

POP AND JAZZ PLATFORM MEETING (AEC)
Conservatorio di Musica «Luisa D'Annunzio», Pescara (Italy), 08-11/02/2018

OPEN FLOOR SESSION

VOICE as BODY and BODY as VOICE

- Workshop about Group Practice of Voice through Movement and Improvisation -
for musicians, actors, dancers

presenter - MARTA RAVIGLIA



ph_Marta Raviglia

Marta Raviglia will introduce her own research about the relationship among voice, movement and improvisation through a series of guided exercises. The massive use of the body and improvisation in vocal warm ups positively affects the consciousness of the voice as a pure instrument. This approach to teaching vocal technique involves a deep relationship with the others and, in particular, with a group and this leads to a better level of communication – group practice enhances sense of trust through mutual exchange and contact. Vocalizing in movement and, at the same time, improvising using many different kinds of musical forms help developing in every student sensibility, creativity and the ability to listen. Respecting the uniqueness of a body is fundamental and every voice in the world is different because every body generating it has a different shape – so you cannot separate the voice from the body that produces it. Warming-up this way, there is almost no separation between practice and performance because students need to be very much concentrated on what they do and learn how to be effective on the use of their own instrument and, most of all, they become aware of the full technical and interpretational potential of their voices.

During the workshop I will introduce my own research about the relationship among voice, movement and improvisation since so far I have found out that a massive use of the body and improvisation in vocal

warm ups deeply and positively affects the consciousness of the voice as a pure instrument and one's improvisational and interpretational skills. This is why vocalizing in movement and, at the same time, improvising using jazz forms like the blues, the rhythm changes, the song form and even open structures help focusing on the full potential of the voice.

When I was still a student and, later, when I started teaching jazz singing, I realized there were too many limits in the traditional approach to voice teaching – so I started studying very carefully my own voice which was apparently free while my body was not. In addition, I felt exactly the very same kind of restrictions while practising jazz improvisation in comparison with song interpretation – in the first case, I experimented great freedom, in the second I was scared to death to deal with words and meaning. So I started observing my own body and its moving and standing schemes and, also, I started practicing contemporary dance while developing a strong interest towards *Alexander Technique*, *Dalcroze Eurhythmics*, *Feldenkrais Method* and *La Musique du Corps Method*, among others, because I knew I had to do something to liberate energy that could be addressed into interpretation and, more extensively, into self-confidence.

So when I started teaching jazz singing, I tried to mix my jazz background, my classical voice training background, my theatre background and my dance background and this led me to develop a particular kind of voice training including vocalization, movement and improvisation. I also tried to decontextualize the practice and to vocalize not only during practice time but also in other moments of the day and other circumstances to feel the whole process to be more natural. For example, I suggest that you should try and sing a be-bop theme while walking or while you clean the house and, at the same time, try and mark the accents of the theme itself with specific practical actions, that are far from being artistic, concerning the acts of walking and cleaning the house.

Apart from that, there are a huge amount of exercises you can work on to improve, at the same time, the quality of sound, the sense of rhythm and your improvisational and interpretational skills. First of all, I suggest that you should work in a quite big room according to the number of students you have and that you wear very comfortable clothes. Then you start warming up the body to become familiar with the space itself and to awake your senses. Sometimes you work with your eyes closed and sometimes with your eyes open, sometimes you work with music and sometimes what you only need is silence. After the physical warm up follows the vocal one where traditional *vocalizzi d'opera* are inserted in a completely different frame since you work in different positions and both standing and moving but, above all, in the pause between one exercise and another many things can happen. This is exactly when a singer becomes an actor, too, and this helps increasing one's natural musicality and creativity – that pause becomes the place where action and its potential are explored both vocally and physically. This is why I always suggest working on themes – musical ones (like glissando, accents, syncopation, ect.) and theatrical ones, so you have to imagine to be in a certain place and do certain things – for example, you can imitate animals or children, or you can pretend to live another era or a specific place and act and behave consequently. Then you can start working on improvising structures – for example one of the most successful exercises among my students consists on singing the roots of a typical jazz structure, like the blues or the rhythm changes, while describing a situation with some obliged and some free movements.

As the great Italian jazz singer Maria Pia De Vito always says, we have to remember that swing used to be a dance. Swing is contagious and very much physical – even if nowadays we tend to intellectualize jazz (and, more in general, music), we do not have to forget this because the authentic nature of this music lies in rhythm and movement, conceived as evolution and revolution of body and soul. So I discovered that respecting the uniqueness of a body is fundamental and that every voice in the world is different because every body generating it has a different shape – so you cannot separate the voice from the body that produces it. Only then you will start to deeply feel what you sing through your body because your voice is your body, you are your body and you have to feel very comfortable with it because it is your own instrument. Moreover, you have to be conscious about your body expressive potential and everyday life can be a source of infinite inspiration this way. If you carefully think about it, this is exactly what in jazz we

call the creation and development of a personal and recognizable sound.

