

Mariam Sarkissian

I think, therefore I sing

or

The Praise of Cognitive Belcanto



To my students

I

Who

*Дано мне тело — что мне делать с ним,
Таким единым и таким моим?*

Осип Манделъштам¹

Не выходи из комнаты, не совершай ошибку.

Иосиф Бродский²

Intrusion

My appearance into this world took place in Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union at that time, causing a shocking event in the family on my mother's side: Madeleine, my maternal grandmother, born in Paris in 1929 and brought back by her doctor parents in a fit of madness into the Stalinist nightmare of the thirties, officially announced to the family and the close circle that she had finally found a meaning of her life.

When I was just one year old, I showed a particular interest in a certain musical programme on television, which resulted in a few buttock movements, faintly resembling a dance. This imprudent act was noticed and punished on the spot: my grandmother decided to dedicate my life to the music.

Painter Saré, a scenographer at that time, quite impassioned by the theatre, happened to have my father as a husband, a talented director with a great penchant for alcohol, which killed him later on in the prime of his life. Not feeling adventurous enough to wait for this predictable ending by his side, my mother got divorced when I was five, which made my grandmother's presence in my life definitively indispensable and gave me the surname of my beloved grandfather, a diplomat in every sense of the word.

My official initiation began with piano at the age of five. Two years later, having already developed an idiosyncrasy towards practicing on this instrument that I used to love so dearly, which was even more tragic given that my grandparents were close to Sviatoslav Richter³ and I adored him, I entered a competition in a specialized music school – an educational institution at the disposal of the capitals and large cities of the Soviet Union where children were devoted to music from a very early age.

My negative emotions expressed towards playing the piano did not affect Madeleine's children: my mother had taken refuge too early in the world of drawing and theatre to understand that a

¹ *A body was given to me—what to do with it, so uni and so much my own ?* Ossip Mandelstam

² *Don't leave the room, don't make the mistake..* Joseph Brodsky

³ Sviatoslav Richter (1915-1997), great Russian pianist

child under the age of ten doesn't necessarily have to have a profession, and my uncle, a microbiologist turned musicologist, had already been making headlines as a young Esperantist at my age...

As for my grandmother, student of Maria Maksakova⁴ and Alexander Melik-Pashayev⁵, who in her youth exchanged live performance for the teaching of a dead language due to post-war tuberculosis, she had already started paving a path towards the fulfilment of her dream: to making a lyrical singer out of me.

She shared her plan with Richter and his wife, chamber singer Nina Dorliak, and another friend of the family – composer Edison Denisov. The latter loved the transverse flute and it was decided to develop my breathing into a future singer's one by practicing this instrument. The good news was that thanks to this specialization the charge of the piano would decrease, the bad news, turned out to be unexpected mostly for myself – it was that I didn't like playing the flute...

Unlike some of my little classmates at the special school, I couldn't get used to playing these instruments and take other pleasures than to please my beloved grandmother. I certainly loved the music I played, but incomparably more – performed by others... As I later realized, this was due to the fact that *my technical thought* was not connecting properly to my *musical thought* and did not follow it naturally (these terms will be explained later on), and it was creating a constant frustration, even though I was practicing several hours a day being "very musical" as my teachers regularly confirmed.

It was only through the practice of singing that I finally realized what musicians who did not have this "dephasing" felt when playing their instrument: contrary to me, they were able to create good technical automatisms and, once the preparatory work had been completed, freely expressed their musical thought which then directed the interaction of their body with their instrument without passing through technical thought again – a sensation of freedom that I had never managed to have when playing the piano and the flute.⁶

⁴ Maria Petrovna Maksakova (1902-1974), Soviet mezzo-soprano, soloist of the Bolshoi Theatre

⁵ Alexander Melik-Pachayev (1905-1964), Soviet conductor, artistic director of the Bolshoi Theatre

⁶ From my observations, one can have a beautiful and rich musical (or artistic, if it concerns to another art) thought, but if the technical thought is not able, for one reason or another, to create quality automatisms to free the realization of musical thought from constant technical control, the artistic practice will not be completely free and satisfactory. Certainly, one can take other pleasures which do not necessarily concern the quality of the realization of the musical thought, but for me this pleasure is essential in the practice of my vocal instrument and consists of being able to *produce the sounds I want to produce*.

Conditional release

After attending the delights of the economic and social upheavals of the late eighties in Yerevan and the first half of the nineties in Moscow, having passed through a Parisian college and a French Moscow high school in the meantime, I finally settled in Paris, still a flutist fighting against myself and my beautiful instrument. As for my grandmother, at that time she had already almost dropped the idea of making a singer out of me, because the memory of the bad experience of exchanging the piano for the flute was still vivid in me and, fearing the worst, I preferred to adopt the wisdom of the Armenian proverb "it is better to be eaten by a well-known wolf".

My grandmother's many attempts to get lyrical sounds out of me, supported by my already so well developed breath, were unsuccessful: her dream was that I would be the student of Nina Dorliak, born in 1908, who since my childhood had tried to convince my grandmother that she would have disappeared before I was even old enough to sing... But my grandmother's faith in her friend's longevity was absolute and disarmed Dorliak, who once in a while tried to make me sing a few notes, and as I was not ready to exchange my beloved wolf for another one, prudently declared to my grandmother that it was still too early to understand anything about it...

But the ways of the Lord are what they are. When I was twenty, I fell in love with Cecilia Bartoli's art, which made me really want to sing for the first time. I began by imitating her endless miles of baroque agility with a very fine little voice, and even if I had loved opera since I was a child, as a performer I saw myself rather as a concert and chamber musician, since opera is based on theatre, which I certainly loved despite its dubious impact on my happy childhood, meanwhile chamber music is based on poetry, my great love, not to mention the fact that my grandparents' musical entourage literally rocked me into chamber music – instrumental and vocal – putting it above other genres.

Still a flutist and an apprentice singer, having lost quite a bit of time but not totally the hope of understanding the working of the vocal instrument under the benevolent eye of people who, aside from this benevolence, had no other convincing evidence to justify their title of singing teacher, I was sent back to Moscow by another friend of my grandparents, Mstislav Rostropovich, in order to make up for that bad experience and to approach the mystery of singing guided by the person who, according to him, knew best about vocal music – Zara Dolukhanova, incidentally his first great love, who, as he used to say, had received the highest possible distinction according to Prokofiev's criteria : He compared her voice to the clarinet...

After I had received minimalist instructions from the great cellist "to become a singer, you just need a good singing teacher and a pianist", I embarked on a two-year long two-way trips from Paris to Moscow, resulting in a first hewn stone in my vocal construction and a home-made diploma-benediction by my beloved Zara Alexandrovna.

In Paris, having finally given up the flute, I continued my exploration of the voice in Anna Maria Bondi's class at the Schola Cantorum, arriving there with the words "I don't want to sing at the opera". "*Ma* what are you going to do ?"⁷ exclaimed the lucid Italian, and I had my first

⁷ This famous Italian "*ma*" was also part of Everardi's vocabulary, who spoke a delicious mix of French, Russian and Italian when he taught in Russia [5].

view of the state of the operatic world, which had slightly changed since the years when "the Viardot of the 20th century" Dolukhanova and the other great chamber musicians were shining, revealing to me the current impossibility of making a career in a different field than opera.

After I'd spent three years with her and with many other great teachers, singers and composers who frequented her discourse and, one could have sworn, her class, creating that unforgettable magic that Stanislavsky called "the atmosphere", I moved to the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris in the class of the charismatic Daniel Ottevaere, in whose teaching I found some essential characteristics most similar to Everardi's school. Then, two years later, my accompanied exploration of my voice came to an end.

The second life

Finally I became a singer and even had time to practice on stage... and then I got into a car crash.

Bedridden with multiple fractures and disturbed vision, I fixed myself a precise objective : to sing again *like before*.

In parallel with the exciting post-traumatic and post-operative rehabilitation, while trying to restart singing, I found myself confronted with a problem that was certainly predictable but which I unfortunately couldn't solve : nothing was working *like before*.

Since my stay in Anna Maria Bondi's class, whose voice pronouncing the words "there are no bad days! There is a bad technique" still sounds in my head, I was used to practicing a series of daily exercises, but when I tried to work on them again, I couldn't even by far approach the result I had before the accident: no upper register, "holes" in the *passaggio*, unable to hold a note and to vocalize... I was panicking when realizing that it was not only related to the general state of fatigue resulting in shortness of breath, but that there were some essential elements missing, and I couldn't figure out which ones.

It has to be said that my technique before the accident was a reinforced concrete construction on a straw basement: I was practicing a lot, very regularly and was capable to create technical automatisms and to subject them to my musical thought, thanks to which I was able to function professionally, but, as I understood later, some essential technical ideas were wrong, and as I know now – I was in constant imbalance, which was the reason why *my voice was not developing in the right way*. There were questions to which I could not find answers, some very concrete problems and shadowy areas that I no longer had the courage to touch, having had bad experiences due to the "solutions" proposed by teachers, after which it was taking me a lot of time and effort to return to the previous state, which was unfortunately better than the one I sometimes found myself in "thanks" to those solutions. So, at some point I stopped searching – I learned to hide holes in the concrete with the wallpaper, staying with my unsolved technical problems and with the famous "wolf" I used to know.⁸

I am actually infinitely grateful to all my teachers. I have only mentioned three of them – the ones I consider to have transmitted to me the more positive elements through their teaching and to have guided me, together with the three great masters of the past mentioned below, to the understanding of the need for Balance in vocal technique, each of them being for me the representation of one of the three essential elements of lyrical singing in the context of my concept: Openness, Tone, Breath. These three teachers will always be part of my singing and my teaching.

In total, I have had nine teachers, without counting the courses and master classes, and my gratitude goes also to those I will not mention because I do not use what they were trying to transmit to me. It is partly thanks to them that I kept looking for *technical coherence* (as an ex-pianist and ex-flutist, I was sure that there had to be one also for the voice) and I was "digging" on the side of the Italian school, which greatly helped me to rebuild a new base after the accident, because I already had some of my guide-books on hand and also a second chance.

⁸ My last role on stage was Zanetto in Pietro Mascagni's homonymous opera. During that production, I had begun to understand some essential things and to develop new technical ideas, which I took up again after the accident, that happened four months later.

In addition to those that will be mentioned, the curious reader will find some works that inspire me and on which I base these pages and my teaching in the "Bibliography". I will also quote my three teachers who in their turn quoted theirs, as well as other singers and great masters of the belcantist tradition. At present, the ones I most often quote in class and compare their approaches are Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1839-1910), son of the great master Francesco Lamperti (1813-1892), Camille Everardi (1824-1899), student of Francesco Lamperti as well as of another great master I quote – Manuel Garcia (1805-1906), son of the great tenor Manuel Garcia (1775-1832) and brother of the singers Maria Malibran (1808-1836) and Pauline Viardot (1821-1910).

Everardi was one of the great contributors of the so-called "Russian school" in the second half of the 19th century, from whose branch of education my first teacher Zara Dolukhanova descended, as well as Fyodor Shalyapin, Elena Obraztsova and many other great singers, including some of the best representatives of today's lyrical art.

Over time, by exercising and analyzing the new connection between my technical thought, my musical thought and their physical realization, I found control over my voice by reconstructing a new technical basis incomparably more solid than before, despite my physiological problems that had been caused by the accident. My release and my switching from "I sing, therefore I am" to "I think, therefore I sing" was done progressively during this physical and mental restructuring, carefully guided and accompanied by David Gevorgyan, great psychologist and teacher I was fortunate enough to meet with, who also advises me in my pedagogical work.

Having thus proven the effectiveness of my approach on myself, I began to transmit this experience to others.

No longer being able to perform opera on stage, mainly because of fractures that made me fragile and limited in movement, I also began to develop an activity in the field of vocal chamber music – my initial predilection vector that the accident involuntarily had returned to me – by finding unfairly forgotten treasures from the past centuries and promoting new ones through original concert programmes and recordings.

II

What

The great Kant has taught us that time, space and causality are present in our consciousness with respect to their lawlikeness and the possibility of all their forms ; and that their presence in consciousness is entirely independent of the object that appear in them and constitute their content. In other words : time, space and causality can be found just as easily be proceeding from the subject as from the object, which is why it is just as correct to call them the subject's mode of intuition as it is to call them characteristics of the object, in so far as it is an object (or as Kant would say : appearance), i.e. representation.

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*

The Balance Triangle

With time and intensive pedagogical practice, this post-traumatic experience crystallized into a vocal technique teaching method around a concept that I had created for a better understanding between myself and the student – a technical communication base that was always missing to me with my teachers – which I called *the Balance Triangle*, further called " the Triangle " .

The method, named after the concept, brings together three pedagogical tools, the two first of which constitute its particularity: the Cleaning, the Triangle and the Images.

N.B. Currently, the majority of my students are professional opera singers, soloists and choristers, who have already worked with other teachers before coming to me: the method's description will be based on work with this category of students. However, the method is also suitable for beginners and amateurs, but also for people who want to find the comfort of the emission in a high position : non opera singers, teachers, actors, lawyers, etc., later called "the speakers". Unlike opera singers, in the process of practicing with the elements of the Triangle, the majority of representatives of this category do not need to work on the amplitude of the Openness, related in the Triangle system to the natural amplification, indispensable for opera singers, and musical thought is also replaced by verbal thought.

The Cleaning represents the process of detecting new student's already installed technical ideas and automatisms.

Before proposing a healthy technical idea or putting a name on an already installed student's useful automatism and detailing its functioning so it can be controlled if necessary, I ask him to explain :

- what he is thinking about, on which part of the body he is concentrating or what does he usually imagine when he wants to produce a sound, produces a sound or sings a musical phrase with or without a text ;
- what are for him, in his vocal functioning, the meanings and roles of the terms used in the teaching of vocal technique, such as openness, high position, and so on ;

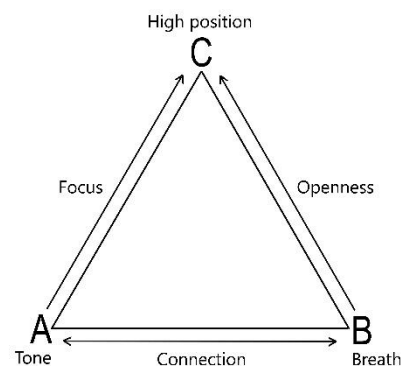
- how these elements are related to each other, what are the causes and consequences for him ;
- how he imagines his sequence of lyric sound production, if he has one.

