

# COMMUNICATING VOICE

SUMMER 2018  
VOLUME 19, ISSUE 1



The journal of **the british voice association** – the UK's voice for voice

# COMMUNICATING VOICE

## SUMMER 2018 VOLUME 19, ISSUE 1

Welcome & Inside this issue.....2

### EVENT REPORT

World Voice Day 2018 ..... 3

### LET'S TALK ABOUT

Core Competencies in Singing Teaching ..... 4

A hard beginning maketh a good ending: *Some personal thoughts on the making of a singing teacher* ..... 6

### EVENT REPORT

Voice Clinics Forum ..... 8

### BOOK REVIEW

Galvanising Performance: *the Alexander Technique as a Catalyst for Excellence* ..... 10

### EVENT REPORT

Freeing the Dancer's Voice ..... 11

FORTHCOMING EVENTS ..... 12

### COVER PHOTO



Yvon Bonenfont, keynote speaker at this year's Voice Clinics Forum; see p8–9



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## WELCOME

Welcome to the Summer edition of *Communicating Voice*. I am delighted to be taking up the role of editor; simultaneously nervous about how I might fill the very elegant shoes vacated by Lynne Wayman, who has edited this publication so skilfully, but also excited at the prospect of taking it forward.



Geraldine McElearney

*Communicating Voice* is one of the primary touchpoints between the BVA and its members, so it's of the utmost importance to me that it provides a high-quality, stimulating read throughout the year. This newsletter is also one of the best opportunities we have to present ourselves to the outside world and I want to ensure that it reflects an organisation containing an enormous diversity of talent, interests and experience within its membership. Every time I go to one of our events, I am bowled over by the brilliance of our people and the fantastic, creative, insightful and highly skilled work you do. I always come away buzzing with ideas and looking forward to getting back to work. If *Communicating Voice* can offer even a tiny window onto the energy of the BVA, I'll be happy.

If there is anything you would like to see covered here, anything you loved, anything you hated and all shades in between, please do get in touch. I look forward to hearing from you!

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

As we go to print, the first part of the annual Accent Method course has just taken place in Birmingham. So far this year, we've had two fantastic events: in March, in spite of heavy snow across the land, 'Freeing the Dancer's Voice' (London) explored ideas around the often conflicting challenges of being both a singer and a dancer – challenges routinely faced by the musical theatre profession, the pop industry and increasingly, those working in opera. Dr Hara Trouli reports on page 11. Just a week or so later, Southampton was bathed in balmy sunshine for the annual Voice Clinics Forum (VCF). The reviews on pages 8–9 by ENT Consultant Jonathan Fishman and singer/singing teacher Clare Costa will give you some idea of the range of presentations assembled by the Forum's host, BVA President Nimesh Patel.

The final speaker at the VCF, Amanda Smallbone raised the thorny question of who is qualified, and on what authority, to teach singing. On page 6, Amanda gives a frank account of her own experience in establishing a career as a teacher, and how her conservatoire training prepared her for that work. Alongside Amanda's account, Gillyanne Kayes draws on her very considerable track record as a teacher to suggest a framework of competencies that should be viewed as prerequisites for any would-be teacher, especially in an essentially unregulated profession.

We also report on World Voice Day around the UK and beyond.

Don't forget the AGM on Sunday 9 September (Baden Powell House, SW7). All members are encouraged to attend; watch out for details of the full programme over the coming weeks. The next issue of *Communicating Voice* will report on the AGM; publication late-Autumn. Meanwhile, please send feedback and any letters for publication to [BVA@gmcelearney.com](mailto:BVA@gmcelearney.com)

Have a great Summer!  
Geraldine

# WORLD VOICE DAY

Every year on April 16th, the BVA joins friends and colleagues around the world to mark World Voice Day. The day celebrates healthy voices in any occupation where vocal wellbeing is especially important: teachers and lecturers, spoken word artists, DJs, call centre workers, singers, actors, barristers..... the list is far too long to include in full here! Members around the country mounted a range of events; here, **Sara Harris** presents a selection, beginning with her own contribution at a local radio station.



**Sara Harris**, South East London

"I undertook an interview for Voice of Islam radio on their drive time show. I was asked about the work of the British Voice Association and also questions about voice disorders, how many people suffer from them and what you can do to look after your voice. We spoke a bit about what can cause voice disorders, especially in terms of how damaging shouting can be for the voice. It was nice that during the interview somebody rang into the programme about a relative who had been offered surgery to remove a small benign growth on a vocal fold but was afraid to accept in case it might permanently damage the voice. It was nice to be able to reassure the caller that in the hands of an expert voice surgeon this was extremely unlikely and that in the same circumstances I would definitely accept the surgery option."

