

BMPF7013

The psychology of the performer – overcoming self-consciousness and self-criticism through mindfulness

Elin Berg-Rolness

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Assessment 1 – Portfolio

1. Introduction and rationale

This independent study sets out to explore the psychology of the performer and how the craft of mindfulness can be incorporated into the singer's practice. The aim of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of how mindfulness and meditation can reduce the impact of self-consciousness and self-criticism. The reason for choosing this particular subject derived from my own interest of achieving a deeper understanding of the psychological aspect of the performer, not only to develop my own knowledge but also to learn how to better guide my students. Through the preliminary review of literature, I stumbled across an article by Rao that particularly caught my interest and started my creative process:

Is singing a demonstration of artistry or musicianship, is singing a foundation of consciousness, or is it a manifestation of the soul? (Rao, 2005, p. 249).

This made me reflect upon the purpose of singing and made me question my own viewpoint in regard to this. When performing a song, it can create a high sense of joy, freedom and an extraordinary sensation of expression or it can create a highly self-aware, tense and perhaps negative sensation of expression where the mind focuses upon criticising the sound that is being produced. If the latter is true, then how can one overcome this negative sensation when singing in order to free the mind and express the emotions of the soul? Rao's quote ignited my wish to continue to learn and reflect upon my own practice, thus the search for new knowledge and relevant sources continued. Other readings that drew my attention was the work of Jeremy

Dion, Lisa Perks and Doreen Rao PhD. These sources were highly interesting in my search of understanding how mindfulness can be used in order to approach issues of self-consciousness and self-criticism in performance.

As a musical theatre trained performer with long experience within the act of dancing, I have strived to investigate both acting and singing in order to develop these skills further. My goal has been to achieve a truly integrated expression of all three disciplines when coaching students. Whether it be acting, singing or dancing, I believe it is important to focus upon the psychology of the performer since, in my case, any investigation within the field of singing will be linked to that of acting and dancing. The aim being to create a stronger multi-disciplined performer. I believe this study presents a valuable opportunity for me to continue my life-long learning process as well as presenting me the opportunity to gain valuable tools to use when teaching or coaching performers.

In order to gain a wide insight into the chosen subject, I will examine and explore various sources related to the psychology of the performer and mindfulness. The goal is to investigate the general in order to explore the particular. It is therefore important for me to undertake a thorough literature review in order to be able to make an informed choice as to which scholars and articles to focus on in this study. My main aim is to explore sources related to singing, the experience of performing, self-consciousness and self-criticism. Other sources relating to mindfulness and meditation will also be explored. The main focus will be placed upon how to use the tools of mindfulness and meditation to reduce the psychological issues mentioned above as well as expanding my own knowledge and understanding of the topic.

My background consists of training in dance and musical theatre on master level as well as over a decade with teaching experience within the field of dance and musical theatre. I have experience with choreographing and directing musicals and this is where I have previously encountered the challenges of coaching students through vocal numbers. The reason why I have found it challenging is perhaps due to my own insecurities within the subject. Even though I have been singing since I was a teen, I have always felt more comfortable within the field of dance. Making dance my comfort zone has perhaps limited my own development within singing.

Acknowledging my weakness in my own training as well as my teaching practice made me want to study at the Voice Study Centre in order to bridge the gap between singing and dancing in order to be able to combine the skills with more strength and confidence. At the moment of conducting this study I do not have a regular teaching practice as I recently had a little baby that I am taking care of. Therefore, I am undertaking this study as a pending practice with the focus upon developing my own opportunities for growth whilst keeping in mind the possibilities for any future impact upon my teaching practice.

In my professional practice I have experienced the challenges of listening to that inner voice that seems to never stop criticizing and analysing my vocal sound. Throughout the years I have often reflected upon this process, however, it is not until now that I have found the courage to deal with the issue. I have also encountered this common phenomenon of the inner critic in my teaching practice. Students being self-conscious and highly critical of their own expression in both the act of singing and dancing has made them appear more restricted and nervous in the classroom. Arguably, this unnecessary stress that takes over the task of producing efficient sound is a waste of energy and therefore it becomes valuable to investigate how to avoid this when performing.

In today's musical theatre industry, the demands are very high, and the performers has to continuously develop and advance their skills in order to be able to compete in this business. At times it seems like there is no limitations of how good a performer can be and the boundaries of what is human possible seems to continuously being pushed (Cohen and Matheson, 1974). With the digitalisation of the world and the fast phased lives of the contemporary human being, as well as the high demands of artists, it has become even more important to find space to recover and recharge. The industry can feel somewhat overwhelming and performers can therefore benefit incorporating mindfulness into their craft. Not only to centre oneself, but to become a grounded and secure performer. Due to the limitations in scope of this essay, I have chosen to focus upon the implementation of mindfulness into a daily practice. I will conduct the reflection of the essay around four words presented by Jacobs (2017) in which I found relevant for the practical application of the study: "change, awareness, attention and self-compassion". Through the implementation of these focus points, I

aim to explore the following question: How well can you master your vocal instrument and silence your inner critic?

