



Expanding the art song repertoire: A Masterclass of Latin American and Iberian Art Song in Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese

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The Eurocentric training of classical singers, anchored in paradigms of thought that privilege the rational and disdain emotion and embodiment, places the repertoire of the old centers of power at the center and above, considering them as the "true music," the so-called art music.

Thus, the vocal repertoires of the rest of the world —the former colonies and peripheral countries— are marginalized and confined to a place of less value, where it is assumed that "only folk music is produced," music of lower quality; incomplete and exotic music that aspires to reach the level of European music. (Caicedo, 2019)

For centuries, this paradigm of thought —an expression of the coloniality of power and being— has manifested itself not only in the performers but also in the composers and the audiences, not only in those belonging to the aforementioned centers but also in those of the "peripheries" who, in the construction of their identity, introjected the values promulgated by the centers of power, assimilating them as their own and in doing so, paradoxically colonize themselves, perpetuating and strengthening the structures of domination from which they seek to escape. (Caicedo, 2021)

In the field of performance practice, this situation is manifested by applying the styles of interpretation, uses of the body, and the voice of Central European music into the interpretation of the rest of the world's repertoires. It is assumed that the "correct" way of performing is the one that comes from the canon, and thus it is incorporated without questioning it into the various repertoires.

Thus, the performance of the art song appears as one more of the spaces where the constant tensions and power struggles are staged, a place where the sound and performative transformations are carried out in the direction of the groups that hold power, not the other way around.

By applying wholesale techniques and styles —the performance practice— of Central European music to all art song repertoires of the world, we neglect their uniqueness and situate them in a place of a lower value.

Awareness of these mechanisms is the first step in constructing a virtuous circle that contributes to expanding and diversifying the curricula of classical singers. However, mere awareness is not enough. To truly diversify the curriculum, we must study the context of the creation of the different repertoires, know the composers and vocal literature and acquire linguistic skills. Performing and teaching a new repertoire demands voice teachers and singers to go out of their comfort zone and learn the diction of other languages; in the case of the Latin American and Iberian vocal repertoires, it is required to learn the diction of Spanish, Portuguese—two of the most widely spoken languages in the world— and Catalan.

Learning the languages and the historical context of the creation of the repertoires is a necessary step to understanding the performance practice of it. This understanding will lead to an embodied performance practice consistent with the cultures of origin of the repertoire. (Caicedo, 2019)

In the masterclass of Latin American and Iberian art songs presented at ICVT2022, we worked on five works in Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese with singers who were not native speakers of the languages.

The choice of singers who were not native speakers was made on purpose, seeking to demonstrate to teachers, who tend to assign these works only to native speakers, that anybody can approach the Iberian and Latin American repertoire and achieve accurate interpretations if they study the diction and contextualize it socio-historically.

With the masterclass, I seek to create awareness about the existence and beauty of a rich repertoire in Spanish, Catalan, and Portuguese and encourage voice teachers and singers to use the resources I have created to facilitate their understanding, access, and enjoyment.

NOTES

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