

Customs and trends in the professional phonation

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Abstract: *The customs of the pedagogical practice, as well as the professional practice, can be talked about indefinitely and is dependent on the school from which the specialist comes, or his professional experiences. It is important to always keep in mind the principles of professional singing, namely, to be able to sing effortless throughout the vocal score and to keep the voice young and beautiful for at least 25 years. Voice broadcasting is a custom that is often based on subjective information, even though it refers to the way in which sound is produced and should be based on scientific information. Breathing, though, less affected by subjectivism, tends to be caught in the whirl of circumstantial information. Similarly, sound support, mouth opening and head position on acute notes have their own, more or less justified, customs. The conclusion that is necessitated following the presentation of some customs ubiquitous in pedagogical singing practice is that the correct translation and motivation based on thorough study of each expression and applying scientifically methods is essential.*

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1. Introduction

Why did I choose these customs as the subject of this paper is very simple. I also got stuck on them and by the mistakes in their translation, the lack of comprehensibility of the terms used and the lack of connection and coordination with the scientific information given by my singing teachers or offered by my body while learning during the time I was myself a student and also while teaching singing.

I have been often stuck on a pedagogical act not based on scientific information, coupled by receiving ambiguous information, not always logical or nor based on knowledge of anatomy or physics and, at times, lacking the care for the health of the vocal apparatus of the singer, because of a lack of attention to the details to individual requirement of each person, regardless if that person is a pupil, a student, or someone who is maybe 40 years old.

All this considering that we are talking about an art that is extremely demanding.
From immemorial times, the art of singing was characterized by competition, an absolutely necessary condition for attaining perfection... (Iuga, 2012, 108).

2. Customs and trends in the professional phonation

Involving the students in examining the historic sources and, why not, in the aesthetic research, out of a desired development which points at both theory and practice, is and must be the project of every singing teacher.

Among the customs of the beautiful art of *belcanto*, perhaps the most important is **placement of the voice**, often meant to be a support and a means of controlling the vocal sound. Although apparently it does not seem to, the sensation, the feeling that you know where the voice is, is encouraging enough and provides the comfort needed for a quality vocal performance. However, the placement of the voice translates into, to be more precise about the meaning, *setting the voice in some predetermined parameters*, namely the control

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of the constant pressure parameter in the oropharyngeal space and the optimal direction of the sound towards the public.

In terms of translating the term, imposing the voice as it is commonly used currently around the world, its true meaning is deprecated until it is reduced to the level that it means the voice direction area, based on the teaching technique and the preference of the teacher or the singer.

More specifically, the term “voice placement” is often used with reference to the placement of the voice in order to obtain the maximum resonance of the cranial box, or more precisely, so-called mask resonance.

A mistake appeared from the incorrect translation of its meaning and it is especially dangerous for the vocal cords of the singer and for the sound quality, and not least, it is detrimental to the artistic performance. The desired vibration in the mask area is what can only be achieved with a greater pressure than optimal on the vocal cords of the subject. Although the vocal cords can endure for a long time those harsh conditions, can and most likely will, at one point, give up.

In time, the cords develop micro-ruptures of muscle fibers that may degenerate into the nodules, due to micro-hemorrhages produced on the surface of the mucous membrane, which then lead to a weakening of the vocal muscular tone.

Vocal cords that are subject to much elevated *sub glottis* pressure, tend to produce voices with flaws such as:

- unclear sound, or as it is said in practice, with parasites
- beating sound
- sound with “capretto”
- rigid sound, lacking flexibility
- with the inability to make micro-dynamics

This increased pressure at the same time causes cranial disturbance of blood circulation in the peripheral vessels. All this is found in practice frequently, flaws resulting from intentional or unintentional regulation of *sub glottis* pressure to a very high level, without taking into account the fact that the voice must be externalized to the maximum and that in fact the main resonance chamber is, after all, the performance hall.

About vocal emission, the custom says it must be achieved easily, and hilariously enough, ...just that! Unfortunately, there are no more precise terms to explain this ease of emission in practice. As each of us knows, lightly or easily, both have quite different meanings for each of us, depending on our personal receptivity. Something that for a person can be very easy, for another can be an effort. The singing teacher when referring to vocal emission usually calls it the yawn position, but unfortunately, very few teachers define this yawning term precisely enough to create a correct reference point for students. Very few of the professors know or feel the need to specify the mechanical interdependence between the lowering of the larynx and the lifting of the palatine velum. Only a small number of teachers have the information that this is relatively limited in the sense that an exaggerated elevation of the palatine velum does not cause the larynx to descend throughout its range.

