pleasure, grief or joy, courage or fear.

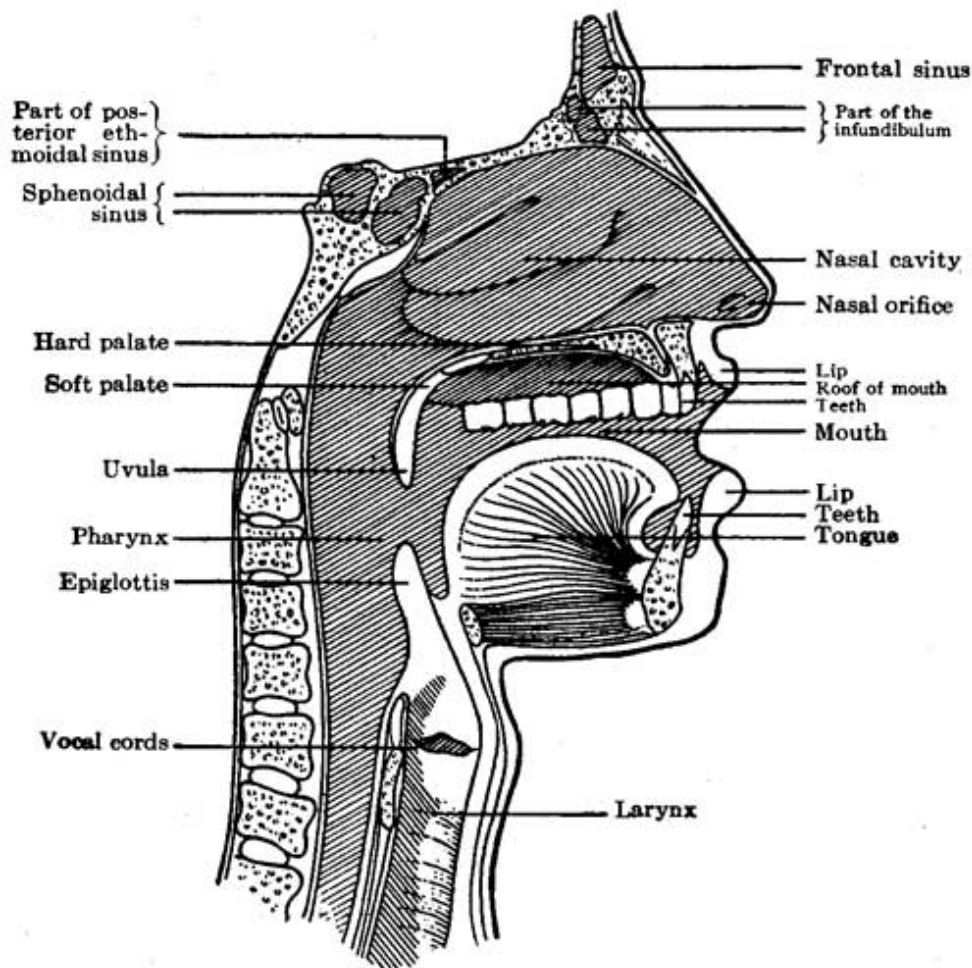


FIGURE 1.—Section of the head and throat locating the organs of speech and song, including the upper resonators. The important maxillary sinus cannot well be shown. It is found within the maxillary bone (cheek

bone). The inner end of the line marked *Nasal cavity* locates it.

TIMBRE

The minute differences in these physical conditions, coupled with the subtler differences in the psychical elements of the personality, account for that distinctive physiognomy of the voice called **timbre**, which is only another name for individuality as exhibited in each person. The same general elements enter into the composition of all voices, from the basso profundo to the high soprano.

That the reader may better understand the proportion and relations of the different parts of the vocal apparatus, a sectional drawing of the head is here produced, showing the natural position of the vocal organs at rest. As the drawing represents but a vertical section of the head the reader should note that the sinuses, like the eyes and nostrils, lie in pairs to the right and left of the centre of the face. The location of the maxillary sinuses within the maxillary or cheek bones cannot be shown in this drawing.

The dark shading represents the cavities of the throat, nose, and head. The relations of the parts are shown more accurately than is possible in any diagram. It will be noticed that the vibrations from the larynx would pass directly behind the soft palate into the nasal chamber, and very directly into the mouth. The nasal roof is formed by two bones situated between the eyes; the sphenoid or wedge-bone, which is connected with all other bones of the head, and the ethmoid or sieve-like bone. The structure of these two bones, especially of the ethmoid, consists of very thin plates or laminæ, forming a mass of air cavities which communicate by