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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM ON THE RADIO:
TECHNOLOGY IN VOICE AND SPEECH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

A Midsummer Night's Dream on the Radio: Technology in Voice and Speech

By David Malachi Becker, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Major Director: Janet B. Rodgers, Professor of Theatre
Head of Performance, Voice and Speech

Recent advances in sound technology have had significant implications for the teaching of voice and speech that are only now becoming apparent. As more students become “plugged in” it becomes more difficult, both for the instructor and the student, to communicate, let alone find a voice. We are becoming increasingly addicted to communicating through our devices, rather than through the traditional and accepted modes of the past: using the human voice. In light of these rapid and various new developments, voice training, especially at the introductory level, needs to be examined anew. A number of traditional approaches and teaching methods for twenty-first century Generation Y students may need to be reconsidered or updated. Technical advancements - which are affecting actual physical changes in our human condition - necessitate that the voice instructor be informed by, and where possible incorporate, the new technologies into teaching. This thesis focuses on possible ways to combine and integrate such technologies with traditional practices of voice and

speech training in an attempt to reestablish the importance, vibrancy and creative potential of the spoken voice in theater performance. This thesis includes a record of a production that I directed in the fall of 2009: *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 2009 ON THE RADIO* and its later Podcast.

INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in technology. Growing up, there was always the latest computer in my household. My father used it for his music composition, and it could even play back the compositions as he wrote them. But, even at a young age, I suspect I may already have been aware that the presence and growing importance of such technology in our home, mediating our interactions, might have unseen consequences for our personal and creative lives. It was creating barriers between family members, and it was changing the way we wrote, thought, and expressed ourselves. It is obvious now that there was good reason to be concerned: the many technical advances that have arrived on the scene since the early computer are affecting changes in every aspect of the human condition, even physical ones. However, there is no turning back. As a 20 something myself, and having pursued a specialization in voice and speech pedagogy, it is necessary that my work be informed by, and where possible incorporate, the new technologies into my teaching.

The current environment for theatre and performance is a rather stressful one, focusing increasingly on spectacle and ticket sales. As a trainer and coach for the next generation of young actors, I feel it is my responsibility that they now receive, and will continue to have, proper training in voice and speech. The aural technologies of radio, the internet, TV, film, and video, in addition to their many obvious benefits, have created a number of challenges to voice and speech training, which will be enumerated and explored in this thesis. I will propose what I hope to be successful ways to revitalize the teaching of voice and speech – and argue for the continued need and importance of such training in contemporary theatre performance, beginning at the high school level.

In order to conduct an investigation of approaches to voice production for Generation Y, this study will begin by examining those technological innovations - and the consistency and power of their influence on society – that have led us to the current pass. And I will seek to examine critically the casual use of the voice, along with the problem of depersonalized communication, in a variety of contexts, as they intersect directly with the preoccupations of the contemporary stage.

CHAPTER 1

GENERATION Y AND DISTRACTION DEPENDENCY

Sound Distraction: An Overview

"Generation Y," also known as the "Millennial Generation," is a term that has been used to describe the demographic cohort following Generation X. Including those born between the second half of the 1970s and the first half of the 1990s, several other terms for this group might include: "Echo Boomers," "Millenium Generation," "iGeneration," "Einstein Generation," and "the Google Generation." Characteristics of the generation vary by region, depending on social and economic conditions. However, it is generally marked by an increased use of, and familiarity with, communications, media, and digital technologies. Studies have found that most of these young people, now "twenty-something's," have been exposed to a plethora of consumer-centric electronic devices and often inhabit a virtual world. They are dazzled and distracted by countless gadgets just begging to become obsolete. According to Eric Chester, a former educator who has proposed strategies for the employment of Gen Y, generational profiling can be a dangerous activity. He observes that, in attempting to characterize this group, we may be apt to make sweeping generalizations, based on our prejudices. He further notes that, while some might characterize this generation as "self-indulgent, entitled, demanding, spoiled-rotten, techno-dependant, video-game-addicted, impatient, spotlight-grabbing, saggy-pants-wearing, pierced and tattooed, disrespectful, in-your-face, know-it-all," others might see them as, "talented, techno-savvy, multi-tasking, optimistic, fearless, resilient, trend-setting, team-oriented, nondiscriminatory, environmentally vigilant, socially conscience, and out-of-the-box thinkers." (GenY.com), The high school students

that I taught this past year range in age from fourteen to eighteen, and they would serve to represent the younger element of Gen Y. I observed that many of my students were routinely going about their day socially disengaged. Many would have their iPods or other mp3 player at a low whisper volume tucked away under their sweatshirts in most clever and inconspicuous ways. Their senses were being blocked, I believe, both by the distraction of these devices and by their constant need for sensory distraction, all contributing to a general disengagement in the classroom. I find it ironic that the very same engagement in social media devices, such as Facebook and Twitter, engenders in these young people “the illusion of omniscience.” (Distracted Listening 13)

What could be responsible for this need for distraction? According to journalist David Goodman, advancements in technology have enabled transitions from relatively sound-scarce social environments to the sound abundance of modernity. He observes that the industrializations that occurred during the earlier part of the twentieth century - which included the sounds of construction, traffic noise as well as a wide range of other mechanical noises - had become constant rather than occasional. Goodman observes further that the sound produced by amplification and radio in 1929, which was a particularly new phenomenon, and exciting for the public, had found its way into many households. Of particular interest to the present discussion of distraction - and self-distraction - induced by omnipresent sound stimulation, Goodman advances the provocative idea that the ability of the public to control and manipulate the sound transmitted on radio added to its attractions: “The exercise of judgment involved in turning the dial and changing stations was celebrated in broadcasting industry publicity as a fundamental American freedom. Decisions about sound environment, like choices of

personal appearance and opinions, became important acts of self-definition and self-projection.” (Distracted Listening 13)

It should be noted that, during the onset of radio, its implementation in every household generated considerable opposition, and noise abatement laws were established in urban environments. So, defying such limitations and boundaries, then as now, became an act of self-expression. Significantly, young people seemed more comfortable than their elders in integrating the radio into their regular lives, a practice which also would also include extensive inattentive background listening. Children and young adults liked having the radio on as much of the time as possible and were repeatedly discovered among the most “radio-minded” of Americans. When, at the onset of the Great Depression, many families were forced to sell their radios, the loss impacted the young in particular.

“Distracted listening, then, became a part of the modern condition—enabled by the revolutionary technology of recorded and broadcast sound that allowed ordinary people to choose to accompany their lives with talk and music from elsewhere. In the 1930s, responsible and irresponsible modes of listening were defined and debated as the new conditions of listening were culturally absorbed.” (Distracted listening 45)

While initially it was seen as a status symbol to own a large furniture sized speaker, the portable transistor radio, which enabled listening outdoors, provoked new concerns. When the British literary critic F.R. Leavis visited the United States in 1966, toward the end of his career, he chose in one lecture to observe how in “those once very quiet places” near Cambridge “to which my wife and I used to take our children, the working-class people now everywhere to be met in profusion carry transistors around

with them almost invariably." It was not, he pointed out, "Beethoven to which they were listening." In the much later individualized, head-phoned sound environments of the Walkman and iPod eras, a different set of debates about the civility of listening practices replaced these—this time about how listening has led, or might lead, to removal of oneself from the public sound world. Distracted listening in the late twentieth century has come to seem a symptom of solipsism, a sign of too deep absorption in the self, manifested in diminished interpersonal interactions. (Distracted Listening 14)

Teaching voice students about radio theatre performance, and exposing them to this experience, has, I believe, many uses. "More than just an historical conjunction, it [radio performance] implies the recasting of texts and writers in order to locate a particular mind set." And, such teaching also can serve as a useful bridge within the pedagogy of training actors for modern theatre and film: "You can make connections to the language imaginatively, so that the givens are a frame, a scaffolding in which you can actually give life and force with your imagination to the language." (Rocco Dal Verra. 232)

The Weakened Voice and Virtual Reality

Patsy Rodenburg, one of the leading voice coaches of this current generation, believes that, without fully speaking Shakespeare, we eventually will lose the plays. The above interview with David Carey on the eve of her publication, *Speaking Shakespeare*, offers additional insights into her feelings regarding the training of actors. In recent years, the number of radio theatre production companies has increased among education and community theatre groups. My experience has shown a close similarity between classic stage theatre production skills and radio theatre production skills. But, where do we

begin with the training? How can we speak to those students who already seem so dependant on their iPods and other such forms of distraction? Are we going to be speaking through their computers, and thus, are our students going to be third party listeners? Can the voice teacher approach the subject of elocution, scansion, rhythm, and Shakespearian pentameter limited by vehicles already drained of expressive potential by the same innovations of technology? Using radio to heighten the meaning of old language potentially could serve as the missing link in voice and speech training for the twenty-first century. But one must begin, I think, by acknowledging and addressing the problem of the weakened voice of the young actor who is attempting to speak.

