

Actor's Voice

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Abstract

In order to acquire good communication skills, actors need to train their vocal abilities and learn to control their voices. This control is essential for acquiring a proper style of articulation and speech. Vocal training enables students to remove all personal obstacles to correct phonation, and to get to like and accept their voice as an individual quality and a signature of their personality. Proper breathing is essential for actors and singers. Breathing properly means giving soul to each character on stage, it means freedom to play with one's breath, and the ability to activate all the available resonators. Special focus in vocal training is given to the relationship between movement and voice, and to vocal transformations in relation to the needs and demands of particular dramatic genres.

Through the continual vocal training actors can develop their vocal potentials. However, the mechanical exercising only often leads to the fixation of intonation, tempo, and volume, which can become an obstacle in the actor's interpretation of the script. Breathing, vocal transformations, articulation, diction, and movement - all serve the creation of dramatic character. Vocal training needs to be continual, gradual, and a special focus needs to be given to students' individual needs.

Actor's Voice

Marina Marković

A British theatre director and one of the most distinguished theatre artists of the XX century, Peter Brook, once said: "It is very important to realize the difference between the actor's voice as it is and as it could be!" (Cicely Berry, 1973: 3). Of course, we can ask ourselves whether this idea is a reiteration of Shakespeare's famous line that embodies the fundamental question of every actor: "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be" (W. Shakespeare, Hamlet, act IV, scene V). This introductory idea could be the starting point, or focus, in the process of vocal training for actors.

In order to reconcile two distinct voices - his own, and the voice of the character - an actor has to be theoretically and practically prepared. He also needs to find out how the voice is being formed, and when, how, and why people began to explore different types of breathing and problems of voice formation.

The process of voice formation is very complex and its various aspects have to be scrutinized methodically. The medical aspect is very important, but in order to practically understand the processes of respiration and phonation, first we have to understand the physiological built of our vocal apparatus. Voice has its stronghold, its root; it is being moved by certain impulses; voice is the result of our will (as well as nerve impulses), but it is also being moved by a generator - air current; voice has its amplifiers and its dimmers.

Speech and singing depend on respiratory mechanism, phonation, resonance, and articulation. The goal of vocal training is that students learn how to consciously and at will take control over these complex processes. Proper phonation depends on anatomically and functionally healthy vocal apparatus. Incorrect usage of vocal apparatus can damage the vocal cords.

Intercostal-abdominal breathing

There are several known types of breathing. These are: clavicular (upper rib cage), lower rib cage, and abdominal type. None of these types of breathing is complete, or very useful for often extreme and strenuous conditions of acting and singing on stage.

Scientific investigations of breathing techniques have recognized the intercostal-abdominal type as the most complete and most useful type of breathing. This type is the most appropriate for actors and singers, but also for people from various other professions whose daily activities include public appearances, public speech, and communication. Intercostal-abdominal type of breathing does not allow the over-exertion of vocal cords because it involves deep and complete breathing; it does not need too much effort and muscle strain. The physiological aspect of this process, in fact, involves conscious activation of particular muscle groups and acceptance of particular types of movements.

Functioning of respiratory organs and vocal apparatus depends on the activities of the skeletal frame (rib cage, spinal column, pelvis) and the most important muscle in the process of respiration - diaphragm. The muscles move and control proper inhalation (inspiration muscles) and proper exhalation (expiration muscles). Larynx generates voice, and the part of larynx that has the most important role in voice formation is glottis. In the throat (glottis) there are vocal cords that vibrate under the influence of breathing force, and in that way they produce sound. During inhalation they expand and after that they recede.

Movements During Respiration and Phonation

Voice *is* movement. Under the impact of signals that come from the central nervous system, certain groups of muscles move and in that way we inhale and exhale. Breathing force moves the vocal cords and causes them to vibrate. Larynx and muscles in oral cavity take part in phonation - and that is movement. Respiratory movements related to speech and singing can and should be voluntary, although numerous psychological and emotional factors also influence the formation of voice.

