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ON SOME ISSUES OF WORKING ON ORTHOEPY AND DICTION IN THE STUDENT CHOIR OF THE STATE CONSERVATORY OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

The article discusses the methodological issues of working on orthoepy and diction in choir, based on the example of studying major Western European composers' vocal and instrumental works by students of the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan. The article gives an overview of the student choir's repertoire, and also describes the brightest premieres of recent decades, which were the basis material for analyzing the methodological aspects of teaching correct pronunciation and accuracy of diction. Particular attention is paid to the issues of orthoepy in oratorios in German. Based on many years of experience, the author gives a number of valuable and proven exercises for improving orthoepy and diction in choral performance.

Purpose: to reveal the essence of the concepts of choral orthoepy and choral diction, to provide methodological recommendations for practicing correct pronunciation and clear diction when working on major vocal and instrumental works by Western European composers.

Methods: observation, generalization, methods of pedagogical empirical analysis.

Results: the problems of orthoepy and diction in the choir are characterized, methodological recommendations and exercises are given based on the work with the student choir of the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan on studying vocal and instrumental works by Western European composers.

Scientific novelty: the issues of orthoepy and diction are analyzed for the first time using the example of work with the student choir of the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan.

Practical application: the main provisions of the article can be used in performing and teaching activities.

Keywords: *choir, student choir, methods of working with a choir, choirmaster, orthoepy, diction, exercises, oratorios, Western European composers, the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan*

Introduction

Over the years of independence, the repertoire of the student choir of the State Con-

servatory of Uzbekistan, of which I have been one of the leaders for 35 years, has noticeably expanded and become more complicated. In

the recent decades, the concert and performing activities of the student choir had intensified significantly, which is increasingly becoming an active participant in the cultural projects of international importance, music festivals, as well as in the first performance of a number of the most complicated choral works by Western European composers. It will suffice to mention the premieres of such masterpieces of world musical classics as “St. John Passion”, “St. Matthew Passion” and “Christmas Oratorio” by J. S. Bach, “The Creation” by J. Haydn, “Carmina Burana” by C. Orff, “Messiah” by G. F. Handel, the musical “West Side Story” by L. Bernstein (in concert performance), “Christmas Oratorios” by F. Mendelssohn, “Requiem” by L. Cherubini, “Stabat Mater” by F. Poulenc, “Requiem” by A. Schnittke, “Bells”, “Spring” by S. Rachmaninov and others.

In preparing these compositions, the student choir and the National Symphony Orchestra of Uzbekistan worked together with such foreign musicians as: (1) the conductors from Germany: Tim Schaschel, Hans-Josef Brings; (2) the conductor of the Royal Swiss Opera Alan Buribayev; (3) the singers from the USA: Daniel Washington, Ira Spaulding, Andrea Baker; (4) the singers from Germany: Bettina Schöller, Erdem Baydar; (5) the vocalist from Kazakhstan Jamilya Baspakova; (6) the piano duet from Israel Sivan Silver and Gil Garburg.

The premieres that took place were held at a fairly high professional level – bearing in mind that preparing and presenting such complex and large-scale choral works on the concert stage requires truly titanic work of choirmaster. All this means a huge amount of accumulated experience, which the author would like to share, paying special attention to some issues of working with the choir, which contribute to achieving high-quality results and increasing the level of the choir’s performing skills.

Main Part

The field of choral music intended for large performing group requires from singers a special approach, accuracy and thoroughness in conveying various shades of thoughts, feelings and moods, choosing performing expressive means to promote revealing the artistic

content of music being performed. It is very important that the interacting binary principle “works” in each performer: “singer-actor, actor-singer”, allowing to freely and emotionally feel in the stage performance zone. The main task for choir director in this case is to provide the performing apparatus necessary for a convincing artistic interpretation and to achieve a sufficiently high creative result from the group. The process of mastering the above examples of world choral literature was associated with a number of difficulties in the performing activities of the student choir. Let us dwell on the problems of orthoepy and diction, which seem to us the most relevant.

One of the key tasks is the correct performance of the work in the original language, that is associated with the issues of choral orthoepy (orthoepy – from the Greek literally “right speech”, i.e. correct pronunciation): “A correctly and meaningfully voiced poetic text is a prerequisite for the disclosure and conveying the artistic intent of the choral composition to a listener” (Ovchinnikova, 2014).

Choral works may be written in different languages, many of which are completely unfamiliar to young student choir singers. With the Russian language, the issues of orthoepy are easily resolved, largely due to the large amount of methodological literature. One of the basic works characterizing the basic rules of orthoepy is the book “Orthoepy in Singing” by V. Sadovnikov (Sadovnikov, 1958). With other languages, a Russian- or Uzbek-speaking singer has many problems. Religious works (mass, requiems, magnificats) are usually sung in Latin; many choral works contain texts in Old German and Old French, including their various dialects, which presents certain difficulties for mastering. An example is the oratorio “The Creation” by J. Haydn, “St. Matthew Passion” by J. S. Bach, in the cantata “Carmina Burana” by C. Orff.

