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UNDERSTANDING VOCAL PRACTICE IN EUROPE By Gérard Authelain, translated by Claudia Phillips

When we are with people who speak the same language, we are not sure that the words we use are understood well by those whom we address. For example if a director of a music school who wishes to obtain subsidies to create a supplementary choir of young people goes to ask the Mayor of his city for help, he is not sure to be understood well by the Mayor who receives him. The word "choir" (chœur in French), for him, could mean "choir" (chorale, in French), like the one in which he sang when he was a teenager in school, or "choir" like the one that he already subsidizes and that animates the town holidays, or groups like those he sees on television, or like those of the nearby village who perform contemporary songs, etc.

The problem isn't only that of the dictionary, because each of us has representations in his/her mind; the mental images that each of us has according to his/her profession, history, social insertion and environment.

Furthermore, when we are with people who don't speak the same language as us, it is even more important to find the word that corresponds exactly to the idea that we have in our heads.

I had to settle this difficulty when I was asked to train the professors of a music school in Ramallah, Palestine, who had to teach musical education in the elementary schools of refugee camps. I don't speak Arabic, and they didn't speak French. It was also necessary to establish a book of musical pedagogy terms like the ones that we use in France for musicians working in schools. I experienced a similar situation in Tunisia and Morocco, where I did my speeches in French, but I was never sure that what I said was understood in the same way as I meant it.

The workshops of the first morning revealed, unsurprisingly, that we do not really know how to translate some words, that some words that exist in both languages don't have the same meaning and that subtleties in spelling can easily lead to miscomprehension. Another example which reveals possible incomprehension: *a cappella* (with two p's), in Holland and in Germany indicate a popular repertory, , while *a capella* (with only one p) applies to classical repertory. *A cappella*, in French (with 2 p's in respect of the Italian origin of the word), points to any singing without instrumental accompaniment.

If we want to understand each other, we need to have a tool of equivalencies, like that which exists for the conversion of currencies or measures. But the confrontation of the words is not enough, because it's not certain that inside a common language the understanding of the terms is sufficient. Further explanations are thus needed for every term.

It is therefore necessary to establish not a dictionary, but a glossary, to find words that allow to us to really understand each other. This glossary will enable us to say : "I see what you mean when you say this boy sings (juste in French, in tune in English), he sings notes, he sings with his heart, he has a nice voice, he has a (voix chaude in French, warm voice, sultry voice in English) , he has a rough voice, etc. "

After that, we can define objectives, meet each other with common aims, or on the contrary say " it is not what I want to do ". But at least we have a serious base to begin working together.

There are several ways to build this glossary.

I propose a method which sums up the work of the past three days. I'll work on this glossary using several elements that were started the first morning, and have been completed during the three following days with the speeches and the conversations that we have had together. We will then choose the words that appear to us to be the most important, with the Voice Missions and AFPC, and I will give you the collected elements so that you have material for the next meeting in Freiberg.

This method consists of establishing a list of words classified according to three main chapters:

- 1 **Who** does what (Those who lead vocal practice)
- 2 The **forms** of this vocal practice (typology and organization of vocal practice)
- 3 The **vocabulary** used for vocal practice
 - Technical terminology
 - Aesthetic terminology

Inside these chapters every word will be presented according to three developments:

- A) The etymology and the usual meanings
- B) The mental images and the allusions
- C) The most precise comparative definition possible.

Usual meanings

For example: the English word "to play", is the equivalent in French of the word « *jouer* ». But in French there are many uses with common different meanings : we can play the dad and the mom, we can play football, we can play the piano, we can play with our lives, we can play poker, and also the steering of my car has « du jeu » but not « game ». In German, in English, in Spanish, in Arabic, have we the same differences of meanings? Are there others, or less?

Mental images and implied meanings

Once we know that there are all these meanings, it is necessary to identify the one that unconsciously prevails. When we say to pupils that we are going to do a vocal game, what difference is there between a game and an exercise? What do we mean when we say to a pupil that he sang a melody well? It depends on the representation that we have of this pupil, his age, what he has already done, the work which he agreed to do, the context in which we heard him, the goal that we have for him, the structure for which we are responsible and what accounts do we owe to the family, to society, etc.

The mental image is built on philosophical, cultural, ethical and social attitudes, without forgetting all that it contains of prejudices. It is which allows us to understand each other and to work together.

Comparative definition

It is the ultimate stage, consisting of summarizing the meaning of the word in a formula with all the variants highlighted through the representations of each one, and bringing to light the fact that in the same language (tongue) it can have several different jobs (uses). Maybe we can agree on a common meaning corresponding to the general objectives of education and vocal practice policy, wherever this activity is implemented.

