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An application of the Stanislavsky system of acting to the teaching of song-interpretation

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AN APPLICATION OF THE STANISLAVSKY SYSTEM OF ACTING TO THE TEACHING OF SONG-INTERPRETATION

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Whenever voice teachers gather in a discussion of their work, the attention often centers on the methods of teaching vocal production. This interest in the physical performance of the singer is reflected in the amount of literature written on the subject. Valuable as these studies of vocal production are, they are overshadowing an equally important field, that of song-interpretation, the creative aspect of singing.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this thesis (1) to show the need for emphasis on the teaching of song-interpretation; (2) to go to a new source for methods of teaching interpretation; and (3) to show how these methods can be used in teaching voice students.

Importance of the study. The improvisation of the moment, and the heightened response due to appearance before an audience are too often taken by the singer to be artistry. Lotte Lehmann remarks:

> I have listened to many young singers, and have found with ever increasing astonishment that they consider their preparation finished when they have developed a lovely voice, a serviceable technique, and musical accuracy. At this point they consider themselves ready to appear before the public.[1]

Harry P. Greene, speaking of the English concert stage, reports:

> It is a popular fallacy that a beautiful voice is synonymous with a lucrative profession and entitles its possessor to a place among the masters of music . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Our platforms are overrun with voices half-developed and quarter-trained, singers without technique, without charm and without style, to whom rhythm is of no account and language but the dead vehicle of sound, . . . and to whom the high note at the end and the clapping of hands spell the sublimity of achievement. . . . Sufficient unto the song is the singing thereof, and by his applause he [the singer] measures his musical stature.[2]

From Zay we hear:

> We all know the qualities required to be a good storyteller: personality, interest and sincerity; also, he must have a thorough knowledge of the story he is telling, the capacity to enter into the spirit of the story, the ability to half act it, and a sympathetic appreciation of its merits. Then he can create and sustain an interest. Isn't it absurd to suppose that, just because the story is told accompanied by music, the melody and pretty tones of the singer are to be a satisfactory substitute for all the qualities demanded of the story-teller? Yet singers frequently sing with a very indefinite idea of what the words mean--and sometimes with none at all! Generally this

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[1]Lotte Lehmann, More Than Singing, p. 10.

[2]Harry P. Greene, Interpretation in Song, pp. ix-xi.

> is because they are thinking of the wonderful tones they fancy they are producing; or the top note at the end absorbs their attention.
>
> Think what would be the effect of all the qualities of the skillful story-teller, combined with the musical accompaniment and vocal melody. When an artist appears who can command such a combination, his performance seems like a revelation.[3]

Granted that it is important to bring interpretation to the attention of singers, what new study is there to present? Most books on voice training include a chapter on interpretation; however, much of the information is general and rather limited. There are exceptions. Interpretation in Song by Greene[4] is one of the most complete treatments of the topic; it is an excellent discussion, especially of the technical points of interpretation from the standpoint of musicianship. Lotte Lehmann's More Than Singing[5] goes to the heart of song-interpretation, challenging the singer to find the background of the song he is singing and to become the person of the song. The book is valuable, too, in that it gives suggested interpretation for many art-songs; Miss Lehmann gives those suggestions, not to limit the singer's own creative powers,

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[3]W. Henri Zay, Practical Psychology of Voice and Life, pp. 105-6.

[4]Harry P. Greene, Interpretation in Song, 323 pp.

[5]Lehman, op. cit., 192 pp.

but to open for him the vast reaches of song-interpretation.

The possibility of another approach to the study of song-interpretation presented itself when this investigator was told of Stanislavsky's work in the field of drama. Study showed that in seeking to help the average actor gain a creative state of mind, Stanislavsky had evolved principles which, when used by theatres and actors, led to original creative achievements. Since creativity is necessary for the interpretation of songs, the Stanislavsky "system" provides a challenge for singers. Let us review the work of this great dramatic producer.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The man. Born in Moscow in 1863, Konstantin Alexeyev became famous as an actor and a producer under the stage name of Stanislavsky. Beginning as an inexperienced actor, lacking natural acting genius himself, he had his first training under dictatorial directors who prescribed for the actors how they should feel and what their exact body movements should be. This was the custom of dramatic directing of the time, and in his first experience as a director, Stanislavsky followed the tradition, often achieving successful productions.

> At the time of the [his] foundation of the Moscow Art Theatre [1898] Stanislavsky had reached the stage in his development as an artist where he was perfectly competent to deal with a play that was devoid of inner feeling and that gave him a chance of applying the methods of stage presentation he had already used with signal success . . . . Such, in particular, were the crowd scenes . . . and, generally, the fine pageantry of scenery and costume and all the other purely theatrical elements of the play.[6]

However, he was not satisfied, being "obsessed by the divine dissatisfaction of genius which drove him to the discovery of new truths and the rejection of what had seemed to him to be the truth only a few years earlier."[7]

Thus it was that in the summer of 1906, in Finland, Stanislavsky looked over his more than twenty-five years of acting. He had with him the diaries in which he had put down his doubts and criticisms from the time of his first appearance on the stage at the age of fourteen. He re-read these notes; he went over his old roles, trying to find why certain places in them had given him so much trouble; he analyzed his different stages in the process of developing the roles; he recalled the advice of his friends and fellow-artists.

> What appalled him was the great number of bad theatrical habits he had acquired. It was clear to him that the only way of avoiding spiritual decay and

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[6]David Magarshack, Stanislavsky, A Life, p. 168.

[7]Loc. cit.

> the deadly repetition of the same old tricks of acting was some spiritual preparation before he went on to the stage to play one of his old parts. He had to know 'how to enter that spiritual atmosphere in which alone the sacrament of creative art was possible.'[8]

For the next three years, then, back in Moscow, Stanislavsky worked on the problem of discovering the creative state of mind and the elements which were necessary for its development. This became what the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre called "Stanislavsky's latest fad." He worked continuously, writing down his observations, reading any book that had any bearing on the subject, and discussing his theories with experts and friends. "He was more than ever appalled at his own ignorance. . ."[9]

In about 1918, Stanislavsky founded the Opera Studio of the Moscow Bolshoy Theatre, and his brother and sister joined him. The three spent the rest of their lives together as trainers of opera singers and producers of opera. All the theatres in Russia took part in the celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday on January 18, 1938. On August 7 of that year he died.

We have seen how Stanislavsky's search for discoveries in the art of the stage continued for the remainder of

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[8] Ibid., p. 281.

[9] Ibid., p. 282.

his life. "Even while he was seeing his book on his system through the Press, he kept looking for flaws in it and trying to perfect it. But in a sense his work was done."[10] We are impressed, then, with the man's genuineness and sincerity, and with his humility. The system which he formulated achieves results because it is functional, based on his analysis of his own experiences as an actor and tested in his work as a producer-director.

Stanislavsky's "system." Is it possible to teach interpretation? Konstantin Stanislavsky devoted his life to solving that problem from the standpoint of drama. His thorough analysis of his past experience on the stage led Stanislavsky to the conclusion that the state of mind in which an actor had faced his audience was both unnatural and harmful.

> It had led to the invention of a large number of theatrical clichés for the expression of feelings. . . . It was merely a way of showing what the actor did not feel; . . . . Only the genius among the actors did not suffer from this abnormality. He was free from it because for some mysterious reason he did not acquire this state of mind. . . . Instead he possessed on the stage what Stanislavsky called the creative state of mind. . . . How then, Stanislavsky asked himself, was the average actor to attain this creative state of mind on the stage? . . . Might he not come very close to the thing that distinguished a genius?[11]

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[10] Ibid., p. 392.

[11] Ibid., p. 281.

In Stanislavsky's own words: "What exercises are needed by the actor for the development of creative feeling and experience? . . . There is no practical textbook."[12]

Thus, in seeking the elements leading to the creative state of mind, Stanislavsky formulated his "system." Lee Strasberg reports:

> The Stanislavsky 'system' is therefore no continuation of the textbooks of the past or present. It represents a sharp break with traditional teaching and a return to actual theatre experience. It tries to analyze why an actor is good one night and bad another, and therefore to understand what actually happens when an actor acts. His actual methods have more than vindicated themselves wherever they have been used. Theatres and actors of great variety and diversified form have created outstanding works on the basis of the training acquired by use of Stanislavski's principles. The works created are never copies or imitations of one another but are original creative achievements. That is the purpose of the Stanislavski idea. It teaches not how to play this or that part but how to create organically.[13]

The Stanislavsky methods, then, have one aim: to awaken the actor's individual creative powers. Expressed another way, the methods aim to develop in the student-actor those abilities and qualities which give him the opportunity to free his creative individuality.

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[12]Konstantin Alekseev (Constantin Stanislavski, pseud.), My Life in Art, p. 167.

[13]Lee Strasberg, "Introduction" in Toby Cole (compiler), Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method, p. 16.

Sources of information. Throughout his life, Stanislavsky wrote about his constantly evolving principles of acting and directing. His books are listed in the Bibliography under the name Konstantin Alekseev, Stanislavsky being a stage name. Articles of his appear in the book compiled by Toby Cole, Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method.[14] This book has been a most valuable source of information, since it is a compilation of articles written by actors and directors who associated with Stanislavsky.

Magarshack's biography, Stanislavsky, A Life,[15] shows the gradual, laborious development by Stanislavsky of the principles which came to be his "system." The book truly pictures a life, for the creation of the system is an outgrowth of the personality and experiences of the man.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The remainder of the thesis is organized in two parts. First, the next two chapters will present the Stanislavsky system in detail, with his basic principles for the creative state of mind covered in Chapter II, and his technique of characterization discussed in Chapter III.

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[14]See Bibliography.

[15]See Bibliography.

Second, the three final chapters make application of Stanislavsky's methods to the teaching of song-interpretation. Chapter IV discusses the problems involved in the teacher's presentation of the Stanislavsky system to the student, Chapter V shows the teacher and the student how to use, in singing, Stanislavsky's basic principles for the creative state of mind, and in Chapter VI, the Stanislavsky technique of characterization is applied to the field of song. A brief summary of the thesis is made at the end of Chapter VI.

CHAPTER II

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE CREATIVE STATE OF MIND

In checking the basic elements of the Stanislavsky system, the reader will note that they are not directed towards the development of the actor's outward technique--his skill in making use of his body, his vocal equipment, and his powers of speech. This does not mean that Stanislavsky ignored this field. Actually he states that the perfecting of the actor's bodily and vocal equipment must go parallel with the development of the elements of the system. Without physical technique the actor would be unable to bring to life on the stage his theatrical images.[1] Stanislavsky placed emphasis on another type of technique, however, because he discovered that the artistic condition was not reached by the physical technique of the actor. Instead, the artist-actor possessed a creative state of mind. Stanislavsky felt that, in the absence of creative genius, artistry was not reached by any effort of the will.[2]

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[1]Constantin Stanislavski, "Direction and Acting," in Toby Cole (compiler), Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method, p. 28.

[2]Ibid., p. 23.

What basic principles, then, can be given the student-actor to help him develop his own individual creative powers? This chapter will discuss the principles which Stanislavsky formulated in his search for the elements leading to the creative state of mind. These principles are the ruling idea, muscular freedom, public solitude, concentration, activity of imagination, justification, and the sense of truth. They are closely related, depending on each other; "the absence of even one factor will soon mean the loss of most of the others."[3]

During the years of the development of his methods, Stanislavsky changed his ideas about the importance of certain elements of his system. At first he had regarded the emotional memory of the actor as of paramount importance; it was later that he began to regard the "magic if," that is, stage-belief aroused by the actor's imagination, as of much greater importance. Later, by 1914, when his book, An Actor's Work on Himself, was already in print, it was the ruling idea that had become the cornerstone of his system.[4]

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[3]B. E. Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," in Cole, op. cit., p. 217.

[4]David Magarshack, Stanislavsky, A Life, p. 380.

The ruling idea. Stanislavsky preached that without an understanding of the ruling idea of the play, the actor could not have a creative state of mind. By the ruling idea, he meant the inner meaning of the play. Each actor should probe for the fundamental motive, the creative idea, "that is characteristic of the author and that reveals itself as the germ from which his work grows organically."[5] When the actor is aware of the ruling idea running through the performance, he will have a perspective which might otherwise be lost in the necessary study of details of his role.

A great Russian actress, a contemporary of Stanislavsky, wrote:

> At first appears the general idea of the part which I begin breaking up until I remain with a fraction of it; but in the work I keep adding to it until it is whole again.[6]

Certainly it is seen that an actor may be lost in details if he does not find the central idea which runs through the play--the "through-action," as Stanislavsky sometimes referred to the ruling idea. In his own words: "The smallest detail,

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[5]Stanislavski, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

[6]A. S. Giatsintova, "The Case-History of a Role," in Cole, op. cit., p. 127.

if it is not related to the ruling idea, becomes superfluous and harmful and is liable to divert the attention from the essential point of the play."[7]

Muscular freedom. One of the requisites for the creative task of the actor is freedom from muscular strain. What is muscular freedom? It is the normal expenditure of "as much muscular energy as is required for a given operation and not one iota more."[8] In life this usually happens instinctively, as in the automatic acts of walking, talking, and using hands; however, this proper distribution of energy disappears when the actor goes on the stage. He finds himself full of tensions, resulting in woodenness and the loss of all rhythm and plasticity of movement. He speaks and finds that he does not hear his own voice; he will be at a loss as to what to do with his hands. This awkwardness which a person experiences when he appears before the public is due to that over-expenditure of muscular energy that comes from the awareness of the fact that people are looking at him. Writes Stanislavsky:

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[7] Nagarshack, op. cit., p. 372.

