

“BABEȘ – BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
CLUJ - NAPOCA
FACULTY OF THEATER AND TELEVISION
DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN THEATRE

***FROM SINGING TO SPEAKING VOICE. VOCAL ASPECTS IN THE
PLAY COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE***

Ph.D. THESIS SUMMARY

Scientific coordinator:

Ph.D. Prof. Laura Pavel-Teuțișan

Ph.D. Student:

Luminița Gheorghe-Milea

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CONTENTS

FROM SINGING TO SPEAKING VOICE. VOCAL ASPECTS IN THE PLAY COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE.....	1
CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION	6
PART I. INCURSION IN THE UNIVERSE OF VOICES AND SOUNDS	11
Chapter 1. Voice - introductory notes, evolution.....	11
1.1. Voice – from sound to speech.....	12
1.2. Voice, an object of study for experts from various areas	14
1.3.Evolution of voice, speech and canto.....	16
1.3.1.Evolution of voice and speech.....	22
1.3.2.Evolution of voice and canto	25
1.3.2.1.Music and canto, first signs	25
1.3.2.2.Canto and sacred music	31
1.3.2.3.Secular music and minstrels, the beginning of change	34
1.3.2.4.Polyphony, canto with different voices.....	35
1.3.3.Voice and music in theater.....	38
1.4.Voice and speech, theoretical and practical aspects	40
1.4.1.Voice changes throughout life.....	40
1.4.2.Features that give voice personality	42
1.4.3.Fundamental frequency of voice (f_0).....	48
1.4.4.Vocal registers and mechanisms	50
1.4.5.Voice types, voice classification	53
1.5. Singing voice, speaking voice-characteristics, interferences	55
Chaper 2. Vocal apparatus, the perfect musical instrument	59
2.1. Anatomical aspects of the phonetic apparatus.....	60
2.1.1.Breathing	61
2.1.2.Larynx and phonation.....	71
2.1.3.Vocal cords	75
2.1.4.Pharyngobuccal tube.....	78
2.1.5.Resonance apparatus	79
2.1.6.Organs of articulation.....	79

2.2.Sound perception	79
2.2.1. External ear and middle ear	79
2.2.2.Internal ear	80
2.2.3.Cochlea	80
2.2.4.Auditory cortex.....	81
2.2.5.Areas responsible of speech.....	82
Chapter 3. Vocal technique in the professional artistic canto, theoretical and practical aspects.....	84
3.1.Vocal technique plainly explained.....	84
3.2.Essential contributions of the three main European schools	86
3.2.1.Vocal technique of Italian School	86
3.2.2.Vocal technique of French School	87
3.2.3.Vocal technique of German School	88
3.2.4. Conclusions regarding the particularities of the three main European schools	89
3.3.Vocal techniques that influenced the history of canto	90
3.3.1.Vocal technique of low impedance on larynx	90
3.3.2. <i>Appoggio</i> technique	90
3.4. Correct breathing, the basis of vocal technique	91
3.4.1.Types of breathing.....	92
3.4.2.Costo-diaphragmatic breathing, characteristics and advantages	93
3.5.Correct techniques of voice transmission, articulation and pronunciation.....	94
3.5.1.Rules for correct transmission	94
3.5.2.Vowel production, articulation and pronunciation	97
3.5.3.Consonant production, articulation and pronunciation	99
3.6.Voice homogenization techniques.....	103
Conclusions for part I.....	107
Part II	108
COMEDIA DELL'ARTE, PRACTICAL NOTES ON SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES FOR PROFESSIONAL ARTISTIC CANTO	108
Chapter 1. Commedia dell'Arte, a dramatic play of great impact as to the actors' complex training	108
1.1.Theoretical and practical aspects regarding the theatrical phenomena Commedia dell'arte...	110
1.1.1.Commedia dell'arte, a short presentation	110
1.1.2. Contextual emergence, phenomena evolution.....	112

