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SINGING IN ENGLISH

English has been the language of our country since its earliest years. It is a beautiful language and comes close to being the universal one. The singing of English presents no greater difficulties than those met in other languages.

The person who elects to express himself in song has one distinct advantage over his fellow musician. He has the word as well as the tone to project his ideas and emotions.

It follows then that the achievement of beautiful and expressive singing in English should be a matter of great concern to every teacher of singing. However, there is ample evidence in the singing of our time that this concern is less grave than it ought to be. One is far too often obliged to listen to singers who seem to lack all appreciation for the beauty of the language. Their utter disregard for vowel sounds and their failure to strengthen the consonants adequately leave the listener with an increased repertoire of songs without words.

There are of course very definite reasons why singing in English often fails to meet the standard of excellence one may rightfully demand. Likewise there are established ways and means whereby it can be understandable, intelligible and exquisitely beautiful. The procedure for this is essentially simple and productive in good results if persistently pursued.

A word is made up of two elements, the vowel and the consonant. The vowel must be sustained in its pure form for its given musical value. The consonant must be made short, crisp, and clean-cut and not anticipated. The singer must have a perfect mental concept of the actual sustained sound of every vowel. It is the singer's predominant vocal medium. The projection of the word depends upon a uniform, disciplined procedure in these matters.

Often one unconsciously adopts certain local speech habits or dialects which, when used in song, further tend to impair the beauty of the language. It is the responsibility of the teacher therefore to offer a good example of correct speech habits to his pupils.

The average student of singing is usually more concerned with the sound of a newly assigned song than he is with the words. Teachers should insist that the student absorb the meaning of the text before he proceeds to learn the music. If this practice were diligently pursued by teachers and students alike, one would hear fewer performances in which the song becomes solely a medium of sound.

The age in which we live is another contributing factor to careless and meaningless use of words. The overemphasis on physical aspects of the functioning of the human voice tends to deemphasize the text. The treatment of the text must never become secondary to physical vocal procedure. Vocal technique is a means to an end, never an end in itself. Nevertheless the teaching of diction must not disturb basic vocal technique. Obviously the perfect projection of words will never be a cure-all for vocal problems, but vocal problems will never be solved without it.

Thinking, listening and strict adherence to fundamental principles can result in the beautiful singing of English. It can be all it rightfully should be—expressive and meaningful.