

The influence  
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Certain of Cornelius Reid's students singing in Europe were the first to influence their colleagues in Germany. In 1985 a course was organized at the *Niederrheinische Musik- und Kunstschule Duisburg* and on that occasion Cornelius asked me to translate the short work he was writing on *Vocal Exercises: their purpose and dynamics*.

I cooperated with the singer and teacher colleague Leonore Blume, which was a happy choice. The book is such a slim volume, it is inconceivable that it took four years to translate, although admittedly it was in our spare time. Rita Noel-Martin, former student of Cornelius Reid living in München, and Jolly Stewart, then teaching voice in the States, read the proofs and gave us invaluable advice.

After the publication of this book as *Funktionale Stimmentwicklung* by Schott of Mainz in 1994 we invited Cornelius over to Frankfurt to give a course at Dr. Hoch's Konservatorium. With a play on words with the second volume of Reid's trilogy *The Free Voice*, we decided to call it *Free the Voice* seminar, so as to avoid any misunderstanding.

1995 was the first course and lasted a week. Schott Verlag advertised the course along with details of the book in two of their publications.

Although Cornelius has a very effective repertoire class in his studio in New York we decided to let him concentrate on vocal technique during the courses in Germany. This has been very valuable, especially for teachers as, over the years, Cornelius has commented more on the reasons behind the exercises he is using.

The course immediately generated a lot of interest.

Ulrich Schoenholtz came down from *Duisburg* and invited Reid to go there. A former student of his, Professor Rudolf Piernay invited him to the Musikhochschule in *Mannheim*.

In 1997 the president of the German Singing Teachers Association (Bundesverband Deutscher Gesangspädagogen), Professor Charlotte Lehmann invited Cornelius to give some demonstration lessons at the BDG conference in *München*. In addition to the two weeks in Frankfurt and one in Duisburg, other courses in the following years have taken place in *Wiesbaden, Immesheim* and *London*.

When translating Reid's book on *Vocal Exercises* it was difficult to find a suitable title in German. Although his teaching is based squarely on the *function* of the vocal mechanism, in Germany two other names immediately spring to mind when *functional voice training* is mentioned. These are Eugen Rabine and Gisela Rohmert.

## Eugen Rabine

first met Reid in 1967. He studied with him for just under two years. Reid's books and teaching influenced his subsequent career as an opera singer in America, Switzerland and Germany, becoming even more important when he dedicated his life to vocal pedagogy.

*Interest in the work of Sir Victor Negus (1929) over the double valve function of the human instrument led me and my collaborator Prof. Peter Jacoby of Detmold to further develop and more precisely formulate my theory of vocal function. This basic theory I have continued over the years to expand until it includes not only the evolution of the laryngeal double valve system and its primary influences on phonation, but also the evolutionary development of body, brain and voice, which includes basic physiological and neurological relationship between body postures, body movements, breathing, vocal tract, phonation, as well as psychological (emotional) aspects of phonation and communication in the resulting acoustical phenomenon we call voice.*

(cit. from personal correspondence with E. Rabine from 21. July 2000)

During the 1980's he started to give lectures in various German music colleges on the anatomy and physiology of the human voice. He was met with an extremely negative reaction from many voice teachers on the grounds that *science has nothing to do with singing and anatomical information over the voice inhibits the singer's ability to sing and the teacher's ability to teach*. The term *functional vocal pedagogy* was used by many as a disparaging word.

As a result of the scepticism of the established music college voice teachers Eugen Rabine and Gisela Rohmert set up the Lichtenberger Institute in 1982. After a certain length of time they went their separate ways. Eugen established the Rabine Institute in Büdingen in 1988 where his own method of functional voice pedagogy is taught.

Eugen Rabine writes further in the correspondence that *this method unifies the information over body and vocal function to the senso-motoric and perception aspects of the body-mind and learning psychology. The control of the instrument and voice is body control because every acoustic movement in sound is the result of body (muscular) movement, that is controlled partly consciously, partly unconsciously by a mental concept.*

In summary one can say that the central idea of his vocal theory is based on the evolution of the valve function, found in the <true> and <false> vocal cords in the larynx. The main function of the larynx is part of the respiratory system: the respiratory tract is open for breathing and closed to protect the lungs from foreign bodies. A secondary function of the true vocal cords (or vocal folds) is tone production.

