

## The singing teacher. Comparison between the 20th century teacher and the corresponding evolution in the current 21st century

### El docente de canto. Comparativa entre el maestro del siglo XX y la evolución correspondiente en el actual siglo XXI

LIMA-SOLANYE, Caignet†, CHAVEZ-ACUÑA, Samuel Caleb and BAUTISTA-ACOSTA, Edgar, Enoch

Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas

ID 1<sup>st</sup> Author: Caignet, Lima-Solanye / ORC ID: 0000-0002-5559-2088, Researcher ID Thomson: ABI-6860-2020

ID 1<sup>st</sup> Co-author: Samuel Caleb, Chavez-Acuña / ORC ID: 0000-0001-8489-6155

ID 2<sup>nd</sup> Co-author: Edgar Enoch, Bautista-Acosta / ORC ID: 0000-0001-9138-7893

DOI: 10.35429/JESC.2021.14.5.24.30

Received: July 04, 2021; Accepted December 22, 2021

#### Abstract

The figure of the institutional singing teacher is one of the most complex and undefined within the lyrical academic scene. The complexity of the instrument is already enough to make the task of the difficult master, since it is an impalpable and invisible instrument but with a special delicacy and treatment. The singing teacher from past times has worked with a fixed methodology that has given determined results. Today the contemporary teacher works differently, with the use of technology and the use of ICTs. Both figures have cultivated the emotional and psychological development of their students regarding Singing. In this research, the teaching figure was analyzed in an integral way, having as objectives the analysis of its evolution from the institutional and private perspective, the comparison between the fundamental differences of both figures and the continuous contribution and research of academic-artistic fields for the Singing area in general. It was found, through a comparative table, that the teacher of the so-called "old school" handled other concepts suitable for their social context but that they have several essential quality elements for the correct learning of the vocal technique, as well as the best phoniatic knowledge and physique that many contemporary teachers expose in the classroom.

Teachers, Singing, lyrical, Comparative, 20th and 21st century

#### Resumen

La figura del docente de Canto institucional es una de las más complejas e indefinidas dentro del panorama académico lírico. La complejidad del instrumento ya es suficiente para hacer la tarea del maestro de difícil envergadura, pues es un instrumento impalpable e invisible pero de una delicadeza y tratamiento especial. El maestro de Canto desde tiempos pasados ha trabajado con una metodología fija que ha dado resultados determinados. En la actualidad el docente contemporáneo trabaja de manera diferente, con el uso de la tecnología y utilización de TICs. Ambas figuras han cultivado el desarrollo emocional y psicológico de sus estudiantes con respecto al Canto. En esta investigación se analizó de manera integral la figura docente teniendo como objetivos el análisis de la evolución del mismo desde la perspectiva institucional y privada, la comparativa entre las diferencias fundamentales de ambas figuras y la continua aportación e investigación de rubros académicos-artísticos para el área del Canto en general. Se encontró, a través de una tabla comparativa que el docente de la llamada "vieja escuela" manejaba otros conceptos adecuados para su contexto social pero que tiene varios elementos de calidad indispensables para el correcto aprendizaje de la técnica vocal, así como el mejor conocimiento foniátrico y físico que exponen muchos docentes contemporáneos en el salón de clases.

Docentes, Canto, Lírico, Comparativa, siglo XX y XXI

**Citation:** LIMA-SOLANYE, Caignet, CHAVEZ-ACUÑA, Samuel Caleb and BAUTISTA-ACOSTA, Edgar, Enoch. The singing teacher. Comparison between the 20th century teacher and the corresponding evolution in the current 21st century. Journal Education Sciences. 2021. 5-14: 24-30

† Researcher contributing as first author.

## Objectives

- To analyze the evolution of the figure of the singing teacher from the institutional and private perspective.
- To make the comparative between the fundamental differences between the teacher of the XX century and the teacher of the XXI century.
- To contribute to the continuous investigation of academic-artistic items for the area of Singing as an academic element.

## Methodology

The following research uses a qualitative methodology of documentary cut through the comparison between texts and interviews on the teaching function of singing in the 20th century and in the 21st century. This topic involves somewhat subjective aspects that need to be reinforced through these documentary compendiums. A table was made to show the main elements that frame the differences, as well as direct quotations from the opinion of some very well known singers in the lyric field.

## Contribution

Contribution to the continuous investigation of academic-artistic items as an academic element.

