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THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OF THE OPERA SINGER
- A COMBINATION BETWEEN VOCAL TECHNIQUE
ELEMENTS AND MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL
KNOWLEDGES

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Abstract

The present study aims to bring together all the elements underlying the development and training of an opera singer, from the knowledge of his own body and of the phonation, breathing and resonant components, to the understanding of the mysteries of the human intellect and the application of psychological knowledges in learning and performing an opera role. In the first part of the study, there will be presented the stages of the formation of an opera singer and the learning of a score, applied on different musical parts of the belcanto repertoire. Also, the elements of the human body that serve the opera singer to perform his vocal activity will be presented: the phonation component - the larynx, the respiratory - the lungs and the diaphragm, and the resonators - the oral cavity and the sinuses. In the second part, it will be presented how the opera singer assumes a role of opera, using actor's art techniques based on elements of psychology and also, by observing human behavior in various situations. Finally, the author's conclusions will be presented.

Keywords: music; vocal technique; medicine; psychology; opera singer;

1. INTRODUCTION

The approach to an opera role requires an artist, in addition to vocal and acting skills, to work diligently to research and acquire many knowledges about everything that means author, source of inspiration, musical analysis, style, stage directing concepts, interpretations, ecc., aiming at the perfect interpretation of the role and, at the same time, in the printing of a note of originality, without which, the artistic act would have no meaning and perennality over time.

The singer must therefore, in addition to "putting the role in voice" and vocal perfection of the role, form his empathic ability to transpose himself into the personality of the character and to make his

own the feelings, even the gestures and mimics of the character, all these being dominated by a "self control" well established.

Often, the world of the opera is superficially treated by students of universities or music faculties because they either do not have enough general and musical culture, or they think they can easily approach to this field and finish their studies without too much involvement on their part. In this study, however, we will not refer to "the majority," but to the ideal, passionate, talented, aspiring student, who will become the future successful international opera singer.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

First of all, it is necessary to review the most important studies on the formation of operatic voices in order to be able to follow the different opinions and points of interest of the teachers-researchers throughout history, from the appearance of the genre of opera until the present days.

The opera, as a genre with roots in ancient Greek theater, was created in the 16th century, within an artistic circle of poets, composers, singers and singing teachers, called *Camerata Fiorentina*. Giulio Caccini (1545-1618), eminent singer and composer, the soul of *Camerata Fiorentina*, publishes *Nuove musiche* (*New music*) in 1602, which is a kind of musical manifesto, but also deals with singing pedagogy. His opinions have played an important role in the development of the artistic singing. The principles of the new vocal style are defending the ideas of the text, giving great importance to the elasticity of the voice, to the breathing in singing process and to the text.

In the eighteenth century, dramatic action and text gradually moved to the second place, giving way to trills, vocal runs and ornamented singing. The singing tends to develop for bravery. In Italy there are famous singing schools in Bologna, Naples, Rome and Venice. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, the castrated singers will develop. The feminine ambitus and the masculine breath strength of castrati's voices gave them the opportunity to offer stunning performances: the renowned Ferri castrated singer made across a two-octave chromatic scale a trill on each note, from one breath, and others performed 18 times vocalizations on two octaves only from one breath. The singer and professor Pietro Tosi writes a special work on the anatomy and physiology of the vocal apparatus, *Opinioni* (*Opinions*) in 1723. He pays much attention to the intonation. He also enters into the details of the pupil's private life and recommends: "*Learning foreign languages, harpsichord and composition. He has to listen to as many singers as possible, learn in the morning, to become accustomed to learn silently, to become his own teacher to be independent and to accustom his voice with the place where he sings. The pupil must begin to have a correct position while singing. The learning of the ornaments must be done in the head voice register and begins with the learning of the trill, the grace notes and finally the filato on open voice. It will be practiced in forte, because it is easier to sing in piano when you master well the forte. People who sing a lot in piano risk to loose their voice.*"¹

In 1775, 50 years after the appearance of Tosi's work, another great treatise on the preparation of the voice appeared, written by Gianbattista Mancini in 1774, namely *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (*Thoughts and practical reflections on figurative singing*). This representative of the school in Naples and of the school in Bologna, made reference to the study of the human voice, insisting on correct intonation, on the singer's good mood, on small-scale exercises, and on studies that must be done in full voice.

