

## TRIPARTITE UNITY: WHAT STUDENTS EXPECT FROM THEIR TEACHER AND ACCOMPANIST DURING INDIVIDUAL SINGING LESSONS

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**Abstract.** A successful singing lesson requires coordinated efforts from the three parties involved: student, teacher, and accompanist. Results are reported of a survey in which 32 statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale by high-school students, university students, and professional singers from an opera chorus. The statements were related to students' expectations of their teacher and accompanist during individual singing lessons. Participants were also able to add their own comments to the questionnaire. Results demonstrate that students expect a partnership to develop between the three parties in a singing lesson. The teacher is expected to have a positive attitude, professional and up-to-date skills, and the ability to motivate students to work more efficiently. Alongside progress in musical terms, students expect to receive assistance from their teacher in how better to cope with increasingly stressful situations during a public performance.

**Keywords:** vocal pedagogy, teaching, learning, classical singing, individual tuition

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### 1. Introduction

Modern vocal pedagogy is based on a long tradition which takes into consideration each individual student's particular features. In the field of classical music, world class competition is a self-evident criterion. The training of musicians, including classical singers, is a long process that requires patience and consistent work from both students and teachers. Singers are usually trained in lessons where, in addition to the vocal teacher, a piano accompanist is also involved. Since the singing process is extremely closely related to an individual's physical and psychological preparation, besides good professional skills a vocal teacher also needs very good analytical abilities and empathy. Vocal teachers are directly responsible for bringing out, developing and consolidating the qualities of

a student's voice that are required if (s)he is to stay competitive in this field. Vocal pedagogues often are or have been professional opera singers and teachers at the same time.

There is little in-depth research carried out into teaching methods of the Western classical singing, its scarcity sometimes being compensated with anecdotal evidence. The reasons for such a state may lie, firstly, in the highly personal character of interaction between parties involved in the teaching process and, secondly, in the cultural differences between national schools of singing even within the Western paradigm. According to Miller (1997:189), in Germany and in England, scientific studies dealing with vocal production tend to have a direct impact on studio teaching, but these studies are interpreted in a number of different ways and contribute directly to the diversity of vocal methods in those countries.

The profession of a performer depends primarily on self-development. The profession of a vocal teacher is aimed at shaping another person's "vocal instrument", which requires analysis and empathy. Lehmann et al. (2007:203) emphasise that today's efficient teacher has to be more than just a good performer. While discussing the assessments given by piano students, Siebenaler (1997) has pointed out that students rated more highly teachers who were active in their lessons than teachers who displayed little activity while conducting classes. A difference has been observed between novice and experienced music teachers. Based on research on instrumental teachers, Henninger et al. (2006) suggest that in the lessons of experienced teachers students spoke and expressed their thoughts more frequently than in the lessons of novice teachers.

The expectations that teacher-performers and teachers trained as pedagogues have of their students have also been investigated. Fredrickson (2007) concluded that the expectations of the teachers trained as performers and those trained as teachers were different. Both types of teacher expressed the same desire to teach, but teacher-performers were considerably more interested in their students' level of self-motivation. Hamann et al. (2000) found that students especially appreciate their teacher's skills in conducting a lesson and pay less attention to the quality of the content. This in turn shows the importance of the ability of teachers to inspire, motivate and captivate their students while teaching their subject.

Students see singing teachers as pleasant or less pleasant personalities and on that ground they draw conclusions about the pleasantness of the subject. Based on their study involving different age groups in Finland, Ruismäki and Tereska (2008) have reported that students associated the most enjoyable experience in music lessons with singing and the least enjoyable experience with learning music theory. At the same time, the main reason for not wanting to sing in lessons was associated with not liking the teacher.

It cannot be assumed that all students like their teacher for the same reasons, although the latter must definitively have certain professional communication skills. Hallam (2008:177) identifies as inevitable the fact that certain teachers and students are more compatible with each other than others, but a professional teacher is able to adapt to a situation regardless of its character.

In the learning process the reliability of teachers' feedback and assessments is very important. Zhukov (2008) reports a difference in the critical and positive feedback given by music teachers to their students. Her research shows that music teachers give rather detailed negative feedback to their students, but in their positive feedback they are considerably less specific. Teachers often comment on shortcomings and take positive developments for granted. From the learner's point of view, it is necessary that the teacher also notices and reinforces what the learner has achieved. Positive feedback encourages students, builds their confidence and supports them in accomplishing more difficult tasks.

A musician's training, including singing studies, is organised around individual lessons. There is a critical level where the teacher-student interaction can develop into a friendship or a child-parent relationship. Gaunt (2010) explores the distance in the interaction of music teachers and students and has found that in the majority of cases students do not want their teacher to interfere in their personal issues. Students who have a very good personal relationship with their teachers do not want to discuss personal topics in the lesson.

