

SUMMARY

The monograph by artist (director, singer, actress), researcher and pedagogue Brigita Bublytė titled *Balso kaukės. Vieta, kur susilieja garsas ir kalba, kūnas ir tradicija, emocijos ir kultūra* (*Voice masks. Where sound and language, body and tradition, emotions and culture come together*) presents a comprehensive discussion of a special human quality – the ability to consciously change the timbre of one's voice and thereby put on a unique voice mask. In the book, the voice's timbre is revealed as a multilayered, qualitative phenomenon encompassing not only the individual sound of one's voice, but one's cultural identity as well. As a consciously controlled voice mask can become an instrument of artistic, physical, political or other form of social power, the author examines this very aspect by analysing the expression of vocal timbre in different cultural, artistic and performative contexts. In her monograph, the voice is analysed based on the author's creative and pedagogical experience, which on account of being a synthesis of theoretical and practical discourses takes on a new qualitative level of depth. The theoretical analysis is not separated from practical aspects in the book – it has been born of creative work with the voice and has always interacted, creating new paths of understanding and interpretation.

The subject of this book is the contemporary voice artist, who the author identifies as the voice performer. The monograph is dedicated not only to creators and performers honing their professional skills but everyone for whom their voice is an important part of their communication, self-expression or work. Therefore, it is very important that when conducting various studies associated with vocal expression, the author applies non-traditional methods and constantly encourages her readers to expand their voice-cognition boundaries, to look at their voice without any preconceived notions or assessments (try to listen, look, draw, model, touch, feel and experience in other ways the pleasure of singing), even to overcome the fear of their own voice.

There are so far relatively few scholarly works about vocal expression in Lithuania, nor has a common terminology or concept base formed to cover this field in the Lithuanian language. For these reasons, in her monograph the author examines vocal expression and its characteristic aspects, analyses, uses and adopts Lithuanian terms and concepts related to vocal expression already existing in contemporary usage, and recommends the inclusion of new ones, while also inviting the academic community and artists into an open discussion, making this work so innovative.

One of the key vocal expression terms used in this book is *vocal body*. The vocal body is born of the interaction of the regular innate voice and the voice mask. Even though these two phenomena may be perceived as being separate, they both function in an individual's body, constantly transforming one another. As the innate, or natural, voice, conveys multilayered information about a person's psychophysical structure (sex, age, experience, health, social status and the sociocultural context in which a person formed), the author considers it an artefact. Incidentally, this is a phenomenon that changes over the course of time, always interacting with another artefact – the voice mask. Nonetheless, something constant does remain in the voice – the tembral signature, testifying to origins:

in terms of the person themselves, the musical style, the country and even one's professional identity. It is precisely here that the vitally important thread of origin and tembral identity comes to prominence.

In order to encompass vocal expression as a place where sound and language, body and tradition, emotions and culture all merge, the title of the first part of the book – **“(Trans)formation of the vocal tembre”** – uses the word *(trans)formation* to describe several closely related processes at once, indicating the constant interaction of the innate voice and vocal mask. In this part of the monograph, most attention is dedicated to a theoretical analysis, presenting the main ways in which a voice mask is put on: 1) imitation; 2) use of an external, acoustic or technological object; 3) the body as a percussion instrument; 4) language change; and 5) application of vocal techniques. The functions of various forms of vocal expression – shouting, whispering, wailing, etc. – in ethnic traditions and contemporary practice are also analysed here (vocal traditions, including opera singing, are analysed as vocal mask sources, aesthetic and psychotherapeutic discoveries, and repositories of cultural memory).

Further in the book is a discussion of the latest actualities in the performativity of the voice mask and performer, also, based on theories of anatomy, ethnomusicology, anthropology and performativity, the author clarifies a universal model for perceiving vocal tembre, which discerns three main segments in the voice mask: language, the specific way in which vocal tembre is achieved, and bodily articulation. This algorithm became the main practical tool of the book, helping the author answer a fundamental question: how can the contemporary performer consciously and effectively put on and change voice masks, overcome problems of originality in the context of globalisation, and at the same time open the way for new opportunities for their voice and work without losing their tembral identity and vocal health? Also, there is a new deliberation of the concept of a voice performer, bringing together in one place the names of today's Lithuanian artists meeting this category who are thus uniquely creating and firmly establishing this new direction of art in Lithuania.

The first part of the monograph ends with a deconstruction of the elements of vocal expression, based on the levels of expressiveness and pre-expressiveness defined in theatre anthropology, discussing the categories of innate voice and voice mask, and analysing how these two artefacts operate at various levels of stage expression, while also forming the voice body matter created somewhere in-between that which is innate, and that which is the mask. A semiotic discourse episode is also introduced, aiming to look at the voice as a space for the fusion of sound and language. The author contemplates how the balance between these two primal states changes in different vocal expression situations, how the *geno-* and *pheno-* principals are formed (as creative and performance categories). Finally, the author presents some personal experiences and, using the semiotic tradition as inspiration for her practice, recommends to the reader to visualise their sound as a creature of inner power animal, a principle source of energy and authenticity, and to see language as a sociocultural form.

As the vocal timbre is a qualitative parameter, in the second part of the monograph titled **“The voice factory: philosophy, psychophysiology and mechanics”** Bublytė first of all determines which objective and psychoacoustic factors that can actually (in the bodily sense) be grasped and controlled do indeed form vocal timbre. Having worked out that the formant, attack and quieting, *vibrato*, the sound’s volume, strength and duration are the main parameters forming vocal timbre, the author delved deeper into how the voice factory functions. In this case, the voice is revealed as an instrument, a structural derivative of expression, which encompasses the universal laws of vocal expression operating regardless of a person’s culture, country, age or social environment.

Of great significance is the fact that the voice depends on the interaction of our hearing organs with the brain (this was proven by the French otolaryngologist Alfred A. Tomatis in his research of the connection between hearing and the voice), so the chapter “Conscious hearing and listening to your voice” serves as the axis of this part of the book. In it there is a comprehensive discussion of acoustic and osseous sound conduction, which determines why we hear our own voice differently to those around us and why we can feel it with our bodies, which opens up opportunities at the bodily hearing level. The mutual connection between sound and bodily articulation is also discussed. As the quality of the produced sound depends on one’s voice use habits and the degree to which this has been developed, the author continues by looking deeper into anatomical aspects relating to vocal timbre, i.e., she analyses what bodily structures determine the objective and psychoacoustic parameters of vocal timbre. For this she has used the visual, tactile and kinesthetic levels of voice perception, which proved to be very important methodological tools. Harnessing lessons with teachers from the performing arts, theatre and academic world, flamenco, throat singing, *sutartinės* [Lithuanian multipart songs], jazz, descriptions from the field of speech therapy, the experiences of contemporary vocal artists, various practical exercises and references to texts, sounds and images, the author constantly encourages readers to dive deeper into the themes analysed in the monograph not by just reading the theoretical material described within or examining the illustrations, but to actually try everything themselves practically.

The book’s epilogue – **“Flamenco and sutartinės voice masks: practice and interpretation”** – describes how one can practically apply the universal vocal timbre perception model by trying on and interpreting voice masks associated with flamenco and *sutartinės* songs.