

**A FULL BODY ARTIST – THE OPERA SINGER:
A CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM OF TRAINING, VISION
AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ART OF OPERA**

UDC (784.9+782):371.3

Nikola Matišić

Operalabb, Sweden

Abstract. *Working together with Operalabb in Sweden, we try to develop a stronger pedagogic framework for educating vocal artists in the art of opera and classical singing, one that is better adapted to handling and dealing with the paradigm of vocal culture in our time. We have noticed that basic skill-sets of novice singers are no longer similar to the time when the pedagogic and aesthetic foundations of classical vocal training were built. This paper basically relies on the observation and incorporation of present and past cultures of spoken and sung language as well as physical and artistic frameworks related to the development of linguistic, aesthetic and artistic ideals of young musicians.*

Key words: *pedagogy, vocal and physical culture, opera, classical voice training*

In starting this article, I would like to pose a question to you, the reader: is the opera singer an artist? If so, what does the art consist of, and how has it grown into art?

Basically, this article is a debate on artistic and aesthetic ideals and how the way of developing those ideals is contingent with putting our present aesthetic culture of speech, voice and movement in a historical context. The adaptations we need in order to develop ourselves as artists in the art of opera and musical drama rely on our understanding of the dramatic and musical possibilities for our own creativity and abilities. Colloquially, this form of pedagogy is considered "traditional" or even "reactionary", because the art form and its pedagogic forms are not well adapted to the present day aesthetic paradigm of voice and movement. The reason why I created Operalabb and developed a pedagogic platform for this type of work was that I could not find anywhere a connective between the aesthetics of the modern world and the inherent possibilities in the essential strengths

Received June, 8, 2015 / Accepted September, 13, 2015

Corresponding author: Nikola Matišić

Operalabb, Sweden

E-mail: nikola@operalabb.se

of the raw art of opera – often referred to as "bel canto"- which really goes back to ancient Greek theatre and beyond. The gap between the essential strength of the art form of Opera and the present day aesthetic culture have often released a myriad of psychoanalytic or/and post-structural conceptualization processes in pedagogy and presentation that effectively reduces its core value. This kind of approach brings me close to Antonin Artaud and his "brutal regime" of raw theatrical communication (Artaud, 1958). So be it.

1. A COMMON GROUND FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL PARADIGMS AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES OF TODAY

I agree with Zygmunt Bauman when, in his *Consuming Life* (2007), he argues that we now in the 21st century live in the era of the consumer. According to him, personal relations are no longer worth much without the evidence of transactions. Individuals that do not buy or sell things are redundant. The strong effect of the principles of New Public Management has reached far into the world of art, and of classical music in particular. And even if the more hardcore NPM theory has been discarded in the government-subsidized and regulated areas of education and health, it still holds the business of opera and classical music in its chilling grip.

The business of opera is today more of an industry than ever before, an industry in the sense of brand awareness, production concept, stream-line packaging, predictability and customer focus. The artistic development of the individual and aesthetic refinement of each work is rapidly becoming the sole responsibility of freelance individuals without any sort of long-term financial security. This is all the more true because long-term contracts are almost non-existent today. All these have caused a rift between business and artistry. It is a fragile situation since the individual artists generally are without any community or stable group support for such a resource-demanding and expensive undertaking. It's also a remarkable state of affairs, since the artistic ability and development of the individual artist is the central essence of the operatic art form itself. The side-effects of consumer-industrialization have also caused conductors, composers, coaches, voice trainers and directors to avoid being involved in developing young artists the way they used to.

For you as an audience, there is no other way to communicate with the house or the artists or the art community than buying a ticket. The community of art lover and artist exists purely in the form of a transaction of goods, rather than dialogue or exchange of ideas. The artists have become mere suppliers of role-interpretations. If their ideas, vision or development are at all interesting, it is via their role as celebrities more than their status as artists. Furthermore, there is no longer any critique from the young generation, and the discourse on the art form is mainly focused on celebrity, production and concept. The fact that there are hardly any blogs on the aesthetics of vocal art, classical singing or critique that deals with the art itself is also relevant. Instead we have blogs on the business, the marketing, the concepts, and of course the mechanics of singing (as opposed to the art).

