Frank Havrøy

Alone Together

*Vocal ensemble practice seen through the lens
of Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart*

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Acknowledgements

From time to time I have published a little text under the heading 'PhD-life pleasures' on Facebook; I have now some 70 updates under that heading. I remember at one point publishing a photo of two boxes of pills, one for headaches and one for heartburn, believing them to be the most suitable pills for a long PhD writing process. The feedback from my friends was mostly concerned that the 'Ibux' pills could actually trigger the processes that made me need the pills against heartburn, one of many surprises I have come across during these six years. Another surprise is how many people I need to thank after all these years, people who have stood by me through this process.

First of all, without any doubt, there is one person who has been with me all this time, even a long way into his retirement. He deserves the credit for making this project come alive, and for believing in it, even when I didn't. I have come into his room disillusioned many times, but left an hour later with a light heart. I am forever thankful for his analytical skills, his empathy, his ability to see the long lines in my project, and for his patience. This person is of course my supervisor, Elef Nesheim.

Secondly, I have to thank the singers and staff of Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart. I am forever thankful for the way they have let me into their lives, allowing me to invade their rehearsal space, their concerts, their meals, their hotel rooms, and for letting me sing with them. Thanks to all of you.

Abstract

Alone Together – Vocal Ensemble Practice
Seen Through The Lens Of *Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart*

The study examines different aspects of vocal ensemble practice, and explores the ways in which this practice differs from other classical vocal practices, like solo singing and choir singing. Vocal ensemble practice is described through the eyes and words of the members of the German ensemble, Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart.

The empirical data upon which this thesis draws consists of a case study of the ensemble, including observations, semi-structured interviews, and participating observations. In addition to this case study of Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, additional studies have been conducted for comparative purposes, including a study with interviews with Rogers Covey-Crump (singer in The Hilliard Ensemble) and John Potter (former singer in The Hilliard Ensemble).

The theoretical framework of the study is focused on a range of theories of practice, including Wenger's theories on *Communities of practice* and Shatzki's theories of practices as an *array of activities*. In exploring various activities (or fields) within the practice, each is treated individually, with its own theoretical background, but always within the broader framework provided by the different theories of practice.

The findings of the study suggest that vocal ensemble practice demands singers with special skills within the fields of intonation, communication, and ensemble vocal technique. The study shows how the ensembles studied,

particularly Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, deal with challenges within these fields. Other findings of the study relate to the organization of the ensembles' work and to some of the social processes involved, for example the types of conflict which can arise and the ways in which the ensembles work to resolve these.

The study shows how ensemble singers, including those of Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, have worked hard to gain credibility as singers in an environment which attributes higher status to solo and operatic singing, and how they balance between working as soloists on one side and ensemble singers on the other. The unspoken hierarchy among singers and those who employ them, in which an opera soloist has higher prestige than, say, a chorister, means that the vocal ensemble singer has to balance between these two. More significantly, these entrenched attitudes to ensemble singing impact on the education of singers, who are encouraged to work towards operatic careers that can only be achieved by a very few, rather than for choral and ensemble singing, which provides a greater number of professional and opportunities for trained singers.

This thesis concludes with recommendations for the development of educational practice based on the findings of the study, suggesting that singers of all kinds would benefit greatly from learning the particular skills required for ensemble singing, which are embedded in the distinctive practice it has evolved.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

This study looks at the practice of the classical vocal ensemble, seen through first of all a case study of the German vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart (henceforth 'NVS'). The singers in this ensemble all have higher-education training as solo singers, but they have now chosen to spend much of their time as singers in a group. There are a substantial number of vocal ensembles existing all over the world, giving a quite high number of singers choosing this career.

The motivation for writing this thesis is a personal one. It springs from two observations I made when studying singing myself: First of all, the focus in my singing studies was mainly on solo singing, a focus influenced by my singing teachers, my coaches and my fellow students and also inherent in the overall plan of my studies. I had been singing in different vocal ensembles and choirs, but now I experienced this being put aside in favor of a focus on solo singing. Secondly, singing in vocal ensembles did not seem to be discussed at all in the literature central to my studies. There was some literature regarding choral singing, but most literature we read during my studies focused on solo singing. On the other hand, I felt that my vocal ensemble practice, working with ensemble repertoire and with fellow singers over time, gave me insight and vocal technique that was useful to me as a soloist. After a while, the question arose whether I was sharing my insights with other singers within the same vocal ensemble practice.

One of the ensembles I became aware of was the German vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart. After having met Daniel Gloger, one of the singers of the ensemble, I was invited to observe the group in 2009. It was after reviewing the material from this visit, that I decided to make NVS the central case study of this thesis.

1.2   Explanations of terms used in this study

1.2.1   The term 'vocal ensemble'

The term 'vocal ensemble' is used in many connections. In itself the term is formed of two words, 'vocal' and 'ensemble'. The online Oxford Dictionary defines 'ensemble' thus:

> [...] a group of items viewed as a whole rather than individually.[1]

This definition says, in other words, that there are individual elements (or items) interacting in ways that make it possible to view them as a whole, a unity. On the same page there is also a definition in a musical context:

> [...] a group of musicians, actors or dancers performing together.[2]

Here we have individual elements, musicians and others, performing together, interacting with a common goal of producing a musical result. If we add the word 'vocal', it means that this unity of musicians are performing music by producing sound with their voices.

There are other terms that could also cover such a unit. A choir or a chamber choir is also an interacting unit of persons who share the common goal of producing a vocal-musical result. The terms 'vocal ensemble', 'choir', or 'chamber choir' are all used interchangeably. But while many large singing units call themselves a vocal ensemble, even though the number of participants is quite high (for example the American vocal ensemble Ishtmus, which has about 55 members[3] or the Norwegian Uranienborg Vokalensemble, which has around 20–24 singers[4]), I have not been able

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1   http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ensemble?q=ensemble (Viewed 16.05.2012)

2   Ibid.

3   http://www.isthmusvocalensemble.org/ensemble.html (Viewed 16.05.2012)

4   http://www.uravok.no/ (Viewed 16.05.2012)

to find small ensembles, with one or two singers per vocal part, calling themselves a choir or a chamber choir. I will discuss this issue later in the thesis.

England is one of the countries with the strongest choral traditions. In the English language we find the term 'consort', a term that can be used to describe a small group of singers, often in combination with the performance of early music repertoire. In *Grove Music Online* the term 'consort' is defined as a small instrumental ensemble performing music, mainly that written before 1700. The term 'consort' has gained other meanings since it was first used around the end of the sixteenth century, and it is now often used as a description of an ensemble of voices, with or without being accompanied by instruments[5] – but there is no consensus in English singing circles about the use of the term. The word itself seems to have derived from the Italian word 'concerto', and during the seventeenth century it simply meant an ensemble of voices or instruments.[6] There are 'whole' and 'broken' consorts in that period: the term 'whole consort' is used to describe an ensemble with the same kind of instruments, while a 'broken' one is an ensemble including different kinds of instrument.[7] The authenticity of these two terms is discussed in the article, 'Consort', in Grove's.[8] In *Baker's Student Encyclopedia of Music* the term 'consort song' is mentioned:

> [...] *Consort song,* a vocal ensemble, usually a quartet, sometimes accompanied by a broken consort.[9]

But the origin of this term is also very unclear and the term is not very widespread, at least with this definition. In his article *The English Consort Song* (1962), Philip Brett says that this term includes a string ensemble together with a solo voice or solo voices.[10]

On the other hand, the tenor of The Hilliard Ensemble*,* Rogers Covey-Crump, uses the term *vocal consort*. He defines this as a small vocal ensemble, describing it as the opposite of *choir*.[11] Although he is not consistent, either

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5   Edwards 2012

6   Ibid.

7   Kuhn, Laura ed. 1999 p. 302

8   Edwards 2012

9   Kuhn 1999 p. 302

10   Brett 1962 p. 73

11   Covey-Crump 1992 p. 1021

regarding the number of singers per written voice (one or two) or in relation to the use of the term *vocal ensemble* and *vocal consort*, it is very clear what kind of musical organism he is referring to: an ensemble of singers where each singer alone (or together with one other singer) is responsible for their own written part.

There are many different terms, and their use can seem both confusing and difficult to grasp. As far as I can see, there is no clear consensus about the use of the term 'vocal ensemble', and I have to define what I mean when using the word in this thesis.

Covey-Crump's definition of the term 'vocal consort' seems to come closest to the music phenomenon I am examining in this thesis, but the term seems not to have been used in the same manner by everyone else, so I have chosen to use the term 'vocal ensemble', and I define it like this:

> *A group of singers singing together, where each singer alone is responsible for their own written part.*

Another term that also has been used for such a vocal ensemble is the term, 'one-voice-per-part vocal ensemble' (or OVPP vocal ensemble), but I find it easier to only use the term 'vocal ensemble' here.

My definition of the term *vocal ensemble* can imply that each member has the same influence on the resulting sound. This is not necessarily always the case. First of all, there are vocal ensembles singing one voice per part who have a defined leader, like the English vocal ensemble *I Fagiolini*.[12] The English singer and conductor Robert Hollingworth conducts the group, and its hierarchy is well defined. But although Robert Hollingworth is more or less conducting, leading rehearsals, planning projects and so on, they sing one voice per part, and when it comes to concerts, they could work as well without Robert Hollingworth conducting as with him.[13] The use of a conductor in vocal ensembles, with only voice per written part, will be discussed later in this thesis.

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12   http://www.ifagiolini.com/ (Viewed 16.05.2012)

13   A performance of I Fagiolini singing Tallis *Lamentations of Jeremiah* can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjAmQ–F6–jA (Viewed 16.05.2012)

1.2.2   The genre focus of this study

There are many vocal ensembles working today, and they sing in various genres. From these ensembles singing jazz and pop, we have seen the birth of brilliant groups like Manhattan Transfer, Take 6, The Real Group and the Norwegians Pust and Pitsj. But in this thesis I have chosen to focus on vocal ensembles that concentrate on what we call classical music.

The musical use of the term 'classical' is not very precise. There have been numerous attempts to define it. Perhaps it is easier to say which genres I am *not* studying. My decision to examine the classical vocal ensemble implies that I will not look into vocal ensemble practice in pop or jazz, so that ensembles like The Real Group do not feature in this thesis, though I acknowledge that they probably work in quite similar ways to NVS. In Chapter 5 I try to give an insight into the evolution of the 'classical' vocal ensemble throughout music history, clarifying the kind of repertoire they mostly relate to. Later, in Chapter 7, I have described what singing in a 'classical' style is, giving an insight into the vocal techniques required.

1.3   The focus of this study and research questions

Vocal ensemble practice has gained increasing attention during the last 20–30 years. It involves singers who have dedicated their lives to a practice that seems to lack proper attention in the education system, and perhaps also from the classical music industry.

This thesis aims to map out this practice, mostly through studying the work of one of these ensembles, then looks into what kind of competence and skills the singers involved in this practice have gained. Theories regarding the term 'practice' are, of course, central to this study, and the different elements of vocal ensemble practice will be touched on, each with their own theoretical material. In chapter 3 I will present the theoretical framework of this study.

My hypothesis is that the vocal ensemble way of singing and making music is quite special, that these vocal ensembles' practice finds its place between solo classical voice production and choral voice production, and that it is possible to articulate some of these features by studying these ensembles. At the same time, I think that the singers who work within this practice

have become specialized in it, that they have gained some knowledge and competence about singing together with other singers that is quite special, and that this is knowledge that could be helpful for classical solo singers when they encounter ensemble music. I want to create a deeper understanding of vocal ensemble practice, and of the singers that practice seems to produce.

The following research questions are the basis of this study:

How is classical vocal ensemble practice described by some of its members?

How does classical vocal ensemble practice differ from other classical vocal practices, like solo singing and choral singing, and how has this practice evolved through music history?

What kind of singers does such a classical vocal ensemble practice produce, according to the singers themselves?

I choose to examine classical vocal ensemble practice from inside the ensemble, by interacting with its members. My project is to let their voices be heard, to study how they experience their work, and to find out what kind of singers they mean to become after working with ensemble music for a long time. At the same time, I turn to the various theories put forward by these singers, so that when they, for instance, talk about vocal technique use within their practice, I turn to the relevant voice technique literature.

These three questions are highly interconnected, and rather than addressing one question at a time, all three questions will be present through almost every page of this study. But, and this is important to underline, all three questions will not be presented in equal measure in each chapter. While questions 1 and 3 are present more or less through every chapter, question 2 is most prominent in Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, although also touched in the other chapters.

Although I ask my questions about vocal ensemble practice as a whole, I have chosen to focus mainly on one ensemble (NVS), but I have visited other ensembles (The Hilliard Ensemble and I Fagiolini) in order to compare my results. In addition to this, I allow my own experience as a vocal ensemble singer, especially through the work in Nordic Voices, shine through the whole thesis.

I started this chapter with an observation that the classical vocal ensemble is rarely mentioned in vocal literature, noting that I had experienced scepticism from voice teachers and other authorities in the field about my

participation in this practice. In addition to presenting the structure of this thesis, the next chapter will give an insight into the status of knowledge on the vocal ensemble practice within the literature on voices and choirs.

After an eternity, the inky atmorphous swirls finally coalesced into... into what? Some sort of glistening mauve orifice. 'Now, do you know what iss it?' challenged Waafels.

There was an awkward pause, then Ben spoke up

'I believe I do,' he said, his voice calm an gently resonant. 'It's a close-up of a larynx, as seen by a laryngoscope'

'Ferry goot, ferry goot!' said Waafels, happy to have found a soul on his wavelength. 'In de beginning woss de word, yes? De word dat coms from widdin de focal cords of Got.'

(Faber, 2002)

2   The structure of this thesis and knowledge status

2.1   The structure of this thesis

This thesis is divided into five parts. The first part (Chapters 1–4) tells the story of how the thesis came to life; it describes the field in which I as a researcher am moving, and the methods and theories that together will form the foundation for the other chapters. This part describes the idea of the project, and the articulation of the research questions at hand.

This first part is devoted to articulating my own definition of a vocal ensemble's practice and explaining my reasons for viewing this practice through the lens of the vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart (NVS). In the chapter on methodology, I explain how I have moved towards the research questions in finding what to ask for, how to ask for it, when to ask for it, what to look for and so on. The result shows broader aspects of the whole practice, and may perhaps also point the way for future studies of instrumental practices. The theoretical chapter (Chapter 3) explains the terms used in the thesis, the term *practice* first and foremost. I will explain how my theoretical platform is a multifaceted one, relying in part on the various theoretical views of the meaning of the term, *practice*, for instance in Etienne Wenger's theories of *communities of practice*.

The second part of the thesis (Chapters 5–6) places both practice and the ensemble into a historical context, and provides a description of the place

NVS holds within musical life inside and outside Germany. It is important to know where their practice comes from, in order to be aware of the historical reasons that lie behind the ensemble's choices. It is my belief that most research on instrumental practice needs to have an eye on the past, because this awareness of the historical evolution of practice can explain some of the questions of today.

The third part of the thesis (Chapters 7–9) looks into the technical aspects of practice. The technical aspects of musicianship are important to musicians: they define what we are able to do. The sound we produce and the way we produce it, comes directly from the aesthetic choices within our practice, tacit or not. I have chosen to divide this part into three sections: *Vocal technique*, *Intonation* and *Communication*.

The fourth part of the thesis (Chapters 10–11) records an observation of NVS at work. It looks at how they prepare and rehearse, both as individuals and as a group, and how they prepare and carry out their concerts.

The fifth part of the thesis (Chapter 12) is the concluding chapter. I present my findings and discuss some of the issues they raise. At the end of this chapter I also offer some recommendations about ways in which my findings might be pursued, and some advice on ways how my findings can contribute to the education of singers.

This project aims to reveal the different dimensions of vocal ensemble practice and the ways singers within that practice see themselves. My hope is that it will reveal new knowledge about this practice and say something about the musicians who live and breathe within it. At the same time, my ambition is to give an insight into the work of NVS.

2.2   Knowledge status

This thesis looks upon vocal ensemble singing as a unique practice, including activities that require special skills from the singers. Singing in a vocal ensemble seems similar to singing in a choir, but it has many similarities with solo singing as well. This means that we can find useful insights into vocal ensemble practice in literature regarding both solo singing and choral singing. But as this chapter shows, literature addressing vocal ensemble practice and vocal ensemble singing directly is very scarce.

Thus, when looking at the different sides of vocal ensemble practice, one has to examine different sides of music making and singing, including literature on musical communication, intonation and so on. This chapter will deal with literature and research that in some way touches upon or directly addresses vocal ensemble singing. Chapter 3, on my theoretical framework, will review the literature regarding practice.

2.2.1   Research and literature on vocal ensembles

Research on vocal ensembles is very limited, and there have been very few attempts to describe either vocal ensemble practice or singers working as vocal ensemble singers. In a chapter in *Cambridge Companion to Singing* (1998) John Potter describes some purely technical dimensions involved in vocal ensemble singing, covering some issues in vocal techniques, some intonation issues and some ensemble technique issues, like precision, communication and so on. Based on Potter's enormous experience, for instance as a vocal ensemble singer in The Hilliard Ensemble, this chapter is interesting and informative. On the other hand, it seems to be written with the inexperienced vocal ensemble singer in mind, giving very useful tips as an introduction to vocal ensemble singing.

Paparo (2012) examined the ensemble Accafellows, an all-male *a cappella* student group in a midwestern American university. This article has a pedagogical focus, and Paparo proposes some recommendations for music educators based on his findings that 'provide a glimpse into the musical lives of the nine members of the group'.[14] It is interesting to see how this study reveals a vocal ensemble practice that lives outside the formal settings of the music education provided within the university system. Some of Papano's findings are relevant to the present study, amongst them findings connected to rehearsal strategies, social relations amongst the members, the development of a musical identity within their practice as well as the development of some special skills. But although relevant, the issues are not dealt with deeply enough, in my view, perhaps due to the limited dimension of the article. Paparo's study deals with the special *a cappella* societies in the American colleges, often called *collegiate a cappella*. Duchan also deals with this special branch of singing in his book, *Powerful Voices* (2007). Both Paparo and Duchan reveal interesting findings in their studies of these vocal

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14   Paparo 2012 p. 20

groups, and there is no doubt that they both provide information that has some relevance to this present study. But since they both are occupied with amateurs, often improvising and imitating pop singing, the relevance seems relatively limited to me.

In my search for vocal ensemble literature, I came across Michael Faber's quite amusing novel, *The Courage Consort*. Though fictional, this novel offers a glimpse into vocal ensemble practice, and I have used some quotations from this book throughout the thesis.

