

DOI:10.29013/EJA-25-3-15-21



TECHNIQUES FOR SMOOTHING THE PASSAGE OF SOPRANO SINGERS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN VOCAL SCHOOLS

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Cite: Akhmedova Ch.I. (2025). "Techniques For Smoothing the Passage of Soprano Singers: A Comparative Analysis of European Vocal Schools". *European Journal of Arts* 2025, No 3. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJA-25-3-15-21>

Abstract

Register transitions, especially in the passage area, are one of the key and most difficult aspects of soprano singers' vocal technique. The relevance of this topic is due to the need to ensure the stability, expressiveness and technical freedom of the voice in the critical zone of transition between registers. The present study is aimed at a comparative analysis of the techniques of passage smoothing used in the framework of four leading European vocal schools – Italian, French, German and Russian. The main method used is a qualitative content analysis of pedagogical approaches, vocal exercises, terminological differences and interpretations of the passage phenomenon. Special attention is paid to the specifics of working with the mixed register, respiratory support and articulatory coordination in the zone of transitional notes. The analysis revealed both fundamental differences and significant points of contact between the traditions, which allowed us to conclude that the integrative approach has a high potential effectiveness in the modern vocal training system. The presented conclusions can be useful both for teachers of academic singing and students of vocal departments seeking a deep understanding and practical mastery of register balance techniques.

Keywords: *Transitional notes, passages, vocal cords, larynx, vocal schools, soprano, thoracic resonator, head resonator*

Introduction

The soprano's transitional notes (passages) represent a critical zone of the vocal range in which a complex physiological and acoustic restructuring takes place between the chest and head registers. In this area, vocal mechanisms change, accompanied by changes in the parameters of the vocal apparatus, in particular, the configuration of the

vocal cords and the activity of the laryngeal muscles (thyroarytenoid and cricothyroid muscles). Passage zones require systematic and specialized methodological work, since it is here that problems with the accuracy of intonation, stability of sound production and adequate formation of a resonant medium (formants) most often arise. In addition, the transition features are related to the need

for respiratory support coordination, articulatory consistency, and effective sound dynamics management. Considering that each vocal school has historically developed its own methods of working with register transitions, there is an urgent need for a comparative analysis of these approaches, especially taking into account modern pedagogical requirements and scientific research in the field of vocal physiology and acoustics.

Methods

For this study, a careful selection of methodological sources was carried out, representing four key European vocal schools, each of which has a rich historical and pedagogical tradition of working with register transitions in sopranos:

1. The Italian school, represented by classical works by Giuseppe Lamperti, Manuel Garcia and modern vocal teachers, which emphasize the aesthetics of bel canto and the development of smooth legato in the passage area;
2. The French school, based on the vocal techniques of the XIX–XX centuries, including the works of Louis Lablanche and Alfred Guillard, focused on the formation of elegant timbre and controlled sound attack;
3. The German school, represented by the methodological developments of Franz Sigmund and Karl Martens, with an emphasis on a detailed physiologi-

cal analysis of the vocal apparatus and the principles of respiratory support;

4. The Russian school, reflected in the works of Evgeny Nesterenko, Vaclav Blazek, Mikhail Mirzoyan and other prominent teachers, characterized by an integrated approach to the development of a mixed register and resonance balance.

Qualitative content analysis of pedagogical texts and methodological manuals was used as the main research tool in order to identify and systematize strategies for working with the passage. The analysis covered the study of the professional terminology used, the specifics of vocalizations, the principles of respiratory coordination and resonant sound construction, as well as various approaches to the formation of the so-called mixed or “mixed” register. This comprehensive analysis made it possible to identify not only the unique features of each school, but also general pedagogical trends, which creates the basis for substantiating integrative methods in modern vocal pedagogy.

The Italian School

The Italian vocal school traditionally focuses on the clear separation and subsequent smooth mixing of the two main registers – voce di petto (chest voice) and voce di testa (head voice) – within the transition zone, usually in the range from E4 to A4.