## Introduction

The music student decides from the beginning the instrument in which he will specialize for his study. There are two scenarios within the study of music as a profession, that of so-called “long” careers and that of “short” careers. Long careers are called this way because the earliest age is required to begin the study of the instrument and it is around seven years of age. The instruments that are inside these are generally the piano, the violin and the cello. The age to start a short career is usually from ten years to twelve years of age for wind instruments such as the trumpet or percussion.

Singers are the musicians who begin to study later in life. The training begins by attending the different instances that offer this preparation. One of these is the so-called music school or music unit.

These schools are often part of a university or university system. The other way to join the singing learning is privately, through private teachers, coaches or voice specialists.

To start studying singing in an Institution, in general, the minimum age required is eighteen years old. This is because the physiological structures of the phonatory apparatus are not ready before this age, especially for male students whose larynx undergoes a more delicate and aggressive change process during puberty and adolescence with the so-called: voice change. The larynx has a maturation time that influences the health and vocal qualities. Ossification of certain cartilage can take a long time, even beyond twenty-two or twenty-three years of age. The progress of a singer can be slow and complex. Many years of study are required to develop the much desired correct muscular coordination and a complex balance between mind and body, necessary to be able to tackle the great challenge of mastering a vocal technique.

Time and patience are some of the qualities that a singer must show to achieve her goal. Mastering a vocal instrument is an art that occurs within a narrow gap between theory and practice through emotional and neural connections integrated into corporeality. "...technical control is essential, not only to manage the roles but to balance the anxiety of the artists to abandon themselves to the music during the performances" (Popp, 1993)

Hand in hand with physical, psychological and emotional growth, there is usually a trained teacher who guides the new student through the complex world of Singing.

But the figure of the teacher and facilitator has shown an evolution, accompanied by technological-digital development but that on the other hand, has diminished in how much some aspects that have to do with the environment and current demands for singers and therefore for the new graduate of the Institutions.

In this research, the differences in teaching between the singing teacher of the last century and the current teacher were considered, through an exploratory procedure.

## Developing

Despite the scarce job outlook that exists for this career: Bachelor of Singing is one of the most difficult and demanding careers of modernity. The teacher is faced with an invisible and untouchable instrument, since what is really perceived is a sound that is emitted by the passage of air between two vocal cords. Many singers even claim that they have learned in a self-taught way:

"I taught myself to sing" is what you occasionally hear from a professional singer. This statement should not surprise anyone, because all singers should be their own teachers. Learning to sing involves unification of the musical ear, body control and creative intelligence, an act of artistic integration that cannot be superimposed on the singer from the outside. In this sense, no teacher teaches a singer to sing. The singer must have confidence in the teacher's ear and in the technical school that he presents, but none of these positive factors is enough. The teacher's job should be to point the way (an essential service). "(Miller, 1986)

The singing teacher has always accompanied the student and in the past he was an essential and interchangeable figure. Since the voice is an instrument that evokes a lot of mystery and first-rate auditory qualities, the individuality of the student must be carefully reviewed by the teacher. For this reason, methodological reflections go in the direction of personalized teaching.

Currently, we are heirs to the romantic vocal technique, whose main characteristics are the coverage of high-pitched sounds and the use of the full voice throughout the register. This "new" way of singing is the invention of the French tenor Gilbert Duprez, who in 1831 almost completely replaced the *bel canto* technique and has remained the correct singing technique to this day.

The singing teacher must master certain skills and cultivate various very specific competencies to efficiently carry out the arduous task of forming a young voice. In this regard, the American singer and vocal educator Richard Miller (2004) thinks:

There are certain questions that must be asked to recognize the quality of a teacher: is the technique consistent with the function of freedom and the laws of vocal acoustics? Are the objectives of the vocalization patterns clear? Does the teacher use an understandable and adequate language, avoiding the pseudoscientific and the mythological? He listens if technique and performance are balanced, and determines if the lesson produces recognizable results. Is there a sense of honesty, lack of pomposity, absence of cloying solicitude, avoids omnipotent behaviors? Does he know the needs of the students? And above all, is the lesson around the student or around the teacher? (Miller, 2004, p. 218).

But this teaching function is also demanding, especially for those who work within a public or private institution, which are the two types of education offered in the academic field, since the general and particular intention is to be able to achieve the highest percentage possible high, the demands of an exit profile.

