

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL
TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by Lana Martino-Smith

2006 Churchill Fellow

The Dame Roma Mitchell Churchill Fellowship to undertake advanced tuition in contemporary vocal technique with world renowned singing teacher, Neil Semer – USA

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Introduction

In September this year I was granted the enormous privilege of traveling to New York to study contemporary vocal technique with master teacher Neil Semer under the sponsorship of the Dame Roma Mitchell Churchill Fellowship.

There are few words that can express the gratitude I feel at having been granted this prestigious award. I would like to extend my deepest, most sincere thanks to Dame Roma Mitchell and the Trust for their generosity. It is a great blessing to find people so selflessly dedicated to the cause of the enrichment of the Australian community through assisting others in pursuing their passions.

My time away has shown me that Australia is an incredibly gifted country, rich and vibrant with talent. I look forward to contributing to that richness and vibrancy with the knowledge I have gained during my time overseas, and enriching the lives of many, just as Dame Roma Mitchell and the Churchill Trust have enriched mine. Thankyou.

Executive Summary

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Project Description

The project involved me undertaking 16 private singing lessons across 4 weeks with voice coach Neil Semer in his private studio in New York. The aim of the project was to investigate techniques used to teach contemporary singing technique, particularly belting in the genre of music theatre, by a master teacher working at the highest level of the field, in this case, Broadway. I also spent time observing the lessons of other students as well as viewing a number of on and off Broadway shows, witnessing professional vocalists at this level in action first hand. I also attended regular dance classes at a local performance school which gave me the opportunity to network with working performers based in New York.

In addition I spent a week in Los Angeles observing voice lessons of legendary singing teacher to the stars and creator of Speech Level Singing (SLS), Seth Riggs and CEO of SLS, Dave Stroud. This opportunity arose mere weeks before I left for New York after a chance meeting at a voice conference, and the experience proved to be an invaluable addition to the project as I gained enormous insight into this celebrity endorsed technique.

Highlights

- Having regular contact with Neil Semer, an incredibly insightful, passionate and effective teacher
- Viewing a number of the most famous musicals in the world on Broadway including Rent, Wicked and Chorusline, and seeing Sutton Foster, one of the world's greatest music theatre performers in The Drowsy Chaperone
- Meeting writer/composer Barbara Schottenfeld, and assisting backstage at her latest show, Hot and Sweet as part of the New York Music Theatre Festival
- Observing the lesson of one of Neil's students who was preparing for an audition for the character of Elphaba in the show Wicked
- Observing lessons of Seth Riggs and Dave Stroud, undertaking lessons with Dave Stroud and observing the training of SLS teachers by Dave Stroud

Recommendations

- For vocal representative body's and universities with contemporary voice programs to organize master classes and training events with teachers from overseas specializing in the teaching of contemporary vocal technique, ie. Pop, rock, jazz and music theatre, for the benefit of teachers and performers of contemporary music
- For teachers and performers to maintain regular contact with international specialists through use of phone lessons and the internet to ensure that the Australian contemporary scene remains vital and in line with international standards

Implementation and Dissemination

- Information gathered will directly effect my teaching of contemporary vocalists in Australia
- Information will also be disseminated through networking within the voice community which I am involved in, particularly with the Contemporary Vocal Teacher's Forum which has its basis in Brisbane

Fellowship Programme

1st September – Depart Brisbane, Australia

1st -28th September – New York

- Private lessons with Neil Semer
- Observation of lessons of other students of Neil Semer
- Viewed on and off Broadway shows
- Attended regular dance classes at the Westside Dance Project

29th – 5th October – Los Angeles

- Observing lessons with Seth Riggs and Dave Stroud
- Private lessons with Dave Stroud
- Observing SLS teacher training by Dave Stroud

6th October – Return to Brisbane, Australia

PART I – New York

What is Contemporary Singing?

The question of defining what contemporary singing is is huge and could be discussed at length without conclusion. However I thought it important to clarify my meaning of contemporary singing for the purposes of my research.

