A BEGINNING GUIDE TO ACTING WHILE SINGING

Jesse Adam Koza

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Committee:
Christopher Scholl, Advisor
Jane Schoonmaker Rodgers
ABSTRACT

Christopher Scholl, Advisor

There are many young or inexperienced singers out there who are either unaware or misinformed as to the power of both character and the text in music. This thesis was an attempt to create an accessible guide on acting while singing those singers. Part review of literature and part pedagogical theory, it became a strong beginning argument for both why and how to act in song.

In the first section, “A Call for Performance,” I argued for acting while singing, rather than complete reliance on the music to cover the drama. Then, I commented on existing texts in “Why this Thesis?,” pointing out things both positive and potentially limiting for the young singer. I also argue that the approach I, along with a few other authors, take – giving the singer options to increase their imaginative power – is more beneficial than telling the singer what to do.

I then cover the importance of the text, sometimes overlooked in pedagogical studies, giving examples and exercises for the young singer to improve both consonant diction and understanding of the flow of the language. I touched briefly upon the score, reminding the student of both its power and its ability to absorb any decision he or she makes. I then listed additional resources to consider when studying the score and lingered for a moment upon the importance of thinking through rests.

From there, I moved toward character, starting with the importance of imagination in singing, the strength and connection provided by a solid focus, the possibilities and reasons for movement or gesture, and, finally, basic steps for creating characters in vocal music.
There are vocal exercises in “The Text,” several examples throughout the thesis for the teacher of singing on how or what to ask the student, and finally, an appendix, which hopefully should serve as a quick reference guide for both beginning character development and exercises for the studio or practice room.
To Melissa, who survived hours of ranting and gave up her time for copy editing,
to the entire cast of BGSU’s Production of Gilbert & Sullivan’s Trial by Jury
(Performance December 8th, 2008), who let me try out some of these ideas,
and, to my parents, for perhaps no other reason than I finally have a dedication page,
and they both deserve to be on it.
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CHAPTER I - A CALL FOR PERFORMANCE

Singing-acting, when completely realized, is the most complex aesthetic task a human being can be called on to perform. – Wesley Balk, *The Complete Singer-Actor*¹

There is no reason to sugarcoat it: Dramatic interpretation should be taught, and those lessons should begin as soon as or before the student begins working on vocal technique.

Interpretation, as it is used here, is synonymous with “acting a piece” or “performing” a song and not with phrases like “musicality” or “musical interpretation.”² It is more than simply singing, but it should not be considered, in the end, as being separate from singing. It will be considered on its own for the sake of this thesis, but in the performance, everything must come together to form a whole. That includes vocal and acting technique, both of which have a myriad of subheadings. As will be stated throughout, the text and music of many pieces are beautifully interwoven. The two techniques should be just as mixed. Throughout this paper, acting, character, imagination, and the like are occasionally put under the heading of “dramatic interpretation.” It should not be forgotten, however, that much of the drama comes from the music itself (there are many books on how to find character and the like in the music).³ This thesis contains one short section on the topic. This thesis, in its narrow topic, is not an attempt to put performer-created ideas above the composer’s. The goal is merely to raise the performer’s ability to create a believable character.

The question arises, why interpret at all? Why are singers, unlike seemingly most other musicians in the world, forced to play two roles, as the singer/actor? It would be easy to quote Richard Miller and simply state: “Singing machines are uninteresting,” but, unfortunately, more

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² This issue with the word “interpretation” is another unfortunate occurrence for this paper, as many authors just talk about musicality. And while that is important, I do not believe it to be the sole definition of the word.
³ This thesis is does not put forward the idea of creative interpretation in the sense of taking the piece and changing it to fit one’s needs, putting forward only passages that show off one’s voice, or changing the text as the singer sees fit.
explanation is necessary. Wesley Balk, author of *The Complete Singer-Actor*, states that “Sharing the music-theater experience as intensely as possible is one of the principal goals of singing-acting.”

Thomas Hemsley puts forward that “singing in [the European tradition] does not take as its starting-point the wish to make sound, but the wish to express and to arouse all kinds of emotions through music.” This statement leads to the idea that expressing emotion should not happen simply through the voice, but through the entire body. Just as we encourage singers to sing from deep within or in a supported way, so too should they be encouraged to act from deep within or in a supported way, for, as Robert Caldwell states, “When you are not worrying about your technique, you are doing something else.” Caldwell’s “something else” is truly performing a piece. Helfgot and Beeman have a similar statement: “The moment singers emit sounds rather than meaning, they are not performing opera, they are doing something else – something parrots can do.”

While there are very few pedagogues out there that would argue against acting a piece at all (indeed, the only pseudo-argument against dramatic interpretation might be not including it in a performance at all), many of them do warn about the danger of too much movement: “Singers who mistake physical movement for freedom and who indulge in weaving and rocking, gesticulating, and “mugging” in the hope of increasing communication do a great disservice […] to themselves.” Claire Croiza states it even a little more bluntly: “Our operatic art is ruined by

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5 Balk, 73.
gestures, by undisciplined running about on the stage, by useless agitation.”

It is not the intention of this paper to state what is and is not tasteful movement in a piece, but such a warning is well kept. It is again Thomas Hemsley who puts forward the most meaningful statement regarding why we should interpret and, in addition, why we should start to learn early:

Believing that the ‘how’ of singing is largely meaningless without first clearly establishing the ‘why’ and the ‘what,’ […] I decided to write a book which might help young singers, and others interested in the art of singing, to a better understanding of what singing is all about; to help them ask meaningful questions as a necessary preliminary to finding meaningful answers; to focus, in fact, on the human and imaginative dimension, not as an optional extra, but as an essential prerequisite of the art of singing.

The idea of waiting for technique to be in place before one begins character study is an old one, but not forgotten. Harry Plunket Greene, in his book Interpretation in Song, writes: “It is obvious that interpretation would be impossible if the singer were hampered by difficulties of actual performance. If his mind be absorbed by the physical struggle, the intellectual side cannot have fair play.” Clayton Hamilton (an American drama critic), in his forward to Yvette Guilbert’s How to Sing a Song, states that the young artist should concentrate on technique while he is young so that he may be able to express his thoughts when he is older. Many studios are moving past these views, there is no doubt of that, and while both Mr. Greene’s and Ms. Guilbert’s books are old – the latter copyright 1918, and the former 1912 – they have been reprinted consistently in the United States, both as recently as 2008. Their ideas are still, whether as pedagogy or curiosity, possibly influential.

And while it is very easy to respect their ideas (after all, who can argue that having bad technique improves anything?), it is hard to accept them when taken in context. Robert Caldwell,

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11 Hemsley, forward from Singing & Imagination (np).
12 Greene, Harry Plunkett, Interpretation in Song, (London: Macmillain and Co., Ltd., 1912), 4-5.
in his book *The Performer Prepares*, states, “even a beginning student can captivate an audience, [and] not because of her technical skill,” later affirming that “we find repeatedly that the performers’ inner experiences directly affect their technical execution and their interpretation.” Creative performance can help support a lack of technique. It can, as Caldwell has illuminated, even help it grow.

It seems rather foolish, then, to wait until one completely masters technique to begin thinking about performance. Both halves of the final performance go hand-in-hand and therefore should be both taught and learned hand-in-hand. Waiting until a singer has mastered their technique to begin interpretation is ridiculous. The singer, more often than not, wants to move on to a professional career at that point, and that is not the arena in which to begin learning about interpretation. This macro idea of dramatic interpretation can be zoomed into the micro experience of learning a piece. Certainly more work can come after the memorization of the words and music, but to memorize before one begins to lay the emotional groundwork forces a singer to nearly memorize the piece again.

Lotte Lehmann offers a slightly differing opinion from Caldwell, one that resonates, to an extent, with Greene’s thought: “The voice – must be capable of responding with the greatest subtlety to every shade of each emotion. But it must be subordinate, it must only be the foundation, the soil from which flowers true art.” According to Lehmann, performance is more important than technique, but performance skill can only really be improved when technique is refined and ready.

This paper is not, however, attempting to argue that technique is subordinate to performance skill. There are certainly pedagogues that stress the importance of technique over

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14 Caldwell, 9-10.
acting, sometimes choosing to believe that true artistry lays simply in ones technical skill. Miller does not go this far, but in his article “The Seven Pillars of Performance success,” he does place (in order of importance) “Vocal Technique” as pillar two and “Artistic Imagination” as pillar three (“Musicianship” is the first).\textsuperscript{16} The pillars are representative of a possible chicken-and-egg argument in singing: if communication with the audience is our goal as performers, how do we go about finding the ideal communication? Which of these pillars is supposed to come first in that process? In the most basic interpretation of this hierarchy, it seems Richard Miller views communicating what is in the score as being more important than acting the piece. And while this is a valid viewpoint (music is, after all, subjective), I do not agree with it.\textsuperscript{17}

Beyond this (over) analysis, Miller does state earlier in his article that all seven pillars are requirements for a successful career. Even before that, however, he claims that from the viewpoint of many young singers, and perhaps, at times, their teachers, the only necessary ingredient for success is the voice.\textsuperscript{18}

This answer, and the belief that the voice is all that is necessary, might stem from the fact that many published teachers of singing either like to quickly touch on character study or imagination and switch to another topic, or simply ignore the subject completely. Vocal technique often wins its imaginary battle with character simply due to a forfeit. Many books, often serving as guides to singing various arias or songs, talk about the musicality of the piece, stressing the dynamics or rhythmic importance of a passage, and end up calling themselves interpretive guides or “master classes” with a particular singer or vocal coach. And, again, while

\textsuperscript{16} Miller, \textit{On the Art of Singing}, 150-152. The pillars, in order, are: Musicianship, Vocal Technique, Artistic Imagination, Objectivity, Perseverance, Talent, and Business Acumen.

\textsuperscript{17} My argument is largely based upon the order in which he places these pillars. It could be argued that they are equal slices of the same pie. I would find it hard to believe, however, that either Miller believed Talent would play such a large role in performance success (as much as vocal technique, at the least), or that Business Acumen would have an equal standing with technique and musicianship in his eyes (thus, these seven are in order of importance). Someone, somewhere probably believes one or both of those statements to be true, and I wish them the best.

\textsuperscript{18} Miller, \textit{On the Art of Singing}, 149. He states that the original answer “\textit{voce, voce, voce},” is attributed to Rossini.
musicality is an important part of finding all the drama and character within a piece, the main
focus of this study is finding it through other means.

This problem of a lack of acting technique is often fed by warnings given by pedagogues
to not do “too much” when performing a piece, which often leads to a performer not doing
enough. Richard Miller gives a strong warning that can be misconstrued: “some singers and
pianists forget that they are re-creators, not creators, of the music, mistaking self-indulgence for
sensitivity.”19 While he is no doubt striking out at those performers who take liberties that do not
serve the music, and, thus, the drama of the piece, it is not impossible for the
actor/singer/performer to take such a statement rather personally and react against it,
compounding the problem. Such statements can also be misconstrued, leading a performer to
simply recreate the sound of a piece, leaving out altogether and possible gesture. This possibility,
however slight, is potentially dangerous to the development of young singers. Greene worsens
the issue when he states that while anyone can gain “perfected technique,” a “sense of
atmosphere,” and “command of tone-color,” the best singers are borne with an innate gift, which
he calls “Magnetism.”20 He continues a few pages later, stating, “Any singer who has sincerity, a
fair amount of imagination, and perfected technique can interpret, but not necessarily
successfully. To be successful he must have Magnetism. Magnetism […] is a gift.”21

“Magnetism,” or Charisma, as we would probably call it today, is indeed a gift, but
contrary to Mr. Greene’s comment, it only allows that performer a slight leg up, just as anyone’s
biology can give him or her a “nicer, more natural” sound. In fact, charisma is not always used to
its fullest extent. There are some singers, Richard Miller claims, who use their natural

19 Miller, Singing Schumann, 17.
20 Greene, 4.
21 Greene, 8. Again, to repeat an earlier point: While it is certainly easy to dismiss Mr. Greene’s views as antiquated,
or forgotten, the many times his book has been reprinted tell a different story. It would certainly be easy to overlook
his ideas if his book was not recently printed. It has been, however, and therefore must be considered a relevant text.
“charismatic performance abilities [to mask] a number of remaining technical faults.”22 Some performers have made stellar careers after perfecting their vocal and acting technique, and developing dramatic interpretative skill is no different. Anyone can learn to interpret, and they can do so quite successfully. Wesley Balk writes that a lack of charisma can be assisted by removing “whatever inhibits the flow of energy [that] interferes with one’s charisma.”23 He recommends doing this by “[separating] charisma down into its components: [...] intense concentration, extraordinary technical skill, great personal confidence, and an openness (vulnerability) which allows all these abilities to flow outward.”24 These components are then exercised independently and eventually put back together, where, if there is not an increase in the amount of charisma, there is always “a change for the better.”25

There are also varying views regarding the many genres of vocal music, be it operatic or oratorio arias, Lieder, English song, or gospel music and the amount of interpretation one can tastefully do in such songs. It is safe to say that most any person, be they singer, audience, or teacher, expects more emotional connection from the operatic aria than, perhaps, the concert piece or oratorio aria. The true answer is that the intent and intensity levels of both performances must be the same, whether or not the reflective facial and bodily gestures are large or small. There are different levels of gesture and acting required in various circumstances, and the singer must be prepared for all of them. Acting in a large opera house is often different from acting in a small recital hall. The potential effectiveness of nuance in a performance is inversely proportional to the size of the house (and prospective audience). This does not preclude a performer from having a very specific, nuanced performance in a large house, but that nuance’s

22 Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, 246.
23 Balk, 52.
24 Balk, 52.
25 Balk, 53.
value will tend to drop sharply as the house size increases.

