

PRELUDE TO OPERA WORKSHOP:  
STAGE MOVEMENT CURRICULUM FOR UNIVERSITIES  
OFFERING THE BACHELOR OF MUSIC DEGREE IN VOICE

BY

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Submitted to the faculty of the  
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Music  
Indiana University  
May, 2013

Accepted by the faculty of the Jacobs School of Music,  
Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## Acknowledgements

To my graduate committee members, Professor Adam Noble, Professor Andreas Poulimenos, Professor Carol Vaness, and Professor Patricia Wise - thank you for your enthusiasm, support, and guidance through every stage of this project. I knew that if I was to take on a project like this, I wanted to work with performing artists and educators such as yourselves, as you are all wonderful performers and have spent much time “treading the boards.” Your artistry inspires me to continue on my own journey as a singer-actor.

To my parents Ken and Sherrie Pereira - thank you for your unconditional love and support. It is a precious gift that I most certainly do not take for granted. Thank you also for teaching me the value of hard work and to never give up.

To Joaquina Calvo Johnson – words are not enough. I thank both you and your husband Howard for your support, mentoring and friendship. How I wish you were still here to see me finish this part of the journey.

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## **Philosophy and Rationale**

An opera singer must be both a complete musician and an actor. He or she must have the vocal technique to sing some of the most challenging music ever written, while also creating a believable character onstage. Despite the findings of the National Association of Schools of Music's 1984 study "The Education and Training of the Singer-Actor," the major-field curriculum for most vocal performance programs is devoted primarily to developing a student's singing voice and musicianship, with little or no curriculum dedicated to dramatic training. This document outlines a two-semester course in stage movement that is specifically designed for operatic performers. Through looking at the defining characteristics of this genre, current and historical approaches of dramatic training for the opera singer, as well as the demands of the current operatic industry, one will begin to see why the stage movement course outlined later in this document is both desirable and essential to the dramatic training of a young operatic performer.

Opera is recognized as a culmination of art forms, all of which are necessary to evoke an emotional response in the audience participating in the opera experience. An opera features a dramatic text (libretto) set to music, and is sung by singing actors who perform a staged theatrical production. Accompanied by an orchestra or small instrumental ensemble, an opera employs all of the visual elements of theatre such as scenery, lighting, costuming, and properties, and very often features a ballet or other dance elements. In his book *A History of Opera: Milestones and Metamorphoses*, Burton Fisher offers this description of this all-encompassing genre:

In its most ideal and literal form, opera is sung drama, or music drama. Words performed with music can express what language alone has exhausted, a combination that achieves an expressive and emotive intensity that neither words nor music can achieve alone. Opera unites those two expressive languages into its art form; at times it is sung speech, whose dramatic essence derives from music's intrinsic power to transcend words and heighten, arouse, and intensify emotions.<sup>1</sup>

Further exploration of the defining characteristics of opera yield similar explanations in terms of the genre's relationship to drama; the common thread between them all is the use of the terms *acting* or *drama*, and that the art form is meant to be "presented theatrically."

Opera requires the collaboration of all the art forms in order for the genre to exist. Just as opera requires this collaboration, the operatic performer must develop and coordinate his or her musical, vocal, intellectual, linguistic, psychological, and physical abilities in order to fully inhabit the role in which he or she is performing. Given these requirements, one would naturally assume that a great deal of time is devoted to each of these areas in the early training of the operatic performer. However, this does not appear to be the case. As stated before, the current system of training in many undergraduate voice performance programs focuses mainly on developing the vocal and musical skills necessary for pursuing an operatic career with very little curriculum devoted to dramatic training. This fact is perplexing especially given the numerous definitions of opera, which are all inclusive of the dramatic aspect of the art form. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* even goes as far to define opera as a "drama in which actors sing throughout..."<sup>2</sup> as opposed to one where "singers sing throughout." In my own experience as both an undergraduate and a graduate voice performance major during the

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<sup>1</sup> Burton D. Fisher, *A History of Opera: Milestones and Metamorphoses* (Miami: Opera Journeys, 2005), 14.

<sup>2</sup> *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan 2001), s.v. "opera."

first decade of the 2000s, acting and/or movement classes were never included in degree requirements. They merely counted as elective credit. This is baffling, since most present day vocal performance curriculums endeavor to train singers for a career in opera. Opera is a dramatic art form, and while singing beautifully is (and should remain) of high priority, opera singers must also be believable actors onstage.

The one elective course that exists at nearly every institution with a vocal performance program is the “opera workshop” class. In this course, instructors are often expected to teach a myriad of skills and techniques essential to a career in opera and stage performance thus fulfilling the accreditation requirements put forth by the National Association of Schools of Music. The curriculum includes but is not limited to: acting, period movement, dance, stage combat, stage make-up, audition techniques, scene study, and musical style. The instructor is also expected to cast, musically coach, stage direct and rehearse an end of the semester scenes production. In my experience both as a student and an associate instructor for both undergraduate and graduate level opera workshop classes, the majority of the time in class is spent preparing for the final performance. Only a fraction of the aforementioned performance skills are addressed during the first few weeks of class while the singers are learning their music for the final performance. While the opera workshop class provides students with an essential opportunity for both scene study and performance, the students are not given enough time, especially with training in physical modalities, to develop a secure foundation in their own stage craft.

Throughout the history of the art form, one can find precedent for the importance of the dramatic training of an opera singer. The pre-eminent opera librettist of the

eighteenth century, Pietro Metastasio, believed that the only way to keep the art form alive was “through proper training in acting [and] proper concern for the synthesis of *canto* and *azione* (singing and acting).”<sup>3</sup> More recently, these sentiments appeared in a 2007 lecture at the Chautauqua Institute given by future Metropolitan Opera general director Peter Gelb. Mr. Gelb stated, “[Opera was] meant to be... a pure, theatrical form... a complex but perfect... marriage of music and theatre.”<sup>4</sup> Mr. Gelb further elaborated:

Great artists are those who have in their vocal delivery and in their stage and in their acting the combination of all those elements that make it work... Looking beautiful is not enough, particularly if you can’t act and certainly if you can’t sing. Those artists are not going to be on the stage at the Met.<sup>5</sup>

Through the informed perspectives of these men, one can see that the importance of the dramatic training of an opera singer is not a new or revolutionary concept. Prior to the twentieth century, the dramatic training of the opera singer greatly paralleled that of the actor. During this time, acting was dominated by the presentational style that incorporated various poses and gestures. Each individual pose and gesture was carefully defined and codified in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by individuals such as Gilbert Austin and François Delsarte among others. In his book, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Acting*, Dene Barnett shares a number of diagrams and writings from “contemporaneous sources,”<sup>6</sup> which describe the various poses and gestures in detail, and explain when they should be employed by the actor in

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Savage, “Staging and Opera: Letters from the Caesarian Poet,” *Early Music* 26 (1998): 584-585.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gelb, “The Future of Opera” [audio] (lecture, Chautauqua Institution, August 17, 2007), *The Great Lecture Library*, Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua NY.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Dene Barnett. *The Art of Gesture: The practices and principles of 18<sup>th</sup> century acting*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, (1987): 1.

order to convey a certain emotion to the audience. Gilbert Austin's diagrams in his *Chironomia* show the distinctive positions of the feet and hands as well as a myriad of gestures. Barnett writes, "Austin devised a very effective notation which he used to show the detail of the gestures to be used in declaiming such pieces as Gray's *Elegy*, the Brutus speech from *Julius Caesar*, and Young's *Night Thoughts*."<sup>7</sup> In the appendix of the book, Barnett provides an example of this system of notation, which portrays the drawn figure demonstrating a different pose and gesture for each line of text.

This practice of pose and gesture continued into the nineteenth century with the writings and teachings of opera singer François Delsarte in his system of "Applied Aesthetics."<sup>8</sup> This system was highly respected during the nineteenth century by both opera singers and actors, with many giving Delsarte credit for their success on the operatic and dramatic stages.<sup>9</sup> Delsarte offered singers and actors a wide array of positions and gestures correlating to specific emotions. The performer could then choose which gesture and/or pose he or she felt was appropriate to the text being acted onstage. In his article "How to be an Emperor: Acting Alexander the Great in Opera Seria," for *Early Music*, Richard G. King writes:

This formal, highly codified acting technique made the singer's job easier. Once learned, the gestures could be used again and again. The performer would have "acted them all before, often to the same text (for example, in settings Metastasio's librettos), or even to the same text and music (in the case of baggage arias.)"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, *The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism* (Westport: Greenwood, 1999), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Richard G. King, "How to be an Emperor: Acting Alexander the Great in Opera Seria," *Early Music* 36 (2008), 181-202.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 184.

From this passage, one can surmise that the acting of the operatic performer was rather generic, and only employed the poses necessary for the given type of character he or she was playing. This mode of performance was further compounded by the use of “baggage arias,” a common practice in which a singer would insert his or her favorite aria into any opera and use the same gestures for each performance regardless of the character or plot.

In the early twentieth century, despite the theatre world’s movement toward realism and the development of “the method” by famed acting teacher Constantin Stanislavski, opera singers were encouraged to continue in the older mode of performing. In 1927, Bennett Challis wrote an article entitled, “The Technique of Operatic Acting” for *The Musical Quarterly*, advocating the antiquated acting approach of pose and gesture for opera singers.

The presentation of such a drama, the task of communicating a world of inner conflict and emotion directly to the heart of the listener, will naturally demand a certain technique of its own, in general a technique of large lines, which will make as nearly as possible exhaustive use of the pose, and of that variation of the pose which consists in sustaining a comparatively motionless bodily attitude, if effective, throughout a whole a scene, even while singing. It is a technique, in short, which strives to eliminate all ineffective outer gestures and to produce a maximum of expression with the simplest means, preeminently with utilization of sustained attitudes of the body, among which the dramatic use of the eyes, the deliberately sustained gaze, is perhaps the most important subdivision. Another variation is the *moving* pose, composed of a fixed gaze, shoulders and body as nearly motionless as possible, and a scarcely perceptible, sliding motion of the feet which will suffice, nevertheless, to carry the actor clear across the stage if desired, without breaking the pose, the impression of which is after all invariably centered in the eyes.<sup>11</sup>

While a detailed explanation of this method would require its own lengthy study, one fact remains obvious; this type of “acting” in opera is rarely seen today, except perhaps in the highly stylized opera productions of directors such as Robert Wilson. As the century

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<sup>11</sup> Bennett Challis, “The Technique of Operatic Acting,” *The Musical Quarterly* 13 (1927), 633-634.

progressed, this style of acting was watered-down to a style dubbed, “park and bark,” in which the singer stands in one place and sings, occasionally making a gesture to bring out a certain word or thought, and changes position at the director’s request to make a more beautiful stage picture. It is important to note that there has been many singers who were naturally gifted actors, who dazzled audiences with both musically and dramatically compelling performances onstage. In modern times, performers and directors alike have strived to achieve a more natural, operatic acting style. With the advent of telecasts and now high-definition simulcasts of opera performances from the world’s leading opera houses, opera singers are expected to act and look in a way that is dramatically plausible, while continuing to sing some of the most difficult repertoire beautifully and freely.