I am referring to the speech like quality, particularly belt, although legit as well, which is used in the singing of modern styles of music such as pop, rock, jazz and music theatre. My lessons specifically focused on music theatre repertoire as this, along with classical, is Neil Semer's specialty area. The techniques detailed below could however be used as a foundation for all contemporary styles of music.

Contemporary Voice in Australia

In Australia, the contemporary voice industry, that is the performance and teaching of styles such as pop, rock, jazz, and music theatre, is rapidly growing. One need only watch Australian Idol to see this. However, there are still few teachers in Australia that can say with certainty that they know how to guide a student safely through the registers of their voice while maintaining a contemporary sound that meets industry standards and remains true to the student's own personal style and artistic sensibilities, with a view towards longevity and performance at the highest level.

This is not a situation that is peculiar to Australia. Contemporary voice as a science is still in its infancy around the world, so it is important for us, if we are to continue to grow and develop in our effectiveness as teachers, to remain abreast of the techniques that are being used by people at the highest level of the industry.

Why Neil?

Although I have met a number of teachers from America and Europe who I could have worked with, it was Neil's balanced approach to the teaching of singing that appealed to me. Firstly, he has a comprehensive knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the voice and the body as a whole, which enables him to isolate problems very quickly and accurately. He then utilizes simple, effective exercises that target the root of problems rather than just the symptoms, thereby making changes long lasting. Secondly, he has a comprehensive knowledge of a broad range of repertoire, particularly classical and Broadway, and thirdly, he has the intuition and experience to guide a student through the battlefield of their own mind, which is the biggest hurdle a student must overcome in developing as an artist.

Neil's Philosophy

Neil's approach is based on the teachings of Giovanni Battista Lamperti, which were transcribed by his student William Earl Brown between 1891 and 1893. The teachings were later published in 1957 in the book "Vocal Wisdom".

"Vocal Wisdom" is not a book on how to sing. There is no detailed technical instruction in this book, rather it is a philosophical book about what good singing is and what it consists of and it is these philosophical principles that Neil felt a profound connection with.

Following on from this Neil went about researching its scientific underpinnings, in other words, the "how" behind the "what", the anatomy, physiology and function of the voice. It was later that he added a third component to his approach, that of the spiritual, an aspect that I found very interesting and unique.

While his spiritual beliefs are detailed in a book that he often recommends to students, "The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle, in short he believes in being present in the moment, in your body, in your creativity, in your musicality. The mind may wander and the emotions may become turbulent but the authentic self must remain present with what is happening in the body at all times.

So the approach is 3 fold:

1. Philosophical
2. Scientific
3. Spiritual

In Neil's words –

"I am looking for the voice to be a reflection of the human heart and soul. I am not looking for a sound. I am looking to open a person up to themselves.

I believe that the most natural voice, personality, musicality, emotions and spirituality should emerge through singing. Towards this end I am looking for a physical state that supports this honesty and connectedness.

In terms of alignment that means lengthening, broadening and releasing, in terms of space it means opening and softening the space, in terms of breathing it means a low control of the breath rooted at the pelvic floor, in terms of speech it means speaking directly from the heart, not just in terms of the emotion but in terms of where the person feels the resonance beginning (A connection to tracheal resonance)."

When I asked Neil if there are students who do not respond to this approach he said, "Absolutely. People want different things out of singing. If they want to sound like someone then we will be poorly matched as teacher and student because I try to pry people away from sounding like anybody else. I am looking for them to open up to themselves. The person who is not interested in their own creative voice is not the right student for me."

This raised an issue for me with a background in pop and jazz where a large part of what is learned comes from imitation. It took some time for me to adjust to Neil's approach, but, as difficult as it was, with Neil's guidance I was able to put my judgments about my voice aside, my ideas about how I should and shouldn't sound, and this allowed me to get more out of Neil's techniques and in turn see more of myself. To not limit myself with judgments was probably the greatest lesson that I learned and these judgments would usually arise when I was in the past listening to the sound I was making rather than being in the present, actively involved in the process of creation.

