

Written reflective essay.

TASK 1 (WRITTEN): 1000-word Reflective Essay.

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During term one, I reflected on many aspects of my learning, specifically in 'Performance Class.' In this reflection I will use Gibb's Reflective Cycle (Gibbs 1988) to structure how I reflect on aspects of 'Performance'.

Performance Class provides me opportunity to exercise pieces in a safe, improvement-based learning environment, where I focus on my vocal technique, my stage presence, acting, language skills and knowledge of pieces. Of the six components, I will reflect initially on my growing recognition of Emotional factors. According to Compton and Postlewaite (2004 pp. 1536–1557), "...there is ample evidence that emotions affect performance. Positive emotions can improve performance, while negative ones can diminish it." I notice how my performance changes with emotions and during my first practical assessment I became overwhelmed. This negatively affected my ability to sing, was detrimental to my performance and reflected in a low grade. To prevent this from occurring in future assessments, I will establish strategies to build confidence, learn to relax and remain mindful of how assessments are conducted and graded. In singing techniques (2024) the following exercises are recommended and will help me work on controlling my emotion before and during heartfelt performances.

Step	Action	Benefit
Step 1	Find a quiet, calm space	Reduces distractions and helps focus
Step 2a	Inhale slowly through the nose	Maximizes oxygen intake, calming nerves
Step 2b	Exhale slowly through the mouth	Helps manage emotional responses
Step 2c	Repeat breathing exercise	Promotes calmness and mental clarity

3. During Singing:

- **Maintain Focus:** While singing, stay mindful of your breath. Use the breathing techniques you practiced.
- **Release Tension:** Pay attention to your body. Release any unnecessary tension in your shoulders, jaw, or throat.

(Singing techniques, 2024)

I feel that my memory and recollection of lyrics and ornamentation is at a strong point. It is important for me, with the extent of repertoire I learn, to remember a vast array of lyrics, in different languages, along with ornamentation on repeating phrases. I feel these skills will improve, however, I find I lack skills in recollection of monologue and spoken text within the music, specifically Recitative (Recit). Generally, I find it easier to remember lyrics when accompanied by music. When questioning different Opera singers, Ammons (2011) found that they used the following techniques that they claimed to be the most efficient to memorise lyrics and aid recall:

1. Translate the music
2. Learn how to speak the words properly
3. Learn the rhythms absent of the words
4. Learn the words in rhythm
5. Learn the notes absent of the words
6. Add the words to the notes and rhythms

Furthermore, with Patterns, Chunks, and Categorising, Ammons (ibid) contends that humans do much better in memorising lists or random items when they are able to

provide some structure to the data they're attempting to recall and I might memorise more information doing the same.

Jakubowski (2023) states that there are several reasons why music and words seem to become intricately linked in memory, including the features of music, which "often serve as a predictable 'scaffold' for helping us to remember associated lyrics, and the rhythm and beat of the music give clues as to how long the next word in a sequence will be." This helps limit the possible word choices to be recalled, possibly by signalling that a three-syllable word fits with a particular rhythm within the song. (Jakubowski 2023)

Conversely, in Racette's and Peretz's experiment (2007) they found that "the best strategy for learning song lyrics is to ignore the melody, as it seems to interfere rather than facilitate word recall in songs, in both musically trained and untrained singers." These findings were intriguing and provide me with ideas for training.

When singing, my vocal 'tone' is described as 'young.' reflecting my age and current level of maturity with my vocal capacity and stage of learning. Henceforth, one of my main intentions is to move the tonality of my voice from a lighter lyrical sound, usually associated with Soubrette Sopranos, to a deeper, more mature sound of a richer Tessitura. This develops over time and particularly in middle age when according to Haeseleer (2012) "menopause lowers the voice with approximately 14Hz." Essentially, my Performance goal involves learning the style of Bel Canto. In a video I observed recently, four of the world's greatest past singers discuss how to achieve Bel Canto style. Bonyng (2007) stated that "One of the most important things of course is the legato singing and how does one go about singing legato - you, you [sic] do this by joining the tones, uniting the tones and we do this mainly by scales." I find my continued use of scales will be an effective training style because the variation is abundant; I can increase the tempo and pitch of scales, the objective to adjust my tonality over time.

Performance class encourages improvement of language, specifically correct diction required in languages including in German, French and Italian, which all require different spoken and sung techniques. Vowel intelligibility for classical singers is imperative to ensure accurate pronunciation of words in different languages. The clarity of diction allows the audience to hear what they are singing, not only in their native language, but also when singing in foreign languages. My grasp of languages and diction is strong and improving. I am not only learning how to pronounce words but also understanding what the words mean. I always ensure I write the literal translation over the lyrics of the language I am singing. Using an IPA source for translation helps my understanding which benefits my performance overall. I can really connect with what the composer writes. In the words of Gregg and Scherer (2006), "Vowel intelligibility during singing is an important aspect of communication during performance. The intelligibility of isolated vowels sung by Western classically trained singers has been found to be relatively low, in fact, decreasing as pitch rises, and it is lower for women than for men." I must therefore ensure my vowels do not diminish when my pitch raises and I can train this by warming up using particular vowel sounds, specifically focussing on vowels instead of consonants, and exercising other sounding letters that are not in the English language. - for example, the *umlaut* used in German.