[8] I. Rapoport, "The Work of the Actor," in Cole, op. cit., p. 40.

> The flow of the actor's artistic force is considerably retarded by the visual auditorium and the public, whose presence may hamper his outward freedom of movement, and powerfully hinder his concentration on his own artistic taste.[9]

Take, for instance, an inexperienced speaker before an audience,

> . . . his voice does not obey him; his movements become forced, he cannot find the right words, etc. But the more the speaker becomes engrossed in the object of his speech . . . the stronger will be his desire to convince his audience, and the sooner will he overcome his own initial stage-fright. . . . The time comes when the orator has mastered himself and loses his embarrassment and awkwardness. His movements acquire assurance, his voice grows stronger, he has found 'himself' and has become convincing. . . .
>
> As in the case of the developed orator, the actor too can free himself of the strain of body, face and voice--from muscular strain, as we shall term it--only by learning consciously to direct his attention to a definite object.[10]

On the stage the objects of attention are the things around the actor, the events of the play that involve him, and those characters with whom he comes in contact in the play. Freedom from muscular strain, then, is possible only with the aid of attention, focused on some object, for under such circumstances the actor forgets about his muscles.

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[9]Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 24.

[10]Rapoport, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

Public solitude. Another quality which an actor must develop if he is to turn his attention to the objects of his stage environment, thus gaining freedom from self-consciousness, is public solitude. Public solitude might be described as being alone in front of a group, forgetting the audience in the attention given to the objects of the stage.

The use of the expression, circle of public solitude, came to Stanislavsky from his interest in Hindu philosophy and especially in the yoga system of abstract meditation and mental concentration. The circle of public solitude consisted of a number of large and small "circles" into which the actor had to withdraw in order to keep his attention concentrated on the stage and not on the audience.[11]

The Russian director felt that the artistic achievement of great actors is bound by their concentration of attention to the action of their own performance, and that just when the actor's attention is taken away from the spectator, he gains a particular power over the audience, gripping it and compelling it to take an active share in his performance. This does not mean that the actor must

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[11]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 322.

cease to feel the public, "but the public is concerned only in so far as it neither exerts pressure on him nor diverts him unnecessarily from the artistic demands of the moment."[12]

Concentration--object and attention. When Stanislavsky was completely absorbed in his work on the stage, he held the attention of the audience without any effort; he called this element the "circle of attention." This is demonstrated by the fact that a person, in life, acts plainly, freely, and naturally. The reason for this, we will see in examining the behavior of that person, is that at any given moment his attention is focused on something. This vital law of always focusing on some object or idea is obligatory for the stage. "The first prerequisite of stage presence is the ability to control our own attention, to use our will-power to focus our attention on the object we have selected."[13]

There are two areas which are incorrect for the actor to select for the object of his attention. One is the "portrayal" of emotion. In the following chapter, a

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[12]Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 25.

[13]Rapoport, op. cit., p. 35.

discussion will center on this field. Suffice it to say here that when the portrayal of emotion becomes the object of the actor's attention, he is led astray along the road leading to time-honored theatrical traditions. He looks at his own image, trying to inspire emotions within himself. When forcing such an image, he by no means attains that desired result of artistic genius; he must present only the rough conterfeit of emotion, because emotions do not come to order. By no effort of conscious will can one awake them in oneself at any given moment. Therefore, the actor who wishes to be a true artist on the stage must not play to produce emotions.[14]

The other poor selection for the actor's object of attention is the audience. When an actor's concentration is focused on the audience, he may find that he cannot detach his attention and thoughts from the teeming auditorium. Self-consciousness, muscular strain, and loss of creative acting will be the result.

Let us point out that in trying to concentrate on an object, it is fatal to try not to see and not to think about distractions. This directs the concentration to the

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[14]Stanislavski, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

things one is trying to ignore. One has only to focus on the desired object itself, and the distracting elements disappear.[15] It is readily seen, for example, that in trying to ignore a noise from the auditorium, the actor on stage becomes even more aware of the audience. Only in concentration on his work on the stage will such distractions be ignored.

Stanislavsky also cautions against the actor's being self-centered in his concentration. Says he:

> If the actor on leaving the stage remembers only how well he played, it means he played badly. On the other hand, if he does not recall how he himself acted but remembers only how beautifully his colleague acted, then he acted well.[16]

Dramatic artistic genius, then, requires a full concentration of all the mental and physical talents of the actor. When the artist masters his concentration so that he can fix it at will on any idea or object, he will be able to work when he wants to on any subject he determines, without being distracted and without waiting for "inspiration." "He will find that from the starting point of

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[15] M. A. Chekhov, "The Stanislavski Method of Acting," in Cole, op. cit., p. 111.

[16] Zakhava, op. cit., p. 212.

concentration, interest, and relevant imagination will grow."[17]

Activity of imagination. The faculty of imagination, or creative fantasy, is a necessary quality for an artist. Imagination begins to operate when the actor asks himself, "What would I do if I found myself under such and such circumstances?" This impels him towards concrete action, with his attention fixed upon the right object.[18] Note that this calls attention to action rather than emotion. As mentioned before, Stanislavsky cautioned against suddenly beginning to operate on emotion; the actor must start himself moving in the direction of artistic imagination. Then, surrounded by the figures of his imagination, without effort on his part, the sounds of sympathetic emotion will be called out from him.[19]

What are the sources for developing imagination? The materials are not found in textbooks, for the work of the imagination is based on functional knowledge of life.

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[17]Chekhov, op. cit., p. 112.

[18]I. Sudakov, "The Creative Process," in Cole, op. cit., p. 76.

[19]Stanislavski, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

first importance in his system.[24]

It is true that an actor's individual emotional experience, by its limits, "actually leads to the restriction of the sphere of his creative genius, and does not allow him to play parts dissimilar to those of his psychic harmony."[25] However, though the emotional experience of each person is limited, the shades and combinations of fundamental emotions are infinite.

One might ask, "How is it possible that an actor can express thoughts he has never experienced? How can he, for instance, experience the feeling of a murderer if he has never killed anyone?"

> Our reply is that it is not necessary to commit murder in order to experience the feeling of a murderer. We are already being trained in the technique of murder when we are seized, very often for trivial reasons, with the impulse to drown our neighbor in a glass of water. In reading a book, or in listening to a story, we subconsciously assimilate the experiences described therein. That is why we can enact murder, and much else, things which we have never done in actual life. If we had to enact something which we had never experienced in life and of which we had not the slightest conception we would scarcely be able to act at all.[26] We can enact whatever is rooted in our psychic life;

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[24]Cf. ante, p. 12.

[25]Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 26.

[26]"There is nothing more painful than the duty of embodying what is unfamiliar to you . . . what exists outside you." Magarshack, op. cit., p. 22, quoting Stanislavsky.

> it is within our subconsciousness that the possibilities of various performances reside. That is why we can do things upon the stage which we have never done in actual life.[27]

Imagination, then, is necessary for interpreting a role, and the quality of the artist's imagination will depend on the richness of his observations of life and on his ability to use this material in expressing the idea behind his work.

Justification. The possession of a well-developed, easily aroused imagination makes it possible for the actor to determine the details of his role and to examine his stage motives. This is termed "justification" in the Stanislavsky system. Since in life every action has a motive--is prompted by a cause, so on the stage every action, thought, and glance must have a reason and a goal.[28]

Thus, the actor must examine the motives behind his role, probing, too, for the fundamental motive of the play (the ruling idea). In this way the details of his characterization will be in accord with the situation as a whole. In order to justify his stage actions, the actor

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[27]Sudakov, op. cit., p. 87.

[28]This section is based on the following sources: Rapoport, op. cit., pp. 43-44, and Zakhava, op. cit., p. 214.

will detail the stage environment and the traits of the character, thus giving reasons for his reaction, as the character, to the situation he finds himself in. As the actor examines his motives, he tends to select a motivation that is closest to his own personality, and the more he details the circumstances of his role, the more he will believe in the situation he is playing; his stage environment then will have reality for him. Thus, he can convert the stage activity into personal conviction; this conviction is the essential quality demanded by his audience.

Justification may also take the form of physical self-awareness of the actor. By physical self-awareness, we mean that the actor should detail the set of physical circumstances in which he, as the character, finds himself at a given moment on stage--whether he is hungry or satisfied, sleepy or rested, relaxed in the open air or sitting in a smoky room with a splitting headache, and so on. "Physical self-awareness and concentration of attention--these are the conditions necessary . . . for achieving the state wherein the actor may go on doing his work in public without being at all self-conscious.[29]

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[29]Sudakov, op. cit., p. 81; the above two paragraphs are based on this source.

Every trifling detail must have its justification; the lack of conviction in the slightest detail threatens the creative functioning of the actor. Zakhava shows in the following excerpt how the director's calling the attention of the actor to a stage detail helps bring the actor to reality, side-stepping "theatrical emotion."

> The actor rehearses. . . . He squeezes out of himself all the emotion he can; . . . overplays pitifully; feeling all the while the inadequacy and falsity of his acting. He becomes enraged at himself and at the director, quits in disgust, and then begins the whole agonizing process over agin. Stop such an actor at a pathetic spot in the scene and suggest that he minutely examine the button on his colleague's jacket. Have him note its color and shape. Then have him observe the way the man has combed his hair. When the actor is completely engrossed in these observations say to him, 'You may now resume playing at exactly the point where we stopped.' You will marvel at the instant change in the actor. He'll come to life, gain in color, and sensitive, genuine emotion will appear as from nowhere.[30]

The actor's examination of his motives and justification of details provides the correct object for his attention, and makes possible his belief in his stage environment and in himself as the character.

The sense of truth--stage belief. The culmination of all the elements of the system comes with the feeling of truth which surrounds the work of the artist-actor, causing

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[30]Zakhava, op. cit., p. 213.

the audience to believe in the reality of what they see before them. The term "artistic truth," also labelled "stage belief" or "stage attitude," defines an actor's belief in the situation he is playing. If he lacks it, the audience will lack it. They may admire his performance and say, "Isn't he exactly like a hungry man?" but they will never believe that he is a hungry man on a street corner.[31]

Stanislavsky comments:

> What is so difficult on the stage is to believe sincerely in what is taking place there and to take it all seriously. But without belief and without a serious attitude it is impossible to play a comedy or a satire. . . . For everything here depends on the actor's sincere belief in the absurd and improbable situations in which he finds himself. . . . There is all the difference in the world between experiencing something and merely pretending to experience it.[32]

Another aspect of the feeling of truth is the voice of control which governs the actor's work upon the stage. By this is meant that the actor, in the use of his imagination, must not surrender himself on the stage to the loss of a sense of reality around him. On the contrary, some part of his senses must remain free from the grip of

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[31]Chekhov, op. cit., p. 106.

[32]Magarshack, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

the play to control everything that he attempts and achieves as the performer of his part.

> One must retain the feeling of truth, that voice of control which keeps on signaling all the time: all right! good! . . . or else: not so; I don't believe it; you lied--just as soon as you begin to get out of ?tuen.[33]

How, then, does the actor achieve this sense of truth and stage belief? Let us make it clear that he will not achieve it by "portraying" anything for the effect that it will have on the spectator; the actor gains stage belief when he carries out his stage action because he believes in the given circumstances. In this regard, Stanislavsky suggested, "Get rid of the stage smiles, for they prevent the actor from believing in the reality of his feelings."[34] Justification, then, is the means to a feeling of stage truth, for the more the artist details the circumstances of his role, the more his stage environment will have reality for him.

Exercises in sense-memory will help develop the feeling of truth. For instance, one may do exercises such as the following: wash without water or soap, comb one's hair without a comb, make tea without tea or teapot, work

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[33]Sudakov, op. cit., p. 82.

[34]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 344.

at a sewing machine without the machine and material, and so forth. While doing these exercises, one should try to recollect the smallest details of executing these actions in real life, and see that the details of performance correspond to actuality. If the exercises are done before a group, members of the class may check on the reality of performance. Note that the exercises will show how the detailing of circumstances is necessary for the stage attitude to be true to life.[35]

Only partially have we answered the question: how does the actor achieve the sense of truth and stage belief? Stage belief is set in motion by the actor saying, "Suppose. . ." In other words, though the actor must realize that he is surrounded by things that are not true, he may say to himself, "I know that my imagined setting is not reality. But if all should be real, see how I might be carried away." Or again, the actor may ask himself, "What would I do in his place if I had to do such and such a thing?" At that instant, when there arises in his mind that artistic "suppose," the actor passes into the world of creative acting.[36]

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[35]Sudakov, op. cit., p. 81.

[36]Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 27.

The "magic *if*" thus became an important element of Stanislavsky's system. Indeed, at one time, he considered it of paramount importance in his listing of basic principles.[37] Magarshack reports that it was only when Stanislavsky had discovered the importance of the feeling of truth, produced by the action of *if* on the actor's imagination, that he, Stanislavsky, succeeded in attaining a genuine and natural state of concentration and relaxation of muscles.[38]

Thus, we see that stage belief is put into action by the use of the "magic *if*" and achieved by the detailing of circumstances (justification). That procedure is possible only with imagination and concentration. This combination of traits brings about the necessary qualities of muscular freedom and release from the spell of the auditorium (public solitude). Welding all of these elements together is the through-action of the play, pointing towards the ruling idea of the play. According to Stanislavsky, these are the conditions necessary for a creative state of mind.

