



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

The Academy of Music and Drama

## **Exploring classical expression**

A comparative study of methods used at  
Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London  
and  
The Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg

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**Title:** Exploring classical expression: A comparative study of methods used at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and The Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg.

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**Abstract:** My purpose with this thesis is to compare which similarities and differences there are between the work of two pedagogues at Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) and The Academy of Music and Drama (AMD). I want to elucidate which methods my chosen pedagogues use when they work with classical singers from an acting point of view and stimulate the discussion about how two, apparently separate, art forms can blend together. I am also interested to learn if this kind of methods could benefit the musical expression of a classical singer. My principal questions are: How is it possible to work with a personal expression in classical singing? How does the two selected pedagogues at AMD and GSMD work with the student's personal expression? I attempted to answer these questions by interviewing the pedagogues by taking part in a private session myself with each of the pedagogues to get a student's point of view, and by auscultating. The result is presented in three written themes as well as an attached recording with the private sessions. The themes *allowing exploration in a safe environment together with others*, *finding and showing who you are without restrictions* and *building a bridge between yourself and your craft* represent the foundation of the methods I found. The major similarity was the creation of a safe environment that allows the students to explore and the major difference I found was the starting-point of the education; at GSMD it was the text and at AMD the subtext. For vocal pedagogues I believe that the results of the thesis are worth attention as an innovative way of working with classical singers.

## **Foreword**

I would like to give my warmest thanks to the pedagogues Dinah Stabb at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Gunilla Gårdfeldt at The Academy of Music and Drama for giving me the opportunity to follow their work and interview them to investigate their methods. They have shown me great hospitality by taking time from their hectic work schedule to each give me a private session, so I could have the privilege to experience their methods in first hand. I would of course not have been able to write this thesis at all if it was not for their contribution and for that I am deeply grateful.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

My own musical background lies within classical singing, where (in my opinion) a good technique often is given a higher value than being able to mediate your own personal expression. I have experienced that to imitate someone who is better than you, is almost looked upon as something desirable.

As a contrast to this I have also spent a lot of time acting, where the focus is in expressions and to start from yourself and your unique personality. I have seldom met a context where these two elements mix.

When it comes to classical singing I have always been focusing on the technique and rarely experienced that the lyrics of the song is treated as equally important. I am sad to say that I have on many occasions translated a text from a language that is not my own into Swedish, just before a recital, and I have put the emphasis on the sound of my voice rather than on the content of the text. I have in a way always figured that my voice is unique, but it took me quite some time to believe that my expression also could be just that.

For as long as I can remember, I have looked upon myself as a singer and that acting is just something that I do as a hobby. I think that this made me able to, in a theatre context, put my focus on the text, in a way that I did not do in singing. Since I was not preoccupied with singing beautifully, I enjoyed expressing myself and to really convey what the text I was working on was all about.

I have also over the years I have spent at The Academy of Music and Drama (AMD) as a student, taken part in several courses of Music dramatics. This is an innovative subject, developed by Gunilla Gårdfeldt, to combine drama and music by mixing music- and drama exercises to create new forms of expression. Which kind of music you chose to play or sing is up to you, but I have never dared to bring a classical aria to class. This is because I just could not see how I could connect that type of technical singing to the honest emotions I have always known being possible to draw forth from drama exercises.

It was not until fairly recently that I thought that the combination of my two interests, classical singing and acting, was unfortunate and almost incompatible.

Two seemingly different incidents of my life changed that. The first is that I decided to focus my classical singing on the baroque music that I love, which is known to focus on and illustrate the emotions of the text.

The second is that this summer (2011) I participated in an acting course at Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) in London. I experienced there that the teachers had a collective value-system, where they all talked about the importance of taking care of your own personal expression and that even if you had to play a Classic as Shakespeare you needed to bring your own uniqueness to your performance. That was an attitude that touched me and was something that I realised I wanted to “translate” to the world of classical singing.

My school, AMD, had a visit from Dinah Stabb, one of GSMD's teachers in May 2011. She spent a couple of days at AMD and amongst others she followed the professor in Music dramatic, Gunilla Gårdfeldt, to see how she blends music and drama in her education. I first met Dinah Stabb when I attended the workshop in communication that she held at AMD and then I happened to meet her again when I visited London a couple of months later. When I realised that she works with classical singers at GSMD, but has her background in acting, I got curios about the content of her classes and which methods she uses. Since I have studied a couple of years at AMD I know that Gunilla Gårdfeldt, also with a background in acting, teaches classical singers as well. My pre-understanding of the mixed art forms in Music dramatics led me to think that Gunilla Gårdfeldt might use her drama methods when she teaches classical singers also.

So my guess was that neither Dinah Stabb nor Gunilla Gårdfeldt had their starting-point in teaching the students perfect singing technique since they both come from the world of acting. I thought that perhaps the emphasis was lying on finding a personal expression?

This is how the thought of comparing these two schools, pedagogues and their methods was born.

## **1.2 Purpose, problem and restrictions**

### **Purpose:**

My purpose is to elucidate which similarities and differences there are in how my chosen pedagogues work with classical singers from an acting point of view at GSMD and AMD. Which methods are used and how are they motivated?

My main purpose with this thesis is to stimulate, develop and continue the discussion about how two, apparently separate, art forms can blend together and the different kinds of methods that might be used. I am also interested to learn if this kind of methods can benefit the musical and personal expression of a classical singer.

### **Problem:**

The questions that arise are:

Principal questions:

How is it possible to work with a personal expression in classical singing?

How does the two selected pedagogues at Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) and The Academy of Music and Drama (AMD) work with the student's personal expression?

Research questions:

In what way do they educate?

How do they think and reason about it?

How do they motivate their methods?

I will try to answer these questions by interviewing my two chosen pedagogues. I will also take part in a private session myself to get a student's point of view, as well as by auscultating in a couple of classes.

## **Restrictions:**

Since the research is focused on such a small area of investigation with a limited selection of pedagogues, this thesis can only be looked upon as a pilot study, in the form of a small comparative survey.

## **1.3 Theoretical connection**

In order to unravel the conceptions of this thesis I will here clarify two of the frequent used terms and how they reflect the different views of music and drama:

### **1.3.1 The concepts in a music context**

#### **Interpretation:**

The term *interpretation* is explained by the web-based database Grove music online as how a performer understands a piece of music and shows it through the way it is played/sung:

This concept of interpretation takes as starting-point the relevant definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'the rendering of a musical composition, according to one's conception of the author's idea'. It however may, and normally does, extend beyond the interpreter's conception of the author's idea and represent, rather, the interpreter's own idea of the music, possibly embodying understandings of what is taken to be latent in the score but also his or her own view of the best way of conveying that idea, in a particular performance, to the audience in the circumstances of that performance.

Further on in the article you can read that a single interpretation cannot be seen as "correct", but if an interpretation clearly defies the idea of the composer, it can be looked upon as "incorrect". There are also other circumstances to consider, such as what the historical traditions of a performance allow, as well as what kind of instruments the specific period of time practised.

The Oxford Dictionary of Music states that interpretation is "the act of performance with the implication that in it the performer's judgement and personality have a share". The thoughts of the composer are mentioned here as well:

Thus there is no 'right' or 'wrong' interpretation in the strict sense, but in matters of style and taste, a performer's 'interpretation' may be felt by listeners to be out of sympathy with, or a distortion of, the composer's intentions.

The Oxford Companion to Music writes about the difficulties a performer has when it comes to interpreting a composer's work because of all the different aspects of musical expressions:

Because of the ambiguity inherent in musical notation, a performer must make important decisions about the meaning and realization of aspects of a work which the composer cannot clearly prescribe. These may include discrete choices about dynamics, tempo, phrasing, and the like, or large-scale judgements concerning the articulation of formal divisions, pacing of musical climaxes, and so on. These determinations reflect the performer's understanding of the work, as conditioned by musical knowledge and personality, and result in an interpretation.

