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Jan E. Bickel, *Vocal Technique. A Physiologic Approach for Voice Class and Studio.* San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2008. Paper, xiv, 178 pp., \$59.95. ISBN 978-1-59756-190-7
www.pluralpublishing.com

The words “voice class” in the subtitle may lead readers to assume that Jan Bickel’s new volume, *Vocal Technique*, falls in the category of textbooks for group instruction, and consequently consists of a brief overview of voice production along with a large song anthology. That is not the case. The book’s subject is, in fact, exactly what the title states: an exposition and explanation of vocal technique based upon physiology. Intended for use in a first-year voice class at the undergraduate level, the text is an introduction to vocal technique. Drawing upon almost thirty years of college teaching experience, Bickel explains the anatomic and acoustic aspects of singing, and how that information is used to develop beautiful tone.

The first of nine chapters asks a battery of questions that are posed by many

novice singers, such as how long will it take to become a singer, what is involved in acquiring technique, and how to overcome stage fright. In the next eight chapters, Bickel presents acquisition of skills for singing in a logical progression. She begins with an explanation of anatomy. Using nearly a dozen diagrams, the author identifies structures of the body, from spine to soft palate, that are involved in singing. Next, she leads the student through posture exercises to establish correct alignment. Bickel clarifies breath management for singing by showing how some, such as clavicular, are ineffective. The author supplements the discussion with a series of vocalises to develop breath control.

Bickel devotes a chapter to tone production, and her discussion encompasses attacks and releases, registration, resonance, and timbre. Vocal exercises are included, as well as a synopsis of voice classifications, complete with representative operatic roles for each voice type. A later chapter discusses resonance, tone quality, and a free sound in greater detail. An elucidation of articulation is couched in a summary of the International Phonetic Alphabet, and its application to the sounds of English and Italian. A chapter devoted to health concerns covers a wide range of topics, from nutrition and premenstrual syndrome to environmental pollution and allergies. In the final chapter, Bickel advises students on concert deportment and apparel, as well as offering guidance to becoming artistic performers.

Vocal Technique has many commendable qualities. The volume is comprehensive, yet comprehensible. Bickel covers the gamut of subjects germane to singing technique in a manner that is not intimidating. Each chapter in-

cludes a list of important terms to define and understand, as well as a list of references. In addition, appendices contain a list of musical terms, an introduction to music reading, and a selected bibliography. The author strikes a balance between the physical process of singing and the mental work that must be done to move a singer beyond anatomy to artistry. Bickel does not rely upon imagery in her text, but she has an inventive method of description that triggers the imagination. For example, in an exercise, the author directs the students to “allow the voice to enter the nasal, mouth, and pharynx cavities for resonance and amplification.”

In addition, Bickel introduces the beginning singers to the literature on the voice. In the preface, she encourages the reader to “be a discoverer. Go out and read more books and articles on the subjects contained in this book.” She is forthright about the authors who have influenced her own pedagogy, citing William Vennard, Richard Miller, and Robert Sataloff, among others, in her acknowledgments. Their influences are apparent throughout the volume, but the impact of other well known pedagogues, ranging from Johan Sundberg to Shirlee Emmons and Stanley Sonntag, is detectable as well. By referencing the writings of pedagogic luminaries, Bickel introduces the beginning student to the vast resources available to singers.

Vocal Technique is an excellent guide for beginning voice students at the university level, and teachers of high school students will find it useful, too. The volume contains essential information—from laryngeal anatomy to the International Phonetic Alphabet, and from concert deportment to working with a pianist—which applied

teachers often have to pull from multifarious sources. Instructors who would like to rely upon a single textbook should consider adopting *Vocal Technique*.