2.2.2   Vocal ensemble in vocal technique literature

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I had problems finding vocal ensembles and vocal ensemble singing within the traditional vocal technique literature. From Garcia's *Treatise on Singing* (1841) to the vocal technique literature of today, the focus is primarily on the soloist, and especially an operatic, soloistic technique. Of course, several books on vocal technique were published before Garcia's *Treatise*, and although some of them also mention vocal ensemble singing, these references never treat the subject in depth. From Garcia's *Treatise* onwards, the focus is entirely on solo singing. If the theme 'people singing together' is mentioned at all, the focus is on choral singing. In Oren Brown's *Discover Your Voice: How to Develop Healthy Voice Habits* (1996), only one seven-page chapter is dedicated to people singing together, and he does not mention vocal ensembles at all. The chapter is mostly written as an aid for conductors, giving them some useful tips, especially about handling young voices in a choir. Johan Sundberg's *The Science of the Singing Voice* (1987) also dedicates a chapter to choral singing. After talking about intonation issues, he touches on the discussion between choral conductors and solo singing voice teachers, about how fruitful it is for solo singers to sing in a choir: some vocal teachers claim that choral singing can be harmful, or at least not beneficial, for a solo singing student.[15] Sundberg points out that there seem to be a difference between the vocal technique involved in choral singing and the vocal technique involved in solo singing; he also admits that most vocal literature has only dealt with the technical challenges involved in solo singing.[16]

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15   Sundberg 1987 p. 179

16   Ibid. p. 179

The focus on solo singing is present throughout the whole line of vocal technique literature since Garcia, and such comments as this one, from Victor Fuch's *The Art of Singing and Voice Technique*, could show that choir singing perhaps not has been seen as a high status activity::

> [...] An unsuccessful soloist may decide to become a chorister.[17]

One can find literature on vocal technique in the choral literature as well. James Jordan's *The Choral Warm–Up* (2005), one of the books in his series *Evoking Sound*, includes a thorough description of the way he thinks choral singers should use their voices. The technique is well known to classical singers, with a low larynx, warm and spacious sound and a good posture to enhance a good breathing technique.[18]

In another book in this series, Jordan writes about straight tone production for blending purposes, a technique which involves singing with less vibrato, a feature that is mostly connected to choral singing.[19] The classical singing techniques, combined with less vibrato for blending purposes and less intensity within the singing formant range, sum up the way in which choral singing technique is often described.

Literature on vocal technique, whether it is from the solo singing literature or the choral literature, gives an insight into how the singers of a vocal ensemble use their voices. I have asked myself how vocal ensemble singers balance between the two: perhaps this singing is a balancing act between being a solo singer and a choral singer. Although Sundberg mentions that there are of course people who manage to sing in both ways,[20] I have never seen this balancing act being dealt with as an independent issue.

2.2.3   Vocal ensembles in the literature on choral singing

The volume of literature on choral singing is enormous. It spans from methodological literature aimed at conductors and covering issues around leading choirs and choir conducting, to literature on singing for choral singers. In section 2.2.2, I described how the choral literature describes different aspects of vocal technique often used in choral singing. But there

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17   Fuchs 1967 p. 213

18   Jordan 2005 p. 17

19   Jordan 2008 p. 165

20   Sundberg 1987 p. 179

are, of course, other aspects of working with choirs that can give an insight into vocal ensemble practice as well, from how choirs work on intonation to how they work with communication, reading scores, balance and so on. Both Thomas Caplin, in *Fra Teknikk til Musikk – en bok om korledelse,*[21] and James Jordan in his series *Evoking Sound*, deal with different sides of choral singing. For instance, Caplin has some very interesting approaches to singing in choirs, and his methods of working with balance, for instance, [22] is transferable to vocal ensemble singing. I recognize many of the methods listed when reading these books, but again, they are written solely for choral singing, and they describe choral methods exclusively. In these books there is always a conductor present, and the books cover all kinds of choral singing, with a focus on the amateur choir. Vocal ensemble singing, which does not have a conductor, is not touched directly in this literature.

2.2.4   Historical sources on vocal ensembles

There are no music-historical works dealing exclusively with vocal ensemble practice, although this practice may have been dominant for a time, especially during the Renaissance. Potter and Sorrell describe this practice in *A History of Singing* (2012) and try to describe how the singers must have sounded.[23] Plank (2004) makes a point of looking at the size of the ensembles, examining the payrolls of the churches, and Lionnet (1987) has a similar approach, looking at the diaries and other books from the Vatican chapel in Rome during the seventeenth century. Others have used the same approach and studied singing practice by looking at, for instance, part books (Rifkin, 1982) and the study of concert programmes in Notley (1997) to point to a vocal ensemble practice. But this vocal ensemble practice is very seldom treated as a phenomenon in itself, but is rather mentioned as one of many practices alive within the studied historical period.

Chapter 5 discusses the history of vocal ensemble.

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21   'From Technique to Music – a book about leading choirs'

22   Caplin 2005 p. 85

23   Potter and Sorrell 2012

2.3   Conclusions

Literature on vocal ensembles is scarce. There are some historical sources dealing with vocal ensembles, and there are works that mention vocal ensembles and vocal ensemble practice as a part of musical life. Besides these, literature that deals directly with vocal ensembles or vocal ensemble practice is very rare. The vocal technique literature does not seem to mention vocal ensemble singing at all. The choral literature, both that which discusses vocal technique for choirs or the pedagogical literature meant for conductors, also does not seem to mention vocal ensembles. Maybe singing in vocal ensembles is a matter of balancing between being a solo singer and a choral singer; but this is an issue I have not seen mentioned at all, at least up until now. In this thesis, therefore, I have brought in literature from different angles and different fields to cast light on vocal ensemble practice.

She wished this new piece by Pino Fogazza didn't require her and Dagmar to do so many things that distorted normal perception. Other people might think it was terribly exciting when two females singing in thirds made the airwaves buzz weirdly, but Catherine was finding that her nerves were no longer up to it.

(Faber, 2002)

3   **Theoretical framework**

This chapter will explain the theoretical framework used in this thesis. The chapter will first give a more detailed insight into how the theory used in this thesis is distributed throughout the text, then present a discussion around the term 'practice', also looking at the term 'identity', describing how singers within vocal ensemble practice see themselves.

This thesis studies vocal ensemble practice. The different elements that are presented here are the most important dimensions of the practice, according to the participants in the study and as gathered from my own observations of them. Every single part of the vocal ensemble practice studied here has its own theoretical material describing a specific part of the practice. However, there is no general theory informing every part of the thesis, except for the different theories on the concept of 'practice'. The concept of 'practice', discussed first here, will play a part in later chapters, as well as being central to the discussions in the concluding chapter.

3.1   **How much can we actually tell?**

The voice is an instrument integrated in the body. It is a part of your body that is yours and yours alone, just like your face or your arm.[24] Your voice

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24   Brown 1996 p. 1

defines you as a human being, but has a kind of mysterious dimension because you cannot touch it or put your hands on it. Our throats are as individual as our fingerprints or faces, and to describe your own voice is quite difficult, mainly because you don't have much idea of how it actually sounds. The sounds that hit your ears are not only being brought to you by air, but are also being transferred to your ear through bone induction and tissue vibration.[25] You also hear your voice through air conduction when the sound travels from your mouth to your ears, and then of course you hear your voice as acoustic feedback from the walls and the interior of the room you speak or sing in.[26] In addition to this, it is my view that this sensation of your sound production comes after the voice has left your body, and that you interpret this sound against your perception of how you would actually like your voice to sound. In my experience, all of this creates a picture of your voice that is quite a long way from how it actually sounds.

When the singers of NVS describe how they sing in relation to other singers, they automatically place themselves within a discourse of vocal technique choices: their language about it is not a universal one, but rather a language constructed to categorize the world they operate within, as if their knowledge about it is a part of their common struggle to build up truths about what is legitimate and not.[27] It means that the descriptions given by the members of NVS of their own and others' vocal techniques are always coloured by their wish to legitimize their own choices. In the end, it could mean that their descriptions of and thoughts about their own and other's vocal technique preferences will be coloured by their own placement in the vocal technique preference field.

As mentioned, a voice has a dimension of indescribability to it. The people I have interviewed often use words like 'vibrato', 'timbre', 'light' or 'dark' to describe a voice, but the meaning of these words differs from person to person, and context to context. Describing a voice is a bit like when Ludwig Wittgenstein's chess king: you can show someone a king and say 'this is the chess king', but the person would not know how to use it, because you don't give any explanation on how to use the piece,[28] especially since the use of

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25 ibid p. 200

26 ibid p. 200

27 Jørgensen and Phillips 1999 p. 14

28 Wittgenstein 1953/1997 p. 15e

the piece varies depending on context.[29] It is a kind of language game, and Wittgenstein explains that to speak a language is a part of an activity or a lifeform; to know something does not mean you are able to formulate it:

> §78. Compare *knowing* and *saying*:
>> how many feet high Mont Blanc is –
>> how the word "game" is used –
>> how a clarinet sounds.
>
> If you are surprised that one can know something and not be able to say it, you are perhaps thinking of a case like the first. Certainly not of one like the third.[30]

To formulate anything about a voice is like formulating something about how a clarinet sounds, just as difficult and personal.

When you produce sound with your voice you involve your whole body, and the muscular processes are both voluntary and involuntary. The relationship between the voluntary and the involuntary cognitive system will shift:

> [...] First, the singer or speaker starts by tuning the laryngeal musculature so that the next sound to be produced will match the intentions, according to previous experience and practice. The respiratory system raises the subglottic pressure. That starts a transglottal airflow, which in turn, generates the sound. Then the system for automatic phonatory control is switched on.[31]

Around 98 per cent of our internal processing within the brain happens outside our consciousness,[32] which means that our singing is subject to a system that we can clearly understand only to a very limited extent. It is, for example, enough to think of a tone and the vocal chords will come into position.[33]

As a singer, my instrument inhabits me, and in my view it differs in this way from other instruments. It would be absurd for me to talk about sitting down and playing on my instrument. It is within me all the time and it involves who I am at any time. And when listening to other singers, I can sense their singing in my own body. I can feel how their muscles tense, I share their experience and I can in some ways know it and translate it into

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29   ibid p. 11e

30   ibid p. 36e

31   Sundberg 1987 p. 59

32   Thurman, Welch et al 2000 p. 90

33   Brown 1996 p. 5

my own bodily experience. When a carpenter hits a nail, he uses his hammer. He doesn't have to measure the distance from the arm to the hammer, and from the hammer to the nail. The movement is an automated task, and the hammer has become a part of his body, like a white stick is to a blind man, as if the white stick and the hammer have become a prolonging of the senses involved. Merleau-Ponty says that it is through my body I understand others, and that it is through my body I perceive 'things'.[34] I can feel other singers' voices in my own body and I can perceive their singing within myself. But, as with the carpenter, my voice is so integrated in my body that I cannot describe all the events during the sound producing process. It is as if my body has this knowledge and knows it and uses it, as though it has acquired it as a habit. Merleau-Ponty exemplifies this habit acquisition through a number of examples: driving a car, when you more or less identify yourself with the car and don't have to go out and measure the width of the road; typewriting, where you don't have to look at the keyboard to type the words you intend. Or playing the organ, whose player, when sitting down with a new organ does not have to measure up all the distances from all the register handles, or measure the distance to the pedals. After an hour they are ready to perform, and the organ has become a part of their body. It is as if the bodily acquisition of habit has given a new kind of meaning, where meaning is not only something connected to cognitive processes, but is deeply connected to the whole body.[35]

But although the organ player knows how to play the organ or the carpenter knows how to hit a nail into wood, they cannot explain every detail of the process. The acquisition of the habit becomes a way of getting a bodily experience of the world, but the tasks they perform are in no way clear to them. A singer, in my view, would experience the same. I sing and produce sound using the whole body, and my instrument inhabits me. But I cannot put my finger on all the muscular processes involved in getting there. Although I have practiced how to breathe or how to prepare the cavities of the throat to get the specific formants I want, those processes are now so automated that I do them without thinking about them. And if I directed my attention to each of the processes involved, I would lose control over the result. Singing is a process dominated by the involvement of tacit knowledge, where the distal knowing or the distal section is the total result,

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34   Merleau-Ponty 1962 p. 153

35   Ibid. pp. 100–103

and generates the sound that hits my ear, or the inner feeling of the sound production to which I am directing my attention. The proximal knowing, or proximal section of the knowledge, includes all the processes I cannot explain, and it is the part of the process from which I turn my attention away. Together, these two aspects of tacit knowledge, the to–from aspects, form what Michael Polanyi calls the *functional structure* of tacit knowledge.[36]

All the members of a vocal ensemble like NVS carry with them the same kinds of dimensions in their singing process. And it gets even more complicated when we begin to talk about aesthetic choices, for instance when the members of NVS label themselves as *classical singers*.

Dealing with singing and singing preferences is difficult, partly because there is a strong subjectivity linked up against vocal aesthetics. One of the best examples of this is perhaps Roland Barthes' famous essay, 'The grain of the voice'. Barthes describes the voice as being possessed of a 'body'; and he says that listening to such a voice has an element of the erotic to it. I interpret it to be what we often talk about when we try to talk about singers as either 'artists' or 'craftspersons'. Barthes calls this the 'grain' of the voice and grain is

> [...] the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs. If I perceive the 'grain' in a piece of music and accord this 'grain' a theoretical value (the emergence of the text in the work), I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic...[37]

The essay is a good attempt to explain what makes one voice worth listening to more than other voices, but to my view the subjectivity of the 'grain' concept shines through when Barthes tries to explain why a singer like Panzera (actually Barthes' own singing teacher) has more 'grain' in the voice than Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. The latter is described as

> [...] an artist beyond reproach: everything in the (semantic and lyrical) structure is respected and yet nothing seduces, nothing sways us to *jouissance*.[38]

Barthes' term 'grain' has been widely discussed, and there is no doubt that he puts his finger on something that is difficult to explain: What is it in a

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36 Polanyi 1966/1983 p. 13

37 Barthes 1977 p. 188

38 Ibid. p. 183

voice that moves us? Why is it that one voice makes our body vibrate, and another one is stamped as uninteresting?

When the singers of NVS – or indeed any singers – describe their own singing, they draw their language from a number of discourses, and their description of their singing is partly a legitimization of their own choices. With their language choices and their self-description, they most certainly place themselves within a practice field and create an authority inside it, or, as Bourdieu describes it, they

> [...] constitute[s] a relatively autonomous space whose structure is defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members...[39]

At the same time, the way they describe their singing is a way of creating an identity within the practice community, and in the same manner distancing themselves from other communities of practice, as this identification includes relations that shape what they are and what they are not, or what they enjoy and what they don't.[40] A good example of this is the way vocal ensemble singers tend to distance themselves from the 'Romantic' way of singing (see chapter 5).

But does all this mean that it is impossible to describe one's own singing? Does all this mean that a singer does not have an idea of how they are singing? After all, the literature regarding singing and vocal technique is huge, with a history starting centuries ago. All the singers of NVS, or from The Hilliard Ensemble, I Fagiolini and Nordic Voices, have a long history of being taught singing, either by singing teachers and coaches or at universities or opera schools. They discuss vocal techniques with their closest colleagues and they do not have any problems in being understood or in understanding what they are being told. At the same time, the vocal literature is extremely rich and the level of knowledge about the production of vocal sounds has increased enormously during recent years. Now it is possible to observe vocal sound production happening inside the body with modern technologies like MRI or measuring of electric impulses in contracting muscles. But, although knowledge about the singing voice has grown, it remains true that describing a voice will always be difficult, due to the indescribable dimensions of it.

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39   Bourdieu 1984/2010 p. 260

40   Wenger 1998 p. 191

It is therefore, to my view, important to know that these indescribable dimensions of your own singing voice, the discourse singers place themselves in when talking about it, and the community of practice they belong to and identify themselves within, serve as a backdrop. When the singers of NVS use the term 'soloist', the term describes not only how they sing, but also how they look upon themselves and others, how they describe their own world. Both these aspects need to be taken into consideration when talking to and observing a vocal ensemble describing their own practice and their singing.

And, although singing has a dimension of *tacit knowledge* to it – regarding the indescribable processes involved – the knowledge is neither entirely *tacit* nor *explicit*. Wenger argues that classifying knowledge as either tacit or explicit runs into difficulties because both aspects are always present to some degree.[41] He uses the famous 'riding a bike' example, often used to describe tacit knowledge, since people frequently have difficulty in explaining what they do to keep their balance. Wenger states that although this is right, people often can explain something of the process involved, how they have to use their speed, wiggle their steering wheel and so on.[42] The same can be said about singers. Although singers would have problems describing every detail in their singing technique, they do have some quite good ideas about it as well. When singers engage themselves in a community of practice, they engage in processes that have certain patterns which, when renewed, give rise to an experience of meaning.[43] Wenger argues that meaning is always the product of its negotiation,[44] and singers engaging themselves in a community of practice contribute to this negotiation of meaning by participating in it, acting and connecting, bringing their history to the table and affecting the other participants. In the end this negotiation of meaning also contains a process of reification, where the sound produced by the singers is an artefact representing their practice, a reflection of it.[45]

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41   Wenger 1998 p. 69

42   Ibid. p. 69

43   Ibid. p. 52

44   Ibid. p. 54

45   Ibid. p. 61

3.2   **Knowledge management on an organizational level**

In this thesis I study vocal ensemble practice, mainly through my observations and work with NVS, but also through more limited studies of other groups. These groups have been working together for a long time and they call themselves vocal ensembles. They share this practice and I suppose they have just about the same ideas on what makes this practice special or what kind of singers they will end up as after being inside this practice for a long time. They develop knowledge about this practice by being inside it, singing and working together with the other members.

The members of NVS work together a regularly. They see each other every week and they carry a great deal of experience and knowledge about how to sing in a vocal ensemble. This knowledge is not always something they can express: it is tacit, and, as with their singing, they carry out their vocal ensemble performing tasks as automated tasks. If we consider a vocal ensemble like NVS an organization dependant on knowledge development, then, as Von Krogh, Ichijo, and Nonaka (2005) point out, to recognize the value of tacit knowledge and develop ideas on how to make advantage of it, is a core challenge.[46] As Nonaka (1994) says, creating information and knowledge is essential to an organization that deals with a changing environment.[47] This means, as I see it, that when a vocal ensemble works, they also work to make this knowledge explicit, so that they can grasp how they make their choices. Singing is a skill, and I mean that singing together is also a skill, and to be able to sing together requires that the singers agree upon how to do it, or create knowledge about it. In this study, I feel that my task has been to grasp some of this knowledge, tacit or explicit, which has required diversity in the methods used to access it (see Chapter 4).

According to Nonaka, in an organization or a group like NVS, knowledge can go from tacit to explicit through a process of knowledge conversion, and the key to grasping this tacit knowledge in the organization is experience.[48] When one of the singers talks about the difficulties of starting their singing with NVS, it may be that they spent some time in getting this experience, that they had not yet grasped some of the tacit knowledge involved in the

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46   Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka 2005 p. 21

47   Nonaka 1994 p. 14

48   Ibid p. 19

ensemble's music making; but after a while, without actually being able to say how, except for the fact that they had been talking and singing with the others, things got better. In a later article, Nonaka and his colleagues argue that knowledge creation is

> [...] a continuous, self-transcending process through which one transcends the boundary of the old self into a new self by acquiring a new context, a new view of the world.[49]

It is transcending the boundary between self and others, and knowledge is created in the interaction amongst individuals or between individuals and their environment.[50] This is a view I feel I observe and have felt myself. When I create new knowledge in a setting, it is with an understanding that includes my whole body, in interactions with other individuals and my surroundings.

