



THE COMMON SENSE OF SINGING

By

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PERGAMON PRESS
OXFORD · LONDON · PARIS · FRANKFURT
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

PERGAMON PRESS LTD.
Headington Hill Hall, Oxford
4 & 5 Fitzroy Square, London W.1

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
60 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, New York

COLLIER-MACMILLAN CANADA, LTD.
132 Water Street South, Galt, Ontario, Canada

GAUTHIER-VILLARS ED.
55 Quai des Grands-Augustins, Paris 6

PERGAMON PRESS G.m.b.H.
Kaiserstrasse 75, Frankfurt am Main

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PERGAMON PRESS LTD.

Library of Congress Card No. 63-21131

Set in 11 on 12pt Bembo and printed in Great Britain by
PAGE BROS. (NORWICH) LTD.

FOREWORD

BY

SIR ADRIAN C. BOULT, O.St.J.

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GEORGE BAKER

WHERE artistic matters are concerned there is often a very delicate balance to be maintained between the tidiness of theory and the varied experiences of practice. I know how tempting it is slightly to distort an experience of fact in order to make it fit in with a pet theory which won't always hold water.

Readers can be assured that there is no danger in this book of even the slightest deviation from the straight path of the purest common sense, for Mr. George Baker has an enviable reputation on both sides of the art, having for many years been one of the most popular and respected singers in this country, who has, as well, never spared himself as a teacher, and has helped countless young artists on their way.

Those who discover that Mr. Baker's most recent Gilbert and Sullivan recordings were made for H.M.V. as recently as December 1962 will no doubt be surprised to know they bring his total to over 3000. They have embraced all kinds of music, from Opera to *Lieder*, and from Oratorio to 'pops', for he holds the view, which I consider is right, that "a working professional is one who is in the

open market to be engaged to sing when and where required, and to perform to the best of his ability the work given to him to do" (Introduction). The astonishing fact to me is that all his recordings have been made continuously throughout a career extending over fifty-five years. That is a remarkable record for any singer and the best possible tribute to the soundness of his basic technique.

But that is only one side to his art. His musicianship is attested by academic diplomas won not only as a singer but also as an organist; and I know that his ability to learn and interpret unfamiliar (and often new) music quickly, coupled with unusual versatility, has greatly increased the demands for his services both here and in the New World. He lectures, examines and writes extensively; this book is a compendium of the wisdom and long experience of a man holding a unique position not merely in the world of singing, but in the greater world of Music itself.

I personally have the greatest pleasure in commending this book, for all British musicians are thinking now of the 150th birthday of the venerable Royal Philharmonic Society, and George Baker's name and mine are, I believe, two of the oldest now on the books of the Society. We joined as young enthusiasts almost on the same day, and Baker has given it most generously his time and energy in many capacities: member of Council, Treasurer, and now Chairman in this most notable year of its history.

INTRODUCTION



HOW MANY books have been written about the art, the science, the technique and the anatomy of singing? I do not know; probably the number runs into hundreds. However, I *do* know that I have more than a dozen on my library shelves and if, like the Colonel in W. S. Gilbert's "Patience", I (quoting freely)—

"Took all these treatises all that are fusible,
Melt them all down in a pipkin or crucible,
Set them to simmer and take off the scum"—

what would the residuum be? An indigestible pudding of confusion and nonsense. The truth is, there are no commonly accepted principles of tutelage in the technique of singing. In no other field of education is there such chaos of ideas and opinions.

Nevertheless, there are in existence some excellent books on the subject and I am indebted to the authors of four of them, viz: *The Singing of the Future* by Ffrangcon-Davies (John Lane); *Dynamic Singing* by Louis Bachner (Dennis Dobson); *The Voice of the Mind* by E. Herbert-Caesari (Robert Hale); and *Interpretation in Song* by H. Plunket Greene (Macmillan & Co. and Stainer & Bell).

The preface to one of the less important books on singing in my possession starts with this sentence—"This book had to be written." A bold statement. I cannot convince myself that my book *had* to be written, because I hold to the opinion that the art of singing cannot be entirely learned from books, but I honestly feel that I have something of importance to say.

After 55 years of continuous employment as a professional singer and adjudicator, I do claim to know something about

the human voice and how to use it. In putting my views, precepts and opinions before the reader I would like to state quite clearly that I address myself to ordinary people who like singing. I have always described myself as a working professional; that is, one who is in the open market to be engaged to sing when and where required, and to perform to the best of his ability the work given to him or her to do; and it is for the established and the embryo working professional, as well as lovers of singing generally, that this book is written. What I have to offer is the essence of a long experience as a public singer, an all-round musician¹, a musical administrator, an adjudicator and a teacher with a number of pupils who have achieved enviable success in life.

“What I have written, I have written” but, unlike Pontius Pilate who made this historic statement, not for the sake of political expediency but with an earnest desire to help, to clarify and if possible, to instruct.

There are no anatomical drawings in this book and I offer no apology for their absence, because whatever interest they may have for students of anatomy or as examples of drawing and design, they are of no help to anyone who wishes to understand and practice the art or the skill of singing. In short, this book purports to be a plain man’s guide to the career of singing.

My grateful thanks are due to Miss Winifred Dodd for preparing the typescript of this book and for her invaluable help in checking the proofs. Also, I acknowledge with thanks the permission given to me to reproduce musical examples from (1) *Lulu* by Anton Berg by Universal Edition (Alfred A. Kalmus Ltd.) and (2) *Moses and Aaron* by Schönberg and *Elegy for Young Lovers* by Henze by Schott and Co. Ltd.

¹ A gossip column writer said of me, “He was once an organist.”

TO MY WIFE
OLIVE GROVES