

EXPLORING LEARNING AND UNLEARNING (II): EFFECTIVE STUDY METHODS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE OF PROFESSIONAL SINGERS

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SUMMARY. Education today no longer means just memorizing information and mastering technical procedures. Education today means exploring and discovering as many things as possible from diverse fields that can shed new light on your own field of interest. Education is more creative today, and is now accessible worldwide, just a click away. But discernment in choosing the valuable paths and what we do with the extensive information we acquire; the power to create a coherent structure, the adaptability and the energy to combine training with a broad vision – these are skills that will make the difference in education. *The future belongs to those who will never stop learning*² - this modern mindset is like a *motto* for my articles on *learning and unlearning*. This article attempts to outline why individual study is a necessity for singers as it has always been but must be structured by a clear methodology in which each participant is also a co-author. Because each artist presents his uniqueness – benefiting from anatomical-physiological and psychological particularities – the study methods are permanently adapted to everyone. A good teacher knows and practices these permanent adjustments of his pedagogical manner to effectively respond to the needs of each young singer in training. But the singer in his individual practice also needs to become aware of the benefits of a progressive adaptation and particularization of his personal training. And to periodically review the correctness of his vocal technique, of his artistic perspective, using tools such as unlearning and re-learning. This mental flexibility, combined with an analytical and conscious study – can lead to a more efficient education and good training for young singers. The structure of the article includes topics such as: Effective study

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² Simon, Stefania, *The Future Belongs to Those Who Never Stop Learning*, Minimalist Brain, Medium, 2021.



methods for professional singers; Singer's individual practice in approaching a new musical score; Unlearning Tasks; Creativity in vocal training; Time Management for Singers.

Keywords: learning, unlearning, music education, study methods in singing, time management, vocal pedagogy, creativity in vocal training

When a singer begins his training for a professional career, there are three major tasks that his teacher will guide him: 1. how to build the voice³ (the "invisible" instrument); 2. how to develop the most important performance skills (coaching the technical and interpretive singing aspects) and 3. how to assimilate basic information about vocal health and longevity, healthy habits in preventing disease and singing voice rehabilitation.

The study of singing cannot be a rigid nor completely standardized procedure although the basic information related to vocal technique or interpretation is common. Why the study of singing needs to be extremely carefully conducted, in an adaptable and creative manner, is primarily due to the need to adapt all the knowledge to each individual: the study of singing is always personalized. "The individual unified variability of the vocal instrument suggests that there cannot be a unified vocal behavior for all singers. Rather, the vocal technique taught needs to be adjusted and optimized for each individual. Diversity is introduced on several levels, i.e., by gender (see e.g. different formant tuning strategies for males and females in their upper range, resulting in different jaw opening paradigms); by voice category or *fach* and more subtle anatomical variations such as distinct geometric features of the hypopharynx, different mucosal wave speeds or variations in the geometry of the vocal folds and the glottal channel, whose systematic influences on singing technique and voice classification are as yet largely unexplored"⁴.

Although anatomical and physiological peculiarities have an undeniable impact on the human voice, at a deep but extremely concrete level – an individual's psychological evolution, his culture and the environment from which he comes – influence his timbre and his voice just as strongly. "What makes the human voice identifiable, unique and recognizable? The fact is that every human being, and every artist, carries in the slightest nuance of his voice the gift inherited from his ancestors - talent, the sum of his life's

³ "Voice Building (derived from the German term "Stimmbildung"), primarily comprising the functional and physiological aspects of singing" (Gill, Brian P; Herbst, Christian T., *Voice Pedagogy – What do we need?* Logoped Phoniatr Vocol. 2016 Dec;41(4):168-73, p. 1).

⁴ Gill, Brian P; Herbst, Christian T., *op.cit*, p. 4.

experiences, the full range of his emotional and personal knowledge, the stamp of his geographical and social origins and the cumulative cultural knowledge - which over time makes his voice an identifiable, recognizable trademark.”⁵

The study of singing is *par excellence* practical, a face-to-face meeting between disciple and teacher, in which a dialogue develops, concepts, sensations, correct reflexes are trained, but also a certain musical intelligence and artistic culture. No book, no textbook can replace direct communication and practical exercise in the study of singing.⁶

Although it is generally preferred for beginning singers to train most of the time under a teacher guidance – for direct supervision in building correct reflexes; the individual practice of each student is indispensable in the development and improvement of an artist, at any age. A correct method for individual training, learned from the very beginning, makes time much more efficient for artistic development, for correct memorization and assimilation of the repertoire.

The purpose of individual study is vocal training and artistic progress: to build by repetition new skills in the emission and sustaining of sound, the so-called “reflexes” (basically new neural networks), to solve technical difficulties, to achieve an optimal sound quality, to deepen the musical pieces from multiple perspectives, to train expressiveness and naturalness in interpretation, to memorize the score.