## Rachel Radford

Rotherham Speech and Language Therapy Department, Rotherham Hospital, South Yorkshire

"The main entrance of Rotherham Hospital was filled with the voices of talented students earlier this week in recognition of World Voice Day on 16 April.

More than 20 students from Rotherham College's musical theatre and dance department joined Speech and Language Therapists from The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust to raise awareness and celebrate the voice. Songs were performed and the public and staff were invited to join in. A number of Speech and Language Therapists were on hand during the celebrations to provide patients and visitors to the hospital with advice and guidance on a range of simple voice exercises.



We wanted to celebrate World Voice Day by showcasing how powerful their voice can be, how people should look after it and what support is available for people with voice problems."

## Leslie Cartwright

National Theatre Drama School, Melbourne, Australia

"Working with first year students in the professional acting program, we took 'Vocal Health' as our theme and discussed common vocal problems for actors. The BVA's A4 flyer, Take Care of Your Voice, served as a helpful prompt for general voice and health issues. It's important for young actors to take ownership of such issues, early on in their training."

## Sam Brady

Specialist Speech and Language Therapist, Speech Tools Ltd, Bristol

"Speech Tools Limited is an app company which designs and creates apps to help people to improve their voice. As a specialist speech and language therapist working in the field of voice, all of our voice apps have been developed due to a clinical need – for people who need help in maintaining a healthy voice or are wanting to monitor or change their voice. We have now sold our apps in 177 different countries!" <https://speechtools.co/>

## Pippa Anderson

Pippa Anderson is a vocal coach and singing teacher based in the North East, and a Director of Vocal Room. Visit her facebook page to see posts celebrating WVD. <https://www.facebook.com/vocalroom/videos/451812721914796/>

## LET'S TALK ABOUT...

# Core Competencies in Singing Teaching

Dr Gillyanne Kayes

At the beginning of this year I was invited by London College of Music UWL to take up a Visiting Professorship. As you might expect I'm on a pedagogical path and hoping to make a contribution to our profession. It seems there is a real zeitgeist Europe-wide to put in place guidelines for training of singing teachers. In France legislation is already pending, and EVTA (European Voice Trainers Association) are holding a round table session on this topic at this year's Eurovox conference. Currently anybody can – and does – set themselves up as a singing teacher. The Millennials are hitting the work scene – keen to make their mark – but sadly (despite boundless enthusiasm) all too often without the 10,000 hours of experience that can help make an expert teacher.

## Your client, your team

According to Wikipedia the business world identifies Core Competencies as being "The harmonisation and combination of multiple resources and skills". The big question of course, is what these might comprise in our multifaceted world of singing teaching. Bear with me as I digress in comparing our profession with that of the voice clinician.

Back in November 2017 I attended a two-day conference run



by the British Laryngological Society. A big take-home for me was the strong sense of collaborative team-work that goes on in a good voice clinic.

Cathy Gass, lead SLT clinician at QEH Birmingham, spoke about how teamwork facilitates ongoing professional development within the team – something that we singing teachers often lack. How often do we co-coach or co-teach a client? To whom can we go to for a bit of supervision? I am in an advantageous position working with my husband Jeremy – it means we discuss clients between us and share ideas constantly. OK, well sometimes the lesson content of the day before gets discussed over your morning tea but you learn to manage that and have switch-off time from your voice-nerd-teacher brain. Cathy Gass also emphasised that at the heart of the work in a voice clinic is the client's case history. Earlier in 2017 I had sat in on three days of voice clinic sessions (both general voice and singing voice) with Sue Jones and her team: I was in awe at the time spent in taking case histories and the skill with which the team were able to explore possible underlying aspects of lifestyle that might impact on voice.

I would hope that all singing teachers keep a log of client progress, however informally: it allows us to check our own progress and review the evidence base of our practice. Personally, I have kept notes on students for most of my teaching career and insist that teachers I mentor do the same. End of digression.

## Vocal function

One aspect of Core Competencies that I imagine fellow members will be agreed upon is knowledge of vocal function: anatomy and physiology of voice including the big four – respiration, phonation, resonance and articulation. A basic understanding of the neural networks involved in voice production is also helpful so that we can understand which aspects of singing voice production are likely to be under conscious control, and which are not. There is a range of courses available now for teachers seeking CPD that are externally validated, and I personally am extremely grateful

for the many learning opportunities I have had during almost 30 years of BVA membership. For me, the most reliable knowledge bank of vocal function resides with the clinicians, rather than with singers and singing teachers. From what I can see, all the great singing teachers have 'hung out' with clinicians and voice researchers at some point in their career. Our practice needs to be informed by valid and reliable information about vocal function.