Nonaka states that it is possible to expand Polanyi's philosophical theory about tacit knowledge in a more practical direction, and he suggests a spiral model for organizational knowledge conversion. In this model the knowledge is transferred from tacit to explicit through different stages and different levels inside the organization.[51] His concepts of making knowledge explicit involve what he calls 'repeated, time-consuming dialogue among members', or processes like socialization and collaboration.[52] These processes are involved in the SECI model of knowledge conversion (socialization–externalisation–combination–internalisation). Socialization works by sharing experiences, as for instance in social meetings, NVS rehearsing or drinking coffee in between sessions, or eating a meal together. Externalization works by crystallizing and sharing knowledge, for instance when NVS discuss a concept or a vocal challenge in a piece being rehearsed. Combination works by converting explicit knowledge into more complex and systematic sets of explicit knowledge, for instance when the members of NVS have a fuller overview of how to attack vocal challenges across the full range of the contemporary vocal repertoire. Internalization is the process of learning by doing, or the process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge.[53]

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49   Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000 p. 8

50   Ibid. p. 8

51   Nonaka 1994 p. 20

52   Ibid. p. 24

53   Nonaka, Toyama and Konno 2000 p. 10

These are processes that are involved in the daily work of NVS, in rehearsals and at concerts, at meetings and at social events. And when I am interested in finding out about different aspects of vocal ensemble practice, these are the processes I observe. When the singers of NVS talk about what they know, how they sing and how they attack the challenges they meet singing music together, it is from these processes that their competencies have evolved. To know something is not the same as having the competence to work within the practice. It is only when knowledge has been through the different stages that the individual is able to use it in action and we can talk about competence. Or, as Filstad puts it, knowledge as a question about competence has to involve both knowing about (an epistemological level) and a knowing through participating (an ontological level).[54]

3.3 The question about practice

The term 'practice' is widely used in everyday conversation. When I say I want to see whether there is such a thing as a vocal ensemble practice, and whether this practice differs from other vocal practices, such as solo singing or choir singing, I must begin by defining the concept of 'practice'. Although it is an 'everyday' term, the concept of 'practice' is difficult to define precisely. When we talk about musicians, we speak of them 'practising', rehearsing something again and again to master a skill in music making. But the verb 'to practise' does not include all the activities that we find within a practice. The dictionary's definition of the word sheds some light: it is defined as an actual application or use of an idea, belief or method (as opposed to 'theories') or a customary, habitual or expected way of doing something.[55] There is a distinction between the terms theory and practice, though they are linked. Aristotle made a distinction between them, describing three different types of active discipline, *theoria*, *praxis* and *poeisis*. *Theoria* is connected with 'thinking' and with a purpose of explaining or finding the reality. *Praxis* is connected to practical knowledge,[56] linked up with 'action' and can be a result of experience, while *poeisis* is linked

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54 Filstad 2010 p. 108

55 http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/practice?q=practice (Viewed 24.11.2013)

56 The definition by Aristotle of praxis as connected to actions, is found in his *Nicomadean Ethics,* for instance at 1141b.

to production.[57] When NVS sings, the resulting production is of course the sound itself, but to master their practice they have to invest and channel their experience and knowledge through their own bodies, and this bodily know-how, often evolved through social interactions with others,[58] can be seen as one of the elements required in the mastering of a practice.

This bodily know-how, or 'bodily doings' has been a focus point when theorists have tried to define the concept of practice. Since it is said that practice has something to do with actions or activity that take place in human encounters, some have tried to place these actions or activity at centre of the definition. Schatzki (2001) says that, given the multiplicity of issues within the discussion of practice, it is difficult to find a unified approach, although he states that most theorists lean towards a definition of practice as *arrays of activity*. He continues:

> [...] most theorists, above all those in philosophy and the traditional social sciences, identify the activities involved as those of persons: practices are arrays of human activity.[59]

Schatzki first defines practices as 'organized nexuses of activity', before giving a new definition of practices as 'an organized web of actions'.[60] As Hovland (2013) points out, it looks as though there is some confusion about terms, whether the actions involved are 'nexuses', 'arrays' or being 'organized' (and what is organized by who and how?).[61] Schatzki's focus is human actions, understood as 'either bodily doings and sayings or actions that these doings and sayings constitute'.[62] But is a practice understood only through the human activity involved within it, or could we suggest that there is more to it than that? If all the members of the vocal ensembles throughout the world went home and sat down on their own without doing anything, then would vocal ensemble practice not still exist? Practice is in some way a social order, but this 'order' is, as Schatzki says, more than an order made of regularities and their apprehensions. Schatzki puts forward Wittgenstein's example of how different activities count as games, and in that sense compose an order, a 'tangle of sameness and similarities among the activities

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57   Potur and Kayihan 2011 p. 119

58   Collins 2001 p. 109

59   Schatzki 2001a p. 2

60   Schatzki 2001b p. 48

61   Hovland 2013 p. 2

62   Schatzki 2001 p. 48

involved'.[63] It is therefore perhaps not very daring to suggest that language and discourse are parts of a practice as well as the actions involved, as the members of a practice play out roles, roles constituted by their practices, and roles which constitute practice in themselves. If we look at these roles as not only constructed by free will, nor determined by structures, but created as an interplay between the two over time, they remind us very much of *habitus*, the term used to describe a system of structured, structuring dispositions, constituted in practice and always oriented towards practical functions.[64]

I will argue that there are individual as well as collective actions involved in practice, together with discourse and language, making up a complex web of processes. If we choose to study a practice, it may not be enough to study the members' actions only; we need also to hear them describe these individual and collective actions. We also need to hear the members of the practice describe their world, and how they place their own practice within the world of other practices that surround them. Hovland, in his essay *Turning to Practice* (2013) argues that the social sciences (very generally speaking, as he says) seek knowledge *about* practice, while what we seek (as musicologists) is knowledge *in* practice.[65] According to my point of view, to understand or have an insight into a practice involves both of these viewpoints. The following chapters will therefore give an insight into knowledge about practice and knowledge from within the practice.

But the aim here is also to provide a transition into the next chapter of this thesis, by deciding how to study a practice. Barry Barnes (2001) describes how people can engage in what he calls *shared practices*, explained as 'the accomplishments of competent members of collectives.'[66] I read this as an attempt to say that practice is a collective thing (although it can be exercised alone), by people who have some knowledge and routines which enable them to perform the required actions. Barnes also states that practices are learned from other people, and it is a part of the nature of shared practices that learning what it is and enacting it are inseparable.[67] The question, of course, remains: what is learned, and how? And this is perhaps the core

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63   Ibid. p. 43

64   Bourdieu 1990 p. 52

65   Hovland 2013 p. 2

66   Barnes 2001 pp. 24–25

67   Ibid. p. 25

issue here as well: if you are to look at practice, you have to study all sides of it. Barnes talks about riding in formation as practice, how the members need to know different aspects of riding together, such as knowledge about terrain, besides the skill of riding itself. To study the practice of riding in formation means to look into these different dimensions of the practice and to gain knowledge about *and* in practice. In his article, Hovland exemplifies how playing an instrument engages the body into different internalized movements, movements that cannot be seen as practice itself, but bodily acts which a practice 'articulates'.[68] All these different sides of the practice, whether it is knowledge about riding a horse or playing an instrument, contain their own theoretical platform(s). Therefore, through the following chapters, the theoretical concepts of the term practice are not obviously present, but form the background against which the actions discussed are played.

3.4   A vocal ensemble as a community of practice

NVS is a group of people, coming together to perform actions that bind them together. They have the task of performing music written for their special constellation of people, and they do this together, they learn together, they perform the different actions together. They *do* together. As Wenger says, it is the doing they perform, when put into historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what they do. In this sense, he says, practice is always social practice.[69] To Wenger, this social practice is the place where meaning is negotiated, where experience is shaped through participation and where objects formed through the practice come to life through a reification process. Wenger also says that a practice does not exist in the abstract. It exists, as he says, because people are engaged in actions whose meaning they negotiate with others.[70] These participants are mutually engaged with each other; they form a community of practice. NVS could be seen as a community of practice, and Wenger suggests 14 indicators[71] indicating that a community of practice actually has been formed:

68   Hovland 2013 p. 5

69   Wenger 1998 p. 47

70   Ibid. p. 73

71   Ibid. p. 125–126

1 **Sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual.**
I suggest that there is no doubt about mutual relationships having been formed, both harmonious and conflictual, in a vocal ensemble having worked together for a long time.

2 **Shared ways of engaging in doing things together**.
In such a vocal ensemble, the members probably will share, for instance, a huge collection of strategies in working out the challenges and difficulties in their repertoire.

3 **The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation.**
In a vocal ensemble I suggest that there has to be a very easy flow of information within the organization (for instance in every moment they share information while singing), together with a collective willingness to produce for instance new ways of performing their repertoire together.

4 **Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process.**
I would guess that in a vocal ensemble working over a period of time, processes get automated, and there will probably be less need for lengthy conversations about problems, for instance in their singing.

5 **Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed.**
The singers of a vocal ensemble will probably spot collectively the challenges they work on.

6 **Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs.**
This is a known feature within group process theory. When you belong to a group for a long time, you will create what Brown calls 'group distinctiveness', and who belongs and who doesn't can be seen in the language and discourses within the group itself.[72]

7 **Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise.**
Knowing what others know is of course difficult, but in a vocal ensemble they probably have a very good sense of each others' knowledge, and certainly more than an outsider would have.

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72 Brown 2000 pp. 315–322

8 **Mutually defining identities.**
There are concurrent ideas on the roles the different singers seem to take, and it rhymes quite well with the ideas each singer has about their own roles in the ensemble. This is one example of mutually defined identities in the group.

9 **The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products.**
Discussing the repertoire, what to sing and what not to sing is, to my experience, important in every vocal ensemble. This could be seen as one example of the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products in a vocal ensemble.

10 **Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts.**
Most of the time the members of a vocal ensemble, like any singers, would be very aware of what to wear and what tools to use. This includes uniforms (dresses and suits) and tuning forks, music stands and so on.

11 **Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter.**
In a vocal ensemble, the members do have a common history together, they will probably share so much experiences that their language is full of comments that they are the only ones to fully understand.

12 **Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones.**
A vocal ensemble will probably work as a group according to inside language, and a common language, including jargon and shortcuts, can be seen in the processes of *group cohesion*.[73]

13 **Certain styles recognised as displaying membership.**
Most vocal ensembles are uniformed at their concerts, and they probably strive to make a unique visual output at their performances. This is one example of a display style of a vocal ensemble.

14 **A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.**
This is, to my view, an important point in this list. The members of a vocal ensemble, or a group, will share certain discourses

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73 Ibid. p. 45

reflecting certain perspectives of the world, for instance the
process of creating group norms.[74]

Wenger does not say whether all 14 indicators must be present at all times
before we can state with certainty that a community of practice has been
formed. Neither does he suggest that some indicators might have more
significance than others. I find it more interesting to look at a community's
ways of working together or at their language than to look at their output
styles, like uniforms or clothing, and therefore I reflect more on some
indicators than others during the next chapters. But through Wenger's
suggested indicators, I will be quite confident to call a vocal ensemble
a community of practice, and in the last chapter I will return to these
indicators to see how they relate to the work inside NVS.

3.5   Identity in practice

When I ask how the singers inside a practice view themselves after having
spent a great deal of time within vocal ensemble practice, I touch on the
issue of *identity*. One issue is of course to identify the competence that
each singer seems to acquire, and then try to put it in writing; another is to
discuss how the singers place themselves within the fields of other singers.

The term *identity* has many dimensions, and the literature covering various
aspects of the term is huge. To talk about identities for singers, or vocal
identities, if we can call it that, could cover several theses, so I will be a
little cautious in my use of the term. On the other hand, as mentioned, it is
difficult to avoid the term, so I will have to clarify some perspectives on my
use of the term in this thesis.

In a study of what she calls 'Vocal Identity'[75] (2007), Tiri Bergesen Schei
looks into identity formation from a discourse-theoretical perspective.
She examines the identity formation of three singers from three different
genres. She divides the term 'identity' into *being* an identity, that is, being
a part of a group, the intuitive, naturally and not reflected part of being;
having an identity, that is, to play a role; and *seeking* an identity, that is, the

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74   Ibid. p. 56

75   'Vokal identitet – en diskursteoretisk analyse av profesjonelle sangeres identitetsdannelse'.
      [PhD thesis, University of Bergen, 2007]

way the individual shapes their future.[76] Schei concludes by saying that identity shaping as a singer has something to do with defining the genre the singer operates within, and that singers defines themselves as something when they know what this something is. She continues by saying that the singer has a vocal identity, which comes to life through the singer's self-consciousness, through what she calls the subject's positioning, and through their consciousness about the vocal-cultural space. All this has an impact on how the singer chooses when it comes to issues like timbre, interpretation and even contact with the audience.[77] In other words, their vocal identity is connected to the genre to which the singers define themselves as belonging. Perhaps this is an obvious thing to say, but we could take it a little bit further and say that every bit of project, group or practice to which the singers define themselves as belonging will form their identity. The weakness of this is, of course, that we still have to say a little bit about what their identity within this practice is.

The way we look upon ourselves has something to do with the groups that we define ourselves within. We can say that our social identity derives from our group(s) membership(s).[78] Humans tend to have a positive self-concept rather than a negative one, and Brown (2000) juxtaposes *self-concept* with *identity* and continues that this self-concept is also defined in terms of group affiliations; it follows that there will be a preference to view those in groups positively rather than negatively.[79] Being a part of a group is different than being a part of a practice in one sense, but in another, the two are the same. There is a distinction between being a part of a community of practice and being a part of a group, if we define a group simply as two or more individuals who perceive themselves as members of the same social category.[80] A vocal ensemble is a group, but I also suggest that it is a community of practice. As Wenger says, and this is a position I share, identity is profoundly connected to a practice, and identity formation goes on all the time in the actions connected to the practice and the humans participating in it. Wenger characterizes

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76   Schei 2007 pp. 182–186

77   Ibid. p. 212

78   Brown 2000 p. 311

79   Ibid. p. 312

80   Turner 1982 p. 15

> [...] identity as *negotiated experience*. That we define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves.[81]

In a vocal ensemble this is expressed, for instance, through discourses on singing and vocal ensemble history: how they talk about their repertoire, their way of communication and their way of defining their competence according to other singers. Hall (2006) says that identities are constructed within discourses,[82] and then says that identity is the meeting point between the discourse and the practice, and the processes which construct us as subjects that can be 'spoken'.[83] In chapter 7, I describe a certain discourse that seems to run in vocal ensembles, the discourse of 'being an ensemble, not a choir'. When the members of NVS describe their group as an ensemble, not a choir, that discourse has a direct impact on how they view themselves as singers, which in turn has a direct influence on the choices they make when singing the music they choose. After a while, this way of talking and singing becomes familiar. Wenger continues to characterize

> [...] identity as *community membership*. We define who we are by the familiar and the unfamiliar.[84]

A vocal ensemble will develop habits in their work, their way of doing things, solving problems and meeting challenges. The pattern in these choices is a part of their ideas about themselves as musicians. Wenger then says that one can characterize

> [...] identity as *learning trajectory.* We define who we are by where we have been and where we are going.[85]

I suspect that the members of NVS know very well what kind of singers they are, what history they have and where the group is going, as well as their own future paths as singers. But of course, identity is not shaped by one practice connection alone:

> [...] identity as *nexus of membership*. We define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity.[86]

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81   Wenger 1998 p. 149

82   Hall 1996 p. 4

83   Ibid. p. 6

84   Wenger 1998 p. 149

85   Ibid. p. 149

86   Ibid. p. 149

The singers of NVS participate in many communities of practices. They do projects with other musicians, and every one of these will contribute to the way they look upon themselves, and, in the end, will become a part of the changing the identity of NVS. And, of course, NVS, is not alone in the world doing what they are doing. Wenger characterizes

> [...] identity as *a relation between the local and the global*. We define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses.[87]

Like all vocal ensembles, NVS is a part of vocal ensemble practice throughout the world. They share the stage together with other ensembles, like The Hilliard Ensemble, Nordic Voices, I Fagiolini, The King's Singers and so on. They have a very clear view of their own work in relation to these other ensembles, and they compare what they do with them all the time. The group's identity and the identity of each singer will be shaped in the demarcations they make towards these other groups and singers.

The singers of NVS have certain ways of looking at themselves. As I will show during the coming chapters, in their interviews with me and in my observations of them, they placed themselves in relation to the other singers outside the vocal ensemble practice and the singers from other groups and communities of vocal ensemble practice. Some of their experience, what they have learned and experienced in practice, will be of interest and of use to singers outside the ensemble practice.

3.6   Conclusions

This chapter has looked into the theoretical framework of this thesis. I have described how the voice is an instrument with a dimension that defies definition. I have argued that it is important to be aware of the ways in which singers' observations of vocal ensemble practice will be influenced by their tacit knowledge, on both a personal and an organizational level. Further on this thesis looks into the concept of 'practice'. Although a term used in everyday conversation, 'practice' is difficult to define. In this thesis the understanding of this concept is based on the theories of Schatzki (practice as human actions) and Barnes (shared practices), and especially on the theories on communities of practice formulated by Etienne Wenger. I

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87   Ibid. p. 149

have also argued that, when looking into practice, the actions that articulate the practice must be dealt with separately. The different parts of the practice each have their own theoretical platform, but are always supported by the theories of practice.

The hours were passing, not in linear flow, but in endless repetitions of two minutes there, five minutes there, and then the same two minutes from before, over and over and over.

(Faber, 2002)

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4 Method

As I wrote in Chapter 1, I have myself a quite long history as a vocal ensemble singer. I started singing in the vocal ensemble Nordic Voices in 1997, and before that I had been singing in various ensembles and choirs in Norway. Thus, I have started this project of looking at vocal ensemble practice with a lot of experience in the field, but also with some preconceptions about the nature of this practice. This chapter will look into the methodological aspects of the current study; but first I will discuss my own role in the project, both in terms of my role in examining the vocal ensemble phenomenon, and the consequences my own role has for the writing of this current thesis.

This is a multiple method approach study, and this chapter presents all the methodical approaches I have chosen during the project. This chapter is therefore organized in the following way: each methodical approach is presented in both a methodical-theoretical way, and then in a methodical-practical way, describing how I conducted my investigations. I could have chosen to present my methodical choices in a chronological way, but I found that an inconvenient way of describing my project, since the different methods of investigation overlapped each other during the period of study.