2. A planned programme of study

Aims:

- To widen my knowledge and understanding of the psychology of the performer with a particular focus placed upon issues such as self-consciousness and self-criticism.
- To conduct a thorough review of literature that enables me to broaden my knowledge of the use of mindfulness and meditation.
- To develop and expand my knowledge of how to practice mindfulness in order to address psychological issues when singing.
- To explore new teaching tools and incorporate these into my practice.

Objectives:

- To identify the significant researchers and contributors in relation to the theme of the study.
- To explore sources through the investigation of journals, articles and books.
- To continue developing my knowledge of the use of mindfulness in order to address psychological issues in performance.
- To critically analyse and compare texts by conducting a thorough literature review.
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Timescale:

Activity	1.April 2022	1.May 2022	5.June 2022	15.June 2022	4.July 2022	1.Aug 2022	18.Aug 2022
Discuss topic idea with tutor							
Explore various literature – gather information							
Portfolio – writing of introduction and rationale, literature, critical reflection							

Assignment – evaluate the learning process							
Send draft to tutor							
Rewrite and submit							
Assignment due date							

I have included the original timescale for this essay as it was already written before I was granted an extension of this module. Even though the dates does not add up to the timing of conducting this study, I have followed each step of the timescale.

Literature review:

Drawing upon my previous experience of researching various topics within the field of musical theatre, both through desk-top and practice-based studies, I was able to explore this literature review with a solid understanding of the importance of how to conduct a thorough literature review in order to explore the topic in question. The aim of the literature review is to familiarise with the research topic, exploring and analysing what information that is already available by other scholars and authors (Fink, 2010). Bearing in mind the ocean of information available through archives, books, articles, online search engines and other sources it is important to acknowledge that this is a small-scale study and therefore the time to explore the literature will be limited. Bell and Waters (2018) discuss the importance of creating a time schedule and sticking to when conducting research studies as time will always be limited. In my previous research (module 3) I highly benefited from the work of Cooper. Therefore, I will apply the Taxonomy of Literature Review (Cooper, 1988) to this study. Cooper suggests the following six stages of conducting a literature review: “focus, goal, perspective, coverage, organisation and audience” (Efron and Ravid, 2019 p. 24; Randolph, 2009).

I particularly found Randolph’s (2009) description of Cooper’s work useful in my previous studies and I believe I will benefit from continuing my understanding of the system through his description. The *focus* of the literature will be outcome oriented as well as placed upon practical application. My aim is to be able to use any new

knowledge in my practical practice of teaching singing. The *goal* of the review is to be able to critically analyse various sources in order to determine if there are any gaps to be furthered investigated. Furthermore, the *perspective* of this review takes a “espousal position” which is common for qualitative research (Randolph, 2009, p.3). It is only natural in the literature review that I, as an insider researcher, will carry with me any pre-existing biases in relation to singing and performing into this study. I will return to the notion of bias later in the essay.

When it comes to the *coverage*, I have found it natural to apply a purposive sampling. This sampling method enables the researcher to analyse relevant sources in relation to the topic of the study (Randolph, 2009; Reviere et al., 1996). The benefits of choosing a purposive sampling is that it is an easy method of gathering information that is relevant to the study (Fonseca-Becker and Boore, 2008). The nature of this research is one of smaller scale, and a more comprehensive review of the literature seemed unrealistic when bearing in mind the time limitation. Therefore, I found it beneficial to immediately concentrate on the investigation of sources that were of immediate relevance to the topic of study. In the preliminary search I used words such as “mindfulness in singing”, “performance anxiety”, “meditation”, “history of singing”, “self-consciousness” and “self-criticism” when searching for sources.

After gathering a variety of sources, I started to search for new words which would narrow down the information at hand, leaving me with the most relevant literature. I will return to this process later in the portfolio. The final step in Cooper’s (1988) Taxonomy of Literature Review is the *audience*. Being a small-scale research project, the obvious audience of this study is “the supervisor and the reviewers” (Randolph, 2009, p. 4). The goal, however, is for me to study many areas within the field of musical theatre with a particular focus on singing, I hope to develop my knowledge through my master dissertation and hopefully, in the future, into a PhD. Through the application of Cooper’s Taxonomy of Literature Review and the six characteristics, I feel that I have been able to conduct an in-depth and more focused literature review through the reflection upon each stage.

The act of singing and especially the understanding of the vocal apparatus has developed throughout the years as humans have gained a wider understanding of the science behind singing (Ilari, 2020). As the technical demands or ideals of singing have increased, the demands of the 21st century performer have equally increased. As previously mentioned, the fast-paced world in which we live, where technology makes our brains work in high gear has resulted in the need of excelling as human beings when it comes to entertainment. When the demands are high, the stakes of performing also rise and a higher pressure is placed upon the singer. In order to understand the psychology of the performer and how mindfulness can aid in relieving negative self-talk and encourage self-love, it became natural to conduct a narrative literature review. This form of review can be described as presenting a wide examination of a chosen subject (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016). Since I aimed towards exploring the development of singing, I approached the literature review through a historical perspective. This enabled me to systematise the literature in a historical timeline (Randolph, 2009) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the changes of focus in the teaching of singing.