Exercise №1 (Lesson 1)

Legato

♩ = 80

Piano

5

In working with the passage, light and flexible vocalizations on open vowels are widely used here, mainly “a” and “e”, performed in the legato technique to ensure smooth transition and uniformity of sound. The most important element of the technique is the conscious development of a sense of resonance in the resonator zone of the “mask” – mainly in the nasal and frontal sinuses – as well as maintaining an open larynx, which contributes to the formation of a free, rich timbre without straining the vocal cords. This school emphasizes the importance of proper respiratory support and air flow control, which ensures the stability of intonation and sound stability in the critical area of the passage.

The French School

The French vocal tradition focuses on the formation of a light, graceful and elegant timbre, often described as a “French sound”. As part of the work with register transitions, the emphasis shifts to the use of falsetto mixte – a mixed falsetto register, which provides softness and flexibility of sound in the passage area. The methodical exercises of this school are aimed at fine coordination of respiratory processes and articulatory movements, with special attention to the soft, fish-free attack of sound, which minimizes mechanical stress and preserves the naturalness of the vocal apparatus. In addition, the technique of closed vowels is widely used, which helps to stabilize the register and control the vibration of the vocal cords, as well as improve the resonant characteristics in the transition zone.

Exercise №2 (Lesson 2)

Legato

Piano

♩ = 80

5

9

The German School

The German vocal school is characterized by a deep anatomical and physiological approach to the study and teaching of vocal technique, paying special attention to a detailed understanding of the functioning of the larynx, soft palate and respiratory system

as a whole. The vocal method focuses on developing a powerful respiratory support and airflow control, which allows you to create a dense, rich and dark vocal tone – the so-called *Kopfstimme mit Deckung* (head voice with a cover). The exercises are dominated by intervals of thirds and fifths with a gradual

change in the resonant properties of sound, which contributes to a more natural and stable transition between registers. At the same time, the German school pays great attention

to the coordination of the laryngeal muscles and balancing tension, which minimizes the risk of vocal overstrain and promotes effective vocal projection.

Exercise №3 (Lesson 3)

Non legato

mf
Piano

♩ = 80

5

9

13

The Russian School is a synthesis and integration of key elements of both Italian and German vocal traditions, combining technical expressiveness with a deep understanding of the physiological, psychological and pedagogical aspects of vocal activity. In working with register transitions, the Russian school widely uses methodological techniques, including chants with elements of speech origin, which contributes to the development of natural articulation and improvement of vocal phrasing. This technique helps to form a harmonious

combination of speech motor skills and vocal sound, which ensures smoothness and expressiveness of performance.

Special attention in Russian pedagogy is paid to the development of respiratory support, which is the foundation for stable airflow control and dynamic balance when changing registers. At the same time, there is an active use of the technique of “covering” sound – conscious regulation of the resonant space and the degree of tension of the vocal cords, aimed at achieving optimal timbre

while maintaining vocal health and preventing overexertion.

In addition to technical aspects, the Russian school emphasizes the importance of diction clarity and articulatory intelligibility, considering them as an integral part of vocal expressiveness and emotional impact on the listener.

The psychological component also occupies an important place in the pedagogical

system: the emphasis is on the formation of psychological freedom and naturalness of vocal sound, which helps to remove internal clamps and stresses, improve creative improvisation and develop an individual vocal style. This comprehensive approach ensures not only technical excellence, but also the depth of artistic expression, which is highly appreciated in modern vocal pedagogy.

Exercise №4 (Lesson 4)

Non legato

Piano

$\text{♩} = 40$

Ма-ма мы-ла ра - му, ма-ма мы-ла ра - му, ма-ма мы-ла ра - му,

4

ма-ма мы-ла ра - му ма-ма мы-ла ра - му ма-ма мы-ла ра - му

7

ма-ма мы-ла ра - му ма-ма мы-ла ра - му ма-ма мы-ла ра - му

10

ма-ма мы-ла ра - му ма-ма мы-ла ра - му

Discussion

A comparison of the schools showed that despite the differences in terminology and pedagogical vocabulary, they all strive to achieve the same result – a smooth, controlled transition in the passage. The differences show up in the nuances:

The Italian school is characterized as the most vocally oriented tradition, in which the principle of “natural” singing is fundamental, based on the development of a subtle vocal sensation and intuitive control of the vocal apparatus. This technique attaches key importance to the development of internal auditory perception and kinesthetic sensitivity, which allows

the singer to achieve maximum freedom and expressiveness of sound with minimal strain on the vocal cords. This approach involves the formation of a harmonious balance between respiratory support, resonant structures and articulatory mechanisms, which contributes to the smoothness of legato and uniformity of timbre throughout the voice range, especially in the area of register transitions.