1.1.2.1. Social, economic and cultural context in the XVI century.....	112
1.1.2.2. Phenomena evolution	115
1.1.3. Main characteristics of genre	117
1.1.3.1. Fixed type, mask.....	117
1.1.3.2. Script, text	119
1.1.3.3. Improvisation, the actors' art.....	122
1.1.3.4. Play	123
1.1.3.5. Characters in Comedia dell' arte	124
1.2. Music, speech, canto and vocal effects in the play Comedia dell'arte	135
Chapter 2. Specific methods and techniques for professional artistic canto used to train the actor for the roles in Commedia dell'arte	138
2.1. Voice management.....	138
2.2. Phases within the voice production process.....	140
2.2.1. Identification of native values and flaws, the first phase in voice production and training.....	141
2.2.2. Setting of proper vocal techniques	146
2.2.3. Implementation, training of vocal techniques, vocal training	148
2.3. Role of the canto teacher in the development of artists' vocal qualities	149
Chapter 3. Cultivating vocal qualities, from necessity to art in Commedia dell'arte.....	151
3.1. Aspects regarding the issues met by students in preparing the roles for Commedia dell'arte	151
3.2. Practical exercises, vocal training.....	153
3.2.1. Correct posture exercises.....	156
3.2.2. Vocal warm up exercises	157
3.2.3. Vocal cool down exercises.....	168
Chapter 4. Voice therapy and vocal hygiene.....	170
4.1. Dysphonia, disorder of vocal apparatus.....	171
4.2. Other factors that may disrupt the voices' optimum level	173
4.3. Recommendations and suggestions on vocal hygiene.....	174
4.4. Conclusions.....	176
Conclusions for part II.....	177
Instead of conclusions	179
Appendix.....	183
Bibliography.....	199

Key words: *singing voice, speaking voice, breathing, impostation, vocal registers, mask, theatre, character, vocal training, vocal management, posture, vocal warm up*

THESIS SUMMARY

The thesis subject is based on the desire to analyze in parallel the vocal phenomenon in various hypostases and to identify the most efficient methods of shaping and refining the voice. The paper, through its content, yearns to be a worthy insight on the most efficient methods and techniques of education, development, refinement and care of the voice.

The artistic experience and personal activities of refining the vocal and interpretative technique, along with the pedagogical experience in shaping and educating the voice of future actors and other professional categories who are using their voice intensely, represented the core foundation of this paper. Concurrently, the phenomenon Commedia dell'arte awoke my interest, through its colour palette of vocal notes and hypostases, the fervor by which each actor passes from canto to speech while the body is constantly moving, becomes quite a challenge. In this type of play, vocal speech, spoken sonorous effects and canto come together and intertwine with scenic movement and gestures, unveiling the actors' complex side.

The paper is based on a broad investigation and documentation on the speciality literature, taking account of methods, techniques and theories of different schools, in regard to the education and refinement of vocal qualities. Therewith, the subjects' complexity required a transversal and interdisciplinary approach, therefore other areas such as anatomy, psychology, speech pathology, emotional intelligence, speech therapy, analysis techniques, etc. were also investigated.

The thesis aim is to identify the ensemble of efficient techniques in developing vocal qualities meant to improve the professional evolution of actors and of those for whom the

profession demands an intense use of the voice, having as a leaving point the adequate techniques of shaping the scenic voice in the canto art.

In order to achieve this I wanted to enhance the value of the entire theoretical and practical support, through a structured, organized and disseminated information, so that the paper can become a practical, applicative and accessible instrument, and at the same time to lead towards performance. For that purpose I followed a few objectives :

- Inventory of the best vocal techniques meant to obtain perfection in canto art and their transposition, in a way more accessible and easier to understand for future actors ;
- Scientific explanation regarding methods of voice education, shaping and refinement, through correlation with other subjects, so that the process may be understood overall ;
- Confirmation of the essential role that Commedia dell'arte plays in the development of vocal qualities of the future actor ;
- Establishment of a set of practical exercises in order to develop the vocal qualities of future actors, but also of other professional categories that work in areas where the voice is highly used.