Proper phonation is very important for successful communication and for free, spontaneous speech. During the vocal training it is important to follow the physiological process that occurs during phonation, to observe the muscle movements and to create a clear mental image of these movements. The activation of vocal musculature stimulates different sensations that occur during phonation. When the muscles get used to a particular movement, we are free to forget what we have learned and trained; this

means that the whole process is placed under control of our consciousness, and that everything we do is a result of our will and knowledge about the ways of moving particular muscle groups. In fact, as a result of routine exercise the muscles get used to repeating only the necessary movements and they discard the others; our body economizes, we should listen to it!

That is why the respiratory exercise requires initial practice of relaxation. Only relaxed but supported muscles, especially head, neck, and shoulder muscles, have the ability to properly memorize movements. It needs to be stressed that during respiration, phonation, and voice formation only certain groups of muscles are active. Other muscles rest, they are relaxed. The most important is the consecutive series of workouts and relaxations of muscles. A complete muscle workout needs to happen soon afterwards, after a month or two of continual practice and after we have mastered the anatomic structure of vocal apparatus and the physiological aspects of the process of respiration.

During the second phase of the training, it is important to combine respiratory and vocal exercises, exercises for voice placement, and finally physical exercises. These exercises need to be very simple in the beginning and can grow more complex during the process. This is especially important for strengthening the muscles around rib cage and abdominal areas that are often neglected in everyday life. When we master these movements, seemingly complex and novel but actually only natural and correct, they become automated (unconscious) actions.

The main breathing muscle - diaphragm - is at the same time the lower *appoggio*. It provides support for breath and voice and protects vocal cords from straining. In fact, the performance of vocal cords is closely connected to the activity of the diaphragm. *Appoggio*, the breath support on the diaphragm, provides a sense of fortification in the intercostal-abdominal area.

As breath support is being formed on the diaphragm, at the moment of inhalation there is a pause that many academics refer to as a "prefatory tension." What happens is that the breath (and voice) support on the diaphragm, or *appoggio* on the diaphragm, can consolidate without any phonation - sound formation at all. We can easily recognize this if we inhale and then, by pushing the diaphragm, soundlessly but firmly exhale. For this we can use syllable "HA." We can conclude that the phonation has not happened at all, even though we have established the breath support on the diaphragm. From this we see that the moment of preparation for phonation is important, the secret moment before the formation of sound in which a transition occurs from respiratory to sound making function. In that moment begins the collaboration and consolidation of both *appoggi* - the one on the diaphragm and the one in the head, which assumes the role of a resonator, sound transmitter, and sound amplifier. Good coordination of both *appoggi* activates completely the resounding areas, allows unhindered emission of voice and gives this voice its volume.

The correct, deep breathing, is a process that can be learned and controlled. The breathing conditions and changes our posture, the positioning of our bodies, but it also conditions our worldview. Breathing yields self-esteem and allows deep inner peace. Deep breathing can relax our thoughts, body and soul, and enable us to find the right words that accurately express our immediate, often very complex, emotional state. Breathing is action, breathing is philosophy. Breathing properly means thinking properly. Controlled breath triggers creative excitement, but it also leads into the peace of mind and body, as in a prayer. For a moment, we can come close to the blessed ones and touch the realm of spirit, like in a controlled, deep breath of monks at prayer.

Mastering the proper type of breathing enables actors to:

- Consciously move inner muscles;
- Achieve a feeling of freedom through controlled movement;
- Use resonant cavities and naturally amplify their voices, without straining;
- Overcome stage fright;
- Have a spontaneous and natural stage presence;
- Discover and expose the richness and versatility of their voices;

Exercising the proper breathing should not be perceived as an athletic discipline, as a technical exercise and mechanical repetition of learned movements, in an attempt to energetically activate particular muscle groups that will in the future - as is sometimes misconceived - be able to independently carry out the proper respiratory process. In the real, inspiring vocal training, this would be impossible. It is necessary to stimulate instincts, impulses, will, and imagination and to free the kinetic, creative energy contained

in our muscles. Through mechanical exercises, or repetitions, we can learn the basic set of movements, memorize those movements, and keep repeating them until we reach the point of exhaustion. However, if we go through this process mechanically and technically, the acquired experience can quickly be forgotten, pushed down, or it can simply become tedious. The muscles, however, have the ability to memorize, so if we once skied well we could easily, after some training, get back in shape. This provides some comfort regarding both the respiratory work and the vocal setting. But there is another, more fortunate way that is only seemingly more difficult. When we consciously activate the inspiration or expiration muscles and place their activity under control of our will and consciousness, we can always rely on the fact that our "articulated body" (according to Anne Dennis) will not fail us. One of the confusing facts is that breathing should be spontaneous, instinctive, inherent process. Most certainly, it would be wrong to suppress the spontaneous and instinctive for the sake of mysterious "proper type of breathing," if the process is carried out only technically and mechanically.