The connection to the breathing muscles enables the larynx to make differences of pressure in the thorax:

1. **Supraglottal pressure** by closing the true vocal folds and false cords thus narrowing the pharyngeal cavity by the pharyngeal and expiratory muscles (outward exertion as for example lifting or pushing) which is unsuitable for phonation.

2. **Subglottal pressure** by closing only the true vocal folds, maintaining an open vocal tract with the inspiratory muscles ( as for example with a gymnastic pull-up) that energates the necessary inner laryngeal muscles for an efficient voice production. In this way the muscles of respiration and locomotion, and even the whole body have a mechanical as well as a neurological reflexive influence on the laryngeal function.

(cit. from an unpublished manuscript, p.25 - *Grundlagen der Rabine Methode*)

This theory is commented on in Cornelius Reid's *A Dictionary of Vocal Terminology* under *Breath Pressure Theory*, Page 41:

*Traditionally, the vocal organs have been considered to be a single-valve-instrument in which the vocal folds act as the valve. Many important theorists however (including Lunn and Myer), have suggested that the mechanism is comprised of two valves rather than one. According to this theory, the false vocal cords, located above the vocal folds, serve as the upper valve, and narrow to create supraglottal pressure by impounding air within the ventricular sacs. In this way an equilibrium is maintained between the sub- and supraglottal pressure, each system mutually counteracting the other. This leaves the vocal folds free to create the pressure variations necessary to pitch without having to act as resisting agents...*

*On the basis of the known anatomical structure of the vocal mechanism, there appears to be no other alternative for neutralizing subglottal pressure than the inflation of the ventricular sacs, which is caused by a narrowing of the false vocal cords. If breath compression is substituted for the conventional view of breath pressure, a source of self generating energy will be found readily available. When properly utilized with other forces which are maintained in equilibrium, compression will obviate the necessity for having to act overtly upon the respiratory system, i.e., using abdominal pressure or other techniques for directing pressure against the vocal folds. Breath compression, built up by inflating the lungs during the act of inspiration, is self-energizing.*

*(For a further discussion of these theories see in addition to the entries in Reid's dictionary the article on *The Nature of Breathing* in his *Essays on the Nature of Singing*).*

The Rabine Institute offers a four-year training program for voice teachers. Over the past ten years more than 120 teachers have been trained, some of whom are active in Italy, Spain, Austria, Switzerland, France, Finland, Turkey and Argentina. The Institute also offers advanced training seminars, not only in vocal pedagogy but also in the application of voice training in the fields of music therapy and psychotherapy.

At present Eugen Rabine is professor of vocal pedagogy at the College of Music in Weimar. He teaches the Rabine Method of functional vocal pedagogy in a Bachelors and Masters degree program. This is the first Bachelors and Masters degree program in Germany dedicated to vocal pedagogy and the professional teaching of voice teachers.

### **Gisela Rohmert,**

the singer and voice teacher, was first confronted with Reid's ideas about 20 years ago when she started to study with Eugen Rabine. Up to that time, despite her earlier medical studies, she had very little concept of the *organic* function of the vocal mechanism. The development of her own voice surprised her. She found here a pedagogy that took into account the law of self-regulation, long before synergetic and chaos theory were popular.

Right from the beginning of the Lichtenberg Institute in 1982 it was supported by a research initiative of the Technical University of Darmstadt under the direction of Professor Dr. Walter Rohmert (ergonomic). The main focus of the research lay in defining the relationship between voice and the body, using well-tested methods of measurement. At the same time physical training techniques were tested for their effect on the vocal function. (*Feldenkreis, Rolfing, Alexander technique, craniosacral therapy, yoga, shiatsu* etc.)

As a result of this research Walter Rohmert's book *Grundzüge des funktionalen Stimmtrainings* was published in 1984.

Through Gisela Rohmert's experience of the constant conflict between objective knowledge of vocal function and the subjective sensations that the singer makes, she developed a pedagogy that took into account these functional mechanisms, and led to a purposeful stimulating repertoire that encourages the awareness of the singer when singing.

She speaks of sensations on the level of the sensory nerves that reduces willful activity and furthers inner vivacity.