In addition, you always need to focus on the strong connection between exercises and music. Every exercise, from the easiest to the most difficult, is music – every note sequence composing it is music, the result of it is music. We tend to feel the study of technique as something very boring, something we should avoid in favour of the acquisition of emotional and interpretational skills. But the study of technique can be very stimulating – this is why we should not call it technique because it is not a purely mechanical phenomenon but it is a process, a creative process. So that there is not a unique way to learn this process because it is always different and every singer has to find its own way of dealing with it and making it her or his own.

For these and many other reasons, what I do while teaching jazz voice is trying to develop in every student sensibility, creativity and the ability to listen. I like very much working on the repertoire but it generally represents the last part of a lesson because, first of all, I concentrate on warming the voice up through movement and improvisation. I do conceive movement in a deep relationship with space – in fact, moving can be regarded as a reflection on the concept of space. Moreover, this particular kind of approach to teaching vocal technique involves a deep relationship with the others and, in particular, with a group and this leads to a better level of communication – what in jazz we call interplay. In fact, group practice enhances sense of trust through mutual exchange and contact.

To recapitulate and conclude the vocal warm-ups that I conceived are mainly based on rhythm modules so that movement improvisation and vocal improvisation are constantly mixed together. What I really care are the quality and preparation of vocal gesture. So, warming-up this way, there is almost no separation between practice and performance because students need to be very much concentrated on what they do and learn how to be effective on the use of their own instrument and, most of all, they become aware of the full technical and interpretational potential of their voices.

MARTA RAVIGLIA



ph_Matteo Mangherini

I was about to write: Marta Raviglia can sing everything. And while this is true it is not sufficient. Since Marta Raviglia is not only able to sing everything, but she *wants* to sing *everything*. The project she pursued – which is not so much the result of a planned eclecticism, but more the vertiginous extension of desire – has been expanding over the past few years leading her to increase her repertoire, to bypass the boundaries of the genres with amused irreverence, to approach different ages and styles with elegant self-assurance. Marta, gifted with an excellent voice, flexible and full, has shaken off the suffocating bonds of a standard musical education, both academic and jazz music, has made faces to concert etiquette, and has been able to do that thanks to her studies pursued with such passionate rigour. You can break into pieces only after refining the art of construction. She has practised the most daring and voracious improvisation and played with silence and the anticipation of sound. She can shout, sigh, laugh, gasp – and she can make an element of perfect music with each line. She can be moved and become childlike again – and she can enrage herself with a previously unheard harshness. She wants to sing everything, and she is succeeding, remaining indifferent to obligations, conveniences and conventions. Pandora has just opened her box and is not going to close it, get ready. (Claudio Morandini, *writer*)

Singer, composer, performer. Her research moves between jazz and contemporary music, songwriting and daring improvisation. She has sung as a soloist with Orchestra Jazz della Sardegna, Bulgaria State Radio Big Band, Coro del Friuli Venezia Giulia, Corale

Polifonica Santa Cecilia (Sassari - Italy), Orchestra del Conservatorio «Bruno Maderna» (Cesena - Italy), Orchestra del Conservatorio di Musica «Francesco Morlacchi» di Perugia, percussion ensemble Odwalla, Franco Ferguson collective, Tower Jazz Composers Orchestra and with, among others, David Linx, Hamid Drake, Paolo Fresu, Gabriele Mirabassi, Roberto e Eduardo Taufic, Tino Tracanna, Ettore Fioravanti, Angelo 'Lillo' Quarantino, Tiziano Tononi, Lisa Mezzacappa, Gino Robair, Giovanni Maier, Giorgio Pacorig, Piero Bittolo Bon, Alfonso Santimone, Francesco Cusa, Vincenzo Vasi, Mauro Campobasso, Mauro Manzoni, Cristina Biagini, Maurizio Brunod, Pierluigi Balducci. She has worked with conductors such as John Tchicai, Bruno Tommaso, Paolo Silvestri, Giovanni Agostino Frassetto, Paolo Paroni, Eugenio Colombo, Gabriele Verdinelli, Pino Iodice, Mario Raja. Her long-time musical partnerships include 'Vocione' with trombonist Tony Cattano, 'What About Dust' with guitarist Simone Massaron and 'Lost Songs' with pianist Simone Sassu. Her multidisciplinary partnerships include performances with musician/visual artist Manuel Attanasio, coreographer Alessandra Mura and writer Claudio Morandini. Composer Gianluigi Giannatempo conceived especially for her *Lapses of Silence*, a project for solo voice and jazz orchestra dedicated to the music of some of the most representative American composers of the 19th century. She has performed at many important festivals in Italy and abroad (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, USA) and recorded a lot as leader, co-leader and guest. She graduated in jazz music and, also, in American literature and currently teaches jazz singing at Conservatorio di Musica «Francesco Morlacchi», Perugia (Italy). She often holds workshops about improvisation and the interaction between voice and movement and was invited to present her own research in Helsinki for the International Jazz Voice Conference 2017 promoted by the Sibelius Academy.