Actor and the Voice of his *character*

The above-mentioned facts about breathing serve as a physiological and technical basis for vocal training. Actor's creativity in the process of building a *character* depends on his ability to discover the way his *character* breathes and to adjust his breathing with the needs of that *character* and the demands of the genre.

Breathing freely means having an ability to bring to life each *character* in a different way. Breathing means communicating with other actors on stage and not reciting lines, hamming, and delivering speech with an empty soul. Breathing means energy, it means not having to fake emotion, excitement, or frenzy because that is what the role calls for. In a situation when actor consciously and willfully controls his breath, it is his *character* that is excited or hysterical, and not the actor himself.

While analyzing a script, an actor perceives the main qualities of the *character*; he thinks about breath, about the way that *character* breathes. Each *character* breathes differently, in the same way that they walk and move differently; if the actor breathes properly and at a constant rate, his *character* can breathe differently.

Voice placement

To place the voice means to find the best possible position of the vocal apparatus for the proper sound formation. The best position is one that enables free, unhindered flow of air, and one that does not require straining. Voice placement is a conscious uniting process: proper inhalation, establishing of air stream with the breath support on the diaphragm, soft voice formation and the activity of the resonators. A good position of phonetic apparatus allows a production of an optimal sound with the minimum expenditure of energy.

Voice placement can be misinterpreted as a fixation or restriction of voice, or its placement within the confines of one of the familiar, already used vocal ranges. For an actor, this fixation is not beneficial: it creates psychological pressure and fear that he will lose his voice in case that, even for a moment, he breaks away from the cliché. It is much better to get to know the entire range of one's voice, from the lowest to the highest registers. This enables an actor to play with his voice, to use the variety of intonations, and to transform his voice according to different genres of the play.

In the process of voice placement, it is very important to train our inner ear, inner hearing. It is not good if we constantly control our phonation relying on our outer ear, although our sense of hearing has the ability to memorize the positive phonetic sensations. After the inhalation, when vocal cords are ready to move under the influence of air, in a particular moment we should get ready for the proper beginning of the sound. This, still unformed, sound that "hesitates" to make a transition from respiratory to phonetic function, we can hear with our inner ear so clearly and precisely that we can even notice its height, intensity, and volume. We must hear the sound from the inside, before it begins with the vibration of the vocal cords. A famous opera singer, Enrico Caruso, used to say: "Sound before sound," which actually means that we must hear the sound before it is formed. The ability to "hear" the sound before it begins will allow the formation of soft and correct voice, and this will allow us to take control over the entire process of voice placement.

Dynamics of Voice

Voice can be very voluminous and strong, but some students are not aware of that. Sometimes they fear and hesitate to speak loudly. Loud speech has resonance and required intensity. Other students sometimes make too much effort to be loud instead of

using their physiological assets as well as their technical abilities acquired in the course of vocal training. Forcing the loudest variable in speech or singing at the beginning of vocal training can damage the vocal cords, and affect actor's confidence while speaking loudly. That is why it is essential to discover the range and abilities of one's own voice. Only then it is possible to achieve the vocal variety: whispers, soft speech, gradation in volume, and very loud speech. Exercises for the strengthening of voice should be parallel with the exercises for respiration, voice placement, and resonance.

The beginners should not be required to speak loudly and with too much force. Vocal dynamics must be strictly controlled at the beginning of vocal training. If we demand that students always have a "powerful expression," then we push them to force and strain themselves, by trying to project and speak very loudly without having a chance to establish a deep breath and the breath support on the diaphragm. Sometimes it is difficult to control emotions, the abundance of ideas, strength, and a need to show off and to achieve results quickly. It is very important that the vocal training happens gradually; students should not worry about achieving their goals quickly - they must focus on achieving them in a correct way. They must not skip certain phases of the training, or make long breaks in the beginning. Continual work is very important.