Her understanding of vocal development led her to the conviction that the physical training techniques mentioned above, however, did not take into account the function of the larynx nor present the body as a contact area for sound.

*For her this contact area is represented by the mucous membrane that has numerous nerve endings and covers the whole pharynx connecting the trachea, throat and mouth and integrates the nasal passages, and above all the middle ear (tympanum), in the pharyngeal system. The mucous membrane she sees as the source of the singer's formant, the brilliance of tone. As a result the connection between the mucous membrane and the brilliance provokes sensory excitement, which causes the networking of the voice function and leads into a higher order.*

*This free brilliance is responsible for the sound even as the mucous membrane for the function of the voice. It connects the rest of the sound parameters (the tonic, the vowel and the vibrato). With the right stimulation it matures to the spiritual essence of sound. (personal correspondance with G.Rohmert, 07.Aug.2000) From this viewpoint she calls her method a sound-oriented pedagogy.*

Dana Buchenau, a voice teacher who trained at the Lichtenberg Institute, writes in an untitled unpublished manuscript of 23. May 2001 that *Gisela Rohmert is concerned with the basic structure of sound. She names four parameters that stand in hierarchical order: the two more speech-oriented parameters, more directly accessible to deliberate control, the*

*tonic and the vowel, and those less influenced by conscious will-power, steered in a more vegetative and sensory manner, the parameters of vibrato and brilliance. On the level of sound we now come to the heart of her pedagogy; the significance of the singer formants at 3000, 5000, 8000 and 13000 Hz for the sung sound.*

*The sound for Rohmert is not the end product but she puts it in the forefront of her pedagogy as a creative, function-regulating phenomenon. The ideal is a sound that is enriched by the frequencies of the singer formants. Only then is it deemed to be free and vigorous. The parameter brilliance is for her that which keeps everything in place.*

*Rohmert's pedagogy is rich, fascinating and broadens physical consciousness and the ability to apprehend unusual aspects of sound. However, the prospective singers lack a firm vocal foundation. They remain in narrow tonal limits through the overemphasizing of the parameter brilliance (i.e. the singer formants at 3000, 5000, 8000 Hz). The voice tends to be lacking in flexibility, especially when singing greater intervals. Also quick tempi are difficult to execute if the tone quality Rohmert strives for is retained. The students rarely sing beyond the mid- tonal-range. The tones produced are too <chesty> which understandably leads to problems with high notes. Vowels remain comparatively indistinct. The ability to sing a <messa di voce> is severely limited. The way to sound broadens the consciousness, it is more spiritual and wishes it to be so.*

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So how do these views of the vocal function differ from Reid's approach?

First of all Cornelius demands a simplification of activity that excludes extraneous body movement and concentrates attention on the essential workings of the voice.

He works with four basic principles: the two register theory, the necessity for pure vowels, the use of rhythm to encourage the muscles to react spontaneously and the choice of dynamic (loud or soft).

As **Stephan F. Austin** so succinctly wrote in his article for *Australian Voice* (Volume 4, 1998 pp. 1-4; *Confessions of a Golf-Playing Voice Scientist*):

*There are two opposing muscle systems within the larynx and each one defines the fundamental nature of a register (modern science confirms this ancient theory). Strengthen a muscle system and you build a register. Almost all voices are deficient in one of the two, and if this is so, then the voice cannot function correctly. So you target the weak register and strengthen it. As you strengthen you balance the dominant register appropriately and the voice reaches its full potential. The hallmark of success is that over time all evidence of the registers disappears!*

*Loudness encourages the chest voice to speak. The chest register is the source of power and fullness of tone. Soft invites the falsetto, the source of ease and flexibility. The (a) is the vowel of the chest; the (u) of the falsetto. Through appropriate exercises we create an environment where the weak will be made strong and the strong will be brought into balance. Nature takes the lead and*

*the result is very predictable. The bliss of all this is in its simplicity when compared to all the pedagogy in the world today. It stands like a Haiku next to a romantic sonnet.*

*The result is a free voice. A voice that can sing high and low, fast and slow, legato and staccato. It can swell and diminish evenly and can perform a beautiful trill! A voice that will endure and reach its prime during its 4th and 5th decade of life - when too many voices are in their decline.*

These then, are the fundamental principles that have attracted so many to Reid's seminars in Germany and had many of the participants fly to NY for extra lessons. The enthusiasm and improved performance of the participants during the courses have confirmed our conviction of the validity of Cornelius' research theories.

