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STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVING AND PROTECTING THE VOICE OF YOUNG ACADEMIC VOCALISTS

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Abstract

This article explores strategies for protecting and preserving the voices of young academic vocal performers. The voice is the primary instrument of the singer, and its proper management in physiological, psycho-emotional, and technical aspects is of critical importance. The paper analyzes breathing and resonance exercises, vocal hygiene practices, psychological stability, and overall health maintenance. These strategies form the foundation for developing performance mastery and ensuring the long-term preservation of young vocalists' voices.

Keywords: *academic vocal, young performer, vocal hygiene, breathing technique, resonance, voice protection, psychophysiology*

Introduction

In academic vocal performance, the voice is the primary and unique instrument of the singer. It determines not only the quality of musical interpretation but also the level of individual mastery and the state of the performer's health. Therefore, for young vocalists, strategies for preserving and protecting the voice are of paramount importance. "It is known that the physiological temperament of each individual at any age possesses unique characteristics; consequently, the physiological and anatomical structure of the vocal apparatus differs among all people. This necessitates an individualized approach and an exclusively personalized method of voice training" (Yantao C., 2020). The voice, first and foremost, represents an instrument—that is, an acoustic and physical phenomenon. All modern systems of classical vocal pedagogy have deep historical roots. The foundation of most existing vocal schools is considered to be the old Italian school of singing, which differs significantly from the modern Italian school of academic vocal performance.

Main Part

The human vocal apparatus consists of:the larynx and vocal folds; the respiratory system (lungs, trachea, bronchi, intercostal and abdominal respiratory muscles, diaphragm); the resonator system. According to V. P. Morozov, resonance theory in singing identifies seven primary functions of vocal resonators:

1. energetic;
2. generator;
3. phonetic;
4. protective;
5. indicative;
6. activating;
7. aesthetic.

However, this division is conditional, since all resonators function in close interconnection."Improper use of the upper resonators leads to the emergence of a 'senile' timbre, dullness and weakness of the sound, as well as excessive strain in phonation. Neglecting the lower resonators, in turn, results in sharpness, harshness, and excessive rigidity of sound production" (Yantao C., 2020).

1. Physiological protection of the voice In young performers, the vocal apparatus may still be underdeveloped, which increases the risk of misuse. Excessive forcing of the sound, singing outside the natural tessitura, or overly prolonged practice may cause vocal strain or injury. Therefore, vocal training should be conducted in moderation and under the supervision of an experienced pedagogue.
2. Development of breathing technique The strength, stability, and continuity of vocal sound directly depend on correct breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing, along with static and dynamic exercises, helps young vocalists develop control over their voices. Breathing exercises are beneficial not only for vocal development but also for overall physical health.
3. Rational use of resonators As demonstrated by the bel canto tradition, resonators play a central role in sound production. Harmonious interaction between the upper and lower resonators ensures richness, clarity, and strength of timbre. Improper use, however, may result in hoarseness, sharpness, or distortion of vocal sound.
4. Healthy lifestyle and prevention Maintaining vocal health is impossible without a proper lifestyle. It is essential to practice moderation in food intake before lessons or performances and to avoid products that irritate the vocal tract mucosa (overly spicy, salty, excessively hot, or cold foods). Smoking and the use of tobacco products have an extremely harmful impact on the vocal apparatus. After performances, prolonged speaking in cold air is not recommended, as the mucosa is particularly vulnerable at this time.
5. Psycho-emotional and physical stability Stress significantly reduces the quality of vocal performance. Therefore, young vocalists must acquire methods of psychophysiological self-regulation, including breathing practices and relaxation exercises, which contribute to maintaining stability and optimal vocal quality.

Discussion

Proper sound production presupposes the ability to use resonators effectively. This requires specialized knowledge and skills in their practical application. It was in the Neapolitan vocal school that the bel canto style emerged, which became the foundation of the modern Italian vocal tradition. The bel canto style is characterized by a sustained cantilena, an abundance of ornamentation, complex improvisations, and advanced coloratura technique."Incorrect or excessive use of the vocal apparatus leads to a decline in sound quality. Representatives of speech-related professions and singers differ significantly from individuals in other fields, due to the specific demands of vocal and speech activity. 'Protective techniques' refer to methods that reduce the load on the vocal folds and prevent overstrain. Applying such techniques decreases the risk of vocal disorders, hoarseness, and fatigue after prolonged singing" (Otinova-Ordina. E. E., 2014). The first signs of vocal fatigue are irregular sound production and the appearance of a "laryngeal sensation" (discomfort in the throat). At the initial stages of training, students are advised to practice singing exclusively under the guidance of a teacher. This is explained by the tendency of inexperienced learners to misuse their voice, particularly by forcing the "high notes" that have not yet been properly developed in their vocal range.

Adverse factors include excessive forcing of volume and singing outside the natural tessitura, both of which are equally harmful

for beginners and professionals. Before important performances, extended rehearsals should be avoided. “In women, one of the negative factors for vocal health is singing during menstruation, when, as physiology shows, the blood vessels of the vocal apparatus are dilated. Therefore, for singers and professionals who rely on their voice, caring for vocal health primarily involves maintaining the good condition of the upper respiratory tract” (Kofler, L. 2019). Among external factors, temperature is particularly important: inhalation of cold air may lead to hypothermia of the vocal tract mucosa. “From melodiousness and harmony is born the song, as a symbol of the unity of the origins of poetry and music. A simple tune is the initial stage of these connections” (Ashurov B., 1997). A singer should avoid overeating before lessons or concerts, as this hinders the movement of the diaphragm. “singers have the qualities necessary for a performer to perceive the sound and timbre of music, it is considered an impossible task to master European academic vocal performance techniques in a short period of time” (Tashpulatov M., 2024). The consumption of excessively spicy, salty, or coarse foods has a negative effect on the mucous membrane.

In cold weather, prolonged talking outdoors is not recommended, especially during brisk walking or immediately after performances, when the mucosa is particularly sensitive to cooling. “Nicotine, being a neurovascular toxin, has harmful effects. In addition to its systemic impact, tobacco smoke irritates the mucous membrane of the vocal apparatus” (Stockhausen, Yu., 2018). This irritation causes hypersecretion of the mucous glands, leading to mucus accumulation in the pharynx, larynx, trachea, and on the vocal folds. Smoking is especially harmful for women, since their mucous membranes and tissues are more sensitive to such irritants.

Conclusion

Strategies for preserving the voice in young academic vocalists are important not only for enhancing their professional mastery but also for ensuring a generally healthy lifestyle. Proper breathing technique, effective use of resonators, training under the guidance of a pedagogue, as well as adherence to the principles of a healthy lifestyle, are the fundamental conditions for protecting and maintaining the voice. The voice is the singer’s personal wealth and the most valuable instrument in their artistic activity.

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