Later, the harmful or inefficient automatisms due to technical misconceptions are progressively eliminated and replaced by beneficial automatisms through the assimilation of the new technical thought and thanks to the consequent appearance of positive results.

This process of detecting of already installed ideas is the same for everyone, including beginner students, because even if they have never sung before or very little, they already have some ideas about " how it should be " and in the majority of cases they start to *imitate* the great lyrical singers, without following the technical way of sound construction, which in most cases is neither healthy nor viable. I call this twisted mirror "the Castafiore effect".

To allow the student to construct his technical thought (which will create automatisms that will serve the realization of his musical thought), for an optimal understanding between us, I establish a common "system of coordinates", inspired by the ideas, concepts and coherences of Lamperti Jr., Everardi and Garcia Jr. – **the Balance Triangle**, which groups together the main notions in the teaching of vocal technique that will be described and detailed later. The six elements represented in the Triangle are "cleaned" with the student at the very beginning of studying.

The left side of the Triangle, associated with control and horizontality, is represented by the Tone at the left vertex (A) and the Focus on the left side, with an arrow pointing to the top vertex (C), which represents the High Position. The right side, associated with the free element and verticality, is represented by the Breath at the right vertex (B) and the Openness on the right side, also with an arrow to the top vertex (C). At the base of the Triangle, on the lower side stands the Connection element with a two-way arrow pointing to vertexes A and B.



The goal is to reach C with the energy of the Connection generated and renewed by the balanced interaction between A and B, passing through the Focus and the Openness for lyrical singers and going directly up to C for speakers and non-lyrical singers.

The technical thought that I propose to adopt, the Sequence of Sound Creation, further called "the Sequence", is therefore the following: the desire (the motivation, the intention) to produce a sound, accompanied by the mental visualization of it in the place of the Tone (A), stimulates the energy of the Breath (B) to enter into physical contact with its opposite in the Triangle system, the Tone (A), in order to realize the mentally visualized sound. Their interaction creates and regenerates the energy of the Connection which makes them rise towards C, passing, for lyrical singers who need natural amplification, through the Openness and Focus (equivalent to the Focused Tone), represented on the sides A and B.

Technical problems are caused by an imbalance between the left and right sides of the Triangle, which is in its turn the consequence of wrong causality or the failure of one of the elements of the Sequence. In both cases, we know how to solve the problem, detecting the failed element, working on it separately and linking it to the others following the established causality.

It may seem strange, but singers react very well to the Sequence and the patterns (some of which are represented by the Images described below), especially those of them who for a long time have been looking for coherence and need "the concrete", which does not concern physiology or phoniatrics, but an efficient explication of "how it works" in practice.

I compare the process of sound creation to a game of ball courses: we know what our goal is and the final square that the ball has to reach (the High Position); we know that we can reach it on condition that we pass through a precise trajectory composed of several elements dependent on each other. If we put the ball in the middle, the elements of the first part of the trajectory will not be activated by the passage of the ball and will not interact with the following elements preparing the continuation of the trajectory to the final goal, so the ball will not be able to reach it. But if we put the ball at the right start, it will pass through all the predefined points activating the necessary elements and go to the goal. Without our help, without our effort, but just because we have prepared and organized in advance the elements of the trajectory and put the ball at the very beginning.

Vocal technique is not a science and even less an exact science, but it is possible, through the concept of the Triangle, to learn "to know the result before we act", which is, according to Lamperti Jr., "the golden rule of singing" [8, p.28].

By **musical thought**, I define the mental visualization of a musical phrase, with or without a text, that we "hear" in our head: when we are preparing to realize it, it is only an idea of how we would like it to sound. This idea concerns our imagination, is nourished by our knowledge and senses, our musical instinct and our motivation for artistic expression.

During technical work, musical thought is the mental visualization of the sounds that will be realized later on through the technical thought. The aim is to develop, with the help of the latter and by regular exercise, the automatic response of the elements serving the realization of musical thought so that we do not have to control the technical realization of sound at the moment of its production.

Musical thought must stimulate the work of technical thought on the elements of the Triangle which will allow its realization: the more technical thought is developed to serve musical thought, the closer the performer will get to his imagined ideal and as a consequence, his satisfaction will be greater – he will produce the sounds he wants to produce.

Musical thought must always be the singer's main vector, even during the practice of the major part of technical exercises and all sung exercises.

The **technical thought** is thus only a *means*, the main goal being the optimal realization of the *initial creative idea*, which is, in singer's or musician's case, the musical thought, and its expression is impossible without the first one : this "language" that we learn to "speak singing" is, like all other languages, at the service of the *expression*.

When I teach vocal technique, the objective value of the student's musical thought is of little importance to me: I teach him to detect it, to listen to it and to follow it, my goal being to help him form his instrument of expression that will allow the realization of this thought, making him, with practice and time, *free and autonomous*.

The technical thought and the musical thought are self-stimulating: when we have a musical idea in mind, we look for the way to realize it, we stimulate the technical thought to *find a solution*; when we acquire the technical possibility to realize what we couldn't realize before, it stimulates our imagination, the musical thought trusts the technical thought, becomes richer and

freer. In all cases and at all levels, if it does not concern a specific technical work, the student must get used to *impose his musical thought as the main vector*.

The technical thought is associated with daily exercises, working on the elements of the Sequence, on the *two movements of the Connection* and the *Images* I give to allow the student to better understand and feel the role and functioning of each of these elements and to automatize their physical realizations in the Sequence, working separately on each of the elements as well as on the links between them and the causality. The research of balance here is primordial : *none of the elements is superior to others*, we swear neither by the Tone, nor by the Breath, nor by the Openness (which is not a base element of the belcanto coherency), their common goal serving a lyric singer in the Triangle system being the High Position.

Since the 17th century, the great masters had their students work with different **Images** to stimulate physical responses and put them at the service of technique [4]. This process represents thus the third tool of this method: I work a lot with the Images, as do many instrumentalist teachers of the Russian school as well as my last singing teacher Daniel Ottevaere.

The aim of working with Images is to create a precise physical response or to awaken the necessary sensations to accomplish a technical task. This approach represented the great power of the schools of Lamperti Jr. and Everardi [2, 5, 8], who taught that technical preparation should be such that one should not think about the way one produces sound when on stage and that the *effort* associated to singing should not be greater than that of speaking. This seems unlikely, especially when we think of the "great sound" produced by opera singers. But what exactly is the effort involved?

Let's analyze how we talk spontaneously, consciously and naturally to someone close to us. First of all, we don't talk before we want to express something: an idea, an image, an emotion, a thought first appears in our head. By verbalising them through simple sentences whose construction we don't feel we are monitoring in real time, we don't control the movements of our lips and tongue, nor the frequency of the sounds we emit, nor do we control our movements, and so on. How is this possible? Thanks to the complex patterns and automatisms that we have already acquired and which are at the service of our verbal expression which is, in its turn, at the service of the expression of our thoughts.

In the same way, working with the Triangle elements creates automatisms to serve musical thought. And this is what the masters were talking about : not "doing", but "thinking", action being the physical consequence, the materialization of the thought.

For most of the Images, I suggest to the student to adopt the term of " crutches " : we get rid of them as soon as the desired physical response or automatism is acquired.

In absolute terms, *this whole method can be considered as a great crutch*, as it is only needed for studying, understanding, correction and re-education, the aim being to help the student to develop technical mastery through the acquisition of automatisms and to create *his own technical coherence*, unique for each individual. The concept of the Triangle is also a "life jacket" for those who have reached Balance through intuition, which happens especially to singers who have the Tone as *initial advantage* and who think they have a technical mastery, which proves to be false in situations where one of the elements fails for one reason or another and they no longer know exactly what to do to be able to regain the right sensations and spontaneity, and continue to sing properly.

In technical work, the essential thing is to trust the *ease and naturalness*, that are the consequences of the smooth running of the Sequence, and the absence of unpleasant sensations, clarifying ideas about causality and working the elements separately, constantly watching that there is no discomfort, especially in the larynx area, which is the most fragile part of the singer's instrument, and no physical effort if it is not the consequence of technical thought. The aim is to move to the *natural* balance between the elements, which is the consequence of the good progress of the Sequence, and not to intervene in this process artificially and physically. We know the right ingredients, we know their dosage and the order of the alchemical preparation, we start the process and do not intervene any more, they will interact and create reactions without our participation. Daily practice can be compared to the waiting period for the finished product: many great masters had this notion of waiting "for the miracle of singing to happen" [8].

The response of the elements must be proportional to their natural development in the ongoing studying process, we continue the daily practice and *we do with it*, without trying to run before learning how to walk: once the voice is warmed up, the difficult parts of the piece are worked on, we sing by putting *the technique we have today* at the service of musical thought.

Often, it is from my mouth that a student who has already practised singing hears for the first time that performing an aria should not be difficult, it is all the preparatory work that is; that one can sing literally *until the very last breath*: it all depends on regular practice; that one should not *make* any effort to produce a great sound but *think* of mentally placing the "centre" of this sound in a spot where it can grow, and so on. Described in various manners, the only technical thought that remains to serve musical thought once the training of the singer's instrument is completed concerns breathing and the Focus : while singing, one *is exhaling the musical thought* while focusing the sound.

The methods of the Belcanto tradition schools continue to find explanations of their effectiveness in cognitive neuroscience and psycholinguistics, especially after the identification of mirror neurons [29]. I will talk about those of them I have practiced and adopted, about my own empirical experience as a student, musician, singer and singing teacher, just like the aforementioned masters, whose goal was the same: to put the physiology controlled by thought at the service of Art. Here will be described only the part of my teaching concerning the technical work on the creation of automatisms and the connection of the technical thought to the musical thought.

In the current period of my life, the theory interests me exclusively from the point of view of my pedagogical practice: I unify and conceptualize in order to optimize the understanding between the student and me.

The first meeting

Professional or amateur singer, soloist or chorister, beginner or experienced, I first ask what he is looking for when coming to consult me.

In the majority of cases, I am told that he would like to be able to solve one or more technical problems, to clarify his ideas about the functioning of the singing voice or to know his tessitura. It should be noted that neither beginners nor students who have already practiced singing complain about problems related to *musicality*: it is the instrument that allows its *realization* that causes them problems. Often, the fight against technical difficulties distance the student from his musical thought: he *physically* insists on technical realization during singing and loses the main vector, making the work even more difficult and the musical result even less satisfying for him and for the listener, who feels a certain discomfort whose origin he cannot always determine.

It should not be disregarded that an opera singer's musical thought includes not only the text but also the personality of the character and his emotion at the moment of singing. "You have to feel, you have to suffer, you have to think – you are Rigoletto, Don Giovanni, Rosina, Gilda – and live this character, otherwise, *there is no life* in singing, only sounds, only sounds," Everardi says [5].

My last singing teacher Daniel Ottevaere insisted from the very beginning of the work on an aria on the importance of placing ourselves in the situation and condition of the character. Anna Maria Bondi, like one of her teachers, the great tenor Tito Schipa (1888-1965), made me practice vocalises in the temperament of the character whose aria I was going to perform after the warm-up, or just by thinking of different characters: making a great Rossini in the skin of Rosina, then – Sesto, then – Angelina, and so on.

To stimulate musical thought, I also teach working with Stanislavski's *vector verb* [11, 14].

Following the instructions of Lamperti Jr. and Everardi [2, 5, 8], I do not work on isolated problems described by the student or observed by myself such as "high tongue" or larynx, engorged voice, air "leaking" in the low or medium register, squeaking in the high register, unsteady breath, tight throat, etc. All these "problems" are only *consequences* of an imbalance resulting from a bad technical approach and in most cases they gradually disappear through working with the tools of the Triangle.

If the student wants to explore a specific repertoire, we work on it technically, I introduce the key notions and the basics of the style, I mention the best performers in the concerned repertoire that I strongly advise to listen to at will, then I suggest to work on this repertoire with an appropriate vocal coach pianist.

Anyway, I am convinced that Rostropovich was right: to become a singer, you *only* need "to have a good singing teacher and a pianist", the former – to train the singer's instrument and teach him to follow his musical thought, the latter – for an in-depth work on styles and also for creating the habit of interacting musically, "enveloping" and enriching his musical thought, learning to *make the orchestra sound in his head*. I would also add an acting coach, indispensable for young soloists, one of the most remarkable examples of this importance is indeniably the great Fyodor Shalyapin [17, 18], and for the rest – reading, listening and watching: attending live performances (even, if possible, rehearsals, unique and precious

moments of creation) and viewing recordings of the good productions of the last fifty years, available to everyone.

I am convinced that a singing teacher currently training soloists who want to pursue a career in opera should not exaggerate his teaching role as a musicologist and a director *during the lessons*: it is a fatal waste of time. The role of a singing teacher is above all *to teach the student to sing*, without going on historical, aesthetic, personal, philosophical, musicological, stylistic or other trips (certainly, sometimes very enriching and nourishing the student's main vector, like any other information), *if it does not directly concern the training of the instrument of expression and its use*. It does not either consist in exposing his point of view on the defects of the libretto of the "Queen of Spades" or drawing a detailed psychological portrait of Cherubino, then proposing a differential diagnosis of the Don Juan syndrome. Of course, it is often interesting to get to know better our singing teacher, to communicate, to discover his musical and intellectual world, but this potentially enriching communication should not refer to a singing lesson, which should be exclusively devoted to ***the art of realisation of the musical thought***, notably through the optimization and development of the sound, indispensable for today's opera singers of all repertoires (while recalling that Manuel Garcia-father telling that the beauty of the voice constitutes "ninety-nine hundredths of the singer's power" [7] and that Wagner was considering La Scala too big for *Falstaff* [31] ...)

During the dinner that was given after the final of the competition where I had been rewarded⁹, I was seated at the same table with such great French singers as Michel Sénéchal and Gabriel Bacquier who were the part of the jury. Their stories about the profession were amusing and exciting, but what had most impressed me at that time (when I hadn't yet sung on stage the roles containing my bravura arias presented at the competition) was that both of them claimed to have *learned to sing on stage*, comparing everything else to trying to learn to swim in a pool without water.

As with instrumental soloists, the younger the singer is when he starts performing, the more chance he has to understand "on the way " who he really is and what he wants to realize. For an opera singer aiming for a solo career, time is just as precious as in sports or ballet, and a good singing teacher must devote it to scrupulous technical work to develop *in priority* the qualities that will allow the student to appear on stage.

