

The origin of Phoniatics in Padua: interview to Mario Rossi

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Introduction

Mario Rossi was born in Crognaleto in 1938, since from young age he developed a great interest in singing and singing voice.

He attended Liceo Classico "Melchiorre Delfico" in Teramo.

He graduated in medicine in 1965 with a thesis on "Medical Problems of Singing" at Padova University and specialized in Otolaryngology in 1967.

For many years he worked at the ENT Dept. of Padua University Hospital, moreover he has participated in the realization and management of regional health care in phoniatics and logopedics.

He carried out a close collaboration with Phoniatics Turin School with Oskar Schindler to whom he was also bound by a fraternal friendship.

Since 2008 he held several courses at the University of Padua and he was the director of Masters in music therapy.

Currently he is contract Professor in Phoniatics disciplines at the music academy "Conservatorio Statale di Musica C. Pollini" in Padua.

He is founding member of U.E.P (Union of the European Phoniaticians), member of I.A.L.P (International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatics) and honorary member of S.I.F.E.L ("Società Italiana di Foniatria e Logopedia").

How did Phoniatics initially develop in Padua?

Prof. Michele Arslan, since the 1940s, had realized that it was necessary to create in Padua a service of Otorhinolaryngology – Phoniatics in collaboration with the Institute of Glottology of the Faculty of Humanities, then directed by Prof. Tagliavini (Carlo Taglia-

vini, Bologna 18 June 1903 – Bologna 31 May 1982, internationally renowned glottologist).

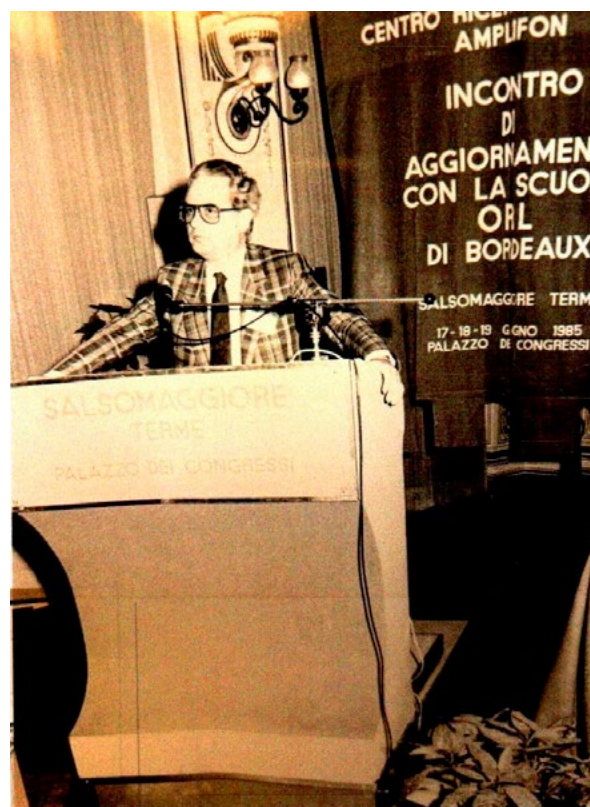


Figure 1 "Incontro di aggiornamento con la Scuola O.R.L. di Bordeaux". 17-19 June 1987, Salsomaggiore (Parma).

Prof. Arslan requested information through an exchange of letters, copies of which we keep, from Dr. Giuseppe Bellussi, at the time assistant to Prof. Malan, director of the ENT Clinic of the University of Turin and collaborator of Prof. Renato Segre, (who was present until he was forced to emigrate to Buenos Aires due to the well-known racial laws), on how the above-mentioned service could be orga-

nized, since in Turin a service called "Oto-logopedia" had been established already in the 1930s.

What happened in Padua? And when?

The year was 1943, on the initiative of Prof. Arslan, the Phonetics Laboratory of the University of Padua ("Laboratorio di Fonetica dell'Università di Padova") was established, with a deliberative act by the Academic Authorities which provided for the equal collaboration between Otorhinolaryngology and Glottology in the person of Prof. Michele Arslan and Prof. Carlo Tagliavini (see Proceedings of the Phonetics Laboratory of the University of Padua, vol. I), Figure 2-3.

What was the main difference between Turin and Padua?

In Turin, the first development of phoniatrics took place exclusively in the ENT Clinic; subsequently, by the work of a personality of high cultural and scientific profile such as Oscar Schindler, my fraternal friend as well as my colleague, wide and deep collaborations were realized with other medical-biological and linguistic disciplines, with important developments also in the field of speech therapy.