With older and professionally more experienced students, demanding and purposeful work is undoubtedly especially important. Younger music students have expressed a wish that dealing with music should first and foremost be fun. By their nature, music studies are focused on corrective repetition, which may be difficult for the beginning learner. Rife et al. (2001) have observed that in music studies with younger learners (9–12 years old) the joy and satisfaction received in their music lesson are of primary importance. Therefore, attention should be paid to maintaining the pleasure of making music in spite of the requirement of routine exercise.

The training of singers is different from the training of players of other musical instruments in that the singer's "instrument" is live, relatively unstable and influenced by the physical and psychological state of its "player". The vocal pedagogue is the most important reliable source of feedback for a voice student. It is sometimes suggested that the contemporary sound and computer technologies may provide a student with comparable or even better evaluation of her/his voice qualities than teachers do. Welch et al. (2004) have addressed the issue of whether modern technology allows singers to be given visual feedback during singing, which could help them to develop the optimal use of their vocal tract and air consumption. They showed that working with a computer screen still requires previous knowledge of tone quality and optimal muscle sense on the singer's part, which means that the computerised "teacher" can only help advanced students, not novices.

In order to find and maintain a singer's optimal self-perception, a very strong relationship of mutual trust and confidence is needed between student and teacher. It is especially difficult for beginners to immediately find the correct coordinated feeling and to reproduce that feeling when required. In addition to professional skills, vocal pedagogues and teachers who train singers need to be open communicators and providers of reliable feedback who support students in their chosen professional field.

This paper is aimed at exploring expectations of the singers – beginners and more advanced individuals alike – towards the psychological environment during voice lessons. The situation in such lessons may be compared to training in contemporary sports where requirements to the bodily and mental performance of an athlete are equally high and where several tutors and assistants are involved in her/his preparation for a competition (Dayme 2006). While the parallels between the competition in sports and the musical performance become more and more accepted in the literature, we are unaware of any previous empirical studies focusing on the well-being of a voice student under the specific circumstances of a singing lesson.

## 2. Method and participants

In the survey of classical singing students, an original, structured, written questionnaire was used, consisting of a number of statements, each of which the participant had to rate as to its correctness. Items to be dealt with and statements to be rated were chosen by the first author of the paper, relying mostly on her decades-long experience of opera performance and voice teaching. The questionnaire was in the Estonian language and divided into five subtopics called “Recognition” (14 statements), “Consideration” (17 statements), “Expectations of the teacher” (15 statements), “Lesson” (23 statements), and “Performance” (19 statements). At the end of the questionnaire there was an additional sheet, where respondents were asked to write a free-form answer to the question: *What are my personal expectations of the vocal pedagogue and the accompanist in psychological terms? (What do I expect them to do and what should they avoid doing?)*

This paper focuses on 32 statements of the questionnaire from the subtopics “Consideration” (statements 15–31) and “Expectations of the teacher” (statements 32–46) as well as on students’ answers written on additional sheets. The statements are presented in the Appendix. These two subtopics deal mostly with how students perceive the support and attention of their teacher and accompanist to their endeavours in the context of individual lessons. The subtopic “Consideration” explores the extent to which students feel their teachers’ and accompanists’ concern for their efforts and objectives is sincere. The subtopic “Expectations of the teacher” reflects students’ expectations of vocal pedagogues and accompanists in the learning process. The questionnaire included questions about the socio-demographic data of the respondents: gender, for how long (s)he had been studying classical singing, and whether (s)he had performed as a soloist in an opera performance or a concert.

During the preparation and development of the questionnaire interviews were conducted with 3 reference persons who had previously graduated from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. As a result of these interviews a more precise selection of the areas which seemed to be problematic for classical singing students was carried out. Two weeks later the comprehensibility and clarity of the

questionnaire was validated with a reference person who had graduated as a singer from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and who was working as a chorus member and inspector at the Estonian National Opera.

The sample consisted of students of classical singing from the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School, students of classical singing from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and professional singers in the opera chorus of Estonian National Opera. The Georg Ots Music School is a high-school level educational institution and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre a university-level educational institution. An overview of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Only those singers whose vocal training had taken place in Estonia in the field of classical singing were included in the study. Based on this precondition, 30 questionnaires were handed out to singers of the Estonian National Opera chorus. All 30 questionnaires were filled in and returned. The inspector of the opera chorus was responsible for distributing and collecting the questionnaires. In the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre 15 questionnaires were handed out to classical singing students, 14 of which were returned. The accompanist of the opera class was responsible for handing out and collecting the questionnaires. 15 questionnaires were handed out to students of classical singing at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School, 13 of which were returned. The elocution teacher of Georg Ots Tallinn Music School was responsible for distributing and collecting the questionnaires. The total number of questionnaires returned was thus 57. The total number of respondents and their share between the three groups was to a large extent conditioned by the actual number individuals available for representing a particular group in a small country.

