



Garcia checking the glottis with his laryngoscope. (Garcia: *Hints on Singing*, 1894, p. VII)



One of the most famous pupils of Manuel Garcia, the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind (1820–1887), here shown in a production of Bellini's *La Sonnambula* (painter unknown).



The female voice in the Garcia family: His sisters Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot (the latter shown in a picture by Carl Timoleon von Neff, 1842) were famous singers as well.

Forschungsschwerpunkt Interpretation

The female voice of the Garcia School – Research on opera vocal techniques from a gender perspective

Abstract: Gender aspects of operatic singing techniques are at the heart of this project, which takes as its starting point the famous Garcia School. Although Manuel Garcia Jun. (1805–1906) geared his treatise on singing (1840/47) towards the male operatic voice, he and his successors enjoyed their biggest successes with women singers such as the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind.

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Gender-Aspekte von Operngesangstechnik stehen im Zentrum des Projekts, das von der berühmten Garcia-Schule ausgeht. Obwohl Manuel Garcia jun. (1805–1906) sein Gesangs-Lehrwerk (1840/47) auf die männliche Opernstimme zugeschnitten hatte, feierten er und seine Nachfolger ihre grössten Unterrichtserfolge mit Sängerinnen – etwa der schwedischen Sopranistin Jenny Lind.

Dieses dreijährige Postdoc-Projekt wird vom Swedish Science Council unterstützt.

Introduction: Manuel Garcia's treatise on singing was published in 1840/47. Although it was geared towards the male voice, the most successful pupils of Garcia's school were female singers, among them the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind.

I here consider three of Garcia's "vanished" techniques as significant factors for the extraordinary success of the Garcia school with high sopranos. These are: the controversial *coup de la glotte* (hard tone onset), *lateral breathing support* (a higher breathing support than is used today) and the *voix blanche* (with a high position for the larynx).

This project engages with current gender-critical discussions about opera and vocal aspects of female opera singing in a world defined by men – issues first raised above all by Susan McClary and Carolyn Abbate. Empirical data will be analysed on the basis of these discussions, and I shall examine female opera singing as having been adapted from conditions that had been defined for the male voice, both in matters of technique and in the music itself.

Methods: The material for this project consists of two parts: 1) recordings of singers from the Garcia/Marchesi school of the early twentieth century, such as Nellie Melba, Selma Kurz and Emma Eames; 2) recordings of seven sopranos today – three professionals and four opera students at the Bern University of the Arts. In filmed experiments, all the latter sang the same Garcia exercises and also the same aria (part of Lucia's mad scene from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*) using Garcia's techniques. Audio recordings of their singing will be compared with the early recordings of group 1) in a spectrogram. We also filmed the singers' glottis while they were singing using Garcia's techniques.

These experiments have two purposes: to see if soprano voices may benefit from Garcia's techniques, and to determine what techniques were used by sopranos in the late 19th century.

Results: Our investigation indicates that some of Garcia's techniques may be useful to high sopranos and coloraturas in the bel canto repertoire and earlier operas. The *coup de la glotte* and the higher larynx position (the *voix blanche*) benefit a straight voice without continuous vibrato. The *voix blanche*, together with *lateral breathing support*, benefits really fast coloratura. The *voix blanche* benefits singing in the third octave and in the flute voice. The recordings from the Garcia/Marchesi school suggest that, even during the Romantic era, opera singing was not as heavy as it became during the 20th century. This was due to a wider throat and a lowered larynx. Even though Garcia was already regarded as old-fashioned by his contemporaries and his ideas were about to be replaced by the heavier ideal, singers from both the Garcia and Marchesi schools retained the older traditions longer than did other singers in the same era. For this reason, the Garcia school might be a useful, audible historical window to singers who want to improve their historical singing.

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