After the sixth *Free the voice* course in Germany the participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire. The following is a summary of their comments.

#### Question 1)

For those singers and teachers who took part in the courses the term *functional voice training* conjured up various reactions. For some it meant nothing. Others associated the term with the Lichtenberg Institute. One commented that through encounters with Lichtenberg Institute students they had the impression of something therapeutic which, however, did not satisfy the demands of the singing profession: the production of healthy tones that were not necessarily in accordance with the music. Although many had vague ideas about coordination and movement and work on the physiological function of the voice, none had a clear concept of Reid's application of these principles before the Frankfurt courses. Reading the book *Funktionale Stimmentwicklung* made people curious to learn about Reid's approach.

#### Question 2)

After taking part in the Reid courses the term *functional voice training* often took on a different meaning or connotation in comparison with Rabine or Rohmert's interpretation. It was felt that some of those teaching according to functional principles overload the students with too much theory. One singer even commented that she understood the term to mean *healthy singing*. However the four years she learnt in that manner were far from healthy for her voice. It was only with Reid that she learned for the first time what functional hearing really is. His precise and logical descriptions could be easily understood. Here was freedom from too many relaxation techniques; concentration on that which is essential, namely the voice mechanism itself. The voice was being stimulated and not manipulated. Reid gave a new criterion for active listening, the ability to hear functionally. His explicit and unambiguous description of functional sequence and clear elucidation of the correlation of the registers illuminated the basic theories he propounded. Putting these theories into practice the participants of the

courses sang freer. Indeed one singer said that for the first time in all her studies she had learnt how to use the head voice.

#### Question 3 & 4)

In the Frankfurt courses Reid's books have always been available to buy. The majority of those attending had read the German book; about half of them were also familiar with his other publications in the English language. Certain aspects of his writing were found to be particularly interesting. Reid's research has made the Bel Canto technique available to us again today. His books help the reader to recognize the background and theory that can only be touched upon in the practical work with the voice; the relation between older pedagogic writings and the most modern techniques of analysis, the scientific exactitude of execution, the insistence of just two registers and the secondary role that Reid gives to the whole topic of breath control.

The recommendation to practice the falsetto and chest register separately was found to be quite revolutionary. It was new and comprehensible that all teaching about attack and support was rejected, so as not to disturb the complex, autonomically - controlled process of singing.

The simple and approachable manner of explanation broadens the singer's perspective of the voice, creating a deeper awareness, the ability to recognize vocal faults, to evaluate them and be shown ways to remove them. One singer wrote that the anatomic perspective brought into voice training wonderfully avoided the description of individual sensations. She had never been able to feel what she was supposed to feel!

Teachers are stimulated to experiment. Tracing vocal problems back to clear, logical, anatomic answers, the meticulous work with vowels and recognizing the influence of dynamics on the registers frees the voice. Then the singer can experience more volume, better top notes, better vowels and more beautiful tone colors.

#### Question 5,6 & 7)

Taking part in the courses has influenced the sensibility and awareness of the participants as singers. There is less *willed* activity. It is possible to let oneself go along with the singing and be less pressurized. There is joy in getting to know one's own voice instead of having to distort it. The formally tabooed chest voice is strengthened and consciously used. There is increased ability to become aware with regard to the analytical hearing of the registers, enabling a quick diagnosis of the state of the voice: diagnosis and therapy advice. The rhetorical question: *why this or that exercise and what does it do?* can lead to fewer exercises but with the knowledge of which to choose and their functional effect. This form of conscious singing becomes easy singing. It leads to easier, effective tone production, more agility and freedom in the voice. Awareness has been awakened and strengthened.

Reid's way is not a panacea; it is constant transformation and adjustment. It involves observation of what is actually happening, not what should happen. It demands and increases the perceptive faculty of



the ear to discern different tone qualities: the recognition of the importance of the principle of pure vowels, the significance of rhythm for spontaneous muscle movement. This total change of thinking about the phenomenon of the voice helps singers to know better how to treat their voices, helps them also to have patience in letting the voice grow. Continually new technical goals can be worked on without primarily aesthetic orientation. Many may then be surprised at the ability of their own voices.

