

LESSON VIA THE INTERNET

ALLAN WRIGHT IN FRANCE LINKED TO US IN LJUBLJANA

Allan Wright moved to France from the U.K. He had a number of clients that still wanted to continue to study with him but could not always travel to France for lessons. He now teaches *via* Skype (a Voice over internet protocol allowing internet telephony between two computers with video) to clients all over the world. He teaches using his blog and his internet site <http://www.chanteurmoderne.com/>, that has examples of vocal exercises, resources and reference material available to his clients. He also deals with some questions using e-mail.

Each article has a text based part and a video on Youtube. It is also an online “shop window” to his teaching and the services he offers. He allows a large amount of his information to be accessed free (for example, see <http://www.youtube.com/user/chanteurmoderne#p/a>).

Distance Teaching: He splits it into two areas: Youtube and Skype. He encourages his students to post their own videos of themselves singing, and post them on Youtube for comment. He also uses the backing tracks made by other people, available on Youtube as they are a readily available resource. He has a library of styles on his Youtube site as examples of different types of singing, ranging from bel canto to saturated rock, with different artists singing, and he encourages discussion and interaction of these videos with his students.

Teaching *via* Skype: When he first started to use Skype, at first, he was not convinced, primarily because there was no physical contact possible between himself as the teacher and his student. To work effectively using teaching *via* a live internet link, it is important to have a good quality connection, (and he has found that sometimes students don't always have good equipment). One challenge to Skype teaching is the time delay that can arise in transmission. For example, if the teacher was to accompany the student, the short time delay between transmission and reception at each end can be an obstacle.

He resolves the lack of physical contact by asking students to palpate themselves and describe what is happening to them, how they feel and what they are feeling. This, he says, and as we observed in the demonstration lesson, does take longer and requires very clear use of language by the teacher. This is less suited to teaching styles using sound (e.g. tone balancing etc.) as Skype does not always reproduce reliable or accurate sound reproduction at either end (student or teacher).

Advantages: The most obvious advantage is that distance no longer becomes a barrier to having lessons and it is possible to achieve real-time sound and video as near as is technically possible using good equipment. It is also easy to record the lessons in sound and video. This enables students to view the recorded lesson later, and see and hear what they did, notice the differences between when they first sang and compare their performance after the teacher and they had worked on any alterations, and analyse their performance during the lesson in more detail than using audio without video.

Teaching *via* Skype also allows screen sharing. For example, Allan sometimes uses images of the larynx, or voice analysis software which he can show simultaneously on his computer and the student's. It is also possible to share images of printed music.

Another good use for remote teaching can be in helping students who have difficulties in performing during a lesson; the shy student, who become stressed or nervous in a lesson when teacher and student are in the same room (for example, the student who says frequently “I sang so much better at home”). By teaching a class *via* Skype in their home environment they may feel more comfortable and less stressed, perform better and learn more. If the student or the teacher has a cold, this reduces the opportunity for infection contagious diseases.

Skype teaching can also be good for following artists who are touring. The teacher can provide remote warm-ups, technical checks, demonstrations etc. This is being used by one vocal coach to warm up the chorus of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

The Demonstration Lesson: The lesson demonstrated was between teacher, Allan Wight, and a CCM (Contemporary Commercial Music) singer and teacher, who slipped into the role of student.

The student began by singing to Alan. Alan asked her about how much vocal effort she was using. She said that she felt that she was not using her body as she was singing very close to the microphone and this was proving to her to be an obstacle. Alan agreed. He asked her how much effort she felt she was using in her larynx, and asked her to grade it on a scale of from 0 to 10 (0 = breathy and the least effort, 10 = feeling that the effort was the most extreme). In Allan's pedagogy, the vocal effort felt or perceived in the larynx when singing (including CCM), should never be above the effort the singer perceives in normal speech. He asked her about support, and gave her a test example of the amount of effort she would use in her body if she were trying to pick up two heavy suitcases. This idea didn't work, so he moved swiftly to the concept of pushing ski sticks into hard snow or the ground. She understood this idea. He then established how that felt with her, and got her to maintain the effort she felt in her back and then asked her to chew at the same time as maintaining the effort in her back. He then asked her to switch the sensation on, and then off several times. When he was sure that she had assimilated the sensation, and had checked with her that she understood, he repeated the process several times more with her singing the vowel i: and checking with her whether she felt any changes as she sang.

Throughout the lesson Allan maintained a consistent dialogue, questioning and checking with the student what was happening. He used the same descriptive vocabulary that she used without making any corrections or alterations to the anatomical or physiological language that she used to describe to him how she was feeling.

It is clear from this demonstration lesson that the language used by the teacher has to be tailored very precisely to the student's vocabulary and understanding. It is equally important that the teacher uses the same language as the student. Body work was a more challenging and took longer, but stylistic changes were easier as was evident.

The comment was made that if as a teacher you are working with a student that you know and have an established relationship with (i.e. you have worked together in person), then this mode of teaching can be a very useful tool when teaching in person is not possible. It was suggested that body work could be made easier with a zoom lens on the camera, but one of the audio visual technicians pointed out that it would be necessary for the control of the camera to be done by the teacher using their computer so as not to impede the flow of the lesson. This puts a higher demand on the technical specifications of the equipment and the software that is used (and would also increase the amount of data transmitted over the link). While this is possible to achieve, remote control of the camera does present a technical challenge at present.

It was also noted during the demonstration lesson that there were limitations imposed by the microphone quality, position, and the acoustic properties of the singer's room. As a result of these variable factors, subtle changes in the singer's sound may not be perceived and therefore present another challenge.

Skype is not the only voice over internet protocol (VOIP) service available that would support this style of teaching. As the quality of the technology will continue to improve, this mode of teaching remotely *via* Voice and Video over the internet will become an increasingly viable way of working in some circumstances.

Ivor Flint