John B. Harer and Sharon Munden, *The Alexander Technique Resource Book. A Reference Guide*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009. Paper, xxx, 160 pp., \$45.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-8108-5431-4; ISBN-10: 0-8108-5431-7 www.scarecrowpress.com

The focus of the Alexander Technique is the efficacy of muscle use. Instructors, using a hands-on approach, help individuals rid themselves of habitual unwanted tensions. John B. Harer and Sharon Munden — professors of library science and voice, respectively, at East Carolina University—have compiled an annotated guide to sources on the Technique. It may seem an inherent contradiction to create a resource guide dedicated to a method that, as emphasized by any writer on the topic, is based upon a practical awareness and cannot be learned from a book. The authors, however, advocate perusing descriptions of the Technique as an invaluable step toward understanding Alexander work. *The Alexander Technique Resource Book* fills a gap in the literature; the authors found other resource guides, but the works are limited both in number and scope. Some are not universally available, while others are selective, or omit current and or nonprint sources.

Harer and Munden preface the source listings with a brief history of the Alexander Technique. The method was devised by F. M. Alexander (1869–1955), an Australian actor and orator,

as he sought solutions to his own vocal problems stemming from ineffective body use. The propagation of the method increased rapidly after he moved to London in 1904, and many notables since then (including educator John Dewey, Nobel Prize winning neurophysiologist Sir Charles Sherrington, and actors William Hurt and Kevin Klein) studied the Alexander Technique. In addition to listing the works written by Alexander, the authors catalogue his contemporaries and protégés who taught the method, as well as the benefits and principles of the Technique.

The first section of the guide is devoted to general texts and articles. Sources pertaining to specific disciplines are grouped into three broad categories: performing arts (especially dance, music, and theater); sports, fitness, and recreation; and health and medicine. Internet sites comprise a section, and another is devoted to audiovisual materials. The chapter devoted to serial publications contains a listing for every article in the journals *Direction* and *The Alexander Review*. Finally, there is a directory of Alexander Technique Associations, organized by country, in the English-speaking world.

The Alexander Technique Resource Book is more than a guide to the literature. The text offers an overview and history of the method, and serves as an excellent introduction to the work of Alexander. Many pedagogues will recall the dearth of information when the Alexander Technique was first embraced by voice teachers. Fortunately, that is no longer the case, and singers interested in learning about the work of Alexander, or expanding their knowledge about the technique, will find this book a richly detailed road map for the journey.

Phyllis Bryn-Julson and Paul Mathews, *Inside Pierrot lunaire. Performing the Sprechstimme in Schoenberg's Masterpiece*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2009. Paper, xvii, 235 pp., \$50.00. ISBN-13 978-0-8108-6205-0; ISBN-10: 0-8108-6205-0 www.scarecrowpress.com

Pierrot lunaire (Op. 21) by Arnold Schoenberg is a seminal work in Western music. The work, scored for *Sprechstimme* and chamber ensemble, is significant for its nontraditional use of the voice. The performer is instructed to interpret the text, notated with definite rhythm and pitches, into spoken melody. The composer's instructions are somewhat enigmatic, and the confusion is compounded by the fact that Schoenberg, over time, altered his directions for the speaker. Soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, renowned for her interpretation of twentieth century vocal music, and music theorist Paul Mathews offer a guide to the work with *Inside Pierrot lunaire: Performing the Sprechstimme in Schoenberg's Masterpiece*. The authors strive to codify and clarify the composer's intentions. Beginning with an overview of the artistic ancestry of *Sprechstimme*, the treatise leads the reader through the compositional process, and culminates with insight into each of the twenty-one individual melodramas.