In order to convey the wide spectrum of emotions a principal operatic character experiences and still be able to sing beautifully and healthfully, a young singer must be trained initially in ways that are specific to this mode of performance. In his work with singers in the Opera Studio of the Bolshoi Theatre, Constantin Stanislavski initially focused on the following:

Here he put two main objectives before the young actor-singers. The first was to achieve expressive, incisive diction, thanks to which they could convey clearly and colorfully the words they sang. “Fifty percent of our success depends on diction. Not a single word must fail to reach the audience.” That was the “leitmotiv” of Stanislavski’s work with singers. The second objective was the complete freeing of their bodies from all involuntary tensions and pressures, for the purpose of achieving easy, simple handling of themselves onstage.<sup>12</sup>

While the first objective is frequently covered in both voice lessons and diction courses for the singer, the second objective is not often addressed specifically in the dramatic training of singers. I believe that a movement-oriented approach is necessary for

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<sup>12</sup> Constantin Stanislavski and Pavel Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 4.

training singers dramatically, by teaching them how to use their bodies in a way that both enhances the dramatic element of their performance and does not adversely affect their vocal production. In a documentary about her career, American soprano Renee Fleming speaks of performances in which she experienced emotional agony from portraying the emotions her character onstage, only to be approached by friends and audience members later who told her that she “needed to work on her acting.” This prompted Fleming to an understanding that in order to project her acting past the footlights, she needed to use her entire body to convincingly display the character’s emotions, and not just feel them internally.<sup>13</sup> This is reminiscent of my experiences as a teaching assistant in opera workshop classes, as I often encountered singers who psychologically understood his or her character’s emotions, but had no physical language in which he or she could exhibit them while maintaining vocal poise. This led me to look more closely at various movement methodologies from the theatrical world, such as Vsevolod Meyerhold’s Biomechanics, Michael Chekhov’s exercise of Psychological Gesture, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s Viewpoints, the training methods of Suzuki Tadashi and Jacques Lecoq, and various improvisation techniques. I also examined several embodiment and awareness methods such as Yoga, the Alexander Technique, and Feldenkrais Method, all of which have found footing in the voice studio and theatre movement class.

In addition to the physical training, a major unit of the course will be devoted to training the singer in period movement and style. As time has passed, American culture in general has become more casual in terms of how we dress and interact with each other. Thus, young performers often have great difficulty transcending their twenty-first century physicality in an eighteenth-century Mozart opera. It is imperative that an opera singer

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<sup>13</sup> Tony Parker, director, *Renee Fleming*, DVD, (London: Decca, 2002).

be well versed in the conventions of the period in which the character he or she is portraying lives. This section will address not only movement issues dictated by the period's dress, but also social conventions, cultural ideals, manners, furniture and other issues which would help the performer gain an understanding of the era.

The curriculum outlined later in this document is by no means intended to take the place of the opera workshop course, but rather, help lay a foundation for singer-actors from a physical standpoint, and provide understanding and development of the whole body as an instrument of expression. This will ensure the performer greater ease, expressiveness, and adaptability in the acting training inherent in the in the opera workshop curriculum, and will allow for more extensive scene and role study to take place.

## Review of Related Literature

*In this section I will present various approaches to movement training in established movement methodologies, by examining the research and writings of leading authorities in this field, as well as empirical data showing the benefits of each method of training for the singing-actor.*

### Biomechanics

**Braun, Edward, ed. *Meyerhold on Theater*. London: Methuen, 1991.**

This book offers translations of many of the writings and speeches of Vsevolod Meyerhold, which allows the reader some insight to this famous Russian actor and director's creative process and views on theatre and cinema. The book is organized chronologically, with some biographical information provided when it helps illuminate Meyerhold's writings and commentary on his art.

There is a chapter devoted solely to the explanation of his physical training for actors, known as "Biomechanics," which he developed in his work as Director of the State Higher Theatre Workshop in the early 1920s. It is enlightening to read translations of Meyerhold's lectures on Biomechanics, as they provide the reader with a clear understanding of his reasoning for the development of this method of training. Though initially a student of Constantin Stanislavski, Meyerhold left the esteemed teacher's tutelage, and began to explore a more physical approach to dramatic training. Meyerhold initially compared the training of actors to that of a skilled industrial worker. A transcription of one of Meyerhold's lectures at the Moscow Conservatoire reads:

If we observe a skilled worker in action, we notice the following in his movements: (1) an absence of superfluous, unproductive movements; (2) rhythm; (3) the correct positioning of the body's centre of gravity; (4) stability. Movements based on these principles are distinguished by their dance-like quality; a skilled worker at work invariably reminds one of a

dancer; thus work borders on art. The spectacle of a man working efficiently affords positive pleasure. This applies equally to the work of the actor of the future. (198)

While the references to the industrial worker could have been a ploy to adhere to the ideals of the Soviet Union and its embrace of the “new mechanized age,” one can see that the four attributes of the industrial worker are desirable pursuits for the actor in terms of how the body is used. Meyerhold further explained that the actor is both the “organizer and that which is organized (i.e. the artist and his material)” (198). Therefore, Meyerhold held the belief that the actor must train his body (the material) so that he may be able efficiently carry out the tasks given by either the actor or the director (the artist). He explained this concept in the equation  $N = A1 + A2$  ( $N$  = the actor;  $A1$  = the artist who “conceives the idea and issues the instructions necessary for its execution”;  $A2$  = the body which must bring the instructions to life). Braun writes that it appears that Meyerhold developed his exercises from many sources including theatrical traditions. From them, the actors learned to analyze their own body use and movement, and found more efficient ways to engage their bodies when performing a task.

While this book provides a thorough philosophical understanding of the method, one could wish for more in depth explanations of the twenty-two exercises employed in the training to have been included in this book. Only one exercise, “Bow and arrow” is explained in detail. However, it is important to note that due to the popularity and wide spread acceptance of Meyerhold’s “Biomechanics,” Braun reports that systemized physical training was incorporated into every Soviet Drama School as a result of Meyerhold’s work.

**Kubik, Marianne, “Biomechanics: Understanding Meyerhold’s System of Actor Training.” *Movement for Actors*, Nicole Potter, editor. New York: Allworth Press, 2002.**

In her succinct but informative essay, Marianne Kubik offers the reader a greater sense of how Biomechanics could be implemented at a practical level in a movement curriculum. Her experience with the training is based on her study with Gennadi Bogdanov, who was one of eight students who trained with actor Nikolai Kustov, who himself studied directly under Meyerhold. Initially, Kubik offers background information on Meyerhold, as well as the presentation and further explanation of the philosophical ideas behind the technique.

Kubik’s explanations of Meyerhold’s terminology used in describing the various parts of an action, as well as her description of several Biomechanics exercises, are extremely valuable. In discussing Meyerhold’s analysis of action, she writes, “Meyerhold further observed that there exist three basic parts to every action: the preparation for the action, the action itself, and the precise end of the action.” (7) Thus, each action is broken down into its separate parts allowing the actor to learn how to perform this action with greater ease and efficiency, which will in turn give the actor to the physical means necessary to execute what his mind and emotions ask of him. The main focus of the four exercises Kubik presents is for the actor “to find equilibrium in space while pushing the limits of his own natural movement” (9). The exercises are clearly explained, and will prove to be immensely helpful in the movement class.

## Psychological Gesture

**Chekhov, Michael. *On the Technique of Acting*. Preface and afterward by Marla Powers. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.**

Renowned actor/director/teacher Michael Chekhov outlines his acting technique in this text. This book is an expanded edition of Chekhov's previous publication *To the Actor*, containing more of the original manuscript and acting exercises. A fascinating account of Chekhov's artistic life is given in the introduction, which tells of his somewhat tumultuous relationship with another famed acting teacher, Constantin Stanislavsky, and the development of Chekhov's teachings. As opposed to Stanislavsky's use of emotional recall, Chekhov's pervading technique is developing the actor's use of imagination coupled with physical expressiveness in order to alter his or her own physicality into that of the character.

Multiple exercises are provided in this book to aid in this training. One of the more intriguing concepts presented is that of the Psychological Gesture, in which the actor finds one whole body gesture to represent the inner psychology and objective of the character he or she is portraying. There are various components of the exercise, and one part that I believe will speak to singing-actors initially is listening to a piece of music, and finding a Psychological Gestures that fits the actors' perception of the inner movement of the music. After the student has had time to explore Psychological Gesture through music, he or she will then move on to incorporating this into an aria. However, prior to the exploration of Psychological Gesture, the student should explore their instrument through Chekhov's exercises in staccato, legato, expansion, contraction, molding, flowing, flying, and radiating movement. An appealing facet of Chekhov's

training is that it combines the psychological and physical aspects of performance in each exercise.

### The Alexander Technique

**Alexander, Frederick Matthias.** *The Use of the Self: Its Conscious Direction in Relation to Diagnosis Functioning and the Control of Reaction.* London: Orion Books Ltd, 2001.

This book offers a thorough explanation of the Alexander Technique by the man who developed it. While the principles and their rationale are clearly explained, this is not a “how-to” book. The author states that one must work with a trained instructor to fully incorporate the technique into one’s life as a performer.

In introducing his technique, Alexander first describes the compelling reason that forced it into existence. As an actor, he would frequently suffer chronic bouts of laryngitis following his performances. Many doctors would prescribe rest, which would help for a short period, but eventually the laryngitis would reappear once he started performing his recitations again. These experiences inspired Alexander to observe himself while reciting his lines using a three-way mirror system. Through his observation, he discovered various habits that contributed to his vocal ailment. Alexander writes, “I saw that as soon as I started to recite, I tended to pull back the head, depress the larynx and suck in breath through the mouth in such a way as to produce a gasping sound” (26). After making these observations, Alexander decided to “inhibit” this pattern of movement when approaching the task of reciting, and re-educating his body to take on a new pattern of movement that was less tense and therefore less harmful to his voice. He soon found that this method could be applied to multiple areas of life,

and further developed his technique to help others become aware and re-educate their patterns of movement in everyday tasks. The area of focus when “re-training” movement, mainly revolves around the position of the head (the “primary control”) encouraging the feeling that it is moving forward and up allowing for greater length in the neck, as opposed to back and down which throws the neck out of alignment.

While there are many other books on the Alexander Technique that do explain the various exercises and their applicability for singers and actors, it is interesting to read the creator’s own words about this technique and the myriad of benefits it provides for all aspects of life.

**Brennan, Richard. *The Alexander Technique Manual: A step-by-step guide to improve breathing, posture and well-being.* Boston: Journey Editions, 1996.**

If someone were unfamiliar with the Alexander Technique, this book would serve as an excellent introduction to the method. The information is presented in a very accessible manner, and there are many pictures illustrating various points the author is trying to make.

In addition to explaining the development of the Alexander Technique, there are abundant exercises provided that are designed to help one release unnecessary tension in the body. In addition, methods are provided to assist a myriad normal body tasks such as sitting, standing, getting up from the ground, etc... all with a minimal amount of effort from the body. Again, detailed pictures are provided to help the reader understand what the author is carefully describing in the text. While it is always best to work with a certified Alexander teacher, this book gives the reader an excellent foundation when beginning to research the technique.

One particular exercise described in the book that I would employ often in class is that of the “semi-supine position” or “constructive rest.” For a period of about five minutes, the student lies on the floor on his or her back with the knees bent and feet flat on the floor. A book or two may be used underneath the head for comfort. The teacher then asks the student to feel certain sensations, using phrases such as “think of your entire back widening and lengthening,” to facilitate the release of unnecessary tension. This would be an excellent exercise to begin and end a class with, as it focuses on reducing muscular tension throughout the entire body, particularly in the neck and shoulder area as well as the lower back. According to the author, this exercise will also aid in feeling more length in the spine, and helps improve breathing and circulation.

**Heirich, Jane Ruby. *Voice and the Alexander Technique*. Berkeley, CA: Mornum Time Press, 2005.**

According to the author, there is a two-fold purpose to this book: introduce voice professionals to the Alexander technique, and introduce the Alexander community to the world of vocal study. Ms. Heirich writes, “I have used the speaking and singing voice as the medium for introducing basic principles of the Alexander work” (xvi). She further elaborates about how the principles and exercises introduced will lead to “a freeing up of sound and movement” (xvi).