## The language of singing teaching

But how do we translate this knowledge of vocal function into something meaningful to our singing students? This brings me to the subject of lexicons in singing teaching. By lexicon I mean the terms we use. Examples would be 'chest', 'head', 'twang', 'tilt', 'onset', 'forward placement' and so on. Lexicons can provide a common language between student and teacher and between groups of singing voice enthusiasts. Sometimes an 'in-house' lexicon is devised to facilitate development and dissemination of a teaching method. The advantage is that everyone trained in that method understands what their colleagues are talking about as well as to feel part of a group. Ours is an isolating profession and language connects – right?

That said, there are disadvantages too. I was very struck by a Ted Talk I watched recently about a remote tribe in the western edge of Cape York who use cardinal directions rather than 'left' and 'right'. For example, in Kuuk Thaayorre you might talk about moving your cup in a North-Northwest direction. Apparently, this allows tribe members to be superbly oriented, in a way that we tend to think of as being only possible in the animal kingdom. The thrust of the talk was that while language may connect groups of people, it can also limit their thinking. Suppose a new student doesn't know your lexicon? Or perhaps another teacher wants to discuss an aspect of vocal technique with you but doesn't use terms that you do – does that make them wrong? So the take-home of this reference is that while the language of vocal function needs to be unambiguous, a good singing teacher needs to be multi-lexical.

This brings me to the issue of knowledge transfer to our students. I am rather fond of saying "teaching isn't telling" – what Katherine Verdolini refers to as the difference between "learning how" and "learning that". Teaching is about eliciting change in our students' voices via meaningful exercises that can then be applied to musical patterns in songs. So, while I may be aware of an issue of subglottal pressure in a student's voice – say pressed phonation – it won't help her if I use either of these terms in the lesson. It will be more useful to give her a sensory instruction such as "hold your hand in front of your mouth and aim for a feeling of warm air as you sing". Sounds very 'singing teacher' I know, but it will help reset the balance of breath and vocal fold resistance. If you're a lover of the language of vocal function then Verdolini's *Principles Of Skill Acquisition Applied To Voice Training* will be an eye-opener. What your student needs from you is not 'information' about the voice – he needs sensory and perceptual cues, a clear point of focus for these, and a meaningful exercise to address the issue you want to tackle in the lesson. Guidance on the manner of teaching is therefore high on my list of core competencies.

Obviously, there is much more to be said about Core Competencies – whether a singing teacher needs keyboard

skills for example, what level of musicianship might be required and if they should have had a performing career... and more.

If this topic interests you as much as it does me, I encourage you to attend a one-day conference that we are holding at LCM on September 22: *Towards Best Practice: Teaching Singing in Higher Education – Core Competencies*. Keynote speakers are Janice Chapman, Professor Johan Sundberg and myself, with invited speakers Tori Burnay, Dr Denise Borland, Ali Bell, and Dr Susan Yarnell Monks. In addition to the presentations, there will be a focus group session where delegates can discuss what they feel a singing teacher needs to know. There will also be a poster session and a prize awarded by Compton Publishing. Proposals of no more than 300 words should be sent as a Word attachment (including details of author(s), affiliations (University, Conservatoire/ College, Orchestra, Chamber Ensemble etc.), contact details etc.), to [ivor.flint@uwl.ac.uk](mailto:ivor.flint@uwl.ac.uk) to arrive before the deadline of noon on 17th August 2018.

Booking is open now and you can read about the event here: [lcme.uwl.ac.uk/events](http://lcme.uwl.ac.uk/events)

### References:

LERA BORODITSKY *Does the language we speak shape the way we think?* Ted Talk: <http://bit.ly/2J6QI3H>

VERDOLINI, K. *Principles of Skill Acquisition Applied to Voice Training*, Chapter 8, 'The Vocal Vision: Views on Voice by 24 Leading Teachers, Coaches and Directors'; Applause Books (1997) ISBN-13: 978-1557832825

*Dr Gillyanne Kayes is a former Director/Council member of the BVA, and is much in demand as a singing teacher, vocal coach and pedagogue. With partner Jeremy Fisher, Gillyanne runs the international vocal education practice Vocal Process. Her published works include 'Singing and the Actor', 'Successful Singing Auditions' (Methuen Drama), the 'Singing Express' series (Harper Collins) and 'This is a Voice' (commissioned by the Wellcome Trust) and Oxford University Press.*



*Gillyanne Kayes working with a student at a Vocal Process Musical Theatre masterclass*

# A hard beginning maketh a good ending

*Some personal thoughts on the making of a singing teacher*

Amanda Smallbone

The words of the English renaissance writer John Heywood is perhaps an unlikely starting point for an article on teaching singing in the 21st Century, yet his words capture the essence of my evolution as a singing teacher. Without the struggles I faced early in my career, provoking me as they did to face some difficult questions and to trigger my ongoing evolution as a singing teacher, I would not have found my 'good ending'.