To speak about comparison will often lead to restoring the origin of the word in the history of its appearance and its development. Cultural practices, political choices and traditions are many elements that have to help in understanding. They must be specified every time a definition could leave an error of interpretation. The usual meaning helps to understand history too.

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This is also important for another reason. The lingua franca being English, it seems useful that particular attention is paid to the precision of definitions in this language, to know if the used terms send back to practices identified in the United Kingdom, in fluent English (in Europe) and English throughout the world. To accede to the peculiarities of every country, English vocabulary will make allowance for the specificities of each usage beyond the specific British use.

Introduction

The first way of raising the subject can be formulated in a simple and synthetic way:

« **who** does **what** ? And **how** ? ». In other words we could successively envisage who are the actors favouring vocal practice,

- Those who lead various activities,
- Those who sing and are a member of diverse groups,

and which vocabulary is used for the progress of the different activities.

In fact it is necessary, before specifying the role of the leaders, to know the multiplicity of forms which appear to those who express a desire to sing, according to their taste, their skill and their objectives. That is why it seems better to approach this glossary according to the following plan :

1 - TYPOLOGY OF VOCAL PRACTICE

Which is connected to the group/organization and independent from the repertoires, with a variety of terms

2 - CONDUCTING

With different denomination for a similar occupation: choir conductor, master, director, coach, trainer, singing teacher, ...

3 - TERMINOLOGY

- a) Technical
- b) Aesthetical

1 - TYPOLOGY OF VOCAL PRACTICE

Usual meaning

Chorale - Choir

Putting this word first means putting up front the term which is used by the majority of the French population that doesn't know vocal practices very well. This word is also used by the elected representatives (who subsidize vocal activity) as well as by the public who comes to listen to a group singing in any form with children, young people, adults or seniors, singing a repertory of songs which can go from classical or traditional pieces to contemporary songs or other diverse creations.

Singing can be in unison or polyphonic. The term « chorale » is generally used for amateur groups, which can have very good levels, but the members of which don't envisage their activity with a professional goal.

Mental images

The « chorale » is an activity which experienced a big development in France for the last thirty years, thanks to the rising skill of those who are the leaders. It particular developed among adults, who find a place to regularly express themselves, which they need for their personal equilibrium in life.

Comparative definition

The « **chorale** » is a gathering of people who express the wish to sing together, do not wish to make it a lucrative activity nor a professional one, within which they live a musical experiment according to their capacities of the moment, where there is no selection for entrance with preliminary skills, and where an annual final production gives them the opportunity to share their pleasure of singing together with a public (generally consisting of friends and close relations).

Chœur - choir

Usual meaning

The « chœur » is also a set of people gathered for vocal expression. Ages cover childhood as well as adulthood, but the practice of which announces a more steady level of requirement. Even if the members are not professional singers, they all have an interest in musical activity other than as a simple hobby. A « chœur » of « maîtrise » is a preparation for children to have a solid musical training course and represents a possible pool of future students in music. A « chœur d'opéra » is of course made up of professionals for whom it is their main activity. The « chœur » of the regional orchestra, the « chœur » of Jean-Claudio Dupont-Martin doesn't have only this activity; its members are also singing teachers or music teachers in other organisations.

Mental images

There is a certain qualitative distinction between the « chorale » and the « chœur ». The « chœur » benefits from an honorary presupposition, on one hand because the members are chosen from a rigorous selection, on the other hand because their repertoire is made up of more difficult works which overtake the level of the usual « chorale ». The time of rehearsal is important, presence in rehearsals is not random and each singer has to do personal work outside the collective working time. To be a member of a « chœur » gives a certain prestige, even if it is not the one of Laurence Equilbey or the Swingle Singers.

Comparative definition

The « chœur » is a vocal ensemble the practice of which concerns people ready for a strong commitment in collective singing practice, doing this activity either full-time, or in parallel with other activities connected to the musical profession or to the preparation of a musical job. The « chœur » has variable staff, according to the financing and the musical styles, it can be mixed or same sex. Its activity is supported by performances aligned with invitations which are given by cultural organizers (concerts, festivals, etc.)

NB. We heard here, in Leo Sings, the « Chœur national A cœur joie », and we know that there are very numerous « Chorales A cœur joie ». We know the difference between the two words.

Atelier vocal – Vocal Workshop

Usual meaning

The term workshop shows the reference to a place where there is a manufacturing of something. In other words the vocal workshop is the gathering for a specific opportunity, people wishing to become attached to a task which is not their usual activity, either because it's not in the attributions of the choir they're in, or because they are not a member of any vocal group, but are interested in searching in the field of the voice for a specific reason.

