

Phoniatric problems in folk singing teaching

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Abstract: *In folk singing seems to be unnecessary to train the voices. Is it so if one sings when he/she feels it to do and in the tune suitable for him/her. In teaching folk singing many problems appear. The student must sing regularly in a fixed time and has to practise and in fixed tunes in order to sing with others or be accompanied by instruments. In this changed situation the vocal chords are in a extremely high strain. The other problem in folk singing teaching is that many students are under the age of 14, so their voices are before the mutation. Sometimes teachers don't recognise the mutation period and force singing at that time too. These facts led to the recognition of the need for voice training in folk singing teaching and in some cases to the rehabilitation of the vocal chords. So it became necessary to build in phoniatric knowledge in the folk teachers training in the Music Academy.*

Key-words: *folk singer, vocal training techniques, the speech-centered characteristics, speech therapy, phoniatrics*

1. Introduction

The need to formulate the characteristics of folk singer vocal training and the need to develop a related methodology became urgent when the Academy of Music launched a degree programme for folk singer teaching artists in 2007. Although classical singing tradition and the principles related to the classical manner of singing supported the development of a methodology for folk singers in many ways, they still were different in several aspects (tone, the ideal sound), or they did not talk about some of the topics related to folk music (e.g., vocal training of a child's voice before mutating). The question arose as to whether it is necessary to

have vocal training for folk singers. For thousands of years, the singing of folk music was done by hearing and by word mouth, and everyone was singing folk songs using their own abilities and their own natural voice. What, then, can be the justification for vocal training, of forming the voice of folk singers? Is it not a mistake to interfere with a natural performance?

Based on my many years of experience in the training of a wide variety of voices, I am firmly convinced that the human voice needs training. While during the past centuries, the same people who enjoyed singing - and their performance was enjoyed by the community as well - had a good voice and typically were able to use their voice properly, were singers, but in an academic setting, folk singers have to be able to perform on almost the same level every time and in all kinds of situations. This means that we need to help students to develop a correct way of singing. In this, we are supported by the knowledge accumulated over the decades and centuries in other vocal teaching styles, as well as by the different elocution exercises and methods of actors, and of course the „voice maintenance” methods developed by speech therapists and phoniatrists. These last two are very useful in folk singing, because the speech-centered characteristics of folk singing make it a subject of elocution, speech therapy, and of phoniatics. This parallel is particularly striking when the voice is forced because of non-accurate use of vocal training techniques. In some cases, we can see dysphonia, or worse, voice loss or the appearance of a vocal nodule or other deterioration in the organ. In these cases, knowing the basic phoniatic exercises and rehabilitation principles of the vocal folds is especially helpful.

2. Objectives

This articles aim is to show the historical background of the folk singing teaching in Hungary. Cross this overview I'd like to point to the importance of the vocal training in folk singing practise especially around the period of mutation. While applying several vocal training excercises from the classical singing schools some phoniatic tasks seem to be very useful as well. I hope that some points of view can help the teachers to treat their students' voice with special care and lead them to the joy of singing.

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3. Material and Methods

In Hungary there is a special system of music teaching. Children from the age six begin elementary school and in parallel they can start music school optional. In the early 1980's the need of folk education raise up. It was a period of „tánc ház mozgalom” the folk dance movement which made a community of hungarian intellectuals. It was a feeling of being Hungarian and to be related to the social roots. So the folk songs was related to the dance music. In the hungarian traditional costume the girls had very tight skirts wich made the breathing getting upwards. So in this situation the singing was done with a high positioned breathing. This technique made an esthetic category of folk singing wich is suitable only for the dance music. The other style of folk singing wasn't in common. This period was hallmarked with the artists as Sebestyén Márta, Sebő Ferenc, and the Muzsikás Ensamble. What did the education reacted for this? In Budapest they established the „Óbudai Népzene Iskola” (ONI) and another school for folk music: the Nádasy music school in Budafok. Both schools had folk singing faculties. One of them had the professor Bodza Klara and the other had Budai Ilona. Bodza Klara was a classical singer who had early musician and folk musician practise the other teacher was Budai Ilona who had kindergarden pedagogist degree but had folk singing practice as well. Bodza Klara had the need of vocal training as a classical singer and as a practising folk singer. Later many music school started to teach folk music, folk instruments and singing. At that time none of the Universities had folk music teacher training in the country. The teachers in the music schools came from several parts of specializations. The common thing was the love of folk music and the practice came from the „Folk dance movement”. In 1989 a young folk singer Vakler Anna started teaching in Székesfehérvár. Her curiosity and engagement with folk singing induced changes in the attitude of the professional folk singing and the way of its teaching. She had many consultations with folk singer colleagues and these consultations forced to make didactic guides for the teachers. In 1992 two high-skilled folk singer Bodza Klára and Paksa Katalin writed and published the „Hungarian Folk Singing School Book I-II”



Fig. 1. The cover of Bodza-Paksa Hungarian Folk Singing School Book I-II (1992)

In these school books were certain instructions on the way of vocal training and had some concrete exercises to help the teachers:

