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Singing at Tertiary Level : Training the Female Singer in the First Year of Studying Voice

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SINGING AT TERTIARY LEVEL – TRAINING THE FEMALE SINGER IN THE FIRST YEAR OF STUDYING VOICE

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THIS THESIS IS PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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INTRODUCTION

Through a synthesis of the secondary literature and interviews with leading professional singing teachers, this dissertation offers a practical approach to the teaching of beginner singers at tertiary level. It will be shown that there are many alternative approaches to teaching vocal skills, and furthermore, it will show that it is of vital importance that the teacher finds the most effective principles/approaches that can be provided for the student at the initial stages of their development. Factors that teachers need to take into account include: appropriate repertoire; balance between technique and musicality, and finally, overall support for the student to develop into a well-rounded artist. I will present a clear picture of what is necessary for sound vocal training at the early stages of singing. This information adds to the secondary literature in the field of vocal pedagogy. The conclusion is presented as a set of suggested strategies that could, in turn, form a sample syllabus that would be of particular use to a singing teacher newly facing the problems of teaching voice to female students in the first year of tertiary education.

PART ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the reviewing of the literature on this topic this section will discuss some of the research undertaken in vocal pedagogy. It will explore some of the practices and approaches which are employed in teaching singing, and also explore some of the research undertaken in teaching female singers at the tertiary level.

As suggested by David (1995, p. xii), the main goal of a vocal teacher is to develop the individual student's talent to their fullest potential and to provide that student with techniques which will produce a free tone, which in turn will give them freedom to express the meaning of the text and the music. A common belief that appears to be universal in the teaching field, is to make the experience an enjoyable one for the student. Many believe this is the key to getting results from students.
Teachers of voice are challenged with determining the focus and areas of need for the individual student and then providing them with the most appropriate instruction. Of prime importance is the acquisition of a solid technique. When discussing vocal technique most teachers concentrate on breathing and the effective ways of achieving good vocal support. Blades and Nelson (2002, p.73) discuss how breath powers singing and highlights the importance of keeping the chest open and spacious to stop the body from collapsing which will in turn ensure a continual free flow of breath. Miller, R (1996, p. 254) believes that to have and maintain good breath support the singer needs to be able to move freely with no tension but states “tonicity must be present” - similar to a confident sports player who is ready for action but not tight.

Correct posture affects the student’s sound, and it is very important that the student feels balanced and grounded. David (1995, p. 16) describes good singing posture as encompassing a number of aspects including; feet being squarely placed on the floor, knees flexible, a straight back for abdominal/costal expansion, shoulders held back for the upper chest to be open and the head and neck to be straight and held as a continuation of the spine.

Resonance is an area of technique that can be quite challenging to teach. Anderson (1979, p. 99) describes vocal resonance as “being produced by vibrating air within chambers. These chambers can change shape and relationships with each other... pitch phonated in the larynx is amplified and various harmonic overtones are greatly strengthened by resonance chambers of the vocal tract.” It appears that a resonant sound is not easy to produce, however when achieved it is satisfying to the singer (and the teacher), so there is never any absence of motivation.

A number of other areas in which some teachers focus upon include, the positioning of the jaw, cheekbones, soft palate and tongue, vowel modification and vocal onsets. At times teachers may find a certain effective technique and focus on that for a particular time. It is, however, important to maintain a balance in all technical areas so that the sound produced is centred and coloured in a satisfactory way.
Boytim (2003) discusses the importance of a teacher having a critical ear and observes how technical work helps the student to develop a secure and comfortable sound through sensation. He believes it is very important that the student does not listen to herself when singing, as often the sound a singer hears can be significantly different from what another can hear. This can be challenging at first, but can make a positive improvement in many students' tone. Anderson (1979, p.16) mentioned this when discussing the disadvantages of a vocal student who listens to her voice. He believes what singers hear inside their “bony structure” is completely different to the sound that an audience hears. He stresses the importance of a singing teacher being able to know what he/she likes to hear and to really understand why he/she wants that particular sound. “The teacher must understand vocal mechanics, the physical construction of the voice and what makes it work.”

Singing is a very mental process and many teachers believe this area needs to be constantly worked upon, developed and strengthened. Blades and Nelson (2003, p. 138) discuss the benefits of mental warm ups. They believe it is powerful and effective if practised regularly and very useful if the individual does not want to sing too much or can’t in certain circumstance. Miller, R (1996, p.4-5) feels once the singer has a sound understanding and coordination of breath support coupled with “laryngeal and respiratory responses” then mental imagery could be used but only with caution. With regard to interpretation and the power of the imagination, he feels when teachers impose technical imagery; it can cause confusion and complications. “There is an increasing realization that the voice as an instrument that can be best trained through exact communicative language.” In contrast, Caesari (1963), discusses the mental-physical process involved in correct, natural voice production and believes to achieve a beautiful singing result one must be able to first perceive it mentally. For example, a technique he employed was to ask the student to sing the pitch and vowel of the note in their head before releasing into a sound.

It is important for a teacher to focus on the sensations a student will feel when singing correctly. Bonynge (cited in Boytimm, 2003, p.57) stated, “Part of singing has to do with
memory. Singing is sensation. You have to remember what it feels like when you do it correctly, so you can reproduce it.”