There were 17 men and 40 women among the respondents. The length of their vocal studies ranged from 1 to 12 years. Of the respondents from the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School, 3 students were male and 10 female; they had studied singing from 1 to 4 years. Of the respondents from the Estonian Academy of

**Table 1. Overview of respondents to the questionnaire**

Group	Professional level	Number of questionnaires obtained	Gender balance	Length of vocal studies (years)	Number of respondents who provided comments
Georg Ots Music School	high school	13	3 male 10 female	1 to 4	3
Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre	under- or post-graduate university	14	3 male 11 female	3 to 10	7
Estonian National Opera chorus	employees	30	11 male 19 female	4 to 12 (length of professional experience 1 to 33 years)	16

Music and Theatre there were 3 male and 11 female students, whose singing studies had lasted from 3 to 10 years. Among the respondents from the opera chorus, 11 were men and 19 women. The singers from the opera chorus had studied classical singing from 4 to 12 years. The length of their experience of singing in the opera chorus ranged from 1 to 33 years.

The questions were rated on a 5-point balanced Likert scale: 5 – completely agree, 4 – mainly agree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 2 – mainly disagree, 1 – completely disagree.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1. Overall comparison of the three groups*

The average scores of the ratings of all questions were compared by one-way analysis of variance in the three groups of respondents, namely students at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School, students at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and singers in the opera chorus at the Estonian National Opera. Differences between the groups were statistically significant [ $F(2,261) = 3.47$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ].

A comparison of the groups in pairs yielded the following results. Differences between the scores of the ratings given by students at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School and students at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre were statistically significant [ $F(1,174) = 4.93$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ]. Differences between the scores of the ratings given by singers in the opera chorus of the Estonian National Opera and students at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School were statistically marginally significant [ $F(1,174) = 3.12$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ]. Differences between the scores of the ratings given by singers from the opera chorus of the Estonian National Opera and students from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre were not statistically significant.

On the basis of these results, it can be concluded that among the three groups of respondents, students at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School stand out, whereas students at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and singers of the chorus of the Estonian National Opera seem generally to perceive the problems covered by the questionnaire in a similar way. The difference may be due to the shorter professional experience of students at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School in comparison with the other two groups of respondents. It may also safely be assumed that the average age of high-school students was lower than that of their university-level peers and the members of the opera chorus (although the questionnaire did not include an explicit question about the age of a respondent). These two factors are thought to be the reason for the lower level of professionalism and social maturity of the high-school students compared to respondents in the remaining two groups.

In the subsequent analysis of responses to individual statements in the questionnaire, results from the three groups were pooled. This was done for two

reasons: firstly because, as the previous analysis showed, comparison of the groups in pairs yielded a statistically significant result in a single case only and, secondly, because the number of respondents in two groups out of three was relatively small (less than 15).

3.2. Statements rated lower than average

In Figures 1 and 2, respondents' ratings of the statements of two subtopics conditionally named "Consideration" (statements 15 to 31) and "Expectations of the teacher" (statements 32 to 46) are presented. These statements have been sequenced in ascending order of the average scores of the ratings given by all respondents (statements with lower average ratings are on the left and those with higher average ratings on the right). The average values of the ratings have been given with standard deviation. The gross average values for the subgroups "Consideration" and "Expectations of the teacher" were equal to 3.78 and 3.83, respectively.

When analysing the two figures, it is notable that the overwhelming majority of the average ratings of statements on a five-point scale are concentrated in the range between 3.5 and 4.4. Only three ratings in both groups of statements have a value below 3.5. Average ratings with a higher value than 4.4 are represented by one in the "Consideration" group and two in the "Expectations of the teacher" group.

Below we will analyse in more detail what these statements are that respondents have considered more or less important as compared to the average. In the "Consideration" group, lower average ratings were given to the following statements: (20) I wish that the teacher would treat me as his/her "own child"; (25) My teacher encourages me to take up an area that would help me to be in better physical shape; (26) I like it when the teacher shows interest in details of my personal life.

