

The Radamsky Method

Somewhere amongst my notes I found this small treatise on Sergei Radamsky's method. Sergei Radamsky was one of my teachers in Vienna, and was an important voice teacher there after WWII. He is author of the book, *Der verfolgte Tenor - Mein Sangerleben zwischen Moskau und Hollywood*, written in German and published in 1972. The title translates: The Persecuted Tenor – My Life as a Singer from Moscow to Hollywood. I have included my own comments in red. Sheila Jones Harms.

The Radamsky Method

The singer does not sing scales in order to make tones or to “enjoy” singing. Nor does he sing scales to “warm up” his vocal chords. Scales are sung in order to gain control of his mental and physical faculties. **This is probably very true** The sound that he produces during this work is of relatively minor importance to the importance of his remembering and heeding the IRREFUTABLE (**the flexibility is lost if everything is irrefutable**) laws that are the basis of the technique of singing the exercise. During the student's preliminary studies, he is above all not to “listen”! He must concentrate his entire effort on the “doing”! (**This is very dictatorial**) Only thus can he eventually develop a sense of the sound being produced as the result of mental and physical action put into use. If, as a result of using the prescribed technique, the student hears a sound or feels a sensation which, according to the teacher, is correct, his whole effort must be to return immediately to doing again the VERY SAME series of actions and inducing in his mind the VERY SAME mental picture of what he wishes to do as in the preceding scale. This is the ONLY way he will be able to produce the same sound. If he is studying correctly, the student will find that his whole energy is taken up with the problem of repeating what he has DONE, and the “problem” to him of the resulting sound will fall automatically into its proper relationship in the act of singing.

Basic Rules:

Breathing

Breathe with open mouth, open throat, little smile, and imagine that you are “breathing in” the vowel that you wish to sing. Breathe as deeply as possible so that it seems that the lowest part of the abdomen is filled with air. (**I preach this too**).

As SOON as you have taken the breath, send it out again. Never wait or give yourself any possibility of holding or “controlling” your breath. The action should be comparable to that of a bellows. (Note: When the student is more advanced, the same deep breath can be taken with less “sucking in” and decidedly faster, with the same results. In the beginning, the breath must be very deliberate, slow, and in some cases should be definitely heard.) (**If the breath is heard there is constriction in the throat**)

The student must at all times be consciously aware that he has taken a breath. He must ALWAYS take a breath before beginning a new scale or phrase, even if he believes that he still has some breath left in his body. In principle, he should NOT have any breath left in his body when he finishes a scale – but even if he thinks he does have, he MUST take the same long, deep breath that he took on the previous scale. (**I have found that the lungs never completely empty themselves of breath – I make students blow out all their breath and proceed to say the phrase “It's a nice day today”. They are amazed that they can still speak this phrase**).

The attitude towards breathing (which applies to singing songs as well as scales) should be that the breath is a definite part of the scale or music to be sung. The singer should not “breathe in order to sing” – it should be inseparable from the singing and as much a part of it as the note that will follow!

In certain cases, if the singer tends to be very rigid in his breathing, he may try opening his arms to the side - like the wings of a bird simultaneously with the breathing in process and at the same speed, and, as he starts to send out the voice, simultaneously bring his arms and shoulders a bit forward until all the breath is out of his body. He should then immediately start to open his arms again while breathing in. (**I find this to be a bit of a gimmick – Sergei did it with my husband and it helped to misplace his voice**).

On certain scales, such as the “5-9” or the “5-9-12” running scale, the singer will feel himself to be completely out of breath at the conclusion of one step of the scale. This should not deter him from immediately taking a quick and deep breath – the SAME breath he took to begin the previous step and above all not a gasping breath. He should be very sure that he does not change the position of his mouth from the way it was on the last note of the preceding step of the scale. He should be sure that he does not succumb to the temptation to tighten his body or in any way attempt to hold back the breath or the voice in order to “save” himself for the following step of the scale, even though he may have an acute feeling of exhaustion and fear that he will not have enough breath. (Again very dictatorial. It does not allow for enough flexibility the singer will feel constrained). He must breathe from the VERY SAME position in which he finds himself at the end of the preceding scale and without any hesitation or movement of the body, and immediately begin the ascent. He will undoubtedly feel more physically exhausted with each new ascent. However, if he has sung technically correctly, and “sends out” the breath rather than forcing it out, he will have done himself no physical or vocal harm, and will have exercised his lungs in the most constructive way. He will feel completely exhausted and even dizzy when the entire scale is finished, but after a few minutes of relaxation, this feeling will turn into one of exhilaration.