The stages of individual practice evolve from physical vocal training to the broader processes of documentation and analysis, supported by reading and comparative auditions. The principle of order and method are only *the tools*, but they must always be logically motivated by a precise *purpose*. This purpose - in the individual study - can be exploration and knowledge, building the voice and the correct technical reflexes, but also to develop a personal way of singing that responds both to aesthetic and spiritual needs of the public. Music is an art with a major impact on human consciousness. In the study of music, a discussion about aesthetic, cultural and spiritual values is also necessary, for the correct definition and distinction between *form* (study method) and *content* (the deep meanings of the studied works). From this perspective, we can understand the purpose of extensive documentation in the study process. These documentations can give a real perspective and depth in the true knowledge of a complex musical work, such as a Lied or an Aria (which belongs to a larger work of art from - an opera or an oratorio). Not only solfeggio and formal, harmonic, melodic and rhythmic analysis will

⁵ Hary, Judit, *Vocal pedagogy - reflections on how to teach proper speaking and singing to students*, Studia UBB Musica, LXVIII, 2, 2023, p. 208.

⁶ Radu, Cristina, *Metode de studiu pentru tinerii cântăreți. Note de curs pentru anii I-IV IMC Licență* (Study Methods for Young Singers), Ed. Ikono, Brașov, 2024, p. 5.

shed light on the decoding of the meanings and expressiveness of a work. It is not enough to even go through and translate the entire literary text, otherwise this is mandatory. It is necessary to go deeper with the documentation process: to explore a character from a psychological perspective, or to have the ability to fit the musical work into a cultural context and artistic style. The competence that an artist acquires in time develops through assimilation and processing of information, not just with its knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of individual study is to be able to best assimilate the content of a score, both from a musical and interpretative point of view.

In a relatively recent television presentation, historian and philosopher Yuval Noah Harari⁷, author of the bestsellers *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus* and *Nexus*, asked some disturbing questions: What are we preparing young people for? Future generations will face a world completely different from ours, what education can we give them for this new, deeply technological world? – and developed the idea of the necessity to train and to reinvent yourself, to adapt to the extremely dynamic and changing societies of the future. This training begins in the study room, where you discover, train and reinvent yourself countless times. The process of individual practice is a skill that is good to cultivate throughout our lives, along with curiosity, wonder, playfulness and an appetite for experimentation and novelty.

Effective study methods for professional singers

How often should singers practice?

Singers' practice should be regular – because singers should train both mind and body in order to obtain good singing habits in vocal technique (breathing, emission, posture), they are dealing with muscle memory. This is why singers' practice should have always clear objectives and a precise target.

Why is purposeful practice a necessity? Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson argues that *Homo Sapiens* (the knowing man) would be more aptly called *Homo exercens* (the practicing man), because humans are aware that they can only improve their abilities through practice. In his book, *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*⁸, he points out that there are two types of practice: *naive practice* (the allocation of time for something without any criteria) and *purposeful practice* (where the practitioner has a clear goal, pursues it with total concentration, and constantly seeks feedback from competent people).

⁷ Yuval Noah Harari & Russell Brand, *The Future of Education*, Penguin Talks, 2018.

⁸ The book was published by Ed. Publica in Bucharest, 2016 with the title "*Peak, Secretele performanței de top și noua știință a expertizei*".

Consistency of study is also an important topic to be aware of for those who want to perform in a certain field. I recall here the well-known rule of 10,000 hours. Inspired by Ericsson's studies, British journalist Malcom Gladwell wrote the essay *Outliers: The Story of Success*⁹, in which he shows that the time dedicated to developing a certain skill makes a difference in terms of performance. If, for example, it takes about 1 hour to have a basic introduction to a new field; after 10 hours we obtain a broader perspective on the main concepts; after 100 dedicated hours we will reach an average level in the discipline practiced, and after 1000 hours we will become what we call specialists; however, it takes 10,000 hours of exercise and practice to reach a top, high level of performance and mastery in a certain field.

The authors Hector Garcia (Kirai) and Francesc Miralles¹⁰ state that perseverance and well-articulated study are indispensable for this endeavor, but each person decides how much time they want to dedicate to achieving such a goal, and in this regard they also made a calculation, which expresses the time you need to reach top performance, depending on the interval you allocate to your daily practice:

- 8 hours daily x 5 days per week = 5 years;
- 4 hours daily x 5 days per week = 10 years
- 2 hours daily x 5 days per week = 20 years;
- 1 hour daily x 5 days per week = 40 years...

How long should a singing practice session be?

It is necessary to nuance this topic when it comes to singers. The distribution of the dedicated 10,000 hours of individual study for the goal of excellence – must be adapted to each type of musician. Unlike a regular instrumentalist (like a pianist, violinist or flutist etc.) a singer can't afford to sing continuously for eight hours a day. Excess can lead to vocal cord fatigue and even premature wear of the voice. This means that the vocal practice should be shorter but effective.

According to the stage of technical development, a singer can practice between 15-30 minutes once in a session, if he is beginner level and he's not familiar with what means to sing technically right. The individual practice time can extend to 40-60 minutes for intermediate singers and to several hours, for advanced or professional singers.