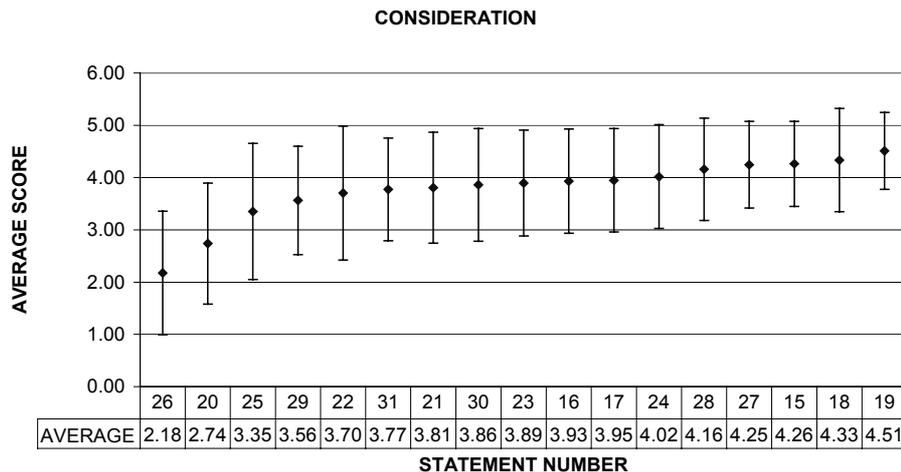
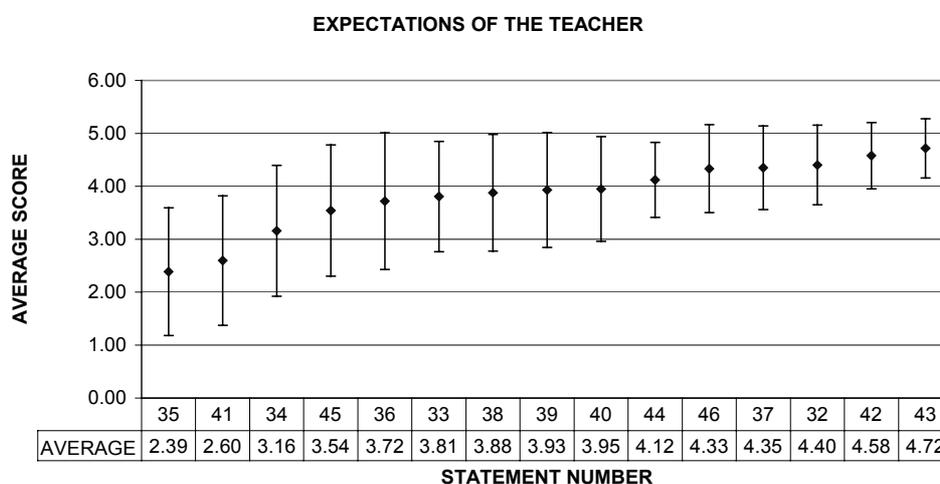


Figure 1. Average scores of ratings of the statements of subtopic "Consideration" (with standard deviation).



**Figure 2.** Average scores of ratings of the statements of subtopic “Expectations of the teacher” (with standard deviation).

In the group “Expectations of the teacher” depicted in Figure 2, lower average ratings were given to the following statements: (34) I like it when the teacher is highly emotional, it inspires me; (35) I like it when the teacher makes all the decisions concerning me, he/she knows what is best for me; (41) The teacher’s continuous dissatisfaction makes me work harder and contribute more.

In an attempt to generalise the content of these six statements, we can draw the following conclusions. Firstly, students do not generally seem to favour the development of an excessively personal relationship between themselves and their teacher (statements 20 and 26), and students find authoritarian tendencies in a teacher’s teaching style equally unacceptable (statement 35). Secondly, students seem to appreciate a calm, constructive lesson atmosphere (statements 34 and 41), which is why they do not approve of a teacher’s excessively emotional state on the one hand or continuous dissatisfaction with students’ achievements on the other.

### 3.3. Statements rated higher than average

Next we will explore the statements in the groups “Consideration” and “Expectations of the teacher” which received above-average ratings. In the “Consideration” group there was only one such statement: (19) The teacher’s positive expectation encourages me to work harder. In the group “Expectations of the teacher” there were three statements rated higher than average: (32) I wish that my teacher would be open to new ideas and opportunities; (42) It is important that the accompanist is familiar with vocal problems; (43) It is important that the accompanist should be open to new ideas and develop him/herself.

All the statements that received above-average ratings refer to a situation in which students’ expectations of the activity of the teacher and accompanist seem

to be somewhat higher than the actual one. Teachers are expected to be more positive than they currently are (statement 19) and accompanists to display more professionalism (statements 42 and 43), while both of them – the teacher and the accompanist – are expected to be more innovative (statements 32 and 43).

