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Webmaster: Corina POP

Address: 29, Eroilor st., 500036, Braşov, Romania

Phone: +40-268-410525

E-mail: editor.but@unitbv.ro

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Vocal technique in the formation stages of the lyric artist

Emilia GIOL (CALEFARIU)¹

Abstract: *Singing is the way of expression through which feelings, experiences, an ideational content are poetically expressed; in its absence the vocal qualities cannot justify the purpose of the interpretation. The topicality of music education for young performers is determined by an appropriate approach to the process of knowing the essential structure of singing, by understanding and mastering the multiple styles and ways of interpreting each genre, all in conjunction with an integration of historical views on the art of singing. Finding directions of orientation and thinking in the field of vocal interpretation, corroborated with the identification of some intrinsic values of it will contribute to achieving a stable foundation on which the lyrical artist can build a career in interpretation.*

Key-words: *Vocal technique, Musical thinking, Phonation process*

1. Introduction to vocal technique

Music education and the cultivation of the technique of vocal expressiveness require an adequate approach to the cultural musical process, to the essence of the structure of vocal singing, all involving integration in a cultural procedural context of music. The process of conscious understanding of the different ways of phonation, ways of interpretation, musical styles, is an imperative for the professional lyrical artist, for the topicality of his musical education but also for those he will guide, possibly, during his career.

Artistic forms of expression in general and musical forms in particular have evolved over the centuries. This evolution is accentuated in the last decades by the intense use of technology in the arts, which certainly allows an accelerated growth of the quantity of artistic products, and of their quality (Meyer 2003).

¹ PhD, *Transilvania University of Braşov*, emiliacalefariu@yahoo.com

Singing is the way of expression through which feelings, experiences, an ideational content are poetically expressed; in its absence the vocal qualities cannot justify the purpose of the interpretation.

The topicality of music education for young performers is determined by an appropriate approach to the process of knowing the essential structure of singing, by understanding and mastering the multiple styles and ways of interpreting each genre, all in conjunction with an integration of historical views on the art of singing. The process of training vocal performers must be thoroughly approached, taking into account the perfect relationship between stylistic and expressive ways of all aesthetic forms of singing and the historical and structural evolution of multiple varieties of singing, by their superior aesthetic achievement.

Music, in various forms, has accompanied important experiences for man since ancient times, such as religious rituals or poetic expressions. Thus, Chinese, Egyptian or Sumerian music presents increasingly complex ways of expression over centuries of evolution. However, the musical evolution of the West is determined by a dynamic process, begun in the flourishing Greek culture, the first to theorize music in the European space and for which music was considered the most complex form of philosophical expression (Uscătescu 1989, 24). From a structural and interpretive point of view, Greek musical drama, namely the Greek tragedy, is an element of great importance in music theory and interpretation. Since those times, a distinction was made between performers and performers, the superiority of those who know the structural elements being widely recognized.

The evolution of vocal interpretation continues the Greek intellectual and philosophical conception, through the ecclesiastical, liturgical psaltic interpretation (outlining two directions: the Byzantine current that embraced a vocal interpretation impoverished by any lyrical vibration and the Western / Gregorian current) from the first centuries of Christianity. The liturgical song presents an important evolution from the technical point of view of the constructive structure (the neumatic notation and the polyphonic structures meant to give solemnity to the liturgical act, counterpoint elements), but it also represents a generating element of further innovations. Secular songs and primitive Latin musical dramas from the Middle Ages later emerged from these structures.

This opens the evolutionary path of vocal musical performance, known as Ars Nova, revived by the great Italian, German, French and Anglo-Saxon aristocratic families in the seventeenth century. This evolutionary process refers to both vocal and instrumental music, the various elements materialized over time leading to a journey that continues nowadays.

2. Voice studies. Singing techniques

The hermeneutic amplitude of the word *Voice* springs from the comprehension of the German verb *stimmen*, whose meaning is "to fit" or "to agree", deriving from the noun *Stimme*, which means "voice" (Melton 2003). This results in an important, valuable meaning, namely that the voice means the harmony of matching sounds, of creating a state of mind in consensus with the outside world.

The voice itself represents the miracle of the possibilities that it opens during deepening the knowledge of the adequate study of the voice. The voice is of course in the center of the constructive concern of the music study and interpretation, but it is imperative to have a prior knowledge of the natural anatomical-physiological characteristics of the vocal apparatus. This knowledge, corroborated with the innate skills, with the capacity to adapt to the professional interpretation opened by a thorough training and an accumulation of correct technical knowledge and with sustained work, contributes to the formation of a successful lyrical artist.

Knowledge of the anatomical-physiological characteristics of the vocal apparatus contributes, as a foundation for other basic elements, in the formation of the vocal technique of the lyrical performer, such as breathing, articulation or utterance. Thus, the vocal interpretation must take into account the scientific elements, the anatomy of the vocal apparatus and all bodily elements involved in the phonatory act, as it results from research conducted by specialists, the justifications being some based on rigorously argued arguments. The health of the phonatory apparatus is of fundamental importance, the lyrical interpretation not being possible in its absence. For the purpose of vocal interpretation, there is also the singing teacher, who contributes through the cultural background accumulated, to the development of the interpretation technique, so necessary for the lyrical artist.