Since its inception in Padua, the competences of otorhinolaryngology, not yet defined as phoniatric, were combined with those of glottology, with collaborations that provided biological and physiological contributions on the one hand and linguistic contributions on the other. They began to study experimental phonetics also through palatograms to investigate the points of articulation of the tongue inside the mouth during pronunciation, and from the other they began to study the alterations of the voice and the word also on a linguistic basis.

Did you mention Tagliavini... was there an evolution of that group and of glottology?

There was and still exists in Padua, as is well known, a Centre of Experimental Phonetics of the CNR, with a high scientific profile, which was initially housed at the "Casa di cura Trieste" directed by Prof. Croatto and which, later, always had its own site, obviously connected with the Department of Linguistics of the University for research and study activities. I remember only a few names of the many re-

searchers who worked in this facility and with whom I had the opportunity to collaborate such as Dr. Emanuela Magno Caldognetto, Dr. Franco Ferrero, Dr. Claudio Smarich and others.

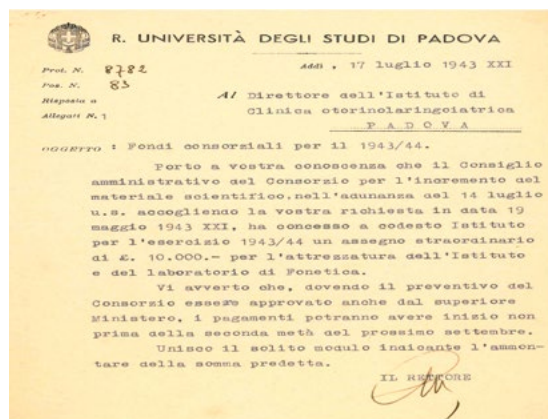


Figure 2. Official act of funds allocation for the Phonetics Laboratory of the University of Padua, 1943.

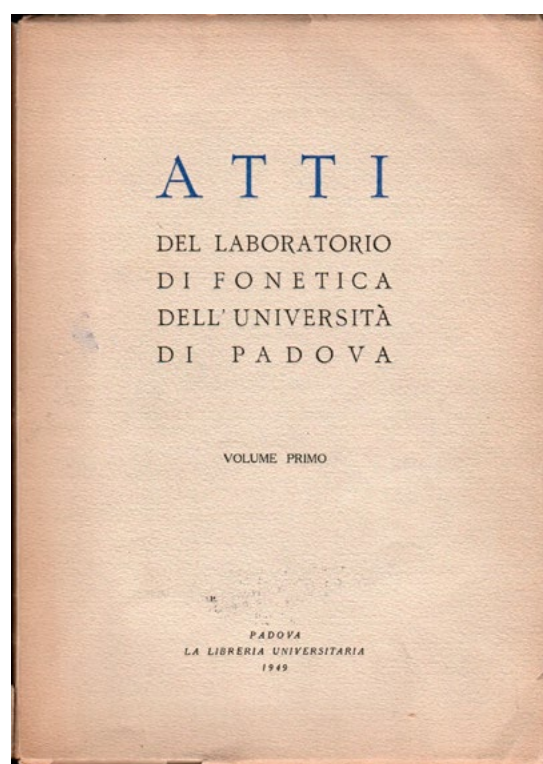


Figure 3 "Proceedings of the Phonetics Laboratory" of the University of Padua, vol. I, 1949.

It should be noted that the contributions of experimental phonetics guaranteed by the Centre first to the School for Speech and

Language Therapy Technicians and then to the bachelor's degree in Speech and Language Therapy have allowed the graduates in Speech and Language Therapy of Padua to acquire an indispensable and qualified competence in the field of linguistic and experimental phonetics such as to be the envy of all other Italian schools.

But how was the Phonetics Laboratory of the University of Padua structured?

It was located inside the ENT Clinic, initially in the Giustiniano complex and later in the Policlinico complex, close to the ENT clinic. It was equipped with its own instrumentation and clinical staff. There is ample documentation including photographs of the structure as well as articles related to scientific research carried out with contributions from foreign scholars (Figure 4a-4b-4c). Everything is available at the "Proceedings of the Phonetics Laboratory" of the University of Padua, vol. I - II - III, published by the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery and the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, respectively in 1949, 1952 and 1959.

