THE MESSA DI VOCE AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS A TRAINING EXERCISE FOR THE YOUNG SINGER

D. M. A. DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

The Messa di voce and Its Effectiveness as a Training Device for the Young Singer

This document is a study of the traditional Messa di voce exercise (“placing of the voice”) and its effectiveness as a teaching tool for the young singer. Since the advent of Baroque music the Messa di voce has not only been used as a dynamic embellishment in performance practice, but also as a central vocal teaching exercise. It gained special prominence during the 19th and early 20th century as part of the so-called Bel Canto technique of singing. The exercise demonstrates a delicate balance between changing sub-glottic aerodynamic pressures and fundamental frequency, while consistently producing a voice of optimal singing quality.

The Messa di voce consists of the controlled increase and subsequent decrease in intensity of tone sustained on a single pitch during one breath. An early definition of the Messa di voce can be found in Instruction Of Mr. Tenducci To His Scholars by Guisto Tenducci (1785):

To sing a messa di voce: swelling the voice, begin pianissimo and increase gradually to forte, in the first part of the time; and so diminish gradually to the end of each note, if possible. (Tenducci 2)

This study has two main parts. Chapter 1 explores the history and use of the Messa di voce exercise by voice instructors and singers from the Bel Canto era to present time and its perceived benefit in stabilizing breath pressure and pitch along with improving coordination of the laryngeal muscles. Chapter 2
contains subjective information gathered from a questionnaire received from over fifty voice teachers across the United States concerning whether and how they employ the *Messa di voce* in their voice studio.

The second part of the study (Chapter 3) contains data gleaned from a longitudinal study of freshman voice students from The Ohio State University School of Music (begun in 2000) conducted by Martin Spencer, speech pathologist formally of ExcelENT Voice Clinic in Columbus Ohio. I also used subsequent protocols for and findings from my own “spin-off” study of the Messa di voce exercise and its use with young singers. My six-week study is considered a pilot study and as such, is not conclusive, but does provide interesting indicators for future explorations.

In the final chapter, conclusions are drawn about the benefits that may or may not accrue to young singers when they employ the Messa di voce as a regular part of their vocalizing routine.
In loving memory of my father

Robert J. Pulte
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I am indebted to Martin Spencer for not only allowing me to use the data from his research project, but also for his help in learning how to use the KayPENTAX Computer Speech LAB and in creating the protocol for my pilot study. I sincerely thank Dr. Michael Trudeau for helping me complete the final phase of the project after the departure of Mr. Spencer. His advice for facilitating a viable study was invaluable.

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Finally, I would like to thank members of my family, especially my mother, Coralee Pulte, for her unwavering support since I first decided music was to be my profession. Her strength and courage has always been an inspiration to me.
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INTRODUCTION

The Messa di voce lends itself better than others as vehicles for affecting a solution to the problem at hand. In learning to swell and diminish, it is evident that a single tone best serves this purpose. No other musical figure will do as well.

Cornelius L. Reid, The Free Voice A Guide To Natural Singing, p. 129

Attempts to achieve the highly controlled Messa di voce must wait for general technical stability. Only the singer who has fundamentals of vocal technique well in hand should attempt these vocalises.

Richard Miller, The Structure of Singing, p. 175

Since the advent of Baroque music in the early 1600’s, the Messa di voce (Italian for “placing the voice”) has been used both as a dynamic embellishment in performance practice and as an important singing pedagogical exercise. The seemingly contradictory quotes cited above by acknowledged contemporary experts in the field of vocal pedagogy symbolize the range of opinion which exists about the Messa di voce and its benefits as a voice-building tool. An early definition of the Messa di voce may be found in Instruction Of Mr. Tenducci To His Scholars by Guisto Tenducci in 1785:

To sing a Messa di voce: swelling the voice, begin pianissimo and increase gradually to forte, in the first part of the time: and so diminish gradually to the end of each note, if possible.

In September of 2000, a longitudinal study of the singing voice was begun by speech pathologist Martin Spencer, M.A.:CF/SLP, a staff member of
ExcelENT Voice Clinic in Columbus Ohio. In collaboration with the OSU voice faculty, Spencer began taking several measurements of the voices of incoming freshman voice majors. In this study (which will be described later in the paper) Spencer employed the Messa di voce (hereafter called “MDV”) as one of the devices for taking vocal measurements. The study lasted for four years, and included eighty singers, who were tested annually.

As a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Vocal Performance Area, and assistant to the voice area head at the time, I was given the opportunity to assist in developing a protocol for the “Voice Range Profile”, a chart based on several vocal measurements Mr. Spencer employed. I also was responsible for scheduling the subjects and facilitating their participation in the longitudinal voice study. As I observed the disparity among the young singers’ abilities to perform the MDV, and realized that I had only used the exercise for my own singing development in the advanced years of my voice study, I became interested in this time-honored traditional vocal exercise, and whether it was well-suited for use in early stages of vocal development. Would the MDV, in fact, accelerate the learning curve of a young singer’s vocal development, or could it perhaps be detrimental (an assertion frequently made by contemporary voice teachers)?

My curiosity peaked; I began researching writings on the MDV exercise throughout pedagogical history. I questioned acknowledged singing professionals in the voice-teaching field about their use of the MDV both casually and subsequently through a questionnaire. Finally, using Martin Spencer’s data as a springboard, I developed a limited pilot study of the MDV as a teaching exercise for a small group of beginning voice majors in the OSU music program.

This document chronicles my findings. In Chapter 1, I will explore the use of the MDV exercise by voice instructors from early operatic development through the Bel Canto era and up to the present day, along with its perceived
result in stabilizing breath pressure and pitch while improving the coordination of the laryngeal muscles. Chapter 2 contains subjective information gathered from questionnaires received from over fifty voice teachers across the United States detailing how they employ the MDV in their voice studios. Chapter 3 contains data gleaned from the longitudinal study of freshman voice students in The Ohio State University School of Music conducted by Martin Spencer, and focuses on my pilot study on the MDV exercise, using some data from the Spencer study. I outline my research protocols, the limitations and problems with my study and the Spencer study, and suggest definitive protocols for a future inclusive study.

A pilot study is a name used by many principal investigators to define a short-term initial investigation of a problem or hypothesis that is limited in scope and seeks to determine the necessity or value of pursuing a full-fledged experiment. It is often considered a learning experience, and is not intended to answer all questions pertaining to the hypothesis or problem, but rather to explore the value and protocols for future study. Due to time restrictions, scheduling problems, and data inaccuracies – all explored in Chapter 2 - my study could only be a pilot study. Yet in my opinion some interesting outcomes resulted from my study that suggest the need for, and strong value for a full research study of the use of the MDV in early voice instruction in the future.

Chapter 3 of this document presents these conclusions, based on empirical data from the questionnaire to voice professionals and findings in my pilot study. I summarize the most effective forms of the MDV exercise used today, and suggest protocols for a future controlled and much longer research study of the MDV as a teaching tool for young singing voices.
CHAPTER 1

The History, Tradition, And Practice Of The Messa Di Voce Exercise

With the exception of the central principal or core idea of the Messa di voce exercise itself (a gradual crescendo and decrescendo on a single pitch); many different opinions abound in voice pedagogy literature written about this exercise during the past three hundred years. Thus, in exploring the best origins and traditions of the Messa di voce, one must also look at the various definitions, name translations, and exercise models associated with the term.

The New Grove Dictionary of Music defines the MDV as: “The singing or playing of a long note so that it begins quietly, swells to full volume, and then diminishes to the original quiet tone.” (Harris 487) This definition, which applies to the MDV both as a vocal ornament, and as a vocal training exercise (see Fig. 1), developed during the time period that has come to be known as Bel Canto. The term Bel Canto is used frequently and loosely in discussions of singing. For the purposes of this document, I prefer the definition of Bel Canto found in Cornelius Reid’s A Dictionary of Vocal Terminology:

The term Bel Canto is commonly used to refer not only to a style of singing, but also to an era of operatic history, to a musical style, and to a pedagogical technique for training the singing voice. The era itself began in the early part of the eighteenth century, and flourished until the middle of the nineteen. Whether the musical style or the pedagogic technique, which made its execution possible, came first is difficult to say, but its certain that the functional principles used by voice teachers of the time produced singers possessing special qualities. (Reid 18, Dictionary)
Confusion about the Messa di voce begins with disagreement on the literal translation of the term itself. The most accurate translation is “placing of the voice.” In the Mandadori’s Italian-English Dictionary, “messa,” from the Italian word “mettere”, means “to put” or “to place.” (Mandadori 151) However there are those who disagree. Norma Jean Erdmann-Chadbourne, and Ellis Chadbourne, authors of The Art of the Messa di voce – Scientific Singing, written in 1972, assert that “messa” does not mean placement, but should be translated as “sprouting, budding” or “unfolding.” (Erdmann-Chadbourne 132) In his groundbreaking 1962 text, Singing: The Mechanism And The Technique, the noted pedagogue William Vennard interprets “messa” as “mass”, which may also be found in Matadori’s Italian-English Dictionary. (Mandadori 151) Vennard did not explain his reason for this translation choice; however his book was the first American text based solidly on anatomical and scientific studies of the larynx and its function. One might suppose that, due to Vennard’s observation of the changes in the body or “mass” of the vocal fold during the crescendo and decrescendo phases of the MDV, he was seeking to connect the traditional name more closely to the physiological function it produced. (Vennard 213)

Authorities also disagree on how the MDV exercise should be executed. The esteemed American pedagogue Cornelius Reid states that the MDV was originally a tone sung only from pianissimo to fortissimo. Reid asserts that it was the so-called note filate, or “spun note,” that swelled fully from pianissimo to fortissimo and back to the original dynamic. (Reid 100, Bel Canto) One may also find other names in the literature for the MDV.
including *filar la voce*, “to spin the voice” or *filar i suoni*, “to spin the sound” (Ferrari 5), and the obvious name of crescendo/diminuendo. (Curtis 171)

There are also numerous exercises similar to the MDV, if not precisely the same. Reid cites two exercises that are variations: the *esclamazio viva* which is a tone begun on a fortissimo dynamic, taken to a pianissimo dynamic and back to the fortissimo; the *esclamazio languida*, Reid contends, is a tone begun on piano, swelling to only forte, decreasing back to piano and increasing to fortissimo. (Reid 100, *Bel Canto*)

![Figure 1.2: MDV Exercise Variations](image)

In her book *The Vocal Sound*, Barbara Kinsley Sable argues that the MDV is actually two swell tones back to back without a breath in between as shown in Figure 3. (Sable 16)

![Figure 1.3: Swell tones](image)

Furthermore, not everyone called the crescendo/diminuendo exercise the Messa di voce. Giulio Caccini, a member of the Florentine Camerata, wrote of the importance of the “crescendo and decrescendo” in singing but never gave the ornament a name. (Harris 487) Hence, the concept of the MDV as we know it today did not always bear that name.

The idea of the MDV originated in Florence, Italy from members of the Florentine Camerata, a society of poets and musicians who began their
collaboration in the late sixteenth century. Originally, the term Messa di voce stood neither for a vocal ornament nor exercise, but rather was a term signifying a new approach to the art of singing. This “new” vocal art would bring, they asserted, increased expressivities to music. (Erdmann 11)

The masters of the Florentine Camerata, who created this new vocal technique that became known as the “Messa di voce,” included in their number such luminaries as Vincenzo Galilei, Guilio Caccini, Pietro Bardi, Jacopo Corsi, Emilio de’Cavalieri and Jacopo Peri. They began their collaboration in 1560 with the express purpose of creating a new means of expressing emotion through music, especially the vocal art. Prior to this time voices were not systematically trained and lacked power and dynamic control. (Erdmann 17) The Camerata sought a more refined use of the voice, requiring more tonal and dramatic sophistication than had been used in the choruses and madrigals of the Renaissance. Voices were required to crescendo and diminuendo on a single tone or phrase and demonstrate the power and control necessary to accomplish the compositions of the Camerata composers. This crescendo/diminuendo facility thus became a popular embellishment, and required practice as an exercise, though not yet named Messa di voce.

As the music of the early Baroque flourished, singing masters and their pupils responded to the new music by developing training methods that achieved more and more vocal nuance and sophistication; audiences came to demand this refined and pristine way of singing. Reviews written during this time extolled the clarity, control, and power of the opera singer. (Erdmann 14) As their pedagogical methods became known, the Italian school of singing gained prominence throughout Europe for producing excellence in vocal music. Other schools in Germany, France, England, and Russia developed, but none achieved the controlled level of singing needed to perfect the MDV. German composer, critic, music journalist and theorist Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) wrote of the importance of the MDV, or “swell tone” as it was
first known, but admitted that the German school did not incorporate it into their singing regimen. (Mattheson 85) Italian singers of the seventeenth century found the MDV invaluable. (Fields 173, *Training the Singing Voice*)

Several writers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mention the MDV exercise. In his book *Observations on the Florid Song*, noted Italian voice teacher Pier Francesco Tosi (1653-1732) stated that the MDV should be used sparingly. Eminent teacher and castrato Giovanni Battista Mancini (1714-1800) wrote a short chapter in his book *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* devoted to the MDV, and asserted that every accomplished singer should use the ornament on every long note found in a *cantilena* (Mancini p 87), a “song” or “melody” developed from the middle ages. (New Grove p 487) It seems that even in its early use, singing masters were in disagreement about the relative value of the MDV. Still proponents outweighed opponents. In the 1730s, famed castrati Farinelli was celebrated for his wonderfully executed MDV ornamentation. During the early 1800’s, composer and teacher Domenico Corri (1746-1825) said the MDV was “the soul of Music” and considered it an excellent exercise that should be practiced on all notes in the singer’s range. (Harris 487) The MDV appears in Italian composer and voice teacher Giuseppe Concone’s (1757-1824) book of *Thirty Exercises* wherein he suggests it be practiced daily. (Titze 24, *Messa di Voce*)

Yet by 1860 the MDV was regarded as an old-fashioned devise and most teachers and singers stopped using it. Tosi had asserted that its elimination from normal practice would cause the professional singer to lose their stability of tone, (Tosi 8) but by the late nineteenth century, singers found the exercise either too boring or too difficult to use in a warm up or training session. (Titze 31, *More on the Messa di voce*) Even teachers during the time of the Bel Canto era had a difficult time convincing many students the value of the MDV exercise for their technique. (Cooke 224)
In his book *Singing – An Extension of Speech*, Russell Hammar blames the MDV’s loss of favor to the rising popularity of a “meatier style of singing” found in Romantic music. (Hammar 115) In *Singing: The Physical Nature of the Vocal Organ*, Frederick Hussler states: “Singers do not rely on good technique, but instead rely on naturalism, which is intuitive-intellectualism (emotion, expression, imagination).” (Hussler 83)

If the popularity of the MDV did not endure past the late nineteenth century, certain changes in vocal style requirements and the sheer difficulty of executing the exercise are causal factors. It would not be surprising, however, if the controversy and confusion surrounding the MDV’s execution and history cited above, are also important reasons for its fall into obscurity. This controversy and confusion about the exercise remains today.