⁹ The book was published by Ed. Publica in Bucharest, 2016 with the title "*Excepționalii: Povestea succesului*".

¹⁰ Garcia, Hector (Kirai), Miralles, Francesc, *Metoda Ikigai, secrete japoneze pentru a-ți descoperi adevărata pasiune și a-ți atinge țelurile în viață*, (original title: *Ikigai, The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*) Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest 2019, pag. 45.

However, the study of a singer is not limited to vocal training and consists of several procedures such as body exercises, text translation, exercises for correct pronunciation (as the declamation of the text, in various foreign languages), formal analysis of scores, knowledge and assimilation of the structure of larger works (such as an entire role of an opera/ oratorio/ operetta/ modern musical work), large documentation of the studied works and the stylistic aspects of the artistic epoch. And also, many musical auditions (audio and video tutorials, master classes, professional performances, musical movies...) In conclusion, as a singer, you can dedicate many hours to study music and literature, but in your individual practice, the singing sessions should be adapted to your actual level of training.

How should singers study?

Body Training

The sound of the human voice is more than a mental construct; it is a wave of energy emitted in physical space. Producing an artistic sound involves participating of the body as much as that of the singer's mind. The entire body is the singing instrument and for this, it is necessary to shape it through sports and constant physical training. "Classical singing is a complex and multifaceted skill that requires the amalgamation of multiple cognitive, perceptual and motor functions. The teaching of classical singing is consequently a unique skill that holds further complexity. The singer is required to achieve and maintain consistently high-performance development of a specific motor activity, much like the sports athlete."¹¹

Sport develops our breathing capacity, body flexibility and plasticity, restores a harmonious posture, tones the muscles and significantly increases our resilience to physical effort. It also increases our immunity, our mental and physical health. Practicing sport gives the body extra endurance and stamina during long performances; it teaches us essential principles such as energy dosing. It also influences mental processes: increasing the power of concentration and attention, restoring security and self-confidence, increasing resilience in the face of criticism and exaggerated self-criticism; in the face of inherent failures, which sometimes occur and can be a good antidote against depression or procrastination.

The purpose of performing physical exercises before starting any vocal training is to stimulate the body and prepare it for sustained engagement in the singing process. Exercises activate energy in the body, straighten and

¹¹ Crocco, Laura; McCabe, Patricia; Madill, Catherine, *Principles of Motor Learning in Classical Singing Teaching*, Journal of Voice, Volume 34, Issue 4, July 2020, p. 567.

open the posture (open ribs, wide chest, raised spine), and are useful for good anchoring in the body, in the breath-support process.

Recommended exercises are Pilates, Yoga or any personalized set of medium-intensity physical exercises for warming the body. Breathing exercises, which involve long, deep inhalations and exhalations, as well as the apnea technique are also good tools for singers.

Voice Training

Voice building is certainly the most central area of voice pedagogy. It is concerned with “building the instrument”, by establishing motor control and behavioral patterns which allow sustainable healthy voice production within the limits of “acceptable” or “beautiful” singing as determined by the chosen singing style and aesthetics.”¹²

The singer’s regular training includes a series of melodic and rhythmic vocal exercises, called vocalize. The purpose of vocalizing is to achieve ease and freedom in singing, even in the most difficult technical passages or in extreme registers.

The vocal exercises can help develop the technique, expand the vocal range, equalize registers, increase singing endurance, train vocal virtuosity (by practicing agility and speed, or addressing difficulties related to wide intervals) and even acquire a more generous volume of the voice (vocal strength and penetration). They contribute to the correct imposition and also to the correction of emission defects that may occur in the “passage” area, to the control of vibrato, of sound dynamics, to learning the correct opening of the mouth, or the correct position of the tongue during emission, etc.

The vocal exercises can be performed by the singer to warm up, to train the voice before starting the study of the repertoire or can also be done independently - in sessions dedicated exclusively to vocal technique training.

There are a lot of vocal exercises, each teacher using his own set, according to his preference and habit, but adapting them to the technical development needs of his students. Personalizing the set of vocal exercises for each student is particularly important. “A voice pedagogue who indiscriminately applies her vocal exercises to all her students based on the sole fact that these exercises were good for her is comparable to a doctor who only prescribes the medications that cured her own diseases.”¹³ If the teacher does not do it, then the singer himself should create his own personalized set of vocal exercises.

¹² Gill, Brian P; Herbst, Christian T., *op.cit*, p. 5.

¹³ Gill, Brian P; Herbst, Christian T., *op. cit*, p. 4.