The method of research consisted in going over and analyzing the main treatises of canto masters, the representative canto schools (Italian, German, French and Russian) as well as the representatives of the Romanian canto school. Following the basic bibliography, I added along the way specific, necessary and mandatory titles for describing the scientific and vocational areas approached. For example, I have studied certain scientific and Ph.D. papers found in the libraries of music academies or other universities, mainly scientific papers from speech therapy, speech pathology and psychology areas. The list of studied papers was supplemented with a series of studies dedicated to Commedia dell'arte and the history of universal theatre. As to the method of research, I used the historical-comparative one, the

paper being organized and structured according to analytical principles, giving an insight from exterior toward the main theme.

As a practitioner of canto art, not a theoretician, I focused my entire work on practical and essential aspects that come in handy for the future actor. The transversal and interdisciplinary approach comes as a novelty. The importance of this paper lays especially in the chosen theme, in particular the use of refinement techniques of vocal qualities specific for professional artistic canto, in order to improve the vocal qualities of future actors, and of course, other professional categories that work in areas where the voice is highly used. I also mentioned the group that reunites 'the people responsible with the assistance voice', because they represent an expanding segment, whose needs for improvement are getting more sophisticated. Unfortunately, they do not undergo postgraduate training in order to develop, shape and improve their vocal qualities, like singers and actors, therefore their training in this area is limited only to professional qualification courses with a length of two-three days.

Consequently, the paper has a highly applicative character and represents a set of practical information, solutions, methods and exercises, meant to solve important issues for voice development and shaping, from breathing technique to support, articulation, diction and vocal apparatus care.

The paper is structured in two main parts, the first one entitled *Incursion in the universe of voice and sounds*, is mainly theoretical and covers quite a large area of the paper. This is due to the fact that these parts are numerous and important to acquire coherence.

Therefore, the first chapter entitled *Voice – introductory notes, evolution*, presents rigorously the essential moments in the evolution of voice, speech and canto. An overall view on the evolution of canto makes it easier to understand and perceive the style of each period, which is useful to both actor and professional lyric artist, given the fact that during their artistic career, through their roles they have the privilege to interfere with a world in various hypostases.

Also, in this chapter, during my research I underlined the preoccupation of many experts from various areas, as to the voice as an object of study for engineers, physicists,

information services, sociologists, psychologists, doctors or mathematicians. Certain theoretical and practical aspects were discussed, such as: voice changes throughout life, features that give voice personality, voice classification, comparison between the singing and speaking voice. All these are key notions in understanding the process of voice education and training.

Taking into consideration that speech is based on anatomo- physiological processes, the second chapter entitled *Vocal apparatus, the perfect musical instrument*, presents key notions about the structure and operation of the phonetic apparatus. To know the anatomy and physiology of the phonetic apparatus, along with training the voice according to the physiological mechanisms that produce sounds, brings great advantages for training the voice because: it is a more rational approach; mistakes can be easily spotted and explained; the accidents to vocal cords can be more efficiently prevented and handled; the singer can guide its own development. No matter how talented is an individual, he can have the best results only when the mechanisms that he wishes to use in order to impress the listeners are accordingly trained, such as any singer or actor.

The third chapter is dedicated entirely to the vocal technique in the professional artistic canto, because in this area there were always methods and techniques that became useful tools in perfecting artistic expressiveness. I have pointed out the importance and characteristics of the vocal techniques belonging to the three main European schools, respectively the vocal technique of the Italian School, the vocal technique of the French School and the vocal technique of the German School.

Another issue described to length is the correct breathing technique, this being considered the basis of vocal technique. It depends on how we appropriate the correct breathing technique so that we can use it along our career, taking into consideration that it can determine success, wellbeing and most important the longevity of a successful career. Only with a correct breathing we obtain a strong base, both artistically and technically. All developed techniques focus on correct breathing, importance of natural tone, vocal gesture equilibrium, equal transmission, resonance amplification as well as other aspects such as attack and diction.

The second part of the thesis, entitled *Commedia dell'arte, practical notes on specific techniques of professional artistic canto*, focuses on practical aspects, that combine the specific theories on professional artistic canto with the play *Commedia dell'arte*.