4.1   My role as researcher and author

My background is a part of what makes my preconceptions and my prejudgements, or, as Gadamer calls them,[88] my fore-meanings, which are very much alive when I start to interpret what I see and what I hear. And my interpretations are the focus point of this study. This is a qualitative study, and it is little data here that can be counted and weighed. Every thing I have observed, every line from the interviews I have written down, and every note I have made had to be read by me, and interpreted by me. And every time I have read any transcription I have made, for example from my interviews, all the words, all the information has had to go through my filters. These filters are my history, my values, my choices in my singing, my discussions with colleagues, everything I have done and thought up until the point I read the text. These fore-meanings can remain unnoticed, as Gadamer explains, and in order to secure the reading of the empirical data in this thesis as a hermeneutical task, I have to foreground my own fore-meanings.[89]

To read and interpret has often been characterized as a process that goes in a circle, as you become aware of more detail each time you read. You go from detail to the entirety, back to the detail again and so on. As we discover new detail we make up a new entirety, again and again.[90] All my fore-meanings create a horizon of fore-meanings, and the goal is to have what is often called a 'fusion of horizons', a fusion between the horizon of fore-meanings and the horizon of preconditions, the assumptions and conditions that are in a text.[91] This is of course an image from a perfect world, and this fusion of horizons is an unattainable goal.[92] But if we submit to these ideas on interpretation of texts, they will have an influence on how I treat my empirical data. I must at least be aware of the preconditions and prejudgements I carry with me.

As I wrote in Chapter 1, I have a history as a singer within vocal ensemble practice myself. It means that when I visited NVS, I was not a researcher without any preferences in respect of the practice I was studying. Such a researcher is of course (almost) impossible to find, but my situation was

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88   Gadamer, Hans-Georg 1975/2004 p. 270.

89   Ibid. p. 271.

90   Jordheim et al 2008 p. 226.

91   Ibid. p. 236.

92   Ibid. p. 236.

that I had been singing in another vocal ensemble for some 12 years. Repstad (2007) has some thoughts about researching within ones 'home field', as he calls it.[93] He warns that when you as a researcher know the participants or have what he calls a 'professional expertise' in relation to the object you are studying, there is a chance you might lose 'academic distance' and develop a personal interest in what happens in the field. If you know the participants, according to Repstad, you can end up censoring yourself in order to avoid upsetting good colleagues.[94] It is plausible to think that, as a singer in Nordic Voices, I might look at NVS as competitors to my own group. Yet the singers of NVS were and still are my colleagues within vocal ensemble practice, and the chances that I will sing with them at some time, or at least that I will *want* to sing with them some time, are good. This could lead to a situation in which I would not be as critical as I should be, or, on the other hand, that I may be too critical. Also my background in Nordic Voices meant that I might look at the material I got from NVS through the lens of all my years with Nordic Voices, that for instance when the singers of NVS encountered a musical problem, I would look for signs of them solving it the way I (or Nordic Voices) would normally solve it. Kvale (1997) has some important views on the role of the researcher, and he recommends the researcher to apply control instances during the analysis phase of the study, having the material and findings reviewed by second party.[95] This will reduce, as he says, the chances of arbitrary or biased subjectivity.[96] In my case, it would mean having other readers and interpreters during the different phases of my study. I have been careful to discuss my findings and my method choices with others, from my supervisor to colleagues. It has taken shape as for instance a presentation of a research report from an interview study, or a presentation of my analysis process, to my fellow research colleagues.

But, although there are things to be cautious about when researching within your own field of expertise, Repstad argues that the objections to such research is not an absolute argument to not undertake such project.[97] He continues that one should not underestimate the source of motivation and endurance the researcher gains from being humanly attached to the

93   Repstad 2007 p. 38.

94   Ibid. p. 39.

95   Kvale 1997 p. 136.

96   Ibid. p. 136.

97   Repstad 2007 p. 39.

environment her or she is studying.[98] He also says that first-hand knowledge about a field of research can make a researcher more able to understand what is going on, which again can reduce the chances of misunderstandings and misjudgements.[99] I feel that in my case, this is very true. I have an insight into the work of a vocal ensemble that I feel is unique. My experience would mean that I would be able to spot the areas of interest and recognize important aspects of vocal ensemble practice and the work of NVS more quickly than other researchers might, and my experience would also give me intuitive knowledge about what is going on in the work of NVS.

The different reflections upon my own role as a researcher had some practical implications. First of all I felt it was necessary to find ways to study vocal ensemble practice which reduced the chances of me influencing the material. This was one of the reasons I chose a multiple method approach. At the same time, my role as a vocal ensemble singer could influence the voice speaking in this present text. I mean that my own experience as a singer could contribute to the findings in this present study, which means that I sometimes allow my own voice come through in the text. In those instances where I allow that to happen, I have been careful to make this clear using words like 'in my opinion', 'in my view' etc.

4.2   Case study design

When I first got the idea to investigate the nature of vocal ensemble practice, it was tempting to build the whole investigation around studies of my own ensemble, Nordic Voices. This presented a number of problems, though, primarily regarding my working relationship with the subjects I was going to study and my long membership of the ensemble. Being inside an organization and studying it at the same time can work, of course, but Nordic Voices is a very small organization, and the social structures are quite delicate. While I was the researcher, there was definitely a chance of me not daring to ask my colleagues tough questions. At the same time, the chance of my informants (and co–singers) forming their answers on the basis that we would be working together in the future was also quite high, as was the chance of me choosing sides, and not keeping an 'academic distance',

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98   Ibid. p. 39.

99   Ibid. p. 39.

as Repstad calls it.[100] All in all, I regarded that way into the project as too risky, creating too many blind spots, and I thought that I would not be able to put aside my personal values and biases to the extent I needed to when gathering my empirical data. So, as I wrote in Chapter 1, the opportunity of going into the research process with NVS changed everything.

As Repstad says, qualitative studies are often studies of limited single environments where the goal is to give an account of a broader field.[101] In my situation, I was suddenly able to come close to one of the leading vocal ensembles in the world. To me, it represented a chance to get away from *some* of the challenges I met with studying Nordic Voices. I decided to try out NVS as the central case of my study.

When doing a case study, what you first seek to gain knowledge about is the case being studied, and Stake (2005) warns about generalising a whole field based on only one single case.[102] But, as Yin (2014) says, although it is difficult, you can compare a case study to a single experiment, where the experiment is built on 'a multiple set of experiments that have replicated the same phenomenon under different conditions'.[103] He continues, saying that the goal is to carry out a 'generalizing' rather than a 'particularizing' analysis, meaning that the study does not represent a sample, but expands and generalizes theories.[104] I decided to look at the vocal ensemble practice through the lens, so to speak, of NVS. They became my case, my focus point, and through them I got an insight into their dealing with the challenges of vocal ensemble practice. To me, studying NVS permitted a broad view of practice, like the broader view of life and society that Berg (2001) mentions in his book on the matter.[105]

Stake divides case studies into three types, *intrinsic, instrumental* and *collective*, where an intrinsic case study is a study in which one wants better understanding of that particular case, an instrumental case is one case that provides insight into an issue or redraws a generalization, while a collective study has even less interest in a single specific study, and multiple cases are

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100   Repstad 2007 p. 38.

101   Ibid. p. 24.

102   Stake 2005 p. 443.

103   Yin 2014 p. 20.

104   Ibid. p. 21.

105   Berg 2001 p. 225.

studied.[106] Studying vocal ensemble practice through the case of NVS puts this study into an instrumental case study, although this particular study also contains inputs from other ensembles as well. I will come back to this distinction later.

When it comes to the case study design type, Berg lists three approaches: *exploratory*, *explanatory* and *descriptive* case studies. An exploratory case study is, according to Berg, a prelude to a large social scientific study. Explanatory case studies are useful when conducting causal studies, he says, especially when one wishes to 'employ multivariate cases to examine a plurality of influences'.[107] Descriptive case studies, according to Yin, are those whose purpose is to describe a phenomenon in its real-world context.[108] This particular study is an instrumental, descriptive case study.

Within case study design, Yin suggests five components he finds essential for conducting the study. They are the case study's questions (or research questions), the propositions derived from the questions, leading to the choice of case, the unit of analysis (or the case, derived from the propositions), the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the data.[109] These components are all in play within all types of qualitative studies, except for propositions (or theories and hypothesis), which are derived from research questions and open up the study of one or more cases. The benefit of doing a case study is that I as a researcher can focus on one case and at the same time retain, as Yin puts it, a 'holistic and real-world perspective'.[110]

Both Stake and Yin underline the importance of keeping a firm grasp of the issues being studied within the case study. Yin points out that the main skills one needs to conduct a good case study are asking good questions, being a good listener, remaining adaptive, avoiding bias and conducting research ethically.[111] In many ways, a case study looks quite like any other qualitative research study, and can be seen as just an umbrella term for all the other 'real' methods you put into a research project. There is some truth in that,

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106 Stake 2005 p. 445.

107 Berg 2001 p. 230.

108 Yin 2014 p. 238.

109 Ibid. p. 29.

110 Ibid. p. 4.

111 Ibid. pp. 73–76.

but case study method also includes some strategies for dealing with the generalization process, from one case to a whole field. According to Yin (and I share some of his beliefs on this), there are some things of which you have to be aware when choosing a case study approach, for instance when dealing with observation techniques. For example, Yin says that a case study observation should take place in a 'real-world setting of the case'.[112]

Case study method can be a multiple method process, where interviews, observations, participating observations and similar methodical pathways can be a part of the project of observing your single case. At the same time, it is important, when considering generalization from a single case to the whole field, to have something with which you can compare your findings. Stake says that what we learn from the single case is 'related to how the case is like and unlike other cases we know, mostly by comparison'.[113] To me this has been evident since I am trying to say something about the whole field of classical vocal ensemble practice. I have therefore also conducted interviews and observations of other groups.

I wanted to study NVS through a case study design also because it made it easier to keep my own bias outside of the study. At the same time, by choosing to look at NVS, I felt that I also opened this study to a number of methods that were more transparent. As Berg says, 'for many researchers, objectivity rests on the ability of an investigator to articulate what the procedures are so that others can repeat the research if they so choose'.[114] That, I felt, told me that looking at vocal ensemble practice through the lens of NVS was the right path to choose.

4.3   Research interviews

As Yin says, one of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview.[115] He says that most of the time within case studies, you will find that interviews are more likely to be in the categories of either 'in-depth interviews' or 'unstructured interviews'.[116] To me, to choose to talk to the

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112   Ibid. p. 113.

113   Stake 2005 p. 454.

114   Berg 2001 p. 232 .

115   Yin 2014 p. 110.

116   Ibid. p. 110.

people of NVS was quite easy, because, as Kvale says, if I want to know how people look upon their own world and their lives, why not talk to them?[117] So, if I wanted to learn anything from them, it was important that I got to hear them talk about their own situation, their own group, and how they experienced life as vocal ensemble singers. A structured interview technique, as Fontana and Frey put it, is an interview where the researcher asks all respondents the same series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories.[118] I found this way of conducting my interviews inadequate for the things I wanted to find out. To me it was important that the people I talked to could have a way of letting their thoughts flow, while at the same time I would be organizing the interview in terms of some themes, a so-called semi-structured interview. Kvale divides the interview process into seven stages, from structuring the themes of the interview, through planning, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting.[119] As I will show in the next chapter, I chose to follow this path in all the interviews I conducted. I chose also to conduct only one-to-one interviews, and I acknowledge now that group interviews would also have yielded interesting results. Repstad points out that one-to-one interviews can be too focused on the one person and can miss the social contexts and group structures.[120] Perhaps I might have had a different picture of the social structure of NVS if I had sat down with them in a group discussion. On the other hand, I felt that I had enough observation time with them to cover the issues adequately.

When it came to who I was going to interview the answer was quite easy: I had to interview all the members of NVS, and some of them more than once. All the interviews were recorded on two different recording devices, a *Zoom H4* recorder and an iPhone. In addition to this, I made numerous notations during the interviews, notations that became very handy later in the process. I carried out two rounds of interviews with NVS.

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117   Kvale 1997 p. 17.

118   Fontana and Frey 2005 p. 702.

119   Kvale 1997 p. 47.

120   Repstad 2007 p. 76.

4.3.1 Interviews, round 1, NVS June 2009

It was natural to me, since I had met Daniel Gloger first, to use him as my channel into NVS. Repstad talks about the importance of having good informants who can help you with getting the right people to be interviewed. Since I wanted to conduct a pilot study in this first interview round, rather than interview the whole group, I wanted him to suggest one more person, perhaps one of the women. He suggested that I interview Sarah Maria Sun. In addition, Daniel arranged for me to observe the group at their last rehearsal before they went on a concert trip to Paris, then their rehearsals in Paris before the concert, and the concert itself.

The interviews with Daniel Gloger and Sarah Maria Sun were conducted in Paris on 12 June 2009. The main goals of these interviews were to

- make a pilot study of my preliminary research questions;
- try out interviewing strategies;
- build competence for the next rounds of interviews/observations of nvs and others within the study.

First I outlined the two main research questions I wanted to answer. The first question focused on the ensemble's work on one specific piece of music. Before I came, I had been informed about the music they would be working on and performing during my stay; I received a copy of the score when I arrived and studied it during my stay, primarily to try to find passages in it that could shed some light on the topics on which I would focus in conversations and my observations of the ensemble. I would be able to use some of these topics in the interviews, so that the singers could illustrate their points or discuss concrete examples. The work was Georges Aperghis' *Wölfli Kantata*.[121] My first question was directly focused on the music, in particular on the challenges they would meet in the score, and how they solved them. The second question I wanted to put to them was about the vocal ensemble singer's competence and knowledge, and whether that knowledge and competence could be used in other settings in which they were singing. A loose interview guide was produced for the two interviews. It was made before I went to Stuttgart, but was revised after each meeting and observation with the group. The final interview guide can be found in the Appendix 1 (Interview guide I).

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121   Aperghi's own notes on the work can be found here: http://www.aperghis.com/notices/ wolflikantata.html (Viewed 28.01.2014).

Transcriptions, analysis and final report

I chose to transcribe both interviews word for word. To me this meant listening to the recordings and reading my notes so many times that at some points I could cite passages from the interviews by heart. It also allowed me to 're-live' the interview situation, which helped me remember more about the situation that surrounded the interview. I could remember my own reactions, my own tone of voice and so on. By transcribing every word and listening to each interview many times, I gained access to some other dimensions of the interviews that I found valuable, especially at the start, when my experience with qualitative interviews was limited.

To analyze means to split something up into smaller pieces or elements, according to Kvale.[122] He warns that the analysis should not end up as series of small elements of meanings and words without any connection. The important task is to organize the text, condense its internal meaning, and work out the implicit meaning within.[123] In these first interviews I chose to do a so-called condensing of meanings in the interview text, meaning that I compressed the text. This process of compressing long sentences into short ones was, as Kvale says, to get the immediate meaning of what is being said into a few words.[124] In addition to this, I put the meaning into my own words, making three different versions of the analyzed text, perhaps also with a question beside it, to mark a place that needed following up. Here is an example of one of these condensed texts:

Interview text	Condensed meaning	Interpretation, follow-up
The ensemble changed. We had a conductor and he was with us until, I think, around 98-99, for all rehearsals nearly. Only some pieces we did without him. And then we thought it is more interesting to do this chamber music, because there are many ensembles or small choirs or soloistic choirs with conductors, but only very few ensembles who do it without any conductor	Ensemble started with conductor, continued without. More interesting with chamber music, few ensembles without a conductor	**Historical:** NVS shifted from ensemble with conductor to an ensemble without. **Motivation:** Have more influence on the music.

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122   Kvale 1997 p. 118.

123   Ibid. p. 121.

124   Ibid. p. 125.

In addition to this, I conducted a full categorization of both the interviews. I followed Kvale's suggestion to reduce long statements into much more simple categories. By doing this and looking at the presence of each category in the interviews, I established a hierarchy of structured meanings from the text.

Through the processes of condensing and categorization of meanings, I ended up with a long list of condensed meanings, organized within a few categories. In many ways, these categories set up the structure of the rounds of interviews and studies I was going to carry out next. What I didn't know at the time was that the categories these two interviews gave birth to would become a part of the whole structure of this study. The categories gave an insight into how the two informants looked upon their lives as vocal ensemble singers, and they laid the path to the strategy for the next rounds of interviews and studies. The following categories dominated the first round of interviews:

- The ensemble history and repertoire
- The ensemble at work, rehearsing and doing concerts
- Intonation
- Vocal technique
- Communication
- The singers' working situation and own history
- The group processes

My findings in these interviews and my interpretation of them were presented in a final report.[125] This report was presented for my colleagues at a researchers' forum in December 2009.

4.3.2 Interviews, round 2, NVS May 2010 and Sept. 2010

The first round of interviews included only two people from NVS. After having put together the final report on that first interview round, I wanted to visit NVS again as soon as possible. This time I wanted to interview them all, to collect as much documentation and to observe them as much as I

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125 It is important to mention that these reports took many forms. They are very different, some of them formal, like the report in this case. Others are more fragmented, like narratives and histories (one of these is presented in the Appendix). What they all share, is that they are mostly in Norwegian, are meant as summaries for my own use, and cover too many pages to be presented in full in this thesis.

could. I also talked with Christine Fischer about the administration and history of the group. Both Daniel Gloger and Sarah Maria Sun had been interviewed once already, which meant that my interviews with them this time could follow up on the questions I asked during the analysis phase of the first interview project (see Appendix section, interview guide II). For the rest of the group, I focused on doing the same kind of interviews as I had done with Sarah and Daniel, a semi-structured interview in which I tried to help them come into a 'flow', without me interrupting too much.

I used Kvale's seven-stage interview process for these interviews. The interviews were conducted in Stuttgart between 3 and 7 May, 2010. The interview guides for these interviews can be found in the Appendix.

Transcriptions, analysis and final report

I chose the same approach for these interviews as for the first round. All these interviews were transcribed word for word, and the analysis followed the same path as round 1. The 'follow-up' interviews with Sarah Maria Sun and Daniel Gloger gave me a chance to go into depth on the topics from the first round of interviews. In particular, they gave an insight into the more personal side of singing in a vocal ensemble, including the singers' own history and background, and also the shaping of their identity.

Through the condensing and categorization of meanings and the structuring of categories in my analysis of the interviews, the pattern of topics I had found during the first round of interviews was further confirmed, but also narrowed down. These were the topics that derived from those interviews, describing vocal ensemble practice from the singers' point of view. I decided to use these topics as the outline for this thesis.

Based on the interviews with Daniel Gloger and Sarah Maria Sun and the other the singers, two final reports were made.

4.3.3   Interviews, England Dec. 2011

Repstad points out that introducing a dimension of comparison within a field study can be a good thing. He states that the abilities to view and interpret are sharpened if you can compare two different environments.[126]

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126   Repstad 2007 p. 37.

Yin also stresses the value of testing a method in another environment, or even re-running a case study.[127] I wanted to examine my preliminary findings to see if they also occurred in the study of other vocal ensembles. I chose to visit two different groups, The Hilliard Ensemble and I Fagiolini. These two groups represent the English vocal ensemble tradition, and they have been very successful during recent years, both at a high international level. From The Hilliard Ensemble, I contacted Rogers Covey-Crump and John Potter. Potter left the group in 1998, but he has done a significant range of academic work on singing, which made him an attractive interview subject. I Fagiolini is led by Robert Hollingworth, so they are an ensemble with a conductor. It was therefore interesting to see if I could find comparable patterns within such an ensemble. Together these three people represented, in my view, a good representation of the English vocal ensemble tradition.