## **Expression:**

Grove music online explains the term *expression* as the musical elements of a performance that is affected by personal response. This may vary from one interpretation to another.

The Oxford Dictionary of Music addresses the complexity of the different kinds of technique a performer needs to master in order to express the music:

In performance, expression is created through a complex interaction of a variety of discrete technical devices and practices used by the performer, such as dynamic variation, choice of tempo, rubato, phrasing, articulation, variations in the use of vibrato, changes of instrumental or vocal timbre, body movement, or any number of similar devices. By these means a performance may be invested with emotion, and hence 'playing expressively' may be synonymous with 'playing with emotion'.

The Oxford Companion to Music has a somewhat different angle to the term. Here you read that the expression is the part of the composer's music that he or she never meant to put on paper, such as subtle nuances of dynamics. The composer must leave this to the perception of the artist and can only indicate what the music expresses via musical terms on the score.

### **1.3.2 The concepts in a drama context**

#### **Interpretation:**

The Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis (1998) give three approaches to the word *interpretation*; from a dramaturgical analysis point of view and from the actor's or audience point of view. I will write about the approach from the actor:

The actor's interpretation may be anything from an interpretation planned by the author and director to a personal transposition of the play, a total re-creation by the actor using the materials available to him. In the first case, the interpretation tends to take second place to the intentions of an author or director; the actor does not use and transform the message to be transmitted, but is only a puppet. In the second case, the interpretation generates all of the meaning (p.187).

#### **Expression:**

In Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis (1998) *expression* is explained in three different ways:

The first and mostly well-recognized is as an embodiment of concealed elements or deep meaning, that is to say to carry out the intentions of the author. This comes from a movement inside out and is best achieved through the actor's body language and gestures:

The classical theory of expression implicitly postulates that the meaning already exist in the text, that expression is only a secondary process of "extraction" based on a prior idea (p.137).

The second description is the integration of form and content. It is supposed to express a world that has its own particular form and view:

In theatre, this means that a particular production will experiment with all of the resources it has available to it, to produce a meaning that was not established in advance for all eternity. The director assembles his stage materials in such a way as to evoke a given reading by the spectator. Such a reading may be



distorted, uninteresting or insignificant, but at least it raises questions about the text and the meaning of the performance (p. 137).

The third description is that the actor should, through his gestures, give shape to emotion as well as expressing it. Expression can also happen from outside in, not just from inside out, according to this description.

### **1.3.3 Summary:**

To clarify this theoretical connection I will here present a summary of what I have found in the Encyclopaedia's when it comes to the terms *interpretation* and *expression*:

Interpretation in music reflects the performer's understanding of the composer. An interpretation can be looked upon as incorrect, if the performer ignores the idea of the composer. Musical choices, such as dynamics and phrasing, create a vast selection of possible interpretations. An interpretation must be the cooperation of the performer's personality and judgement.

In drama, interpretation is similarly described, as something planned by the author or the director, but it is also mentioned as a possibility for the actor to make a personal transposition of a play.

Expression in music is explained as the personal response of the performer and created by different musical techniques. Expression might be the effect of playing with emotion. It can also be looked upon as the part of the music that the composer wanted to leave to the interpreter.

In drama, expression can be looked upon in three different ways: as the messenger of a hidden meaning in a play, as an experiment and an inventive provocation for the spectators or as something that conveys through the actor's body movement. The latter can be influenced from the external environment (outside in) instead of the inner environment of an actor (inside out).

## **1.4 Earlier research**

### **1.4.1 Ethos of drama**

One of the most influential methods of drama is called Method-acting and is developed by Lee Strasberg and based on the System of Constantin Stanislavskij. Many actors training are based on this method and according to herself, Gunilla Gårdfeldt builds most of her work from the thoughts of Stanislavskij. In the theatre section of the library at AMD you find a lot of literature that refers to this philosophy and how it contributes to the ethos of drama.

According to The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance (2003) the techniques of Method-acting support the actor to bring into awareness feelings that are based on an event from the past. The actor then invents a mental or physical cue to revive the emotions that are revoked so they can act them on stage. The purpose of these techniques is to create a behaviour on stage that is truthful and that liberates the actor (p. 848).

In "Creating a role" (1975) Stanislavskij explains it further:

An actor can subject himself to the wishes and indication of a playwright or a director and execute them mechanically, but to experience his role he must use his own living desires, engendered and worked over by himself, and he must exercise his own will, not that of another. The director and the playwright can suggest their wishes to the actor, but these wishes must be reincarnated in the actor's own nature so that he becomes completely possessed by them. For these desires to become living, creative desires on the stage, embodied in the actions of the actor, they must become part of his very self. (Stanislavskij, 1975, p. 50)

In Uta Hagen's "Respect for acting" (1973) the idea of finding a starting-point from you is also present. We can here find a chapter about Identity: "First, you must learn to know who *you* are. You must find your own sense of identity, enlarge this sense of self, and learn to see how that knowledge can be put to use in the characters you will portray on stage" (p. 22). Further on she writes: "The more an actor develops a full sense of his own identity, the more his scope and capacity for identification with other characters than his own will be made possible" (p. 25).

In Hagen's next book "A challenge for the actor" (1991), she continues to talk about this subject when she writes about the many times she heard the expression of "losing oneself in a character". After many years in acting she discovered that she did not have to lose herself, she needed to *find* herself in the role she was playing (p. 53).

When it comes to imitating others Hagen states that although you can learn a lot from observing, it is of uttermost importance to not lose your own self:

There is a time in the life of every young artist when he falls under the spell of a mature artist whom he idolizes and *will* emulate, consciously or subconsciously, almost by reflex. It is probably the way great art is passed on from one generation to the next. Mozart was influenced by Haydn, but Mozart went to become Mozart. Beethoven was strongly influenced by Haydn *and* Mozart but developed his own powerful expression. We must hope that we are influenced by the best. We must pray that our taste and judgement will help us to discern between true artists and those who make a temporary commercial splash. Above all, we must try to inherit the *concept* of the work of the great artists rather than the outer shape and form of their expression. (Hagen, 1991, p. 59)

Gillyanne Kayes has written a book for actors that need to express themselves in music. The book "Singing and the actor" (2000) is divided into three sections, where one of them addresses how to work with texts. She writes:

When you are preparing the text of your song, you are considering both the words and the music. Decisions you ultimately make about your performance will be a balance between these two. An actor who blagues his way through a song by talking it roughly on pitch is not serving the music. A singer who makes a string of impressive noises without communicating the meaning of the words is just playing an instrument. (Kayes, 2000, p. 169)

In the introduction of her book, Kayes also brings the issue of actors trying to sing "properly", as classical singers, to the table. She writes about how classical singers train to sing beautifully, even if it is at the expense of the feelings they are portraying, because they need to be heard over an orchestra. When it comes to actors singing in a play the context is completely different, hence the actors need to learn how to sing more direct to be able to convey their emotions. For a long time actors have been trying to learn the techniques of a classical singer, but to sing musical theatre, you do not have to sound beautiful. You need to be in contact with your voice, so you do not hurt it, Kayes writes in her book and offers help to actors to find the appropriate techniques for that purpose.

The summary of what the literature says about the ethos of drama is that the work of an actor is to first find themselves and whom they are, to be able to do the work properly. Then they need to understand and interpret the text they are working with. A singing actor does not need to sing with a perfect technique, but needs to focus on conveying the meaning of the text. So the major work materials of an actor are themselves, the text, the context and content of the text. The basic is to understand what is said and to make it your own.

#### **1.4.2 Ethos of classical singing**

Almost all of the books you find in the library at AMD about singing are about the technique of a singer. Most of the books are from the 1970's- 1990's and speak in a general matter, not specific about classical singing. Many of the books address interpretation, but most of them only mention it briefly.

Nanna-Kristin Arder, the author of "Sangeleven i fokus" (Focusing on the singing student) (2001) comments on a typical problem when it comes to vocal teaching: "Many vocal pedagogues mean that you should not put too much emphasis in interpretation in an early stage of the education, because the tools, that is to say the technique, is not yet developed enough to create different nuances and expressions".