Although most vocal scholars agree the MDV is an important exercise for training the singing voice, various aspects of the MDV and how it should be practiced provide provocative conversation, and often disagreement among voice pedagogues. An examination of the contemporary literature in vocal pedagogy reveals how wide-ranging the opinions are. To fully understand various opinions and theories on the MDV, it is important to first understand the physical actions it creates within the human phonation system, principally the muscles of the larynx and the respiratory system.

**Muscles Used During The Execution Of The MDV**

A large number of muscles must be used to execute the MDV. (Titze 31, *More on the Messa di voce*) Obviously, with such a great number of muscles to control, singers find it difficult to coordinate the minute changes needed to crescendo and diminuendo, especially if attempting the MDV in the register transition known as the “break” or the “passaggio”.

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The muscles of the respiratory system include: the diaphragm, external and internal intercostals, the rectus abdominus, internal and external oblique and transverse abdominus of the abdominal muscles, and several smaller muscles within the thorax. The MDV is created with “balanced pressure of the thoracic muscles of inspiration opposed by the abdominal muscles of expiration.” (Appelman 11) During the execution of the MDV, the change of amplitude (loudness) occurs because of the change of breath pressure. For the tone intensity (or loudness) to increase, the breath pressure increases and vice versa.

The muscles of the larynx include: the cricoarytenoid muscles, lateral and posterior (which assist in opening and closing the vocal folds), the cricothyroids (which lengthen the vocal folds), and the thyroarytenoid muscle (the vocal folds themselves) encasing the vocalis muscle (the “mass” that actually increases or decreases in size). The cricothyroid and thyroarytenoid muscles are the vocal fold “tensor muscles”; as tonal loudness is increased, their tension must also be increased at a gradual pace to resist added breath pressure. Conversely, when attempts a decrease in loudness, both muscles must release their tension, in response to less breath pressure, otherwise tonal accuracy is compromised. (Titze 24, Messa di voce) These muscles do change, however, in slightly different ways during the crescendo and decrescendo process.

During the crescendo, the cricothyroid and thyroarytenoid have to change their activity levels systematically. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce) For example, the thyroarytenoid muscle changes its mass, tension, length, and elasticity so that as the vocal fold vibration increases, the intensity (amplitude) of the tone increases. (Appleman 11) But the muscle activation pattern needed to release the tension during the decrescendo phase is more difficult to coordinate. (Garcia 135) When the thyroarytenoid is changing muscle mass from thick to thin, in order to achieve a softer tone (in common parlance,
going from “heavy mechanism” to “light mechanism”), it is difficult for the tightly tensed cricothyroid muscles to maintain pitch stability while the tone decrescendos with the same ease and gradual pace that it increased tension for the crescendo. The crescendo builds on muscle contraction with a fresh breath intake; the decrescendo occurs when breath is partially spent, requiring some muscles to release tension, while others hold tension---a difficult maneuver for any muscle system. (Reid 89, Essays) It is not surprising then, that singers find soft singing and a smooth decrescendo to be among the most difficult vocal tasks they must accomplish, and a skill mastered only in advanced study. Indeed, for the same reasons, most young singers find simply descending a scale (considered the heart of legato technique) to be more difficult than ascending the scale.

Additional difficulties are added as the singer negotiates the MVD on different pitches of the voice. As pitch rises or decreases, the ratio of tension between heavy and light mechanism use shifts gradually for each note. (Reid 60, The Free Voice) An added factor is the role played by the adductor muscles of the larynx, the interarytnoids and the lateral cricoarytenoids. In an extended article on the benefits of the MDV, Ingo Titze, one of today’s most innovative voice scientists and researcher of the singing voice, describes the coordination of the adductor and abductor muscles of the cricoarytenoid like the dimmer on a light switch. He suggests that the singer begin in a light mechanism---near falsetto, and then as s/he crescendos or decrescendos and heavy mechanism is added or reduced, the adductor muscles must become more or less active or tense. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce)

Another pitfall occurs if singers over-activate the crocoarytenoid muscles during the crescendo, and the tone becomes pressed, or strident and sharp in pitch. In order to keep this from occurring, the vocal processes of the arytenoid cartilages must gradually spread during the crescendo to reduce tension as the vocal folds vibrate. Slight air leakage, which might occur, tends
to dissipate, as the tone grows louder. (Titze 31 More on the Messa di voce) It is interesting to note that over one hundred years before Titze, the renowned pedagogue Manuel Garcia knew of the importance of slightly spreading the vocal processes of the arytenoids cartilages. (Garcia 135)

As noted earlier, one of the most difficult areas in which to negotiate the MDV is at register shifts, or passaggi. It is in this pitch area that one mechanism releases its strength or dominance while another mechanism gains strength or dominance. If that transition is abrupt and not coordinated, the singer notices a sudden “break” in pitch. (Reid 89, Essays) Before a singer tries to perform a MDV in their passaggio area, both the heavy mechanism and the light mechanism must be equally strong, or the pull or coordination between the two mechanisms will not occur in a smooth manner.

It is clear then that the singer must balance a host of minute muscular and respiratory actions to execute the MDV: lung pressure, cricothyroid activity, thyroarytenoid activity, and interarytenoid activity. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce) This can only be done with attentive and patient practice. Some singers may find the MDV easier to execute than others because of the disparities between sexes and laryngeal structures. (Miller 233, Solution for Singers) A large dramatic voice will probably take longer to master the MDV than a lyric voice, but even with added complexity of the larger voice, the benefits of practicing the MDV are well worth it. Titze has asserted that this exercise may in fact be the single most important one for a singer to master when building a flexible and responsive vocal technique. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce)
The Benefits Of The MDV

Seven significant benefits cited from my research will be examined here. These benefits are:

1. Improved breath management
2. Smooth register blending
3. Subtle negotiation of the passaggio
4. Dynamic flexibility without pushing
5. Improved vibrato rate and pitch stability
6. Accurate tool for measuring technique and growth
7. Artistic development.

Breath Management

Improvement of breath management is the most frequently cited benefit of the MDV. The benefit is discussed in various ways, such as assisting with supporting or controlling the breath, or creating proper breath energy, but in essence the pedagogues were emphasizing the importance of creating a steady stream of air that supports good phonation. (Sable 9) In Elizabeth Blades-Zeller’s book, *A Spectrum of Voices*, voice instructor Joan Walls advocates the use of the MDV exercise to “improve exhalation” with her students. The MDV “keeps the ribcage wide during the beginning onset and the ribs remain open as the tone is started.” (Blades-Zeller 142) If the ribcage does not collapse upon the lungs, the ability to support and suspend the tone greatly improves.

In *Code de musique pratique ou methods*, written in the mid eighteenth century, French composer and theorist Jean Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) believed that practice of the MDV would enhance breath support, thus
providing dynamic control. He asserted that this would ensure that the “action of the glottis” would remain free and flexible and would not be damaged by overly loud or bombastic singing. (Rameau 87)

In his NATS Journal article “More on Messa di voce”, voice scientist Ingo Titze contends that the MDV develops coordination in the respiratory system. He explains that the lungs must change pressure during the decrescendo and the abdominal muscles must work harder at the end of the decrescendo. There must be “an expulsion of air” to build intensity of the sound. This breath action does not come naturally and must be practiced. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce)

The results of Titze’s research supporting his hypothesis that lung volume changes with the increasing and depleting of air during the MDV are published in Jean Callaghan’s book Singing and Voice Science. Titze’s study investigated the symmetry of the crescendo and decrescendo in the singing of the MDV. The study’s purpose was to determine if advanced singers could perform the embellishment symmetrically, and with “a non uniform depletion of lung volume.” After examining singing samples from advanced singers, Titze first noted that the crescendo phase was longer than the decrescendo phase. (This is not unusual since asymmetric phrasing is usually found with singers who do not practice the MDV exercise.) But according to Titze, the change of the lung volume was linear throughout the entire exercise. One would suspect the singer’s lung volume would decrease faster with the creating of the crescendo, and slower with the decrescendo. Titze speculates that some differences in respiratory strategy carried over to “phonatory” control; however, because of these anomalies found in the study, Titze admits more research will be needed to understand why lung volume dissipates at the same level, no matter the dynamic change. (Callaghan 440)

Even if there are still questions of how breath actually controls phonation, it is a well known fact that a steady air stream which supports a free and
focused tone is imperative not only to dynamic control but to good singing in general. The beauty of the MDV exercise is that all facets of breath management, from control and support, to energy and volume can improve with its use in daily warm-ups.

Registration

Another popular benefit cited is improvement of mixing registers or register blending. The ability to smoothly move from one mechanism to another without abrupt timbre changes is crucial for developing an even vocal scale. In *The Free Voice*, noted author Cornelius Reid asserts this “mixing” was the main reason for practicing the MDV during the Bel Canto period. Singers began with the development of the “light register” (head voice) and then added another mechanism or “tonal texture.” (Reid 145, *The Free Voice*) Well know pedagogues William Leyerle in *Vocal Development Through Organic Imagery* and Jean Callaghan in *Singing and Voice Science* declare the MDV is an excellent tool for both genders to learn the coordination of blending registers. (Callaghan 44) (Leyerle 68) In writing about the MDV, Richard Miller adds to this premise by suggesting that the blending of registers builds muscular equilibrium throughout the singing range and facilitates the ability to evenly negotiate the lower and upper passaggi. (Miller 171, *The Structure of Singing*)

Manuel Garcia (1775-1832) is one of the first known voice teachers that used the MDV to help his singers blend chest voice and head voice in the upper passaggio. In *A Complete Treatise On The Art Of Singing*, Garcia suggests tenors should practice the MDV on E⁴, F⁴, F#⁴, and G⁴ beginning in light mechanism. (Garcia 135) Garcia writes that they will feel a gap at the beginning of their practice sessions, but over time, this ‘break” will smooth out into the “feigned voice”. (Reid 86, *Essays*)
Most instructors realize problems with registration, such as “breaks”, are the result of ascending the scale with too much heavy mechanism. William Leyerle contends that with proper dynamic control, the singer will learn to release from one register to another freely and easily. (Leyerle 69) The development of controlling light and heavy mechanism for the blending of registers will also produce another benefit: dynamic flexibility.

**Dynamic Flexibility**

Many pedagogues believe the MDV improves dynamic flexibility, including noted voice instructor, Clifton Ware, who states; “the MDV is one of the best exercises to practice in achieving dynamic flexibility”. (Ware 185) In his book *Training the Singing Voice*, Victor Fields credits the MDV for helping the singer learn to control the minute changes needed to gradually swell and diminish dynamic levels. (Fields 58, *Foundations of the Singer’s Art*) With the MDV exercise, the singer can experiment with different levels of breath pressure to produce different dynamic variables, and learn how to gain intensity in the sound without adding heavy mechanism or pressing the tone.

According to instructor Richard Rosewall in his book *Handbook of Singing*, the Italian masters used the MDV to assist the singer to increase volume without creating a pushed or pressed tone. (Rosewall 48) In *Expressive singing*, pedagogue Van Christy agrees with this principle when he writes of the importance of finding the proper balance of vocal fold resistance. According to Christy, the MDV helps the singer find this delicate balance without “overloading” the voice. (Christy 83) Singers find that the MDV helps them experience “light mechanism and assists the development of head voice or “full voice” (Leyerle 95) by taking the weight out of the upper range.
Thus the singer is able to find the correct balance so the voice will “open up” or grow in clarity and volume without pressing.

Tonal growth or volume occurs when the singer has achieved a healthy balance of glottal pressure to develop natural overtones or “ring” in the voice. The MDV helps the student discover proper space and support for maximum resonance, thus discovering “vocal ring” or resonance. (Hammar 116) The voice of the singer will become richer and fuller once they learn how to expand the tone in a free manner, especially if the student has equally balanced registers. (Rosewall 48) Cornelius Reid adds that the practice of the MDV will strengthen a weak register and help a singer achieve a balanced tone in the voice. (Reid 116, *The Free Voice*) With this balance, the singer will develop firmness in the tone and increase power volume healthily. (Lablache 20) In his book *The Baritone Voice*, instructor Anthony Frisell uses this exercise for baritones because he contends it adds “bite” or strong upper partials to the voice without pressing the tone. (Frisell 38, *The Baritone Voice*) Once singers are able to build the voice on all dynamics in the MDV exercise, they will have established proper breath energy. (Miller 171, *The Structure of Singing*) Cornelius Reid agrees with Richard Miller when he mentions that the MDV was not created with the idea of “building on the soft,” but is for the purpose of finding good balance of heavy and light mechanism. He concurs that there is a true danger of developing unsupported singing if one uses too much breath in the soft phase of the MDV. (Reid 120, *Bel Canto*)

**Pitch stability**

The benefits of register blending, negotiating passaggio points, dynamic flexibility, and vocal growth all have one important factor in common: the control of light and heavy mechanism. Once the student has learned the exacting task of strengthening and balancing these two registers, voice production grows to its maximum level of proper tone production. With this
open and free quality, an even vibrato rate and stability is achieved throughout the entire singing range.