Seldom will a revolutionary idea spring forth without adumbration, and that is the case for Schoenberg's use of *Sprechstimme*. Other composers of his generation grappled with blurring the line between speech and song. The most famous of these was Englebert Humperdinck, who incorporated speech-melody into the incidental music he wrote in 1897 for the play *Die*

Königskinder. (The authors believe that Schoenberg was aware of the work, despite the assertion by one of his students to the contrary.) *Gurrelieder*, Schoenberg's massive work for chorus, soloists, and orchestra begun in 1900, makes use of *Sprechmelodie*. Another influence was cabaret. Schoenberg served as music director for the Bunte Brett (or Überbrett), an important early cabaret. In Germany, the style was in its infancy, but Schoenberg may have been influenced by the *disease* style—half-speaking and half-singing—borrowed from the French theater. Other artists of the era, such as the earnest young composer, Alma Schindler (future wife of Gustav Mahler), envisioned a bridged form of speech and song. The dramatic roots of *Sprechstimme* can be traced to Wagner's *Sprechgesang*, the form of recitative that he used in his late operas. Spoken word is interjected when intensity surpasses song. (Interestingly, it is the mirror image of music theater, where characters burst into song when the emotion is too great for words.)

The authors paint a vivid landscape of the aesthetic angst that plagued Schoenberg, and how it may have contributed to the composition of *Pierrot lunaire*. Around 1909, he briefly moved away from motivic development in the style of Brahms, and flirted with a language that was influenced by the music of Wagner. He was, as well, formulating his philosophy of the balance between inspiration and organization (later articulated in his 1946 essay "Heart and Brain in Music"). Throughout his life, most of Schoenberg's writings reveal him as a believer in the logical progression of musical development. Immediately preceding the composition of *Pierrot lunaire*, however, the authors identify passages that

reflect "a bomb-throwing modernism that breaks with the past and demands an Art created of immediate, unfettered expression." Around the same time actress-cum-singer, Albertine Zehme, wrote a tract on singing that paralleled many of Schoenberg's writings in that it emphasized "direct expression and inner experience," and it was Zehme who commissioned and premiered *Pierrot lunaire*.

Every decision regarding performance practice of the work should begin with a study of the score, state Bryn-Julson and Mathews, and they follow their own advice by basing their recommendations for the execution of the *Sprechstimme* upon Schoenberg's instructions. He wrote three different sets. The first is a single sentence written on the day he began composing the work. He wrote a second set of guidelines on the score that was sent to his publisher, but it was a third list of directions that appeared on the printed score. Each directive is more detailed than its predecessor, but Bryn-

Julson and Mathews believe the first instruction may be most descriptive of Schoenberg's ideal sound for the *Sprechstimme*: "The recitation has to effect the pitch as if by suggestion." The authors identify three broad schools of thought regarding *Sprechstimme*. The first maintains that the pitches are guidelines, suggesting contours to the line. The second school holds that a varying degree of fidelity to the pitches is acceptable. Finally, there are those (including Bryn-Julson and Mathews) who believe the *Sprechstimme* should be faithful to the notated pitches.

The second half of the book, which is dedicated to a motivic analysis of each melodrama, focuses upon the contributions of *Sprechstimme* to the fabric of the piece. The examination is based upon the principles of analysis Schoenberg espoused in his lectures and essays. This section includes translations and analysis of the poetry, the date of composition, and the musical materials employed by Schoen-



With a Song in my Psyche

ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SINGING
AND TEACHING SINGING

by

Pearl Shinn Wormhoudt

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Complete introduction
is on the website.

With a Song in My Psyche studies the psychology of singing and teaching singing. It describes the musical brain, the singer's mind/body interaction, the crucial early musical development, the adolescent singer, gender factors, psychology of performance, and the psychological basis for attaining greater artistry. In these descriptions, a number of psychologically motivated factors are explored that lead either to poor singing or to excellent healthy singing: personality, temperament, managing the singer's life-style, building a character, perfectionism, performance anxiety, motivation, memorizing, breathing, stage movement, body messages, body image, timing, musical and poetic meanings, self-image, confidence, concentration, consistency, creativity. (175 pp.)

berg. The combination of instruments—duplicated so frequently, according to the authors, that it is nearly as influential as *Sprechmelodie*—yield sufficient permutations that no two pieces have the same orchestration. A chart outlines the instrumentation, and numerous musical examples are included throughout the volume, including several for each song in the analysis section.