Miller, R (1996, p. 6-10) has developed five principles which he feels are necessary to teach singing successfully. Firstly, he stresses the importance of developing an open respectful relationship with each other and establishing a clear understanding that each lesson is a problem solving session for both student and teacher. Miller stresses the importance of being positive at the early stages of the lessons and the value of creating a team feel about the learning process. Secondly, the author feels that “diagnosis and prescription” is a crucial step. He believes the explanation needs to be easy to understand and functional. He gives importance to describing the general vocal mechanism and vocal terminology so the student has a sound understanding of what the teacher is trying to convey when correcting or explaining a technique. A structure is necessary for organization of time, and for communicating the necessary steps in each session. The author suggests making explanations physical so the student can immediately rely on seeing and feeling the difference between tension and freedom. And finally, patience is a valuable trait and helps the student understand that learning the art of singing is a long process and learning one new skill, or gaining a new understanding in each lesson is a necessary step to achieving results.

Another significant area of focus is interpretation. Challenging the student to understand the text, translations and languages, to analyse harmony, to stress the importance of making a piece individual and to try to discover what the composer’s intentions were for some particular piece are all aspects of interpretation. To achieve effective result with students, there needs to be a balance between the technical aspect of singing and the awareness of singing as an art form. If there is not consistent energy given to both, the student may experience troubles, as both of these aspects are interlinked and help the student to achieve sound results. When feeling the emotion of a text, the body will respond automatically by breathing with that emotion, and if the student knows how the body feels physically when everything is working as it should, then he/she will be better prepared.
In order for the student to improve, the teacher needs to maintain a positive attitude. Boytim (2003, p.65) suggests to teachers some key approaches; “Being yourself, enthusiastic, encouraging, patient, empathetic, understanding, but demanding and expecting excellence.” Miller (1996, p. 213) believes there are three features necessary to be a solid voice teacher: stability, arising from feeling comfortable that the teacher has a competent level of understanding of the singing mechanism; the continual growth of the teacher- being aware of new ideas and information and being flexible enough to change and try new concepts and finally, having the imagination and the musicianship to guide the student.

PART TWO

METHODODOLOGY

Data collected for this research is primarily qualitative. An interview questionnaire was developed, and interviews were conducted and answered by three experienced voice teachers in Perth, all of varying ages, experience and upbringing. (See Appendix 1). From this research it was possible to select effective exercises and approaches that could be seen to be beneficial to a beginner female singer. The three interviewees were: Roma Conway (Vocal coach, accompanist and vocal teacher); Taryn Fiebig (Vocal teacher and currently professional opera singer) and Christina Gronborg (Vocal teacher who studied vocal studio teaching in Denmark). The results from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, analysed and patterns were identified. Also, two dissertations on topics related to singing techniques were analysed and the findings of the dissertations were identified and recorded. Amy Cobb- Jordan (2001) "The study of English, French, German and Italian techniques of singing related to the female adolescent voice and "A study of Vocal Exercises and Vocalises used in selected University programs" by Mary Jones Saathoff (1995).
PART THREE

RESULTS

1. Questionnaire

The responses to the questionnaire can be synthesised into distinct sections. There was a focus on the teacher’s personal experiences as musicians, and what worked for them in regard to vocal warm-ups, exercises, interpretation and stress management. Gronborg discussed her training in vocal teaching and the beneficial knowledge she gained from studying in Denmark. Studio teaching in Denmark has an emphasis on the importance of the teacher understanding the human body (with regard to the areas used for producing a vocal sound.) By the end of the four-year course the teachers have developed a sound understanding of how the vocal mechanism works through many hours spent studying anatomy. It was clear, however, that this detail was not to be discussed in too much depth with a beginner as it could lead to confusion, nevertheless, it appears logical and clearly beneficial for a teacher to have a sound understanding of the vocal mechanism in order to be able to correct tensions.

In discussing first lessons, all three interviewees felt there needed to be a conscious effort on their part to make the student feel relaxed. They all commented that they stressed to the student that it is good to make mistakes and to experiment in front of their teacher. Ideally, there needs to be a level of trust and respect for one another and the first lesson needs to be gentle and not too confusing. As Conway suggests, if the student is too serious they may tense their muscles and this will detract from the sound. She would question the student about how they breathe as they talk and then she would gently make them aware of their breath as they sing. Fiebig demonstrates how the voice box, larynx, lungs, diaphragm and basic anatomy work using the analogy of a balloon. The action of the balloon demonstrates the tension of the diaphragm and the pressure that is created within the lungs. The opening of the balloon represents the position of the vocal chords and their function. It is a basic demonstration of what is happening in the body when an individual sings.
In regard to vocal warm-ups there was a general consensus that this was an important aspect and it appears that the teachers mainly used general humming and intervals of 5ths or less. All used warm-ups that were gentle and light. Their actual exercises differed, some chose solfa whilst others used Italian vowels. Interestingly Miller (1990, pp.20-22) states that every student, should come to the lesson warmed up and he further suggests that a “singer should never become dependent upon the teacher for the warm-up process”.

Each teacher gave examples of vocal exercises, which they felt were effective, although they indicated that the choice of exercise depends on the individual student. Conway selects light exercises of scales and arpeggios with alternating consonants; Fiebig discusses chest and head voice with the student aiming to make a perfect mix between the two. Gronborg works on extending the students vocal range and requesting not just legato singing, but also staccato techniques, so as to prepare students for the song repertoire.

With regard to breathing, all teachers felt this was an area of great importance. They stressed that it needs to be constant and flowing and each gave alternative approaches to explaining this movement of breath through analogies, physical exercises and demonstrations.