#### *3.4. Statements in the rating of which students have been more unanimous than average*

Let us now consider those statements in the groups “Consideration” and “Expectations of the teacher” in the rating of which students have been more unanimous. This is revealed by the scope of standard deviation: the narrower the scope of standard deviation, the less the respondents’ ratings differ from one another. It should be noted that in both Figure 1 and Figure 2 the statements characterised by a narrower scope of standard deviation are concentrated on the right side of the figure, i.e. they have also gained high ratings from respondents. This allows us to conclude that respondents have generally been of the same mind about the statements with high average ratings, whereas in statements with which respondents agree more reluctantly there are greater differences between respondents. In other words, respondents have been more unanimous about positive ratings than about negative ones.

Let us consider those statements with a standard deviation value of less than 0.9. In this case three statements in the group “Consideration” qualify as most unanimous: (15) The teacher trusts me and counts on me; (19) The teacher’s positive expectation encourages me to work harder; (24) The teacher has helped me to recognise my weaknesses. When we apply the same criterion to the group “Expectations of the teacher,” six statements qualify as most unanimous: (32) I wish that my teacher would be open to new ideas and opportunities; (37) I wish that my accompanist would treat me as a future professional; (42) It is important that the accompanist is familiar with vocal problems; (43) It is important that the accompanist should be open to new ideas and develop him/herself; (44) I like it when the teacher encourages me to take more risks, to take on more challenges; (46) I wish that the teacher would speak more about opportunities and the ability to attune myself psychologically.

We should observe that all the statements with above-average ratings considered in the previous section also qualify as most unanimous (statements 19, 32, 42 and 43). In an attempt to generalise the content of those questionnaire statements relating to “Consideration” and “Expectations of the teacher” which were unanimously rated highest by the respondents, we can point to the following students’ expectations of their teacher: (a) the relationship between the teacher, student and accompanist should be based on partnership (statements 15 and 37); (b) the teacher should be positively minded, have professional skills and up-to-date knowledge and be able to inspire the student (statements 19, 24, 32 and 44); (c) the accompanist’s abilities and skills should be at a sufficiently high level (statements 42 and 43); (d) in addition to technical skills, the teacher should also

develop students' psychological skills to help them to cope as professional singers (statement 46).

### 3.5 Answers on additional sheets

To the question asked on the additional sheet, *What are my personal expectations of the vocal pedagogue and the accompanist in psychological terms? (What do I expect them to do and what should they avoid doing?)*, 26 respondents gave a free-form answer, including singers of the opera chorus of the Estonian National Opera (16), students at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (7) and students of the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School (3). Of the 26 respondents 18 were female and 9 male. The respondents' singing studies had lasted between 1.5 and 12 years. Among the singers of the opera chorus and students from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre approximately half replied to the question on the additional sheet, respectively 16 out of 30 and 7 out of 14. The smallest number to express their personal opinion was among students of the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School: 3 of the 13 respondents (see also Table I).

The additional comments provided by participants in free form were mostly of a positive nature, i.e. participants preferred to indicate how they would like to see a productive co-operation to occur in a singing lesson between its different partners. The number of negative comments as to what should not happen in a lesson was small. The content of answers on additional sheets was analysed and the 20 most frequent expressions used by respondents were extracted. The five most popular phrases turned out to be the following: (1) support of efforts [of the student], (2) understanding, (3) mutual trust, (4) creator of atmosphere, and (5) positive attitude. These phrases, together with the frequency of their occurrence as well as a few examples of their usage by respondents are presented in Table 2. Answers by individual respondents are indicated by a capital R followed by a number. The length of vocal studies for each respondent is presented in parentheses. Many respondents wrote that they expected to receive support for their efforts from the teacher in a lesson. 18 respondents expressed their desire to have a supportive attitude from their teacher and accompanist. The 18 respondents included 12 singers of the opera chorus, five students from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, and one student at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School. The teacher's understanding of the student was mentioned 16 times: 10 times by a singer of the opera chorus, four times by students at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and twice by students at the Georg Ots Tallinn Music School. Altogether nine respondents emphasised the importance of trust: seven singers from the opera chorus and two students from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Teachers as creators of atmosphere for the student were mentioned nine times: six times by singers from the opera chorus and three by university students. The teacher's positive attitude was mentioned eight times: three by university students and five by singers from the opera chorus.