⁹ Forum Lyrique d'Arles, France

The daily exercises¹⁰

After the introduction of the method, I begin to install between the student and me our *common coordinate system* so that we could understand each other better: I show him the Triangle, then, I explain the coherence of the concept, talking about the aim, the necessary balance between the left and the right sides and about the Connection. The first Cleaning begins at this very moment and after the meaning of the terms is clarified and the functioning of the Triangle is explained, I begin to expose the Sequence: the basis of the singer's technical thought in the system of the Triangle.

I suggest the student to adopt a sequence of exercises in his daily practicing, lasting from twenty minutes to an hour (with interruptions), depending on his level and objectives. This training consists of three parts : *the Elements, the Sung ones* and *the 3.00 a.m.*

N.B. Daily practice is indispensable during the period of studying and installing the technical basis.

In the first part of the exercises, we work separately on **the Elements** of the Sequence and on their arrangement in order to understand the connection between them, to learn how to watch the balance and to clarify causality.

We start with the "closed mouth" exercises, humming, known in France as "*moïto*".

Lamperti Jr. indicates that "the spot where tone seems to start, is the place where the vibration of « ng » (as pronounced in the word « England » is located" [8, p.56]. By pasting the back of the soft palate to the back of the tongue, we think of capturing the Tone, represented in the Triangle at vertex A : the "initial vibration" [8, p.104], a small, very thin sound that we look for in the *posterior nasality*, that we mentally hang on there. We can imagine that the soft palate, taking off from the back of the tongue when pronouncing "nga-nga", takes this tiny sound with it and that it goes up and resonates above the palate, *in the middle of the skull*. We therefore "imprison" this little sound, the Tone, in the posterior nasality, not letting it come out through the mouth, by sticking the soft palate to the back of the tongue and we begin the exercises of the *moïto*.

I advise to do the exercises of the *moïto* with detached lips: it is necessary to avoid the soft palate to separate from the back of the tongue, what we can better watch out for when the mouth is open.

N.B. *Moïto* exercises can be practised at will, as long as there are regular interruptions and provided that there is no discomfort in the larynx area. If any discomfort appears, it will mean that the position is low, that the Tone is not fixed in the right place: it is then necessary to make a "lifting", *to focus* the Tone, to imagine a thinner, more strident sound and to mentally put it back in *the Place of the tone*, in the posterior nasality, the goal being to keep it always fixed in this place, *in the middle of the skull*. Attention : this place of the mental attachment of the Tone does not concern the resonance sensations of the top of the skull, which *consequently* occur

¹⁰ Warning : some Images may shock you.

above the upper jaw and change according to the frequency and intensity of the sounds – we are only noting their appearance.

During and around the moïto exercises, we start the basic training of other elements of the Sequence, some examples of which are as follows:

The « Nga-nga »

We pronounce it by checking out each time the Place of the tone (which we associate with the posterior nasality, by locating there a "sample" of the Tone, of the "initial vibration",) and the last physical mark of the *Path of the breath* (the point of contact of the "ng") before it passes over the upper jaw. Between the nasal "nga-nga" we pronounce, we touch with the tip of our tongue the border between the hard and soft palates.

The Apne

It is a stretching, resembling a great yawn, by which we work on the Openness and the Connection : we make a movement as if we were uncovering our ears in the plane, provoking *consequently* the lowering of the root of the tongue and the larynx, thinking of pulling as much as possible on the musculature of the soft palate, imagining its upward and backward movement. At the same time, we breathe in deeply through the mouth, imagining storing air in the abdominal cavity and pushing the diaphragm downwards. We block the breath during the stretching of the soft palate, seeking the sensations of the Connection by contracting and relaxing the muscles of the abdomen and the diaphragm several times, thinking at the moment of contraction of a downward and outward movement, with the vocal cords closed, then we release the diaphragm from the "weight" of the inhaled air by opening the cords.

The Pig

We think about simultaneously inhaling through the nose and mouth, animating the soft palate membrane as if we were snoring slightly. To capture the sensations of the palate, we start the exercise by breathing in through the nose with the palate attached to the back of the tongue, then we let it detach. This exercise allows us to feel the Path of the breath "backwards" as well as to explore the resonance of the cavities above the upper jaw by starting the exhalation (just after slowly inhaling by " the pig ") with a slight "h" and transforming it into a French nasal sound "en" or "on", which gives us "hhhan" or "hhhon" and assures the air passage through the nose and mouth, as when inhaling. We reproduce this sequence several times, snoring – "hhhon", snoring – "hhhan", and so on, watching the attachment of these sounds in the posterior nasality, at the Place of the tone.

The Duck

We want to produce a small, strident focused sound on [ə], imitating the quacking of a duck – a cancan, a cackling – by which we work on the Tone and its Focus in the Place of the tone. We can alternate "the duck" with a meow, by doing cackle-miaow, cackle-miaow sequences, comparing and analyzing the balance between the elements in the two sounds. We constantly watch for the Tone's hold on the Place of the tone to avoid any discomfort at the larynx.

The Snake

We work on the Connection sensations : we breathe in deeply through the mouth, imagining storing air in the abdominal cavity and pushing the diaphragm down. While exhaling, we pronounce the prolonged "s" sound, with our tongue behind our teeth, then we *solidify the Connection* between the "s" and the diaphragm by propulsion and by varying the sequences: by tightening the "s" or by contracting the muscles of the abdomen and the diaphragm, thinking of

a downward and outward movement. We shift our attention to the "s" and then to the work of the diaphragm, learning to feel the two "conncted" points and seeing that it can be controlled and *stimulated* from below and above.

N.B. Once we have understood how the Connection works and have automated the correct movement of the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm, while exhaling, we will keep our attention on the Place of the tone.

During this work, we clarify and define which are the good and bad sensations (those the consequences of which are harmful to the voice), how and why we must watch the balance, which are the thoughts and Images to adopt in order to have consequently the desired positive effects, and so on.

Students often feel embarrassed of asking more or less precise technical questions, thinking that they are revealing incompetence or misunderstanding which, according to their criteria, should no longer be relevant at the point they are in their studying or career path. My credo : no taboos. During the work, I explicitly ask the students to ask me all the technical questions that come to their mind, to dig into areas of uncertainty that everyone has. At an advanced stage, we often recognize our strong and weak points, but we leave a number of "unsolved cases " which, even if we have the impression that we can sing without solving them, slow down our progress and limit the repertoire – in the best of cases.

Once the work on the moïto and the elements of the Sequence is completed, we proceed to the second part, the **Sung ones** exercises, including the *surprise-inspiration* and the *wonder-inspiration*, which will be described later.

As an example, during an advanced singer's ongoing warm-up, we start with the descending fifths, an up and down on a fifth, an up and down on a perfect chord, *the little Rossini*, *the ninth-eleventh* up and down, *the vowels*, and we end this second part with a *big Rossini*, an exercise of entering the troops since the 19th century and today applied mainly in big choirs, and the *messa di voce*¹¹, the favourite exercise of Rossini himself according to Anna Maria Bondi, "the most difficult problem in singing" according to Lamperti Jr. [8, p.13], the quintessence of belcanto according to Celletti [4] and the best proof, with the *big Rossini* and when they are well executed, of a solid technical mastery. Some of the exercises are done on an "i", "é", "o" and "a", helping the balance of the beginning of the sound with the *buccal braking*, which gives: "ou-i", "y-é", "y-o" and "y-a".

In the third part of the exercises, which the student then practises mainly at home by himself, unlike the two previous ones which are the part of my lessons, we work on the tricky parts of the scores and the culminations of the bravura arias that must always be kept on hand and in excellent condition, especially for competitions and auditions : we work on what to think about to create an automatism and always obtain the same *good* result. This work is called **3 a.m.** because the technical automatism must be such that even if we are woken up at three o'clock in the morning, it has to come out !

During my lessons, the students listen to each other and learn to analyse the technical functioning of others. We watch together the recordings of the great singers and learn to analyse their balance through the Triangle system installed between us. The student also learns to analyse his own recordings – an essential work for his autonomy.

¹¹ One or more crescendo-decrescendo on a sound held at the same frequency (<>).

I also give some important tools for the better assimilation of technical work, here are a few examples:

The Little papers

The student should not hesitate, whether on his own or taking a lesson, to write down tips and ideas that occur to him during the work: he will reread them the next day while practicing, he will add or clarify some points, he will have other illuminations and then, on the next day, he will tear and replace this paper with another one, more perfect and clear, and so on. With time, he will learn *to know himself* better and better and to correct himself, becoming *his own teacher*, and the more the student progresses, the less he will need these little papers. Afterwards, he will write down a few essential sentences that will be enough for him for a long period of time, for example, the time of a production, to keep an eye on some technical specificities related to the role.

This habit may turn out to be of essential importance to get back in good shape after an illness or pregnancy.

The Questions-answers

This tool is an indispensable "life jacket" at the beginning of studying and during rehabilitation. If the student works alone and feels lost, he can use this sequence to get his ideas about "how to sing" back in order:

- 1. Where ?** In the Place of the tone, in the middle of the skull, above the upper jaw, in the posterior nasality;
- 2. What ?** The Tone that can shrink in Focus;
- 3. How ?** By imagining storing the air in the abdominal cavity by naturally pushing the diaphragm down and indicating the *availability* of the Openness when breathing in, then *releasing* the Breath towards its opposite through the Path of the breath, towards the Tone attached to the Place of the tone where it can shrink in Focus.

The Positive result

Repeat the exercise, a musical phrase or the last practiced sound as many times as it takes in order to always end a work session with a completely satisfactory result (taking breaks if necessary or changing the objective if we feel blocked).

The Meditation

Meditate before sleeping, reviewing the Sequence with eyes closed; imagining and wanting to feel the tensions of the two "plates of the Connection" – the diaphragm and the soft palate; imagining the stretching of the Openness; directing the inner look towards the Place of the tone, inhaling through the nose, then through the nose and mouth at the same time, then exhaling through the mouth; imagining the Tone at the Place of the tone, then shrinking it up into Focus; mentally following the Path of the breath's way when inhaling through the nose, and so on.

N.B. During the technical work, the student will avoid thinking about what is *really* going on physiologically: we work structurally with imagination and sensations to obtain precise physical results.

III

How

"– But there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."

"I'm sure *mine* only works one way." Alice remarked.

"I can't remember things before they happen."

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,"

the Queen remarked.

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and what Alice found there*

The Tone and the Focus

In the Triangle system, the **Tone** represents the initial vibration, *the basic sound* of the voice, specific to each person. The Tone is the opposite of the Breath, their dichotomous interaction creates the Connection, *the energy through which we sing*.

The Triangle Sequence begins with the idea of the Tone to indicate that the realization of sound, through the release of the energy of the Breath and the creation of the energy of the Connection when the Breath joins the Tone, is preceded by our thought – the desire, the motivation, the intention to produce a sound that we mentally visualize at the Place of the tone.

We work on the Tone and its Focus from the tiny sound that we visualize the appearance in the posterior nasality when we pronounce "nga-nga", imagining that the soft palate, when it detaches from the back of the tongue, takes this tiny sound with it in the Place of the tone, in the posterior nasality. We imagine that the energy of the Breath will create the energy of the Connection by joining its opposite – the Tone – in the spot we are going to place it mentally: in the Place of the tone.

Here are some **Images** I work with and through which we understand the role of each element of the Triangle, as well as the link between them.

The Image of the bell

In this image, the clapper represents the Tone and its Focus; the attachment point of the clapper – the Place of the tone; the rope attached to the clapper – the Breath; the bell skirt – the Openness; the clapper animated by the rope – the energy of the Connection; the resonance of the skirt when the clapper is animated – the High position.

The Image of the hook

The hook on a metal string represents the Connection, the moment it touches the string for the first time – the very moment when the Connection energy appears, when the Breath energy joins the Tone. It is hooked in the middle of the string stretched between the ears representing the soft palate. The hook is followed by two *Ariadne's threads* of the Connection, which the

singer must never drop : the Tone and the Breath. In the *Connection's first movement*, the Breath thread is pulled, in the *Connection's second movement* – the Tone's.

The Image of the violin

In this image, often used by Lamperti Jr. [8] who had inherited it from the castrati Tosi and Mancini [4], the strings represent the Tone, the bow – the Breath, the body of the violin – the Openness.

The Image of the engine

The starting spark is represented here by the idea of the Tone : *the order* of the Connection is issued. Once the engine is started (the contact of the Breath with the Tone established by the *Connection's first movement*), we just have to keep our foot on the accelerator pedal (*Connection's second movement*, the Tone hanging at the Place of the tone renewing through its interaction with the Breath the energy of the Connection to go down and do a diminuendo on a held note) in order to be able to accelerate at any moment (by activating the Connection's first movement to go up and do a crescendo on a held note, but also to launch a sound held with the same intensity by the reproduction of *air bubbles*).

The Image of the illuminated stage

In this image, the theatre's stage space represents the High position, with the floor associated to the Tone (horizontal): we learn to "live above the upper jaw", by sending the "light" – the Breath (vertical) through the Path of the breath – to it.

The Image of the needle

Yet another image is that of a needle (the Tone), planted in a needle cushion (above the soft palate controlling the Openness, uplifting to the Place of the tone to reach the Focus) with a thread passing through its eye (the Breath through the Path of the breath).

The Focus represents the shrunk Tone – the sharper, slimmer, thinner basic sound – in the Place of the tone, being the counterbalance and opposite of the Openness in the Triangle system. We imagine that the tone's placement automatically rises when we shrink the Tone into Focus: we imagine a cone behind the nose, with the top point up and the base on the "plateau" of the soft palate, we imagine that the more the Tone we visualize is *focused* – shrunk, tight and concentrated, – the more it rises by automatically placing itself at the level of the circumference of the cone corresponding to it.

« How can I make a focused tone ? You can't ! It *happens* ! » [8, p.113], dixit Lamperti Jr. So we imagine it until our technical thought can make it real through regular work on the Triangle elements.

Why do we need the Focus in our coherence if we already have the Tone? Again and again – for the balance, the most important one for a lyrical singer being between the focused Tone and the Openness, representing the basic sound "resisting" the conditions of its amplification. As the Openness grows, the core of our imaginary sound sphere (the Tone) tends to want to follow it naturally: to grow bigger, to widen, to thicken, to dilute in the space that is created around it, and it is in order to avoid the lowering of the position that we must keep the basic sound clean and concentrated, solid and metallic.