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[37]Cf. *ante*, p. 12.

[38]Magarshack, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

CHAPTER III

THE TECHNIQUE OF CHARACTERIZATION

Chekhov states that the work of the Stanislavsky system may be divided into two parts: (1) one's work upon one's self, and (2) one's work on specific roles.[1] The previous chapter discussed the basic principles for developing the creative state of mind, thus covering part one--the actor's work on himself. In this chapter, the second part of the system will be the center of attention as the technique of characterization is presented. Specifically, this chapter will deal with inspiration, the creation of a part, the stage task, results of acting emotion, and the process of expressing emotion.

Inspiration. Wanting the actor to realize that his talent "doomed him to the herosim of creative work,"[2] Stanislavsky agreed with Riccoboni, who taught that "the actor must never rely on inspiration or go on the stage as

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[1] M. A. Chekhov, "The Stanislavski Method of Acting," in Toby Cole (compiler), Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method, p. 105.

[2] David Magarshack, Stanislavsky, A Life, p. 337.

an improviser, but must work, work, and work."[3] In his early acting days, Stanislavsky had not realized this, for "he was waiting for something outside him to arouse his enthusiasm, and he depended on the audience to supply him with the necessary amount of energy to carry on with his part."[4] In other words, as Vakhtangov states, a journeyman-actor becomes emotionally aroused because of coming out on the stage, and he accepts this agitation as the "feeling" of the character. This agitation does not react upon the audience very deeply.[5]

What is inspiration, and what part does it play in creating a part? Vakhtangov, Stanislavsky's great student, expresses it as follows:

> Inspiration is the moment when the subconscious, without the participation of the consciousness, gives form to all the impressions, experience and work preceding it. The ardor accompanying this moment is a natural state. Whatever is invented consciously does not bear this characteristic. Whatever is created subconsciously is accompanied by a discharge of energy which has an infecting quality. This is ability, the subconscious carrying away of the subconscious of the spectator, is a characteristic of talent.[6]

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[3]Magarshack, loc. cit. Francesco Riccoboni's The Art of the Theatre was one of many books which Stanislavsky read.

[4]Ibid., p. 51.

[5]E. Vakhtangov, "Preparing for the Role," in Cole, op. cit., p. 119.

[6]Ibid., p. 117.

There was one element which seemed to Stanislavsky to provide all the stimuli necessary for setting the actor's subconsciousness free to create the character he was representing on the stage. That element was the through-action of the part, directing all elements of the system towards the ruling idea of the play.[7]

Creation of a part. Anticipating Stanislavsky by more than fifty years, Shchepkin[8] worked out a system of acting based on stage realism.

> He demanded that the actor should stop imitating the external habits, voice and mannerisms of whatever class his character belonged to. An actor, he taught, must penetrate into the 'soul' of his part, he must get 'under the skin' of the character, and not just copy life outwardly. At the same time, however, the actor must be very careful not to rely on intuition alone: on the stage he must strive to represent 'a living man, a man alive not only in body, but also in mind and heart.'[9]

Speaking thus on the creation of a part, Shchepkin claimed that an actor must never invent his stage characters,

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[7]Magarshack, op. cit., pp. 342-43.

[8]Mikhail Shchepkin, 1788-1863, was one of the greatest actors on the Russian stage. His principles of stage acting and production were made by Stanislavsky into the corner-stone of his own system of acting and production. (Magarshack, op. cit., p. 1)

[9]Ibid., p. 142.

but that he should create them as living people with the help of his own experience of life. In getting "into" the part, it was important, he said, that the actor should remain himself, that he should speak his own words and utter his own sounds, which must come straight from his heart. Giatsintova, the Russian actress, quoted Pushkin, "The words were flowing as if being born not by timid memory but by the heart," and then wrote, "It is exactly so that I would like to act."[10] Such acting can be done if the actor has become one with the person of his role.

The first reading of a script brings a fresh approach and enthusiasm which are useful in characterization. At this time of spontaneous reaction to the material, creative suggestions for the characterization are most likely to turn up. These can be stimulated by provocative questions about the characters, their backgrounds, and the details of their lives. For instance: which trait of the character is nearest to the actor? What animal does he suggest? What would he do in some situation outside the play? This speculation will help the actor clarify his idea of the character.[11]

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[10]A. S. Giatsintova, "The Case-History of a Role," in Cole, op. cit., p. 127.

[11]Chekhov, op. cit., p. 107.

A further study of characterization is revealed in the principle which Stanislavsky learned early in his stage career--that in presenting the dark sides of life, the performer must look for its brighter sides. Otherwise, the exaggeration of the naturalistic elements may produce hysteria and not life. This suggests the fascination of contrast in the acting of a character: when personifying a villain, the interpreter should try to find where he is good, or in playing a good man, he should look for the man's bad points. This is typical of human nature, which is not all good, or all bad. Thus, characterization takes on reality when it is brought down to earth, and given a balance more nearly like that found in life.[12]

Not all details of interpretation can be planned ahead in stage work. Chekhov expresses it well when he states:

> Everything in acting is not done mentally. Intellectual analysis determines what is demanded by a scene, and sets the problem for the actor as clearly as possible. But the way in which the problem is to be solved, the details and manner of the performance cannot be arbitrarily determined in advance. They have to be worked out as one plays. This is where the rich material of the subconscious, which holds much of the background and personality of the actor, makes its contribution.[13]

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[12]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 66.

[13]Chekhov, op. cit., p. 105.

The activity of the imagination and the "magic if"[14] are necessary conditions, then, in creating a character. Sudakov[15] stated that he could find the proper action for the character only when he asked himself, "What would I do in his place if I had to do such and such a thing?" Then from the many suggested actions, he selected the one that was typical for the character. Stanislavsky realized the importance of discovering the most typical traits of a stage character, for it is these that protect the actor from the wrong methods of acting.

The stage task. Much more important than the external action--the carrying out of action and the delivery of words, is the internal action, by which the actor compels himself to have the same objectives as the character he is playing. The actor's first job, of course, is to find the ruling idea, the inner meaning of the play.[16] "The actor's task, then, begins with the search for the play's artistic seed. All artistic action . . .

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[14]Cf. ante, pp. 20-28.

[15]I. Sudakov, "The Creative Process," in Cole, op. cit., p. 88.

[16]Cf. ante, pp. 13-14.

starts from this seed . . ."[17] In the light of this understanding, the actor can set himself his stage task by determining what aim he, as the character, is pursuing and what his wishes are at any given moment of his presence on the stage. Action will result, then, from the actor's fulfilling his stage task.[18]

In showing student-actors the procedure for developing a part, Stanislavsky demonstrated how thinking in terms of action ("What shall I do?") awakened the actor's imagination.

> 'Suppose,' he said, 'you are working on the part of Hamlet. What are you to start with? You can, of course, do what we used to do and begin your work with a study of the middle ages, conjure up in your imagination the gloomy old castle at Elsinore with its draughty vaulted corridors, and imagine yourself as a pale, dishevelled prince, wrapped in a cloak, walking slowly along one of these corridors. Can such a picture excite you? Well, perhaps it can.'
>
> 'But we prefer to go another way. If I were asked to play Hamlet, I should start with the proposition that I am Hamlet and not the man who is wandering about the castle. When? Now, and not in the middle ages. Where? Here in Moscow, in Leontyev Lane, and not in Elsinore.' Stanislavsky looked round as though confirming the reality of his being in the rehearsal room with the columns at that very moment. 'Now I am told,' he went on, 'that from behind that column (which in time may be transformed into a ledge or a cliff or a column of a medieval castle) my dead father appears, my

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[17] Constantin Stanislavski, "Direction and Acting," in Cole, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

[18] I. Rapoport, "The Work of the Actor," in Cole, op. cit., p. 50.

> father who died some time ago and at whose funeral I was. What should I do? Not feel, but do, that is, act physically. I don't know. For the time being I can't do anything, but the question which has been put to me has already aroused my imagination and awakened my creative nature. Action is the very basis of our art, and with it our creative work must begin. . .'[19]

Three elements of the stage task are (1) action--what the character is doing; (2) volition--why he is doing it; and (3) adjustment--how he is doing it. The first two, action and volition, are consciously determined by the actor; as a result of their performance the third element, adjustment, arises involuntarily.

For example: a. You bang your first on the table, b. In order to quiet the meeting, c. The character of the blow is the result. Let the action remain, but change the desire: a. You bang the table, b. In order to test the firmness of the table, c. The blow will be unlike the one in the first case. Or change the volition to b. In order to play a joke on a friend who is dozing at the table (to frighten him); again the bang will be different.

> Remember: never anticipate how you will act, nor plan the adjustment beforehand (e.g., <u>how</u> you will bang on the table), but always strive to concentrate on <u>why</u> you are acting (why you are banging), then, quite independently, the proper adaptation will appear.[20]

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[19]Magarshack, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 397.

[20]Rapoport, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 51.

The actor's stage feelings will seem truthful and convincing in proportion to his understanding of the first two elements, "what he shall do" (action) and "why" (volition). This demands that he believe in the given circumstances of his role.

The actor must make the surroundings of the drama become his atmosphere, so that the problems of his character become his own problems, i.e., "the acting out of the character must become the actor's natural need."[21]

Results of acting emotion. When the actor does not detail the circumstances in which he finds himself as the acting person of the drama, when he fails to consider "what" he is doing and "why" he is doing it, when, instead, he seizes upon emotion, trying to act it out, he foredooms himself to clichés which inevitably distort the nature of his acting.[22]

The artificial effect resulting from the attempt to act emotion is seen when an actor puts a sentimental quiver into his voice, or injects a throbbing, sweet note into some emotional phrase. This journeyman-actor, lacking the artistry of a master, "grasps with bare hands at feelings

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[21]Vakhtangov, op. cit., p. 119.

[22]Rapoport, op. cit., p. 53; and Sudakov, op. cit., p. 72.

and tries to give a definite form to their expression."[23] In this way, he is behaving just the opposite of how he would act in real life.

> In life a man who weeps is concerned about restraining his tears--but the actor journeyman does just the opposite. Having read the remark of the author (He weeps), he tries with all his might to squeeze out tears and since nothing comes of it, he is forced to grasp at the straw of the stereotyped theatrical cry. The same is true of laughter. Who does not know the unpleasant, counterfeit laughter of an actor?[24]

In one of his many discussions with his student-actors on the elements of his system, Stanislavsky was questioned by a student, who objected:

> But Shakespeare is very difficult to play. He forces you to resort to pathos.
>
> 'But what is pathos?' Stanislavsky asked. 'Sing-song enunciation, tremolo, unnatural intonations--that's the cause of all this beastliness. The first sign of pathos appears in an actor when he speaks without seeing anything. To destroy pathos, one must act. If an action requires pathos, it will come by itself, but it will be quite a different kind of pathos. It will not be the kind of pathos with which an actor fills his spiritual emptiness.'[25]

Asked why anyone can communicate with anyone he likes in life, while not everyone succeeds in being truthful on the stage, Stanislavsky replied:

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[23]Vakhtangov, op. cit., p. 118.

[24]Loc. cit.

[25]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 398.

> That happens because in life all people can be normal people, while on the stage not everyone succeeds in being normal. In life everyone has organic lines, the actor on the stage alone has not got them. It is only on the stage that an actor can think of anything under the sun while singing a passionate love aria to the audience and at the same time clasping the leading lady to his heart without even bothering to look at her. When an actor makes a declaration of love on the stage, he puts his hand on his heart, rolls up his eyes, sighs, and so on. If you ever tried to do the same in real life, the girl you were in love with would certainly take offence and send you packing, but for some reason that sort of thing is considered quite normal on the state.[26]

Thus, an attempt to act feelings is a beginning from the end, doing the opposite of what nature demands; Stanislavsky taught actors to follow the road pointed out by nature herself.

The process of expressing emotions. Stanislavsky directed that the actor should not try to experience feelings, or make them to order, but should forget them altogether. Vakhtangov writes that the following statement takes first place in the system and methods of Stanislavsky: "The actor should not be concerned about his feeling during a play; it will come of itself."[27] The actor, therefore, must come on the stage not in order to feel or experience

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[26]Ibid., p. 400.

[27]Vakhtangov, op. cit., p. 117.

emotions, but in order to act. "Don't wait for emotions--act immediately."[28]

This makes acting true to life, for in life a person's feelings come to him by themselves, not because he wills that they do, but because they are the result of his actions taken to satisfy his desires. Should the individual satisfy a desire, a pleasant sensation results. If, on the other hand, difficulties lie in the way of the satisfaction of the desire, suffering may result. Along with the attempts at satisfaction of desires go all the sensations of pleasant anticipation or fear of possible failure. Emotion, then, is a result of the individual's attempt to satisfy a desire and to overcome the obstacles in the way of that satisfaction.[29]

"By obstacles we mean not only external but also internal circumstances which counteract our task."[30] For example, you need to study, someone prevents you, and as a result of your struggle with this obstacle the feeling of anger or excitement will arise. Or, you are in a hurry to catch a train. Your things are in your room, packed and

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[28]Ibid., p. 118.

[29]B. E. Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," in Cole, op. cit., p. 202.

[30]Rapoport, op. cit, p. 53. The following two pages are from this source, pp. 52-56.

ready; you come for them, but the door is locked and you cannot find the key. You will be upset, angry, or annoyed. In other words, you will experience the same sequence of feelings as you would have if such an accident had happened in real life.