There is another side to our time and culture and that is technology and entertainment. Our technology today has made public speaking and public use of the voice impossible without the use of a microphone, even in smaller gatherings. Mobile phones with microphones close to the mouth allow communication in a completely new way for our

human culture, removing the importance of breath and flow of air through the body while speaking. It is not inconceivable that we soon will have an “always on” mobile phone function. But most of all, our entertainment idols of pop music, television and movies are using more and more synthetic filters that allow the use of a form of speech and song that is void of line, shape and vocal core. Not only does this decrease the longevity of the voice, but also the personality and unique characteristic, well established by earlier singers and actors in history. The “template” voice is the new “normality” of today. This has a strong effect on young people who are eager to copy their idols in all manners and ways. The “authentic” or “natural” vocal sound of TV and movies have affected the theatre, as many theatres have also begun using microphones for their actors. This cultural effect is not restricted to entertainment, though; in churches essentially all church musicians report that they are forced to transpose down church hymns because the keys the songs are written in are today impossible for the congregation to sing in. The same keys that were considered low and comfortable decades ago are now far too high. The use of the voice is also the use of the body. The agility and skill of the voice and the breath is not simply a trait, but a result of cultivation of ideas. When the breath and the voice are no longer culturally developed, the whole sense of vocal and physical culture within the individual becomes limited. Just like a person growing up without ever being allowed to run, stamina and basic core strength are never developed, and they do not become familiar with the sense of moving fast. Even though the vocal instrument has tremendous capabilities, if its use is uncultivated during adolescence, even the simplest of songs will become unsurmountable for the adult person.

2. THE INDIVIDUAL EFFECTS OF OUR CULTURE

As mentioned above, imitating the vocal sounds in modern pop music and media affects the way we think about singing, and the aesthetic and cultural significance of singing for the singer. In the modern media culture of “always on” – so much based on the vast abundance of available media – very little of the existing operatic literature is left to the imagination and creativity of the individual. Human beings are hard-wired for finding patterns, learning music today is more than ever before affected by previous recordings. This imitation instinct causes an immediate effect on the whole body. Instead of a vocal vision or goal based personal vision of the written music, first imagined and then acted upon, we create a vocal framework based on all the previous versions we have heard. This creates an outer paradigm that effectively becomes a feedback loop in our minds as we develop the voice to sound like it “should” or “should not” sound to us. This self-referential feedback loop that essentially becomes automatic effectively stops the body from developing its own characteristic and vocal identity. That is the reason why modern singing risks to be more about having a feeling yourself rather than communicating a feeling to the listener. You want to feel expressive rather than really express something.

This is my point of view, based on personal observation during my artistic and pedagogical work and professional discussions with a wide network of fellow musicians and artists from other fields of music, sports and art. I am inspired by Antonin Artaud, Etienne Decroux and Grotowski and their ideas about the role of the artist as “holy” in terms of conveying something beyond themselves, and the relationship between artist, art

and audience as well as the idea of the body as a vessel for emotional communication. Implicit in this work is a criticism of contemporary academic teaching of the dramatic arts; the basis of the traditional established centers of higher training of music and vocal art (opera) is based on a structural premise that does not exist any longer.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE THE SAME VOCAL AND MUSICAL CULTIVATION TODAY AS WHEN THESE ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS WERE CREATED

Please note that I do NOT say less cultivation; only ... not the same. Visual and abstract skills are remarkable in most young people of today. Instead, young people are more often than before complete novices in terms of speech and breath, something earlier generations could take for granted. My goal with Operalabb is to reawaken the idea of the voice as a raw skill, an expression, a vessel and a remarkable gesture, rather than a trait or a set characteristic of one's personality. The voice is not a sound as much as it is movement. It is a sign that travels invisibly through the air and strikes the listener as a bell with emotional capacity. The aesthetic discussions on the voice, the prosody, the attitude and the line of the voice were once common knowledge in the business of classical singing. In the time of Jean de Reszke, a commentator could write: "His voice was by no means incomparable, but his art was" (Johnstone-Douglas 1989, 104). The aesthetics of the aim was always considered the primary mental goal and not a result of proper vocal position. A student of Giovanni Battista Lamperti describes the vocal aim for the singer as such:

"The 'dark-light' tone should be always present. The weird feeling that the pitch of tone (focus of vibration) commandeers every thing beneath it, comes to the expert singer. The chief thing that prevents this feeling is the muscular 'attack' of tone, from beneath the focus. Hearing in advance yourself singing the tone is the cause of this weird sensation" (Brown 1931, 38).

In reading, studying and observing the aesthetic and artistic ideals of such masters as De Reszke, Tetrzzini, Cotogni, Lauri-Volpi, Lamperti, Kofler and Lehman amongst others – it becomes clear that there is a void to be filled in our contemporary discourse on the operatic art and its development.