That young actor, often inhibited both personally and socially, may resist the teacher's attempt to get him/her to "project." He or she may try to find excuses for not doing so, and need to be "convinced" that his/her own voice, without amplification, has the power uniquely to convey a variety of emotion and meaning on the stage. It may be useful, then, to consider in a general way the function and purpose of vibrant, nuanced and expressive speech.

"There's nothing casual about a great play, and I think that's what heightening of text is for." (Rocco Dal Verra. 227-35).

Conversely, the heightening of text (read, text expressively and meaningfully delivered) is indispensable to conveying a great play. When we heighten text, as I often tell my students, we're placing value, or coining the words, so as to create variation in their sound, intensities that enable language to reach beyond the stage lights to the farthest seat in the theater. I would argue that any play being performed, especially by students, requires the same commitment to render text so that it is intelligible, meaningful and accessible to an audience. Regrettably, high school students are faced with immense social pressures. In these very sensitive times for their physical and intellectual development, the student must overcome his/her own fear of being considered "not cool" in the service of the meaning of the play. The teacher can help by explaining that it is NOT an act of egoism to make one's voice heard; rather, the audible and meaningful expression of text, and working on emphasis and timing of words, is an act of generosity toward the audience, as well as an artistic challenge to do so convincingly. Along these lines, Cicely Berry remarks, with respect to voice training: "However heightened the language it is accessible to everyone."¹

We all have the sense that, somehow, stage language is speech in action: to be grasped fully it must be read aloud. Until you speak Shakespeare out loud, you can never totally understand all the implications of it, because the sounds of the language and the rhythms of it give you a bottom line - they underscore it in a way.²

¹ "Heightened Text, Verse and Scansion." By Rocco Dal Verra. 232

² "Heightened Text, Verse and Scansion." By Rocco Dal Verra. 232

Until spoken aloud it is often difficult to grasp the gesture, let alone nuance and implication, of a Shakespeare text. This may be because one requires the sound and rhythm of the language to provide that "bottom line," with the sound underscoring the sense, as it does also in great poetry. And of course, the actual physical experience of speaking does much to further both the comprehension and communication of text meaning. I suspect - and it is perhaps a cliché - that the association of Shakespeare with "high culture" may have to an extent "hijacked" his work, creating the perception that it is dry and literary. Adding to this is the practical problem that many words are unfamiliar, their usage antiquated especially if spoken aloud. As a high school student, I remember experiencing difficulty with Shakespeare's language. When I was finally able to read aloud, I remember the initial frightful feeling of doing violence to a sacred (and dead) tome. Because I recognize that frustration and fear, I also can relate to the initial difficulty that my students had in grasping the liveliness and spontaneity of Shakespeare's "speech in action."

The radio drama as produced in live theater can be a quite complex concept, and it was certainly the first exposure my students at Charlottesville High School had had to this performance medium. I decided to set *A Midsummer Night's Dream* during the roaring twenties, the golden age of radio, explaining to the actors that staging this radio drama performance on an actual stage would require them, as well as the audience, to use their imaginations. This would then allow them to focus more intently on the language, and perhaps to get closer to speech traditions of the past in our American culture, a possibly vanishing form of rhetoric.

Edna St. Vincent Millay on Radio: Mixed Blessings

As a first year high school teacher, it took me by surprise that, in this day and age, students would be resistant to a new performance concept - indeed, would experience such difficulty in thinking outside the black box. How could students be so reactionary? While they are a new generation of students within an age of great technological advancements, they tend to lean towards what already has been done, and therefore, what is the norm. Let us consider the norms that constitute “the box.” These could be described as the traditional performance styles and standard repertoire that appear to be most effective in high school theatre productions, serving as vehicles for instruction in various ways. Directors often deliberate over what might have the most educational value and may select repertoire that exposes the student to important aspects of form. For instance, Rogers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma*, which in most ways is completely dated and laden with assumed gender responsibilities, has within it some particularly fine examples of the musical theatre form. In George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, and its musical manifestation, *My Fair Lady*, language and dialects are used in a variety of ways: to delineate the characters in the play, while also underscoring the class structure of English society – all providing insights into the style and tradition of musical theater performance so important in secondary education. Notwithstanding such values - and the well- deserved place of such works in the “canon” of traditional music theatre, *My Fair Lady* seems pretty remote from the experience of the modern Gen Y student.

Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is one of his most age-appropriate and accessible plays, with a story that resonates quite effectively with high school

students, dealing with familiar adolescent themes relating to the blindness and whimsy of young love. While deciding my performance line-up for the year, I chose this play as a vehicle for staging as a radio play. In doing so I hoped to create an effective pedagogical opportunity: on the one hand, to infuse a sense of form and rhetoric missing from the voice of the actor while, on the other, to explore new approaches in voice and speech training. I may also have been attracted to direct this play by the additional thematic element of illusion and reality. By itself the performance of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, including the play within the play, seems to create its own several layers of illusion. As a radio play the concept of illusion is extended further; it enables the listener to be transported elsewhere (an additional "reality"- or perhaps an additional "illusion"), while still *seeing* a live production of theatre. The superimposed reality, which was emphasized in my production by placing the action in a pretend sound studio with prop microphones and prop sound mixing devices that might have existed in the 1920s or early 30s, was a source of fun while it further subverted the "reality" of the play itself. Naturally, I experienced considerable resistance to the idea:

Table 1.1 Favorite Rehearsal Quotes:

Student A: Mr. Becker, I feel kind of static up here. Should we move somewhere? I already delivered my lines, and we're not supposed to hear what is being said on stage, so what should we do?

Mr. Becker: Well, since there really isn't any need for you to be standing right now, you can use the prop couch where you can drink a cup of coffee and go over your next lines. This would be part of the performance as well.

Student B: Mr. Becker, I don't want to be rude, but we're not really acting up here, you basically want us to move to various pretend microphones and speak.

Mr. Becker: Yep, and I want you to speak as clearly as you would need to do so to broadcast through the airwaves. Imagine that you're reading this beautiful language to a blind audience hearing it for the first time.

Some unanswered questions and murmurs that floated about:

Student C: So, the lovers wear just casual 1920s attire? Are we going to wear flapper dresses?

Student D: I'm kind of confused. Are we using microphones for real or are they just for the audience?

Student E: Shouldn't Bottom have a mask for when he turns into an Ass so that the audience knows?* (This question was answered for Student E, see p. 49.)

Edna St. Vincent Millay in 1928 became one of the first poets to read her own work over American airwaves, responding to a call issued by many parties to "save" poetry as an art form. In doing so she was, at the same time conserving the original oral medium of poetry and utilizing new technology in order to transmit it to a national audience. Her work became an important example of how poets and other artists in the modern era both used, and were used by, a developing medium. Millay had been trained to recite verse in an educational system influenced by nineteenth-century theories of elocution. Edmund Wilson speculates that her transatlantic accent originated in this instruction: "I suppose it was partly the product of the English tradition in New England, and no doubt - since she had acted from childhood - of her having been taught to read Shakespeare by a college or school elocutionist." Hilmes observes that "linguistic unity"

was one of the “utopian projects of early radio.” According to Hilmes, this was a definable moment, establishing a standardized dialect for the masses. The voice of Millay on the radio would serve as a paradigm shift for much of the United States, and it would later lead to what is considered General American dialect - assumed to be the dominant way of speaking. “Millay's broadcasts, shaped by her mastery of elocutionary arts, served an educational purpose even at the level of pronunciation.” (Broadcasting Modernism 238-256). But in the twenty-first century that dominant culture is not so easy to recognize. And, might not such linguistic unity and elocution actually “turn off” rebellious young people, tending to associate it with biblical-sounding English?

However, and paradoxically, it is also the case, that the microphone and advancements in technology have dealt a blow to vocal production. Just as transmission had served initially to get vocal sound out over the radio, amplification of the voice inevitably came to be developed and widely used in live performance. Among other consequences, this has had the unfortunate result that actors and singers now have become dependent on amplification. We all are familiar with the now age-old warnings, “don’t depend on the microphone,” or “microphones are not your friends.” To this dilemma (the loss of vocal self sufficiency and autonomy) one must add another perplexing side effect: the role of the performer, his or her vocal nuance - what each individually can bring to the performance - now potentially also can be usurped and undermined by the sound engineers in their newly appointed (perhaps tyrannical) capacity.