According to Martyn Denscombe (2010), the literature review aims towards becoming familiar with the pre-existing knowledge. Coding of the collected data is then carried out in order to create a system (Boeje, 2010) before dividing the data into reoccurring words or “themes” (Kvale, 2007, p.105). In the literature review I plan to apply content analysis and open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Robson, 2011). Krippendorff (2004, p.18) uses the following definition of content analysis: “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”. The open coding consists of exploring various categories (Schreier, 2012), axial coding is used to connect each category whilst selective coding enables the researcher to analyse in-depth the main category (Robson, 2011). In order to make the investigation of the literature more efficient, Chris Hart, suggests that the focus is placed “from the general to the particular” (1998, p. 54). By searching for specific words or sentences it becomes possible to find the relevant information faster which will give more time to analyse and criticise the valuable sources. Due to the small scale of the research, coding was carried out by hand. Saldaña (2016, p. 29) notes

how this process gives the researcher more “control over and ownership of the work”. I used different coloured pencils in order to separate the codes.

In this literature review I hope to gain a thorough exploration of a variety of sources that I can analyse and connect together. I wish to explore and compare sources related to brain activity and performing, self-consciousness and self-criticism and how to apply mindfulness and meditation in order to aid the singer in his or her performance situation. As an insider researcher I am aware of my own bias in which I bring into the research and it therefore becomes important to acknowledge how my own thoughts and viewpoints will shape this investigation. This awareness creates a notion of validity to the study (Robson, 2011). It is also important to acknowledge that the results of this investigation are not aimed towards being generalized (Johnson and Christensen, 2012), rather it is an investigation of a specific theme within the teaching of singing.

In this study, similar to my module 3 study, a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach will be applied. As an insider researcher it is important to be aware of the limitation in objectivity and therefore acknowledge that views and interpretations are shaped by the background of the researcher (Efron and Ravid, 2019). A hermeneutical-phenomenological approach gives me the opportunity to acknowledge my pre-existing knowledge and viewpoints in regard to the psychology of the performer and issues related to performing and enable me to accept that these assumptions will have an impact on how I reflect upon the work being done. Through a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach I am able to work in a cyclical process, or the hermeneutic circle (Efron and Ravid, 2019), where sections of information is being studied in order to gain an overview of the whole picture (Lavery, 2003; Annells, 1996).

The main aim of the literature review process is for me to familiarise with a wide selection of sources related to the topic under investigation and be able to critically analyse these sources. I wish to gain a deeper insight into the psychology of the performer and how to calm the mind through the application of mindfulness in order to overcome self-consciousness and self-criticism whilst performing. I hope to widen

my perspective and develop my skills as both a teacher and a performer in order to become better equipped to guide my students in the classroom.

3. A critical reflection on the learning experience

As I embarked on this study, I felt confident that I would discover several relevant and interesting sources of information which would be valuable in regard to my learning development. The literature review provided me with precisely this opportunity and as I delved into the ocean of sources, I quickly became aware of the increasing need of investigating mindfulness and singing by looking at the amount of sources available. My main aim of this study was to explore how I can improve my coaching strategy in order to better guide students in achieving a mindful approach to singing. Through this study it became important for me to reflect upon my own practice and learning method. Therefore, I also in this module, chose to draw upon Schön's (1983) theory of "reflection in action" and "reflection on action". My previous experience with applying this theory to my work was that it enabled me to gain a stronger focus in the analysis, the exploration and evaluation of the various sources. This can be view as *reflection in action*. The adaption of Schön's *reflection on action* made me reflect upon my learning development throughout the project. Throughout the process I found tremendous help in the reading of Kolb's (2015) work and particularly the learning cycle. Since I was already familiar with this cycle from my work with module 3, I felt that I was better equipped this time to adapt the theory to my research process and to develop my knowledge more effectively. The learning cycle has four stages: *concrete experience (CE)*, *reflective observation (RO)*, *watching: abstract conceptualization (AC)* and *active experimentation (AE)* (Kolb, 2015, p. 50). The application of this concept enabled me to increase my learning through the experience of investigating the literature.

As I have already completed one module where I set out to critically evaluate sources, drawing upon various methods of conducting literature review, I delved into the ocean of literature with confidence. Knowing that the process in itself would be a continuation of my previous learning related to how to efficiently conduct literature review. Though the use of coding I was able to narrow down my search for literature in a way that left me with many relevant sources in which I could study in depth. In

the preliminary search process, I read numerous articles on the MA student web. My area of interest lay amongst the articles related to the psychology of the performer and theoretical articles about how to conduct literature review. I continued to search for relevant material in books and scholarly articles online as well as news articles and web pages. During this process I made short notes with my reflections and ideas which became a form of a journal. Journals can be used to enable reflective practice as well as give perspective to the study (Henson and Pickering, 2017). I particularly found the journal useful when discovering and analysing the literature.

Throughout the literature review it became evident that the development of the teaching of voice might have a split in the focus (Rao, 2005). One being on the technical aspect – the vocal instrument and the production of efficient sound and one with the body, mind and voice. Some sources focused upon the technical production of sound whilst others aimed towards focusing upon the primitive approach to singing – the natural body mind connection of producing sound. As previously mentioned, I became inspired through the reading of Rao's (2005) text and her questioning of what it means to sing. Another source that made me continue to reflect upon the idea of ridding oneself from being too self-aware was a book by Dion and the following quote:

Singin brings us home to ourselves, and provides a pathway to a more joyful, present life. (Dion, 2016, p.7)

This quote connects well with the idea of mindfulness and approaching a present singing practice in order to avoid negative self-thoughts or observations. Sources discussing the essence of the voice inner critic, self-criticism and stress provided me with good information in the investigation of the subject being researched. All these texts encouraged me to continue researching and trying to understand this aspect of the psychology of the vocal performer.

