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**EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF THE ART OF
BREATHING
IN VOICE PRACTICES ON STAGE**

DOCTORAL THESIS

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RESUME

In this thesis we examine breathing as a basic principle that lies in a better understanding of voice production both in art and in life. Breathing provides an essential key not only for our being, but also for our communicative function. Once we admit the breath in consciousness, we become aware that it is no longer just a psycho-physical phenomenon but it is a subject to social and cultural values. Therefore, the conscious use and management of breathing, especially in terms of an individual's ability to express himself, provides an essential key not only for our being, but also for our communicative function, which is fundamental in theater.

The research hypothesis is rooted in the historical evolution of vocal pedagogy and the belief that some current theorists in the field related to voice for theater share knowledges, practices and terminology used three centuries ago by singing teachers to train singers. Conex, the desideratum of this work is to create a robust, pluri-vocal discourse about the science, theory and practice of breathing dedicated to the voice used in theater or in other professions that uses the voice as an intermediary.

The multitude of visions presented in this thesis reflect the desire that the understanding, pedagogy and practice of breathing for human communication must be examined in its broadest possible sense. To fully address this, within the research methodology, the interdisciplinary focus of the thesis is designed to generate a creative cross-fertilization between singing and speaking practices by differentiating or juxtaposing the functions of speech and singing from the point of view of breathing and breathing training practices. Hoping that this will not only contribute to the development of a broader understanding of breathing in action, but also to its application in a number of domains where communication is a key element or even in holistic practices.

Distinctively, the research was limited due the lack of access to some reference bibliographic sources to the study of the peculiarities of the treatises and the methods of teaching and formulating the principles of breathing for singing from the original methods. Therefore, in some specific cases, we have failed to conduct the direct analysis of the practices proposed by

Italian, French or English masters, therefore the extent of this chapter is sometimes parsimonious. The attained overview for the singing schools listed above was completed from treatises that analyze the pedagogical formulas of the time and we have condensed the analysis for the French singing school on the "*Méthode de chant du Conservatoire de Musique*" published in Paris in 1803, respectively on the work of William Shakespeare (the musicologist not the dramaturg), "*The art of singing*", published in 1910, republished in 1921. We have completed the notions and essential elements related to the respiratory vocal methodologies through the extensive works of Richard Miller: "*National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited*", to mention only one of the most important titles of the 3 books from which the information on breathing methods and management was extracted. As for the German school of singing, we have carried out with the help of colleagues from the University of Zurich, an intense analysis of over a century of treatises and methods of singing, which were made available in electronic format.

The first treatises (textbooks or manuals) dedicated exclusively to the voice on stage directly related to theater, emerge as vocal pedagogy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this new discipline began to be associated with science, this being in line with the positivism of the mid-nineteenth century and the notions of scientific reasoning. These first publications provide the means to legitimize a given vocal aesthetics, the medical science evolution and the related physiological, acoustic and mechanical knowledges. The emergence of stage vocal pedagogy is synchronous with the new emerging sciences of the musicologist, the laryngologist, the phoniatriest or the speech scientist. The first textbooks appeared immediately in the early twentieth century, Elsie Fogerty, a top British practitioner published her first textbook on voice in 1907. The voice specialist H.H. Hulbert, published in 1912 "*Voice Training in Speech and Song: an Account of the Structure and Use of the Vocal Organs and the Means of Securing Distinct Articulation*" and, on the first page, the author notes: "*The treatise is intended for voice users generally, singers, clergymen, lawyers, actors, public speakers and lecturers, but more especially teachers, who are probably the greatest voice-users, and therefore most in need of voice-training.*"¹ as mentioned above, vocal pedagogy, even if formulated by practitioners in direct relation to the theater, can be extended to many other areas where communication is paramount.

¹ Hulbert, H.H., "*Voice Training in Speech and Song: an Account of the Structure and Use of the Vocal Organs and the Means of Securing Distinct Articulation*". 1912,p.1.

At the London School of Speech and Drama, in the 20th century, Gwyneth Thurnbrun, J. Clifford Turner and Cicelly Berry taught and published methods, textbooks or treatises on voice training for the performing arts. The solid phonetic beliefs of H.H. Hulbert are similar in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Under the influence of the English phonetician William Tilly of Columbia University in New York, phonetics is used to provide scientific verification of voice, similar to that sought by H.H. Hulbert in the UK. Tilly's student in the 1920s, Margaret Prendergast McClean, opined that the science of phonetics is the only way in which pronunciation can be studied correctly and accurately represented, her book "*Good American Speech*" published in 1928, became a widespread text used in high schools, American universities and theater schools. In it, she points out that a solid knowledge of the science of phonetics can help students acquire good American speech without regionalisms.