I share my story here, followed by some brief, emergent thoughts on the essential skills and qualities singing teachers must have. Not only so that we can identify similar ground in our experiences, but also in order that we can model good practise across the field and continue to spark discussion and debate around a profession that is constantly changing and should be adapting in response to socio-cultural spaces in which it operates.

Graduating from a London music college in 1990, having completed as part of my course a year-long module in teaching singing, I was cautiously excited to take up my first post as a peripatetic singing teacher at a school in Horsham. This first experience of working in the world of professional singing teaching taught me that my preparation was not entirely fit for purpose and that I didn't entirely know what I was doing. Whilst I was a competent pianist, knew the repertoire (at this point almost exclusively drawn from the western art music canon), had a basic knowledge of the anatomical structures of the vocal apparatus, a repertoire of vocal exercises to draw on, and was an experienced singer, I had little understanding of how these skills could be applied holistically to address the vocal needs and challenges of my students – a base-line level of competency of any professional singing teacher.

Reflecting on my own experience of singing lessons, I began to understand that I was taught primarily by rote. I learnt much from my eminent teachers, however, much of what I was taught was heavily rooted in a traditional, linear model of teaching with a teacher-centred approach at its core: ie do as I do. Whilst there are benefits to this mode of teaching, it can



be an arbitrary process, the success of which, I would argue, depends largely on the student having a similar vocal makeup to that of their teacher and being able to accurately model the desired somatic response. This approach has produced many great singers, however, many, many more have not had the chance to even begin to explore their potential for lack of a more individual and informed intervention.

It became clear to me that my own approach to teaching singing was almost entirely modelled on the teaching I had experienced, and that some of the difficulties I encountered addressing specific individual vocal issues were due to the fact that I had adopted a mode of teaching which wasn't responsive to the needs of my students. Whilst my teaching did not result in students experiencing vocal damage, it was clear to me that I did not have the appropriate diagnostic tools to assess and support those who were experiencing difficulties with aspects of vocal function. Neither did I have any working knowledge of how the vocal apparatus operated across genres, so I was unable to effectively support students in achieving particular vocal qualities required of different genres outside the canon of western classical vocal repertoire. It was all very hit and miss.

I was not as effective a singing teacher as I had expected and was finding it a much less instinctive process than I had imagined. Frustration with my limited skill set grew as confidence in my ability diminished. Further frustration arose when I developed some serious issues with my vocal function several years after graduating and was unable to find appropriate help. Subsequently, through my own research, I discovered these problems were, in fact the result of a long-standing misunderstanding of breath-management and TMJ issues which resulted in almost total jaw lock and an inability to produce any useful sung sound.

Today, these early experiences still provide the basis of a life-long, and on going project to discover what it means to be an effective singing teacher. I have learnt that teaching singing is a far more complex and skilled undertaking than I imagined 30 years ago, requiring the mediation and application of a surprisingly wide range of complementary knowledge, skills and instinct, too broad to do credit to in the scope of this article.

What I will say here is that the discourse surrounding the appropriate training, on going development and support of singing teachers is as pressing as it has ever been, and the BVA with its members representing disciplines across the broader field of voice, is ideally placed to continue to be at the forefront of these developments. At the recent BVA voice clinic forum there was much productive discussion around the incipient dangers to vocal health of the unregulated nature of the field of singing teaching, and the urgent need for a clear set of core-competencies and role descriptors to be laid out by professional bodies, such as the BVA. This would be a useful aid to those looking for a singing teacher and/or rehabilitation singing voice specialist and, more pertinently in the context of this article, those looking to enter the field and/or engage in continuing professional development (CPD). My 22 year old self would have hugely benefitted from being able to make reference to a sliding scale of optimal competencies alongside a guide to recommended training resources through which these competencies could be developed further.

Much of what I have detailed above has been discussed, researched and written about in much greater detail by distinguished colleagues in the field and from whose research,

wisdom and support I continue to benefit from. Which brings me to the good ending I alluded to at the beginning of this article. Because my good ending continues to unfold with an acknowledgement that whilst I may still not have all the answers I do now know which questions I must ask.

