

Teaching concept and grading key

Music Drama Performance

for Master students at the Opera Department of the
University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna

4 semesters

Direction: Markus Kupferblum, Senior Lecturer

At the beginning of each lesson I do exercises with everyone in the group on coordination, exchange of impulses, concentration and complicity in the group. Balls or bamboo sticks can be used as aids.

For me, these exercises are the basic prerequisite for constructive, dramatic work and are also an important technical basis for the stage profession.

1: Basic exercises

In the first block we start with acting exercises and improvisations. These exercises are a good introduction - they are both group-building, but also enable me to determine the level of the individual students in order to respond specifically to their individual needs and support them in a targeted manner.

This is followed by work with the “neutral mask”.

This mask, which covers the entire face, forces the students to act with their entire body in order to express themselves subtly and in a variety of ways - without speaking and without grimacing. At the same time, the magnifying effect of the mask makes it possible to achieve a different expression with tiny changes in posture.

Working with the neutral mask is an important technical basis for working with the body as an instrument because it requires enormous physical precision. The students also recognized the power of an allegorical representation that is elevated above subjectivity.

2: Neutral mask

In the second block, we continue working with the Neutral Mask and play different rhythms, elements, animals and states. Then we begin to work dialogically - but always with the focus on precise physical expression. It is important to develop a “precise thought” - what happens to the character in the respective situation. What attitude does he adopt in the different situations and towards the other actors? What emotions does

this attitude trigger? How is this attitude conveyed to the audience? The Neutral Masks make all these thoughts visible - but also the absence of such thoughts.

Literature:

"Paroles sur le mime", Etienne Decroux

'Neutral Mask' in "The Poetic Body", Jacques Lecoq "Reflections on the Theater", Jean-Louis Barrault

Film:

Marcel Marceau

Etienne Decroux

"Ivan the Terrible", Sergei Eisenstein

3: Melodrama

In the third block, we turn to melodrama.

After the precise, minute movements of the Neutral Mask, which we were only just able to control, this work is a liberating blow: in melodrama, it is the great emotion, the great gesture that leads us into the situations. The unconditionality of expression, the renunciation of any relativization of a feeling, the joy of great despair, of great happiness. Here the body acts to its extremes in gesture, emotion and voice.

The "precise thought", as we have come to know it with the neutral mask, is exactly the same important basis for melodrama, as it gives our character's emotion a goal and can therefore create a dramatic situation on stage that is comprehensible to the audience. The emotion of our character can never be an end in itself, but only becomes interesting when it is triggered by a clear stance in a conflict and thus becomes comprehensible to the audience. Only when the audience can understand an emotion can they develop empathy.

Literature:

"Les Miserables", Victor Hugo

Film:

"Les Enfants de Paradis", Marcel Carné

"Dancer in the dark", Lars von Trier 'La strada', Federico Fellini

"One summer long", Ingmar Bergman Television series

4: Bel canto arias and duets

In the fourth block, we work on specific arias and duets to inspire the joy of emotion through music.

We use masks from the Balinese tradition with grotesque facial shapes to further stimulate the passion of the characters. The Balinese masks act as a catalyst, magnifying the existing emotions and directing them into clear, legible channels.

Literature:

Bel canto operas

Maurice Maeterlinck

"Carmen", Mérimée 'Lady of the Camellias', Alexandre Dumas

Film:

“E la nave va”, Federico Fellini

5: Tragedy

In the fifth block, we turn to tragedy. Here we explore the radical standpoints of the protagonists of a tragedy, which are manifested by the large vertical and horizontal axes. The authority of a relentless posture determines the fate of our character. The choral work then takes center stage. From the choir, which is its own independent organism, emerges a luminary who must lead the choir safely and confront the luminary of a second choir. Each choir supports its luminary and defends its point of view.

The experience of the unconditionality of melodrama is the basis for being able to hold one's own as a luminary, i.e. on the one hand to lead one's own choir with a clear thought, and on the other hand to win the confrontation with the other luminary with one's own physical strength and without fear.