Pitch stability or maintaining fundamental frequency as one crescendos and decrescendos arises from the action of the cricothyroid and the thyroarytenoid muscles that must change activity levels gradually in order to stabilize the tonal center of the pitch. The fundament frequency may waver (usually sharpens) when the breath pressure increases during the crescendo, unless the laryngeal muscles hold the larynx in a stable position. When the singer is executing the decrescendo, the fundamental frequency may lower slightly with the loss of air pressure unless muscular stability is achieved. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce) (Harris 487)

Evaluation tool

Besides using the MDV to improve laryngeal strength, it can also be used as an evaluation tool. Well-known pedagogue William Vennard in his text Singing: The Mechanism and the Technique mentions using the MDV to measure the singer’s ability to control the vocal mechanism. Asking a new student to execute the MDV gives a voice teacher a quick means to evaluate vocal strengths and weaknesses. One can determine the number of notes the singer can control, how long they can sustain a tone, the dynamic variations between pianissimo and fortissimo, the purity of the vowel as well as the smoothness of register transitions between the break of the passaggio. (Vennard 213) In The Vocal Sound, instructor Barbara Sable writes that she uses the MDV to find the dynamic range of specific voices. (Sable 25)
Artistic development

Another important result of an accomplished MDV is artistic development. The MDV during the Bel Canto period was one of the most demanding ornament in use. In fact, *In Singing and Voice Science*, Jean Callaghan mentions it was the most commonly used ornament during that era. Any variety of dynamics during singing aids expressiveness and vocal interest in a performance. The Bel Canto period considered to be the era in which the singing artist came to full fruition, and the MDV ornament greatly aided in that endeavor. Certainly as a singer gains dynamic control, resonance and laryngeal stability, a vast world of colors and vocal nuance are available to enable the singer in his or her artistic expressiveness.

Since the sixteenth century, various benefits stemming from the MDV have been debated and discussed, but it is surely a devise that greatly aids in coordinating the laryngeal and respiratory muscles for optimum singing. Because of the great number of muscles that must work in perfect synchronization to execute the MDV ornament, it may be extremely difficult and frustrating when first attempted. This is surely the reason why some singers and teachers today question its importance as a vocal training tool. With this in mind it is instructive to note comments concerning the MDV from singers considered to be some of the finest in their field.

In an interview with Wah Keung Chan, Rene Fleming tells her secret for executing high pianissimo notes:

A very good exercise that I practice is the MDV on all pitches going up chromatically and back down again. There is a slightly different use of resonance, a more focused use of resonance. It’s important to learn how to balance the change in resonance. When you decrescendo, think of the resonance going up and release from the bottom up. There is also a change in the flow of breath. It requires a lot of
experimentation, and for sopranos, listening to Montserrat Caballé. (Chan)

While reminiscing about her teacher Anna Fitziu, mezzo-soprano Shirley Varrett said:

She insisted I learn to sing piano throughout the range of my voice. She didn’t talk much about the MDV, but I do with my students. You must be able to play with the voice in that way. To me, it is a wonderful way of painting pictures throughout the range. (Purdy 32 Shirley Verrett: She Never Walks Alone)

High lyric coloratura Roberta Peters said that her voice teacher William Herman drilled the MDV in her lessons.

If you can produce a very small note, do a crescendo and then decrescendo, then your vocal cords are working. You have to practice...you have to work the cords. (Purdy 24 Staying Power)

All three ladies found the MDV such an important exercise they gave it a strong mention in their interviews. None mentions its difficulty and all praise its benefits.

**MDV exercise protocol**

If one searches various pedagogical textbooks, different protocols or “routines” may be found that instruct the best way to practice the MDV exercise. These suggestions include how often and long a singer should practice, the length of time it takes to master the MDV, the range in which the exercise should be practiced, proper dynamic levels to use, most productive vowels for practicing the MDV, and optimum pitch onset and release. All of
these suggestions are extremely beneficial for teachers and students alike if they wish to master challenges presented by the MDV exercise.

**Practice Time for the MDV**

There are a surprising number of discrepancies among authorities on how often and how long a student should practice the MDV exercise. Most pedagogues, including Richard Miller and Berton Coffin, agree that the MDV must be practiced every day; there the similarity ends. In his NATS Journal article “The Messa di voce,” Ingo Titze asserts that the MDV should be carefully practiced every day, starting on a comfortable mid-voice pitch and practicing that pitch until a comfort level as been reached before moving on to the next highest pitch. In *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing*, Italian castrato and teacher Giovanni Battista Mancini (1714-1800) advises singers to practice the MDV daily but have rest periods in between exercises. (Mancini 80)

Some pedagogues have very firm restrictions for how much the MDV should be practiced. Richard Harpster does not believe singers should ever practice the MDV unless supervised by the teacher. (Harpster 26) In his book *Elements of vocal science; being a philosophical inquiry into some of the principles of singing*, Richard Bacon (1776 - 1844) advises his singers to limit the practice of the MDV because of possible fatigue issues. (Bacon 90) The concern of fatiguing the voice was even broached earlier by author, singer and teacher Pier Francesco Tosi (1653-1732) who insisted for singers to “use it (The MDV) sparingly”. (Tosi 8)

According to William Leyerle, it is important to warn especially aggressive or motivated students against straining their voices with MDV practice. If a singer is experiencing soreness or tonal instability, they need to stop and recover before going on because they may have over extended their
voice. (Leyerly 143) He further suggests they practice at short intervals throughout their practice session to ensure that the student will not tire his/her voice, or become overly frustrated with the challenges of mastering the MDV.

Most authorities indicate that it takes from months to several years of diligent and careful practice before a singer can expect to master the exercise. (Titze 31, More on the Messa di voce) Yet Schulte writes that it may take over a period of months just to move from the lower middle range to the upper range. (Schulte 174) Leyerle adds that if a student practices the MDV consistently, they should see “excellent control in possibly six months, but one should never expect perfection.” (Leyerle 69) Anthony Frisell, in his text The Baritone Voice, writes that the length of time it takes to master the MDV depends on the strength of both registers and the size of the voice. Because of the differences in these factors, it may take some students six months while others have to work much longer. (Frisell 41, The Baritone Voice) Herbert Wilber Greene and James Frances Cooke also insist that it takes years to master the MDV. (Greene 69) (Cooke 224)

For today’s voice teacher, the important question remains: will students dedicate the necessary time to practicing the MDV, and will contemporary curricular demands provide the time needed to teach and supervise this important exercise? The hectic schedule of the average undergraduate singer does not leave much time for practicing this challenging exercise much less mustering up the personal discipline needed to train the basics of vocal technique, which is breath, onset, and phonation. Because of all the preparatory work demanded on the average student schedule, including core curriculum classes, ensembles, theory, history, and others, most singers take much longer to acquire the skills of managing all the subtle changes of air and muscular coordination needed to practice the MDV exercise successfully. (Miller 34, Maintaining Consistency) But perhaps if the student is made aware of the importance of the MDV, they may be willing to practice the
exercise for “short bursts” every day. A responsible teacher should provide instruction about the benefits of the MDV and then have their students incorporate its use in every lesson.

Pitches and Range to Practice for the MDV

Suggestions vary about the optimum pitch one should use for starting the MDV and how high in the range one should take the exercise. Miller states the student should begin on a pitch in the lower middle area of the vocal range. He insists that the student should not ascend the range until ease has been attained on that first pitch, and then they should slowly work their way up the scale. (Miller 34, Maintaining Consistency of Timbre) Noted instructor and author Clifton Ware, in his Basics of Pedagogy, has a similar notion as Miller, but seems less cautious in his approach. Ware suggests the singer should start in the middle part of his/her range and then expand outwards until they are able to sing the MDV on every note in their range. (Ware 126) In The Vocal Sound, Barbara Sable agrees with Miller and Ware when she writes that all singers can learn to” float” the tone on every note in their range with the help of the MDV. (Sable 16) In his book Overtones of Bel Canto, Berton Coffin takes matters to the extreme by suggesting the singer should only use the MDV for high notes. (Coffin 82) In his text The Art of Singing and Voice Technique, Viktor Fuchs insists the MDV should only be sung on a small portion of the range, never in the extreme upper or extreme lower area. (Fuchs 114) Furthermore, Cornelius Reid, who advocates the practicing of the MDV in the passaggio area, says the MDV should only be practiced on two or three semitones lying in the “immediate area of the break.” (Reid 99, Bel Canto) But Harm Schutte cautions his singers not to practice the MDV in the area of the break. (Schutte 173) Does this confusion continue when pedagogues discuss gender?
Richard Miller is the only writer to make a distinction in the use of the MDV with male and female singers. He warns that men should only practice the MDV in the chest or modal register, and never in their falsetto range, warning that the singer will develop “bad vocal fold approximation and increased airflow” if he strengthens the falsetto through the MDV. He states that the cricothyroid and the thyroarytenoid muscles experience a sudden shift going from heavy to light mechanism and this is detrimental for the male voice. (Miller 34, *Maintaining Consistency*) Miller gives fewer restrictions for sopranos. In *Teaching the Soprano Voice*, he insists sopranos should practice the MDV until they are able to perform the MDV on every note in their range, something he contends only a few professional singers are able to do. (Miller 154, *Training Soprano Voices*)

Some vocal instructors have specific pitches in mind for practicing the MDV. Richard Harpster lists specific pitches for each voice type to begin the MDV and recommends they continue down the scale by half steps until they reach the bottom of their mid-range. (Harpster 26)

- Bass – C⁴ down to Aᵇ²
- Tenor – Eᵇ⁴ down to B²
- Alto – Aᵇ⁴ down to Eᵇ³
- Sop. - Dᵇ⁵ down to B³

Frisell suggests that baritones practice the MDV, beginning in falsetto on Aᵇ⁴, G⁴, F⁴, and E⁴, and descend through every note in their range matching the quality of the tone to the pitch above it. (Frisell 39, *The Baritone Voice*) This is a direct contradiction to Richard Miller’s admonition that males should never use falsetto! Frisell further suggests that tenors practice the MDV at A⁴ or G⁴ and work down in the same manner as suggested for the baritone, though he does not mention using falsetto or light mechanism. (Frisell 41, *The Tenor Voice*) Contradictions abound! Every prominent author seems to have
firm ideas of which pitches should be utilized in the practicing of the MDV, but very few of the pedagogues agree with their colleagues. The questionnaires discussed in Chapter 2 will add to the multiple opinions about the range, pitches, and vocal mechanisms to be used in practicing the MDV.

**Dynamic Range Used in MDV Practice**

Because soft singing is so difficult and loud singing can become strained or pressed, most vocal scholars are sensitive to the importance of approaching dynamic range for the MDV in a healthy way. It is necessary, of course, to incorporate varying degrees of dynamics during practice. If a student does not practice both loud and soft singing, their voice will only develop “one-sidedly”, but loud and soft singing should be practiced within the limits of good technique. (Christy 13)

Texts suggest many wonderful ways to practice the MDV within the limits of good technique. First, one should select the most comfortable dynamic range and pitch range, and then use that particular pitch and dynamic range with the MDV. (Christy 13) When executing the crescendo, keep it light. (Phillips 350) The singer should not crescendo to the point that the tone is forced or pressed, otherwise the decrescendo will be more difficult to control in a smooth manner. To help the crescendo, “think of the sensation of growing taller and expanding around the lower rib-line.” (Christy 84)

Once the singer has reached the peak of the crescendo, they are advised to sustain the forte before diminishing. It is important not to hurry the MDV because of the importance of establishing the stability of the forte tone between dynamic changes. (Field 109) The MDV ornament appears in many different tempi and a singer must be able to comfortably sustain and fully support the length of the note dictated in the music. Fields has interesting imagery for the crescendo and the decrescendo. “Reach out with your singing
voice as if trying to maintain contact with an imaginary listener who is slowly receding and then approaching you.” (Field 65) This may be good imagery for some students, but a possibly detrimental one for students who have overly developed the heavy mechanism of their voice, and may tend to press the tone as they crescendo. There are a number of students that have either an overly developed chest voice or a naturally large instrument; it usually takes these voice types longer to master the MDV than the lighter voice. This is probably the reason many women are faster in its mastery than men. (Miller 233, *Solutions for Singers*) The most consistent advice agreed upon by all pedagogues was never sing too loudly in the crescendo phase of the MDV

Vowels to Use for MDV Practice:

Many teachers, including Richard Miller, Clifton Ware and even Guisto Tenducci suggest that all vowels should be used when practicing the MDV. (Miller 34, *Maintaining Consistency*) (Ware 126) (Tenducci 2) However, there are some differing opinions as to what vowels are best to use in early stages of MDV practice, and how these vowels should be shaped.

In *Building the Voice as an Instrument*, Peral Wormhoudt espouses MDV practice only on a student’s “favorable vowels”. (Wormhoudt 89) Pier Francesco Tosi believes the MDV should be practiced only on open vowels. (Tosi 8) This may present a problem for singers who find the more closed vowels easier to produce and control.

Other vocal pedagogues do not limit the vowel choice, but do have interesting ideas of how to approach vowel shaping during the singing of the MDV. Richard Harpster tells his female singers to change the vowel from [a] to [o] during the crescendo. (Harpster 28) Wormhoudt (quoting the instructor Paola Novikova), like Harpster, suggests that singers should round the vowel as they crescendo and return to the original vowel when they decrescendo.
Kenneth Westerman instructs his students to nasalize the vowel as they decrescendo. Many teachers suggest vowel modification when singing through the passaggio, but unlike the pedagogues mentioned above, others believe that it is important to keep the vowel pure throughout the singing of the MDV by keeping the resonance space consistently open or centered. (Appelman 101)

The question about these “shaping suggestions” remains: how much vowel purity should be sacrificed in order to insure comfort in executing the MDV? Nasalizing of vowels can be detrimental to the tone quality. Modifying vowels by changing the shape of the resonance chamber of the mouth may interfere with vowel recognition. Most likely the above suggestions for modification apply to the pitches being sung, and are to be treated as subtle changes that will not be detrimental to text clarity.

**Pitch Onset and Release during MDV Practice**

A balanced onset is crucial for executing the MDV. The start of the MDV should be clean and coordinated so the folds will adduct at the same instant breath pressure is added. If the folds are closed before the breath pressure is released, the breath pressure will build behind adducted folds and force them apart. (Ware 107) If the breath pressure is added before full closure of the folds, the onset will be breathy. Richard Miller insisted earlier that a clear, full, but easy piano onset is essential for establishing an MDV tone with good resonance, and that a breathy or pressed tone would be detrimental. William Vennard adds that it is necessary for the vowel to be placed correctly at the start of onset in order to have a good focused tone. (Vennard 213) If a student does not know how to negotiate a clear onset of the tone, it may be beneficial that they first learn how to do so before proceeding to the practicing of the MDV.
The release of the MDV can be equally as challenging. The release has to be fully coordinated between air pressure and adduction of the folds. (Ware 108) The vocal folds must have the right amount of tension or there will be a terminal “gasp” or hard release, which results in flat intonation and expelled air. (Mancini 80) To assist in producing a balanced release, Manuel Garcia suggests the singer keep the chest high and the abdominal muscles moving inwards or the release will end with the pressed release. (Garcia 133) Mancini suggests singers not use all of the reserve air so the release of the tone will end easily. (Mancini 77) Fields believes if the singer “holds” the breath before releasing the tone at the end of the MDV a balanced release will occur. The term “hold” may present problems with some students, but the idea of “suspending” the breath could be helpful. (Field 66) All of the suggestions for a balanced onset and release seem to have merit and can be utilized in the MDV exercise as well as other vocalises. The importance of balanced onset and release may be minimized by the student, yet if the singer does not start or end the MDV with a correctly coordinated tone, the singer wastes several moments during the exercise making vocal adjustments to improve pitch quality.