Mental images

The representations are not very numerous, because the workshop is a reference to a less known activity, and reserved for people of whom we guess have the greatest interest in the search which they lead together. We more or less know the work of the ATEM (Theater and Music workshop), but we know that it is an important organism, and not only because Georges Aperghis was the initiator. Generally speaking, vocal workshops, for children or for adults, are connected to an activity of elaboration, and often with the invitation of one personality facilitating the creative initiative.

Comparative definition

The vocal workshop is the organization of a common working time, which can take place during a week, over several training courses or during a whole year, consisting of an initiative where the members are invited to develop the project which is submitted to them. An artist in residence can be invited to help in the elaboration and in the possible finalization of research. The workshop,

outside of excessive acceptance of the term, is generally associated with a collective creative initiative.

2 - CONDUCTING VOCAL PRACTICE

Chef de chœur - *Conductor*

The sections used in connection to the words previously mentioned are useless here, because the function of the man or woman who leads the choir is directly connected to the activity of the choir. The choirmaster is thus the person who insures the running and permanent quality of the choir.

One may suppose that he or she is an excellent professional, not only regarding singing and management, but more widely for the whole musical field.

Training - tools to learn, train oneself and professionalize

Directeur de chorale - *Director(Manager) of choir*

It's not sure that we always use the term " director (or manager) ", in France; we have rather a circumlocution: " the person who manages/leads the choir ". **** (leader of choir?) but the remarks about the « chorale » are valid here : the person who manages has all the characteristics of the group that he or she leads. He or she did not necessarily follow a very elaborate training course, even if many organisms have developed numerous training programs to help these amateur directors (or managers) to develop their capacity to lead a group (Missions Voix, ADDM, A Cœur Joie,)

Training - tools to learn and train oneself

3 - TERMINOLOGY OF VOCAL PRACTICE

The separation between technical and aesthetic aspects is an easy way to present terminology, but it is not possible to conceive vocal practice in this way: we know that the one doesn't work without the other, and are indissolubly connected in the progress of the activity.

Gestures - *Gestique*

Usual meaning

Every person who manages a choir has a position in front of his group which allows to give the beginnings or ends, to mark the tempo, the nuances, the expressiveness of the music, and to breathe a dynamic to the singers. Numerous elements come into play : the hand, the arm, eye contact, posture, energy, etc. Every style has moreover its gestural peculiarities: we don't direct a Kyrie in Gregorian in the same way as for singing jazz. The bodies of the singers don't involve the same behaviour according to the type of interpreted music (*cf word vocal gesture*).

Mental images

For many spectators, the gestures of the leader of choir are not always perceptible. It is nevertheless one of the important aspects for the interpretation of a group, and it is where we see numerous beginners being contented with "beating time", a little like we would beat wings, which is not enough for "taking off". On the contrary, we all have images of choirmasters whose direction, thanks to their gestures, is an obvious commentary on the music.

Comparative definition

The gestures of the person who directs a vocal ensemble control all the physical attitudes, from the most imperceptible movement to the most ample gestures, which give to the singers the intention of meaning that they have to show in their singing. They do not limit themselves to the movements of hands or arms, but involve the whole body, posture, position in the space, etc. The quality of the gestures of a leader depends on the way he "lives" in the music, and of how he transmits it in his technical competence and expressive requirements.

Gestuelle - Gestures

This word is also analysed in the following chapter, referring to the vocal gesture **of the conductor and also the singer** totally oriented towards musical expression.

b) terminologie esthétique and positive or negative scope of the words according to the musical style

Couleur vocale - Vocal Colour

Usual meaning

The voice has this peculiarity, to define it, to borrow from the pool of colours, and to be presented by analogy with the visual world. A voice is thus coloured: brilliant, dull, pure, dark, straight, linear, etc.

(Propose a list)

Mental images

It's easy to understand that it is the image of the colour that each has in oneself which helps to translate the sensation perceived by the eye into sound.

Comparative definition

The definition of the words, here, should be easier : it is more a matter of the dictionary.

Sensations vocales - Vocal sensations

Usual meaning

The remarks made about colour are similar, we are in the tactile domain here

Mental images

The sensations are also guided by images (rough, smooth, velvety, etc.) and the physical investment

Comparative definition

The definition of the words, here, should be easier : it is more a matter of the dictionary

Un vocabulaire spécifique A specific vocabulary

There is a technical language, which is also rooted in the aesthetic: it's the vocabulary inherited from Italian (allegro, piano, ritardando, affetuoso, appassionato, capriccioso, glissando, mezzo forte, pomposo, sforzando, staccato, vivace, etc.)