„Teaching folk songs requires thorough professional preparation. The most important prerequisite is the knowledge of vocal training, which is essential for singing in any genre. Although the basic rules of singing education apply to some extent to all singer genres, we also have to take into account methodological differences, which are determined by the stylistic differences of the folk melody world. With the help of the cassette tapes and the methodological and folk music chapters of our book, anyone can get to a level of style knowledge that they can sing, ornament and perform a folk song as their own. This book can be used by enthusiastic enthusiasts and singing teachers, as well as those who are preparing for artistic careers. We therefore recommend the textbook to all primary, secondary and higher education institutions where singing teaching is included in the curriculum, as well as to folk song groups, young people attending dance houses, music school solfeggio

teachers and students. Last but not least, we recommend it to kindergarten educators, as music education and taste formation begins in kindergarten, and the first volume of the book contains many children's toys and folk customs for kindergarten children. In this way, the purpose of our book is to make folk singing a common treasure and to stay alive for generations to come.”²

As the need of trained folk teachers' arrived, the higher education had to start the training. In 1993 the Nyíregyházi Teacher Trainer College started the degree program of „elementary school music teacher and folk music teacher”. In the first semester the students were the folk teachers of the music schools. The College invited them and there was no other way to join the courses. In 1994 in Székesfehérvár a secondary music school (Líceum) was founded with folk faculties. The curriculum of folk singing in this secondary school was written by Vakler Anna. In 1998 the curriculum of artistic education was published. In this regulation the folk music was included as well. The folk singing curriculum had instructions for vocal training too. In 2005 Bodza Klara and Vakler Anna published two further school book to continue the Hungarian Folk songs School Books series.

As a result of a long term folk music lobby in 2007 the Liszt Ferenc Music Academy founded its Folk Department. The leader of the folk singing specialization was Vakler Anna. She invited Bodza Klara to teach vocal training for the students and Dr. Balázs Boglárka a laryngeal doctor and phoniatician to teach vocal health. So in the folk singing faculty appeared the same background knowledge as in the classical singing.

To help the folk singing teachers in work the fifth school book were published in 2010. The authors were the Professors of the Music Academy: Bodza Klara and Vakler Anna. So the book series contained five pieces. In the books (in the following MNÉ I., II. etc.) we can find the instructions in connection singing technique:

How to use our breathing and vocal organs for singing in style:

- Methodology of Folk Singing Teaching (MNÉ.I., pp. 11-26).
- Learn about our organs used while singing and their functioning (MNÉ.I, p. 12)
- The elements and practices of correct breathing, and of the natural sound formation (MNÉ.I. pp. 13-22, MNÉ.III, pp. 15-21).).

² Bodza-Paksa (I. 1992, Preface)

- The technical possibilities of folk singing and the differences between folk and classical singing (MNÉ III. pp. 23-24, MNÉ IV. pp. 11-12).
- The role of excellent folk singers (MNÉ.II. 17-31).
- The topics of the Hungarian folk song education include the most important information related to teaching (MN.I. pp. 9-10, MNÉ.II. 7-8, MNÉ.III. 5-37 MNÉ.IV. 15 -19).

This technical guidance was based on the classical singing literature like Kerényi: Singing school and Szamosi: The way of free singing. The anatomical and functional informations are the same in every genre of singing and in speaking as well. In folk singing the way of singing is very similar to speaking. The importance of the text is extremely big. That's why the articulation is more focused than the extension of resonance in case of folk singing. If one sings or speaks a lot loudly with weak resonance the vocal cords get tired or even injured. If it happens the teacher has to know the way of rehabilitation. Classical singers rarely have this kind of problem because their focus is on the voice and on the resonance.

The way of rehabilitation of the vocal cords is very similar to the treatment of the speech. First the patient has to be able to concentrate on her/him own body and be relaxed. Afterwards you have to correct the breathing and have to connect the breathing with the voice. It sounds easy, but very often a separately perfect breathing falls apart while trying to use in sound making. The next step is to help to hear and feel the differences between the wrong (overwrought, tiring) and the good (clear, tinkling) voices. If the student can make nice clear sound then have to be able to make it on several pitches or in a scale and on the whole range of the voice. The most critical part in singing is the beginning of the voice. It has to be soft without any glottis beat. To release the vocal cords have to use the optimum of resonance.

This whole process can be clearly examined on the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MDS37x3FI4>

This video shows the treatment of dysphonia in the "Speech-clinic" of Budapest. The children who have dysphonia get a complex treatment of speech-, psychological- and motion therapy.

If somebody teaches singing for children there is a special period of mutation which needs extra attention. Under this period the singing can be harmful for the developing vocal cords. So identify the first signs of mutation is very important. A

detailed description can be found in the first part of the book Phoniatics and co sciences. ³ Hacki divides mutation into three parts: pre-mutation, mutation and post-mutation and describes the specialties of the parts.

4. Results and Discussions

In Hungarian folk singing teaching the teachers have to be able to treat several voice problems. They must know the anatomy and the functioning of the organs used in singing. In the vocal training they need a multitude collection of exercises included phoniatic ones.

5. Conclusions

In the folk singing teacher training have to be some courses on vocal health informations. The teacher students have to obtain skills to recognise, identify and treat damaged vocal cords.

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³ Hirschberg J., Hacki T. and Mészáros K. (2013.) *Foniatríia és társtudományok*. pp. 213-215.

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