4. OUR BASIC PROCESS AND SOME OF THE WORK WE DO

All workshops are based on a physical premise: the body and movement of the body. Very early in the training we establish that movement of the body must be allowed, and not imposed. The idea of movement rules over the template form. The functions and possibilities of the body are made clear through gradual exercises, and the fact that cultivation and trajectory are the basis of communication. After an aesthetic and pedagogic vocabulary is established through working with the body, we transfer the workshop form into the realm of sound, voice and music. It is still, however, the body and the idea of the body, which is the premise of this movement and cultivation. The point is to allow the body to be "prepared" or "ready" for the musical ideas that lead to the movement of the voice. We also encourage participants to consciously focus their minds on articulating an artistic vision. This creates an awareness of having to make an

individual aesthetic effort even outside of the learning environment. The ultimate aim for our pedagogical environment is a removal of a hierarchy of taste and aesthetics, by including instructors as students as well as purposefully including singers of many levels of skill.

That's why the first question we ask the participants during our workshops usually is; what is your vocal vision? This has proven to be a challenging question. The answers most often circle around professional situations, roles or certain types of roles or jobs. Some answers we get also linger around very specific technical development like increasing the range of the voice or general life-goals such as "positive feelings" towards their own vocal work. But the workshops we do are about the voice, the art of singing and the musical expression of drama in an operatic environment. I insist that the singer sees him or herself as an artist. Bruno Walter calls this "the recreative artist" in his book *Of music and music making* (1961). The question of vocal vision we pose is really from one artist to another, no matter what level you are on. Therefore the vision is an artistic one. For many, this is quite a challenge, mainly due to the consumer-oriented way classical music is taught and produced. The student has come to rely on the taste and aesthetic sensibility of someone higher up in hierarchy, an older student, an idol, a teacher or conductor - and does not have a deep foundation of the own self.

5. DARK CORNERS OF ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Today's modern art world is dominated by a focus on conceptuality, intertextuality and normativity or on discussing post-structuralist phenomenology. Of that I am essentially incompetent. The pedagogic arena of musical drama very often delves into psychoanalytic areas. This is unfortunate, since very little artistic development can be attained in that way. The point of the matter is that, as a performer your own ideological method is irrelevant. That's why I call these areas: "the dark corners". Whatever you do that causes an emotional response in the audience is what matters, not what or how you feel. In this matter great help can be found with former artists and pedagogues, not necessarily skilled in the linguistics of theory. A practical example: What is the vocal attitude of the Duke of Mantua as he enters his own chamber in: *Ella mi furapita* and then *Parmi veder le lagrime*? How to portray this psychological transition and character purely through tone, line, and vocal movement? That is a practical type of aesthetic work that cannot be reasoned, it must be "transferred". Psychoanalysis has nothing to do with the line of voice or whether the tone is "sombre" or "bright", and gives very little effect to the development of the singer or the role.

The student must observe the physical and vocal attitude of the teacher and then through this silent transfer, begin cultivating his own vision for his own instrument. We constantly work with the operatic environment in mind. This doesn't mean that we discard modern pop song or televised acting as altogether rubbish, just because of the vast differences in aesthetic needs and requirements. By understanding the dramatic environment and its possibilities, we simply develop a much clearer detail and vocabulary of listening. The audience, the theatre stage, the orchestra, the music - it is always present in the complete vision. Can you really sing *Winterstürme* with the aesthetic vocal ideal of Justin Bieber? I am sure it is possible. But what does the aesthetics of such singing

communicate to the listener? How would your body move while singing in that way? Look at the shaking body of Johnny Depp in the movie version of *Sweeney Todd*. Merely his physical discomfort and obvious inhibition of voice signals a completely different character from that envisioned in the music. What emotional impact would Radames make if he sang *Celeste Aida* with the aesthetic ideal of Kanye West?

The question is double-edged, because to some listeners that would be thrilling as a curious thing for the collection. Many modern theatre creators love the deconstruction of every concept, and direct their operatic production like a commentary of and discussion about the art instead of a direct communication. And that has to do with the customer-based business. Instead of having a relation to the art form, many people just sample, visit and attend different types of venues, in order to "know" what it is about and then move on. To the lover of opera, who develops a relationship with an aesthetic expression, following Kanye the imaginary opera singer through his career and listening to his *Don Carlo* and then go to his recital of Debussy and Ravel songs could prove challenging, in my humble opinion. Not because I believe classical music should sound in a certain way, but because Kanye West would not be able to last vocally and because he would be severely limited in expression and communication.

6. THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FIELD

Singing classically is merely a term used for those who are able to sing that particular music. It is not the sound that is chosen, it is the music that sets its demands. This music carries very clear aesthetic possibilities. Nobody would decide to run a marathon in high heels and expect to win. The same is true for more subject-related choices, like attempting to perform an opera like *Eugene Onegin* as if it were a heavy Puccini opera, without the inherent French lyricism of line and seamless flow of melody between orchestra and soloist. Not only would this alter the dramaturgic significance of the story and the characters, but it would also heavily affect the demand and requirements for the singers.