All three teachers considered interpretation to be a crucial part of vocal training, however, their process for teaching interpretation differed from one another. Some felt it to be the most crucial aspect of singing and this aspect was discussed immediately when a student was given a new song, whilst another suggested focussing on basic technique first before tackling the meaning behind the music. Fiebig discusses text with the students immediately and she identifies the singer's purpose as a storyteller, with the singing simply embellishing the story. Gronborg, with her extensive musical training places an emphasis on the harmonic structure of a work, constantly questioning the student about the composer's choices in regards to harmony. When combining this focus on text in relation to harmony, it is likely that the student will look at their singing repertoire in a different way.
With regards to the mental process of singing, the interviewees felt the most appropriate way to deal with performance anxiety was through mental preparation of what the performance space would look like: what they would do on the day etc. Fiebig sometimes requests spontaneous performances from her students to discourage them from feeling that public performances are stressful. By doing this she seeks to make performance ordinary, not extraordinary. Interestingly, only occasionally was there a mention of mental visualisation to help the vocal sound. If we compare the methods of Caesari (1963), who based his teaching on the “bel canto technique” it is clear that his main focus was at all times on singing mentally. He suggested students sing each note, with the vowel shape ready in their mind before making an external sound. This method has worked for centuries and appears to be very beneficial in preparing the larynx for the notes that are about to be sung.

When looking at appropriate repertoire for beginner singers, there was mixed response. Conway suggested specific pieces from Vaccai (a book of short Italian songs specifically designed to train a singer’s voice). Gronborg also mentioned the use of an Italian song book, whereas Fiebig, believed in finding a piece which the student would be able to relate to and would enjoy singing. She would then find a “Vaccai exercise” within a bar in that song. She believes the student will be motivated to practice if she can appreciate something in the piece. Interestingly only Gronborg mentioned practice sessions and the importance of not over singing. She felt beginner singers should practice for short bursts of no more than fifteen minutes a few times a day. She believes the length of the sessions should only increase as the student develops solid technique.

All three teachers had a common belief that the most important thing when teaching a beginner is to make the experience positive so that the individual really enjoys herself. Without this factor, they believe a teacher will not see results. When discussing goals/aims after one year of teaching, the importance of early positive experiences was reiterated. The student needs to have a desire and love of singing for it to be satisfying experience for both the teacher and the student. There was also a similarly held belief that teachers learn from their students and each interviewee felt they had gained so much by conquering challenges that came up when a student did not understand or did not produce
the sound the teacher was looking for. There is a common acceptance of the value of adopting an approach that is gentle and supportive and a recognition that each student is different and needs to be taught with alternative approaches. When asked for specific exercises they used in their training, all of the interviewees suggested possible exercises but emphasised that it will depend on the student’s background, confidence levels, attitude and vocal mechanism. No two students are ever the same and approaches and strategies need to be chosen to suit the individual. This is what makes teaching such a challenging and rewarding profession.

RESULTS

2. Secondary Literature

The two American dissertations discussed below are useful for teachers to extract effective singing techniques used across the world and to incorporate some of these methods in their everyday teaching. The first dissertation was written for the University of North Texas in 2001. It discusses the pedagogical techniques taught in the four main schools of singing: Italian, French, German and English. Through a control group, certain techniques from each of the schools were taught and the results were noted, providing the reader with a clear idea about what was considered effective in each of the national schools. The second dissertation was written in 1995 for Texas Tech University and it reviews literature on vocalises and vocal exercises. This dissertation tabulates results from a questionnaire on the most common vocal exercises used at tertiary level in a variety of North American Universities.

There are many different techniques a teacher can focus on when teaching singing and this is clearly evident when analysing the sounds produced by vocalists from different countries. Each country appears to have particular areas of technique, which they feel is the most important. As Cobb-Jordan (2001) discovered, the English, French, German and Italian schools of singing differ dramatically in their pedagogical approaches. From this writer’s findings, methods will be extracted which appear to be effective in achieving results in the female students that were coached.
Cobb-Jordan's dissertation, "The study of English, French, German and Italian techniques of singing related to the female adolescent voice" focuses on the varying teaching tools used by the four different countries in regard to vocal technique. It is particularly interesting when examining the results of the breathing techniques as it leads the reader to understand that breath support is something which most students need extra guidance in when singing. This dissertation can assist a teacher to gain additional teaching tools to help achieve a positive result.

The Italian school produced successful results amongst the female singers by focusing on posture, a high chest, straight spine, and forward natural resonance. They emphasised the importance of combining the work of the body and the voice in a term called appogia. Freed (1991, p. 48), defines this Italian word which comes from appoggiare (which means to lean) as "steady breath pressure, balance of the muscles and deep inspiration, especially for higher tones." It is interesting to note, the Italian open, bright vowels helped the singers to produce clear diction and a resonant sound with the assistance of singing into the mask of the face. In comparison to the Italian’s focus on breathing, the French method gave less focus on breathing and more focus on posture in order for the student to breathe naturally just as when talking. The results achieved from this method were poor in comparison to the other countries that focused a lot of energy on breath support. However, the French technique produced a brilliant resonance with a focus on high cheek bones and a buzz sensation on the bones of the face. The texture was described as thin but bright. With regards to “natural breathing” for singing, Freed (1991, p.112) discussed how breathing used for normal everyday speech for body functions is generally not sufficient for singing. The German school had success with breath management. They taught the student to pull in the abdomen upon breath intake and to tighten the buttocks while singing. Although this method was effective it goes against the principles of many who try to minimise as many tensions as possible from the body.

