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**BEL CANTO-BASED METHODOLOGY FOR ACTING
STUDENTS: VOCAL TRAINING AND WARM-UP**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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In this research I examine the methodology of vocal training for acting students, the possible curricular structure of this training, and relevant scholarly literature.

As explained in the Introduction, in the section justifying the choice of topic (1.1), the research begins with the observation that there is a relatively limited body of vocal-pedagogy literature offering detailed practical guidance that can be directly applied to the training of actors. In response to the stated, I aim to develop a coherent methodological framework based on concrete examples, explanations, and detailed descriptions of exercises. This framework is intended to support the progressive development of vocal skills throughout a four-year program and to help acting students establish a secure technical foundation for singing.

The relevance of the topic is also confirmed by contemporary practice in the theatre: musical stage works, including operetta, couplets, chanson, and musical theatre – a feature present in the repertoires of many theatres. Professional vocal preparation is therefore an important component of actors' training.

A personal experience of over 30 years as a performing singer, as well as teaching at the Babeş-Bolyai University's School of Theatre and Film, played an essential role in the development of this dissertation. Vocal-pedagogical training for acting students requires different starting points and methodological solutions from those used in upper-level education of music, particularly for students preparing for careers in opera performances. Differences between the two forms of training arise primarily from students' previous experience, the nature of their vocal tasks, as well as their future artistic and professional requirements.

Present dissertation examines this subject in five principal content chapters, followed by a conclusion and bibliography.

The subsection on the complementary relationship between speech and singing voice training (1.2) examines the speech and singing components of the Education of Vocal Expression, as taught at the Babeş-Bolyai University's School of Theatre and Film, while identifying their similarities and differences. Speech and singing are not isolated techniques, but the complementary poles of vocal expression. Their coordinated development in training of actors can therefore support flexible, expressive, and healthy use of voice.

In subsection 1.3, I compare the objectives, methodological characteristics, and different professional requirements in the training of student actors and that of classical singing students at music academies. I consider differences in prior training, individual vocal abilities, the duration of training, and future artistic tasks. Pedagogical methods used in classical singing provide an important foundation for actors in training. However, given the diversity of stage demands, they must be adapted to students with different educational aims and individual needs.

A historical and scientific context (1.4) places the development of ideas and methods concerning the functioning, training, and development of the human voice within a broader perspective. It discusses educators and authors who played important roles in the history of vocal instruction from Antiquity, including Claudius Galen, through the medieval period and Guido d'Arezzo, the Baroque era, and significant representatives of the twentieth century, as well as the anatomical, physiological, and acoustic knowledge that has supported the understanding and conscious development of vocal production. This historical overview makes it possible to interpret vocal-pedagogical questions in actor training not merely as contemporary educational issues, but as part of a longer professional process in the culture of actor training.

In the subsection entitled The Singing Tradition of Cluj's Musical Theatre and Bel Canto (1.4.1), I pay particular attention to the local, regional, and national contexts of vocal education and to the ways in which the principles of classical vocal technique relate to the traditions of musical-theatre genres.

The subsection named The Place of Singing Instruction in Actor Training (1.4.2) reviews the historical and institutional context of Hungarian-language actor training in higher education in Hungary as well as in Transylvania/ Romania. The account of Hungary gives particular attention to the School of Dramatic Art established in 1865, regarded as the predecessor of today's University of Theatre and Art Film in Budapest. Speech and singing voice development were both present in actor training (1.4.2.1). The history of actor training in Hungarian language in Transylvania/ Romania contains early indications of a connection between the education of music and training of actors. These historical examples demonstrate that vocal training has long been part of actors' preparation, and its methodological systematization remains necessary (1.4.2.2).

The final part of the chapter outlines the structure of the dissertation and identifies the links between the theoretical foundation, the presentation of the vocal-pedagogical process, the systematization of exercises, and the proposed curriculum (1.5).

Chapter 2, Bel Canto and Modern Vocal Technique, summarizes elements of the classical bel canto tradition and modern vocal techniques that can be applied in the vocal training of student actors. The historical and pedagogical discussion also draws on the work of Pier Francesco Tosi, Giambattista Mancini, Francesco Lamperti, and Mathilde Marchesi. The chapter aims not only to introduce concepts, but to also demonstrate their technical and pedagogical significance.

The discussion of fundamental elements of bel canto begins with posture and breathing. The dynamic of bodily stability, the conscious differentiation of breathing types, vocal support (*appoggio*), coordinated onset, and the effective use of resonance all contribute to a free, balanced, and economical vocal production. Register balance, the principle of *chiaroscuro*, and *legato* are important means of achieving musical continuity, timbral unity, and expressive performance. These elements are presented as parts of a coherent technical system rather than unrelated exercises (2.1.1., 2.1.2., 2.1.3., 2.1.3.1., 2.1.3.2., 2.1.4., 2.1.5., 2.1.6., 2.1.7., 2.1.7.1., 2.1.8.).

The discussion of vowel formation and articulation focuses on the functioning of the tongue, lips, jaw, oral cavity, and palate. The coordinated functioning of these organs affects textual intelligibility, resonance quality, and freedom of vocal production and it is also essential to the transition between stage speech and singing (2.2).

The subsection on Differences between European and American Singing Terminologies (2.3) examines the relationship between the emergence of American musical theatre and its vocal practices, with special attention to changing vocal demands as the genre developed. It then introduces the terms legit and belt, their main technical characteristics, and their role in musical-theatre performance. The next section discusses the features of traditional and contemporary legit singing, considering their connections with classical vocal technique and their use in modern musical theatre. The discussion of belting addresses the characteristics of vocal production and the diversity of contemporary vocal approaches, including mix belt and extreme twang (2.3.1., 2.3.2., 2.3.3., 2.3.4., 2.3.4.1., 2.3.4.2., 2.3.4.3.).