In a workshop environment the concrete parameters of this aesthetic work begins by discussing different singers and together with an instructor addressing their attitude, their choice of attack, core, elasticity, sense of line and language as well as coherence with the orchestral music. Questions of the following kind will be addressed:

- What is the emotional context of the orchestral embrace around the vocal line?
- How is the soloist juxtaposing his voice against that?
- How does that fit together with the character or the idea of the character?

For example: is Don Giovanni a gentleman renaissance intellectual with a self-destructive complex suffering from desperate need of closeness or is he a sadistic model-like hipster thug with no morals?

All the answers should be translatable through voice. How can we convey that through the use of casting, prosody, tone, attack, line or agility of the vocal trajectory? What is the intended vocal line and what is an accident? Cultural awareness of this form of listening results in the growth of musical and vocal ideals. These ideas and visions must be tempered with the understanding of the singers' own instrument, body and range of development.

David Björling used an exemplary attitude when teaching his three sons, one of whom grew into one of the greatest opera singers of the 20th century (Liljas 2007). Today, this method would be called the "Suzuki method", and it consists of the cultivation of a "silent" relationship between teacher and student, where imitation and practical work allows the student to learn gradually and practically about art, music and musical skills with a focus on cultivating ideals rather than mind processing and theory. It is the teachers' goal to slowly increase the demands and never allow the student to fall into the rational gap of "failure". I usually say: you don't learn through mistakes, but through success. This requires the teacher to be, above everything else, trained in listening, observation, communication and development – and, last but not least, knowledgeable in vocal theory and in possession of artistic skill.

The main point in learning a complex skill is that it is a process that requires a certain degree of "forgiveness of the body" because the direct processes in the brain or body awareness is in many ways inaccessible to the conscious mind. Rather, the body must learn to react to an idea, a vision and an image of what one wishes to achieve instead of a mechanical position. The skill of singing is an "indirect" skill in that respect (Andersson, Östman & Öhman 2013).

Much has been said of and even more written about the different mechanical and technical aspects of singing, with Richard Miller and Johan Sundberg being some key individuals in this field. They have played a great role in observing the vocal process, vocal health and the instrument, but not really had much effect in the field of artistry and skill. In many ways the mechanical idea of the instrument can act as an inhibitor to the learning process. There really is no substitute for the master-student relationship (Pilotti 2009).

7. SO, WHAT THE HECK IS THIS VISION?

To make a long story short: *there are three sets of basic cultivations that need to take place – that of the soil, the goal and the process.* All of this encompasses the artistic vision of the musician. During this training, the teacher must assess the students' point of origin (what he or she knows and what their tendencies are) and predict an optimal development trajectory and slowly introduce exercises that would promote this trajectory.

Let's first talk about cultivation. As I wrote earlier, the voice is about movement. The question is: movement of what? Well, the body, actually. The body moves, and as a result, the voice starts making sounds. The voice is a product of physical movement, just like clapping is the result of slamming your hands together many times in a row. The vocal instrument is primarily a portal for the lungs, protecting them with the fastest reacting muscle (Hoh 2005) in the body from particles and fluids entering the trachea. So far, so good ... but then we start talking about aesthetics! What happens to the body when it becomes cultured, refined or simply used to certain things like high heels or constant training? The walk of an athlete is different from that of a couch-potato; that much is evident, but is it really on purpose? Something happens to the body when it becomes cultivated. The 100m sprinter doesn't move her arms that high while running because of style, but out of necessity. They are acting within the kinetic parameter of what is needed to get where they are aiming, and this has a spill-over effect on the aesthetic of their physical culture, when not running. The sprinter's aim is to get as fast as possible during

competition, faster than anyone else, to the finish line. Their training and preparation is centered on this idea. The passive dynamic is also true, what they do when “not training” affects their training. In singing, the goal is not to sing faster or louder than anyone else in a short burst of time, but to be as cultured as possible and through the medium of the voice cause emotional response to the listener. Part of this goal consists of being completely in tune, develop a speech that is dynamic and melodic, and have complete flow with the written music, the orchestra, as well as your own body. Instead of one very quick goal, the opera singer must aim for innumerable challenging goals over a very long period of time. Very much like a ballet-dancer, but the principle of aesthetics based on kinetics for the sprinter and the opera singer are the same; they are not there as addition to the singing, they are the point of singing – just like running fast is the point of the 100m sprint.

8. LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

For the classical singer, the development of the “soil” of the voice is a cultivation of the body and the understanding of the instrument itself and the use of language as a tool. It is from this soil that the amalgam voice will be expressed, or “grown”. The voice is not the body, it is not a physical thing, it happens in the body and because of the body, but it isn’t “the body”. In fact, the voice is merely the link between the body of the singer and the body of the listener. The cultivation of the body first requires the teacher to assess the origin of the student. What linguistic foundation does the student have? What corporeal foundation? What type of flow or physical trajectory is natural for the individual? How well does the body allow flow? How does the singer understand the impact of action? A clear understanding of observing aesthetics often does not coincide with the ability or understanding of developing aesthetic ability. In other words: some understand but cannot observe. The skill of observation or doing is not the same as theorizing. Therefore, learning how to learn is often a major issue that must not be skipped. In Operalabb, I develop physically simple tasks like the shaking of hands while walking in a circle or making the sound “pr” while walking to and sitting down into a chair to assess these issues, and gradually build physical skills that are observable to a group, before I enter into the abstract area of vocal learning – using the same pedagogic language. These simple exercises are also great for observing the level of physical cultivation in the singers.

Attitude is also a major factor. A person that is easily aggressive or euphoric differs very much in learning from a lethargic or distant individual in terms of physical cultivation. This will be a major factor for the student of singing all through his or her process.

9. LANGUAGE AS BASELINE AND TOOL

Different languages and dialects cause different sets of vocal habits and skills. Just as different physical lifestyles cause different sets of kinesthetic habits and skills. Richard Miller writes extensively about different national schools of singing, primarily in his updated book *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (1997).

I am well aware of this thinking even though national singing ideas are fast becoming diluted. But I have a slightly different focus. Instead I refer to language from the general idea of a baseline aesthetic or "soil" of the singer. Different linguistic cultures use and maintain different ideals. It's just like training wrestling or sitting down in front of a computer all day, speaking also uses or misuses the culture of movement. If a runner flaps their arms and head around, it says something about the basic training required of them before they should or even could compete. The same is accurate for singers and the use of language and body. The intuitive understanding of vocal line, unity and trajectory is of vital importance for the vocal and physical cultivation of a singer. If you do not have a baseline linguistic cultivation, your vocal development will be severely affected.

I will use the example of the Swedish language: only fifty years ago, the Swedish language was very different from what it is now. As spoken by media personalities, actors, public speakers and officials, it was performed in a melodic prosody of a mixture between the German emphasis on "brave" syllables starting on supported consonants, and the unhindered Italianate flow of line that carries little embroidery. The vocal line of spoken Swedish was very unified in tonal identity and color all through the register, and required the ability to mix effortlessly between chest and head voice even in spoken Swedish. It basically sounded a bit like "song". This was always done without losing the vocal core, or "identity". Vocal core is the central audible quality of the voice which becomes the singer's formant when used in classical song that new born babies use naturally. Using the voice with constant vocal identity could be called "sul appoggio" in Italian, and implies a fully tempered contact between breath and the vocal mechanism.

Today, the cultural use of this vocal core or unified vocal identity in spoken Swedish is lost. Instead, the Swedish language now uses a form of shortened phrasing starting in vocal fry and ending up in *voce finta*, or reversed. In simple terms, it means that the voice starts from a "digging" or rasping sound and ends up in a whisper or unsupported half-voice. Individuals speaking in the older aesthetic form sound very mannered and artificial in the modern Swedish culture. The spoken Swedish today consists of broken phrasing, interrupted sentences, and a tonal quality that never effectively stabilizes in any unified vocal identity of the speaker. For many people of younger generations, their whole speech culture is made up either "*voce finta*" (unsupported half voice without vocal core) or vocal fry (where the vocal chords do not fluctuate freely and a more rasping or squeaking sound occurs). The melodic and individual quality of the spoken culture has disappeared. Naturally, this type of cultivation renders a traditional approach of teaching voice very difficult, since the nature of speech is the foundation of singing. Not only does this hinder a more traditional development of the musicality, but the use of breath in song is also severely compromised cultivating a restriction of the use of breath and speech. In dramatic art this is especially problematic, and it is underlined by new research that implies that we feel as if we violate ourselves if we stray too far away in behavior from forms of expression that we feel connected to (Gino F, Kouchaki M, Galinsky A. D. 2015).

Experienced critics and opera experts repeatedly claim that the average vocal ability of even an amateur singer of many decades ago was on par with what is considered professional level today. This is of course anecdotal, but as experts go, this makes it a valid reference point for further observation.

That's why the teacher must initially introduce the art of speech and listening as a foundation for the art form and not as an extra-curricular subject, tacked on at the end.

Since musical drama, such as opera, is an "original" art form, just like dance or martial combat, it is heavily dependent on automated functions of the body. A fundamental development of the artistry happens indirectly since much of the vocal process is unavailable to the conscious mind. Danish vocal scientist Mette Fogh Pedersen stated in a conversation with me that: "The voice is founded in behavior", a statement that reminds me of Antonio Damasio theories on consciousness and emotion that states that language stems out of the emotional experience of awareness (Damasio 2000).