Interestingly, the research showed the English teachers encouraged the student to tilt the torso forward in order to feel the expansion in their back. They also instructed the singer to pull their diaphragm in on intake of air, allowing the rib cage to expand laterally. After the set number of weeks practicing this technique, the student’s breathing improved and
there was a definite improvement in their consistency of tone in long phrases. The results indicated that the students began to feel the air entering around their lower back muscles.

In regard to vowel formation, the English school requested a tall mouth, in comparison to the French school's smiled mouth. This narrow technique of the English assisted the singers when singing in the upper register. It must be noted that some students over extended with this technique. The German school have one position for each vowel that helped create a full resonance that used all the back space as well as the front space. Overall, the German method created a warm, dark, full texture, however their stress on an open throat caused some problems when the tone became throaty and swallowed. The Italian school asked the students to modify the vowel as they ascended whilst singing. By changing the shape of the mouth and vocal tract, the students sung with ease in the higher register.

The second dissertation is "A study of Vocal Exercises and Vocalises used in selected University programs" by Mary Jones Saathoff (1995). This is a comprehensive piece of work that looks at the many possible options when choosing appropriate exercises for singing students at the tertiary level. It makes the reader aware of the variety of viewpoints on this topic and helps a voice teacher realise the importance of researching what has worked for others and then discovering what is effective for themselves and their students. The findings from the questionnaire completed in twenty three universities, provides the reader with a valuable insight into the vocalises and vocal exercises used in North American tertiary singing programs.

Saathoff (1995, p. 29) offers a number of viewpoints on the importance of technical exercises. Results from her research, showed most people feel vocal exercises are necessary, however, there appears to be two distinct ways to teach them. Some teachers focus on technical work with specific exercises and vocalises such as Vaccai, whilst others incorporate technical work within a song. Some perceive vocalises to be a dull way of teaching singing and according to Witherspoon (Saathoff 1995, p.29), "the use of vocalises may be valuable but they should not be prolonged." It is assumed that the teacher will make a professional judgement and adopt his/her approach to suit the
singer's needs and attitude. The research indicates that what it is most effective is a combined approach of these two viewpoints. When looking at singing exercises Saathoff (1995, p. 39) concludes that each exercise needs to have a specific purpose and the teacher and student need to be aware of this otherwise it will not be effective. With regard to practice of technical work, the writer discovered that most believe that vocal exercises should be practiced almost daily, in short bursts rather than for long periods of time, and there was a common suggestion of beginning this process in the morning. The statistics showed that the most predominant exercises were scales, arpeggios and same note work or a combination of these.

Saathoff (1995, p. 30) places vocal exercises into two distinct categories, singing and non-singing. Firstly, she discusses non-singing exercises which include stretching, breathing, tongue, jaw, speech work and movement / relaxation. When suggesting physical conditioning of the body for singing, there was an implication that swimming was not recommended because there was a chance of upper respiratory infection. This conflicts with beliefs by many other teachers who encourage swimming, as they believe it can assist with breath control. When teaching attack or onset, Saathoff (1995, p. 57-58) discusses the three types; soft, hard and balanced. A balanced onset is what Saathoff believes teachers should be encouraging students to strive towards. Simple exercises such as, singing a repeated note with a breath in between can be effective. Saathoff describes placement as the physical sensation a singer feels at phonation and its link with resonance. Resonance is often taught with other vocal elements such as, articulation, vowel modification etc. Research has shown that most agree that humming can help with resonance; however, there is a theory that it can lead to strain and intonation problems.

Breath support like all other technical aspects can be taught in a variety of ways. Saathoff (1995, p. 62) discovered some use staccato exercises, others use a legato approach or rolled rr's and some simply believe any exercise is a breathing exercise and that the student should aim to maintain good breath management at all times.

Results of the data showed the majority of teachers recognised that they used a range of vocal exercises they had learned in their own training, which they have refined for their
students. Most of the respondents stated that they gave differing exercises to different students depending on their individual needs. Saathoff challenges this as she believes teachers commonly give the same exercise to all students and use exercises which they have used personally in their own singing training rather than making an individual assessment of each student's needs. If this is a common approach adopted by vocal teachers then students are disadvantaged, as they may not have their areas of weakness addressed.

CONCLUSION

Suggested strategies to be incorporated in a vocal syllabus.

This section will comprise the findings based on the results collected from parts one, two and three of this research.

1. BREATHING

- It is clearly evident that the teacher and student need to have a sound understanding of how to develop effective breath management through being aware of the human body and how it functions.
- Asking a student to physically feel their body as they breathe appears to be an effective way for the student to understand the breathing process and to recognise the importance of creating a free flowing breath. Particular attention needs to be given to the back muscles as they support the breath.
- Linked to breathing is posture, and physically instructing the student to develop the awareness of when the posture is aligned and balanced is beneficial. An example: *Ask the student to lie on her back and place her hands on her lower stomach to feel the breathing process.*
2. RESONANCE

- As identified through the Freñich technique, feeling the buzzing on the facial bones is an effective way of teaching resonance.
- Miller (1996, p. 79) suggests humming on a [m] which creates a balanced resonance, so that there is back resonance as well as front resonance.
- Asking the student to place their hand to the back of their head whilst singing encourages more depth to the sound.