Resonance & Resonators

In terms of actors' work on stage, the acoustic phenomenon - resonance - depends to a large extent on the process of respiration. When we consciously and willingly move our inspiration and expiration muscles, especially the diaphragm, the air is channeled towards the vocal cords that vibrate. Clear sound that happens as a result of the vibration is basically very weak and dimmed, not even entirely articulated; it does not have volume or force. *Appoggio* on the diaphragm serves as a support and a foundation for air that is channeled towards the supra-glottal part of larynx, and in this process the oral and nasal cavities are important resonators. However, chest resonator also has a very important role in producing resonance. By consciously forwarding breath and voice into certain resounding cavities, we transmit and amplify the sound.

To conclude, the resonance or sound amplification depends on: established breath with the support on the diaphragm, channeling of air into certain skeletal areas, and air burst into resounding cavities. The direction of movement is towards the primary resounding areas inside the head, and its goal is to bring to life those resonators. In the same way, the resounding cavities in the chest area are being activated. Resonance, sound quality, and the emission of sound depend on the direction of air current and the intensity of the air blow into certain skeletal areas.

The key thing and the focus of vocal training for actors is learning the functions and the effects of resonators. The number of direct and indirect resonators is almost infinite, so that in this area of investigation many questions have remained unanswered.

It is commonly accepted that head resonators can be divided into two categories: the flexible (oral and nasal cavities) and fixed head resonators (skull and its parts: frontal bone, parietal bone, occipital bone, nasal bone, zygomatic bone). Rib cage and abdominal areas are also natural resonators of the body, and they are responsible for the deeper frequencies of the sound. These resonators are also called "natural resonators," as opposed to the mechanical amplifiers in radio and TV studios. The collaboration of natural resonators (and actors, after all, have to rely on them) allows the formation of audible, resonant, naturally amplified voice.

Strict division into head and chest resonators seems obsolete. It can be useful only in the first phase of vocal training when it is important that actors recognize individual resonators and develop the ability to use them. Without the collaboration of both resonators it is impossible to produce the resonant, powerful voice. Only with the teamwork of all the muscles that take part in the respiratory process, in voice formation, and activation of all the resounding cavities - it is possible to produce unrestrained, resonant, high quality sound. In that respect, we can adopt a term, coined by the French school of singing, "voix mixte" ("mixed voice") because it reflects the possibilities of equalization of all vocal registers.

An actor can play with resonators and resonance, once he has mastered their physical and physiological aspects. Actor's imagination and his ability to control the breathing will depend on the technique he has acquired and his understanding of physiological processes of voice formation and resonance. He can allow certain resonators, or resounding cavities, to become more dominant. By consciously activating particular resonators an actor can discover a vast range of different voice qualities: voice that primarily uses throat as a resonator (so called 'drop larynx' voice), one that comes from the head, nasal voice, shallow, 'white', falsetto, deep voice that comes from the chest, abdomen, diaphragm, etc. In this way, actor's voice can be transformed and adjusted to the demands of the genre.

Listening

Listening is one of the main components of the complex communication process. However, the term "listening" usually refers to the outer listening only, paying attention to the way we sound or the way the other people sound. If we only listen to the echo of our own voice, words, pitch, tone, and melody, we can end up in a state of anxiety and strain, asking ourselves constantly "How do I sound?" This tension reflects upon our voice and speech and as a result we sound as if we are out of breath, we show voice tremor, tremolo, broken voice and phrases, stuttering, and hesitating.

For an actor, listening has many different meanings: hearing his own voice with his inner ear, judging the way this voice sounds and reverberates, hearing all the positive sensations during phonation, listening to and memorizing all phonetic elements, listening to the partner on stage, and "listening" to the pulse of the audience.