At the end of the eighteenth century appeared in France, the most important writing about the pedagogy of the singing: *Méthode du chant du Conservatoire de Musique à Paris* (*Method of singing in the Conservatory of Paris*). In France, in the eighteenth century, professional singing goes through a crisis caused by the French singers' inability to compete with the performances of Italian singers and the strong influence of the Italian opera. The French singing style, edited by a committee of musicians, singers and pedagogues (composer Cherubini, French singer and pedagogue Carat and Italian singing teacher Mengozzi) aims at removing this situation: "*It is good for the head sounds to be directed to the frontal sinus without receiving a nasal character. When passing from the chest register to the middle register, the*

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pier_Francesco_Tosi

last note of the middle and first note of the head register will be moderated. It is also valid for tenors. In the style of the Paris Conservatory it is recommended:

- *Staccato - is done with larynx strokes supported on diaphragm and abdominal muscles*
- *the recitative - is performed without the introduction of the ornaments*
- *The correct breathing is used in phrasing*
- *the legato singing - the voice increases in climb and decreases in the descent; in the case of different musical intervals, from the first to the second note the passing is made with anticipation "* (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k991280n/f11.image>).

The evolution and improvement of the vocal technique that took place in the nineteenth century was due to the appearance of large orchestras and the movement of the opera shows in theaters and concert halls with a capacity of more than 1000 seats. The most important breakthrough in the field of modern vocal technique was the sound-covering mechanism, around 1820, in Italy, which was later taken over by the French school. An extremely important study on this subject is the *Vowels compensation method* by Albert Labriet, opera singer and vocalist researcher, but also the 1928 Jean Mauran's *Method* is important, which has revealed a very specific resonance point of the voice, which received the name of *Mauran's point*. In 1847 appeared the *Treatise on the Art of Singing*, by Manuel Garcia, a famous study in which, besides the method of singing, appear various vocalizations and exercises for the development of opera voices. In 1900, studies focused on the subjective directives of sound projection, written by famous singers Lily Lehmann and Mado Robin. Several studies have also appeared in Germany, mentioning *Theory of Voice* by Liskovius (1818) or *The Art of Singing* by Bernard Marx (1826).

In the modern period, in the field of vocal physiology, an excellent study is the one made by Raoul Husson - *The sung voice*, in 1950, in which he presents his discoveries concerning the production of human vocal sound. In 1970 was published Mathilde Marchesi's treatise, known as the continuator of the belcanto tradition in the 20th Century: *Bel Canto: A Theoretical and Practical Vocal Method*, and in 2003, the book *Bel canto - the history of vocal pedagogy* by James Stark appeared. Also in Romania appeared important publications: Cernei Elena - *Enigmas of Human Voice*, 1982, Severin Adrian - *The method of singing teaching*, 2000, Piso Ion - *The cybernetics of phonation in singing*, 2000, Pop Ioan - *Singing - way of communication. Singing treatise and method*, 2004 and, perhaps the most elaborate and documented treaty, the study of soprano Silvia Voinea - *Foray in the history of singing and voice aesthetics*, 2002.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Today, most of the opera works performed around the world come from the 18th-20th century musical legacy. The vocal performance of an opera singer must be on an increasingly high level. Artists are asked to excel in rendering the artistic values of the score, but also in acting part. The issue arises around the 21st century singers and their ability to cope with the demands of modern opera theaters, impresarios, conductors and directors, even the audience, with an extremely varied range of recordings at its disposal, and, thus, which has higher expectations. But the most important challenge comes from the score - is the modern opera artist able to study a lyrical work for a long time so that he can penetrate all its secrets and reach a perfect interpretation? But to resist growing temptation especially among young musicians who want celebrity and money long before the instrument they use - that is, the voice - is totally formed and prepared for performance at the highest levels, not risking, in this manner, to lose forever the voice?

Often, singers are compared to athletes because they have to work and discipline their body and voice permanently to serve them in the artistic act, and the physical and intellectual effort that an artist carries in his work and along a show resembles the effort of an athlete.

The whole problem becomes even more sensitive when we relate it to an instrumentist - while he has the instrument in his hands and can replace parts of it when it deteriorates, the vocal cords cannot be replaced, here intervening the science and art of the opera singer - and care for the "instrument" throughout his life, hence the necessity of knowing the phonatory, respiratory and resonator device to perfection, for a good "use" of the voice.