The question finally ends: how does one go about teaching interpretation to a young singer? Such a question deserves much more time than it will receive. For some young singers, the problem may be nothing more than simply reining them in. Many young singers will try to do too much, thinking, as Miller described, that their numerous weak gestures are a sign of high emotional communication. These singers should be reminded that while gestures in themselves are not bad, less is, quite often, more. As Croiza states, “I believe that the greatest actor is the one who creates a character in he simplest possible manner.”

Other singers will be far too introverted, in which case, getting any dramatic interpretation to present itself will seem, at times, like pulling teeth. It might be stressed in such situations that dramatic interpretation is a good way to “hide” (for the lack of a better term) behind a character and present someone “else” as the subject for the audience. There are easy ways to prepare a student for creative dramatic interpretation, all of which can be started from the very beginning of a lesson:

1. Raise kinesthetic awareness. Many students are simply not aware of what they are doing. They try, but it does not look quite right. Helping to raise their awareness (which, simply by learning how to sing, should already be going up) by giving helpful, concise feedback will help them tune in to all of their body parts and allow them to realize their full expressive potential.

2. Add intent to exercise. This can be useful even when stretching before a lesson. Use the warm-ups that will suit the young singer’s growing voice (there is no need to vary that helpful routine!), but ask, perhaps after a few repetitions of just technique, that they add the intent to persuade a friend, flirt with someone, or scold another. This will probably be very difficult for the introverted students, so little steps are best. The extrovert might suddenly do too much; in this case, nuance of emotion can come in to play.

3. Remind them that no decision is wrong. “The emphasis must be on free exploration,” Balk writes, “Process must not yet be allowed to identify itself as product.” When the student is “in character,” every decision they make should also be in character. Therefore, any decision they make will also be the one the character makes. Thus, no

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26 Crozia, 154.
27 Balk, 103.
decision is wrong. They are more or less engaging, surprising, interesting, or any number of other adjectives. You may help them play with making different ones, which will inform and change the character, but when they are performing, the student/character should be allowed no opportunity to judge what decisions are being made. Such reflections are for after the performance, be it on stage or simply in an exercise in a lesson.

These three items are mainly for the student’s growth. What is not advised, however, is the teacher making the dramatic decision in place of the student. Perhaps stronger suggestions could be made at first, slowly weaning off as the student progresses, but growth of character comes out of discussion, not quick decisions, especially ones we do not necessarily support or understand.

On top of how to learn to interpret dramatically, the problem of authenticity comes into play. Creative dramatic interpretation can lead to an authentic performance. Several arguments permeate this statement, such as “which version is authentic” or “by whose standard?” Intention of the composer versus the freedom of the artist, contemporary style versus historical practice, and even individual style versus the teacher’s ideas of “correct” can all come into play. As Lehmann explains, the youth of every generation is eager for new ways. Even the teacher should do as she commands and “consider tradition not as an end but as a beginning.”28 Beyond that, the possibility of the young student going too far and lifting too much from their imitation exists. There can be no one true “right” way to perform a work. Were it possible, it must not be allowed. As Croiza points out, “There could be a number of Carmens quite different from each other, and all equally true.”29

Dramatic interpretation is a tricky subject, but it is one that must be handled. It must be taken slowly, like vocal technique. It must be started early, with the earlier a serious student starting, the better. But it must be kept in mind that interpretation, because it is tricky, is easy to overdo. The changes can be as small as those from vowel to vowel. Given time, the performers

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28 Lehmann, 11.
29 Croiza, 152.
who are able to confidently interpret will find themselves leagues ahead of their peers and ready
for the demands of a professional career.
CHAPTER II - WHY THIS THESIS?

There are several books available in which the author attempts to help the singer learn the art of dramatic interpretation. It may seem odd, then, to write a thesis on such a widely covered topic, in which there are a growing number of available books. The problem comes in the language used by the various authors.

When used as textbooks, David Ostwald’s *Acting for Singers* and Balk’s *The Complete Singer-Actor* are fine reads, and, for the most part, readily accessible. But they require someone with the knowledge of or a strong background in the subject matter to guide the student through the book. For the average singer, they are confusing, alienating texts. The late Dr. Balk’s book (along with *The Radiant Performer*) is widely seen as the “go to” book for learning the art of dramatic interpretation in singing. Dr. Balk’s exercises, however, are difficult to perform on one’s own and often require a great deal of feedback from an experienced outside source (this is not to say that learning the art of dramatic interpretation can be done solely on one’s own. That point will be discussed later).

David Ostwald’s book is much more accessible to the inexperienced student, but there are times, especially throughout the beginning chapters, in which improvisation factors in greatly. This would not be such a problem if many singers, so long dependent of the set rhythms, pitches, and words of their songs, did not avoid the theatrical practice completely. Mr. Ostwald’s book also does not contain many exercises that would be immediately familiar to the inexperienced singer. For example, Richard Miller, author of *The Structure of Singing*, has within his text many very useful ideas for the upcoming singer, especially those focusing on technique. His language is familiar to most, and his ideas are similar to the ones a young singer might hear in an average

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private lesson. Miller does not, however, talk at great length about character. He mentions it from time to time, to be sure, but when it comes up, he almost seems clumsy talking about it. From these two books, we either get something that the singer could see and immediately recognize, but nothing that would help them learn this new skill, or we get a great manual for this new skill, but nothing familiar to them.

Helfgot & Beerman have a lot of wonderful things to say in their book *The Third Line: the Opera Performer as Interpreter*, and their points are often very practical and irrefutable. They also talk, however, about “contrast” in a piece, and while this is at the core the effect we are going for, to attempt for more contrast without accessing it through character does a major disservice to the performer and to the audience.

The counter to this situation would seem to be the other type of available book on dramatic interpretation: the “master class” book. These are books of “master classes” with a famous performer, often a singer or coach of opera. One such book is *An Interpretive Guide to Opera Arias*, by the famous Martial Singher. This book epitomizes both what is great and what is dangerous about such resources.

Singher has several great recommendations at the beginning of his book: “Study one aria at a time,” “You must know who you are and why you sing what you sing,” and “Imbue yourself with the meaning in of each word, then with the meaning of each verse, then the meaning of the entire piece, literally and in its human significance.” 31 These are all wonderful suggestions for the singer desiring to improve his or her interpretative skill. Studying one aria at a time will allow the singer to really get to know everything about it without causing confusion. His second suggestion is, fundamentally, the basis for this paper. As Singher writes, knowing the who and

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why of singing is a must. Knowing the language, as well as knowing the meaning of the whole piece (absorbing it as a whole) is something that comes up time and time again in interpretation texts. Harry Plunkett Greene, in *Interpretation in Song*, corroborates that “a singer does not think of those notes separately; he thinks of the phrase as a whole, and the song is to the phrase what the phrase is to the note. […] This treatment of the song as a whole is the secret of interpretation.”

The danger with Singher’s book, however, comes first with the language he uses, which is rather forward at the beginning of his book. The first occurs when he comments on the metronome markings he gives in his various discussions: “[they] are given in order to protect the inexperienced from grievous errors. They constitute a reliable basis for studying arias, though I am well aware, having sung *Le Nozze di Figaro* in twelve different countries, that a dozen or more conductors do not all use the same tempi. Nevertheless, some solid premises have to be established. Changing tempi, or changing dynamics without a valid motivation is a betrayal.” While his final statement is somewhat positive in what the student should learn (rather than claiming it as a betrayal, it would be better to simply state that one should have a valid motivation for changing tempi or dynamic), he is essentially equating his ideas with the correct ideas, an effect that has the danger of bleeding over into all of his other directions. “You might do this” becomes “you should do this,” and creative performance is stifled.

This affects his statements within the various suggestions for each aria. For example, while discussing Mozart’s “Deh vieni alla finestra,” from *Don Giovanni*, Singher suggests that “During the two-bar interlude, pretend to look slightly to right or left of center and above you, at

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32 Greene, 18.
33 Singher, xv.
the window, with some expectation; then resume your singing in a new attempt”.

This is, of course, a recommendation for dramatic interpretation. While presenting this as a possible way of performing the piece would not be a bad thing, the student on singing would be better off if Mr. Singher had instead written the way he had at the beginning of the discussion, when talking about Don Giovanni’s character: “The man who sings this graceful tune is the same who fought off a furious crowd in the finale of act 1 and who will later challenge the statue of the Commendatore. But in this moment he plays the traditional part of the Spanish lover singing under the window of his beloved, accompanying himself of the mandolin. […] But Don Giovanni is a gentleman when he wishes to be, and his singing must be polished and without flaws. Remember, Don Giovanni wants to be heard by the chambermaid but not by the neighbors.” This bit of information, especially the last line, is fantastic for the performer’s rationale of this song. Other statements (“His voice must be light and warm”) are completely unnecessary in comparison. His description of the many sides of Don Giovanni at the beginning of the quote is as equally powerful.

Following this style, another message following “during the two bar interlude” might have been: “The Don is not used to waiting for a woman. What might he be feeling in this moment? What can he do to help reflect those emotions? What causes him to sing the second verse?” This, followed by suggestions, such as “frustration,” “doubt,” “unease,” “wonder to himself what he might do next,” and “he really wants this girl and is not one to give up,” would be much more useful for the singer trying to learn a skill rather than “put on” someone else’s interpretation. In fact, any suggestion whatsoever, as long as it promotes a dialogue between student and teacher, or, at the very least, gets the student to think about what Don Giovanni is

34 Singher, 139.
35 Singher, 139.
36 Singher, 139.
thinking, is a positive suggestion.

A similar example occurs in the book Lyric Soprano Arias – A Masterclass with Evelyn Lear. Ms. Lear’s book, much like Mr. Singer’s, has both its wonderful moments and moments which are not as educational as they might be. While discussing “Deh vieni, non tardar” from Mozart’s Le nozze di Figaro, Ms. Lear assists the student’s growth by showing the detailed amount of observation they will one day have to do: “Notice, how Mozart’s genius keeps Susanna’s ersatz nobility different (simpler, with less depth, and more self-conscious) from the Countess’ true musical character.” This information is wonderful for studying both Susanna and the Countess, and while it could have been framed in a more educational sense (by being a question and answer), such a statement stands as an example for the student’s own research. She continues in her essay, before the sheet music begins, with more suggestions for the performer, both for the aria itself and for the singer’s musical future, using straightforward, encouraging language throughout:

How does one balance all of that in what appears to be a deceptively simple aria? There is only one way to try: you must know the whole opera, and you must understand who Susanna is. This is often one of the first arias that a young soprano will sing, and it is a perfect opportunity for you to learn how to do research in preparing an aria. […] Read Beaumarchais to get a concept of the character that is independent of the opera […] read through the entire libretto, looking for clues to Susanna’s character […] You may want to listen to a recording of the entire opera to get a sense of the sweep and momentum of the score. Only after you have done considerable preparation will you be able to create the magical moment that this aria can be; otherwise it will never be anything more than a pleasant song. […] And don’t be frustrated if it never feels as rich and full of meaning as when heard in the context of the opera. That’s true of nearly every opera aria […] You can, however, do your best to summon up a 17th century Spanish night, to try and live and breathe as Susanna for a few minutes, and at least to convince the audience (and yourself) that you know what you’re doing singing these sensuous phrases in Almavivia’s garden.38

It may be enough to merely read that to a student and consider the teacher’s job done. Ms. Lear’s

38 Lear, 35. Emphasis mine.
language is very straightforward, and quite applicable to everything else the young soprano might do in her future. The only problem with the book is when Ms. Lear’s ordering language goes from helpful ideas, such as doing research and understanding the character, to very specific, somewhat limiting orders when presented in the sheet music.

One wonderful moment occurs in the recitative: “(Think subtext in-between phrases. What is she thinking in addition to what she is saying?)”39 But before that, she ends the first line of the recitativo with this order “Make this recitativo interesting and theatrical throughout, not sedate and timid. It is a charade, after all, and should have some fun about it. Use the Italian words colorfully.”40 This statement may very well be true, but to be entirely effective as an educational book, the phrase should have been more question-oriented, with Ms. Lear’s suggestions in either a footnote at the bottom of the page or in an appendix at the back of the book. At the very least, she could have phrased it “how would you act if you were pretending to be someone else, all the while making your boss look the fool?” She continues to switch back and forth, however, between fantastic phrases and limiting orders. Her statements are good ideas; there is no denying that. But the fact that they limit what the performer can do, how the performer can play with those lines, is damaging to the untrained singer. The next time a singer is given an aria to learn, there is the possibility that they will again look for a suggestion from the book or from a teacher, rather than beginning to ask questions themselves and truly exercising their artistic imagination.

While the present thesis certainly owes a great deal to Dr. Balk’s work, it differs from *The Complete Singer-Actor* in that it offers practical exercises for the young singer, sometimes offering new warm-ups (such as the case in “Text” and in the appendix) or new ideas to take into

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39 Lear, 38.
40 Lear, 37.
existing ones. In this thesis I attempt to bring Balk and Miller together, essentially, citing other writers through the various sections as well. It is beyond my experience to go too far into detail regarding these various subjects, but there is plenty to bring in and relate for the young or inexperienced singer. Throughout the various sections within I will also present everything as an option, for this is how it should be presented to the performer; everything is subjective, and anything that a performer comes up with can be made to be believable. It is with these topics in mind that I begin by looking at one of the neglected elements of the score: the text.
CHAPTER III - THE TEXT

Obviously, it is impossible to sing without voice, but voice is not enough for operatic expression. Often voice is even prejudicial to it … The singer who is only interested in voice takes the servant for the master; he forgets the aim of singing, which is to express and therefore to articulate.41

Louis H. Huber’s equating articulation with expression, or in our case, dramatic interpretation, is telling. A performer cannot hope to interpret without making sure that first, they comprehend what they are saying, and second, that the audience understands what they are saying. It seems like a rather obvious statement to make, but, sadly, it is a problem that continues to grow.42

Before we begin, it seems prudent to state that the discussion and exercises that follow are in no way arguing for a more text-oriented approach to singing. I intend, instead, to call for more of a balance in the study, where text and music, much like in the German Romantic Lieder, become one.