‘Ongoing open and honest collaborations between voice teachers and voice scientists – both of whom are thoughtful and humble enough to consider perspectives other than their own – are needed to advance the pedagogy and art of singing’ (2013: xiv)

**Reference:** Bozeman, KW, *Practical Vocal Acoustics: Pedagogic Applications for Teachers and Singers*, Pendragon Press (2013); ISBN 978-1-57647-240-8

*Amanda currently holds a post as senior lecturer in voice at the University of Winchester where she teaches undergraduate students across the department of performing arts. Alongside her teaching and research at the University, she runs a small private teaching practice giving individual singing lessons to a range of students, as well as delivering voice-related workshops and lectures.*

## Non-exhaustive list of some of qualities and competencies singing teachers should possess

### Core skill and knowledge

- Secure knowledge of vocal structures and and their physiological functioning across genres
- Basics of vocal acoustics and role in vowel shaping
- Ability to identify vocal development needs and design appropriate vocal function exercises
- Knowledge of repertoire in chosen field – ideally this should encompass a range of genres
- Ability to identify repertoire choices appropriate to vocal development needs
- Musicianship and keyboard skills
- Artistry

### Contextual awareness

- Awareness of sociocultural/institutional context in which teaching takes place. This is a much longer discussion, but has a crucial impact on repertoire choice, teaching methodology etc
- Awareness of different requirements of teaching in one-to-one setting and group settings

### Personal attribute – Self-Awareness

- Language choice and prosody
- Physical presence and body language
- Emotional wellbeing and boundaries
- Awareness of strengths and limitations – asking for help from colleagues when working outside your area of experience
- Adaptability
- Enthusiasm

### Teaching and Learning

- Ongoing engagement with teaching and learning pedagogies relevant to the contexts in which teaching takes place

# VOICE CLINICS FORUM

Attendees at this year's Voice Clinics Forum were treated to a wealth of knowledge, ideas and shared experiences from the truly diverse panel of presenters. Two delegates describe the day.

## Jonathan Fishman

On Friday 23rd March 2018, the BVA congregated at the Hilton Hotel in Southampton for the Voice Clinics Forum 2018 – an update on the multidisciplinary management of common voice disorders.

The day started out with a phenomenal introduction to neurolaryngological disorders that affect the voice by John Rubin and Ruth Epstein. In their talks they emphasised the diverse array of neurological disorders that can affect the voice, including the importance of speech therapy and surgery in the management of various different neurological voice disorders.

This was followed by a fascinating talk by Yvon Bonenfont introducing the concept of how we might engage wide-

ranging audiences to reflect on the nature of the voice and the role the voice plays in wider culture, by inviting them to become vocalisers, utilising innovative methods to explore the relationship between sound and touch. For further information, visit <http://yourvivaciousvoice.com/>

The free papers sessions included papers by Jessica Chapman on the effects of electronic cigarettes on voice. There was some discussion on further work being needed to assess the role of electronic cigarettes on the voice. Dr L. Jones presented a poster outlining a case of Crohn's disease affecting the supraglottis. Elinor Warner presented a 3-cycle audit of tertiary voice clinics over a 13 year period (2004-2017) and their group concluded that tertiary voice clinic attendance resulted in 69% of diagnoses being made, changed or refined.

After lunch, Tom Harris, Sara Harris and Linda Hutchison gave a joint session entitled 'The Elite Performer in Crisis'. They all offered their unique perspectives and experience of the role of the surgeon, the speech therapist and the singing rehabilitation coach in managing this often complex scenario, and they emphasised the importance of the multidisciplinary approach in such situations.

The theme of the final session of the day focused on functional voice disorders. Marianne Bos-Clark discussed the role of the speech therapist. Amanda Smallbone gave a singing teacher's perspective. Yakubu Karagama discussed the role of video biofeedback and surgery (Botox and vocal fold augmentation) in the management of hyperfunctional and hypofunctional voice disorders and showed some impressive videos of patients being treated utilising a biofeedback approach with videolaryngoscopy. He also touched on his experience of the type 2 thyroplasty in the treatment of patients with spasmodic dysphonia refractory to other, more conventional treatments.

Thank you to Nimesh Patel for organising this successful event, as well as Compton Publishing, DP Medical Systems Ltd, Merz Pharma UK Ltd, NeomedUK Ltd and Pentax Medical for their sponsorship of this meeting.

**Jonathan Fishman** is an ENT Locum Consultant and Laryngologist at the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust



*John Rubin*



*Linda Hutchison*

## Clare Costa

This year's forum provided a fascinating programme of speakers from across the spectrum of voice care. The morning kicked off with an exploration of neurological voice disorders. John Rubin spoke about their diagnosis and surgical management, looking at the various neural pathways associated with speech and sound production, and giving us a whistle-stop tour of different disorders. As a person of limited medical knowledge, my brain struggled to get to grips with some of the material presented, but it served to highlight the intricacies of the vocal mechanism in all its ability and fragility, and its connection with the human brain. Ruth Epstein went on to illustrate how voice therapy can trigger changes in the neuroplastic central nervous system outlined by John. She also looked at the psychological aspects of treatment, including how the client relates to therapy, their perception of the possible outcome, whether they use active or passive coping mechanisms, and how these factors can influence their progress.