While much of the book deals with vocal technique issues outside the scope of a movement class, there are many activities that aid in finding physical “release” while incorporating singing, which would prove beneficial in a movement class for opera singers. Heirich builds on traditional Alexander Technique exercises such as “constructive rest,” by incorporating the use of voice. She prepares students through the

use of another Alexander exercise known as the “whispered ah,” which allows them to initiate sound in a manner that is in keeping with the Alexander Technique’s primary goals. Through the exercises presented, students will be able to gain both the benefits of the Alexander Technique, and concurrently learn how to use their voices with a greater sense of ease.

**McEvenue, Kelly. *The Actor and Alexander Technique*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.**

In the introduction of this book, the author argues that the Alexander Technique will help actors negotiate the physical needs and challenges of performance roles. In the introduction the author writes, “Since the physical body is the actor’s instrument of expression, it is vital that he is tuned in and aware of his corporeal versatility and flexibility. The Alexander work will heighten the actor’s awareness of his physical habits and stimulate the actor’s consciousness of how he may redirect his energy.” Furthermore, the author claims that through this awareness, actors will have a wider range of choices he or she can select from when developing a character.

While this book is primarily meant for actors, many of the exercises presented would work very well for singers, especially given the growing trend of emphasizing the physical aspect of performance on the operatic stage. The usual information is provided in terms of the basic principles and history of the technique, but the author additionally provides an Alexander based warm-up for the actor, as well as partner work, which would be highly effective in a movement class setting. Another topic of interest is the brief section on how the Alexander Technique can help women playing “trouser roles.”

## The Feldenkrais Method

**Feldenkrais, Moshe. *Awareness through Movement: Easy-to-do Health Exercises to Improve Your Posture, Vision, Imagination, and Personal Awareness*. New York: Harper Collins, 1972.**

This book provides an introduction to the Feldenkrais Method written by the man who developed it, physicist Moshe Feldenkrais. The book is divided into two sections, the first, “Understanding While Doing,” provides the philosophical principals behind the development of the method, as well as ideas for practical implementation. The aim of the method is to help build one’s self-awareness through movement. In many ways, the goals of the Feldenkrais Method reflect those of the Alexander Technique. The key difference however, lies in how the method is taught, and there are two main techniques in teaching Feldenkrais Method. The first is known as “Function Integration” (FI), which involves one-on-one work between an individual and a Feldenkrais trained instructor in an effort to help the client become more self-aware of his or her movement patterns. This is very similar to the lessons in Alexander Technique. The other technique, however, is known as “Awareness Through Movement” (ATM), and in this setting a Feldenkrais instructor works with a group, leading them through movement exercises that will yield a greater sense of self-awareness and ease of motion. The ATM exercises will prove particularly useful in the movement classroom, as they are designed to be used in a group setting.

The second part of the book is entitled, “Doing to Understand: Twelve Practical Lessons.” In this portion, Feldenkrais selected twelve lessons “from among more than a thousand given at the Feldenkrais Institute” (55) and writes, “The lessons do not represent a sequence, but were chosen rather to illustrate points from the author’s system,

and the technique used to convey it” (55). Prior to the detailed explanation of each lesson, Feldenkrais offers some general observations and practical advice on how to implement the lesson concepts into one’s own life.

**Nelson, Samuel H. and Elizabeth Blades-Zeller. *Singing with your whole self: The Feldenkrais Method and Voice*. Ann Arbor, MI: Scarecrow Press, 2002.**

In the preface of this book, the authors write of the importance of developing a singer’s sense of kinesthetic sensitivity, which they feel has been neglected in other written works on vocal pedagogy. One way to help develop this sense, they posit, is the use of an advanced sensory motor learning system, known as the Feldenkrais Method. After presenting a basic overview of the method, the authors address specific areas of the body and offer various “Awareness through Movement” (ATM) group movement exercises to help the reader release excess tension as well as develop his or her own sense of kinesthetic awareness. I believe that early in the movement class training, it would be valuable to devote a section of each class to the ATM exercises associated with one area of the body, helping students find release and ease. While the ATM exercises presented do not incorporate singing, they do all address areas in the body that are imperative to singing, such as the singer’s base of support (the legs and feet), the head and neck, and breath among others. There are a few interesting sections in the appendix, including an index of the lessons presented in the text, as well as information on how one can use the lessons in a group setting or in rehearsal.

## Suzuki Theatre Training

**Carruthers, Ian and Takahashi Yasunari. *The Theater of Tadashi Suzuki*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.**

This book serves primarily as a study of Japan's best-known director Tadashi Suzuki. The author provides an informative history of Suzuki's work in the theatre, as well as a look at his approach to several traditional Japanese plays, Greek drama, Chekhov, and Shakespeare. While the aforementioned sections are fascinating and provide a window into the esteemed director's creative process, what is most applicable is the chapter devoted to explaining Suzuki's physical training for actors, where detailed explanations are given for each discipline or exercise, which would prove helpful in implementing them into a lesson plan. The disciplines are designed to give the actor "strength and control he can use as he wants" (72). Many of the exercises are preoccupied with the use of the feet, and the various ways in which they make contact with the ground. Carruthers quotes Suzuki's explanation of this aspect of his training:

The way in which the feet are used is the basis of a staged performance. Even the movements of the arms and hands can only augment the feeling inherent in the body positions established by the feet. There are many cases in which the position of the feet determines even the strength and nuance of the actor's voice (71).

As part of the training, there are ten different types of walking, including forwards and sideways varieties, and they can all be performed backwards as well. Each explores a different aspect of the relation between the performer's feet and their contact with the floor.

While all of the Suzuki disciplines are very effective in the physical training and conditioning of actors, in my own brief experience with Suzuki training, I have found

both “Shakuhachi” and “Statues” to be extremely effective exercises. “Shakuhachi” challenges the actor to move from lying down to standing in slow motion, and walk downstage in the same slow motion (a slow walking pattern known as ten-tekka-ten), the whole time being drawn by an image in the distance that the actor creates. After dealing with the image, the actor returns, slowly to where he or she began the exercise. The actor need not “do” anything, but the audience can clearly see who is actively pursuing his or her image, and who is just walking slowly. “Statues” on the other hand is a vigorous discipline in which the actor quickly moves from a squatting position to a standing “statue” on the command “High” or to a crouching “statue” on the command “Low.” While this is a tremendous workout for the thighs, it also forces the actor to notice his or her habitual patterns and gestures, which in early work tend to all be the same. There are also “sitting statue” exercises which offer a vigorous abdominal workout.

One could criticize the author for not using more pictures to give the reader a better understanding of the exercises, but the explanations themselves are very concise and well written.

### Viewpoints

**Bogart, Anne and Tina Landau. *The Viewpoints Book*. New York: Theater Communications Group, 2005.**

In the preface the authors state, “This is not a book on theory, but a practical how-to guide through the stages and applications of the work” (ix). The first few chapters offer succinct explanations of the development of the technique through the choreography of Mary Overlie, its expansion by the authors to apply to stage actors, the

concept of “Viewpoints and Composition,” as well as the problems inherent in the current system of American training for actors, and how the Viewpoints technique can help. In offering a concise definition of this method, the authors write:

Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage. Viewpoints is a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage. Viewpoints are points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working (7-8).

The following chapters then explain how one can implement this technique in a group setting, offering beginning exercises, and an introduction of the nine individual viewpoints with exercises for each. Exercises to put the individual viewpoints together are offered as well. The viewpoints are grouped into two categories: Viewpoints of Time (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response and repetition), and Viewpoints of Space (shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography). The authors advocate the idea that most, if not all, of the Viewpoints are featured through their exercises in a single session. The detailed explanations of each exercise are concise and assessable, and the authors provide practical, convenient information to instructors on various pitfalls to avoid during the exercises.

Through the application and adoption of these Viewpoints, the authors identify the following benefits or “gifts” that are derived from Viewpoints. These include: **surrender** (through this process the performer will learn to let something occur onstage, rather than make something occur), **possibility** (helps the performer recognize and remove the limitations he or she places upon him or herself), **choice and freedom** (the exercises build greater awareness, which leads to greater choice, which leads to greater freedom), **growth** (through building awareness, the performer will discover their

limitations and will have the option to change and grow), and **wholeness** (a performer will learn to listen all the senses) (19-20). The authors believe that Viewpoints will lead one to emotion, not away from it, and as through other movement and acting methods, the performer will learn to be “alive and engaged onstage” (80).

In addition to the many exercises devoted to teaching the various Viewpoints, one chapter is entitled “Working with Music,” and it provides some very good exercises which might prove extremely effective in working with singing-actors once they have been introduced to the general Viewpoints exercises. The authors even suggest composers and musical artists for Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Viewpoints students.

## Yoga

**Carman, Judith E. *Yoga for Singing: A Developmental Tool for Technique and Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2012.**

Among the many books about yoga, this particular book presents a unique, and valuable perspective, as the author is a voice teacher as well as a certified yoga instructor. In the opening chapter, the author points out the intimate connection between yoga and singing, and how yoga can aid singers throughout all phases of their singing lives. The author writes, “An exploration of these connections for singers of every age and level of training and experience shows how the application of yoga practices works in building vocal technique and grounding the art of performance.” Throughout the book, the author presents various yoga methods that help strengthen specific areas of the body necessary for singing, reinforce the concepts of breath necessary for healthy production of the

voice, and build the concentration necessary to maintain the intense mental stamina needed for this art form.

One area of particular interest is how the author incorporates humming and vocalizing into yoga sequences. These exercises may aid the singer's transition from the physical training to full performance, which is the aim of a movement course. There is also a companion website to this book, for which the author provides a username and password. Video examples of the various methods are presented, as well as some of the sequences the author describes in the book, and a short demonstration class. The website also provides the musical notation for the different vocal exercises incorporated in the yoga sequences.

**Kirk, Martin, Brooke Boon, and Daniel DiTuro. *Hatha Yoga Illustrated: For greater strength, flexibility, and focus*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2006.**

As the title states, this book offers an illustrated guide to hatha yoga, or “sun and moon” yoga (xiii). In the opening chapter, the authors provide background information about the practice of yoga as well as how one may derive the many advantages the discipline has to offer. In describing the benefits of Hatha yoga, author and photographer Daniel DiTuro writes, “Hatha yoga can calm the mind, provide a gentle workout, or make you sweat. It can reduce your heart rate when you are stressed or elevate it by providing a vigorous workout... documented medical benefits of yoga include increased strength and stamina, relief of stress and anxiety, and lowered blood pressure” (ix; xiv).

The following chapters provide “detailed information for the 77 asanas classified by the type of posture.” What is extremely helpful is that each asana has photographs clearly showing the beginning middle and final positions with detailed instructions. Also

included are the physical and mental benefits as well as the “contraindications” which allow one to understand any “necessary variations or precautions for performing certain poses.”

The final chapter of the book shows eleven hatha yoga routines that could easily be adopted into a movement class. In addition to all of the wonderful explanations of each asana, there is a section in the opening chapter on diaphragmatic breathing, which is just as applicable to singing as it is to yoga.