The improvement of the vocal technique over the centuries depended on the contribution of the two fundamental elements previously treated, improvement that determined the longevity of the professional careers of the lyrical artists, as well as an increased amplitude of their repertoire.

Recent research related to the study of voice develops the vocal interpretation theory theme, analyzing elements related to the human psyche, the importance that the mind, as "conductor" of what the body performs has on the generation of the interpretive act. Approaching the relationship between music and psyche in the formation of the lyrical artist, both from a pedagogical and a scientific perspective, represents important semantic elements, because technique not associated with meaning has no foundations in musical thinking, performing and feeling.

The evolution of the singing schools over the centuries initially involved the use of the chest voice, being considered wrong for the voice to be nasal or guttural, in

order to amplify the voice, to increase its power. The technique of the head voice is later appreciated, the highlighting of its possibilities implying for the great masters of singing (Lily Lehmann, 19th century) of that time a freshness of the timbre and a youthful charm. However, it has the disadvantage, the danger of alteration due to its lack of strength (according to Pier Francesco Tosi's book published in Bologna in 1723 entitled "The Art of Singing, Considerations of Old and Modern Singers, or Observations on Figurative Singing"). It is important to associate in the technical elements related to the vocal emission and the anatomical and physiological conformation of the vocal apparatus, a unique conformation for each performer.

This must be guided by the singing teacher, but must be sensory-conscious by the vocal performer himself. Thus, the vocal technique is consciously developed, the performer being able to responsibly analyze the disciplined way of singing and the result obtained. In this way, the formative process of the vocal technique presents a special importance in the formation of the lyrical artist.

3. The phonatory process

The larynx, hormonal elements and brain are involved in the phonatory process. Thus, the larynx is the place where the sound is produced, by hitting the vocal cords with the passage of the air column between them, a process directed by the motor nerves of the larynx (Allen 2000). It consists of a set of cartilaginous elements and is located above the trachea. But within the larynx, a sound without personality is emitted, a neutral sound that is not endowed with timbre or power. The projection of this sound in the pharynx leads to a total metamorphosis of the initial sound, which involves the formation of the unique timbre of each individual. However, the quality of sound with musical value occurs in the oral cavity (Blake 2007). Its interior, formed by very elastic walls of great mobility, becomes an amplifier of the sound vibrations received from the pharynx, being supported by the roof of the mouth which also has this function. The timbre is thus enriched, acquiring volume, warmth, harmonics, becoming interesting in terms of sound quality and emotion transmitted.

The hormonal elements, as a constituent of the natural anatomical-physiological ensemble, have a special significance in the process of formation and development of phonation, influencing the change of voice but also the individual particularities of the voice. These particularities contribute, through their uniqueness, to the formation of the artistic temperament of the lyrical performer.

Last but not least, the brain, the part of the central nervous system, is the one that initiates the command that must be executed to form the voice, but also the intonation, the rhythm, the intensity.

4. Musical thinking in the process of vocal training and performing

Vocal technique in a field that involves so many elements, many of them invisible (such as the entire vocal apparatus, the lyrical artist's instrument) imposes an enormous responsibility on the singing teacher, who has a decisive role in the young artist's career. The correct identification of the essential possibilities it has, the correct exposition of a principle of setting and realization of the sound process, its attitude towards a field that requires total dedication and passion, selecting the right repertoire according to the correct classification of the voice in the typologies framing currents, represent elements that the singing teacher must take care of so that his decision, decisive for the young artist, is a correctly argued, justified one.



Fig. 1. A selection of a lyric artist's skills

The young lyrical artist's vocal training also involves psychological and pedagogical skills. The communication skills for transmitting technical information can decisively influence the future lyrical artist. His personality, his attitude towards the study, his personal ambitions, the degree of development of his taste for art and the cultural background he has must be identified, interpreted, masterfully modeled, so that the vocal technique is placed on a solid foundation. The pedagogical training of the singing teacher can also influence the training of the lyric artist. Teaching techniques, how to organize information, ways of communication, capitalizing on errors in search of solutions, capitalizing on practical knowledge, consolidating known theoretical elements, formulating paths

to lead the artist to reflections and personal observations, are elements that support the process of the evolution of the lyrical artist in his stages of forming the vocal technique and the complexity of the lyrical artist's personality.

An ample reflection in the development process of the vocal technique is also represented by the way of treating the defects. The defects that the lyrical artist can learn in the process of forming the vocal technique refer to breathing, emission, articulation, body position, maintaining the body in a state of relaxation. All these elements must be controlled from the earliest stages otherwise they can significantly disrupt and influence the vocal study.

5. Conclusions

The formation and consolidation of the vocal technique represents a fundamental stage in the formation of the lyrical artist. Finding directions of orientation and thinking in the field of vocal interpretation, corroborated with the identification of some intrinsic values of it will contribute to achieving a stable foundation on which the lyrical artist can build a career in interpretation.

The vocal technique is an instrument of interpretation, along with the natural endowment of the future lyrical artist and together with his passion and determination to sing. It can always be perfected, the artist having the task of permanently rediscovering the interpreted work, in terms of the evolution of his voice, personality, culture.

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