In all my endeavours I aim towards developing my knowledge in order to grow as a performer and a teacher. There are so many challenges within the field of musical theatre and through the investigation of one specific area, I wish to gain the opportunity to reflect upon my own learning and viewpoints in order to coach my

students to my best ability. Personally, learning is not about completing a task and tick a box or add a qualification to the list, rather it is a life-long process in which needs care and reflection upon practice in order to be able to stay in tune with the fast-evolving industry. Throughout the literature review process, I was able to investigate numerous sources, reflecting upon my own pre-existing thoughts and viewpoints and open up to new and inspiring ideas and concepts. Along with my previous modules at Voice Study Centre, I believe this area of research will further guide me towards my topic of investigation when soon to be conducting my master research project.

However, this study has not been completed without facing any challenges. I first started writing this essay in April 2022, after having taken one-year interruption of my studies. As I enthusiastically re-enrolled and prepared to start working on module 4 and this independent study, I quickly discovered that I neither had the energy or time to carry out the investigation needed to complete the study in time for the original deadline in August 2022. Having a little baby at home had certainly changed my everyday life schedule and I therefore applied for an extension. Needless to say, the rest of 2022 was hectic, and I have to take into consideration how this has affected my mind and readiness to conduct this study. I have therefore spent a lot of time of self-motivation and perseverance in order to be able to continue my investigation. Being aware of my emotions throughout the last year and always returning to my main goal of undertaking this master's degree has given me the courage and determination to explore a field within singing that I know is very valuable for my development both as a performer and a teacher.

The reflective tools applied to this study has given me the opportunity to reflect, expand and develop my knowledge. By the conclusion of this research project, I hope to have gained valuable skills to add to my professional and teaching practice. Due to having had one year of interruption and an extension of this module, I do believe that if I were to conduct this study again at this point in time, it would be done through a less stressful mindset. The psychology of the performer is an area of study in which I find highly interesting and I believe that there is so much more to be explored within this field. I wish for this study to give me a better understanding of the benefits of using mindfulness in singing and I also hope to have gained a better

understanding of how to address issues such as self-consciousness and self-criticism in order to develop practices to overcome these negative aspects of performing.

Assessment 2 – Written assignment

The psychology of the performer – overcoming self-consciousness and self-criticism through mindfulness.

This independent study aims to explore and evaluate how to incorporate elements of mindfulness in order to overcome self-consciousness and self-criticism whilst singing. The main goal is to widen my knowledge and understanding of the psychology of the performer and to conduct a thorough review of literature in relation to the use of mindfulness and meditation in order to address these psychological issues whilst singing. The objective of this study is to critically analyse sources and find ways of implement the key findings into my own practice as well as my teaching practice. The reason for conducting this study derives from my wish to gain a deeper insight into how to better handle these psychological obstacles when singing, as these are issues in which I have not focused on previously.

The wish to investigate this particular subject derives from the need to bridge a gap in my knowledge in relation to how to approach self-consciousness and self-criticism in a performance situation. As a musical theatre professional and teacher, I have experience with these issues when singing both in my own performance and through the works of my students. The performance of text, song or dance requires hard work and continuous practice. Even though a performer feels confident before going out to perform, things can change in an instant. As humans in the 21st century, the need of seeking external approval is apparent in social media as well as in the daily interaction with other humans (Grady, 2020). This can become an issue when singing. The anticipation of waiting in the wings, the sound of the breathing audience and the wait before the first tone can welcome, perhaps unintentionally, the little voice in the head that starts to analyse every small sound and movement in the performance situation. This is one of the reasons that I felt a need to research this particular topic and one of the questions I was left with was: How to silence the inner critic and creating an inner cheer leader?

The purpose of this study is to explore sources of mindfulness and meditation in relation to the act of singing. How can the singer incorporate these concepts in their practice and what impact might it have on their body, voice and performance? These are a few of the questions in which I hope to be able to find answers to in this study. This study aims towards finding ways of empowering the singer with tools that increase self-kindness.

In the literature review, I applied Randolph's (2009) reflections of Cooper's (1998) Taxonomy of Literature Review. When conducting the written assignment in module 3, I drew upon Driscoll's (2007) description of Borton's (1970) model of reflection and the questions of *what?* *so what?* and *now what?* My experience of using this reflective model was positive and I have therefore chosen to apply this model to this assignment as it made me to structure the explored literature in an efficient and organised way. This enabled me to become more efficient in the process of evaluating and analysing the collected literature. I will present the application of the reflective method and each question in the beginning of each section below.

What?