Vocal parameters that require practice and technical skills:

- Breathing: “in the case of professional speaking or singing - singers, actors, teachers, priests - the aim is to achieve a correct, robust, strong, audible quality of voice, which requires the acquisition of technical breathing techniques developed for this purpose.”¹⁴
- The vocal range, which can be extended and equalized through study. The wide range, the homogeneous evolution from the low register to the high register, the diverse vocal colors, the virtuosity and versatility, are the mark of native talent doubled by technical performance and at the same time the product of rigorous, constant and long training.
- Personal timbre
- Proper resonance - professional voices use in singing a focused emission of sound, with an efficient resonance. An opera singer can sing for hours without the help of amplification (without a microphone), overcoming the massive sonorities of the orchestra, without tiring and without destroying his vocal potential.
- Controlled vibrato
- Correct and expressive intonation
- A varied dynamic of sounds in musical phrases (expressive nuances) The richness of the nuances that a voice can reproduce, bring an extra eloquence and refinement to the interpretation, making it credible in front of the audience
- Virtuosity - Agility and malleability of the voice in virtuoso passages, in the coloratura technique, heroic acutes
- Proper diction – the correct and expressive articulation of vowels and consonants, corresponding to the phonetic requirements of the international languages used in the Opera, Lieder and Oratorio repertoire
- Correct posture in singing
- Training the resilience, the energy in body and in mind focus: increasing vocal resilience for sustained effort over extended periods of time, without tiring the cords and larynx. “The energy which the singer brings to the performance greatly influences the success of the communication with an audience. For example, if ordinary conversation requires a certain level of energy, singing to an audience will require much more! If that energy is not present, the communication will be weak.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Hary, Judit, *op.cit.*, p.208.

¹⁵ Campbell, Ross, *Singing – An extensive Handbook for All Singers and Their Teachers*, Novordium Limited UK 2017, p. 75.

Singer's individual practice in approaching a new musical score

When a singer starts studying a new musical work, it is always good to have an overview and then analyze. A documentation about the composer, the stylistic characteristics of the epoch and the particularities of the compositional style, of the literary source and also the analysis of the musical structure – contributes to deepening a broader vision of the artistic work.

Then follows the decomposition of the work into its component parts and the separate training of the music and of the text.

The literary text is the first to be studied. "Learning music and learning words take place in different parts of the brain. It becomes easier to memorize if you address one of these at a time. It is worthwhile to treat the lyrics as text which can be recited independently of the music. After the words have been committed to memory in this way, the process of rehearsal reconnects them with the music"¹⁶

First, the text must be read cursively, identifying the particularities of the respective language and the challenges related to diction.

Diction is one of the essential parameters of a professional singer's technique. It is often called "the singer's politeness". The study of diction focuses on 2 important aspects:

- the proper articulation of words in the language in which the text is sung/ or recited, paying attention to the particularities related to the consonants or the colors of vowels.
- intelligible articulation of the text - the ability to correctly emit vowels and consonants in legato, following an appropriate phrasing, considering the natural accents of the text and the meaning of the words (to recite the text like a theater actor). Also, it is important to pay attention to the intelligible unification of words in long musical phrases, in a manner opposite to their syllabic and meaningless singing.

Also, the complete translation of the text is one of the first steps that a singer needs to take when studying for a new score. "We remember best that which is meaningful to us. We might expect classically trained singers, while memorizing the words and music of songs, to attend separately to the semantic meaning of the words and the compositional structure of the music"¹⁷ Understanding the meanings of the text leads not only to the subsequent finding of the appropriate interpretative expression but also has a precise purpose in identifying the moments of breathing. Locating and marking the

¹⁶ Campbell, Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁷ Ginsborg, Jane, *Classical Singers Learning and Memorising a New Song: An Observational Study*, *Psychology of Music*, 2002, 30, p. 60.

right moments of breathing in the score is essential at the beginning of the study and is done considering both the musical writing and the meaning of the text - for a good phrasing. One will never breathe in the middle of a word. After the breaths are noted in the score, they will be constantly considered during the separate practice of the text and of the music, to be rigorous memorized by the singers' mind and the body (muscles' memory) who must get used to supporting the air throughout the length of the phrases.

After this first reading process has been completed and breaths have been marked in the score, the rhythmic reading of the text follows. It is essential that the singer beats/marks his metrical landmarks while reading the text along with the musical rhythm. Speaking the words aloud and counting aloud (while reading text from the score) is an essential exercise for learning the text.

Rhythm is of the utmost importance. If the singer discovers rhythmically difficult passages in the score, he will study them separately from the text. Later he will resume those passages by combining the text with the rhythm of the music - repeating as many times as necessary to solve the passage correctly and practicing progressively, from a slow tempo to the tempo desired by the composer.

The study of the music begins with the solfeggio, but the singer has to remember that "a musical score is a complex semiotic object that excels at conveying musical information in a human readable format." (Francesco Foscarin) In this respect, the singer should pay attention to every single detail of the musical score: the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic aspects, the nuances indicated by the composer, the tempo changes, the articulation modalities (legato, staccato, etc.) and even the directing instructions that some composers expressly note in the score.

