



Classical singers' performance preparation and coping with performance anxiety

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The 5th Annual Meeting of AIRS (Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing)

August 11 - 13, 2013 Ryerson University, Toronto



Singing

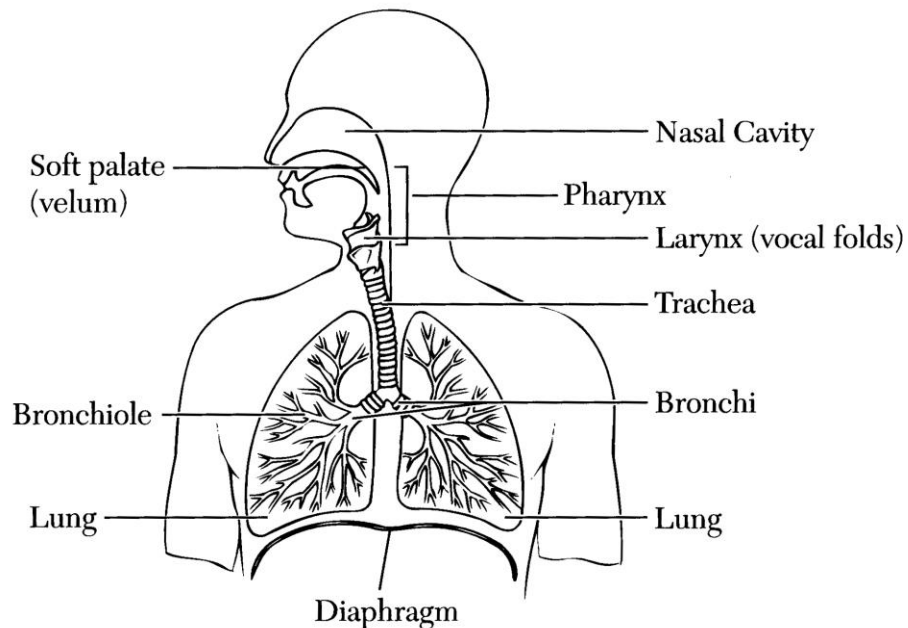
- Stark (2008) has described singing as a process where the singer has to achieve kinaesthetic control over the muscles that influence voice production and simultaneously be able to use his or her auditory system to monitor and correct voice quality to achieve the desired outcome.
- Phillips (1992) describes singing as a psychomotor skill that contains both physiological co-ordination and psychological processes manifested in the perception of tonality and musical memory.



Performance anxiety

- The most common physiological changes are increased heart rate, dry mouth, sweating, shortness of breath, indigestion, nausea, diarrhoea, trembling, dizziness and blushing (Ely, 1991; Salmon, 1991; Wesner, Noyes, & Davis, 1990, Hallam 2008).
- In case of performance anxiety, authors most frequently mention situation anxiety (Humara, 1999; King, Mietz, Tinney, & Ollendick, 1995; Little, 1999).

The singer's "instrument"



Schematic of the Breathing Mechanism (Based on Titze 1994)

- Bunch (1997)
- the physical structure of the head
- neck and vocal tract
- the co-ordination of the mechanism for singing
- the imagination of the singer
- the levels of health and energy



Purpose of current study

- How professional classical singers cope with performance situations and what their most frequent performance-related disturbing factors are
- How professional singers achieve and maintain the optimal psychological and physical feeling needed for their performance
- Which exercises and activities vocal teachers recommend to their students to cope with performance anxiety



Method

Semi-structured interviews 2009-2011

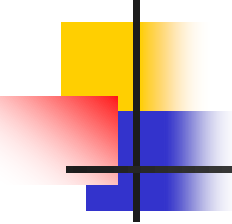
- **12 professional classical singers and voice teachers**
 - 9 opera soloists of the Estonian National Opera and Tartu Vanemuine Opera Theatre: 16-45 years of performance experience
 - 3 leading oratorio and chamber singers: 23-30 years of performance experience
 - One freelance singer, sung roles in Estonian National Opera (ENO): 10 years of performance experience



Method

12 professional classical singers

- 56 questions and two topic areas:
 - 43 questions asking classical singers/voice teachers about their personal coping with performance anxiety
 - 13 questions dealing with their work with students in the lessons
- The interviews were recorded, transcribed and subjected to analysis with the qualitative data processing software NVivo9.



6 factors that contribute to successful professional life

- An excellent vocal and general health
- Well prepared for a performance
- Physically fit
- Maintain an optimal pre-performance routine
- Support of the family
- Able to maintain emotional balance



16 factors interfering with coping as a professional singer

- maintaining vocal fitness
- responsibility maintaining voice quality in spite of conditions
- problematic family relations
- problems with colleagues (especially conductors)
- personal unjustified criticism
- the fear of making mistakes
- acting at maximum efficiency at any moment
- subjectivity of assessment
- general health problems
- fatigue
- sleeping disorders
- maintaining stable nervous system
- difficulties due to the part they need to sing
- different parts in a short time
- lack of preparation time
- too intensive schedule of rehearsals before a performance



Three groups of 14 common pre-performance activities

- **First group: 4 ordinary daily activities**
 - Morning at home/hotel
 - Sufficient sleeping time
 - Well-established physical exercises
 - Light breakfast



14 common pre-performance activities (2)

- Second group: 5 activities for maintaining an optimal condition for a voice
 - Avoiding speaking
 - Well-established breathing exercises
 - Well-established vocal exercises
 - Reviewing the part with eyes only
 - With voice only a few passages



14 common pre-performance activities (3)

- Third group: 5 activities for maintaining generally optimal condition
 - Preferring being alone
 - Eating 4 to 5 hours before the performance
 - Changes were not accepted
 - Avoiding haste in actions
 - Getting to the venue 2 to 3 hours prior to the performance



Most frequently used breathing exercises

- Rhythmically breathing in, holding breath and breathing slowly out
- Exercises for diaphragmatic breathing (shh-shh-shh)
- Rapid inhalation and exhalation without control during various physical activities
- Rhythmically exhale and letting tension out through one nostril, and inhale energy in through the other nostril etc.



Three most frequently used breathing exercises for immediate reassurance

- Two or three deep breaths (in and out)
- Two or three deep sighs
- Take a deep breath, keep your muscles tense for some time, then suddenly let go



The most common techniques for concentration and inner peace

- *Directing thoughts* - used by all vocalists
- *Visualisation* - used by all vocalists
- *Meditation* - used by three vocalists
- *Gradual relaxation of muscles* - one vocalist
- *Affirmations or positive assurance* - no one consciously



Conclusions

- Profession of a classical singer is closely connected to and intertwined with emotions
- Importance of a good preparation
- Importance of a physical fitness
- Importance of pre-performance routine
 - **As a hardship:** Need to be fit all the time i.e., every day during the whole season



■ *THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!*

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