

**LABLACHE'S
ABRIDGED METHOD
OF SINGING**

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Lablache's Abridged Method of Singing by Louis Lablache

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LOUIS LABLACHE

**LABLACHE'S
ABRIDGED METHOD
OF SINGING**

LABLACHE'S
ABRIDGED
METHOD OF SINGING,

OR, A
RATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRINCIPLES ACCORDING TO WHICH THE STUDIES SHOULD BE DIRECTED

FOR
Developing the Voice, and Rendering it Flexible,

AND FOR
FORMING THE VOICE,

WITH
EXAMPLES FOR ILLUSTRATION,
AND
Progressive Vocalizing Exercises.

Lusgi
By LOUIS LABLACHE.

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French, and improved from all former issues by the addition of

S FOR SUSTAINING THE VOICE

of the parts of the Mouth and Throat brought into Action in the Cultivation and Development of the Human Voice.

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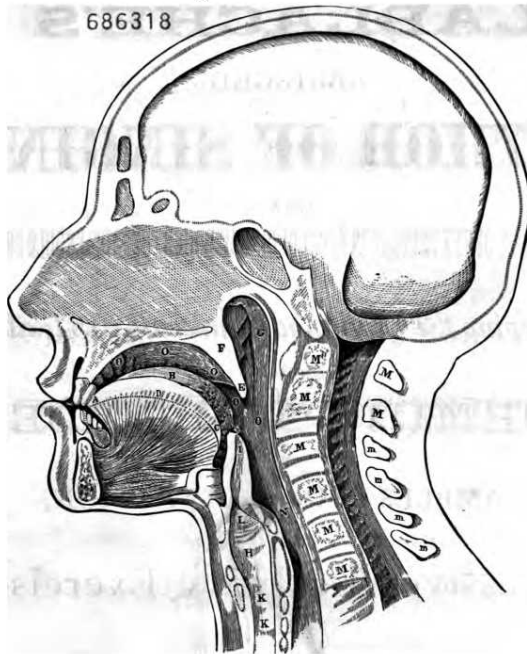
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Parts of the Mouth and Throat brought into action in the Cultivation of the Human Voice.

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This Plate represents all the parts of the mouth and of the throat which are brought into action in the cultivation and development of the human voice. When the mouth is shut, the tongue takes the shape of A, B, C. E is the uvula; F, the soft palate; G, the passage which communicates with the nose; H, the Larynx; I, the Epiglottis; K, the Windpipe; L, the Glottis, or opening of the larynx, passing through which the breath in ascending from the lungs, produces the vocal sounds; M, the cervical vertebrae; N, the cavity of the throat; O, the cavity of the mouth.

The windpipe has a natural elevation and depression, and therefore gives the larynx a movement either downward towards N, the cavity of the throat, or upward towards O, the cavity of the mouth. In producing the grave sounds, the windpipe, K, descending, the larynx, H, is inclined towards the cavity of the throat, N; and in passing from the grave to the acute sounds, the windpipe gradually ascending, raises the larynx, which then inclines towards the cavity of the mouth, O; and this is the cause of those sounds to which the name of "head voice" is given. During this action, the interior muscles of the larynx dilate or contract; in dilating they produce the grave, and in contracting the acute sounds.

The elastic action of the muscles gives the glottis the power of forming itself into a variety of spaces, and as every sound requires a particular space in which to be produced, so from these various spaces are derived all the sounds of the voice. But the quality of the voice is shown by the position of the vocal organs in the throat, as I have before observed.

In pronouncing the open segment of the Italian *a*, the English *hat*, pleasant, smiling appearance. The tongue lies flat, as A, D, C. The soft palate, F, and the uvula, E, stretch towards G, the passage communicating with the nose, and thus form a space sufficiently large to allow the sound to pass through it quite freely, and with a capability of expansion. This is the only position proper for practice; all others produce injurious effects and bad habits, of which I will mention the following:—

1st. The projection of the lips, as in pronouncing the vowel *e*. This position, by compressing the muscles of the throat, prevents a free expansion of the sound, which, consequently, is thick in quality, and deficient in power of vibration.

2d. Too much lateral extension of the lips, produces a weak quality of sound, because in this position the muscles of the throat become stiff, and therefore the sound has but little power of vibration, and no capability of expansion.

3d. To close the teeth too much, produces an effect almost similar to that caused by shutting the mouth. The whole space, therefore, becoming contracted, the tongue curving itself nearly as A, B, C, in the plate, and the soft palate and uvula descending, the sound is no longer able to issue freely, but introducing itself
 passage, G, which communicates with the nose, it becomes,
 in consequence, nasal.

LABLACHE'S METHOD OF SINGING.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE STUDY OF SINGING.