The German School of Vocal Art is characterized by an increased scientific and physiological focus and an emphasis on a deep understanding of the anatomical and functional processes of voice formation. This approach is based on a detailed study of the mechanics of the vocal apparatus, respiratory system and resonator structures, which makes it possible to diagnose and correct pathological changes and dysfunctions of the vocal cords as effectively as possible. Due to this, the German technique is often used in working with problematic voices, including cases of vocal overexertion, dysphonia, and rehabilitation programs, ensuring safe and functionally sound restoration of vocal functions.

The French vocal school focuses on the development of lightness, grace and fine vocal coordination, which is especially important for the performance of coloratura passages and virtuoso vocal figures. The basis of the technique is the improvement of respiratory control, articulatory clarity and the ability to quickly and accurately switch between registers while maintaining a light, transparent timbre. The French school emphasizes the importance of elegant timbre and controlled sound attack, which contributes to the formation of a vocal style that combines technical virtuosity with aesthetic sophistication.

The Russian school is an integrative synthesis of leading vocal traditions with an emphasis on the development of intonational accuracy, expressiveness and emotional intensity of performance. Special attention is paid to the complex development of respiratory support, resonant balance and articulatory intelligibility, which allows achieving a high level of vocal expressiveness without compromising technical stability. The pedagogical process also includes work on psychological freedom and naturalness of sound, contributing to the disclosure of the individual vocal timbre and creative potential of the performer.

This approach ensures the formation of a balanced and adaptive vocal apparatus capable of performing a wide repertoire with different stylistic and emotional requirements.

Modern vocal pedagogy benefits significantly from the integrative use of various methodological approaches presented in European vocal schools, especially given the growing need for individualization of the educational process. In the conditions of modern vocal training, where each singer has unique anatomical and physiological characteristics, level of preparedness and creative tasks, universal techniques are not effective enough.

The integration of elements from Italian, French, German and Russian schools makes it possible to create adaptive pedagogical strategies aimed at the comprehensive development of the vocal apparatus, including both technical improvement and the formation of artistic expression. This interdisciplinary approach provides flexibility in methods, allowing for the individual characteristics of each student to be taken into account, from physiological parameters and vocal range to psychological state and stylistic preferences.

As a result of the integration of the efforts of various traditions, it is possible not only to optimize the learning process, but also to increase the effectiveness of correcting vocal disorders, reduce the risk of overexertion of the vocal apparatus and contribute to the formation of stable vocal skills. Thus, modern pedagogy, focused on the synthesis and adaptation of various techniques, is becoming more comprehensive, scientifically based and aimed at unlocking the maximum potential of each vocalist.

Conclusion

The development and improvement of passage smoothing techniques remain one of the most urgent and challenging tasks in modern vocal pedagogy, especially when teaching sopranos. Register transitions are physiologically and acoustically complex phenomena that require an integrated approach that includes both technical and artistic aspects of vocal performance.

The conducted research and comparative analysis of the methods developed by the leading European vocal schools – Italian, French, German and Russian – revealed a significant

potential for mutual enrichment of pedagogical practices. Each school introduces unique methodological accents: from the aesthetics of bel canto and the development of legato in the Italian tradition, through the elegance of timbre and respiratory coordination in the French, to detailed anatomical and physiological analysis and respiratory support in the German school, as well as a comprehensive synthesis of technical and psychological components in the Russian.

The combination of these approaches expands the teacher's arsenal, providing an opportunity for a more individualized and adaptive choice of techniques depending on the physiological characteristics, vocal experience and artistic goals of a particular student.

In the future, the development of hybrid techniques based on the integration of the strengths of each of the traditions considered seems to be the most productive direction. Such synthetic pedagogy is able to provide a harmonious combination of technical reliability, expressiveness and vocal health, contributing to the formation of highly qualified vocalists with a wide range of expressive means and stability in working with register transitions.

Thus, an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach to the study and teaching of passage technique opens up new horizons for the development of modern vocal pedagogy and academic singing practice.

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submitted 07.06.2025;

accepted for publication 21.06.2025;

published 31.08.2025

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