Table 1.2 General American Articulation Exercises for Radio Voice**Forward Consonant Exercises: samples to be OVER articulated**

P. Pearls please pretty Penelope.

B. Big Byron broke Bertha's bouncing ball.

T. Try teaching to tax temper.

D. Dear Dora danced delicately.

Th. Thin things think thick thingies.

Th. Thee, thou them that thou thee

Ch. Chew the chump chirps chants cheerfully.

J. Johnson Jones jumps jauntily.

K. Clever critical cricketers keep catches.

G. Guy gives good gifts gracefully.

F. Fair Flora flirts fancy French fashions.

V. Vain Vernon vowed vehement vengeance.

M. Mild-mannered men make more money.

N. Nellie never noticed ninny Norah.

R. Round rough rocks ragged rascals run

L. Lion lilies like light lunches

W. Wise Walter won't whine.

Final consonant Exercises:

Tip-top trip. Search church porch.

Bob rub tub. Madge lodge Hodge.

Bright white light. Make woke Luke.

Fred led Ned. Snug swag-bag.

Tounge Twisters:

The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick.

A big bug bit a bold bald bear and the bold bald bear bled blood badly.

Can you can a canned can into an uncanned can like a canner can can a canned can into an uncanned can?

Three Swedish switched witches watch three Swiss Swatch watches switches. Which Swedish switched witch watch which Swiss Swatch watch witch?

CHAPTER 2

SOUND ENGINEERING, LIVE THEATRE, AND EDITED SOUND

MANIPULATION

“The State of the Art”

When I arrived at Charlottesville High School in my first experience as a full fledged high school drama teacher, I realized that I was now an authority figure, no longer a fellow actor or buddy to my students. I realized I would need to reach and relate to them as a teacher - and that some would resist my efforts. I also realized that, at age twenty-six, I was considerably older than these students in terms of "mindset," ways of communicating and other factors. This presented me with a dilemma that was as interesting as it was potentially frustrating. Before I proceed to discuss my staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream on the Radio*, in which I attempted to address and overcome the perceived "disconnect" between myself and them, let me first discuss the uses of technology that pose a particular challenge to the teacher of voice and speech.

Generation Y grew up along with the computer and, of course, the internet – both of which have impacted substantially the way the people live now. While initially providing communication through email, the most recent developments in the internet afford a plethora of additional resources, from downloading music, to online chatting, to blogging, and of course, texting. High speed internet and cell phones have become a way of life, along with other radio signal based gadgets, now including Smartphones, Bluetooth devices, and wireless stereo systems. Adding to this glittering array of technological resources are Countryman ear-sets and micro-lavalier microphones used for

stage performances. Countless twentieth century artists, composers and playwrights have attempted to come to terms with, as well as contributed to a discussion of, the implications of these changes,³ a vast topic which is beyond the scope of this particular study. However, I wish to mention that the potential threats posed by new media, and our saturation by new technologies, were envisaged nearly eighty years ago. In his 1935 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the German critic Walter Benjamin, a Marxist and influential theorist of early twentieth century media and culture, examines technology and its impacts on humanity and art. A close friend of Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin, in his essay, is concerned with the inevitable changes in our perception of art (and, I posit, of theater as well) - a loss of "authenticity" due to the ease with which art can be reproduced. Benjamin even goes further, proposing a kind of self-consciousness, in which art is being, in fact, created for the very purpose and in expectation of facile reproduction.

"To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility." ("Walter Benjamin." Marxists Internet Archive.)

It is as though Benjamin could foresee the dilemma that is the subject of the present study: that of singing and speaking with diminishing resonance and expression, with the

³ Perhaps an expression of the effects of technology on art, Stephen Sondheim, in *Sunday in the Park With George*, created a "minimalist" Broadway score utilizing quite limited thematic musical material, mixed and varied in numerous ways. The work is about Georges Seurat, the French impressionist painter who developed the technique of pointillism, in which small spots of pigment - only eleven colors in all - are utilized to create a large composition and the illusion of a full color world. Sondheim's musical devices, and Jonathan Tunick's orchestration (eleven instruments are used in the pit) mirror Seurat's approach, which can be interpreted as a response to an increasingly mechanistic and technological world.

<http://www.newlinetheatre.com/sundaychapter.htm>

expectation that the voice will be enhanced and nuanced, as if by magic, by someone or something else. The later twentieth century French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard, expresses what I believe to be a related concern: that technologized media, having long ago become the agent of a depersonalized economy of consumption, facilitates a type of postmodern non-communication.

(<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ baudrillard/>)

Free radio: it speaks, it sings, it expresses itself. Very well, it is the sympathetic obscenity of its content. In terms a little different for each medium, this is the result: a space, that of the FM band, is found to be saturated,... Speech is free perhaps, but I am less free than before: I no longer succeed in knowing what I want, the space is so saturated, the pressure so great from all who want to make themselves heard... I fall into the negative ecstasy of the radio.

(Illuminations: Kellner)

I would contend that such media saturation, and its attendant leveling effect, where everyone is able to be "heard" equally, may indeed be encouraging Gen Y students towards greater expression; but that expression is of a kind quite different from traditional exchanges between communicating parties. And, this is also having a profound effect on teacher-student communication and on the training of the voice for the stage. Streaming broadcasts of online classes through podcasts, while cost effective during a time of economic stress and cutbacks, unquestionably have weakened the traditional relationship between student and teacher, leaving both feeling alienated, as though "third recipients" of information with the computer as go-between. The effect has been an emotional, as well as an intellectual, one for the teacher, requiring pedagogical

approaches that have to acknowledge the new empowerment of students. But their power comes at a price: in exercising the desired control, and in their need to possess the latest gadgets to achieve and exceed it – whether through a volume knob or a mouse-click - many young people are allowing themselves to separate from the reality, let alone the beauty, of their surroundings. So that, in an uncanny ontological shift, technology has come to define both the modern and postmodern age, placing the speaking human being in an ontological limbo.⁴

The microphone and many other sound recording devices have made contributions to the music industry, both classical and commercial, allowing recorded performances to be accessible for mass consumption. Live broadcasts can be simulcast to outside venues, where performances at the Metropolitan Opera can be heard and seen without the exorbitant ticket prices or taxi fares. This is, of course, enormously beneficial. Sound technologies, the internet, as well as an array of sensitive new microphones, can be seen to have enlarged and created whole new audiences for “high art,” as well as promoting popular culture. But many voice and singing professionals, performers and trainers, maintain that these also have contributed to a decline in live performance quality.

⁴Baudrillard's concerns were anticipated in 1927 by Bertold Brecht: “Later generations would have the opportunity to marvel how a certain caste was able to tell the whole planet what it had to say and at the same time how it enabled the planet to see that it had nothing to say . . .” Brecht here is describing the radio and its usages for mass communication. (Brecht on Film and Radio)

Live Theatre

Given our “brave new world” of devices with the potential to both augment and diminish human expression, I would like to explore the effect of the media enhanced voice within live performance, an effect I believe to be potentially deleterious. I am referring particularly to sound produced by the vocalist with the fore-knowledge and expectation that it will be edited, processed and “tweaked” - perhaps beyond any similarity to the original vocal sound. Available technology now allows us to adjust the pitch, quality and accuracy of sung music, which can be done either live or post-performance. Such technologies not only adversely affect the importance of training for the actor; they have led to weakened bodies, where speech at the level and quality of cell phone conversation - and with its diminished communicative power - is now the norm. Conversely, we have developed acoustic engineering that bestows on disadvantageous or poor venues, from the standpoint of vocal projection, far better clarity of sound - in fact, an improved experience for singers and actors on the stage.

Acoustic engineering allows for sound to reverberate more effectively. The New York City Opera recently renovated their performance venue. In his article, *Mikes Banished, Natural Sound Returns to City Opera*, Anthony Tommasini, chief music critic for The New York Times, responds to the 2009 renovation:

There will be a marked improvement in the integrity and naturalness of the sound. How can I know this in advance? Because the theater’s dreaded amplification system (euphemistically called a sound-enhancement system by City Opera officials and termed an acoustical control system by its Dutch designers) is gone.” Referring to the new

system known as “electronic architecture,” Tommasini further notes that “...for the first time in a decade the music making at the theater will be guaranteed to have no electronic filtering, no amplified boost. Whatever the acoustical results, the sound will at least be true. (The New York Times).⁵ With respect to opera, then, natural acoustics in performance are considered to be optimum. But such is not the case with respect to musical theater on Broadway, which tends to set the standard for productions in colleges and schools.

