

Singing and the Expression of Emotion

A Research on the Performative Process of Opera Making

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Since Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) the idea of a 'similarity', or a 'homology', between the 'dynamics of music' and the 'dynamic qualities of feeling' has become an important topic of theorists and researchers all over the world:

"There are certain aspects of the so-called 'inner life' which have formal properties similar to those of music - patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfilment, excitation, sudden change, etc."

(Langer, 1942: 228)

Over the last decades, empirical research in musical performance (*Clynes, 1980; Sundberg, 1982; Gabrielsson, 1995; Todd, 1995; Scherer, et al. 1995, 1996; Gabrielsson and Juslin, 1996; Juslin & Laukka, 2000; Juslin, 2001; Cox, 2001; Wang, et al., 2014, 2016; Salgado, 2003, 2017; Scherer, et al., 2017; Shu, et al., 2018; Bota, et al., 201; etc.*) has revealed that musical creativity concerned with the expression of emotional meaning presents gestures (vocal and kinetic) that can be considered as the parallel of structures between two sets of processes: *musical processes* and *affective states processes*.

It seems, thus, that it can be accepted that a homology exists between the inherent organization and dynamics of sounds of music and the movements and dynamics of our affective life; and, between those and the patterns of movement 'whose general characteristics are similar to bodily movement symptomatic of human emotions, moods or feelings' (Shove & Repp, 1995:58).

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The portraying of emotions in singing is determined by a highly complex mixture of factors. Music, text, interpretation, context, voice technique and articulation, bodily movements, singer's personality and interactivity with the audience seem, altogether, to play an important role in the music-emotional expressive outcome.

According to Manén (1974) and Newham (1998), the evolution of Western Singing Art, mainly in last century, led us today to a state of almost complete dissociation between vocal tone and emotional expression. In fact, they argue, that at the very beginning of opera, singers were masters of singing having the capacity to express vocally different emotive qualities using distinct characteristics for each tone and for each vowel and consonant.

Historically, they claim, singing vocal technique was a musical exploration of the different vocal expressions for the different emotional states. So, in a practical way, there has been an exploration of vocal emotion in the performance of singing ever since opera was born in the 16th century. In fact, according to Manén (1974) and Newham (1998), *“whilst early singers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in Italy, were intent on mastering the arts of extending the different emotive qualities and characteristics of each tone and vowel, later singers, as the music evolved into more concrete, dehumanized and electronic sounds, began more and more to sought to master the perfection of a single operatic or lyric color of voice production, and to train to specialize in a single timbral quality”*.

Furthermore, the increasingly elaborate complexity of musical composition has led to a process of training operatic singers in a way which has become more and more concerned with the vocal technical demands of the music and less connected to the primal and primordial role of the voice as the expression of emotion, feeling and all different moods of human soul and experience. Indeed, Manén (1974) claimed that *“for many modern composers the voice provides simply one tone of a certain pitch in various intensities. Loud and soft tones have replaced changes of mood and of emotional meaning and expression. Quite on the contrary, in earlier times of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Italy, many composers of vocal music were also performing*

singers, and they composed with the understanding of these inborn laws of the voice, using exclamations of every grade and shade as the foundational material sound of their compositions.”

The Italian Art of Singing in early opera was based on the use of the exclamatory primordial vowels to produce colorings appropriate to the mood and the emotional content which the music was meant to express. Caccini (1601) also claimed that “*the exclamation—is a quite important means for moving the affect*”. The exclamation - the utterance - of the human voice of a primordial state of emotion follows common, innate and universal laws of all humankind. The utterance of contentment and joy takes place through the exclamatory vowel of pleasure (a), as in happy (*‘hapē*); the utterance of disgust and hate takes expression through the exclamatory vowel of hatred (ē) as in fury (*‘fyōōrē*) or hideous (*‘hidēās*); fear and horror through the exclamatory vowel of terror (ōō) as in spooky (*‘spōōkē*), and sorrow or sadness through the neutral shwa (ə), as in hurt (*hṛt*); all these utterances emerged in response to the need for emotional genuineness and authenticity combined with musical precision and virtuosity.