Learning the musical content of the score should be done with the utmost rigor because anything learned incorrectly is very difficult to correct later. At this stage, the melodic and rhythmic passages are studied separately from the text, the singer beating the tempo pulse. "Counting helps musicians to maintain a steady pulse and to produce rhythms accurately. It also provides a framework within which musicians can keep track of where they are in a piece of music, to plan and to sequence musical events. Counting beats aloud through rests and long notes while reading from the score, may well contribute to the proficient memorizers' speed and accuracy of memorizing. Teachers recommend using auditory and, to a lesser extent, muscular memory rather than visual memory for the musical score. Strategic memorization can involve the use of different kinds of memory (for example, auditory, visual and muscular)."¹⁸

¹⁸ Ginsborg, Jane, *op. cit.*, p. 59, 61, 93.

After the music is learned correctly through rhythmic solfeggio and the text is added, after the technical problems are solved and the singer manages to sing the entire work at the tempo desired by the composer, the most exciting part follows that of configuring interpretive ideas.

Configuration of the personal interpretive vision on the aria/song or of an entire opera role approached – is deeply related to investigation of the psychology of the character, his/her attire, attitude and relationships with the other entities of the drama. The details that help to outline these aspects, as well as the visualization, with the help of the imagination, of the physical and gestural representations of the embodied character – is one of the most exciting stages of the study. This stage is achieved gradually, with the increasing proximity to the role studied by assimilating the details of the score and the information explored through the complex process of documentation.

An artist does not always have access, in his private life, to similar experiences of his roles embodied on stage. This prevents him from using exclusively information from his personal experience in outlining the characters, and forces him to sharpen his sense of observation, searching outside himself: in literature, but also on the street, in the everyday landscape. He will complete with his imagination many elements of the complex puzzle of the human personality of the character he is researching. In composing a role, the sense of observation and imagination are cardinal points.

The next step in the laborious practice of a singer is to train to adapt himself mentally and vocally (through the vocal and interpretative technique) for the the most authentic reproduction of the musical score meanings and the studied character.

Mind Training & Stress Management

Awareness and mindfulness are needed in individual practice, monitoring bodily sensations and recognizing markers that indicate possible vocal excesses or technical errors, which can damage the vocal instrument over time. These markers can be pain or tension felt in the throat; any discomfort in the larynx; vocal fatigue; hoarseness; tightness in the cervical area/ shoulders/ lips/ jaw/ or tongue; overventilation; abundant secretions that “parasitize” the sound; hissing voice; capretto (trembling voice). When the singer identifies one or more of these “symptoms” it is necessary to stop singing and evaluate what he did wrong, or what was insufficient (perhaps in the support of the breath, in the sound projections..), or what was in excess (too much air volume, too much pressure in larynx, singing too loud / too high/too long). After becoming aware of the problem, the study process can be resumed, after a hydration break, or after the singer takes a few deep breaths to refocus their attention.

Training the mind through study, documentation, memorization, meditation, awareness, imagination; mental representations, experimentation and creativity – is specific to artists. These abilities along with extended concentration are developed over time, through training and through the scenic experience.

Cultivating resilience and determination (motivation combined with will) leads to results and creates the possibility of overcoming physical obstacles (vocal ailments, illnesses) or psychological ones (performance anxiety, stress generated by fierce competition, nervousness, various blockages, disappointments, emotional turmoil). Determination is fueled by real motivations (passion for singing, desire to overcome certain limits, desire to assert oneself, desire to communicate a message, desire to evolve, to share in communion with the audience the values you believe in, to educate, etc.).

Managing emotions is another aspect of mind training, a key point in preparing a singer for a lyrical career. Singers can be subjected to major stress in their preparation for stage performance and when they are exposed in front to a large audience during the representation. They need to train their mind and the body to confront and manage stress, nervousness and stage fright – through learned breath techniques and relaxation. “Increasing competition among musicians on the contemporary scene means additional requirements in terms of preparing of versatile and competitive singers, i.e. students who have acquired stable and high-level technical skills and who cope with the competitive environment. It became evident that younger students and students with less singing experience need greater psychological support from the teacher. In vocal pedagogy, besides developing vocal technical side, more emphasis should be put on knowledge and skills that help students to adjust to the pre-performance situation. Exercises and techniques facilitating and ensuring good performance should be given to students simultaneously with the development of technical skills. Knowledge about developing pre-performance preparedness may be vital in the training of singers, given that the profession of a classical singer today requires readiness for performing in a very tight, worldwide competition.¹⁹

Coaching yourself in singing practice and also requesting feedback from teachers or other professionals

When studying alone, it's good to have clear goals set, whether they are technical or interpretative: every session of individual practice must be dedicated both to improving vocal technique and to learning the repertoire.

¹⁹ Kiik-Salupere, Vaike; Ross, Jaan, *Two Complementary Aspects of Contemporary Vocal Pedagogy*, Problems of education in the 21st century, Volume 20, 2010, p. 93, 101.