The lessons were totally geared towards maintaining contact with the present, constantly punctuated with the question, "What are you feeling, physically and emotionally?" The effect of this was to give me a much greater awareness of my body and my emotions, as opposed to fighting against them. This is where Neil was very clear about distinguishing between observations and judgments. Was I expressing fact about the experience of singing or was I placing a judgment upon what I had done? Facts were useful, judgments were not because judgments are not based in reality, judgments are based in the mind.

Fear was a common feeling that arose in lessons and I think Neil's favorite saying was "Feel your fear and do the work", the work being the technical aspects of singing that opened me up to my voice and got the job done, as opposed to wrestling with my mind and emotions about what I thought I sounded like, which didn't.

I found this to be a highly effective approach for me as it kept me focused on what was real as opposed to what I imagined. Although very confronting at times, I found a great freedom and truth in this method, and I know that I have a much greater sense of myself because of it.

A Full Body Approach

Neil advocates a full body approach to singing in that he does not deal with the voice until the instrument as a whole, the body, is working fully and efficiently. Across the course of the lessons, he developed my body awareness through the use of simple instruction and exercises. Through practice, much repetition and general awareness, the new muscular actions that the exercises promoted started to happen involuntarily so that aspects of artistry could take precedence.

Below I have detailed the fundamental aspects of the instruction which was consistently used in each lesson. These form the basis of good vocal technique in any style.

Alignment

This refers to the alignment of the body. Good alignment ensures that the effort of any physical exertion is distributed throughout the body for the efficient use of the muscles and ligaments and that the bearing of the body's weight is accomplished through balance rather than muscular effort or rigidity. Where one part of the body is being utilized incorrectly or inefficiently then another part of the body will have to compensate. Singing is a muscular activity that occurs within the body therefore it is imperative that all the muscles of the body are working in cooperation with one another in a balanced way to ensure the muscles of the voice are not placed under any unneeded stress.

Neil described good alignment as involving three active energies:

1. Earth –

This consists of feeling

- a. The feet in contact with the floor
- b. The knees releasing
- c. The pelvis releasing under you

2. Heart –

The sternum opening up and forward. As a consequence one should feel an opening of the heart like your emotions are more available.

3. Sky –

A feeling that if the spine were to come out of the crown of the head it would float ever higher.

Neil emphasized that these energies are movements, not positions. There should always be a sense of continual movement, in other words, one keeps releasing into the floor, one keeps opening the heart, and one keeps floating upward.

The feeling of this in my body was one of absolute freedom, lightness and an agility that allowed my movements to flow naturally and easily. I felt bigger than usual, like I was taking up more space. I worked on incorporating this into my every day life, being aware of my alignment at all times, so that when it came to singing, my alignment was not an issue.

Open Drop Lean Flow

Once the body was as large as it could be, it was possible to open the space inside the body and allow a deep connection between the body and the voice. This was done at first in 4 stages.

1. Open –

The creation of a big internal opening by

- a. Smiling
- b. The feeling of the beginning of a yawn in the back of the throat
- c. Puckering the lips forward
- d. Releasing the tongue forward

The smile and the pucker are two opposing things so it was at first difficult to maintain both together. The cheeks must also remain high while the lips pucker forward. The result was an actual increase in internal space and I spent a great deal of time just experiencing the new sensation of this.

2. Drop –

This step is inhalation, although it is not an active drawing in of the breath. It involves a complete relaxation of the muscles of the abdomen from the diaphragm to the pelvic floor, which, combined with the broad opening of the throat in the first step, allows for an easy drop of air into the body rather than via a noisy gasp.

3. Lean –

This is an action that supports the lowered position of the diaphragm and the broad position of the ribs that is part of support in singing.

At the points in the body where the diaphragm is attached at the front, back, and all along the lowest ribs there should be a feeling of leaning outward during exhalation or singing, and conversely a feeling of relaxation when the air is coming in.

4. Flow-

This is the initiation of the outflow of breath at the lowest point in the body, the pelvic floor, and on that outflow we sing. While maintaining the lean into the diaphragm the deep muscles of the pelvic floor move upwards. The effect of this is to create a deep internal connection between the body and the sound. Air has to leave the body somehow and somewhere to sing, and Neil wishes for it to flow

out from the lowest place possible, thereby avoiding a collapse of the sternum, ribs or back.