Chapter 3, Stages of Learning and Teaching Singing, examines the pedagogical conditions and process of vocal learning. It emphasizes the importance of rapport, mutual respect, and trust between teacher and student, which form the basis of effective long-term collaboration. The singing teacher's physical presence enables movement and vocal models to be demonstrated, checked, and refined, while an empathetic and individually tailored approach supports the student's confidence and development (3.1., 3.2.).

Physical preparation is part of preparing the voice: exercises combined with movement mobilize the body and may facilitate freer vocal production. At the beginning of the learning process, it is necessary to assess the student's previous singing experience, existing skills, and difficulties, as an individual's development path can be designed appropriately only on this basis. The chapter

describes the organization of teaching, lesson structure, expectations of students, and assessment criteria (3.3., 3.4., 3.5.).

The discussion of hearing and perception highlights a fundamental condition for vocal development: students must not produce the desired sound only, but also perceive and recognize its qualities and understand the teacher's feedback. The next steps are to establish the individual vocal range and identify the voice type, followed by the selection of suitable repertoire. Incorrect voice classification or the choice of roles that do not suit the student's range can lead to vocal overuse and hinder vocal development; repertoire selection is therefore important both pedagogically and for vocal health (3.6., 3.6.1., 3.6.2., 3.6.3., 3.7., 3.7.1.).

Chapter 4, Breathing, Vocal Warm-Up, and Voice-Building Exercises, is the practical and methodological core of the dissertation. It presents breathing, warm-up, and voice-building exercises based on bel canto principles and applicable to the training of acting students. Exercises are organized according to their role in the learning process and the way they build on one another. The methodology is based on the principle that a newly introduced technical element does not replace earlier ones; rather, it builds on them, expanding and refining students' vocal skills. Detailed descriptions are supplemented by musical notation and recorded audio-visual materials demonstrating the exercises, supporting both independent practice and teaching.

Breathing exercises (4.1) support the practical application of the technical foundations of bel canto. Conscious inhalation and directed use of the breath are essential to stable onset, sound quality, dynamic control, and the preservation of vocal health. Posture and breathing are treated not as isolated mechanical tasks, but as the foundation of vocal function as a whole (for theoretical foundations, see 2.1.1 and 2.1.2).

In a section on the functions of vocal warm-up exercises (4.2), breathing tasks are followed by exercises designed to develop awareness of resonance and facilitate free sound production. Humming helps students recognize sensations associated with chest and head resonance. Practicing vowels and syllables supports a rounded, effortless, well-projected sound. The functioning of the palate – especially the soft palate – the appropriate opening of the jaw, and the shaping of the oral cavity are important acoustically and articulatorily.

Awareness of diaphragmatic movement contributes to breathe management and the production of connected, articulated, and sustained sounds. Articulation exercises improve textual clarity and vocal focus, while gradual range-extension exercises aim to develop balanced vocal production across multiple octaves (4.2.1–4.2.9).

Developing the transition between speech and singing is particularly important in training actors, as spoken and musical expression often occur within the same performance. Coordinating speech training with singing pedagogy can increase vocal flexibility. Repertoire-based work should therefore include musical-theatre genres in which speech and singing frequently alternate, such as in musical theatre and operetta (4.3).

The subsections on identifying vocal faults (4.4) and corrective exercises (4.5) discuss phenomena such as nasality, excessive darkening, a swallowed or muffled tone, pressed phonation, and breathy phonation, along with practical solutions that can help make vocal production more conscious and balanced. Comparing correct and incorrect modes of singing through audio-visual materials can make these phenomena easier to recognize and correct.

The application of warm-up exercises (4.6) focuses on aligning the repertoire with its specific vocal demands. Different genres require different technical and expressive skills, so the warm-up should prepare students purposefully for the task at hand. The examples support vocal preparation for operetta and chanson, opera and classical art song, as well as musical-theatre repertoire. The specific exercises and their associated musical examples make the methodological approaches used in my own teaching practice more accessible (4.6.1).

The aim of the entire Chapter 4 is therefore not to merely describe individual voice-building tasks, but to present a progressive practical methodological system that can be adapted to acting students' different levels of prior training and to the varied demands of stage singing.

Chapter 5, The Proposed Curriculum (5), offers a curriculum for the four-year vocal training of student actors, building on the theoretical and practical findings presented earlier. An important consideration in designing the syllabus is that students should encounter various musical material and gradually acquire the technical and stylistic skills required by different

genres. Following folk songs and intonation exercises, the curriculum introduces a range of genres progressively: pre-Classical arias, chansons and couplets, Classical and Romantic songs, musical theatre, operetta, and opera (5.1., 5.2.1., 5.2.2., 5.2.3., 5.2.4., 5.2.5., 5.2.6., 5.2.7., 5.2.8.).

The sequencing of genres takes account of progression, students' technical development, the difficulty of the musical material, and its applicability on stage. The curriculum aims not only to expand the repertoire, but also to develop secure, stylistically sensitive voice use and prepare students to move consciously and flexibly between spoken and sung performance tasks.

Conclusion (Chapter 6). The dissertation begins from the premise that vocal training for acting students requires a methodology supported by practical examples, applicable throughout the four-year study period, and capable of connecting the foundations of classical vocal technique with the varied demands of theatrical genres. The dissertation seeks to meet this objective by systematizing the theoretical background, presenting the pedagogical process, progressively organizing breathing and voice-building exercises, and proposing a curriculum. When appropriately adapted, bel canto principles can provide a technical starting point usable across several genres. The exercise system and curriculum presented aim to support acting students' vocal preparation, healthy voice use, and versatility of stage expression.

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