Richard Miller, in his book On the Art of Singing, argues for a wider study of bel canto technique: “It is clear that a systematic approach to acquiring the agility factor and the sustained legato is an essential part of vocal pedagogy. Exercises for developing both capacities abound in the technical vocalization systems of the nineteenth century; modern vocal pedagogy will make vast strides forward if these two pedagogical poles for the foundation of studio instruction. One complements the other.”43 Miller later added text to these poles, and it is the aim of the following pages to continue that work. The student of singing must fully understand and be able to

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42 It is slightly outside the view of this thesis, but several things might have led to what I perceive as a text problem: a larger orchestra and larger venues both require the singer to make more sound, which often takes away from diction, and the constant increase in various editions of classical music increases the chance of “singing translations,” which can move far away from the original intent of the song, hurting the unaware student’s interpretation of the original text.
43 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 102.
elaborate on the text of a song.

The text has not been ignored in pedagogical textbooks. It often seems to be missing from the performances of many young singers, however. It is surprising, too, since, as Helfgot and Beeman write, “Indeed, the seed, the origin of the opera is the text, which inspires the composer to give a particular shape to the work.” They take, throughout their book, a rather strong text over music approach. Ideally, both sections of the score would be equal, as Wesley Balk views them: “A great many emotional statements, both subtle and broad, can and should be conveyed while speaking and singing. How to blend the two is a problem we must solve.”

The study of the text of a song or aria can be broken down into two problems: understanding what is being said, and making sure the audience understands (however superficially) what is being said. Or, even more concisely, the main subjects are poetry and diction. The poetry itself can be a problem for a few reasons, whether it is because the student does not understand the symbolic nature of the text or it is in another language. The latter problem is easily corrected in this age of information, as many websites (not to mention the many books available) contain translations of well-known arias and songs (many of which will also provide a poetic rewrite of the translated text). The difficulty of understanding the poetry of the song or aria being studied is, as expected, different for every song and singer. The underlying motivation and symbolism of a lied aria might be easier to find or understand than the complex emotions present in many of Schubert’s songs. The singer having difficulty with a particular piece would do well to continue his or her research into the song. If looking at the aria or art song in a wider context (the opera or cycle) does not help (or is not available), there are

44 Helfgot & Beeman, 43.
45 Balk, 56.
46 It is again perhaps outside the goals of this paper, but the many variants of texts that exist, including poetic rewrites, could bear some investigation. At what point does ease of understanding start to affect the student’s understanding and interpretation of the piece?
many outside sources that might provide enlightenment. There is more on research further on in
the thesis.

True to his book’s title, Foster describes what is necessary to reach the ideal declamation
of the text: “Ideal singing is an emotionally expressive event involving the word, its meaning and
feeling, and its musical environment. Thus, it is essential that the singer be keenly perceptive of
and sensitively receptive to the word, that he possess a fully developed linguistic awareness.”47
He goes on, shedding light on what can bring us to that finely tuned awareness: “Only when we
reach out to describe the poignant momentary echo of some deeply felt emotion or the
exhilarating thrill in witnessing some marvelous feat or accomplishment, only at moments of
heightened stimulation, perception, response and awareness do words suddenly become vibrantly
alive with felt meanings. In ideal singing, however, one must be ever susceptible to this
meaningful, reverberant elaboration of the word, for it is the word in its felt entirety to which the
emotional process responds, giving rise to the expressive urge.”48 The singer must be fully aware
of what the words mean, both literally and poetically. And that awareness must be present at all
times, for if the singers are not fully invested or interested in the words, the audience will not be,
either.

This is not necessarily a section on how to correctly shape the various consonant and
vowel sounds available to us. For that, sources such as Richard Miller’s The Structure of Singing
(to mention a text I quote here; there are numerous diction books available) would be more
helpful. Instead, the following deals more with the importance of diction or why it should be as
intensely studied as a beautiful sound, and exercises for practicing various consonants through
the use of pitched tongue twister exercises. Indeed, this section may feel at times that I am

repeating myself *ad nauseam*. This effect is intentional, as the importance of diction in singing (however properly done) cannot be overstated. While an overall view of diction is likely to generally apply to both vowels and consonants, I spend my time in the exercises mainly on the latter, for, as Foster states, “Vowels provide a tonal substance that radiates the energy level, intensity, or temperature of the emotional value, while consonants provide an information-bearing structure and an expressive gesture for the word, defining its shape, tempo rhythm, inflection and character of movement.”

Diction was a problem even back in Greene’s day, as he explains the plight of the singer in his time: “For his faults of diction he is hardly to blame, seeing that his public has never remotely demanded a standard of him. […] [They have] heard [his consonants] so long, and looked upon them as so sanctioned by authority, that [they have] never felt even remotely entitled to anything better.” He continues to enlighten: “The old Italian school of singing was a pure joy of sound—In many cases they had not much to say, and the text of what they said was valueless; yet every note was a gem of beauty and every word a model of elocution.”

Obviously, if Greene’s observation of “the old Italian school” is well remembered or researched, the singers of the past managed to find a balance between sound and text. Unfortunately for us, if we are to take Greene’s statement as both true and as an ideal to which we can return (why write the book if not to improve upon something?), something happened along the way.

Walter Charles Foster, in his book *Ideal Singing*, gives a bit more insight into our current state: “The greater part of our daily communicative encounters is so prosaic, so commonplace in character, that we tend to treat language itself with little or no regard.” Thus, it might be that

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50 Greene, 105.
51 Greene, 105-106.
since our ability to communicate with one another outside of vocal music is so easy or relaxed, we approach singing with the same type of ease and “laid back” character. This leads our diction or general communicative ability to start at a level less than necessary.

Huber’s book, a book about producing opera, has a rather lengthy discussion regarding the importance of diction. He begins this section with a straightforward statement: “Realism in the theater finds its beginning with the proper expression of words.” He then goes on to quote several famous conductors’ techniques, such as Richard Wagner, who “expected [each singer] to read his part in the manner used in the legitimate theater.” This goes along well with Greene’s idea that “To talk sense intelligibly, the talker, be he speaker or singer, must give to his words their right values according to the rules of prosody.” Huber later quotes Wagner directly: “Enunciation! The long notes will take care of themselves; the short ones and the text are what matter.” Strauss, Verdi, Toscanini and Bruno Walter are all referenced as having placed a high amount of importance on diction.

And, of course, like any argument with strong opinions on both sides, the fight between the importance of vowels versus the importance of consonants could very well go on forever. The ideal, then, perhaps, might be to either a) find a sound for the singer in which diction and sound are equally balanced, or, balanced enough so that the text can be understood or, b) find moments, like those hinted at by Wagner, where the voice can become more important and those where the text can take center stage. Unfortunately, many young singers, as Greene states, “[have] remembered the “Voce, voce, voce” of Rossini, and in the desire to sing, [have]

53 Huber, 32.
54 Huber, 35.
55 Greene, 120.
56 Wagner, quoted in Huber, 35.
57 Unfortunately, for time’s sake, the main argument for the importance of the vowel over consonants is Rossini’s “voce, voce, voce.” It was not a goal of this paper to show as better than the other, so exhaustive arguments were not sought out.
forgotten to *speak*.\textsuperscript{58} It may very well be the case that the singer has not learned *how* to speak (rather than “forgotten” to, as Greene suggests), but, as put forward in this paper, “voce” and “speaking” should happen concurrently from the start.

How, then, do we find this balance? Well, to some extent, the result depends upon the vocal coach, music director, or studio teacher. But the student can prepare himself and enhance the overall strength of his consonants by adding them to his daily warm-up and exercises. It is unfortunate that most warm-ups are done only on the vowel. To help balance this, the student can either add normal text to their warm-up, perhaps alternating between doing it on a vowel and doing it with a sentence, or they can try one of the tongue twister exercises I have adapted:

First, just read the text aloud:

I am a mother pheasant plucker. I pluck mother pheasants. Of all the mother pheasant pluckers, I am most pleasant.

Once the student is fairly confident with this, add music:\textsuperscript{59}

![Musical notation](image)

There is a lot of nuance here to be found if desired. It is especially good for final consonants. Essentially an “up five, down five” exercise, the words add an extra bit of challenge. Of course, it can be practiced on a vowel, alternating with the text. The goal should be to go as quickly as possible while maintaining a fair balance between text and sound. Even finding a balance in the

\textsuperscript{58} Greene, 106. Emphasis his. He has a more specific thought regarding diction later on: “One concession has to be made by speech to song. Men’s voices as they ascend in pitch have a tendency to “cover” the tone; women’s to open it. Here the vowel assimilates by nature a darker or lighter shade respectively. The change is not only not apparent, but is actually demanded physically and artistically.” (118) Covering is also discussed at length in chapter 3 of Richard Miller’s *On the Art of Singing* (10).

\textsuperscript{59} I did not include a time signature so that a feeling of 4/4 or 2/2 could be achieved without confusion.
consonant itself is difficult and must be practiced. As Harry Plunkett Greene states, “the uses and abuses of consonants are hard to put in writing. To find the happy medium between incisiveness and demonstrativeness is the difficulty.” While there is certainly a level to which each individual singer can strive, at some point the singer and teacher will take on a more subjective approach, and the diction, while fantastic for the duo, may not, for whatever reason, be good enough for someone else. In fact, even each space in which a singer performs will be different, and the consonants ready for that particular room will be different from another. Finding the suitable consonants for that space will more than likely require an extra ear. Having the possibility for a wide variety of colors, as these exercises can bring out, is always useful.

Another example:


Then, adding music, we get an exercise that looks like this:

![Musical notation]

Again, this can be taken up a half step each time, with the end goal being a nice, understandable declamation. Another way to think about this exercise (that is, another rhythm), would be the following:

![Musical notation]


This example can also help with rhythm, as the difference between these two types of notation (dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth, and a triplet with a half note and a quarter) are often

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60 Greene, 113.
much blurrier than they could be.

One final English example is excerpted from “Trio,” found in Act I of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado*:

To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark dock,
   In a pestilential prison, with a life-long lock,
   Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock,
   From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block!
A dull, dark dock, a life-long lock,
   A short, sharp shock, a big black block!
   To sit in solemn silence in a pestilential prison,
   And awaiting the sensation
   From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block.\(^{61}\)

I have reduced the sheet music to cover just Pish-Tush’s line from the beginning of the tune. The entire section, including all three vocal lines, is given in full in the appendix.

Huber explains another way in which the student can improve their diction: “Let us reiterate that good diction in singing is so closely related to good diction in speech that the learning and memorizing of words alone is most desirable. It is far easier to memorize words; therefore, if only the music is memorized, or if the singer merely allows the music to suggest the words, the thoughts do not flow freely, and the diction is bound to suffer.” Huber, while mainly talking about diction, hits upon another solid point: if we do not have a solid control over our diction, we cannot properly act a piece. “The thoughts do not flow freely,” as he says, and if the thoughts cannot flow freely, our character’s inner monologue cannot flow freely, and thus, we are not as engaged in the piece as we could be.

Miller takes a much more technique-oriented stand, saying that good diction “is accomplished when the singer recognizes that most consonants occur quickly and crisply, with

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Example 1: W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *The Mikado*, No. 10

To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark dock. In a pestilential prison, with a

life-long lock, Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock. From a

cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block!
the apex of the tongue touching the inner surface of the lower front teeth.”62 “Even voiceless palatal fricatives,” he continues, “need not cause the singer to abandon this frontal feeling.”63

There are not arguments directly against diction, but there are authors who would remind us that “the music’s the thing; the music must always come first, even in song, where speech would appear to be the most important.”64 Miller warns against the use of over-enunciation: “Raising diction to a high level of awareness may be a virtue in some specific phrases, but pretentious diction is to be deplored. […] Diction-conscious enunciation is not good diction.”65 Elsewhere in his book, Miller does warn about the danger of diction exercises, claiming “they produce notes, not phrases.”66 What separates the previous phrases given in this thesis from Miller’s typical diction exercises is that they incorporate whole phrases and not nonsense syllables (such as an up five, down five exercise on “ti,” “ta,” “vi,” “va,” or the like). These lines should help work against the feeling of notes against phrases. Miller does have an exercise of his own to work against “notiness:” “A good device to use when working on songs or arias with quickly occurring syllables is first to sing the phrase on nonsense syllables, filling each note with sound. Use ‘ra-di-da-da,’ or ‘ra-la-la-la,’ or something similar. Follow that by sensing the same single phrase on one vowel, then with just the vowels inherent in the text. Finally, the text should be sung with the same linear character of the continuously sung sound. This process should be done phrase by phrase, not by singing the aria from beginning to end.”67 These processes, when

62 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 22.
63 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 22. He states later in his book that “it is clear that diction will be cleaner when constant legato and quickly occurring consonants permit a flowing singing line. (111)
64 Greene, 121.
65 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 21. Unfortunately, there is little more given on what constitutes good or bad diction (exactly what constitutes “diction-conscious” enunciation is never specifically mentioned). Miller spends time earlier in the same section specifically regarding [m], [n], and the other nonfricative continuants, saying “they should not be treated as though they were vowels, except when they require doubling” (as occurs in German or Italian), (20)
66 Miller, 111.
67 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 111.
practiced regularly, will not only add to the audience’s understanding of the text, but the singer’s as well.