### **Improvisation**

**Lecoq, Jacques, et al. *The Moving Body*. Translated by David Bradby. New York: Routledge, 2000.**

In this book, famed actor, mime, and acting teacher, Jacques Lecoq explains his philosophy of performance through his use of improvisation, masks, movement, and gesture. After a brief biographical section, which highlights Lecoq’s own development as an artist, the book is divided into sections on improvisation, movement technique, gestural languages, and the main dramatic territories (melodrama, commedia dell’arte, bouffons, tragedy, and clowns), as well as an introduction to his Laboratory for the Study of Movement (LEM). In each section, exercises are provided that can be implemented into a movement curriculum. There is also a very helpful glossary provided, which explains terms that are unique to Lecoq’s training system.

The neutral mask and improvisation exercises are particularly appealing for a movement class of singing-actors. A singer’s main mode of expression is that of the face, however, in wearing a neutral mask, all facial movement evoking feeling is taken

away, leaving the body as the main means of communication. Lecoq writes, “With an actor wearing the neutral mask, you look at the whole body. The look is the mask, so the face becomes the whole body. Every movement is revealed as powerfully expressive” (38). He goes on to describe how to introduce the mask to the group, as well as various improvisational exercises one could perform with the mask. From his account of these exercises, there would be tremendous opportunity in class for students to share their own experiences utilizing the neutral mask.

Lecoq also describes several other improvisational activities that include words, poetry and music. An interesting facet of these activities is using the translations of a single word in several languages, allowing the students’ impression of the language dictate their improvised movement. Lecoq notes that these activities aided his own students in foreign language acquisition. His improvisation activities in poetry would prove helpful for singers, allowing them to bring in a foreign language text to an art song or aria to serve as their impetus for improvised movement. It is interesting to note that Lecoq never showed students what they should or should not do, but rather provided a framework wherein students could explore. In the forward to this book, Simon McBurney writes, “Contrary to what people often think, he had no style to propose. He offered no solutions. He only posed questions” (ix). I believe this is a necessary step in aiding a young performer in learning to trust his or her intuition on stage.

**Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963.**

Well-respected as a theater educator, the author provides many theater games in this book and gives meaningful advice on how to coach these activities as the teacher.

There are several sections in the book with activities to help develop the actor's sense of awareness, particularly through games focusing on listening and seeing.

Another interesting section is entitled "Acting with the Whole Body," in which the author provides both exercises for specific parts of the body, as well as those for total body involvement. Singers are often accustomed to only using their face as the primary means of expression, and these non-threatening games could help the singer develop his/her sense of expression throughout the whole body.

### **Period Movement**

**Russell, Douglas A. *Period Style for the Theater, Second Edition*. Ann Arbor, MI: Allyn and Bacon, 1987.**

This book is an invaluable guide to anyone looking for information on traditions, customs and sensibilities of different historical eras. In the preface the author states, "This text probes the inner life and feelings of a particular period style," which provides actors, directors and designers a context on which to base their work. Beginning with the ancient world up through modern style, the author provides a general discussion of art in context of the culture of the specific period, with a brief section on musical styles, life and cultural ideals, interiors and furniture, costume and accessories, manners and movement, the theatre, the plays, and the challenges in acting, directing and designing the plays of the period. An added bonus for the instructor is the inclusion of potential project ideas further exploring each period. There is also an annotated bibliography provided at the end of each chapter, providing more resources on the particular period discussed. While this is not a "how to" guide, it does provide a framework that actors, directors and designers can use to guide their work in a certain historical/stylistic period.

## **Instructional Strategies**

In employing the methodologies previously described, the curriculum of the first semester will be divided into three main sections: 1) Physical release and awareness, 2) Physical Training, 3) Improvisation and Application. While initially the classes will focus on the first section of Physical release and awareness through activities based in the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Method, I will begin to incorporate the physical training aspect of the course through the adoption of yoga, the Suzuki exercises, Viewpoints exercises, and Biomechanics. Part of each class will also be devoted to the improvisation exercises found in Lecoq's method of movement training as well as other improvisation exercises. There will be specific exercises employed using Lecoq's neutral mask and Chekhov's Psychological Gesture.

In the second semester, each class will begin with exercises aiding in physical awareness and release, physical training, and will continue to explore improvisation, but the main focus will be learning period movement and applying it to short scene assignments from opera and plays. The opera excerpts consist primarily of recitative scenes. The students will be able to bring in repertoire from their applied voice lessons for some assignments. Students will also learn various dances that are often used in operatic productions.

## Sample Lesson Plans

Below are four sample lesson plans, three from the first semester, and one from the second semester, describing in detail the activities of each class.

### Sample Lesson Plan #1 – Semester 1, Week 2, Day One

#### **Warm-up:**

(in a circle)

Yoga: Sun Salutation 3 times

First time with 2-3 breaths in each position

Second and Third Time on the breath

**Objective:** This sequence is known to be an excellent warm-up routine for the body, be it for a yoga routine or the start to one's day. In addition to the stretching and strength training this routine provides, it will help the individual find mental focus and coordinate the movement and breath.

Sun Salutation Sequence:

1. Mountain
2. Mountain (arms overhead)
3. Standing Forward Bend
4. Lunge
5. Plank
6. Cobra
7. Downward-Facing Dog
8. Lunge
9. Standing Forward Bend
10. Mountain (arms overhead)
11. Mountain

#### **Awareness and Release:**

Awareness Through Movement (ATM): Balance in Standing

(Exercise taken from *Singing with Your Whole Self: The Feldenkrais Method and Voice*, by Samuel H. Nelson and Elizabeth Blades-Zeller, pages 35-40)

**Objective:** This Feldenkrais sequence will aid the student in establishing and retaining a dynamic sense of balance.

1. Standing with your feet shoulder width apart. How does this feel? Do you feel balanced? Supported? **Shift your weight (pelvis) left and right several times.** How evenly did this happen? How easy was this? **Move weight forward and back several times.** Pause.

2. **Place your right foot directly in front of the left foot.** (A chair may be used for stability.) **Put most of your weight on the left foot. Shift your weight to the front of the left foot then back to center.** Repeat at least five times. Then pause with your weight still on the center of left foot. **Shift weight to the rear of the left foot and then back to the center.** Repeat at least five times. Pause and balance your weight between the two feet for a moment.
3. **Put most of your weight on the left foot. Shift the weight from the front to the rear of your foot.** Repeat this seven to nine times. Where are you shifting weight? Do several of the above shifts with the pelvis and a few concentrating on the ankle. What feels best to you? **Pause. Put your right foot parallel to the left and rest a minute.** Which leg seems to support you better?
4. **Place your right foot directly in front of your left foot. Put most of your weight on the right foot. Shift your weight to the back of the right foot and then back to its center.** Repeat this at least 5 times. Pause. **Shift your weight to the front of the right foot and then back to the center.** Repeat this at least 5 times. Pause and balance the weight between the two feet for a moment.
5. **Put most of your weight on the right foot. Shift the weight from the front to the rear of your foot.** Repeat this seven to nine times. Notice how you do this and try at least one other way. Put your right foot parallel with the left. **Move forward and back a few times.** How does this feel now? Pause and rest for a moment.
6. **Place your right foot directly in front of your left foot. Put your weight on your left foot. Move the weight to the outside of the left foot and back to center.** Repeat at least five times and then pause with the weight in the center. **Now move the weight onto the left foot. Shift it from the center to the inside and back.** Repeat this five to seven times. Rest with your feet parallel to each other.
7. **Place your right foot in front of your left foot. Put your weight on your left foot. Move the weight forward and then make a circle with your weight over the foot.** Repeat this at least five times. Note the direction you chose. Recall how it feels.  
**Reverse direction.** Circle at least five times. Is this as easy as the other direction? Usually we choose the easiest route without even thinking about it. Stop.  
**Place your feet side by side. Move your pelvis left and right a few times.** Is it easier to go in one direction? Rest for a minute.
8. **Place your right foot directly in front of you left foot. Put your weight on your right foot. Move the weight to the inside of the right foot and back to the center.** Repeat this at least five times and then pause with the weight in the center. Move the weight onto the right foot. **Move the weight to the outside of**

**the foot and back.** Repeat this four to six times. Rest with your feet parallel to each other.

9. **Place your right foot in front of your left foot. Put the weight on the right foot. Make a circle with your weight over the foot.** Repeat at least five times. Allow the circle to be rounder each time. **Reverse direction.** Repeat at least five times. Is this circle as round as the one in the other direction? Stop. **Place your feet side by side. Move your pelvis forward and back.** Pause. Compare this to when you began. **Move side to side.** Compare this to how it was initially. Stop for a minute.
10. **Place your left foot in front of your right foot. Place a hand on a chair if you need support. Put the weight on the right foot. Move the weight from the center to the front of the foot. Now move the weight from the front through the center to the back of the foot and back.** Repeat this ten times. Go slower and slower each time. Pause.
11. **Put your weight onto your right foot. Move the weight to the inside of the right foot then back through the center to the outside. Go back and forth from the inside of the foot to the outside.** Repeat this ten times. Does this weight shift become easier each time? Pause, place your feet parallel to each other, and rest a minute. Notice any differences between your right and left sides. Pay special attention to differences between your right and left sides. Pay special attention to differences between your two feet.
12. **Place your left foot in front of your right foot. Put the weight onto the left foot. Move the weight from the center to the front of the foot. Next move the weight to the back of the foot and return to the front.** Repeat this ten times. Notice where you shift your weight and explore shifting from other places. Pause.
13. **Put your weight onto your left foot. Move the weight to the inside of the left foot then back through the center to the outside. Go back and forth from the inside of the foot to the outside.** Repeat this ten times. See how gentle you can be with yourself as you do this. Pause. **Place your feet side by side. Move forward and back.** How is this compared to when you began? Pause and rest for a minute. Notice how balanced you feel. Compare this to when you began.
14. **Place your left foot in front of your right foot. Put the weight onto the left foot. Move the weight from the front to the back of the left foot twice.** Pause. **Now move the weight between the inside and the outside of the foot twice.** Pause. **Make a circle with the weight on the left foot.** Notice the direction of this circle. Go around seven to nine times. See if you can make each movement more circular or easier. Pause. **Make a circle in the opposite direction to the one you just made.** Go around at least six times. Pause and place your feet parallel. Rest a minute.

15. **Place your left foot in front of your right foot. Put the weight onto the right foot. Move the weight from the front to the back of the right foot twice.**

Pause. **Now move the weight from the inside to the outside of the foot twice.**

Pause. **Make a circle with the weight on the right foot.** Go around seven to nine times. Pause. **Make a circle in the opposite direction to the one you just made.** Go around at least six times. Pause and place your feet parallel. Rest a minute.

16. Imagine that you are trying to balance a plate on your head. **Make a circle with your pelvis without moving either your head or your feet.** Go around five to seven times. Pause. **Now make a circle in the opposite direction.** Go around at least six times. Pause. Notice how balanced you feel now. **Move your weight forward and back several times.** Compare to when you began. Pause. **Move your weight left and right.** Again compare with how it was initially. Stop and rest a minute. Then walk and observe how you feel. Note your balance from time to time as you resume your normal activities.

### **Yoga Sequence:**

Balance (learn new asanas)

(Taken from *Yoga for Singing* by Judith E. Carman)

**Objective:** The student will be able to utilize his or her new found balance from the Feldenkrais exercise in this balance-oriented yoga sequence.