**Table 2. The most frequent expressions used by respondents in their answers to the question What are my personal expectations of the vocal pedagogue and the accompanist in psychological terms? (What I expect them to do and what they should avoid doing?) Answers by individual respondents are indicated by capital R followed by a number. The length of vocal studies for each respondent is presented in parentheses.**

Key phrase	No. of occurrence	Examples of statements by respondents
support of efforts [of the student]	18	R5 (10): <i>The teacher and accompanist have to be calm and supportive, especially in the first years of study.</i> R9 (5): <i>I expect more support from them (teachers). They should avoid implanting in students the idea that they cannot do anything, but the other way round.</i> R12 (8): <i>I personally like singing risky things. I would really like it if my teacher and accompanist supported me in this.</i>
understanding	16	R1 (2): <i>More support, understanding that you can't manage to do well every single time.</i> R10 (6): <i>The vocal pedagogue should try to understand students and take into account their state of mind – on a "bad day" the teacher could attempt to attune the student towards a positive attitude.</i> R25 (10): <i>A supportive and understanding attitude is essential.</i>
mutual trust	9	R24 (7): <i>Between the student and the teacher first of all there should be complete trust and mutual understanding, otherwise it is never possible to achieve a good result.</i> R5 (10): <i>Only confidence in the student and student's trust in the teacher carve an "instrument".</i> R17 (8): <i>It is clear that "friction" between the teacher and the student does not benefit either of them – one does not achieve anything and the other loses his/her nerve. So then, friendliness and trust.</i> R18 (9): <i>Honesty, trust and mutual respect.</i> R25 (10): <i>I expect a lesson to be busy and have an atmosphere of trust.</i>
[teacher as] the creator of atmosphere	9	R20 (11): <i>I expect an ability to attune the student to complete concentration in both learning and performances, and also the development of independent working skills.</i> R21 (12): <i>There should be a positive, hard-working atmosphere in the lesson that inspires the student to mobilise him/herself to achieve the outcome that opens the content of the piece. The wrong atmosphere produces the wrong outcome.</i>
positive attitude	8	R9 (5): <i>For me a positive attitude is very important. If it is not going so well today, then may be it goes well tomorrow.</i> R13 (9): <i>Positive attitude is important. less nagging on details, more freedom to interpret the piece</i> R11 (7): <i>In the lesson it must be positive attitude and a good working mood.</i>

In addition to the most frequent key phrases presented in Table II, other important expectations of a vocal lesson by students were also mentioned. The necessity of a lesson to proceed calmly was emphasised seven times, by five university students and two singers of the opera chorus. R8 (10) wrote: *I like a*

teacher who is active but at the same time calm. Calm is best, as it can provide a lesson with activity and purpose. R6 (3) wrote: *I expect a lesson that is conducted in a peaceful atmosphere, and includes a discussion about substantive issues and (vocal) techniques.*

The importance of partnership was also highlighted seven times, by five singers of the opera chorus and by two university students. R4 (4) wrote that communication should be *like between three equal adults*. R26 (4) wrote: *I expect so-called team work [in a lesson].* In addition, respondents wished that the teacher and accompanist would engage in self-development. R18 (9) wrote: *I wish that the singing teacher and accompanist would be open-minded and would continuously improve themselves, and not only vocally or technically. Sense of style and knowledge of several languages are also important, as well as their participating in master classes.*

Teachers were expected to be patient in lessons and to have an optimistic attitude.

R10 (6): *When doing technical exercises and solving problems, apart from competence the teacher could also show patience and optimism.* Respondents also emphasised the link between singing studies and psychology. R19 (9) wrote: *In singing, psychology is one of the most important components. The teacher has to be tactful but at the same time demanding, has to realise where the limit is. Sometimes nudging is needed, sometimes some breathing space should be provided.*

As negative features, teachers' irritability, nervousness, impatience, boredom, irony, anger, superior attitude, humiliating students, tactless criticism, criticising behind one's back, excessively emotional attitude, and the lack of distance between the teacher and the student were mentioned.

R5 (10) wrote: *The teacher should avoid emotions, such as: anger, boredom, irony, impatience, superiority, etc. When the student is vulnerable, the teacher should refrain from acid remarks and ambiguous comments.* R10 (6) wrote: *A vocal pedagogue should be emotionally balanced. Above all, the teacher should not get angry with the student when he/she fails to produce what is required not because he/she has not done the independent work (i.e. when it concerns technical issues, not the failure to have learned the part).* R11 (7) wrote that *humiliation should be avoided.*

R13 (9) wrote: *The teacher should avoid so-called criticism behind one's back, i.e. when the student's singing is mediocre, part of the blame goes to the teacher and the accompanist.* Teachers were sometimes blamed for their lack of a positive attitude. R12 (8) wrote: *What bothers me is their excessive caution. Sometimes they lack a positive attitude.*

The lack of student-teacher distance was pointed out as another negative aspect. R19 (9) wrote: *The relationship should not become that of parent and child, or close friends. Distance has to be maintained.* R21 (12) wrote: *There should always be a certain distance between the student and the teacher. It is necessary. You can't do without.* R6 (3) wrote: *Excessive emotionality and personal attitude interfere with the lesson.*