THE study of singing can be undertaken, before that age at which the voice is generally supposed to change, without any danger to the health or to the voice. But, *during the period of transition*, it is necessary either to interrupt the exercises altogether, or to sing only very moderately, and entirely abandon the employment of sounds extremely high or low. The skillful and conscientious teacher must determine the best course for the interest of the pupil intrusted to his care.

There are three things to consider in the art of singing;—First, sentiment; second, voice; third, execution. Sentiment and voice are chiefly the gift of nature. Study can develop and strengthen them, but it cannot give them to one who is entirely destitute of them. Execution can be acquired and perfected, with more or less labor, according to the aptness of the individual.

As before singing well it is necessary to sing in some manner, we shall have to occupy ourselves, at first, with the voice and with its mechanism. We shall afterwards speak of musical sentiment, and of the proper means for developing it.

CHAPTER II.

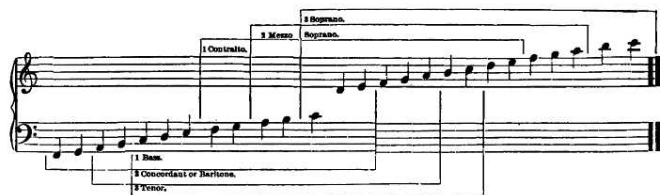
OF THE VOICE, AND OF ITS FORMATION IN GENERAL.

WHAT is called the voice is the sound which human beings have the faculty of producing with their own organs. The lungs and the larynx are the principal agents of it; but it is modified by the co-operation of the maxillary sinuses, the nasal cavities, and the frontal sinuses. The greater or less opening of the upper extremity of the larynx, called the glottis, produce sounds more or less grave. The purity of the voice depends upon the exact relation which there should be between the degree of opening of the glottis, and the degree of elevation of the sound which it is desired to produce.

What is called talent for singing consists then principally in the aptness to seize this relation, and in the promptness with which this organ can articulate the sounds which the mind has conceived.


DIVISION OF THE VOICE.

The compass of sounds, formed by the human voice, may be presented by the following scale:—



This scale is formed, as may be seen, by six kinds of voice;—three male, (Bass, Concordant or Barytone, and Tenor) and three female, (Contralto, Mezzo-Soprano, and Soprano). It may be observed that No's. 1, 2, and 3, of the female voice, correspond to Nos. 1, 2, and 3, of the male voice, at the distance of one octave above; thus the Contralto has the same compass as the Bass, and so on.

OF THE REGISTERS OF THE VOICE.

Men have the faculty of forming two series of sounds, which are called registers of the voice. The first series commences with the lowest note of the voice, and extends for the Bass as far as  and is called the Chest-register. Above this sound would begin another series, which would be called the Head-register; but the Bass voice has such a force, in its Chest-register, that it is almost impossible to well unite or equalize these two qualities of sounds. Hence the use of sounds of the Head-register has been discarded in this kind of voice.

Barytone and Tenor voices, which are softer and more flexible, can make use of the two registers; and these are distributed in the following manner:



The female voice is divided into three series of sounds, or registers; the Chest, Medium, and Head-register.

The Contralto voice, which is the Bass of the female voice, rarely employs the Head-register.

This voice varies in its capacities with almost every individual; hence it is impossible to fix the limits of its registers precisely.

The Mezzo-Soprano and the Soprano, divide their sounds in the following manner.



CHAPTER III.

OF THE MANNER OF EXERCISING THE VOICE.

EXPERIENCE has shown, that, in order to form the voice and equalize it, the pupil should sing much on the vowel sound *a*, (*a*, as in fat), and a little also, but at a later period, on the sound *á*, (*a*, as in fate). This is called vocalizing.

Vocalizing, by laying bare, so to speak, all the faults of the voice, which would be in part disguised by the employment of words, becomes for this reason the most efficacious means of combatting them.

The conditions of good vocalizing are, first, to know how to hold the mouth well; second, to breathe well; third, to form and send forth the sounds of the different registers; fourth, to pass insensibly from the sounds of one register to

those of another; fifth, to attack and connect sounds for forming successions. We proceed to devote a special section to the analysis of each of these conditions.

ON THE POSITION OF THE MOUTH.

The mouth should be kept smiling, without distortion, and opened sufficiently to admit the end of the forefinger.

The jaws should not remain always perpendicular one over the other, (as has been wrongly said,) but in the position which is most natural for the conformation of the pupil's mouth.

The tongue should be suspended, and placed in such a manner as to leave the greatest possible open space.

ON THE RESPIRATION.