Let me draw from an experience of mine as a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University. I had been asked to voice coach the singing portions of a 2008 production of *Cabaret*. Rehearsals were to take place within the academic constraints of VCU’s theatre program, commencing at the beginning of the spring semester and continuing throughout. I was excited to be able to focus on the musical aspects of vocal production, emphasizing in particular clear articulation, rhythm, and counting. I reminded students that they would need to maintain a healthy voice during the course of the show, and I suggested useful ways for them to stay healthy. I assumed they would need to be strong enough vocally to perform as an ensemble, and project above the accompaniment, in a theatre considered to be acoustically challenging. The performance space seats only about 350 people, but it has a ceiling height that allows much of the sound to reverberate into a vacuum—often a problem in institutionalized theatre spaces where musical acoustics are not at the center of the architect’s interests. Such challenges do have benefits both for actors and vocal coaches, yielding insights into problems of balance, projection and subtle differences in the perception of time. At any rate, once the

⁵ The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. Web. 1 July 2010. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/05/arts/music/05sound.html>>

performers had been effectively rehearsed, with a focus on clear ensemble work (cut-offs, dynamics, etc.), and prepped with respect to healthy solo singing for the long (three-week) run, it was then time for the actors to be miked. I understood that this was a necessity based on the performance venue, and so I had no misgivings. *Cabaret* is a post-1960's musical requiring the use of instrumental miking, so it would also then be necessary to mike the actors - and ask them to belt. Nearing the performance, the sound designer would ask the performers to do a "sound check," which now appeared on the schedule before the vocal warm-up. In fact, a vocal warm-up was not even an established part of the schedule. To my dismay, during the sound check the actors were asked to produce their highest vocal level - without a warm-up - in total disregard of the correct practice of getting the voice and body connected internally before anything else is done with the voice. As the show began its tech week I became increasingly aware of the negative aspects of live-mixing a show. The sound designer was determining what levels were necessary, based on what was coming through his earphones, then raising or lowering the microphone to affect proper balance overall. The actors often would resort to over-singing their solos, having no way of knowing, in the acoustical situation, how their voices would or would not be amplified. This process has become the norm for sound engineering and miking in a large performance space. So, we are in effect asking the actor to score his/her scene, memorize his/her lines, learn the music of the whole show, utilize the effective teachings of voice and speech, and then at the end, throw away the process of preparation based on what, according to an engineer, needs to be amplified or muted.

Similar problems with miking are experienced by touring actors who must adapt to the acoustical situation in each new performance venue. As a former touring actor myself, also given the responsibility for the sound-check and miking of my cast-mates, I often would be uncertain as to how the equipment would work within each venue. We were using a tracked musical recording and needed to be able to hear it through a monitor; but we also had project over it so the audience could hear our singing clearly. Because of the differing sizes and acoustics of these venues, successfully projecting speaking and singing over recorded and ambient sound can be a crapshoot. Notwithstanding the limited time for the sound-check afforded by our touring schedule, we found that the microphones and amplification systems at the venue would be our primary concern as performers. And I would also feel responsible for any instance where the sound would become distorted or cut off (e.g., from interference from air traffic control nearby). I would insist that we find the best vocal level during sound check so as to leave the mixing board out of the equation for the performance.

Such experiences are also reported by performers in more intimate settings. The musician (vocalist-pianist) and actor Claudia Stevens, classically trained both in speech and music, tours widely with her original solo plays, usually performing one-night stands at colleges and alternative spaces. She is one of a growing body of such solo performers. Reciting and singing to her own piano accompaniment, or with recorded sound, and also moving about the stage, she has come to rely on a lavalier microphone. This enables her to be heard above the accompaniment without forcing her voice, in large as well as intimate venues. The use of the microphone has made her rather unique and demanding performance medium possible, but there are problems, speaking usually requiring one

level of amplification and operatic singing another. Nevertheless, with limited time for rehearsal, and always concerned that the sound engineer will impose his own values on her work, she usually asks him/her not to alter or adjust the level of her microphone during performance, choosing instead to modify the volume, quality and direction of her voice when singing – an additional challenge of performance in this medium.

I don't believe that the sound engineers are at fault; they are simply doing their jobs. But we must consider seriously the whole process of training and coaching when so much of the practice and necessary work that empowers the actor, enabling him/her to understand and reap the benefits of good vocal production, can be overshadowed, even lost, in the final result. Even if the actor possessed good vocal production habits (clear articulation, projection, and clarity in final consonants), the values of variation and nuance in spoken or sung texts that rely on a natural acoustic environment would still be diminished by artificial amplification technology. I contend such technology is doing a disservice both to actors and trainers of voice and speech. Might we one day find ourselves superfluous within the training of the actor?

Voice and Speech Aesthetics

There are ongoing battles within the music theater industry concerning performers and their dependence on amplification and tweaking – a quite commonplace practice on the Broadway stage. I suspect the reason for this is that works created for Broadway audiences have been catering to the untrained ears of a younger, perhaps less sensitive audience. Another aspect to the current focus on amplification has to do with the aging of contemporary audiences. Increasingly, audiences able to afford attending live shows tend

to be older, so amplification also is serving the elderly and hard of hearing. Some among the older generation of performers within the industry have found these “improvements” frustrating. Broadway diva, Patti Lupone has amassed many decades of stage experience, ranging from her title role, *Evita* and the Los Angeles Opera debut of Weill-Brecht’s *Mahagonny*, to Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle Award nominations – Best Actress in a Musical). Lupone rants about technology and its impact on the young voices that combine with hers on stage and screen:

“I think there’s a big problem with microphones that are preventing actors how to (sic.) project emotions and voice physicality. The performances stop at the footlights. When I’m in the audience, I don’t know where the voice is coming from. There’s so much sound, so many speakers, but my ears hear sound somewhere else. This is an immediate disconnect. I want to look and hear where I’m looking. That will bring me forward in my seat, and bring me on to the stage. The actors that don’t project beyond the footlights in my mind are the actors that are not involved enough to give it to the audience.”

She continues on the subject of the devaluing of vocal performance, describing young people and their impressions of an “American Idol” kind of performance, where the singer’s interpretation of song is superimposed by visual interest or glamour:

Lupone: American Idol performers have no idea what it is to be on the stage.

Interviewer: They think we want to hear the same sound that is on our Ipod.

Lupone: Producers don’t allow audience to have a theatrical experience.

(<http://www.broadwayworld.com>)

In the current economy, producers are seeking ways to cut production costs of Broadway musicals and enable the show to stay profitable. According to Broadwayworld.com, the producers of *West Side Story* are planning to replace half of the orchestra's string section with a synthesizer. This has sparked much debate, with opponents claiming that a synthesized sound alters the theater-going experience.

“From Broadway theaters to opera houses and Hollywood production studios, digital orchestras are providing controversial alternatives to real-life musicians. How much of a difference does it make?” (<http://www.broadwayworld.com>)

Audiences exposed to the new commercial sound, whether instrumental or vocal, are being “programmed” to expect similar auditory experiences elsewhere. And so, in their relentless quest to enhance box office, Broadway producers are casting pop stars from television shows, in which the performer's singing (and the expectation of that singing) must already be quite different from standard live-sung sound. Where commercial success is more important than the development and encouragement of innovative work and the integrity of performance, special effects, and the use of sound-editing software, would seem inevitable. For example, “auto-tune,” a downloadable studio trick, where sung material can instantly be nudged onto the proper note or moved to the correct pitch, has found its way into sung theatre performance. Almost like airbrushing, this phenomenon has totally computerized and altered audience perception of the human voice.

Glee, a musical comedy-drama television series on the Fox network, airing weekly during prime time, has become something of a phenomenon. Many of my high school students watch it regularly, as it would seem to relate to their own experience in

theatre and performing arts in school. Grudgingly, I watched a few episodes. I should first acknowledge that this show has had beneficial results, among which are a revitalized interest in performance and in singing. But it also creates the impression (illusion) that anyone can sing perfectly and without training. The humorous aspect of “auto-tune,” utilized in this show, is that it is capable only of creating a technically flawless sound. Nuance, artistry, dynamics, vocal variety, and even articulation are subsumed by this flawless veneer. The recent craze over *Glee*, then, has changed audience impressions and expectations of what happens during live performance. It would appear that anyone can sing! “Anyone, apparently, with an army of producers and engineers at their disposal.” <http://www.gleetastic.com/articles/glee-too-much-auto-tune>

Simply put, the singing in this show - and many another - relies far too much on post-production editing, as well as pitch manipulation.

