



МУЗИКАЛНА ПЕДАГОГИКА

MUSIC EDUCATION

TEACHING MUSIC PERFORMANCE: A HOLISTIC PROCESS

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Abstract: *This research analyzes some representative attributes of holistic teaching. It focuses on the comprehensive development of students, which benefits from the holistic approach of the tuition. The aim of a holistic teacher is to expose alternative ways of performing music. This point of view leads young artists to achieve the wholeness of their performance. The research is based on relevant literature, The author's own experience as an opera singer, and The observation of various ways of teaching.*

Keywords: *holism, performance, opera, interconnection, balance*

Introduction

Holism, defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is a theory according to which parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts. "Musical performance is by its nature a holistic activity, therefore a correspondent holistic teaching is needed. The teacher's ability to perceive the performance holistically is fundamental, because then he/she can offer solutions to solve the problems that are interconnected among multiple aspects.

People do not define a monologue in an individual apartment as a performance. Emmons S. and Thomas A. (1998) state "It only counts when he or she does it at the appointed time and in the appointed place, under pressure....before an audience" (Power Performance for Singers, I, 1, 5.) The performance starts from the silence before the entrance. The audience by default instinctively knows the physical and symbolic distance from the stage. During the whole process, everything, whether it can be perceived or not by the audience, is considered an element in performance.

Methodology

The research methodology includes a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the author's personal experience as an opera singer, and observations of various teaching methods, which allows for a deep understanding of how holistic teaching practices can be implemented and their effects on student performance.

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Results

The research reveals that a holistic pedagogy goes beyond sound skills. The process of teachers instructing students is also a process of assisting students in self-exploration. Students, under the guidance of the teacher, need to understand how singing performance should be, rather than merely pursuing vocal perfection. When singers can naturally coordinate various psychosomatic aspects, their voices accordingly improve. This is one of the advantages, as the voice serves the overall benefit of performance.

Moreover, the observations reveal that many singing problems often have a domino effect, interconnected with aspects such as a singer's psychological state, experience, body movements, and more. For example, a lack of solid vocal foundation or confidence can lead to vocal and physical stiffness, resulting in a tense stage presence.

Discussion

In music performance, technical proficiency is undeniably important. However, techniques are meaningless if not serving a purpose. Take singing for example: A vocal performance is not simple sound production on the stage. A singer is expected to understand and convey several messages contained in a song, and to deliver them. According to Richard Miller in his book "On The Art Of Singing", there are "Seven Pillars: Musicianship, Vocal technique, Artistic Imagination, Objectivity, Perseverance, Talent and Business Acumen". As can be seen, the vocal technique is only one of the elements of equal importance.

More specifically for opera, every character's existence is given by the plot and serves its own function in the story. Opera can be seen as a syncretic product of vocal, musical, visual, and dramatic interaction. The moment an opera singer steps onto the stage, every movement and every sound he/she makes should be within the logic of the role and the story. In opera, interactions with other characters, stage design, costumes, makeup, props, and various theatrical elements collectively contribute to the development of the whole narrative.

A commonly observed phenomenon is that vocal virtuosity is seen as a crucial criteria for a vocal performance. Nevertheless, a sublime vocal technique would hardly be achieved if the vocal mechanism is the only goal. Otherwise, laryngologists or phoniaticians would be the most skillful singers. Besides, vocal techniques are not static: repertoire from different eras, different styles, and different regions requires an adequate approach. Students who fixate on the "perfect" techniques may struggle to adapt their voices to the versatility of stylistic expectations.

No equal performances can ever be identical and on the stage, a performer may face various unpredictable emergencies, like temporary memory lapses, vocal cracks, shortness of breath, vocal dryness, choking, etc.

What should be noted is that in most cases the problems happening to singers are not merely caused by a single factor (except for force majeure like accidentally inhaling a fly during respiration, or an earthquake...), like lack of technique, nervousness, or sudden out of the "acting zone".

Holistic pedagogy goes beyond sound skills. The process of teachers instructing students is also a process of assisting students in self-exploration, thus the teacher's comprehensive guidance is crucial. Laurel H. Campbell (2011)¹ Students, under the guidance of the teacher, need to understand in the first place how singing performance should be, rather than pursuing only vocal perfection. Based on this fundamental concept, all relevant training aspects can be properly developed.

There are also some misconceptions about holistic teaching, where the teacher's educational objective is to guide students in creating meaningful and optimal performances, not just for the sake of producing the best sound. Objectively speaking, when singers can naturally coordinate various psychosomatic aspects, their voices naturally and accordingly improve. However, this is just one of the advantages, the voice serves the overall benefit of performance.

¹ **Laurel H. Campbell** (2011). "Of all these concerns, however, no goal in education is more important than self-understanding through which students come to appreciate the diverse aspects of the cultural and social forces that shape their lives. This understanding, in turn, provides the foundation for self-transformation, leading to a life of personal and communal responsibility." *Art Education*, vol. 64, No. 2, *Holistic Art Education: A Transformative Approach to Teaching Art*.

