

Editorial.

The practice of opera singing in Italy on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity UNESCO

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On 6th December 2023, in Eighteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, hosted in Kasane, Republic of Botswana. The practice of opera singing in Italy was recognized and inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, online source). The work of representatives of the Ministry of Culture together with the Committee for the Safeguarding of the art of Italian opera singing (Ministry of Culture, online source) arrived to the long desired result.

Was does this mean for Italy? What does this mean for physicians of Arts, theatrum doctores and many phoniatricians and audiologists dealing with singers and with singing teachers all over the world?

First of all, has been recognized that Italian language musical attitude brought to the development of a particular kind of singing, basically possible to everyone, but in need of specific training to permit a singer's profession.

Opera singing in Italy developed since Monteverdi, well before a common spoken Italian language, which spread mostly in second half of XXth century. "Canto lirico" meaning evolved in centuries up to a performance (melodramma) in which the affective, sentimental, emotional elements and tone predominates, outside of historical, epic, realistic, didactic or moralizing elements.

So at least three elements give relevance to the "Italian" singing language

- *Phonetics* with seven precise vowels with highly correlated settings of the vocal tract. Unvoiced vs voiced consonants which change words' meaning: Tono (tone) /Dono (gift) as well as Pasta (pasta) /Basta (stop) among dozens of examples. Consonants that may all double (Babbino caro - Zitti, zitti - Vissi d'arte) and elisions become famous (Va'pensiero - All'alba vincerò - Nessun(o) dorma ...). Intonation (pitch) where accent is always on a vowel, melodically binding previous and following syllables. Word's end in battere or in levare (Vurma et al., 2023); (Rossi, 1971) and many other peculiarities.

- *Practice*, developed by Italians' connected speech attitude in a sort of supranational language, which indeed spread all over the world well before Italians reached and spoke a common national language: people sang Va' Pensiero in times where people from different parts of Italy hardly understood each other, because they all were speaking dialects or French. Italian practice aims to use minimal amount of air with maximal sound expression, has deep link with facial and body mimics and postures, needs elastic relaxation of faucis and intelligibility itself is a fundamental part of healthy technique - like playing precision for a pianist.

- *History*, because soon after its birth, the art of Italian singing spread all over the World, not only with composers, artists, teachers, but also with those millions and millions of

migrants leaving Italy for many Countries, bringing with them the cheapest souvenir: singing. It became such an identifying character that required the evolution of teatri all'italiana, many times the first built in those places, where many operas, also Wagner, were often first played in Italian and then sung in their original language.

So, what does this mean for us, for physicians? Since the beginning of ENT and Phoniatrics in Italy, Colleagues like Carlo Labus or Giovanni Nuvoli worked together with Singing Teachers and Singers. Our highly developed

competences and experiences must help to educate to a physiological and safe practice of Italian opera singing, from conservatories, schools and academies, checking not only vocal folds' health or singing voice profile extension, but as well articulo-phonatory organs, hearing function, facial mimics integrity like Carlo Labus himself explained us in his protocol (Calcinoni e Cazziniga, 2022).

Let's work together to preserve, let live and develop such an Intangible Cultural Heritage.

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