#### Question 8)

The courses have greatly influenced teachers. One who attended the very first course decided she had to totally change her way of teaching and invited Reid to give a course at her studio. Another, a professor at a Musikhochschule, told a couple of his students to go along to the course, forgetting everything he had ever taught them, and listen to Cornelius Reid and learn anew how to sing!

A good number of singers can say that it is through Reid that they first came to teaching. They have more courage to teach and no fear of taking on new students, working with them on the development of the voice and fine-tuning their perception. For those longer in the profession, teaching is fun again. They can see past problems from students days (tremolo, unsteady voice, problems with top notes ) corrected within a few hours. There is a gradual cultivation of the capacity to hear discriminately and develop the perceptive factor: more certainty in the judgment of vocal faults in students and direction in the alleviation of those faults. The relevance and purpose of vocal exercises is now understood with the goal of their application, for some in teaching and others in choir work.

By giving the students the directive: *pay attention to yourself and speak up if you feel anything is wrong*, the teacher gives the students back the responsibility for their own voices and makes them less dependent on the teacher. Thus students are no longer the infants of the overbearing teacher.

More importance is given to the observation of the vocal mechanism. There is the elimination of faults, instead of trying to do things right. The orientation is not on superficial goals, such as aesthetics and presentation, but on natural, spontaneous movement. Movement instead of immobility and inflexibility, the liberation of physiologically favorable reflexes. This leads to greater freedom, flexibility in the voice and release of unnecessary tension.

Teachers have found that intense and more accurate listening to the students with the background knowledge of the functional activity helps them to feel more certain and competent, and to teach more effectively. Questions do not have to be answered immediately. We can have patience! Vocal development takes time and cannot be forced.

#### Question 9)

Reid himself says he has no method. The use of the exercises and the technique is so bound up with Reid's experienced hearing ability, that it

needs years of training in acute listening to teach this way. Some feel, therefore, that the majority of teachers can neither diagnose nor rectify vocal faults. Teachers coming from more established *methods* complain that there is hardly any work on the body or breathing, that he works less with pictures, physical imagery, clear instructions where the tone should sound or be felt; that he elucidates no *support technique*. For most, however, it is a relief; ability can be developed without superficial and affected agonizing techniques. Admittedly during the courses the application of singing with consonants was only briefly or scantily introduced.

There are similarities between Reid's approach and the thought processes of Alexander Technique, (for instance in the elimination of tension). One aspect of both approaches, however, runs contrary to the *end-gaining* of the market which demands quick results. Despite the sincerity and authenticity of Reid's method, there can therefore be difficulties with entry examinations and auditions, as development demands time and cannot be forced.

Cornelius Reid is unique in his way of teaching after his sixty years' experience. He does not say how the tone should be made beautiful, on the contrary, he lets the students go through ugly phrases, so as to reach his more important aim: the free tone. He makes no aesthetic compromises but always works essentially on the functional ability of the voice mechanism. He works on the elimination of faults, instead of doing this or that. In fact he counsels, *do not do anything, let it happen*. His applications are clear. One stands on firm ground. There are no artificial effects: aesthetics are no longer the measure of all things!

Reid's work goes to the basis of things and does not try to reach the objective by imitating appearances. He does not demand anything spiritual or unreasonable, such as robs other methods of their credibility.

Reid's is not a technique that one simply makes use of: it goes deeper. This way of singing reveals the person in the singer; that means that work on the voice is always work with the person. There is a natural discovery and development of one's own voice. The voice is stimulated and not manipulated. Exercises are progressive and adjusted to the technical progress of the student. This results in freedom in the throat and the whole body and (one said *despite* but actually *because of* that) more volume in the voice. Sopranos in particular are surprised that the chest voice opens the throat for the top notes.

#### Question 10)

Those who had had experience of other kinds of voice training described the difference. Traditional teachers often rely merely on personal intelligence and intuition alone as their exceedingly limited tools. They disregard and ignore the long tradition of collected experience of teachers and singer personalities that have contributed to this knowledge over the centuries.

