

## The Musical Soul

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I would like to begin by recalling a concept expressed by Percy Bysshe Shelley in his “Defence of Poetry:” “Poets . . . draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world. . . . A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions time and place and number are not.”

When, in 1274, Dante saw Beatrice for the first time, his soul was awakened by the spirit of life through aesthetic beauty, the human form of the world soul, as the poet Guinizelli also called it. For me, as a singer, and thus, as a physical instrument, this translates into the perception of the energy of the universe through sound. From that moment, Dante placed himself at the service of the figure of the soul, dedicating his life to three things that are inseparable: love, imagination, and beauty.

He wrote the *Divine Comedy* to educate, to free the living from the unhappiness they bring upon themselves, to teach the path that leads from pain to hope, rising step by step to the heavens of Light and Music, to the point of becoming a flute into which universal love breathes its *neums*; that is, the same energy that passes through Creation, that permeates everything, the soul of the world that nourishes the human soul.

Our life itself does not take place as a function of our “I.” It is our “I” that has been created as a function of the life of Everything . . . or the One.

To teach and learn beauty and truth is a path of in-

quiry for the teacher and the student. Absolute beauty and truth exist, and every one of us participates in them based on their own characteristics, which often do not coincide with what we call the “I.” The process of inquiry is one of revealing one’s own beauty, that is often greater than we had imagined at the outset. It is

our own artistic being, which strengthens us and allows us to express ourselves with art for intellectual enjoyment, but also physical enjoyment, as a singer. At the same time, we will be the conduit for beauty and truth, so that others can enjoy them. Studying is thus a process of knowledge of the true Self, masked by the I.

It is an activity of experimentation, imagination, continuous feedback between the Self and I, to be conscious of one’s own personal creation. Often, the discovery and education of one’s own voice is emancipating and liberating—an interplay between instinct and reason, imagination and memory, nature and technique, that mutually nourish each other. There are many technical-artistic aspects involved

in the collaboration between a teacher and a student. The student must never copy the teacher’s results; the student must acquire the principles.

We can only learn what we already know, and thus what we are. Studying singing (or any other form of art) is a process of repossession, memory, recognizing that which was incarnated when we were born. Only by starting at this point can we create art and give life to our eternity. It is beautiful when a student’s eyes shine with satisfaction after having experienced the ability to do something beautiful with enjoyment. Creating art is a manner of being; we learn a technique to learn about ourselves.

### The Purpose of Studying Singing

Moving on to a more practical level, I would say that the fundamental purpose of studying is to find the center of one’s own instrument, the “position” that, as in a yoga position, is the result of the equilibrium of all of the parts and forces of the body/instrument. When you sing, you learn to develop your internal perception



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and physical imagination in a sort of three-dimensional projection—maybe even four dimensions—that, just like in a virtual game, makes use of the information gathered from all of the internal sensors and creates the next image in time and in the future.

I often compare the flow of breath to a ray of light/energy (sometimes I compare it to the jet of a fountain on which a ball dances, changing form, weight, and color), that is generated by our body and projected towards the area of control, where an interplay of movable mirrors are used to change the direction of the ray, to ensure that there is support for the music, coloring, and molding its force with the idea of the composer. At that point, I think that the music automatically knows how to use my instrument, and in a certain sense, it does it all on its own.

I must say that, thanks to the fact that I am a singer, I perceive matter and spirit as different aspects of the same Reality (but this is another question...)

One of the other technical/artistic aspects of the teacher-student relationship is the effort not to have preconceived ideas about the voice and how it should be. As I said at the beginning, it is a process of searching for true beauty. The more we use our real instrument (which can be educated to the highest level only if we are familiar with it and respect its nature), the more we will transmit all aspects of the composer's intention, and we will be able to respect and convey the composer's imaginative power and become instruments of creation. By forgetting what we believe our personality is, that I translate with "I," we will find our "Self," that is the real artist, that can hear and understand the composer to convey the character. How often in the process of studying do we find that the difficulties do not come from limitations of the instrument, but from limiting mental and psychological attitudes! So what is necessary are suggestions translated into metaphors, that spark the mind to look at the problem from another point of view and abandon customary behavior; that which you can not imagine, you can not do.

### **Music Must Go Beyond Time**

Another essential aspect of musical expressiveness is Time; this seems obvious, but it's not.

The musician must be the absolute master of the time in which she expresses herself, and thus live for the performance. Music is expressed in time, but it must go beyond time, and be eternal. The performer has the

practical responsibility for this. Time is never absolute, especially not for voices. It is never beating time; that's what clocks are for, that are all too "human" and limiting.

Emile Cioran wrote a beautiful book entitled *The Fall into Time*, to describe the separation of human beings from the One, exactly what we try to recover in music.

To overcome the problem of time we have to be immersed in the reality of the sound at every thousandth of a second. This seems like a contradiction, but it's true. When you sing, you don't count! 1, 2, 3, and 4 do not exist; the bar line of the measure does not exist. Inside of us we have a world-class electronic counter, that travels at very high speeds (the speed of sound? or the speed of light ... how fast do neuronal connections travel?)

Thus, music is not made of times, but of accents and proportions, of sound time and silence time, which is just as alive. At the beginning of a work of music, in its first real sound, we have to have the image of the whole, until after the end, as with a ray, that from the moment of creation is projected into the future in the same instant. Maybe every work of music recreates the creative power of the first sound. A work of music is like a time machine, and a transfer of reality.

Going onto stage to perform is already a different dimension, but I have had the experience of "non-time" very often, like an experience of being separated from the reality of the performance itself, even as a character. There are long moments in which we don't belong to ourselves. It is a magical sensation, almost a super-perception of one's self.

Starting with the first sound, we are no longer ourselves; we are another person who expresses an artistic language, a primary language. We create in ourselves another personality which we will succeed in taking possession of, to the extent that we have forgotten ourselves through studying it. We get used to a different "I" by studying its symbol and educational power through music. Every sound, duration, interval, musical accent, dynamics and silence, form, harmony and instrumentation, are important to understand the intention of the author of the character. It is not enough to "give voice" to a role; we also have to take it into ourselves. Yes, because every character is a human symbol that passes through a language that is also symbolic, that educates us in artistic and human terms—two sides of the same being.