A long and easy breathing is one of the most essential qualities for the singer. Hence we persuade the pupil to practise holding his breath for a long time, even without singing. In order to take in the breath, he should be careful to make the chest rise and swell as much as possible. He should remain in this position as long as he can, and then he should let the breath flow out very slowly, until his chest has regained its natural position. Afterwards he should begin again, observing that the mouth is moderately open, as well in drawing in the air as in pressing it out again. By this exercise, lungs of a moderate capacity will become able to furnish a well-pitched sound which will last from eighteen to twenty seconds.

TO FORM SOUNDS OF DIFFERENT REGISTERS.

The sounds of the Chest-register should be produced by sending forth the breath freely, and in such a manner as not to strike against any part of the mouth on its passage; the least rubbing against the glands destroys the vibrating quality of the tone. Females will obtain them more easily by keeping the mouth a little rounded.

The Medium sounds are produced by directing the breath against the upper teeth.

The Head sounds are made by directing the breath entirely towards the frontal sinuses.

There are two faults to be avoided in the delivery of the voice;—first, the guttural sound; second, the nasal sound. The first proceeds from the fact that the tongue is too much pressed backwards, and against the lower part of the mouth. It may be avoided by pushing the tongue forward a little, and keeping it suspended. The second is because the breath is forced into the cavities of the nose. With attention, beginners who may have a tendency to this, will be able to avoid it easily; but, in order to eradicate it with persons with whom it is a habit of long standing, there is no other means than that of making them vocalize at first upon the vowel *O*, then upon *a*, and upon *a* holding the nose pinched in such a manner that the breath cannot pass at all. This expedient is the only one the efficaciousness of which has been proved to us by experience; we point it out without fear of ridicule, persuaded, as we are, that when the pupil shall have become able to send forth his voice in this manner, the fault will have disappeared entirely. Observe only this, that one should not attempt to sing with words in this manner; it is quite impossible.

Every sound ought to be uttered without feeling or groping about for it. Many persons, when they are required to sound *Do*, are disposed to strike *La* or *Si*, and then lead the voice rapidly up to the required *Do*. This occurs frequently in striking notes which are pretty high. It is a fault which must be carefully avoided.

We must also avoid commencing a sound, by preceding it with a kind of preparation, which may be expressed by *um*.

When one finishes a sound without having exhausted all the breath, it is necessary to use care to stop the remaining breath very gently, and not to fling it out with a kind of expiration very disagreeable to hear. We should equally avoid shutting the mouth as soon as the sound is finished.

EXERCISE I.
FOR THE
MALE VOICE.

This exercise should be performed by forming the sounds, according to the principles given above, and breathing on each rest. For Barytone and Mezzo-Soprano voices, this exercise should be commenced a third lower; and for Contralto and Bass voices, it should be transposed a fourth.

OF THE MANNER OF UNITING SOUNDS OF DIFFERENT REGISTERS.

The two registers of the male voice frequently afford unequal sounds, which would produce a very disagreeable effect, if the ability to unite them could not be attained by study. The highest tones of the chest are very strong, by the very effort which they require, while the first head-tones are very soft and often feeble. Hence it is necessary to apply one's self to strengthening the latter, and softening the former. As our organs permit us to produce the extreme sounds of one register in the next register, the best means of uniting the two kinds of sounds, is to begin by making a single sound pass from the chest-register to the head-register, and vice versa.

EXERCISES FOR UNITING THE CHEST-VOICE WITH THE HEAD-VOICE.

The letter C indicates the Chest-voice, and the letter H indicates the Head-voice.
To facilitate the reading for amateurs, we have written all the exercises in the treble clef, though for male voices this manner of writing is not regular.


EXERCISE II.
FOR THE
MALE VOICE.

* Men who have Tenor voices will do well to exercise themselves in singing the entire scale from the chest-voice.

EXERCISE III.

FOR THE MALE VOICE.

Tenor voices can form a kind of sound which is called *mixed*, because it combines the vibrating quality of the chest-sounds with the softness of the head-sounds.

It is very difficult to fix the upward and downward limits of this kind of voice. We have heard Tenors who, in descending scales, prolonging it even to  and only regained the chest-sound at the lower G. This aided them admirably in making the difference of sound, existing between the chest and head-registers, disappear.

Hence we urge Tenor pupils to exercise this kind of voice in its whole extent. As for the means to be employed, they can only be pointed out by the verbal instruction of the professor. We shall merely recommend to them to guard themselves against the habit of the guttural sound, which is easily contracted in the use of the mixed voice.

EXERCISE IV.

FOR THE MIXED VOICE.

Although female voices have in fact three registers in the compass of their voice, the passage from the medium to the head-voice offers but little difficulty to them. They should, above all, direct their attention to the union of the chest-register and the medium-register. The difficulty to be overcome is the same which men experience, and the means to be employed are identical, namely, weakening the high sounds of the chest, and strengthening the first tones of the medium.