Bryn-Julson and Mathews, in an understated manner, describe *Inside Pierrot lunaire* as a “small book.” Their descriptor is analogous to Schoenberg’s initial simple sentence of directions which was, according to the authors, concise yet complete. Similarly, *Inside Pierrot lunaire* offers a wealth of insight into this landmark twentieth century work in a clear and organized manner. It is highly recommended, not just for those who perform *Pierrot lunaire*, but anyone interested in the monumental composition.

Robert Stuart Thomson, *Operatic Italian*. Godwin Books, 2008. Paper, 443 pp., \$40.00 US, \$45.00 Canadian. ISBN 0-9696774-0-5
www.godwinbooks.com

Anyone who has ever tried to translate operatic Italian can attest to a world of difference between standard modern usage and the language found in libretti. Robert Stuart Thomson, who has both a terminal degree in Romance Languages and a passion for opera, has written an indispensable guide for anyone wishing to understand this theatrical tongue. Thomson strives to clarify the grammatical structure of opera libretti to make an often confusing, convoluted, and outdated usage of the language comprehensible.

The author begins with a description of the sounds of Italian, complete with a chart of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols and guidelines for pronunciation. Italian opera libretti employ language that is atypical of the vernacular: specifically, the use of obsolete and truncated words, unnatural syntax, concision, and the addition and deletion of words to fit the musical line. Thomson’s approach is based upon the premise that learning to recognize the parts of speech is a short cut to learning the structure of the language. Accordingly, the salient aspects of grammar are presented in a systematic manner, beginning with a discussion of nouns, and wending through prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and verbs. Verbs are the most important part of speech, and Thomson devotes six chapters to different tenses. He maintains that traditional grammatical labels are off-putting and inaccurate, and he adopts his own terms—such as “compound past” in lieu of “present perfect”—for clarity.

In some sections, *Operatic Italian* contains two tracks. The first is for the reader who is seeking an overview of language usage in libretti; the second is for those who wish to delve more deeply into operatic Italian. The book includes numerous musical examples, as well as translations and transcriptions into the IPA, complete with indication of stressed syllables. Fourteen quizzes are interspersed throughout the book, and an answer key allows students to monitor their progress. None of the chapters is long, and Thomson writes in a style that is conversational and engaging.

Thomson wrote an earlier book, *Italian for the Opera* (Vancouver: Godwin Books, 1992) dealing with the same topic. *Operatic Italian*, however,

is nearly three times as long, and encompasses topics and resources that were not included in the previous volume. For instance, the bibliography is greatly expanded, both in the number of titles of books, recordings, and videos, and in the inclusion of Internet sources. *Operatic Italian* also contains a discussion of the operatic aspects of *canzoni* (such as Scarlatti’s “Sento nel core”) and the influence of Dante on poetry and the language of libretti. Throughout the text, Thomson offers much more than translations and transliterations. He probes the literary roots of operatic plots, and weaves a backdrop for the language with the threads of social mores, psychological insights, and character study.

The essential component of a successful teacher is a deep knowledge of a subject. A great pedagogue, however, is one who combines this expertise with a love for the material so palpable that it inspires students. Thomson is such a teacher. Aficionados of Italian opera, and especially singers and their teachers, should own this book. *Operatic Italian* has a rightful place next to the Italian dictionary and handbook of Italian diction on the shelf of every serious student of opera.

Debra Greschner holds the Bachelor of Music and the Bachelor of Education degrees from the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, and the Master of Music degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She was selected as one of the twelve participants for the 1994 NATS Internship program in Boulder, CO. A lyric soprano, Greschner’s solo appearances include those with the Nevada Symphony, the Symphony of Southeast Texas, Nevada Opera Theatre, and Chamber Music Southwest. Greschner is currently Lecturer of Voice at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX. In addition to managing the Bookshelf column, she has written book reviews for *The Opera Journal*.