Inner listening and training of our inner ear will enable us to understand and accept all the complex phonetic processes; in this way we will also gain confidence and learn to trust our ability to judge the qualities of our voice and effects it has on others. Many students and actors have excellent reproductive hearing, or so-called "outer hearing," while the others do not have this useful but not necessary ability. Development of inner ear can compensate for the insufficiently developed outer ear. Hearing, inner ear, and listening can be developed significantly after years of training, persistent work, and understanding of the positive phonetic phenomena. On the stage, we not only listen to our partner and his words, but we also try to listen to and feel things that are not said, that are only implied in between the lines. We also respond to that. Inner hearing is very important in this process.

The process of active listening involves many different aspects: psychological, acoustical, cognitive, etc. In the act of communication, listening can be a more active component than speech. The ability to listen plays a significant role in acting because it allows live and active interaction on stage. When the partners on stage really listen to each other and really hear each other, their speech can be flexible and spontaneous. In a different case, when the act of listening is neglected, the speech feels prepared and mechanical; it loses spontaneity and becomes lifeless. It is important that we really hear the sentence - the line - and not only act as if we do. How can we actively listen to the script that we have already heard dozens of times before? One of the possible solutions would be to introduce change into performance. There is always something that can be changed: intonation, tempo, intensity; an actor should never repeat himself, because if he does, the joy of playing on stage is lost and acting turns into a routine. If there are only slight changes in every performance, then the partner will not have to act as if he really listens: he will actually hear the changes that occur and he will respond to those changes.

Voice and Movement

It sounds like a paradox, but very strenuous, complex, even acrobatic movements can liberate the voice. This is even more obvious if an actor has problems controlling his vocal apparatus, for instance problems in activating one of the resonators - the occipital one, that enables the guttural placement of voice. Standing on one's head, as well as other poses, gymnastic positions, dances, and acrobatic movements can release the tension and enable sound emission. Completely "closed" and stifled voices with poor volume can, through the controlled, rhythmical, and complex movement, "open up", become strong, powerful, and convincing. Naturally, the success in such a complex training brings confidence and incentive for further advancement. It is very important that actors discover a series of movements that result in a bodily position that stimulates vocal emission.

On the other hand, breath and voice have to remain independent from the movement of the body, because difficult and demanding movements can, in many ways, disturb the rhythm of breathing and vocal production. Movement that stimulates the emission of sound gives energy and strength to the voice. This movement has to be in perfect coordination with breathing and speech.

The main purpose of vocal training is achieving physical and vocal fitness that will enable the realization of all the tasks that an actor has to accomplish on stage: interaction in very complex situations, response to unexpected change of circumstances, and the ability to improvise in a completely new situation, with as little strain as possible. However, the audience should never be aware of the technique that actors use on stage. The purpose of vocal and movement training is to enable actors to bring to life the characters from the play, and the acquired technique is the basis for building a *character*.

Vocal Transformations Related to the Genre of the Play

Different genres: tragedy, comedy, grotesque, farce, vaudeville, musical, etc, require different acting skills, different kinds of expression. The voice, as one of the means of expression that actors use in creating a *character*, will also transform depending on the characteristics of the genre. However, we should not make strict rules that link certain types of acting with certain genres; there have already been many attempts to make rules like this throughout the history of theatre. Especially the rigid rules regarding voice and speech – once established, they could easily be misused. If actors uncritically conform to these conventions, their range of expression can become poor, and this will stifle their creativity, because by using fixed intonations, pauses, and tempos, they will lose spontaneity, liveliness of their voice, and flexibility of their speech.

However, it is unacceptable to use exactly the same means of expression in a tragedy, comedy, or farce. In a grotesque, for example, it is important that the actor uses from a wide palette of intonations, sudden changes of rhythm and tempo, unexpected pauses, etc.

Vaudeville, farce, and comedy of manners, call for higher pitches of voice and speech. In these genres, the slow, playful, and singsong voice is connected with the staccato melody of speech, and the pitch is a part of the acting trick that creates a comic relief and induces laughter. Falsetto, that most often has negative connotations in theatre, in this case becomes a part of the palette of actor's voice, or a specific vocal transformation.

Acting in a Greek tragedy requires certain vocal adjustments because it is comprised of heightened versed monologues, requires powerful projection and volume, and calls for deeper tones and lower pitch.