I interviewed the three of them in December 2011.

Transcriptions, analysis and final report

For these interviews I chose a different strategy. The interview of Robert Hollingworth was transcribed verbatim, but the interviews of Potter and Covey-Crump were transcribed only in fragments. I chose the same approach to the analysis of these interviews as with the two rounds of interviews with NVS. The big question was whether these interviews would bring forward new topics regarding vocal ensemble practice, but my conclusion after having analyzed the three interviews was that they did not reveal any new topics beyond those already discovered in the previous studies. The main value of these interviews was that they gave a good insight into the English tradition of vocal ensemble practice, and they provided good comparative material to the NVS interviews.

The final report on these interviews was made during spring 2012.

4.4　Observations

In addition to talking to the singers of NVS, I also chose to observe the ensemble, especially during their rehearsals and concerts. Observations and interview data often go hand in hand; even observations of gestures

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127　Yin 2014 p. 188.

and body language can be a part of an interview analysis.[128] Observations are studies of people, which examine the environments or situation in which they normally meet and the way in which they behave in these environments and situations.[129] By observing the ensemble in addition to interviewing them, I saw another angle from which to understand the processes involved in the work of the ensemble and its singers. I decided very early on to have multiple ways of collecting data, although it meant that I would end up with a great deal data to work with. I quickly gained access to the group's rehearsals, mainly because of the connection with Daniel Gloger. The ensemble invited me into their rehearsals, and I was also allowed to spend time with them during their travels, during their meals and in different social settings. It meant that I had a great variety of settings in which to watch the singers interacting with each other. Of course it is impossible to always give full attention on what is going on, and the level of my attention, as a researcher, would naturally change from setting to setting. But, as Repstad says, observation data can give more direct access to social interaction and social processes.[130] And my experience is that my observations not only became an addition to the interview data, but also served as independently empirical data that gave me valuable information about the ensemble.

4.4.1   Observation NVS and I Fagiolini

I observed NVS during the same periods as I conducted the interviews with them. The observations took place in two phases, during May and June 2009. During these two periods I observed the ensemble in rehearsals, in pre-concert rehearsals and in concerts, in what I call formal observations. In addition to this, I spent much time with the ensemble during meals and in social settings, making so-called informal observations.

During all formal observations I used notations constantly. As suggested by Repstad, I notated both my actual observations and my own comments and questions on the same sheet of paper.[131] Each evening I looked over my

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128   Angrosino 2005 p. 729.

129   Repstad 2007 p. 33.

130   Ibid. p. 33.

131   Ibid. p. 62.

notations and went through each observation in my mind, trying to catch episodes and moments I had might missed out.

Some of the rehearsals were videotaped. I used a Canon camera and placed it in the rehearsal room. I would change the position of the camera during the rehearsal so that I could watch the ensemble from more than one angle. The movies were transferred to a computer directly after the session.

I also had the chance, by invitation of Robert Hollingworth, to observe the vocal ensemble I Fagiolini in a rehearsal. This observation was done in December 2010. In collecting the data, I used the same approach as with one of the 'formal' observations of NVS, using video recording and personal notes.

Transcription, analysis and final report

All field notes were transcribed and organized after each session. For some of the sessions, I chose to take a narrative approach, as for instance suggested by Kvale,[132] to the field notes. Especially for the sessions where I did not have a video of the session, I chose to make a complete story of the session. It meant writing a story about what I had seen, to interpret what I had heard. One of these stories can be found in the Appendices.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a method using what they call thematic analysis in six stages to analyze collected data. For the transcribed data from the observations I chose this method, mainly to try a different approach and to see whether this could reveal new dimensions in the material. Braun and Clarke define a theme as a pattern in the data.[133] These patterns are not only decided by counting their recurrence, but also by the researcher's determination of the theme's (or the pattern's) *keyness*, or how significant it is.[134] These themes are discovered and organized through a process of six steps, steps that include familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.[135] This method proved very useful and 'hands on' for the observation data and transcriptions. Although not revealing any

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132   Kvale 1997 p. 125.

133   Braun and Clarke 2006 p. 79.

134   Ibid. p. 82.

135   Ibid. p. 87.

new themes, patterns or what I had previously called 'topics', the method suggested by Braun and Clarke did provide a new approach to the material.

It is important to underline that the video material was mainly used as a support to my field notes. As Radcliffe says, video contains an incredible amount of data, and one can spend hours analyzing a ten-minute segment.[136] But in spite of this, as with my observation notes I transcribed the video films by splitting the text in two segments, both the actual observation and my comments, and later analyzing them to find patterns. I also followed Ratcliff suggestion in treating the video as text, analyzing it directly,[137] especially when looking at what I considered quite easily observable phenomena, for instance who did the most talking, when did they talk and to whom, or how much time did the ensemble spend on singing versus non-singing in rehearsals. The video files provided useful insights and provided a deeper understanding of the interview material and observation data.

4.4.2 The *Sternklang* project

In September 2010 I was asked by NVS to come and sing with them in their production of *Sternklang* by Karlheinz Stockhausen. The concert was to be a part of the Sounding D concert series, again a part of the festival Musikfest Stuttgart. I was hired as one of eight singers in an ensemble of 21 musicians in all. In my group two of the singers from NVS, Sarah Mariah Sun and Truike van der Poel, were involved. This project gave me an opportunity to see the ensemble work from the inside. Together with these two singers, I witnessed some of the strategies they used in solving the challenges we found in the music. I was participating in the project, but at the same time I was observing what was going on in it. The rehearsals in this ensemble, and the research process I undertook, reminded me of an action research process, rhyming with the *action-reflection cycle* suggested by McNiff and Whitehead (2006),[138] through all the time we rehearsed, evaluated, decided upon new strategies, rehearsed some more and so on. While I was singing, rehearsing and evaluating what we were doing, I was observing what we were doing together.

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136   Ratcliff 2003 p. 116.

137   Ibid. p. 117.

138   McNiff and Whitehead 2006 p. 9.

One can say that when a researcher –in this case, me – is sitting and observing the ensemble, it is a kind of participant observation. Bernard (2006) says that participant observation involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information.[139] But I choose to make a distinction here, because my observation of the group, before the *Sternklang* project, had been a more passive kind of observation. This time I was included in the group, and accepted as a part of it. To me, this was truly participant observation.

Bernard has suggested what he feels are the advantages of participant observations, and I find his suggestions interesting. First of all, he says that participant observation makes it possible to collect all kinds of data, meaning that a researcher who is accepted by a group will be able to witness more of the processes going on in the same group. Secondly, he says that participant observation reduces the problem of reactivity, meaning that people change their behaviour when they know they are being studied. Thirdly, he says that participant observation helps the researcher to ask sensible questions in the group's 'native' language. Then he suggests that participant observation makes it easier to understand the data you have collected as a researcher. Finally, he suggests that there are problems that cannot be addressed adequately without going through a participant observation process, like getting to know about human interactions.[140] Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013) suggest a few supplements to Bernard's suggestions, notably that participant observation might reveal topics in which people cannot or will not accurately report their own behaviour, and that participant observation might lessen reporting biases. This means that participant observation is a strategy that helps to minimize the hazards of me acting as a researcher collecting data which reflects my own views more than the social reality of the people in it.[141]

The *Sternklang* project was a chance to see some of the singers at work from inside a project. It meant getting close to the singers, dealing with the challenges together with them, solving the challenges together with them, and interacting with them socially. I did not articulate my role as a researcher directly to all persons involved in this project. I concentrated

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139   Bernard 2006 p. 342.

140   Ibid. pp. 354–356.

141   Guest, Namely and Mitchell 2013 p. 81.

on the singers from NVS in my group, observing from within our work. Although not signalling directly that I brought my ears and eyes as a researcher, there was no doubt that I still was conducting my research project. The *Sternklang* project produced some very useful insights.

Transcriptions, analysis and final report

I took notes during the whole *Sternklang* project. I followed the same strategy in note-taking as I did with my other observations. Each evening I transcribed these notes, using a narrative approach to them, making them into a diary from each day.

All the diaries were analyzed using the same approach as the other observation notes (see Chapter 4.4.1), looking for patterns that further explained or deepened my understanding of the topics I had found during the interviews and observations of the ensemble.

Due to the massive amount of collected data, the participating observation part of this study did not get the same depth of attention as other parts of this study. But the diaries were there as constant stories about the work of the ensemble, seen from a different angle, also correcting my presumptions and personal biases.

4.5   Document analysis

As Repstad says, document analysis can serve as a necessary 'backdrop', to both the researcher and the reader, before 'diving into more intensive study'.[142] Document analysis is a method that gives written sources the same status as other data sources, such as field notes, interview transcripts and so on. Bowen (2009) recommends that the researcher use a multiple method approach in a qualitative study, and suggests that document analysis may be a part of the multiple method approach, especially for triangulating purposes.[143] Bowen states that document analysis is a low-cost way to obtain empirical data as a part of a process that is unobtrusive and nonreactive, but he also warns against document analysis being used as a 'stand-in' for

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142   Repstad 2007 p. 103.

143   Bowen 2009 p. 28.

other kinds of evidence that may be more appropriate in the study.[144] Both Bowen and Repstad say that document analysis includes analysis stages just like other qualitative methods, meaning that, for instance, the chosen documents should undergo a thematic analysis similar to the thematic analysis of an interview text. They also both urge researchers to be critical of the quality of the document they decide to bring into the study. In respect of historical sources, for instance, Repstad warns that written sources from the past can easily be interpreted through today's ways of thinking, rather than being understood in the context of the period in which the document was made.[145] Repstad also says that with historical documents it is important to be aware of the document's credibility. Most of the time, not everything regarding a historical event is written down, and when a written record of such a historical event has survived, it is often a person of a high social status who has written it.[146] Bowen says that documents are often produced for other reasons than research, and therefore do not have a sufficient level of detail to answer a research question. He also notes that accessibility to documents may be limited, and also warns against biased selectivity, for instance when an organization presents documents that align with their corporate policies.[147] But both Repstad and Bowen underline the advantages of documents, for instance their stability in not changing because of the researcher's presence.[148]

In this study I have used documents for several reasons. In Chapter 5, regarding vocal ensemble practice through history, I have used articles about the subject, but also looked at newspaper articles, concert programmes and other sources, for instance newspaper advertisements and reviews of vocal ensemble concerts. Articles that deal with sources saying something about vocal ensemble practice are, of course, secondary sources, and Repstad suggests that the researcher should, when it is possible, to turn to primary sources as well.

I have also used documents regarding NVS as a backdrop in this study. These documents include concert programmes, concert reviews, newspaper interviews, documents from the website of NVS, programme notes and so on.

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144   Ibid. p. 38.

145   Repstad 2007 p. 105.

146   Ibid. p. 105.

147   Bowen 2009 p. 32.

148   Ibid. p. 31.

I have not been able to get access to documents regarding the finances of the ensemble, reports from meetings or strategy documents. But I nevertheless feel that the documents I do use have given new dimensions to my findings. Many of these documents are used in this study, especially in Chapter 6.

4.6   Other methods involved in this study

During this study, the key method choices have been focused around interviews and observations. But sometimes I have met challenges in the project which demanded other approaches. In Chapter 7, about vocal techniques, I used a computer program to study the amount of vibrato in a phrase sung by The Hilliard Ensemble and NVS. In Chapter 8, on intonation, I used a particular method to measure sung frequencies in chords sung by NVS. It is important to mention that, while giving useful and informative insights into the issues, these methods should be seen as documentation and supportive methods more than evidence producing methods. There are moments of uncertainty within these methods, and I discuss them as they occur in the different chapters.

Then, in Chapter 9, I have used an observation method to study communication patterns in video files of a performance by NVS, and solo performances by two of its members, a method developed by Jane Davidson. All these three methods illustrate other dimensions of the collected data and their analysis. As already mentioned, although they all contain some quantitative dimensions, they are not central to the conclusions I draw, but are there for to support these conclusions.

At some points in my interviews with NVS I turned to showing them parts of the videos taken during rehearsals, giving them opportunity to comment. Stimulated recall is a process where you show an extract from an episode to an interview subject so that they can comment on it.[149] It is a way of reminding a person how they thought about a certain episode.[150] Whether or not you get better access to an interview subject's thought processes about an episode through watching it on film is open to debate. But I found that this method gave some new insights in respect of my other collected data. At some points in the film I had some problems in getting all the nuances of

149   Haglund 2003 p. 145.

150   Ibid. p. 146.

the German language during their rehearsals. Talking about these episodes with my interview subjects proved very useful. Also, it was useful for getting them to comment on concrete technical issues that arose during the rehearsal, for instance a chord going flat and the group's strategies to solve that particular problem. By letting the singers comment on that episode, I understood much more about what they did and why. But it is important to underline that these stimulated recall moments were only there to support some dimensions of the other collected data.

4.7   Ethical challenges

NVS and the other ensembles I have encountered during this study are all small groups of people working closely together. Their work in the ensemble is vital to their lives, both in terms of creating a social environment around them and in terms of their economic situation. It means that I have a responsibility towards the participants in the study. I have to be sure that they are comfortable with their participation and that they always are informed about what they are expected to do within the frame of the study. When, in the end, I present the study and the participants read what I have written about them, I have a responsibility towards their still being able to work together.

Christians (2005) writes about some points he feels are important in considering the ethical aspects of a study. First of all, he points to the importance of *informed consent*, meaning that the participants have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments in which they are involved. First, he says, they must agree to participate voluntarily. Secondly, their agreement must be based on full and open information.[151] Christians also says the participants have rights regarding privacy and confidentiality, which mean that all collected data must be stored properly. If possible, their identity should be hidden within the study.[152] Fontana and Frey (2005) identify three topics around ethical concerns. Like Christians, they also put forward informed consent as the first important ethical concern, as well as the right to privacy. They also

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151   Christians 2005 p. 144.

152   Ibid. p. 145.

put forward the participant's right to protection from harm of any kind.[153] Fontana and Frey suggest that these three topics would not be dismissed by other scientists, but they also argue that other topics may be important as well. For instance, they say that a researcher's involvement in a group might stir up some concerns. Their involvement with a group gives the researcher trust from the group's members, a trust that lead to access to valuable information, which could be misused.[154] Kvale talks about the importance of creating a balance between what the participants give in a study and what they get back from it. He says that this is, of course, an ideal description of the setting, but an interview can be felt as a positive episode, just because the participant is being listened to: the reward for participating in a study is that the world of a participant has some light shed on it.[155] But Kvale also underlines the responsibility of the researcher towards his own field: the researcher has a *scientific responsibility* to his profession and its members.[156]

All these ethical concerns are important, and to me it is important to be aware of ethical issues throughout the study. In this current study I have been extremely cautious with the collected data. The interviews and the analysis have all been kept in an encrypted folder on my hard drive, also on my backup drive.

All participants from NVS have been asked to participate, and where there have been special wishes, I have followed these. If my questions about filming a rehearsal or a concert have been answered negatively, I have of course not filmed on that occasion. All interviews were taped, and the sound files have been kept on a single hard drive as soon as I have finished listening to them. I have agreed with the interview subjects that these files will be deleted no later than 1 January 2016, including interview transcriptions, observations logs, and so on. The interview subjects from NVS have all been informed of the consequences of their involvement in the study. They have all been able to read through their interview transcripts and been given the chance to say which parts they did not want to be quoted directly. I have, when writing this thesis, been very strict about not using their names when citing them, unless the using of their names was absolutely necessary, or when it was obvious who was talking. But I have been very careful about

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153 Fontana and Frey 2005 p. 715.

154 Ibid. p. 715.

155 Kvale 1997 p. 69.

156 Ibid. p. 69.

using their names, and have also been very careful about not using any passages when the interviewed person has wished for that specific passage not to be used. When it comes to the 'English' data, I have not used any direct quotations from any of them.

4.8   Validity, reliability, and generalization

The three terms *validity*, *reliability* and *generalization* have turned into what Kvale calls the holy trinity of science.[157] Qualitative studies often involve case studies looking at a single environment. To claim that your findings from a local, limited environment can have global value is difficult, and often critics of qualitative research can be found making this challenge. How can my findings, from my studies of a few vocal ensembles with a focus on one of them, have some kind of global value? The easiest thing would be to deny that the generalization of research findings is a goal at all, and there are researchers who try to minimize the relevance of generalization.[158] Payne and Williams (2005) admit that generalization remains a big problem in qualitative research,[159] but nevertheless they suggest a *moderate generalization* through, among other suggestions, deciding upon how widely applicable the findings should be, limiting the time period of the findings, limiting claims to basic patterns, or saying that the nature of the generalization will be conditional upon the ontological status of the phenomena in question.[160] In this present study I have mainly followed NVS. But I have also followed other ensembles – I Fagiolini and The Hilliard Ensemble. With the addition of Nordic Voices, my own ensemble, these ensembles form quite a good representation of the classical vocal ensembles of the world. I look at various aspects of vocal ensemble practice from a theoretical and practical point of view, as Payne and Williams suggest, moderate generalization is possible through, among other things, a firm theoretical foundation. Therefore, I will not completely resist generalization, but suggest moderate generalization where I consider it appropriate.

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157   Ibid. p. 160.

158   Payne and Williams 2005 p. 295.

159   Ibid. p. 309.

160   Ibid. p. 306.

In daily speech, when an argument is valid, it is considered as the truth, or at least something trustworthy. A valid argument is a reasonable, strong and convincing argument. Kvale says that to validate something is to control it.[161] It is the researcher interpreting his own findings with a critical mind. Kvale also says that to validate is to ask questions.[162] For instance, an interview subject might not tell the truth, and this has to be controlled each time. Kvale argues that to validate something is to theorize it,[163] meaning that the theory chosen for a study is connected to the method. Kvale differentiates between communicative validity (meeting an argument with the opposite argument), and pragmatic validity (that action follows knowledge).[164]

As Merriam says, *internal validity* asks the question: how congruent are one's findings with reality?[165] Merriam suggests different approaches to strengthen the internal validity of your findings, using *triangulation* (the use of multiple investigators, multiple sources of data or multiple methods), *member checks* (taking the data and the findings back to the participants, asking if the interpretations are plausible), *peer/colleague examination* (asking peers or colleagues to examine the data), *statement of researcher's experiences, assumptions, biases etc.* (enables the reader to understand how the data was interpreted), and *submersion/engagement in the research situation* (collecting data over a long enough period of time to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon).[166] In this present study I have employed a multiple method angle in the collecting of the data. I have studied vocal ensemble practice and NVS in interviews, observations, video analysis, and more experimental methods. This should cover the demands required for thorough triangulation of the material.

'Reliability is concerned with the question of the extent to which one's findings will be found again'.[167] This is a direct quotation from Sharan B. Merriam (1995), and it means that the findings of a study should be the same, if the inquiry were replicated. This is a challenging criterion, as qualitative research always has to do with human beings and human phenomena. If

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161   Kvale 1997 p. 168.