This process of open, drop, lean, flow was done as a breathing exercise to promote space and connection in my singing and Neil likened it to a ballet dancer doing exercises. In the first two lessons he recommended that I do this for five minutes every waking half hour to make it an unconscious activity for singing.

I would open my throat in the way described above, drop by relaxing all the muscles of my abdomen, lean into my diaphragm and then exhale energetically through puckered lips by compelling my pelvic floor to rise while maintaining the lean into the diaphragm.

My biggest difficulty with this was maintaining an elevated sternum during the process as my body was not strong enough at first to maintain its alignment.

Strengthening the Suspension of the Rib Cage

When Neil demonstrated open drop lean flow for me I was amazed at the independence between his abdomen and his chest. As he dropped, his sternum remained in its high position, completely unmoved. He said it was natural for men to have more strength in the upper body area however it could be developed in a woman's body as well.

He instructed me to practice blowing out vigorously while challenging my sternum up and forward. At the end of my breath I was to continue blowing outwards for 10 seconds, continuing to challenge my sternum up and forward against the pull of my lower abdominal muscles. I was to do this 15 times every waking half hour.

This process was exhausting and extremely uncomfortable at first, like doing push ups for the first time, however it was important that this exercise be done rigorously, like pumping iron at the gym, in order for the necessary strength to develop in the muscles of the rib cage and sternum. This would allow them to work without effort or tension during singing.

Catch Breaths

Once the process of open, drop, lean, flow was in the body, it was possible to reduce it to 2 steps.

It became - exhale, and open drop, exhale, and open drop - so that the open and drop become one step and the lean and flow become another.

For this to work effectively it was necessary to spring into the opening so that the tongue seems to be on the wall in front of you, the top of the head flies to the

ceiling, the walls of the throat fly to the side walls of the room and the pelvis releases into the earth.

Eventually this will look and feel much more subtle however at first it needs to be exaggerated in practice.

It should be noted that inhalation is not a step in any of these breathing exercises. The very act of opening, relaxing and giving over to gravity allows the breath to flow into the body without the need to inhale or gasp, even though it feels as though the body has not breathed at all.

Making Sound

The Primal Sound

The sound that Neil is after in a singer is one of richness, fullness, openness and connection to the body and the soul and he would initiate this feeling in my body through use of a primal sound, a low rumbling expression made at the level of the heart. The sound is created by the balance of space and connection to the heart and is also characterized by a balance of light and dark, or in Italian, the idea of chiaroscuro. This balance had to be present in all singing that was done in the lessons, from lip trills and open vowels to the words of a song.

On a typical day we would begin with lip trills, beginning in a lower part of my range and gliding through octaves, maintaining as much space inside my body as possible through the smile, the yawn and the pucker. Neil's most common prompt was "Bigger smile, bigger yawn", which had the external effect of raising my cheeks towards the ceiling and the internal effect of increasing the space within my body. The result of this was an increase in the richness, fullness and connectedness of the sound. It felt as though my entire insides were being stretched and for the first few days the muscles inside my throat felt the same way as the muscles of my body felt after doing yoga for the first time, sore, but in a positive way.

Lip trills were then followed with vowels such as ah, ee and eh in the same internally opened, connected way. These exercises were then applied to standards such as "Someone to Watch Over Me" and "Can't Help Lovin' That Man", for the purposes of developing my legit sound.

It is fair to say that the sound was a good deal more inside my body than I was accustomed to and the effect of this was to create a muffled sensation in my ears. This led me to question the quality of the sound. However, when I listened back to the video recording the sound was clear, unaffected and full.

Line and Spin

Each exercise and legit piece was sung using portamento, gliding from one note to the next smoothly and connectedly without breaks. We used portamento a great deal because it demands a fierce connection to the arc of the vocal line, as opposed to thinking one note at a time. This facilitated growth in the color, connection, balance and fullness of the voice. Scientifically speaking, portamento balances the cryco-thyroid muscles action with that of the thyro-arytenoid muscle. This is the muscular action that balances the head and chest registers.