Michael Chekhov was preoccupied with one very complex and interesting question: how to reconcile two bodies – the **body** of an actor and the imagined voice and **body** of a *character* in a play that has very specific qualities. How to reconcile two voices: actor's own voice and breath, and the voice of his *character*? Peter Brook shows similar approach to this problem: he emphasizes that an actor always needs to have a specific voice, which is actually the voice of his *character*. Step by step, through rehearsals, exercises, discussions, and daydreaming, these two voices could be reconciled in a natural way. The natural way implies flexibility in accepting or rejecting conventional, standardized, and safe techniques. Vocal transformation never implies fixed intonation, articulation, volume, and intensity that dominate throughout the play.

If an actor completely understands the processes of respiration and phonation, he can consciously control, regulate, and change them. An actor gains self-esteem and confidence that his body and voice will not fail him; in that way, he can consciously change the way of breathing, and transform his voice accordingly. This way, he clears the space for the entire palette of vocal transformations as well as transformations of speech. The technique brings genuine freedom to the actor in the process of creating a role.

There are always several ways to discover the *character's body* and to reconcile two voices: that of an actor and the one of his *character*. It takes a lot of courage to explore different ways. It is not possible, or necessary, to explore and exhaust all the possibilities, but it is important to avoid the early, anxious fixations, and choosing only one – the first and often superficial solution.

Psychological Obstacles

Phonetic dysfunctions can be of organic, hormonal, or functional origin. Organic causes include: injuries, surgical operations, chronic illnesses, allergies, hearing impairment, etc. Hormonal causes are: mutation or dysfunction of thyroid and adrenal glands. The functional causes could be of psychological origin, or it could be a dysphonia that involves growth of nodules, polyps, or hemangioma on vocal chords. The most common type of dysphonia among actors and singers is hoarseness. It could be caused by organic changes of vocal cords, or by psychological problems.

Actors can overcome these deficiencies, both technically and psychologically, through patient and careful workouts, thinking about their own voices, and practicing the proper voice placement.

It is possible that the most complex vocal disorders are caused by psychological problems. This group includes: a) disorders caused by forcing and straining of one of the resonators – nasal or guttural, for example – which leads to nasal, dropped or guttural, stiff

voice; b) breathing disorders - a phenomenon known as gasping or struggling for breath, when one is not able to inhale a sufficient quantity of air, but is gasping, or quickly, suddenly, and soundly inhaling smaller quantities of air; c) a choking syndrome, caused by irregular breathing; d) dysfunctions of articulation - aphonia, too hard or too soft enunciation of certain sounds.

Many obstacles in vocal training can be removed by projecting attainable goals. The primary task is to open different vocal possibilities. This could not be achieved through passive observing and listening. Before all, an actor needs to define what he wants to express by using his voice.

It is a misconception that we can or should change our voices. This is not only impossible, but also unnecessary. We can correct certain smaller deficiencies, we can enlarge and widen our voice; all of its limitations can be turned into assets. One of the problems that are typical for the beginners is that they are often unsatisfied with their voices, and think that they need to change it. In these cases, it is important to show the student his current abilities and all the advantages of his voice.

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical methods of vocal training are categorized in the following manner:

1. Scientific method, which involves examination of the functional aspects of organs for preparing, production, and shaping of sound - that is the apparatus for articulation and resonance.
2. Visual method, which involves observing of the proper phonetic phenomena.
3. Auditive, hearing method - concerns hearing of positive vibrations and sensations during phonation.
4. Empirical method, which involves relying on one's own experiences, accepting the movements during respiration and phonation, memorization of positive qualities of voice placement, resonance, and sound emission through hearing.

Cicely Berry says that there are many wrong ways of placing one's voice. However, it is not wrong to approach vocal training based on the individual abilities of each student. Stereotypes and clichés are unnecessary, and even damaging in the vocal training. Patience, as well as relaxed and gradual work, both of the students and teachers, is necessary for discovering the vocal qualities that can often remain hidden for a very long time. Sometimes the projected goal seems to be very far. Indeed, we can rarely predict the moment in which one's voice will break free. The moment in which a student recognizes his own voice and understands and accepts all its qualities and deficiencies, could be essential. What comes after that is the acquiring of a technique, stimulated by imagination and creativity.