The lyrical voice develops and grows through the work of the Breath with the Tone and the Openness, and these last two must "grow" together, remaining in balance: the more we work

on the Openness, the more its amplitude increases, the more care must be taken to focus and solidify the Tone, because the imbalance will cause the loss of one of the two threads of the Connection and consequently, a lowering of the position.

I call the Focus "the timbral stem" and for a lyrical singer this stem must be made of steel, for a light voice as for a dramatic voice: each one will "shrink " and create his own, learn to "extract" it and work on *the pure tone* of his voice. It is only through daily practice that we succeed if we don't have it naturally. Voices that have this "initial advantage" (a naturally present timbral stem) are called "natural voices", and thanks to this peculiarity, they are familiar with the Connection and the High position experiences.

N.B. Even if the evolution of the "natural voices" is often impressive by its speed compared to singers who have no initial advantages or who have that of the Overture (which is an enormous advantage but which requires work on the Tone and its Focus), if afterwards the technical work on the elements is not consciously constructed and if the Place of the tone is not defined, it remains a construction on the sand which can collapse due to a disturbance related to health, age or pregnancy.

Personally, I didn't have any initial advantage for lyrical singing apart from the "low breathing" (abdominal breathing) developed by the transverse flute. This "manufacturing defect" has become my advantage in the exploration of the vocal apparatus because, in addition to an unfavourable start from a morphological point of view, I practiced almost everything that should not be done technically before I could understand and assimilate this both simple and complex functioning and create my own coherence and a system through which I can transmit it *to help others create theirs*.

When we have the feeling that a singer has "holes" in his voice, or that we hear sounds that are blurred or more strident than others, or that the sound comes closer to us and then goes back to the performer (which may be a desired effect but not in opera), we feel an inevitable discomfort that we do not necessarily know how to explain. However, this is due to the consequences of the loss of balance, often related to the fact that one of the two elements of the Connection – the Tone – regularly falls down from the Place of the tone, which is the only place where it can be effectively focused.

In the Triangle system, the Place of the Tone, associated with the posterior nasality, designates the place where we mentally hang the Tone which shrinks in Focus. This is where the singer's "lighthouse" is located, towards which the Breath rises by activating the resonators. Lamperti Jr. indicates that "the desire *to feel* the "touch" of the "point" of tone, becomes the objective guide to the breath". He also says that this place "in the middle of the skull" is always there, even when we don't sing [8, p.70].

By following the hard palate mucosa with the tongue backwards from the front teeth, we start to imagine the tone hanging over the palate from where it becomes soft, pronouncing french nasal "en" and "on" sounds well backwards and high, imagining the soft palate "smiling", digging and rising towards the "point of tone".

If during the work on the Place of the tone the student starts to yawn, it means that he is looking for it in the right place and that his inner look is directed towards the space above the palate, behind the nose and between the ears. Another gesture that indicates the search for the Place of the tone in the right location is the unconscious need to hold the hand at ear level, as if we were wearing headphones.

One of the most important points to note from the beginning of the training: for an opera singer, the Place of the tone must not change according to registers, volume or anything else. We do not work on the resonance, neither of the head voice nor of the chest voice: their activation is a consequence of a well-constructed work on the elements of the Sequence. Lamperti Jr. sums it up perfectly: " Resonance is always changing. Vibration, never" [8, p.98].

* * *

Every lyric singer is naturally inclined more to one side of the Triangle or the other: towards control or freedom, towards intellectualisation or intuition, towards the outside or the inside, having more natural ease or initial advantages related to the Tone or the Openness. Detecting and understanding these psycho-physical predispositions helps the student to better monitor the balance, to pay more attention to working on the elements that are at the opposite of his strengths. In any case, no matter what the initial predispositions are, the first step is to detect *the pure tone* and to mentally place it in the right place, from where it should not move: to define the singer's guiding star.

As mentioned before, according to my observations, the most advantaged at the beginning are those who associate their voice with the Tone, i.e. without this little metallic sound, this "glass" that we can hear in some people's even spoken voice, this sometimes strident sound and even unpleasant, their voice "does not exist": the Tone and their voice for them make one.

When beginning to work on the Tone and the Place of the tone, when pronouncing "nga-nga", care must be taken to ensure that the tongue does not touch the hard palate and that its surface area of contact with the soft palate is not significant. To do this, it is pronounced by opening the mouth wide, with an exaggerated detachment of the lower jaw.

N.B. Later, while doing the exercises of the moïto, the student should be able to move the lower jaw freely without the sound changing, which will be the proof of a good tone hanging.

The work on the balance of the moïto begins with the " blowing ". Inhaling through the nose, we press the soft palate to the back of the tongue, preventing the passage of air through the mouth, and we begin to exhale as if we were blowing our nose, mentally displacing the sensations of the tip of our nose in the posterior nasality, then we think of "smiling" with the soft palate by placing the opposite of the Breath – the Tone – in the posterior nasality, pronouncing nasal sound "hen" (the soft palate always pressed down). The action is repeated a few times in a row: we start to exhale through the nose, then we force the Breath to confront the Tone.

Having imagined and captured the sensation of the initial vibration in the posterior nasality, we begin the exercises of the moïto with the descending perfect major chord, then by going up and down an octave, always playing with *glissandi* and *portamenti*. We can imagine ourselves wiping a glass pane or "squeaking" a vinyl disc as DJs do, we try to "butter" the intervals with this fine tiny sound, a residue of the cat's meowing or the creaking of a door, without forgetting: no unpleasant sensations, no discomfort in the area of larynx.¹²

¹² The work on the two movements of the Connection, described below, begins with the moïto exercises. When they are correctly applied through the technical thought (the first movement to go up, the second to go down, and so on), we can explore the student's whole vocal range from the extreme high to the extreme low without endangering the vocal cords, and this – even with young students for whom it will take years to be able to hold a sound in these registers.

It is hard to believe that even the most beautiful, warm, round sound of a great lyrical voice is based on this little groan, this "initial vibration" [8, p.104], that it is its heart, its centre, the little steel gear that activates the largest – the whole singing mechanism – that "unifies the whole voice, equalizing all registers" [8, p.104]. It is even sometimes difficult to understand how this little sound relates to the lyrical voice. But by placing it in the right place, we receive *the key* of the world of resonance.

The Breath

In the Triangle system, the **Breath** refers to the exhalation gesture without the contraction of the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm.

The Breath stands to the right of the Triangle and represents the opposite of the Tone, their interaction creating the dichotomous energy of the Connection.

The Breath is the element of the Triangle that is the basis of the realization of the sound. In the Sequence, we start from *the idea* of the Tone, then the Breath enters into physical interaction with the Tone by creating the Connection, the energy of singing.

Lamperti Jr. indicates that one must "release the compressed breath" to start the sound, not help it to come out by pushing it muscularly [8, p.46], which is also confirmed by Everardi [5]. Garcia Jr. in his turn looks at "the physical way to obtain the holding of the voice", speaking of the open ribs and the lowered diaphragm [7, p.14] and imposes the famous revolutionary "glottal blow" [7, p.16], also proposing the "ka", the equivalent of Lamperti Jr.'s "nga", by which he worked on the beginning of the sound and the balance of the Connection.¹³

N.B. We dissociate all these elements for the technical work, the greatest difficulty of singing in general being that "everything happens at the same time". And it is above all the beginning of the sound that remains a delicate subject: when it appears, all these elements are activated simultaneously, are connected and dependent on each other, the sensations of vibration and resonance are fused.

From the same Lamperti Jr., we find out, for example, that "the voice begins first, the breath comes next and the energy enters last" [8, p.48], which would be the equivalent of the sequence Tone – Breath – Connection in the Triangle system. He also says that "finally the voice controls the breath – not the reverse" [8, p.134], equivalent to the realization of the will of musical thought through the two movements of the Connection belonging to the technical thought, and also equivalent to the Tone that guides and controls the free energy of the Breath.

Garcia Jr., with his scientific approach, is for me the opposite of Everardi who, unlike the former, before fully dedicating himself to teaching, had a great stage career over a quarter of a century and remained true to himself having never written a method. I place Lamperti Jr. between them and I prefer him to the two others precisely because of his pascalian side, be it the balance between "theory-practice", "knowledge-sense" or "philosophy-poetry". In any case, I notice that in the effective coherences of belcantist provenance (those thanks to which *several dozens* of good singers have been formed), from the second half of the 19th century and up to the present day, the technical work is done around the "diaphragm vs. the sphenoidal sinus", passing through the soft palate and the larynx *that is imagined elsewhere*.

¹³ I call the moment of the appearance of the Connection "the little kiss": I suggest that the student imagine that the Breath (the air) rising up makes a "kiss" to the Tone (to the vocal cords) to move him away from terms such as the "attack of the sound", the "glottal stroke", etc., which are often misunderstood and misinterpreted, provoking a movement of voluntary effort. For the same reason, I do not use the term "voice support", because the student often thinks that something (pushing, pulling, squeezing, pressing) must be "done" to "support" the sound, while the Connection, is created and renewed *just* because the elements of the Tone and the Breath are like the "minus" and the "plus" of a magnet, *just* because of their dichotomous nature: the Breath always wants to escape freely and the Tone always wants to hold and control it.

It is very important to insist from the very beginning of studying that the contraction of the abdominal musculature and diaphragm during the sound production (if it is not an exercise that awakens the sensations of the Connection and the abdominal "low breathing") must be a consequence of the Connection. Through balanced work on the elements of the Triangle, we learn to manage *the energy of the compressed breath*.

To balance the moment of the appearance of the sound, during the *surprise-inspiration* or *wonder-inspiration* that involves the Overture (and adds more weight to the right side of the Triangle with the Breath that will inevitably appear on exhalation), we think of the Tone's hanging in the Place of the tone, where it will shrink in Focus. The Connection is created on exhalation when the Breath touches the Tone, we imagine that the air rises up through the Path of the breath to the Place of the tone. With time and exercise, all the elements *naturally* rebalance themselves in relation to the registers, volume, ascents, descents and frequencies of the sounds, all thanks to the two Ariadne's threads that the singer must never let go : the Tone thread and the Breath thread, which play with the amplitude of the Openness.

Lyrical singing could be defined as "the art of the right exhalation", the technical goal being *the exhalation of musical thought*.

In singing, the common expression "sul fiato"¹⁴ is not just about the Breath: it describes the Connection, the comfortable feeling of tension when the balance between the Breath and its counterbalance, the Tone, appears, as if one were leaning against a large inflatable ball. The Connection here depends on a precise order: imagine that the spring of the diaphragm will release the air to the point where we will put the flag of the Tone, where we will place its opposite that attracts it like a magnet.

While working on the elements, we learn to watch for the presence of the singer's two Ariadne's threads (the Tone and the Breath) which guarantee us the Connection, the energy of singing. We practice by imagining that the Breath is a wave and the Tone – a surfer, that the Breath is a thread that we insert into the eye of a needle (the Tone), we imagine pulling on the rope (Breath) to animate the clapper of the bell (Tone), and so on.

Once we have acquired the necessary technical automatisms related to the elements of the Sequence and once we have warmed up our voice, our basic technical thought will be to fill the *compressed air container* by naturally pushing the diaphragm spring downwards and to aim the Tone at the middle of the skull, where it is shrunk in Focus, by exhaling to the posterior nasality, through the Path of the breath.

The **Path of the breath** refers to the path by which the Breath rises from the *Place of the breath*, from the *compressed air container*, to the Place of the tone. It is imagined to pass behind and above the soft palate, having as its last physical mark (before the space above the upper jaw where we can't "touch" or contract anything) the place where the Lamperti Jr.'s "ng" is created, this passage bringing the Breath to the Tone in Place of the tone. To visualize it, I propose the

¹⁴ "Sul fiato", literally "on the breath": a technique described by the castrati Pier Francesco Tosi in *Opinioni de'cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna, 1723) and Giovanni Battista Mancini in *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna, 1774), where they speak of sensations of resistance (at the time – "resistance of the chest": until the beginning of the 19th century, the "high" breathing was taught) of the work on the antagonism between the inspiratory and expiratory muscles, creating *the energy of singing* [4]. In the Triangle system, the equivalent of "sul fiato" is the Connection, created by the Breath/Tone antagonists: the sound of the voice is "sustained", it is "on the Breath" when the last one meets the resistance of the Tone.

image of a Beaubourg pipe¹⁵ (an upside down 'L'): we imagine the air rising through a pipe along the spinal column, passing by the Openness and animating the Tone's clapper at the Place of the tone by rising above the upper jaw, activating in consequence the resonators corresponding to the frequency emitted and *located on the Path of the breath*.

While working on this passage through the moïto exercises, I propose to imagine a bat (Tone, the initial vibration) sending ultrasounds (Breath through the Path of the breath) to probe the space of the cave above the upper jaw (resonance of the High position).

N.B. After having worked on the Path of the breath with the moïto exercises (the most effective to find it but also to find it again), while passing to the singing exercises, we keep the same thought associated with the backward hold of the Path of the breath: even if the back of the soft palate is no longer attached to the back of the tongue, blocking the exit of air through the mouth, even if most of the air physically circulates through the mouth, we continue to imagine that the Breath rises through the Path of the breath towards its opposite, the Tone, at the Place of the tone, above the upper jaw.

* * *

Lamperti Jr. tells us that finally, the only two technical elements to watch while singing are "the focus of tone and the breathing" [8, p.51].

At the beginning of studying, for daily practice, two inspirations with the same technical basis are adopted.

The first one, the long one, is called *wonder-inspiration*. We breathe in slowly through our mouths, imagining that we are discovering a splendid landscape or a large fabulous painting, as if we were going to breathe out afterwards, saying "wow !" By inspiring, we create the Openness, always from above: we unclog our ears, we tend the soft palate towards the Place of the tone, we imagine its stretching towards the nape of the neck, resulting in the lowering of the root of the tongue and the larynx. We imagine storing the inspired air in the abdominal cavity: we swallow a huge bowling ball that falls heavily down to the pelvis, pushing the diaphragm down and pushing the abdominal walls outwards.

We associate two additional exercises with this inspiration : we imagine that the whole upper part of the face is inhaling, the forehead, the eyes, the cheekbones. Then we imagine breathing in through the ears.

N.B. If we feel that when we work on the inspiration this way the air also enters through the nose – this is a good sign. We can feel the air coming in through the nose and mouth and cooling the soft palate from above and below. We just have to make sure that the inhalation is *silent*, without the soft palate getting caught on the back of the tongue as in the "pig" exercise.