Balance Sequence:

1. Mountain
2. Mountain toe balance variations ( x2 alternate sides)
3. Tree (stay 2-4 breaths each side)
4. Standing Big Toe Holding (stay 2-4 breaths each side)
5. Forward bend (halfway x3, arms alternately forward, both forward, stay 2 breaths; full bend, stay 4 breaths)
6. One-footed Forward Bend (stay 2-4 breaths each side)
7. Warrior (x2 each side; stay 2 breaths)
8. Warrior, balance variation (stay 2-4 breaths each side)
9. Kneeling Forward Bend (x2, symmetrical compensation)
10. Ruddy Goose with arm and leg lifts (x6, alternating opposite arm and leg lifts)
11. Cobra (x4; stay 2 breaths)
12. Supine Forward Bend (compensation; x4)

## Introduction to Biomechanics

Give brief introduction to Vsevolod Meyerhold and Biomechanics

Explain different parts of the acting cycle:

1. Otkaz: a refusal, a reversal
2. Posyl: a sending out, to, or away
3. Tormoz: a break
4. Tochaka: a point or dot  
- or -  
Stoika: a stop or stance
5. Pauza: a pause, or interval

Give example with different parts from above identified:

Pitching a baseball

1. Otkaz: Windup
2. Posyl: Throw/release of ball
3. Tormoz: energy begins to dissipate: pitcher's body still active as ball heads toward catcher
4. Tochka: end of complete action: the ball meets the catcher's glove
5. Pauza: energy of action dissipates: ball settles into the catcher's glove

### Meyerhold exercises:

(Exercises from "Biomechanics: Understanding Meyerhold's System of Actor Training" by Marianne Kubik, in *Movement for Actors*, edited by Nicole Potter; pages 10-12)

**Objective:** These exercises will aid the students in identifying parts of Meyerhold's acting cycle.

### Stomping the Feet

This is one of the simplest exercises with which to understand the integration of the three basic elements of the acting cycle: *otkaz*, *posyl*, and *tochka*. Lift the right foot with the intent of stepping down into the floor. Place the ball of the right foot strongly on the floor, followed by the heel. Alternate left and right sides continually until you find an organic rhythm to the movement. Be careful to lift the leg and foot energetically but only as high as you need to execute the main action of stomping the foot down. You will execute stronger movements and find better balance and support by using your knees as springs, releasing tension in your torso and grounding your center.

Once the stomping becomes familiar in the body, you can begin to break it down into its acting cycle of *otkaz*, *posyl*, and *tochka*. The action (*posyl*) is stepping down on the ball of the foot, but in order to do so, you must first lift the foot in preparation (*otkaz*). The *otkaz*, lifting the foot, acts as a pickup beat to the downbeat of placing the foot down, and together, they are counted as "and one." The heel meeting the floor marks the end, or period, of the action (*tochka*) and is,

therefore, separate from placing the ball of the foot down. Together, the *otkaz*, *posyl* and *tochka* are counted “and one, two.”

Return to firm stomping of each foot into the floor, utilizing this count as you lift the right foot, place the ball, then the heel; lift the left foot, place the ball, then the heel; and so on (“and one, two,” “and one, two,” etc.). A tendency to speed up means that the heel is not making solid contact with the floor, and you are passing through the *tochka* of the action rather than clearly defining it.

### **Moving to a Point**

The addition of the *tormoz* and *pauza* to the acting cycle is better understood with this exercise. Fix your eyes and face on a specific point across the room; perhaps it is a poster on the wall, a speck of dust on the floor, or a ceiling light. Walk determinedly to that point and stop as close to it as you can, bringing your arm and hand up like a crossing guard would signal “stop.” It is important that the action of this “stop” signal be initiated from the torso through the shoulder, elbow, and hand. The hand does not come upward in front of you but outward as if you are firmly and slowly pushing the space in front of you: “Stop.” Repeat this action with another point, then another, until you feel comfortable with the action. Your movement will feel more organic if you inhale before you walk to each point.

In this exercise, the preparation (*otkaz*) is not the turning of the head to look at the point, but the moment just before you take your first step toward it – the moment of inhalation. It is a subtle recoil from the intended direction – like drawing back the string before shooting from the bow – and it needs to be exaggerated until it becomes ingrained in both the body and mind.

Following the recoil, or *otkaz*, is the *posyl* of walking directly to the point. The “stop” sign you make with your hand is a signal to your body that this is the very end of your action, which is why it is essential that you feel this gesture in the torso: specifically the back muscles. It is a precise end, as if the hand meets an imagined wall – a period to the sentence of walking across the space (*tochka* or *stoika*).

As you begin to bring the arm out, this signals in the body the preparation for the stop. There is a natural slowing down in the body before the stop, and this is what Meyerhold referred to as the *tormoz*, or “putting on the brakes.” Once you take your last step and stop, there is a settling in the body that goes on, a slight reverberation. The end of this reverberation marks the *pauza* or pause, after the action. The body does not relax, as it needs to remain ready to move toward the next point.

## **Sending the Ball**

This exercise applies the acting cycle to partner work. Stand facing your partner with a child's rubber play ball in your hands, holding it just below chest level in front of you. Using equal force in both arms, send the ball along a straight path directly to your partner, aiming just below his chest. Your partner should catch the ball with both hands and send it back to you in the manner just described. Repeat continually, sending the ball only along this path (i.e., not tossing underhand, overhead, or making one-handed throws).

This exercise may seem elementary, but any change in the rhythm, speed, or number of balls too early in the game is likely to cause the ball to drop or the body to tense. There is also a tendency to stop the energy of the ball, like a catcher does with his mitt. In this exercise, allow the energy sent to you from your partner to continue through your catch.

To determine what this "energy of the ball" is, step aside for a moment instead of catching the ball and watch where it goes. It will travel beyond you until it, perhaps, meets a wall or loses its momentum. This same energy is blocked every time you catch the ball abruptly. Instead, embrace the ball soundlessly and literally step back a few paces until you have actually received the energy of the ball. When you can determine the exact moment when the energy is completely received by you, you have found the *stoika*. The *pauza* is the moment between your receipt and your release, when you transfer the energy of the ball toward your partner, stepping forward. The energy behind the ball is like the energy of a line, an emotion, even an eye contact onstage; it is the dialogue between partner so in sync that the ball never falls or makes a sound.

**Assignment:** For the next class, everyone needs to bring in an action, such as pitching a baseball, with the various parts of the acting cycle identified within that action. Be ready to demonstrate this in front of the class!

### **Cool down:**

Constructive rest

(As explained in *Voice and the Alexander Technique* by Jane Ruby Heirich; pages 49-50)

**Objective:** The Alexander Technique practice "Constructive Rest" gives the student an opportunity to undo the excess habitual tensions of daily life, and has a profound effect of reorganizing the head, neck, and spine.

Instructions for Constructive Rest:

Lie down on your back on a firm surface with your head on 1-2 inches of paperback books, your knees bent with feet flat on the floor. The amount of books depends on your current posture; if you are round-shouldered you'll need more books. The knees should not flop outwards; sometimes this might mean that putting the feet *more* than hip-width apart. Or you may find that you need to let the knees lean toward each other to prevent

over-tensing of the leg or hip-joint muscles. Think about releasing your lower back (do not push or directly move) your lower back to the floor and see if you can temporarily let go of any excess muscular work that you thought you needed for standing upright. Your hands can rest on the stomach with elbows pointing away from each other. With your head resting on the books, and gravity working with you, your neck receives a very gentle extension. This extension can gradually work its way through to the other end of the spine. As a result, you may feel taller when you get up, however, if the muscles that lie alongside the spine are very tightly held, you won't find much lengthening of the back.

## Sample Lesson Plan #2 – Semester 1, Week 6, Day 1

### **Warm-up:**

Sun Salutations 3 x (as described in previous lesson plan)

### **Awareness and Release:**

ATM: The Connection of the Feet Through to Head

(Exercise taken from *Singing with Your Whole Self: The Feldenkrais Method and Voice*, by Samuel H. Nelson and Elizabeth Blades-Zeller)

**Objective:** This lesson is designed to teach the student what it feels like to have a more even weight distribution on the feet. It also will help them feel that the best position for the feet in sitting (provided they fit in the chair) is with their knees over their ankles.

1. Take your shoes off. Sit forward comfortably on the edge of the chair. Have your feet in front of you, shoulder width apart. **Keeping the ball of your right foot on the floor, lift your right heel from the floor a couple of times.** How easy is it? **Now lift the ball of the right foot several times.** Is it easier or harder than lifting heel? Notice the relationship of the knee to the ankle. **Move your leg forward so that the ankle is in front of the knee.** (If you dropped a line from your knee, the ankle would be in front of it.) **Alternate lifting the heel and the ball of the foot several times.** Which movement is easier than before, which harder? **Now move the leg so that the ankle is behind the knee. Alternate lifting the heel and the ball of the foot, once or twice only, very slowly.** Has the ball of your foot become quite difficult to lift? **Now move the leg forward until the ankle is under the knee. Alternate lifting the ball and the heel.** Is it easier to go back and forth in this position than in the others? **Move your foot a little forward and back until you find the best place for both movements.** Where is it? Compare the relationship of the right knee and ankle to that of the left. Pause and notice how your left and right sides line up.
2. **Now lift your left heel a number of times. Then lift the ball of the foot several times. Move the foot forward and back a little into several different positions, alternating lifting the heel and the ball of the foot in each. Find the position where the combined movements seem easiest.** Compare this placement with that of the right leg.
3. **Alternating right and left feet, lift the heel and the ball of each foot.** Do this four times. Compare the way your two sides feel. Stand and walk a little.
4. Sit forward on the edge of your chair and remember how your feet were positioned at the end of the previous section. **Alternate lifting the heel and the ball of each foot several times to see if this still feels relatively easy. If not, adjust the position of the leg.**

5. **Now lift the inside of your left foot slowly several times. Then lift the right hip.** Gently repeat this movement three or four times. **Explore lifting the inside of the left foot now.** Is it easier than before? **Add lifting the right hip to lifting the inside of the left foot.** Do this three or four times. **Then go back and just lift the inside of the foot.** Slowly sit back in your seat and compare the way the two feet fit on the floor.
6. **Move forward again and lift the inside of the right foot several times.** What does your head do? **Now lift the left hip several times as you raise the inside of the right foot.** What do you notice about the way your head moves now? **Then lift the inside of the right foot by itself.** Pause and compare sides.
7. **Alternate lifting the right and then the left hip slowly.** Repeat this five or six times. **Then alternate lifting the inside of the left and right feet five or six times.** Pause; notice how your feet are on the ground. **Stand for a moment and be aware of the feeling. Now walk for a minute.**
8. Sit comfortably forward on the edge of the chair. **Lift the heel and ball of each foot a few times to check ease of movement and the position of the foot.** Recall the previous section. Remember lifting the inside of each foot. **Once again alternate, lifting first the left and then the right hip four or five times.**
9. **Lift the outside of the right foot six to eight times.** What happens in the pelvis when you do this? What do you do with your head? (Note: Some people will move the head to the left a little, others to the right. There is no correct way; we just want to draw attention to the relationship.) **Alternate lifting the inside and the outside of the right foot five or six times.** Sit back and rest. While you do so, compare your two sides.
10. Come forward in your chair. **Now lift the outside of the left foot six to eight times.** What happens in the pelvis when you do this? Do you feel the same effect with the head as when you lifted the outside of the right foot, or is it the opposite? **Now alternate lifting the outside and the inside of the left foot several times.** How do your feet feel against the floor now? How balanced do you feel on the chair? **Stand and notice how this feels. Walk a little.** What is it like?
11. Sit comfortably on the edge of the chair. Recall alternately lifting the heel and the toe of each foot. **Repeat each motion several times. Now alternate lifting the left and the right hip two times.** How does that feel today? **Lift the inside and the outside of the right foot four times.** Pause. **Now lift the inside and the outside of the left foot three times.** Pause.
12. **Slowly lift the right heel. As you put the heel down, raise the inside of the right foot. As you put the inside of the foot down, lift the ball of the foot. Now as you put the ball down, lift the outside of the right foot.** You have now, in effect, made the circle with against the floor. Slowly continue to circle in

this manner for a least four revolutions. Can you allow the movement to become easier? Maybe if you make it smaller, it would be easier. **Now reverse direction.** Again go around at least four times. What do you notice in your hips as you make this circle? Do you feel any effects of this movement in the position of the head? Stop. Compare the way the left and right feet feel against the floor. Does either foot feel better connected to the back, to the head? Rest.