In this section, I used the question *what?* to embrace the exploration of the literature concerning the human voice, the art of singing, the psychological aspect of performance, mindfulness, self-consciousness and self-criticism. In order to gain an awareness and understanding of the topic of study and how to approach the psychological issues of performance, I find it beneficial to first look at the essence of the human voice. Voice has been a part of humans since the beginning, through the breath. James Stewart (2020) highlights the description of the voice by Otto Jespersen as being "sounding breath, the audible sign of life". The advanced language of humans has had a huge impact on the development of the human species, particularly the survival of the human species (Anfinson and Christensen, 2021). Humans have benefited for years through the advanced use of voice in which enables us to communicate and cooperate with each other as well as to transfer knowledge from one generation to another. Depending on the situation, the human

voice can be adapted in volume from a low whisper to a high shout which has given us the benefit of protecting ourselves (Tipping, 2017). Through the voice we can express ourselves in many ways which enable us to connect and convey emotions to the audience.

In musical theatre, the performer express himself through speech. When spoken words is no longer sufficient in order to express what the character feels, he or she begins to sing and thereafter, if singing is not enough dance is used as the highest form of expression (Harvard, 2013; Deer and Dal Vera, 2008). Through singing we have the ability to express our emotions on a higher level than through speaking alone. According to Rogers (1893, p. 5) singing can be viewed as “the most direct expression of the emotions of the soul”, thus making it the strongest musical expression. Unlike other musical instrument, the voice is connected to the human body and is “the only instrument that is an attachment to the soul itself” (Rogers, 1893, p.5). If the voice is regarded as being attached to the soul, it becomes the true expression of human emotions. Through song we have the ability to create a bodily connection, portray through our hearts, follow our emotions and achieve a unique expression (Dion, 2016). In this viewpoint, the act of singing can be understood as being exposing to the performer. Jeremy Dion argues how singing is “the most frightening form of self-expression” (2016, p. 8). If song is the expression of the soul, then it might be easier for the singer to focus on the technical aspect in contrast to opening up and invite the audience into their soul.

Even though singing is a natural part of the human expression, people are often scared of singing. This is perhaps due to being told that they cannot sing (Dion, 2016) or that their voice sounds strange. In a performance situation this feeling might be a result of bad experiences with singing in front of people where the vocal challenges have occurred. What happens then the next time when we are about to sing a song in front of a lot of people? This form of self-consciousness might interfere with the performer’s mindset and create tension in the body which is making singing challenging (Sharon, 2016). Arguably the stakes are high, and the singer might become apprehensive: what if my voice fail me? Nerves can become so strong that it affects the quality of the sound (Elliott, 2010). As the sound of the voice fills a room through that of speech or song, it quickly becomes an opportunity to become critical

of the sound that is being produced. Because our ears listen and analyses in seconds of opening our mouth. Hunt (2021) notes how self-criticism is part of being human. It can be argued that the inner critic is a result of all the criticism an individual has received throughout the life from influential people (Jacobs, 2017). Jacobs (2017) discusses how our emotions give life to the inner critic which we use as a defense mechanism in situations where there is an opportunity of being exposed to criticism, judgement or rejection.

A performing situation is highly demanding and can also create stress within the body of the performer. This is especially true if the performer becomes self-conscious and listens to negative self-talk. This self-consciousness can lead to bodily reactions. Little (2020) highlights how when stress occurs in the body “it triggers the sympathetic nervous system to release stress hormones” in which creates a “flight or fight response” in the body. Our fight or flight response can be traced back to early days when humans had to fight for their survival against other animals. Similarly, we can see this in the lion fighting for her pray today. Molly Tipping (2017) reflects upon how biologically, strangers can be viewed as a threat and notes how each individual respond differently to “stress, anxiety and fright” all being forms of “perceived danger”. In this perspective, singing in front of an audience (strangers) may trigger stress responses in our bodies even though we love to sing and have practiced a long time. Singing in front of an audience is in this aspect compared to that of a dangerous situation.

Tipping (2017) connects the response to danger to the “Moro Reflex” which is easily observable in the first months of a baby’s life. According to Tipping (2017), as we grow, this reflex develops into an “adult Startle Reflex” which is what drives our “flight, flight and freeze responses”. It is the Vagus nerve or 10th cranial nerve that is responsible for this notion (Tipping, 2017). This nerve is very long and as seen in figure 1 (Appendix A), it connects to the “mouth, tongue, larynx, heart, lungs and digestive organs” (Tipping, 2017). Evaluating figure 1, it becomes possible to understand the connection and how these “fright flight signals” is not aiding in reaching the most beneficial vocal placement (Perks, 2018). When being placed under stress, the vocal performance can be affected through the experience of having a dry mouth, change in pitch, faster phase, tense muscles in the body which

affects the jaw and tongue as well as tightening of the vocal folds and difficulties with breathing efficiently (Tipping, 2017; Perks, 2018; Little, 2020). These responses align with our biology; however, they are not very useful when it comes to singing (Perks, 2018) and becoming aware of these things happening might make the situation even more stressful (Tipping, 2017).

Even though getting up in front of a crowd of people is placing a lot of pressure on the performer, it is one of those things that is part of the game. The love of performing will conquer that of any challenges related to it. However, it is important to focus upon how to handle these challenges and how to manage stress when performing (Ihnen, 2016). It is required by the musical theatre performer to portray emotion through song in order to be able to convey the story being told. If the focus is placed upon worrying about the sound that is being produced instead of storytelling through the song, the body and mind can be seen as being separated. Rao (2005) connected singing with the portrayal of the soul. The connection between the body and soul in song can be traced all the way back to the Greek. Aristoteles's regarded singing as an action where "the soul and the body constitute a single substance" (Rao, 2005, p. 252). So how do we shift the focus and draw the attention back into our own body?