162   Ibid. p. 169.

163   Ibid. p. 170.

164   Ibid. pp. 170–176.

165   Merriam 1995 p. 53.

166   Ibid. pp. 54–55.

167   Ibid. p. 55.

my research work in this study was replicated, the results could very well be a different interpretation of the findings, but still true. Instead of using the term reliability, Merriam suggests using 'dependability' or 'consistency', meaning that the results of a study are consistent with the data collected.[168] In this context, triangulation is central (see above).

4.9   Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown the methodical framework employed in this study, focused on a case study of NVS. Within this methodology there is a multiple approach, including interviewing of participants, observation, participant observation, video analysis, and also elements of methods like stimulated recall and more experimental strategies. Using these methods, I have chosen different approaches to the analysis process, and through this conglomerate of methods, my findings are triangulated, making the study both valid and reliable.

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168   Ibid. p. 56.

*Whereas others might cruise along
on a diet of antique favourites and the
occasional foray into the twentieth
century, the Courage Consort were always
open to a challenge from the avant-garde.*

(Faber, 2002)

5   The vocal ensemble in music history

In one of my first conversations with Christine Fischer, the administrative leader of NVS, she talked about how the classical vocal ensemble had gained quite a new position in musical life during recent decades. Since 1950, she claimed, composers had started to write for these ensembles again, and the repertoire for these ensembles had therefore slowly grown. This had not happened, according to her, since the Renaissance, when composers wrote for constellations containing one singer per written voice. I immediately recognized this attitude. It confirmed my own experience about the vocal ensemble's history. In Nordic Voices we had long ago defined our activities as taking place within two fields: early music, meaning music from around the thirteenth century and until around 1750 and contemporary music, running from 1950 up until today. Even if we could from time to time throw in a piece by Josef Rheinberger or Johannes Brahms, it was always with a feeling that we were doing something that Nordic Voices was not created to do, something that did not suit the ensemble. In discussions around this repertoire, two issues were often raised: the repertoire was not originally written for this kind of ensemble, but for a bigger choir, and therefore the sound would be significantly different from the sound the composer had intended. And, when it came to Romantic music, there was a feeling that our 'thin' vocal ideals, light on vibrato, would be a long way from the vocal ideals traditionally expected for the music from the Romantic era. We felt as if we represented a complete different kind of vocal tradition. A search

through the vocal ensembles I knew about throughout the world told me that almost every one of them dedicated themselves to either early music or contemporary music or both categories. It confirmed my assumption: vocal ensemble singing, meaning classical vocal music sung with one voice per part, seemed to be best suited for singers who had chosen another path vocally than the traditionally taught classical solo singing style, which to our view was concentrated mostly on music between 1750 and 1920.

The members of NVS also followed this path. One of the singers, when questioned about why the vocal ensembles of the world do not sing music from between 1750 and 1920, answered that the pieces from that time were meant for larger ensembles, that they were written for ensembles with more people than one voice per part. Another singer stated that there was a shift of focus through the baroque era, from smaller groups to larger and larger groups, from vocal ensembles to choirs. You could find composers who wrote for solo quartets, terzettos and so on through the Romantic era, but preferably accompanied by piano. Again the singers of NVS would underline that they represented a different singing ideal to that of traditional classical singers.

When asked about concrete elements in their vocal technique that differentiated them from other traditional, classical solo singers, they all pointed to a singing ideal that was 'more flexible, slimmer and with a definite control over vibrato'.

There seemed to be consensus among the vocal ensembles of the world that the repertoire of this period was not intended for the ensembles, and that the singing styles from this period were quite far from the vocal aesthetics held by those in vocal ensemble practice. From this I concluded that what I called the Romantic era was not the era of the vocal ensembles, and that there had to be quite few, if any vocal ensembles operating during these years.

But then I stumbled across the Halfdan Kjerulf Quartet in Norway. This ensemble, with up to eight singers, operated in Norway during the 1850–1860s. At the same time I discovered that the famous singer Lauritz Melchior had been a part of a quartet called the Scandinavian Quartet, together with the singers Olaf Peelmann, Holger Madsen and Holger Hansen. They had toured Sweden in the early years of the twentieth century, and had even

recorded some of their music.[169] Both these ensembles proved that classical vocal ensembles had existed at least in the last half of the nineteenth century. Both ensembles seem to have focused on the Romantic male choir repertoire, and they proved two things: that singers with 'Romantic' singing ideals absolutely could sing in a classical vocal ensemble and that professional vocal ensembles were present in a period from which many vocal ensembles of today have distanced themselves.

The existence of these ensembles could be an indication of a vocal ensemble practice also present during the 'Romantic' era, quite in contrast to my own assumptions about vocal music in this period. The question I felt arose was that of why the vocal ensembles of today distance themselves from the repertoire of the period between 1750 and 1920.

I have chosen to have a small look at the history of the vocal ensemble practice, with attention to what I call the 'big gap' in the repertoire of the vocal ensembles of today. This historical view will only serve as an illustration to the questions being asked about this 'big gap'. I am ***not*** telling the whole story about the vocal ensemble practice from the Middle Ages to the present day, since such a survey would exceed the limitations of this thesis. But I will underline that my view is that the vocal ensemble practice seems to not have been a prioritized area for music historians, and I hope that there will come more historically founded projects on vocal ensemble practice in the future.

5.1   Vocal ensemble practice in music history

The early music / contemporary music repertoire divide of the vocal ensembles may have an origin in the history of vocal ensemble practice itself, and therefore this chapter will look at the practice from before the Renaissance and until today. This is important to do because when the vocal ensembles claim that there is a gap in vocal ensemble practice, I have to examine how this practice has evolved, and whether there is truth to the notion that this practice was abolished during the nineteenth century.

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169   For a recording, see Truesound Transfers – Lauritz Melchior 1, TT–3031 www. truesoundtransfers.de (Viewed 18.10.2011).

5.1.1 Before 1650, from vocal ensembles to choirs?

In the churches

When it comes to the singing in churches we can, by looking at pay-records and the like, say something about the sizes of ensembles.[170] But even then we meet some difficulties. For instance, when the pay-record says that 10 singers were employed, how did they perform a four-voice motet, for instance? Already Manfred Bukofzer, in the chapter 'The Beginning of Choral Polyphony', in his book *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music,*[171] documented multiple singers on a line in the early fifteenth century, describing a choir rather than a one-voice-per-part ensemble,[172] and showing that the idea of using multiple voices per part might have begun early in churches. But there is also considerable evidence of one-voice-per-part ensembles as a part of church music practice in the period.

For instance, in the Papal Chapel in Rome, around 30 singers were employed at times during the seventeenth century, but some of these were so called 'giubilati', which meant that they had served for more than 25 years, and no longer attended.[173] The singers in this ensemble formed a group with a strict hierarchy and a rigid set of rules regarding which singer was obliged to sing when, and the rank of the singers.[174] When they broke these rules, the incident was noted in a *book of punishment*, or *Libro dei punti*.[175] These books therefore give us a great insight into the daily life and the musical practice in the Papal Chapel. They show that the singers were singing one voice per part as a general rule.[176] For instance, on 1 November 1613, the *Libro dei punti* notes that a newly appointed bass, Cosimo Corselli, was singing bass in a *quarto* and *terzo* in the Papal Vespers and suggests that the Pope himself should attend to listen to him, mostly to judge the quality of the new singer. It would of course have been impossible for the Pope to judge the singer if they had been singing in a group of 24 men, so this indicates that

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170   Plank 2004 p. 32.

171   Bukofzer 1950 p. 176–189.

172   Plank 2004 p. 32.

173   Lionnet 1987 p. 4.

174   Ibid. p. 7.

175   Ibid. p. 5.

176   Ibid. p. 5.

they were singing one voice per part on this occasion.[177] These papal singers were not cut off from the rest of the music life in Rome. As individuals, they participated in events elsewhere in the city,[178] and it would be strange if they participated in one musical practice inside the Vatican and another one outside.

In an article on the performance practice of Palestrina, Graham Dixon states that one voice per part was the norm, and that when extra singers were employed in Roman churches, it was often for the performance of polychoral music rather than to provide a fuller texture for few-voiced music.[179] It is difficult to state categorically that one-voice-per-part-performances would have been the practice everywhere, but it certainly seems to have been a quite normal way of performing vocal music.[180] In his article of 1987, Lionnet is quite firm on this, and states that the use of many singers to a part began in Rome only in the final years of the seventeenth century.[181] His conclusion has been disputed, but there is no doubt about that one-voice-per-part-singing was an important part of the musical practice then.

Around the turn of the sixteenth century, Italian choirs experienced a time of growth. The cathedral at Milan went from seven adult singers in 1480 to 15 in 1496, and the same thing happened in Florence and Bergamo.[182] It does not mean that they all were singing multiple voices per part at all times, but we can guess that they did occasionally. If we look at the number of musicians under the direction of Lasso at the Bavarian court chapel of Albrecht V in Munich, we find that he had around 62 singers at his disposal in 1570[183], which clearly indicates multiple-voices-per-part. In Rome the number of choirs increased and more churches were able to afford to employ more singers as time progressed,[184] meaning that more and more singers became available for the composers of the time. It seems plausible that one-voice-per-part singing began as the norm, and that multiple-voices-per-part

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177   Ibid. p. 4.

178   Ibid. p. 4.

179   Dixon 1994 p. 669.

180   Ibid. p. 674.

181   Lionnet 1987 p. 12.

182   Plank 2004 p. 35.

183   Ibid. p. 35.

184   Dixon 1994 p. 669.

became a common way of performing polyphonic vocal music later, so the two different performance practices lived side by side for many years.

In Germany and England we can find a similar pattern. We can find evidence in works by Heinrich Schütz and Praetorius that they alternated between one-voice-per-part and multiple-voices-per-part. In their polychoral works, they clearly write passages for different types of ensembles. Praetorius, in his *Syntagma Musicum III*, uses the words 'omnes' and 'solus', while Schütz, in his *Psalmen Davids* (1619) designates some of the choirs in polychoral textures as 'cori favoriti', a description later interpreted as referring to soloists.[185]

The church polyphony of the fourteenth century in England seems to be the preserve of ensembles of solo voices. In the foundation charter of a small chantry college at Epworth in the Isle of Axholme, Lincolnshire, dated 1351, we can find that the college was to be staffed by a warden, two priests and four adult clerks. The founders required of the latter that they should be able to perform polyphony.[186] In fourteenth-century England, four soloists were the norm at the institutions where such personnel were required. Before the 1380s, approximately, the number of individuals who were able to read and understand the notation of polyphonic music, and to write it and perform from it, may not have exceeded a couple of hundred,[187] which could mean that the churches were challenged with having the personnel required to sing vocal music with multiple-voices-per-part. But the number of institutions soon grew, and around 1450 the number of institutions in England likely to have maintained a musical culture that could perform written polyphony extended to around 65, as opposed to 35 to 40 around 1390.[188] The ensembles themselves also grew, with choirs in some of these institutions ranging from around 50 to 60 singers, but also as few as a dozen. The smaller institutions, perhaps those associated with the monasteries, could only be as small as three or four singers.[189] We can find evidence that, within these larger choirs, there were selected teams of four singers committed to singing polyphony, and we find records of this practice in institutions like Lincoln Cathedral, in Manchester, Eton, Winchester and so

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185 Plank 2004 p. 33.

186 Bowers 1995 p. 15.

187 Ibid. p. 2.

188 Ibid. p. 11.

189 Ibid. p. 11.

on.[190] It seems that Westminster Abbey may have been the first in England to experiment with polyphony sung by both the boys' choir and the adults together,[191] and this practice seems to have expanded. This is evident in the introduction of the treble or superius parts in compositions from the middle of the fifteenth century, something that had not been present before.[192] The expansion towards larger choirs and a more multiple-voices-per-part musical practice became even more evident in the middle of the sixteenth century, which can be observed by looking at the individual pages of choirbooks increasing in size to accommodate the increasing numbers of performers.[193]

Outside the churches

We do not know very much about where the secular music of the Middle Ages came from, or how it developed. There are, for example, no surviving medieval works known to be for voice and lute, yet there are many illustrations suggesting that it was a very popular combination.[194] Polyphony probably only played a very small part in secular music, and we believe that in the fifteenth century there were many ways to perform music, with or without instruments or with only voices. But it has been argued that it was performed with soloists.[195] We can also assume that this was the case with madrigals, both those of fourteenth century Italy and those of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. By this time, the word 'madrigal' was a general name for musical settings of various types and forms of verse, and their form was no longer related to that of the madrigals of the fourteenth century.[196] The complexity of these later madrigals, especially the way the compositions dealt with texts, often composed phrase-by-phrase and highly connected to each individual line, gives the madrigals a texture that suggests soloistic performances as a norm. We find description of madrigal singing with one voice per part, for example in the partbook of Antonfrancesco *Doni's Dialogo*

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190   Ibid. p. 16.

191   Ibid. p. 17.

192   Ibid. p. 25.

193   Ibid. p. 33.

194   Potter 1998 p. 33.

195   McGee 1985 p. 97.

196   Haar 2011 p. 5.

della musica (RISM 1544[22]) where he describes amateur musical evenings in Pacenza and Venice, at which the singers try out the new pieces, one voice per part, but also with instruments.[197] We can find another example in Giovanni Camillo Maffei's *Letter On Singing*, where he says that

> [...] when four or five people sing together, while they sing, one should yield to another.[198]

The famous ensemble of female singers, the *Concerto delle donne* at the court of the Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara consisted of up to 4 women, among them the famous Laura Peverara. This ensemble of singers became extremely famous and respected by composers like Monteverdi, de Wert, and Marenzio, and we can find evidence for these composers writing music for the ensemble.[199] The women in the ensemble were great virtuousic singers and there is no doubt that they performed one-voice-per-part. The *Concerto delle donne* represented a shift from the Renaissance ideal of the skilled amateur performance to the establishment of a professional vocal ensemble outside the churches, maybe the first of its kind.[200] To have a *Concerto delle donne* in the court became very fashionable, and soon you could find one in many of the courts around Northern Italy.[201]

It seems that the performance practice of madrigals was quite pragmatic, and that they were performed with whatever resources were available. The late sixteenth-century madrigal had two major functions, public and private.[202] In addition to the relatively professional madrigal singers of the courts, one could find madrigals performed by more or less cultivated amateurs at large public events, at the minor courts or at home to pass time: these functions were as old as the genre itself.[203]

The madrigal gained more and more popularity, even spreading to Germany where in many ways it replaced the German *tenor lied*.[204] In Germany, too, one-voice-per-part singing seems to have been the norm. Hermann Finck

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197 Ibid. p. 7.

198 MacClintock 1979 p. 53.

199 Emerson 2005 p. 5.

200 Ibid. p. 8.

201 Ibid. p. 8.

202 Newcomb 2011 p. 12.

203 Ibid. p. 12.

204 Finscher 1994 p. 188.

was a German composer and organist, working at Wittenberg University. He wrote in his *Practica Musica*

> [...] let those who practise music see whether the music is in four or more voices, and that each voice be assigned to a select and suitable singer.[205]

The polyphonic madrigal gained enormous popularity, and every Italian composer seems to have released a madrigal book, not least because the madrigal represented an excellent means of instruction in the art of composition.[206] But from the turn of the seventeenth century, the numbers of madrigal books being published suddenly dropped, with first editions going from 271 between 1581 and 1590 to four from 1631 to 1650.[207] The madrigal, often sung by singers around a table for their own amusement,[208] was now accompanied by instruments, with more solo appearances, and, perhaps most importantly, dramatized on larger occasions.[209] The practice of inserting theatrical material into collections of chamber music for vocal solo may be traced to the founder of the genre, Caccini.[210] His *Nuove Musiche* of 1601 is a turning point from which we often trace the beginning of the Italian song style we call *bel canto*. It was no longer enough for a performer to produce a pure, beautiful sound; now they were also obliged to demonstrate and display artistic and technical expertise.[211] During the early decades of the seventeenth century, the polyphonic madrigal was gradually overshadowed by the solo concerto, instrumental music and opera. The fall of the madrigal is clearly seen in the falling production of madrigal books, demonstrating the madrigal's loss of popularity. According to Bianconi the first decades of the seventeenth century saw a kind of a 'crisis', a paradigm shift where the ideal that social harmony should be imitated in music disappeared. It was an undermining of the sixteenth century's idea of a civilized society: the focus was now on culture and chivalry as symbolic of power and authority, and the ideals of courtesy and politeness embodied in the madrigal disappeared.[212] The focus moved to solo singers and their virtuosity, and when the first

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205 MacClintock 1979 p. 62.

206 Bianconi 1987 p. 4.

207 Ibid. p. 2.

208 Ibid. p. 18.

209 Ibid. p. 18.

210 Ibid. p. 18.

211 Alessandrini 1999 p. 634.

212 Bianconi 1987 p. 28.

public opera house opened in Venice, in 1637, the shift was complete. In his essay *Musica Practia* (1977), Roland Barthes makes a distinction between music one does and music one listens to. He describes the historical point at which music is no longer available to everyone to practise themselves. When this point is passed, he states, relations between composer, performer and audience shift, and the canonization of the composer emerges, together with the idea of the performer as an interpreter.[213] To Barthes, this historical point came with Beethoven. But John Potter, in his book *Vocal Authority* (1998), suggests that a similar shift took place at the beginning of the seventeenth century when polyphony was outchallenged by the virtuoso solo singer. It is a very interesting view, and although the shift was not related to one person (as with Beethoven), it must have been as drastic. It seems that the *a cappella* vocal ensemble, one-voice-per-part, did not receive the attention and status it had had before. Secular solo ensembles did not disappear, of course, but they moved into the operas, accompanied by instruments, but always with the solo singer in focus, an improvising, ornamenting solo singer, marking the shift into *bel canto*.

Summary

There is a lot of evidence that supports the idea of singing one-voice-per-part as a normal way of performing vocal music in this period. But I cannot say that this was the only way, or even *the* norm for performing vocal music at the time. People seem to have been quite pragmatic about the performance of music, performing with the resources they had available, or could afford. Both singing one-voice-per-part and singing multiple-voices-per-part existed, but one-voice-per-part singing seemed to have been more common in the singing of madrigals. One point worth noticing is how one-voice-per-part practice was present in the singing of madrigals by the more professional groups of the time, for instance as with the example of *Concerto delle donne*. One-voice-per-part seems to have been more prevalent on the professional side of the musical life in Europe at the time.

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213   Barthes 1977 p. 150.

5.1.2 1650–1800 and the reduced significance of vocal ensemble practice

We find little evidence of *a cappella* vocal ensembles, one-voice-per-part, from the middle of the seventeenth century onward. The diminished role of the madrigal, and the reduced focus on *a cappella* vocal polyphony, especially in Italy and the secular part of the music life, gave a huge focus shift in favour of the solo singer and the opera, in particular. But did it also mean that the one-voice-per-part practice disappeared?

In *a cappella* work, there can be distinct parts for soloists or a group of soloists. The work of Heinrich Schütz is an example. Often the singers in a church or at a place of employment were classified as *concertist* or *ripienist*, or solo singers and tutti singers.