The second inspiration, the brief one, is called fear-inspiration or *surprise-inspiration*, we will adopt the second term. We breathe in briefly by mouth, imagining that we've just received surprising news or seen something that suddenly frightened us – "ah !" – creating at the same time the Openness, as in wonder-inspiration. This time, we imagine swallowing a petanque ball that pushes (down) the diaphragm and (out) the abdominal walls with a sudden movement at the moment of its rapid fall.

¹⁵ The Pompidou Centre in Paris

We imagine the *compressed air container*, the *Place of the breath* in the space of the abdominal cavity. By filling it and creating the Connection by imposing the Tone as the element resisting to the energy of the Breath (conditioned by the "desire" of the diaphragm to free itself from the "weight" of the air and to relax), we imagine the movement of the muscular contraction of the *Place of the breath* always directed downwards and outwards.

Near the end of his life, Lamperti-father was teaching in a lying position, holding a long cane in his hand, which he was poking into the bellies of students who were not breathing low enough with the words "canta da qui, bestia! »¹⁶ [5].

When working separately on abdominal breathing, we breathe in normally through the mouth (it doesn't matter what this normality is for the student), we block breathing (the vocal cords close), then we imagine pushing a tight belt outwards with the belly with short, tonic movements (as in the "snake" exercise, but here the air outlet is completely locked). To work on these movements, we can put our hands on top of each other on the belly by pressing hard at the navel, then push them outwards – relax, push – relax several times, then we repeat the same movements by placing our hands below the navel, then by putting our hands on the waist on both sides.

To activate the abdominal breathing, by inhaling through the mouth, we mentally move towards an imaginary buoy at the waist level, as if we were filling it with air at every inhalation to inflate it, the objective being to move the "centre of gravity" of the breath downwards. When breathing in, we have to imagine a widening of the lower torso, as if we were becoming an enormous pear on legs – a bell, an Eiffel Tower, a Barbapapa, a pyramid, – whose base must be wide and stretchy, elastic like an inflatable balloon. We also work with the heavy balls described above, imagining them falling on the diaphragm spring. Afterwards, once the low inspiration has been automated, we will work more with the image of the barrel with its metal circles: we will imagine that the abdominal muscles must remain spread outwards ("nailed" to the metal circles) so as not to obstruct the movements of the diaphragm inside the barrel during singing.

By leaning forward, it is easier to capture the sensations of abdominal breathing: we bend our knees slightly and lean with our hands on our waist, we breathe slowly and deeply through our mouth, keeping our attention on the work of the abdominal muscles, then we imagine storing the inspired air at the pelvic area.

When Everardi started teaching in St. Petersburg, the abdominal breathing he imposed was a real local technical innovation. He also taught how to breathe in through the nose and mouth at the same time [5].

The exercise he was proposing to his beginner students to work on abdominal breathing was the following: lying down, one inhales a maximum amount of air (through the mouth or through the mouth and nose at the same time) thinking of storing it in the abdominal cavity. One blocks breathing for a few seconds, then exhales very slowly through the mouth, imagining that if there was a candle flame in front of it, it should not move [5]. This "candle exercise", one of the oldest in the history of singing teaching, is part of his legacy from Lamperti-father's class, the only difference being that in the latter's class inspiration was through the nose [33]. These sensations of "muscular retention" of the Place of the breath are extremely important for having a good control over the Breath, in particular to help it to find its balance with the Tone, by learning to respect the needs of the vibration and by nourishing it without tiring the vocal cords

¹⁶ Sing from here, beast !

by too much air flow. In its turn, the Tone will learn to "resist" the Breath and to direct it, especially starting with the exercises of the moïto and the "little kiss".

Besides the specific effects sought by the performer, especially performing chamber music, it is important for a lyrical singer to ensure that *all the air that comes out of him is transformed into sound.*

The Connection

In the Triangle system, the **Connection** represents the dichotomous energy generated by the interaction of the Tone at the Place of the tone with the Breath.

We can observe that in singing, as in any one-voice instrumental part, for there are very few possible sequences: either we go up an interval, or we go down, or we hold a note; we make a *crescendo* (we increase the volume), or we make a *diminuendo* (we decrease it); the sound begins, or it ends; the sounds that follow one another are linked, or they are detached. All these actions in the Triangle system are realised by the **two movements of the Connection** : the first movement (further – m1) belongs to the right part of the Triangle and the second (further – m2) – to the left part.

When an interval goes up by a semitone or an octave (m1) or when we do a *crescendo* on a held note (m1), as soon as the Connection is created, the Breath with its Path (right) becomes more important on our imaginary balance ; when we go down by an interval (m2) or when we do a *diminuendo* on a held note (m2), it is the Tone with its Focus and its hang (left) that becomes more important.

These two movements can be represented by the signs indicating the *crescendo* " < " (m1) and the *diminuendo* " > " (m2) in a score, composing the *messa di voce*. The air bubble also contains these two movements: by this term I designate the gesture where we launch the m1 by mentally going towards its culmination (the widest point of the first sign, by executing a rising passage or interval or by making a *crescendo* on a sound held at the same frequency) and we let the m2 (the descent or the *diminuendo*) happen *in the technical conditions of the day*, without thinking of visualizing the Tone.

In the m1, as soon as the Connection is created, we direct our musical thought upwards or towards the culmination of the *crescendo* (on a sound held at the same frequency), being mentally held on to the *release of the Breath through the Path of the breath* towards the Tone in Place of the Tone. This movement of the Connection hardening is associated with the lowering and contraction of the diaphragm, already stretched under the inspiration's "weight".

N.B. After working on the correct muscle contraction movement of the Place of the breath, of the *compressed air container* – always downwards and outwards – the mental attachment will remain at the Place of the tone for both movements of the Connection.

In the m2, the movement of the *diminuendo* on a sound held at the same frequency and the descent, *we move our attention to the Tone* in the Place of the tone, while continuing to release the Breath naturally. In this way, we do not lose the Connection or the High position, but we notice that the diaphragm is less contracted than in the m1, which is the guarantee of a healthy apparatus: "contraction-decontraction" are the watchwords of the vocal health, whether it concerns the musculature of the palate or larynx, the diaphragm or the abdominal musculature, whose movements are simultaneous and well coordinated during the execution of the two movements of the Connection.

More time will be spent acquiring automatisms related rather to the second movement of the Connection (left) than to the first (right). Lamperti Jr. also confirms the importance and technical complexity of the second movement compared to the first [8].

In conclusion, here's the idea that we should follow while practicing: we go up, *releasing* the energy of the **Breath**, thinking that the Tone towards which it is moving and which we have imagined at a precise frequency will decide, by slowing it down, the amount of air necessary to realize the sound, and we go down thinking directly of the **Tone** which is above the "board" of the upper jaw, in the middle of the skull, *stimulating its control* and resistance to the Breath energy, the aim being to balance and automate the responses of the elements serving the two movements of the Connection and to *keep the High position*.

N.B. In the two movements of the Connection, the two counterweight elements are always present, it is the proportions that vary slightly: we go up on the Breath wave and we " don't lose our heads " (Tone) when going down.

Here are the Images that accompany my explanations of the two movements of the Connection:

The Image of the wheel

The two movements of the Connection are animated here by two natural forces: those of gravitation and inertia. We imagine a large vertical wooden wheel with a round metal weight fixed on its rim. The wheel rotates thanks to the weight which goes down and accelerates, obeying the force of gravity which attracts it downwards (m1), and which goes up and slows down thanks to the force of inertia (m2), and then goes down again due to the gravitation, and so on.

The Image of the boomerang

A boomerang is thrown (m1) and is always caught at the spot from where it was thrown (m2) – at the Place of the tone, in the posterior nasality.

As soon as the Connection is created, you just pull on the two Ariadne's threads that are attached to the Place of the tone: we hold them both constantly and firmly, but when going up, we "pull" slightly on the Breath thread and when going down – on the Tone thread. We constantly play with Images and *vector verbs*: ascend – release, descend – control; crescendo – release, diminuendo – control; m1 – accelerate, m2 – slow down; m1 – give, m2 – receive; m1 – throw, m2 – catch; ascend – we fix the big wave (Breath) with a telescope, descend – we slightly raise it by fixing the surfer (Tone), etc., etc.

All the ascents, regardless of the nuances, will be done with the idea of the Breath (vertical, right) and the descents – with the idea of the Tone (horizontal, left), the Openness depending on the interaction of these two elements and changing naturally according to their needs, while balancing with el Focus.

Do not go down or try to decrease the sound with the right part more present than the left (m1) and go up and increase the volume with the left part (m2): both will cause a drop of the position followed by immediate problems or which will occur with time. This does not mean that good singers never fall into these traps, as into others, related to technical imbalance, but what differentiates them from less good singers is that *they know how to rebalance themselves*, alone or with the help of a trustworthy teacher or a vocal coach pianist.

N.B. The perfect Balance can never be definitively acquired, as it does not belong to statics, but to dynamics: even when it is well mastered, adjustments are necessary "until the last breath".

The two movements of the Connection follow one another and are self-stimulating: the contraction (m1) "waits" for the relaxation (m2) which, in its turn, is impatient to see the contraction reappear, and so on, as if the inhalation (m1) and exhalation (m2) were done during singing *under the conditions of a single expiration*.

I propose to imagine the suppleness and fluidity of the movements of an octopus in the water: it is tonic, but not fixed, relaxed, but not flaccid, all the time in movement, contraction and relaxation follow one another. In his technical work, the singer must consciously move towards the constant alternation of the two movements of the Connection, learning not to overload the one, for which he has a natural predisposition.

No matter which nuance is chosen by the musical thought, the beginning of the sound is naturally done by the m1 and the end – by the m2. If the m1 is followed by a *crescendo* on a sound held at the same frequency or by a rise, we will keep the m1, with or without a new *air bubble*, and if we then decrease a sound held at the same frequency or go down, we will let the m2 unfold on its own, moving mentally towards the next m1, or we will accompany the m2 thinking about shrinking up the sound. Let's not forget that there is always the spark of the start at the beginning – the idea of the Tone, the order of the Connection – and that this idea is realized through the Breath. In the case where a sound must be held for a long time with the same intensity, to guarantee its balanced "filling", we have to launch a first *air bubble free* so that it can reproduce itself afterwards until the end of the held sound (we sometimes say: "the sound turns"), moving mentally towards the continuation of the musical phrase, towards a spot corresponding to the culmination of the m1, by "feeding" the point of the initial vibration with the Breath.

We should not "weigh down" the right part of the Triangle on the note preceding the highest note of an ascending legato passage : the effort will then be unavoidable to be able to propel the high note, whereas the ascents must be made by the m1 through the *release* of the Breath, and not thanks to a muscular *effort* which "helps it to come out". In the same way, so that a descent through the m2 can take place "alone" following the musical thought, it must be preceded by the culmination of the m1.

N.B. Generally speaking, musical thought should always be "ahead": we should not think about the sound we are producing, but about the sounds that will follow – moving towards the next bar, towards a culmination, towards the end of the phrase, and so on. This guarantees us the balanced filling of the musical phrase through the stimulation of technical thought, which thus learns to realize the will of the musical thought.

During the exercise, we have to imagine the whole vocal line cut into small sequences of the two movements of the Connection: we move mentally towards one mark, then towards the next one, and so on. This does not cause the loss of the legato: the most beautiful and long well conducted musical phrases, "filled" and sustained, are realized through the automatisms created by working with these marks. The most important thing here is still and always the follow-up of the main vector – that of the musical thought.

While the singing is composed in equal parts of m1 and m2, we will only work the m2 in the exercises and the 3 :00 a.m., letting it run automatically and *in the technical conditions of the*

day after the warm-up (in the pieces sung in class, on stage, etc.) in the majority of cases, helping it to keep the High Position by the thought of the Tone only in delicate parts but which are not difficult enough to be part of the work of the 3 :00 a.m.

* * *

Everardi's term to describe the Connection was "pulling oneself", more precisely – "pulling oneself out", "тянуть себя" in Russian (Dolukhanova). This term is sometimes taken up and transformed by Russian singers into "pulling inward" – "тянуть в себя", probably more "speaking" for some.

One can imagine that the air column is limited by the soft palate at the top and the diaphragm at the bottom, and that these two ends vertically stretch a rubber container when the Connection hardens through the m1.

N.B. Once the compressed air container has been filled, the range of movement of the abdominal muscles should not be important: in singing in general everything is played out over millimetres. One should not exaggerate the movement towards the outside nor push by making a muscular effort, if it is not for an exercise.

The text also helps us to create marks, important for the balance, to retain and then release the energy of the Breath towards the culmination of the m1, to help the resistance of the m2 and to create beneficial *air bubbles*.

All the elements belonging to both sides of the Triangle are present during singing. To better understand why their proportions vary according to what we imagine and on what we are concentrating on, I suggest the student the "hand exercise" : we close our eyes and direct our inner look, for example, towards the index finger of the right hand. By focusing our attention on it, we naturally begin to feel it better than the other fingers, we feel its temperature and pulsation, the contact of the skin with the air, etc. – this finger becomes *more important than the others*. We then move our attention to another finger, then we try to hold our attention on two fingers at the same time, then on three, giving more importance to one of them by directing our inner look to it, and so on.

The work on vocal agility also follows the rules of the two movements of the Connection. While working on it, we mentally set ourselves reference points (m1 culminations) and we don't control the sounds that are between these points (neither the pitch, nor the other parameters), we put them "in brackets": these sounds will be realized "without us", just by following our musical thought, in the technical conditions of the day. The quality of their realization depends exclusively on the preparatory work on the elements and daily exercises, but even if it is not perfect, the musical thought imposed at the beginning *must remain the same* and represent the main vector, independently of the technical level of the student: to progress and create good automatisms, the technical thought must always have precise indications, *a motivation*, and it is the musical thought that must indicate to it its *goal*.

Concerning vocal agility: the following classification, which I have adopted, was taught to me by Anna Maria Bondi.

In this classification, there are only **three categories of voices**, men and women combined: light voices, lyric voices and dramatic voices, the terms lyrico-spinto, light lyric, coloratura,

etc., indicating an orientation in the repertoire related to a specific skill of the voice, developed or natural.