To improve the vocal technique, it is necessary to focus on the aspects you want to assimilate or develop, one by one. Choose one technical thing you have learned from your teacher, such as breathing, support, releasing tension from the jaw, projection in emission... and insist on learning it properly.

Studying the repertoire, it is necessary to learn properly a score (both music and text), to study one by one every phrase in order to solve technically or dynamically difficult passages, but also to build up stamina and create resilience (to be able to support and sing an entire piece of music to the end). This requires physical endurance obtained through training, but also mental concentration and focus.

I mentioned in “Mind Training & Stress Management” about the necessity of awareness and mindfulness in the individual practice and how important is to pay attention of every marker that indicate possible vocal excesses or technical errors. For self-control in individual study of singers, mirror, water and a recorder are extremely useful tools. Water keeps you hydrated and is essential for optimizing a lot of physical and cognitive processes. It improves the focus of the mind and the state of awareness. The mirror shows you in real time any grimace or jaw sway, tension. Recording rehearsals helps you progress faster by becoming aware of the technical aspects that need improvement and also of your interpretative objectives. You can auto evaluate your practice day by day and rate your progress.

However, it is essential to obtain a professional assessment of your individual study and practice, by consulting your teacher/ mentor/coach or a professional who can regularly check your progress. This can restore your goals, motivation and offer encouragement. Also, it can have a major impact in preventing bad habits and bad techniques and offer faster improvement and an accelerate progress.

Unlearning Tasks

Unlearning is giving up what is no longer true, or relevant, or helpful. In the dynamic process of learning - unlearning is one of the most difficult moments, especially if we talk about singers and body reflexes formed for breathing management or for the sound emission mechanisms.²⁰ During individual training, persistent bad habits in vocal emission or breath control can lead to serious vocal injuries. That is why it is necessary for the teacher to initiate discussions about vocal hygiene and about problems that can arise

²⁰ Radu-Giurgiu, Cristina, *Exploring Learning and Unlearning In Singing Technique (Breath)*, Studia UBB Musica, LXVIII, Special Issue 2, 2023, p.191.

from a bad vocal technique or bad singing habits (singing too loudly, brutal forging of the high register, continuing to study for a long time even though the muscles are tired, covering the sound too early). The young singer needs to know when to stop when certain indicators (such as vocal fatigue, hoarseness or lack of focus) occur during individual training. And of course, to make the necessary technical adjustments. “Most professionals in the field agree that vocal health education - including instruction on vocal anatomy and physiology, vocal hygiene, optimal use of the speaking voice, and early warning signs of functional vocal pathologies —plays an important role in preventing vocal disorders. The singing teacher acts as the first and main source of vocal health knowledge for singers.”²¹

From my pedagogical practice I have often noticed certain situations in which students have difficulty rehearsing pieces studied in the past because they were learned with wrong technical reflexes or even with musical mistakes. “If the song is not learned accurately, then it will not be memorized accurately.”²² Many musical arias or songs, learned earlier in time, when the student was in the beginner level with a rudimentary vocal technique, present problems when they are re-entered into the study after a longer period. This fact follows a natural consequence: muscle memory. More precisely, the musical works were memorized together with certain reflexes and sensations that return intact even if in the meantime the singer has evolved and has a much better vocal technique. “Muscles “remember” the actions they perform. The more often these actions are repeated, the more efficient the muscles become at doing them. Training a voice involves building up muscle memory which allows the voice to work at its best. A singer may arrive for their first lesson with muscles which are under-active, over-active or used incorrectly. Breaking down old habits and creating new ones which are more efficient is an essential part of teaching singing”²³

That is why in the process of resuming arias or songs studied in the past, it is sometimes necessary to correct or to unlearn the bad habits in vocal emission, the musical mistakes or the bad pronunciation of the incorrectly assimilated text – learned in the past in a certain musical work – and to relearn a score accurately, with a new technical approach, from the current vocal technical perspective, achieved in present.

The Unlearning process is primarily a process of awareness of the new vocal stage and the contents that need to be updated or corrected.

²¹ Latham, Katherine; Messing, Barbara; Bidlack, Melisa, *Vocal Health Education and Medical Resources for Graduate-Level Vocal Performance Students*, Journal of Voice, Volume 31, Issue 2, March 2017, p. 251.e3

²² Ginsborg, Jane, *op.cit.*, p.94.

²³ Campbell, Ross, *op.cit.*, p.20.

The process of correcting or updating in the new manner of singing the vocal emission, breath support and other technical aspects – can be difficult, or even impossible sometime, especially when the student sings on “autopilot”, without consciously and actively participating in the steps initiated by the teacher/ coach. It became sometimes more useful to resume the study of that work from scratch, as if it were a new acquisition in the repertoire – and approach the study through the prism of the singer’s current technical and interpretative level.

These aspects once again reveal the importance of establishing a correct individual study method for singers, right from the beginning. The more a piece is learned accurately from the very beginning and seriously deepened in terms of the music, text, style and vocal technique - once it is memorized, this acquisition will be resumed even after long periods of time - with all the details fixed in a correct and secure way.

