

# A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SINGING



## WHEN THE ROOTS OF ONE'S VOICE MEET THOSE OF ONE'S ESSENCE

The voice, our voice, opens us to a true apprehension of the self, a clearer conscience of what constitutes us and a novel sensation that leads to a better knowledge of the self: every human being's goal. How can we explain the mystery of the voice?

### THE ALCHEMY OF SOUND!

We all breathe the same air, yet as singers, we enjoy the privilege of transforming this air into Sound: a specific emotional medium reflecting our deepest essence, its unique quality, capacity and colour. Let's discover all of this in ourselves in happiness and bewilderment.

### “SCIENCE WITHOUT CONSCIOUSNESS IS NOTHING BUT THE SOUL'S DISTRESS”

We are fortunate enough to have at our disposal nowadays a rich array of information concerning the physiological aspects of phonation: books, TV shows, sophisticated tools (ENT panoply), enabling us to follow the workings of our vocal cords. All of this science is quite useful but shouldn't remain an abstract body of knowledge.

### “GNOTHIS TE AUTON” (know thyself)

Work is at the root of it all. A work in depth involving abdominal, intercostals breathing, focus on the diaphragm's working, consciousness raising of the body through appropriate exercises helping us develop the necessary *appoggio* to relax any superfluous tensions at the level of the shoulders, neck, throat, jaws...regrettably often acting as prison bars of a free sound. Let's feel compassion for this essence from within us and help it express itself, fulfil itself; it is our responsibility. To cut a long story short: let's trust our body and go in ourselves to the origins of our instinct, too often tyrannically kept under the yoke of our minds. Always ask yourself the question: how does my human machine work and listen to what it tells you.

### The LOWER part equals the HIGHER part

A gradual opening of the throat, the possibility to learn to give more space inside your mouth (by raising the soft palate) in order to better receive the sound, make room for it (ie: breathe it in rather than push it out), the correct opening of the mouth with lips shaping (so as to become the *timone della voce*), the steersman of the voice, the harmonisation of the various voice registers thanks to a systematic work on the passages and the delicate formation of vowels (see the rainbow metaphor), the covering of the sound (aperto-coperto) which will help the top notes bloom (see the feline metaphor taking his run/gathering speed before leaping onto his prey...how rich nature is in images serving our purpose...the relation between micro and macro cosmos is obvious). Developing resonators, in the mask, bearing in mind the critical importance of the eyes, the expression, the capacity to listen, in other words of the sum of our senses, which could be defined as “allies”. The latter enable us to collect information and impressions from the outside world and should help us give back part of this in turn with gratitude.

## **SYMBOLISM OF THE CROSS**

The feet well anchored in the ground: immanence, incarnation, pragmatism, rooting  
The head reaching out to the sky: transcendence, spiritual and ideal elevation.  
Arms opened horizontally to the rest of the world: humanism, sharing, generosity.

To sing with all of one's body from tip to toe and even beyond, implies a total verticality not only of our physical but also of our inner mental attitude. Verticality is the key word. This Gothic spire should however be tempered by the Byzantine dome of the palate against which it assembles itself, as if to become the crucible of the human and the divine elements (see Boulgakof's "Orthodoxy"). Parallelism and reflection: the fullness of beautiful singing stems from this union of nobility and height, the roundness and the warmth of the sound!

Analyse the relation between thoughts, feelings, body, that is: develop your presence.

**HARMONISE THE BEING AS A WHOLE IN ORDER TO EXPRESS ON THE SOLID FOUNDATION OF OUR EARTHLY BODY, TRUE AND DEEP FEELINGS UNDER THE CLEAR AND KINDLY SUPERVISION OF INTELLIGENCE.**

## **MAN HARNESSING**

Human beings are constituted of three parts/levels: the body, the soul, the spirit or the physical more instinctive part on the one hand and the emotional on the other hand, with an intellectual third.

Gnostics used to distinguish between three types of individuals: the Hylics (from the Greek "matter"), Psychics ("soul"), Pneumatics ("spirit").

Other traditions among others refer to the car (body), the horse (feeling), the coachman (thought).

How many singers fail to understand that not everything is connected to the outside appearances, or to the power of their organs, in a wave of narcissism; others roll themselves in pathetic suffering, playing a tragedy to first and foremost themselves, and then last but not least: some singers are cold analytical theorists of music too hemmed in to be passionate.

## **POSSIBILITY(spark of hope) OF LETTING A MASTER OF HARNESSING WITHIN OURSELVES EMERGE**

Wouldn't it become a goal in itself for us to unite, harmonise those three different but indistinguishable aspects of ourselves in order to communicate to our fellow humans a sincere feeling, an appeal to spiritual elevation and communion with others in ever renewed joy?

And how else would a true feeling emerge in us but by being actively and intensely present to ourselves. The danger otherwise, is to be dragged by a superficial epidemic bogus emotion which shall not touch our deepest being.

## **"ALL IS IN ALL"**

Many other aspects of teaching should be evoked, such as that of the phrasing, the use of the legato which is one of the pillars of the bel canto tradition, the purity yet mutually enriching sequence of vowels (seen as the different colours of a single sound). Let's use those colours as a painter would, and sculpt the sound into space; but which sound? Certainly not a flat horizontal note, without flesh. No! Consonants shall give bones to the sound, and vowels shall feed the flesh of a sound to flow naturally and smoothly. "Lass die Stimme von selbst klingen": let the voice resonate by itself, is a common expression in German.

## **SINGING SHOULD BE A SERENLY FLOWING STREAM**

A voice flows (*corre la voce*) certainly, yet in a channeled flow, not broadening itself out but rather concentrating itself (*raccogliere il suono*) as the Italians say: "un suono ben girato", a well turned sound, which brings us back to what was said above about "sculpting the sound". A river brings fertility and wealth to the regions it crosses unless it overflows: quality matters more than quantity.!

## **OUR BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGES**

Finally there should be some linguistic work. Not only on the grammatical plane, but rather on the colour, spirit, soul of the language in order to best interpret the lyrics with as much genuineness and intelligence as possible; whether speaking the language or not the listener will always be more invested in a performance delivered with much conviction. Hence respect and love the language in which you sing!

*“WELL NOW THERE IS FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE LEFT TO US; BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL THREE IS LOVE”* Saint Paul

All of this constitutes a considerable but accessible and supple task for us, based on patience, understanding and adjustment to each student’s peculiarities, as well as a reciprocal faith and a dialogue established between student and teacher.

## **TRADITION AND FILIATION**

“We are but dwarves mounted on giants’ shoulders: we see more and further than they. It isn’t because our eyes are more penetrating than theirs or our size higher; but their size brings us closer to the sky and propels us higher” (Bernard de Chartres XIIthC). Therefore it is important to learn about and respect the great singers of the past and what they have bequeathed us with, not out of sentimentalism or nostalgia but because they help us better feed our present and project ourselves with enthusiasm into the future!

What is the point of all of this?  
One answer only: “Du Holde Kunst..”

# **SERVE MUSIC**

### Key words:

Knowledge, Communication, Spontaneity, Availability, Openness, Awakening, Joy, Confidence, Attention, Presence to oneself. Excellency requirements but above all with oneself and through one’s work.

ORA, LABORA ET INVENIES.

*Nicolas Christou.*