In "The free voice- A Guide to Natural Singing" by Cornelius L Reid (1972) you can read in the chapter called "Repertoire and Interpretation":

A rich and varied musical literature is open to the student who has gained a reasonable degree of technical mastery. The repertoire chosen for study must be carefully selected, however, to avoid the inclusion of material which is too demanding. (Reid, 1972, p. 157)

Long before any thought is given to interpretation, correct use of the voice and the observance of elementary principles of good musical phrasing are of primary concern. (Reid, 1972, p. 157)

In comparison with Kayes' thoughts about texts in "Singing and the actor", L Reid (1972) states:

The idea of interpretation as a word-centred activity may well be the reason why vocal recitals are often so dull and uninteresting. Just singing the words is a strange way of making music. It is like having a meat sauce without the meat. (Reid, 1972, p. 158)

Daniel Zangger Borch, author of "Stora Sångguiden" (The Big Guide to Singing) (2005) writes a little bit about interpretation, not as a part of the everyday training, but as something you need to think about when you are getting closer to, what he calls, a gig. The book mainly addresses singers in the genre of pop, rock and soul and Zangger Borch states that the singer's main task is to create an understanding of the text, so he or she can convey the message or feeling of the text. He writes that many lyrics are often ambiguous, which leaves the interpretation of it freer to the individual singer. (p. 81-82)

Zangger Borch gives a couple of examples of what to think of interpretation-wise. When it comes to the actual text you should learn how to pronounce the words, translate the lyrics, understand the content of it and think about if you can relate to the text and what you want to convey when you sing it. Other than that you need to think about the imaginative environment, what you might experience there with your senses, the historical time, who you are as the storyteller, facial expressions, emotional state and your body language (p. 82-83).

The author of "Singing & Imagination", Thomas Hemsley (1998), writes about the importance of being aware of the feelings and thoughts that are expressed within the text of a song: "Too often this is forgotten by singers, at least until the last moment of their preparatory work, when they attempt to add text, feeling and expression, after long periods devoted entirely to mechanical vocalizing, divorced from imagination" (p. 111).

He mentions this as a problem, because he sees that the words are, more often than not, what inspired a composer to write a particular song. Hemsley (1998) stresses the fact that a singer needs to respect the composers understanding of the text and writes:

Singers are not free to give an individual interpretation of a poem, while ignoring what the composer has done; nor free to sing the composer's music, while ignoring the words which make clear the thoughts and feelings about, the poem; singer's concern must be to use their imagination to try to understand those indications. Only when this has been done can they consider themselves, within proper parameters, to make their own individual contribution to the performance. Because of the music, then, singers are less free than actors would be deciding on their interpretation of the words; and because of the words, they are less free than an instrumentalist in their interpretation of the music. (Hemsley, 1998, p. 144)

The summary of what the literature says about the ethos of music is that the interpretation of the text is often neglected on behalf of the technique. There is a fear of letting a singer attempt to sing a piece of music that he or she is not technically ready for. The wish to interpret a text should not control the selection of a song. The fact that a composer in a way already has made an interpretation for the singer is also mentioned and that it is important for the singer to consider the thoughts of the composer first and then his or her own.

## **1.5 Method and material**

### **1.5.1 Selection of method**

Within the qualitative viewpoint the research material is processed through different kinds of forms of qualitative analysis (Stukat, 2005) where the scientist's "pre-understanding", that is his or her own feelings, thoughts and experiences, are of great significance, and looked upon as a resource for the research (p. 32). There are different traditions of research; grounded theory, phenomenology and phenomenographics, and they all have their own rules of method. A certain tradition of research within this area of method is the hermeneutics, where the interpretation means a puzzling with pieces as interview answers, field studies with observations, written stories etcetera. These pieces are put together to a totality of meaning, where the scientist then searches for an interpretation, understanding and a possible explanation. The requirement of an open report of data is substantial in order for the reader to be able to estimate how reasonable the presented interpretations are (p. 33)

According to Gustavsson (2004), hermeneutics as a scientific method means, that the scientist interprets the material from his or her own pre-understanding. These interpretations can only be seen as a suggestion, that might not be suitable in every context, but that could give an understanding of social/human problems (p 13-14).

To measure human experiences in terms are almost impossible, but a hermeneutic perspective means an attempt to try to grasp these dimensions through interpretation. There are four different main elements within the hermeneutical process: interpretation, understanding, pre-understanding and explanation. Interpretation implies the scientist's understanding of the phenomenon, the "translation", whilst understanding means the insight the scientist gets after

discovering a certain problem. The foundation of all this lies in the pre-understanding, which is founded in the scientist's previous knowledge and experiences. Explanation is what the scientist then uses to mediate his or her interpretation (Gustavsson, 2004, p 71-75). I will interpret my material through a hermeneutic point of view.

So, why did I choose this method? My starting-point lies with Stukat (2005), who states that it is appropriate to not only use one method in research in educational science. He writes:

In certain cases a combination (method triangulation) can be the most appropriate way to work. By using several different sources in the description, methods can complete each other and sometimes be a possible and appropriate procedure to get an area elucidated in a more versatile way. (Stukat, 2005, p. 36)

As an example he gives the combination of initial observation studies with complementary interviews. He urges:

On many occasions you can penetrate the problem even deeper and illuminate it more thoroughly and from several different sides by using several methods. Use your creativity to create the right way to get the answers to your specific questions. (Stukat, 2005, p. 37)

This point of view fitted my entry to my comparative study very well, and hence the hermeneutic became the natural choice of method. A purely quantitative approach with for example survey questionnaire with 5-step response scales and results presented from analyses of variance of the data with means and standard deviations was never an option. This is because I only have an exploring ambition that aims toward an initial understanding and interpretation of a so far relatively unexplored field. Metodpraktikan (The practice of methods) (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wägnerud, 2009) mentions that you can use the hermeneutic spiral as a way of understanding: The wholeness is understood by the foundation of the parts, as well as every part needs to be understood from the wholeness they are a part of (p. 252).

I am aware that the hermeneutic method can be criticized for an uncertain reliability and that the low number of interviewed people makes generalizations unsustainable (Stukat, 2005, p. 32), but my goal is not there either. I am primarily trying to achieve an initial research and since this comparative study is an approach to survey a field that is in a kind of borderland, I figured I would meet a mixture of ideas and methods both from the world of classical music and from the world of drama. I have already tried, in the section called earlier research, to establish the different approaches to interpretation and personal expression that is custom within these two departments. To be able to navigate in the borderland I was about to enter, I decided to use as many methods of research as I could:

Doing *interviews* with the educationalists to hear their thoughts of their methods was my first and main goal, but also to *experience in first hand*, how these methods convey by taking part, as a singer, in a private session. In order to fill in any possible "blanks" after both interviews and private sessions, I also planned to *auscultate* lessons were other students worked, to see if I would see anything new by not being a part of the event, but only as an observer.

However, unfortunately, Gunilla Gårdfeldt's timetable at AMD made it impossible for me to auscultate any of her lessons, so I could not get any new material from her classes. I have although spent over four years at AMD, and previously been able to auscultate Gunilla Gårdfeldt's work at many occasions, so I will mention that I believe that I have a good understanding of how she works with a group of students. It would have been less fortunate if

I had not gotten the possibility to auscultate at GSMD. I do not think that the fact that I only auscultated Dinah Stabb's way of work will be an obstacle of my comparison of the disciplines, since I have previously auscultated Gunilla Gårdfeldt's work. I will however not use any of my previous auscultations from AMD as a base for my thesis, because they would not be accurate for this particular research, but they may apply as my pre-understanding of her methods.