Practical aspect of vocal training should focus on each of these segments separately. Very quickly, after several months of work, we should insist on combining all of these elements. The beginners would get tired or scared if they work on only one element for a very long time. The training should be comprised of a variety of exercises, and we should insist on an "acting" approach to the workout (according to B. Brecht), and live, spontaneous, unique, individual expression. A step-by-step work is very important: we start with simple exercises, and move towards the more complex etudes and vocal workouts, and also toward the combining of speech and movement. There has to be a relationship of trust between a teacher and a student, or a vocal coach and an actor. This trust can be established if we recognize the positive vocal qualities and insist on freeing those qualities; the next step involves drawing students' attention to the limitations in their vocal production, followed by the specific training for overcoming those limitations. We should never discourage a student by emphasizing mistakes and deficiencies that the beginners, most probably, will not be aware of. It is important that every student himself can recognize the positive and negative sounding, and not only to rely on someone else's judgment. Vocal training should be accompanied by physical training. In order for muscles to work properly and continually, they need to be strong, elastic, and well trained, and this can be accomplished only through physical exercises.

Human voice has many possibilities. We are not always aware of the expressive power of voice because we have accepted speech and language as primary means of communication. However, spoken word in theatre not only has a literary meaning but also acoustic meaning that is expressed and communicated to the audience through the creative manipulation of actor's voice. All the exercises used in vocal training need to be justified and well thought through. Even if we repeat certain exercises over and over again, this process should never be carried out mechanically. We have to justify every workout and ask ourselves what is the point of doing it. Gradual understanding and mastering of individual elements leads to an awareness of the whole process and of

the final goal of each individual exercise. These individual elements (correct breathing, breath and voice support, soft sound attack, resonance) become useful only on stage - woven into our analysis of the script and in the role that we create. We should first ask "Why?" and only then "How?" If we ask these questions in a reverse order at the very beginning of vocal training, we will only anxiously listen to the echo of our own voice and words that we say, looking for the correct intonation and fixing the melody. The answer to the question "How?" needs to come as a result of our inner hearing, rhythm, and imagination.

Based on our long experience of working with acting students, actors, radio and TV announcers and show hosts, we have realized the importance of individual approach in vocal training. It is important that each student develops a feel for his own voice and that he learns to accept it. Everybody has to go through the same workout process, but every student will adjust particular exercises based on his needs and his vocal abilities. Actors usually have very subjective perceptions of their voices. Many beginners often make mistakes and create wrong perceptions of their own abilities. The others find the right way to free their voices at the very beginning of the process. Some students unerringly feel the obstacles and limitations, but also the power and possibilities of their voices. Sometimes they tend to overestimate their vocal abilities and as a result they force and strain themselves. Of course, there are exceptions. Some of them don't even realize the richness and strength of their voices, so they shy away and suppress their power by escaping into safe and conventional solutions.

Working on one's voice can be a very simple process, but it can also be very complex and full of uncertainties. If, at the outset, we begin to understand and accept our voices - then the whole process becomes much easier. But if we have misconceptions about our vocal abilities - either by underestimating or overestimating them - then we run into obstacles and dead ends. One of the most difficult things is to pay attention to the technique and be creative at the same time. Technique is a method, a way, but not a goal in itself. A technical process is, in fact, very short - it lasts about one or two months. At the beginning of the training students learn to accept certain practical and theoretical rules of voice placement. In the very next phase, the creative aspect of the process will replace the technical workout, and in that moment technical exercises will become acting tasks. The goal is: a student must get to like his voice, learn to take care of it, and let it communicate one of its secrets. Words are given to him by the playwright, they are not his words, but the voice *is* his, and its expressive power is special and unique.

We cannot expect the impossible from our voice, although we have to put forth high standards and goals at the very beginning. Patience is essential for the successful training, and this quality should overcome impatience, anxiousness, and searching for fast results. Other important factors are motivation, preciseness, simplicity without mystification, and accepting the reality of the entire phonetic process.

Our voices change from day to day, same as our moods and feelings; they change with age and experience. We can and we have to follow those changes, face them, and try to adjust them. The most important thing is that we learn to:

THINK THROUGH OUR VOICE!

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Author's Biography

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