In addition to placing huge importance on line, Neil also emphasized the importance of spin or vibrato in the voice. The reason why this is so important is because vibrato is a sign of free vocal production as well as a sign of emotional connection. In Neil's words:

"If you spin at the level of the heart you will feel vibrancy in the movement of the air right from the place where the trachea breaks into the bronchial tubes. When the air is really in vibrant motion the voice seems to spin/vibrate. You will feel a deep relaxation and connection to the voice and hear fuller overtones."

With my background in pop and jazz, where the singing style is much more rhythmic and percussive, both of these concepts introduced me to very new sensations, especially when done to the degree that Neil asked. The vibrato in particular took some getting used to as I was not accustomed to feeling vibrato the entire way through my phrases, however the feeling was very open and grand and my voice seemed to get richer as a result of it.

Neil advised singing through a legit piece everyday as part of a practice routine. This would enable it to become easier as well as allowing me to become more comfortable with the aesthetic of it, not to mention having it as a skill that can be used in a professional situation.

Vowel Modification

Vowel modifications were used in order to close through the passaggios of my voice. In approaching the 2nd passaggio, the sung vowel would be modified through a closed oo position and then opened to a vertical oh position after transition.

In my voice, when singing legit, the closure would peak around F#5 although would begin much earlier, and then would open around the following G. An interesting proposition that Neil made was that in belting this closure should happen a 6th lower than in classical/legit singing, so the peak of closure should happen around A4. The effect of this was to make belting much easier.

The Difference Between Legit and Belting

According to Neil, belting is a primitive expression that has its basis in speech. It uses a different registration to classical or legit singing.

In classical or legit singing there is approximately a 50/50 balance between speech and space. In belting the balance towards speech is greater. The thyro-arytenoid muscle (TA), which forms the vocal fold itself, is used with much greater intensity. In the mix of head/chest resonance there is a greater preponderance of chest resonance, therefore greater action of the TA muscle. When properly balanced it is not an abusive behavior.

It is more chest predominant although this is only true as one ascends in range, not as one descends in range. Good belt singing has no more chest in the bottom of the voice than legit singing. Only in the middle and upper registers is there a greater predominance of chest voice resonance.

Teaching Belt

Neil does not use exercises to teach belting, he prefers to do it through repertoire. He generally starts with the song, "The Rose" because it is calm and linear, it has the range of only an octave and it is easily transposable.

In classical training students will often start on simple Italian songs like "Caro Mio Ben". For Neil, "The Rose" is the "Caro Mio Ben" of belting. He uses primitive sounds to build a connection to the chest, while maintaining openness and a released tongue and then applies this to "The Rose", transposing it into higher keys as the student learns to maintain the correct balance of head and chest resonance while remaining open.

Strategy for Learning Up Tempo Songs

For the most part of the training, in developing both legit and belt technique, we worked on ballads because the slow tempos allow for the development of openness and breath control. Neil explained that the difficulty with learning up tempo songs is that

1. There is limited time to breathe so a fantastic breathing technique must be in place or the breathing will tend to get high and hectic.
2. The words have to be spoken more quickly so the singer has to have a way of speaking that does not tire the muscles or create tension.

1. Breathing Technique

At first when we sing quickly the steps of open, drop, lean, flow are not done as effectively as when we sing slowly:

- The open isn't really open
- The drop becomes a pull
- The lean will be violent rather than supple
- The first moment of the flow will be a kick or a tightening

The tongue will retract, the throat will close and the sternum will drop.

That is why repetition of the process is so important because it allows the body to become accustomed to doing each step fully, regardless of speed. Practicing catch breaths allows this process to become faster.

2. Speaking

Singing up tempo requires the tongue to be much more agile and the jaw to be more passive.

Speech must be clear but not gripping and the body must be open at the end of every phrase.

Neil prescribed 2 exercises for promoting freedom of speech.