The difficulties of the MDV

To fully appreciate the value of the MDV, it is important to appreciate its challenges. The first is the crescendo. Keeping the pitch steady is quite troublesome considering that the increase of breath pressure needed may sharpen the pitch if the singer is not careful in coordinating the stabilizer muscles. (Appelman 101) Expanding the tone without pushing or thickening the thyroarytenoid (too much heavy mechanism) can be very difficult to correct. The decrescendo, according to many voice instructors, is even more difficult to execute than the crescendo. (Reid 126, Bel Canto) This difficulty lies in coordinating a matched pull of the cricoarytenoid when the
thyroarytenoid muscle is changing mass from thick to thin. (Reid 89, Essays)
Not only is it tricky to properly coordinate the laryngeal muscles, but also the
coordination of the muscles of respiration without losing focus and energy in
the tone is challenging. (Ware 186)

Coordination of both the laryngeal and respiratory system also effects
vibrato rate. If the minute coordination of both muscle structures is even
slightly off, it affects the natural motion of the larynx, thus interrupting the
consistency of the vibrato rate. The difficulty of keeping the vibrato rate
steady and consistent has not been approached in any research collected for
this paper, but it will be touched upon in Chapter 2.

Another difficulty of the MDV involves register changes. (Garcia 135)
The balance of tension between the cricothyroid and the arytenoids that assist
the changes of the vocal fold thickness can be problematic, especially the
coordination needed when going from heavy mechanism to light mechanism.
(Reid 89, Essays) In Technique in Singing, Richard Harpster believes that
flipping from heavy to light mechanism in the secondary passaggio (above C4)
is the most difficult register shift to perfect. (Harpster 27)

Some smaller challenges exist that are easier to overcome. Keeping the
crescendo and decrescendo phases of the exercise symmetrical should be
corrected easily if the singer is aware of an inner beat in which half the length
of the exercise is delegated to the crescendo and vise versa. Peral Wormhoudt,
in Building the Voice as an Instrument, has a useful approach for achieving
symmetry by suggesting the singer change the intensity of the breath at every
beat. (Wormhoudt 71) Keeping the vowel pure may be a challenge until the
singer becomes clearly aware of the articulatory muscles and is able to keep
the articulators well shaped. (Callaghan 44)

The information in this chapter relies on written statements gleaned from
approximately thirty vocal pedagogues. These writings, dating from the early
sixteenth century to present day, show a vast array of material based on
traditional practice as well as scientific fact. The fascinating point about the
MDV exercise is how controversial it is for use with beginning singers. Many
strongly believe it is quite detrimental and can cause vocal set backs when
learning healthy vocal technique. In order to help settle this argument, the use
of definitive research should be initiated. This has been set in motion in a pilot
study, which will be presented in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 2

Pulte Survey of Contemporary Voice Teachers on MDV Use

In 2005, a letter and questionnaire was sent to over one hundred and fifty members of the National Association of Teachers of Singers (NATS) from major colleges and universities in the United States. (See Appendix A for the letter and questionnaire.) The names selected are well-known voice instructors, pedagogues and artists chosen by my advisor Dr. Karen Peeler based upon their reputation and experience. My study was an informal one and not meant to be statistically viable. I received 51 responses (several typical response questionnaires are in Appendix A), or 33% return rate. This chapter presents a compilation of those responses, especially highlighting new ideas or procedures not mentioned in Chapter One.

Questionnaire Results

Question #6: Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice.

Figure 2.1: Survey results of teaching experience
**Question #1: Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?**

![Figure 2.2: Use of MDV with young singers](image)

Those who responded negatively to the above question generally believe the laryngeal development of a young singer is too immature for the challenges of fully controlling dynamic changes on a sustained note. Many teachers feel it is unwise to employ the MDV when so many other technical aspects need to be introduced. Fundamentals, such as the need to create a free and open tone, body alignment, releasing excess muscle tension, extending range, and establishing pitch stability on a legato scale need to be in place before introducing the MDV. Many prefer to use the MDV only with advanced singers.

Responders who do use the MDV with their young singers varied as to when they begin its use. It could happen as early as the second semester or as late as the end of the second year. A few do not assign the MVD as a regular exercise.
for their beginners but have their students perform it in lessons from time to time as a test to examine the student’s technical abilities.

Of the twenty two responders who use the MDV with their young singers, most believe the MDV is helpful in building proper breath support and breath energy by assisting the student’s ability to judge the exact breath pressure needed for tonal response while keeping the larynx free and open. Some mention that it is useful in balancing the heavy and light mechanism, stabilizing and focusing the tone, and establishing dynamic control needed for expressive singing.

Some expressed a certain amount of caution when introducing the MDV exercise to their beginning students; however, and set certain limits. If a student comes to their first lesson either with previous voice experience or innate natural abilities and is able to show proficiency in important technical aspects, then they are introduced to the MDV right away. One expert asserts if a student has proper breath control and is able to produce a steady flow of air to properly support a healthy pianissimo and forte, they should be ready to execute the MDV. Responders suggest limiting the exercise to only those notes that are in a comfortable part of the young singer’s range, as well as the degree of crescendo/diminuendo. One suggests dividing the MDV into two separate exercises; first as one sustained note on a crescendo, and secondly as one sustained note on a decrescendo.

Four responders indicated that they never use the MDV with any of their students. One felt it was too fatiguing while the other three seemed open to its use, but admitted knowing little about the exercise.
Question #2: Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

Figure 2.3: Use of MDV with advance singers

Forty-two of the fifty-one responders (92%) who use the MDV with advanced students consider it a “conditioner” exercise that should be practiced regularly. Some instructors believe the MDV serves well as an “evaluatory mechanism” (See Appendix B - Response #7), so the teacher can hear how well the voice is functioning, but most of the subjects in this survey think of the MDV exercise as a builder and refiner of the vocal mechanism.

Specific reasons to exercise the MDV mentioned were:

- Beneficial in building proper breath support and breath energy
- Balancing the heavy and light mechanism
- Stabilizing and focusing the tone
• Establishing dynamic control needed for expressive singing
• Balancing onsets and releases

Of particular interest is the comment of a teacher who found the MDV helped the student’s concentration by “slowing their brain down to a level where they can really listen to the tone and monitor the way they use the breath”. (See Appendix A- Response #8) Two instructors held that the practicing of the MDV is unnecessary if the student possesses good voice technique. One subject insisted if the voice is “well grounded on their support with a free throat, then they can do an MDV”. (See Appendix A- Response #12) Some commented that since the more advanced repertoire calls for the MDV embellishment, and the singer must sing dynamics smoothly and consistently, the MDV must be practiced. Not only should the singer be able to interpret the wishes of the composer (or editor), the MDV embellishment is essential for interpretation. All singers must sing “musically” and the changes of dynamics and color provide interest and excitement to what ever is being performed.

Question #3: If you use the MDV exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

Pitches Used

Thirty instructors replying to this questionnaire suggest beginning the MDV in what is considered “middle range” or the “comfortable range” of each student’s voice. They agree that once optimum pitches are established for executing the MDV and are free and open, the singer may practice a wider range
of tones. One expert forbids their students from proceeding upward in pitch only after the middle ranges has been mastered, and then ascend only as far as they can comfortably do so.

There were five instructors who prefer to start the MDV in the lower “middle range”. C\(^3\) was suggested as starting pitches for men and C\(^4\) for women. Descending the MDV further into the lower register was rarely mentioned so it appears few instructors use the MDV as an exercise to blend chest voice and middle register of the female voice.

After beginning the MDV in the middle range, only four responders acknowledge they ask the student to extend the exercise up to or above the upper passaggio. Of these four, one instructor states: “For those in whom the \textit{lutto vocale} begins big-time in the passaggio, I encourage them to take the challenge, but I monitor them carefully to ensure they don’t become discouraged in their struggle”. (See Appendix A- Response #5) A second instructor expresses caution in extending the MDV upwards, and suggests that a student should not extend the range of the MDV higher than they are able to “feel/hear the original resonance at the center of the pitch”. (See Appendix A- Response #14) Another specifically warns their students not to sing the MDV in their extreme range, otherwise the possibility of creating tension increases.

In general, most instructors exercise caution once they introduce the MDV to their young students. If the singer experiences any undue tension or fatigue, s/he should not extend any further upwards or downwards.
Vowels Used

Each cardinal vowel was mentioned by responders for use with the MDV exercise, as well as some open or closed vowels. Since I.P.A. (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols were not always employed by responders, it is difficult to be completely accurate regarding open and closed vowel variations.

Thirteen instructors chose the [a] vowel for use with the MDV, another thirteen preferred [i], and ten elected the vowel [o]. The [a] vowel is favored by one instructor because “it gives less opportunity to use a high tongue position to hold the tone”. (See Appendix A- Response #8) Another teacher finds the [i] vowel to be easiest for their students with naturally high voices. A few instructors did not specify particular vowel choices for MDV practice, but some expressed a preference for open vowels while others preferred closed vowels. One instructor believes that open vowels are more challenging to sing than closed; however another asserts that the student is better able to feel the movement of air when singing open vowels. To keep the students from becoming discouraged, it is probably wise to assign only a few vowels at a time.

Some instructors wait to assign any particular vowels for the MDV until they have determined which vowels are the most comfortable for the individual singer. Five responders assign all vowels warning that singers do not have the luxury of choosing favorite vowels when executing the MDV embellishment in their repertoire.
Six instructors suggest what could be termed as vowel “cycles.” These examples are listed below:

1. [i]--------------------- [a]--------------------------[i]
2. [i----------------------open-------------------------i]
3. [i]--------------------- [e]-------------------------[a]
4. [u]---------------------[a]-------------------------[u]
5. closed----------------open-------------------closed
6. [u-------i-------e-------a-------o-------u]
7. [u------------o----------a------------e--------------i]
8. [i-------------e----------a------------o-------------u]
9. [i-e-a---------------------------------------------o-u]
10. [i-----e-----a-----o-----u-----o-----a------e-------i]

Figure 2.4: Suggested Vowel “cycles”

Duration of the MDV

Only nine instructors gave opinions on MDV duration. Three instructors gave specific time lengths for the exercise, ranging from two to eleven beats per phase.

The remaining responders state they ask their students to sing the MDV as long as they comfortably can in one breath without, as one teacher quotes, “reaching the end of their rope”. (See Appendix A- Response #15) One instructor insists that the breath should remain a “normal singer’s breath” in length. Another
adds that MDV should last only as long as “a free and consistent breath flow” can be achieved. Still another comments:

When the sound and the balance are free and stable and the breath and body are responding without vocal tension, then work on planning the breath and extending the breath and equalization of the duration of the crescendo/decrescendo. It is not necessary to make this a specific number of seconds. Then work on extending the duration daily a little at a time. (See Appendix A- Response #16)

Only three responders specify how long during their vocalizing routine a student should practice the MDV. “Young singers should practice it no more than five minutes but advanced singers can practice it for ten minutes at a time”. (See Appendix A- Response #1)

When the MDV should be placed in a warm-up schedule

Thirteen instructors consider the MDV too taxing to begin a warm up session; it should only be practiced once the singer has sufficiently warmed the muscles of the larynx with less complicated exercises, such as; sliding and stretching exercises, short scales followed by longer scales, arpeggios, agility exercises, onset exercises, and resonance balancing. Two instructors insist students perform the MDV only after they have been singing for at least ten to fifteen minutes; otherwise they will be unable to accomplish the subtle work needed to properly execute the exercise. Eight responders favor of placing the exercise towards the end of the warm-up session, especially if the singer is trying to execute the MDV in the higher register. “This exercise should come near the end of the daily routine and increase with regards to range and duration depending on the students’ ability”. (See Appendix A- Response #18)
Interestingly, five teachers advocate placing the MDV *early* in the warm-up routine after some scale work, and only on lower pitches – ideas contrary to those of most of their colleagues!

**MDV Exercise Variations**

Eight instructors offer other means of practicing the MDV exercises beside the traditional single tone method. Three have simplified the MDV or created what could be termed as pre-MDV exercises for the younger or less experienced singer. Before assigning the full fledged MDV to a young student, one instructor suggests first having the singer practice sustaining a pitch; once this has been mastered, assign the MDV. Another teacher has their students produce the MDV on a hiss. These pre-MDV exercises will insure that the singer has the proper breath support to sufficiently sustain a tone before moving on to pitch stabilizing challenges when changing dynamics. One instructor cautions that many singers are so determined to please they will do what is asked of them “at all cost”. One should first give exercises that will start an “MDV way of thinking without building tension”. (See Appendix A- Response #7)

Variations of the MDV exercise are:

![Figure 2.5: MDV Exercise Example](image)

**Figure 2.5: MDV Exercise Example**
Figure 2.6: MDV Exercise Example

Figure 2.7: MDV Exercise Example

Figure 2.8: MDV Exercise Example

Figure 2.9: MDV Exercise Example

Figure 2.10: MDV Exercise Example

Figure 2.11: MDV Exercise Example
The upward leap is beneficial in properly supporting and energizing higher tones in light mechanism. Even advanced undergraduate singers may have a difficult time with executing a traditional MDV in the upper passaggio and these alternative exercises will assist them in approaching high notes easily and healthily.

Other helpful suggestions

Seven instructors volunteered effective imagery and motivational suggestions to aid singers with the execution of the MDV. One recommendation assists a singer to properly support the second half of the MDV exercise: instead of decreasing air for the decrescendo, the singer should concentrate only on the even distribution of air. The decrescendo is the most challenging phase of the exercise, so the student should support a steady dynamic until the release. A natural decrescendo will occur without the loss of support and the singer will accomplish that phase of the MDV without losing the core of the sound.