Indeed, I suggest that one of the main problems for young singers today is the backwards pedagogic situation of starting with complex vocal training on vocal mechanics and quickly graduating to difficult repertoire – easy to do with most healthy young voices, when damage done is rarely obvious. And then, only after years of training in this nonconstructive and debilitating manner, they start training the deep complexity of languages and listening in a proper and cultivated way according to the poetic and melodic nature of each individual language.

The idea of "original" art form came to me from the statement of Sir Charles Darwin that musical drama must have been the first method of communication for mankind. Before language, there can only have been sounds, melody and descriptive or unconscious gestures. The other part of "original" is that this art form is something that comes from a human urge or a natural human behavior that essentially all human beings do, more or less. Babies use their voice in a fashion that is the basis of musical drama. This is also the key to developing the idea of the voice for the novice singer: Homeostasis.

10. ON HOMEOSTATIC SOUNDS OF THE BODY

Homeostasis is the equilibrium of the body. All living organisms function according to this principle, including single-cell organisms. When the body senses a change occurring in outer or inner corporeal values, pressures or hormones, the body reacts in order to establish equilibrium again. In many instances, the human body reacts indirectly with vocal sounds. Pain, fear, pleasure, surprise, joy; there are many forms of vocal sounds that are automatic in connection to the change in homeostasis – and thus involuntary. The sole purpose of this function must be an extension of the synaptic communication inside the body, so that other individuals can respond to the change in Homeostasis. Notice the word: "communication". This is the natural function of the body in the listener that must be addressed in the art of music and drama.

When the teacher observes a student that has cultivated a weakening of this clear impulse of the voice, resulting in "overly intellectual or mechanical sounds", I suggest starting training at the core of homeostatic sounds, before progressing to speech or song. The singer must be comfortable with vocal communication, even in its most unsophisticated form. In short, vocal technique can be explained as: the shortest, smoothest and least hindered way between idea and action. The first step to cultivate this method is by attaining a "forgiving" body that is allowed to learn by itself. This cannot happen if the student has cultivated a negative attitude towards homeostatic sounds, because this attitude actively triggers a stop of the unconscious processes that develop the artistic instrument of the singer. The singer must train to be more forgiving, to allow sounds that are angry, sad, joyful or in other ways revealing of the homeostatic changes in

the body. However, this is not psychotherapy, a method vastly different in prospect from training the voice, and must be left to the professionals of that field. Rather, it is a cultivation of the body, an understanding of what is required of the singer as a full body artist and the possibilities of development through cultivation.

The vital part of these homeostas-exercises is the concept of an emotional state. The student clearly envisions an emotional state, a vowel or syllable, and only when this is completely clear in their mind, when they find it unbearable to keep silent, they would utter the sound. The end goal is to make this process snappy. I do not use the word "snappy" lightly. It essentially means "altogether, now". The body must learn to act as one entity and not as different departments in combination. This effect cannot develop properly if the student still has an unforgiving body. Action must be enthusiastic, the soil of the voice must be eager and ready to act. The goal of this stage of development is the corporeal immediacy. In lessons I suggest starting with this type of training and linguistic cultivation before going into pure vocal exercise and breath.

11. CONNECTING HOMEOSTASIS WITH SONG

When the aesthetics of spoken language, homeostatic sounds and progression of vocal exercises are second nature to the interaction between student and teacher, the teacher can more easily observe how the student understands the ideals of the teacher. It is also during this initial exchange that the teacher will encourage the student to rely on his or her own visions of sound. The groundwork of homeostatic sounds is the basis for the artistic vocal vision of the full body artist. This must be developed into purely vocal exercises; the student must first envision the complete vocal exercise before actually committing to the communication of this idea – often singing lessons become a form of sound-production session, which is (no pun intended) not productive. The training should really be mostly about refining the ideal of the student and the connection between vision and action. It is a clear sign of the teacher not observing the visionary process of the singer and focuses merely on the sound production, when the student feels vocally misunderstood and often needs to explain what is happening to the teacher. Anyone can make good sounds on a good day, but if the sound is not preceded by a clear vision, there is no development. The result of the sound quality comes only after the process of the vision is clear and reliable and the forgiveness of the body is established. All this, the physical cultivation, the forgiveness, the homeostatic sounds and the linguistic ideals can be called the "soil" of the voice. I have on purpose left out the part of musicality and musical understanding from this text, because in truth, musicality is just another word for all that I have described above.