Voices are ranked from the smallest to the biggest in terms of *timbral potential*, the initial advantages (if any) of a non-worked vocal apparatus always being different: there are light voices with a well present timbral stem, dramatic voices with a small Openness, etc. Depending on these basic qualities and on the development of other elements due to regular technical work, a well-developed light voice *can project better* than a voice with a lyrical or even dramatic base that has technical weaknesses. The indication the teacher needs to know in order to define the type of the student's voice is the following: light and dramatic voices always possess one basic advantage – *natural agility*. This is not to say that these two categories do not need to work on vocalization, but unlike them, lyrical voices need specific work: it is important to mention that any big, "heavy" and large lyrical voice can – and must – learn to vocalize. Here again, *the idea* (in this case, good technical thought) is more important than anything else.

To close the classification topic, concerning the definition of the student's tessitura, the best indication is given by his passing notes and by the extremities of his low and high registers, preferably revealed by the *moïto*.

The Openness

In the Triangle system, the **Openness** refers to a gesture in which the larynx and the root of the tongue are lowered while the soft palate is raised. The Openness is associated with the amplification of the sound and is controlled by the soft palate. Essential for lyric singers, speakers and non-lyric singers can know how it works but in most cases do not need to work on its amplitude, it depends on each person's objectives and morphology.

The Openness is a consequence of the necessity of sound optimization for opera singers: their "biological microphone".

Dolukhanova used to say that in order to best serve the amplification, to be able to easily vary the dynamics of the brightest as well as the softest sounds and to pass from one register to another, the Openness must be "as elastic as a stocking" (or a sock: "раскрытие должно быть эластичное, как чулок") and must always be created in the presence of a fine and clear timbral stem. For a certain time, Dolukhanova had worked a lot on the amplitude of the Openness (it is hard to believe that she had a very humble one at the beginning and that her splendid dramatic voice remained "throaty" for a long time) and had lost the suppleness of her voice, her pianissimi and the control in her *messa di voce*. By later reworking on the Focus and rebalancing it with the Openness, she regained it [6].

In her personal technical concept, Dolukhanova associated the control of the Openness and the Place of the tone with the root of the tongue: unfortunately, it did not work for me, as well as for a number of students of this great singer, musician and philosopher, who especially taught me an infinite respect for the Word in vocal music, for the poetic, sacred, dramatic and literary text, having motivated the composer to *amplify it through music*, creating a vocal work. Having chosen chamber music as her main vector, she felt this coherence deeply: the poet was inspired by an emotion, created a work that inspired the composer, who in his turn created another, representing an alloy of impressions, and the performer must begin to work on the score from the beginning, from *the initial impression*, that of the Poet. This in-depth play of semantics and semiotics, diving into history and philosophy, this interaction of knowledge with senses that creates a luminous energy belonging to Art, is since one of my greatest pleasures, especially in vocal chamber music.

But let's get back to the technique. This personal search for balance between Tone and Openness is regularly described by great singers. Here is another example: Anna Maria Bondi was quoting Caruso who said that in the high register one must sing on an "a" *thinking* of an "oo": the Italian "a" shrinks up the Tone in the Place of the tone (horizontality), while the "oo" stimulates the Openness (verticality).

Here is another testimony, that of Mario del Monaco. Having passed through several teachers, he describes in his memoirs having made in a few months considerable progress in the high register with a teacher who made him "lighten" the voice and focus the Tone, by working mainly on the repertoire of the 18th century. During the second year with the same teacher, he began to lose the "velvet" of his timbre, the high notes began to be rough and difficult and the passaggio became bland. He says that it was then his intuition that saved him: he found a teacher who was working a lot on the Openness. On working with him, within a few months del Monaco regained his high notes and his beautiful timbre and also left this last teacher because he felt that with him *he was going to fall into the other extreme* [3].

In this search for balance focused Tone/Openness, I propose the Image of a flexible metal headband "supporting" the soft palate, but also those of a horsebit between the ears and a drawer opening towards the nape of the neck by a small round metal handle, because the Openness develops thanks to the Images motivating it to stretch upwards, but also sideways and backwards, not forgetting the cold, metallic little detail that each image must contain to balance it with its opposite – the focused Tone, the Focus.

Moving to the High position does not depend on working on the Openness, which is why the Triangle is also suitable for speakers, since the Openness is not represented by one of the vertexes and is therefore "optional". For some non-lyric singers, the hang of the Tone may change its place in response to the search for various expressive effects, while for a lyric singer, the Place of the tone and the access to the Tone through the Path of the breath must not change at the risk of losing natural amplification and resonance, which he cannot afford. We must always imagine that the Breath will go to the spot where the flag of the Tone will be planted, and this will not necessarily be the place where we will be able to benefit from the Openness (for example, if the Tone is hanging in the hard palate's tissues).

The most important thing in the work on the Openness is to insist that the lowering of the larynx and the root of the tongue should not be fixed or controlled directly during singing and should only be a *consequence* of the work with the space between the ears: the Openness should always be controlled by the soft palate's stretching. Pretend that you are unclogging your ears in the airplane, keeping your attention on the work of the soft palate and put your finger on the larynx: it will lower.

As the larynx is the most vulnerable part of the singer's instrument, we should not visualize it or think about its work while singing. We detach our attention from it *in order not to feel it* and not to risk losing the hang of the core of our imaginary sound sphere in the Place of the tone, which would cause a drop of the position. To make the student understand why he should not think of the larynx but direct its work by the soft palate, I propose him to do the "hand exercise" described above, by concentrating for a moment on the larynx during singing: the core is attracted downwards, the appearance of discomfort sensations and the fight for the High position are inevitable.

The Image I give to lyric singers working on the understanding of causality and explaining why the Openness should not be artificially fixed while singing is that of a candle in the dark: we have nothing else *to do* but to light the candle, the light (the halo) and the heat appear accordingly. The Tone here is the flame, the heat – the Breath and the halo – the Openness. We indicate *the availability* of the Openness by creating it during inspiration (this can be done by retouching the last physical mark of the Path of the breath: the point of contact of the "ng"), and we place the Tone that is shrunk there in Focus in the middle of the skull, in the posterior nasality, towards which the soft palate then stretches out "smiling". Thanks to our visualization of the Tone and the idea that the Breath will reach it through the *well receding* Path of the breath, the Openness will not close when we will stop thinking about it: once the Connection is established, it will constantly change its amplitude, balancing itself naturally with the other elements according to the registers, the frequency and the intensity of the sounds.

Another Image that I propose is that of a large reel (Openness) that starts to rotate between the ears during the Connection thanks to the two threads that are wound on it: the Tone thread and the Breath thread.

The amplitude and suppleness of the Openness are practiced during the exercises and are naturally trained during the production of the sound.

N.B. When starting to work on the Openness, we do not worry about the position of the tongue – whether it is lying down or not, whether it is touching the teeth or not, whether its back is flat, and so on. – we learn to direct the movements of the larynx and of the root of the tongue by the soft palate, by unclogging the ears, by imagining the well receding passage of the Path of the breath and trying to "touch" it with the soft palate, by looking for the sensations of the metal headband, pushing on its arch, and so on. The position of the lower jaw should not be part of our concerns either: the opening of the mouth will be done according to each person's morphology, its amplitude may vary from one person to another, independently of the amplitude of the Openness (while singing, we can enjoy a large Openness at the rear and the shape and opening of the mouth may not change, as if we were speaking normally or singing a lullaby).

We can imagine the soft palate being stretched between the ears like a trampoline or a bowstring, the bow being represented by the dental arch. In the first Image, when we breathe in through the mouth to create the Openness, the palate muscles are stretched, we imagine the elastic trampoline being pulled back like a boat sail under the influence of the "wind" that we breathe in.

In the second Image, we think to pull the bowstring backwards, imagining the stretching of the soft palate towards the Path of the breath, the notch of the arrow placed in the middle of the bowstring, pointing the Tone at the Place of the tone, where it will shrill up in Focus.

* * *

In a general way and independently of the acoustic conditions, we must concentrate on our musical thought and a minimum of technical gestures to serve it well: with time and practice, we will only be left with "the focus of tone and the breathing" to watch out for, but even this technical thought of "thinking about thinking" about the Breath and the Tone to stay in the High position will become automated and will follow the vector of the musical thought, serving its realization.

Before learning to trust his musical thought, to mentally project himself forward and to "not listen to himself" while singing, the student is often disturbed by the acoustics of a room to which he is not accustomed. He begins to modify the technical realization of the sound *while singing* "from the outside", disrupts the natural course of the Sequence and loses the vector of the musical thought stimulating the response of the right automatisms, causing his interpretation to lose both its technical and artistic qualities.

When singing in "deaf" halls, we often tend to make the left side of the Triangle heavier, to thicken the bell clapper, to make the Tone larger trying to "make sound" with it. In this case, it is necessary to surpass ourselves and to concentrate on the right side in order to be able to rebalance ourselves: on the amplification represented by the Openness and the first resonator that "awakens" all the others – the Breath.

In churches where the right side of the Triangle is naturally well served by the acoustics, it happens that we don't bother to focus up the Tone because we have the impression that "it sounds good enough", but that's exactly what we should concentrate on.

In the two cases described, the imbalance leads to a drop of the position (and consequently a loss of volume and ease of emission) and endangers the larynx.

The High position

In the Triangle system, the **High position** is associated with the resonance of the top of the skull – above the upper jaw – which is the consequence of the smooth running of the Sequence and the balance of the Connection.

A lyrical singer, whether bass or coloratura soprano, must always mentally hang the timbre in the Place of the Tone, one of the consequences of which is the activation of the "high resonance", "the mask". We must imagine that the sound that will appear owing to the Connection must not "come out through the mouth" but through the upper part of the skull, above the upper jaw, keeping the attachment of the Tone in the same place throughout the entire vocal range, independently of the resonance that is activated: in other words, the imaginary point of the vibration will always remain in the same place and the response of the resonance will always change [8].

N.B. As previously mentioned, we do not work on resonance in general: its activation and optimization, whether related to skull or chest resonators, are the consequences of a well-constructed technical work. The activation of the High position is therefore our final technical goal but it can only appear as a *consequence*.

We mentally visualize the Tone hanging in the Place of the tone indicating to the Breath the Path of the breath to pass behind the soft palate above the upper jaw, in the High position. We imagine that if the Tone detaches itself and falls into the mouth, the Breath will follow it. Once in the mouth, it will be separated from the space above the upper jaw by the hard palate and will not be able to pass through in order to properly activate the upper skull resonance: the sound will be "stuck" in the mouth, the teeth, the jaw tissues – in the lower position.

We have to remember the safety rules: physical discomfort during singing should never be tolerated, especially when it appears in the area of larynx, which is a sign of the low position. If discomfort appears, we must start the Sequence from the beginning, from the mental hang of the Tone to the Place of the tone – in the posterior nasality, in the middle of the skull – and let the Breath *nourish* this point, awakening the resonance and realizing our musical thought. In other words, when the functioning of all the worked elements is balanced and we "live above the upper jaw", the emission is free and natural, *we breathe out the musical thought*, the Breath being then the first physical representative and *the realizer* of our imagination.

I often find that even after several years of study, singers are not aware of this essential technical aim: to keep the position high. It happens even during the course of a career, and even a great one: we find a precious testimony to this in the autobiography of Nicolai Gedda, where he tells about the happiness of having acquired the freedom and comfort of singing, (at the time he was already performing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and had six years of singing experience behind him) having learned to keep the resonance of "nose and cheekbones" in all registers thanks to the teaching of Paola Novikova, a student of the legendary belcantist baritone Mattia Battistini [12].

The Text

In the Triangle system, Text contributes to the balance of the Connection through the realization of consonants and vowels.

Lamperti Jr. proposes us a search for a balance between "tone and breath" [8, p.76], then between "tone, breath and word" or "vibration, breathing and pronunciation" [8, p.100]. He also says to "never separate diction from singing, not even in thought" [8, p.58]. I impose this unity "diction-singing" from the very beginning of my working process with the student, the text being part of the musical thought in the Triangle system : we sing when we have something *to say*.

The work with the Text begins with the following imaginative exercise: while singing, we must imagine our mouth – the well-articulated work of the tongue and lips when pronouncing the text – *behind the nose*, mentally hanging it on the "nail" of the Tone at the Place of the tone.

The good balanced singing is a "declamation on the breath ". We can imagine that as long as the Text contains the Tone, the "elevator" of the Breath will bring it to the height that our musical thought will indicate to it.

The Place of the the tone thus becomes the true "lighthouse" of the singer: the Text is placed there by associating it with the Tone which regenerates the Connection through its interaction with the Breath by indicating the Path of the breath towards the High position through the Openness, the soft palate stretching towards the place where the Tone is fucused.

While singing, it is important to be careful not to modify the vowels by rounding them off *before the sound is realized* (be careful of the Castafiore effect!): they will change *naturally* when they will be hung in the Place of the tone, when all the elements will be in balance. We therefore imagine the "real" vowels, like those that are naturally formed in the usual register of our speaking voice, without worrying about the height (often unusual for our speaking register) at which they will then appear and without interfering in the interaction of the elements *that will modify them according to their technical needs*: we hang the "real text" on the "nail" of the Tone, we imagine that the syllables are the Christmas baubles – all different from each other – but that they have the same metal hook.

The Text should make singing more comfortable and natural, not the other way around. With certain consonants, we will stimulate the response of the diaphragm and the release of compressed air, of the energy of the Breath, by creating *air bubbles* realizing the syllables: to acquire beneficial automatisms, we must learn how to harden the Connection by pressing on the diaphragm spring using the counterweights of certain consonants – which then move to the left side, "braking" the air as the vocal cords do – and then releasing the spring more or less suddenly.

Try to extend the sounds "nnnn", "mmmm", "llll", "rrrr", but also "vvvvv", "zzzz", then the "ffff" and "ssss" thinking at the same time to push out with the belly an imaginary tight belt. This gives us an additional tool to retouch and revitalize the Connection, to relaunch the beneficial contraction-decontraction of singing.

N.B. When singing a text, even when pronouncing syllables composed of vowels, the Tone must not be left "alone" with the Breath: we imagine the Text hanging on the "nail" of the Tone and together they form a unity waiting to be realized by the Breath. We have already learned to speak by "cutting out" the exhalation through these two well coordinated "barriers": the larynx and the mouth. Therefore, we must use the automatism of this well-established functioning to create that of singing. It is in order to start on this healthy basis serving the expression of verbal thought that I impose on beginner singers and to those in re-education arias in their native language.