Exercise 1

This is for the purpose of developing the agility of the tongue and the stretched release of the tongue root.

1. Rest index finger on chin to monitor any jaw movement
2. Starting with the tongue behind the top teeth, say "lah" by flicking tongue down from the upper teeth, followed by "ah" as you stretch the tongue root far forward. Repeat this with lee and ee – so you say lah-ah, lee-ee, lah-ah, lee-ee
3. Repeat using the consonants n, t, d, th which are in order of difficulty

Sound must remain connected at the level of the heart.

Only breathe when you need to so that you create a long flowing phrase.

If the jaw moves it is not caused by a jaw problem, it is caused by tongue laziness.

Exercise 2

1. Place the thumb of one hand in between the teeth, allowing the teeth to rest on the tongue

2. Place the thumb and index finger of the other hand on either side of the lip corners
3. Speak with excessive clarity through the text of the song, allowing the teeth to remain rested on the thumb – at no time should the teeth bite into the thumb, nor should the lips corners pull back.

Do this slowly maintaining breath flow and connection to the heart.

Continually give each phrase to the breath.

End each phrase really open and then drop.

If the teeth do not bite into the thumb it is a sign that the jaw is relaxed. If the words are clear the tongue is working properly.

Once this is achieved repeat without the assistance of the hands.

Feel yourself talking with a very energetic tongue tip, uninvolved jaw and with a continual flow from the heart.

This is ultimately how you want to be able to sing. By doing it this way you don't grab and you can sing faster because the sound is not labored with heavy muscular action.

7 Neck Stretches

The 7 neck stretches are for the purpose of releasing tension in the neck and jaw. All begin with good alignment and a high sternum. They are to be done using the gravitational pull of your head and hands. Do not pull! Maintain each stretch for 30-60secs.

1. Front
 - a. Allow head to fall forward while maintaining a high sternum
 - b. Put hands on the back of your head, relaxing the elbows to feel a lengthening in the upper spine
2. Side
 - a. Raise one ear to the ceiling
 - b. Place the opposite hand on top of the head to feel a lengthening in the side of the neck
3. Repeat 2 on the other side
4. Over Shoulder
 - a. Look over one shoulder while maintaining elevation through the top of the head to feel a stretch in the side of the neck

5. Repeat 4 on the other side
6. 45 Degree Angle
 - a. Allow head to fall forward while maintaining a high sternum
 - b. Tip it to a 45 degree angle while keeping face to the front to feel a stretch in the muscles between the spine and the side of the neck
7. Repeat 6 on the other side

Practice Routine

Neil described this as being like the ballet barre for singers, a practice routine to maintain vocal health and fitness for a lifetime. These are the building blocks of a great voice. Doing this routine will keep the voice in great shape and keep it growing.

1. Begin by sitting or lying down and simply observing what your body is feeling emotionally and physically – what is going on in your body? Are you ready to work or is there some emotion that needs to be addressed?
2. Alignment – review directions of the body
3. Opening throat with smile, yawn, pucker, tongue release forwards – stay in this position and observe how it feels
4. Breathing – air coming in and out at the level of the bronchial tubes, the body should feel completely hollow
3. Open, Drop, Lean, Flow – stretch body and throat – when you look in the mirror there should be no change in upper body, only belly dropping. The sternum, while not rigidly fixed high, should not drop.
4. Catch Breaths – to increase speed of breathing technique

Note: Even though a note has not been sung yet, just by doing this the voice will already be very warm

5. 7 Neck Stretches
6. Exercises
 - a. Lip trills – octave portamento
 - i. Throat should be hugely open
 - ii. There should be a connection to the chest
 - iii. Feeling of a light floating vibration on the lips
 - iv. If it is only chest you'll be screaming, if it's only the lips the throat is closed
 - b. Consonant Portamento on v and n
 - i. Use these particularly if the voice is tired – it's very gentle on the folds. When done well (meaning the vibration seems to

begin on the tongue tip and lips) you will experience the voice as well and effortlessly “placed”.