The choice for this field of study is mainly because its provocative nature. *Commedia dell'arte* represents a permanent source of ideas, analysis, scenic constructions and technical details, for any teaching staff involved in training the future actor, given its generous offer of theatrical experiments very valuable in the process of training students, of images, masks, movement, gestures, costumes, speech and canto. The existence of an interdependence in the process of student training, between the one who searches for appropriate techniques to a correct posture during performance and the one who searches and implements specific techniques for diction, gesture, movement or canto, creates the premises towards performance. The key to success in training the actor is represented by the teams' contribution, that is everyone trained in the pedagogical process, thus we can certainly say that 'work with body and mind, with every and each muscle and vowel, every gesture, expression of an idea, spiritual and physical health have been and will always be the roots of the performance'.¹

For the student, *Commedia dell'arte* is 'a true school of artistic training'². Not by chance, the student who studies acting must be able to interpret all classical characters of the genre. He must be competent, so that through movement, dance, gestures, acrobatics, pantomime and canto, to show that he possesses distinctive qualities that contribute to the success of a performance. Through his voice, he must prove that he can be an authentic Lover; a funny Arlecchino – not only by mask and costume, but also by expression, gestures and movement; or by replacing the mask to become through attitude and movement a genuine Pantalone; and through his speech a bothersome Dottore, who has always some latin motto for everything.

Regarding the importance of *Commedia dell'arte*, as a study for future actors, the actor Mihai Malaimare firmly believes that 'to study *Commedia dell'arte* is mandatory, is almost

¹ Olga Mărculescu, *Commedia dell'Arte*, Editura Univers, București, 1984, p. 23.

² *Ibidem*, p.23.

the synthesis of the entire theatre pedagogy. If you pass through these caudine forks it is pretty possible to become an actor. If not.....³ all that is left is anticipation.

Full of energy, the play Commedia dell'arte signifies for the actor or the future actor, such is our case, a vocal point of view, a demand sometimes carried to excess through the variety and complexity of roles, tonality, vocal expressiveness, dialect, vocal effects, all combined with movement, dance, acrobatics, mask and equilibrium in the play. Here, the actor becomes 'an unmatched performer because he has to be the best speaker, singer, acrobat, dancer, juggler and the most intelligent, literate and kind man'⁴. The path towards performance in the play Commedia dell'arte is according to Mihai Malaimare, 'awfully long and laborious'⁵ and we must agree because he is the most competent modern actor and dedicated teacher to this genre, who understood that 'to have a body than you can control means a lot of work even where is plenty of predisposition, as the path towards performance is infinitely long, performance itself being just a stake, meant to be surpassed as it is never enough, there is always room for more'⁶.

Thus, Commedia dell'arte is a challenge for those responsible of training the future actor, an acknowledgment for analysts, researchers and theatre practitioners in the viability of concepts 'full actor'⁷ or 'the work of the actor with himself'⁸ and a genuine school for students of acting.

The first chapter *Commedia dell'arte, a dramatic play of great impact as to the actors' complex training*, brings forward certain theoretical and practical aspects regarding the theatrical phenomenon Commedia dell'arte. In this way, I briefly went over the contextual emergence and the evolution of Commedia dell'arte phenomenon and the main characteristics of the genre. A close look on the characters in Commedia dell'arte pointed out their main characteristics. Arlecchino, Brighella, Pulcinella, Capitano, Pantalone, Dottore,

³ Mihai Mălaimare, *Commedia dell'Arte clipa astrală a teatrului universal*, Editura Tracus Arte, București, 2011, p.93.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p.94.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p.93.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.93.

⁷ Concept that belongs to Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), polish director and theater theoretician.

⁸ Concept which also gives the title of the book written by Konstantin Sergheevici Stanislavski (1863-1938), russian director, who had an important influence in the preparation technique for actors.

Colombina and Lovers, are characters inspired from normal life who bring forward an image full of colour and dynamism.

Given the fact that in speech the voice must adjust according the character, Commedia dell'arte offers a great variety of tones, tone colour and types of pronunciation. These and other elements complete and define the character. All the details, respectively the characters' origin, character, clothing, mask, movement and gestures, were detailed in the research, according to those who have studied thoroughly the Commedia dell'arte phenomenon. At the same time, I analysed the vocal aspects of speech and canto of all characters, in correlation with the other aspects mentioned above. It must be emphasized that music and canto, the main components of Commedia dell'arte, create a perfect symbiosis with acting improvisation.