Two responders have created varied types of imagery to help keep the tone free and open. The first instructor calls their concept a “motivational scenario”. For creating the crescendo/decrescendo, the singer should “imagine opening a door slowly, seeing something beautiful, then closing the door”. (See Appendix A- Response #8) Another suggests to “fill the body with sound to replace the air”. (See Appendix A- Response #16) Both “motivational scenarios” create the concept of producing the suspended crescendo/decrescendo tone with proper support and energy.

A nurturing psychological approach is also helpful in avoiding excess “weight”. One instructor stresses the important of being “calm and gentle” when practicing the MDV. The singer should never press the voice or sing “as loud as
can be sung” (See Appendix A-Response #17) and remain composed and focused at all times. Asking a student to not force or press the tone is often not enough. Creative teaching “tools” are extremely beneficial for any technical challenges, including the MDV exercise.

**Question #4: If you use the MDV, what do you consider to be its prime benefit of use?**

The responding instructors of this survey named nineteen prime benefits for the practicing of the MDV.

**Breath control (20 responders)**

These teachers believe the MDV is a proven tool to refine consistent breath support and breath energy. The MDV exercise “makes one really concentrate on getting the voice seated on the breath”. (See Appendix A-Response #12) It strengthens the sustaining and management of “sound traveling on the breath”. (See Appendix A-Response #19) The fine control needed between the diaphragm, abdominal muscles, and intercostals muscles to perform the MDV must be practiced in order to reach the support skills needed to aptly support dynamic changes.

**Dynamic Control (9 responders)**

The MDV helps singers learn how to find healthy dynamic choices without forcing the tone. Once the student has understood proper technique for creating a crescendo/decrescendo, they will be able to build resonance in the voice at all dynamic levels.
Expressive singing (7 responders)

With practice, the student will learn how to properly execute this important embellishment and build artistic skills that will assist in interpretations of all styles of music.

Vocal Color (7 responders)

As a singing artist, a student must be able to “offer several color choices for any given pitch.” This is truly the mark of a refined vocal instrument. (See Appendix A- Response #18)

Vocal control (7 responders)

The MDV is excellent for “strengthening the ability of the valve to smoothly coordinate gradual tension and release”. (See Appendix A- Response #5) It also assists in the development of abdominal muscle coordination while keeping the pharynx, neck and laryngeal area free and open. With this accomplishment, the singer can achieve proper focus and resonance.

Vocal evaluation (5 responders)

Since the singer must combine several complex processes to execute a successful MDV, the exercise can evaluate the general state of the vocal instrument. One teacher states that the MDV illustrates how well the student is calculating the sustained pitch with the increase and decrease in breath intensity. Once an instructor has diagnosed the student’s attempt, they will know what technical skills need to be addressed.

Placement and consistency (5 responders)

The MDV assists the singer in making dynamic changes without “hindering the basic timbre of the voice” (See Appendix A- Response #4) by connecting breath support to efficient phonation from the beginning of onset. This leads to a consistent “placing” of the voice at all volume intensities.
Register blending (4 responders)

To facilitate the smooth transitional areas or passaggi, the MDV assists the singer by balancing light mechanism (head) and heavy mechanism (chest).

Efficient tone quality (4 responders)

Once the student has become aware of the effects of light and heavy mechanism, they will be able to build healthy power and focus the tone. While increasing breath pressure, some students thicken the mass of the vocal folds, but with the MDV students learn how to add intensity only with the breath.

Build laryngeal muscles (4 responders)

The MDV is an excellent exercise in balancing and strengthening the vocalis and the cricothyroid muscles under constantly changing sub-glottal pressure. The MDV “engages the vocal folds medially from the mucosal edge to deep muscle, and back again”. (See Appendix A- Response #20) This change of light to heavy mechanism, combined with the variations of air pressure, promote proper coordination of the laryngeal muscles.

Vowel Articulation (4 responders)

With the MDV, the student learns to focus on airflow and phonation every moment of its implementation. This type of concentration is needed for maintaining vowel integrity while sustaining the tone. With the MDV, the singer builds better awareness of pure vowels as well as consistent breath and phonation.

Build mental concentration (3 responders)

The MDV “tends to slow the student brain down to a level where they can really listen to the tone and monitor the way they are using the breath”. (See Appendix A- Response #8) With all of the subtle changes occurring while
executing the MDV, the student is forced to deliberate every second they sustain the exercise.

**Promoting light registration (3 responders)**

This concept is somewhat similar to developing an efficient tone, in that the singer can establish the upper register without utilizing too much “muscle mass”. With the development of light registration, the student is able to “float” the tone instead of pressing.

The MDV permits lighter registration (*voce di testa*) to appear without unwanted heaviness. If one begins with a thread of sound and adds energy evenly, one often gets a more complete and beautiful head voice not encumbered with weight that is sometimes mistakenly carried up in exercises when moving from low to high and back. (See Appendix A- Response #3)

Once the student has grasped the concept of energizing the tone without adding mass in the folds, the voice contains more “spin” and projection power.

**Vibrato Rate (3 responders)**

Three teachers use the MDV to evaluate their student’s vibrato so they may diagnose technical faults. The natural fluctuation of the pitch becomes even and steady once the student supports an efficient tone.

**Sub-glottal air pressure (3 responders)**

The MDV is useful for fine-tuning the balance between “variations in breath pressure and glottal resistance” (See Appendix A- Response #21), especially if the student is forcing the tone.
Pitch consistency (3 responders)

The voice tends to sharpen in pitch with increased sub-glottal pressure during the crescendo, and flatten with the decrease of sub-glottal pressure during the diminuendo. The practicing of the MDV helps strengthen and refine the “stabilizer muscles” of the larynx and keeps the pitch consistent throughout all dynamic levels.

Alignment (2 responders)

The body must be properly aligned in order for a singer to execute a proficient MDV embellishment. If the student does not “employ” the body properly, the whole singing mechanism is compromised by the loss of a “full physical hook up”.

Balance onset and release (2 responders)

The MDV is considered to be an advance onset exercise, which assists students in controlling tonal onset. If the closure of the vocal folds does not coincide precisely with the adding of air pressure, the singer will find the MDV extremely difficult to stabilize.

Out of the fifty-one instructors who submitted responses to this survey, only one did not find the MDV a useful tool in solving vocal problems. In this particular responder’s experience, the MDV did not assist in properly projecting the tone or fully supporting the sound.

Question #5: If you do not use the MDV as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are there other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

Not all teachers who responded to the questionnaire use the MDV with all of their students. Other simpler exercises are used to focus on breath support and
energy, dynamic shifting, and register blending. Once these individual technical aspects have been improved, the more challenging MDV exercise may be introduced for further refining of the singing instrument.

Most instructors agree that breath is the foundation of singing. Without proper breath support, one cannot produce a healthy and free tone.

I often do this with young singers who have been trained to lock their support and press to produce their tone. They have no concept of the low breath and must first learn what it feels and sounds like when the breath is low and elastic and the larynx is in a floating relaxed open throat. Till they can sense this, they cannot begin to master the MDV. (See Appendix A- Response #2)

An essential part of breath support is energy, or the “fuel” that drives the breath forward. One instructor spends a great deal of time increasing the energy of the body in order to open up the voice through the use of “bouncy and/or staccato exercises”. The student is then instructed to take that animated feeling and relate it to sustained singing “in order to get the flexibility required”. (See Appendix A- Response #12) Another subject uses Eurhythmics to “physicalize” how to support dynamics and phrasing. “This makes the sound visual and the students seem to grasp this quite easily”. (See Appendix A- Response #18)

Along with the development of breath control, discovering, building and controlling vocal registers is essential for efficient phonation. One responder believes a voice instructor should stress the development of the weakest mechanism, whether it is light or heavy, to provide “dynamic potential in the voice”. (See Appendix A- Response #9) To develop the pure head voice that is essential for floating pianissimo sounds in the high register, one teacher asks female students to find what they call the “teeny tiny voice” or filo di voce, (pure head voice produced with a minimum of support effort). The “teeny tiny” voice
should feel like “it is supported in the mouth and helps the student find a pianissimo dynamic”. (See Appendix A- Response #22)

Once a healthy tone in both registers has been consistently established, both male and female singers must get to know their own “personal” forte, piano and pianissimo.

The student must realize their soft may be someone else's loud and vice-versa. Soft doesn't mean the world's softest pianissimo. It's just softer than your personal forte or piano. (See Appendix A- Response #23)

One instructor noted it could even be unhealthy to teach dynamic control per se because students will most likely try to sing piano with “dampening of the cords”. “One must be careful about making sure proper breath flow and a relaxed throat has been established before teaching piano singing as a specific goal”. (See Appendix A- Response #24)

Those teachers not wishing to introduce the MDV have volunteered other exercises to focus on dynamic control:

![Figure 2.12: Dynamic Control Exercise](image1)

**Figure 2.12: Dynamic Control Exercise**

![Figure 2.13: Dynamic Control Exercise](image2)

**Figure 2.13: Dynamic Control Exercise**
One teacher asserts that if the student is “connected” to the text and thoroughly understands its meaning, the student’s sense of natural artistry or expressive singing can help them enormously with shaping of phrases and dynamics.

Although subjective in nature, the reasons for using the MDV taken from the fifty-one questionnaires provide specific and detailed examples for those who want to know more about the exercise and how to use it. Methods and exercise components vary. It is interesting to note the creativity and flexibility, which contemporary voice teachers have brought to this traditional exercise for building the voice.
CHAPTER 3

Spencer Longitudinal Study and Pulte MDV Pilot Study

Although little objective or empirical research has been conducted to date to determine the efficacy of the MDV exercise for use with young undergraduate singers, most teachers who responded to my survey (see Chapter 1) do not assign this exercise to their beginning voice students in the belief that it is too difficult for a young singer to execute. Some even hold the belief that the MDV is harmful to the technical development of young singers. Since current computer technology is now available to objectively measure and document many aspects of the singing voice, vocal musicians should no longer have to speculate about this question. It was the purpose of my pilot study on the MDV to seek definitive answers.

In the Autumn quarter of 2000, speech pathologist Martin Spencer of The Ohio State University Otolaryngology Department began his study entitled, “A Longitudinal Study Concerning the Voice Range Profile as an Objective Measure of Progress in the Art of Singing” (hereafter called the LVS) in collaboration with the OSU School of Music. The study was begun, according to Spencer, “to determine whether a known objective voice measurement technique was applicable to longitudinal study”. He adds:

The field of singing generally lacks objective documentation. Subjective measurement of artistry may be complemented with objective measures of technical progress.

Initially Spencer’s purpose was to objectively document the progress of tonal development throughout the voice range of beginning singers during their undergraduate tenure at OSU. Spencer developed what he would call the “Voice
Range Profile” (hereafter called the VRP) as a possible standard of documentation by asking the subjects to sing each note of their range forte and piano “as musically as possible” and transferred these sounds to a chart reflecting decibel and pitch. (See Appendix B for an example of a typical VRP.) The protocol of the LVS study stipulated the students would be tested twice in their freshman year, once in the beginning of the Autumn quarter and once at the end of the Spring quarter; measurements would then be taken each spring thereafter through their senior year. (The LVS study, which was intended to be a ten-year study, ended prematurely due to the departure of Martin Spencer from the OSU Voice Clinic staff in the summer of 2004.)

In 2001 each subject was first examined with a rigid fiber optic scope to determine vocal health. The required singing samples were recorded on an acoustic analysis system KayPENTAX Computer Speech Lab (hereafter called CSL), Model 4300B. He also recorded each singer performing the MDV embellishment on four separate pitches: B\(^3\), F\(^4\), C\(^5\), and G\(^5\) for women and B\(^2\), F\(^3\), C\(^4\), and G\(^4\) for men.

Spencer felt the changes over time in the VRP would reflect a number of aspects of technical growth in the singer. However, due to the large amount of collected data gleaned during the LVS, Spencer quickly narrowed his scope of study to one parameter: *pitch intensity*. Data taken from the MDV measurements was left virtually unexplored. I was fortunate to assist Spencer in creating and testing the protocol for the Longitudinal Voice Study, as well as scheduling appointments and collecting data in 2000 and 2001. As testing proceeded during the first year of study, I noted the disparity among the young subjects’ abilities to execute the MDV during the collection of data. I became increasingly interested in the efficacy of this exercise for use with beginning vocalists. I obtained permission to proceed with a branch study in 2001 from Spencer’s LVS data. Realizing that time and resources were not available for an in-depth and statistically viable study of the MDV exercises with young singers, I nevertheless
created a protocol for a separate MDV “pilot study”. [N.B; a pilot study is
defined as a preliminary exploration of a hypothesis to develop appropriate
components for a future inclusive and workable research study.]

In developing my study, three problems arose for determining protocols
from the existing data of the LVS. The first problem was what pitches should be
used for my own continued testing. After researching current pedagogical use of
the MDV, I deduced that only pitches of the middle voice range should be used;
this left two of the four pitches recorded (F⁴ and C⁵) available for my experiment.
(The other two pitches were not in middle voice.) Upon further investigation I
discovered errors in the database recording of the C⁵ MDV pitches which
rendered them unusable. Therefore only the F⁴ measurements would be accurate.
Due to the pilot nature of my study, the pitch of F⁴ would suffice; however at least
two additional pitches should be utilized for a future full-fledged study.

A second problem was the inconsistency of the duration of each sample of
the MDV taken in the Spencer study. Since samples were not uniformly timed,
singers who took longer to execute the MDV had more time for stabilizing the
voice during each dynamic phase of the exercise. The final problem was the
amount of times the MDV exercise should be executed. For the LVS, three
samples on each pitch were recorded. My MDV experiment sought to determine
progress after practicing the exercise for a certain length of time, not how well the
singer adjusts during the recording process. Therefore, only two samples of each
pitch should be recorded. Additionally, in order to maximize consistency,
duration time for the MDV samples should be four seconds for each dynamic
phase. Unfortunately it was during analysis of collected data that I realized that
these problems existed with the data collected in the LVS---data which I had to
use for the first phase of my study.

Unaware of the significance of these problems, however, I formulated a
hypothesis for my MDV pilot study: regular practice of the MDV exercise in
early stages of voice study will not have a negative effect on pitch onset and
release, pitch consistency, or vibrato consistency. As I carried out my study, I would meet with further obstacles.