'And now for something completely different' was the phrase that came to mind as Yvon Bonenfant took the floor to talk about his innovative work. His aim is to challenge the public perception of voice as something over which we have little control and advocates a conscious engagement with our voices. He explored issues of authenticity and identity, and the need to de-mystify voice work, using the term 'vocalising' rather than 'singing', which for many people can conjure up prescriptive ideas, or even fear, and therefore impede the process of finding vocal freedom. Together with his team, he has conducted several highly original and highly successful experiments using sound and touch. Although they might seem a little wacky to the casual observer, these playful and engaging ideas have a strong scientific basis. The subject matter of this talk was both refreshing and compelling.

The early afternoon session was devoted to looking at 'the elite performer in crisis', and the three speakers eloquently demonstrated the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach within the voice clinic setting. Tom Harris spoke from a surgeon's perspective about the perks and pitfalls of dealing with a professional, possibly famous, performer. When dealing with such a patient, the additional pressures of expectation, fear, and length of rehabilitation time must be managed in a complex decision-making process. In a joint presentation, Sara Harris and Linda Hutchison explored the complementary roles of speech therapist and singing rehabilitation coach respectively. They highlighted the need for a compassionate awareness of all the pressures facing the performer, and a supportive, often tailor-made approach to therapy, so that they can return to work as swiftly as is safely possible.

Speech therapist Marianne Bos-Clark led on from this in an inspiring contribution, drawing on her experience with all types of voice user, and stressing the importance of the therapist's own commitment to the process. She too advocated having recourse to a variety of techniques and exercises. Her buzz words to describe a good practitioner were 'effective', 'reflective' and 'dynamic' – someone with clear strategies, capable of good listening, and able to encourage the patient in self-analysis and empowerment.



Yakubu Karagama presented video clips of several different case studies, where chronic voice problems showed a dramatic improvement as patients performed vocal exercises whilst being able to watch their own larynx on video simultaneously. His evidence seemed to show that having their voice made visible had a very positive effect on patients, perhaps enabling them to feel reunited with their voices, and able to respond better physically and emotionally. It was certainly a moving experience to witness the patients' joy as they were able to vocalise again after months, or in one case 30 years, of suffering.

The final speaker of the day was Amanda Smallbone, university lecturer and singing teacher. She addressed the problems arising from the lack of an adequate functional knowledge of the voice amongst many singing teachers, and the lack of any regulation or accountability within the profession. She touched on the contentious area of technique that I'm sure many teachers can relate to, a point also made by Linda earlier in the day. Singing teaching seems to divide into two camps – those who endorse a functional and anatomical approach, and those who (sometimes vociferously) oppose it, preferring to rely more on the use of imagery. Most controversial of all is the concept of 'support', and many a singer has become completely confused by contradictory advice in this area. She stressed the importance of helping all types of singer to really connect with their bodies and understand how their instrument works. She made an interesting point about the influence of personality type on voice disorders, for example how introverts are more susceptible to muscle tension dysphonia whilst extroverts are more susceptible to nodules.

A fully functioning voice is an integral part of who we are, how we express ourselves, and how we communicate with others. Anyone suffering a voice disorder can find themselves in a place of frustration, inadequacy, and even loneliness. I found the day to be informative and inspiring, challenging us to be the best practitioners that we can be in our own sphere of expertise. The day's talks showed clearly the advantages of a multidisciplinary approach, where different skills can complement each other and provide a comprehensive process of healing.

*Clare Costa is a classical singer and voice coach  
See pages 6–7 for a more detailed account of Amanda  
Smallbone's experience as a singing teacher.*

# Galvanising Performance: the Alexander Technique as a Catalyst for Excellence

Ed Cathy Madden and Kathleen Juhl,  
Singing Dragon, 2017, 336 pps, £27.99,  
ISBN 978-1-78592-720-1



Reviewed by  
Jeremy Finch White

My personal experience of the Alexander Technique (AT) began at RADA with weekly private lessons through the first two years of training. Before drama school I had little relationship to my body, and AT played a major role in waking up my awareness and an experience of embodiment that helped me develop as a performer. Since becoming a Voice and Singing Coach I have sought ways of bringing some underlying AT principles to my classes. Therefore, I was excited to review this ambitious collection of essays. I looked forward to discovering, as the blurb promises, some “creative and practical ways of incorporating the Alexander Technique” into my teaching work.

*Galvanising Performance* brings together current insights and applications of the AT in 13 peer-reviewed essays by leading Alexander teachers experienced in training actors, singers and dancers. In the introduction, Cathy Madden shares her conviction that the technique gives the neophyte performer a powerful way to facilitate learning, develop

creatively and move efficiently. She quotes educationalist Frank Pierce Jones who writes that AT “opens a window onto the little-known area between stimulus and response and gives you the self-knowledge you need in order to *change*.”

