

## Lamperti and the Evolution of Appoggio (Support!)

The following article is a probe into the origins of the ubiquitous term "support". I have heard this term defined so many ways by so many people—some who sing well and others who sing poorly. When I looked at the Italian text where the term was first used, I was surprised to discover that it was quite different from the commonly used translation that is cited as "Lamperti". In my point of view, this is something of a scandal. Ideas of "low support" are often taught as being "several centuries old", but there is no evidence to back that up.

Francesco Lamperti (1811-1892) was a famous Italian voice teacher, as was his son, Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1839-1910). Francesco is one of the early sources of the word *appoggio* in voice teaching, which he first defined in his *Guida Teorico-Pratica-Elementare* (1864).

*Appoggio* has been a favorite subject in many books and articles up to the present day. It is translated as "support". "Support", in turn, has taken on a life of its own with many meanings and assumptions that go far beyond F. Lamperti's original definition. In the last century, "support" has become a quagmire. Ask five teachers what it means, and you will get at least five definitions, and many teachers will tell you that they avoid the word.

Lamperti himself changed his description of *appoggio* between his original publication of the *Guida* and his later published material. In 1876, Dr. Louis Mandl published a book titled *Hygiène de la Voix Parlée Ou Chantée: Suivie du Formulaire Pour le Traitement de la Voix* (Hygiene of the Voice Spoken or Sung: Followed by the Form of Treatment of the Voice). Dr. Mandl apparently had some influence over both Lampertis, as their writings after this time mention the diaphragm and abdomen, which was not the case in Francesco's *Guida*. Previous Italian and French authors had mentioned very little about breathing and related body parts.

The *Guida* was revised and translated in 1890 into English as *The Art of Singing*. The title page contains the phrase "Revised Edition with Translation by J. C. Griffith". This edition has been widely cited in English writing about the voice. It contains a reference to Dr. Mandl and the influence he had on delineating abdominal, lateral, and clavicular respiration, among related concerns. Here we will look at Articles IV, VII, and XII. I will show how the 1890 edition differs from the 1864 edition, reflecting his evolving concept of *appoggio*, and concerns about breathing in general, in the late 19th century.

Articles IV and VII are in question-and-answer format. Article XII is written in regular paragraph style. The questions stayed mostly the same from 1864 to 1890, but the answers differed significantly, reflecting the trend to discuss the diaphragm, abdomen, and what has come to be called "breath management".

Below, for each of Lamperti's "Articles", I show: 1) the original Italian edition of 1864; 2) my translation of the original; and 3) the 1890 English edition.

Lamperti 1864:

**ARTICOLO IV – DELLA RESPIRAZIONE**

**Cosa s'intende per respirazione?**

**S'intende la doppia azione dei polmoni di attrarre l'aria esterna e rimandarla con moto contrario.**

\* \* \*

My translation:

**ARTICLE IV – ON RESPIRATION**

**What is meant by respiration?**

**It means the dual action of the lungs to draw in the external air and return it with contrary motion.**

\* \* \*

1890 English edition:

**ARTICLE IV – ON RESPIRATION**

**What is meant by respiration?**

**It means the double action of the muscles of the thorax in receiving into and expelling air from the lungs.**

The omission of the "action of the lungs" and the addition of "thorax" are interesting. Perhaps by 1890, Lamperti or his translator wished to be more inclusive about the role of the muscles of the torso in breathing.

In 1864, Lamperti does not give specific instructions about how a breath

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is to be taken. His anatomical references are limited to the lungs, which he explains are filled to different degrees depending on the phrase, while only the 1890 edition says later in the same Article that the breath is to be taken "first through the nose".

## ARTICOLO VII – DELL'APPOGGIO DELLA VOCE

[FIRST QUESTION]:

Lamperti 1864:

**Qual'è l'appoggio che devesi dare alla voce onde poter studiare senza stancare la gola?**

**È l'appoggio dei muscoli del petto e dell'aria concentrata nei polmoni.**

\* \* \*

My translation:

**What is the support which should be given to the voice to be able to study without tiring the throat?**

**It is the support of the chest muscles and the concentrated air in the lungs.**

\* \* \*

1890 revision and translation:

**What is the *appoggio* or support which should be given to the voice to enable one to study without fatigue to the throat?**

**The support afforded to the voice by the muscles of the chest, especially the diaphragm, acting upon the air contained in the lungs.**

The 1890 version adds "especially the diaphragm", and omits "concentrated air". The use of "appoggio" in the translation indicates that the term may have started to be used in the English-speaking world.

[SECOND QUESTION:]

Lamperti 1864:

**Come si ottiene tale appoggio del petto e del fiato?**

Tenendosi nella posizione ed alle norme indicate all'articolo 3 ed aprendo bene il fondo della gola colla vocale *A* la voce sortirà limpida, sonora e bene appoggiata tanto nel piano che nel forte, cosa importantissima da ottenersi, dipendendo da ciò in buona parte l'esito della carriera. Dato il caso che l'allievo non potesse emettere la vocale *A*, bene appoggiata al petto e gli riuscisse troppo aperta, o, come dicesi, nella maschera, oppure nasale, da principio potrà emetterla colla *L*, pronunciando *La*, onde facilitare il modo di renderla appoggiata e sicura.