In lessons, teachers observe students' performance from a more objective perspective than students themselves. Therefore, the guiders also need to be aware that many singing problems often have a domino effect. This interconnection is not limited to vocal techniques alone; a singer's psychological state, experience, body movements, and more are associated elements and significant aspects of performance. For example, when performers lack a solid vocal foundation or lack confidence in their vocal mastery, they often cannot fully immerse themselves in interpreting the role. This is often accompanied by vocal and physical stiffness, resulting in a tense stage presence. There are also situations when technically proficient singers do not understand the situation well enough or have unstable emotions - they may strain their voice, leading to muscle tension throughout the body and affecting physical coordination. When singers disconnect from their role, the organic performing is interrupted, and this can lead to forgotten lyrics and stuttering, further impacting subsequent performance. It's evident that a successful performance is not solely a product of proficient vocal techniques. Teachers need to prepare singers in multiple aspects. Like I previously mentioned, many errors in performance are not as straightforward as they may appear. Disadvantageous singing habits are often intricately linked to other aspects such as aesthetics, knowledge, and emotions. For instance, when a student misunderstands how to perform a Mozart piece and believes that it should only be sung with a delicate and thin voice, their body's natural response can lead to a rigid vocal delivery. Consequently, this habitual singing can subsequently affect the interpretation of other pieces in the future.

In an operatic production, it is difficult to imagine how a performer who has exclusively undergone vocal training would manage various aspects such as interacting with partners, coordinating with conductors and orchestras, and moving properly on stage, among other factors. Furthermore, performance extends beyond the mere accumulation of the aforementioned elements. A truly convincing performance necessitates the actor's immersion into the role and the continuous interpretation based on the character and the narrative.

And empirical teaching may enable students to replicate certain roles, but it not only consumes time but also hinders the performers from independent thinking and innovation.

In the same book, Emmos and Thomas discussed how to create a sustainable performance. They proposed the viewpoint that the performance level of many singers progresses in tandem with psychological maturity.

A professional performer looks for sustainable development and the ability to achieve success in performance. This can only be achieved if the singer is both physically and mentally ready. Necessary psychological elements such as self-confidence, relaxation on stage, concentration, strong motivation, imagination, etc. are closely related to physical and technical expression in performance, and more importantly, each of them can have a chain reaction on the others. Some students may be better than others. But either way, mental skills should also be subject to training.

For instance, there are several emotional impacts after the performance that performers can have. They can seem harmless because the performance is already finished, but they directly influence your following learning process or even worse performances more often than people think.

After a successful premiere, a successful Chinese soprano with decades of professional experience announced her intention to commit suicide. Luckily, she didn't do it, because she had built up enough psychological strength to fight the depression. The same emotions are felt by athletes: even Olympic champions do not handle their success well and end up injuring themselves in the training sessions that follow.

Vanessa Cornett(2015)² believes that psychological health is an important and too-frequently overlooked aspect of musician health and wellness. Unlike top athletic coaches, however, most music teachers were never trained to address the psychological factors of performance. As a result, we often

² **Vanessa Cornett** (2015). Psychological health is an important and too-frequently overlooked aspect of musician health and wellness. Unlike top athletic coaches, however, most music teachers were never trained to address the psychological factors of performance. As a result, we often neglect the mental component of practice and performance in favor of focusing on technical and interpretive skills. We often teach intuitively, suggesting performance preparation techniques, which may have worked for us in the past. *Mental Skills And Music Performance: The Teacher's Role*.

neglect the mental component of practice and performance in favor of focusing on technical and interpretive skills. We often teach intuitively, suggesting performance preparation techniques, which may have worked for us in the past.

A teacher should not only be experienced but also be aware of the mental dilemmas the student may face. Every student reacts differently to the teacher's interference. For this reason, instead of using empirical suggestions based on the idea that it works for everyone, a teacher needs a holistic view to analyse different situations and adapt teaching strategies. The work of teachers is not limited to helping students prepare for performances. Often, it is equally important to lead students in effectively regulating their mental and physical states after a performance, learning from their successes or failures, and making adjustments to their teaching methods in the future accordingly.

Conclusion

Holistic pedagogy is not just about creating technically proficient musicians; it's about nurturing artists who can connect with their audience on a deeper level, and who are psychosomatically prepared for the rigors of the stage. It acknowledges the uniqueness of every student, and it requires teachers to adapt and tailor their guidance to individual needs. In embracing holism, we honor the profound interconnection of every element in the world of musical performance and teaching. Everything a teacher does is linked to all aspects of student's behaviors. With the development of aesthetics and music education, not only performers but also teachers are facing more challenges. To teach holistically demands that the teacher has ample knowledge and experience in different areas, and sometimes requires a longer circle of education. We should bear in mind that a successful performance is underpinned by the collective efforts of performers and educators, who dedicate countless hours to perfecting every possible detail.

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