The auto-tune device is just one of many employed by the commercial music industry. In addition to their effect on audiences, such devices are also impacting directly performers’ use of their own voices and bodies when singing. Those singers who are growing accustomed to their use may find themselves becoming not only dependent but lazy.

Our whole way of expressing ourselves in this modern age is to underplay what we are feeling or what we are thinking, we do it through a laid back way of communication...I think all actors- whether they’re American, English, Canadian or Australian realize that. They can hear it in the language, but they need confidence. I mean, it’s basic confidence to actually fill the language without feeling they’re being a bit false or a bit classical or whatever.

(Rocco Dal Verra. 227)

At the risk of appearing to be rather too negative, I would suggest that the prevalence of diminished expression in contemporary speech, so much in evidence, might also reflect a new aesthetic. Within the framework of Voice and Speech, aesthetics heretofore has had to do with the usages of regional dialect, accents and similar factors. The new aesthetic, as a response to a developing cultural stereotype, concerns itself with tone and coloration. Viewed through the lens of a high school student, the somewhat ambiguous concept, “emo,” a slang term frequently used to describe or refer to fashion, style, attitude or overall subculture, denotes a certain neutrality of expression. According to Facebook, most definitions of “emo” hold that an “emo” person is emotionally candid, sensitive, shy, introverted, glum, and quiet. “Emo” speech lacks pitch variety, and words are often mumbled and slurred together in a monotone that could be interpreted as mirroring the avoidance of facial expression and eye contact, another characteristic. Many high school students who may be somewhat withdrawn perhaps excluded from mainstream high school activities -like football and cheerleading- might become interested in theatre, latching on to this “subculture.” After all, theatre is about emotions. It is ironic, then, that such students are contributing to an aesthetic of “emo” - in effect, to the subversion of expressive communication. This also is being fostered by contemporary iconic superstars like Lady Gaga. Gaga (Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta) is a twenty-three year old pop-music sensation who has achieved the status of Facebook fan membership even higher than that of Barack Obama, according to recent tallies. She seems to be using a form of inarticulate singing/speaking to considerable advantage. A total shape-shifter to her audiences, Gaga wants us to understand her self-presentation as

a kind of deconstruction of femininity, not to mention celebrity. As she told Ann Powers, “Me embodying the position that I’m analyzing is the very thing that makes it so powerful.”⁶

With respect to all the twenty something’s out there, myself included, she has an interesting point. She understands the workings of mass media and has found a way of exploiting it. Aesthetics has always been part of the voice and speech discussion, and the new voice of young Gen Y students and actors is a valid one. We all respond to the influences around us and give expression to them. Because we are using our senses and engaging with our surroundings, these outcomes are understandable, valid, and real to us. I am reminded of a presentation about birds and their environment that took place in a Graduate Modern Drama class. Sir David Attenborough's documentary, *The Life of Birds*, featured the Australian Superb Lyrebird, which was shown to imitate all the sounds in its environment:

“With its built-in MP3 recorder and player, the feathery sound box also reproduces the sounds of camera shutters, car alarms... and chain saws.”⁷

At first glance, a comparison between ourselves and the Lyrebird might seem like a stretch. But if technology has allowed this bird to change its vocabulary – even, in this case, to learn the “songs” of machines about to destroy its habitat - then similarly, human beings, in their ability to mimic the sounds that stream through radiowaves, and podcasts, are - quite naturally - developing a new mode of expression.

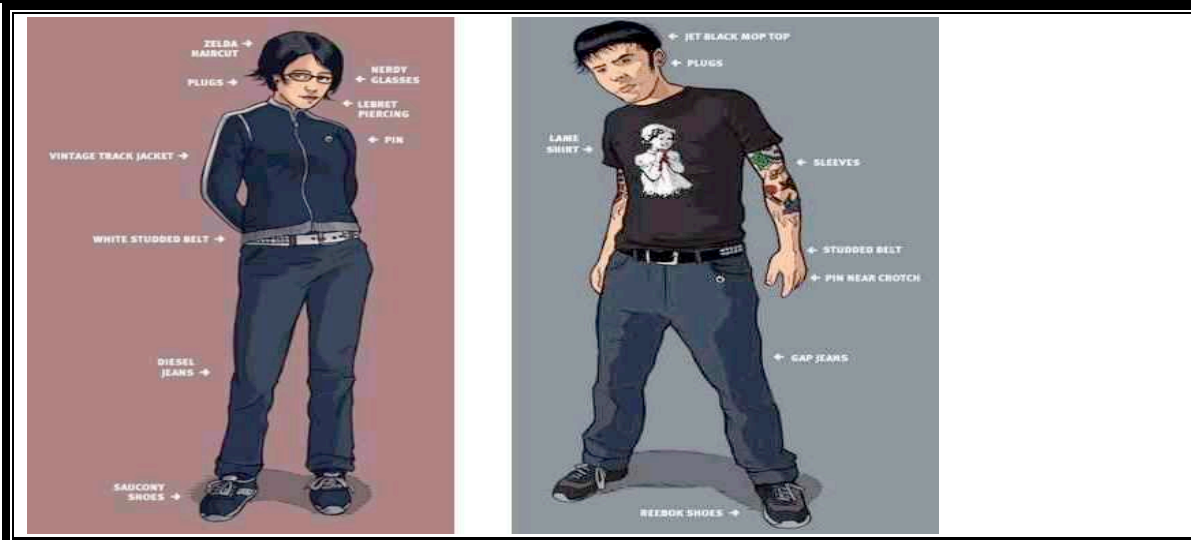
⁶ Bauer, Nancy. Opinion - Opinionator Blog - NYTimes.com. Web. June-July 2010. <<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/lady-power/>>.

⁷ Superb Lyrebird Sings Own Song of Destruction - A(frican) Blog of Ecology Blog | Nature Publishing Group." Nature.com Blogs: Home. Web. June-July 2010. <<http://blogs.nature.com/rafaerts/2008/03/07/superb-lyrebird-sings-own-song-of-destruction>>.

Table 2.1 The “De-Emoing” Technique

Inflection or intonation is the movement of the voice up or down along the line of sound. The focus is more on the “pitch” of your voice. Pitch is one of the elements of voice along with volume/loudness, rate/duration and quality/timbre. Pitch refers to the elevation/depression of the voice or simply the highness or lowness of a sound. Very much the same with intonation. This is where you’re ability to intone comes from, if you practice varying pitch in your speech.

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CHAPTER 3

TEACHING AND NEW SPEECH TRENDS

Pedagogy

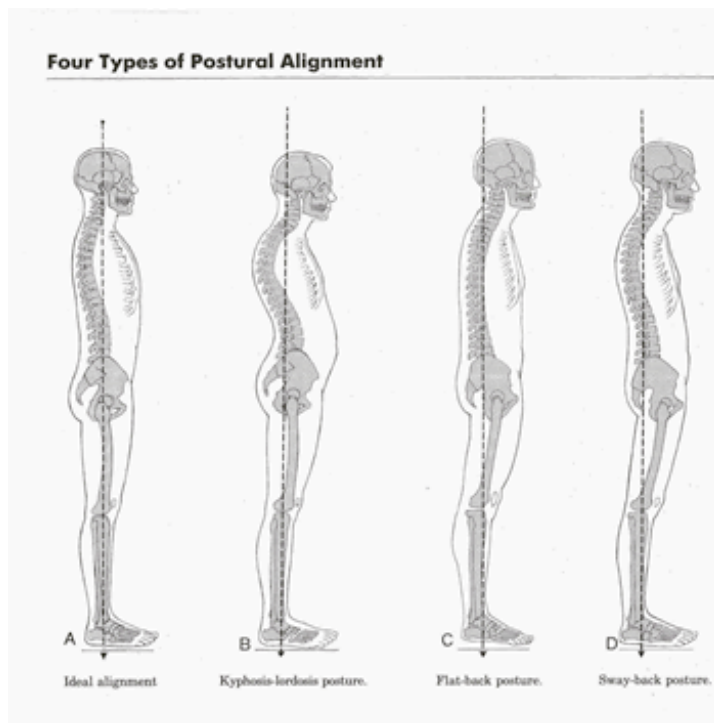
As a new high school teacher, I remember my first week of teaching very vividly. During an improvisation class for my Intro to Acting students, I observed that several of them elected to convey on stage - through mime - the mechanical movements of text messaging as a commonplace behavior. Initially, I found this objectionable. It appeared that the students were insinuating what seemed to be contrived and perfunctory actions into what I requested to be the “natural” way of moving and communicating on stage. I later realized that such new gestures and movements were valid because they were, in fact, “natural:” a reflection of the changes in our human condition as observed and experienced by impressionable young people. I decided to set aside my frustration over their apparent fixations with technology: “If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.”