Respondents did not want the teacher or the accompanist to give recommendations immediately before a performance. R7 (6) wrote: *A day before performance or immediately before stepping on the stage there is no point in telling me: do this thing this way and that thing that way. I think that this kind of teaching is useless. It simply makes the student nervous. The work with singing has to be done earlier and remarks made and advice given in the lessons, not before stepping on the stage.* R5 (10) wrote: *Another thing about the accompanist that would annoy me is when he/she starts giving advice when I am about to step on the stage.*

Finally, the accompanist was expected to have a good command of the piano part and build students' confidence through this. R6 (3) wrote: *The accompanist should also be patient and not be disturbed by students' errors. The accompanist's willingness and enthusiasm while accompanying are important for making the student feel more confident. The accompanist's nervousness is transmitted to the student (especially when the accompanist makes errors while playing).* R8 (10) wrote: *Nervous fidgeting will definitely inhibit me. The accompanist should also be calm, and not attempt to compete with the teacher in teaching.*

#### 4. Discussion

As might have been expected, the results of the survey do not contradict the contents of the free-form comments by participants. The most frequent key phrase in the comments, support of efforts [by the student], may be coupled to statement 19: The teacher's positive expectation encourages me to work harder. Similarly, the next two key phrases from the top, understanding and mutual trust, may be coupled to statement 15: The teacher trusts me and counts on me, as well as to statement 24: The teacher has helped me to recognise my weaknesses. Another key phrase, [teacher as] the creator of atmosphere, is related to statement 44: I like it when the teacher encourages me to take more risks, to take on more challenges. Ratings of all these statements were more unanimous than average (see Figures 1 and 2), i.e. there was more consensus on these issues among the respondents than on others. In addition, statement 19 received the highest average rating (4.51) within the subtopic "Consideration". This agrees with the study of the teacher-student relationship by Gaunt (2010), who demonstrated that students expected their teachers to provide objective feedback and support in building students' confidence. The importance of mutual trust was also emphasised in her study.

Our results revealed the importance of accompanists and their significant role in the training of classical singers. Students were of the opinion that teachers and accompanists should have versatile skills and that they should continuously develop themselves. Accompanists were expected to have a good professional preparation, familiarity with vocal-related issues and a supportive attitude, especially in performance situations. Students wished that their teacher and accompanist would treat them as future professionals.

Vocal pedagogues are expected to provide students with good skills in vocal techniques and also psychological knowledge about coping in performance situations. Informal observations show that in the opinion of many students their teachers do not encourage them to take up a sport, the practice of which would benefit singers in their profession. According to Emmons and Thomas (1998: 67), cultivating good habits in the body and eliminating bad ones is just as important for a singer as it is for an elite athlete.

It is likely that teachers focus primarily on solving vocal problems in the singing lessons and disregard the fact that the quality of voice and also stamina are directly related to physical fitness. General physical endurance and stress tolerance are becoming an important factor in the career of a professional singer. Sataloff (1991) notes that in today's rapidly changing society stress involves almost all professional areas. Stressful situations demand especially high endurance from singers, because physical health is directly related to the quality of voice. Stress can affect both physiology and psychology and sometimes the effects are combined. The demands on today's singers are considerably higher than, for example, 50 years ago. According to the criteria today's singers have to follow, a vocalist's appearance has to suit the role (s)he is playing and very good physical preparation is needed to participate in contemporary performances. Vocal pedagogues meet students in individual singing lessons, where over time students' weaknesses and strengths are revealed. Therefore, vocal pedagogues are in a position to guide students towards practising sports, which would support their singing studies and ensure competitiveness in their future work.

In the musician's profession, emotional interaction with the audience is very important. However, students did not approve of teachers' excessive emotionalism. Vocal pedagogues are often people who work simultaneously as professional singers. Teacher-performers are expected to apply a more rational approach in the teaching process and develop a more balanced and calmer working style than they are accustomed to on stage. Nervousness, impatience and irritability were mentioned by students as teachers' negative qualities. Sometimes in the time-consuming work of training singers frustration is caused by haste. Hallam (2008) suggests that teachers have to avoid situations where a student needs to acquire too many skills at the same time: a student is not able to receive too much information at once.

Teachers' frequent dissatisfaction is not considered motivating by students and putting up with teachers' authoritarian attitude also tends to be a thing of the past. Students' expectations of teachers are related to inspiring, encouraging and motivating. Lehmann et al. (2007) describe two sources of motivation for musicians: internal and external. Internal motivation comes from a person's inner wish and from the joy of practising music. The formation of a musician is a long and painstaking process, in the course of which external motivators are also relied on, typically parents, teachers, fellow students or colleagues. At some stages of development either internal or external motivators may assume greater importance. They can also occur simultaneously in combination.