Of course, the trouble remains that many singers are not fully aware of how the phrases work when the text is apart from the music. Though, as Greene explains, the music is not always necessarily helping them: “The fact remains that the text can never count upon untrammeled assistance from music in all the aspects of its expression. […] To accommodate the prosody of his language to the rhythm of his music is the singer’s difficulty, for music, with the best of good wills, is so hampered by the limitations of its own notation that it often acts as a positive drag on the wheel.”68

“Si canta come si parla” is a familiar line for many students and teachers of voice.69 While often used as a method for determining how the vocal tract should be shaped (a concept rather thoroughly examined by Richard Miller in his book On the Art of Singing), this concept can also be used to describe how we think about the line in music.70 That is, many singers forget that the lines we sing are just that: lines. Just as we wouldn’t necessarily stop in the middle of a line or emphasize odd words when speaking, so too must we be mindful about this when singing.71 This also takes us back to Greene’s line about forgetting how to speak.

One key to fully realizing a text is finding the operative word of the phrase. Now, this should not be treated as a verbal Where’s Waldo?, with only one answer, hidden so cleverly amongst many others like it, takes precedence. There are many different ideas, each of which might be appropriate depending on the context. The idea is to find the word that works best for

68 Greene, 121.
69 “One sings like one speaks.”
70 Miller looks more at the vocal-tract shaping aspect of “si canta come si parla,” rather than its possible affects on sentence structure.
71 Miller, in his section entitled “Liederwurst,” recalls the “childhood schoolroom experiences when the “Dick and Jane” primers were haltingly read: “Dick! Throw – the – ball – to – Spot! Spot! Bring – the – ball – to – Jane!” (On the Art of Singing, 108). We learned not to do this years ago, yet it comes up quite frequently in song.
the situation. Often times the composer will have taken care of finding the word for the singer, placing it on the highest note of the phrase or on an important beat. “In singing,” however, as Miller states, “one often overlooks the inflections of speech that most composers have taken into consideration when setting texts.”72 Sometimes, often in recitative (and especially in translated recitative), there are several possibilities, and it is up to the singer to find which one suits the situation best. One very simple exercise to practice finding the best operative word is to take a simple sentence and ask leading questions. First, start with the sentence:

Give me that book.

Second, ask leading questions:

- Do what with the book? (Give me that book.)
- Give it to whom? (Give me that book.)
- Give you which book? (Give me that book.)
- Give you what? (Give me that book.)

As you can see, each question changes the important word in the sentence. It is then necessary to find which version best fits the situation, or, in essence, decide which word in the sentence is most important. Is it important that you are given (not thrown or kept from) the book, that you (and no one else) receive it, that it is that particular book (not the red one beside it), or that it’s the book (and not the stapler)?

Miller has two more exercises to help the performer better understand the inflection of the text: “Speaking the text at a relatively high dynamic level suitable for stage delivery, in the tempo of the musical setting, is useful in eliminating series of individual notes, while it also points out the important words that shape the phrase. Another useful device is to sing the text with the same rhythm and tempo on a single pitch, beginning at a lower level than the actual musical phrase elevation.”73

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72 Miller, 111.
73 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 111.
Richard Miller often worries about the acting of the inexperienced singer, mainly in the
way he tries to prevent them from going too far. His fears spring mainly from German Lieder,
“where the poem has been the original inspiration and the music its resultant outward expression,
the text has been treated with equal honour, and the lilt of its language followed faithfully by the
composer so far as the restrictions of his medium have permitted him.”74 The text and music are
one.

Miller’s main problem comes with what he calls the “link-sausaging of the vocal line,”
where the inexperienced (or perhaps ignorant) singer tries to add too much to the text, rather than
pulling it out.75 This occurs when someone tries to impose emotion on a piece, rather than really
experiencing it as it is performed. Words are broken up syllabically, almost as though the
performer wants us to know they know what the word (or larger phrase) means. “The singer,”
Miller explains, “tries to express depth of emotion and profound understanding of the text
through syllabic detail.”76 While Miller does not expressly state what his ideal would be, he does
write that “the shape of a phrase, like that of a sentence or the formation of a thought, has a
continuity that directs it to a specific point or points of importance.”77 Much like in the operative
word exercise above, the singer must know what the important parts of the phrase are. Miller is
reminding the performer that this process is a natural thing. The important part of the phrase does
not need to be added (or, as written before, imposed) because it is already there.

Therefore, another key to singing like one speaks is to make sure that neither
syllabification nor the separating (or over-emphasizing) of words occurs. As Miller states, such
actions “[interfere] with both vocal timbre and phrase direction.” He states earlier in the same section: “we express ourselves by organizing words into sentences that permit the progression of an idea.” It is therefore important that performers understand how the entire sentence works, and that they are able to say the entire phrase with correct inflection, avoiding, while singing, doing anything resembling a “mezza di voce” on each syllable.

For instance, the Foster examples in the appendix should be read first aloud, with no music added. They can be spoken, as Miller suggested, “at a relatively high dynamic level.” Then, once the phrase is spoken with proper inflection, and at a suitable legato, add the music, making sure that the legato and inflection do not go away. Eventually, these exercises can be done without the first step, and the student can begin merely by singing the line.

Continuing this thought of text first, “[Paul] Sperry, [instructor at the Julliard School of Music], recommends that when studying a new piece, singers first learn the poem entirely independently of the music, in its own rhythm; then learn to speak the poem in the given rhythm of the song; and only last learn the pitches of the song, which he considers the most straightforward part of the process.” This idea has been reciprocated throughout more than one text, such as when Helfgot and Beeman suggest that, “Ideally, in studying a new work, singers should not study the music before becoming familiar with the full text of the libretto – to learn the music before understanding the text is unproductive.” It would be better instead to fully understand how the music helps the performer comprehend the sentence/text. If, as Greene so

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78 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 110.
79 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 110.
80 Throughout On the Art of Singing, Miller seems wary of dramatic interpretation because of what he calls the “false assumption […] that it is artistically correct to customize each syllable or word in order to enhance it” (110). This is certainly not the aim of this thesis, and it certainly begs the question to what exactly Miller was listening.
81 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 111.
82 Schneider, Sara K, Concert Song as Seen: Kinesthetic Aspects of Musical Interpretation, (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1994), 51.
83 Helfgot & Beeman, 43.
puts it, the text and music are so blended, what does the musical phrase say about the poem itself? Or, rather, what can the music tell the singer about the poem’s subtext?

Lotte Lehmann wrote: “The fundamental basis of my conception is this: never approach a Lied just as a melody. Search for the ideas and feeling which underlie it and which will follow it.” While Lehmann was speaking directly about German Lied, we should consider her phrase as reading like this: “Never approach [all of music] just as a melody.” We should search for the “the ideas and feeling[s]” that lie under any work. This is the piece’s subtext, the “underlying meaning” behind the notes and words which helps supply the meaning of the song, acting as part of its context. It can often be a very subjective thing. Helfgot and Beeman state that it is “[supplied] in cooperation with the artistic staff, especially the stage director and conductor,” giving rise to the idea that the subtext is collaboratively found. Of course, following their advice, the private teacher or coach will substitute just fine for non-opera productions, and while Helfgot and Beeman seem absolute in their belief that a singer should work with an outside source, I do not believe there should be anything keeping the (experienced) singer from coming up with their own personal subtext. Perhaps, in a larger dramatic work, the sung lines do need to mean something rather specific, and the stage director and conductor will have more of a direct say, but in a song or extracted aria, the performer can feel free to experiment, finding strong choices that are true to their own style and resonate with the story they want to tell. Subtext and character decisions, discussed in “Character,” go well together, especially concerning Ostwald’s “Inner Dialogue.”

Much as any word can be emphasized to change the general meaning of the line, so too

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84 Lehmann, quoted in Schneider, 77.
85 Helfgot & Beeman, 12.
86 Helfgot & Beeman, 12.
87 Ostwald, 15.
can the phrase itself be inflected in various ways to mean various things: “For example, the phrase “It’s a nice day” can be said many different ways to mean: “I guess it’s a nice day,” “It is definitely a nice day!” or “Do you think it’s a nice day?” The more such situations can be dissected, the greater the performance will benefit.”

This phrase change can be taken to extremes as well, with one phrase meaning its exact opposite, for either sarcastic or ironic effect. As Helfgot and Beeman explained, the more often these phrases are explored and taken to extremes, the more the young performer will build flexibility, enabling them to find the optimal choice in any situation.

One final thing that occurs quite often in both songs and arias (especially those in ABA form) is repeated text. “There are many times,” Helfgot and Beeman write, “when a singer must deal with repetitious material, such as strophic songs with much the same music repeated again and again.”

It is very easy for the young singer to fall into the trap of doing the same thing over and over again each time the repeated text comes up. This is not what a believable character would do, however. A believable character, like any other human, would never repeat the same thing the exact same way. Helfgot and Beeman talk about bringing “contrast” to the repeated text (change it in some way), but their approach comes from more of a technical aspect and is not true to any character. It is another way of thinking about the same thing, to be sure, but overall, it would be more beneficial if the student knew why they were changing it, or if it was a decision on their part. To change the repeated text simply because “that’s what a normal person would do” cheats both the performer and the audience.

Ostwald takes a better approach: “You will wonder why your character has to say the same thing more than once; you will want to explore what your character needs to express but

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88 Helfgot & Beeman, 82.
89 Helfgot & Beeman, 82.
hasn’t yet been able to fully articulate or what she wants but still has not gotten.”90 If a character asks for something and does not receive it, they will ask again, but perhaps with more force. If they say, “I love you,” and do not receive a response, they will say it differently. Even with a song, the second time you repeat text needs to be informed by everything sung between the two repetitions. How has the new information the audience has been given affect the character and the repetition of the text? The repeated text will be different, but only coincidentally so. It will be different because the character, while using the same words, is saying something else.

No matter how practiced and nuanced the performance might be, “the text must be born again with the same freshness and reality that inspired the poet; the melodic line, with its particular grouping of intervals and rhythmic patterns, ought to spring from the singer’s consciousness at an intensity level at least as strong as that which motivated poet and composer.”91 This is where imagination and character comes back into the game. These skills can supply the high intensity level and rebirth for the piece each time it is performed. Even if, as Mr. Greene puts it, “the great men of to-day have risen so far above the limitations of the written note that the singer finds little […] to do but sing the music as it stands,” the singer should know how to do this, so that they can decide on their own, song by song, whether just singing the music or performing the text would be better.92

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90 Ostwald, 18.  
91 Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, 142.  
92 Greene, 131.
CHAPTER IV - THE SCORE

The score, for singer interested in character and movement, is a wonderful thing. It provides extra background for the character or provides the performer with extra insight into the character’s mind as Huber implies when he writes, “The music is the key to the psychology of the character, no matter how simple or complex the role may be.”93 A particular accompaniment might be the jubilant nature of the scene, like Evelyn Lear mentions when she discusses Susanna’s aria from Le Nozze di Figaro: “The introduction and this interlude are good clues from Mozart of the delight of the situation. […] The introduction of dotted rhythms is a signal to sing with added playfulness here.”94

If a singer is having a difficult time working through an aria, they can go to the score itself for assistance in addition to a “master class” book or a guide on aria interpretation (or instead of, as might be the case more often today, a video or audio recording of their favorite singer performing the piece). As Ostwald puts it, “The score provides the blueprint you need.”95 Balk adds: “The singer-actor has an additional source of stimulation in the music itself.”96 Even those students having a hard time with gesture or movement might find help within the music, since “The score always asks for movement in appropriate places. Movement may be signaled by a musical interlude where there is no singing, or by a sudden shift in tonality, tempo, or rhythm.”97 This wide variety of possibilities implies that there is great potential for movement in each song, should the performer choose to do so.

As far as choices go, the score is again helpful, as “[it] is already highly specific; the attitudes simply color it and give it nuance in various ways. [The score] can absorb virtually any

93 Huber, 31.
94 Lear, 37-40.
95 Ostwald, 20.
96 Balk, 64.
97 Helfgot & Beeman, 73.
set of attitudes one might choose."98 This, again, allows the singer to pick nearly anything they want to do and have it be accepted by the score. As we mentioned in the imagination section, there are no wrong choices.

Unfortunately, specifically pulling such information from the score itself is outside the scope of this thesis, but the following are a few books to which a young student might look for help:


98 Balk, 62.
Rests

Rests are akin to death for the unprepared singer. A singer who does not continue the character’s internal dialogue through the rests will return to a default “neutral” state and completely lose the audience. They will then have to regain every connection they had worked on before the rest came up. This is similar to the concept of keeping a thought going through the entire phrase, not letting go until it finishes naturally. The breath, then (however long), is essentially the new thought, the transition between thoughts, or the end of the previous thought. It is not merely “dead space.” Going to the music is helpful, as it can often provide you with whatever internal development or atmospheric changes you need.

Wesley Balk is one of the few writers to comment on the difficulty of keeping the phrase going: “The fourth convention requires that a singer remain on stage without singing during the introductions, interludes, postludes, and spaces when the orchestra plays. Actors never pause as often or for as long as singers must do regularly during their performances. And although singers are aided by the fact that there is music filling the pauses, their psychological and physical processes must fill the pauses as well without the aid of that primary weapon, the voice.”

And while it may seem easy to write these moments off as unimportant, we must remember that these rests in-between phrases are moments of intense focus, if only because the singer has nothing else with which to distract the audience. As we have said before, as soon as the singer loses focus, the audience begins to do the same.

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99 Balk, 9.
CHAPTER V - IMAGINATION

As Richard Miller so aptly puts it, “One of a singer’s chief assets is the ability to visualize, to see clearly and distinctly with the inner eye the dramatic and emotional situation of a song. This mental picture must be sharper than reality itself because it transcends reality.”

We use this ability to imagine, to visualize what we are singing about, quite often as children. It is a sad fact that we let it fall into disrepair as we age. It is for this reason that we must exercise our imaginative capabilities. There are few better opportunities to do that than in song, where it is so necessary. Unfortunately, many singers either avoid imagining while singing in favor of concentrating on technique, or they use a stock supply of gestures, thinking, however ignorantly, they are truly doing everything they can with the piece.