The perspective of this book differs slightly from the AT that most performers have experienced in the UK: these, mostly American practitioners, teach in groups rather than in traditional 1:2:1 sessions. Such an approach was developed by Marjorie Barstow, an early pupil of Alexander’s. Rather than the sitting, standing and lying down work typical in AT private practise, group classes open out the technique to any activity the student wishes to perform. Several of the authors cite Barstow’s approach as central to their work. In the UK we are seeing a further development of Barstow’s teaching in Barbara Conable’s *Body Mapping* – for example, in her series ‘What Every Singer/Musician/Dancer should know about their Body.’ *Body Mapping* teaches experiential anatomy which promotes an understanding of the form and function of the body in order to create an efficient use that works with, rather than against, our design. Along with Barstow’s ‘learning in activity,’ Conable’s work is cited as directly influential by several of the authors in *Galvanising Performance*.

Some of the “new approaches ... brought to light” by this book struck me as noteworthy for the voice community. Three essays seem especially useful: Patricia O’Neill writes in ‘Metaphorically Speaking’ about connections between classical singing, the use of imagery in pedagogy and AT; Kate Conklin, a Bulgarian singing specialist and Alexander Teacher, who documents her collaboration with Cirque du Soleil during ‘O’ in Las Vegas in ‘Engaging the Expert Performer: Affinity as Pathway’; and finally, Madden’s case studies in ‘Glimpsing the Collaboratives’ explore detailed, productive teaching partnerships between several pairs of voice and AT teachers at Julliard and in the professional development arena in LA.

Part of the purpose of this collection is to demonstrate not only an ‘evolution’ in the application of AT but an opening out the very language that is used in teaching the AT. For me, some of this shifting out of traditional terminology enhanced my understanding of how to apply the Alexander learning process: stopping, directing and then acting with awareness. For instance, the reframing of ‘Direction’ being an inner

**wish** stimulated my actor’s imagination and prevented me from fixing my neck before working on a speech; in addition, the ease of ‘wishing’ resonated with the way my singing teacher Jane Streton suggests her students simply think a pitch. This way of preparing an intention to act or sing takes the effort out and cultivates efficiency instead.

Other changes to the use of Alexander language however, I struggled with. A change found in several essays, what AT refers to as Inhibition – the idea of pausing or stopping before carrying out a stimulus – is renamed as **withholding definition**. Initially this confused more than enlightened me. However, having lived with and revisited the idea in preparation for this review I have found some merit in the idea of ‘withholding’: it implies that one can experience an impulse without having to react to or label that experience. Recalling Jones’ idea of AT opening a window of space where we may change – withholding definition prevents our automatic thought from becoming fixed into habit. As performers it keeps us in the present, responsive and receptive.

There are other insights from the book that will appeal to performers and teachers; I liked the assertion in Sarah Barker’s essay, ‘Full Embodiment’, that it is not necessary “to achieve good self-use before applying it” in performing. This essay develops a productive way of applying the AT in opening up possibilities for actors. Poise is seen as being full of potential as opposed to an emptier state of neutral. Barker also asserts that direction, the intention for a freer coordination between neck, head and back realises such presence in performance. Far from zoning out, “allowing a new relationship of ease becomes the initial step for **action**.”

Overall I found the collection very stimulating. This is a handy, elegantly written book, which allows the reader to dip in and out of many teachers’ ‘classes.’ Once there, one can fish for ideas to inform our own creative practice and particularly to find ways of encouraging ease and freedom in our students. If you have previous experience of Alexander or want some ways of articulating the psycho-physical experience of freedom to bring to your clients you will find this book a great resource.

*Jeremy Finch White is a professional performer and teaches Voice, Text, Singing and Dialect at LAMDA and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.*

# FREEING THE DANCER'S VOICE

by Dr Hara Trouli

On Sunday 18th March at the Arts Education School in Chiswick I attended the 'Freeing the Dancer's Voice' day event organised by the School and the British Voice Association. From morning to early evening, we were privileged to see and hear a variety of expertise and real life scenarios that made the day truly worthwhile. The theme around the dancer's voice addressed the multiple issues of the musical theatre performer from the young age to the elite professional and we were left more knowledgeable and appreciating these multi-level artists who we so admire and enjoy in our London theatres and worldwide.

The day started with Laurann Brown and Christine Mottram who described the challenging tasks of educating young students in the Arts School and introducing them to musical theatre skills. They discussed their curriculum integrating vocal skills and how 'speech work is choreography'. As clearly stated by Laurann and Christine, the teachers who firstly establish the principles of the craft; they also develop the platform from where these young professionals will emerge and grow.

