

## Italian Transcriptions & Translations

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions used on this site correspond in the most part to the pronunciation suggested in the *Lo Zingarelli 2002* dictionary, available in both book and CD-Rom. An added source of reference was the Langenscheidts Euro-Set on CD-Rom. Translations were made with the use of both previously named dictionaries and the WordAce Talking Translation Dictionary from Transparent Language and the Oxford Pop-up Italian dictionary for the PC.

**The open and closed -e and -o.** There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the pronunciation of the open and closed pronunciation of the Italian -e and -o in singing. Some linguists insist that the singer use the open pronunciation only in the stressed syllable while others make adjustments for the singing voice opening vowels throughout the word to accommodate the vocal line. Nico Castel in his libretto transcriptions has chosen the latter approach. In essence, I agree with his assessment. It is a rare Italian singer that will sing the majority of the Italian vowels with the closed pronunciation as indicated by most dictionaries. However, although the premise used by Mr. Castel is a valid one, it is based upon his personal observations and understanding of the singing voice and it therefore subjective. The necessity of singing a vowel more open in a high tessitura is inevitably dependant upon an individual's technique and size and weight of voice. Also, differences in native language and even regional dialects will make basic vowel color differ for each singer. For example, the open [ɛ] of an American singer differs greatly from that of a native Italian speaker.

It has been my experience that allowing the American singer to use the open pronunciation where the closed pronunciation is correct in speech will often lead to vocal spreading. The American [ɛ] is simply too open for the Italian language. What Mr. Castel suggests for the sake of "vocalic harmonization" is often lost due to the personal accent of the singer. For this reason, I use the standard dictionary pronunciation for Italian and allow the singer to adjust the pronunciation as necessary to accommodate his or her technique. Each word has been checked against the *Zingarelli* and where two pronunciations are suggested, the most common pronunciation has been used.

### Variants from standard pronunciation.

**The open [ɛ] and [ɔ] in the unstressed syllable.** Although not found in dictionaries, the open [ɛ] and [ɔ] do occur in the unstressed syllable in Italian. The -e takes the open pronunciation [ɛ] in all unstressed syllables preceding the stressed syllable when followed by a consonant in the word *Merlin* plus another consonant.

entrare	[ɛn.'tra:.re]	(to enter)	gentile	[dʒɛn.'ti:.le]	(gentle)
perché	[pɛr.'ke]	(why, for)	mercé	[mɛr.'tʃe]	(goods)

The -o takes the open pronunciation [ɔ] in all unstressed syllables preceding the stressed syllable when followed by -r plus another consonant.

dormire	[dɔr.'mi:.re]	(to sleep)	formaggio	[fɔr.'mad.dʒo]	(cheese)
tornare	[tɔr.'na:.re]	(to turn)	sorbetto	[sɔr.'bet.to]	(sherbet)

These are the only two conditions under which the open vowels will be found in the unstressed position in Italian.

**-n Assimilation.** Even though it is my intention to remain with the standard, dictionary pronunciation, there are other areas in which I will deviate from *Zingarelli*. As noted by Mr. Castel, *Zingarelli* does not give the *-n* assimilation found in proper speech and song. The rule I will follow is that the *-n* will take on the sound [ŋ] when preceding a [k] or [g] as in the single word *ancora* [aŋˈkoːra] or in consecutive words such as *in core* [iŋˈkoːre].

**Special Consonant Doublings.** The Italian consonant combinations *-gn*, *-gl*, and the *-sc* when preceding an *-i* or *-e* will always be doubled. Examples: *ogni* [ˈɔŋ.ni], *giglio* [ˈdʒi.ʎo], *lasciare* [laʃ.ˈʃaː.re], or *conoscere* [ko.ˈnoʃ.ʃe.re]. When initial after a word ending in a vowel, the combinations will be doubled. *di gnocchi* [di ˈɲɔ.ki], *burla gli* [ˈbur.la ʎi], *la scena* [la ˈʃʃeː.na]. The single Italian *-z* is always doubled as in the double *-zz*. *terzetto* [tert.ˈtʃet.to], *Suzuki* [sud.ˈdzuː.ki].

**Phrasal Doublings.** In the Italian language, some words ending in a vowel will cause the initial consonant of the following word to be doubled. The words that cause the doublings are either monosyllabic such as *a*, *e*, *che*, or *oh* (but **not** articles or pronouns), polysyllabic words ending in a stressed vowel (*perchè* and *ahimì*), and certain two-syllable words (*come*, *contra*, *dove*, *ove*, *qualche*, *sopra*, and *sovra*).

The use of phrasal doublings can be substantiated in the spelling of those words that have come into common usage.