OSU is on the quarter system, containing ten weeks of classes; the LVS study, source of my first set of MDV data, did not begin until the third week of autumn classes. Hence the length of time available for subjects to practice the MDV was limited to six weeks. A statistically viable study would require up to several months for subjects to “master” the MDV exercise. Once again, since mine was a pilot study, six weeks was deemed a sufficient time period for investigatory results.

Another significant problem for both my study and the Spencer study was the availability of subjects. The freshman voice class of 2001 at OSU was uncharacteristically small. Only seven freshman females and one freshman male were available for the LVS study. For my MDV study, two control groups were needed (those who would practice the MDV and those who would not), therefore control groups were limited to four subjects each. This is not a large enough number to provide meaningful results. There was no guarantee that this small number available for my study would be reliable in their practice habits. A controlled environment is mandatory for a significant research study. Time limitations, schedule conflicts, and lack of means to control and direct the dedication of study participants in the Autumn of 2001 ensured that my pilot study would be investigatory at best, and flawed for significantly proving or disproving my hypothesis. The pilot study proceeded, however, under the following conditions:

Four young women were asked to practice the MDV after their fall samples were procured for Spencer’s LVS. (The one male available from the LVS study was found to have vocal pathologies and his samples were deemed unusable) When these four female subjects returned six weeks later to record their MDV embellishments on the computer speech lab (hereafter called the CSL), I learned only two actually practiced the MDV exercises on a regular basis, thus
further limiting my viable subjects. For the other control group I easily found two female subjects, who had not practiced the MDV, and recorded their samples for a basis of comparison.

After completing the recording sessions for both control groups, I analyzed the results. I used two analysis programs from the KayPENTAX Computer Speech Lab (CSL): a fundamental frequency chart (determining pitch) and an intensity chart (determining dynamics). For my purposes the sole benefit of the intensity chart is to document the change in the two dynamic phases of the MVD. Therefore I chose the fundamental frequency program as my primary method of objective observation. In the fundamental frequency chart (hereafter called the pitch chart) results are presented in several different ways. One can observe pitch onset and release accuracy, vibrato rate during each dynamic phase, and pitch integrity during each dynamic phase. To assist in understanding the MDV charts obtained from the subjects, three pitch chart examples containing three different vibrato patterns are provided below.

![Figure 3.1: F⁴ sung with little or no vibrato](image-url)
Figure 3.2: F^d tone with “normal” vibrato (5-7 fluctuations per second)

Figure 3.3: F^d with a “wobble” (over 9 fluctuations per second)
When observing an ideal pitch chart one would expect:

- Pitch onset should immediately begin with a steady vibrato rate centered on the correct fundamental frequency (hereafter called F₀).
- F₀ should remain stable during the increase and decrease of intensity.
- Vibrato rate should remain steady during each phase of dynamic change.
- The F₀ and vibrato rate should remain consistent until pitch release.

With these basic standards established for assessing proficient production of the MDV, as illustrated on KayPENTAX CSL, one may examine the first example of an MDV embellishment provided by one of the pilot study subjects:

![Fig 3.4: Subject #1 F⁴ MDV – 10/21/2001](image)

Important aspects of this pitch chart to notice are:

- Onset is begun with a straight tone that continues about one fourth of the crescendo phase.
- Vibrato is introduced once the dynamic intensity increases, but when the subject reaches full intensity (loudness), vibrato oscillations widen.
• As intensity decreases, oscillations narrow.
• Vibrato oscillation remains steady and centered on the F₀ at pitch release.
• Once oscillation is established, vibrato rate is 5.6 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).
• During the highest intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato rate rose to 6 oscillations per second.
• With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate slowed to 5.3 oscillations per second.

Note that marked energy and support differ with the changing of dynamics.

After practicing the MDV exercise for six times a week over a six week period, Subject #1 returned to execute a second attempt of the embellishment on F⁴ as seen in Figure 3.5:

Figure 3.5: Subject #1 F⁴ MDV – 12/01/2001
• Pitch onset is begun with a straight tone, but vibrato is introduced much sooner than the F⁴ example recorded six weeks earlier.
• Vibrato oscillation in the second attempt is slightly improved in consistency during the increase and decrease of intensity.
• After onset, the vibrato rate during the increasing of intensity is 5.5.
• At fullest intensity of the MDV, the vibrato rate is 5.9.
• As intensity decreases, vibrato rate lowers slightly to 5.8.

Pitch onset, pitch oscillation, and vibrato rate consistency may show only minor improvement between the MDV attempts, but there is no evidence that the MDV embellishment deteriorated with practice, or was harmful to the subject’s voice development.

When working with the CSL pitch chart program, one is able to record the F₀ of the top and bottom of each vibrato oscillation. Once these F₀ rates are recorded, the “mid-line F₀” or “pitch center” of the vibrato oscillation can be calculated. Figure #6 illustrates “high hz” (top of vibrato oscillation), “medium hz” (pitch center) and “low hz” (bottom of vibrato oscillation). This chart will be called the Vibrato Oscillation Chart.
The first attempt of the MDV embellishment illustrates inconsistency in pitch oscillation throughout the exercise.
In comparison to the first F⁴ MDV attempt, the medium pitch line shows slightly more frequency stability, even as intensity (loudness) changes. Though the two frequency level charts show only minor improvement in frequency consistency, they show no degeneration.

Now let us examine the second F⁴ MDV attempt of Subject #2 who practiced the exercise four times a week for a period of six weeks.
Figure 3.8: Subject #2 F⁴ MDV – 10/21/2001

- Vibrato oscillation begins immediately at pitch onset.
- Vibrato oscillations remain mostly consistent throughout both dynamic phases.
- Vibrato oscillation remains steady and consistent at pitch release.
- At onset, vibrato rate is 5.8 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).
- During the high intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato rate slows to 5.3 oscillations per second.
- With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate returns to 5.8 oscillations per second.
Onset begins with a consistent vibrato oscillation.

As the dynamic intensity increases and decreases, vibrato oscillation remains fairly consistent.

Vibrato oscillation remains steady and consistent at pitch release.

At onset, vibrato rate is 5.4 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).

During the high intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato rate remains steady at 5.4 oscillations per second.

With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate increases to 5.8 times per second.

The second attempt of the MDV shows some minor improvement when compared to the attempt recorded six weeks earlier.
Figure 3.10: Subject #2 Vibrato Oscillation Chart – 10/21/2001

F₀ drops in pitch at onset by 5 or 6 hz but becomes stabilized by the release.
Figure 3.11: Subject #2 Vibrato Oscillation Chart – 12/01/2001

This chart illustrates continued problems with intonation yet there is some improvement to the earlier attempt. The drooping of pitch before the release might be defined as a set back in vocal growth.

Now let us examine the two subjects who did not practice the MDV.
Figure 3.12: Subject #3 F^4 MDV – 10/21/2001

- Onset begins with a straight tone that continues for approximately one fourth of the crescendo phase.
- Vibrato oscillation is introduced for a short time until the dynamic intensity increases, when the subject reaches full intensity (loudness), vibrato oscillation straightens once more.
- As intensity decreases, vibrato returns.
- Vibrato oscillation remains steady and consistent on the F_0 at pitch release.
- Once oscillation is established, vibrato rate is 6.1 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).
- During the highest intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato slowed to 5.7 oscillations per second.
- With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate returned to 6 oscillations per second.
• Onset begins with vibrato that continues for approximately one fourth of crescendo phase.
• Vibrato oscillation ceases when dynamic intensity increases, when the subject reaches full intensity (loudness), vibrato oscillations returns.
• Vibrato continues as intensity decreases.
• Vibrato oscillation remains steady and consistent at pitch release.
• Once oscillation is established, vibrato rate is 6.1 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).
• During the highest intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato rate slows to 5.9 oscillations per second.
• With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate rose to 6.2 oscillations per second.

This second attempt of the F₄ MDV shows little improvement of vibrato consistency.
Figure 3.14: Subject #3 Vibrato Oscillation Chart – 10/21/2001

The first attempt of the MDV shows a slight flattening of $F_0$ at onset. Subject exhibits a consistent $F_0$ until a slight drooping of pitch at the release.
Figure 3.15: Subject #3 Vibrato Oscillation Chart – 12/01/2001

The second MDV, attempted six weeks later, shows improvement of pitch control until once again the pitch drops at the release.
Vibrato oscillation begins at pitch onset.

As dynamic intensity increases, vibrato oscillations ceases for the last half of the crescendo phase.

After vibrato oscillations return and intensity decreases, oscillations remain stable.

Vibrato oscillation remains steady and centered at pitch release.

At onset, vibrato rate is 4.9 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).

After the reintroduction of vibrato during the highest intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato slows to 4.2 oscillations per second.

With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate rose to 4.9 oscillations per second.
- Onset is begun with straight tone, but vibrato occurs quickly thereafter.
- Once dynamic intensity increases, vibrato oscillations stabilize.
- As intensity decreases, oscillations remain stable.
- Vibrato oscillation remains steady and consistent at pitch release.
- Once oscillation is established, vibrato rate after onset is 4.8 oscillations per second (within normal parameters).
- During the highest intensity phase of the MDV, vibrato rate slows to 4.3 oscillations per second.
- With the decrease of intensity, vibrato rate increases to 4.8 oscillations per second.

Subject #4’s chart shows no improvement in vibrato oscillation, in fact, there appears a degeneration of pitch onset control.
In the chart above, F₀ is slightly sharp at pitch onset but intonation stabilizes by the end of the exercise.
The frequency chart of the second attempt illustrates improved intonation. Like Subject Two, it appears improved intonation occurs without practicing the MDV.

After examining the results of my MDV pilot study, and noting that all four subjects showed improvement in intonation regardless whether they did or did not practice the MDV, an interesting question arises: Is the improvement in intonation a result of six weeks of regular voice study? Clearly this question cannot be fully answered without a larger pool of subjects. Even considering the problems surrounding my MDV study, in my opinion, the overall findings are persuasive. Observation of all of the MDV F\textsuperscript{4} charts reveals that the second MDV measurement of the subjects who practiced for six weeks did not show any deterioration, thus concurring with my hypothesis: regular practice of the MDV exercise in early stages of voice study will not have a
negative effect on pitch onset and release, pitch consistency, or vibrato consistency. Due to the limited length of the study I did not expect to see a marked amount of improvement, I believe however, that with several months of practice, a large pool of dedicated singers and clear research protocols, it may be possible to determine definitively if the MDV is or is not advantageous for use with singers under the age of twenty. Such objective data may help teachers ascertain the advisability of using the MDV with students in the early stages of voice study.
CONCLUSION

For much of its history the practice of voice pedagogy, or the teaching of singing, has been built on tradition and custom, relying on the accuracy of the teacher’s ear and the ability of the singer to use the voice-ear connection to painstakingly refine over time the sounds s/he mastered or the teacher requested. Teaching methods were handed down, and the judgment of vocal excellence was the result of subjective opinion. Replication of a desired vocal sound or successful teaching practice was all too often the result of chance. Thanks to modern sound technology, we have the ability today to objectively measure the components of vocal sound. We can chart its pitch accuracy, vibrato rate and evenness, and the overtone structure of a given pitch or frequency. Moreover, we can compare and contrast minute aspects of two or more sung tones on visible and objective graphs. No longer need singers or their teachers wonder if a tone, an exercise, or a method is effective or not. Since the middle of the twentieth century, voice science has given us the means to decide these questions.

As I pondered the multiple opinions about the exercise that appeared in my questionnaire to contemporary voice teachers, I became fascinated with their variety as well as the numerous ways in which the MDV is used today. A compilation of the most popular methods reveals:

1. The MDV should only be introduced to singers who have first proven themselves adept in breath and phonation control.
2. Pitches first assigned for practicing the MDV should occur in the “middle range”, or the most free and open tones of each individual singer’s voice.
3. The range of practice should never extend beyond the middle range until the singer has mastered the MDV in the middle area of their voice.
4. All vowels should eventually be used, but a singer should begin MDV practice with his/her most comfortable vowels.

5. Each MDV exercise should last only as long as the singer retains a free and open tone production.

6. The MDV should be practiced only after the voice has been sufficiently warmed up, and for no more than five to ten minutes.

In Chapter 1, I explored opinions from vocal pedagogic literature about the MDV exercise. Most writers seem to agree on the benefits to the singing voice from use of the MDV as a singing exercise, but do not agree as to when and how it should be introduced. Because of the disparity of information found in these pedagogic texts and treatises dating back to the 1600s, I wondered why we could not bring the tools of voice science and research at last to bear upon the value of this long-accepted exercise for singers. When the MDV was chosen as a major measurement tool for the freshman voice majors participating in the OSU Longitudinal Voice Study, my concern deepened. Should we be using this exercise with young singers? Is it harmful? Is it helpful? Hoping to determine the answer to these questions I began my pilot study, using data from the Spencer LVS, but adding my own research data from a small pool of subjects who agreed to practice the MDV over a six-week time period and submit to an additional set of measurements.

After analyzing data from my pilot study and after consulting with Dr. Michael Trudeau, an experienced voice researcher, it became apparent to me that many parameters of the study were imprecise.

1. There were too few participating subjects in my pool to obtain significant data.

2. Practice sessions of the subjects should have been more closely supervised.
3. Additional pitches beyond the F^4 needed to have been used.
4. Each MDV trial should have a specific duration time.
5. The practice time should have been longer than six weeks.

For a number of reasons, then, this pilot study could not produce any substantial evidence as to whether students who practiced the MDV improved in pitch onset and release, or pitch and vibrato consistency. Still I found little indication that any of the technical aspects studied had become worse with MDV practice. Furthermore, I have now learned a great deal about how a future and definitive study should be created. Proper parameters developed for such a study would be:

1. A large subject pool of at least twenty singers, containing equal numbers of men and women is essential.
2. The Researcher must carefully instruct the practice subject group and meet with them at least once a week.
3. Test pitches for the MDV study should be F^4, A^4, and C^5 for women, and F^3, A^3, and C^4 for men.
4. Subjects should record practice sessions on log sheets to ensure they are practicing the proper amount of time.
5. The MDV should be practiced and recorded over 4 seconds per dynamic phase for consistency (8 seconds total).
6. The MDV should be practiced for at least three months.
7. Recording sessions should be conducted in a location convenient for the subjects to ensure they will be available.
8. The MDV should be recorded twice on each pitch.
9. Once samples have been recorded, additional subjective and objective trials should be conducted to support the validity of the test data. For example one might create “random acoustical samples” for a panel of voice experts to compare, containing the early and late
MDV attempts. Experts will judge if the paired examples indeed exhibit improvement in MDV execution.