Creativity in vocal training

Creativity plays an essential role in the preparation for a professional lyrical career, in vocal pedagogy and in individual practice. Creativity and adaptability are needed to find the right and personalized teaching formula for each singer because anatomical and psychological peculiarities make each individual a unique artist.

Each voice has its own particularities, its own timbre, but also its own needs to develop. Some need to work more on certain parameters, others need to improve other specific aspects of vocal or interpretative technique.

Each teacher should adapt the vocalizations to the developmental needs and particularities of each student’s voice. Also, each singer is welcome to make their own personalized set of vocalizations for vocal warm-ups or for approaching different repertoires. All these adaptations, improvisations and customizations in combining certain new melodic and rhythmic formulas for vocalizations are aspects of vocal creativity. “Creativity is the driving force that ensures human evolution and the key element in every art, but its specifics and its dynamic are still a subject of research and wonder.(...) Improvisation is an important feature of the human brain, with implications outside the music spectrum, one of the main tools in human evolution, that facilitates adapting to environmental changes, helps us to solving problems and communicating actively using tools of improvised speech.”²⁴

²⁴ Zan, Luiza; Drăgulin, Stela, *Vocal improvisation – a cognitive and a psychological process*, Studia UBB Musica, LXVIII, Special Issue 2, 2023, p. 207.

But the most evident impact of artistic imagination and vocal creativity is in the interpretative field, where singers are forced to recreate the psychological profiles of the characters they embody - both through the colors of their voices and through the modeling of phrasing, accents, nuances, mimicry, gestures, and stage presence. The individual time dedicated to study is transformed into a laboratory of exploration and creation, not just of polishing vocal technique.

Another aspect of creativity is favored in singing training by repetition. We might be tempted to think that repetitions lead to routine, but in fact they can produce new free associations and probe new content. "The French word for rehearsal is "repetition". Successful performance is the outcome of creative repetition. Each time the phrase, section or entire song is repeated in rehearsal, the music should be brought more and more to life and closer to performance. This repetitive process should not be sterile and mindless, but creative and enjoyable."²⁵

I would not like to conclude without emphasizing one more aspect related to creativity in contemporary singing pedagogy: flexibility and versatility. For centuries, the opera genre has developed and grown in popularity, and singers have been forced to develop their technique both to cover an increasingly demanding repertoire, with increased technical and expressive complexity, but also to cope with the sound of larger orchestras and with the challenges created by modern tuning, which is higher than in the Baroque era. However, with the invention of both recorded and amplified sound - in the modern era, voice study can take many forms to adapt to multiple styles and arise the concept of "cross-training". "Tremendous advances in the field of vocal pedagogy have given the profession an opportunity to approach teaching voice in a different way. It is time to recognize that students can be taught multiple styles healthily, enabling them to become more flexible and marketable performers. The key is the functionality and flexibility obtained with the proper techniques of cross-training."²⁶

Time Management for Singers

This brief introduction to singing methods for young singers cannot be concluded without a few thoughts about time management. Time management is a process of planning and conscious control of time to achieve chosen objectives. Its basic principles are: Planning, Prioritization and Action itself

²⁵ Campbell, Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

²⁶ Wilson, L. C. (2019). *Bel Canto to Punk and Back: Lessons for the Vocal Cross-Training Singer and Teacher* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2019). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/5248>, p.VI

(achieving objectives). Time management is proactive, not reactive, which means that intelligent time management strategies are best designed and prepared in advance.

What activities should singers plan? Studying for exams, auditions, competitions, concerts, performances; studying for their debut in a new role; organizing a specific ritual on the day of a concert; but also, other personal objectives, health monitoring, various activities in the daily ritual, etc.

In preparing for an artistic career, but also during its development, any singer reserves consistent periods of time to practice and develop their technical vocal skills, as well as acting and public communication skills, or networking skills. Not only vocal virtuosity, but absolutely all other aspects require constant training. But to successfully prepare for a specific goal (such as a competition or debuting in a new role), the dedicated time must be structured.

Competitional activity is a constant in the life of a lyrical performer, whether it is singing competitions, auditions, or maintaining a status. Training for this competitive activity begins during university and continues during the affirmation and development of a lyrical career. It is training that involves both the physical and psychological aspects of the singer, requiring discipline and good organization. For a clear picture, I divided this process into several stages:

- Documentation on national and international competitions/auditions: information about place and period of the event, required repertoire, deadline for registration, jury, prizes, booking transport and accommodation, etc.
- Planning the competition/audition calendar for the respective year
- Choosing the repertoire
- Planning the actual study period (starts at least one month before the competition date)
- Planning the time for assimilation period (the penultimate week/a few days before the last week of study before the competition)
- Planning the day of the concert/ competition/audition
- Conclusions (evaluation process, self-evaluation and setting the next objectives)

In preparation for a competition, the more extensive and complex the repertoire is, the better it is for the artist to plan an appropriate amount of time for studying, memorizing the pieces and deepening them optimally, from a technical and interpretative point of view. Otherwise, the stress inherent in the competition will be added to the stress of not knowing enough the repertoire he has to present and the fatigue that accumulates in the last hundred meters

before the competition, when trying to “make up” for lost time. Each singer knows his own learning pace and can thus decide how much time he needs. But preparation and training before a competition, especially when the pieces are already known, begin at least a month in advance. My recommendation for the last two weeks before the competition is to plan a break of a few days (the so-called “assimilation period”) and then resume the repertoire at a moderate pace, training but also conserving the energy so that it can manifest at maximum in the competition.