## Institutions are supported by study plans and graduation profiles

The graduation profile is a reference that defines the educational purpose of each career, which is why it becomes a key to the creation and strengthening of the study plan. With the graduation profile, each career guides its educational processes to delineate a curricular trajectory and generate an articulation of the different components of the Major Curriculum. (Universidad Mayor, 2019) It is not easy at all to develop a graduation profile relevant to social reality and that is where some Institutions give in to analysis and the continuous search to elaborate it. The graduate profile of the Bachelor's Degree in Singing from the Arts Unit of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas (UAA-UAZ) is as follows:

The graduate will be a professional with a solid comprehensive education that allows him to reach high degrees of flexibility, versatility, autonomy, creativity and critical sense. In addition, you will develop a deep level of awareness about your career development possibilities, extensive knowledge about music, and a high level of technical skills and knowledge in your area of emphasis: education, theory, and composition and performance.

The Bachelor of Singing will possess a set of values, knowledge and skills related to the specific knowledge of the musical discipline in its theoretical and practical aspects and a set of skills and abilities specific to the practice of the profession within a framework of self-development skills and values, and an emphasis on musical performance, education, theory, and composition.

As a first statement we find that the graduate must have a solid comprehensive education and a broad knowledge of theoretical and practical aspects. In the sense of the Canto student, integrality also has to do with being a complete, solid, autonomous, creative musician. One of the peculiarities of Canto students is that they begin at an advanced age, eighteen years old, which implies for the Institution to combine groups with instrumentalists who have already been studying first-order theoretical subjects, such as music theory for years. This particularity is interesting, because it can generate various negative or positive reactions in the new singing student, who only has four years to comply with this part of the graduation profile.

This element is of utmost importance to advance within the Singing class, the individual class of the instrument, since a singer who does not read music, who does not know the musical language and who cannot master it through the race, triggers doubly exhausting activities and generally unsuccessful for the singing teacher.

The other statement refers to in-depth knowledge of the possibilities of professional development. The figure of the professional counselor as the first contact with the social and labor reality within the career, can be considered essential. The contributions offered by professional guidance can be various, according to Polanco (2013):

1) Because it provides essential information to students about the variety of professional options that exist in the current music job market, and about the specific functions that are required for each case; 2) because it provides advice on decision-making throughout the training itinerary; and 3) because it contributes to the success of the educational process (Polanco, 2013, para. 2).

Tutoring is practiced both at UAA-UAZ and at various institutions where Singing is offered as a bachelor's degree, a program that still has a lot to offer and could combine what is related to professional guidance. At the end of the 19th century, the concept of the singing teacher was reduced, it was simplified. According to Felipe Pedrell, a singing teacher is one who "teaches the rules or exercises of emission, vocalization, etc., and in general the art of singing" (Pedrell, 1894, p. 267). So the choice of a good singing teacher was crucial to the success or failure of the singer's future artistic career. The talent was not enough to face a career as a singer, but the selection of the ideal teacher who can transmit the knowledge and the correct technical bases for the correct vocal emission.

The main duties of a singing teacher are: "to form the voice of the disciple, making the intonations fair and in such a way that he acquires an equal degree of flexibility in the forts and pianos, so necessary for intonation and to the extent that is due give each sound. Accustom the disciple to read the music at sight; try to make him pronounce and declaim with clarity and correction and, finally, instill in him the true and natural expression. It is also necessary for a singing teacher to know the practical part of harmony to accompany" (Fargas y Soler, 1853: 119-120). Here he refers to the importance of the singing teacher as an integral teacher, in the past.

There were all kinds of opinions regarding the qualities that a good singing teacher should possess. One of the great debates that existed and that is still maintained in the so-called Modernity revolves around the requirement that the singing teacher must or should not be an exalted and recognized singer. The contrary theory has been defended, which explains that a good singer is not necessarily a good teacher. According to Cerone, a good teacher, in addition to offering an adequate teaching methodology, should have three qualities: wisdom, experience and patience when teaching and he affirmed with a certain humor that "because he is funny in singing, because he has a good voice, because he is the brother of Chapel Master, because he was a good scribe, a good Grammarian, a good Rhetoric, deprived of the Bishop, a friend of the Count, Marquis or Duke, or because of other qualities in this way, the condition of a good teacher was not obtained" (Cerone, 1613).