The teacher is of the opinion that voice develops out of the need to express emotions. With vocal talent the student does this *right* sometime

or other; the voice *functions*, but they cannot say what has happened to the voice or how it happened. The development of function is left to chance. The teacher may have a beautiful voice but cannot pass on that ability. The student only attempts to copy. Tone is put to the fore, and that must above all be beautiful.

Then there is the teacher trained in a particular *method* who uses this, irrespective of whether it suits the student or not. The student's own condition or tension interests hardly anyone. Right at the beginning there is usually a total concept that the student attempts to imitate, without being able to get to know his or her own basic vocal possibilities. Specific images and ideas have to be adopted. Individuality falls by the wayside. One has to do this or that, here or there. There is too much work with the imagination, where the voice should be directed, instead of the concrete concept of the vocal mechanism and muscle activity. The result is that often artificial tones are produced instead of following the clear principles of the natural function of the vocal mechanism.

Bi-polarized breathing types, covering etc. do not go to the source of tone production. The use of the chest voice for sopranos is regarded as ruinous. However, even more ruinous is the division in voice categories when mostly made according to tonal criteria, not according to structural ability. Therefore, often in the first semesters of study, a person is relegated to a certain category, and trained in *the necessary technique for this particular <Fach>*, to all intense and purposes, as a feat of skill that has nothing to do with the natural voice.

One singer said: All the breathing techniques, use of imagination, attempts at relaxation through an act of the will to improve the structure of the personality, all this had no influence on my voice. It lost me only time and money: in addition, almost the abandonment of singing and the loss of faith in myself.

Question 11)

Summing up with the free expression of their opinions the participants found Reid's approach, above all, convincing. For those who are rationally-minded, his teaching is a revelation. Teaching is fun again and becomes a mind-game. One is seldom helpless and has the possibility of checking things. With the help of pure logic one can find a way out. The book *Funktionale Stimmentwicklung* is not understood as a text-book but rather supplies information that describes rational and historically-derived theories without any dogmatism of method. Singers attest to the fact that their voices developed well over the years on the bases of this kind of functional voice training. It is the general opinion that Reid's approach should be taught and offered in every music academy and specialist training center.

Cornelius Reid himself is a shining example of teaching right into old age that is quite admirable.

*The spiritual dimension by Cornelius Reid is expressis verbis not mentioned and is possibly not even intended. It is nevertheless ever present, as the way to freedom is of a spiritual nature. In any case C. Reid's method of approach, freeing the voice, leads singers to the ability to sing the whole range of vocal*

*literature of the Western world in such a way that does them justice. As a result of the freedom of function, the voice finds his own healthy aesthetic and may satisfy the needs and demands of the "Music World". The listener, consciously or unconsciously, is always empathetically receptive. The physical sensation of well-being and the corresponding psychological release of tension that comes from the freedom of the voice is not only noticed by the singer alone. The listeners are also able to share it. A free voice releases the emotional content of music for all to hear and is the prerequisite for letting personal emotions flow without which the singer may tend to fall into a mechanistic activism that disturbs the natural function. Genuine emotion moves. (op. cit. Dana Buchenau, manuscript of 25. May 2001)*

Observing and taking lessons from Cornelius over the years constantly brings two quotes to my mind:

*You shall know the truth  
and the truth will set you free*  
(John 8, V.32),

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*The way up is the way down,  
the way forward is the way back.*  
(T.S. Elliot, Four Quartets, the dry salvages, III).

We often have to work with paradoxes to *Free the Voice*.

Margaret Peckham and Leonore Blume

## Questionnaire

1.	What meaning did the term <i>functional voice training</i> have for you before?
2.	After taking part in the Reid courses has the term <i>functional voice training</i> a different meaning or connotation for you in comparison with Rabine and Rohmert? If so, in what way?
3.	What did you find particularly interesting or new in his books and writings?
4.	What influence have the books and writings had on the way you use your voice?
5.	What did participation in the courses do for you personally?
6.	What influence did the courses have on your own work with your voice?
7.	Have the courses influenced your sensibility and awareness as a singer?
8.	What influence have the courses had on your voice teaching?
9.	What is your criticism of Reid's way of teaching? / Negative comments Positive comments
10.	When you have had experience of other kinds of voice training, please describe the difference.
11.	Free expression of opinion