The following exercise demonstrates the feeling of sorrow resulting from the conflict with internal obstacles:

Someone you are fond of is seriously ill. You want to help him, ease his suffering, but you are unable to do so. Here we meet with a different kind of obstacle--the locked door was used to illustrate external (physical) obstacles.

> Imagine you are sitting close to the sleeping patient; you are waiting for the doctor. You look at the patient, there is no outward action, but inwardly you are very active indeed. Internally, you are fighting with the sickness; with all your heart and soul you want to help your friend get well. But the disease is making inroads as you can see by the face and the movements of the patient and as you can judge by his breathing. In this case, too, there is conflict, struggle, action and counter-action, but they are internal and are reflected in your eyes, in your entire appearance and in your behaviour, although outwardly you are practically motionless and silent.[31]

The actor should never seek a mood of feeling merely in the abstract, such as "fear in general," "sorrow in general," and so forth. Take for example, fear. What is

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[31] Ibid., p. 55.

fear in general? It is a feeling which results from some threatening danger, or from something which seems inexplicable. Since this is a concept which is present in all cases of fear, it is too general to be sufficient for the stage. In life, and consequently on the stage (which must be a true reflection of life) there is no "fear in general."

> There are as many individual instances of fear as there are people.
>
> It is one thing to be frightened by a frog which jumps up before one's foot, and quite another thing to be frightened by an explosion. A young girl's fright differs from that of a healthy lad. Every person has his own individual expression of this or that feeling under any given set of circumstances.[32]

It is, therefore, impossible to act fear "in general." In order to avoid this mistake, the actor should justify (think through in detail) the circumstances in which he, as the character, finds himself, and define the object which threatens danger; only then will a genuine stage feeling of fear arise appropriate to the given situation.

For another example, take sorrow. There can be no "sorrow in general." Every person will have his own variety of sorrow, peculiar to himself and to the circumstances.

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[32] Ibid., p. 54.

In every given instance, the actor must find the detailed circumstances of his situation and the task which lies at the root of the given feeling, so that it will be plausible and convincing to the audience.

We have seen that action differs from emotion chiefly in the element of will; a person can will himself to action, for actions and thoughts are subject to the will, while emotions are not.[33] Since the motivation for action is desire, the actor must think about what he, as the character, wants to obtain at a particular moment and what he is to do, but not about what he is going to feel. The emotion, as well as the means of its expression, will be generated subconsciously and spontaneously in the process of acting in order to gratify the desire.

Often the emotion arises involuntarily, in spite of the individual, as if he said, "I don't want to cry but I can't help it." This is true in life, where a man who weeps tries to restrain his tears rather than make them obvious. Stanislavsky discovered that the concealment of feeling on the stage would lead to his intensification. This discovery came about due to his early attempts to play tragic leading parts; whenever he had to play a highly

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[33]Sudakov, loc. cit.

dramatic scene he lost control of his body, with the result that it seemed to be tied up in knots. He learned that the calmer and more controlled his body was on the stage, the more liable he was to substitute facial expression, intonation, and looks for gestures. Whenever in the quiet scenes of a play he tried to appear calm and indifferent, "he invariably felt a strange excitement boiling up inside him. And the more strongly he concealed the excitement, the more powerful it became."[34] It was in this way that Stanislavsky began to understand the value of controlling emotion.

There follows an example of finding motives for stage action: the actor might ask himself what he would do, what simple action he would perform if he found himself in despair--if, for example, he were rejected by the girl whom he loved, or if he were to vacate an apartment for failure to pay his rent. He could give himself an account of what he might think or feel; but it is more a question of what he might do. It is inappropriate to ask what one might feel, say, at the moment one is being ordered out of his apartment. It is of greater interest to think of what

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[34]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 66.

one might say or do in such a case; that is the best way of making oneself have that inner experience.[35]

Another example is cited:

> The script calls for a quarrel between two of the characters. One of them is the attacked, the other is on the defensive. The director wants the actor who plays the part of the attacker to display rage and the victim to be helpless to the point of tears. If the director keeps repeating to one, 'You are angry, show rage,' and to the other one, 'You are ashamed and should be crying,' nothing tangible will be achieved. However, if the director will carefully study the script he will be able to grasp the motives behind the feud and clarify them for the actors; if the director makes himself clear, the desired emotions will result . . .[36]

When an actor has asked himself what he wants in a particular situation in which he finds himself as the performer in a play, he should find his answer in the form, not of a noun, but of a verb: "I wish to obtain possession of the heart of this lady"--"I wish to enter her house"--"I wish to push aside the servants who are protecting her."[37] To persuade, to comfort, to ask, to reproach, to forgive, to wait, to chase away, to beg, to mock, to hold back the tears, to hide one's joy or suffering--these are verbs expressing <u>will action</u>. The actor can undertake to execute

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[35]Sudakov, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 72-73.

[36]Zakhava, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 204-5.

[37]Stanislavski, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 30.

such action at any given time provided he understands the motives behind them. On the other hand, to pity, to weep, to laugh, to hate, to love, to be impatient, to become irritated, to get excited--these verbs express feeling and cannot and must not be used by the actor in the analysis of his role. Feelings denoted by these verbs must be born spontaneously as a result of the actions executed by the first series of verbs.[38]

When the stage problem has been set by expressing a desire in the form of a verb, the object and setting of the problem begin to form a brighter and clearer picture for the actor, and the problem itself grips him and excites him, "extracting from the recesses of his working memory the combinations of emotions necessary to the part, of emotions that have an active character and mould themselves into dramatic action."[39]

The following excerpt shows how Stanislavsky demonstrated to his students the difference between verbs of feeling, or state of mind, and verbs of action.

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[38]Zakhava, op. cit., p. 203; Vakhtangov, op. cit., p. 118.

[39]Stanislavski, op. cit., p. 31.

> Stanislavsky asked two student-actors to repeat the scene of the first meeting of Romeo and Juliet. . . . Romeo rushed in with light, furtive steps, looking round him apprehensively. Then Juliet ran out, looking radiant and gay.
>
> 'What are you doing?' Stanislavsky asked the actor.
>
> 'I am admiring Juliet's beauty,' the actor replied.
>
> "The word 'admire' must not exist in the actor's vocabulary," said Stanislavsky, "for it expresses a state of mind and not an action. Before you begin to admire Juliet's beauty, you must examine and appraise it. What is your attitude to Juliet now?"
>
> 'I am madly in love with Juliet,' the actor replied.
>
> "Not madly in love," Stanislavsky corrected, "but madly attentive to Juliet. Love first of all expresses itself in exceptional attention to a person. You can only play the feeling of love on the stage by conventional methods of acting. In a theatre one must never act feeling or an action or a character. That is the horrible 'professional' way of acting from which I am trying to do all I can to protect you. Don't rush after feeling, but learn to act correctly, and the correct desire will evoke the correct feeling. For action always evokes correct desires and correct desires will evoke the necessary emotions. It is much easier to overact on the stage than to act and speak truthfully."[40]

In this way, a student of the Stanislavsky system learns to develop a role. As he masters the basic principles of creative interpretation, he understands his stage task--what he, the character, is doing, why he is doing it, and how he is doing it. This precludes trying to act emotions. The process of expressing emotion on the stage

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[40]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 399.

is accomplished, not by seeking a mood in general, but by detailing the circumstances in which the character finds himself and deciding what the character would do, not feel, in that situation.

> All must be simple and natural. Observe and study life, the simplicity of words, actions, and feelings of living people, and try not to 'portray' everything on the stage, but to bring with you on to the stage that inner impulse which prompts people to act this way or that.
>
> And always remember that the best test of the correctness of your stage behaviour will be that feeling of truth inherent in everyone of us. For we ourselves in our capacity as spectators notice that the only good actor is the one who is simple and who convinces us by his performance . . .[41]

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[41]Repoport, op. cit., p. 59.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE STANISLAVSKY SYSTEM TO THE STUDENT

With the evolvement of his system, Stanislavsky marked a change in the relationship of producer and actor. Rather than be an autocratic director, the producer trained in the Stanislavsky tradition seeks to develop the creative individuality of the actor. Since this is an important aspect of the Stanislavsky system, this chapter will present the relationship of the teacher and the student-singer, bringing out points of the teacher's duty and of the student's responsibility, examining methods of presenting creative interpretation to a student, and discussing the value of voice classes in studying interpretation.

The teacher's aim. The voice teacher will want to help the student-singer establish for himself the conditions in which he can make the performance of a song a creative experience. The principal aim of the teacher "must be the liberation and disclosing of the individuality" of the singer.[1]

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[1] E. Vakhtangov, "Preparing for the Role," in Toby Cole (compiler), Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method, p. 116.

If the teacher does not draw out this self-sufficient creativeness on the part of the singer, he will have the easily influenced, subservient will, the mere body of the singer lacking in all creative energy, a soulless doll, a marionette; the result, artistically, will be second-rate.[2]

The problem for the teacher is how to draw out the "self-sufficient creativeness" of the singer. How is he to stimulate the student's imagination? How can he make him wish to put the "system" into practice?

To begin with, the teacher should arouse in the student-singer the desire to interpret, stressing the difference between merely entertaining the audience and bringing to the listeners an expression of life in song. Just as acting should be used "as a means of penetrating deep into the heart of the audience,"[3] so should song be used. "If real life is born on the stage," said Stanislavsky, "the audience does not demand anything else--it is entirely in your power."[4]

> Consider for a moment how powerful the theatre is! In the theatre, you can arouse an audience to ecstasy, drive it to distraction, make it tremble. Or, on the

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[2]B. E. Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," in Cole, op. cit., p. 190.

[3]Constantin Stanislavski, "The Actor's Responsibility," in Cole, op. cit., p. 20.

[4]David Magarshack, Stanislavsky, A Life, p. 389.

> contrary, you can make the spectator sit quietly in his seat and obediently absorb whatever you wish to pour into him.[5]

Surely the student can be encouraged to forget himself in the presentation of his songs, finding an urge to share with others what has already moved him deeply, and anticipating the "untold joy of the artist in . . . blowing the breath of life into it [the song], and then watching it take on life for others."[6] This is the singer's challenge and responsibility--that he bring an experience of life to the audience. It would seem valuable, then, for the teacher to insist on a high level of song-interpretation at all performances, whether at studio recitals, in voice classes, or in private lessons.

The teacher-student relationship. In conferring with the student on his interpretation, the teacher will guide according to his own experience; the student, then, can build his own creative interpretation in collaboration with the teacher. The teacher should not force points of interpretation on the student; he should offer suggestions and be of assistance to the singer as they together develop

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[5]Stanislavski, loc. cit.

[6]Ruth Sawyer, The Way of the Storyteller, p. 36.

the interpretation of a song. As Stanislavsky stated, "One must never force people to do things, but always seek to influence them through their imaginations.[7]

When a singer does not reach a creative state, experienced teachers are careful before they lay the blame upon the singer; they try over and over, carefully feeling their way. Therefore, the instructor may find it useful to check his own approach for errors in psychology. He may be expecting the impossible of the student. Or, perhaps the student cannot carry out a suggestion because the teacher has demanded an unrealistic point of view towards the characterization of the song. Also, the teacher may have presented the singer with a problem beyond the student's experience and understanding.

Another teaching fault is the arbitrary demand for immediate results from the singer at the beginning of work on a song. Such pressuring often causes "emoting" on the part of the singer. Time is needed for creation; the teacher who understands creativity will allow for that.

On the other hand, when the student makes an attempt at creative interpretation, he should not be stopped "cold,"

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[7]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 361.

cut off by the teacher. Magarshack reports, in this regard:

> When Stanislavsky was told by a director once, in his mature years, that "he had not succeeded in giving birth to the part," it made it impossible for him to carry on with the part. He never felt able to play a new part after that.
>
> He could never forget the injury done not to his prestige (that would not have worried Stanislavsky in the least) but to what he considered to be the most precious part of himself as an artist--his capacity for a direct and intuitive realization of a stage character.[8]

Another typical characteristic of an inexperienced teacher is lack of faith in the student; each singer seems lacking in talent to such a teacher. This teacher expects nothing, yet is impatient and demanding. "He does not understand that creativeness is a co-ordinated process, . . . [that it] is like an embryo which one must safeguard."[9]

A teacher who understands the nature of interpreting and of the interpreter behaves very differently towards the singer, whome he loves and values. He tries to make all his instructions clear, simple, and easily

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[8]Ibid., pp. 346-47.

[9]Zakhava, op. cit., p. 211; this section is based on Zakhava, pages 210-12.

understood. He does not fatigue the student with excess theorizing. He talks little, encouraging the student to discuss his ideas on the interpretation. He is attentive to the singer. He adapts himself to each student as the demand is made upon him, being severe when necessary, yet gentle and kind when that is called for. He never forgets that the material of his art (the singer) "is the most delicate, most perishable, most temperamental, most sensitive, most complicated mechanism in the world; a human being."[10]

Therefore, the teacher must be able to help the singer in his blind search for expression of half-formed ideas. Sympathy is needed for the student's pains of creation:

> You feel the something that your part lacks; it is just here, inside you, and all you have to do is to stretch out your hand and grasp it; but the moment you do so, it vanishes. You approach the strong part of your role with an empty soul, without any spiritual content. All you have to do is to open up, but a kind of wall suddenly springs up all round the strong feeling and prevents you from getting near it. This state of mind resembles the sensation of a man who cannot make up his mind to plunge into icy water.[11]

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[10] Ibid., p. 212.