This idea of original art form and homeostatic sound is also the start of the basic exercises we do in Operalabb as an initial foundation every day for visualizing the work. In short, we visualize a short, concrete movement – allow the mind to be tolerant and forgiving so that there is no part of the body that is going to hinder this concrete idea of movement. Then, and only then, do we move. It can be a spin, a jump, a flexing or leaning. This is something utterly simple to start with, bit by bit, this vision of movement becomes more advanced, longer, more sustained, complex, and less structured. In the beginning, the wish of the student to make it "right" overwhelms the idea that the body

learns indirectly. Being wobbly is not the same thing as making a mistake. The mechanical idea of the movement often takes over and stops the body from reacting instinctively to the idea. That is why the teacher must structure the parts of the session very clearly, and always take full responsibility. These small exercises are also important for the singer in order to develop physical forgiveness. The small corrective movements or tensions that we all are laden with through our lives that hinder and involuntarily criticize every position and movement we make, will also affect our singing and actions on stage. The movement exercises we do by combining simple sounds and movement slowly reveal these little choreographic devils that linger in the body.

12. THE GOAL

We have now entered into the field of the goal, which is an idea derived from Lamperti and his individual ideal of vocal artistry. It is the beauty of tone, the quality of emission, which is the goal of the singer. But without cultivation, this cannot mean anything. A specialist in any field knows the exact measure of pressure or temperature required to achieve the task, and the same goes for the singer. Yet, the knowing is not in the doing, but rather in the aim. The doing is a reaction to the aim. This clarity of idea must be strongly present in the mind of the singer, before the voice can ring true. The clarity of idea of the voice, music and speech must be constant and continuant through the end of the line of song. The teacher needs to observe that the generalized attitude of noise making doesn't take over. Instead of communication, this idea of noise and sound production leads to declamation and musical demonstration, which is not the same as communication. Authenticity in the singer is when the audience is struck with emotion and projects it on to the singer. Without a clear idea, or goal, this authenticity becomes a feeling inside the singer and at most impresses the audience with how authentic the singer himself or herself seems to feel.

In practical terms, this starts with the vowels, expands to the shape of words and expresses itself fully through the line of voice and body. A pure, continuant vowel and consonant must be spoken from the core of the being, with the whole body in direct response. The teacher must be able to hear the level of purity of the vowel by the student, and react accordingly. The teacher must also be able to see and hear the level of engagement of the whole physical structure of the singer. Since the vocal instrument is just the end tip of "the whip of the body", if there is stiffness or too little engagement at some part far away from the end tip, it still affects the way the whip lashes and cracks.

Even while the length and the disposition of the embouchure (the place in the throat that shapes the vocal resonance of the vowels) must adapt to the tonal registers, the initiation of the vowels must start with an inner listening and personal ideal, and not the wish to make it "right". The earlier mentioned exercise of "walking to the chair" is excellent in demonstrating this principle. We move our limbs in complex ways to get from standing five meters away from a chair to sitting down on it. But we only need the simple instruction of thinking that we want to sit there in order to make it happen. With singing we should use the same very clear image of what we want to achieve, and not focus on the variations of getting there while we are getting there. Instead, we must reinforce the attitude of forgiveness and together with the teacher develop a greater acceptance for movement in the voice, as opposed to positions.

In order to improve the soil for vocal readiness, we in Operalabb design games that create a positive and childish attitude in the body of the singer, including the vocal tract. The complete forgiveness allowed when playing silly physical games that also require unregulated movement without finesse but much energy and enthusiasm, is all part of developing this quality in the singer. In times where great flow is in place, we make a note and soon sit down and make the singers in the studio aware of the idea of flow as something that occurs "while doing something else". It is the result of allowing one idea to be the great guide to everything else. This readiness of the "soil" of the voice requires only that complete readiness and a great forgiveness of the body.

13. TRIAL AND ERROR – A BAD PROCESS

I am against the idea of trial and error. It is a destructive method propagated by a more simplistic artistic ideal. The reason trial and error is ineffective is that it teaches the student to expect constant revision and relearning. It also teaches the student to self-regulate while performing. In order to avoid this ineffective and energy-consuming method, the teacher must develop a clear idea of long term process together with the student. The teacher must also establish a form of teaching where both the idea of mistakes and the experience of mistakes are avoided. Learning and the method of learning are part of the process. The structure of forming a vision, setting a goal and acting towards this goal with complete forgiveness and readiness of the body, is a very simple tenet, but it requires complete strictness of form. The cultivation of this method cannot happen without a teacher, because self-observation while "doing" effectively stops the goal-focus of the doing. The action cannot both be self-observation and goal-orientation. This method is well described in the book *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1953) by Eugene Herrigel as well as Thomas Hemsleys' *Singing and Imagination* (1998). I eschew the idea that people born with talents get where they are no matter what way they are taught. It becomes more and more obvious that there is an abundance of talent today that is simply not refined, that could achieve masterful work if assisted or helped to greater heights by better ideals, better teachers and circumstances. The misguided culture of belief in the innate or spiritual gift is very strong. Learning through mistakes takes a lifetime and suddenly one is too old to do anything but teach. A good process must include the understanding of what kind of progress should be expected and what to do if there is no process offered.