### **1.5.2 Procedure**

When I came to the conclusion that I wanted to do a comparative study, I emailed Dinah Stabb in the end of September and, after a lot of correspondence through mail, we decided I should visit her at GSMD the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of October. During my first day I had a session with her and a pianist (a volunteer student). Since the pianist had a busy timetable the session was limited to 30 minutes. I recorded the session with a Zoom H2 as well as with my mp3-player and took notes afterwards, so I could be fully attentive during the lesson in order to be a student, meeting this kind of method for the first time.

The day after, I got to auscultate two lessons for the first grade singers. It was their final lesson of three encounters with Dinah Stabb and her work and they were each an hour long. Directly after the lessons were over I got to do an interview with Dinah Stabb and to hear her thoughts about her work and her methods. The interview had no time restriction, so it took about 30 minutes to get answers to my questions. I also recorded this session with the Zoom H2 and my mp3-player, which was fortunate since the Zoom broke down half way through the interview.

Approximately a week after I got home from London, the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, I met Gunilla Gårdfeldt at AMD for a private session and an interview. The structure of my investigation was the same as in GSMD, first 30 minutes for a private session (again with a volunteer pianist) and then approximately 30 minutes for the following interview. I used the Zoom and the mp3-player again to record my meeting with Gunilla Gårdfeldt.

I chose to record the private sessions with only sound, because I did not want to restrict neither myself, nor the pedagogues with the sensation of having someone else "watching" in the room. It was also a practical matter, since it would have been complicated to find and travel with a video camera.

The recordings are subedited by my fellow student Joel Jungerstedt, who compressed the sound to increase the volume and cut unnecessary small talk before and after the sessions. The recordings were then transferred to a cd and can be found enclosed with the thesis.

After the two meetings with the pedagogues, I transcribed the interviews word for word and then looked for themes in the answers I got. These themes created the foundation for the interpretation, understanding and explanation in the hermeneutic process. The interviews in written form are kept by the author of this paper, and could be provided on request. I have also found similarities and differences in the methods of the pedagogues and will specify them as a part of my comparative study.

All of the material that originally is in another language than English has been translated by the author of the thesis.

### **1.5.3 Material**

I have chosen to look at the methods of two pedagogues, Dinah Stabb from GSMD and Gunilla Gårdfeldt from AMD. I contacted Dinah Stabb because I saw that her name was written as a member of the staff, on GSMD's webpage, in both the Drama- and Music department. I e-mailed her and asked if she could consider talking to me about the possibility of meetings between "expression" and classical singing and if she had any lessons on her timetable that would fit into that category. After I got a positive reply, I contacted Gunilla Gårdfeldt. I chose to contact her because she is the head of the Music dramatics at AMD and I knew that she often works with classical and opera singers.

I will here present the two pedagogues of my comparative study:

#### **Dinah Stabb, born in 1944.**

Dinah Stabb joined a theatre company and became an actor after she had finished a social science degree at University. She has spent almost all her working life as an actor and was first introduced at GSMD as a mentor to acting students and as a director. After she had met Armin Zanner, the Deputy Head of Vocal Studies at GSMD, on a conference (<http://innovativeconservatoire.eu>) she was asked to come to his German recitative class for singers, to help the singers to tell a story and to invest in their work. She started to work with them in the spring of 2011. At the moment this thesis is written (autumn 2011) Dinah Stabb's is involved at GSMD as a director of a short piece for the third year acting students. She also works with the German recitative class, with the first and second year musicians and holds a text class with classical singers.

I will not refer to Dinah Stabb as a teacher, since she does not see herself as one. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to both her and Gunilla Gårdfeldt as pedagogues when mentioned together.

#### **Gunilla Gårdfeldt, born in 1945.**

Gunilla Gårdfeldt is a trained singer and actor. She started as a starlet at Stora Teatern in Gothenburg and went on to study at, what is now, AMD. There, Gunilla Gårdfeldt lost her self-confidence and her voice, after an initial period of self-doubt and trying to force awareness on how she was performing. She states that she saved herself with the use of subtexts. When she started teaching at the age of thirty she had that in mind and therefore she wanted to figure out a way to "sing outside the already set template". Gunilla Gårdfeldt started teaching the opera students and developed subjects called 'Scenic/musical communication', 'Music dramatics' and 'Vivid expressions'. She does not however teach those classes now, but she teaches the musical singers and guest-teaches woodwind musicians, classical singers and pianists. She also teaches chamber music and co-teaches a choir together with a conductor.

#### **Other material:**

Apart from the interviews, I will use the 30 minutes long private sessions as well as the observations I did at Dinah Stabb's "Text classes" to interpret the methods of these two pedagogues.

#### **1.5.4 Ethical consideration**

Since the pedagogues of my research are so specific in what they do and are so unique, I figured I would not be able to write this thesis unless I could openly write about their background, methods and experiences. I therefore asked them if they could accept that I wrote about them with their full names and as a consequence unveil their identities, and they both agreed.

## **2. RESULTS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **2.1 Research**

I will here present the interviews I did with the two pedagogues. By reading the interviews a couple of times I found that there were certain areas of the general topic that the pedagogues kept coming back to: The importance of a safe environment, putting your trust into a group, finding and showing who you are, expectations and restrictions and the connection between yourself and your craft. So after a qualitative text analysis pursuant to the hermeneutic method, I chose to make these different topics into three different themes. I will here present them and give illustrative quotations to each theme. All the quotes are taken directly from the recorded interviews.

#### **2.1.1 Allowing exploration in a safe environment together with others**

In order to be able to explore your capability when it comes to expressing yourself through music, you need to feel safe. This is something that both pedagogues are unanimous about and that they take special care about when they work with groups. Dinah Stabb talks about that she has the impression of that singers are not used to “getting things wrong in the room”. She says that it is more common that they want to get the adequate information about how to perform something and then go to a private room to rehearse it. To feel safe enough to explore your voice together with others is a matter of trust and something that Dinah Stabb puts a lot of emphasis on:

I'm trying to [...] make it somewhere safe so they can begin to explore who they are and their voice and examine what it feels like to speak a poem or a piece of text from themselves. I'm trying to help them connect to themselves through their work.

Since Dinah Stabb has spent almost all her work life in acting, she says that her methods come from the way she has been brought up:

I suppose because of my background in theatre and in ensemble theatre, and the ethos in the drama department here as well is in ensemble, we work together. Everybody pulls from each other and challenge each other, but it's a safe place to discover yourself, to fail, to do things badly and it doesn't matter, to try, to move forward and grow. So that ethos, that comes through my beliefs as well, it's just putting that in place in a room where people might not experienced it before and just allowing them and try to make a safe place.

Dinah Stabb also speaks about the importance of not letting “mistakes” play such a big role during the lessons:

I always say “Don't embrace your failure”. [...] All this energy on the failure. What about the success? What about solving the problem? Change. Adjust. Keep going. It's like when you trip, you don't go: ”Oh, now I'm going to throw myself on the ground 'cause I nearly fell.”



For the students to be brave enough to make mistakes, Dinah Stabb makes sure that they do not rate each other's efforts by either applauding or laughing:

...I'm quite fierce about them supporting each other. [...] I won't have them laugh at each other. Even if "I was laughing 'cause I was embarrassed". "Yes, but actually, don't", because it can be misread or something. In the beginning especially, I think it is important that they feel that they're not going to be laughed at.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt continues on these thoughts when she talks about how you, as a student, need to "leave yourself alone" and to let go of the fictive vision you have of the way everyone else is looking upon you. She speaks about getting the student to believe that he or she is good enough:

So the art that you do, the singing that you do, the expression that you do is unique, because you leave yourself alone and you are good enough. [...] That is what I work with: courage, pleasure and to be good enough.

