

# On the Role of the Vocal Teacher's Capability of Singing Played at Vocal Music Teaching

## DU RÔLE DE LA CAPACITÉ DE CHANTER DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT-APPRENTISSAGE DE LA MUSIQUE VOCALE

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**Abstract:** Vocal music is an art of seeing, hearing and sensation and vocal music teaching is not as audio visual as that of the other types. Students learn only through the teacher's correct demonstration singing and teaching language to comprehend and experience conscientiously. In my years of teaching practice, I realized deeply how important the teaching quality is for students. This paper expounds the roles and importance of the vocal teacher reaching a certain level in singing capability in terms of the distinctiveness of vocal music teaching.

**Key words:** Improve, the capability of singing, vocal music teaching, role

**Résumé:** La musique vocale est un art de perception audio-visuelle. L'enseignement-apprentissage(E/A) de la musique vocale n'est pas aussi direct que celui des autres disciplines. Les élèves n'apprennent qu'en percevant par l'intelligence à travers la démonstration correcte du professeur et son langage d'enseignement. Durant l'enseignement de longue date, l'auteur éprouve profondément l'importance de la qualité d'enseignement de la musique vocale. Commençant par les particularités de l'E/A de la musique vocale, le présent article expose le rôle et l'importance de la capacité de chanter des professeurs dans l'E/A de la musique vocale.

**Mots-Clés:** amélioration, capacité de chanter, E/A de la musique vocale, rôle

### PREFACE

Vocal music course is specialized as well as elementary for students majored in vocal music performance from the higher college of music and those majored in music from the normal university, it is loved and learned dedicatedly by the students due to its importance, to some extent, it determines their future and fortune.

'Vocal music is regarded as an integral part of music art, due to its integration with literature and the fact that the human body itself is the source of sound, the social role it plays or the social function it realizes is more direct and quicker, and it effects larger areas and owns more audiences in number and ages compared with the other type of music art, all of which eventually laid a foundation for its unique position in music art.' Singing is the most direct means of art to touch one's heart, bring mental pleasure, push one buoy up and strive

forward and even change one's and character and temperament. In Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period in Chinese history, there is a singer called Han E, whose singing is described as 'the sound of singing lingers for three days', from which we can see that singing is the treasure of human society, a shining pearl in music art and a subject each one aims to study in the college of music wants to learn as quick as possible and grasp to one's utmost for final application. As vocal teachers, we should shoulder our responsibility for the students, improve our teaching quality, enabling our students to truly grasp the musical and vocal skills. We should also provide solutions to their puzzles, encourage them to devote to their major, to learn with full confidence and to live up to their ideals in order to become a useful person to our country.

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## 1. VOCAL MUSIC TEACHING

### 1.1 vocal music and vocal music teaching

'Vocal music takes the human body as its instrument, and the throat voice as its source of sound. Music comes from the singer's voice is also the music of throat singing.' Vocal music is an art featured with singing and performance, producing pleasant singing voice to ears by throat singing. 'vocal music' in Chinese character means one type of the art of music performance. People engaged in this profession should be equipped with the basic musical skills and knowledge, know the vocal methods and the singing language well, have the capability of performance and other relevant knowledge and culture, aiming to turn music pieces of works to concrete sound and image. 'Vocal music is neutral in terms of both its type and concept, it provides strong functionality, but this social function being positive or negative is determined by the quality of the works and singing. Ge is the man, and Ge makes one what he is. The first Ge is a noun, means the song, and the second one is a verb, means singing the song, it shows the idea, standpoint, accomplishment and capability of the composer and performer determines the social effect of the works.' Vocal music, the most ancient type of music, is getting more attention and love from the public with the evolvement of the era and development of the society. It is more than an artistic subject, an integral part to fertilize people's high-level livelihood and a preliminary way for provincial and municipal literal and artistic exchange. Take the singer competition held by CCTV every two years for example, has become the largest stage to evaluate the music al strength of each province as well as a show window to display it. In China it has been well known to each household and the public actively participate in with terrific zest, out of which stand a quite number of winners, who take shape of the main force of Chinese musical and artistic stage performance.

Vocal music teaching is a process to coordinate the vocal mechanism of the human body with skills, performance, composition and psychology and to skillfully train on the mentioned aspects. Different from the other class teachings, it is not only a scientific subject but also a delicate art, and a crystal of wisdom as a result of the coordination and collaboration and good interaction between the teachers and students, it's woven by diligence, sweat and tears. It is a musical and artistic subject that has high requirement on technical, mental and practical side. It combines vocal skills with musical performance and musical aesthetics and teaches the specialized technical course with various kinds of flexible means.

### 1.2 Principles of teaching and vocal music teaching

Teaching principles, established in accordance to teaching guidelines, goals and object laws, based on the conclusion of teaching practices, are the general principle or guidelines need to be followed in teaching work ensuring the accomplishment of the teaching tasks.