In 1982 Joshua Rifkin published an article claiming that one-voice-per-part singing was actually much more common than many had thought. The article created a good deal of debate, and his conclusions have been disputed. Rifkin surveyed surviving partbooks from churches and performances, and studied the number of *concertists,* solo singers, and *ripienists,* tutti singers, and the balance between them. He concluded that the ensembles of the seventeenth and eighteenth century were considerably smaller than modern ensembles or choirs.[214] By counting the number of the partbooks he concluded that Mozart only had 12 singers available for the performance of most of his masses.[215] Rifkin also wrote that the term *choir* (or *chorus*) meant something different around 1750 to what it means today. According to Rifkin, before 1750 the term only meant a group of solo singers.[216] And, as the partbooks show, a *concertist* also sang together with the *ripienists*. Rifkin also states that Haydn had significantly fewer singers available than we normally use today when performing his works. The Esterhazy chapel had included only eight singers, so it is plausible that he also used one-voice-per-part.[217] Rifkin's most controversial conclusion was that Bach performed his St John Passion with only ten singers and there is a set of only 12 partbooks for the 1736 performance of the St Matthew

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214   Rifkin 1982 p. 747.

215   Ibid. p. 747.

216   Ibid. p. 747.

217   Ibid. p. 747.

Passion.[218] Rifkin concludes that most of Bach's performances must have had very few singers, and that one-voice-per-part was more or less the norm. Andrew Parrott argues in a reply to this article that Rifkin's conclusion that the partbooks of the *ripienists* were personal items and never shared, may have been a bit hasty. Parrott argues that partbooks were in fact shared and even copied.[219] He also quotes Bach's own words, from *Entwurff:*[220]

> [...] Zu iedweden musiclischen Chor gehören wenigsten 3 Sopranisten, 3 Altisten, 3 tenoristen und eben so viel Bassisten.

> To each musical choir there belong at least three sopranos, three altos, three tenors, and as many basses.[221]

Parrott, although he supports Rifkin in his main conclusion, puts a finger on the problem: Bach himself, in the *Entwurff*, says that he prefers a choir with three singers on each voice. This point created much dispute and uncertainty between debaters like Rifkin and Parrott: in the end the discussion evolved into, among other things, an argument about whether or not it was possible for the instrumentalists to turn the pages themselves.[222] But what we can say on the basis of this evidence is that there was a huge difference between the vocal resources the composers had at their hands from place to place, from church to church. And there is definitely a possibility that Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schütz and so on, may have performed their works with only one singer per part. My question is then, if they used to do this, shouldn't they also do it in other parts of their repertoire? Did it happen that the singers came together and performed, one-voice-per-part? I think the answer is yes.

But it is important to stress that we also find evidence for the enlargement of the choirs around in Europe during the eighteenth century. The amateur singer suddenly got another position, and the social conditions included the middle and the working class into the musical life. The number of singing academies grew in Germany, and we can begin to see the first real attempts at writing and publishing books on vocal pedagogy and methodology, one

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218   Ibid. p. 749.

219   Parrott 1996 p. 562.

220   The *Entwurff* is Bach's famous memorandum to the town council of Leipzig, explaining, as Parrott (1996) says, 'the structure and workings of the musical institution in his charge in Leipzig'.

221   Parrott 1996 p. 562.

222   Koopman 1997 p. 541.

of the most widely read of these being Francesco Tosi's *Opinioni de' cantori antiche e moderni* from 1723.[223] In 1754 the orchestra Académie Royale de Musique consisted of 46 players, and balanced with a choir of 38 singers, of which 17 in fact were women.[224] If we look at other occasions where we know how many singers were included, we can for instance look to the large festival in Westminster Abbey in 1784 where the centenary of Handel's birth was celebrated. Three hundred singers participated[225] on this occasion, and in 1791 (when Haydn was present) more than 1000, singers and players included, participated.[226]

Summary

We can see, through the research of Rifkin and others, that the one-voice-per-part practice held its ground to a certain extent, especially in the churches. But the growing focus on the solo singer, the growing influence of the Italian opera and singing ideals, and the growing participation of the amateur singers, created an environment where the one-voice-per-part practice seemed to pass more and more into the background.

5.1.3 The nineteenth century. The disappearance of a practice?

It is in the music of the nineteenth century that we really find the big gap in the repertoire of the vocal ensembles of today. If we agree with Rifkin's assumption, we can see that both Haydn and Mozart probably used ensembles with one-voice-per-part, and we may assume that the practice continued to a certain extent. These singers, being used to singing one-voice-per-part in churches, would be able to sing in the same manner on other occasions. As already stated, it is unlikely that the one-voice-per-part practice disappeared, but it certainly did not have the significance it had had before.

Singing, and singing in choirs, became accessible for more and more people in the nineteenth century. Choral associations, the choirs themselves and the

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223 Potter 1998 p. 40.

224 Young and Smith 2010 p. 11.

225 Ibid. p. 12.

226 Ibid. p. 12.

works written for choirs grew to sizes never seen before. It is quite natural to assume from this that vocal ensemble music practice, singing one-voice-per-part, got less attention during the nineteenth century. But to say that it disappeared is probably a too hasty conclusion. When one of the singers of NVS says, when being asked about why they don't do 'Romantic' music, that there simply isn't any 'Romantic' music available, apart from the ensembles accompanied by piano, that answer is a good insight into the present vocal ensemble repertoire philosophy and an insight into the vocal aesthetics of NVS. But the picture is a bit more complex. There is of course 'Romantic' music to sing. The tradition of the *partsong* was present in Europe during the whole eighteenth and nineteenth century. It was a reminiscence of the madrigal tradition, and it is seen, for instance in the tradition of glees and catches. In Grove, partsong is defined simply as a song for two or more voices without an independent accompaniment. In practice, the term, still according to Grove, usually refers to a small-scale secular piece of unaccompanied choral singing.[227] Many composers wrote these partsongs (although it is very difficult to see where the line is between the partsongs and other genres). Schubert, for instance, wrote several partsongs, and there are some hints that these songs often were performed by ensembles singing one-voice-per-part. In the *Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, Margaret Notley has a chapter about Schubert's partsongs, and she states that the songs, although later used within the traditional choral repertoire, were written for and performed in the manner of what she calls 'the Austrian custom of one singer to a part',[228] a description also found in the foreword of *Neue Schubert–Ausgabe, vol. III/4* (1974) by Dietrich Berke. These partsongs were also performed in public concerts. Notley mentions that in the *Abendunterhaltungen* presented by the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in the 1820s, programs that started with a string quartet often ended with a vocal quartet by Schubert. The partsongs also appeared on concert programs in public spaces like *Kärntnerthor Theater.*[229] Composers like Mendelssohn and Schumann also wrote partsongs, and there is in fact an entry in Schumann's diary noting that, on excursions, he would listen to members of the choral society singing partsongs.[230]

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227   Blezzard 2010 p. 1.

228   Notley 1997 p. 148.

229   Ibid. p. 149.

230   Worthen 2007 p. 292.

The nineteenth century also saw the spread of the pianoforte, and it became a natural part of many households around Europe. Partsongs or polyphonic lieder with piano accompaniment soon became a popular genre, and it is well represented in Schubert's work list, as well as in those of Brahms, Schumann and other composers. It is not one-voice-per-part *a cappella*, but it is chamber music related to the one-voice-per-part practice. It is interesting also to note that Brahms himself, during his work as choir conductor in Detmold, clearly wrote in the score of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* where he wanted one voice per part and where he wanted all singers to sing.[231]

The amateur singing movement in Europe grew significantly during the nineteenth century. Choirs, student groups and singing academies were founded in many countries. In Scandinavia the student choirs became a significant part of musical life. In Norway the male choir *Studentersangforeningen* was founded in 1845. One of its first conductors was the Norwegian composer and conductor Halfdan Kjerulf. He had been studying, like many Norwegians, in Germany, and had brought influences of the German music tradition back with him. In 1845 he founded a quartet for 'private entertainment'.[232] It was not the only quartet in town, as his colleague Johan D. Behrens also had his own. These quartets sprang from the male student amateur singing movement, indeed, many of the choirs coming out in Europe during the nineteenth century emerged from the amateur singing movement. Kjerulf's quartet consisted of eight members,[233] which are of course four singers too many to be called a quartet. But this was only to assure themselves that they could show up with at least four singers at events, and there are accounts of them singing as a quartet.[234] It is difficult to imagine that these quartets were a phenomenon only existing in Norway. Kjerulf had his background in Germany, and when considering the huge choir movement that evolved in Europe, combined with the partsong tradition, it seems reasonable to suggest that such quartets existed in Germany, England, and throughout Europe. What is perhaps new is that these quartets seem to have been a closed unit, a band in which the members worked together on a regular basis. And unlike the old ensembles

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231   Hancock 1984 p. 129.

232   Lysdahl 1995 p. 123.

233   Qvamme 2010 p. 1.

234   Ibid. p. 1.

like the *Concerto delle donne*, these new ensembles existed for their own sake, and were not connected to a church or a patron. I have not found any description of such vocal ensembles before 1800–1850. It does not mean, of course, that they did not exist, and more research on the area may show the existence of such groups. But my hypothesis is that these closed groups came out of the amateur singing movement around 1800–1850, and it is the first encounter I have had with groups that look like the vocal ensembles of today, like NVS, Nordic Voices or The Hilliard Ensemble.

In USA the barbershop tradition arose at around the same time. We find accounts of vocal quartets forming in the USA around the early 1840s.[235] As with the quartets, which from choir associations, these barbershop groups were amateur groups, but they soon gained some significance in their part of musical life.

In England there are accounts of a number of groups coming out of the glee and partsong tradition. At the turn of the twentieth century we find their recordings, with groups like The Troubadour Glee Singers, Tally-Ho! and The Meister Glee Singers. The latter gave a number of concerts in the UK. In 1898, for instance, they performed at the London Promenade Concerts.[236]

Summary

One-voice-per-part practice seemed to play some part in the musical life in Europe in the nineteenth century, although it took many other forms, for instance through accompanied and un-accompanied partsongs. It is most important that we recognize the first indications, in the nineteenth century, of vocal ensembles being formed as closed units, with fixed members, like a band, organizing themselves as the vocal ensembles of today.

5.1.4   1900–1945

In the *Musical Times* in 1901 there was an article reviewing the Leeds Festival. In this article, one can read the following:

> [...] We were then carried back to the *sixteenth* century by the strains of Palestrina. The introduction of the motet 'Surge, illuminare' was an

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235   Abbott 1992 p. 290.

236   http://www.bbc.co.uk/proms/archive/search/performers/meister-glee-singers/1 (Viewed 02.02.15).

undoubted mistake. The motets of the great Italian master of church music need a much smaller choir, and one traditionally equipped, to do justice to that old-world and spiritual music; moreover, a town hall in broad daylight, with lady singers in festival attire, is not the proper environment for such devotional strains.[237]

This quotation appears to be an example of what is often thought of as a new awareness, both about the repertoire of the earlier centuries and also about how this old music should be performed. In his book *Choral Performance* (2004), Steven E. Plank puts this quotation forward as an example of what he calls the 'Romantic blindness' to the performance practice of music from before the eighteenth century.[238] Although the quotation seems to catch that 'Romantic blindness' on the spot, one should add that this was a large festival, with 356 singers registered,[239] and this occasion on its own is not enough to conclude anything about how Palestrina was performed in England. As I have shown in the previous section, the one-voice-per-part tradition seemed to have been present in musical life, as well as a growing choir tradition. As we have the example of Brahms editing and conducting Palestrina, and we know that there was a tradition of thinking flexibly about choirs and choir sizes, this 'Romantic blindness' was not that blind after all.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, recording techniques were developed, and from this time we can find recordings of vocal ensembles of a fairly good quality. First of all, the range of recordings that exist shows that there were quite a large number of groups existing in Europe. Groups like The Meister Glee Singers mentioned above, delivered quite a large number of concerts at the turn of the twentieth century. The group was founded in 1890 and performed a lot during the 1890s and well into the first decade of the twentieth century. There are accounts of them performing in venues as far away as Australia, and at home in large venues like the Royal Albert Hall and at important concert series like the Promenade Concerts. In an article from 1904, describing musical life in London, the authors say this about vocal ensemble practice in the capital:

> [...] the Meister Glee Singers hold the foremost place as entertainers among the numerous male quartets to be heard in London.[240]

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237   Anonymous 1901 p. 734.

238   Plank 2004 p. 31.

239   Anonymous 1901 p. 734.

240   Lucas and Bispham 1904 p. 766.

In his book *My Life of Music* (1938) Sir Henry Wood wrote this about the Meister Glee Singers:

> [...] up to this time (1899) no vocal quartet had achieved anything approaching their success, probably because they rehearsed for a whole year before making an appearance in public... it was not that their voices were so good, but that their diction and ensemble were perfect.[241]

This excerpt tells us that this was a very serious working vocal ensemble and also that there existed vocal ensembles in higher numbers than I had previously expected.

In Germany, too, we find one-voice-per-part vocal ensembles singing around 1900 and onward. For example, we can find recordings of groups like the Nebe Quartett. Besides this ensemble, we can find ensembles like the Kardosch-Sänger and the Comedian Harmonists, the latter being influenced by American groups like the Revelers and the Rollickers.

From 1900 and until World War II, another kind of vocal ensemble genre emerged. The barbershop and close harmony singing traditions influenced many of the new vocal ensembles, like the already mentioned American ensembles the Revelers and the Rollickers. Their German counterparts, Kardosch-Sänger and Comedian Harmonists, also defined themselves within these genres, although there are also recordings of them singing Schubert, for instance. There is a line from the Meister Glee Singers and their variety singing forward to the ensembles of the 1920s and 1930s. When I listen to some of these ensembles, I am struck by how their close their sound is to some of the vocal ensembles of today when they sing popular genres, for example vocal ensembles like for instance the Swedish Real Group.

The example of the Palestrina chorus at the Leeds Festival shows that there was a growing consciousness of the way in which music written before 1750 should be performed. And in the years up to 1940 a number of musicians felt that they needed to find out not only what had been written before 1750, but also how this music had been performed or sung.

Summary

The one-voice-per-part vocal ensemble practice seemed to continue from the form it had taken during the nineteenth century. With groups like The

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241   Wood 1938.

Meister Glee Singers and their counterparts another line of music style seemed to emerge, perhaps being what we could call the ancestor to the tradition of groups like The Real Group. The most important thing to notice, though, is that the one-voice-per-part practice had not vanished. There were a lot of groups, working on a professional basis, singing all over the world and performing in places like Royal Albert Hall in London during the Proms.

5.1.5 The early music movement, modernism, and the new vocal ensemble era

In England the works of Byrd, Tallis and other Renaissance composers have remained at the repertoire from the time the works were composed and up until our own time.[242] Because of this, John Potter says, there has been an ongoing interest in Renaissance music in these circles, which has resulted in a 'retrospective taste', as he calls it.[243] A short article, 'The Renaissance Society', in *The Musical Time and Singing-Class Circular* of 1946, gives a somewhat different picture: this article suggests that the works were in the repertoire, but were seldom performed.[244] But from the 1930s and 1940s and on, the English church and university choirs came to play a stronger part in English music life, especially through the works of conductors like David Willcocks. At the same time, there was a growing interest in the music written before 1750, and the result was a greater historical awareness of this historical music.[245] According to Haynes, this historically informed performance practice drew the attention to

> [...] the profound differences of music before and after 1800 in ideology, values, and performing practices.[246]

This historically informed performance movement, often referred to as the early music movement, supported a wide range of performers defining the way the music before 1750 should be played. And with this the scene was ready for new vocal ensembles to form. Especially from the church and university choirs, there came ensembles with singers setting the standard on how the music from the time before 1750 should be performed, often with

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242 Potter 1998 p. 113.

243 Ibid. p. 132.

244 D.G. 1946 p. 361.

245 Haynes 2007 p. 10.

246 Ibid. p. 10.

the 'Romantic' way of singing representing the opposite direction in singing styles for them. One of these singers was Alfred Deller.

Alfred Deller started the Deller Consort in 1948, and Rogers Covey-Crump emphasises that the formation of the Deller Consort was the first in a line of new vocal ensembles to emerge in England,[247] although, as I have shown, that line of vocal ensembles in England had been there all through the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that the Deller Consort represented a shift, as it was one of the first vocal ensembles to dedicate itself completely to 'early music'. We find such vocal ensembles in other places as well. In the USA, five years before the forming of the Deller Consort, David Randolph formed his Randolph Singers, also singing and dedicating themselves to 'early music'. These ensembles were to be followed by other ensembles through the 1960s and 1970s, where we can find names like The Early Music Consort, the Pro Cantione Antiqua and the New London Consort. The singers of these groups and of this repertoire became a kind of a singing elite in England, and the specialized choirs came along, choirs like The Monteverdi Choir and The Clerkes of Oxenford, the latter engaging female singers as well, among them the singer Emma Kirkby.[248] In the 1980s we then find this singing elite in vocal ensembles like The Tallis Scholars, Gothic Voices and, of course, The Hilliard Ensemble.

In John Potter's book, the chapter about 'early music' is not called only 'early music', but rather 'Early music and the avant-garde'. This duality is seen also in the repertoire of the vocal ensembles around the world. There is a connection between singing 'early music' and contemporary music, as with the repertoire of NVS, The Hilliard Ensemble and Nordic Voices. Alfred Deller's newly invented voice category, the 'countertenor voice', became very popular among composers, Britten composed the part Oberon in *A Midsummernight's Dream* for Deller, and composers like Ligeti, Reich and Maxwell Davies also composed roles for his voice.[249] At the beginning of the twentieth century, Schönberg had experimented with a speaking voice for his *Gurrelieder*, a thread he followed especially in the work *Pierrot Lunaire* where the singing style is described by Schönberg as 'Sprechgesang'. This way of 'singing' represented a growing tendency to liberate singing styles

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247 Covey-Crump 1992 p. 1020.

248 Potter 1998 p. 116.

249 Ibid. p. 115.

from those of 'classical' singing.[250] With composers like John Cage and others, the voice was explored as a sound-source,[251] which allowed singers and composers to challenge the rules of this 'classical' voice. The revolutionary development in singing style diversity during the post-war period has had an enormous impact on performance practice, the education of singers and compositions for singers. All these new ways of using the voice feed into the concept now often called 'extended voice techniques' (see chapter 7 for more on extended voice techniques in vocal ensembles and NVS).

These new voice techniques also gave birth to new vocal ensembles. Right after World War II these new ways of singing and the escalation of the early music vocal ensembles marked the beginning of what Benoît Aubigny calls the renaissance of the *a cappella* vocal ensemble.[252] He says that

> [...] Gradually the richness of a sound spectrum revealed itself towards what appears to be a new instrument, extremely malleable, as springing directly from the human body. Whether it is raw or worked, sung or spoken, it is a passionate voice, and has inspired composers and becoming increasingly important in their production.[253]

In 1944 the French composer Francis Poulenc wrote *Un soir de neige* 'pour six voix mixtes ou choeur a cappella' (for six mixed voices or choir *a cappella*). This is one of the first pieces where the composer explicitly writes that the piece is intended for a vocal ensemble, and Benoit Aubigny calls this a new repertoire, written for vocal soloists.[254] There have of course been a tradition for one-voice-per-part *a cappella singing* before, and composers, like the Norwegian Halfdan Kjerulf, and through the part-song tradition had been writing for a group of soloists before, but this is music written with an intention of a usage only in vocal ensembles, and it is clear that the composers now looked upon the vocal ensemble like an instrument of its own, like a string quartet. This instrument withheld some new possibilities

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250 Ibid. p. 124.