Mindfulness is a tool that can be used in order to silence your inner critic in preparation of a performance (Little, 2020). It can also be used to as a means to calm bodily stress. In order to understand what mindfulness is, it is important to explore the definition. The literature provides many definitions and descriptions of what mindfulness is. The word itself derives from Vipassana, a Buddhist form of meditation and means "insight or clear seeing" (Elliot, 2010, p 35). Little (2020) defines mindfulness to be "fully present in the moment". Gunaratana (2011) describes mindfulness as being aware of the now, observing this presence without judgement nor criticism. Through the observation of the breath, it becomes possible to gain awareness of the present moment and how it feels to be in that precise moment.

In the recent years it has become increasingly popular to practice mindfulness and the performing art industry also has seen its beneficial potential of incorporating it into practice. As a singer, it is possible to highly benefit from incorporating mindfulness

into a daily practice (Little, 2020). Mindfulness, can help to increase self-awareness, create a sense of calmness, reduce stress and become more engaged with a task (Little, 2020). It can also aid concentration, increase focus (Elliott, 2010) and rid oneself from outer distractions and resist judgement (Little, 2020). According to Elliott (2010) all these aspects would aid the singer in his or her performance. Jeremy Dion (2016, p.7) notes how singing with a mindful mind and being truly present in the moment “reconnects us with ourselves, our bodies, our emotions, with others and with the Divine”. Through a mindful approach it becomes possible to “silence our inner critic” and truly connect our body to the voice, without any distractions from the brain, leading to a better experience of singing (Dion, 2016, p.9).

The art of meditation is a perfect way of practicing mindfulness (Elliott, 2010). Nairn (1999) describes meditation as training the mind to let go of negative influences, find calmness, gain awareness and understanding and becoming pure. Rao (2005, p. 253) discusses how breathing meditation can help singers to reduce anxiety and increase “positive emotions such as joy, enthusiasm and good will”. Through meditation it is possible to develop “new positive neural pathways and decreasing negative ones” through the process of neuroplasticity (Little, 2020). The amygdala is related to the emotion of fear (Perks, 2018). It is this part of the brain that triggers the “flight or fight response” (Little, 2020). The ventromedial prefrontal cortex is related to the emotion of feeling confident (Perks, 2018). It is important to embrace the positive experience of singing in order to approach singing with confidence in contrast to being too self-conscious of all the potential pitfalls of performing a song. When feeling overwhelmed and the mind is filled with thoughts of “I won’t reach that note” or “my voice does not sound pretty” our body will likely respond with actions that makes it more difficult for us to sing. Elliott (2010) notes how this is a common sensation amongst singers as the mind is an expert on being two steps ahead instead of being in the present moment.

Along with the acts of singing, dancing and acting, mindfulness is a tool that has to be practiced. Through meditation it becomes possible to reduce the release of the stress hormones (Little, 2020). Meditation can optimize the experience of singing by reducing stress, increasing the feeling of relaxation and focus thus create a sense of flow (Little, 2020). Through meditation it becomes possible to achieve a mindful

approach to singing by becoming more grounded and connected with the body. Dion (2016, p.10) states how singing can create a connection to the “divine” and to be in the “present moment”. Through the process of writing this study, I keep coming back to this quote because I find it very helpful in understanding what singing should feel like in the moment rather than being a self-conscious experience of the portrayal of voice.

So What?

In this section I aim towards reflecting upon what to do with the information at hand by asking the question: *so what?* Having investigated the *what?* and explored various sources related to the psychology of the performer, self-criticism and mindfulness amongst others, I now aim to connect the information and explore how the use of mindfulness can help the vocal student in creating a more bodily connected performance and change the way we think about the expression of the voice. In order to start to envision the information gathered into a practical application, I will let myself be inspired by the work of Jacobs (2017) and her four principles of silencing the inner critic: *change*, *awareness*, *attention* and *self-kindness*. I will try to approach the collected material through those four words as I feel that they provide an opportunity to link the literature with the practical understanding. The exercises presented in each section is grounded in exercising mindfulness through meditation (Appendix B).

Change

Through the observation of habits, it is possible to create a change. By becoming aware of how the brain functions in a stressful situation (flight or fight response), it becomes possible to renew the mindset (Jacobsen, 2017). The ability to reflect upon how our body and mind reacts to performing is the very starting point of working towards reducing being overly self-conscious and silencing the inner critic. Reflection upon action is a valuable tool to address these issues. Acknowledging the things that are not helping in singing to the best ability is the first step in making a change to a practice (Appendix B). Wendy Braun (2019) notes how changing the mindset will affect the “inner critic” in which will respond through the feeling of “fear or love”. At

this stage it becomes important to embrace the things that feels good and discard anything that does not feel good (Braun, 2019).