'An essential principle should be followed in vocal music teaching practice is called group coordination, that is to actively mobilize all the organic parts related to vocal practice(breath, vocal, acoustic resonance) after the body relaxation, meanwhile, make our throat, 'the singing instrument' reach the coordination, balance and union status with the other organic parts.' The firm adherence to this principle from beginning to end is the only way to make sure that the student's singing technique works harmoniously with the body mechanism, the psychological activities harmonizes with the physical activities, and the facial expression adapts to the limb movement, enabling rich feelings expressed by the human language merged with the beautiful song. Vocal music teaching, distinguished with the other teachings, for which teaching and learning combines more closely, therefore, the intended close coordination and congruence between teaching and learning plays a key and significant role.

### 1.3 The role that vocal teacher plays in teaching

Teaching of vocal music in essence is skill teaching, it is like 'taking photos with a camera', the teacher plays the role of the camera during the teaching process, while the focus of the camera directly determines the clearness of the picture or even the quality. In singing, all the sound organs work and coordinate with one another, which status is invisible for us, without turning to its help, the teacher expresses to the students the right concept of vocal through demonstration singing, color and his or her own feeling and experience when singing and techniques and skills, all of these are conveyed through concise, simple, accurate, visualized and vivid teaching language, ensuring the students can sing individually after quick thinking and active experience. The teacher judges, comments and guides in accordance to each student's performance and then expresses in metaphor with vivid language, leading the students gradually adjust, improve and correct their vocal method, helping them find the correct way and establish the right concept of sound.

During vocal music teaching, the teacher makes the 'blur' and 'abstract' sound being embodied and visualized through the accurate, vivid demonstration singing with rich facial expressions, in this way, the teaching becomes audio visual and direct, making it easy for students to know the correct definition of sound and the vocal skills and upgrade the knowledge from

sensibility to rationality. Meanwhile, the teacher can also use various kinds of vivid metaphors to make the abstract feeling of sound more concrete and visualized. The vocal music lesson is usually once a week, especially for freshman, over this time span, the student will not sing at the right state and lose the comprehension of the concept of sound. Students majored in musical performance usually have two lessons one week, the time interval is much shorter, so their learning efficiency is higher and they make quicker improvement. Students from the department of music teaching also have one lesson each week, if one or more lessons added to their curriculum, those students whose voice condition remains at mid-level will make a great improvement and their performance will exceed those of musical performance major, in a word, the teacher plays a significant role in vocal music teaching, without his correct demonstration and timely guidance, the students will stray away from the right path, even go backward and lead to more new learning problems.

## **2. IMPROVE THE CAPABILITY OF SINGING TO GUARANTEE THE TEACHING QUALITY**

### **2.1 The capability of singing**

The definition of sing in Chinese dictionary is to eulogize by singing, recitation and other forms. Singing is to integrate the musical human voice with the language, a musical way to express feelings and emotions. As quoted in *Yue Ji. Shi Yi Pian*, ‘When the singing voice goes up, it’s like being held high, when goes down, it’s like being fallen down, when turns the tone, it should be straightforward like things being broken off, when stops, it should be as silent as the withered trees. The abrupt change of the tune shall be as angular as a polyline, and the change of the euphemistical melody shall be as smooth and traceless as the curved line. The sound shall be coherent, like pearls threaded together. This excerpt shows that the singer paid attention to the use of breath when singing as well as the strictness in interpreting a song. As professor Shen Xiang said ‘Singing is a movement, as any other sports need to be done at an adequate and reasonable physical state, singing itself requires a good posture, the most natural and beautiful one stretching out to its utmost is regarded as the best posture. When singing, all the parts involved shall be active but not nervous, relaxing but not slack. Singing could be done at different postures, such as standing, seating, and lying but this will not have any effect on the singing.’ Singing came up early in human history, even earlier than language, at the preliminary stage it conveys feelings and emotions through various sounds produced and afterwards gradually combines with language to

develop into the simple singing.

Capability is the subjective condition to ensure the accomplishment of a task. The capability of singing means one’s singing reaches a certain or higher level, it’s a composition of a good many of qualities and capabilities such as: the first, being intelligent: a thinker and an analyzer, the second, develop the capability to analyze, comprehend and perform, and the third, have a good health and naturally beautiful voice. The above three elements are indispensable to singing. A great singer has a strong capability of singing, besides that, he also has an excellent musical instrument, the throat, and the diligence and hard working.