In opting to have my students present *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a live radio play, I was attempting to provide them some new ways to access Shakespeare's language with an honest and robust integration of voice and body. I hoped to draw upon an understanding of radio communication that still resonates somewhere in our culture. Many young actors have developed vocally inhibiting habits at an early age, which are difficult to break during their subsequent training. The way they use their bodies and try to project even simple spoken prose lacks the breath control or diaphragmatic support necessary for a full sound. This may reflect their long hours “communicating” in front of a computer screen. Because I recognized how, so often unconsciously, these students would slump in their seats or half-stand, I focused on posture and alignment as a warm-

up for the radio play. I also emphasized that, when they spoke, they should try to be “grounded,” that is, in state of readiness, having their weight evenly distributed, feet at a hip’s length apart, and to avoid the overwhelming urge to fidget. Initial reactions to this were lackluster at first. At first, I had better success when I reminded students that radio theatre, when performed live, required the actors to place focus on voice and meaning, and it was then that they began to understand what they had missed before.

“Let us consider this in relation to the voice: a young actor slumped in a contemporary posture, hands in the pocket of low-slung jeans, gaze dropped, shoulders rounded and collapsed into the front of the body. In this posture, the actor is compressing the spine and the ribcage, squashing the diaphragm and leaving no space for the efficient working of the breath.” (Rocco Dal Verra. 227-35)

Table 3.1 Skeletal Effects on a Weakened Body



These are the “weakened bodies and voices” to which I referred earlier. First recognizing, and then addressing this problem – an unavoidable reality for the high school teacher - is of tantamount importance and must be at the center of any discussion or comparison of the benefits of live and edited performance. I believe we must ultimately accept as a given the attitudes and practices of the present generation of young actors, especially within the current performance stage of YouTube viewing. And, we need also to acknowledge the benefits of such viewing for those eager and excited theatre students who otherwise might not be able to experience live performances on stage and now can access them on a screen or through a computer. As educators, we have the responsibility to usher in the millennium with excitement and energy. At the same time, we can seek to develop strategies to incorporate new technologies and techniques in the training of the weakened bodies and voices of our students. I will address this later on in the chapter.

Given the premise that the use of technology to enhance live performance (and to act as quality control) simultaneously may be diminishing the quality of both live speech and sung music, I now arrive at a central question that I hope will spark some useful discourse within the voice and speech community: What is the role of the voice and speech trainer in the face of “innovative” technologies and practices that would seem to render the very same training obsolete? We need to consider our role as teachers and trainers of voice and speech as impacted by these practices and ask, “What are the implications for our work when the sound designer nuances the performance and the performers are left out of the equation?” We are inhabiting a world where, what once was a theatrical experience - meaning a liveness or corporality, and perhaps even an

unpredictability on stage, now can appear so homogenized that it might as well be viewed on a screen. Acknowledging the capabilities of live mixing and after-show tweaking to rob the voice of nuance and subtlety, we must ask where we go from here as teachers and coaches.

In my first year of pedagogy work at VCU, I became fascinated with “extreme voice” and the possibilities of allowing one’s self to go beyond traditional emotional and physical limits. Extreme voice work is a culmination of voice and body work with the purpose of increasing vocalic range. Through imaginative exploration of the increased range, and performing activities such as yelling, screaming, or keening, both the voice and body are able to access more forcibly the extremes of their potential ranges.

People have asked why I am so obsessed with the voice - what about all the other important means of human expression? I have found that full development of the voice, that is connecting all its tones of expression to embodied feeling, includes everything else, and forms a vital bridge between head and body, the conscious and unconscious. It is because I have aimed to sing eight octaves or more, using my whole body, will and imagination to do so, that my acting performance appears as immediate and embracing. To educate my voice to produce at will a great variety of timbres and nuances that relate to immediate experience rather than to a clever, intellectually acted simulation of experience, I had to gain in my body the knowledge of my comprehensive humanity.

(<http://www.roy-hart.com/objective.voice.htm>)

Within the already challenging world of new ideas and approaches to voice and speech work, Roy Hart had a particularly strong impact on me. While also integrating the imagination, I found his insistence on the necessity for heightened and extreme vocal work to be, not only useful, but indispensable for growth in the actor's training. I attempt to integrate such principles of imagination into my teaching of high school students.

Patsy Rodenburg, along with Cicely Berry, Barbara Houseman, Janet Rodgers and Rob Macdonald similarly explore the use of imagination. These distinguished practitioners also seem to share the recognition that the voice, itself a physical phenomenon, is affected, even governed, by the physical usage of the body. Each practitioner therefore begins voice training with attention to the body, emphasizing that an awareness of posture and physical tension is paramount to understanding how the use and misuse of the body affects vocal function. When habitual physical tension is dispelled, the body can become more connected and grounded, and breath support is enabled. This has an almost immediate positive effect on vocal facility and quality: vocalic sounds become fuller, richer, deeper and more resonant; the words themselves have color, texture and nuance.

Rob Macdonald acknowledges the important role of posture in voice work: "Because the voice is suspended in the body, its free activity depends on the postural mechanism working efficiently; any inefficiency of the postural body will impose limitations on the voice. The Alexander Technique, by bringing about natural body support, gives the voice the support it needs and the chance to work freely. It then helps us move into energized activity while avoiding any interference that limits it."

Beyond techniques to improve posture and facilitate the release of tension, other types of body awareness training have yielded benefits for students of voice and speech.

The San Francisco-area singer and vocal pedagogue Allen Shearer has been practicing the Feldenkrais method for nearly twenty years and gives occasional workshops for voice students on its application. The method builds on practice techniques that every singer is acquainted with already: repeating actions until they become automatic and no longer require conscious effort. Singers use such techniques for control of the tongue and palate, the larynx, the ribs and abdominal muscles. Feldenkrais applies these techniques more broadly by allowing the whole body to take part in movements (i.e., working with the pelvis, chest and neck) rather than restricting and localizing them. Learning to stand strongly and quietly has great benefit for a singer. Says Shearer, "I have also found that Feldenkrais work clears the mind and makes memorization and concentration easier."

Of course, I couldn't just throw techniques such as Alexander and Feldenkrais at my students and expect immediate improvement. In fact, I always remind them that our practice, the preparation of our bodies and voices as we warm up, is what we call "our work" in an ensemble. Explaining it in this way implies a process, rather than an automatic result from the activity. Extending this concept further, it becomes our goal to recognize the effects of the work - improvements in our body awareness and vocal production. When the warm-up is finished, the actor is ready to apply this practice to the stage. It is human nature to desire recognition of progress, and to want it to be immediate, so I would stress that improvement cannot happen, or be sustained, without continued work and practice. The everyday practice is key. A number of my students at Charlottesville High School became impatient with my emphasis on this sort of discipline. Some appeared to fall back on old vocal habits. In some instances, this may have been laziness, but I also suspect they were again responding to cultural pressures to

"hold back" and avoid the appearance of emotion in performance, as discussed in the last chapter, which provides further evidence that the weakened voice is being encouraged and catered to by the surrounding media-heavy pop culture.

Shakespeare and Canonical Considerations

“Too often our students have not experienced a classroom, let alone a world, that engages them on a variety of cognitive levels at the same time... We recognize that one of our major tasks must be to reintegrate and perhaps re-imagine the body into conscious awareness,” writes Laura Hitt, Associate Professor of Voice and Speech at West Virginia University. According to Hitt, Gen Y students likely have first encountered Shakespeare in a book, probably read in silence, which necessitates new methods and approaches in teaching such “canonical” works. “The imagination of Shakespeare requires actors who have been encouraged to play and engage with the sense of imagining, and language processing as a whole.” (Lewis, Martin, and John Rainer 5).

