

Panel on Challenges of Vocal Pedagogy in the 21st Century

On Saturday 21st September as part of our Jewels of Vocal Pedagogy Jevop meeting in Wroclaw, Poland we held a panel to discuss what we felt were the challenges of teaching singing that we felt were current and contemporary. The board of EVTA were on the panel plus Monika and Piotr our Polish colleagues.

Here is a brief summary of our discussions:

- Educate whole person, musician, human being, instrumentalist and singer
- Technology: the upside and down sides
- Hearing and the Ear
- Mental health concerns
- Portfolio careers- how to help singers prepare for a variety of work
- Open minds and not slaves to 'schools of singing'
- Developing the unique voice
- Helping singers to find 'teams' of support

Ineke: I think we need to educate not just singers but also musician/singers, composer/singers, instrumentalist/singers.

Christa: and we need to help them learn how to earn a living, a portfolio career, how to manage it and get the best out of their singing life, as well as feeding themselves and their family.

Antra: Yes but more important than anything is to teach them to be full human being so their lives and their music are a source of blessing, peace and harmony in our troubled world.

Bettina: We need to grow their personalities, to help them grow up and mature as responsible citizens too.

Monika: We have in the 21st century a specific cultural environment where music is often too loud and we are noticing signs of deafness in the young. Does anyone else notice this?

(lots of heads nodding... we need to rescue the hearing/listening skills of human beings)

Antra: be nasty and complain if the sound is too loud, use ear plugs...we have noticed that singers can't locate sound very well which is a disaster on the stage!

Anne-Marie:Technology - is it killing music??? a BIG question....

Ineke: I want to speak up for the microphone...it is a very democratic instrument for it has enabled a wide variety of voices and voice colors to be heard.

Bettina: even opera can be too loud nowadays... I went and heard a beautiful understated but incredibly moving performance of La Traviata in Luxembourg with the conductor Teodor Currentzis and it wasn't too loud!

Martin: My PhD was in singers performance and 2 questions came up

1. How can we be sure that young people can get a musical experience, coming together to make music because that was the early experience of the many singers I interviewed?
2. How can we broaden the education of singers so they can have a portfolio career and have a balance for their needs in education?

Antra: as far as loudness goes we must learn from Baroque music, you have to really focus to hear all the details, it is good for our children and audiences in general to have those opportunities.

Lieve: I want to ask how fast do you have to learn to be a singer? In Belgium you must learn in 5 years then at 23 you are out in the real world? Is this good? There are time pressures for singers.

Anna (a young Polish singer): you have to learn to live a happy life and not take criticisms too seriously. I had problems with my own education with teachers letting me down and saying “you must do what I tell you and don’t ask why!” But I know I am ‘becoming’ and I am so willing to learn...

Susan: One of the challenges we face at our University in the UK is the increasing number of students who are facing huge mental health problems...is this what you experience across Europe so my colleagues are suggesting???

(lots of nodding)

Antra: Giving marks can be so violent and detrimental, I prefer a more gentle form of assessment with young singers

Martin: it depends on the tradition of music education, Conservatoires tend to be “Master-pupil’ model, Universities tend to be “Teacher/student learning together” model? Open thinking, personal values etc.

Piotr: The teacher can be open, sometimes we here professor A and his students are A1, A2, A3, all sound like him, no individuality, no unique voices? Just copying the Master! My school of teaching- NO!

Edgars: the keyword of the 21st century is Information it is more valuable than gold or fuel BUT do we have too much access to information - we need to filter - but who and what can we trust!

Claudia: There are many different methods but we as EVTA do not recommend any specific ones. Students live in a very different world now - we must be very careful BUT in Pop music you do need that acoustic pressure from the loudness of sound though I agree we must protect our ears.

Maria: I think the most important thing is to find a local team to support you, personal connections, try things out, have a mixture of experiences but have a 'team' to support you.

Lieve: we must learn to trust and not just "be strong" - Life-long learning and always be open with students and to new things.

Susan: to summarise this is exactly why in 1987 EVTA was created and **Paul Deegan** was there!!! We want to encourage local teamwork and local dialogue, open and searching for all singing teachers but also to provide events like this to all teachers to come together across all countries to share ideas and concerns.

Thank you all for being such a wonderful group of councillors and friends.



Paul Deegan Founder member of EVTA in Wroclaw September 2019 with Susan