3. VOCAL REPertoire

- It is apparent that some teachers perceive the use of vocalises such as Vacci and Concane as a useful tool to encourage beginner singers and build confidence. In early stages, it could be effective to use these traditional pieces combined with a song that the individual student is interested in or familiar with. Combining these two types of repertoire will assist the students to develop technically and also add an element of enjoyment to the lesson.
- Often technical exercises can be found within songs, so the majority of the lessons do not have to be spent on repetitive exercises and vocalises.
- When assisting the student to choose repertoire, it is important to have a clear understanding of the type of music the student is interested in, and what they hope to gain out of the lessons.
- The ultimate goal is for the student to improve their skills and to enjoy the singing process. For the teacher there is the constant challenge of locating areas of need and devising actions/activities or ideas to correct and strengthen the weaknesses.
4. INTERPRETATION

- This is an area of great importance and the teacher needs to dedicate a lot of time to make the student aware of why this is important.
- The student needs to know how to discover what the composer wants from the music and contribute what they want personally to the music.
- By encouraging the student to relate to the text the singing can become moving and purposeful and the vocal tone, diction and colour will improve.

5. THE MENTAL PROCESS OF SINGING

- It is evident that singing involves the whole person and utilises physical, emotional and mental processes.
- It is beneficial for the student to be instructed to prepare mentally before singing. Hearing the vowel and note in the head before producing a sound is very helpful, especially in coloratura passages where this process prepares the vocal mechanism.
- Students need to be instructed on how to prepare mentally for performances. Through visualisation, the students can prepare themselves to overcome the nerves and anxiety that can be experienced when performing in public.

Conclusion

The student and teacher must be prepared to continually change and to grow in order to meet the difficulties that will emerge as the student progresses and strives to reach their fullest potential. Singing is a complex process that requires commitment and dedication on the part of the teacher and student.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1
APPENDIX 1

Interviewees are:

1. Roma Conway
2. Taryn Fiebig
3. Christina Gronborg

QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been teaching? From what year 19...

2. Where did you train? Who was your vocal teacher/s?

3. What types of students do you teach (age, gender, experience etc)?

4. What is the first area you tackle when teaching a new voice student regardless of their background?

5. What do you utilise as a warm-up if you use one?

6. Do you believe in teaching breathing technique? If yes, how do you teach breath management?

7. What other areas of technique do you focus on? Do you give certain areas of technique more attention than others?

8. Do you have particular vocal exercises you use regularly in lessons? Do they vary depending on the individual's singing/musical ability? Are there specific exercises you feel are suitable for all? Please describe

10. How do you choose repertoire for your students? Do you select different pieces for each student, or do you have standard songs, which you feel are excellent for all
beginners. Please list some of the repertoire you would select for an 18-year-old female singer in her first year at tertiary level.

11. Can young singers be trained to sing early music? Do you think this can cause problems later in their development?

12. What goals do you hope your student to achieve after studying voice with you for one year? Are there specific areas you aim for them to be competent in?

13. Do you instruct male students in the same way as female students?

14. Is there any other area you teach your students to assist their singing apart from interpretation/technique? Eg: theory, aural-solfège...

15. Do you focus any time on the mental process of performing music and strategies for dealing with nerves?

16. Do you feel the need to discuss vocal health and effective ways of protecting your voice?

17. Have you changed the way you teach from when you first began? Do you teach in a similar way to your previous teachers, or have you created you own style? Have you noticed a generational change from when you first began singing to the way individuals are teaching in today in 2004?
Roma Conway

1. How long have you been teaching? From what year 19...  
Teaching since 1974

2. Where did you train? Who was your vocal teacher/s?  
Vocal teachers: Lucy Howell (Perth), Elizabeth Todd and Florence Taylor (Sydney). I learnt how to teach singing through my own teachers and through being an accompanist for many singing teachers. I am a vocal coach and had my first experience as a voice teacher in Sydney at NIDA.

3. What types of students do you teach (age, gender, experience etc)?  
I have taught a wide variety of students of varying ages and experience.

4. What is the first area you tackle when teaching a new voice student regardless of their background?  
I try to make the first lesson enjoyable as if a singer is too serious they can tense muscles. I will ask a student if they are breathing in and out, and ask them how they know this and to describe what it feels like. I listen to their voice through simple exercises to check on their breathing and work out how confident they are with singing. Communication is very important. An exercise I use in a first lesson is to ask the student to feel the ground supporting them and rise on their toes and put their arms out to the sides and then close their eyes. This is to work on being balanced.

5. What do you utilise as a warm-up if you use one?  
I use a light warm-up of descending and ascending 5ths and arpeggios.

6. Do you believe in teaching breathing technique?  
If yes, how do you teach breath management?  
Yes, breathing is a must, it touches the sound as it moves through the larynx. Vocalists must be aware of this. Breath support needs to be flowing.

7. What other areas of technique do you focus on? Do you give certain areas of technique more attention than others?  
A free jaw, no tension, lifting the soft palate, making sure the back of the neck is free, breathing.
8. Do you have particular vocal exercises you use regularly in lessons? Do they vary depending on the individual's singing/musical ability? Are there specific exercises you feel are suitable for all? Please describe
Descending major scales. Descending broken chords. All done to Sah (makes the tongue free), See, Zzz. Use W or B if the lips need to be freed. I make them feel the sound, I chose light and easy exercises to begin with. If the student isn't singing out I use F at the start of the vowel. It depends on their confidence levels, some people work well with imagery. Examples: Think of the room turning pitch black... see your voice in the room, what would it look like? Or feel the breath in your body warming the inside of your mouth, back......
I use exercises such as touching your face with your finger tips and pretend the sound follows it. Or thinking of the air above you, pretend the high note goes through the top of your head and make a molecule sparkle.