Now that the problems have been resolved during the pilot stage of my MDV study, I believe a full study regarding the effectiveness of the MDV as a teaching tool for young singers would produce informative results that would assist voice instructors in deciding whether to use the MDV exercise with their young student’s lessons and daily practice session. There are obvious benefits to a singer’s technical proficiency and artistry arising from practicing the MDV. It should follow that the earlier this exercise can be safely employed the better. We need the help of voice science to be sure. Moreover, it is important that singers and voice teachers become increasingly educated in the methods of voice science research, and participate in that research, if the field is to meaningfully serve the vocal artist and the vocal arts.
Greetings,

My name is Diane Pulte and I am a doctoral candidate in Vocal Performance at The Ohio State University. Under the direction of Dr. Karen Peeler, and with the assistance of Dr. Michael Trudeau and staff members of The Ohio State University Department of Otolaryngology Voice Clinic, I am currently working on my dissertation, "The Messa di voce and Its Efficiency as a Training Device for the Young Singer". The Messa di voce has not only been used as a dynamic embellishment in performance practice, but also as a central voice teaching exercise, especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries. We might now view the Messa di voce as demonstrating a delicate balance between changing subglottic aerodynamic pressures and fundamental frequency while consistently producing a voice of optimal singing quality.

A Messa di voce consists of the controlled increase and subsequent decrease in intensity of a tone sustained on one pitch across one breath. An early definition of the Messa di voce may be found in Instruction of Mr. Tenducci to his scholars written by Guisto Tenducci in 1785:

“To sing a Messa di voce: swelling the voice, begin pianissimo and increase gradually to forte, in the first part of the time: and so diminish gradually to the end of each note, if possible.”

In addition to generalized clinical studies involving OSU voice majors, I am seeking subjective information from voice teachers as to if, and how they employ the Messa di voce in their voice studios today. Towards that end I would
be most grateful if you would complete the following short questionnaire. Only a short explanation will be needed for each question, so the questionnaire should not take more than a few minutes of your time. Just hit the "reply" button in your email program, fill in the question areas, and then press "send".

Only your responses will be used. Your names will be withheld so your confidentiality will be protected. You also have the right to skip questions you do not wish to answer, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Thank you in advance for your time, and for sharing your knowledge and experience with me! I believe that an objective analysis of this commonly used expressive device and traditional voice exercise may inform us all more deeply about its nature and potential efficacy. Please indicate if you would like to have a copy of my finished study, and I will be happy to send it to you.

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?
6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice:

3-10_____  10-20_____  20-30_____

7. Would you like a copy of my study?   Yes____  No _____

Again, thank you so much for your time and assistance
Response #1

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 – 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   I do not use it a great deal, if at all, with singers of this age. To properly execute a Messa di voce, many facets of a singer's technique must be not only developed, but in proper proportion (or in balance) to one another. Re: the issue of breath, Barbara Conable, with whom I'm certain that you've worked, believes that it takes at least five years for a singer to begin to master breathing for singing. The key word in that last sentence was "begin." Also, I've found that extrinsic musculature is too often employed in the singing techniques of this age of singer. If a singer cannot easily, or somewhat easily, manage their breathing mechanism, then the extrinsics are almost always going to "assist" in approximating the folds, especially in softer passages due to some air escaping ("mutational chink"). If a singer has an underdeveloped breathing mechanism (due to age and experience factors), a somewhat underdeveloped intrinsic musculature (due primarily to age factors), and an overactive (a lack of proportion with the intrinsics) extrinsic musculature, a demanding exercise like the Messa di voce can be too much for young singers to execute successfully on a regular basis. Other simpler exercises will be of greater benefit to them.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   I use it some, but not frequently. I tend to employ this exercise with the context of repertoire first - e.g. - selecting pieces with arch phrasing and tapered phrase endings; which is similar to what one
might execute in a Messa di voce, but it is in a context that may be
more accessible to the student (especially undergraduate students).

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short
explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels
used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

As you might expect, as the singer becomes more advanced I have
them sing higher pitches using the Messa di voce. For younger
singers, I only have them sing the Messa di voce where it is
comfortable for them to do so (usually in the upper middle voice). It
is an effective tool in balancing registration, particularly that students
are chest register dominated (as in - not in proportion with other
higher registers, not "chest" as in a modal use [as in males]). Vowels
should align somewhat closely with First Formant vowel frequencies,
but whatever vowels the student can sing well at first are the vowels of
choice. For older singers, ten minutes maximum of this exercise is
enough; for younger singers, five minutes is sufficient. The Messa di
voce can be placed in most any part of the warm-up schedule,
depending on the frequencies used. Higher frequency Messa di voce
exercises should occur later in a warm-up schedule than lower
frequencies.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of
use?

It shows the overall state of an instrument (meaning the all facets of
singing) as one has to combine several different (and complex)
processes to execute a successful Messa di voce.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 10-20
Response #2

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   I begin using this exercise with students who are advanced enough in their understanding of how the breath works and will not lock or press in order to create the increase in volume and intensity of sound and who will not squeeze or allow the breath to collapse in order to decrease the volume and intensity of the tone. This can be as soon as the second semester or as late as the fourth semester of study. It really depends upon the student and how quickly they can grasp the importance of and the use of the breath placement and its use in producing the tone. Since I tend to work with college students, they are mostly about 19 when we begin this exercise.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes, I use it with my third year students more than the beginners, not so much as a consistent exercise in my vocalization of them but as a reminder occasionally if I sense they are locking their support muscles when producing the tone. I may even take certain tones out of the piece we are working on and work with them on it using various vowels. Then, I try to get them to feel this elasticity of the breath and the support throughout the phrase.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   With upper voices, I begin with a five note scale beginning around f1 above middle c and pause to about a count of 5 on the upper tone crescendoing and decrescendoing. An octave can also be used when
the student has a better command of the breath. In the case of an octave run, I begin around middle c. With baritones, I start around and e below middle c on the five note, or c below middle c on the octave run and gradually work them through the passaggio.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

A better understanding of how the breath sustains and controls the volume of the tone as well as how the tone can be made to "float" and still have power and focus through proper use and placement of the breath.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

If a student cannot get clean closure of the vocal folds because of too much breathiness and is therefore not able to focus on dynamic control and has not truly mastered the control of the breath, I sometimes have them feel as if they are "sniffing" deeply or inhaling while singing to draw the breath lower and away from the upper chest. This generally produces more focus in their tone as well as an increase in volume due to proper closure of the vocal folds after the high breath pressure has been alleviated. I often do this with young singers who have been trained to lock their support and press to produce their tone. They have no concept of the low breath and must first learn what it feels and sounds like when the breath is low and elastic and the larynx is in a floating relaxed open throat. Till they can sense this, they cannot begin to master the Messa di voce.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 10-20
Response #3

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   I don't use the Messa di voce until some measure of balanced timbre and consistent vibrancy has been established in the middle voice. Many young singers begin with a sound that lacks a vital dynamic connection between breath and vocal fold resistance. I see that as a first priority.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes. I believe the Messa di voce prevents a certain locking in of an energy level and promotes a flexible response among the factors of subglottic pressure, vocal fold resistance and airflow.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   They should be used once the voice has been warmed up properly. The exercise is most easily accomplished in mid range and the crescendo is easier than the decrescendo. However, skilled singers can take the exercise into the upper range. Teachers have to listen carefully to see that it is promoting freedom of function and not throat constriction.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   I believe the exercise promotes dynamic range control, but as important, I believe that it permits the lighter registration (voce di testa) to appear without unwanted heaviness. If one begins with a
thread of sound and adds energy evenly, one often gets a more complete and beautiful head voice, not encumbered with weight that is sometimes mistakenly carried up in exercises that move from low to high and back.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are there other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   Octave leaps followed by a melisma over the ninth and then descending stepwise. The lower octave is mf and the upper octave pp with a crescendo.

7. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #4

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   With students of all ages, the Messa di voce is not assigned in the early stages of study. It comes after basic breath-management and vowel definition processes are in hand.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   They begin it when ready, which can mean near the close of the first year of study, or in later semesters. Range is at first limited, greatly extended with advanced students.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   Messa di voce exercises should be begun in comfortable low-middle range, both for males and females. It is done on a single vowel, then on a cardinal-vowel sequence. It follows exercises in onset, agility, and resonance balancing.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   To make possible dynamic changes without vitiating the basic timbre of the voice. "Singing piano is in all respects the same as singing forte, but is softer (and harder)."

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?
The single note Messa di voce can be applied to sostenuto patterns built on sustained 1-3-5-3-1 sequences. Phrases from the literature can be excerpted as Messa di voce exercises.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 40+
   Response #5

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 – 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   I use it with all singers with a full explanation of what it is designed to accomplish.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
   Beginning on C3, Females on C4 ranging through the passaggio (an octave and a fifth, or higher for those voices capable of doing so without difficulty) For those in whom the “lutto vocale” begins big-time in the passaggio, I encourage them to take the challenge, but I but I monitor them carefully to ensure they don’t become discouraged in their struggle. Having them start lower in their range where the exercise is easier to master provides them with a goal to strive for. I take the exercise as outlined in Rossini’s “Gorgheggie Solfeggi” as a model.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
   1) Strengthening the ability of the valve to smoothly coordinate gradual tension and release, the while producing vocal tone in a manner that is 100% efficient;
2) Training sublottal air pressure;
3) Strengthening the ability of the “cover’ over the vocal folds to engage in a manner that produces efficient tone at onset, leading to perfect ‘putting/placing” of the tone at full volume.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are there other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

Octave leaps executed as follows: Full voice on a given low pitch, followed by a pianissimo attack on the octave above, which is then swelled to full voice on that pitch before descending legato back down to the original pitch as follows;

AH ha<<<<-----

f pp f

Do Do Sol Mi Do

This is accomplished on one breath and ranges from the lowest to the highest pitches practical for the singer.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Before I answer your questions regarding Messa di voce, let me preface everything by saying that any vocal exercise can be performed with various types of voice productions. For example, a Messa di voce can be performed with breathy or pressed phonation in combinations with vocal tract alignments that produce various tonal qualities, from breathy/hoopy to pressed/throaty, and so on. Of course, balanced phonation in conjunction with a coordinated vocal tract alignment and adequate subglottal pressure (airflow) will produce optimal results. This what I think of as the traditional Italian vocal approach, which is based on natural vocal function— the ultimate athletic vocalism of which humans are capable of producing when fully adhering to natural principals of voice production. I hope this explanation is clear.

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   
   First things first. Mezzo forte, let-go gestures are used until established, and that takes at least a year or so. However, when a student is capable of doing it, I think it is a very useful and essential skill.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   Yes, but not regularly in warm-ups, mostly in repertoire, as in phrasing and enlivening sustained notes.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
I should probably use it more often. Unfortunately, I don’t since my first objective is to get students to understand what it means to release and let-go (with sufficient breath energy). I find that music that moves, for example Purcell’s “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly’, is ideal for such purposes. Sustained singing is the most difficult; hence, when singing sustained music I encourage the constant “release” or breath throughout each musical phrase, in effect somewhat like a Messa di voce, but not as extreme. No “wow wow” effect, for example.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   To encourage a balance onset, to coordinate light (head) and heavy (chest) registration, and develop a balance between inspiratory/expiratory forces.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   Expressive means associated with the text and musical demands.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   No, because they would learn to do it with too much tension.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Only as they are able to crescendo and decrescendo using only the breath.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   It depends on the pitches that are the most free and the vowels that are least manipulated for the effect. Singers are terribly determined to do what is requested at all cost. I try to give exercises that will begin the Messa di voce thinking without the buildup of unuseful coordination. The pitches and vowels depend on the individual student.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   As I said above, I begin with little versions – sometimes short repeated notes – each becoming louder.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #8

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 – 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   
   Usually not much - the danger is that they will close the throat in their quest for diminuendo.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   Yes, though probably not as regularly as I should. It is a proven tool to learn breath management. It tends to slow the student brain down to a level where they can really *listen* to the tone and monitor the way they are using the breath.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
   
   Because of the difficulty of the Messa di voce, I try to include a "motivational scenario" if you will, so that they don't tighten up - e.g. Imagine opening a door slowly, seeing something beautiful, then closing the door (there might be some subliminal negativity in the word close, but this image seems to shift some attention away from the dangerous 'holding' mechanisms. I use [a] - the most revealing, less opportunity to use a high tongue position to hold.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
   
   See #2

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?
[i] for brilliance  [u] for more floaty spin - leaps upward, arpeggios, and scales. These vowels help them feel the difference - easier to be loud on [u], easier to spin the tone on [u]

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: **10-20**
1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   **I do not use this exercise until the second year of study generally if the singer is a beginner. If the singer is new to me, but advanced, I use it as soon as an even legato scale is achieved.**

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   **Yes, in some form or the other. I feel it trains breath control, dynamic flexibility, and agility of the vocalis muscle.**

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   **Begin in the middle voice and progress upward and downward by half steps. Use a vowel cycle (I-E-A-O-U-U-A-E-I) with a gradual crescendo/diminuendo; use a soft glide on [i] up a fifth, crescendo that tone on (E-A-O-U), and then glide down five tones (One per vowel) gradually diminuendo-ing, do the vowel cycle on a single tone, slowly increasing and decreasing the volume.**

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   **As state above; breath control, dynamic flexibility, exercise in balance of the vocalis and the cricothyroids under varying subglottal pressure.**

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   **In addition, I stress development of the light mechanism (or heavy if that does not exist) to provide dynamic potential in the voice.**

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #10

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   
   Most definitely! The exercise serves several purposes but primary is it establishes AWARENESS of a breath movement/tonal response from the student.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   With ALL students

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
   
   I use it employing the following vowels on one pitch in middle voice: [u] [i] [e] [a] [o] [u]. [a] is the loudest vowel. Duration should be as long (or as short) as it takes to comfortably sing through all vowels in one breath. I suggest that the exercise should be used after the voice is thoroughly warmed up.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
   
   See 1

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #11

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   I don’t currently teach many students this age, but yes I would use Messa di voce, at least in a limited way. For instance, a diminuendo from a forte or a crescendo from a piano on a single sustained pitch are also good exercises. I believe it is advantageous from the beginning to feel the possibility of dynamic change on a sustained pitch, even if it is very small at first. It encourages balance of registers and support or appoggio.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes, for the same reasons. Vocal technique is all about poise and balance, which must be constantly reinforced. Messa di voce is a wonderful means for the student to sense poise and balance, or see where they are lacking.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   Primarily middle voice and passaggio, but also upper voice, especially with women. Any vowel, but primarily /a/ and /i/. Duration should be whatever is comfortable on one breath with the Messa di voce fairly evenly distributed. The return to piano is always the hardest part. I urge them not to continuously fade out to the release, but to get to a steady piano dynamic that can be sustained briefly before the release. No specifics about where in a warm-up session, but not first thing.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
Stated above.

8. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice. 20-30
Response #12

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 – 20 years old)?
   Why, or why not?
   
   Not usually because I find they need to establish their basis of support and its relationship to a free throat before a Messa di voce is even conceivable.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   Sometimes. Because it's kind of like the chicken and the egg. If they're well grounded on their support with a free throat, then they can do a Messa di voce, and it is a helpful flexibility/musicality exercise. But having them sing a Messa di voce when they're not technically able to do it doesn't necessarily give them the proper support and freedom to achieve that technical goal.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
   
   General middle voice, starting on [i] and moving from closed vowels to open vowels, fairly early in the warm up.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
   
   It makes one really concentrate on getting the voice seated on the breath.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?
   
   Yes, but they're hard to explain here. I mostly work with increasing body energy and relating that energy to a free throat through the use of bouncy and/or staccato exercises, and then taking that feeling
and relating it to their legato singing in order to get the flexibility required to do a Messa di voce.

5. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 10-20
1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 – 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   I use it with all singers with a full explanation of what it is designed to accomplish.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   Beginning on C3, Females on C4 ranging through the passaggio (an octave and a fifth, or higher for those voices capable of doing so without difficulty) For those in whom the “lutto vocale” begins big-time in the passaggio, I encourage them to take the challenge, but I but I monitor them carefully to ensure they don’t become discouraged in their struggle. Having them start lower in their range where the exercise is easier to master provides them with a goal to strive for. I take the exercise as outlined in Rossini’s “Gorgheggie Solfeggi” as a model.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   1) Strengthening the ability of the valve to smoothly coordinate gradual tension and release, the while producing vocal tone in a manner that is 100% efficient;
   2) Training sublottal air pressure;
   3) Strengthening the ability of the “cover” over the vocal folds to engage in a manner that produces efficient tone at onset, leading to perfect ‘putting/placing” of the tone at full volume.
5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are there other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

Octave leaps executed as follows: Full voice on a given low pitch, followed by a pianissimo attack on the octave above, which is then swelled to full voice on that pitch before descending legato back down to the original pitch as follows:

\[ \text{AH ha} \lllll \text{----} \]
\[ \text{f} \quad \text{pp} \quad \text{f} \]
\[ \text{Do} \quad \text{Do} \quad \text{Sol Mi Do} \]

This is accomplished on one breath and ranges from the lowest to the highest pitches practical for the singer.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: **20-30**
Response #14

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   Yes, I do use this exercise for the reasons you stated above. I vary the pitch depending on the singer. Very helpful in finding balance in the breath pressure and resonance.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   If the singers are ready for the exercise I use it right away but only after we have thoroughly worked with breath use, vowel and resonance.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   I usually (again depending upon the stage the singer is in) start with a closed vowel and opening into some open sound. I ask them not to take it farther than they can and still feel/hear the original resonance at the center of the pitch. Some will have weak high resonance and it is a process but a valuable one.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #15

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   **I use this exercise occasionally, but not consistently with each student.**

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   **Again, I use the exercise occasionally, as the situation dictates, but not consistently with each student. I believe that the exercise is suitable for all ages and abilities, and use it as part of my overall vocalise arsenal.**

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   **I tend to use it on medium pitches (middle voice), on various vowels (but only one, consistent vowel in each individual repetition of the exercise). The duration should take up one full breath cycle without the student reaching the "end of the rope" so to speak. The exercise should be done when the student is already fully warmed up. I haven't experimented much with the Messa di voce in the passaggi, but I probably should do so.**

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   **Establishes breath control, dynamic control, and pitch stability at various dynamic levels. Does a good job of connecting the breath mechanism to the phonation.**

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
**Response #16**

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   Yes, on occasion. There are those few students who are singing freely and very balanced naturally, yet also pure tone. I use it to enhance the breath energy and stability and to encourage dynamic changes with constant connection to the breath without tension.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes. The Messa di voce helps to unify the entire instrument, so that head, middle and chest voices all feel a similar connection to the breath. It helps to build consistency in dynamic changes and stability throughout the instrument. Breath flow is also enhanced.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   I try to go from the student's best and most free area of the voice and build outward. I also try to start with that student's best vowel. I start from the and go to the more difficult, for instance on 'i' at first and opening to 'e' and 'a'. Generally I do this on one pitch, both the crescendo and decrescendo. I always start piano to forte then back. In the beginning I do not stress duration; instead, I stress freedom and consistent breath flow. I use an image of filling the body with sound to replace the air which seem to work with most students. When the sound and the balance are free and stable and the breath and body are responding without vocal tension, then we work on planning the breath and
extending the breath and equalization of the duration of the crescendo
decrescendo. I do not make this a specific number of seconds. We
measure the number whatever it may be and that is a good start.
Then we work on extending the duration daily a little at a time. I
place this near the end of the 'workout' unless there is a specific
reason to put it elsewhere. If a student is feeling vocal tension and
cannot seem to get this exercise coordinated, we move on very quickly.
I find students learn from frustration, but learn even more quickly
when what they try works for them!

7. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #17

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   Yes I use it with my students and rather early...the young ones get very excited about being able to be "expressive" with dynamics and I try to encourage them to use the Messa di voce in their repertoire as early as possible. Now they have to be able to physically crescendo and decrescendo. Then I move on to making it an exercise with the goal of being able to do it on each pitch of their range and on various vowels....

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes...I continue to use this through out their study.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   I have them simply start on an "i" vowel and do gentle Messa di voce though an easy part of thier range....then continue to other vowels....oooo, ah...O.......and still in the comfortable areas of their voices. It should be a part of their daily practice and warm-ups early in their study...I stress being calm and gentle with it...not to push to "as loud as can be sung" and to listen for even vibrato and breath line....Diane...I find this to be a FABULOUS exercise IF the student can handle the thoughtful concentration of this exercise. To sustain one note for a length of time can be boring for some. It is a great exercise to encourage "falling in love" with your sound and experimenting with subtle colors on the various vowels....again the
student has to care and be smart enough to have the discipline to do this.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   Benefits...line development, breath control, color development, vibrator regulator, and interest in becoming expressive....

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   Actually...no....I'd love some other ideas but if the student doesn't want or have the ability to sustain a Messa di voce, I simply leave it for a while and pick it up later.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   
   Yes, but in a very limited range and a limited amount of crescendo and diminuendo. It establishes balance and control of breath and is a very artistic and emotionally expressive technique.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   Yes, for the same reasons as stated above. This depends on the ability of the individual and whether or not they are ready or to what extent they can manage the exercise correctly.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
   
   Yes, I use it with all of my students, unless they have some difficulty phonating, etc... I begin in middle range (below passaggio) and start on [i] and take four beats to crescendo and migrate the vowel to [a] and four beats to diminuendo and migrate back to [i]. It is extremely important to gradually increase and decrease dynamics and breath flow/pressure to achieve an even swell with out creating tension, all the while being reminded to stay on the core of their sound. My observation is that the crescendo is much easier than the diminuendo. This exercise comes near the end of the daily routine and is increased regarding range and duration depending on the students’ ability.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
   
   It is an artistic and expressive device which offers several color/dynamic choices for any given pitch. Technically, it teaches the
singer to manage the increase/decrease of subglottic pressure and the relationship to the function of the vocal folds (mass).

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are there other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

Yes, always. I utilize eurythmics to physicalize the dynamics and shaping of phrases. This makes the sound “visual” and the students seem to grasp this quite easily.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 10-20
Response #19

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   I use with singers around junior year, so 20 and older. younger singers aren't ready with breath management in most cases and feel overwhelmed by the challenge.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes, I think it is excellent for refining breath management possibilities, and it is also useful for checking to see if the voice is on the breath or being muscled. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   I think the Messa di voce should be used once the voice is warm. I usually have students do an octave leap on u or the open u (vowel in pull), feeling grounded in the body on the lower octave, then going up with the minimum of sound that is, however, fully energized, then adding more breath and open the mouth for the crescendo, and reducing breath pressure and closing mouth for the decrescendo, then an agility down a half and up a second several times before singing the low octave at the end.
4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   I think it is excellent for strengthening coordination of sound traveling on breath, and focus and concentration are also developed. Also, if a singer can perform this well, it opens up many options within repertoire to produce artistic effects and interpretation.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: **3-10**
Response #20

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   
   **No, too difficult for beginners.**

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   **Yes, advanced singers need to be able to do it.**

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   **Middle voice on a E I and O but not U**

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   **Because it engages the vocal folds medially fro the mucosal edge to deep muscle, and back again – this, combined with the variations in sub-glottic pressure needed to sustain it, promote exceptional co-ordination.**

8. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: **10-20**
Response #21

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 – 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   No. In my experience dynamic control is a more advanced technique - it is more important for me to get young students to simply have a free flowing phonation.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Sometimes. If a student's level of technical ability is ready for it.
   Though I would usually focus on it as part of repertoire work/study.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   We explore the exercise beginning on comfortable, mid-voice pitches where there are few other technical concerns, so the delicate balances associated with this exercise can be the focus. As control is gained in this pitch region, the exercise can be transposed up. I recommend that it be practiced after initial warm-up - toward the end of the warm-up schedule.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   Achieving the fine tuned control of the balances between variations in breath pressure and glottal resistance while maintaining a free flowing function and ringing tone.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   I typically focus on dynamic control through repertoire work first - making exercises of various phrases as needed. The text is often the
key. Understanding the need to communicate a text in a certain way can help students enormously.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 10-20
Response #22

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?

   No, at the beginning stages of learning to sing, proper support of a legato line is basic. The Messa di voce requires more subtle use of the breath control mechanism. I will however demonstrate and have the young student try it to feel for themselves the difficulty.
   Sometimes I am surprised at the natural ability to approximate it.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?

   Yes, I feel it is essential to begin the use of more flexibility in singing—the ability to add color to phrasing, onset, and cutoffs.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   Nothing too complicated. Middle voice (f3-f4) on an [i] or [a] vowel, one note at a time, and measured over a normal breath for singing a legato line.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   As stated above, more flexibility in coloration, more control of tone onset and cutoff. Also encourages evenness of vibrato and optimal resonance at all dynamics.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are there other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   I also use a “teeny tiny voice” which is pure head voice produced with a minimum of support effort (also called filo di voce)—it feels like it is
supported in the mouth—and this helps the student find a pianissimo dynamic.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 10-20
Response #23

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not?
   
   Sometimes. I find that only more advanced singers "get it" and have enough control of their voices to manage it without frustration and tying themselves up in knots.

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   Some, but not all. By then, they are open to "some things work, some don't" and don't get over-whelmed. Also, at that point they are singing softly with support, rather than just because they can't produce anything other than pip-squeaks.

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.
   
   I don't have them use it in the extremes of the range, due to the possibility of creating tension. Mostly on the more open vowels to get used to feeling of air movement. They must stop short of any new tension. I say, "Don't hold it till you ruin it, only as long as there is a fair amount of relaxation and shimmer." Only at end of warm-up. Never too early, because it's fruitless if cords are cold and inflexible.

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?
   
   Good for consistency of tone through air pressure and consistent vowel sounds. Promotes accurate placement. It is a good way to prove to students that their placement or air is off kilter.

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?
Ease with dynamics results from the culmination of much good line up. It is important that singers work within their own personal forte and piano, knowing that their soft may be someone else's loud and vice-versa. I say "soft doesn't mean the world's softest pianissimo. It's just softer than YOUR personal forte or piano.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 20-30
Response #24

1. Do you use this exercise with your beginning singers (16 - 20 years old)? Why, or why not? **Somewhat, more the crescendo part than the decrescendo.**

2. Do you use this with your more advanced singers (students with more than two years of study)? Why, or why not?
   
   **Yes, more with the advanced singers.**

3. If you use the Messa di voce exercise with your students, please give a short explanation of how you instruct them to practice it e.g. specific pitches, vowels used, duration, when it should be placed in a warm-up schedule, etc.

   **Depending on their level, I usually start with it in the middle register, then top, not usually in the lower. I also combine it with register changes, leaping up an octave and then doing the Messa di voce. I start with emphasis on the addition of breath energy and tone, and as they develop, the subsequent "decrescendo" as well. It is a part of their warm up I like in the second half.**

4. If you use the Messa di voce, what do you consider to be its prime benefits of use?

   **Excellent for breath flow, the eventual dynamic use, establishing the top register without too much muscle in the tone, "floating."**

5. If you do not use the Messa di voce as part of your regular warm-up schedule, are their other methods that you use to focus on dynamic control?

   **I don't like to "teach dynamic control" as dynamics because it is only one form of musical expression, and students often think of it as a volume control more than expressive in intent and style. They also sing "piano" most often by dampening the cords. I am very careful about making sure breath flow and a relaxed throat are established before teaching "piano" singing as a specific goal. What I like about the Messa di voce is using it for intensity of breath**

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energy and flow, etc. and avoiding "piano" and "forte." Often times the student will learn these dynamic" styles before focusing on them.

6. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching voice: 3-10
The Voice Range Profile (or VRP) is a software program developed by Kay Elemetrics. Mr. Martin Spencer used it as a basis for his Longitudinal Voice Study. In the chart above, the x-axis represents intensity (loudness) and the y-axis represents frequency (pitch). Series 1 (top line) represents high intensity pitches and series 2 (bottom line) represents low intensity pitches. In the protocol of this VRP chart; the singer sustains a pitch for three to five seconds starting in his/her middle register in a comfortably loud dynamic. The subject proceeds upwards to
the highest pitch in his/her range. He/she then proceeds downwards by half steps in a comfortably soft dynamic until reaching the bottom of the range. The singer finally proceeds upwards on a comfortably loud dynamic to the starting pitch. The pitch samples for this chart were taken from a professional mezzo-soprano.


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Mattheson, Johann. *Der Volldommene Capellmeister.* Hamburg, 1739.


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