The answer is: find a teacher that involves you and your creative mind in your development. And most of all: a teacher who is able to link the level of cultivation of the singer with the level of cultivation required to become a real artist in one's own right, *an artist with a goal, a vision and a process*. I will end with a quotation:

"The world is not seeking merely the perfect voice but a great musical individuality manifested through a voice developed to express that individuality in the most natural and at the same time the most comprehensive manner possible. Therefore, young man and young woman, does it not seem of the greatest importance to you to develop, first of all, the mind and the soul, so that when the great hour comes, your audience will hear through the notes that pour from your throat something of your intellectual and emotional character?" (Brower, Cooke 1996, 4)

REFERENCES

- Andersson, Joacim, Leif Östman, & Marie Öhman. "I am sailing – towards a transactional analysis of 'body techniques'." *Sport, Education and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (2013): 722–740.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and its Double* (trans. Mary Caroline Richards). New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958.
- Bachlund, Gary. *How to Opera Germanly*. <http://www.bachlund.org/HowToOperaGermanly.htm>, 2006.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Consuming life*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- Brower, Hariette, James Francis Cooke. *Great Singers on the Art of Singing*. New York: Dover, 1996.
- Brown, William Earl. *Maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti* (Ed. Lillian Strongin). New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1931.
- Cotton, Sandra. "Voice Classification and Fach: Recent, Historical and Conflicting Systems of Voice Categorization." DMA thesis, Faculty of The Graduate School, The University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 2007.
- Damasio, Antonio. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000.
- Drechsler, Wolfgang. "The Rise and Demise of the New Public Management." *Post-autistic Economic Review*, Vol. 33 (2005): 17–28.
- F. Gino, M. Kouchaki, A. D. Galinsky. "The Moral Virtue of Authenticity: How Inauthenticity Produces Feelings of Immorality and Impurity." *Psychological Science*, published on-line, May 11 2015, doi:10.1177/0956797615575277
- Hemsley, Thomas. *Singing and Imagination: a human approach to a great musical tradition*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Herrigel, Eugen. *Zen in the Art of Archery*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953.
- Hoh, J. F. Y. "Laryngeal muscle fibre types." *ActaPhysiol Scand*, 183 (2) (2005): 133–149.
- Johnstone-Douglas, William. "The Teaching of Jean de Reszke". In: Berton Coffin, *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classic*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 1989.
- Lesage, Dieter. "The Academy is Back: On Education, the Bologna Process, and the Doctorate in the Arts". *e-flux journal* no. 3, 2/2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-academy-is-back-on-education-the-bologna-process-and-the-doctorate-in-the-arts>
- Miller, Richard. *National schools of singing: English, French, German and Italian techniques of singing revisited*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 1997.
- Liljas, Juvas Marianne. *Vad månne blifva af dessa barnen?* Stockholm: KMH Förlaget, 2007.
- Pilotti, Katarina. *The Road to bel canto*. Master's thesis, Academy of Music, Örebro University, Sweden, 2009.
- Walter, Bruno. *Of music and music-making*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1961.

**POTPUNI TELESNI UMETNIK – OPERSKI PEVAČ:
SAVREMENA PARADIGMA U OBRAZOVANJU, VIZIJI
I RAZVOJU OPERSKE UMETNOSTI**

Kroz rad 'Operalabb'-a iz Švedske, pokušavamo da razvijemo temeljniji pedagoški pristup u obrazovanju vokalnih umetnika koji se bave operskim i klasičnim pevanjem, pristup koji je prilagođen vokalnoj kulturi današnjeg vremena i u skladu je sa njom. Uočeno je da osnovne veštine koje danas poseduju pevači – početnici, više nisu slične onima iz perioda kada su se postavljali pedagoški i estetički temelji učenja klasičnog pevanja. Polazna tačka našeg načina rada jeste udruživanje elemenata savremene i prošlih vokalnih kultura u govornoj i pevanoj formi, kao i fizičkih i umetničkih okvira koji su u vezi sa razvijanjem jezičkih, estetskih i umetničkih ideala mladih muzičara.

Ključne reči: *pedagogija, vokalna i fizička kultura, opera, klasično vokalno obrazovanje*