The Romanian voice school for the performing arts from the last century is also based on a phonetic methodology, even speech therapy and logopedics, with exercises applied on logatomes, syllables, groups of words. The teachers that have worked and published in the field of voice for theater are Cella Dima, which publishes "*From speech to eloquence*", Marietta Sadova, "*Exercises of dramatic art*", Sandina Stan, "*The art of scenic speech*", Valeria Covățariu, "*Words about the word*" and Nicolae Gafton "*Treatise on speech therapy and sonoropoetics*". Of these methods, only Sandina Stan's textbook presents breathing exercises, which are built more on quantitative breathing formulas and do not include musculoskeletal procedures. As well, in the same book there is a description of the types of breathing and the author recommends the use of the costal-diaphragmatic breathing. Therefore, the Romanian school of theatrical vocal pedagogy is not connected to the theories of voice formation through the prism of phonation theories, modern source-filter theories, the theory of resonant formants, or other related disciplines, from neuroscience to phoniatics or vocology. In our opinion, with each new generation of teachers, the science of breathing for vocal performance demands solid investigations. If the methods used at professional level for this purpose, intend to remain relevant is essential and inevitable to integrate new knowledge in order to create more efficient teaching and techniques, new learning approaches adapted to the new horizons of knowledge. Therefore, the research conducted in writing this thesis aims to address the serious gap in the lack of studies and practical texts dedicated to breathing for the voice training in the field of theater in Romania, where this subject area was too often ignored, the domain of breathing being invisible or superficially treated.

This doctoral thesis is structured in four chapters. The first chapter encompasses basic knowledge about the anatomy and physiology of the phonatory system that is essential in understanding the objective principles of singing and speaking. The structure of the first chapter is intrinsically related to the anatomy and physiology of the phonatory system, containing detailed anatomy of the resonators, respiration, types of respiration, the different organs used in respiration and speech as well as theories of vocal production.

The second chapter subsumes stages in the history of European vocal pedagogy, with references to the techniques of approaching breathing in singing, from the perspective of Italian, German, French and English singing schools as mentioned above. The most in-depth perspective is applied to the German school of singing, where breathing techniques from over a century of treatises and singing textbooks were analyzed, with over ten important authors, whose methodologies evoked all those principles and concepts that we found, later, in contemporary methodologies, or, we have drew up certain methods of the epoque that respected the knowledge of vocal anatomy and physiology of the moment, but which today are outdated. It is obvious that with the discovery of the muscular structure and the connection between breathing and speaking or singing, the emphasis on the function of singing appeared. Later, when the vocal folds were found and their function related to voicing was proved, and once the theories of voice formation and propagation appeared it was possible to separate and identify the anatomical parts that can or must be engaged or systematically prepared to achieve certain vocal abilities. As can be seen from the examination of respiration management methods included in this chapter, each country has developed its own specific techniques and methods for an appropriate voice methodology and all schools have based their importance on the breathing management system in relation to singing.

The voice is a ubiquitous tool which is omnipresent, it is as much an essential tool of ordinary human communication but also it is an essential part of the theater performance. A major component of the actor's work is the effective use of a number of identifiable and adjustable components of the voice, to work with the material realities of the voice as a tool and as a revealer of moods, feelings, specificities of a certain character. From a medical and physiological point of view this was possible only after the vocal apparatus was identified and studied and questions and answers could be established about its functioning and its role in phonation and singing, as we have presented in Chapters I and II of this Thesis. For the historical beginnings of the definition of methods and principles related to breathing attached to singing, analyzed in Chapter II of the Thesis, we could conclude that the Italian method of pedagogy involves and establishes a link between all the singing schools presented. The

common thread observed is the importance of the abdominal region and the conscious use of abdominal wall muscles for sustained singing can be identified in three out of four schools: English, German and Italian. As shown in Chapter II, each country has developed its own specific techniques and methods for an appropriate voice methodology. All schools have based their importance on the respiration management system, and there is a common thread for achieving body and breath coordination, in the use of lower abdomen support. Although each school may have different methods and positions for the upper and lower thorax, breathing is what sets the tone (and everything) in motion, respecting the principle evoked by Dan Marek, "*chi sa respirare, sa cantare*" ("*who knows how to breathe, knows how to sing*")².

The third Chapter examines some of the key directions for breathing, in voice instruction manuals for theater and the performing arts of the 20th and 21st centuries, which exemplify a number of approaches to breathing in voice training in theatrical practice in Europe and the United States. The chosen methods are those whose principles I use in the practical methodology for the curriculum of voice education for the theater, and they were selected because I have benefited from trainings, workshops, conferences, pedagogical sessions and I know or have had the privilege to work personally with half of the practitioners presented in this chapter: Frederick Mathias Alexander, Jo Estill, Arthur Lessac, Catherine Fitzmaurice, Kristin Linklater, Patsy Rodenburg.