The advanced student should always inhale with his throat in the same position as it is on the last note of the preceding scale. There should be no wait between finishing the preceding scale and breath for the next step. However, with certain beginners who tend to become rigid with their jaws or in the body, it may be advisable to relax a second in between, and re-open the throat for the next breath.

The Vowel

The singing of a pure vowel is of the utmost importance. The vowel **is** the voice. There is no other way to make the throat open correctly or the breath to flow smoothly and without hindrance than the application by the student of intense imagination of the form and quality of the vowel which he is singing. He must see the vowel before him at all times. He must imagine that he hears it in its purest form before he even takes a breath. This imaginary vision must be thoroughly clear at all times, and it must be the CORE of every tone which he produces. All technical aides are devised for one purpose - to make it possible for the singer to emit the purest possible vowel sounds. Without this strong vision before him, all other technique is of little avail. Therefore the advanced student will find that the very thought of the vowel which he wished to sing will be a sort of “Open Sesame” for his throat to the desirable position, and the imaginary act of “sending out the vowel” will immediately carry the breath along with it.

A beginner should attempt to produce an “open” sound on open vowels, being very careful that he is not “making” an “open sound” with the help of muscles, but is thinking strongly of the vowel. In his advanced studies, this exercise will be tempered – however, he will always go back to this basic exercise from time to time, and he will find that this will be a life-giving element to every tone that he produces.

The important key, and the basis of the method, can be stated briefly: THE VOWEL CANNOT BE “MADE” ... IT CAN ONLY BE “THOUGHT!”

“Running Away”

A favorite question of Mr. Radamsky’s is, “Don’t you feel that the voice is ‘running away’ from you – that you have no control of it?” That is CORRECT! The voice is only free when the singer feels the correct control of his voice, i.e., mental control. This “running away” feeling is extremely unpleasant for most beginning students, but it is an essential part of the method. Mr. Radamsky usually adds that, in order for the audience to have the sound of your voice and its full quality, the singer cannot expect to be able to hold it to himself.

Sending Out

“Sending out” is a term that, by its exactness, can be of great help. This is also an imaginary action, and the student should immediately try to recognize the minute difference between “pushing” and “sending out.” This term also has its basis in the imaginary quality of the vowel and also the imagination of the breath being exhaled. The beginner may have difficulty getting his body to work for him, and may at times literally have to “push” out the breath with various exercises of the shoulders and the stomach muscles. However, as soon as possible, he should switch over to the imaginary picture of breath and vowel flowing out before him. This picture should be before his eyes at all times – and he will note that if his mental picture is strong enough, his whole body will respond – the stomach will go in, the shoulders will come slightly forward, the chest will relax, (I beg to differ with this remark of Radamsky’s). The

head will find its proper relaxed position on his shoulders, and **his/her** body will become emptied of air without having used any muscular force.

The Technique of Opening

Each scale that we sing has an individual pattern of throat opening, based on the assumption that: each note of the human voice requires a certain degree of throat opening **in order that the vocal chords can join (very important to remember)** that the breath can flow freely to it and support them, and that the resonance in each particular note of the scale will not be MORE or LESS than is healthy for the other notes of the scale. It is assumed that the singer wished to sing from the bottom to the top of his vocal range with the same amount of ease and freedom. It is also assumed that when one note is allowed to develop to an unequal size and resonance, the other notes of the scale must suffer in comparison. **(Probably correct)**. The Radamsky method is based on the conviction that there are no different “positions” for the various “registers” of the voice. One should be able to sing from the lowest to the highest note with smoothness and ease, using the same basic throat position, and fully developing the entire span of his individual vocal range. **(Exactly what I preach)**.