\* \* \*

My translation of the 1864 edition:

**How is this support of the chest and breath obtained?**

Holding oneself in the position and with the provisions contained in Article III and opening well the bottom of the throat with the vowel "A" will produce the clear voice, sonorous and well supported as much in piano as in forte, an important thing to be achieved, as on it will depend, to a large part, the success of the career. Given the case in which the student cannot emit the "A" vowel well supported in the chest, and it risks being too open, or, as it is said, in the mask or nasal, in the beginning he could emit it with "L", pronouncing "La", so as to facilitate the way of rendering it supported and secure.

\* \* \*

1890 English edition:

**How is this support to be obtained?**

By observing the rules in Article III., with regard to position, and then opening the lower part of the throat with the vowel A. The sound thus produced will be clear and sympathetic; but if the pupil is not able to pronounce the vowel A with a full tone, let him first begin with LA, which will render its emission more easy and secure. This is a most important point for an artist to observe, as on it will depend, in the majority of cases, the success of his future career.

Here the opening question has been rewritten significantly. The words "breath" and "chest" are omitted. "Support" is the only noun left in the question.

In the answer, "with a full tone" replaces "well supported in the chest, and it risks being too open, or, as it is said, in the mask or nasal". Note that Lamperti considered "in the mask" to be undesirable in 1864, but had no such admonition in 1890. "Mask singing" became very fashionable in voice studios from Lamperti's time to the present day. The 1890 version also changes the location of the "as on it will depend, in the majority of cases, the success of his future career".

#### ARTICOLO XII:

Lamperti 1864:

#### APPLICAZIONE DELLA REGOLA PER L'APPOGGIO DELLA VOCE.

**Per appoggio ossia regola del fiato s'intende che tutte le note dal basso all'alto e viceversa, sieno fatte col medesimo volume d'aria, trattenendo il respiro, cioè non permettendo che il fiato raccolto nei polmoni sfugga più del bisogno.**

\* \* \*

My translation:

#### APPLICATION OF THE RULE FOR THE APPOGGIO OF THE VOICE.

**For support, namely, regulation of the breath, it is meant that all of the notes from bottom to top and vice versa, be made with the same volume of air, withholding the breath, that is, not allowing that the breath collected in the lungs escape more than needed.**

\* \* \*

1890 English edition:

#### THE APPLICATION OF THE RULE FOR THE APPOGGIO OF THE VOICE.

**By singing *appoggiata*, is meant that all notes, from the lowest to the highest, are produced by a column of air over which the singer has perfect command, by holding back the breath, and not permitting more air than is absolutely necessary for the formation of the note to escape from the lungs.**

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1864 says that the notes should be made with the same "volume of air", while 1890 calls it a "column of air". The term "air column" is popular today in many voice and wind instrument studios. I don't know when it started, but Garcia and the old Italians did not use the term "columns". Also, "over which the singer has perfect command" and "for the formation of the note" were not in the original. It should also be noted here that Lamperti unambiguously says that support pertains to the regulation of the breath.

The Italian words for "abdomen", "abdominal", and any form of the word "diaphragm" do not exist in F. Lamperti's 1864 *Guida*. His son used the terms extensively in his 1905 book *The Technics of Bel Canto*, and was adamant that the chest NOT be involved in breathing, contrary to Francesco.

Can the typical voice teacher of today imagine "support" that is centered in the chest, and ignore the lower torso as F. Lamperti did in the *Guida* – indeed, as all those who came before him did? Why did he include a paragraph on the proper formation of the (Italian) /a/ vowel in a section dealing with "support"? What does the vowel and its origins in the body ("opening well the bottom part of the throat") have to do with "support"?

There are a lot of descriptions of behaviors labeled as *appoggio* today, most of them having to do with controlling skeletal muscles of the torso, but the *Guida* pulls in other factors, such as the way the vowel is made. I can see how Cornelius Reid and others believe that good singing creates its own feeling of "support". That is, good phonation has to develop first, and then the biofeedback of sensations of steadiness and security can start to be discovered. If there is nothing yet to support, then efforts to create support in isolation, as "preparation", make little sense.

The original *Guida* and the 1890 English version are in the public domain and freely available. Unfortunately, F. Lamperti's 1883 Italian title *L'arte del canto in ordine alle tradizioni classiche ed particolare esperienza* is difficult to find. If the 1890 edition is indeed an accurate translation of F. Lamperti's revised (1883) treatise, we see him in his later years pointing toward the modern idea of a complex system of "support". If the 1890 version is *not* a faithful translation, then we at least see how the editorial changes reflect ideas about "support" that had started to become popular in the late nineteenth century.