[11] Magarsheck, op. cit., p. 60, quoting Stanislavsky).

Here is where the teacher needs to help the singer perceive what already exists in himself. He must be able to put himself in the student's place; he "must have his tenacles sunk deep into the psychologic mold" of the singer.[12]

This is a complex job for the teacher, for it is much simpler to impose a ready-made interpretation on the singer then to help him find himself in his part. The tendency of the teacher is to develop an interpretation he likes best for a song, and then to influence, perhaps unconsciously, the student's interpretation of that song. It is important, then, that the teacher as nearly as possible should approach the song with his mind as fresh and clear as the singer's, and that he should grow with the student in the development of the interpretation for that song. In this, he must have the maximum regard for the individuality and the creative abilities of the singer. Thus, the teacher's creativeness should not be a rigid control over the student, but should be rooted in the student's attempt at creative interpretation.

Note that nothing has been said about the teaching of creativeness. This is because the Stanislavsky method

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[12] Zakhava, op. cit., p. 208.

stresses the director stimulating within the pupil the qualities which make it possible for him to do creative work; the system does not attempt to teach creativeness itself. As Stanislavsky's greatest student said: The teacher "must clear the way for the creative potentialities of the student--but he [the student] must move and proceed along this road by himself; he cannot be taught."[13]

> It is impossible to teach anybody how to create because the creative process is a subconscious one, while all teaching is a form of conscious activity which can only prepare the actor for creative work.[14]

Speaking of creativeness, Zakhava writes: "To use [material] creatively means to use any given material as an expression of one's own reaction to life."[15] This infers individuality of understanding and performance. It also presumes an understanding of life on the part of the singer. If he seeks to gain a wide background of social and individual experience, of culture, and of academic study, the student-singer will find that he has "opinions and convictions on those phases of life which are the activating influences"[16] in the songs to be studied.

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[13]Vakhtangov, loc. cit.

[14]Ibid., p. 117.

[15]Zakhava, op. cit., p. 191.

[16]Ibid., p. 193.

The next chapter will present in detail the conditions which will help the student-singer perform creatively. For now, the discussion will focus upon how the teacher may give his help.

Methods of teaching interpretation. The teacher may give his assistance either as an explanation or as a demonstration. Zakhava feels that the explanation is the superior technique, since "no matter how the director phrases his explanation it demands the active participation of the actor."[17]

The more talented a teacher is, the more liable is he to "show" the singer how a certain song should be interpreted, or how a bit of stage business is to be managed. Stanislavsky, during his earlier period as an autocratic director, resorted frequently to this method. The danger of this technique of demonstration is that the teacher may be satisfied if the singer reproduces correctly what has been shown him and that the singer will merely try to imitate the directions of his teacher. The singer's attitude might easily be: "I will do what my teacher tells me but I don't understand why."

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[17] Ibid., p. 205; this section is based on Zakhava, pp. 198-206.

The result would be that the audience sees only a pale copy of the teacher's characterization instead of the student's own individual interpretation. As Lotte Lehmann writes, "Imitation is the enemy of artistry."[18]

Let us assume, for example, that the director not only has explained to the actor some phase of his role, but has demonstrated in detail.

> The actor carries out all the instructions. He is docile and willing. But what happens when he reaches the point where the directorial demonstration comes to an abrupt stop? What then? The actor, his hands slack at his sides, looks bland and says, 'What shall I do now?' He resembles a mechanical toy which has run the gamut of its accomplishments and needs rewinding.[19]

However, the method of demonstration cannot be ignored, for it possesses many values. It is one of the best ways to stimulate the creative resources of the singer, for it often has the effect of inspiring and exciting the student when long explanations have proved fruitless. Also, it is a great time-saver. Let it be understood, though, that the demonstrative technique should not be considered basic in the teacher's work. "The basic

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[18]Lotte Lehmann, More Than Singing, p. 10.

[19]Zakhava, op. cit., p. 199.

method should be a last resort used only under certain conditions."[20]

Conditions for the use of demonstration. One of the conditions necessary for the success of the demonstrative method is the developed creative status of the singer. When the student has achieved a level of creative interpretation, he is less likely to copy mechanically the details of the teacher's illustration. Only when the teacher sees that the singer is independently creative does he have the right to enrich and widen the scope of the singer through demonstration.

A second condition in the use of this method is that the teacher should give an idea of varied approaches. "The most appalling of all faults in a director is the pedantic insistence upon a particular inflection and particular movement. . . ."[21] Therefore, the student should be given a choice of interpretations. By the singer's reaction, the teacher can tell which was the most suitable and he then can encourage the student to expand upon it.

Also essential in presenting a demonstration is that the teacher should place himself in the student's position,

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[20] Ibid., p. 206.

[21] Loc. cit.; all of this section is based on this source, pp. 205-212.

adjusting himself to the student's degree of expressive power. An honest teacher would never give exactly the same instructions to any two singers even though they were rehearsing the same song.

Thus, while using the method of demonstration, a true teacher always seeks to develop the creative individuality of the singer. He tries to discover these individual assets, and helps to expand them. Never will he accept from the student-singer a shallow, mechanical, even though polished, performance.

In addition to the obligations of the teacher, there is a responsibility on the part of the student before the demonstrative technique can be successful. This further condition is that the student must know how to utilize the teacher's demonstration. If the student accepts the illustration of the teacher with the intention of mechanically copying it, then the efforts by the teacher to awaken his creative potentialities are wasted. To handle the demonstrated interpretation in a resourceful manner, the singer "must be able to seize the inner meaning, the essence, inherent in the particular demonstration and independently translate the idea into terms" of his expression.[22]

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[22] Ibid., p. 209.

Vakhtangov reproached his students at one rehearsal for lacking in creative response to his directions.

> He said, 'You'd like to get by with only the material I give you. It's not enough. If you continue in this way, anybody who'll see the production will say, "There is no individuality in the actors."'[23]

What did Vakhtangov recommend to his students to help them gain a creative approach to their roles? First of all, he demanded that they work on their role at home, and come to rehearsal with the result of that work. "'Make it a habit to reflect on your role,' says Vakhtangov. By 'reflect,' he meant to allow the imagination free play."[24]

The responsibility of the student, then, is that he should not surrender to the teacher his own invaluable creative rights. He must develop his own interpretations outside of lesson time, seeking to apply his teacher's explanations and to translate the underlying idea of a demonstration into his own expression of a song.

The value of voice classes. An important aid to the student in developing creative interpretation is his participation in voice classes. By this, we do not mean the limited use of classes for the teaching of voice

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[23] Ibid., p. 196.

[24] Ibid., p. 195.

production and song literature to beginning students. When referring to voice classes in this thesis, we shall be thinking of any group of voice students, whether it be a scheduled voice class or a regular gathering of private students, beginning or advanced. These meetings of students should be more than student recitals. They may be places for evaluation and constructive criticism of the level of interpretation the singer has reached; they may give opportunities for the students to try before each other the various exercises for the creative state of mind, as presented in chapter five of this paper.

This use of voice classes is suggested by the way Stanislavsky made use of group study for his student-actors of the Moscow Art Theatre. He discovered that actors were reluctant to do exercises for the different elements of his system. He found a solution to this reluctance in the suggestion of Gorky, a playwright, for a theatre of improvisation.

> The playwright would first of all prepare a rough outline of the plot of the play and its characters. After that the actors would set to work on it, every actor developing his part independently and then discussing his idea of it with his fellow-actors, who were expected to criticise and complement it.[25]

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[25]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 321.

Stanislavsky's use of this idea was to let the actors improvise on the dramatic situation that was best suited as an exercise for a particular element of the creative state. He found this process of improvisation so satisfactory for the teaching of his system that he incorporated it as an exercise into the curriculum.

The value of this suggestion as applied to the voice field is that it implies group action. For example: throughout the presentation of exercises in the next chapter runs the thread of group observation and participation. After a student has presented an exercise for one of the elements of the creative state, the members of the group may determine how successful he was in demonstrating that element.

Another example of group action in the voice class is seen in the class participating in song-interpretation. When a student has presented a song before the class, the class members should be expected to make constructive criticism, such as: "I believe in your characterization," of "I don't get the meaning of your song; why are you singing it?" Then would follow a discussion of the singer's ideas of his character, with the fellow-singers criticizing and complementing the idea. Obviously, no two people will agree on characterization in detail, but the discussion

should bring a fresh approach and enthusiasm to the performer. The class observation also guards against the singer's expressing feelings in a shallow, insincere, and conventional manner. In this way, besides benefiting from his own performance before the group, the singer learns from the observation and discussion of the song-interpretation of others.

This procedure presupposes three things: one, that members of the class know the basic elements of interpretation; two, that they learn how to make constructive criticism; and three, that the performers can learn to take criticism. Of this last, let it be pointed out that Stanislavsky, in his early years of acting, dismissed the producer's criticism as jealousy! As he says:

> From this vicious circle of self-delusion there seems to be no way of escape. . . . The actor cannot help believing in what he wants to believe. . . . Young actors, . . . learn in time to listen to, to understand and love the bitter truth about yourselves! And get to know those who can tell it to you.[26]

Young singers may gain more quickly the humility needed to accept criticism when they read what the great Lieder singer, Lotte Lehmann, writes: "This was the first step [of an awakening]: the awareness of my ignorance."[27]

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[26]Ibid., p. 61.

[27]Lehmann, op. cit., p. 12.

The values inherent in group activity would seem to indicate that the teacher, besides encouraging singers to study characterization independently, should provide private students with regular group meetings in order that the students may have the advantages of group participation.

CHAPTER V

APPLICATION OF STANISLAVSKY'S BASIC PRINCIPLES

Just as the Stanislavsky system does not aim at developing the actor's outward technique--his skill in making use of his body and his powers of speech, so this discussion of the teaching of song-interpretation does not center on the mastery of vocal production. Nor does it touch on the usual points of song-interpretation, such as the flow of the song, phrasing, diction, dynamics, and vocal timbre. In the first place, these aspects are covered by such authors as Zay, Greene, Coward, and Lehmann.[1] In the second place, many qualities such as dynamics and vocal timbre should result from "getting into the song," as Stanislavsky teaches.

In this chapter Stanislavsky's basic principles for attaining a creative state of mind will be applied to the field of song-interpretation. Also, exercises for each element of the system will be presented.

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[1] All authors are listed in the bibliography.

The ruling idea. The chief element necessary for a creative state of mind is an understanding of the ruling idea, the inner meaning of the song. The smallest interpretative detail which is not in tune with the ruling idea tends to break down the artistic conviction of the performance. Especially in the case of an operatic aria, an oratorio excerpt, a light opera number, or a selection from a song cycle, the singer has the task of searching for the fundamental motive which runs through the total composition, fitting the interpretation of the excerpt into the unity of the whole. With an individual song, the singer has less to guide him; yet even there, he should consider a song as a moment taken from a sequence of events. Thus, in planning interpretation, the singer should search for the ideas and feelings which underlie a song. He should ask: What brought the song to life? "Out of what mood or situation was the poem born? What drama, what dream, what experience was the inspiration for its conception?"[2]

The text, of course, is the source for getting at the dominating idea of the song. This demands from the singer an understanding and love of poetry which many

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[2]Lotte Lehmann, More Than Singing, p. 12.

teachers may not think of developing in their student-singers. Yet to be able to read the lyrics of the song with warmth and sensitivity is certainly the necessary starting point for interpretation. As Lehmann says, "Do not sing just a melody, sing a poem."[3] This ability comes from the singer's sensitivity to the impressions of life's experiences, through which he gains sympathy, understanding, and awareness of spirit. Such understanding is referred to frequently in this thesis, for Stanislavsky speaks of it throughout his writings.

When the singer reads the text of his song, he may discover that it is trite and shallow. Much of the song literature would not stand if it were considered on the basis of its lyrics. Yet there is a wealth of songs set to excellent poems, and one has only to compare, in a musical setting, the impact of a great poem with that of a mediocre one to see the value of considering the song-texts in choosing song literature. The ability to make such choices demands training and experience, all too frequently neglected by voice teachers in the training of singers. An excellent study of song-poetry is given by Hobart Mitchell

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[3] Ibid., p. 15.

in Poetry in Song,[4] a bulletin issued four times a college year.

If the text is the source of understanding for the singer, it certainly is important to the audience. Yet how many times is the audience left in the dark as to the words of the song?

> It is unfair to both composer and listeners to sing a vocal composition so that the words are not understood; and from this it follows that when the text is sung in a foreign language, it should be understood phrase by phrase, if not word by word, by the singer, and a complete translation or summary should be supplied to the audience.[5]

This emphasis on the text may infer that the music is of secondary importance. On the contrary, the singer should be shown that a song is a union of poetry and music, either of which may lose part of its moving force by standing alone. Mitchell suggests that if the singer is able to read the poem, finding its mood and pace, he then can see when he plays the song through "whether the composer has illumined or destroyed the flow of the poem."[6] If the musical setting is poor, the song should be turned down.

Lehmann speaks:

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[4]Listed in bibliography.

[5]Peter W. Dykema and Karl W. Gehrkens, High School Music, p. 72.

[6]Hobart Mitchell, Poetry in Song, Vol. IV, No. 1.

