

TASTING THE TEXT – THE MISSING INGREDIENT

Simon Carrington www.simoncarrington.com

For all their musicke that they sing with mannes voice dothe so resemble and expresse naturall affections, the sound and tune is so applied and made agreeable to the thinge, that whether it bee a prayer, or els a dytty of gladness, of patience, of trouble, of mournynge, or of anger: the fassion of the melodye dothe so represente the meaning of the thing, that it doth wonderfullye move, stirre, pearce, and enflame the hearers myndes.

Sir Thomas More Utopia 1516

LET WORD STRESSES AND INNER MEANING BE YOUR GUIDE TO INTERPRETATION

We usually assume that all good choirs should blend, balance, sing in tune, produce their voices in an acceptable manner and sing with a reasonable range of dynamics. Too often the importance of the text is overlooked. We have the unique privilege of singing words. Let's make better use of them!

PROBLEMS

Voice teaching concentrates on the throat space, position of larynx, raised palate etc.

Often too little attention is given to the organs of communication: mouth, lips, tip of the tongue, eyes

Essential Techniques

- Study the structure of every sentence - in whatever language - in whatever period of music.
- Consider the significance of nouns and verbs against prepositions and conjunctions.
- Consider the importance of individual adjectives and adverbs and their poetic significance.
- Have every singer mark the points of emphasis in the score.
- Consider the weight required on every syllable:
 - some of the clumsiest word stresses are often in English! Have the singers savour their names with the stresses on the wrong syllables: *SiMON CarringTON, Grant HutchinSON, PetER GodFREY!*
- Sing an English text as it would be spoken by a good reader without any curious "singer's" vowels!
- Read the text aloud, questioning the stress and flow; dwell on the more powerful words and pass over the weaker.
- Don't be afraid of the diphthong - such an expressive ingredient of English and German.
- Relish and extend the softer liquid consonants: *m,n,ng, l,ll,w,v, nd,mp,nt* etc.

Use the Power of Imagination to Colour the Text

- Consider the meaning of the emotive words and how best to depict them in sound.
- Guide your singers to vary the vocal colour of the choir.
- Have them sing certain significant chords using different tone qualities:
 - *soft, hard; warm, cold; dark, bright; rich, thin etc.*
- Ask them to imagine their voices at different stages of their lives and sing with an appropriate tone.
 - to reveal the palette of colours available!
- Guide them as to when to sing with no vibrato, with a little vibrato, with considerable vibrato!
- Guide them as to when to sing with edge; with warmth; with varying degrees of air in the tone.
- With the text as your guide:
 - ask for a bright focus; a medium body sound or a heavy chest tone.
 - ask for a more nasal quality; a heady quality; a reedy quality.
- Vary the "spin" of the sound to reflect the obvious and also to suggest the hidden meanings in the text:
- Calm / Forward-looking / Reflective; Committed / Intense / Dramatic; Melancholic / Passionate / Resigned