Following these authors, singers, nowadays, have moved further and further away from the exclamatory vowels and their capacity to produce coloring as a means of interpretation of love or hatred, joy or pain, surprise, fear or anger. This capacity of interpretation keeps fading away as the technical requirements and adjustments needed to overcome vocal, technical and musical difficulties became the only challenge left. Loud and soft tones have substituted changes of vowels coloring and richness of timbre, and frequently singers today use only one of the potentialities of their vocal organ, one timbre, one color, according to their own psychological mask, it is to say, according to their voice category and voice make-up.

Newham (1998) and Manén (1974) made clear the crucial point that the extensive range of timbres possessed by early singers was not a ‘cosmetic’ trick of virtuosity but a vocal intrinsic capacity to master a wide range of emotions possible to express. Rather, “*the range of timbres or qualities was born out of the spectrum of*

human emotions for it is only from the primeval sounds and exclamations such as joy, surprise, passion, annoyance, anger, sadness, fear, and hatred which people use to express their inner feelings and reactions that the colorful timbres of early singing can emanate. The core principle of early singing technique rests both in the malleability and articulation of the resonating spaces above the vocal folds as in the basic sound uttered at the larynx level in the form of the exclamatory primeval vowels.”

The primary goal of tuition, therefore, according to Manén (1974) must be “*to re-establish this primordial relationship between vocal tone and emotion, without which the variety of interpretation is impossible. Fundamental in this respect is, also, the desirable co-ordination of emotionally colored tones with facial expression and gesture.*” Great theatre directors and actors (Laban, Delsarte, Stanislavski, Grotowski, etc.) claimed, in different ways, that actors should give expression to a wide range of feelings and emotions by means of bodily movement, posture, gesture, vocal and facial expression. Such training will assist the singer to be able to convey the different moods he/she is required to express and also to achieve the desired co-ordination between vocal tone and the external signs of emotion within the expression of an emotional state. According to Manén (1974), “*exclamatory vowels are vowels of phonation and they should be performed by the larynx without the assistance of the lips, like ‘ventriloquists’ vowels. They are primary vowels controlled by a primitive part of the brain and experiencing the primordial and basic functions of the vocal mechanism. The vowels of speech are social learnt replicas of the primary vowels of phonation, and they are called vowels of articulation and are controlled by a different part of the brain.*”

In order to help to reverse this state of things a series of exercises have been created and tried out within EOA_LAB_WG2 program.² The goal of the workshop now proposed, which was partially carried out in both ISPs of Maastricht and Vilnius, is to ‘experiment’, together with singers and other performers, a new approach to Opera and Opera-making that clearly offers a more emotional connected work of the voice and singing in music performance. Through body movement, improvisation and effective

² European Opera Academy – Competence Center for Shared Education in Opera Training (EOA_LAB_WG2)

methodologies to arouse emotion and emotional expressiveness, *Vox Ludos Workshop* tries to find a methodology to reverse a way of singing that to a crescent number of professionals of the voice reveals the actual tendency to use the voice ‘innocuously’ in opera, nowadays.

This ‘new acting of the voice’, proposed in the context of this workshop, will enable the singers and performers to better connect themselves with their bodies and with the others, with their voices and emotions, as well as it will bring them a better understanding of what should be the meaning and the act of making new opera, today.

Vox Ludos Workshop is a set of exercises that proposes a new strategic of voice, singing and body training approach which works complementary the traditional way of voice training and of singing teaching. This approach aims is to regain the emotional aspect of voice production supposedly present in the old Italian school of singing art and to promote new and intense recreations of old and new vocal repertoire.