“The imbalance between imagining and memorizing needs correcting in the worst way. When a young singer-actor says, as many have actually said, “I’m completely lost unless I’m told exactly what to do,” one feels the depth of that need. But neither that individual nor his comrades-in-need are to blame. We have not allowed them to become participating artists in an enterprise that demands their participation.” According to Balk, there has been little in the way of encouraging singers to really imagine and experience the characters they are singing, rather than simply moving from one “X” on the floor to another and continuing to sing. In fact, Balk elaborates, singers can only become a “genuine partner” in the composer/poet/performer triumvirate “when they have flexed and strengthened their own imagining process.”

The first thing that singers may wonder in a song is “what should I imagine?” This will

100 For learning character and movement while singing, the terms imagination and improvisation are often interchangeable. It is true that the former greatly improves the latter, but it is somewhat possible to improvise without imagination. For our purposes, I will avoid the use of improvisation unless it relates directly to an exercise.
101 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 142.
102 Balk, 85. Balk’s “we” can incorporate a number of people: teachers of singing, coaches, directors, and those singers who came before.
103 Balk, 85.
be discussed a bit more in detail in the “Character” section, but for now, it should be enough to know that there is a lot to potentially visualize. It is, however, a tricky area. As Balk states, “Imagination is a personal adventure which cannot be confined by rules, dictated by the experience of others, or compelled by any outside force.” Richard Miller brings up an excellent point when he reminds us that no two performances will be the same: “Another artist singing the same Lied will invoke other visions. Each re-creator varies the vision with every performance.”

For instance, “if,” as Miller writes, “in the song, a performer explores a lonely forest pathway, a specific woodland trail is conjured up.” Going off of Miller’s comment, that forest would be a forest for everyone, but the type of trees, the number of animals, and, among other things, the various colors of the leaves would all be different for everyone each time they imagine it. Balk touches upon the same idea with a reassuring statement: “There is only one Countess exactly like the one you create.”

Miller continues with his thought, stating that a strong image is necessary to fully immerse oneself in the piece. This is a daunting statement made more easily reached by Greene’s explanation of atmosphere: “If the singer has imagination, atmosphere will come to meet him half-way. […] A thousand feet may have worn the path bare before him, but to him all is virgin soil.” Miller is correct. A strong image created by a practiced imagination is needed to fully immerse oneself in a piece. However, as Greene states, that singer does not need to create absolutely everything, as his own imagination will come to meet him halfway. If the

104 Balk, 82.
105 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 145.
106 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 142.
107 Balk, 85. He is referring to the Countess from Mozart’s Le Nozze di Figaro.
108 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 142.
109 Greene, 13.
singer creates the space, that space will come alive for him, allowing him to experience and react to it as he naturally would.

Beyond “atmosphere,” Ostwald believes that a student will have to do some imagining to completely fill out the character’s Given Circumstances (discussed, again, in more detail in “Character”): “When you are developing the Given Circumstances\textsuperscript{110} for your character in a song or lied, you may have to use your imagination to augment the information in the score – particularly to describe your character’s want, why, and what, since often they are not well defined.”\textsuperscript{111}

A singer with a strong imagination, Greene implies, will look for songs that require more from him: “Most songs carry their atmosphere on the surface. They tell their own tale, and the singer has but to follow the beaten track. But to the student they cannot compare for interest with those in which he has to look for it.”\textsuperscript{112} Thus, imagination creates singers who actively seek out more difficult material and, as a result, become even better performers.

Imagination also helps to create a better singer by making those singers more democratic or flexible, able to accept change and make it work for them, turning that new idea into a natural process. A rigid, inflexible performer would be unable to change what they think is natural, and, in the long run, that would hinder the performance. Balk explains in his book “the true skill of the singer-actor lies not in the ability to ask why something must be done but in the ability to make sense of it.” Greene adds to this idea by explaining that singers can show their “individuality” by seeing what they can pull out of a song (through their imagination) rather than what of themselves they can put into it.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} See the appendix for a complete questionnaire regarding Given Circumstances.
\textsuperscript{111} Ostwald, 30.
\textsuperscript{112} Greene, 17.
\textsuperscript{113} Greene, 19.
Of course, there are those people who believe that imagination should merely lend itself to the inward performance, rather than assist in the communication between singer and audience. Schneider is one such writer, stating that “the singer’s ability to imagine the dramatic situation while singing – rather than to literally act it out – is the preferable solution.”

Lehmann is quite correct when she claims, “not every young singer has the gift of imagination.” Unfortunately, there are some singers who are born with (or develop) a weaker imaginative ability than others. I do agree with her when she states, then, that no matter what their creative level, “all that is possible should be gone to develop this capacity. Periods should be arranged in the daily plan of study which should be devoted entirely to developing imagination and expressing what is imagined.” Some exercises from this thesis can be used in that regard, or, perhaps, a piece could be selected from a book at random, and a character, backstory, and subtext could all be developed (however basically) in a matter of minutes.

Many teachers already incorporate imagination or improvisation training into their pedagogical or performance practice. “[Cynthia] Hoffman [of the Manhattan School of Music] trained her singers in an improvisatory, largely naturalistic dramatic techniques which develop and deepen the singer’s relationship to […] what he sings.” [Lotte] Lehmann stressed the role of the imagination in creating the proper atmosphere for each song. Teaching imagination is important, and the only remaining question is how to go about it.

To our benefit, “the skilled artist has a system […] for engendering the creative process.” Our process will be improvisation (which may or may not actually be considered a

114 Schneider, 77.
115 Lehmann, quoted in Schneider, 77.
116 Lehmann, quoted in Schneider, 77.
117 Schneider, 48.
118 Schneider, 76.
119 Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, 142.
process), along with leading questions. The goal for any improvisation is to merely test the
water, to see what is and what is not possible. The teacher of singing should “create an initial
exercise atmosphere of freedom and trust so that the energies can begin flowing.”\(^{120}\) There are no
“wrong” or “right” decisions in an improvisation, merely ones that are more or less effective.
This is where the teacher’s extra pair of eyes comes in handy. Wesley Balk again has an effective
quote regarding improvisation, which teachers of singing might want to either instill in
themselves or their students: “Give your energies to an ongoing, creative interplay, trusting that
you will make useful and necessary decisions, keeping your awareness as open as possible,
avoiding judgmental panic, living in the now as completely as possible.”\(^{121}\)

Since “the only way to learn to work with improvisation was to jump in and do it,” the
easiest way for a student to begin practicing with improvisation is to merely use a piece they
already know and to “play around” with it.\(^{122}\) As Balk explains, “In most instances, we are not
aware of the many emotional possibilities inherent in a dramatic moment, and by testing
arbitrary choices we not only stretch our mental awareness of the additional possibilities, but
exercise the imaginative flexibility necessary to incorporate such choices.”\(^{123}\) He describes this
as “playing the opposite,” where, put most basically, if your character is supposed to be happy,
perform the piece as though you are angry, and vice versa.\(^{124}\)

Lehmann also has a suggestion: “[Students] should take a book and try to act as they
would feel if they were happy and were about to read a gay romance, as if they were absent
minded, or sad, or as if it is a forbidden book. … If they can learn to observe themselves in this
training, learning to feel how an emotion can be expressed without either word or song, it may

\(^{120}\) Balk, 104.
\(^{121}\) Balk, 104.
\(^{122}\) Balk, 104.
\(^{123}\) Balk, 132.
\(^{124}\) Balk, 65.
perhaps be easier to transfer this new ability to their singing.”

Another way a student can practice improvisation is through a series of exercises written by Charles Foster. The exercises themselves can be found in the appendix of this thesis and are used out of their immediate context. What Mr. Foster has done is create a series of workable exercises that can be used as technique lessons and added *several* imaginative lines to the mix, thus combining vocal and acting technique. The students can then create a situation for themselves while practicing with the lines, thus stretching their imaginative limits. And even though Mr. Foster’s end goal was not *merely* to exercise this one notion of performance, he states that the singer should “remember that these exercises should be sung as responses to imagined situations, sights, or deeds. Thus, the degree of initial accent, length of stress, tempo, quality, and volume are all arrived at spontaneously within the gestalt of the response.”

The final recommended way to practice improvisation is to use Conrad Stanislavski’s “Magical if,” or, more precisely, his phrase “I’m going to behave *as if*...” “[These words],” as Ostwald puts it, “can lift you directly into your character’s world and help you generate believable actions that express your character’s feelings.” The phrase can be used (or, rather, completed) in a variety of ways. “I will behave as if the count for whom I work wants to sleep with my wife on our wedding night,” “I will behave as if my father won’t let me meet the man I’m supposed to marry,” or “I will behave as if my brother is trying to frame me for murder” are all valid endings, just as any other response would be a valid ending. The stronger or more specific the situation, the better exercised the imagination will be. Ostwald adds, “the more deeply you imagine yourself into your character’s circumstances, the more those circumstances

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125 Lehmann, quoted in Schneider, 77.
126 Foster was approaching teaching singing by using the text. These exercises are used outside of that context.
128 Ostwald, 28.
129 Ostwald, 28.
arouse your feelings and lead to believable responses.” And creating a believable character is one of the main goals of expressive singing.130

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130 Ostwald, 29.
CHAPTER VI - FOCUS

There are many possibilities when talking about focus and the voice: shape of the instrument, proper use of the resonators, and so on. For our purposes, focus relates directly to the eyes, and how they function when a singer is performing. Focus is especially important to Balk, Schneider, and Helfgot and Beeman. There are few things that can distract an audience more than bad focus, and it is mainly for this reason that it needs to be exercised. Exercising keeping the eyes in one place while singing, shifting as the piece and character dictate, will not only keep the audience from becoming distracted, but will also allow the audience to really connect with the character. As Helfgot and Beeman explain, “The eyes are an open window which let the audience see into the character.”131 Or, as Wesley Balk puts it, “The singer-actor who lacks musical continuity of focus […] is not properly sharing the experience with the audience.”132 This means that whatever empathy and connectedness the performer may feel with his or her particular character, the audience will never have the same feeling if the focus is bad, and one of the ultimate goals of singing, to forge that connection between performer and audience, will have failed.

It may seem unnecessary to exercise focus, the teacher may believe that it should be simple to stand in place and stare at a fixed point during the song. This is not true, and what usually happens is that the body freezes and the mind turns inward, distracting the performer, or, worse, causing self-judgment (and every bad habit that goes along with it) to occur. Of course, turning the mind inward is not necessarily a bad thing. It will often force the performer to listen to what they are singing, and really start to understand the various sounds they are producing. In fact, Helfgot and Beeman observe, “Singers may be thrown off by using focus effectively

131 Helfgot & Beeman, 76.
132 Balk, 69.
because they previously had not been thinking about what they were singing.” So, there are already two possibilities for a singer being suddenly “thrown off their game” by using focus. It is certainly a double-edged sword, and, if used without practice, will probably do more harm than good.

How then can it be any good, if there are so many potential problems? First, as we have stated, proper, strong focus is what really allows the audience to connect with the performer. If the focus is too high, those windows are closed, and the same effect occurs if the focus is too low. Focus also often tells a good deal of the story for the performer: “The externals tell the story: if the eyes are wandering, so is the mind; if the eyes search, so does the mind, and if the eyes focus strongly on something, so does the mind.” It is also, as Balk refers to it, the “external communication of concentration.” So, we can tell what is going on in the mind of the character simply by the focus we are given. It communicates to us what, exactly (if anything) the character is concentrating on, and, for the younger student, will give us the feedback that they are indeed concentrating.

A good focus is easily practiced. The most obvious way to practice singing while focusing is to simply pick a reference object, such as a picture, a tree out a window, or an exit sign in the back of the hall, and look at it while you sing. At the start, the inner workings of the singer’s character might be a secondary thought. For now, it is enough to know that they can sing the song to the best of their ability while maintaining focus. Of course, it is only rarely that one focus would be used in a song, so deciding upon two or three focus points to shift between at

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133 Helfgot & Beeman, 76. Before launching into the problems, Helfgot & Beeman do give a small amount of positive thought to the young singer: “Effective focusing can be learned and practiced.” (75) Wesley Balk puts it forward rather simply: “The simple act of pretending to look at something which is not there may seem so simple as to need no practice. But it does.” (70)
134 Balk, 69.
135 Balk, 68.
136 Balk, 70.
logical places in the music would be advisable. Now, it is not necessarily correct for the student to tense his or her body to keep the focus at a specific point. Balk writes, “Concentration [which he often places with focus] cannot be forced; it must ultimately, like a poem, be.”\textsuperscript{137} It may take some work before the student is comfortable staying with a strong focus for any period of time or completely aware of when shifting would be a good idea. These skills, like all things, will continually get better. In fact, Balk comments, “As the length of time increases (that music is stretching out), so does the demand on the powers of concentration.”\textsuperscript{138} Therefore, the increased ability to concentrate (read: focus) in a song or aria will allow even more difficult literature to be undertaken. At some point in this practice, however, it would be prudent to discuss what these focus points actually are.

As Helfgot and Beeman put it, “It is vital to remember that focuses are thoughts. They are not mechanical points where singers look, and something happens magically to make that moment meaningful.”\textsuperscript{139} The characters focus for specific reasons. Perhaps the point in space is arbitrary, especially if the concentration is inwardly directed, but the focus has stopped wandering for a specific reason. If there is no reason for the focus, that is, if there is no thought, then the focus is ineffective.\textsuperscript{140}

For instance, perhaps the singer is looking at the linden tree from Schubert’s “Der Lindenbaum.” As he looks at the tree, he might be thinking about the wonderful time he and his lover had in its shade. As he remembers that those times are gone and will not return, his focus shifts to a new thought, and he sings his second verse. But as he remembers the tree, even through the bad times, he has to look at it again, and it is exactly where he left it, in the first

\textsuperscript{137} Balk, 75.
\textsuperscript{138} Balk, 67.
\textsuperscript{139} Helfgot & Beeman, 83.
\textsuperscript{140} Helfgot & Beeman, 75.
focus of the song. As he returns to the present, his focus might shift again to that thought, which is, like the first focus, just where he left it. Through the third verse, he may choose to stay in the “present” focus, and, at some point, when the tree calls to him, shift his focus back toward it and the past. This is, of course, just one interpretation – anything is possible – but it shows that a singer can have more than one focus (thought) and move between them successfully.

