

CONSIDERATIONS about PROFESSIONAL SINGING

of Songs, Operas, Operettas and Musicals

from the 18th to the 21st century out of the European area of culture

Why do human beings sing?

- What does singing mean for singers?
- What does singing mean for the listeners?

1. Historical development of professional singing and teaching in Europe

- o Antiquity starting from 500 before Christ: Greeks, Romans
- o Middle Ages until 15th century AD
- o Renaissance 15th and 16th century AD
- o Baroque, 16th and 17th century AD
- o 18th and 19th century AD
- o Richard Wagner and the consequences
- o New challenges by the music of the 20th century

2. Preconditions for professional singing

- o spiritual
- o physical
- o social milieu
- o possibilities for the (professional) realisation

3. What does professional singing mean?

- o mental
- o physical
- o in the social environment
- o what are the possibilities of a professional realization?

4. Conditions for the special training of the voice itself:

- o Musical talent
- o Joy (feeling of happiness!) while singing
- o Willingness to communicate credibly with the audience by text and music
- o Melodious voice-timbre!
- o Diligence
- o Basic musical education
- o Learning an instrument, preferably piano
- o Willingness to learn at least Italian, German and French at a high level in addition to their mother tongue when they start their studies
- o Good basic physical condition of lungs and heart
- o Robust health
- o Unconditional will and patience

5. The professional Singing technique based on the method of the Italian Belcanto

- o Why necessary?
- o How does it work?

6. Why Belcanto Singing technique?

- Very long breathing time (long breath)
- great agility
- well controlled legato
- correct pronunciation and
- same sound (voice colour) in all registers according to European liking
- universal selection of programmes and roles

7. How can Belcanto singing technique be learned?

- Basic understanding of function and interaction:
 - the breathing musculature (active and passive) in general
 - especially the diaphragm (only active when inhaling, passive when exhaling)
 - of the lumbar, thoracic and intercostal muscles and
 - body posture of the vocal tract when singing
- Readiness to undertake physical training in inhalation and tone formation by suitable technical exercises with a duration of **2 academic years (4 - 6 semesters)**
- Instruction by singing teachers who have performed leading roles on stage themselves and have practised the profession.
- It is very difficult to make progress in singing without a private teacher who is able to devote himself/herself intensely to the student.

8. Basics of Belcanto singing technique

The professional singing voice should be imagined, very simplified, as a **"STRING INSTRUMENT WITH AIR DRIVE"** (© author), that means:

as a **RESONANCE BODY, which does not change its volume while singing**, in spite of the air consumption for the tone if possible, thus achieving the **"Squillo"** (penetrating power), the "Singer Format" (maximum energy in a certain frequency range), even in large rooms and with large orchestras!

8.1. **By inhaling correctly**, the **diaphragm** ("appoggiare", better translated from Italian as "to lean against", in German less well: "Stütze") **and the larynx** are brought into the lowest position ("**breathing down the larynx**") and **kept as deep as possible** (i.e. like a sound post of a stringed instrument, e.g. Cello)

8.2. By simultaneously adjusting the "vocal tract", i.e. the actual intonation above the larynx, during inhalation (a position similar to that used when yawning), a starting position is achieved which allows as constant a flow of breath as possible to pass the larynx with low pressure.

8.3. **Correct inhalation**, but without overstretching the chest, requires a **sustained "reset"**.

- keeping **the chest open at all times** during a vocal phrase,
- **constant correction of the larynx position** (lowering after closed vowels like "i" and "u" to open vowels like "a")
- **constant control of the yawning position** of the attachment tube
- Inhalation into the ribcage held open only by the singer (can be controlled by panting, in which case the chest rib muscles must not move)

8.4. By **correct inhalation, adjustment of the diaphragm and the attachment tube**, minimum air consumption is

- **creates a lasting legato**, as is essential to deal with Italian literature in particular; and
- **makes the beauty of sound and the "colours"** of vowels and consonants in the different languages *controllable*

8.5. The procedures according to pos. 8.4. also make the "**Passagio**", the change between chest and head voice muscle, easier to learn.

8.6. The **chest tuning muscle is darker** in colour, the *head tuning muscle is lighter*

- **The goal** must therefore be **to make the voice colour bright**, even in the lowest voice range.
- **This allows to handle "Passagio" with the slightest change of voice colour**
- This means that the **posture of the highest position must always be the same, even in the lowest**

9. What are the benefits of professional singing with the Belcanto technique at the professional and practical level?

- A professional singer must be able to sing on the stage for at least 30 years without any damage to the voice.

Examples: Joan Sutherland, Editha Gruberova, Placido Domingo

- A professional singer must be able to sing in a multidisciplinary way throughout his or her career, i.e. from lyrical to dramatic roles , from Mozart up to Richard Wagner

Example: Nicolai Gedda, Tenor; Placido Domingo (Tenor)

CONCLUDING REMARK:

Many young students often **set their goals too high and start singing the most difficult arias** from their vocal class without any knowledge of singing technique and the "Passagio".

They sing with high pressure through the diaphragm and **squeeze their pectoral muscles**, comparable to the emptying of an air bag in the Scottish bagpipe. This creates too much pressure on the larynx and the vocal chords (singing themselves "empty", the chest "collapses"), the voice sounds pressed and has no natural vibrato.

Characteristic of this is the lifting of the head as the pitch rises, different voice colours in the registers and often too low intonation, which becomes worse and worse with advancing age and leads to the fact that **the voice can no longer be adjusted** from the age of 35 to 40 on.

The **longer one sings in this way**, the more professional singing and the vocal chords are damaged (stretching, etc.). Irreparable damage can be the result (the *muscles can no longer be "re-trained"*).

Wanting to become a professional singer means to consider carefully, it is a very difficult profession, it is rightly named by many a "high-performance sport in standing"!

FOR MANY, INCLUDING ME, IT IS THE DREAM JOB!

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