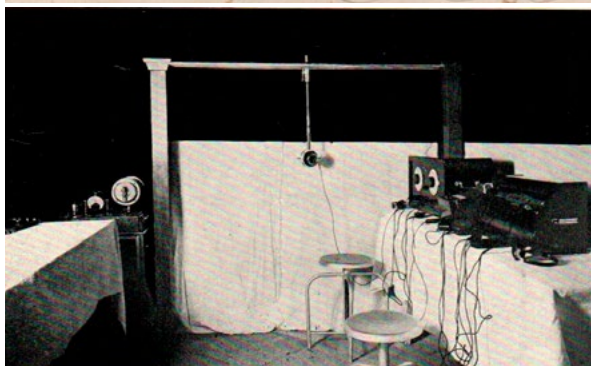


Figure 4a-b. Pictures from the Phonetics Laboratory of the University of Padua. (Proceedings of the Phonetics Laboratory" of the University of Padua, vol. I, 1949).



Figure 4c. Speech therapy with hearing amplification in the Phonetics Laboratory of the University of Padua (Proceedings of the Phonetics Laboratory" of the University of Padua, vol. I, 1949).

What were the relationships with the "Pia Fondazione Elena Vendramin Calergi Valmarana" in Noventa Padovana?

Prof. Arslan guaranteed to this structure a specialist audiological-phoniatric consultation for the children admitted who were suffering from severe deafness, through his assistants who worked at the Phonetics Laboratory (first Prof. Gino Baldan and later me).

Moreover Prof. Arslan used to hold there the last lesson of ENT course to the students of the IV medical course dealing with Deaf-Mutism, obviously because of the knowledge of the time; on that occasion he gave each student the sign of attendance and the Foundation provided a sandwich and a drink to each student. This praiseworthy initiative allowed those graduating from Padua to know that there was not only a health problem but also an educational and social problem in relation to deaf-mutism.

It is useful to remember that in Padua there were two important institutions for the education of the deaf: the Valmarana Foundation managed by the Canossian Sisters with an oral orientation, and the Magarotto Institution with a gestural orientation. I had to take care of both institutions since I managed the "Centro otologopatici" initially established in Padua and later transferred to ULSS n. 21 of the time, often with serious personal difficulties due to pedagogical-educational positions of ideological type by some educators!

How did you get into the ENT clinic of Padova?

I was at the end of my 3rd year of Medicine, in 1960's, I already knew that there was a

structure at the Clinic dealing with voice, also singing voice and speech. This aroused some interest in me because in my hometown, Teramo, at the time of high school, I studied music and singing and I had many friends musicians and singers, I was also part of the G. Verdi Choir as a tenor, with which I had participated in International Choral Singing Competitions in Arezzo.

On my return home my father, who had graduated in Padua in 1929 with a thesis on audiological topics, elaborated at the ENT clinic directed by Yervan Arslan and who also knew Prof. Michele Arslan very well, told me *"go and say hello to my old friend Kajel. . . I'll write you two lines, bring them to him"*. I presented the letter to the Professor, and he said *"Ohh my friend!"* and he didn't give me any chance to say anything, he said *"you're here tomorrow at 9am, what do you care about?"* I told him what my interests were. The following morning he introduced me to the "elderly physicians" Oscar Sala, Vincenzo Ricci and Gino Baldan. *"this is the son of an old friend of mine who graduated here"*, he already assumed that I was his assistant. . .

So, I began to attend the Clinic, in particular the Phonetics Laboratory with Dr. Baldan. In the same structure in addition to some young speech therapists was present Mrs. Jone Palma Bagagiolo, pianist, who dealt with the rehabilitation of laryngectomized and privately in her home gave singing lessons, there the one who would later become my wife initially studied singing and, later, obtained the Diploma in Singing at the Conservatory "C. Pollini" becoming then Teacher of Music Education in the Middle School.

I remember that at the Faculty of Humanities at the time there was a teaching of the History of Music entrusted to Prof. Raffaele Cumar who came from the Venice Conservatory and the Fondazione Cini. Volunteer assistant was dr. Franco Piva who was in charge of forming a small choir group, I joined right away, and I also brought friends with whom we used to sing through the streets of Padua, not only mountain songs. So, we began to study polyphonic pieces of Scuola Veneta, performed some concerts and also participated in the inauguration of an academic year in Bressanone where summer courses were held.

At the same time, I had the opportunity to meet Bruno Pasut, then "Maestro di Cappella al Santo" as well as teacher and director of Conservatory, a great connoisseur of the vocal musical tradition of the Venetian school of the '500 and '600.