If a character were suddenly surprised by a thought, it would cause a change of focus. Basically, a new thought should equal a new focus. The new vocal line would then follow; “the principle is to focus first, and then make the statement that relates to the focus.” Sometimes a performer, director, or coach might think that a particular moment would be more effective if that principle were reversed, and that may certainly be the case. Again, nearly anything is possible. They may find, however, that a new statement, when performed with a believable character, cannot come without a new or reinvigorated focus, however small.

Sometimes focuses are going to need to be reinvigorated. “Focuses,” Helfgot and Beeman explain, “do occasionally get tired and overused.” Some songs, like “Der Lindenbaum,” above, do not need active thinking in reinvigorating focuses. Songs like it, those that deal with more than one topic, are nice, because the singer is “refueling every time [they] change.” If having another focus point is simply not an option, and the instance would be quite rare, then one thing a singer can do to renew focus is to “pick an opportune point in the music – a musical interlude or rest – and look away, then return to the original focus.” Helfgot and Beeman believe that “It is also possible to renew focus from within.” This occurs when subtle variations in the focus cause it to feel new to the audience. Changing how wide the eyes are or

141 Helfgot & Beeman, 74.
142 Helfgot & Beeman, 78.
143 Helfgot & Beeman, 79.
144 Helfgot & Beeman, 78.
145 Helfgot & Beeman, 80.
even how fast one blinks will renew the focus with new life.\textsuperscript{146}

Wesley Balk has a handy tip in his section about focuses: “As a general rule, the object of focus should be higher rather than lower.”\textsuperscript{147} While such a statement seems out of place within a text that is trying to say “nothing is wrong” and “have the character act spontaneously,” there is occasionally a bit of guidance that needs to be given to the focus, mainly in that there is sometimes the ingrained tendency to look too high at something, or look very far down, possibly avoiding the audience’s gaze. Balk’s general rule (which I take to mean “look slightly above the horizon”) is one that any singer can start with and use for a long time. It will have new meaning in different contexts again and again. Ideally, however, if the singer is actually singing to someone or something (and they are not on stage), they should look at exactly where they would look at such a person (usually the eyes, though that depends on the situation). If the person is six feet tall, look about where his or her eyes would be. If you are singing to a table (and, certainly, one would not be singing directly to it the entire time), focus on where the table would actually be for a few moments. Allow the audience to know where you think it is so that they might also visualize it.

Having things, imagined or real, in mind to focus on while singing will greatly help the performer not only invite the audience into their world, but it will keep them there are well. But the thing that you are focusing upon, whatever you choose it to be, does not have to be locked in for all future performers or even your own performances. As Richard Miller mentioned, it is nearly (if not completely) impossible to imagine something the same way twice.\textsuperscript{148} This is not a terrible fact, either, as Balk observes:

\textsuperscript{146} Helfgot & Beeman, 80.
\textsuperscript{147} Balk, 73. I do not mean to imply that this is Balk’s solution to focus. He spends a lot of time on the energy behind the focus rather than, necessarily, the object of that focus, though he does discuss it at times.
\textsuperscript{148} Miller, \textit{On the Art of Singing}, 145.
”It seems, however, that whatever one does feeds into whatever focus is attained, and, perhaps surprisingly, it also seems to make little difference what the object of concentration is as long as it energizes the concentration and the focus.”149 For one performance, you might visualize the lover who just left your character. The next, you may visualize the person for whom you were left. As long as the energy is the same, though the nuance might be slightly different, the performance will be of the same quality. “It may be important,” Balk writes, “for the object of concentration to resonate in a sympathetic manner with that of aria being sung, but even this “rule” will have exceptions.”150

It is important to remember that, even though we are going, in the end, for a “believable” character, “if the focus shifts realistically, randomly, there is a substantive stylistic clash between it and the music.”151 Therefore, “realistic” does not always equate to “believable.” A small number of focuses, dictated by the music and character will be much stronger and communicate much more to the audience (not to mention fit well with the music, as Balk mentioned) than will our natural tendency to shift.

Focus is important. A simple statement, to be sure, but about an oft-ignored part of performing. Helfgot and Beeman sum up its importance rather well: “Eye focus is such a key concept for the stage that it requires a good deal of attention from all performers. […] Nothing can happen onstage without a focus. The focus is the thought, as well as its direction or its source. […] Without the thought, there is no story to deliver – there is no purpose of expression.”152 And while, as we have seen, the actual subject of the focus is unimportant, “the

149 Balk, 70.
150 Balk, 72.
151 Balk, 69.
152 Helfgot & Beeman, 75.
important thing,” as Balk writes, “is that there be energy to be focused.”\textsuperscript{153} And once that focus is strong and clear, the character “should follow naturally as an outgrowth of that focus.”\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{153} Balk, 71.
\textsuperscript{154} Helfgot & Beeman, 83.
CHAPTER VII - MOVEMENT/GESTURE

Movement and Character are not completely synonymous. There is no written, absolute rule that states that a singer must move in order to be “in character.” However, as we have already discussed in the beginning of this book, not moving is movement, and the audience will see that non-movement either as awkward or meaningful. Our goal is to make it meaningful, which means, as we have said, that a lack of movement must be a decision that leads us to a greater understanding of the character. And, as Wesley Balk writes, since “the capacity to not-gesture with vitality depends upon the capacity to gesture with freedom,” we must first make sure that the young singer can indeed perform the latter task.155

Having had little experience with acting, many singers are unsure when acting language is used around them, preferring first to be given practical instruction, such as how to move, not why. For this thesis, I have decided to follow that order, giving the absolute minimum discussion for how to move before I move on to character. Ideally, all movement in songs or arias would be spontaneous, a decision made by the character based upon his wants and possibilities. Ostwald describes two types of movement: intuitive, which is similar to the movement I’ve just described, and mimicry.156 “Mimicry,” as Ostwald puts it, “is extremely useful for those moments when you absolutely have to focus on your singing technique,” but as Schneider and Guyau explain: “Although we may empathize with the body and limbs executing a movement, ‘we empathize still more with the will which moves the body and limbs.’”157 This means that while there are times when the singer can move without thinking, more often than not there must be something behind those movements.

155 Balk, 129.
156 Ostwald, 14.
157 Ostwald, 14 and Guyau, quoted in Scheider, 76. Ostwald continues: “In reality, many good American actor-singers use a shifting mix of brief moments of mimicry interspersed between longer passages of intuitive acting.”
Unfortunately, the default actions for many young singers are to hang their hands next to their sides, as they may have been told that “the only good gesture is no gesture.”\footnote{158} Schneider backs up this statement: “So many [singers] waver between standing motionlessly and moving self-consciously.”\footnote{159} Earlier in her book, she identifies two types of gestures: “the physical expressions of the beginning singer tend to reveal more about himself in the process of the \textit{work} of singing a particular song than they disclose his ideas for enactment within or upon the fictional \textit{world} of the song.”\footnote{160} She elaborates on these two types of gestures, “work” versus “world,” with the latter of the two being ideal, as “Work gestures show the singer acting against, or getting in the way of, the expressive value of a song rather than acting in concert with it.”\footnote{161} She also refers to these types of gestures “fidgeting.”\footnote{162} These sort of movements are distracting to the audience, appearing “disturbingly involuntary or out of control”, and do not add to the meaning of the piece.\footnote{163}

“World” gestures can be most basically considered as those that occur in character, though Schneider also states, “world behaviors may revert back to the attitudes of the singer, as an interpretive artist, toward the \textit{content} of the song – its poetry, themes, style of expression, rhythm, melodic line, etc. – rather than to the effort and stresses of singing, making music, or performing.”\footnote{164} Schneider’s suggestions, that the gesture refer back to the music, seems a bit dangerous or confusing, as the gesture, ideally, should come naturally out of the performer’s interpretation and not out of a conscious comment regarding the song’s content. All movements must be possible, however, so if there arises a moment in which the gesture should comment

\footnote{158} Balk, 129.  
\footnote{159} Schneider, 71.  
\footnote{160} Schneider, 38.  
\footnote{161} Schneider, 39. She adds: “These gestures can represent the singer’s ongoing commentary or editorialization on his own performance.” (Schneider, 39)  
\footnote{162} Schneider, 39.  
\footnote{163} Schneider, 40.  
\footnote{164} Schneider, 45.
upon the rhythm or melodic line of the song, the singer should not be closed off to that possibility. The performer, however, must be aware of the possible danger of taking a gesture too far: “…their attempt to translate into movement every rhythmic detail and every nuance is far too literal.”

It is also not enough for a singer to copy something someone else has done. Technology today has allowed the young singer to watch his or her favorite performers sing various songs, be it on DVD, YouTube, or the like. The trouble comes when a student begins to study a song or aria and copies the movements of these singers without taking the time to learn the character’s intention for doing them. Huber explains: “Sometimes, however, certain ‘business’ becomes a bad tradition when actors superficially copy the whim of a great actor. The great one may have had an excellent reason for his action, but others have adopted it for no valid motive connected with the score.” This mimicry is basically as counter-productive as being a “parrot,” which Helfgot and Beeman describe.

Huber brings up the notion of connecting the gesture to the music earlier in his book: “In the lyric theater, movements and gestures are controlled by the music. […] Furthermore, since the composer has already determined the pitches, the rhythm, and the tempo of the lines, the realization of his intention would seem to be almost a mechanical process. An actor, however, is not a machine, and operatic acting is not mere pantomime to music.” A small argument against that would be the many moments in various operas and musical theatre in which action is tied to music. Therefore, while the gesture itself may be unique to the performer, its timing might be dictated by the score. The Baker handing the magic beans to Jack in Sondheim’s Into the

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165 Huber, 42.
166 Huber, 44.
167 Helfgot & Beeman, 12.
168 Huber, 42.
Woods is one such example. Beyond those exceptions, however, Huber makes many fine points. There are several moments in any given song that will allow the singer to change gesture, to move in space, or to reinvigorate what they are already doing. A break between stanzas is a perfect place to do so. Or, to bring up the example of “Der Lindenbaum” again, the breaks between the verses allow the performer to move within the space, while the phrasing of each line allows for new gestures to spring up between each of them. The singer might begin with an arm gesturing toward the Linden Tree, which then could melt into something else or fall back to “neutral.”

It is not only from the music that the gesture can come. Quite often, actually, it will come from the character, when the singer draws upon, as Schneider calls it, his “dramatic power.” These are more often than not of the first instance of the “world” variety of motions or gestures, and, due to the overlapping of Movement and Character, their genesis is indeed discussed in more detail in “Character.” For this chapter, it is enough to focus on the discussion of possible gestures and the “limits” surrounding them.

Raising a singer’s gestural vocabulary, then, becomes the issue, along with freeing them up for the possibility of making any gesture. There are many different approaches to teaching gesture. Hoffman, […] avoided talking about movement “for its own sake, […] even where Hoffman herself used physical coaching techniques to draw a response from the student.” Her teaching style shows that it is not necessary to simply tell the student to move. It can be encouraged through the use of character, and then, in the private lesson, be subject to feedback, as when “[Hoffman] commented on parts of the singer’s body which apparently had not been

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169 Schneider, 74.
170 Schneider, 49.
allowed to be as freely expressive as others.”¹⁷¹ Healthy, positive feedback, which is so natural for most teachers when giving vocal technique feedback, is also necessary for movement. Even if the teacher feels unpracticed or unknowledgeable in the area, it is important that some level of feedback on the gesture’s effectiveness be given. Voice teachers would also be well off to follow the example of Atonia Lavan, from Mannes College of Music, who “never gave her students precise suggestions for a gesture to be used for a particular moment within a song.”¹⁷² Lavan, like Hoffman, gave feedback, which “dealt primarily with the general scale and range of gestures as they affected the way in which the audience would judge how accessible and comfortable the singer was [in order to find] the ways in which they could make the performance situation as comfortable for themselves and as intimate for their audience […] as possible.”¹⁷³ Schneider’s overview of the various pedagogues she has observed is very useful. Her own advice, however, can get to be far too specific and limiting for the student.

Schneider, in her description on gesture, adds a few “rules” that work against the natural, intuitive nature of the process: “The salient distinctions between operatic and recital gesture are their size and where they take place with respect to the singer’s body. […] Recital-appropriate gestures take place in the very near kinesphere; operatic gestures can penetrate the middle-reach space.”¹⁷⁴ These rules are very similar to Balk’s rule regarding focus (usually higher rather than lower) in that they are controlling an aspect of the performance. The difference comes in the use of the particular aspect of performance. Focus, as was said, allows the audience into the character’s world. Gestures, on the other hand, have three functions, as outlined by Balk:

¹⁷¹ Schneider, 49.
¹⁷² Schneider, 46.
¹⁷³ Schneider, 46.
¹⁷⁴ Schneider, 46.
“indicating, reacting, and describing.”175 Gesture, therefore, is not as critical to the connection between audience and performer, and has much more leeway in its course. Schneider’s ideas certainly have merit, but they should be seen as a subjective ending to the discovery process, not the beginning. A singer should not go into a recital setting thinking that they should keep their gestures small because of the size of the house. Rather, the singer should begin by performing those gestures which are natural and appropriate for the character at the time, and then, with outside help (an extra pair of eyes), determine if the gesture is communicating as well as it could be. If the size of the house is preventing the gesture from providing optimum communication with the audience (in any direction, from too big or too small), it should be altered for the better. It is then up to the performer to engage their imagination and make the modified gesture true to the character and the moment.