Both Gunilla Gårdfeldt and Dinah Stabb agree on how fundamental it is meeting someone else when you want to communicate. Dinah Stabb describes that what she wants to achieve with her students is allowing them to feel that the reason of speaking or singing is because you want to affect or change someone. "Everything is about the other person", she says. Dinah Stabb stresses that the reason for studying music or drama should be about:

...Believing in being present, generous, available, ready to exchange something with somebody, and ready to share it with somebody; one person, five people, an audience. Because [...] that is what you are studying to do: is to go into a space with others and make something happen.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt says that the core of her methods lies in being brave enough to wait for someone else, dare to be quiet and to "place the ball" with someone else. It is about reading the situation and another human being: "To use your senses and read. To let your life play, freely".

### **2.1.2 Finding and showing who you are without restrictions**

Dinah Stabb muses about how a lot of the singers and instrumentalists that she has met have been performing since they were little children. They started developing their craft before they really knew who they were without their music and because they got appreciation and were applauded for it. All of a sudden they are young adults and study at a conservatory because they can, it has become their identity but maybe not what they want to do. When it comes to expressing yourself through your craft, Dinah Stabb says:

It's being able to put into your work what comes from you, not a version that you hold away from you and in order to do that, you have to examine yourself. [...] That part of the training is missing in classical singing and instrumentalists, because people feel that they are doing something from "out there" and they have to achieve "that", instead of making "that" come through them.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt refers to Stanislavskij and how he pleads to "put yourself at disposal", which means that you involve yourself in the present situation and do not hold yourself back with thoughts about how you present yourself. She stresses the importance of not imitating others and how good technique is all so significant, but:

The personal expression is when [...] your “body tone” reaches out. No one else has your “body tone”, no one else has your timbre. [...] You cannot “put someone else at your disposal” in your story telling, which most of us do. You have to be there, I mean it’s *you*.

Except from the expectations the students have on themselves, Dinah Stabb also speaks about how parent’s expectation can have consequences. She says that if you do something well as a child and get approval and attention from it, more often than not you keep on doing it. So it might even lead to students attending a higher music education without really knowing why:

They’re there because they can do it, not because they want to do it or it’s who they are. Suddenly they have got an identity that they are not sure that they want. Or it might be an identity that they are not sure is really them.

When it comes to the order of the school and the expectations you find there, she says:

I think there’s a tradition in music having the master and the student and having the master know everything and the student nothing.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt seconds that when she says that the most common obstacles to get a student to sing with a personal expression are the “already set template”. She means that there is a certain way of singing that is approved of and expected from you and she especially mentions a particular kind of vocal coaches that “needs to be right”:

The obstacle is probably that. You do not feel courage and pleasure when you are supposed to do something right.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt addresses the word self-confidence many times. She says that you need to feel empathy with yourself to make room for acceptance for yourself and your unique expression. She says that as a student you need to learn how to “leave yourself alone” and as a teacher you need to encourage that:

It is all about the self-confidence. To edify that person, to make him or her think it’s fun! [...] It has so much to do with edifying and still not lying, but to portion harsh things... To not ditch, to never ditch, because then I ditch your heart, your soul.

### **2.1.3 Building a bridge between yourself and your craft:**

Dinah Stabb talks about how singers need to work on their craft so that it is one hundred per cent in order to have a career, but that there is no point in refining a student’s craft and then deal with the question of why you are doing it in the first place. She says that connecting them to their work and to remember their voices, right from the very beginning, is essential:

I think that my work is a way of finding a bridge between their new voice, for singers, the voice they’re crafting, and themselves. Keeping that connected, so that all the time it’s something that’s growing absolutely integral within them and their work.

Although Dinah Stabb believes that it is fundamental to connect the singers to their voices, she also says that it is important to see the constant development of the craft as work in progress and to not get fixated by how you or anyone else feel about it:

...So you talk about work all the time, not talking about your feelings about it. It’s about trying to do something, not worrying about what you feel about what you did and nobody else worries about what you feel about what you did.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt speaks about how you need to train yourself and your voice as a singer in order to get a healthy voice, so that you then are able to reach your personal expression. She says that for your body's memories to cooperate with each other you have to not interfere, but you need to have worked a lot on your voice so there are things to remember. Gunilla Gårdfeldt means that this is of fundamental importance for all performers in order to stay in an artistic profession:

I look at it this way: Unless the student, musician, singer or artist learns how to sing with their own voice, or speak or work with their own voice, they will re-educate because they are not feeling well. [...] It does not matter how well you sing if you do not show who you are in your music.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt also speaks about modern musical theatre and how the singers and actors needs to have a technique in singing that is much more brave than the usual techniques:

If the "already set template" is used, then you don't understand anything. Then you close your eyes and it doesn't match... [...] The most interesting thing is that if you don't use yourself and your own voice, [...] in our duet for example, then it's not compatible acting-wise and singing-wise. Then you don't believe in each other, and hence people don't believe in you.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt says that when you only rely on your good technique, people will either stop coming to your shows or only applaud when they hear something that is known as difficult to sing. She says that her motivation of teaching is to free people, give them joy in what they do and make them personal.

## 2.2 Private sessions

For the private sessions I asked the pedagogues for the possibility to experience their different methods in first hand, as a student. I got half an hour with each pedagogue and a volunteer pianist in a classroom at each school.

I chose to sing "If music be the food of love" by the baroque composer Henry Purcell (1659-1695), because it is a song that I know by heart and it is not bound to a specific context, since it is not from an opera. I therefore figured it would be adaptable to different kinds of interpretations of the text and emotions. I also considered the fact that since the music is not ordinarily put together with acting in a play/opera, but is more often sung as single piece in a concert, it would be of interest for my exploration of the personal expression.

The lyrics of the song are written by the poet Henry Heveningham (1651-1700), who took the first seven words in the poem ("If music be the food of love") from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. In the Shakespeare play, the text is performed by duke Orsino and the content of it is that he wonders if an excess of music could make him resistant to love, just as you could be fed up with food if you overeat. Heveningham, however, changed the meaning of the text to more of an envisagement over love and how it can be almost pleasurable to suffer from it:

If music be the food of love,  
Sing on till I am fill'd with joy;  
For then my list'ning soul you move  
To pleasures that can never cloy.  
Your eyes, your mien, your tongue declare  
That you are music ev'rywhere.

Pleasures invade both eye and ear,  
So fierce the transports are, they wound,  
And all my senses feasted are,  
Tho' yet the treat is only sound,  
Sure I must perish by your charms,  
Unless you save me in your arms.

(Heveningham, 1692)

Both Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt asked for the text and the context beforehand and made sure they knew the background of it before they started their sessions. Since I was investigating their methods and was curious about how they would first deal with a new song and text, I figured I would sing it as “neutrally” as I could on purpose, because I wanted to minimize the effect of my interpretation of the song on how they would address the task. In that way I figured I would be a blank sheet for the pedagogues to work with, without them knowing it.

### **2.2.1 Private session with Dinah Stabb**

Dinah Stabb starts the lesson by asking me why I chose this particular song. I tell her that it has to do with several different reasons, one of them being because I have not yet decided how to sing it. It is unrehearsed and “plain” because of that, which I, as previously mentioned, figured would be a prerequisite for me to investigate the researched pedagogue’s selection of method.

The venue we are in is a small rehearsal room at GSMD and both the pianist and the situation are new to me, so I am a bit nervous and very focused. I sing the song once through while Dinah Stabb stands in a corner of the room, listening.

After I have sung the music, Dinah Stabb gives me the lyrics and asks me to read it out loud. She asks me to consider the punctuation, to ignore the end of the lines and to bear in mind that a full stop is a change of thought. She wants me to move the text through the music.

Dinah Stabb then places herself and the pianist on a further distance from me, facing my way, so I can address my reading towards them. She stresses the point for me to be present and to think about why I speak the text: it is for them to hear, they have never heard this text before. Dinah Stabb urges me to not start reading without preparation; she says that I need to be connected. I have to “think on the line” to be in the moment and to allow myself to discover with them simultaneously as I speak.

Then Dinah Stabb asks me to whom I think these lyrics address: God? A lover? Love itself? Music? The borders are blurry in the text, but she wants me to decide to whom I am singing.