<i>cosiffatto</i>	from	<i>così fatto</i>	<i>ebbene</i>	from	<i>e bene</i>
<i>giammai</i>	from	<i>già mai</i>	<i>davvero</i>	from	<i>da vero</i>

The use of the phrasal doublings, while not in doubt, is difficult to justify in all situations. Many singers reserve its usage for dramatic instances only as in Tosca's cry *a me, a me* [a mme a mme]. Phrasal doublings will be used sparingly in these texts. The singer is encouraged to apply the concept with discretion to reinforce the dramatic declamation.

Some possible doublings are:

<i>dove sono</i>	[ˈdoːve ssoː.no].	<i>ove son</i>	[ˈoːve sson]
<i>da me</i>	[da mme]	<i>so tutto</i>	[so ˈtut.to]

**Word elision.** The final vowel of an Italian word will often be dropped before a word beginning with an initial vowel and, in some instances, replaced with an apostrophe. This linking is called *elision* and is done to make a smooth transition from one word to the next. The vowel pronunciation and stressing remain the same.

<i>sarà al buono</i>	<i>becomes</i>	<i>sar'al buono</i>	<i>(it will be good)</i>
<i>la amorosa</i>	<i>becomes</i>	<i>l'amorosa</i>	<i>(the beloved)</i>
<i>quelle aria</i>	<i>becomes</i>	<i>quell'aria</i>	<i>(this air)</i>
<i>tutto è silenzio</i>	<i>becomes</i>	<i>tutt'è silenzio</i>	<i>(all is quiet)</i>
<i>dove è mia amata</i>	<i>becomes</i>	<i>dov'è mi'amata</i>	<i>(where is my beloved)</i>

When the final vowel has not been removed by the composer or the poet and an elision is indicated, I will use the following IPA notation:

sarà al buono	quelle aria
[sa. 'ral 'bwɔ:.no]	['kwel. 'la:.rja]
tutto è silenzio	dove è mia amata
['tut. tɛ si.'lɛn.tsjo]	[do:. 'ɛ mi: a.'ma:.ta]

**Spoken vs. Sung -s.** The main pronunciation difference in spoken and sung Italian is the pronunciation of the -s when found between two vowels. In many cases the sibilant [s] is recommended including the common words *così, cosa, and casa* and the word endings *-oso* and *-ese*.

original	<i>Rugiadose, odorose violette graziose,</i>
spoken	[ru.dʒa.'do:.se o.do.'ro:.se vi.o.'let.te gra.tsi.'o:.se]
sung	[ru.dʒa.'do:.ze o.do.'ro:.ze vi.o.'let.te gra.tsi.'o:.ze]

In sung Italian the use of the voiced [z] is standard and recommend.

**Difficult words.** Italian has numerous words that are consistently pronounced incorrectly by beginning singers. There is a mistaken concept that the Italian language is easy to pronounce. In truth, the language is full of exceptions and although, being a phonetic language, it is relatively easy to read at sight, the proper vowel color is often missed. Special attention should be given to the following words.

[e]			[ɛ]		
venti	['ven.ti]	( <i>twenty</i> )	venti	['vɛn.ti]	( <i>winds</i> )
mesto	['me.sto]	( <i>I stir</i> )	mesto	['mɛ.sto]	( <i>sad</i> )
dette	['det.te]	( <i>said</i> )	dette	['dɛt.te]	( <i>he gave</i> )
affetto	[af.'fet.to]	( <i>I slice</i> )	affetto	[af.'fɛt.to]	( <i>affection</i> )
pera	['pe:.ra]	( <i>pear</i> )	pera	['pɛ:.ra]	( <i>may perish</i> )
[o]			[ɔ]		
botte	['bot.te]	( <i>barrel</i> )	botte	['bɔt.te]	( <i>blows</i> )
voto	['vo:.to]	( <i>vow</i> )	voto	['vɔ:.to]	( <i>empty</i> )
colto	['kol.to]	( <i>learned</i> )	colto	['kɔl.to]	( <i>picked</i> )
Tosco	['to.ska]	( <i>Tuscan</i> )	tosco	['tɔ.sko]	( <i>poison</i> )
torro	['tor.ro]	( <i>tower</i> )	torro	['tɔr.ro]	( <i>to take away</i> )
torta	['tor.ta]	( <i>cake</i> )	torta	['tɔr.ta]	( <i>crooked</i> )
Normal closed final pronunciation			Open pronunciation		
e	[e]	( <i>and</i> ) <b>but</b>	è	[ɛ]	( <i>it is</i> )
te	[te]	( <i>you</i> ) <b>but</b>	tè	[tɛ]	( <i>tee</i> )
perché	[per.'ke]	( <i>why</i> )			