Discovering the correct gesture for each moment is a very personal and subjective process. Helfgot and Beeman call it “a matter of personal approach and experimentation.”176 The main thing that can be done is to have the student experiment, often outside their comfort zone, and find exactly what they can do when. Going too far should be encouraged in the lesson, with the possibility of scaling back always on the horizon. Many students will often find that “going too far” is exactly what they need to do. And, eventually, after trying again and again, perhaps going a little further each time, they will learn precisely of what they are capable and can choose from a wide variety of colors. Balk states, “Our purpose is not to define the many possibilities, but to raise the singer-actor’s awareness of the potential gestural functions available, [as] there is no conceivable gesture that cannot be made into a vital, believable statement, given the proper

175 Balk, 127.
176 Helfgot & Beeman, 74.
execution.”¹⁷⁷ This means that no matter what a student does movement-wise, it can almost always be made into a believable action. There are many different people in the world. They have combined to make, at some point, every possible gesture.

Even the same gesture can be used for different moments since, as Schneider writes, “the relationship between gesture and meaning depends on context.”¹⁷⁸ This statement reinforces the basic idea that as long as the thought is behind the focus, from which the gesture flows, movement will make sense in all the various contexts music provides. Schneider claims that this thought (her “dramatic power”) “will either prove poetical, or will contrast brutally with its outline, leaving only a spasm, a jolt, a break, a straight line or curve, a kind of cold and linear geometry.”¹⁷⁹ This is not necessarily the case, as often differing gestures will provide not only ironic statements in performance, but useful exercises outside that “can be practiced by playing opposites, combining, for example, the emotional attitude of anger with a soft, sensuous sound and a caressing gesture.”¹⁸⁰

Again, the goal of these exercises should be to find the wide palate of gestures (a large “gestural vocabulary”) that will lead to artful decision making for the performance, while maintaining healthy technique. As Schneider so eloquently puts it, “The recital singer can move his body except as movement would affect the mouth and the tone-producing mechanism.”¹⁸¹ And, of course, while Schneider’s focus is on the concert singer, the opera singer is just as welcome to leave or fully explore the crook of the piano. Of course, the goal of building these skills is not necessarily to move all the time, which brings back “not moving as moving” from the beginning of this section.

¹⁷⁷ Balk, 127.
¹⁷⁸ Schneider, 72.
¹⁷⁹ Schneider, 74.
¹⁸⁰ Balk, 65.
¹⁸¹ Schneider, 4.
“The performer,” Helfgot and Beeman write, “may indeed choose not to move at some point, but that choice should be a theatrical statement, a visual statement, or a characterization statement.”Therefore, if a character does not move during a certain moment, it must be because there is some decision that is keeping them there. A lack of any decision pulls us back into mimicry. Of course, we do not want the opposite end of the spectrum, where the singer is constantly moving for little to no reason (or, as is often the case, for a weak reason. “Business” can be as distracting for an audience as a wild focus). Helfgot and Beeman conclude their immediate thoughts on movement by stating, “As a general principle, the less a singer does, the stronger he or she appears.”

This principle should not be taken too far, however, nor should it be done for the wrong reason, as Schneider reveals: “The subtle feelings and intimate objects which form the principal material for art songs are more appropriately expressed with minute physical behaviors, partly because the audience should see the character’s strain to discuss these personal matters in public at all.” To give such a blanket character note for all of art songs is a truly interesting thing to do. This is certainly a possible reason for less movement, and certainly there is such a possibility for each song, but to say that, in general, song gesture should be smaller because of whatever reason limits the potential for character and, worse, the growth of the singer. A better example comes from Helfgot and Beeman:

For example, in King Philip’s powerful soliloquy “Ella giammai m’amò” in Verdi’s Don Carlos, he may be seated at his desk and not move throughout a good part of his aria. Here the lack of movement makes a strong statement, because it is a form of movement. It raises important questions. How much expression should be outwardly shown? Is he coming out of a daze, out of a dream, out of this sleepless night? Is he depressed, or tired? He might not be expressive. He might be repeating his lines almost automatically, but the singer should make sure that the lack of expression is conscious expression. The

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182 Helfgot & Beeman, 65.
183 Helfgot & Beeman, 71.
184 Schneider, 47.
performer may actually have to take some care not to allow any uncontrolled facial
expressions to cross his face in order to create the desire result.\textsuperscript{185}

This is an excellent set of questions surrounding this moment. They can be answered in nearly
any way, giving a lot of flexibility to the singer, as well as giving them the opportunity to really
use his or her imagination. It also makes the excellent connection between movement and
character. It is easy to see how these movements, even though they may be nothing
“spectacular,” are still very powerful and still present a complex internal thought process.

\textsuperscript{185} Helfgot & Beeman, 66.
CHAPTER VIII - CHARACTER

Character, to a young singer, can mean many different things. Often, as mentioned in the previous section, it is synonymous with movement. They feel as though they need to move to be “in character.” Of course, as we have seen, that is not necessarily the case, and often times those movements are not actually made “in character,” but are “mimicry” or end up being “work” movements. That being said, having a believable character does constitute moving like that character, but more than that, it involves thinking like the character.

While this might seem like a daunting task, it can often be accomplished with a series of leading questions, along with an increased knowledge in “natural” human behavior. “All we have to do,” Balk writes, “is acquaint singer-actors with the need to make the connection between the external request and the internal validation.” The singer should be asked a question regarding their character, and they should answer with either the information provided to them in the score or book, or they should use their imagination to fill in the blanks. Ostwald suggests using Stanislavski’s “Magical if” to help find the information, to help “lift [the performer] into [his] character’s world.” Ostwald provides a series of questions to help the performer determine his character’s “Given Circumstances,” which will allow the singer to truly believe in their character and “close the gap” between them. And, as Balk puts it, “If one believes in a given dramatic situation, the perfect external indications of that belief will follow naturally.” Ostwald’s questions are as follows, from his book Acting for Singers:

- When are the events taking place?
- Where is my character?
- Who is my character – including her relationships to the other characters?
- What does my character want? (Your character’s want distills the need that drives

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186 Balk, 86.
187 Ostwald, 34.
188 Ostwald, 29.
189 Balk, 71.
her to do what she does.)

Why does she want it?

What has just happened – literally, what has just occurred that causes her to sing?\(^{190}\)

Balk comes up with a few questions of his own: “What does that fermata mean to the character’s situation, why does he sing in those jerky staccato rhythms, what does that coloratura passage mean emotionally, what happens to the character emotionally during that introduction and the interludes?”\(^{191}\) The more specifically these questions can be answered, the more believable the character will be. And since these believable characters will add to the communication between the performer and the audience (who would want to watch, for long, an unbelievable character?), they should be used as often as possible, even in practice, as Balk states, “Any one of us […] can and should ask young singer-actors to exercise with any one of the foregoing questions.”\(^{192}\) Of course, these questions can be difficult or frustrating at times to answer. It is important to remember, then, that there are no wrong answers. Practicing them is the main thing, and using the answers that are found or imagined in practice to inform the performance.

In a situation with more than one singer, however, such as an opera, knowing who your character is becomes even more important, as you must react as that character to the other performers on stage. To remain believable in these situations “requires that you understand every word that you sing and that is sung to you and that you make the connections between your thoughts, your feelings, your breathing, and your body that we do in real life.”\(^{193}\) This connects back to the section regarding text. The performer, to remain in character, must understand what is happening around him or her. This includes both translations of foreign material and the underlying meaning to any poetry that comes up. A character cannot react spontaneously if they

\(^{190}\) Ostwald, 29-30. Ostwald’s Given Circumstances are given in the appendix, with a few sub-questions included. His own example of possible answers is also included.

\(^{191}\) Balk, 86.

\(^{192}\) Balk, 86.

\(^{193}\) Ostwald, 11.
have to think about what is being said. They should, just as they would, understand.\textsuperscript{194} For those students who are having trouble incorporating their answers into their performance, Ostwald offers the following advice: “If, however, you are still struggling to get into a character or if you prefer to use technical acting, be sure to incorporate these behaviors:

- Your mind is always in gear
- Every action begins with an impulse
- Change attracts your attention
- Consciously, you do only one thing at a time
- You never repeat yourself exactly
- You improvise your way through life”\textsuperscript{195}

Ostwald’s behaviors are fantastic starting points for the young singer, if a teacher of singing feels more inclined to start from this technical approach. It would make sense to, as well, since so much of the private studio time is taken to discuss technique. Some of these behaviors can even be practiced in warm-ups. For instance, the teacher or singer could choose one of Foster’s exercises from the appendix. Then, the performer could be given the chord or starting pitch, waiting to begin until they have the impulse to sing their line. It could be done again and again, moving by half step, repeated with slight variations in meaning each time. Something could change in the imaginary world (this attracts the attention – it happens, and \textit{then} the singer looks at what happened), and their line changes to reflect the new instance. Even the catch breath between the various exercises can be helpful, as it can help the young singer practice quickly renewing the initial impulse for the phrase, helping them to remain believable.\textsuperscript{196}

Finding the character is but the first half of the battle. Staying there while performing is something else entirely, and the difficulty that comes with it should be obvious grounds for continuing practice. A singer must always be in character while singing. Even Ostwald’s two

\textsuperscript{194} Of course, there are slow-witted characters and moments where a character may be ignorant of something. As has been said, there are many possibilities and many exceptions.
\textsuperscript{195} Ostwald, 14.
\textsuperscript{196} Ostwald, 16.
types of movement, “mimicry” and “intuitive,” occur (or appear to) in character. There should not be a moment when that character is dropped, except, perhaps, between songs in a recital setting. The next one is found just before or as the next piece begins.

The key to staying in character is to continue thinking as the character, or, as has been said, believing the character. Continuing to think as the character (“What’s that in the distance?”) and not as the performer (“Which arm should I lift now?”) will allow you to move spontaneously, responding to what occurs on stage. Ostwald writes on the importance this trait: “Of all the attributes that make characters believable, the appearance of spontaneity is probably the most important.” So not only does thinking in character help you stay there, it helps the audience believe what you are doing, as well. Spontaneity occurs in all aspects of the performance, as Greene states: “All such physical response, and all facial expression, should be unconscious and automatic; for the very idea of artificiality is abhorrent.” And while abhorrent might be a strong word, the importance of being spontaneous (within stage limits) is clear. Even the thought itself can sometimes be spontaneous, as it “sometimes […] precedes the text by a few bars, sometimes […] by a split second.”

This, like focus or gesture, will often be dictated for the performer by the music. Sudden shifts in musical texture would fall under the “split second” portion, while instrumental refrains or connections between verses could easily be described by “a few bars” before. The thought must continue and shift through these moments. Of course, being spontaneous in a rehearsal where a performer does the same thing over and over again can be rather difficult. Finding something new, or re-creating that spontaneous impulse is a practiced skill. One tip, however, on

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197 Ostwald, 18. Even the words we say, with exceptions, are spontaneous: “In a process that is normally unconscious, people choose their words on the basis of a combination of the input they receive […] and what they want.” (18)
198 Greene, 16.
199 Helfgot & Beeman, 76.
making it appear even more natural comes from Ostwald: “See, hear, or feel any change in your surroundings before you react to it.”200

Thinking while performing is something that needs to be practiced (like everything else), and the best way to do so is to come up with an internal monologue (or, as Ostwald refers to it, a dialogue) for your character: “One particularly human manifestation of this attempt to understand is the little voice inside your head that is always chattering away, creating an internal dialogue about you – who you are, what you are doing, and how you feel about it. Your characters also always have their minds in gear. They, too, are trying to make sense of their worlds. As part of that process, they, too, have running internal dialogues.”201 Ostwald’s internal dialogue can be considered a much more specific form (to an extent) of thinking as the character. Ostwald continues, clarifying that the internal monologue/dialogue is “one of the most potent things you can do to make your characters believable.”202

One thing to think about (both for the performer and the character) is finding what, exactly, is the reason for actually singing. What is it that the particular character needs to say that can only be sung? As Ostwald puts it, “what has just happened?”203 He advises the beginning singer-actor to “think of beautiful singing as an outpouring of your character’s feelings.”204 Therefore, whatever has happened has caused such an outpouring of emotion that the character is no longer able to speak about what has happened. He or she has to sing, and they have to sing at that moment; this “immediacy,” as Miller explains, is actually heightened by the performer.205 It is, therefore, up to the singer, along with whoever is teaching or coaching him, to find an

200 Ostwald, 15.
201 Ostwald, 15.
202 Ostwald, 15.
203 Ostwald, 30.
204 Ostwald, 11.
205 Miller, On the Art of Singing, 143.
appropriate emotion for such an occurrence. August Everding, a German Opera Impresario and Director, takes this idea one step further, stating that “performers learn their characters by discovering what in them can be expressed only through singing, so that nothing will then seem unnatural.” The task of finding that moment before – and its accompanying emotion – becomes a character study for the performer. You learn a lot about a person when they are their most vulnerable, a moment that occurs a lot in song (or, on the contrary, if they are not vulnerable at that moment, what does that say about them?). Ostwald moves it into another direction: “When you immerse yourself in your character’s circumstances so that what he must sing and do seems not just logical but inevitable, you can let your outward bodily movements spring from your own internal impulses and feelings. Working this way, you will choose evocative and believable actions unconsciously, by intuition. You are rescued from the awkward situation of trying to act – placing your hands in a certain position, making a specific gesture, “putting on” a particular emotion. Instead, you have rich, complex, appropriate feelings leading to integrated gestures that create a believable character.” Much like thinking and finding spontaneity, finding out why our characters are singing pulls them into a very believable world.

Performing these characters also involves expanding one’s “empathetic abilities” and [the] willingness to explore and share the depths of the human soul.” Expanding this empathy will allow “the words [to] be personally felt on the deepest level,” one of Balk’s goals, which allows the voice to “cry out to us.” Ostwald later writes that getting to this point of strong empathy requires a lot of practice, mainly through the use of the “Magical if.” Miller warns against going too far with empathy, however: “To visualize and inwardly experience the drama

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206 Schneider, 50.
207 Ostwald, 34.
208 Balk, 11.
209 Ostwald, 34.
is not to give way to unrestrained emotion.”  