Through the “open technique” the throat is taught to take just so much room and no more for each note of the scale – that is, as much room as is needed for a free and healthy tone. Through these exercises, the singer is eventually able to apply himself to the most difficult passages of the music he will wish to sing and the throat will automatically assume the correct opening for each interval. **(Providing he/she has understood what all this is about)**. The scales themselves are designed to include most “problems” which will be met in the music that will later be sung.

Scales

Some Principles Applicable to ALL Scales

Every scale must start with a consonant, preferably N.

With one exception (to be described later) every scale must be started with a fairly small mouth at the beginning.

Every scale must be sung softly on the bottom, and if it returns to the bottom again, must be soft again when it reaches the bottom. **(What about crescendos?)**

Every scale must be sung with a little smile. **(That is the upsmile)**.

Unless otherwise decreed, every scale must be sung with a small H to the teeth throughout.

The Scales

Octave jump, turn, descending full scale.

Third jump, turn, descending scale.

Third jump, ascend one time, descending arpeggio.

Arpeggio of 4 notes (1-3-5-8), turn, descending scale.

Arpeggio of 5 notes (1-3-5-8-3), ascend third, descending arpeggio (4-2-7-5-4-2-1).

Arpeggio of 6 notes (1-3-5-8-3-5), turn, descending scale.

Direct attack (middle C), hold 2 beats, turn, descending scale.

(Attack is either with H-vowel or consonant.)

Direct attack, either with H or N, hold 2 beats, arpeggio down.

Stance

Stand straight but relaxed, hands hanging loosely to the sides. **(Remember the third finger)**. Head should be directly in the middle, not up and not down. However, for the beginner, it may be advisable to raise the head slightly at the beginning of the scale, and continue to raise it very slightly throughout, especially on the sustained note of the scale. It may also help to move the head from side to side while singing.

One of the basic principles of the method is that the **back of the neck** must at all times be relaxed, moveable, and the singer should have a certain “soft mushy” feeling in this region as if he has no control. This sensation at the back of the neck will prove to be one of the chief aids in attaining the “running away” of the voice, another basic rule of the Radamsky method that has already been discussed.

I personally find that it helps to have the knees very slightly bent - that is, not detectable to the onlooker - rather a feeling to the singer that there is no “support” in them. In standing straight, the student should also be sure that this chest is not “thrown out” or in any way stiff, but just normally raised according to the rules of good posture. **(Very important).**

The **advanced** student should be able to sing all exercises with his body absolutely quiet, standing in the straight and relaxed position.

The Tongue

The tongue should at all times be forward and flat. This applies as well in the inhalation as in the actual singing. When the student is singing correctly, the tongue will form a natural groove toward the back, as the tone is emitted, of its own accord.

The Lips

In most cases, the student should see that the lip is down over the upper teeth with just a **tiny** edge of the teeth showing. This must be the position at all times, even when the singer is smiling broadly. The beginning student may have to actually **pull his lip** a bit to keep it down, and in some cases, it may be advisable to omit showing any of the upper teeth. However, the ultimate lip position will be the one mentioned above.

The Shape of the Mouth

The singer should at all times have a slightly smiling mouth. This should not hinder him from opening correctly, and one of the difficult and fine points of the method is to learn the minute relationship between having the mouth open enough (especially the higher the singer goes in the scale) and still not have a “**long mouth**” (In some cases the long mouth works - as is the case with Sir Robert Allen) i.e., ALWAYS having a little smile. This rule is one of the strongest in the Radamsky method and one upon which he lays great stress. Some students may have to help themselves by pulling their mouth **LIGHTLY** to the sides with their fingers on the higher notes of the scales in order to be able to smile as well as to open. **(If this is done too much - spreading will happen – this is not good)!**

The Slight H

(I do not agree with this completely but if it helps for accuracy with scales, then by all means do it until you can get the scale into your mind).