The Image of the King

We imagine that the King (the Tone), the most important but also the most fragile, must always be protected (from the Breath) by his Army (the consonants). If the latter becomes less numerous (the consonants less clear), the King becomes more vulnerable and risks putting himself in danger (leaving the High Position).

Concerning the vowels, the "e" being that of the *pure tone*, it is the most difficult to "tame", especially when it is already accustomed to settle comfortably in the mouth – often between the teeth in the medium and high medium – causing a drop of the position. Let's not forget that the Breath will pick up the flag of the Tone, even if it is planted in the wrong place.

The "| u: |" sound in its turn is the vowel of the Openness, the opposite of the "e".

Anna Maria Bondi used to say that it is by working with the "e" – the "yod" – that we can measure the "amplifiable" potential of the voice, *the density of the core of the sound sphere*.

The work on the vowels is done like that on the other elements of the Triangle : they are mentally trained to find their natural singing balance.

In the Place of the tone, the vowels recover in different proportions the element they are missing: the "e" and the "é" are balanced by the interaction with the Openness (the "é", unlike the "e", already naturally having the two opposites in different proportions) and the "| u: |" sound is balanced by adding the Tone. It is by the "duck" or by producing the French nasal sounds "en" and "on" that we will reach it, by capturing the "yod" of its sounds in the posterior nasality and progressively incorporating it into the "oo". How? We memorize this "bzzz", the "duck", this little squeak that we try to make appear when we pronounce French nasal "on" or "en", we visualize it mentally and then we pronounce the "| u: |" *wanting to find in it* the "yod" – it will appear there with practice and will stay there with regular training, guaranteeing it the hang above the upper jaw.

We therefore consciously extract an element of a sound by thought and incorporate it into another, exactly as when we move the work of the mouth pronouncing the words to the Place of the tone, "skewering" the text with the Tone nourished by the Breath. We always insist on the source of the order of the action: we do not *do*, we *imagine* and we wait for the *realization* that will occur and progress through daily exercises and preparatory work on the elements.

We work in the same way with the "o" and the "a", we balance the Overture and the Tone, hanging the "yod" in the posterior nasality being the priority for each vowel.

The work with vowels is therefore still and always concerns the search of balance, without forgetting that the proportions of the Tone and the Openness in each vowel vary from one

person to another, depending on their morphology, their native language, etc., without forgetting the phonetic specificities of the sung languages.

We take particular care that the "e" does not tighten the Openness, does not come forward and does not get "in the mouth", and that the hook of the " | u: |" remains high, without falling into the trap of the naturally lowered larynx when pronouncing a deep " | u: |".

We only insist by the thought: even if the realization corresponds only partially to what we have imagined, *we do not change the idea*. The result will appear progressively if we keep the same objective by applying the same technical thought.

Once the work on the presence of the two elements in each vowel is completed and the training tools transmitted, the vowels gradually and naturally regain their balance and left-right proportions, allowing the High position to be maintained in all registers.

It is important to mention that **the projection** and the "big sound" do not depend on our mental work on the "visualization of the 5th balcony", nor on epy singing exercises "for the person who is far": this will not focus the Tone and even less likely – in the right place, but, in the best case, *will only increase the flow of air* without the Path of the breath being followed.

We should not think of "bringing the sound in front" during singing, as the projection is an effect of resonance which is a *consequence* of good technical work, *we do not have to work on it*: the sound "will come in front" naturally and "will go far" when we will have done the necessary work on the elements and their balance and when we will create the habit of watching *the breathing and the focused Tone* while singing, although having something to say: following the vector of musical thought.

IV

Why

Science is only one means of access to knowledge of natural, social and psychological reality. The creative artist, the philosopher, the literary humanist, or for that matter, the ditch digger, can also be the discoverer of truth, and should be encouraged as much as the scientist. They should not be seen as mutually exclusive or even as necessarily separate from each other.

Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and personality*

The cognitive belcanto

There is a significant amount of specialized literature devoted to vocal technique, whose authors represent different fields ranging from pedagogy and musicology to physiology and phoniatics. There are also many methods, both oral and written, based on the schools cited, with or without references. My personal observation and conclusion is that all good teachers of the past and present, as well as good singers, were and are constantly, whether in a conscious and structured or intuitive way, searching for the *balance* between the mentioned elements, taking different forms in their coherence. This is the only condition to be able to obtain a good result and to keep it by practicing and transmitting our knowledge, regardless of our concept and vision of the effective work on the construction of the singer's instrument, which remains unique in its kind in the family of musical instruments, thanks and because of its intimate complexity, especially related to the fact that the singer's body *is* his own instrument¹⁷.

So there is an enormous amount of information, including today's "self-service" information on the Internet, but what I find when I receive people looking for a technical basis is that this abundance has the opposite effect to that which we might imagine: these people are definitively lost, blocked, overwhelmed by all this information which they start to consult, not finding solutions with their teachers. I therefore invite them to go to the source. Because everything here has a history: you, me, the font of this text and even the spelling of the words you are reading – the lyrical vocal technique has one too.

Opera was created in Italy on the border of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, vocal technique was created around and during its development, serving it and creating it at the same time, and this evolution through interaction continued until the beginning of the 20th century.

¹⁷ Unlike all other musicians, the singer cannot choose or change his instrument, he can only learn to "play" it. If we compare his body to a stringed instrument, we can say that when he becomes an adult, he becomes a violin, a quarter or a whole, or a cello, or a viola, etc. If he has an initial advantage, we can imagine that this instrument already has one or two strings (the Tone), or that one of the f-holes is already partly dug out (the Openness). However, the bow has always been there (Breath), and we will go on changing it until we have one that perfectly fits the finished instrument.

According to Rodolfo Celletti, the term "bel canto" appeared only in the 1800's, reflecting a nostalgia for the past: from the birth of opera to the beginning of the 19th century [4].

The great castrati became the guardians of lyrical² know-how, they passed it on to the masters of the 19th century, such as Garcia Jr. and Lamperti-father, who in turn passed it on to Everardi and Lamperti Jr.. Their teaching continued to serve opera and its new demands, linked to new styles and the evolution of instruments, they adapted vocal technique to it in the image of their belcantist predecessors, from whom they had adopted the concepts and methods, just as my teachers and I adopt theirs to train today's opera singers.

The vocal technique currently used in opera is therefore of belcantist origin. Singing teachers have followed and served the development of opera – its Italian suite, its French, Russian and German branches – and they are these schools that today allow us to interpret the entire operatic repertoire, from the 17th century on and up to contemporary music, regardless of the culture in which they continued to evolve, transform and serve the operatic art with all its local specificities, related to language, style, period, etc.

We are pampered here in Europe: the whole of Greco-Roman history is literally under our feet and *we feel* that we also have all the knowledge of the past times somewhere under our hand, including the four centuries of the know-how of the belcantist tradition that any "local" singing teacher, supposedly the disciple of great castrati Antonio Bernacchi and Francesco Antonio Pistocchi, would be able to transmit to us. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Among my eight European teachers (not counting Dolukhanova in Moscow), all of whom taught in different conservatories, only the two mentioned on these pages, Anna Maria Bondi and Daniel Ottevaere, followed, with or without direct references, the belcantist tradition: serving the repertoire by the technique whose provenance and structure they knew. I am convinced that it is this knowledge, *combined with the intuition and the "attentive ear"* of the teacher, that contributes to making him a *master*.

The belcantist concept

In the works of the aforementioned castrati Tosi and Mancini, we find the first advanced reflections on the singing "sul fiato" ("on the breath", corresponding to the Connection in the Triangle system, where the sound is *sustained* by the Breath interacting with the Tone, where it is *put* on it) and "in the mask" (High position). It can be seen that Everardi, Lamperti Jr. and Garcia Jr., although having very different pedagogical worlds from each other, did not deviate from the initial instructions and concepts, apart from abdominal breathing, inspiration through the mouth *and* through the nose and mouth at the same time, taught from the second half of the 19th century [1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8].

To resume, in the belcantist concept, the Breath represents the raw material of singing and the High position – the container of the finished product: the Breath passes through the interaction with the other elements and is found *transformed* in the High position and, in the Triangle system, at the service of the musical thought.

Having proved its effectiveness, the initial concept is thus preserved by many teachers, including those of our time: we have to sing "on the breath" to be "in the mask", but without a scrupulous work on the elements which allow this "simplicity", in particular on the focused Tone/Openness balance that was described above and explained and taught in different ways, the concept remains certainly beautiful, but unrealizable in practice.

According to Lamperti Jr., each voice has *its own law*: many good singers who have had a long career have different ideas about "how they do it", and the curious thing is that this is not exactly what their master taught them [8].

We should not be mistaken in quoting the great singers who say they have never worked on this or always practiced that, trying to find in their explanations "the key" to good singing. If their technique is good and serves them "until their last breath", it will only mean that they have managed to find their balance by going *through a right path*, unique for each one, sometimes having a too personal concept, often difficult to describe, or even intransmissible, otherwise all the great singers would be the best teachers in the world, which is not the case.¹⁸ Moreover, we often do not have the most important information : what were their initial advantages.

To practice is one thing, to know our own functioning is another, but also to have the capacity to analyse and feel it, and then to transmit it in a form that would also be understandable and accessible *to many* others, so that through the assimilation of the essential elements transmitted, they create *their own coherence* – this requires yet another skill.

My conclusion is that often in the teaching of vocal technique one confuses certain causes with their consequences, which at best slows down voice development considerably and hinders the creation of good automatisms. Even if we work directly on a "right" consequence (the one that we noticed present during the "good singing") – we open up the ribs, we flatten the tongue, we lower the larynx, we raise the cheekbones, we release the lower jaw, etc. – *we still have a consequence* : it is not viable and its control requires from us useless efforts, whereas it would be enough to work on the cause to make it appear as a natural consequence [5, 8]. Not to mention the fact that monitoring all these elements requires an infernal technical control that an opera singer cannot afford, having on stage as additional tasks the acting, the interaction with the other singers and the conductor, and so on. Everardi and Lamperti Jr. insisted on the technical

¹⁸ According to Lamperti Jr., all that the great Adelina Patti knew about her "method" was "to keep her tones from being breathy" [8, p.21].

final aim of the singer: to acquire automatisms so as *not to think about the production of the sound while singing* [5, 8]. I have noticed that one of the ideas that helps the student to gradually release himself from technical control during singing, not to think about the sound he is producing and to move forward mentally following the vector of his musical thought, is to think that the moment of the appearance of the sound belongs only to the past or to the imagination, to the *memory of the future*: we can visualize it mentally (Tone), but once it is "out of our head" and realized by our body (Breath), it is in the past. The beginning of the sound, the moment when it appears is never the singer's present.

Here is a memo-poem by tenor Dimitri Tarkhov (1890-1966), a student of Varvara Zarudnaya (1857-1939), who in turn was a student of Everardi (1824-1899) in St. Petersburg. Tarkhov taught at the Gnessin Academy in Moscow (as did Dolukhanova) and regularly demonstrated his high C in class until the age of 75, sitting at his piano [6].

We find there nearly all that I describe on these pages. It is thus written by a representative of the second generation of Everardi's disciples (I translate it verbatim from Russian, what causes the loss of the poetic rhythm):

Smile! Raise your cheekbones !¹⁹
The sound seems wearing a hat.
Live by your whole upper jaw,
And the lower jaw doesn't exist.

The tongue lies as a light boat
Forever pressing the tip to the teeth.
The breath in is inaudible and short,
And expiration seems to be an inspiration to us.

Singing with head and chest at once.
As Everardi says,

¹⁹ Улыбка! скулы поднимите!
Звук словно в шапочку одет.
Всей верхней челюстью живите,
А нижней челюсти – как нет.

Язык ложится легкой лодкой
Навеки кончиком к зубам.
Дышок неслышный и короткий,
А выдох вдохом мнится нам.

Петь головой и грудью сразу.
По Эверарди говоря,
«Тянуть себя». Любую фразу
Петь с равновесьем, а не зря.

Подтянут купол диафрагмы,
Задержки столб на ней – как груз,
И плюс, чтоб подтянувшись так мы
Контроль имели бы и вкус.

Звук бодр, не нойте, что за дудка!
Губ мускулистость, сил расчет.
Глубите горло до желудка,
И все само собой придет.

"Pulling yourself." Any phrase
Singing with balance, not in vain.

The dome of the diaphragm is stretched < downwards >,
The column < of air > is held on it like a weight,
Also, by stretching like this
We have to keep control and good taste.

The sound is tonic, don't whine, what a joke!
Lip muscularity, strength calculation.
Deepen your throat to your stomach,
And everything will come by itself. [6, p.183]

What can we say about this little memo? All's right. But the causes and consequences are mixed up in it, and without Tarkhov himself clarifying the causality, the student will not know exactly what to do (not to mention the fact that Tarkhov was probably working directly on certain elements, considered by other teachers as consequences).

Even the last one "deepen your throat to your stomach" (Openness) can be considered by a student who is taught to press constantly, consciously and directly on the larynx, as a confirmation of good indications from his teacher, while this gesture should not be caused by a direct muscular effort, but should be directed by the soft palate, by the "whole upper jaw" of which we "live", serving during the singing the needs of the two basic elements.

N.B. The best way to verify if the work of the Openness, resulting in the lowering of the larynx, is really directed by the soft palate, is to move the head freely: the neck must not be fixed [2, 5, 8, 31].

* * *

It is sometimes said that a good teacher does not have to be a good singer. First of all, one should not confuse knowing how to sing well with having made a career: a person can have a good technique and not have a career, and today we have more and more examples of short but dazzling careers by singers without viable technical coherence even for themselves, not to mention what they could pass on to others, but who get by thanks to their scenic and musical qualities and natural vocal assets, which, due to a lack of knowledge about how they work, only serve them briefly.

A teacher who has never sung well, even if he knows how to differentiate good singing from bad and can have right intuitions, will be able to diagnose but *will have difficulty in healing*. And someone who sang well, even at the age of 75, like Everardi and Tarkhov or 85, like Dolukhanova, when she taught me, will be able to show the student *healthy* examples with his voice, proving at the same time that good technique does not have an expiration date. But the ability to transmit this know-how through a personal concept based on the famous "sul fiato" and "the mask", without "suffocating" the student so that he can create *his own unique coherence*, is yet another skill.

