

Eavesdropping on a Live Video Voice Lesson  
by Bruce Wilson Boreham

As in previous EVTA Vocal Pedagogy meetings, the presentations were focused largely on voice science and digital technology, and were less informative as to how the voice teacher should apply that know-how to voice teaching.

There were some noteworthy exceptions: particularly spectacular was a big-screen cinema-format live voice lesson held by Norma Enns with two Finnish opera students in another part of our host country. The dazzling albeit costly array of equipment set up by the local university was not completely flawless in its audio production, especially in its synchronization with the image of the young singers vocalizing. It was a rare chance to eavesdrop on a "private" voice lesson, and it emphasized the importance of rapport between teacher and student; even the nuances of the quiet poker-faced piano accompanist's expressions became apparent and a subtle counterpoint to many of the teacher's comments and suggestions, providing a fresh channel of feedback from an objective musical informant.

Mentioned in one of the EVTA afternoon workshops in Helsinki, a teacher's feedback, from an analytical point of view, is essentially "well-informed guidance to *modify* incorrect neuromuscular behaviors. It can be functional, musical or expressive."

We as vocal coaches 1) hear the whole of our student's vocalizing; 2) deconstruct its elements, "disentangling" them; and 3) reassemble these improved elements into a whole which is greater than before.

By receiving objective, specific feedback, the student can learn how to control his vocal instrument. One such source of objective feedback is the voice visualization software examined at the EVTA conference. Its mastery can turn practice into self-regulated learning.

During her live video voice lesson, Norma ably considered all five of the following types of feedback:

Vocal & Postural Imitation. While of course it was not physically possible to touch or adjust body positioning, Norma indeed demonstrated through her own posture how a *bel canto* singer stands, moves, breathes--not just the making of a diva, but the best way of making song. As with most seasoned coaches, she refrained from demonstrating vocalization using her own voice, but strategically showed her students through

Mirror, Chart, Larynx Model. The small video monitor the student had in the corner of her/his screen (also present in Skype) can indeed act as a mirror, and once the self-conscious student gets used to seeing his own face and singing apparatus, he can skillfully use it to his advantage.

Verbal Communication. As with most lessons, the bulk of comments fell into this category. Of course it is the easiest and most direct form of communication in this medium, but metaphors can be misinterpreted, idiosyncratic vocabulary misconstrued. Fortunately there are two more types of feedback which are more objective and concrete:

Instrumental, Audio, Audiovisual Recordings. Practical, tangible examples of what

the student can or should do. They can be prerecorded by the instructor himself or found online. Beware however the range in quality, both musically and pedagogically, of examples available online, such as on YouTube; they vary from sublime to abysmal.

Real-Time Feedback Technology. By monitoring the student's voice while he is singing, one can diagnose incorrect versus effective application of healthy, inspired emission. This does not mean standardization of the voice, but helps identify the characteristics of one's vocalization and hence lead to the development of individuality, literally seeing what the possibilities are. It can provide rigorous objectivity, while encouraging the student's emotional expressiveness. For the teacher, this realtime visual feedback helps confirm his auditory perception of his student's vocalization.

The next step, as I see it, is to apply this same teaching know-how to the budgetless technology all teachers have at their fingertips: Skype.

I intend to do so with a colleague based in Florence, Nicola Votino, also present at EVTA's Helsinki meeting. He'll film his student as I attempt to give him a long-distance voice lesson from my studio in Venice. I've requested that his student be of my same tessitura, baritone, singing pop/jazz/rock in my native language, English, so that I may better demonstrate any vocal examples.

Using voice visualization and analysis software during the lesson is unlikely on my end since my computer would already be involved in skypeing and would require direct singing voice input by the student. However Nicola could set up a second computer in his studio positioned so that it's in my field of vision streamed through his computer using the Skype program. This way I could follow not only what the student is vocalizing, but also its visualization on screen.

As volunteer voice teachers and researchers working to find solutions potentially useful for all, we feel the testing of free technology is imperative. I soon hope to be able to share our results with EVTA.

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