9. Do you discuss ideas about interpretation and how to achieve particular results with beginner singers?
If yes, do you combine it with a technique or do you keep them separate at the early stages of a singer's development?
If you do not discuss interpretation at early stages, do you bring this issue up in your student's later development? If yes, at what stage?
Yes I do. I worked with Madame Mathy (who founded the Mathy Awards). She gave me many insights into interpretation. Its an individual thing.

10. How do you choose repertoire for your students? Do you select different pieces for each student, or do you have standard songs, which you feel are excellent for all beginners. Please list some of the repertoire you would select for an 18-year-old female singer in her first year at tertiary level.
I use Vaccai for my students. I feel the 1st and 6th are too difficult for a beginner singer. I usually begin with the 4th or 5th one. Early on I will transpose the songs so that the student does not struggle with any notes and just gets used to singing in Italian and learning the melody.

11. Can young singers be trained to sing early music? Do you think this can cause problems later in their development?
I think if you only teach one style it means the student won't be very flexible. I think the voice always needs to be free.

12. What goals do you hope your student to achieve after studying voice with you for one year? Are there specific areas you aim for them to be competent in?
Be able to sing all scales, have a two octave range, they will have worked a lot on their middle range, they will know their voice type and be able to sing most Vaccai.
13. Do you instruct male students in the same way as female students?
Yes, it all depends on the individual.

14. Is there any other area you teach your students to assist their singing apart from interpretation/technique? Eg: theory, aural-solfa...
I will discuss the harmony in a piece and ask a student why the composer has put that specific chord in that bar etc.

15. Do you focus any time on the mental process of performing music and strategies for dealing with nerves?
Yes, a good technique I use is before a performance taking your pulse breathing in 4 pulses, hold for 2, and then breath out for 4. It’s a gentle way of controlling your breathing.

16. Do you feel the need to discuss vocal health and effective ways of protecting your voice?
Yes.

17. Have you changed the way you teach from when you first began? Do you teach in a similar way to your previous teachers, or have you created your own style? Have you noticed a generational change from when you first began singing to the way individuals are teaching in today in 2004?
Yes, I used to teach vocal placement and now I focus more on breathing. I used to use only Mem and Mah but I now use a variety of consonant at the beginning of vowels depending on the person.

18. Are there any other areas of teaching singing that you would like to share with me?
I think that’s all for now.
TARYN FIEBIG

1. How long have you been teaching? From what year 19...
Eleven years.

2. Where did you train? Who was your vocal teacher/s?
Studied as a Cellist at UWA-Performance degree. Began singing lessons at 25 with

3. What types of students do you teach (age, gender, experience etc)?
Females aged 12 to 35. Beginner to uni student.

4. What is the first area you tackle when teaching a new voice student regardless of their background?
I talk about how it works, the voice box, larynx, lungs, diaphragm, basic anatomy to
starts with. I always use a balloon...I blow up a balloon to demonstrate the tension of
diaphragm and pressure that's created with the lungs and where my fingers are
holding is where I say the chords are, and as I pull my fingers apart (length of the
chords) and as air comes out it's a high pitched squeak...if you let it go, it goes
ploông, floppy and low. It's a basic demonstration of what's happening. And at the
same time it talks about pitch and what the vocal chords do, the top of the balloon is
like the lips. it moves...basic image. After that I talk about air pressure and when you
manage the air the balloon lasts for ages...if the balloon's floppy the balloon dies
very quickly.

5. What do you utilise as a warm-up if you use one?
Warm up...always. If a 40 min lesson 7-10 mins on warm up. Straight into Do-Me
So. I use solfa and solfeg. Arpeggios and scale. In Solfege C is always Doh.
Singers need to work on sight singing...solfege gives you relative pitch eg: C
always feels a certain way. Sometimes I use AHEEIOOHOO all
on one note and then descend step wise down a 5th. Rolled RR's. Gesture help some
students with difficult notes...tell them to make actions clear on tough notes, if they
are moving with a song.

6. Do you believe in teaching breathing technique?
If yes, how do you teach breath management?
Yes. Breathing is constant. Its like a swimmer. In the first 5 yrs they'll take 10 breaths
in one lap and progressively they economize and do it in less. I tell my students not to
breath habitually...don't breath every two bars cause you can....extend yourself. Jane Manning talked about if the sentence was “the cat sat on the mat”, she’d make me say each word stopping between each so the individual can monitor the amount of air escaping, so trimming away all the gas. Eg: don’t breath between the t and the s. In fast moving passages repeating the vowel in your head. Sometimes I get them to use too much air so they can feel the difference.

7. What other areas of technique do you focus on? Do you give certain areas of technique more attention than others?
On Text. Huge importance. Lovely sound is great but it’s the story that matters. Sound embellishes the text. Interpretation before technique. If its in a different language the student must know each word. You’re a story teller. Loose jaw. Students copy you so I have to watch that they don’t copy my technical problems. Need to take note of exactly what they are doing. Experiment a lot with placement. Especially with Kermit the frog sounds. I get them to experiment with sound, really nasal, into the mask. Pulling piggy tails. Talk about had palate to soft palate. I get them with their finger to feel all the way back...touch the trampoline when singing an ahhh vowel...Someone just given them a bunch of flowers...Ah breath of surprise. Takes a while to feel it. Swallowing plums.