Literature:

“Eating God”, Jan Kott

Film:

“Mighty Aphrodite”, Woody Allen

“The Persians”, Ulrich Rasche

“Les Atrides”, Ariane Mnouchkine

6: Balinese masks

In the sixth block, we return to the Balinese masks and attempt to portray the contradictory nature of the different characters with the help of these masks. Whereas in melodrama it was the great clear emotions that carried us through a scene, now it is the ambivalence of an attitude and the evaluation of a conflict, a character or a situation that forces us to portray people who are doubtful, torn and contradictory and who thus become complex and alive because they do not feel as linearly as in melodrama.

Literature:

Acting theory:

“The actor's work on his role”, Stanislavski

‘Less is more’, Michael Caine

“True and false”, David Mamet

“View Points”, Anne Bogart

„The Beauty of Helena“, Markus Kupferblum

Dramas:

Anton Chekhov

William Shakespeare

Samuel Beckett

Film:

Igmar Bergman

John Cassavetes

Jim Jarmusch

Wim Wenders

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

7: Commedia dell'Arte

In the seventh block, we look at the Commedia dell'Arte.

The examination of this tradition is indispensable for us in many respects. The Commedia is not only the basis of the Opera Buffa, which is always similar in its political function and dramaturgy, but it is the play with the characters of this art form that gives us a secure craft. These characters are archetypal and have a fixed hierarchical structure. If we know them, it is easy for us to fathom their attitudes in certain situations.

The play of the Commedia demands everything we have learned so far: the precision of body and thought, the grandeur and absoluteness of expression, then again tiny movements with the masks of the Commedia, the pleasure of confrontation, the choral behavior, the profound complexity of the passions of its protagonists.

Literature:

“The birth of curiosity from the spirit of revolution”, Markus Kupferblum

Comics: Asterix Donald Duck Garfield

Dramas:

“The Marriage of Figaro”, Beaumarchais Molière

Nestroy

Raimund

Shakespeare

Goldoni

Film:

“Molière”, Ariane Mnouchkine

“Capitaine Fracasse” Louis de Funès Colombo

Simpsons

8th: Human portrayal

In the eighth block, we look at the tradition of the clown in order to get to know our own vulnerability and very personal imagination as a valid and most valuable means of expression that can be used whenever an opportunity arises. This work requires skill, courage and maturity. It is as funny as it is tragic. Its aim is not only to recognize the failure and fragility of a character as something valuable in order to show their humanity and thus encourage the audience to take a risk themselves in a given case, but also to expand the possibilities of their own expression through their unrestricted imagination,

because as a dramatic actor they have lost the fear of breaking taboos, failing to meet expectations or being “embarrassing”.

Ultimately, this is the only way to become an unmistakable and unique “human actor”.

Literature:

“The philosophy of the clown”, Markus Kupferblum

“Il faut appeler un Clown un Clown”, Pierre Etaix ‘Le secrets de Clowns’, Paul-André

Sagel ‘School of Smiles’, Groucho Marx

Film:

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy

Marx Brothers

Grock

Charlie Chaplin

Buster Keaton

“Funny Bones”, Jerry Lewis

‘Medea’, Pasolini

Grading key

The grading of the students is composed as follows:

A. Class participation: 70%

The grading of class participation is based on the following factors:

1. attendance:

Each student must attend all class sessions.

If he/she is absent more than 3 times per semester without a valid excuse from the head of the institute, the student will be graded “failing”.

If a student is more than 15 minutes late for class, he/she is considered “not present”.

If the student is more than 3 times per semester up to 15 minutes late, their grade will be reduced by one grade.

It is the student's responsibility to re-learn the content of the missed lessons and to have it ready for the next lesson.

2. participation in class:

Students are expected to actively participate in class, complete the exercises willingly and with commitment, and participate in the reflection process afterwards. Personal initiative is particularly valued. It is expected that students observe their fellow students in their work and support them with constructive feedback.

The use of cell phones is strictly prohibited.

Students may only film or take photographs during class with express permission.

B. Final examination: 20%

At the end of each semester there will be a final oral exam that will account for 20% of the grade. During this exam, the semester material is tested. The specified literature or film references may also be part of the examination.

C. Written reflection: 10%

In the last teaching unit of the semester, a written reflection on the lessons of at least one A4 page, Helvetica 12pt, must be submitted.

This personal reflection should evaluate the teaching content and the lessons subjectively in relation to the student's own artistic development.