

Summary Documentation: SINGING AND SPEAKING

Four sessions of four hours each
Friday (19.1.2001) through Monday (22.1.2001)
The White Room at the Odin Teatret
The leaders of the group were Julia Varley and Brigitte Cirila

In keeping with its title, this workshop had two distinct areas of focus. Brigitte provided instruction in the singing voice, and Julia led training for the speaking voice. What they shared was their emphasis on vocal production, both the specifics of technique and the challenges of interpretation.

The content of the workshop seemed to fall into three general areas: Brigitte's work with singing, Julia's work with speaking, and an area where the two were combined to create a new and richer content. Each teacher brought impressive expertise in her area, yet somehow they created these substantial areas together, building on each other's groundwork.

Julia placed primary emphasis on working through the body. Action and speaking, she insisted, begin in the feet on the floor. Think of your brain in your feet," we were told. She used different atmospheres and weights, pushing, pulling, walking, jumping, reaching, falling, many methods to engage the body in various ways. The voice was based in these and other movement activities. Imagery entered in with various suggestions for use of the voice: imagine being a foghorn, a nightingale, a Soviet dictator, the softness of a Persian cat, any number of possibilities arose and brought results which delighted.

Brigitte placed great attention on the physiology of breathing properly and supporting the voice properly. This included in-depth explanations of the body's functions and extensive exploration and practice of the various components of breathing and vocal production. These foundations came into practice as the group learned a group of three-part songs from Georgian Russia and Sicily (Mxedruli," Mirandrula," and Agnus Dei"). Brigitte taught and conducted the group in fundamentals and nuance as the pieces became more and more shaped and beautiful.

One project of the workshop required each member to create a personal scenario related to Women-Theatre-Generations." This short piece was then broken down into eleven parts, and served as the basis for practical exercises in voice and body. Text, sound, music, stories were integrated in various ways for development and exploration.

The last workshop day in particular expanded and integrated the work in sound, voice, physical expression and ensemble creation. Groups of three (high, middle, low voices) did presentations of scenarios together, integrating singing, text, and movement individually and in an ensemble setting.

Ensemble musical improvisations challenged participants' abilities to hear well while working together and contributing new elements to the sound world already existing.

This was followed by improvisational vocal quartets, creating events of melody and rhythm together.

There is no doubt that all of us learned and grew in our understanding of sound and the body. Our abilities in singing and speaking expanded and deepened. As experts in their fields, the workshop leaders have introduced us to a demanding discipline, and challenged our commitment to continuing practice and development of these challenging areas.

(Submitted by Beverly Brumm, workshop member)