Of course, in these conditions, in the absence of clear information, the yawning, respectively the creation of the first resonance chamber in the oropharyngeal space, is very difficult to obtain and the correlation of the resonance space with the regulation of *sub glottis* pressure to the minimum, is achieved after many years. Of course, the process of becoming a singer itself is something that it takes a very long time. But... *Even the best natural voice needs years of study...* (Ardelean, 2016, 14)

An important issue in acquiring a correct emission is the idea of listening to the voice while emitting it, although, as we know, at the time the subject feels that the emitted sound, there is a certain delay. Because the emitted sound is listened with the ear, if the singer

experiences an impatience to hear and control the sound, that fact may produce an automatic increase in the pressure of the air flow, followed by a deformation of the initial acoustic space, the oropharyngeal space. By contracting it and subsequently by fatiguing and changing the color of the sound, the harmonic spectrum will change.

The constant harmonic spectrum, as we know, is given by the consistency of the first resonance space, and is dependent by the size of this space. At the same time, it is a reference of a healthy voice conduit. Of course, the optimal developmental effects of the harmonic spectrum are obtained in the conditions of a very broad and spacious neck, but at the same time relatively relaxed.

It should also be noted that the arising problem in the creation of this space, as the muscles are not used or trained to maintain such a yawning, it becomes difficult to solve it and difficult to perform. The explanation would be that, naturally, many of us are yawning when we inhale and descend the larynx, and when we exhale, we let the larynx to naturally go up. Since singing, phonation, is performed on the exhaling phase, the muscles must be specially trained to maintain the yawning position at this stage.

For this reason, often, the effort required to achieve this ability, may cause mild pain in muscles, or even muscle strain in the early stages. Under these conditions, the rule that emission should be done lightly, fits only at the end of the training and is confusing for beginners. Respectively, in my experience, it takes about two years for the study to achieve the desired ease.

Opening the mouth is one of the exciting canto customs, which, likewise, no one specifies in very exact terms what it means. Because there is a relationship of interdependence between getting the fake yawn and the position of the mandible clearly observed in practice, with very few exceptions, the norm refers to a larger opening of the mouth. Unfortunately, there is no clear wording on the optimal form for adapting the mouth opening to an effective diction.

However, for maintaining the yawn position exhaling, as for the size of mouth opening, it is very important that vocal exercises be done. It will take into account the idea of accustoming the singer with a bigger opening, compensated not only by the tightening of the lips for the prolongation of the acoustic space, but also by the improvement of the pronunciation or the diction in the professional phonation. *The role of the singer is to perceive and to relay the artistic message through the use of words and intonation...* (Chifu, 2008, 79)

Another very important custom, and derived from a bad translation, is the **support**, also known as **appoggio**. Here there is a clear confusion between the term support and sustain, as we know, differs in the sense of pressure.

If the singing teacher is not aware of the risks arising in the presence of increased pressure on the subglottic air flow, and works to permanently obtain a vibrational sensation in the mask area, the situation can become dangerous in time for the subject's phonatory apparatus.

This poorly translated custom, along with the lack of appreciation to sound quality, also produces the physiological risk to the singer. Unfortunately, there is also a great drawback to the quality of the artistic act.

I consider that this translation mistake needs to be necessarily corrected, especially in the light of this information provided by the *belcanto* treatises.

These refer to the fact that the optimal voice resonance is found in both frontal and chest area. We can conclude that it is not just addressed to Mauran's point, or to the mask to the detriment of the chest resonance or the room resonance.

The singers who are studying during this period and those who studied in the past in the singing schools (I am referring in the last 25 years), bear the mark of this mistake and

more recent developed voices that are first and foremost small, due to the circumvention of the idea of resonance in the secondary acoustic enclosure, that is to say the space of the concert hall.

Also, they are often singers who are emitting based on personal findings and not intentional at all, being permanently directly dependent on the immediate feed-back offered by the mask.

All this concern for the immediate sensation of vibration in the sinuses area, eludes that at the anatomical level, from a scientific point of view, the sinuses are not resonance organs, but makes the singers dependent by the receptivity of the moment, which is perpetually altered under stress conditions, especially during a performance.

About the **position of the head** during the singing, the singing teachers only intervene seldom and only in the situations of anesthetic postures. However, there is also a common practice that a slightly bent positioning of the head can favor singing more effectively. In this case, anatomical motivation is also eluded. Studying with great care, one can notice that both the positioning of the head down and the raising of the chin over the level of a normal posture, in fact, immobilize the larynx.

What is important to mention is that, starting from a correct position of yawning, this immobilization helps to maintain it, but, if yawning is not created before the phonation phase practically maintaining the position of the head in any of the two variants, the yawning can no longer be created. Still a perpetual custom without sufficient checks or explanations, that can become detrimental to the development of a learning singer.

3. Conclusions

The conclusion that emerges from the presentation of these few ubiquitous customs, in the pedagogical practice of singing, is that correct translating as well as scientific motivation after a thorough study and thorough examination of each expression used is absolutely necessary.

An insufficient implication from the singing teachers may lead to the loss of valuable singers, primarily because subjects predisposed to becoming valuable artists are often hypersensitive in terms of tactile receptivity as well as emotionally and intellectually.

4. References

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