Recently when learning a new piece, a literal translation of the language was the required first step along with 'talking' through the piece and making sure my diction was correct before singing. According to Scotto Di Carlo (2007), "In singing, the average duration of vowels is considerably longer than it is in speech, whereas that of consonants is slightly shorter" and that "what we sing is different to what we say." I can now appreciate this.

Finally, my involvement in acting with and in front of my group is adequate, however, I still lack the confidence to act. I have reflected in Appendix A.

This evaluation has enabled me to identify strengths in 'Performance' as well as important areas for improvement. I will establish SMART targets to improve my confidence in recollection of recitative, altering my tone to a mature sound, advance my vowel intelligibility, principally during higher notes and how I 'act', specifically in assessments. My new routine will include new exercises and rest days to prevent tedium, and I will keep a vocal diary to track my improvements during Performance class.

Word count – 1099 (without tables and references)

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Appendix A

Reflection on my 'Acting' skills for singing.

'Several directors stated that they wished that singers would aspire more towards a deeper commitment to acting, instead of being preoccupied with their voices', including Jennifer Hamilton (2015) who stressed how "the importance of connection to the character and meaning behind the lyrics they are performing is just as important, if not more, as the vocal technique being used." I believe that the best way to connect with a piece of music is to understand the context and mentally imagine the emotions behind the lyrics and the musicality of the piece, acting being a fundamental part of this connection. Kyropoulos (2023 p.195-298) highlights modern 'acting' elements for new singers, drawn from historical techniques, which include Face Gym Exercises for facial musculature strength and endurance (Appendix A), Passion Embodiment Exercises, Temperament Embodiment and Magic Mirror exercises, to name a few. During his experiment with a student production of the comic intermezzo *Livietta e Tracollo* (1734) by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–1736), what started becoming clear from the rehearsals was that the intensive training in imitating Le Brun's facial expressions had a transformative influence on how the singers used their faces.(p.201). With plenty of practice I hope to build the same confidence with these techniques and I plan to schedule time for this next term.

There are other essential qualities that can help me connect to an emotion or feeling, to successfully act it out. For example, physical efforts are very important for stage movement, as part of physical-acting, and the Laban Movement Analysis system is used by many students when practicing acting for vocals. It is split into two main subjects, *direct and indirect*, and *light and heavy*. According to Espeland (2024) "Laban Movement Efforts are eight descriptive 'effort actions' that comprise the building blocks of human

movement. They include *FLICK, DAB, FLOAT, GLIDE, SLASH, PUNCH, WRING and PRESS.*” An example of using these actions to gain feeling for acting is by using Wring to create anxiety, Float to create falling-in-love/romance and Punch for anger. My increased awareness of and use of effort actions when singing will hopefully improve my physical, mental and emotional feelings for acting through song, in next term’s performance class. I do feel a growing confidence and capability when learning supplementary context and background information of the Arias and songs that I currently study, as well as the ability to portray truthful and suitable moods when acting through performance.

Facial Musculature.

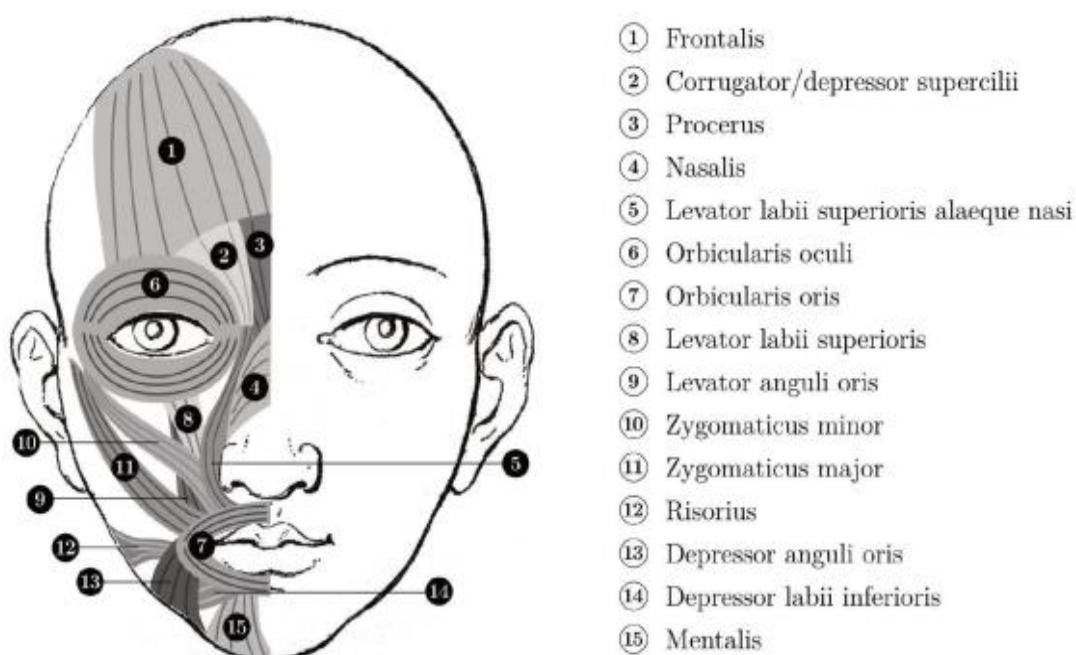


FIGURE 22. Diagram of the main facial muscles involved in facial expression (mimetic muscles) drawn on Le Brun's emotionally-neutral face ('tranquillity'). Order follows warm-up massage sequence for the face gym exercise.