13. Come forward in your chair. **Now begin making circles with your left foot. Go in the direction you choose. After each circle, pause a moment. Then change either the size, the effort, or the speed at which you do the next circle.** What is the relation between size and effort, speed and effort? Make at least five circles. How attentive are you if you go faster? **Now reverse the direction.** Go slowly and easily, endeavoring to make this circle seem effortless. As it becomes less effortful, do you feel more or less of yourself involved in the movement? When you sense that all of you is involved in the movement, make one more circle and stop. How do your feet feel against the floor now? How are you sitting in the chair? Do you feel any shift in your sense of the way the feet support the head? **Stand up and walk around for a moment.** Notice what this feels like now. How easy is walking now compared to when you began? How much can you feel your feet as you walk now?

### **Suzuki:**

#### Walks

**Objective:** This exercise will allow the student to further explore the connection between his or her feet and the floor.

All walks have been introduced in the previous week, after a brief review, we'll perform them all (forward direction only, except for sideways walks, students may incorporate a gesture if they feel comfortable)

1. Ashibumi (Foot stamping)
2. Uchimata (Inward "pigeon-toed" walk)
3. Waniashi (Bow-legged walk)
4. Sotomata (Outward Walk)
5. Tsumasaki (Tiptoe)
6. Yokoaruki No. 1 (Side-step walk)
7. Yokoaruki No. 2 (Side-step walk and Foot stamp)
8. Ashi o hôru (Throwing the feet)
9. Suriashi (Sliding Walk)
10. Shikko (Squat walk)

## **Improvisation:**

**Objective:** These improvisation exercises are designed to prepare the students for another Suzuki discipline: Shakuhachi. In the Spolin exercise, the students will focus specifically on acting with their backs. In the Lecoq neutral mask exercise, the students will “wake up” and wearing a mask, they will discover how to expressive with their bodies.

### **Exercise for Back** (From *Improvisation for the Theatre* by Viola Spolin, page 150-152)

Through this exercise, student-actors should be made aware that “no backs to the audience” is merely employed as insurance against loss of communication with the audience. The actor learns to communicate to his audience without the aid of dialogue or facial expression – in short, to communicate with his body.

Preliminary work: Ask two students to come up in front of the class. One is to face the audience, and the other is to stand with his back to them. Have the audience list the parts of each person’s body that can be used communication, having the student move the parts as mentioned.

Now have the individual students sit at a piano with their backs to the audience. They are to show how they feel through their manner of playing. Let them find their own attitudes. Some examples of attitudes might be: practicing unwillingly, concertizing, playing with nostalgia.

Following this, students agree on Where, Who, and What. Scene must be played with their backs to the audience. They should choose a setting where dialogue is not usable (e.g. a church, around a mine disaster, a place where strangers gather). Point of Concentration is in using their backs to show the audience their inner action – what they are feeling. They should take something that has a focus of interest (e.g. people watching a man threatening to jump from a window ledge, people watching gang fight, people watching football game).

Example 1: Where – bare waiting room with benches. Who – refugees, doctors, nurses, etc. What – flood. Time – Four a.m. Weather – Thunder and lightening. Problem – Trying to sleep and ease discomfort.

Side Coaching: *Don’t show it with your face, show it in your back!*

Evaluation: Did they show us with their backs? Could they have found more variety of movement? Did they diffuse or concentrate expression? How old were they?

Neutral Mask Exercise: Waking Up (from *The Moving Body* by Jacques Lecoq, page 39)

The students will have already been introduced to the neutral mask in a previous class. This will be the first exercise with the student will actually be wearing the mask. The students (probably half of the group) will start out lying on the floor in a sleep state. I will ask the students “wake up for the first time.” The students will then carry this action out in silence. Deprived of the use of their face the students will discover their own bodies and how they can use the space. While some may try to enter in a “dialogue” with another actor, neither will be able to respond to each other due to the mask.

## Sample Lesson Plan #3 – Semester 1, Week 15, Day 1 and 2

### **Warm-up**

Sun Salutations 3 x

### **Awareness and Release:**

Alexander Technique: Constructive Rest with Singing

(As explained in *Voice and the Alexander Technique* by Jane Ruby Heirich; pages 49-50)

**Objective:** The student will gain the previously discussed benefits of Constructive Rest, and will incorporate singing in this lengthened position, allowing the singer to feel ease in the body while singing. This will also allow each singer to have their own “vocal warm-up” for the Psychological Gesture activity later in class.

The students will assume the Constructive Rest position. After they find the length in the neck and release tension throughout the body, each person speaks lines of their prepared song to the ceiling, alternating speech with a hiss or with a sung vowel, monitoring the returning breath so that it flows back in easily. Each person may then start singing phrases of their songs simultaneously, with a natural unforced breath returning between phrases. Allow this to go on for five to seven minutes. When it is time to end, remind the to roll over to one side, or over on to their hands and knees, and come to the standing position without holding their breath. Allow them to walk around the room, continuing to hum, hiss or singing a vowel, reminding them to notice how their whole system (head, neck, back, legs) is connected.

### **Suzuki:**

Standing Statues

**Objective:** This vigorous exercise will give the students an opportunity to observe their patterns in their choices of gesture. From this observation, they will learn to vary their choices. It also serves as a great exercise for the thighs.

This exercise was described in the discussion of Ian Carruthers and Takahasi Yasurnari’s book *The Theatre of Suzuki Tadashi* in the Review of Related Literature section.

### **Psychological Gesture**

(slightly modified for singing actors from *On the Technique of Acting* by Michael Chekhov, chapter 5)

**Objective:** This exercise will help the student find the basic structure of the character and at the same time can put the student into the various moods required by the text.

Prior to this exercise, the students will have participated in many exercises exploring different types of gesture in terms of tempo, duration, etc... Now they will incorporate this work into a musical piece of their choice. An aria is preferable so that the student may explore the whole character, but if he or she is not ready vocally to sing an aria, an

art song may be used. However, the student will have to develop a character for the art song.

Prior to this class, each student will have identified the archetype for his or her character, as well as found a psychological gesture (a single whole-body gesture that embodies the psychology and Objective) of the character.

During class, each student will show the rest of the audience his or her Psychological Gesture before performing the aria, with the Psychological Gesture becoming an internal driving force for the action. After each person performs, the class will be able to share his or her observations and whether or not they felt this gesture was effective. If needed, each individual will be able to explore another archetype and Psychological Gesture for the character.

## Sample Lesson Plan #4 – Semester 2, Week 10, Days 1 & 2

### **Warm-up**

Sun Salutations 3 x

### **Awareness and Release:**

Alexander Technique: “Thinking Up” While Moving

(As explained in *Voice and the Alexander Technique* by Jane Ruby Heirich; pages 100-104)

**Objective:** These exercises will explore the Alexander concept of “Thinking Up” while moving in standing up and walking. “Up” is the direction in which the head is releasing away from the other end of the spine, the tailbone. These specific exercises will incorporate sound as well, and help the students find a greater sense of ease in standing up and walking while singing.

### Making sound, moving to standing position

Move from sitting on a stool or chair to standing, making some sustained sound. A partner’s hand on the crown of the head is a useful reminder of where “up” is. If you think of leading with the crown of the head, the rest will follow. Try using your hip and knee and ankle joints in a coordinated way, as would a little kid.

### Questions:

Did you discover that it is not necessary to heave yourself out of the chair in order to stand up?

Did you observe what your breath was doing before you made any sound?

Did you notice what occurred after you used up all your breath?

Do you know whether your neck got stiff as you stood up?

Did you think about following your head forward and up in space as you straightened your legs?

### Making sound while stepping out

First, pick up and move your right foot forward, leaving your left foot where it is, trying to remember where “up” is during this simple movement. Return your right foot to its original position. Then slowly continue stepping out with the right foot, randomly in various directions, always leaving the left foot in place and always returning the right foot back home after each step. Then do the same with your left foot in all directions (one step at a time), always leaving the right foot in place and returning the left foot back home after each step.

### Questions:

Are you holding your breath or stiffening the neck?

Can you sing or hiss or whisper or speak at the same time as you pick up your foot to make a step?

Can you recite a phrase of your recitative while doing this activity and remember to “think up?”

In order to forestall lurching to the side opposite the moving foot, did you make Charlie Chaplin-esque stiff-legged moves?

After “stepping out,” try walking, both forwards and backwards, while making sound, and continuing to “think up.”

**Period Movement:**

Exercise for Neoclassic and Empire Style

**Objective:** This exercise is one of several cumulative exercises for the course in that it requires the students to combine the various skills they’ve developed so far in the context of a short operatic recitative scene, while incorporating period movement.

In the previous week, the students will have been introduced to the Rococo and Neoclassical and Empire Periods, as presented in Douglas A. Russell’s *Period Style for the Theatre*. The students will have all practiced general movement and manners indicative of the era (walking, standing, sitting, etc...) All the students have been assigned dialogue scenes from Beaumarchais’s play *The Marriage of Figaro*, as well as the corresponding scene from Mozart’s opera of the same name. These two class sessions will focus on incorporating the learned movement into the scenes. The staging will be improvised, which will give greater focus to actual movement of the actors and the relationship of the characters. The play and opera offer a variety of characters in terms of class, and archetypes. An additional bonus is the inclusion of the role of the trouser role of Cherubino. This will allow the mezzo-sopranos to work on a more masculine mode of movement that will be required of them in this repertoire.

Prior to beginning the scene work, I will play a recording of the overture to the opera. Simultaneously, the actors can greet each other in character, getting into the mood of the period and the piece.

For each scene, the students will perform the dialogue from the play in English first. They will then move to the Italian recitative, speaking it first, then singing it.

Time will be allotted for sharing observations.

## Sources for Curricular Information

*The following is an annotated bibliography, with full citations, that may provide additional information and supplemental approaches for this course.*

Allain, Paul. *The Theatre Practice of Tadashi Suzuki: A Critical Study with DVD Examples, Second Edition*. London: Methuen Drama, 2009.

The author provides a critical study of Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki's work in the theatre. The text is largely taken from the author's previous book, *The Art of Stillness*. While this study serves as introduction to the Suzuki's life and career, what is the most valuable is the section of the book devoted to explaining Suzuki's method of training for actors, as well as the underlying principles behind this methodology. This source has gone a step further in providing a DVD featuring a training demonstration led by Antje Diedrich, which was not included in the author's first edition of this book. The DVD introduces the viewer to the basic exercises including stamping and marching, Stamping Shaku-hatchi, sitting and standing statues, the various walks, and slow tenteketen. While in many ways I prefer the text by Ian Carruthers to this one, the DVD is extremely valuable to those who may not have witnessed or taken part in a Suzuki training session.

Balk, H. Wesley. *The Complete Singer-Actor: Training for Music Theater*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

In the preface the author states that this book provides "a holistic view of the singing-acting challenge . . ." In other words, it is a guide to the process of the singer-actor, in which singing and acting becomes one process and not two separate entities. The book is aimed primarily towards opera singers, as well as conductors, coaches, stage directors, voice teachers and other individuals who play a part in a singer-actor's preparations for performance. The author divides the book into three sections, the first calling attention to the various challenges within the art form of opera, i.e. conveying real emotions while remaining calm enough to sing technically well, the second section communicates the skills necessary to becoming an effective singer-actor, and the final section provides exercises for nurturing and building these skills.