In addition to the vocal aspects, there are some psychological problems that are encountered, during the formation and even the development of the career, by a singer:

- fear of receiving a negative appreciation from others
- fear of a vocal ailment
- the stage fright
- fear of not being able to reach the level of performance of other colleagues
- fear of being mocked by colleagues because of the own seriousness (especially among students)
- fear of being unable to have a balance in family life
- fear of not being understood by those closest to you
- fear of being mocked by ordinary people
- fear of being unable to progress because of the teacher / lack of money / lack of chances / lack of interest by employers / public orientation towards a certain repertory segment ecc

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to bring together all the elements underlying the development and training of an opera singer, from the knowledge of his own body and of the phonation, breathing and resonant components, to the understanding of the mysteries of the human intellect and the application of psychological knowledges in learning and performing an opera role. The purpose of this study will be to highlight the complexity of forming an opera singer and also to alert today's young performers to the great responsibility they assume approaching this professional field.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

The following pictures explain the parts of the phonatory system and also the correct breathing. It is important for a student to know exactly how does it function each part of the body involved in the singing process and the teacher must explain patiently and correctly all the scientific terms:

Fig.1 - the vocal chords (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocal_cords)

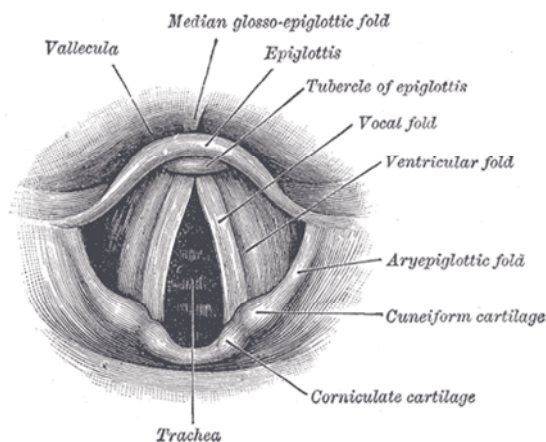
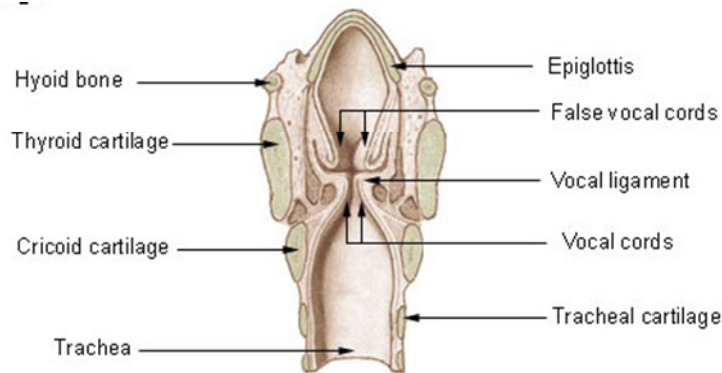


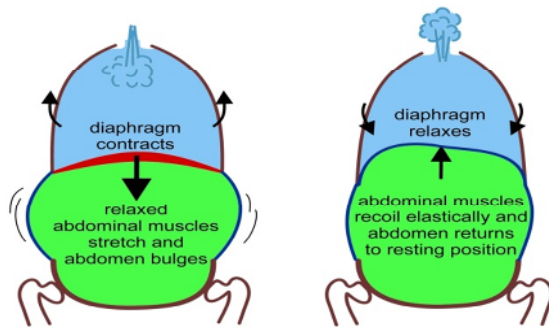
Fig. 2 - The larynx with the vocal ligaments (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocal_cords)



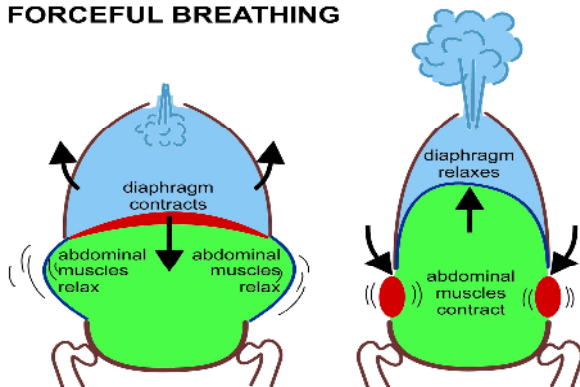
The student must understand that when he sings, he must use a specific type of breath, and not the normal breathing, because in order to amplify naturally the sound, besides directing the voice in the superior resonators, you must use the *costo-diaphragmatic breathing*, the most profound and efficient type of breath, which also oxygenates in the highest proportion the brain and which involves abdominal and chest muscles, engaging in strong action the dorsal, intercostal, abdominal muscles and, naturally, the diaphragm:

Fig. 3 - the normal breathing (quiet) /the singing breathing (forceful) - the movements of the diaphragm (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Respiratory_system)