We then speak about the original Shakespeare text and I get to read that out loud as well. This is a bit nerve-racking for me, reading that kind of classic text, filled with words I do not understand, in front of two Englishmen. However, I feel I am in a warm and friendly environment, so I manage to do it, but as I am now halfway through the session I am a bit exhausted trying to stay present. We speak about the differences between Heveningham’s text and Shakespeare’s and agree that the text I am singing is filled with more pleasure from suffering from love, rather than being sick of it.

Dinah Stabb asks the pianist what the music itself can give as input to enlighten my interpretation and after that we are ready to sing it through once more. Dinah Stabb places herself in the opposite corner of the room and asks me to sing to her as though she is my lover. I sing again and to my surprise I feel really emotional. I was unaware of the fact that all the talking about the text made me connect with a lot of different emotions and when I sing it again I can feel that my voice is affected.

In the end of the session the pianist talks about musical styles and preferences and we speak about pronunciation and phrase lines. Dinah Stabb sums it up in the end by saying: “We are listening to what you’re saying, not what you are sounding.”

After the session Dinah Stabb also teaches me a trick how to quickly understand the meaning of a text. It is to only read the nouns out loud as you underline them. The step after that is to then fill in the verbs. She also again speaks about the importance of being present in a text and discovering it while I am singing or speaking it, and to not “know it” beforehand.

### **2.2.2 Private session with Gunilla Gårdfeldt**

When I am about to meet Gunilla Gårdfeldt I am not nervous, because I have taken part of her classes on a couple of occasions before. However, I have never met her in this context before and when it dawns on me that I will in fact have a private session with her, and not be a student amongst many others, I do get a bit nervous.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt starts the session by letting me sing the song once through. She then asks me how I felt it went and I answer that I felt a bit occupied in my thoughts. Gunilla Gårdfeldt tells me that she could sense that I was not “here and now”. She warns me be about being “general” and asks me to charge the audience with value and to vary my glaze.

She immediately interprets the text as being about earthly love, physical love and tells me to make, both the room and him, my lover, specific. She asks me to answer questions like “who is he?”, “where am I?”, “what do I want?” and “who is listening to me?”

Gunilla Gårdfeldt asks me to make all these variations, but without stepping outside of the genre and to not care about being a “good girl”, but to just explore.

After I have sung the second time Gunilla Gårdfeldt informs me that I now did many variations and that I used the music to create subtexts. She also mentions musical terms as melisms and how I can use them more. She talks about trust and how she feels that I trust the situation so I dare to vary my expression.

I sing the piece two more times: once from the position of having high status and once from a low status position. She interrupts me when I attempt the low status version, because I lose the will to mediate and she asks me to make it more eager.

Then Gunilla Gårdfeldt asks me to sing the text as a defiant kid, as a girl that has been locked in by her father, so that she cannot attend a party she really wants to go to. She tells me that I can sing to her as the mother that has the key and that I should try to persuade her to let me out. When I sing, Gunilla Gårdfeldt varies her expression, sometimes she looks like she is about to soften and sometimes she looks firm and resistant. That makes me sing with a lot of

different qualities, even though I do not really pay attention to how I am singing, I am just trying to get out of my imprisonment.

After that Gunilla Gårdfeldt chose to talk about other things, to give me some kind of intermission. Even though I get caught up in the moment, it is obvious to both of us that I need to rest after making such an effort. Gunilla Gårdfeldt asks the pianist if she has heard any differences of the versions I have sung and she has, and then Gunilla Gårdfeldt also tells a story about a maestro in a theatre in Gothenburg that learns his pupils about dynamics.

I then sing the music one last time, bearing in mind all the versions I have sung and the suggestion of thinking about the possible dynamics of the song as well.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt finishes the session with a wish for me to always surprise myself and allow myself to feel pleasure.

## **2.3 Comparisons**

Here I will try to answer the questions that led me to write my thesis:

How is it possible to work with a personal expression in classical singing?

How does the two selected pedagogues at Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) and The Academy of Music and Drama (AMD) work with the student's personal expression?

Research questions:

In what way do they educate?

How do they think and reason about it?

How do they motivate their methods?

### **2.3.1 Similarities and differences:**

#### **Similarities:**

Except from the mutual thoughts Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt share that you find in the interview themes, a similarity between them is that they both found their methods by “trial and error”. They share the same profession from the start, acting, and have met the ethos of the drama world through the work of Stanislavskij and working with other actors. With the experiences of being a part of that community, they both have a lot of exercises from the theatre world. They use these when they meet their students and by creating a safe place for them to explore their craft. Both Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt are still evolving their work and want to learn more from others that are teaching in a similar way.

#### **Differences:**

Dinah Stabb works from the composer’s point of view. She guides her students to express how the composer interpreted the text and the context of the text. She means that a personal expression of a singer is a help to express the composer’s thoughts:

“It’s a connection to yourself from which you express whatever it is the author or the composer or the songwriter wants to say to the world. But it’s being able to put into your work

what comes through you, not a version that you hold away from you.”

Gunilla Gårdfeldt speaks more of the student’s individual sound. A personal expression to her is when the student’s unique ”body tone” reaches out, which is a timbre that no one else has. Gunilla Gårdfeldt’s entrance to teaching lies within a personal crisis when she lost her voice, so her focus is on individual inner psychological processes and her goal is to help her students individually and without any greater respect for what the composer meant, except from keeping the style of singing in the genre.

Dinah Stabb however found her entry towards acting parallel with the studies to become a psychiatric social worker. Her wish when it came to acting was to break barriers and change the world; hence her focus lies on the group, the collective work and in social psychological processes. Her goal is to help the group forward and to create a safe work environment where it’s okay to “fail”.

Another major difference is that Dinah Stabb is an actor, but Gunilla Gårdfeldt is trained both as an actor and a singer. However, this does not mean that Gunilla Gårdfeldt is more respectful towards the music and the composers. She listens to the music, pays attention to the origin and context of the text and makes comments, but she is not particularly interested in portraying the composer’s thoughts and feelings of the music. She works more with the student’s personal voice and expression and tries to find subtexts in the phrases of the song. Gunilla Gårdfeldt sometimes encourages the singer to go against the meaning of the text, to find certain voice qualities.

Dinah Stabb is more attentive when it comes to the text and the composer’s idea. She asks for the context and the origin of the text and then reasons with the singer what it could mean to him or her. She lays the emphasis on the content of the text, but is very keen on making sure that the student feels that the music comes from within and is not something that comes from “out there”. She means that a singer needs to express what the composer wants to say to the world, but he or she has to work from themselves. Her classes with the classical singers are called ‘Text classes’, which gives a clue to the content of the lessons. Gunilla Gårdfeldt’s primary subjects are called ‘Scenic/musical communication’ and ‘Music dramatics’ and focus more on the expression behind the text, than the text itself.

However, there was room for exploring the personal expression of a student at one of Dinah Stabb’s ‘Text classes’. The lyrics of the song a student sang were emotional and about the insight of that when the speaker of the text is dead, no one will miss him or weep at his grave. First the student sang the song just standing on the floor without any particular expression. After that the student and Dinah Stabb spoke about where the text was from and the context of it. Then he got to sing it again, this time to his fellow students as they sat spread around him and not facing him. When he had finished the song, with a lot more feeling as I could hear it, he was moved by the lyrics and started to speak about how he felt really troubled when he thought of how certain people actually do live their lives without making an impression on anyone. He really wanted a dialog about the content of the text and the meaning behind it and I felt that it had moved something inside him, giving his singing a personal expression.

Something that I also need to mention is that the amount of time that Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt spent on developing their methods is essentially different. Dinah Stabb has spent almost all her professional life as an actor and started to educate singers in the beginning of

2011. Gunilla Gårdfeldt, on the other hand, has devoted nearly 30 years to evolve her way of teaching.

## 2.4 Summary:

To summarise the results I have found I will re-establish the three themes from the interviews:

When it comes to the first theme *Allowing exploration in a safe environment together with others* Dinah Stabb spoke about how the classical singers needs to feel safe enough to fail in the work room. She has her background in acting, focusing on ensemble work, and tries to transfer to her students the feeling of safety that she always have had. Dinah Stabb also spoke about not letting mistakes play an important role in the classroom and how the students should not rate each other's performances.