From the history of vocal performance, it is known that the phonetics of a language influences sound production in different ways, i.e. on vocal technique. Thus, Russian and Italian languages recommend singing with a wide wave, a round, large sound. As for German or French, they are very difficult to sing. There are many diphthongs in the German language, i.e. combinations of two vowel sounds (syllabic and non-syllabic) in one

syllable. For example, this is German [ie], French [oi], English [ai], [au]. The phonetic system of a particular language includes all the sound matter of the language, an organized and complex system of means expressing the content of speech. Each language is characterized by a set of phonemes (smallest semantic units of the language) and their phonetic implementations, as well as syntax, i.e. the way of combining words and forms into phrases and sentences. The functions of syntax are manifested in intonation and in the general laws of speech construction.

Speech plays an important informational and expressive role in the emotional and communicative process of comprehending an artistic work and conveying its essence. Therefore, the choirmaster's attention to the word, to the number of stressed and unstressed syllables, to their location provides the performers with significant assistance in the metrorhythmic organization of the musical text and phrasing. I believe it is very important to teach choir singers a logical reading of text and careful attention to punctuation marks that emphasize semantic caesuras. Vocal speech as a type of stage speech performs basic linguistic functions – the function of communication and the function of influence. Clear and distinct pronunciation must be combined with correct sound production and sound reproduction.

A special feature of the German language is the presence of a special kind of vowel phonemes that determine the nature of singing sound in this language. The German diphthongs [ei, au, eu, au] are particularly difficult. The second sound of the diphthong is short and phonetically unclear. The German diphthong cannot be broken into two syllables when pronounced. In singing, the entire duration is filled with an element, i.e. [a], [o], [a]. It is important that the second element does not drop out completely, as this will distort the meaning of the intoned word.

When working on major vocal and symphonic works by foreign composers, great attention should also be paid to the issues of diction, which “is a means of conveying textual content to listeners and one of the most important means of artistic expression in revealing the musical image.” (Kharchenko, 2018, p. 14).

The clarity and accuracy of pronunciation of words and individual syllables depends on the mobility of the singers' articulatory apparatus (mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, soft and hard palate). Therefore, it is very important when working on diction to train the articulatory apparatus, using exercises based on the musical material of the piece being learned when singing in a group. This is how the choir's work on the passion “St. Matthew Passion” by J.S. Bach was structured. For example, to practice clear, fast and impetuous pronunciation of consonants, the following phrase was chosen on ascending semitones: “Huld, Hold, zum kreuze”, “Kommt ihr Tochter”. For vowels, which are the basis of singing, lasting as long as possible, were used chanting in various versions: “Sehet” (ziet), “Erden” (iirden), etc.

According to the tradition, the basis of singing is a vowel sound, but in singing in German, consonants are important, because they give the pronunciation a shock force, with the help of which the word rushes from the stage to the audience. The author of the article often reminds choir students that the support on the syllable and the word is equal to rider's support on saddle, thanks to which he can easily control his movements.

While working on the oratorios of J. Haydn and J.S. Bach, the student choir singers faced significant dictionary difficulties, especially in choral numbers with fast tempos and fractional rhythm, in which each sound corresponds to a syllable of the text. Therefore, it was necessary to clearly calculate articulatory movements. Due to the huge variety of coloristic possibilities of articulation, the attention of students in the choir was directed to studying the sound capabilities of each phoneme, as well as their combinations (either “a” sounds enthusiastic, surprised, then the sound “o” sounds gloomy, or the vowel “i” flows, etc.). This is a very useful technique, it awakens the “actor's” thinking, develops imagination and expressive possibilities.

Conclusions

The methodological research on issues of working with a choir (finding new methods and forms of learning compositions) is becoming especially relevant at the present time, when, along with masterpieces of world classics, student choirs are voicing very complex

modern scores. In the works of foreign, as well as domestic, composers, one can feel a persistent search for new sound layers and colorful expressive means, related incl. with various difficulties in pronunciation and diction.

Working on orthoepy and diction in the works of Western European classics significantly helps students of the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan in improving vocal and cho-

ral technique, which, in turn, allows young singers to more easily cope with the works of composers of Uzbekistan, including such large-scale and complex works as the suite “Bakhoriya” by M. Bafoev, “Rubai based on the poems of O. Khayyam” by D. Amanullaeva, “Faryod” by R. Abdullayev, “In memoriam” F. Yanov-Yanovsky, “Pearls of Wisdom” by P. Medyulyanova and others.

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