Singing studies are characterised by teachers' idiosyncratic approach to their students. Bunch (1997) has emphasised that since singing students have very individual vocal abilities, the teacher can start teaching only once (s)he has discovered the qualities of the student's voice. Stark (1999) has described singing as a process where the singer has to achieve kinaesthetic control over muscles influencing the voice and at the same time be able to monitor and correct the quality of voice through the auditory system to achieve the desired outcome.

In successful singing studies vocal teachers and their personality traits play a fundamental role. Students considered as especially important their singing teachers' highly developed empathy and how they succeed in bringing out their students' optimal sensibility to their "instrument", which in turn depends on the students' own self-confidence. The joint and purposeful work of vocal teachers and accompanists lays the basis for the success and competitiveness of today's singing students.

## **5. Conclusions**

Studying classical singing is a long-term process where collaboration with teachers and accompanists in individual lessons goes on for years. For this reason, requirements for and expectations of the teachers and accompanists become important. In the rapidly changing world of today, voice teachers must be able to adapt themselves to the dynamics showing up in the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of their students. Teachers must keep pace in acquiring contemporary methods in education and, as group leaders, be able to fit in with each other personality traits of the three parties involved in a singing lesson, in order to reach the desired outcome.

The results of a survey among students of classical singing demonstrated that students have a clear understanding of how they would like to see their instructors. Responses to an ad hoc questionnaire demonstrated that (a) the relationship between the teacher, student and accompanist should be based on partnership, (b) the teacher should be positively minded, have professional skills and up-to-date knowledge, and be able to inspire the student, (c) the accompanist's abilities and skills should be at a sufficiently high level, (d) in addition to technical proficiency, the teacher should also develop psychological skills in their students to help them to cope with stress as professional singers. In their free comments to the questionnaire, the five most popular phrases used by respondents were (1) support of efforts [of the student], (2) understanding, (3) mutual trust, (4) [teacher as] the creator of atmosphere, and (5) positive attitude. Teachers' nervousness and irritability were described by students as the qualities that should be ruled out in a lesson. Since preparation of students is to a large extent similar in all areas of musicianship, students' expectations of vocal teachers and accompanists are generally expected to be valid in other fields of training musicians as well. In an even wider perspective, the issues of student-teacher interaction are expected to overlap in all areas involving learning.

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## APPENDIX

**Statements in the questionnaire  
(subtopics “Consideration”, statements 15 to 31, and “Expectations of the  
teacher”, statements 32 to 46).**

- 15 The teacher trusts me and counts on me
- 16 I share the same values and principles as my teacher
- 17 My teacher takes my opinion into consideration in choosing repertoire
- 18 I expect support and belief in me from my teacher in every situation
- 19 The teacher’s positive expectation encourages me to work harder
- 20 I wish that the teacher would treat me as his/her “own child”
- 21 I wish my teacher saw me as his/her younger colleague
- 22 My teacher is the primary inspiration in my singing studies
- 23 The teacher has helped me to acknowledge my strengths
- 24 The teacher has helped me to recognise my weaknesses
- 25 My teacher encourages me to take up an activity that would help me to get in a better physical shape
- 26 I like it when the teacher shows interest in details of my personal life
- 27 My teacher takes sufficient interest in my vocal achievements
- 28 My teacher does her/his best to ensure that my results will be excellent
- 29 I have the same understanding of my future as my teacher
- 30 My teacher is always delicate and discreet
- 31 The teacher prepares me enough for working independently as a performer
- 32 I wish that my teacher were open to new ideas and opportunities
- 33 My teacher is a constant role model I look up to
- 34 I like it when the teacher is highly emotional, it inspires me
- 35 I like it when the teacher makes all the decisions concerning me, he/she knows what is best for me
- 36 I wish that my teacher would keep a distance between us
- 37 I wish that my accompanist would treat me as a future professional
- 38 I would like my teacher to instil more confidence in me
- 39 I would like to discuss topics related to vocal technique more with my teacher
- 40 I wish my teacher would inspire and encourage me more to work independently
- 41 The teacher’s continuous dissatisfaction makes me work harder and contribute more
- 42 It is important that the accompanist is familiar with vocal problems
- 43 It is important that the accompanist should be open to new ideas and develop him/herself
- 44 I like it when the teacher encourages me to take more risks, to take on more challenges

- 45 I like the fact that the teacher does not make me take risks, but takes things slowly and gradually, there is no hurry
- 46 I wish that the teacher would speak more about opportunities and my ability to attune myself psychologically