Practical Application: 1. Recognising behavioral pattern (Appendix B)

Awareness

We can choose to continue doing what we already are doing, or we can work towards creating a new routine for singing. Elliott (2010) notes how it is impossible to change an “old habit” if we are not aware of having that habit and states how “if we see it and recognize it, it is possible to transform it” (Elliott, 2010, p. 37). Through the awareness of how our mind works in performance situations, it becomes possible to change any negative self-talk through focusing on the present moment (Jacobs, 2017). Sharon (2016) discusses how “creating an awareness of the inner critic begins to reduce the power it has over them, leading to less self-consciousness and more dynamic expression”. Self-awareness can aid the singer to gain more confidence. Through the practice of self-awareness (Appendix B), it becomes possible to gain an understanding of the true self and thereby developing our skills without relying on external validation (Grady, 2020). Mindfulness can aid in creating awareness and being present in the moment (Elliott, 2010).

Practical Application: 2. Creating Awareness (Appendix B)

Action

In the performing arts, we are trained to continuously work towards improving our skills whether it be within acting, dancing or singing. The yearn for perfection is creating a continuous race towards becoming supernatural – to become the best performer possible. In order to create a change, we have to take action. If we the add the element of mindfulness into our practice, it becomes possible to observe our actions without judgment (Elliott, 2010). The practice of breathing and embracing the present moment, can aid in relieving bodily tension, negative though and create a sense of calmness (Rao, 254).

Meditation can create a higher sense of awareness and sharper focus which is important when practicing singing (Little, 2020). It is a skill that can easily be incorporated into a daily practice. A simple meditative breathing exercise (Appendix B) can be incorporated into the students' practice in order to gain a deeper sense of bodily awareness (Rao, 254). Elliott (2010) highlights the importance of observing and creating an awareness of how the breath flows through the body and how it creates a sense of being present in the moment. Through the practice of mindfulness, it becomes possible to analyse and truly sense how the body functions and where there is tension. Elliott (2010) discusses how the emotions connected to different thoughts can be controlled through mindfulness.

Practical Application: 3. Meditation and Body mapping (Appendix B)

Self-kindness

Through action it becomes possible to experience results and thus notice improvements in the vocal practice. It is important to recognize even the smallest of improvement and as stated by Lisa Perks (2018) "keep it in the present, keep yourself talk positive and use positive affirmations". In order to be able to work on self-kindness, it is important to create a sense of awareness of our mind and how we experience our surrounding world (Hunt, 2021).

"The more we sing, the more connected we become with our hearts, with ourselves" (Dion, 2016, p.13). In order to change our mindset, it is important to shift the focus towards thoughts that leads to positive reinforcement (Jacobs, 2017). Jacobs (2017) emphasise the importance of giving the same kindness to oneself as one would give to others and argues that negativity prevails if the mindset is not in the present moment. "Negative self-talk can also be reframed as a well-meaning coach or protector, or simply an indicator of mental state" (Hunt, 2021). In order to change our mindset, it is important to shift the focus towards thoughts that leads to positive reinforcement (Jacobs, 2017). This can be done through mindful practice of establishing positive affirmations.

*Practical Application: 4. Positive affirmations (Appendix B)**Now What?*

In the previous section I reflected upon how to incorporate the newly gathered information into practice by focusing on the practical application of the study. The literature has provided me new information in relation to the psychology of the performer and how to incorporate mindfulness into practice. In this section, I will try to reflect upon the question *now what?* by considering any impact this new knowledge might have on my own personal practice as well as my teaching practice.

The new information I have gained through this investigation has given me the opportunity to embrace mindfulness in my practice. I believe this to be the starting point of a more in-dept investigation of the effects of mindfulness on the singer. The literature has awakened my interest in the how the bodily reactions, such as the flight or fight response (Tipper 2017; Little, 2020, Perks, 2018) interacts with the vocal sound. In contrast to focusing on the technical aspect of singing, worrying about what is coming next, the singer benefits from taking a more present body mind approach. Thus, focusing on connecting the voice to the soul and expressing oneself from a state of pure openness and mindfulness. I also believe this knowledge can be transferred to the subject of dancing and performing issues there as it is common to notice similar issues when dancing in front of an audience. Perhaps this is something that I wish to explore in the future.

Through the practical application of the information collected, I feel better equipped to coach my students. Meditation can be practiced anywhere and at any time during the day. It only requires a moment to be still, close the eyes and focus inwards. A daily practice is therefore easy to incorporate into the training of students and has the possibility to reduce the notion of self-consciousness and silence the inner critic by focusing upon the present moment, reinforcing the positiveness of sharing the voice with others through performance. Dion (2016) notes how the mood increases through song and with a positive mindset, it becomes possible to focus upon self-kindness when practicing singing. I aim towards being able to coach my students in such way that increases confidence and true expression of the soul through the voice.

The literature has pointed out that there is need to focus on the mentality of the performer, not only the technical aspect. It is easy to focus on the technical aspect of singing and it can be questioned whether training of the voice in professional practice become too much focused on the technical aspect as discussed by Rao (2005). As previously mentioned, the demands of the 21st century musical theatre performer are high and the training institutions has a strong focus upon developing skills within acting, singing and dancing. This is normally done through separated classes in each discipline and production classes where these skills are integrated in various projects. A triple threat performer is one who excel in the act of acting, singing and dancing (Lodge, 2014) and the demand placed on the vocal apparatus when combining song and dance is high. In training, the technical aspect is continuously refined, rehearsed and perfected and it is easy to focus only on the things we can easily observe. However, the aim for technical perfection can make the brain think too much. It is not enough to train the physical body, the mentality of the performer should also be trained (Little, 2020). According to Smith (2007) it is important for singers to separate rehearsal from performance in order to not having to worry about the technique when singing in front of an audience. This is easier said than done. The critical mind might not be so easy to control, however there are tools such as mindfulness that can be helpful in order to free the mind as explored in the previous section (*so what?*).

