

Musical Viewpoints: Applying Somatic Methods to the Opera Rehearsal Process

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INTRODUCTION

TIMELINE

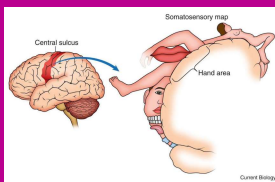
- Fall 2021: Begin research on contrasting breath and alignment guidelines in ballet and voice training.
- Fall 2021: Begin research on the current state of acting training in the undergraduate classical voice curriculum.
- Spring 2022: Combine fall research topics into building a free movement to music course for classical singers based on Heidi Moss's neuroscience research.
- July 2022: Present a thesis draft at the IUGTE conference in Laubegg, Austria. Feedback from participants was that they saw value to the method, but craved more structure in what to listen for/react to in the music.
- September 2022: Further study existing somatic methods and interview practitioners including Corbin Abernathy (Alexander Technique and Laban Movement), Sarah Wigley (Lyric Theatre), Kathy Miranda (Alexander Technique), and Anita Bueno (Feldenkrais).
- November 2022: Complete Capstone paper for M.M. Vocal Pedagogy degree completion.

PURPOSE

To investigate existing somatic methods used in classical voice education and their application for opera rehearsals. Demonstrate the effectiveness of movement-based practices in increasing singers' body awareness, vocal technique, and emotional connection to repertoire. Introduce a variation of Anne Bogart's *Viewpoints*.

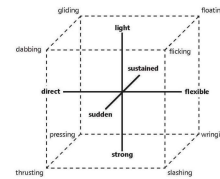
MIND-BODY CONNECTION

- Lynn Holding proposes three pillars of understanding the voice: physiology, acoustics, and neurology. The third pillar is still in discovery stages. Emerging voice science backs up somatic methods that have been based in anecdotal evidence for decades. (Lynn Holding, 2022)
- The somatosensory cortex affects sense processing and voluntary movement, and each body part has a corresponding area in the two cortices.
- There are two larynx motor areas (LMCs), and both partially control the larynx: the dorsal larynx motor cortex (dLMC), and the ventral larynx motor cortex (vLMC).
- The dLMC is located within the central sulcus, as seen to the right.
- The dLMC is adjacent to the motor control areas for the hands.
- "For humans, vocalization pathways are next to our limb control pathways. One can imagine, perhaps, that gestures are related to this closeness." (Heidi Moss, 2020).
- The brain functions as a unit coordinated by small regions that are not independent (C. Lezama-Espinosa, 2020).



METHODS

- Alexander Technique
 - Developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) as a method of encouraging free and balanced body alignment.
 - Uses habits and brain function to build efficient postural and vocal habits. Relevant for opera performers as a tool to help find vocally healthy positioning while still adhering to the needs of the character.
- Feldenkrais
 - Developed by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais (1904-1984) as a means of injury prevention and pain management.
 - Focuses on body awareness through guided movement and observation and is based in developmental psychology.
 - The Royal Shakespeare Center reports that after working with Feldenkrais instructors, performers' vocal stamina, articulation, and resonance improved (Richard Allen Cave, 2015).
- Dalcroze
 - Created by Emile Jacques Dalcroze (1865-1950) and is primarily taught to children as a playful introduction to music education.
 - "Eurhythmics" exercises aimed to improve communication between the brain and body.
- Laban
 - Found more commonly in actor training than vocal pedagogy and created by Rudolf Laban (1879-1958).
 - Introduces vocabulary for energy shifts in the performer (see right), which may result in discoveries in vocal color, resonance, and expression. (Ruth Rootberg, 2000).
- H. Wesley Balk
 - H. Wesley Balk (1932-2003) built exercises that specifically apply to opera performers and address both vocal and acting demands.
 - "The highest truth is found in the synthesis of contraries." (Wesley H. Balk, 1977).
 - Some exercises involve gibberish and vocal improvisation, which is a technique also used by Ann Baltz in her method, Operaworks™.



VIEWPOINTS

- Originally crafted by dancer and choreographer, Mary Overlie (1946-2020) and adapted for devised theatre and stage movement work by Ann Bogart (b. 1951).
- Designed to both build an ensemble and build the performer's ability to listen with their entire body and find more spontaneity onstage (Tina Landau, 1995).
- The "viewpoints" are tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography. Performers interact with each viewpoint in a kinesthetic ensemble experience led by a practitioner.
- Musical Viewpoints incorporates Carol Kimball's elements of style (melody, harmony, rhythm, accompaniment, and text) into Viewpoints work and focuses on moving to music while interacting with those elements.

REHEARSAL APPLICATION

- Vocal & Physical Warm-up
- Ensemble and Relationship building
- Character discovery
- Devised staging

PROMPTS

- Melody
 - How would improvise movement reflect a linear v. disjunct vocal line? Chromaticism, the range/tessitura, ornamentation, vocal color (performers could respond to a recording of 'themselves' or sing live while moving).
- Harmony
 - Movement may be inspired by modulations, cadences, use of modality, and overall harmonic feel. What does the harmony reveal about the story and objective of the character?
- Rhythm
 - Tempo, meter, and rhythmic devices may impact performers' interpretation.
- Accompaniment/Orchestration
 - Performers may "hear" each instrument in a different part of their body, what role does each instrument play in their character? Movement may pull from how the accompaniment coincides with the vocal line, preludes/interludes/postludes, and the overall textural density.
- Text
 - Poetic meter, form, imagery, and text painting may inform movement.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

- ✓ Further somatic methods to explore include: LoVetri, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Kristin Linklater, Gaga Movement, and Ideokinesis.
- ✓ Opera directors should implement stage movement, devised theatre, and somatic methods into their rehearsal processes to improve performers' vocal technique, body awareness, and emotional connection to the repertoire.

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