-e and -o are generally open when the word stress falls on the anti-penultimate syllable, here are a few exceptions.					
debito	['de:.bi.to]	( <i>debt</i> )	credere	['kre:.de.re]	( <i>to believe</i> )
femmina	['fem.mi.na]	( <i>feminine</i> )	credito	['kre:.di.to]	( <i>credit</i> )
-e and -o are generally open when followed by a single consonant and a glide combination, again some exceptions.					
empio	['em.pjo]	<i>brute</i>	scempio	['ʃem.pjo]	( <i>to believe</i> )
The endings -gione, -sione and -zione always take the closed pronunciation					
religione	[re.li.'dʒo:.ne]	( <i>religion</i> )	ragione	[ra.'dʒo:.ne]	( <i>reason</i> )
ambizione	[am.bi.'tso:.ne]	( <i>ambition</i> )	insolazione	[in.so.la.'tso:.ne]	( <i>sunstroke</i> )
lesione	[le.'zjo:.ne]	( <i>injury</i> )	espressione	[e.spres:.'sjo:.ne]	( <i>expression</i> )
The vowels -e and -o are open when they follow a glide (-i or -u) in the stressed syllable. Exceptions.					
fiore	['fjo:.re]	( <i>flower</i> )	unione	[u.'njo:.ne]	( <i>union</i> )
giorno	['dʒor.no]	( <i>day</i> )			
The vowels -e and -o are open when they are found in the stressed position of a diphthong. Here are two very important exceptions.					
voi	[vo:i]	( <i>you</i> )	noi	[no:i]	( <i>we</i> )
The stressed -e and -o are open in the endings -ero ['ɛ:.ro] and -oro ['o:.ro].					
severo	[se.'vɛ:.ro]	( <i>severe</i> )	mistero	[mi.'stɛ:.ro]	( <i>mystery</i> )
tesoro	[te.'zo:.ro]	( <i>treasure</i> )	oro	['o:.ro]	( <i>gold</i> )
The -e and -o are normally closed when followed by a single consonant. There are many exceptions.					
bene	['bɛ:.ne]	( <i>good</i> )	breve	['brɛ:.ve]	( <i>short</i> )
prego	['pre:.go]	( <i>excuse me</i> )	gelo	['dʒɛ:.lo]	( <i>freeze</i> )
estremo	[e.'strɛ:.mo]	( <i>extreme</i> )	greco	['grɛ:.ko]	( <i>Greek</i> )
stremo	['strɛ:.mo]	( <i>to exhaust</i> )	tema	['tɛ:.ma]	( <i>theme</i> )
Amneris	[am.'nɛ:.ris]		stelo	['stɛ:.lo]	( <i>stalk</i> )
parola	[pa.'ro:.la]	( <i>word</i> )	core	['ko:.re]	( <i>heart</i> )
poco	['po:.ko]	( <i>a little</i> )	cosa	['ko:.za]	( <i>thing</i> )
Stressed -e and -o can be either open or closed when followed by double consonants.					
Open Vowels			Closed Vowels		
notte	['nɔt.te]	( <i>night</i> )	sotto	['sɔt.to]	( <i>underneath</i> )
colla	['kɔl.la]	( <i>glue</i> )	colla	['kɔl.la]	( <i>of the</i> )
mosso	['mɔs.so]	( <i>move</i> )	rosso	['ros.so]	( <i>red</i> )
ecco	['ɛk.ko]	( <i>here is</i> )	secco	['sek.ko]	( <i>dry</i> )
campanella	[kam.pa.'nɛl.la]	( <i>bell</i> )	nella	['nɛl.la]	( <i>in the</i> )
			della	['dɛl.la]	( <i>of the</i> )
			quella	['kwɛl.la]	( <i>that</i> )
			stelle	['stɛl.le]	( <i>stars</i> )
The stressed -e is closed in the following nine word endings: -egno, -esco, -esti, -evole, -emmo, -essa, -etta, -ezza, and -mente. This is a very reliable rule with few exceptions. Watch out for variable vowel endings.					
disdegno	[diz.'dɛj:.no]	( <i>disdain</i> )	contessa	[kon.'tes.sa]	( <i>countess</i> )
fresco	['fres.ko]	( <i>cool</i> )	aurette	[a:u.'ret.te]	( <i>breeze</i> )
credeste	[kre.'de.stɛ]	( <i>to believe</i> )	allegrezza	[al.le.'grɛt.tsa]	( <i>happiness</i> )
notevole	[no.'te.vo.le]	( <i>notable</i> )	elemento	[e.le.'mɛn.to]	( <i>element</i> )
faremmo	[fa.'rɛm.mo]	( <i>to do</i> )			

The stressed <i>-e</i> and <i>-o</i> are generally open when followed by two or more consonants. Some exceptions.					
dentro	['den.tro]	(inside)	questo	['kwe.sto]	(that)
fermo	['fer.mo]	(firm)	mentre	['men.tre]	(while)
egli	['eʎ.ʎi]	(he)	trenta	['tren.ta]	(thirty)
giorno	['dʒor.no]	(day)	forma	['for.ma]	(form)
forse	['for.se]	(perhaps)	moglie	['moʎ.ʎe]	(wife)

(© from *Lyric Diction for Singers, Vol. I* by Bard Suverkrop – IPASource, LLC)