### **2.2 The capability of singing makes an excellent vocal teacher**

A figurative way is usually used to describe the teaching of a teacher as one should have a barrel of water if he wants to give others a bowl of water. At the eighth century, in Soissons there were music schools established by the Church, the Pope Adrian I sent two singers of Rome to Karl d. Grosse and they became the first teachers of the music school. Kievan Monastery of Caves set up in 1050 turned out a number of great singers, played a significant role in the development of Russian vocal music culture. In China, a quotation from *Lie Zi*. Tang Wen goes as ‘Xue Tan goes over to Qin Qing to learn singing, not very long after his study, he begins to believe he has grasped all the skills and goes to say goodbye to Qin Qing. Qin Qing does persuade him to stay, but on the way to see him off, Xue Tan sings high with hands stroking the branches of a tree, his voice trembles the trees and resounds across the heavens. Xue Tan listens and stops and decides to continue his study.’ This shows Qin Qing reaches a high degree of technical proficiency in singing and that is why Xue Tan continues his study with him.

Ying Shangneng is one of the singers who hold solo concert in our country. He learned the vocal music at the University of Michigan at his early age, after going back to China, he engaged in vocal music teaching, famous singers like Si Yigui, Cai Shaoxu and etc. are all learned from him.

In the early 40’s of the twentieth century, the well-known singer and vocal educator, Professor Shen Xiang, who has been extolled as ‘Chinese Caruso’ educated a great number of vocal talents. After the Third Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party, he coordinated and collaborated with his wife, the noted opera music instructor and singer, Li Jinwei, brought up numerous vocal talents in the short next years, such as Guo Shuzhen, Jin Tielin (vocal educator), Liang Ning (mezzo-soprano), Dili Baier (coloratura), Liu Yue (bass), Fan Jing Ma (tenor), Cheng Da (baritone), Hei Haitao (tenor), Ding Yi (tenor), they won prizes in various international vocal competitions. Students of Professor Shen Xiang won prizes in

international vocal competitions, among them Cheng Zhi, Yin Xiumei and Guan Mucun are still actively performing on the stage with popularity.

Zhou Xiao Yan, Chinese coloratura and vocal educator, in her youth, she entered Shanghai Guoli Professional Training School, majoring in vocal music, later on, entered Paris Russia Conservatory of Music, studying under the Italian mezzo-soprano, Professor Bernardi, and then under Mrs. Perugia and Mrs. Mani for French artistic songs. She performed in Europe from 1946 to 1947, during that period of time, her performance at the Paris culture saloon, the solo concert of Geneva National Theater and 'the Spring of Prague' Concert achieved great success and gained her the fame of 'Chinese Nightingale'. She trained a group of excellent students such as Ju Xiufang, Luo Wei, Liao Changyong, Zhang Jianyi, Wei Song, Gao Manhua, Wan Shanhong, Gu Xin, Liu Jian and Li Xiuying etc. They all won prizes domestic and abroad and won honor for our country.

Guo Shuzhen, Chinese soprano and vocal educator, studied under American mezzo-soprano, Mrs. Hanki at Shanghai Guoli Professional Training School before 1949, after the foundation of the People's Republic of China, she studied under Professor Shen Xiang at the Central Conservatory of Music and afterwards went to study in Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music. At the noted theater at Moscow, her successful act in the part of *Tatiana* in the opera, *Eugen Onegin* and *Mimi* in *La Boheme* earned her the comment 'she is worthy of the name of The heroine of Pushkin and Tchaikovsky'. Later on, she taught in the Central Conservatory of Music and brought up outstanding singers such as Deng Yun, Wu Bixia, Liu Yuanyuan, Yao Hong, Wang Xiufen, Han Zhiping, Pan Shuzhen, Zheng Li and Wang Jing etc.

'The advantage of a qualified vocal teacher lies in his accurate distinction of sound and a cool head.' The strong capability of singing ensures he has the correct concept of sound, therefore his ears become sensitive to various kinds of sounds and makes it possible to distinguish the right vocal and the wrong one during teaching and correct them in time, which saves time, avoids unnecessary mistakes, improves the teaching quality and brings up groups of outstanding vocal talents, that's why we see the improvement of the capability of singing as the guarantee of teaching.