In the 19th century, the great teachers I'm quoting trained and re-educated *several dozen* extraordinary singers, proving that there was *nothing random* in their pedagogical approach. Like the great castrati, about whom they spoke with admiration and nostalgia, evoking the improbable number of hours for a singer of our time that they were spending per day working

their voice²⁰ like a stringed musical instrument, *they insisted* on daily work during the apprenticeship and on regular work afterwards, especially the mental one and singing "in the head" with the score, without forgetting the "golden rules" of the opera singer during periods of stage activity, the last of which appeared in the 20th century because of the increasingly rapid means of transport [15] :

Niente donne, niente fumo, niente vino,
Molto mangiare, molto dormire, molto riposare.²¹

²⁰ 3 to 4 hours per day, plus the same number of hours devoted to the theory [6].

²¹ No women, no smoking, no wine,
Lots of eating, lots of sleeping, lots of rest.

Cognosce te ipsum²²

According to Lamperti Jr., the role of a teacher is to help the student to know himself. He also says that this knowledge occurs when the head interacts with the heart [8].

Everardi said that the secret of a good vocal technique teaching lies in the famous "attentive and critical ear" of the teacher, who must pick up the slightest deviation of the voice from the "right path" and put it back on. He found it inappropriate to associate the theory of singing with science and felt that it was not useful for the student to know the physiological functioning of the vocal apparatus²³, as this would only disturb him during the technical work with his teacher [5]. A great connoisseur of operatic art history, he was in agreement with the opinion of many other teachers on the books of Lamperti-father and Garcia Jr., doubting their practical usefulness, without denying the value of their testimonies [5].

Everardi's ideas are thus contrary to of Garcia Jr.'s – one of his teachers whom he deeply respected and whom he used to quote in class [5] – who is nearly "medical" in his technical approach, collaborated in Paris with the Academy of Sciences, studied the detailed physiology of the "vocal organ", opposing his "analytical method to the more generally adopted alternative system" [7, p.4]. Everardi himself gives us an explanation for this paradox: "I studied with these *men*, not their books, none of which can teach how to sing" [5], confirming that Garcia Jr.'s role for him was that of a *good* teacher, that of helping the student to know himself, to become free and autonomous, without "suffocating" him with his *know-how transmission tools*.

* * *

It must be said that I do not let students criticize their teachers, no matter what their concepts, pedagogical approaches or psychological particularities are, especially if they have stayed with them for several years, without trying to solve the problems to which they hope to find solutions through my method. I empower the student, telling him that *the most intelligent person is he, himself*: he is the one who *feels* what is suitable for him or not, he is the one who decides, informs himself and looks for solutions to go where he wants to go. I am there only to help him create his own coherence and *his own technical balance* through my concept and my teaching, as other teachers do through theirs. As Tito Gobbi used to say while guiding young singers, "trust your sense of observation, your intelligence, your perseverance and remember: all important decisions you have to make *alone*" [31].

This empowerment is very important, especially in the case of students who assign themselves the place of the "victim" and, especially with the appearance of the first positive results, try to assign me the place of the "rescuer" in the famous Karpman Triangle [28], installed with their former teachers (in order to be able to exchange it later for that of the "persecutor", the very place their last teacher holds when they come to me). The mastery of avoiding the installation

²² Know thyself

²³ An elegant reflection on this subject can be found in the writings of his contemporary and friend, the tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez known, among other things, for his legendary "chest high C" [4]: "it would be inappropriate and perhaps afflicting in a treatise of this nature to give a scientific and physical definition of the larynx, the trachea, the lungs, etc... *Just as a poet does not need to know the physiology of the brain to write verse, so it is useless to know the anatomy of the vocal organs to sing.*" [23]

of *this* Triangle is essential in pedagogy in general: the teacher must ensure that the student *remains in his place as a student* (and not that of the "victim", the abused child or the lost sheep) and he – in the teacher's place (and not that of the "rescuer", the social worker or the supreme spiritual guide). When a teacher starts training a professional singer with technical but also career development problems (these two aspects may not be related), he must be careful not to let himself be transformed into the next person responsible for "why it doesn't work" for the singer, because this is sometimes, unfortunately, the only thing the latter is really looking for. In the same way, the student must learn to trust himself and listen to his vocal and psychological survival instinct, avoiding the "rescuer-teachers", often the only or, in the best of cases, very rare holders of the only *true truth* of singing...

I am convinced that the student should not be "forbidden" to attend classes of other teachers, to do trials and workshops with them: this will enrich and strengthen him. The student must feel comfortable with his teacher: the atmosphere of trust and complicity that is created during the course, apart from the information transmitted and the associated work, stimulates the essential interaction *between head and heart*.

* * *

The majority of those who are looking for a technical basis and who receive my teaching after working with other teachers, know the terms represented in the Triangle, have worked with images, establish connections between the ideas that come into their heads when they sing and their physical realisation, and so on. However, there are often gaps in the student's personal technical coherence and the absence of any kind of causality worked out in a structured way, which makes technical thought remain random and the beneficial automatisms have difficulty being created.

In my approach, when practicing his daily exercises, the student needs to know *why* he is doing them and what to watch for in each of them. We can, of course, make him work without any explanation, waiting for the automatisms to be created " simply ", but, just like the three cited great masters of the 19th century, I am convinced that we should not be afraid to be precise, once the system of coordinates in common has been installed, and that the conscious work with the imagination is the most efficient. We should not forget that the aim of a teacher is not to "distribute the fish" but to " teach how to fish ".

I often notice that the appearance of the first results literally changes the student's view of his vocal functioning: he understands that the voice is an instrument like any other, which does not tolerate randomness in technical studying. He also understands that the production of a loud sound and an easy emission are not only in the realm of the physical and physiological, but are directed by thought, singing being its realization, just like speaking. If the student has already practiced singing, the new technical thought habits installation takes from one up to two months and the first good automatisms appear after three to four months (which include the first period and the mentioned exercises) of daily practice.

* * *

Even if it requires a lot of time and work, the basic vocal technique remains relatively simple compared to those of the majority of musical instruments, those of sports, martial arts or ballet: there are more technical elements to work on in these disciplines. The functioning is always the same: one trains regularly to make the elements respond and execute themselves *automatically*

during the complex sequences of football players or dancers, who work a lot with the imagination, that *memory of the future* that precedes the *realization* of the thought and bends it to its will when the technical automatism are ready to serve it. In team sports, this work with mental projection is even more complex as the algorithms change in real time, while for classical performing musicians, the order of execution of the technical elements, prepared in advance, is predefined by the score.

The only real "technical difficulty" therefore concerns to the *regular practice* of the same simple and precise technical thought and *concentration* during the working time dedicated to the technique, and this is where the word "motivation" becomes essential.

For a beginner with the Tone as an initial advantage (for other categories, it may take longer), one year of daily work is enough to assimilate the basics. Then, it is only regular practice of the same technical thought associated with the musical thought that develops the voice – the richness, agility, nuances, volume, diversity of colours, equality of registers and their extremities, and so on. The formation of the apparatus, which "even in Italy"! [2] takes between four and six years if the technical basis is healthy, involves studying and expanding of the repertoire, stage training and practice, work on the text, styles, languages, interaction with other musicians, new knowledge and experience – musical and others – because everything enriches the main vector: that of the musical thought.

"Artists don't improvise themselves: they are formed by a long-term process," says Garcia Jr. [7] and Lamperti Jr. insists on the essential need for the singer to enrich his knowledge of "beaux-arts" (fine arts), because this increases the "*desire for beauty*, from which springs the instinct to sing" [8, p.99].

* * *

It is important to mention that in vocal technique, the basic studying should not be complicated or frustrating, and even the daily practice of the exercises should bring *pleasure*. If the taught technique is good and if the student *does not try to run before he learns to walk*, the training should be exciting, fulfilling, offering possibilities for expression and satisfaction. If this is not the case, it is necessary to change: the technique, the teacher, the activities.

From the teacher's position, Garcia Jr. tells us that the only defects that should "make us despair of the student's vocal future" are the following: a limited intelligence; a false voice and ear; a rough, trembling or damaged voice. He also points out that for the last two categories, their defects should be declared incorrigible only after a few months of attempts [7] (it has to be mentioned that this appears only in the first editions of his method).

Lamperti Jr., in his turn, testifies that the only category requiring long and difficult work is the one with psychological problems [8].

For his part, Everardi makes no comment or conclusion regarding the particularities of stagnant students, merely noting them, even when it concerns "re-education" and the correction of specific defects. His reputation, like those of the two other masters, regularly attracted career singers who wanted to solve technical problems. For example, he recounts that he tried to correct a "throaty" passaggio of the famous tenor Mario and gave up, having been afraid of damaging his beautiful voice [5].

As far as I am concerned, I observe that the only students requiring "long and difficult" work are those who present a "dephasing" similar to that I had with flute and piano: a problem of

creation of simple technical automatisms due to an unstable contact between the technical thought and the musical thought during the work. This is probably the equivalent of what Gracia Jr. describes as "a limited intelligence", "a false voice and ear" and Lamperti Jr. as "psychological problems". My personal conclusion, illustrated by my own artistic and pedagogical experience, is that in the end, this only concerns to *the poorly chosen means of expression* (artistic or otherwise), because neither a " limited intelligence " noted by a " specialist " in one or more disciplines, nor especially " psychological problems " have prevented exceptional career paths and creations of genius in just about every field of human activity.

But the role of a teacher remains in helping the student *to know himself*.

Bibliography

1. Manuel Garcia-fils, « Ecole de Garcia. Traité complet de l'art du chant », Paris, Heugel, 1904, onzième édition
Manuel Garcia Jr., « Garcia School. A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing », Paris, Heugel, 1904, eleventh edition
2. Giovanni Battista Lamperti, « The Technics of Bel Canto », G.Schirmer 1905
3. Mario del Monaco, « La mia vita e i miei successi », Rusconi, 1982
Mario del Monaco, « My life and my achievements », Rusconi, 1982
4. Rodolfo Celletti, « Storia del belcanto », Discanto, 1983
Rodolfo Celletti, « A History of Belcanto », Discanto, 1983
5. Л.И.Вайнштейн, «Камилло Эверарди и его взгляды на вокальное искусство. Воспоминания ученика», Киев, 1924
Vainshtein L.I., «Camillo Everardi and his view of the art of singing. Memoirs of a student», Kiev, 1924
6. Яковенко С. Б., « Волшебная Зара Долуханова », М.: Композитор, 1996
Yakovenko S.B., « The Magic Zara Dolukhanova », Moscow, Compositeur, 1996
7. Manuel Garcia-fils, « Traité complet de l'Art du chant », Schott, Mainz, Paris, 1^{ère} partie : 1840, 2^{de} partie : 1847
Manuel Garcia Jr., « A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing », Schott, Mainz, Paris, 1st part : 1840, 2^d part : 1847
8. William Earl Brown, « Vocal Wisdom. Maxims of Giovanni Battista Lamperti », New York, Taplinger Publishing Co., 1931
9. J. J. M. Levien, « The Garcia family », London, 1932
10. Herbert Weinstock « Rossini : A Biography », Limelight Editions, 1987
11. Константин Станиславский, « Работа актёра над собой », Москва, Художественная литература, 1938
Constantin Stanislavski, « The actor's work on himself », Moscow, 1938
12. Nicolai Gedda, « Gåvan är inte gratis », Bonnier, 1977
Nicolai Gedda, « A gift is not given for free », Bonnier, 1977
13. Vittorio Tortorelli, « Enrico Caruso », Rimini, 1973
14. Григорий Кристи, «Работа Станиславского в оперном театре», Искусство, 1952
Grigory Kristi, « Stanislavski's Work at the Opera Theatre », Iskusstvo, 1952
15. Александр Лесс, «Тита Руффо. Жизнь и творчество», Москва, Советский композитор, 1983
Alexander Less, « Titta Ruffo », Moscow, 1983
16. Rosa Newmarch, « The Russian opera », London, 1914
17. Fyodor Chaliapin, « Pages from my life », Harper & Brothers, 1927
18. Фёдор Шаляпин, «Маска и душа», Париж, 1932
Fyodor Chaliapin, « The Mask and the Soul », Paris, 1932
19. Giacomo Lauri-Volpi, « Voci parallele », Milano, Garzanti, 1955
20. Francesco Lamperti, « The Art of singing », G. Schirmer, 1890
21. Luciano Pavarotti, « My world », G K Hall & Co, 1996
22. Михаил Глинка, «Записки», Москва, Музыка, 1988
Mikhail Glinka, « Memories », Moscow, Music, 1988
23. Gilbert-Louis Duprez, « L'Art du chant », Paris, 1845
Gilbert-Louis Duprez, « The Art of singing », Paris, 1845
24. Albert Schweitzer, « J. S. Bach », Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1930

25. Albert Schweitzer, « J. S. Bach. Le musicien-poète », Maurice et Pierre Foetisch, 1905
Albert Schweitzer, « J. S. Bach. The poet-musician », Maurice et Pierre Foetisch, 1905
26. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, « Echoes of a Lifetime », Macmillan London, 1989
27. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, « La légende du chant », Flammarion, 1998
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, « The Legend of singing », Flammarion, 1998
28. Stephen Karpman, « Fairy tales and script drama analysis », Transactional Analysis Bulletin, 1968
29. Giacomo Rizzolatti, Corrado Sinigaglia, « Mirrors In The Brain : How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions », New York, Oxford University Press, 2008
30. Noam Chomsky, « Knowledge of language : its nature, origin and use », New York, Prager, 1986
31. Tito Gobbi, « My Life », London, Macdonald & Jane's, 1979
32. Анатолий Эфрос, «Репетиция – любовь моя», Москва, Панас, 1993
Anatoli Efros, « Rehearsal is my love », Moscow, Parnas, 1993
33. Francesco Lamperti, « Guido per lo studio del canto », Milano, G. Ricordi, 1864
34. Steven Pinker, « The Language instinct », New-York, William Morrow and C°, 1994
35. Noam Chomsky, « New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind », Cambridge University Press, 2000
36. Lilli Lehman, « Mon art du chant », Paris, Rouart, Lerolle et Cie, 1922
Lilli Lehman, « My art of singing », Paris, Rouart, Lerolle et Cie, 1922

Summary

I. Who

Intrusion

Conditional release

The second life

II. What

The Balance Triangle

The first meeting

The daily exercises

III. How

The Tone and the Focus

The Breath

The Connection

The Openness

The High position

The Text

IV. Why

The cognitive belcanto

The belcantist concept

Cognosce te ipsum

Bibliography