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the general in order to draw out the particular, I am left with a feeling of having only skimmed the surface. I have gained valuable knowledge about how to incorporate mindfulness into the training of singing and ultimately how to be able to apply meditation to practice in order to be able to be present in the moment of singing. Due to time being limited, it was important for me to now try to cover all areas of the psychology of the performer. However, I do realise that I could develop this study by undertaking an in-dept investigation of performance anxiety and motivational theories. It would also be interesting to continue to explore how to incorporate this study of the voice into the element of dancing in the perspective of

integrating song and dance in musical theatre training and performing. I would like to draw upon the information gathered in this study into my future projects, especially my master dissertation. Through this study, I have gained valuable tools to incorporate into my future teaching practice and I have gained a deeper understanding of the benefits of using mindfulness when singing. I am also left with a feeling of self-development in regard to my own professional practice.

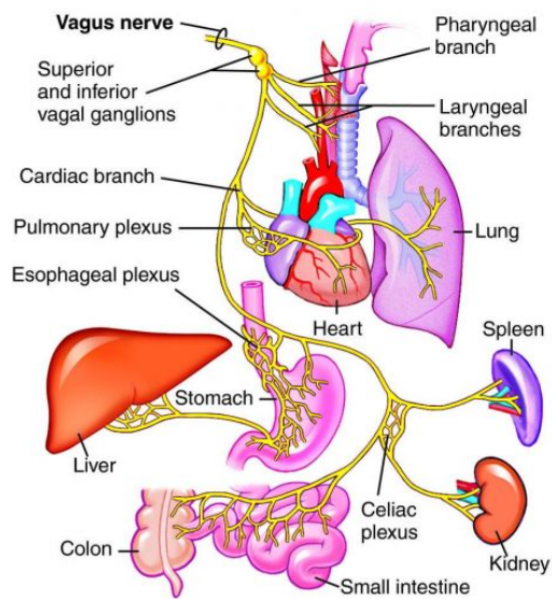
Appendix A – Figures:

Figure 1: Vagus nerve
(Picture taken from: Tipping, 2017)

Appendix B – Practical Application (Lesson plan)

An introductory lesson plan to incorporate into a daily practice.

Practicing mindfulness through a simple breathing meditation:

Find a comfortable and quiet space where you can relax. Focus on the inhale and exhale.

Step 1: Draw the focus inwards and listen to your breath

Step 2: If you notice the mind wondering

Step 3: Let go of any thoughts and refocus on your breath

Practice for 10 minutes every day.

It is important to accept that the mind might wander and instead of feeling frustrated, acknowledge the thought and come back to the stillness. The main goal is to become fully present in the moment.

Exercise 1. Recognising behavioral pattern

In this exercise, the goal is to identify any aspects of critical behavior in which you do not need to keep in your mind. Find a quiet space and practice a simple breathing meditation. After you have done this, then spend some time reflecting upon the following thoughts:

- Why do I become self-conscious during a performance?
- How does my inner critic make me feel when I sing?
- Does my inner critic reflect the reality?
- How do I expect my voice to sound and do I have to live up to this expectation?
- How does singing make me feel?
- What am I grateful for?

The goal is to explore any potential bad habits in which it is time to let go off in order to not holding yourself back and let your voice truly shine.

Exercise 2. Awareness: Creating awareness

Through the practice of simple breathing meditation as described above, it becomes possible to create bodily awareness. This exercise can be done lying down or seated as long as you are comfortable.

Exercise 3. Action: Meditation and Body mapping

Elliott (2010) discusses how the emotions connected to different thoughts can be controlled through mindfulness and presents a body mapping exercise. The goal of the exercise is to release tension through becoming aware of various sensations of the body.

Find a comfortable position, standing, in motion, seated or lying on the floor. Explore the sensation by asking these questions:

- How does it feel to breathe when with a high pulse?
- How does it feel to have a tight sensation in the throat?
- How does the neck and shoulders feel?
- How does it feel to swallow?
- How does it feel to take a deep breath?
- How does it feel to release the abdomen?

This exercise aims to become aware of the sensations of the body in which might trigger the inner critic or self-conscious feeling in order to let the negative thoughts go (Elliott, 2010).

Exercise 4. Self-kindness: Positive affirmations

In order to silence the inner critic, it is important to reflect upon how your thoughts makes you feel. Braun (2019) emphasise how positive affirmation often makes you feel good whilst negative affirmations do the exact opposite. After practicing the breathing meditation make a list of what you like about your voice and your performance. This can include things such as:

- I am grateful for my voice
- I sing with a proud and positive mind
- I love to sing
- Singing makes me embrace who I am
- The people around me makes me feel safe when I sing
- I am definitely reaching that high note with ease

This is the time to revisit the reflections made in exercise 1 and 2. You now know what you wish to change and how you wish to change it. This exercise will help you to silence your inner critic and open your heart to express your true emotions through your beautiful voice.

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