

The Online Lesson

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In the middle of our EVTA – Session in Helsinki we all participated in a very interesting and new way to teach. An ONLINE – Lesson in the Music Center! Prof. Norma Enns taught two students, Maria and Jaakko from northern Finland over the Internet. At first I was really sceptical about the idea of teaching while not being in the same room, but my opinion changed somehow during the course of the lessons.

A very talented woman sang “Elsas Traum” from Richard Wagner`s “Lohengrin”. The time delay was a bit disturbing for me as well for the student, but it was not as big a problem as I thought it would be. Many suggestions that Prof. Enns offered really helped the students, especially the ones concerning breathing and language. Problems with vowel colours could be solved very well. Maria did several breathing exercises with consonants as “s” to elongate the breath for the phrase. Another fantastic exercise Jaakko was asked to do, was reading the text in the original language of the song and immediately after that translating it to his own language. This really helped his emotional connection to the song and therefore his expression. He also improved his rhythmic accuracy by reading the text in the exact rhythm of the song. A further suggestion was to search for different tempos and maybe some more colours by listening to Bryn Terfel’s recording of the same song, because he is a more experienced singer.

What I think is very difficult for the teaching situation is that you cannot see the whole body and the expression on the student’s face. For me that would be a problem, because I think it is very important that you can see and correct the posture of the student.

Another thing which has to be mentioned is that they could prepare this lesson with two prior contacts via Skype and the technical check. Prof. Enns said, that this was very important for her and the students, because this way they could tell Prof. Enns something about themselves and she could prepare the lessons on that basis. On the other hand, Prof. Enns thinks that it would be much easier if the teacher knows the student very well. I can imagine that the teacher has to be even more concentrated and full of energy than in normal lessons.

One difficulty was that the monitor and the camera were not in the same direction so the students and Prof. Enns were sometimes distracted. It was exciting to see the spectrogram and the image of the student side by side on the monitor but the position of the camera and the monitor made it impossible-for the teacher and student to see both at the same time. Even though the problems were not as serious as I expected, these little things still took up time during the lessons.

All in all the students and their teacher, who was also present with them, were very content with the experiment. After all, this kind of lesson only is possible, if there is an accompanist available. In this case, he was a very nice and patient one.

The equipment had a very high quality in the Music Center. I do not think that teaching via Skype at home would be as easy as it was in the Music Center, where the atmosphere was like in a cinema. Image and sound would not be good enough for teaching, but if you have the equipment, why not use it?! It is better to have lessons with your teacher via Internet than not at all and I think it would be a great opportunity to take

masterclasses you otherwise never could have access to, for example with famous singers on the other side of the globe. It is always possible to give good advice and describe important aspects of singing. Otherwise I really do not think that this could ever replace nonvirtual singing lessons. Sometimes it is very important to touch somebody or looking the person directly in the eyes. Imagine your student is in a very bad mood or is very sad about something. Would you not feel bad that you can not hug him? And I as a student would feel a bit helpless as well. For suggestions on interpretation, colours, tempos and in general problems which can be solved by explanations, this way of teaching can be very great to be sure, but I think that bigger problems, for example with a very young student who has to learn a basic technique, are impossible to solve via Internet.

I am very curious if this will be one new way to do lessons, competitions and even auditions. Of course it would be easier and cheaper to not travel around the whole world to get a job or to win a competition. But can you really capture the mood, which is made by the singer in a room, the personality and the way of expressing him or herself? And do we all want to miss the experiences we can get through meeting new people and being in foreign countries? The good thing is that everybody can decide that for himself and that we have the opportunity of using new possibilities such as this. Some years ago, none of us could have imagined that this could be possible. So try it, if you have the equipment available, and find out if it is for you!