Unless otherwise stated, all scales are sung with a slight H blown to the teeth before every note. The exact character of this H or aspiration is of extreme importance. It is, in effect, a sending out of the breath, which later resolves itself into tone. It goes hand in hand with every vowel. Its purpose is to open the throat to prepare for the free emission of the vowel. It must be “sent out” in the same way as the vowel, and must be the means to open the throat, NOT that the throat closes to push out the H, as is very likely to happen, thus causing a scraping or “CH” sound. **(I agree with but with certain reservations).** The beginning student may have to send out a great deal of breath to be able to send this H forward to the upper teeth, which is its proper place. The advanced student will find that the more control he gains, the less he will be conscious of the sound or feeling of the H, but that it will always be his helper to direct the voice and keep the throat open. In singing words, the H will disappear and the pure vowels will take its place.

The Forming of the Vowels

For the advanced student, the change of position of the throat, as well as the mouth, should be very slight in forming the various vowel sounds. There should be, above all, no muscular interference in changing from one vowel to another. The change should be imagined, and the throat will have been taught, through the various technical aids to follow the thought.

There are no two voices that are exactly alike, and each student has his own particular vocal problem, whether from incorrect study, false mental conception of the art of singing, or his individual physical make-up. Therefore, the technical aids which he must use to help him to sing easily and correctly can often vary to some extent, or at least

more emphasis will have to be placed on one facet of the technique than on another. However, the students of the Radamsky method will find that all roads lead to the same goal, and that the advanced students all have approximately the same technique! The basic rules apply to everyone, and each student will eventually arrive at the same simplified set of rules, and will have the same vocal placement, though – and this is most important – their voices will, and must, retain their original timbre and individual character.

Rhythm

Special attention is given to the rhythm of all scales, as well to the rhythm of the breathing. Mr. Radamsky has found that the careful attention to this factor of his method can be the key to the proper use of the other technical aides, and that without this attention to absolute rhythm, the singer can be immeasurably hindered in his efforts. A pattern of breathing and singing the scale, and immediately breathing again, should be established for each exercise. The singer should then keep this rhythm at all costs, as if he were singing with a metronome. In this way, he does not have a chance to change his pattern of technique, and if he has established firmly in his mind his intention at the beginning of the exercise, he will find that the more difficult notes will come almost “in spite of” his imagined difficulty in singing them.

“Dramatic Voices”

Mr. Radamsky does not permit the use of the term “dramatic voice” in a young singer, and certainly not by students in his studio. He has been known to refuse to listen to students who have come to him insisting that they are “dramatic sopranos” or “dramatic anything.” Mr. Radamsky recognizes that there are certain RARE exceptions where a voice may have natural dramatic power of resonance, or that some voices are unusually large, and can produce dramatic sounds even while employing absolute freedom of singing; however, these voices are to his knowledge very rare. Any young singer who wishes to employ the Radamsky method, and insists that they have a “dramatic” voice, will find it impossible to follow the principles and conceptions of the method.

Placement

The Radamsky voices will all ultimately have the same placement, with only slight variation according to the individual voice character. Mr. Radamsky strives to have his voices placed from “above” on ALL notes of the scale. He believes in a balanced combination of high or so-called post-nasal and masque resonance, as well as free resonance. The methods of achieving this – of developing the various resonators that we have in our bodies – are as variable as the individual make-up of the human body. Therefore, the student will find that he must undergo various and sometimes seemingly contradictory stages in his course of vocal training, in order to arrive at the end result of complete development and free use of all of his resonators. The technical aides are basically the same for all students. The placement is IMAGINARY, and the student learns to use the technique to send the breath, and therefore the tone, to the place where he desires it. Mr. Radamsky considers that the highest achievement of any vocal method should be when the public and critics, upon hearing a singer, make the comment, “Oh, that singer has a natural voice. I am sure he never had to study.” Mr. Radamsky insists that when a singer is ready to sing in public, he should “forget” about placement and technique, and simply SING! If the singer has studied well, he will merely have to concentrate on his music, phrasing, the meaning of the words, and the voice placement will automatically follow! (By subconscious direction from the previous technical preparation.)

Practicing

Mr. Radamsky does not believe in practicing many hours a day. He believes that 20 minutes of concentration on the method of singing has more value and will result in greater progress than two hours of unconcentrated work when the voice has become tired and the mental conception unclear. Mr. Radamsky will often say to a student in the middle of a lesson, when he has sung a tone or a scale correctly, “Don’t try to sing it again now. Go home and THINK ABOUT IT!”