8. Do you have particular vocal exercises you use regularly in lessons? Do they vary depending on the individual’s singing/musical ability? Are there specific exercises you feel are suitable for all? Please describe
I experiment a lot with chest, middle and head. That sort 8. of mix. Chest, neck needs to be free and to feel it. Warm up to “Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah”. Head voice is the plum, trampoline, Talk of uniformity of sound through out the registers. From the chest voice to the head voice its not different, they cross over. The cross the mid voice, it’s the mix. Sucking the sound for head voice...if they have troubles finding this I get them to sing really softly...ohhhh sucking the sound in. Force gives chest sound. Float think church music. Always falling with head voice, its easier.

9. Do you discuss ideas about interpretation and how to achieve particular results with beginner singers?
If yes, do you combine it with a technique or do you keep them separate at the early stages of a singer’s development?
If you do not discuss interpretation at early stages, do you bring this issue up in your student’s later development? If yes, at what stage?
See Question seven.

10. How do you choose repertoire for your students? Do you select different pieces for each student, or do you have standard songs, which you feel are excellent for all beginners. Please list some of the repertoire you would select for an 18-year-old female singer in her first year at tertiary level.
Each student is as individual as fingerprints. Different rep for all. First I ask what they like. Eg: pop music. I’d give 1000 Miles, something they know, so they know the tune...once I’d given them one song then I’d give another “Miss... Blues,
Colour Purple. Just slowly edge them to another thought. Classical 24 Italian songs and arias are really accessible, if they liked that then some Schubert, Debussy. If they are studying a particular language then I’d choose composers who’d extend them.

11. Can young singers be trained to sing early music? Do you think this can cause problems later in their development?
Early music, I sang with straight tone until a few years ago. Very fixed larynx, its taken three yrs to free it. I in hindsight think it’s a good place to start I think its really good for tuning as its more instrumental like. Advantages are attention to intonation. I think you need to talk about straight tone as an ornament, you need to be able to switch off the vibrato rather than switching on the vibrato. Talk about the palate of singing, painters palate: So jazz is pink, early music is blue, classical is orange so you add the colours to your voice. Different painters colours, the voice mimics so well, you just have to let go of larynx to sing classical or stick back on for jazz and add air for blues.

12. What goals do you hope your student to achieve after studying voice with you for one year? Are there specific areas you aim for them to be competent in?
Primary goal is for them to enjoy music, enjoy singing. If you instil in them an enjoyment to learn singing, then they are their own teacher. Disguise a piece that they love (Technique) I don’t give a lot of Vaccai, Marchesi. I know my students love coming to the lessons. I fits relevant, like a pop song that reminds them of that gorgeous guy, they get it and in that (Bar 5 ) there is a little Vaccai exercise and we’d spend ten minutes on that bar. Once you’ve got them you can do what ever you like. I ask a student what they want to achieve, they all get a piece of paper and there is a goal for each week written by them on it. I say to them if you lean one idea from this lesson that’s all that’s needed.

13. Do you instruct male students in the same way as female students?
NA

14. Is there any other area you teach your students to assist their singing apart from interpretation/technique? Eg: theory, aural-solfa... Yes, especially if they are doing their TEE.

15. Do you focus any time on the mental process of performing music and strategies for dealing with nerves?
Yeah nerves, I call it the toilet run. I say to them get nervous as you need them to perform, it gets them to not be afraid of nerves, to expect them and use them. I get them to visualise themselves like they are on the stage at assembly, I do that a lot with them so by the time the concert happens they have already performed it in that venue four times. That expression of I wish I could do that again, is fixed. I’ll ask them after visualising it, what came up- like they’ll have memory lapses. I tell them don’t pay me to entertain me,
make mistakes, let’s make them here not in assembly. If that note cracks here, super! For TEE students, I’ll talk to them about preparing there day. After school, 4:30 dinner 5 shower, 6 warm up 6:30 makeup… you can work yourself into a fuss if you don’t think ahead. Also I surprise my students if they are singing a piece well I say quick come and perform for the music class. I’ll also do it with choir eg: barber shop you are performing at lunch today, it makes it ordinary for them.

16. Do you feel the need to discuss vocal health and effective ways of protecting your voice?
I talk about the obvious things, like don’t come to the lesson if you’ve been partying and drinking the night before. I talk about dehydration from alcohol. People get very worried about drinking coffee, milk, choc before a performance, and I say I sing everyday, why should a performance day be any different from a normal day. So drink your coffee in the morning to make that day ordinary not extraordinary. People say when do you start warming up, and I say well I start singing at 7am with my students.

17. Have you changed the way you teach from when you first began? Do you teach in a similar way to your previous teachers, or have you created your own style? Have you noticed a generational change from when you first began singing to the way individuals are teaching in today in 2004?
I have taken the relevant bits. I don’t think it’s changed that much. Most people base their teaching on the bel canto. They all base their techniques on a very old technique. I think just through experience of teaching and every student is a teacher to me, they teach me things all the time. I never think I’m the teacher, you’re the student. Problem solve the kids areas of difficulties. I think I’m a natural teacher, I am interested and fascinated by it.

18. Are there any other areas of teaching singing that you would like to share with me?
With a beginner listen to why they want to have singing lessons, usually they are creative, love text, drama....
CHRISTINA GRONBORG

1. How long have you been teaching? From what year 19...
From 1989 until now.

2. Where did you train? Who was your vocal teacher/s?
I studied singing at the Royal Academy in Denmark and I got my Masters in performance and then I completed a Bachelor in teaching voice in a private studio. When I studied private teaching there was a huge focus on anatomy, in 2nd and 4th year we had one hour per week. So we really understood the vocal mechanism and how it works.

