

BURSTING THE ACADEMIC BUBBLE

Professional Context - Learning from the Professional Field Part II A Unidirectional Introduction to 2.9 of the EOA Manual.

„(...) Playwright and composer Noel Coward (...) was once waylaid at the opera by a formidable female admirer. ‘The trouble with opera’, she opined, ‘is that it is not what it used to be’. To which Coward replied: ‘No, madam, the trouble with opera is that it is exactly what it used to be.’“ (<http://www.opera-management.fr/assets/contribution-nicholas-payne.pdf>)

The “arts” have always been mirror of and engine to continuous change in society. This also applies to opera. Even though we associate tradition and standstill, there have been many shifts within this artform- among them conscious and programmatic disaffiliation of operatic artists from ‚conventional‘ repertoire, driven by the desire to define new artistic goals.

These shifts need to also be reflected in the education of opera professionals. As educators, we need to assure steady evolvement of arts education, in structure as well as in content, aesthetic, presentation. To ensure that the singing artists as well as their employers, the opera companies, festivals and recital venues, can spark new artistic streams and react to diversification and aesthetic fluctuation, opportunity needs to be created very early in the educational process to communicate and streamline both parties needs. Clearly, it is essential to involve the professional world in the creation of new and the adjustment of existing curriculae, thereby answering to the highly specialized, exclusive and unique needs of the professional opera market.

How? A glossary of DOs and DON'Ts.

- DO create a semi-professional environment, DON'T foster an „academic bubble“,
- DO stimulate healthy competition within a counterbalanced climate of merit vs.nurture
- DO involve professional conductors and directors, bring them in for school productions and projects

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- DO create opportunity to gain ‚kilometers on stage‘, thereby enabling the singers to acquire skills like pacing, timing, self-care. As it is for most HEIs impossible to produce more than one opera per academic year, stimulate a vivid exchange and cross-institutional casting between the institutions. Cross-institutional productions and auditions!?
- DO create a safe but flexible environment to F.A.I.L. (First Attempt In Learning) and encourage learning by trial and error
- DO create additional modules of extended vocal techniques and styles. Encourage main subject teachers to attend.
- DON'T attempt to replace classical vocal core training, rather complement it (see above)
- DO collaborate with regional opera companies and theaters (also within the EOA network): understudy, double-casting, masterclasses.
- DO broaden existing repertoire to create a ‚World repertoire‘ (Payne) - DON'T aim to replace classical repertoire
- DO provide composer with vocal training in order to give them first hand insight in physical and psychological sensations and functions of singing, thereby giving them a deeper understanding
- DO require directors (EOA) to be able to read a piano/ vocal score: crucial skill if you want to direct opera. Provide classes to acquire the skill?
- DO stimulate experiences for artistic self-knowledge: can only be achieved by trial&error (no theory)
- Overall: DO shape a curriculum that allows the student to become an expert for their own instrument: vocally, physically, psychologically.