VOX LUDOS WORKSHOP

Vox Ludos is a series of vocal and body exercises that aims to enable singers to connect their singing art with their voices, their bodies and their emotions. Within an improvising methodology, the singers will learn, from the personal and collective experience to express different emotions and moods through vocal sound, postures and body gesture. Based on Ideo-kinetic methodology, on emotional imagery and on evidence of performative cues of emotions within music structure, which are a result of Performance Studies Investigation over the last decades, a series of exercises will be suggested to the singers and the students of singing. This series of exercises propose the use of a set of music intervals (or short musical cells and/or musical phrases) and each singer participant will be invited to produce an emotional state using a sound-voice, an utterance based on a chosen exclamatory vowel, connected to a corporal gesture (body and/or face) or/and posture. This way, the singer will try to express and identify the intended emotion and the intended emotional meaning for him/herself or/and the others. This embodied emotion will be worked-out by the singer as a means of emotional communication among other singers and the audience. As a goal of the exercises, a

kinetic-musical monologue, dialogue (or multilogue) will happen through vocal gestures, facial expressions, body movements and postures intended to express the different embodied emotional states and meanings.

VOX LUDOS METHODOLOGICAL EXERCISES:

- I. **GET 'E-MOTIONAL'** - (IDENTIFY YOUR VOICE AND YOURSELF THROUGH VOCAL EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONS) - Supported by the Categorical Approach of Emotion and based on the innate and phylogenetic continuity character of basic emotional expressions (vocal, facial and gestural) this exercise takes into account some of the most updated theories which consider that emotional expressions are not merely an expressive behavior but, rather, a pattern of neuro-muscular activity that constitutes one of the components of Emotion (Izard, 1971).³ This set of exercises proposes a self-awareness of the singer's ability to express through the voice and body gesture and posture the different emotions suggested in the exercises.

MATERIAL WORK: Basic Music Intervals, Cells and Performative/Structural Musical Cues for each one of the Basic Emotions (Happiness or Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear) chosen from excerpts from the vocal repertoire.

- II. **A FEW WORDS TO SING** - (IDENTIFY YOUR SELF AND YOUR VOICE THROUGH EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION WITH VOCAL SOUND) - Supported by recent research and by the latest contributions to the study and deepening of the comprehensive aspects of Emotion, the researchers came to the conclusion that it would be relevant to assume the categorical and dimensional approaches to emotion as a useful and complementary tool for the investigation of emotional content and emotional

³ Izard, C. E. (1971). *The Face of Emotion*. New York Appleton-Century Crofts.

expression (Baumgartner et al, 2006).⁴ This set of exercises aims to contribute to a broader and more comprehensive approach to the expression of emotions within the musical and vocal repertoire. It, also, proposes a self-awareness of the singer's ability to express through the voice and body gesture the different emotions and moods suggested in the exercise.

MATERIAL WORK: Basic Music Intervals, Cells and Performative/Structural Musical Cues for Moods and complex Emotions (Love, Exuberance, Enthusiasm, Hope, Longing, Tenderness, Sorrow, Grief, Shame, Envy, Desperation, Despair, Rage, Hate, Anxiety, Worry, Panic, Terror) chosen from excerpts from the vocal repertoire.

- III. **WITH THE EYES WIDE OPEN** - (*IDENTIFY YOUR SELF AND YOUR VOICE AND YOUR SINGING PARTNER THROUGH EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION WITH VOCAL SOUND AND BODY MOVEMENT*) – This set of exercises is based on Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice (Overlie & Beavers)⁵ and aims to contribute to a broader and more comprehensive approach to the expression of emotions within the musical and vocal repertoire. In addition, this exercise also proposes a self-awareness of the singer's ability to express through the voice and body gesture the different emotions and moods collectively, using the movement as a way to create an emotional dialogue between the singers through the expression of the different emotions proposed in the exercise. The singer's own movement choices and emotional reactions depend on both his/her internal impulses and his/her reaction to the other singers. The singer will emotionally react to each new emotion or the change of any emotional state expression, searching to respond or to complement those of the others during the exercises. The exercise will start with a first level with the Basic Emotions (Happiness or Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear), and will develop into more complex or sophisticated emotional moods (Love, Exuberance, Enthusiasm, Hope, Longing, Tenderness, Sorrow, Grief, Shame, Envy, Desperation, Despair, Rage, Hate, Anxiety, Worry, Panic, Terror).