The osteopath and musical performer Tommi Sliiden presented his thorough and impressive work on dancers who sing. Tommi has a classical ballet background and transitioned to musical theatre later in his career. He highlighted the difficulties and how he had to re-learn techniques of breathing and emission of voice to succeed on stage. Tommi's research as an MSc graduate of Performing Arts Medicine at University College London reinforced these concepts and gave us a solid scientific interpretation of



*Tommi Sliiden*

breathing and phonation in musical theatre performers. It was exciting to hear such an all-round approach and appreciate the science behind the art.

Ed Blake, physiotherapist and director of PhysioEd Medical with two clinics in London treating performers, gave us a concrete physiological approach to the connection between voice and musculoskeletal structures and how global muscle activity may affect the voice. This is extremely important to understand and, particularly for singers who dance, this connection becomes pivotal. Ed explained the anatomical relations between abdominal muscles, the diaphragm and the control of the subglottic pressure and emphasized the importance of collaboration between vocal coach, physiotherapist, speech and language therapist and singing teacher with setting up programmes of logical progression of simple broken-down tasks.

After lunch we were treated to a demonstration of practical consultations with three young musical theatre performers with Mark Meylan, international contemporary commercial music teacher, and Ron Morris, speech therapist, audiologist and counter-tenor. Themes of how to rehearse, look after posture, alignment, re-balancing and muscle adaptations as a singer/dancer were expertly shown and practised on stage. They also embraced energy presentation principles particularly for dancers who need to reign in their energy in order to achieve the best balance in their musical theatre activity.

It was a thrill to see also Leanne Cope in conversation with Mark Meylan. Leanne started as a classical ballerina and became the lead in American in Paris both in New York and in London. She told us how this transition in her performance skills took place with hard work and adjustments that she had to be re-trained for. She referred to the importance of both body and vocal warm-ups and how she herself has benefited from professionals such as Mark Meylan and her physiotherapist Moira McCormack. I have heard Leanne before at the Performing Arts Medicine conference in

New York sharing her personal experience and amazingly still young career with us and it is admirable to have the opportunity to hear from the elite in the profession. Leanne is a bright example of this.

The day finished with all presenters acting as a multi-disciplinary panel and interacting with the audience. Discussion was made on how choreographers should consider both the singing and the dancing body and how all skills should be integrated. The musical theatre performer needs to continuously adapt to the demands of the show and this alone makes them a unique whole performer. The panel further addressed singing, dancing and speaking breathing, and how less/fewer physiological adaptations need to be made to meet the expectations of the show. This vibrant session finished with Ron Morris' final motto when asked about 'voice over shoe-noise'. He simply replied 'sing kinaesthetically, not orally'.

I thoroughly enjoyed this BVA event. It offered a well-balanced day with professional, scientific and real-life accounts of a crucial matter, the dancer's voice. As a clinician but also as an educator in Performing Arts Medicine, I found the information given to us was pertinent and useful. I would certainly encourage my PAM colleagues and students to attend should the BVA schedule similar events.

**Dr Hara Trouli, DM-SMed, MSc**

*Programme Lead of MSc Performing Arts Medicine UCL and BAPAM Clinician*



*Christine Mottram*

## FORTHCOMING ASSOCIATION EVENTS

See [www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk](http://www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk) for more details

### **BRITISH VOICE ASSOCIATION AGM**

Sunday 9th September 2018, 09:30 to 10:15  
Baden Powell House Conference Centre, London

### **AGM STUDY DAY – including presentation of the Van Lawrence Prize 2018** *(see right)*

Sunday 9th September 2018, 10:30 to 17:15  
Baden Powell House Conference Centre, London.  
Full programme and booking details available at [www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk/events.htm](http://www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk/events.htm)

### **ROCK & POP DAY 2018**

The BVA will host its next Rock & Pop Day event on Sunday 25th November 2018 at Cecil Sharp House in London. An exciting line-up of speakers is currently being confirmed. The event is also likely to include a half-day workshop the day before with a prominent speaker from the music industry. *More details to be announced soon!*

Further information also available from [administrator@britishvoiceassociation.org.uk](mailto:administrator@britishvoiceassociation.org.uk) or +44 (0)300 123 2773

## AGM STUDY DAY

Sunday 9th September 2018

### **Glottal Start: Laryngeal science into practice**

Baden Powell House Conference Centre, London

Presenters include:

- **Professor José R Sañudo**
- **Professor Stephen McHanwell**
- **Dr Justin Weir**
- **Professor Janice Chapman AUA**

A day of lectures, demonstrations and interactive panel discussions that will appeal to all voice professionals including speech and language therapists, laryngologists and singing teachers. The programme will focus on laryngeal science and its direct application to practice. Professors Sañudo and McHanwell will update attendees on applied anatomy and physiology. Janice Chapman and her panel will explore auditory and visual clues particularly useful for singing teachers.

**The day also includes the Van Lawrence Prize Papers with the presentation of the Winner for 2018.**

*The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the British Voice Association will precede this Study Day event.*