DISSEMINATION ABSTRACT

Historical vocal pedagogy literature in the 18th to the 20th centuries and its contribution to modern vocal education, with particular reference to historical sound ideals

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Nicola Vaccai’s Metodo di Canto Italiano, Giuseppe Concone’s 50 Leçons de chant and other historical vocal methods are still in wide use as standards of vocal pedagogy and form an important part of the curricula at many music schools and universities. Music education and vocal training in particular have experienced major changes over the centuries, as have the aesthetic ideals of vocal production and the approaches to the vocal instrument. Today the consideration of historical vocal pedagogy methods and contemporaneous vocal music often neglects important aspects of the musical practice of past eras, and the special characteristics of different historical sound ideals remain undiscovered.

Adhering to both artistic and scholarly perspectives, this dissertation uses the historical vocal pedagogy literature of the 18th to the 20th centuries as the basis for an examination of the characteristic attributes and developments of European vocal traditions, of vocal pedagogical practices and reforms, and of aesthetic qualities and changes in vocal production practice. This art-based research evaluates the ways in which the historical vocal method books, as historical indicators of vocal sound, can still make a substantial contribution to classical vocal training, as well as to historically informed performance practice of vocal repertoire from the past.

The aim of this artistic-scientific research is a practical aesthetic approach (as authentic as possible) to vocal traditions and the changes they have undergone, as well as to national and regional constants in the musical practice of the 18th to the 20th centuries. The principal instrument in this art-based research has been the researcher’s own voice. Historical sources such as singing method books, vocal compositions, travel and newspaper accounts, letters, reviews, as well as literary texts provide colorful descriptions of the musical and cultural life of bygone eras. Supplementing these written sources are early sound recordings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which deliver even greater authentic insight into the performance practice of the period and constitute a living testimony to the prevailing sound ideal of the time. Comparative analysis and interpretation of the information contained in this material have also served as the basis for the author’s own vocal experimentation. In his own vocal experiments the author has sought to combine historical vocal aesthetics with a modern scientific understanding of vocal production. The dissertation offers written and audiovisual documentation of this research and, as a summary to the research findings, concludes in the form of a tutorial, with practical exercises providing a contemporary approach to historical voice pedagogy texts and to representative literature for the voice.