> In general I find that the word is entirely too neglected. On the other hand I should like to protect you from this stage which I had to go through: of feeling first the word . . . and only finally the melody. . . . Learn to feel as a whole that which is a whole in complete harmony; poem and music. Neither can be more important than the other. First there was the poem. That gave the inspiration for the song. Like a frame, music encloses the word picture--and now comes your interpretation, breathing life into this work of art, welding word and tone with equal feeling into one whole, so that the poet sings and the composer becomes poet and two arts are born anew as one. . .[7]

Understanding the ruling idea has two aspects, then, for the singer--finding the dominating idea, the inner meaning of the song, and sensing the totality of music and text. With this as a basis for his interpretation, the singer moves to the application of other elements of the Stanislavsky system.

Muscular freedom. Stanislavsky always pointed out that muscular freedom is a condition of the creative state. A great artist gives the impression of working at ease; when the spectators say, "But it seems so simple," the singer can be assured that he is gaining freedom from muscular strain. Therefore, to work out within himself this creative freedom is the basic task upon which the singer should work.

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[7]Lehmann, op. cit., p. 12.

There are two solutions to the problem of muscular tension. The first and the simplest is concentration, not on the audience, but on some object concerned with the work on the stage. For the singer, objects of attention can be the events of the song that involve him, the imagined presence of characters inferred by the song, or the nature of the thought to be expressed. Muscular tension may arise on every occasion if the singer does not know definitely what these objects are. Losing oneself in the interpretation of the song, then, is one solution to the problem.

The second method for releasing muscular tension is that of using exercises directed towards the relaxation of the muscles. If the singer frees himself from muscular tension, it will be easier for him to overcome his nervousness, which in turn will help his concentration on the whole problem of interpretation. Since muscular freedom is the normal expenditure of as much muscular energy as is required for a given operation and not one bit more, the following exercises are developed to help the student achieve that result.

Exercise one: Move a chair from place to place in your room, using on hand; notice the amount of strength, or muscular energy, it takes. Next, perform the same

action before the class and see how much surplus energy you expend when you are being watched. Note whether your neck and shoulders are free. The group can help check, too, by saying, "Relax your face,"--or the forehead or the neck, as the case may be.

Exercise two: Sit on a chair with your muscles perfectly free, making only the effort necessary to sit upright in the chair. Next, tauten the muscles of one hand (let everything else remain relaxed), then the other hand, then the muscles of your feet, shoulders, neck, and the rest of the body (in any order) until your whole body is tense. Then let go, completely relaxing. Again, sit upright, using as little effort as necessary. See for yourself (and let others check) whether your arms, neck, shoulders, face, and leg muscles are perfectly free.[8]

Stanislavsky had learned "that to walk on stage was one of the most difficult accomplishments for an actor to acquire."[9] As a director, he spent hours teaching an actor to take two or three steps on the stage. It is not strange, then, that perhaps the stiffest moment for the singer is

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[8]I. Rapoport, "The Work of the Actor," in Toby Cole (Compiler), Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method, pp. 40-41. Both exercises are taken from this source.

[9]David Magarshack, Stanislavsky, A Life, p. 134.

making an entrance on stage. The student may find the following exercises helpful.

Exercise three: Practice walking in the privacy of your own room. Check the points of good posture, then swing out in free, natural strides; let the legs swing from the hips, yet do not tense the knees. As you walk, hold the head high and relax the shoulders and arms, allowing the arms to swing freely, not overdoing, of course. Next try this exercise before the class. Do it frequently enough that it becomes natural to walk in this manner; then in making stage entrances you will not have to "think" to do what should seem natural.

Exercise four: Practice, at first privately, making entrances on stage. In order that you do not walk on lamely, perhaps even looking self-consciously at the audience, you will want to have some purpose in mind. Here are a few suggestions. Think of the approximate starting pitch of the song you will sing first; hum that tone mentally as you walk on. Or, even better, concentrate on the first phrase of that song, or on the background of events leading up to the song; have this in mind as you enter. In addition, before starting on, pick a focal spot either in the opposite wing or at the proscenium arch. Keep your eyes focused on that point as you make your

Nothing has been said about the freedom of muscular strain in the act of singing, itself. Truly, if a student-singer masters all of the aspects of creative interpretation, he may find that he sings naturally with little thought about vocal production. But what about the many singers who are not "naturals?" Stanislavsky posed a similar question when he asked himself how the average actor was to attain the creative state of mind exhibited by the genius-actor. Though this paper does not discuss vocal production, let it not be inferred, therefore, that the study of vocal production does not have its place.

> The skillful artist does what he wants when it comes to interpretation, because his technic permits and aids him to do it. The unskillful singer does what he can. He may have ideas, but he is unable to carry them out because his technic is insufficient. It is extraordinary how the rank and file of the profession do not realize that real finish and style cannot be superimposed upon a crude voice-production.[11]

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[10]Marjorie Sheridan, College of the Pacific, Stockton, California, 1953. Exercises three and four are based on this source.

[11]W. Henri Zay, Practical Psychology of Voice and of Life, p. 104.

Lotte Lehmann writes:

> Technique is the all important foundation,--the a b c of singing. It does without saying that no one can carefully enough master the technique of voice production. Complete mastery of the voice as an instrument is an ideal toward which every singer must work assiduously. . . . But realize that technique must be mastered to the point of being unconscious, before you can really become an interpreter.[12]

On the other hand, she points out the shortcomings of vocal production when it is the chief teaching method of the instructor, and of technique, when it is the chief aim of the singer;

> In a certain sense, it seems that perfect technique and interpretation which wells from the heart and soul can never go hand in hand and that this combination is an unattainable ideal. For the very emotion which enables the singer to carry her audience with her into the realm of artistic experience, is the worst enemy of a crystal clear technique. . . . I have found again and again that a singer who delights in technique (much as I may admire her virtuosity) still, in some way, leaves my heart cold. . . . do not misunderstand me; control of the voice is the soil from which interpretation springs-- -- --but do not despair over small imperfections. . .[13]

Public solitude. In order to gain muscular freedom and to develop creative interpretation, the singer must acquire another element of the Stanislavsky system--that of public solitude. This may be defined as the ability to be alone in front of an audience, oblivious to it while in

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[12]Lehmann, op. cit., p. 110.

[13]Ibid., p. 17.

the world of the song itself.

As was pointed out in the previous section, concentration on the audience brings nervous self-consciousness to the beginning singer and is a hindrance to the highest form of creative interpretation even for the experienced artist. It is true that a certain amount of audience enjoyment comes from the performer "playing to the audience," as described below:

> The singer has developed a personality. He . . . is master of himself and of his forces. His forces of personality send out waves of geniality and sympathy to the audience. The psychic forces of the artist are so strong that he is a self-starter, and his forces reach out to the audience which, awakened, gives back generously of the sympathy and enthusiasm which has been aroused in them. This establishes a community of interests with everybody helping, and the audience, having helped the artist, though unconsciously and unknowingly, loves him for it. The performance is lifted to a high plane of excellence which a merely mechanical technic would never reach.[14]

On the other hand, though that performance is admittedly on a higher level than one of a "merely mechanical technic," it does not approach the creative state attained when the singer can forget the audience in his attention to the settings of his songs. At such a time, the performer may still "feel" the audience; he still may

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[14] Zay, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

have the joy of sharing and communicating with his listeners; he still may find the pleasure that comes with the realization that the audience-attitude has changed from that of "spectator" to "friend." However, his primary attention is on his work on the stage. An example of this public solitude is well given by Zay, who is comparing this way of creating atmosphere with the one he used above.

> This is more difficult to create, a kind of atmosphere with which the artist surrounds himself in order to become oblivious of all surroundings. This atmosphere creates for the moment (whether on the platform or stage) a little world of its own in which the artist lives and expresses the feelings, or action, or both, of the character portrayed. This atmosphere is impervious to outside influence; the artist is oblivious of the audience or anything else outside the radius of his atmosphere; and while it is an inspiration and protection to the artist, who seems to be temporarily in another world, it is not repellant in the least, but radiates impressions of the emotions experienced by the artist, who is its center and originator.[15]

Names come to mind of certain great singers who exhibit this trait of public solitude: Marian Anderson, Helen Traubel, Licia Albanese, Roland Hayes, Jussi Bjoerling, and others. Licia Albanese particularly gets into the world of her song; only after the last note of the accompaniment has died away does she break the mood, when the applause brings her back to the reality of auditorium

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[15] Ibid., p. 109.

and audience.

The extrovert will tend to use the audience-appeal technique. Of course, some songs can be presented only in that way--songs such as Grieg's "My Johann," the Tennessee mountain ballad, "The Nightingale," and many of the encore songs. However, most songs will achieve their greatest effect if the singer gives his attention to the settings of his songs, thus demonstrating public solitude.

Concentration--object and attention. Another necessary attribute, then, for interpreting songs is the ability to control attention in order that it may be focused at will on any object selected by the singer. This demands the utmost concentration, and is even more important when distractions arise. Since the ability to concentrate differs with people, it is necessary for the student-singer to discover the duration of his own powers of concentration and to put forth an effort to lengthen and strengthen them.

How can one develop his faculty of concentration? The first suggestion is that the student should build the habit of attention during his study and practice; intense concentration at those times may set a pattern which will be easier to maintain when under the stress of public performance. In addition to this development, the singer should try before a group the following exercises for

gaining control of attention.

Exercise one: In the presence of a group, the student may read a book silently; class members are to interrupt him with noises, conversation, jokes at his expense, and so forth. The student must compel himself to be so absorbed in his book that he does not notice what takes place around him.

Exercise two: In the midst of group conversation, the student may think to himself, or converse with someone, about how he has spent the day, remembering in detail what he did, with whom he spoke and about what, and so forth. While the others talk, or perhaps try to interrupt, the student must continue to follow his own line of thinking.[16]

Next come exercises for developing concentration in performance:

Exercise three: The student may perform before the class while members of the group ignore him. They may try quiet indifference this time, reading knitting, or just looking bored, but by no means giving any attention whatsoever to the singer. It is a challenge to the performer to set the stage for his song and to become engrossed in its interpretation, forgetting his indifferent audience.

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[16]Rapoport, op. cit., pp. 37-38. Exercise one and two are from this source.

Actually, this exercise is also a training in concentration for members of the group, for in ignoring the singer, they must concentrate on their reading, or whatever it may be.

Exercise four: Another version of the "quiet treatment" from the group is for class members to lean forward and stare intently at the performer. This is a greater challenge to the singer in his concentration on his work.

Exercise five: At last, the singer may perform before a noisy group. Class members may talk, move about, and make noises, including such auditorium noises as the slamming of doors, coughing, rattling of paper, and so forth. Participating in this type of experience several times, the performer should work to develop such complete attention to the problems of his song-interpretation that these distractions do not register deeply.[17]

The singer should remember, too, that if he tries not to see or think about distractions, he will be all the more aware of those things he is trying to ignore. Instead, if he focuses his attention on the objects involved in interpretation of his song, he will find that the distracting elements tend to disappear. What are the objects of

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[17]George McNabb, "Get Rid of Your Stage Fright," Etude, (September, 1951), 11. Exercises three, four, and five come from this reference.

attention in song-interpretation? For the singer, the objects of attention are the events of the song that involve him, including the background leading to the song, the imagined presence of characters inferred by the song, and the nature of the thought to be expressed. These are desired objects for the focusing of attention, not the audience or the "portrayal" of emotion.

Activity of imagination. Since the settings of a song do not actually exist, the singer must be able to bring the characters and the settings of his songs to life for himself by means of his imagination. That is why the performer should command an easily aroused imagination--"a rich creative fantasy."[18]

The richness of the performer's imagination depends on his accumulation of varied experiences of living.[19] Listen to Stanislavsky: "And what must you, modern actors be? You must first of all be living people . . ."[20] The singer, like the actor, needs to be gloriously alive. He should like people and have respect for the human

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[18]Rapoport, op. cit., p. 42.

[19]Cf. ante, pp. 68-69.

[20]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 349.

personality; he should be able to associate with people, at the same time observing them carefully. The observation of fine artists will help the student-singer enormously, also. Widening his interests, the singer should participate in varied activities, such as other arts, sports, reading, and various hobbies. It is said of Jennie Tourel, one of today's greatest artists, that "her wide interests include the entire field of literature and the fine arts."[21]

Zay writes of Caruso:

> And he has found himself not only in his singing, and in his acting, but in his attitude towards life. His lack of affectation is refreshing; he does not assume a pose to suit other people's ideas of what a great tenor should be. He is truly himself.[22]

Assuming that the student-singer is developing his powers of observation, and gaining understanding from his many and varied life experiences, where does he go from here? It is his next job to find the creative fantasy or imagination which a young child displays. A child's fantasy is free and abundant; the singer must develop this quality by effort and by exercises.

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[21]Dr. Henry W. Levinger, "The Chemistry of a Star," The Review of Recorded Music, 17:6, July, 1954.

[22]Zay, op. cit., p. 133. Zay heard Caruso when he first came to London, in his first rehearsals and in all his appearances at Covent Garden, both from the front and from the wings. He also heard Caruso continuously for two seasons before he came to New York.

Exercises for the development of imagination follow:

Exercise one: Privately, or before the group, the student is to come home and find a letter. Perhaps he will notice the postmark, wondering who it is from as he opens the envelope. His manner of opening the envelope will be determined by his decision that it is a personal letter, or that it is a bill or an advertisement. As he pantomimes reading the letter, he should have definite details in mind, such as who the letter is from, the place it was mailed, and what is in it--is it a threatening letter, a funny letter, or a letter containing good or bad news?[23]

A variation of this exercise is for the student to imagine writing such a letter, again having the details in mind.