- c. Vowels – ee, oo, ah – octave portamento
 - i. Portamento essential
 - ii. Spin like crazy
 - iii. Commitment to Open, drop, lean, flow
 - iv. Resonance on the lips balanced with heart connection to create light and dark (chiaroscuro)

NB: Be aware of the tendencies to collapse your throat opening and/or body alignment and to retract the tongue at the moment when sound is initiated. Maintain the opening in the body. For the throat to stay open when doing a lip trill, feel as if you are wrapping your lips around a ball.

7. Song work – all done out of time at first

Legit Pieces

- a. Lip trill through melody – portamento
- b. Ah vowel through melody – portamento
- c. All vowels of song – portamento
- d. Add consonants – portamento
- e. Sing song being committed to the line

Belt Pieces

- a. Sing through lines maintaining balance between chest and head resonance, ensuring open throat is also maintained
- b. Speech exercises for tongue and jaw release if it is an up tempo song

Suggested Repertoire for Lana

Towards the end of my stay, when properly acquainted with me as a person and an artist, Neil went through his extensive music collection and suggested repertoire that would be appropriate for my voice type and musical style.

Lana’s voice type:

- Soprano
- Able to sing legit and belt
- Feel for contemporary style with jazz and pop background

Neil suggested that old jazz standards are useful because they are workable in lots of styles and they can show range and diversity of performance style. He also suggested having a mixture of songs from old and new musicals, as well as

having a Stephen Sondheim and an Andrew Lloyd Weber piece for audition purposes.

SONG TITLE	MUSICAL OR COMPOSER
Honeysuckle Rose	Fats Waller
Ain't Misbehavin'	Fats Waller
I Got a Feeling I'm Falling	Fats Waller
I Dreamed a Dream	Les Miserables
Keep Out of Mischief Now	Fats Waller
Meadowlark	Stephen Schwartz
The Love of My Life (Belt)	Brigadoon
Waiting for My Dearie (Legit)	Brigadoon
All Sally's Songs	Cabaret
All Evita's Songs	Evita
What's the Use of Wonderin'	Carousel
Heaven Help My Heart	Chess
With Every Breath I Take	City of Angels
What You Don't Know About Women	City of Angels
You Can Always Count on Me	City of Angels
What You Don't Know About Women	City of Angels
You Can Always Count on Me	City of Angels
Lost and Found	City of Angels
Old Friend	I'm Getting My Act Together
Put in a Package and Sold	I'm Getting My Act Together
I Don't Know How to Love Him	Jesus Christ Superstar
Someone Like You	Jekyll and Hyde
Role of Bianca	Kiss Me Kate
Wherever He Ain't	Mack and Mable
Unusual Way	Nine
Simple	Nine
A Call From the Vatican	Nine
Nancy's songs	Oliver
Is it Really Me	110 in the Shade
Simple Little Things	110 in the Shade
Raunchy	110 in the Shade
You Don't Know this Man	Parade
Kind of Woman	Pippin
Maureen's Role	Rent
Martha's Role	Secret Garden
Poor Everybody Else	See Saw
Nobody Does it Like Me	See Saw
Charity's Role	Sweet Charity
Ilona's Role	She Loves Me
I Will Never Leave You	Side Show

Who Will Love Me as I Am	Side Show
How Did We Come to This	Wild Party
Life of the Party	Wild Party
Maybe I Like it That Way	Wild Party
Raise the Roof	Wild Party
Why Did I Choose You	The Yearling

PART II – Los Angeles

Speech Level Singing (SLS)

My time in LA was not part of my original plan however after meeting Seth Riggs and Dave Stroud at the Canadian Voice Care Foundation Symposium in August and seeing them present a workshop about the SLS method, I was invited to spend some time having and observing lessons at their studio in LA. I was so impressed with the results they achieved in the workshop that this was too good an opportunity to pass up.

This method is essentially about bridging the registers of the voice. It involves the use of vowel, consonant and scale combinations to assist the singer in finding what is called “mix”, a balance of head and chest resonance that allows the singer to move through the bridges of the registers of the voice without audible transition.