The drama landscape shifted in decisive ways during the 1990s. In his book, *A Formalist Theatre*, Michael Kirby frames the consequences for the contemporary practice of theatre against the backdrop of these changes:

“Every aspect of theatre in this country has changed [since the 1960s]: scripts have lost their importance and performances are created collectively, the physical relationship between audience and performance has been altered in many different ways and has been made an inherent part of the piece; audience participation has been investigated; ‘found’ spaces rather than theatres have been used for performance... there has been an increased emphasis on movement and on visual imagery.” He concludes, however:

“All attempts to weave new theories will have the basic principles of theatre as their shared point of departure.” (Lewis, Martin, and John Rainer 4-5).

I envisioned the radio play approach to Shakespeare as an advantageous pedagogical device: simultaneously it could recreate, and reap the benefits of, a more traditional theatrical experience for the students. And, because the attention of the audience would be focused more on clarity of speech and thought than on the usual visual and staging aspects of the play, I felt I would be educating *them* as well.

During the rehearsal process, I urged my students to sing with one another. I told the character playing Puck to sing her lines so that she could hear the iambic pentameter in the phrase. My ensemble of fairies was asked to focus on imagining and expressing their material as though they were a trio of flapper jazz singers. I explained to the student playing Oberon that his character needed greater vocal presence and showed how he could enhance his range with additional support. For one entire rehearsal I had my students sing their parts. By the end of rehearsal, they were exhausted, their bodies worn out from the physical demands of singing, rather than speaking, their lines. But at the next rehearsal, it was apparent to all that their vocal capabilities suddenly had taken a great leap forward. The students later realized how such improvements in their delivery of the language- greater clarity and focus on the text in the service of enhanced meaning - had made the whole experience of the play more enjoyable for the audience.

I also recognized that memorization of Shakespeare is a daunting task for high school students. Rather than enforcing memorization in the early stages of rehearsal I took advantage of, and focused on, the idiosyncratic and amusing genre of the radio play,

which, on its own, did so much to impose the understanding, meaning, and enjoyment of the language.

Michael Kirby, in the above remarks, seems to be implying that theatre now is defined as what theatre practitioners make and do; that in teaching, “anything goes;” that a canon based on traditional materials and methods is no longer valid; and it would follow that there is no one way to teach voice and speech or acting. I believe his description of the current situation is well observed. Teachers of drama at the secondary level are confronted daily with the fact that they cannot expect their students to have had any traditional musical training at the elementary level, to have had the experience of reading aloud in class, to be acquainted with “classical” literature or Western cultural traditions. In the past, these realities, rather than theories put forth by scholars and critics, have had the most profound impact on the teaching of drama, both in high school and in college, affecting not only what is being taught, but also on how and why it is taught.

I also agree with Laura Hitt that ever new ways can be found to access and tap the sources of spontaneity and creativity in a young person, often most successfully by bringing the imagination into play.

As voice and speech practitioners, we consistently retrace the beginning journey of cognition and language development and reengage with a sense of play while beginning to build body, breath, and vocal awareness. From reigniting a student’s childhood abandon, revelry and pleasure in discovering language-whether it be simply the joy of playing with vowels and consonants, to alliteration and rhyming, to awakening the somatic awareness of breath and the fluid movement/energy

associated with a free and fluid spine-we map out a very intentionally concentrated route traveled during the course of early human development.

(Lewis, Martin, and John Rainer 6)

I believe it is possible, as well as necessary, for the teacher to seek new ways of combining seemingly disparate approaches into a larger concept. Whether consciously or unconsciously, my preparation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream On the Radio* attempted to involve students holistically in a number of experiences and activities simultaneously: a disciplined approach to language; the engagement of imagination and play; the building of physical and vocal strength, stamina and awareness. They also were being exposed to an important work of Western literature. I attempted to tackle as many voice and body activators as possible, utilizing warm-ups that were entertaining and enabling for the voice and body- and could be experienced as a game they could “roll with.” Our warm-up process for *Midsummer Night's Dream* would begin by focusing on the articulators using word play. As high school students are sensitive to routine, I tried to maintain the same ritual of the warm-up on every practice day.

Overall, I tried to create a frame of reference for the work, requiring the use of the student's imagination. Similarly to the way a director asks his cast to construct character biographies, I explored with students the sounds of the 1920s and 30s in several ways. Recognizing the difference in sound and old-fashioned dialect between then and now, I used recordings to afford my students key sound examples - similar to the process in finding the right dialect for a particular role. I also asked them to create mental images of working people from the late 1920s and 30s, using old photographs, this allowing them to imagine the voice and the movement of these characters. This kind of imagery work is

not unlike the “portrait work” that I focus on with my first year students. Inspired by Voice and Speech practitioner, Erica Tobolski, her “Portrait Project” explores the idea that a voice and a movement can come from a simple photograph. This is very compelling. As the radio play would be set in the 1930s, I was affording the actors an opportunity to create their own Shakespeare voice characters - radio voices are, after all, distinctive. And, the idea of a time journey makes the application of Shakespearean language less daunting, while it awakens the imagination. I believe it was helpful for my actors to create these voices, almost as though they were recreating the radio play actors themselves – all of whom were performing a play within a play.

As the performance date drew closer, I reminded my performers that costuming was going to be of the least importance, because the main focus of the audience would be on language and sound. Giving in to the total theatrical experience, I worked to find a balance that would allow costumes appropriately to create the experience of radio theatre performers, perhaps casually dressed. Implementing organic sound effects that would enhance the total theatrical experience and not interfere with the focus of the show created a challenge. Similar to lighting effects, the role of sound effects needed to be understated, while serving to support the performers. My technical theatre students helped in the creating of sounds:

Table 3.2 Radio Sound Effects for Live Audience (intended for podcast)

| <u>Live Performance</u> | <u>Pre-production SFX</u> |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cricket whistle (outdoor ambience) • Face Slaps • Shaking flower bush • Flapping Bird Wings • Scuffle of Feet • Chirping Birds (outdoor environment) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairy Dust (metallic chimes) • Puck’s Entrance SFX (arpeggio) • Puck’s Exit SFX (inverted arpeggio) • Thesius’ Entrance (Fanfare) • Sword Drawing • Titania’s Entrance (Wood Chime) • Titania’s Wind • Oberon’s Entrance (Deep Wind) |
| <p><u>Incidental Music ---Underscoring</u></p> <p>Serge Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 3 Maurice Ravel <i>Bolero</i> <i>Gaspard</i> Igor Stravinsky: <i>Histoire du Soldat Suite</i> Claude Debussy: <i>Pour le Piano</i></p> | |
| <p><i>Golliwog’s Cakewalk</i>---Robin and Fairy First Encounter <i>1st Arabesque</i>- Act 4 Scene I <i>Sarabande</i> Annette Hanshaw----<i>You’re the Cream in my Coffee</i> Paul Whiteman’s Orchestra- Excerpt Jimmy McHugh/Dorothy Fields -<i>I Can’t Give you Anything but Love Baby</i> Modest Mussorgsky-Excerpt “Ballet of Unhatched Chicks”-----Fairies Argentine Tango Vol. 1----Lovers Quarrel</p> | |

The Stage Manager was also “sound-man” for the Radio Play. He produced the sound effects while also pretending to serve as the DJ using a prop Vitrola.

My choice of the sound effects and, especially, of musical selections, was meant to evoke the general atmosphere, the antics and the sense of the fantasy, humor and revelry that characterizes this play. But this was not intended just to be background music for the entertainment of the audience. Music affects the performer’s experience of timing and pacing and engenders a palpable experience of the rhythm of spoken language. I also hoped the music would stimulate the imaginations of the actors, and help to infuse certain qualities into their vocal delivery. Some selections, like the *Ballet of Unhatched Chicks*, from Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, or Debussy’s piano *Prelude, Golliwog’s Cakewalk*, are energetic and quirky, giving momentum, for example, to Puck’s delivery. Or, an Argentine tango to underscore a lover’s quarrel might help the actors to access and then give expression to the frustrated sensuality underlying their exchanges. I hoped that the use of big band jazz would do more than create a sense of time and place, but also would inject a mood of flamboyance and expressive abandon - to which the actors would respond, whether or not they were doing so consciously. I believe that, for the more sensitive, musically impressionable and imaginative actors, the choice of music did have its intended effect.

The final performance date arrived, and I think the cast was excited to give it their all. In one of Shakespeare’s most memorable and endearing sleights of hand, Nick Bottom, the rude mechanical, and theatre know-it-all, is turned into an ass by Puck. During our second and final run, Bottom was unable to find his mask and was forced to go on without it. This incident created a particularly exciting moment for me as a director.