MATERIAL WORK: Basic Music Intervals, Cells and Performative/Structural Musical Cues for Moods and complex Emotions (Love, Exuberance, Enthusiasm, Hope, Longing, Tenderness, Sorrow, Grief, Shame, Envy, Desperation, Despair, Rage, Hate, Anxiety, Worry, Panic, Terror) chosen from excerpts from the vocal repertoire.

- IV. **DROPPING THE MASK** - (*IDENTIFY YOUR SELF AND YOUR VOICE AND YOUR SINGING PARTNER THROUGH EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION WITH VOCAL SOUND AND BODY MOVEMENT*) - With

⁴ Baumgartner, T., Esslen, M., & Jäncke, L. (2006). From emotion perception to emotion experience: Emotions evoked by pictures and classical music. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 60, 34-43.

⁵ Overlie, M. (2016). *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice*. Kindle edition by Mary Overlie.

theoretical support from Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Sarah Kofman and Oscar Cesarotto, this set of exercises deepens the work of communication and expression of emotions carried out in previous exercises. Based on the function of the double in the compression of artistic creation understood as a playful act, this set of exercises articulates a conceptualization of masks in the theater, relating them as metaphors of artistic creation, and therefore of artistic emotional expressiveness. This series of exercises works with the variety of emotions understood as spaces of illusion, desire and fantasy in the artistic recreation of the interpreted vocal repertoire.

MATERIAL WORK: Basic Music Intervals, Cells and Performative/Structural Musical Cues for Moods and complex Emotions (Love, Exuberance, Enthusiasm, Hope, Longing, Tenderness, Sorrow, Grief, Shame, Envy, Desperation, Despair, Rage, Hate, Anxiety, Worry, Panic, Terror) chosen from excerpts from the vocal repertoire.

WORKSHOPS FEEDBACK DURING ISP MAASTRICHT AND VILNIUS

Feedback from the Workshops of Vox Ludos Exercises, in Maastricht Conservatorium and Vilnius Akademija

Claire Binyon and António Salgado

From the last workshops we had various feedbacks, positive in the sense that most of the comments were in the area of sensation “I hadn’t felt that before” or “this work opened up a specific area that I usually have difficulty with”. This I conclude is rooted in the process of calming down the system before it starts to work or assimilate new experience and then introducing new material slowly. So that in the first part of the session the time and space for the learning (or assimilation) is created in the whole person (body mind emotion) and in the second part of the session new experience (or data) is fed in on to a blank page (so to speak) thus having a clearer focus and impact within the receiver.

We also had an informal comment that it seemed we didn’t work together very much as the 2 approaches were a maybe a bit disjointed. This is in fact our objective in the workshop, to see what one method of work (awareness through movement) has to say to another method (emotional response and voice). In the long term to see if this makes sense in the training of the singers in ESMAE on a more systematic and long-term level. In fact, there were 2 thoughts that came from this comment. One was to see how to make the connection clearer and more central to the design of the second workshop, and two for the two different approaches to complement each other in a more explicit way.

The questions and thoughts after the first experience:

What is the objective when “exploring” material around connections between the body and the feelings? A connection that we can call e-motion: In fact, the connection is a body-mind-feeling connection and as such using the Feldenkrais Method as a methodology makes sense as it has at its heart the process of thinking sensing and moving as a constant loop best describing how we function as human sentient beings. The method promotes a balance between doing and listening. To enlarge this space can lead to more sensitivity and variety of response as well as creating a space for learning and creativity to take place - a type of poetic that the performer can later apply in making work.