### **3. THE CAPABILITY OF SINGING IS THE BASIS OF VOCAL MUSIC TEACHING**

#### **3.1 The vocal teacher is the beacon light to students**

The great Italian soprano Tebaldi said 'A qualified

vocal teacher is the secret of singing.' Vocal music differentiates itself from the other subjects as an art of seeing, hearing and sensation. The way it broadcasts includes two aspects: the subject of singing, the singer and the object of the acceptance, the audience. Singing related organs produced sound wave and the wave being transmitted by the air entered the ear of the audience makes the singing. While what the singer hears is the sound transmitted from the skull to the inner ear. Because of the different transmitting ways, the deviation of sound occurs when the singer believes what he/she sings is right, beautiful and gets a bang out of it, but to the audience, it sounds like being squeezed; while when the singer feels his/her singing is no good, the audience is highly commended, that is the reflection of the contradiction of the outside and inside hearing. The students should set up the correct concept of sound and aesthetic standard from both sides of the singer and the audience, getting to know, conform and shape their sound image in a scientific manner. On the other hand, the students switching from the part of both of the singer and the audience makes it difficult in their study, for example, to distinguish the tone, the singer should develop the ability to distinguish scientifically the subjective sound from the objective sound and guide themselves with the objective sound (usually refers to the sound heard by the audience), avoiding the effect of subjective sound made on singing. To make it, the students must make practice step by step under the correct guidance of the vocal teacher, which is called the establishment of the concept of the sound. During the whole process, the vocal teacher acting as both of the spectator and the audience, gives opinions and suggestions in time to help them know and recognize their own voice, in this regard, the vocal teacher can be seen as the second pair of eyes and ears of the students as well as the beacon light to them.

#### **3.2 The good demonstration enables the students stay away from mistakes**

The Chinese vocal master, Professor Shen Xiang said, vocal music learning is to make an music instrument, and the vocal teacher giving lessons is the process to instruct the student how to turn his body into an eminent music instrument. For the students, to make an instrument on their body is similar to the procedure of sculpture and production, in which a mold and a process are necessary. In this process, the vocal teacher with good capability of singing can display the image and theory of sound and performance by giving the demonstration and guidance on performance, in this regard, the vocal teacher can be viewed as the instrument mould and standard data for his students.

'The duty of a teacher is to transmit wisdom and resolve doubts. The capability to sing and sing well shows profound comprehension and proficiency in skills, and it is the basis of vocal music teaching, with the basis, can the vocal teacher play the key role in the

demonstration teaching, and can he/ she understand the vocal skills and resolve doubts for the students.' For instance, when singing different music works, due to lack of social experience and comprehension, the student cannot handle them adequately as things have not been experienced can hardly get impressed in the mind, it requires the teacher to put in their minds the vivid emotional color of the sound through lively sound demonstration and teaching language in order to awaken their imagination on the concrete objects and form the perceptual knowledge and upgrade it to rational knowledge and feeling towards beauty. Therefore, the good demonstration of the vocal teacher enables the students to recognize the sound at the least time, turning complication into simplicity, abstraction into specification and vague into vividness. It's hard to imagine a vocal teacher without the capability of singing or whose demonstration is not correct to play the role of guidance. 'One of the most important teaching methods in vocal skill teaching is that the teacher demonstrates the correct singing to strengthen the students' apperception and comprehension.'

### 3.3 Students' correct concept of sound comes from their vocal teacher

The vocal teacher who has good capability of singing will know the correct concept of sound, or in other words, will get the accurate ear of music, that's the fundamental qualification a qualified vocal teacher should have. It also can be regarded as the resolving ability of the teacher to judge the sound and a watershed to decide the teacher's work being successful or failed. Based on the correct concept of sound, can the vocal teacher develop the keen ability of distinction on the students' singing, point out their default timely and give suggestions and guidance on their learning and singing and pull them away from the wrong and indirect route. The great singer, Gigli said 'Before vocalize, one shall shape it in one's mind and endow it with the right color, tone and the facial expressions.' That is what we usually say 'Think before you sing.' It is to form the correct concept of sound at first and the let these concepts do the conditioned response, adjusting automatically in one's mind to balance the sound

organs for vocal and singing. The goal of vocal music teaching is to reach the subconsciously singing through conscious learning. The students will get the right experience when integrating the abstract concept of sound with the concrete and correct image of sound, so they are asked to practice repeatedly and persevere. Till making it a habitual behavior, in this way, the maximum results can be achieved with little effort. Therefore, the good capability of the vocal teacher is the key to instruct the students to set up the correct concept of sound.

## CONCLUSION

Vocal music is a subject which is invisible and intangible but with strong requirements on the technique and practicalness. It is very difficult to teach and train on the vocal method with only the vocal theory and written materials, because the words can hardly disclose the connotation of the vocal skills, adding on that, the difference between each individual's physiological conditions, comprehension and perception makes the study of written materials more difficult. The vocal teacher who cannot demonstrate, teaching only following the methods on books, can hardly judge the correctness of the method and the sound effect and possibly leads to the wrong vocal methods. A teacher who has certain capability to sing and meanwhile knows the vocal theory and knowledge will have a much clearer goal and use more flexible means during his teaching. To improve one's teaching, the vocal teacher should see a lot more of the world renowned singers' concerts as well as the vocal masters' teaching summary, besides that, the tapes, records, and concerts shall also be viewed often. One more important point here is that the teacher should interact well with the students during the teaching, lead them to be diligent at learning and practice and cultivate the habit of thinking, create opportunities for stage performance and various kinds of social practices, encourage them to participate in vocal competitions and summarize timely for them the knowledge not known and already mastered and guide, analyze and resolve in time. In this way, fruitful achievements must be achieved.

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