

# New approaches to spoken voice technique on stage

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I have been teaching spoken voice technique on stage for 35 years. I teach at several national professional academies, and throughout my experience, I have observed how it has been necessary to gradually and profoundly modify our approach to the voice instrument in relation to the transformations in theatre and dramaturgy.

If we listen to the great theatre actors of the second half of the 20th century, we can perceive that the technical management of the voice was largely influenced by the practice of classical repertoires. This vocal approach was also applied to more contemporary and experimental dramaturgies; in this context, I think of the renowned Carmelo Bene. From a strictly technical perspective, the vocal support used was completely centered on the anterior mask, with a strong involvement of the chest resonances to emphasize darker timbres for dramatic effect. The arrangement of words featured pronounced support on the tonic vowels, aiming to enhance the redundancy in intonations within that space, often underestimating the role of consonantal articulation in conveying expressive intention. This led to a prevailing taste (I would almost call it a dogma) that equated the principle of "bella voce" in acting with a stentorian attitude, which was deemed necessary for producing vocal volume in large theatres. This was especially relevant in times when technology had not yet come to the rescue.

Eleonora Duse herself faced considerable criticism in her time for not embodying that type of vocality, yet this did not prevent her from being regarded which did not prevent her from being the greatest actress of the world Theatre.

I believe this approach was also influenced by the traditions of Italian musical melodrama. However, there were exceptions: giants such as Salvo Randone, Gino Cervi, and Franco Parenti (to name just a few) employed a wider range of vocal support, making their performances distinctly modern. A show that exemplifies my point is "Otello," featuring Gassman and Randone, where the two actors alternated in the roles of Otello and Iago night after night. The version available on YouTube features Randone as Iago. The differences in vocal style between the two protagonists are evident, and I believe this reflected their interpretations of their respective

characters: Otello portrayed as "all in one piece" and Iago as ambiguous and protean. Yet, the technical disparity between the two actors was so pronounced that I think they appeared to belong to different theatrical genres.

Repertoires, new directors, technology, and even new breathing and bodywork techniques have profoundly changed the needs and approaches to the technical study of voice for actors. There is now a need to experiment with alternative resonators that, in the past, may have seemed "unpleasant" or overly realistic. This includes exploring different resonance spaces (like the head and throat, even in combination), while avoiding overly anterior resonances (specifically the so-called mask) without compromising volume. Above all, there is a re-evaluation of the strategic importance of consonantal articulation compared to vowels, which are no longer considered the privileged expressive "center." In truth, it is a matter of recovering the remarkable techniques of Commedia dell'Arte

actors, whose vocal daring certainly did not adhere to the dogma of the “beautiful voice,” which they sometimes even caricatured.

A great master of 20th-century theatre who experimented with new vocal techniques with his actors was Luca Ronconi. The deep analytical density of his work on dramaturgies necessitated an extremely varied vocal range. Actors who have fully developed this knowledge include the late Mariangela Melato (notably in her interpretation of Olimpia in Luca Ronconi’s *Orlando Furioso*) and Massimo Popolizio, whose vocal mobility is, in my opinion, the most interesting for engaging with contemporary theatre.

Certainly, increasingly sophisticated technology is profoundly changing the direction of teaching the theatrical use of voice. Theatre has evolved, as have the spaces where performances are held; these spaces often present sound challenges that can be difficult to manage. Furthermore, the interaction with different languages

(especially video or live singing) requires learning to engage in “overall listening,” which is complex and demands adaptability from the actor. This has become one of the main areas on which I focus today: listening to spaces that are not strictly theatrical, not only to understand their needs—because a microphone does not always provide a solution—but also to create an original and authentic dramaturgy of the voice.

In conclusion, far from viewing this profession as heading toward a sunset boulevard, I believe there are vast and fascinating opportunities for evolution. I realize that curiosity, trust in young people, and a healthy passing of the baton are the best tools to navigate this path.