Chapter III presents textbooks that contain a hybridity of styles, including both the pedagogical ethos and sequences of exercises, selected didactic content, practical training that refers to the process of inspiration and expiration, breathing being the only fraction that was analyzed from all the methods or the treaties presented in this Thesis.

The sequences of breathing exercises, as presented exclusively in the form of the textbook or method book raise special problems for the field of breathing, as it is understood today (and voice) but most obviously in the direct use with students or actors and the non-intermediated practical application. Because a practical tools book, could set up problems for students, practitioners or individuals who read the textbook by which they are instructed to follow and learn from exercises that are, captivating in nature, but difficult to fully experience with a book in hand. The authors sometimes present a number of resources to best activate the reader in such circumstances, these include the use of highlighted tips for the teacher accompanying the sequences of exercises with the student, performer or actor, through these means, there is a plea

²Marek, Dan. *Singing: The First Art*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007, p. 76.

for commitment to combine theory with practice. The fundamental questions that persist in this chapter is formulated in relationship not only to the ways in which the sequences of breathing exercises can be read in their own terms, but also as part of a broader conditioning of breathing practice and further vocal practice, and of the manner in which conceptualization can later be applied in theatrical practice. In conclusion, the method textbook itself, when read as part of a solitary experience, is limited in its utility and becomes fully realized only when used together, thus the most important consideration is that the textbook could be interrogated as part of its inclusion in the field of knowledge and professional training of the human voice for the theater field. The ephemeral nature of the classroom, studio hall, or stage experience is common to the broader field of the performing arts, but nothing more than in the voice studio, where the sought-after experience of voice expression at the level of pure sensory consciousness surpasses any other result. In other words, there is rarely anything that verifies the outcome of the voice, other than the "sensed" or "perceived" vocal sensations.

The practices analyzed in Chapter III are each in a distinct relationship with the process of breathing, as it is known to us today. They are part of the vocal science that has developed in the last century by accumulating knowledge from fields complementary to the voice, which have come to intersect with new contemporary practices.

Chapter four contains exploratory manners for training the breathing, exercises that illustrate the methods, treatises or practices analyzed during the previous two chapters, subsuming not only some exercises that belong to the historical part of this research, which were recovered from the treatises presented in Chapter II but also the work of the practitioners who were analyzed in Chapter III of this Thesis.

The interrelationship between the key concepts presented in Chapters II and III, respectively the exploratory practices from Chapter IV can be scrutinized by the way in which practitioners and more recent trainings "recycle" some of the exercises, practices, concepts, imaginary or methods evoked in Chapter II. By this I do not want to sustain that the voice school for theater is directly derived from singing schools but that it is structurally adjacent and that it can and must use its basic concepts because the sung voice has acquired a pedagogical scope and a valuable scientific prominence since the seventeenth century.

While much of the research that deciphers breathing focuses on its correlation with life, death, healing, and illness, capitalizing on breathing or experiencing it can also be crucial to understanding the voice in all the way a person can use it and vocal pedagogy becomes an art form, in addition to a science. The knowledge and methods presented here are not exhaustive

or conclusive, but instead provide the beginnings of a formulation that probes breathing as a discipline, and by scrutinizing it, we become aware of its potential to be trained and coordinated or used more coherently for vocal performance in any field.

Breathing is transformative. An actor's craft is not exclusively an art of breathing, but breathing is the basic action that supports the art of an actor who transforms for each role. Awareness and connection to breathing, the release of excessive muscle activity, which inhibits breathing and restricts the voice, is essential to be able to play on a stage. The action of the breath, the nucleus of the impulse is the inspiration, and this impulse is necessary for the breath to enter and be received by the body, and there is born the moment for action. The impulse for breathing is the source of life: it reflects emotions, physical condition and intellectual states, it is the vital spirit, the soul and the mirror of everything that happens between birth and death. Without a complete, deep, coherent and conscious breath, it is easy to be disconnected from that vital essence which is the very source of life, the breath of consciousness in action and the self. Breathing is the fundamental element necessary to be conscious as an actor, as a human being.

There is a possibility that the appellation of these techniques, practices or exercises that we unfolded in this research, have changed over the years, the techniques may have transformed, evolved or they have been recreated and repackaged in different art crafts at different times for different reasons, but they have never been lost.

Breathing is a key concept through which we could understand the lived reality and the substance of the soul and spirit and, in doing so, it can be significant in revealing what it means to be alive or to be human. If breathing is the essence of life, it can also be an important pawn for death and the afterlife.

Key words : training, breathing, theater, voice, vocal techniques, breathing exercises

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