The assimilation period. The body, mind, muscles need a break after a sustained effort, to process and assimilate information. Just as during the night, while we rest, the brain defragments all the information received during the day, selects, sorts and sends each one to its “little house” - similarly, such a process is necessary after our mind and body have studied a new repertoire, worked out down to the smallest details for several weeks. As we noted above, a period of a few days of break is precisely optimal to let this repertoire be assimilated more deeply. It is also a moment of refreshment after which all the details will fit better into the “puzzle”.

The day of the competition/ concert/ performance: Going through the biographies of many opera singers or their interviews, but also from my own experience, I can say that the day of the concert must be managed in a special way. Every artist has their own eating or rest rituals on the day they have a concert or an important performance. Some sleep more, others take a total vocal break, others do sports, but most hydrate well and conserve their energy during the day for the event that will take place in the evening. I would just point out a few elements for good planning of a day when an exam or a concert will take place:

Organizing a precise schedule for the day.

- Punctuality is extremely important and arriving at the Concert Hall at least one hour before the scheduled start of the exam or performance is essential for the artist’s calm and safety. Because singers need a period of adaptation to the environment in which they will sing (both acoustic and in terms of temperature), and in the case of an opera performance, a substantial amount of time is also needed to put on costumes and stage makeup. In addition to the time of arrival at the Concert Hall, it is necessary to schedule in advance: the hours dedicated to rest (it is good for the body to be awake at least 2-3 hours before singing!), meal times (it is not recommended to eat 1-2 hours before singing, because the body would be too involved in the laborious process of digestion), time for a short rehearsal (the vocal exercises who need to be done right before singing).

- Impeccable preparation and suitability of clothing, accessories and makeup – adapted to the location, the event and the time of day.
- The moment of concentration. I believe that it is useful that before entering the stage each singer has a moment of concentration within himself. A moment in which to deepen and slow down his breathing rhythm, to sing fragments of the piece in his mind (imagining all the sensations of support and sound resonance, but also the details of mimicry and stage play, as if he were singing the piece in front of the audience) and especially to create an optimal inner state to enter the stage: with a confident, secure, elegant feeling and especially with...joy! Joy brings back the release, disperses the artist's stress, cancels the silent pressure of the audience/jury. A bright face, with a positive energy and relaxed attitude will ensure a good entering the stage for any artist. And it's good not to forget, even in the most stressful moments, why we do music and art... because it brings joy to us and those who we share it.

As for learning a new role from the opera, operetta or musical repertoire – this is a more elaborate process, which starts from learning the arias and later the ensembles, goes through a vast process of documentation and training, and finally is polished through multiple rehearsals on stage, together with the director, conductor, set designer and the large ensemble of soloists, choristers, orchestra, ballet and people who make possible a complex and astonishing show such as an opera performance. To the degree of seriousness and efficiency in organizing the singer's study depends on – both the success of a debut and the subsequent resistance of the role over time, as intact as possible in the artist's memory. The more detailed a new role is worked on by the artist in the process of personal training, the more organically assimilated it will be in his mental, emotional and muscular (!) memory. In this way, restoring that role after a longer period will be less difficult. The study of opera role will be the subject of a separate article.

Conclusions

The ideas presented in this article represent a process (work-in-progress) and not a finality. The study methods have been presented that a student or a professional singer can test and master, practicing them personalized for their needs and objectives.

Individual study can be structured in three stages, starting from analysis and documentation – then to the decomposition of a work into its component elements and their separate practice, in order to bring them to a

good stage of execution – and ending by reuniting the essential elements of the work, adjusting them accordingly, until they will render not only the entirety of the musical piece studied but also an interpretative vision of it, already outlined in the study process both through documentation and through the actual training of the piece.

The article emphasizes that a vast education and sustained personal training is essential in the formation of a singer and that is why it is good that it is guided by a correct method. To obtain significant results in the preparation of a lyrical career in the highly competitive musical environment of today, the singers' personal practice should be done with accuracy and consistency.

The processes of unlearning and relearning become inevitable when singers manifest a lack of accuracy in the study and memorization of scores, or when they acquire certain bad habits in their vocal technique. These processes, however, can also mark moments of revision of a singer's vocal and interpretative technique, his desire to experiment with new ways of expression. The article offers pragmatic information about study methodology, Time Management and aspects of creativity in the modern training of singers.

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