Taking into consideration that in the plays Commedia dell'arte everything is exaggerated (as to mask, movement, gestures, speaking or physical flaws), speech and canto follow the same path, which requires a lot from the vocal point of view.

I have demonstrated therefore the importance of voice in Commedia dell'arte, in order to present the next chapter, entitled *Specific methods and techniques for professional artistic canto used to train the actor for the roles in Commedia dell'arte*, that unveils aspects on voice management. A comparison made from the point of view of management roles, between the organisational management and the set of activities designed to qualitatively educate and form the voice, pinpointed the correspondence relation on five roles. Thus we have the roles of planning, organising, coordination, training and control-evaluation, also present in the process of voice education and formation. Given these the reasons, this process can be defined as *Voice management*. The notion can be used also for breathing management, correct transmission management or any other specific techniques for singing and speaking.

In the process of training the voice, no matter if we refer to the singer, actor or other profession that implies the intense use of the voice, it is necessary to follow more phases, in particular:

1. Identify the native vocal values and flaws;

2. Setting proper vocal techniques in order to enhance values and diminish flaws or eliminate them; setting techniques according to the role particularities;
3. Vocal training – implementation and practice of techniques acquired previously;
4. Permanent care of the voice, maintaining and adjusting techniques according to necessities.

This chapter also emphasizes the role of the canto teacher in the development of actors' vocal qualities. The professional development of the future actor depends mainly on the teachers ability to establish proper vocal techniques, given the native type of voice⁹, customized, to explain and make sure that they are correctly implemented. Chapter three, entitled *Cultivating vocal qualities, from necessity to art in Commedia dell'arte*, presents a series of exercises that encompass the vocal training program.

Chapter four, entitled *Voice therapy and vocal hygiene*, concentrates on aspects related to the health of the vocal apparatus. In this matter, are numbered different types of dysphonies and factors that may disrupt the optimum functioning of the voice, as well as a series of recommendations and suggestions on vocal hygiene. The importance of multidisciplinary team work is underlined in order to achieve performance. So, along with the canto teacher, a great responsibility reverts also on the speech teacher, speech pathologist, speech therapist, vocal therapist or psychologist, if necessary.

In a personal style, I created an analogy between the process of building a house and the process of achieving performance, in speech and canto. First of all, we need a strong, efficient and beautiful house, as to ourselves, we follow to achieve performance in canto and speech, from the point of view of quality and longevity. Similar to building a house, in the process of training and shaping the voice is important to build on solid ground, and that is possible only when we focus on its consolidation, on each and single element (native vocal characteristics, theoretical and practical knowledge on the professional artistic canto and speech, strong knowledge about the role, motivation). The 'craftsmen' and the 'tools' are

⁹ The most important step for the entire vocal education process.

also important, in our situation the canto teacher and the future actor. The final result depends on the way the teacher establishes the adequate techniques and their implementation by the student. They represent the true support pillars of the process. Using the same comparison, it is obvious that such a house that fulfills all of the above needs other quality elements, in our case these are the adequate practical exercises. Therefore, if we consider each element engaged in this process, there are high chances to reach performance and possess a quality vocal apparatus that will fulfill the artistic requirements throughout the career.

Finally, I wish to emphasize that it is essential for actors to use the best techniques and methods of training and refining the voice during the first years of study, because as Stanislavski underlined in *The work of the actor with himself*, the artist must show on stage completely armed, from head to toe, and the voice is an important part of its means of creation¹⁰. That is exactly why I repeat the authors' urge to all students: 'Take advantage of your youth and the study period. If you do not accomplish this now, you will not do it in the future either, and constantly throughout your life on the stage, this gap will pull you back. Your voice will be your enemy, instead of your friend'¹¹.

¹⁰ Konstantin Sergeevici Stanislavski, *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*, Editura Nemira, 2013,p.63.

¹¹ Ibidem., p.63.