3. What types of students do you teach (age, gender, experience etc)?
I only teach females from high school age through to 30 year olds. I take a lot of students who are doing TEE singing.

4. What is the first area you tackle when teaching a new voice student regardless of their background?
It depends on what level they are at. Sometimes I will ask them to bring along a song, it's very individual. I will talk a bit about breathing.

5. What do you utilise as a warm-up if you use one?
Yes, I chose descending scales so they don't push their voices. I do a lot of humming in descending 5ths. Sometimes I will ask them to sing on an Italian vowel.

6. Do you believe in teaching breathing technique?
If yes, how do you teach breath management?
I tell them why they need to be aware of breathing. I talk about breathing low. And I talk about exercises. I ask them to lie on the floor, bend their knees slightly and put their hands on their sternum and lower abdominals. I then ask them to breathe. I tell them to feel how the rib cage is flexible but can be held out whilst singing.

7. What other areas of technique do you focus on? Do you give certain areas of technique more attention than others?
It depends on the student. Some people have a glottal stuck to each note, some people have too much vibrato, others are too straight. I try to make sure they have a balance between forward and backward resonance. I use ee for working on the forward or the third eye whenever they sing ahh. To work the back resonance I talk about whimpering like a dog, or the beginning of a yawn.
8. Do you have particular vocal exercises you use regularly in lessons? Do they vary depending on the individual's singing/musical ability? Are there specific exercises you feel are suitable for all? Please describe.

If they are a bit older I work on stretching their voices in both directions starting in the middle register and working up and down. Sometimes I will get the student to sing scales in staccato, some find this extremely difficult, so I ask them to do this regularly. Eventually I will get them to sing it in 9ths and then with the upper 3rd. With staccato singing I make sure they are aware of the area below the sternum. The dog panting exercise is useful here. If someone has a tense tongue this dog panting exercise is useful as well.

9. Do you discuss ideas about interpretation and how to achieve particular results with beginner singers?

If yes, do you combine it with a technique or do you keep them separate at the early stages of a singer's development?

If you do not discuss interpretation at early stages, do you bring this issue up in your student's later development? If yes, at what stage?

I definitely talk about it. I feel the student needs a bit of technique before they can approach interpretation. I will ask them why is it in a major key, what part of the chord is this on, why is it minor, why is this one note not the same. Because singing is a natural instrument it is important to understand the music to sing in tune.

10. How do you choose repertoire for your students? Do you select different pieces for each student, or do you have standard songs, which you feel are excellent for all beginners. Please list some of the repertoire you would select for an 18-year-old female singer in her first year at tertiary level.

It differs. If it were a beginner soprano I would possibly chose an Italian song. The yellow 24 songs and arias book is good, but I also use the purple book which has added embellishments to those pieces, once the student is more advanced musically I would use the purple book. I like to get them to feel like they have achieved a lot.

11. Can young singers be trained to sing early music? Do you think this can cause problems later in their development?

Some soprano's (often young and smallish) have a straight voice. I can't see that it's a problem teaching early music, just as long as there is a focus on not being tense. And working on the blossom at the end of the phrases, the flourish, and not thinking of a little mouth.

12. What goals do you hope your student to achieve after studying voice with you for one year? Are there specific areas you aim for them to be competent in?

I would hope for them to really get pleasure out of it. Feel that they are growing as people and are achieving something.
13. Do you instruct male students in the same way as female students?
I sing lower for them, to demonstrate. I incorporate falsetto singing, not too ow when they sing higher notes. There singing voice is closer to their speaking voice so I get them to do activities where they speak and then sing. I look to see if the jaw has dropped yet. I work on them humming low so they can feel it in their chest. Always a broad chest, strong support. Yodelling eases their singing of higher notes. It all depends on whether their voice has broken etc. To begin with I find songs which don’t have a very big range.

14. Is there any other area you teach your students to assist their singing apart from interpretation/technique? Eg: theory, aural-solfa...
Yes, I do theory with the younger ones. Dulcie Holland’s theory books are very good, she is an Australian composer. I think solfa is great for an absolute beginner, but if the student has been taught to read music a different way, then it is just confusing.

15. Do you focus any time on the mental process of performing music and strategies for dealing with nerves?
Definitely. If they feel very nervous I tell them to take deep breaths through an imaginary straw, which will lower their heart rate. I explain to them that they have to have nerves, otherwise their performance would be boring. I tell them to walk into my room and pretend they are on the stage and practicing for the audience.

16. Do you feel the need to discuss vocal health and effective ways of protecting your voice?
I say they should practice everyday and then have 1 day off. I also tell them to sing for 20 minutes and then rest for 20 minutes. I stress that they must not practice continually for hours.

17. Have you changed the way you teach from when you first began? Do you teach in a similar way to your previous teachers, or have you created your own style? Have you noticed a generational change from when you first began singing to the way individuals are teaching in today in 2004?
Yes. Teachers learn from their students. It is a two way process. I read a lot so I am constantly trying new ideas, I go to master classes and I feel it is very important to talk to colleagues and share ideas.

18. Are there any other areas of teaching singing that you would like to discuss?
I tell them to imagine they have a mint in their mouth and to imagine the cold air at the back of their throat, modifying the vowel, middle voice must have clarity of text, index finger below each ear to feel the drop of the jaw, soft palate exercises, looking in a mirror....