While Miller’s advice with character is often aimed more at doing things at a very small level, he is right in that there will be, at the very least, some small amount of control in every character created. Having that empathetic ability should, however “alter the feeling and sound of one’s singing, and should communicate more effectively with the listener than would an uninvolved reading of the score.”  

This idea of empathy also leads to Ostwald’s sure “gap filler:” “On a more fundamental level, any gap between you and your characters, as well as between you and your audience, is closed by your shared humanity.”  

The audience can connect with your character because, on some level, they are empathetic to what is happening. If the young singer allows his or her empathy with the character to grow in size, the gap between performer and audience will shrink even more.

One warning comes up throughout several books on acting while singing: emotions are not actions. Often times we associate music with a particular emotion, such as, at the most basic level, minor pieces sounding angry or sad and major pieces reflecting happiness and joy. Unfortunately, the performer cannot directly transfer this information to the performance, as Ostwald explains: “Ironically, although feelings are the main channel of communication between you and your audience, you cannot act them directly, because feelings are not actions. You cannot “do” love, hate, jealousy, or joy. You can, however, do the actions of a person who has a particular feeling.” It may be enough to say to a more experienced performer that you cannot see the love, hate, or jealousy coming across when he or she performs, but a young performer will take this information and often become very frustrated with it, sometimes choose to do nothing, since what they were doing (if anything) was not working. Feedback is important, of

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210 Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, 143.
211 Balk, 55.
212 Ostwald, 34.
213 Ostwald, 13.
course, but asking the young singer instead what a person in each of these situations does (rather than simply saying that they are not communicating properly) would be more helpful. And, of course, the answer can come from the private teacher’s experience, the young singer’s experience, or either person’s imagination. The answer can be anything, as long as there is validation for it. Even whatever emotion has been decided upon needs a thought behind it, for, as Helfgot and Beeman write, “The performance of emotions […] is nothing but the aftermath of thoughts, some immediate, some buried in memory.”

There are other things to keep in mind when it comes to discussing emotion. First, of course, is the fact that they change. Just as gestures and focuses can melt into new ones, so too can emotions (or, rather, the thoughts behind them) evolve. Webb, quoted in Schneider, has a great list of possibilities: “Love softens, melts, insinuates; anger quickens, stimulates, inflames; pride expands, exalts; sorrow dejects, relaxes.” These changes will be much more interesting for the audience member. Small changes in the music will hint at these evolutions, including changes in the accompaniment for repeated texts, and so on.

Another idea that arises is where to find the emotion. Some will say to use a memory that resonates with the situation your character is in. Wesley Balk suggests manipulating the body and voice to create “immediate sense stimuli that are as valid as past memories.” “Such sensations,” he writes, “are more tangible, more present, and more powerful than memories.” He explains that this process begins by speaking “loudly or rapidly,” by “slouching one’s hips,” or “rounding the shoulders.” Having the singer hold their body in these various ways (with, hopefully, as little tension – in other words, only the “appropriate” or completely necessary kind

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214 Helfgot & Beeman, 75.
215 Webb, quoted in Seneider, 73.
216 Balk, 63.
217 Balk, 63.
218 Balk, 64.
– as possible) should begin to give them some sort of emotional feedback that they associate with the gesture and context. Shifting the gesture through different contexts should also change the emotional feedback it gives.  

Open discussion with the teacher, coach, or director will help the singer to discover all the various nuances a character may have. This discussion will help the singer grow the most, as opposed to being told what their character thinks and feels, which is limiting. One effective way to help the young singer learn the various possibilities of character is to, much like in movement, play the opposite of what the song otherwise describes: "Attitudes that are seemingly contrary to the apparent meaning of the text and the music will often prove to be more effective than those that simply underscore what the text and the music are already saying." It is, obviously, a very easy thing to go along with the music, but validating actions that are, as Balk puts it, “contrary” to the music will help the student build the flexibility he or she will need as a professional. Experimentation should be encouraged, and the feedback given should cover “what was projected, and what the performer would have to do to project what was intended.” “From then on,” Balk continues, “it is a continual process of performance, observation, objectification, analysis, and re-performance.” If something is not effective enough, then the goal simply becomes finding ways in which it can be more effective, and trying again.

While in character, a performer must remember that things change. An aria or song does not stay on the same dramatic level throughout its entirety. Schneider is somewhat mistaken when she writes “A given art song portrays not a succession of emotions, but rather a single or a

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219 Balk, 64. Balk reiterates: “Speaking well, speaking with an accent, speaking with various types of musical energies can provide all kinds of specific emotional feedback if the sensitivities and skills are aroused; physical movements and gestures can accomplish the same result.”
220 Balk, 65.
221 Balk, 84.
222 Balk, 84.
simple complex of emotions.” Perhaps a song does not go from one extreme to another, but, as was stated earlier, emotions change and evolve. The love your character feels might intensify, or give way to joy. The anger your character feels could lessen or grow as he remembers different details. Therefore, Schneider’s “simple complex” idea is more correct than “single.” A song could involve one overarching emotion (“single”), but it will more than likely also involve that emotions “cousins” (thus forming a complex).

The singer must also remember that the characters they discover are more than “simple.” If he or she wants to create meaningful characters, the young singer would do well to heed Ostwald’s advice: “As you develop characters, keep in mind that they are always more complicated than any single trait. […] If you try to develop Carmen solely by acting “gypsy” or your Tony solely as a street tough, you will almost inevitably use stereotypical gestures and a limited palette of feelings.” So, a character may have a strong trait, but that one trait does not often define who they are.

There are many things to think about when performing a song or aria, including, appropriately enough, thinking. Imagination fuels focus, out of which flows movement. All of those combine to create character. And everything mentioned comes from the music and text. The young singer has many things upon which to focus, and it can sometimes seem like a daunting task. The goal, then, should be to start as early in formal training as possible, doing everything to incorporate character, imagination, and the like into technique, for, as Wesley Balk writes: “Pure sound, whether nakedly unaided or electronically cosmeticized, is not enough. The word must affect that sound; the cry, the scream, the shudder, the whimper, the sob, the sigh

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223 Schneider, 74.
224 Ostwald, 32.
must be there, must be felt, must be part of the total blend of music and words.\textsuperscript{225}
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX

“Given Circumstances,” from
Any mentioned chapters are Oswald’s.

When are the events taking place?
- In history?
- In her own life?

Where is my character?
- In the world?
- In her surroundings?

Who is my character – including her relationships to the other characters?

What does my character want? (Your character’s want distills the need that drives her to
do what she does.)
- For the entire piece? (This is called your character’s “super-objective,” and is
explored in chapter 8.)
- For each scene or stanza? (These are called your character’s “objectives,” and are
explored in chapter 9.)

Why does she want it?
- For the entire piece?
- For each scene or stanza?

What has just happened – literally, what has just occurred that causes her to sing?

[...]

Here is an analysis of Salome’s Given Circumstances in Richard Strauss’s opera Salome.

Where: An outdoor terrace in my stepfather’s immense palace in Judea.
Who: “I am the fourteen-year-old Princess Salome, daughter of Queen Herodias. My mother is
now married to King Herod, who constantly undresses me with longing glances. My
stepfather is wealthy and powerful. He has imprisoned the apostle Jokanaan (John the
Baptist) in a deep cistern beneath the terrace, from which we hear him raving against the
excesses of my stepfather’s court. I am fascinated by this strange man, in part because it is
obvious that my stepfather is afraid of him.”
Want: “I, Salome, want anything I can’t have” or “I, Salome, must be free” (beyond moral or
sexual constraints).
Why: “I am an adult with a will and feelings of my own” or “I’ve got to get away from my
stepfather.”
What: (has to be defined for each vocal response she makes.)
Selections of Exercises “Nine,” “Thirteen,” and “Fourteen” from
Foster, Walter Charles. *Ideal Singing: Expressive and Technical Aspects of the Vocal Art,*
Together with a System for Developing Expressive Spontaneity and Performance Capability.

“Exercise Nine” from Foster’s *Ideal Singing*

EXERCISE NINE combines the musical pattern 1 up to 5 down to 1 (tonic – dominant –
tonic) with single words of three syllables and also with short phrases of two or three words in
length.

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<td>Gigantic!</td>
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<td>Exactly!</td>
<td>Stupendous!</td>
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<td>Remove them!</td>
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<td>Behold him!</td>
<td>Accuse them!</td>
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<td>Announce them!</td>
<td>Refuse them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unite them!</td>
<td>Expose them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine!</td>
<td>Implore them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember!</td>
<td>Provoke them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace me!</td>
<td>Defy them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deny them!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be gone now!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attack them!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember! obey me!
“Exercise Thirteen” from Foster’s *Ideal Singing*

1. Expansive text phrases.

**Lyrical expansive text phrases:**

To you my song I sing!
How beautiful you are!
I hold you in my heart!
I know you are the one!
I toast you, one and all!
You glow with warmth and love!
You know my love is yours!
Your smoldering flame I feel!
I glory in this love!
I soar to heights unknown!
Triumphant is our cause!
Exult in songs of joy!
How young and brave we were!
Well done, my lad, well done!
My love is yours alone!
I offer you my love!
You call me from afar!
My song will yet be sung!
Recall when once we loved!
I knock upon the door!
You throb with life and love!
Aha, at last you’re mine!
The prodigal returns!
My heart is yours alone!
You sparkle in the night!
I shout it to the world!
No doubt you think me mad!
Pronounce them man and wife!
You scoundrel, take my love!
My triumph is complete!
The time at last has come!
You smile and all is well!
Your triumph is complete!
Tonight is ours alone!
Arise and follow me!
Attention, everyone!

2. Contractive text phrases.

**Dramatic contractive phrases:**

Too soon the time has come.
My youth is spent in vain.
The gloom of night descends.
Delude yourselves no more.
Remove them all at once.
Consume them all in fire.
Accuse me if you dare.
Refuse to do their will.
You hurt the ones you love.
I turn to you for help.
Return to me, my love.
Have mercy on my soul.
How could it come to this?
I should be there with her.
You boast too much, my friend.
The road is long and hard.
Repose no longer comes.
You owe me that at least.
You throw away your dreams.
My sorrow none can share.
I know the time is near.
I told them not to go.
You won’t do that again.
Control yourself, my friend.
Forego your foolish dreams.
Implore them not to go.
You ogre, oh, you fiend!
You tore my heart in two.
My sorrow none can know.
Come forth and let me see.
Report to him at once.
Conform or be destroyed.
Good Lord, what have you done?
You scorch their souls in sin.
No more of this, I pray.
You poison people’s minds.
“Exercise Fourteen” from Foster’s *Ideal Singing*

In singing this exercise combine one syllable of the text with each note of the musical pattern.

**Bright expansive mood:**
- Now is the moment!
- I will uphold you!
- I am victorious!
- Thine be the glory!
- Let us rejoice now!
- I am triumphant!
- Upward and onward!
- Darling, I promise!

- Oh, how delightful!
- I’m feeling fine now!
- All these are mine now!
- Here is the climax!
- Let them arise now!
- Truly fantastic!
- I love you madly!
- My, how romantic!

- That would be splendid!
- Truly stupendous!
- Really tremendous!
- I am elated!
- Truly amazing!
- Surely I’m dreaming!
- You are a genius!
- This is ideal!

**Strong contractive mood:**
- I do implore you!
- Hear now my warning!
- This is revolting!
- Not one iota!
- What an injustice!
- I am exhausted!
- It is beyond me!
- He’s an imposter!
- You are a monster!
- You are unwanted!
- Sound the alarm now!

- Oh, how ironic!
- Oh, how ungodly!
- I won’t allow it!
- This is an outrage!
- We are surrounded!
- Why do you hound me?
- I will defy you!
- You are a tyrant!
- Grant me asylum!
- We are abandoned!
- I must demand it!

- You are a jackass!
- Oh, what a scandal!
- I will avenge you!
- You have betrayed me!
- Send them away now!
- Will you behave now?
- You ignoramus!
- Oh, how I hate you!
- You have deceived me!
- Darling, I need you!
- What an upheaval!
End of Trio ("I am proud"), from Act I of "The Mikado"

W.S. Gilbert

Arthur Sullivan

Pish-Tush

\[ p \]
\[
\text{To sit in solem silence on a dull, dark dock, In a pestilential prison with a life-long lock, A-}
\]

Ko-Ko

\[ p \]
\[
\text{To sit in solem silence on a dull, dark dock, In a pestilential prison with a life-long lock, A-}
\]

Pooh-Bah

\[ \text{marcato} \]
\[
\text{To sit in solem silence on a dull, dark dock, In a pestilential prison with a life-long lock, A-}
\]

\[ f \]
\[
\text{waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block! To}
\]

\[ f \]
\[
\text{waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block! To}
\]

\[ f \]
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\text{waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block! To}
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\[ f \]
\[
\text{waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block! To}
\]

\[ f \]
\[
\text{waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block! To}
\]

Waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper with a big, black block! A dull, dark dock, A lifelong lock, A short, sharp shock, A big, black block!

Waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper with a big, black block! A dull, dark dock, A lifelong lock, A short, sharp shock, A big, black block!

Waiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock, From a cheap and chippy chopper with a big, black block! To sit in solemn silence in a pestilential prison and a big black block! To sit in solemn silence in a pestilential prison and a
wai-ting the sen-sa-tion from a cheap and chip-py chop-per on a big, black block!

wai-ting the sen-sa-tion from a cheap and chip-py chop-per on a big, black block!

wai-ting the sen-sa-tion from a cheap and chip-py chop-per on a big, black block!