

The hidden Language - an ongoing artistic research project involving students at RDAM

Many Danish singers find it difficult to sing in their mother tongue. They claim that the Danish language is impossible to combine with classical singing. However, if we go back five decades this was not the case. At that time all operas and most songs were translated and performed in Danish, and, judging from recordings, the singers had not only beautiful but also extremely intelligible text. Today almost all vocal repertoire is done in the original language, and singers have to work diligently to master the pronunciation of numerous languages. So maybe the problems that Danish singers have singing in their own language simply stem from a lack of routine or maybe the reason is that the spoken language has developed very far away from the diction in singing?

The project addresses these issues by investigating the tradition and applying its best practise to current vocal performance as it is being taught at The Royal Danish Academy of Music (RDAM). The voice faculty will be involved in the stipulation of a norm for contemporary pronunciation of Danish in classical singing, and this pronunciation will be transcribed into the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) as a means of communicating the inherent knowledge of this community of practise. The objective of the transcription is to reflect the numerous articulatory adjustments of the Danish language in classical singing.

The method at the core of the project is to go from sound to phonetic notation and back to sound. The purpose of this exercise is manifold:

- to facilitate the implementation of an increased awareness of articulation in the mother tongue for Danish singers
- to investigate the role of this increased awareness in the identity of the young Danish singer
- to create a tool by which foreign singers can access and perform Danish vocal literature
- to document the RDAM norm for pronunciation of the Danish language in classical singing anno 2017.

The validity of the tools that are being developed in the project will be tested on three groups of voice students at RDAM: 1. Danish singers 2. Singers with Danish as a second language 3. Singers with no knowledge of the Danish language. In all three cases recordings are made before and after the introduction to the material in order to test its impact. The investigation also addresses the influence of the material, if any, on the artistic identity of the singers.

The results of the project will be published in a database consisting of a number of articles, written in both Danish and English, which describe the development of the Danish song IPA and document the reflections on the proces. At the core of the database will be a comprehensive list of Danish vocal repertoire consisting of scores, texts, translations, IPA-transcriptions, sound files with the texts recited as poems as well as in the rhythm of the songs. Finally the database will also consist of video recordings of these songs with students from RDAM.



Eva Hess Thaysen, associate professor of voice
The Royal Danish Academy of Music, Copenhagen, Denmark
Eva-hess.thaysen@dkdm.dk

Eva Hess Thaysen has been a member of the voice faculty at The Royal Danish Academy of Music since 2008. Since 2006 she has also been teaching voice at The Bel Canto Institute in Florence, Italy. As an operasinger, Eva Hess Thaysen has sung more than 40 roles on stage, mainly as a principal soloist with The Danish National Opera. She has performed with all Danish Symphony Orchestras and with The Polish National Radio S.O., Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Malmo S.O. She has performed at festivals all over Europe and has recorded extensively, including songs by Carl Nielsen (Rondo), Charlotte in "The Sleeping Draught" with the Danish Radio Sinfonietta (Dacapo), songs by Dan Marmorstein (Classico), and numerous recordings of contemporary Danish music. EHT is President of the Board of The Danish Lied Society and President of the Board of Egnsteatret Undergrunden. She is also a member of the board of The Music Confucius Institute at RDAM.