This I could experience at my private session with her. Although I had not known her for a long time, I felt completely safe and that I was not being judged. I would not have proceeded reading the entire Shakespeare text if I felt worried about not being good enough.

Dinah Stabb also mentioned the importance of giving your fellow student your full attention and that the reason for speaking or singing should be because you want to affect someone else.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt seconded that when she spoke about how the basis of her methods is to be brave enough to put your trust and your actions with someone else. She also emphasised the expression "to leave yourself alone" and how *you* should not rate your *own* performance. Let yourself believe that you are good enough.

When I had my private session with Gunilla Gårdfeldt I could really experience the feeling of "leaving myself alone", especially when I sang the version as a defiant kid and she represented my mother. I did put all my attention and effort into trying to persuade her to give me the keys and I let my singing manage itself.

In the second theme *Finding and showing who you are without restrictions* Dinah Stabb spoke about how classically trained singers and instrumentalists sometimes have developed their craft before they have found their identity, hence the craft becomes their identity. She said that she sometimes meets students that feel disconnected from their work and that it is something they need to achieve and that is not them.

Dinah Stabb also mentioned that the expectations from your parents can be pressuring and give feelings of restriction in the search for who you really are. Furthermore she spoke about the tradition of the music conservatories where the student is supposed to know almost nothing and the teacher is supposed to be the master.

In my private session with Dinah Stabb I could feel that she did not relive that. I could sense that she was on an "exploration voyage" with me and that neither she nor I had the "right" answers, because there were not any.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt referred to Stanislavskij and how you should "out yourself at disposal" and not hold back. She stressed the uniqueness of different individual's "body tones" and how no one else sounds like you. Gunilla Gårdfeldt talked about the restrictions of the "already set



template” and narrow-minded vocal coaches. She also spoke about how self-confidence is of such significance.

When I met Gunilla Gårdfeldt in my private session I could feel that she was not expecting of me to sing after an “already set template”. In fact, I think she would have been quite frustrated if I had tried to. Her whole emphasis lies in the subtexts and the usage of having a goal and tools, that is to say knowing what you want and different ways of trying to get it.

Dinah Stabb talked about connecting singers to their voices in the third and last theme ***Building a bridge between yourself and your craft***. She spoke about that it is pointless to refine the student’s craft unless they can find a bridge between themselves and their voices. She also spoke about how you should not get stuck on your feelings toward your voice, but to remember that the developing of it also is proper work.

In my private session we focused a lot on the text of the song and where it came from. We talked about the context and about different ways of interpreting to whom I was singing. I found that what we did was, first of all, working and that it then led to an interpretation and, for me, surprising feelings.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt spoke about how you should train a lot in order to get a healthy voice and create a memory bank for your body. She said that the body's memories need to cooperate in order to find a personal expression. If you do not sing with your own voice, you will not be long lasting as a professional singer, she said. Gunilla Gårdfeldt also spoke about how a brave singing technique should be used in musical theatre.

I believe that when I had my private session with Gunilla Gårdfeldt, she made me try all the different ways of approaching the text because she wanted to stimulate me to use “my body's memory bank” and to help me find different dimensions of expression that I could take care of and use when I make my own interpretation of the song and the lyrics.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 End discussion**

My purpose with this thesis was to elucidate which similarities and differences there are in how you teach classical singers from an acting point of view, according to two schools of music and drama, AMD and GSMD.

How can you make two, apparently separate, art forms to blend together and in what way do these two schools and their pedagogues educate in this particular field? Can this kind of methods benefit the musical and personal expression of a classical singer?

My pre-understanding in this field of research was based on my experience from several drama- and music dramatics courses and the permissive attitude to the student’s individual interpretation that I had found there.

Another part of my pre-understanding is of course my experience of studying classical singing. There I had found that the education always had been focusing on finding a good technique.

Since singing in a classical manner in so many ways relies on a highly developed technique I do not disagree with the amount of time you spend on refining that part of the craft. However, I believe that spending time on figuring out what the lyrics is all about, what they mean to you and investigating your personal expression in a song could not just expand your experience of singing, it could also give you another input into your technique. So as well as letting yourself get inspired by your idols and imitate, I believe you should also look inside yourself and your imagination and see what you can find there to affect you.

A way of doing this could be through methods of drama, I figured. With my pre-understanding of the usual procedure of “classical tutoring” I hoped I would find a way of working with a personal expression that extended the more general education that I have experienced so far.

By interviews, private sessions and auscultation I then got rich sources of information that I interpreted according to the hermeneutic process and I found three different areas of discussion that arose: *Allowing exploration in a safe environment together with others, finding and showing who you are without restrictions and building a bridge between yourself and your craft.*

I found similarities and differences in the methods used at GSMD and AMD.

The similarities are embedded within the three themes, as the significance of a safe environment, relying on your fellow students, the possible restrictions of expectations and connecting yourself to your craft. That the methods are still in development and that they are a consequence of “trial and error”, are also a similarity between the schools and their pedagogues.

I also found many differences between the work at GSMD and AMD. Dinah Stabb works with focus on the text and the composer’s point of view, while Gunilla Gårdfeldt focuses more on the student’s individual means of expression and possible subtexts. Both pedagogues are trained actors, but Gunilla Gårdfeldt also has a background as a singer. The difference in the amount of time that has been spent on developing their methods is also worth noticing.

Dinah Stabb believes that you should bear in mind the intentions of the composer and with your personal expression lift that. Thomas Hensley (1998, p. 144) is of the same opinion when he says that singers are less free than actors when it comes to interpretation. However, Dinah Stabb shares thoughts with Uta Hagen (1973, 1991) as well when it comes to bringing the work from yourself, that you need to examine yourself and find who you are in your performance.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt is of the belief that you should not spend time on trying to sing beautifully, but you need to know what you want to express. These thoughts she shares with Gillyanne Kayes (2000), who wrote about how actors, for a long time has tried to sing in a classical manner. Gunilla Gårdfeldt means that you need to have a good technique, but that is not all that matters. Kayes also stresses the significance of a healthy voice, but also that the technique should never be at the expense of conveying emotions.

Dinah Stabb has her starting-point from ensemble theatre and one of the main focuses there is in creating a safe environment. I believe that this is transformed to her methods when it comes to working with singers. For an actor the text is one of the most important tools and when

Dinah Stabb works with her students she premieres the text and the context of it, to help them gain a wider understanding of the music.

Gunilla Gårdfeldt has the experience of losing her voice and, according to her, she saved it through the use of subtexts. You can find that the subtexts are the foundation of her methods and to really be able to use them freely, you sometimes need to “go against” the text. I think that might be an explanation to why Gunilla Gårdfeldt does not foremost take the composer’s point of view, but starts her methods from the student’s individual needs.

I believe that Gunilla Gårdfeldt and Dinah Stabb are standing in the same arena, but perhaps in different corners. Dinah Stabb works mainly with the text and context of a song to find the personal expression of a classical singer, while Gunilla Gårdfeldt prefers to work with the subtexts of the lyrics. I think these two different approaches share the same ethos and could work well together. As a singer I believe that you need both of these points of views: The understanding of the text, which includes the content and context of it, as well as pronunciation and comprehension of the words, and the freedom to experiment with subtexts. I think that the work of a classical singer usually mainly consists of technical training and that these two angles are often forgotten, but I believe that you need all three dimensions: technique, text and subtext. The two latter are the result from a “drama arena”, where Dinah Stabb works in one corner and Gunilla Gårdfeldt in another. Together they create, in my opinion, a necessary further development of classical singing and a possibility to find a personal expression within the craft. So this is my answer to the former question of: “Can this kind of methods benefit the musical expression of a classical singer?” I believe that my answer is yes.