----- *Performing Power: A New Approach for the Singer-Actor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

The focus of this book examines the inter-relationship between a singer-actor's internal thoughts and actions while performing. It aids the performer in learning how to effectively connect the psychology of the character (motivation) to the gestures and physical aspects of the character (what the audience can see and understand). The book is intended for the same audience as his previous book *The Complete Singer-Actor: Training for Music Theater*. The author talks about body awareness and how the singer-actor must always keep in mind what his or her face, hands, shoulders, etc... are doing at all times. He also discusses how the various "modes" (facial, hearing, emotional,

kinesthetic, etc...) must be balanced with each other and provides methods for the singer-actor to accomplish this.

Barnett, Dene. *The Art of Gesture: The practices and principles of 18<sup>th</sup> century acting*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987.

In an art form as old as opera, performance practice very often is a primary consideration. While this often pertains mainly to the musical aspect of the performance, occasionally one also encounters directors wanting to recreate the acting style of the period. In the preface of the book, the author states, "The purpose of this book is to give a detailed picture of the acting techniques used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century tragedy and serious opera, based entirely on contemporaneous sources." The book is divided into thirteen sections, with the first couple of sections explaining the different types and physical details of gestures; then the author looks at the "techniques and precepts for good style in the performance of the gestures." Other sections are devoted to the connection of specific gestures to text, connection from one gesture to the next, frequency of gesture, use of eyes, hand and voice, various stage positions, movement and dialogue acting. Many drawings are included which offer diagrams of various gestures as they were employed during this period. While this style of acting is not often employed by modern day opera singers, this book is a valuable resource for those faced with the challenge of having to perform in a "period" style production of baroque or classical era opera seria.

Chisman, Isabel and Hester E. Raven-Hart. *Manners and Movements in Costume Plays*. London: Kenyon-Deane, Ltd., no date given.

This slight book contains a wealth of information about the customs of various periods in England. As opposed to other books, which are organized by period, this book is divided into the following sections: deportment, manners, ceremonial, weapons, dances, and customs in other countries. Then the differences between periods are explained in each of the aforementioned sections. The advice presented is concise and very accessible. There is a useful glossary, which explains any terms with which the reader may not be accustomed.

De Alcantra, Pedro. *Indirect Procedures: A Musicians Guide to the Alexander Technique*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

In the introduction, the author makes the assertion that the Alexander Technique is an effective way for musicians to cope with the stresses of a life in music. In his explanations of the principles, procedures, and applications of the Alexander Technique, the author continually explains how the method is beneficial to musicians, and how each exercise or concept aids a specific problem area for singers and instrumentalists. A particular procedure that will prove helpful for singers is that of the "whispered ah." Especially in a movement class, where the singers will have to be physically active while singing, this concept will help the singers initiate sound with a sense of ease.

Goldovsky, Boris. *Bringing Opera to Life: Operatic Acting and Stage Direction*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968.

In this book, Goldovsky teaches principles of operatic acting and directing by giving practical examples. He breaks down several scenes from various operas for the reader, giving specific staging and dramatic ideas for each moment in the scene. While this approach may seem outdated for many of today's singing actors, there are still some performers who need this level of specificity when being directed in opera. In the selected scenes the author provides analysis and interpretation for both the singer and the director. Goldovsky stresses that his staging ideas are not absolute, and anyone reading this book may use one of his concepts as a beginning point for their own ideas.

Helfgot, Daniel and William O. Beeman. *The Third Line: The Opera Performer as Interpreter*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1993.

The "third line," as the authors of this book explain it, is the line which emerges when respect and attention is paid to the two lines of text and music in opera. This book serves as a guide to help singers find this "third line" in all aspects of their performance. It is not limited to vocal and dramatic skills, but also in how the singer works with the myriad of individuals (teachers, coaches, directors, conductors) he or she encounters when preparing a role. The authors provide exercises for singers to show how to achieve the "third line" in all of the aforementioned areas, as well as in auditions and recitals.

Hoover, Marjorie L. *Meyerhold: The Art of Conscious Theater*. Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974.

This book provides a critical study on Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold. While much of the book is devoted to describing various productions directed by Meyerhold, his system of physical training for actors, known as "Biomechanics," is explained in one section of the book. There is also a section in the appendix that outlines the Biomechanics training, however, no specifics on how the various exercises should be executed is given.

Johnson, Don Hanlon, ed. *Bone, Breath, and Gesture*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995.

While this book is not specifically for actors or singers, it is an excellent introduction to various principles and techniques of body awareness. According to the editor, the essays and interviews included in this volume come from "out-of-print writings, unpublished lectures, as well as some new writing by teachers who have never before been published." The book is divided into five sections, the first about experiencing, the second on the intricacies of the body's structure and function, the third on the many possibilities of body movement, the fourth is a "collection of a field theory of these works," and the final section includes resources for the reader including an extensive bibliography, list of empirical studies, and other resources should the reader want to study any of the presented methods in further detail. There are significant sections

devoted to the Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais Methods, as well as other embodiment techniques such as *Gymnastik* developed by Elsa Gindler, which deserve to be explored.

Knaster, Mirka. *Discovering the Body's Wisdom: A Comprehensive Guide to More than Fifty Mind-Body Practices that can Relieve Pain, Reduce Stress, and Foster Health, Spiritual Growth, and Inner Peace*. New York: Bantam Books, 1996.

While this book is not specifically written for singing actors, it does cover a number of disciplines for general health that would be of interest to performers, such as Alexander technique, Feldenkrais, Skinner Releasing Technique, and Aikido, among others. In the introduction, the author states that she coined the term “bodyways” to describe the various methods presented in the text. According to the author, this term “incorporates both therapy and education as well as relaxation, while still allowing for each separate category of practice and its distinguishing characteristics.” The book is divided into three parts; the first part discusses the causes of various body difficulties and the advantages one can gain from the various disciplines. It also describes how individuals often lose their “connection” with the body. The second part explains ways of choosing a bodyway approach through assessing one’s own personality and preferences. The third part is perhaps the most helpful section for the purposes of the movement instructor, in that it describes the various methods, including “the aim, technique(s) used, benefits” of each discipline as well as a list of resources that would prove helpful for further research. While all of the approaches are not applicable for the movement class, if a student is struggling with a specific physical limitation, this book may prove a helpful resource for helping direct the student towards a bodyway that will help address his or her individual issue.

Lecoq, Jacques. *Theater of Movement and Gesture*. Edited by David Bradby. New York: Routledge, 2006.

This book is primarily devoted to Lecoq’s explanation of his philosophy of movement. In contrast to his other book, *The Moving Body*, which explained his various teaching methods, this book is “centered on the genealogy and aesthetics of his art...” There is a intriguing chapter on the different types of gesture, as well as walking and gait, and how these elements can provide essential information about a character. While specific exercises are not provided, the philosophical reasoning supports Lecoq’s physical training methods for the actor.

Oxenford, Lyn. *Playing Period Plays*. Chicago: The Coach House Press, 1996.

This is another outstanding resource on directing and performing period plays. It is divided into four sections: the Medieval and Early Tudor period, the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, the Restoration and Georgian period, and the Victorian and Edwardian period. Within each chapter the author describes the spirit of the plays of the era including the style of acting and the conventions of the theatre at the time, the costuming and how it affected the actors movement, the occupations and activities people of various

classes often engaged in during the period, manners, dances, and music of the era, as well as suggested scenes from plays written and/or set during the particular period. In the sections on dance, the author provides dance steps for specific types of dances as well as lists various pieces of music appropriate for each dance. In addition to the suggested play scenes, the author also provides several mime scenarios for each period for practice. Also, there are suggested books listed in each section providing more detailed information on the specific period.

Palmer, Wendy. *The Intuitive Body: Discovering the Wisdom of Conscious Embodiment and Aikido*. Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books, 1994.00

In this book, the author culls the conscious embodiment and meditation principles of the Japanese martial art aikido to help the reader find greater “awareness, attention, and self-acceptance” of his or her own self. While this is not specifically written for the singing actor, it appears that many of the principles and practices presented may prove useful in helping singers find their own “conscious embodiment.” Most of the book relates the author’s own experiences of self-discovery through the application of these principles. There is a section entitled, “Practice Guides,” which provides several interesting exercises that would be easy to implement in a group class.

Potter, Nicole, ed. *Movement for Actors*. New York: Allworth Press, 2002.

If someone is wondering about various approaches to movement training, this book is a wonderful place to start. In the introduction the editor writes, “In performance, the actor’s body, and all that it entails – alignment, shape, senses, impulses, sounds, gestures – tells the story. If the body is the place of synthesis, it is as important for the student, teacher, and director to be aware of an array of approaches as it is for them to have knowledge of diverse styles of theater and acting techniques.” With that in mind, this book introduces the reader to many of the leading movement training systems through a series of thoughtful essays on each methodology. There are wonderful bibliographies provided for each section, which gives the reader an impressive list of resources to explore should one particular method pique his or her attention, a suggested reading list, and a thorough guide addressing where one can seek movement training in any of the styles presented in the book.

Shea, George E. *Acting in Opera: With Descriptive Examples, Practical Hints and Numerous Illustrations*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1980.

This book is a tremendous resource for an opera singer who is performing in a more “stylized” or old-fashioned production. Reprinted from acting pamphlets circulated around 1915, this book contains many illustrations and explanations of specific gestures to be used for different emotions and dramatic situations. While many of the ideas presented may seem out-of-fashion for many current productions, the information remains valuable and one never knows when he or she will be called upon to perform in a more “presentational” manner rather than our contemporary “realistic” fashion. It is also an incredible glimpse into past performance practice of operatic acting.

Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Undoubtedly one of the foremost modern pedagogues of acting, Constantin Stanislavski presents his new method of acting to everyone who didn't have the privilege of working with him in the Moscow Arts Company. This is the first book in a series of three. The primary focus of this text is "the inner preparation an actor must undergo to explore a role to the full." Written as a "mock diary," this book follows an actor's journey through the various exercises and rehearsals in which he participates. The actor's emotional and intellectual reactions are recorded, providing the reader with a clear picture of the actor's process.

----- *Building a Character*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 2003.

The second book of Stanislavski's series on acting discusses "the external techniques of acting: the use of the body, movement, diction, singing, expression, and control." As in the first book, Stanislavski continues his "mock diary" of an acting student. This book is most effectively used when one has a sound understanding of the concepts presented in the first book. However, a greater concentration is placed upon the physical aspect of performing on stage, and in this respect, it is more valuable in terms of information presented.

----- *Creating a Role*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 2003.

The final book in Stanislavski's trilogy "describes the preparation that precedes actual performance." The two plays that are being studied by the acting students are Gogol's *The Inspector General* and Shakespeare's *Othello*. Once again the "mock diary" approach is used by Stanislavski to describe in detail the practical application and culmination of the young actors' studies of acting as they prepare for these performances.

Stanislavski, Constantin, and Pavel Rumyantsev. *Stanislavski on Opera*. Translated and edited by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Routledge, 1998.

This book is an account of Stanislavski's work with members of the Opera Studio of the Bolshoi Theater during the 1920's. The first chapter provides anecdotes of the great acting master's interaction with the singers, and how he applied his acting principles from the straight theater to opera. Subsequent chapters are devoted to Stanislavski's analysis of specific operas mainly from the Russian repertoire including *Eugene Onegin* and *Boris Godunov*, as well as one of the most popular Italian operas, Puccini's *La Bohème*. In each analysis, Stanislavski provides the singers with each character's movement and motivation at every moment of the opera.