Exercise two: The student may take a book and act as if he were about to read his favorite type of story, whether it be a gay romance, a mystery, or so forth; or he may act as if he were going to read a forbidden book; or

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[23]Lehmann, op. cit., p. 13, and Rapoport, op. cit., p. 48. Other exercises for development of the imagination and the sense of justification are given in Rapoport, pp. 41-49.

with the book, he may appear to be absent-minded, or said--there are many possibilities of imagined settings here.[24]

Class observation is important for these exercises, since constructive comments at the end of a presentation will help the student evaluate his performance. Class members learn must, too, from their observations and suggestions.

With a developing imagination made possible by participation in such exercises as those above, the student-singer will find, as he begins the study of a song, that his creative imagination is more easily aroused if he asks himself, "What would I do under these circumstances?" He needs to picture the drama, the experiences, of the song so vividly that he feels it is his own being which is creating the song out of response to the situation he is in. Therefore, in order to get into a role, the singer must study the motivations of the person he is in the song.

Justification. In studying the background of events which may have led to the song, and in looking at the situation, he, as the person of the song, is now in, the singer

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[24] Lehmann, loc. cit.

must look at details of the setting and the characterization; the motivations of his role must be justified according to the details of the situation. Stanislavsky called this the "justification of details."

These detailed motivations depend on the situation as a whole; this is true not only of a song which is an excerpt from a larger composition, but also of an individual song, which actually is a moment taken from a sequence of events.[25] The singer should ask: Out of what situation was the poem born? As Stanislavsky would say, "What is the <u>past</u> which justifies the <u>present</u> of this scene?"[26]

How can we apply this idea of justification to song-interpretation? Let us look at "Allerseelen" by Richard Strauss. What is the setting of this song? It is autumn--"Place on the table the flowers of autumn." Furthermore, it is All Soul's Day, the day of the dead. What are the memories that sweep over you? They are memories of an old love that will not die. What has separated you and your

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[25]Cf. <u>ante</u>, pp. 67-68.

[26]Constantin Stanislavski, "From the Production Plan of 'Othello,'" in Cole, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 131.

beloved? Was it life itself, sending you on separate paths? And are you together today on this day of memory? Or was it death that took your loved one from you? Is it then in the overwhelming longing of remembrance that you are united in spirit on this All Soul's Day?

All of that understanding is necessary before the singer, in performance, even begins the song. Such understanding comes from study of the whole song; then the performer would be ready to approach such details of interpretation as would be involved in singing such phrases in "Allerseelen" as "Give me your hand," or "Give me only one of your sweet glances."

This suggests, perhaps, the detailed circumstances which the singer must justify for each song-interpretation he creates. The more he puts into detail the circumstances of his role, the more he will believe in the situation in which he is singing, and as the singer justifies each detail, his imagined stage environment will take on reality for him.

The sense of truth--stage belief. The ability to justify motivations and to detail circumstances makes it possible for the singer to have stage belief, convincing the audience of the sincerity of his performance. The singer is then able to believe in the circumstances of the

song as if they were real. He can feel that he *is* the person of the song and not that he is singing *about* a person; he can believe in the situation in which he, as the person, finds himself.[27]

Since it is important that the singer believe in what he is singing, it would seem that he should seek out those songs which express what he feels about life and the world; such numbers he will be able to interpret most naturally and deeply. This does not need to limit his choice of songs, for the song-interpreter, it has been pointed out, must be a wholly developed person with a wide range of interests and a keen observation of life; if he is that, his understanding will reach out over a variety of song literature.

Also, remember that in observing, reading, and listening, the singer is assimilating awareness beyond that of his own experiences. This means that within his subconsciousness the possibilities of various performances

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[27]Thaemas Swansea, voice teacher at Colombia, California, states that a singer may sing in any one of three persons. Take the performance of Butterfly's Song, "Un bel dì vedremo," for example. If singing in the first person, Mary Smith would be just Mary Smith, singing to the audience. If singing in the second person, she would be singing like another singer, say Licia Albanese, for instance. This would be imitation rather than interpretation. The goal would be to sing in the third person--to *be* Madame Butterfly, singing in Butterfly's situation.

reside, for, though each person's emotional experience is limited and he probably cannot interpret parts that are dissimilar to his own psychic harmony, the shades and combinations of fundamental emotions are infinite. In that way, the singer can interpret and represent situations which he has not yet experienced directly.[28]

The performer puts stage-belief into action by saying to himself, "I know that my imagined setting is not reality. But if all should be real, see how I might be carried away." The use of this "magic if" is an important element of interpretation.

On the other hand, though the singer is carried away in his song, he must retain a sense of truth, the voice of control which remains free from the grip of the song in order to check everything he attempts as a performer. Is the interpretation true to the character and the circumstances: Is the singer penetrating deep into the heart of the character? Or, is the singer giving way to "emoting"? Is his emotional experience while singing actually the thrill of hearing his own voice, or of singing high notes? Zakhava[29] states that when the student shows

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[28]Cf. ante, pp. 22-23.

[29]B. E. Zakhava, "Principles of Directing," in Cole, op. cit., pp. 215-16.

falsehood (insincerity or disbelief) at any point in rehearsal, the teacher should stop him immediately. Otherwise, conviction in the part will be choked off, for future development of interpretation cannot grow from falsehoods of conviction.

Thus, the singer must develop his sense of truth, both in his own work and by observing others. Members of the class may observe each other for the presence of artistic truth in song performance, and also for the presence of truth in the performance of exercises which have been given for developing concentration, imagination, and justification. Class members may note where the person doing the exercise (or the song) has lost the feeling of truth, evident in over-acting or in "portrayal" of emotion for the audience. Observers should point out to him where and why they did not believe in his sincerity, in the authenticity of his stage feelings; the performer should discuss these points with the group, and strive to correct them, performing the song or exercise again, in some other way.

In his work in opera production, Stanislavsky used graphic illustration to make the meaning of an aria clear to a singer. One day at the Opera Studio a new student, a well-known operatic baritone, sang Valentine's aria from

"Faust." Stanislavsky complimented him on his voice, but said that he did not understand anything.

> 'I don't get the meaning of your song and I don't see why you are singing it. First of all, whom were you addressing your song to?'
>
> 'To you, sir.'
>
> 'To me? But am I the deity? Your text says, "Almighty God, God of Love." Your object then is God and your aria is a prayer.'
>
> The baritone agreed.
>
> 'Don't you know how to pray?' asked Stanislavsky. 'Did you never say your prayers as a child or did you never see anyone do it?'
>
> 'As a child I used to kneel in the corner of the room and address myself to the icon.'
>
> 'Well, do so now. Forget all about us. Kneel down with your back to us. Don't you feel now that you shouldn't have sung so loudly?'
>
> It was in this way that the meaning of an aria was made clear to the singers, with the result that after a short time it sounded quite different.[30]

The following exercise is an example of how students may work to develop a sense of truth, or stage belief:

On the stage in the presence of the group, the singer may pretend that the stage is a forest, and that he is alone in this forest. He will need to justify his attitude to the objects on the stage; what about the chairs and the bare stage floor, for instance? The chairs should be

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[30]Magarshack, op. cit., p. 351.

regarded as though they were bushes, stumps, and trees, and the stage floor as though it were the earth strewn with pine needles.

If the student acquires a serious attitude towards this stage forest, he will find that he forgets the class (an example of public solitude), and his thoughts and feelings will become what they actually would be if he were really in a forest. He will walk around a chair, which now is a tree, and look for mushrooms; if he sees a nail, he will be surprised at finding it in the middle of a forest, and so forth. As a result of such a series of justifications he will acquire a correct attitude toward his imagined surroundings; he will believe that he is in a forest, and his behavior will be correct, corresponding to the atmosphere of the forest. He will also compel the audience to regard the stage as though it were a forest,[31]

Variations on this exercise would include imagining that one is in the fields, in a boat on the river, at home, and so forth. The group should discuss the effects achieved by various students, studying why some are more convincing than others in achieving realistic effects.

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[31]Rapoport, op. cit., p. 47.

The above example demonstrates how the elements of the Stanislavsky system are interrelated; when one is lacking, creative interpretation is not possible. In a way, stage-belief co-ordinates all of these elements. Stage-belief is achieved by justification, the detailing of circumstances, and that is possible only with a rich imagination; all of this demands concentration, with public solitude and muscular freedom being not only results, but necessary attributes for successful possession of stage belief. The starting point for this development is for the singer to discover the dominating idea of the song. Thus, in an interacting circle, we find the basic elements necessary for creative song-interpretation.

CHAPTER VI

APPLICATION OF THE STANISLAVSKY TECHNIQUE OF CHARACTERIZATION

With his developing ability to use the principles for the creative state of mind, the singer will do much more in interpretation than accept as true "feeling" his heightened response due to facing an audience. He will not wait for the improvisation of the moment, but will study the characterization of each song.

The stage task. It is the singer's task, therefore, to compel himself to have the same objectives as the character of his song. It is not enough to imitate that person, or to imitate himself; the interpreter must "get under the skin" of his character, and represent a living person; he must make "the outwardly probable character inwardly complete."[1] For instance, it is said of George London, the bass-baritone who is hailed as a great singing-actor, that he "is not content with merely singing a role. . . . He digs into his part until he becomes the

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[1] A. S. Giatsintova, "The Case-History of a Role," in Toby Cole (compiler), Acting, a Handbook of the Stanislavski Method, p. 127.

character, and if he doesn't feel he's ready, he won't sing it."[2]

How may the singer get into his part? Bringing into play all of the elements of the creative state, he must search for the inner meaning, the ruling idea, of the song, and develop his characterization in harmony with that understanding. Especially stimulating are the questions the singer may ask at the first reading of a song-text: What is the background of this song? What events have taken place? What has been the influence of other persons on this song-character? What would I do in these circumstances? Of the possible actions, what is most typical for the character? What are the typical traits of this character? Which of those traits are nearest to mine? What would this person do in some situation outside the song? The interpreter should remember, too, the fascination of contrast in studying a character. In other words, if the song-character is a good man, in what ways is he bad? And if he is bad, in what ways is he good?

Thus, the singer details the circumstances of his role, gaining an understanding of two important elements of the stage task--what the character is doing, and why he

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[2]"Artist of the Month," The Review of Recorded Music, 17:22, January, 1954.

is doing it. This intellectual analysis is the first step in characterization, setting the stage, so to speak, for the performer.

Expressing emotion. The song-interpreter who masters the elements of creative interpretation and gains an understanding of his stage task will find it easier to avoid the artificial effects of trying to force out the emotion of a song. Remember that of prime importance in the methods of Stanislavsky is the statement that the actor should not be concerned with his feelings during performance.[3] Even so, in performances which do not involve staging and acting, how is the singer to apply Stanislavsky's admonition, "Don't wait for emotions--act immediately?"

He may apply it in several ways. First, when the singer thinks of the song as a moment from a sequence of events, he will be aware that action has been involved before the moment in which he is singing, and that it will continue in the imagined future of the song-character. In other words, in his imagination the performer will set the stage and study the action which leads to the song.

For example, in interpreting the Griffes setting of "By a Lonely Forest Pathway" ("Auf geheimen Waldespfade"),

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[3] Cf. ante, p. 40.

the singer must visualize his loved one in detail, for he goes to the beaches to dream of her. What does she look like? What is her personality? And most important of all, since he lies there imagining that he hears her voice, what is the sound of her voice, and of her singing?

From seeking to visualize the loved one, the singer turns to the events of the song. Why is the man alone so many evenings, "fain to flee by a lonely forest pathway" to the dreary beach? Is he with his beloved only occasionally, or is the loved one far away? And at the moment of the song, is she with him as he tells of the lonely moments without her? Or is he writing her, describing his dreams of her? Can it be that he is at the beach, "hearing the reeds' mysterious sighs," and in his imagination placing her beside him so that he can talk to her?--"And I fancy 'tis the accents of thy voice that round me play, Till the music of they singing on the water dies away."

To be able to think of the action involved in a song, then, the performer must detail the circumstances of the song and understand what the character is doing and why he is doing it. When the singer concentrates on the stage task in this way, he will be able to forget about feelings; they will come of themselves, sincerely and truthfully, as the singer "gets into" his part.

Second, though a song may seem to be primarily one of atmosphere, the interpreter must understand that it is not the expression of an abstract feeling. Nothing can be abstract in interpretation, such as "love in general" or "sorrow in general." Every song-character will have his own expression of love, or of sorrow, peculiar to himself and his circumstances.

To illustrate that point, let us look at Georges Hüe's "J'ai pleuré en rêve." Here we find three different sets of circumstances for the expression, "I wept as I dreamed," resulting in two specific emotions of sorrow, and one of joy. In the first dream, it was the grief of bereavement through death of the loved one which brought the burning flood of tears. After the second dream, the song-character wept bitterly a long, long time, for he had dreamed that his beloved had forsaken him. Then there is the release of the third verse, when the dream was of the loved one alive and loving--"And when I woke, blind were my eyes with tears that forever flow."

In each instance above, the expression of feeling, whether it be sorrow or release, will be determined by the conditions and the cause. Again is seen the necessity for the singer understanding the background of his song and believing in it. In this way he will not attempt to "portray" an abstract emotion.