Teaching through imitation has been somewhat redundant in singing culture. Even today this type of teaching has persisted in institutional classrooms and Conservatories in much of the world. Bacilly used to say: "A good teacher must first of all know how to sing and then have enough voice to make himself heard, because you cannot learn singing from books" (1668).

Generally, young students choose a singer who is usually active in the profession as their singing teacher. According to Alessandroni (2014), when a correction is carried out in the singing learning process, the student makes modifications of her physical and psychic schemes. Through these, the singer develops various capacities that bring him closer to understanding and controlling the vocal instrument.

But as Miller explained, the teacher cannot base his teaching on sensations, since these can be very subjective and lacking theoretical and physical foundation. Vitale (2008) states that the internal sensations of one's own body are inextricably linked with unconscious images that are constructed to represent sensory experiences in an abstract way. But somehow there has been a decline in the vocal level in the course of the century, so it is assumed that the much more rigid, disciplined and personalized teaching of the teachers of yesteryear generated higher quality results.

Despite the fact that images can be constructed based on the sensory, it is necessary to fully understand the phonatory apparatus in order to determine the physiological functions of the body. Here is another one of the differences between the teachers of the Canto of the last century and the present one. With technological development, current teachers have access to a large amount of information, videos and support material to teach their classes visually and efficiently. But it does not hold, according to observational experience, that this knowledge and the digitization of teaching have really generated better teachers than in the past century. Singer training is an athletic, muscular and emotional process that becomes a hard work together and that must be thoroughly reviewed.

For the musician, that is, also for the singer, the possibilities of the acoustic analyzer, the sensations of movement, the special motor skills (strength, agility in certain movement processes, coordination of various functions) and the memory performance, eg ability to remember, optical imagination ability (acoustic, motor, emotional). " (Seidner, Wolfran, Jürgen, 1982).

Some coinciding elements in the search for vocal technique by both teaching figures are the following:

- Aperto ma coperto (Open but covered) This sound produced that gives us the sensation of opening our throat without losing coverage and the color that it gives to the voice so that it resonates and vibrates throughout our mask (face).
- Vocce in maschera (Voice in mask) Main resonance zone.
- Sulfiate (On air) The basis of a good song. Understanding this concept is simple, applying it takes a lot of practice. The secret is to keep the ribs open without pushing the air with the abdomen to produce free sounds, especially the treble ones.
- Passagio (Passage) Homogenization of the registers, achieving the same color and intensity throughout the vowel scale.
- Legato (Ligado) This term in singing is used to achieve the linked voice, the passage from note to note without losing the line.

The way in which these elements are worked has been determined by the specific search for methodological objectives in the classroom.

Results

The result of the comparison between both teachers gives us the following:

Song Master	Twentieth Century	XXI Century
Personal vocal skills	It was essential	It is not so essential
Rigidity and discipline	It was essential	Teaching is more constructivist
Teacher with a comprehensive education	It was essential. The need to have been a great exponent of singing is accentuated.	Is essential
Academic loyalty	He was essential	More openness
Methodological challenges	The teacher is fully responsible for the vocal and artistic quality of the student.	The teacher can work with a support team for the student's development.

Table 1

The options and opinions on education vary between some recognized singers of the representative of both centuries. Those of the 20th century preferred and entrusted their vocal and emotional training to a single teacher, while contemporaries decided to use the range of available options as shown in the following comments:

Singers of the Twentieth Century

... Today there are many people, including pianists, who establish themselves as singing teachers without having the necessary experience. I was lucky to find one who understood my voice and my personality and prepared me properly. With her I learned all my roles and songs ... (Matheopoulos, 1993, p. 241) "Berganza's teacher was very concerned about teaching him that the voice should have a single sound, although depending on what one interprets, it can have millions of shades and colors and dynamism ..." (Matheopoulos, 1993, p. 241)

“... She began taking singing lessons with Harry Gottschalk who continued to be her mentor and the only singing teacher she has had in her long career. "(Matheoupoulos, 1987, p. 273)

Singers of the 21st Century

"Since my school days, I have had fantastic friends and mentors, including Master Gergiev. I also had the pleasure of working with so many incredible conductors, singers, conductors and coaches who inspired me to be better. Of course, my wonderful family has supported every step of the way. "(Muñoz, 2018)