However, my discussion does not end here. There are, in my opinion, a lot of tools used in the world of drama that helps the actor to make the work his or her own. They are encouraged to engage in a role by finding themselves in it, as described by Stanislavskij (1975) and Hagen (1973, 1991) and to not just be attentive to the wishes of a director or a playwright, but also to the wants and needs of him or herself (Stanislavskij, 1975). When I have been studying for a role in a play, I have many times been asked to write my own biography of the character I am supposed to play. I have not been asked to be historically correct or consider other known facts, but to look within myself and try to find out what I feel that my role has experienced in her past. I have only been supposed to use my imagination and my “gut feeling”, nothing else.

This is a huge contrast to my experiences as a classical singer. When I have been asked to research the music I am about to sing, it is expected of me to come up with the historically correct facts of the time period, the composer and maybe the lyricist. To make up my own background to the song would not be imaginable. A classical singer is often supposed to sing in a foreign language that he or she might not understand. We learn how to pronounce the words and how to colour our vowels accurately, but too often is the meaning of the text forgotten until the last moment before a recital. My experiences blends well together with the writing of Arder (2001) that stated that vocal pedagogues often let the technique of singing outcompete the interpretation. I believe that that the different approaches when it comes to how you research your work material, depending on whether you are an actor or a classical singer, affects how close you feel to the text you are working with. I do not plague that singers ought to make up their own facts about the songs they are singing, but to maybe find a fraction of “make believe” to connect them to the lyrics and to make a personal interpretation.

When it comes to the theoretical concepts *interpretation* and *expression* I found that the approach to these conceptions was somewhat different depending on from which viewpoint I was looking: music or drama.

In music interpretation mirrors the performer's understanding of the composer and although it is looked upon as a part of the performer's personality, it can also be regarded as "incorrect". In drama the concept can be the reflection of the author or director, but interpretation can also be a personal statement and viewpoint of the actor. Personally I am a bit torn when it comes to how much of the interpretation that should reproduce the composer's or author's point of view and how much that should reflect me as a performer. I think it is a judgement call that you need to take every time you are about to put something on stage. I do however believe that it is of greatest importance to let yourself and your colleagues experiment in the work room and without imaginative restrictions from the maker of the music or play.

I translate the concept expression in music as more connected to the performer's personality and individual perception of the music piece. In drama the word has several meanings and is influenced by the environment, either it is affected by the actor's inner environment, his emotions, or the external environment. Expression might also be created as a provocation for the audience. Based on this research I find that expression is a term that includes a personal perspective in music and a variation of possibilities to connect to the audience in drama.

I have come to the conclusion that the concept expression, ironically enough, gives more freedom to the interpreter than the concept interpretation.

When it comes to the themes from the interviews I have found that they all blend together in a great discourse, so I will mention them separately but, at the same time, in one breath.

The first theme was about *allowing exploration in a safe environment together with others*. Dinah Stabb spoke about how singers often are afraid to try something new in a room with other students. They are afraid to "fail" in front of others, presumably because they do not feel secure that their fellow student will be supportive if they prove unsuccessful. My experience of studying classical singing is by meeting my teacher in a private room and ideally feeling safe enough to explore my voice and try new things with him or her listening. In other scenarios I would try to gather as much information from my teacher as I possibly could, to then find my own private room to try to master this new tool to my craft. I have sometimes taken part in master classes during my classical education and that is mainly the only times I have met other singers outside of recitals or concerts. Unfortunately I have, more often than not, experienced that these classes result in some kind of performance for each other, a show-off, rather than being a safe place for exploration in front of other singers in the same situation.

When my interview with Dinah Stabb was about to come to its end, I asked her if there was anything she would like to add, that I had not asked about. She then asked me what I, as a singer, would have needed and what I think would have helped me when I started studying at AMD. My spontaneous answer then gave me a clue to what this thesis partly came to be about. I spoke about that I thought belonging to a group of singers that dare to give something from themselves, probably would have given me a necessary security:

You rely on each other and you take care of each other, 'cause I think that in my experience, it's too, too easy to compare yourself. [...] So together as a group, rely on each other and explore. That is the key word I think, to explore together.

I continued my thoughts by saying that this is what I have experienced in acting and how I would love to transfer that trust in the group, in your classmates and in yourself, into the world of classical singing.

Both Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt does that when they let their students work together in a group and encourage them to let each other explore without any limitations. This leads me to the second theme called *finding and showing who you are without restrictions*. Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt spoke about the restrictions of parent's expectations, the old-fashioned master/student form of classical tutoring, narrow-minded vocal pedagogues and the danger of the "already set template". I believe that it is almost impossible to avoid being influenced by these expectations and restrictions, but by creating a permissive atmosphere in the work room I believe that there is a chance that a new, more tolerant way of thinking can be born. If we nurture the student's belief that it can be a positive experience to explore, to challenge, to "fail" and to try new uncharted paths together, I think the ethos of classical singing can flourish. It can become a great mixture of the technical-based craft I believe it is today, and the allowance of exploration and personal expression that we need in order to raise performers that are, more than technically, connected to their craft.

This leads me to the third and last theme of *building a bridge between yourself and your craft*. Dinah Stabb and Gunilla Gårdfeldt agreed that the relation between the singer and the craft can be complicated and should be looked upon from several different angles. On one hand you need to see that it is work, just like anything else, Dinah Stabb claims and refers to how students can be pre-occupied by their emotions towards their voices. On the other hand you need to discover and embrace your own personal expression in order to make it as a professional, Gunilla Gårdfeldt says. Personally I do not think these are contradictions, I believe that the art of classical singing demands a high technical level and that it sometimes is, and should be, hard work. You need to sacrifice a certain amount of time to stand in a private room and practice between four walls in order to master some arias. But I believe this is just one part, the foundation, of the pyramid that is classical singing. The centre is constructed of the singer's understanding of the text and context and the singer's subtexts and will to convey. To find the content of this part of the pyramid, I believe that you need to *build a bridge between yourself and your craft by feeling safe enough to explore and to find and show who you are without restrictions*.

The tip of the pyramid is you; your own unique voice and personal expression.

### **3.2 Continuing research**

I would like to expand my research to include even more pedagogues that work with classical singers from an acting point of view. I believe that there are many others that work in the same field, but in different ways and I would like to chart their methods and origin as well.

I am also interested in what material I would receive if I followed a couple of students over a span of time, from the first time they meet this kind of education and further on in their training. I could perhaps do a comparative study between students that get to meet this way of working and students that are taught the traditional way.

Since I am fortunate enough to write an artistic research it gives me the possibility not just to write, but to participate in the studies as well. Therefore I would also wish to have the possibility to continue to have sessions with and record different pedagogues' methods to see what can happen to my personal expression.

### **3.3 Connection to the teaching profession**

I believe that this thesis's connection to the teaching profession is clear and of highest relevancy. When it comes to classical singing there is a tradition of private lessons and maintaining the master/student relations. If there is any kind of group education it comes in the form of master classes, where the master often teaches the students one by one in front of the others. The two pedagogues that I have been following go against that unwritten rule when they educate classical singers in groups.

My thesis shows the significance of being able to feel safe, to dare to fail and to make another person more important than you, in order to experiment and develop your craft. I believe that if you are a vocal pedagogue it is of such importance to think about how your student can be affected by the experience of feeling secure. The work room needs to be a safe environment for the singer to experiment in, and I believe that working together with other student singers can have a liberating effect, maybe on the contrary to what vocal coaches often think. I do believe that many vocal teachers think that the student feels safer in a private room with only the teacher present and maybe that can be partly true, but I imagine that it can also be a disservice to the singer.

If you can create a warm, friendly and above all *safe* environment together with a group of classical singer students I think you have everything to gain and I believe that this thesis and its results prove that.

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## **5. Attachments**

Recordings with the two private sessions

A translation of the private session with Gunilla Gårdfeldt.