

USING PLAYBACK IN CCM

by Marlene Schaff, France

I use playbacks with all my students. I have my own playbacks library on my IPod, and most of the time my students have their own material, and when neither of us has the object of our desire we just go and find it on YouTube!

It's very interesting to work and teach with playbacks. First of all, not all singing teachers know how to play the piano and therefore accompany their students. In which case backing tracks are essential.

Also, it helps the student work on ~~its~~ their ear, it isn't the playback that follows the singer but the singer who has to respect the rhythm of the song.

Very often there are back vocals on playbacks, once again that's very interesting to help the singer get used to singing over harmonies.

When working with a student, we take some time figuring out what song to work on, once the choice is made we find the original backing track.

I then take some time finding out which key's the best for the singer. If it needs to be changed, I use the ILIFT application on my iPhone. If I have my computer, I can also use softwares such as Audacity, Melodyne editor or even Garage band.

USING PLAYBACK

by Caterina Trogu Rorich, Italy

I teach a lot using playback with students that don't know music. They learn everything by listening to mp3s, CDs or YouTube. CCM students use a lot of karaoke. They are so used to following a playback track that if I play the piano for them, they can't follow me well.

Some students are used to singing with a real CD with the voice of a singer. When they don't have the voice of the singer to help them, they don't sing the right pitch or follow exactly the rhythm. When I transpose the song to a lower or higher key than they normally sing, they are not able to get the tone. That is slavery!

I think that this is typical of non-professionals, of beginners. It is a starting level of learning music. I think that the ability of managing the voice and musicality are different, and they proceed individually in their two ways.

With classical students I'm trying to push them to listen to famous singers, to learn arias and duets only listening to the CD a lot of times. They don't know the music so well to learn all that only with one lesson in a week, the repertory is so large!

I ask them the two things: to learn the music and to listen a lot.

Because the voice is very fragile, you can't sing hours and hours, you have to learn passively, listening.

In the old conservatory we stayed 12 (twelve!!) hours a week listening to other students, so I listened to an extensive repertory of sopranos, mezzos, tenors and basses. I learned it passively, just listening.

It is possible to find the playback of arias and duets of Mozart and other composers.

Sometimes I use those at lessons. It is not easy for the students to follow the music. Some are musical (and) they learn easily to follow. Others are so dull, they follow the inner rhythm in themselves, and don't follow that of the playback.

There is an educational (opportunity) even in this.

After this approach with playback, we work with a pianist. It is only a way to gain time.

I really didn't sing with playback myself. I sing classical music with a group or with a pianist. I think I would be in difficulties with playback because I'm used to my lieder, to change the rhythm and the sound often.

I only sang CCM with mp3 to give an example for the students. I found it easy. It would be difficult, if you have a cadenza or a pause in non-musical rhythm.

This has been my experience.

USING PLAYBACK – CLASSICAL AND CCM

by Sofija Cingula, Croatia

One of the topics and workshops at the European Vocal Pedagogy Week in Ljubljana was Playback in classical and CCM singing. Being a classical singer, I will try to give a “classical“ point of view on this matter.

Playback is something unknown to a classical trained singer and with few exceptions (film versions of famous operas etc.) not “allowed“ in classical singing. Voice teachers prepare their students for live performances and playback is a completely new situation for all classical vocal artists. During a week in Ljubljana, we had a great opportunity to try out some of the great e-vocal videos which have most popular arias for each voice type conducted by a professional conductor. We should also thank Norma and e-vocal direction for giving us unlimited password to use their online videos in our classes. Since classical singers normally do not use playback or any types of pre-recorded materials during their performances, I was a bit insecure when asked to participate at the playback- workshop. I was relieved when I realised that I was not supposed to move my lips to the previously recorded arias or songs (a situation so common to the CCM singers which I hardly ever did before) but to sing in front of the big screen “showing“ me the conductor to the piano accompaniment of my aria (*Ombra mai fu* by G. F. Haendel). In general, it was a positive experience but I missed the personal feedback (and encouragement) one normally instantly gets from the conductor during performances and/or practises. In spite of this, I think that these kinds of videos could be of great assistance in vocal pedagogy to both teachers and students. The strange feeling I had while singing was partly because I was put in a new situation in front of my esteemed European colleagues who had never heard me singing before and not because the concept of the videos should in any way be wrong. E-vocal videos are normally meant to be used as practise and not in a performance situation. As practise they are most valuable because they give (young) singers an opportunity to sing their repertoire with a conductor without having to pay expensive co-repetitions and lessons with the pianists. The tempi are very strict (no rubati allowed!) but this too can be of great help to young singers or to more advanced students while learning new repertoire. Another aspect of these videos has come to my mind while working with them together with my students. The “picture“ on the screen requires singer's additional attention and prevents students (being) too stiff while singing. It also gives them an opportunity to go over their repertoire without

parallel voices from the “normal“ recordings they listen to. Normally, they practise singing along to a CD and imitating singers who are not always ideal examples. Often they cannot hear themselves good enough and mistakes become more and more present and automated. E-vocal videos enable us to hear just the accompaniment and to see the conductor which helps to identify and correct the vocal faults and mistakes immediately.

In addition, I may add that students feel more motivated to “work with“ a conductor, feel good about themselves when they successfully complete a new task and have more fun because of the visualisation of their future performances. I can even imagine these videos being a great joy and a big challenge to amateur singers who normally wouldn't have an opportunity to sing with a real conductor.

PLAYBACK WITH CLASSICAL SINGING

by Outi Kähkönen, Finland

CCM singers do it all the time. They have the luxury of singing with a professional band during their singing lessons. Classical singers sometimes have to be contented to singing with no accompaniment at all during lessons, or having their singing teacher play with varying fluency and then finally and preferably with a professional skilled pianist, another artist. The latter is of course what we all want and love. Although, sometimes a beginning singer may feel intimidated by the professional musician, not knowing his/her music perfectly, perhaps missing entrances or making mistakes in counting the rhythm. How about having practiced with playback, learning how the accompaniment sounds even in the most difficult pieces that the singing teacher maybe even refuses to play? Here is one possibility that so far has eluded the typical classical singer.

Now there are resources available to all singers, with lieder or arias. You can sing with a conductor with the e-Vocal program available in the Internet. You can order your piano accompaniment for many songs from a website called Your Accompanist. You can even sing arias with a full symphony orchestra listening to special CDs that offer the repertoire for all voice types.

My opinion of using playback with classical singing is mainly positive although there are obvious reasons why it might not be applicable. It can be good for your initial rehearsing, before you meet your professional accompanist for the first time. You will be better prepared, but do not be surprised if the tempo is a surprise. You will perhaps get frustrated because your digital accompanist doesn't know where you breathe but on the other hand, that can help you keep the tempo at all times. It is inflexible, maybe even unmusical, but what a relief when your real in-person pianist listens to you and lets you make nice tempo changes and rhythmic nuances. Then you really know how to appreciate your partner!

So, it's very good for some rehearsal purposes. Definitely not good for the final artistic development. And absolutely forbidden in performance! This is just to say, don't even think of saving the pianist's fee if you asked to sing a classical song in public.