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The Psychology of Music. XII. A Beautiful Voice

Author(s): Carl E. Seashore

Source: *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Feb., 1938), pp. 18-19

Published by: Sage Publications, Inc. on behalf of MENC: The National Association for Music Education

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3385449>

Accessed: 20-06-2016 00:14 UTC

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A Beautiful Voice

CARL E. SEASHORE

No. 12 in the Psychology of Music Series

IN presenting a plea for the cultivation of a beautiful voice, permit me, as a psychologist, to emphasize the following points: (1) The significance and the possibility of a beautiful voice has been overlooked to an astonishing degree by educators and society in general—psychologists not excepted. (2) The approach to a beautiful singing voice should be made through the very early cultivation of a beautiful speaking voice. (3) A lovely and effective speaking voice is not only an index to character and personality but is one of the most potent means for the cultivation of these. (4) Musicians should recognize that their most effective ally in the cultivation of a beautiful singing voice lies in the early promotion of the development of an understanding of the meaning and the possibilities of a good speaking voice. (5) This development takes place most naturally through the spontaneous activities of self-expression in the schoolroom, playground, and the home, when wisely nurtured.

In our modern tendency to force early development of children in an unnatural way by encouraging too early the beginning of formal lessons on instruments, musicians have much to account for. They have thwarted the effective operation of natural motivation, have started the child toward a lopsided personality by diverting his energies and interests from normal development of other equally important resources, and have often injured mental and physical health by fostering precocity. Fortunately, this tendency is being counteracted to a large extent by the effective and natural development of music in the kindergarten and elementary grades.

We seldom hear a musician giving serious attention to the development of the voice in early childhood. Indeed, we are told that, because the voice is in for such a radical change through maturation, it is not important to begin early training.

Let me enter a plea for very early attention to the development of the voice in boys and girls. I do not mean the early formal training for musicianship or speech exhibition, but rather training for the appreciation and understanding of the significance and the possibilities of a beautiful voice in music and speech. And let us put speech first because the natural quality of a child's voice is set very largely for life in the first six years, in spite of the great changes which take place with maturation. This setting is acquired vastly more in speech than in song and the development of the speaking voice normally comes before the development of the singing voice.

It is a most extraordinary thing that an ugly speaking tone is tolerated not only in the voice of the ordinary

cultivated person but in musicians, even great singers, without any great feeling of incongruity. Likewise, it is a deplorable fact that teachers who are to serve as models for the development of personality in the elementary schoolroom have seldom if ever given any attention to the character of their own speaking voices. Bad voice quality seems to be taken for granted in the educational world just as distortion of facial features, bowleggedness, or a miniature stature are taken for granted as fixtures. It is to be hoped that with a new speech consciousness "a little child shall lead them."

The present world seems to be eye-minded so far as education is concerned, paying little or no attention to the voice which is by far the most effective medium for social intercourse and is more expressive of character than any other means of communication that we have.

With the coming in of corrective speech, dealing with the disabilities, educators are being awakened to the fact that they have neglected a most important positive factor, namely, the possibility of making the child's normal speech more beautiful. All the world loves a beautiful child, and all the world should know that this love attaches very largely to beauty in speech.

I have sponsored a movement to offset the treatment of children's voices in the movies by encouraging the development of playlets which would exhibit lovely children in conversation, giving evidence of the marvels of beauty of speech from the very beginning of vocalization through the formative years. If artistic material of this sort were available, the movie world would immediately respond with enthusiasm, as it always does to child attractiveness. Shirley Temple's voice, both on the stage and in social conversation, is resourceful and effective; but it can hardly be said to be beautiful. This is due, in large part, to the heroic bravado parts she has to play with adults. Beauty is generally attributed to her voice as a halo effect from resourcefulness and effectiveness which, of course, are elements of beauty.

One educator has placed a little endowment upon each of his grandchildren with the stipulation that they shall have the income for a birthday present each year together with the annual reminder of a note pointing out the value of a beautiful speaking voice.