It is a very interesting process to watch and experience as it involves the teacher identifying the vocal tendencies of the student and then making subtle changes in the vowel/consonant/scale combinations used during the lessons to create the opposite conditions in order to create balance in the voice. For instance, if the student is using too much chest resonance the teacher will use a vowel that will encourage the use of more head resonance and vice versa. Consistency of vowel shape is paramount in maintaining cord closure and achieving the desired “mix” and it is up to the teacher to monitor the very subtle changes that the student may make to the vowel shape in the course of an exercise, which will upset the mix, and lead them into an area of too much head or chest.

The method was created by Seth Riggs who is noted for having worked with singers like Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson and Natalie Cole as well as having students at the cutting edge of opera and music theatre. It is now being taught all over the world as part of the SLS program which provides vocal instruction for all genres of music as well as comprehensive teacher training.

It is unfortunate that I only had a week to spend at the studio watching Riggs and Stroud work, as well as having lessons with Stroud, as by the end of the week I had only scratched the surface of understanding this method, although, even without an in-depth knowledge of the workings of the technique, the effectiveness of it is undeniable. I was able to view lessons of students of a wide range of skill and experience, from those who had been learning the technique for many years, whose vocal control and “mix” were well honed, to students in their second or third lesson, whose sounds changed dramatically during the course of the lesson through the correct use of the tools.

The most insightful lesson for me as a teacher was a lesson conducted by Dave Stroud for an SLS teacher in training. This is where I got my first real insight into the scientific underpinnings of this technique and why it is so effective.

I am eager to learn more about these tools in greater depth because when used in the correct way they are very effective in balancing the registers of the voice.

Conclusions

This experience has opened my eyes up to the valuable knowledge that is available in this field and the high levels of precision that one's voice can be trained to with the use of the correct tools. It is a great gift to be able to learn techniques from teacher's whose skills and knowledge are so well honed and refined and proven to be effective at the highest level, without hit or miss or need of experimentation.

So much information did I gather while overseas that I'm sure it will be many months before I have processed it all completely and in that pursuit I will be having follow up lessons via phone and internet with the teachers that I have met to ensure that my technique continues to develop. I look forward to disseminating this information via direct contact with my own students, which has in fact already begun, as well as through my involvement with the growing network of voice specialists in Australia through organizations such as ANATS and more locally, The Contemporary Voice Teacher's Forum.

I would advocate the study and understanding of many methods and styles of teaching in order to gain maximum benefit and effectiveness from them in the safest possible way. It is our responsibility as contemporary vocalists and teachers to take responsibility for our own vocal education and stay abreast of all information out there, not only through reading and research, but through regular contact with specialist teachers overseas. While nothing can beat spending time studying in person with a teacher and spending time observing them in person in their studio, we have a fabulous opportunity with the internet to have regular checkups and spend time observing via our computers, to ensure that our own approaches remain on the right track.

Every private teacher knows how easy it is to get caught up in our own "methods", at times blind to our own shortcomings and the shortcomings of our students, and while it is important for us each to develop our own style, it is also important that the style remain vibrant, ever subservient to the end goal of providing our students with the healthiest, most complete use of their voice possible so they are free to choose how they will use them.

Recommendations

I am reluctant to “recommend” singing techniques as such because I think it is important for every singer and teacher to find techniques and approaches that work for them, and simply because something works for one does not mean that it will work for another. Having said that, I believe that an increase in body awareness, both emotional and physical, would benefit most, if not all performers and teachers.

What I would recommend is a relentless pursuit of knowledge and understanding within the contemporary voice community. There are specialists in this field working at very high levels of the industry that are available to us and we should take advantage of their expertise.

I would recommend that vocal representative body's and universities with contemporary voice programs organize master classes and training events with teachers from overseas specializing in the teaching of contemporary vocal technique, ie. Pop, rock, jazz and music theatre, for the benefit of teachers and performers alike.

I would also encourage teachers and performers to maintain regular contact with international specialists through use of phone lessons and the internet to ensure that the Australian contemporary scene remains vital and in line with international standards.