

Review of Paris teaching October, 2009 by Emmanuel Pesnot

She could come out of an episode of *Charlie's Angels* (the first series): blonde, impeccable hair, a pastel green jacket over a pale rose sweater... But the comparison stops there: Liz Howard is certainly a personality, but above all a being of a great generosity and one of the most enthusiastic pedagogues I have ever met. With her sense of "American style" effectiveness and a stupefying energy, Liz accompanies the singers while she leads them toward an amazing control of their vocal production... Her resumé is impressive: founder of the Vocal Power Institute in Los Angeles, she has coached very numerous artists of the first rank, singers in the Disney Studios, in Broadway theaters, candidates for reality TV, and pop stars like Sting... With strongly imagistic phrases (such as "sing like a creaky door" to add resonance to the voice) she lays the foundations of singing: breathing, support, laryngeal functions, register resonances, articulation— nothing escapes her highly trained ear, or overtakes her well founded knowledge of the physiological aspects of the voice (she is an assiduous reader of Richard Miller, of Garcia, of Lilli Lehmann)... But if one had to recall only one aspect of her work, it would undoubtedly be the tools that she has developed to train the vibrato. In addition to a solid diaphragmatic support (which in French I call *appui* or *affondo*, as Paolo Zedda suggests), a significant openness in the intercostal area, and a muscular, but not brutal onset (her work on the approximation of the vocal cords, inspired by Professor Miller, is quite remarkable), Liz leads you step by step toward mastery of the speed, height and intensity of the vibrato.

She distinguishes four types of vibrato:

*vocal fold vibrato*— a rapid vibrato, produced by brief interruptions of the sound, used by French *chanteuses réalistes* and certain operetta singers;

*throat vibrato*— resulting from a more or less rapid contraction of the muscles of the pharynx, used by Frank Sinatra, among others, and by some classical singers in combination with diaphragmatic vibrato;

*shimmer vibrato*— a very rapid vibrato, nearly the *trillo* of Caccini or Peri, used in scat singing; and

*diaphragmatic vibrato*— the one that Liz recommends, produced by imperceptible pulsations generated in the region of the *solar plexus*, resulting in light fluctuations of height and intensity, giving the voice suppleness and

emotion.

The exercises consist of initiating small impulses of the diaphragm (while feeling them in the *solar plexus* region), then repeating them in groups of 2, 3, 5 and 9 to give them the desired regularity. In the end, Liz can teach you to speed up or slow down this vibrato, or to let it go at will, as the divas of R&B do so marvelously.

One could also mention the unbelievably effective tools that Liz uses to work the famous “mixed voice,” or rather the mixed voices, since she distinguishes the “belt mix,” a chest-mix used for modern music, from the “low mix,” a head-mix used by singers in musicals and opera. Or her systematic study of vocal colors: head, nose, mouth, chest, which she distinguishes, obviously, from the study of laryngeal mechanisms.

Her teaching, precise without being authoritarian, simple without being unintelligent, exacting and respectful, leads you gently towards vocal comfort and efficiency that are hitherto unknown. At the end of an hour of instruction, this writer succeeded to singing effortlessly the final high F in Valjean’s prayer from *Les Misérable* by Boublil and Schoenberg, *pianissimo*, in mechanism I, but with the colors of the head voice. Do I have to explain how many times the attempt to do this was rewarded with an unexpected yodel, disgraceful and a little humiliating?

These exercises, with an approach that is simple and intentionally accessible to a broad public, are given in her book *SING!*, which is sold with four CDs and a DVD, a chance to hear the voice of Elisabeth, who can sing with equal ease in a marvelous low mix that one could attribute to Judy Garland or in a solid belt mix that might come from a CD of Tamla Motown! The book is available on her website, <http://vocalpowerinc.com/>.

One can also register for lessons at the Vocal Power Institute and even take lessons over Skype directly with Liz! Do not miss this opportunity to discover one of the very great pedagogues of singing both for classical and non-classical music, and also to see for yourself the rose sweater and the green jacket...

Emmanuel Pesnot.

Translated by John Glenn Paton