There are several steps that must be taken in organizing this training in the schools and in the home. The first is to teach parents and teachers the significance of a beautiful voice. That idea must be promulgated until everybody begins to take notice of it. This accomplished, more than half of the work is done because the next step is not so much formal training as a con-

tinuous and vital attention to the difference between the beautiful speaking voice and an ugly one throughout life.

Second, in teaching children in the kindergarten, in the grades, in the home, or on the playground, there is not so much need of formal lessons in voice culture as there is of constant *expression of appreciation* of beautiful tone quality and disparagement of the bad. The significant thing is that this is immediately tied up with character and personality. Shouting, screaming, snorting, rasping, and all sorts of disagreeable speech are nearly always expressions of a disagreeable personality trait. Likewise, the deliberate cultivation of sweetness of speech inevitably reacts back, hinging upon the easily observable fact that, while you can imitate a beautiful voice, you do not get far with that; it does not become a part of you until it is a part of the natural personality.

Third, let me therefore carry to music educators of America the most earnest plea for their sponsorship of beautiful speech in the school, in the home, and on the

playground, especially during the first six years of childhood. Let the educators give the support of their prestige to the recognition that a beautiful singing voice is in large part based upon habits of appreciation of beauty in voice quality during the early years of childhood. We have the comfort that proper attention given to the careful training of the voice in speech and in song in the early years has none of the drawbacks that prematurely forced formal lessons on musical instruments is in danger of having. It is also gratifying to know that, while not all children can become singers, nearly all children have latent capacities for good speech. Let musicians show leadership in bringing this issue to the front through teacher-training institutions, parent-teacher associations, and musical activities.

Fourth, from the point of view of motivation there is an advantage for the singing teacher to have the child come into later lessons in singing with a deep-rooted appreciation of good voice quality. The possession of this readily transfers to singing. Let us make our children voice-conscious!

Science for Art's Sake

JOSEPH E. MADDY

WITH so much that is new and challenging in educational procedures, as well as in performance techniques, commanding attention at the National convention in St. Louis, every hour and minute of the six-day period will be well filled indeed. And while the inspiration to be derived from the general sessions, section meetings, clinics, and mammoth festival events is incalculable, the value of the many mechanical devices which science will have to offer should also invite thoughtful consideration. Therefore, let us investigate to the full the possibilities of the new teaching aids which will be there for demonstration and discussion; for, if properly applied, they may add greatly to the effectiveness of teaching and interest in learning.

Every school day brings us several radio programs that are designed especially for use in school music classes. No strictly educational program on the air is tinged with commercial advertising of any sort, yet many parents, school officials, and music educators regard all radio programs as cheap if not harmful entertainment, having no possible value to the children under their guidance.

A recent survey brought the following reasons for not utilizing music education broadcasts: "We have no radio." "We have a music teacher." "We have no music teacher." "Our schedule is too crowded." "Radio programs should come after school." All of these replies could be moulded into one honest answer, "I am not interested."

Yet many of these same schools bemoan the fact that they cannot afford music instruction for their children.

The phonograph has been with us for many years; and it is responsible, in a large measure, for the growth of interest in music on the part of American school children. Band and orchestra directors, desirous of winning contests, have discovered a new use for the phonograph. They study the interpretations of the masters from recordings, then apply the knowledge in training their groups. But the modern phonograph has far greater possibilities. Let me illustrate.

The Illinois All-State High School Orchestra was to play *Scheherazade* with five rehearsals. Only two members of the orchestra had ever played it before. After one reading the phonograph was brought on the scene. The players watched their music as they listened to the first record, by the Philadelphia Orchestra, then they played that section of the music. Repeating each section after hearing the magnificent performance, amplified through a loud-speaker, each member of the orchestra received firsthand instruction in tone quality, phrasing, and interpretation from an artist of the highest type. Did they forget the lesson? Never. Their performance—and the entire experience, I am sure—was very satisfactory.

Imagine yourself, playing second clarinet in *Fingal's Cave* Overture, repeating sections after a great orchestra. Remember the beautiful duet for two clarinets in the middle section? Could you play it without expres-