QUIET BREATHING



FORCEFUL BREATHING



The movements of the abdominal muscles, the pelvis and the abdominal ribs, their slight impulses make the air through the diaphragm to be directed at our own desire, slower or faster, but all the time the air column must be continuous, equal and with a certain pressure. It is said that "*the real force of the column of sound with which we sing is equivalent to 0.40 atmospheres at a musical range of 950 Hz for 7-10 seconds*" (Silvia Voinea, 2002,80). Therefore, the student must be very carefully with his training, in order not to damage his voice and must be supervised by a maestro in the art of singing, who knows how to take care of his gift. Finally, here are some vocalizations extracted from Manuel Garcia's singing treatise, that are simple and can be used by the students and teachers in order to correct the intonation, to develop the ambit of the voice and also its agility (N.B. Manuel Garcia was also the inventor of the laryngoscope):

Fig. 4 - Different scales used for vocalization (source: Manuel Garcia - *New treatise on the art on singing. A compendious method of instruction, with examples and exercises for the cultivation of the voice, revised edition, Oliver Ditson Company, Boston, 1847, page 17*)

The image displays a musical score for vocalization exercises, numbered 20 through 27. The exercises are arranged in a grid-like format. Exercises 20, 21, 22, and 23 are in 3/4 time and feature a vocal line with a treble clef and a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. Exercise 20 includes a 'Rec.' (ritardando) marking. Exercises 24, 25, 26, and 27 are in common time (C) and feature a vocal line with a treble clef and a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. Exercise 24 includes a 'pp' (pianissimo) marking. The exercises consist of various scales and arpeggiated patterns, some with dynamic markings and articulation symbols. The page number '17' is visible in the top right corner of the score area.

Once we exposed shortly some technical aspects in singing, let say also a few things about the musical training of the student and about the acting part. First of all, a singer must be equipped with intelligence, will, perseverance and of course, talent. All the musical aspects must be well known and applied in the most optimal way, in order to perform a role, to present a musical score to the public:

musical theory, harmony, musical forms, counterpoint, polyphony, history of music, stylistics. These are the bases from which the analysis of a score starts and which must be taken into account in the process of learning a score. After this step, the role will be *put in the voice* by the student, under the guidance of the maestro. Here we speak about a process that should not be carried out in haste, but with care and patience on both sides. This part could be very nice and should stimulate the student's creativity to look for a variety of shades in voice, expression and intensity. Here comes another side of the interpretative process, which completes and finishes the work of acquiring a role: the shades in the voice, expression and intensity should not be mechanically built by the singer, but should be based on a thorough research of the features and feelings of the character he is playing. The singer must read the original play, must know the origin of the character, the social context in which the character carries out his actions, as well as his motivations. Of course, here comes psychology knowledges that helps in analyzing the character's behavior.

When you get to know your character and you understand his feelings, appears the danger of entering too much in the character's skin, to get too much emotionally involved. There are few opera singers who have the ability to *master* a role with intelligence, making the public to believe in the character seen on stage and to be very excited of the entire performance, entering in some kind of magic world. The public forgets that the people on stage are actors, because those actors are very credible. Here we must mention another dimension of the singer's job - acting. We speak here about gesture, mimic, body posture, glance, body movements. The singers must investigate all the important books in the field of acting, and here we mention the most famous: *The actor's work with himself* by Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski's system focuses on the realistic development of the characters. The actors were trained to use *emotional memory* to portray naturally the emotions of the interpreted characters, and in order to succeed in this attempt, the actors were asked to think for a moment of their lives in which they felt the emotion they wanted and try to present it on stage, all in the desire to ensure an interpretation as close as possible to reality. Besides this method, a new one has been adopted among actors and singers - that of real closeness to the character's feelings and actions, as evidenced by text and music, without the actor to relate to his own memories and feelings.

Therefore, the student, the future opera singer, must thoroughly investigate all these aspects related to the performing of an opera role on stage, he must understand and love his *job* and his voice, in order to obtain great results and to arrive in the point where "*the technique ends and begins the art*", as the great Italian maestro Nicola Porpora was saying (Silvia Voinea, 2002, 196).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that the musicians who embrace the career of an opera singer have a great responsibility in their lives: to develop the gift that they have in a proper way and to serve the public, to make ART at the highest level. I would finish this study with the words of the one who formed me as an artist and opera singer, the great soprano and singing teacher Silvia Voinea:

" *No other vocal genre brings together all the arts in a whole like the opera. The lyric artist is the one who builds worlds, characters, styles, epochs ... he is the one who gives life to musical notes, filtering them by his own reason and feeling, rewriting them.(...) He is the one who rewrites the work of the composer with his instrument - the voice - which he has to master, beyond the vocal difficulties of the score, in order to transform it into the glimpse of life he submits to his own self. (...) The road of forming a singer, actor, is long, hard, difficult, demanding many sacrifices, labor, patience, and everything grafted on an invincible argument, a natural grace - the voice*" (Silvia Voinea, 2002, 15-16).

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