How to connect to people/students/performers who understand their bodies principally through the functioning of the voice. If opera singers are in fact walking voices, and the voice comes from the body, how then to involve embodiment as a tool to elaborate and create more possibility for the voice. Usually, in theatre work, the performers are more used to these concepts of body, but the tendency is also to see the body and voice as separate. All the newest thinking in performance training is to reintegrate so we could say we are working through the body towards the voice and here in the opera world this is reversed, to work outward through the developed awareness of all physical elements related to vocal production in order to arrive to a more coherent image of the self.

If in the first workshop we started from the body scan which incorporates the distal (arms legs) into the whole image of the self this time we decided to start from the pelvis as a way of locating the center of the body and eventually to link this upwards into the breath and vocal production. Also, it made sense to use Singing with the Whole Self (*1) as a reference, in order to locate the method thoroughly in the area of voice work and to give some background for those who may be interested after the workshop. If the aim of the workshop is to explore the possibility of the 2 methods to work together then also for the student involved there could be further reading and study possibilities if interest was stimulated.

PLAN

1. Awareness through movement session – Pelvic Clock

Lying down and feeling how the pelvis lies on the floor

Appreciating the two separate sides of the pelvis (and hips and ribs) and understanding that they are different.

Imagining the pelvis as a clock and executing various movements using this visualization, Moving in quarter/half and whole circles around the pelvis/clock in clockwise and anticlockwise directions and noticing differences in the pauses between each “experiment” At the end again feeling how the pelvis is lying on the floor, what is clearer and if any of the sensations of differences have been resolved.

2. Applying this new sense of self in lying to the Voice and emotional connection, lying on floor working with vowels and emotions locating them in the body and in the voice.

3. Coming to standing and walking around the room, bringing the bodies back into relationship with space and with others:

a) FIXED POINT - Standing, feel pelvis, walk, run, stop (freeze) become aware of yourself in the space (making an image or fixed point) and then yourself in relation to others (again a collective image with scenic possibilities).

b) EXTENDED FIXED POINT - continue and when arriving to fixed point in the group start to extend your physical attitude in any direction towards somebody or something focusing on your reaction and changing attitude to what is happening around you.

c) VOCALISING FIXED POINT - add in the vowels and one of the emotions, first of all in order so as to pass through all 4 and then whatever seems more appropriate to the situation. Half the group do and half watch so as to introduce the idea of audience and a direction for the performers to focus in terms of image presented to the front.

4 developing the exercise above with 2 groups, in a proposal/reply exercise. Performing towards each other in an action reaction rhythm. Working as a group and supporting a principal performer who has the “solo”.

IDEAS;

As we are having a third meeting in Porto.... (that couldn't never happen due to SARS-CoV-2/Covid-19 Pandemic)

Some of the participants said it would be great to have some “bodywork” every day at the start of the day. In the meeting in Porto, as we have more teachers involved with this movement practice for the singers, it would be a possibility. We can maybe arrange this to happen, as an experiment for the opera lab.

From the experience this time and watching the work in the final exercise, I remembered another excellent game from the Acrobat of the Heart (*2) which is called weapons work which also works through body and voice and action response. More in pairs but would definitely be using elements from the first workshop (first crossings) and second workshop (extended vocal fixed point) in a third stage. This can be seen as an outcome - the possibility to experimental new way of working in the lab and to be able to directly see the next step for the work. In this way we always have an idea for the next time, which moves us forward and is in fact what these short experiences in the residences have allowed us to see and assimilate.

*1 Reference:

Singing with Your Whole Self, A Singer's Guide to Feldenkrais Awareness through Movement, Second Edition SAMUEL H. NELSON AND ELIZABETH L. BLADES.

Singing with Your Whole Self: A Singer's Guide to Awareness through Movement teaches performers to use the Feldenkrais Method of neuromuscular education to ameliorate problems of tension, muscle strain, and illness in order to obtain optimal vocal performance. With new lessons and chapters on kinesthetic imagination and neuroplasticity, this second edition features unique, modularized Feldenkrais lessons designed specifically to liberate function in singers and other voice professionals.

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