With the contribution of other singers in total 4 female and 4 male voices (the first soprano became my wife), we formally formed the "Ottetto Polifonico Patavino" (Figure 5), under the direction of Maestro Pasut, with whom we performed for about 20 years an intense concert activity in Italy and abroad. The debut took place on 30 January 1964 in the hall of the Diocese of Padua, Prof. Arslan was at the concert and after the event he wanted to offer us a drink at Pedrocchi Cafè!



Figure 5 "Ottetto Polifonico Patavino"

Going back to your thesis...

When the time came to establish the topic of my degree thesis, Prof. Arslan told me: *"Hey dear, since you sing you have to do a thesis on singing"* also giving me the title: "Medical Problems of Singing" and he told me that he would introduce me to Prof. Gino Sacerdoti Director of the Electroacoustic Department of the "Galileo Ferraris" of Turin, the only place in Italy with equipment for spectrographic and electroacoustic research. After long and arduous peregrinations, I completed a thesis on the Vibrato of the singing voice, carrying out experimental research under the guidance of Prof. Sacerdoti.

How did the friendship with Oskar Schindler begin?

In Padua in the 1960s, on the initiative of Prof. Lucio Croatto, owner of the "Casa di cura Trieste - Centro Medico Chirurgico di Foniatría", every 19 March it was held a scientific meeting of the Triveneta Association be-

tween Phoniatriicians and speech therapists, to which I joined even before graduation, as speech therapist.

Oskar Schindler was present at one of these events at the request of its Director Prof. Fausto Brunetti and in agreement with Prof. Croatto.

From that moment there was an intense collaboration between Padua, in the person of Prof. Baldan and me, and Turin in the person of Oskar Schindler.

The relationship between Oscar and me was not only between colleagues in different places, but also united us a deep sense of fraternal friendship, mutual esteem and a strong and substantial sharing of cultural aspects related to Phoniatriics to be understood as Physiopathology of Human Communication and Speech Therapy. In this regard we took part together in a congress in Belgrade in 1972 where we laid the foundations for the establishment of the European Union of Phoniatriicians (UEP). In 1973 a French-language document on the state of speech therapy in Europe was drawn up and approved by the European Phoniatriicians in Mainz. The informative reports were edited by Tibor Frint, a Hungarian, who investigated with an appropriate questionnaire the countries of Eastern Europe, and by the undersigned who investigated the countries of Western Europe. It was a basic document which allowed the various Italian and European Schools to unify the nosological catalog of speech therapy, and which later also contributed to the catalog of phoniatriics.

I remember with great pleasure the exchanges I had with Oscar: I invited him to give some lectures as part of the Master of Music Therapy I directed, realized by the Medical Faculty of Padua in collaboration with the Conservatory "C. Pollini" of Padua, and I was invited by him to give some lessons as part of the graduate course of logopedics in Turin.

A great innovation for the rehabilitation of the severely/deaf has been the introduction of Cochlear Implants. . . how do they arrive in Italy and which is the first group to make Cochlear Implants in Italy?

With the patronage of the American 3M in Italy in the 1980s, the "Italian Cochlear Implants Group" was set up, which included Gregorio Babighian in Trento, Carlo Zini and

Mario Sanna in Parma, Antonio Mazzoni in Bergamo, Antonio Quaranta in Bari, and me as responsible for the rehabilitation to be carried out at the various sites. I refer to the single-channel systems that gave as is known, only "sensation of hearing" particularly on timing.

With the advent of the multichannel cochlear implants, I felt the need to prepare an appropriate linguistic material that would meet the needs of the Italian language. After long and lasting efforts and in collaboration with the linguist Dr. L. Tonelli was possible to publish in 1995 the volume "Linguistic Material for the Education of Auditory Perception" for Omega Edizioni, with a presentation by Oskar Schindler.

Back in the present, what do you do now?

Over the years I have continued to deal with singing voice, I also met notable characters like the tenor Mario del Monaco (Figure 6).

Currently I am contract Professor at the music academy "Consevatorio Statale di Musica C. Pollini" in Padua where from many years there is a course of physiopathology of human communication and phoniatriics. In the academy Phoniatriics assumed also a functional rehabilitation value and activities like music therapy were organized for subjects with communicative disability.



Figure 6. Dedication to Mario Rossi from the tenor Mario del Monaco.