

Mag.Mag.art. Sofija Cingula, HUVOP

USING YouTube

During European Vocal Pedagogy Week in Ljubljana (February 2011) we had a great opportunity to discuss many topics and try out new things concerning new technologies (ICT) and voice analysing softwares in vocal pedagogy. In this report I will try to point out some ideas concerning the usage of YouTube in voice teaching.

There are many possibilities of using YouTube during a voice lesson or practise, both classical and CCM.

Voice students use YouTube very often. After voice lessons, they listen to their repertoire and choose favourite singers interpreting their “homework”. Many of them (especially younger, not very advanced students) learn their songs and arias by repeated listening of the recordings on YouTube. Students comment videos and recordings on forums and blogs, share them with their friends and colleagues on social networks, compare numerous interpretations, listen to various artists and ensembles, imitate them, try to do better or as good as they think is possible. Some students do even their vocal warm up exercises using YouTube – all of that mostly without the presence of their voice teachers. (Sometimes it is difficult to compete with online “voice-gurus” and all the promises to their followers and virtual students.)

Upon my return from Ljubljana, I prepared a small questionnaire about the usage of YouTube during voice lessons and practices in Croatian schools and universities. 54 students (72% still at high school and 28% at university) , aged between 13 and 35, answered questions about how they use (or don't use) YouTube and Internet-possibilities in their voice-studies. 46% never use YouTube during their voice lessons in school or at university and only 4% answered they do it often (other replies were 30% “occasionally” and 20% “rarely”). 26% replied that their voice teachers always encourage them to use YouTube as help while practising and singing at home (23% are never encouraged to do so, 18% occasionally, 17% often and 16% rarely). 33% of students compare their repertoire with the recordings on YouTube often while 11% replied “never”. Others do it “occasionally” (28%), “rarely” (17%) and only 11% answered that they always compare their repertoire with the recordings on YouTube.

Asked about how often they use voice lessons and warm up exercises on YouTube, 35% replied that they never use them and only 2% wrote that they use them always. 9% use them often, 30% occasionally and 24% rarely. 50% of them never comment on YouTube recordings with their voice teachers, 26% do it rarely, 11% occasionally and 13% often. Nobody (0%) answered that they always comment the recordings with their teachers. Interesting is that the majority (52%) never find YouTube voice lessons and warm up exercises more interesting than voice lessons with their own teachers (some of them even underlined the word “never” and wrote exclamation marks around them to emphasise loyalty to their voice teachers). 2% answered “always”, 4% “often”, 18% “occasionally” and 24% “rarely”.

Although using YouTube in voice lessons is not very common among young Croatian voice students who were kind enough to fill out my questionnaire, using YouTube as a part of voice lessons and practices has doubtlessly many advantages. I will try to compare some of them with the disadvantages I have noticed during my own teaching and working with my students.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good access to everyone interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No professional revision of the

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in voice technique and singing	“golden rules“ and advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of all kinds of information on singing (technique, breathing exercises, interpretation, accompaniments, translations, interviews with famous singers and musicians...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much information could be confusing for beginners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sing-along versions of famous songs and arias etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students don't get feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great voices and famous singers performing “for free“ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitation without creativity – learning “from scratch“ is not popular
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various singers performing the same repertoire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning from bad singers and interpretations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free master classes of great singers and voice teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No personal feedback but taking advice and solutions given to others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting new ideas, feeling confident and diligent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentrating on minor problems, not finding the right way using unfamiliar technique or style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Working“ with other teachers, learning new things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Losing confidence in their teacher's methods

In my opinion, one of the most important things in using YouTube is to know what one is looking for. Many videos offer only basic (often insufficient) information, some of them can be highly professional and educative, but many, many of them are misleading or could even have a dangerous impact on young voice students and/or beginners. Therefore it would be very helpful if voice students got some guidance from their teachers and pedagogues. In order to be prepared for that, voice teachers should get acquainted with the things concerning voice technique, interpretation and vocal pedagogy existing on YouTube. By knowing that, they can offer their students a critical opinion and advice on these videos and recordings. They can watch them together and make comments on what is right or wrong, what should be avoided and what accepted as a good way of thinking and doing. Many voice teachers already have their own YouTube-accounts with recordings they find suitable for (their) students to use without caution or danger for their voices. It is very important to be open for all the possibilities which YouTube offers to voice teaching but to use it wisely and with caution. Only then can this usage be a source of challenge, new creativity and enrichment both for students and teachers.

USING PLAYBACK – CLASSICAL AND CCM

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

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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 corepetitions 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 to be 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 automatised. 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.