Rather than the mask, it was the vocal and physical changes he had built in to his performance – which were enhanced even further by the absence of his ass’s head- that conveyed absolutely everything essential to the audience: he was now a donkey. Congratulating him afterwards, I told him, "even if the audience had been blind, it would have been very clear that you were an ass." And so, returning to the student’s question cited earlier in this thesis, “What will Bottom do now that he’s lost his mask?” the matter was resolved happily for actor, audience and teacher-director. I wondered if the illusion and reality of the radio play could be developed even further by making (or threatening to make) kids who were not off book in time actually read their lines in performance: as an added commentary on the “process,” and a source of fun (like Bottom having no mask), the “lazy” actor is still on book.

And so, notwithstanding the various pedagogical uses of technology in this show - especially in sound production - it would be the idea and reality of the radio play, rather than technology per se, that actually took center stage in the process of my teaching and directing. It turned out that the most significant benefit, from the standpoint of technology, would be realized post production. I now realize this would have implications for my future teaching as well. Since the show was "podcasted," made readily available for listening through Apple's iTunes, I retrofitted a modern sound (featuring "modern" teenagers) to the classic radio drama format. Podcasting, available and free to the public anywhere in the world, also helped to validate the production for my students, enabling them to enjoy their experience of the radio play as a "product" of technology. From the standpoint of teaching, the Podcast might have additional, and possibly greater, benefits. Viewing and responding to it in a class setting is an ideal way

to follow up on a performance, generating useful discussion. In a low-stress environment, while enjoying the "high tech" fruits of their work, it is possible for the students to criticize each others' performances, as well as experience their own speech - as reproduced on the somewhat ungrateful medium of the Podcast - more objectively than they might have been able to do during rehearsals and performances. Did they project the text as clearly, audibly and slowly as they believed they had? Could others decipher the words? Did they express the meanings of words as fully as they thought, or too much so? I will continue to explore the pedagogical uses of this technology.

Overall, I am certain that my students now feel empowered by Shakespeare to an even greater extent than before, realizing that, by using their voices, they were able to produce such fine theatre performed live - and also to have it preserved, as in a time capsule, for the future.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis I have advanced the view that, in order to get through to our students, we must seek strategies to morph old with new materials and approaches, and suggested that technology can be an effective servant of teaching. Let me cite an interesting example. A faculty member at a Virginia college told me about her experience teaching a course on interdisciplinary performance and improvisation - and how the simple early technology of “effects pedals” had helped her turn a corner. The students, sophomores selected for the class based on academic achievement, had had little or no experience performing. She found them to be quite inhibited about reading aloud or “performing” their original texts – which were often quite imaginative and delightful. First, she created as a sound environment for their recitations the electronic music composition, *Poeme Electronique* by Varese, an eerie soundscape of quirky and evocative synthesized sound and “concrete” music. The students were intimidated, rather than inspired by such strange music. But as soon as she had them speak into a microphone connected to “effects” pedals – allowing them to double their own voices at the octave (creating their own “Doppelgänger”) or to create delay, echoing their own words - it was as though a new world had opened up to them. She found them listening and responding to the background music in creative and bold ways, starting to move about, spontaneously interlacing their live recitations with the gestures in the music, playing with the pacing and volume of the words being distorted and stretched by the pedals. They commented at the end of the course that this experience had been a high point of the class.

The first year of my teaching at the secondary level, along with exposure to the

stimulating ideas and experiences of many other colleagues, provided numerous valuable insights. Foremost among them is, that the possibilities in effective teaching are limited only by the imagination of the instructor. I would encourage all teachers and coaches in the field to acknowledge the need for imaginative exploration in their approaches, thereby keeping the discussion current. I believe also that, adopting approaches not limited to the traditional ones will help assure that the discipline and the craft of Voice and Speech continue to be meaningful and viable. I believe that the future of voice and speech pedagogy is assured, and that it will continue to be vibrant and strong, through meaningful explorations that are not limited to traditional approaches. It has become clear to me that we all must move with the changing times, also allowing ourselves to be changed, while finding new methods to integrate modern world concepts into a more "universal" approach to teaching. At the same time we also must preserve the values of the past.

A Midsummer Night's Dream on the Radio afforded many of my students a new appreciation and understanding of Shakespeare. The benefits for my own budding teaching career may have been even greater. It is my hope in future to continue this process, seeking to implement and integrate new ways of thinking, and imaginative approaches, into the "tried and true" methods of teaching drama. Just as important for moving forward, success in teaching and progress as a practitioner is, I believe, constant self-examination: seeking objectively to assess the successes and failings of my own approaches, drawing on the constructive criticism and helpful suggestions of colleagues and students. It is my hope that my experiences, and the pedagogical insights and ideas generated by them, as explored in this thesis, will contribute meaningfully to others in the

field of voice and speech pedagogy.

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APPENDIX

*See Electronic Attachments

*A. Set Designs/Pictures

*B. Radio Preview, WVTF Charlottesville

*C. Podcast Recording

HANDOUTS

Handout 1

“De-Emoing” (inflection exploration)

| |
|---|
| I. Find the absolute LOWEST energy in your body- just enough to stand up, and begin to walk around the room. |
| Begin to express great Joy: Maybe you just got an A on a test, or won the lottery. (remember you are in your unimpassioned speaking voice) There is very little vocal variety. |
| II. Now align yourself upright so that you are available to the world. Walking around the space with full voice, and breath begin to explore inflection: |
| A. The rising intonation for questions answerable by a YES or a NO. |
| Examples: Are you in love? Can she see us from here? |
| Will you call me later? (Give questions answerable by YES or NO and intone.) |
| B. The falling intonation for questions that can't be answered by yes or no. This is not always literally a falling pitch, but it can be more musically varied than you might think! |
| Examples: Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar? What are you trying to prove? |

Where were you yesterday when I needed help?
 When is your Birthday?
 Whom did you speak?
 Which cereal is your favorite?
 Why don't you go outside and play

Handout 2

Listening Exploration

Finding the Right Voice.

Most people don't consciously change their own voice dramatically for differing situations. Some people might consciously or subconsciously find themselves adopting a slower or clearer voice for the telephone, public speaking, or in more formal situations to make them easier to understand. Somehow, the authenticity is lost when we try to mimic someone else's if the belief is that it sounds "better" than one's own.

Lets explore our own voices!

Start with something familiar.

Use an old monologue, song lyrics, or a poem.

Imagine that you suddenly have been transformed into a voice, and a voice destined for the radio!

* Listen to your favorite presenters, or radio legends.

I might suggest listening to Jay Leno or David Letterman as a radio broadcast.

* Talk to one listener, imagine a-typical listener and broadcast to them

Find a partner in class, and attempt to broadcast your monologue, lyrics, or poem to them

* Being aware of the audience and/or time of day and vary the delivery

Set the mood based on time of day.

Yes, your voice can do that.

* Prepare well, practice, and then we'll record these in class and listen to the broadcast!

Key Terms To Know

Hot Mike. A microphone that is turned on.

Master. The original recording. The tape from which dubs are made. Also, a finished recording of the song from which records are pressed and distributed to radio stations and record stores.

Mix. The final audio product combining all the elements into one composite soundtrack. "Mix" also applies to the act of creating the mix. This is sometimes referred to as the "mixdown."

Mouth Noise. Also known as "clicks and pops." A dry mouth produces much more mouth noise than a damp one. Cigarette smoking also contributes to a dry mouth. The less mouth noise you have, the less editing has to be done later. ☺

SFX. Abbreviation for sound effects. Sometimes also written as EFX. or FX.

Voice Over. The act of providing one's voice to a media project. Called voice-over because the voice is usually mixed over the top of music and sound effects

Underscoring. The way that music can accompany without distracting the spoken text.

VITAE

David Malachi Becker was born on February 18, 1983 and is a native of Richmond, Virginia. He attended Shenandoah University where he graduated with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Music Theatre in 2005 with a vocal certificate. David has performed in numerous touring shows with Theatre IV, a children's theatre company based out of Richmond, Virginia. Some performance highlights include Ichabod Crane in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Bagheera, the Panther in *The Jungle Book*, Rusty Charlie in *Guys and Dolls*, Schroeder in *Charlie Brown*, and many others. He has voice coached many different shows in different venues. Most recently, he coached a community theatre production of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he currently resides as a High School Theatre teacher. During this past year he directed several shows. Most recently, the spring musical, *Guys and Dolls*, and earlier this year, along with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he also directed a production of *Alice in Wonderland*. An accomplished pianist, David studied piano and has performed numerous recitals.