



Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors: History and Technique

Dan H. Marek

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Giovanni Battista Rubini (1794–1854) was a legendary tenor and the first 19th-century non-castrati male singer to become an international star of opera. The previous two centuries had been the era of the castrati, with tenors and basses relegated to character and supporting roles in the operas of their time. Rubini stood apart because he not only matched the castrati in coloratura and pathos, but he also had an extraordinarily high voice. With Rubini's rise, and in his wake, several tenors came to sing roles written specifically for them by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and many other lesser-known bel canto composers. Signaling the end of the dominance of castrati on stage, this period would last some forty years until the advent of grand opera, Wagner, and Verdi and the appearance of the first so-called High C from the chest by Gilbert-Louis Duprez in 1837. Since then, the accepted tenor sound has followed the tradition epitomized by Enrico Caruso and, in our own era, Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo.

Many composers, conductors, and performers would come to regard bel canto dramatic operas as decorative and vapid until Maria Callas and Tulio Serafin demonstrated the heights this genre of opera could reach. However, opera directors and opera performers of late who have expressed an interest in reviving selected masterpieces from the bel canto tradition have found themselves confronted with the problem of locating tenors versed in the vocal techniques necessary to carry the high tessituras. In *Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors: History and Technique*, Dan H. Marek explores the extraordinary life of Rubini in order to frame this special period in the history of opera and connect the technique of the *castrati* who were among Rubini's instructors. Drawing on the work of Berton Coffin, Marek offers long-sought answers to the challenges presented by high tessitura of bel canto operas for tenors. To further assist working singers, *Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors* includes over sixty pages of exercises written by Rubini himself before 1840, which Marek, for the first time ever, has adapted to acoustical phonetics.

Professional singers, teachers and their students, vocal coaches, and opera conductors will find this work indispensable as the only English-language work on high tessitura for tenor **and soprano** singing.

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