“The reality is that I had a great diversity of teachers. All of them, each in their own way, helped me in my development. Each one opened up new possibilities for me, whether in coloratura, belcanto, Mozart, verismo or Verdi. I think I have been fortunate to have been able to receive so many diverse sources of learning and influences. I think having a single teacher could lead to a closed mind and, in the end, monotony. "(Romero, 2020)

Conclusions

Due to the vast knowledge that the vocal instrument implies, the figure of the teacher has become more complex. The concept of singing teacher appears in continuous evolution. At the beginning of the 19th century, as an eighteenth-century heritage, the singing teacher was a musician with a comprehensive training in music theory, music theory, harmony, composition, instrumental and vocal practice, but many times he was an exalted and talented singer who was recognized and recognized. I had great respect and esteem for him. However, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, a specialization of the singing teacher took place that will continue to this day, exclusively in charge of providing their students with the vocal and interpretive technique necessary to be able to face a repertoire of a certain level, looking for adequate muscular coordination within their classes, often relying on a Coach or repertoire pianist who helps the student to assemble their repertoire and other elements included in the programs such as acting teachers, languages and accompanying pianists. The singing teacher of the 21st century works within a team of several teachers who jointly develop the student's abilities as a future professional singer. Their mission is basically to guide the process of successful technical mastery.

The titanic task of the teacher of the last century is recognized, who had to his credit the total responsibility of the formation of the young singer, so it was evident that he had to resort to imitation in order to transmit complete knowledge due to the responsibility granted. The singing teacher in the present century can be supported not only by technological tools but by a work team that involves other equally important figures in the formation of the current singer.

Both teachers could find themselves inserted in the Institution, so their teaching was permeated by the institutional characteristics. The rigidity and discipline of the teachers of the last century determined the realization of their profession with a high level, since the much more personal and reliable treatment determines a technical level and deeper understanding in the student.

## References

- Alessandroni, N. (2014). Estructura y función en Pedagogía Vocal Contemporánea. Tensiones y debates actuales para la conformación del campo. *Revista de Investigaciones en Técnica Vocal*, 2, 23-33.
- Bacilly, B. de. (1668). *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter et particulièrement pour ce qui regarde le chant françois*. Paris: Ballard.
- Cerone, (1613). *El melopeo y maestro: Tractado de musica teórica y practica*. Nápoles: Iuan Bautista Gargano, y Lucrecio Nucci.
- Fargas y Soler, A. (1853). *Diccionario de música*. Barcelona: imp. J. Verdaguer.
- Matheopoulos Helena, (1993), *Diva*, Vergara, Buenos Aires
- Matheopoulos Helena, (1987), *Bravo*, Vergara, Buenos Aires
- Miller, R. (2004). *Solutions for singers. Tools performers and teachers*. Oxford University Press. New York.
- Miller, R. (1986). *The structure of singing, system and art in vocal technique*, Shirmer Books, New York.
- Muñoz Juan Antonio, (2018), *Anna Netrebko: "Mi carrera ha sido una cabalgata salvaje y emocionante"*. <http://www.economiaynegocios.cl/noticias/noticias.asp?id=474546#>
- Panofka, E. (1853). *L' Arte del canto: vade mecum del cantante: teoria e pratica per tutte le voci*. Milán: G.Ricordi & C.
- Pedrell, F. (1894). *Diccionario técnico de la música*. Barcelona: Isidro Torres Oriol.
- Polanco, R. (2013). *La orientación académica y profesional en los Conservatorios de Música. Artseduca*. (5). <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4339753>
- Romero Justo, (2020), *Entrevista. Elina Garanca. Sol y Vida*. <https://www.beckmesser.com/entrevista-elina-garanca-sol-vida/>
- Vitale, A. R. (2008). The singing lesson. Phenomenology of the non-verbal dynamics appearing in studying l'instrument-voix. *Musicae Scientiae, Special issue: Narrative in Music and Interaction*, 111-128.
- Seidner, Wolfram y Jürgen Wendler, *La voz del cantante, Bases foniátricas para la enseñanza del canto*, Edit. Henschel, Arte y Sociedad, 1982, Berlín.
- Tosi: F. (1723). *Opinioni de' cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato*. Bologna: Lelio dalla Volpe.
- Universidad Mayor, (2019), *Construcción y validación de perfiles de egreso de pregrado*, DOI: <https://vra.umayor.cl/images/Construcci%C3%B3n-y-valdiaci%C3%B3n-de-Perfil-de-Egreso-Pregrado.pdf>