Suzuki, Tadashi. *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*. Translated by J. Thomas Rimer. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986.

This book is a collection of essays written by Tadashi Suzuki between 1980 and 1983. They provide insight into this director's creative process and philosophy. In the preface, the translator J. Thomas Rimer states, "Those who read this book may be surprised to find that, despite Suzuki's fame as a teacher of acting, his training method is not described here in any precise detail. As he makes clear, however, that method can merely be *evoked* from the outside; true understanding of it can come only as one lives through and experiences his discipline." Once one has become acquainted on the practical level with Suzuki's method of training, this book may prove helpful in providing insight into the philosophical reasoning behind this type of performance and training.

Yakim, Moni, and Muriel Broadman. *Creating a Character: A Physical Approach to Acting*. New York and London: Applause Theater Book Publishers, 1990.

Israeli actor and mime Moni Yakim developed his system of acting training based on his mime training with Etienne Decroux, as well his time studying acting with Stella Adler in New York City. In explaining his method, the author writes, "My approach to acting offers an understanding of character and entry to the emotional life of a character through the body. The process outlined in this book is designed to help the actor create a character of rich complexity and dimension for the stage." The book is divided into three main sections, "Looking In," in which the actor seeks to understand his/her own self, "Looking Out," in which the actor explores the outside world, and "Creating a Character," which serves as the culmination of what the actor has learned from the previous two sections. There are many exercises provided to help find emotional states and characterization through movement. The author encourages these exercises to be done in groups, which makes them ideal for a movement class.

Zaporah, Ruth. *Action Theater: the Improvisation of Presence*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995.

According to the author's introduction, this book "presents a month-long training, twenty work days of Action Theater. Each chapter reflects a single five-hour session of the training. The exercises for the day appear at the beginning of each chapter and are ordered developmentally." The dynamic exercises provided in this book are clearly described, and the objective of each is also thoughtfully explained for the instructor. Many of the exercises involve the use of voice and text that could easily be adapted and made even more relevant for the singing actor.

## Scope and Sequence

### Objective and Mission

The primary goals of my movement class are to provide introductory training in movement for the lyric stage and to address the need for movement training in the vocal performance degree program in schools of music. Students' growth in the movement class will be based in building practical knowledge and craft. This includes each individual student's development of his or her own sense of physical and kinesthetic awareness, allowing for increased physical freedom, range of motion and release of tension while performing as a singing-actor. This will begin with the acquisition of a state of readiness (neutrality) allowing for a more receptive state of being. Through various exercises the student will understand and develop expressive and communicative dexterity with all parts of the body, not just the hands and face, as well as develop concepts of gesture, spatial relationships, storytelling through composition. The student will also build kinesthetic skills for singing actors as they apply to performance: use of space, time, and weight. In addition, the student will gain an understanding of how historical dress and customs inform the movement of various historical periods and will be able to demonstrate this in the context of short operatic scenes. Another goal for this class is that of physical conditioning, as many of the exercises will help the student gain strength, flexibility and stamina.

The other main goal of my movement class is one that is less easily quantifiable from a conventional, standards-based perspective, but it is hardly less important. This goal consists of three parts: intuition, self-assessment, and sharing. In her book *Improvisation for the Theater*, Viola Spolin defines intuition as "the direct knowing of

something without the conscious use of reasoning... a way of knowing other than intellectual knowing.”<sup>14</sup> While some exercises will challenge a student’s intellect and reason, this movement class will allow students to learn through their intuition and carefully guided direct experience with improvisatory exercises. Self-assessment and sharing are natural outcomes of experiences in the movement class through discussing the students’ personal experiences after completing various exercises. In order to attain this goal of intuition, self-assessment and sharing, I will endeavor to create a classroom environment that is free from the fear of judgment. This will begin largely with my own self, as my own personal energy and demeanor will set the tone. I believe that a teacher must be fair-minded, kind, honest, sharing, and trusting. When the students see that it is possible and beneficial to share of oneself, that the movement class is a place without critical judgment, then they will also begin to share of themselves. My method for achieving this will be through the warm-up routine and improvisatory exercises. When possible, I will personally participate in these activities in an effort to show the students that it is acceptable to step out of one’s traditional role and try something different.

While these goals may seem to go beyond the scope of traditional vocational training of an opera singer, I believe it is important that one educate the entire individual as opposed to just the singing-actor. This course, as a part of a NASM curriculum in vocal performance, will address the physical training that is imperative to the dramatic training of the singing-actor. However, the inclusion of embodiment techniques such as Alexander technique and the Feldenkrais method in the curriculum, as well as the development of their ability to follow their intuition, self-assess and share their

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<sup>14</sup> Viola Spolin. *Improvisation for the Theater, Third ed.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999, p. x.

experiences will aid these students in all areas of their lives, not just in their art. This is in keeping with my own liberal arts education experience, and my desire to help each student to not only become a more competent and charismatic performer, but also aid them on his or her journey toward becoming a well-rounded and well-versed citizen of the world.

### **Syllabus Materials**

**Course Details:** Movement for Singing-Actors is two-semester sequence designed for freshman or sophomores who are majoring in vocal performance. It is a prerequisite course for opera workshop, and it must be taken for the entire year. It is a three credit hour course designed to meet for 75 minutes twice weekly in a 15 week semester and can be adapted enrollments of between 5 and 20 students. The class is ideally suited to a large rehearsal space. A dance studio, recital hall, or black box theatre with a piano will suffice.

**Course Description:** Fundamental movement course for the student singing-actor. Emphasis is placed on developing within the singing-actor an understanding of his/her body as an instrument of expression and communication, and enhancing the singing-actor's ability to use his/her instrument. This course will employ exercises and explorations based on a variety of techniques for developing body and spatial awareness and use, including but not limited to Yoga, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Neutral Mask, Suzuki Theatre Training, Viewpoints, and improvisation. As much as possible, exercises will incorporate vocalization.

## Course Objectives

- Increase physical freedom, range of motion and release of tension through various exercises and movement explorations with and without singing
- Understand the concept and learn to acquire a state of readiness (neutrality) allowing for a more receptive state of being
- Understand and develop expressive and communicative ability of all parts of the body, not just the hands and face
- Understand and develop concepts of gesture, spatial relationships, storytelling through composition
- Kinesthetic skills for singing actors as they apply to performance: use of space, time, weight
- Understanding and demonstration of how historical dress and customs inform the movement of various historical periods
- Physical conditioning

## Required Texts/Materials

- Beaumarchais, Pierre-Augustin Caron de. *The Barber of Seville and The Marriage of Figaro*. Translated by John Wood. London: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Le nozze di Figaro*. Vocal Score. G. Schirmer edition.
- Sheet music for other musical selections, which will be determined after consultation with the instructor.
- Yoga mat

### **Other Important Information:**

- Appropriate clothing for movement class: comfortable, non-restricting clothes you can move around in, preferably dance or yoga attire or sweats. NO HATS. NO JEANS.
- Footwear: While we will primarily work either bare foot or in socks, when shoes are required, gentlemen should use a hard soled shoe; ladies should have a character shoe or if playing a pants-role, a hard soled shoe. NO TENNIS SHOES, NO FLIP FLOPS, NO SANDALS.
- No jewelry, unless required for a certain scene exercise in period movement.
- Hair should be off the face.
- Gum and foodstuffs are not permitted in the classroom. Beverages are permitted if contained within a closeable container. WATER IS STRONGLY ENCOURAGED.

### **Recommended Texts**

Russell, Douglas A. *Period Style for the Theater, Second Edition*. Ann Arbor, MI: Allyn and Bacon, 1987.

### **Grading Criteria:**

Grading a class where hands-on experience is the most important aspect means that attendance is mandatory. This is not the sort of class in which missed work can be substituted with an extra written paper or additional reading. For every two unexcused absences, your grade will drop one letter. Being tardy will also adversely affect your grade. Every three times you are tardy will count as one unexcused absence. You are preparing for a career in a field that is highly interdependent, and chances are, your absence or tardiness will adversely affect your colleagues' experience, hence the strict attendance/tardy policy. While official university field trips will be excused, if there are more than two during a semester, you may want to reconsider taking this course at this time.

There are four components to your grade:

- Class Participation: 50%
- Performance Assignments (preparation and execution): 40%
- Movement Analysis Review Paper: 10%
- Final Consultation: Required for passing grade

The Movement Analysis Review Paper will require you to attend a dramatic performance, either an opera, musical or play, and write a review of the movement patterns and choices of three different characters in the performance. Vocal issues should not be addressed, unless you found that the movement choices of the performer affected the vocal production either positively or negatively. While a review entitles you to present your opinion, you should be able to provide enough information to support it. I also expect the writing to be of a level appropriate to that of a university student. Your grade will be determined by grammar and spelling in addition to content. The final consultation will consist of a ten-minute, one-on-one meeting with me during finals week in my studio. We will discuss the semester and your progress and together define new goals for the next part of your development as a singing actor.

## **Schedule of Topics**

### **Semester 1**

**Week 1** – Intro to Course, Yoga, Building Awareness and Finding Release  
(establish warm-up routine)

**Week 2** – Yoga, Building Awareness and Finding Release; Biomechanics

**Week 3** – Yoga, Building Awareness and Finding Release; Improvisation

**Week 4** – Yoga, Building Awareness and Finding Release; Improvisation

**Week 5** – Suzuki (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Improvisation activities continue)

**Week 6** – Suzuki (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Improvisation activities continue)

**Week 7** – Suzuki (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Improvisation activities continue)

**Week 8** – Suzuki (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Improvisation activities continue)

**Week 9** - Intro to Viewpoints (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Suzuki activities continue)

**Week 10** – Viewpoints (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Suzuki activities continue)

**Week 11** - Viewpoints (Yoga, Awareness & Release, Suzuki activities continue)

**Week 12** - Viewpoints (Yoga, Awareness & Release, and Suzuki activities continue)

**Week 13** - Intro to Psychological Gesture, Pre-Psychological Gesture Activities

**Week 14** - Psychological Gesture - work with Music

**Week 15** – Psychological Gesture – work with Songs and Arias

## Semester 2

- Week 1** - Intro to Semester 2, Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Improvisation (Discuss – monologue, spoken scene, solo recitative, recitative scene, aria projects)
- Week 2** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Improvisation (Scene Assignments made)
- Week 3** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Into Early and High Renaissance Style (Shakespeare monologues)
- Week 4** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Early and High Renaissance Style (Shakespeare monologues)
- Week 5** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Early and High Renaissance Style (Shakespeare monologues & dance)
- Week 6** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Intro to Baroque/Restoration Style (Purcell/Handel Solo Recitatives)
- Week 7** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Baroque/Restoration Style (Purcell/Handel Solo Recitatives)
- Week 8** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Baroque/Restoration Style (Purcell/Handel Solo Recitatives & dance)
- Week 9** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Intro to Rococo/Neoclassical and Empire Style  
(Beaumarchais play/Mozart Recitative – Marriage of Figaro)
- Week 10** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Rococo/Neoclassical and Empire Style (Beaumarchais play/Mozart Recitative – Marriage of Figaro)
- Week 11** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Rococo/Neoclassical and Empire Style (Beaumarchais play/Mozart Recitative – Marriage of Figaro)
- Week 12** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Intro to Romantic Style (Romantic era, solo aria or art song)
- Week 13** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Romantic Style (Romantic era, solo aria or art song)
- Week 14** - Yoga, Awareness and Release, Suzuki, Romantic Style (Romantic era, solo aria or art song)
- Week 15** – Aria or Song, your choice of period.

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