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***SERIES 1-8: Imagery and its application to training the muscles of singing through a devised system of kinaesthetic motor gestures.***

## **1. IMAGERY FOR SINGERS: clarifying the terminology**

Imagery can help singers create a movement or feel a sensation in their body that scientific, anatomical or mechanical instructions alone cannot. It is imperative, however, that those instructions are fully based in anatomical reality, by which is meant *the understanding the action of those muscles together and finding an image or set of images that replicates this action.*

If imagery is applied correctly and with a physiological basis, it can be used extremely strategically to recruit the desired muscle action necessary for the singing task, even when this is complex and requires the use of muscles that are also concerned with other activities, such as posture, movement, respiration.

Vague imagery is not helpful if it is not based in neurological or physical reality, but precise use of imagery can be extremely useful. It is also effective in integrating the many parts of our instrument, such as breathing, support, sound production, resonance and articulation.

Imagery is widely used in sports <sup>1,2</sup>, medicine and other performance disciplines, but has sometimes been dismissed as 'magical thinking' in the voice world. We now know, however, that a particular form of imagery can be used to embody a visualised action in a way that is both kinaesthetic (felt) and



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motor (involving movement). This is an effective means of coordinating muscle activity and can be used to integrate movements of muscles that we cannot consciously control in singing.

Misunderstanding has arisen in vocal pedagogy because the term 'imagery' has been used to mean different things. This has been compounded by a lack of definition and a confusion between different figures of speech. It is helpful, therefore, to commence this series of articles concerning the application of imagery to vocal pedagogy by clarifying the terminology.

### **Image**

At its simplest, an image is *a picture*. We can imagine it, we can create a mental picture of it, we can 'see' it in our mind's eye when the original picture is no longer there. We can create mental representations of it. We can picture it as still or moving – and we can 'feel' it internally. In fact, we can smell, taste and hear imagery, too! If it is a movement we are describing, then it is a motor image. If it is a physical sensation we are describing – it is a kinaesthetic image. These different types of images are also used in training for instrumental music, dance, sport and medical rehabilitation.

### **Metaphor**

In vocal training, it can be misleading to use the word *metaphor* even though it is partially correct. A metaphor, as a poetic figure of speech, is a kind of parallel concealed comparison that describes an object, feeling or event in a



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different and often oblique way. 'A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn't literally true.' (OED).

**It is best left out of the language of vocal training.**

### **Simile**

This, by contrast, is an extremely useful tool in vocal pedagogy and one we use a great deal. Another figure of speech, it can be recognised by the fact that it always contains the words 'like' or 'as'. Thus, in singing, it can be used to clarify the appearance, function or action of something that is unseen so that we can make sense of it.

**A simile helps us visualise the unseen by comparison with a recognisable object, idea or movement.**

The next article will discuss what kind of imagery is relevant to the teaching of singing and why.

<sup>1</sup> Morris T, Spittle M, Watt AP. 2005. Imagery in sport. Champaign, Ill. ; Leeds.

<sup>2</sup> Mulder T. 2007. Motor imagery and action observation: cognitive tools for rehabilitation. J Neural Transm 114(10):1265-1278.