Third, the singer should realize that discovering the inner essence of the role is of utmost importance. Magarshack reports that Stanislavsky ran into an experience similar to that of the interpretation of a concert singer when he was producing a play that did not have the usual "stage" atmosphere of the genuine drama; it was, instead, a psychological study in the form of dialogue. In this case:

> [Stanislavsky's] problem consisted in finding the best possible way of laying bare the souls of the characters so that the spectators should be able to grasp at once what was taking place in them. Such a problem could not be solved by gesture, or the play of hands and feet, or indeed by any of the generally accepted methods of acting. What he had to get was some 'invisible irradiation of will and feeling by means of a look in the eye of the actor, by means of hardly perceptible inflexions in his voice, by means of psychological pauses of great intensity.'[4]

The singer has just that problem of developing that "invisible irradiation" by means of which the audience is led into an understanding of the song, its atmosphere and characterization. Therefore, though he does not act, the singer inwardly is very active. His understanding of his song-character means that he is involved in the internal conflicts and struggles of that person, and this is reflected

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[4]David Magarshack, Stanislavsky, a Life, p. 306.

in his eyes and in his entire appearance, although outwardly he is practically motionless.[5]

The inward activity of the singer will be evidenced in his interpretation of "Do not go, my love," by Richard Hageman. Here, as Hageman suggested to one of his students, a parent is watching beside the bed of a child who is seriously ill. Or, who is to say that it cannot be husband watching beside wife, or wife by husband, or lover by loved one?

> Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.
> I have watched all night,
> And now my eyes are heavy with sleep;
> I fear lest I lose you when I am sleeping.
> Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.
>
> I start up, and stretch my hands to touch you.
> I ask myself, 'Is it a dream?'
> Could I but entangle your feet with my heart,
> And hold them fast to my breast!
> Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.
>
> (From Rabindranath Tagore)

Hageman's musical setting so enhances this moving poem that the singer can hardly escape its poignancy. If he becomes involved in the situation and in the "internal struggles" of the person watching by the bed, the singer will reflect it in his interpretation. Inwardly, he will be very active, and the audience will be drawn into the

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[5]Cf. ante, p. 44.

invisible irradiation of the performer.

In those three ways the singer can "act" and forget emotion: picturing the action which has set the stage for the song, detailing the circumstances and the traits of the song-character in order that the expression of feeling is specific for that situation, and finding the inner essence of the role.

The inner essence of the role. Since the discovery of that inner essence is vastly important to the concert singer, let us look at this aspect in detail. The "invisible irradiation" mentioned above is the result of inspiration, when the subconsciousness of the performer gives form to all of the impressions, experiences, and work preceding that moment.[6] Characterization which waits for the inspiration of the moment is shallow; there must be work, study, and analysis in preparation for it. However, all of interpretation is not intellectual analysis; the details of interpretation will be worked out, not so much in advance as in performance, when the singer will draw upon the rich material of his preparation, background, and personality in order to enter into his role. Lehman expresses

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[6]Cf. ante, p. 31.

this thought well when she writes:

> Do not build up your songs as if they were encased in stone walls--no, they must soar from the warm, pulsing beat of your own heart, blessed by the inspiration of the moment. Only from life itself may life be born.[7]

Thus, characterization progresses from the first moments of intellectual analysis to the final moment of warm, inspired interpretation, when the singer subconsciously carries away the subconscious of the spectator.[8]

What are the points that aid in the discovery of the inner essence of the song, and what are the qualities which indicate its presence? In the first place, in order to gain the invisible irradiation, the singer must visualize the things he sings about. This is similar to the justification of details, but is more specific in that it stresses that each phrase the singer utters must be preceded by a succession of visual images in his mind. It could be said that the song-interpreter must place under each phrase the moving pictures of his imagination. If these visual images are precise and detailed, as Stanislavsky demanded, the singer is protected from the mistake of "emoting." In this way, the performer sings, not for the ears, but for the eyes

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[7]Lotte Lehmann, More Than Singing, p. 10.

[8]Cf. ante, p. 31.

of his audience. If he is caught up in the expression of his visual imagery, his listeners will experience the song, not only as sound, which in itself can become monotonous, but as a visual effect, rich in colorful impressions. Certainly, this discloses the inner essence of the role.[9]

In the second place, the attempt to conceal rather than to portray emotion aids in finding the inner essence. Stanislavsky discovered that if he tried to conceal feeling on the stage, it actually became more intense, such as: "I don't want to cry but I can't help it," rather than, "See how sorrowful I am!" In other words, if the singer tries to turn on emotion, it will be false and shallow, with the body, too, likely to be tense. If, on the other hand, the performer approaches characterization and interpretation with a true understanding of the creative state, he is apt to find in performance that, though he appears calm and his body is relaxed, he will feel a "strange excitement boil up inside him."[10] Then, welling from within, his song will reveal itself in facial expression and play of the eyes, and in the dynamic shadings and tone colors of the voice.

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[9]I. Sudakov, "The Creative Process," in Cole, op. cit., p. 98.

[10]Cf. ante, p. 44.

Thus, among the qualities which indicate the presence of the inner essence is the fact that the singer's eyes will not be cold and lifeless. Rapoport reminded actors, "And above all do not forget that the essence of the role appears in the actor's eyes."[11] If, for instance, the song-character is a jolly person, remember that everything makes him happy, and his eyes will have a merry twinkle in them. The singer who is characterizing such a person should try to regard the world in the way such an exuberant fellow would, then his eyes will take on a twinkle, too. It is important, therefore, that the song-interpreter look at the world through the eyes of his character.

Another quality of the inner essence concerns interludes in the song. These times when the performer is not singing are moments that test whether or not he is "in" his role. Here again, his eyes, as well as his bodily attitude, will give him away if he drops his characterization when the accompanist plays alone, or when his singing partner has a solo. Does he listen, but not hear? Or does he consider interludes as essential to song-interpretation, and use them to penetrate deeper into his understanding of his role? If he does the latter, surely

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[11] I. Rapoport, "The Work of the Actor," in Cole, op. cit., p. 67.

he is finding the inner essence of the song.

The singer who has grown into the inner essence of his songs will reveal it in the dynamic shadowings and tone coloring of his singing. These effects will seem artificial and meaningless if they are used as a substitute for an understanding of the inner qualities of the song. If, instead, such effects come as the result of a deep inner conviction about the song, they will be true and moving. The wealth of tone colors is seen in the following excerpt, which describes how dynamic gradations come to life with the animating interplay of voice timbre--dark and light, clear and restrained:

> There is a clear, silvery pianissimo which sounds light and ethereal, and there is the veiled pianissimo which trembles with passion and restrained desire. There is a bright forte--strong and forceful like a fanfare--and the darly colored forte, which breaks out sombrely, in grief and pain. The 'veiled' piano which I have mentioned is a vibration of tone which holds no place in the realm of technique and yet, in my opinion, it cannot be neglected in inspired singing--in fact it is of the utmost importance. How much restrained passion can be conveyed by a veiled tone and how much floating purity in a clear flute like pianissimo![12]

Bear in mind, above all, that this variety of expression is the result of the singer getting into his part. If he believes, understands, and feels what he sings, the

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[12]Lehmann, op. cit., p. 14.

singer will sing with more than voice; his body will sing, his eyes will sing, his whole being will rise to the fullest possible revelation of pent-up feelings in the climax of the song.

As a final point on discovering the inner essence of the song, let it be clear that Stanislavsky was convinced that the creative process does not end with the first performance for the public, with other presentations being merely mechanical repetitions of the first. No, the singer comes to each performance of the same song in a different state of mind. That fact can be used in keeping the interpretation from becoming stale. In approaching each rehearsal and performance of any song, the singer must learn to seek something new. He must refresh himself by thinking over the principal intention of the character and relating it to his own immediate state; he may ask himself what aspect of the situation is nearest to him at the present moment. This is how the interpretation takes on a special coloring each time, though in essence it remains the same.

As Lotte Lehmann writes, "Everything which breathes the breath of life is changeable: a momentary feeling often makes me alter an interpretation."[13] Therefore, an

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[13] Ibid., p. 10.

interpretation should never become stereotyped; the creative principles must apply to every performance. If, in singing, the performer brings all of his inner forces into play, creatively adapting to the capricious changes which may develop in those forces, he then, and only then, can "transmit to the spectator that invisible something, inexpressible in words, which forms the spiritual content"[14] of the song.

So--summarizing the points above--the singer will have discovered the inner essence of his role, aided by visual imagery and concealment of feeling, and evidencing play of the eyes, attention during interludes, dynamic shadings and tone color, and the creative process in repeated performances. This final aspect of characterization--the subconscious, non-intellectual level--has been reached when the singer is able to picture the events of the song so vividly that he feels it is his own being which is creating the song out of response to the situation he is in. Then, the surroundings of the song have become his atmosphere, the problems of the character have become his own problems, and he is looking at the world through the eyes of his character.

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[14]Constantin Stanislavski, "Direction and Acting," in Cole, op. cit., p. 32.

Freedom of the concert stage. When the application of the Stanislavsky system is carried into characterization and the discovery of the inner essence of the song, the song-interpreter can have the same dramatic impact that performers in opera and drama may have. In fact, one is inclined to agree with Lotte Lehmann when she suggests that the concert stage offers a freedom of imagination which the operatic and dramatic stage does not. As she says, the stage decrees limitations which simply don't exist on the concert platform. In the reality of the stage, "the imagination of the audience has its limits: it sees the figure before it clad in the frame of the role, surrounded by the characters of the story,"[15] yet, because of this material reality, the actor's physical representation must correspond to the character which he portrays. Not so with the concert artist, who can be many personalities in the course of a recital.

> On the concert stage it is the unlimited power of your art which must change you into just that figure which you seek to bring to life. You are without any material aids, without any gestures, . . . You stand close to the audience--almost one with it, you take it, so to speak, by the hand and say: 'Let us live this song together! Forget with me that I cannot have a thousand real forms, for I will make you believe in all

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[15]Lehmann, op. cit., p. 16.

> these forms as I change my personality in every song. Let us together put aside reality, and let us, singing and hearing, soar away into the limitless realms of phantasy . . .' . . .--so the singer soars above all limitations, is young, is beautiful, is man or woman, longing and fulfillment, death and resurrection. . .[16]

Summary. This is a tremendously challenging field--that of characterization and interpretation in song. It is the teacher's task to bring that challenge to the student in such a way that he will work towards interpretation which is characterized by inner truth. The teacher can do this best by offering suggestions, assistance, and guidance to the singer, not by forcing him. Stanislavsky after all insisted that his system was not rigid, and that it was not the only system on the art of acting that could achieve the results he sought. No, indeed; he said that if one had his own method, he should use it by all means. But Stanislavsky stressed that whatever was done, the spectator should never be allowed to be indifferent.

If the spectator is to be pulled actively into the performance, he must be reached by that invisible irradiation which is the indication of the singer's having penetrated into his role.[17] Since this inner essence is

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[16]Lehmann, loc. cit.

[17]Cf. ante, pp. 94-107.

spiritual in content, it would seem that for the song-interpreter, greatness of spirit must be the dominating thought if he truly seeks the inner essence of a song. Great singing, then, is not dwelling on high notes, singing lovely tones, or "portraying" emotion. It begins with the mastery of technique to such an extent that the singer needs not think of it, and it goes on from there to the work and inspiration of creative interpretation.

Thus, the challenge of song-interpretation can be so presented to a singer that he will "work, work, and work" to develop the basic principles for the creative state of mind. He need not wait until he has mastered the principles before he attempts interpretation, for in interpreting and creating the characters of song, he can be mastering the qualities of creativity. He will be "getting into his part," studying his character in the light of the song and its background. He will be expressing emotion, not because he must force it out, but because he understands what the character is doing and why. Then his characterization will seem simple and natural, true to reality. The audience will believe in it, for the singer himself will have penetrated into the soul of his part; the song-character will have become a living person.

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Magarshack, translator and biographer, opens with a fine essay on Stanislavsky's system. The main portion of this book is a posthumous collection of Stanislavsky's lectures taken down in shorthand by one of the actors, and gathered under the title, "The System and Methods of Creative Art." These discourses were given at the Moscow Bolshoy Theatre, the famous Moscow opera house, between 1918 and 1922.

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Chekhov was one of the finest actors of the Moscow Art Theatre. Since Stanislavski was the founder and director of that theatre, Chekhov worked under his direction.

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Only an excerpt or two are particularly applicable to this thesis.

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The introduction, covering the general field of song-interpretation, is brief, but excellent. The book consists of suggested interpretations for many art-songs.

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A concert singer's findings in the field of song texts, this bulletin is a fine source of repertoire for singers.

Rapoport, I. "The Work of the Actor" in Cole, op. cit., pp. 33-66.
Rapoport was a member of the Vakhtangov Theatre, thus in contact with the Stanislavsky methods, for Vakhtangov was a student of Stanislavsky.

Sawyer, Ruth. The Way of the Storyteller. New York: The Viking Press, 1942. 318 pp.
Principles of interpretation in storytelling are discussed.

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Sudakov was a director at the Moscow Art Theatre and an associate of Stanislavsky.

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Vakhtangov was Stanislavsky's greatest student and one of the most original and striking theatrical talents of that era.

Zakhava, B. E. "Principles of Directing" in Cole, op. cit., pp. 182-217.
Zakhava was a director of the Vakhtangov Theatre, therefore familiar, too, with the Stanislavsky techniques.

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