251 Ibid. p. 126.

252 Aubigny 1998 p. 11.

253 Ibid. p. 12. The original quotation is in French: 'Peu á peu se révéle la richesse d'un spectre sonore appréhendé á travers ce qui apparaît comme un nouvel instrument, extrémement malleable, puisque jaillissant directement du corps humain. Ou'elle soit brute ou travaillée, chantée ou parlée, la voix passionne et inspire les compositeurs et prend une place croissante dans leur production.'

254 Ibid. p. 12.

when it came to timbre possibilities and it represented a new way of composing for singers.

Francis Poulenc and contemporaries such as Oliver Messiaen and André Jolivet were soon to be followed by Iannis Xenakis, Luigi Nono, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio. The repertoire and the numbers of ensembles grew. In the USA, The Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble was established in 1972, and in England new ensembles such as Electric Phoenix, Singcircle and the London Sinfonietta Voices also formed for this new repertoire. France saw the formation of the Swingle Singers, for whom Luciano Berio wrote his eight-voice version of *A-ronne*.[255] And so, in 1984 Manfred Schreier founded NVS.

The early music ensembles like The Hilliard Ensemble also got into the contemporary music scene. John Potter, himself a former member of The Hilliard Ensemble, says that

> [...] Textual clarity has been more satisfactory realised by singers working in early music, who have found themselves in demand for contemporary pieces. The light, relatively vibrato-free tone is ideal for the textual demands of the simpler 'post-modern' compositions of Reich, Pärt and others, which have developed alongside the fading avant-garde.[256]

John Potter here beautifully depicts the strong relationship between the early music movement and the contemporary music scene.

Summary

There is no doubt that the repertoire and the number of vocal ensembles has grown since World War II. The early music movement and the development of contemporary singing techniques have resulted in a vast number of pieces and groups. The result is vocal ensembles dedicating themselves to early music and/or contemporary music, with the combination of the two genres almost the norm. In many ways this new direction could be called a new vocal ensemble era.

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255   Potter 1998 p. 131.

256   Ibid. p. 131.

5.2   **Different singing styles**

During the Renaissance there seems to have been a slight difference between the voice singers used in churches (*cappella singing)* and that used in chamber singing *(camera singing)*, where the *camera* singing was closer to speaking than singing, and *cappella* singing was louder and not so intimate.[257] The invention and spread of opera, and the widened Italian influence on singing ideas, came to have great influence on how things were sung. The castrati were the big headliners, and they defined how singers should sound and work. It was especially the *camera* singing that was influenced. The most usual accompanying instrument had been the lute, but now singers faced different instruments to match, meaning that they had to develop a way to sing louder. All these lead to what John Potter calls a 'revolutionary change in singing style' from what we usuall call the Renaissance into the early Baroque.[258] What it also means is that we can see the beginning of a sharper distinction between the solo singer and the chorister, the latter being more associated with the amateur singer.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, we really see the development of what we could call the 'modern voice'. This new way of singing was founded on research about the voice and its mechanisms, and learning to sing became, even more than it had been before, a process in which a pupils attached themselves to a master.[259] The publication of detailed manuals about how to sing flourished, and there was also a significant increase in the number of autobiographies from the singers themselves, evidence of the focus on the soloist which characterised the nineteenth century. According to John Potter, it was as if the singers

> […] could assure themselves of additional kudos later in their careers by revealing technical aspects that would help to legitimise a subsequent teaching career.[260]

This development towards the 'modern voice' included voices that had to sing louder, partly because, as I mentioned, that they had to sing against instruments producing a higher volume. During the nineteenth century orchestras grew and singing had to grow with them. One of the most

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257   Ibid. p. 39.

258   Ibid. p. 46.

259   Ibid. p. 47.

260   Ibid. p. 47.

significant elements that came into singing is the lowered larynx position, one of the best known characteristics of the classical 'modern voice'. This lowered larynx enhances the formants around 3000 Hz (especially with male singers), a feature necessary in order to be heard over an orchestra or a steel framed piano.[261] The technique is first mentioned around 1830,[262] and it made singers capable of singing louder. One of the side effects of this singing at higher volumes can be a stronger presence of vibrato[263] (I discuss these voice characteristics in chapter 7). This Italian *bel canto* way of singing became the trend, *the* way of singing. The technique was perfectly well suited for opera and for penetrating through the sound of an orchestra or a piano. In this environment, the solo singer and the solo *singing* became the focus of singing education and the focus of the vocal techniques being educated.

The singing style of the English cathedral choirs was characterized by light voices, not so concerned with producing the singer's formants and vibrato. This style stood in sharp contrast to solo singing at the time, and the 'early music' repertoire maintained the manner learned in the choirs. This way of singing became *the* way of singing early music, and the sound was imitated all over the northern hemisphere.[264] This way of singing, following the early music movement, was a reaction to the 'Romantic' solo voice prevalent at that time.

5.3   So why the big gap?

When I interviewed the NVS, they all confirmed my assumptions about the reasons why most of the vocal ensembles I knew kept on doing the same repertoire: early music – meaning music from the Middle Ages and until around 1750 – and/or contemporary music. When I began my studies, my assumptions were these: in the 'Romantic' period, let us say from 1750 and until 1920, there was simply no music to sing. The vocal ensemble, meaning the tradition of singing one-voice-per-part, disappeared from the musical stage and was not to be found again before well into the twentieth century. The absence of music from the 'Romantic' period also explained why the

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261   Sundberg 1987 p. 121.

262   Potter 1998 p. 53.

263   Sundberg 1987 p. 164.

264   Ibid. p. 116.

ensembles sound the way they do, and with that it explained why the vocal ensemble singers also sounded different from the 'Romantic' singer.

My observation is that many vocal ensembles often distance themselves from this 'Romantic' ideal of the classical voice, where for instance vibrato is quite omnipresent. I find this distancing from the 'Romantic' vocal ideal quite interesting, because it distances the singers themselves from other classical, traditional, 'Romantic' singers and this could give the ensemble singers a kind of exclusivity, a kind of way of using their voices that the 'Romantic' singers cannot achieve. If this is the case, it is quite natural that the vocal ensembles stay away from the 'Romantic' repertoire as well.

This small part of one of my interviews with one of the singers in NVS can illustrate my point:

> […] Singer:
> …there was no repertoire. I mean, there is not, do you know any repertoire for vocal ensemble from there to there? No… And that's why it starts again, because there are now vocal ensembles building up a repertoire again.
>
> F:
> Do you think they stopped singing in vocal ensemble during that period?
>
> Singer:
> Yeah, the interesting question is why did it stop? I don't know. Maybe there were ensembles that repeated Gesualdo or something?
>
> F:
> Have you tried in the ensemble to sing Romantic pieces?
>
> Singer:
> Well, each of us have sung a lot oratorios and operas:
>
> F:
> But not as an ensemble?
>
> Singer:
> No, I mean, what could we sing? We could sing some transcription of Brahms songs, or… I don't know. For fun we did it sometime on someone's birthday.

Another one of the singers in NVS says this about why vocal ensembles concentrate on the early music / contemporary music axis:

> […] Singer:
> Maybe that has to do with what was in between. There was not much *a cappella* music in between, I mean, there is Brahms, and a lot uninteresting music, like Elgar, or so … It is absolutely undiscussible (laughter). Quite many beautiful pieces by Mendelssohn, but not anything that we would sing in NVS.

F:
Why not the 'Romantic' pieces?

Singer:
Too many people, too many singers. The pieces are more meant for a bigger ensemble, except for the quartets, but you need a piano then. I think it has to do with that.

There is a very clear tendency of vocal ensembles distancing themselves from the music and the singing style of the 'Romantic' period. In my interview with Robert Hollingworth, when asked about which kind of voice suits the vocal ensemble I Fagiolini, he excludes what he calls 'Verdi'-voices. There seems to be, living today, a division between those singing in a 'Romantic', soloistic style and the 'early music' style, also present in the vocal ensembles.

There is no doubt that the singing style changed during the nineteenth century, bringing larger voices that suited larger ensembles and larger orchestras. But when listening to recording of singers from the turn of the twentieth century, the overall impression I get is that the singing style was not so overwhelmed with vibrato and the voices were not as 'big' as I expected before I started to look into it. Of course some of the recordings show that singers sang with a style far from the aesthetic norm of vocal ensembles of today, but some recordings also show that when it comes vocal timbre and control over dynamics, many singers could absolutely suit a vocal ensemble like for instance my own Nordic Voices. My guess is that you could find singers of all colours, as you would today. But the big difference lies in the other aspects of the singing style. When we listen to the late 'Romantic' tradition, with its portamentos and fluctuating tempos, Bruce Haynes has a point when he says that the style, or tradition, is so easy to recognize because no one now dares to play it.[265] The early music singing style developed after World War II was in opposition to what we now call and what we called the 'Romantic' singing style, but the latter seems to be a constructed one, or maybe we could say it was the 1940–1950 version of 'Romantic' style. My conclusion is that the early music singers and musicians in many ways did manage to set the standard for how the music written before 1750 should be performed, and they gained authority on the field, many of them being academics performing and editing the works. The vocal ensembles from this line of singers did a similar job in setting the standard

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265   Haynes 2007 p. 33.

for performance practices of the music from the same period, although the singing style of the early music ensembles is much more modern than the 'Romantic' singing style they opposed. And suddenly, in these circles the 'Romantic' way of singing, became bad taste and the representatives of this style became in many ways excluded from the vocal ensemble performance practice. Bourdieu writes that

> [...] Tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes.[266]

This 'bad taste' label, excluding as it may be, is also of course necessary to gain authority on the field. The early music singing style developed after World War II spread out through the vocal ensemble singing circles. Especially did the English early music singing style gain a momentum, and in Scandinavia it was adopted into the choir movement, especially by the works of conductors like Eric Ericsson.

The avant-garde movement that grew in the decades after World War II was in many ways also in opposition to the 'Romantic' style, and it is, to my view, no wonder that the early music movement and modernists found each other. The vocal flexibility of the early music singing style proved to be a good platform for the development of extended voice technique directions, and helps to explain the duality between early music and contemporary music found in many vocal ensembles of today. Although the singers of NVS distance themselves from English early music singing style, many of them have a background in it and perform early music besides singing in the ensemble.

The early music movement is a community of practice. The movement consists of people who

> [...] share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do better as they interact regularly.[267]

The members of this community, the vocal ensemble community who are occupied with singing early and contemporary music, will of course identify

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266 Bourdieu 1984/2010 p. 56.

267 This quote is taken from Etienne Wenger's own site on the Internet. http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (Viewed 28.12.2011).

themselves as communities. As with 'taste-labelling' mentioned above, identification includes relations that shape who we are and are not.[268]

When the singers of NVS speak about 'Romantic' music as something they do for birthdays, or label the music as 'uninteresting', they distance themselves from this music. This is a labelling process, an identification process that explains their preferences when it comes to repertoire choices and choices regarding singing styles. These are the same mechanisms that we see in the rejection of the musical piece *Blue Danube* by the highly educated teachers and art-producers in Bourdieu's writings, and their preference for pieces like *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.[269]

This opposition to the 'Romantic' style has been extremely important. The early music movement has helped the vocal ensemble tradition flourish. It has, together with the contemporary music movement, invoked new singing styles and provided a new platform for vocal ensemble singing. I am of course aware of that this way of singing in vocal ensembles has been extremely successful, and that this way of singing is perhaps the best way to meet challenges like blending and intonation (see also chapter 7 and 8). But maybe distancing from a whole period of music is a blind spot in the modern vocal ensemble tradition. NVS, Nordic Voices, I Fagiolini, The Hilliard Ensemble and the other groups around, rather than being inventors of a new style, stand on the shoulders of vocal ensembles like the Meister Glee Singers and their like. Unlocking the blind spot could open up a new repertoire. Are we so sure that some of the choral works of composers like Brahms, Reger, Bruckner and so on were never performed by a group of only one singer to a part? I would say that we are not. What would happen if we dared to sing that music one-voice-per-part instead of in choirs? Maybe the whole difference is that it only sounds differently and that it really does not matter if it does.

5.4   Conclusions

In many of the vocal ensembles I have encountered, like in NVS, there is a gap in the repertoire: the music from of 'Romantic' era is excluded. They reject this period in music history as one in which vocal ensembles did not exist,

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268   Wenger 1998 p. 191.

269   Bourdieu 1984/2010 p. 17.

or say that the repertoire does not suit the modern vocal ensemble's way of singing. My observations have shown that:

There seems to be an unbroken tradition of one-voice-per-part singing from the Middle Ages until now.

From the first accounts of ensemble singing in the churches of Rome, through the Renaissance and the madrigal tradition, through the Baroque period, the 'Romantic' period and into the new vocal ensemble paradigm of the 1950s, singing one voice to a part has been a natural part of singing. The tradition has lived side by side with solo singing and choir singing, even in the 'Romantic' period.

The first vocal ensembles working as professional groups and, with fixed members like the vocal ensembles of today, emerged in the nineteenth century

The first vocal ensembles I have found that look like the vocal ensembles of today, with fixed members and an organization structure that is similar to NVS or Nordic Voices, emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. These vocal ensembles, like the Meister Glee Singers, achieved quite a reputation at the turn of the twentieth century. There were also groups earlier than this. We can find groups like the *Concerto delle donne* in Ferrara, Italy. But they were employees in a court. The groups that came out in the nineteenth century, like the Meister Glee Singers, were independent, professional groups.

The reasons vocal ensembles often reject the 'Romantic' way of singing and the 'Romantic' repertoire are many and the picture is complex. Vocal ensembles have found a way of singing that suits their repertoire and their technical challenges, but this distances them from the repertoire of the 'Romantic' vocal ensembles. This repertoire is often seen as 'light entertainment music' and is often regarded as being in bad taste. The modern ensembles' perception is that this distancing is necessary to provide them with a touch of exclusivity, excluding the 'Romantic' singers of today from their repertoire and musical practice.

Roger Courage's Courage Consort were, arguably, the seventh most-renowned serious vocal ensembles in the world. Certainly they were more uncompromising than some of the more famous groups: they'd never sunk so low as to chant Renaissance accompaniment to New Age saxophone players, or to warble Lennon/ McCartney chestnuts at the Proms

(Faber, 2002)

6   Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart

NVS is a vocal ensemble with a high activity. As with Nordic Voices and The Hilliard Ensemble (see later in this chapter), the repertoire of NVS divides into two groups: contemporary vocal music and early vocal music, but with a clear bias towards contemporary music. In 2008 they performed some 54 concerts,[270] involving works by composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Enno Poppe, Georges Aperghis and Salvatore Sciarrino. They have visited festivals and concert scenes like the *Huddersfield Contemporary Festival*, *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* in Darmstadt and *Staatsoper Unter den Linden* in Berlin, all high prestige concert scenes and festivals. This chapter tells the story of NVS in broad strokes, placing the ensemble in the context of the world of vocal ensembles. The chapter is partly based on documentary sources about the ensemble, like newspaper articles and concert reviews. But most of the material comes from interviews with members of the ensemble and my observations, and on what they write about themselves, for instance on their website. This chapter will not tell the full story of NVS, and it is not meant to be a full biography about the ensemble or its members. Instead it aims to demonstrate why I have chosen to make my study of this ensemble the main focus of this thesis, and also it aims to show what I reckon to be a part of their motivation to start the group and to sing in it. In this study I present

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270   http://www.neuevocalsolisten.de/nvs–2008.html (Viewed 02.01.2013).

examples from the work of another group as comparison to the findings from NVS. I will briefly present the group that the members of NVS put forward as their counterpart in the world of vocal ensembles. This group is the English ensemble The Hilliard Ensemble.

6.1 The beginning of NVS and its organization

In 1978 Manfred Schreier, a church musician and conductor working in, amongst other places, the Markuskirche in Stuttgart, founded the organization Musik der Jahrhunderte. Schreier had been a central figure in the music life of Stuttgart for long time, and was especially known for conducting and performing works from the twentieth century, from Gustav Mahler to Luigi Nono.[271] Musik der Jahrhunderte started as a sponsoring organization for Schreier's choirs and orchestras,[272] but during the 1980s the organization started to professionalize and expand. In 1984 he founded Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart (NVS) under the management of Musik der Jahrhunderte, and in 1985 Christine Fischer took over as director of the company. She has been leading Musik der Jahrhunderte since then. Musik der Jahrhunderte is now an organization with a broad span of activities, from managing NVS to organizing the ECLAT festival,[273] started in 1980 and formerly known as *Tage für Neue Musik Stuttgart.*[274] The artistic director of the festival was the German composer and cellist Hans-Peter Jahn, and he ran the ECLAT festival as artistic director until 2013, when Christine Fischer and Björn Gottstein took over as artistic directors. In 2001 Manfred Schreier withdrew from Musik der Jahrhunderte, and Christine Fischer has been running the organization since then.

Musik der Jahrhunderte and NVS have been based in the *Theaterhaus Stuttgart*[275] from 2003, and here they share offices and rehearsal facilities. On their website, Musik der Jahrhunderte is described as an organization that

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271 http://www.mh–trossingen.de/hochschule/personen/dozenten–seite/dozent/schreier.html (Viewed 03.01.2013).

272 Most of the information about Musik der Jahrhunderte, is from their own website: http://www.mdjstuttgart.de (Viewed 03.01.2013).

273 http://www.eclat.org (Viewed 03.01.2013).

274 http://www.eclat.org/hintergrund.html (Viewed 03.01.2013).

275 http://www.theaterhaus.com/theaterhaus/index.php (Viewed 04.01.2013).

'promotes the new, the surprising and the unwarranted in music'. Further on it says that it wants contemporary music to gain a successful position in the public eye, and that it aims to move in uncharted water and premiere numerous new works every year.[276] Now it is an organization centred round the members of the ensemble and Christine Fischer. The administration includes three more people,[277] Annette Eckerle, who deals with PR and marketing, Jakob Berger, who deals with project management, and Willi Binz, who deals with what they call office logistics, for instance taking care of all the scores being kept, copied and distributed to the singers of NVS.

There is no doubt that Musik der Jahrhunderte is more or less personified through Christine Fischer. She is in charge of the projects, she runs the organization, it is her responsibility to get enough funding for the organization and its various projects and it is she who works as the manager of the vocal ensemble. She says herself that she has always been an organizer, even from an early age, organizing at school and at University. During my time with NVS I saw one very good example of her organizing skills. The Stockhausen *Sternklang* project in Sept 2010 involved 21 musicians, a handful of torch-bearers, instruments, a conductor, a park, fireworks, a festival, concert arrangers, sponsors, audience and a full reception after the concert including food and drinks for everyone. The piece is an outdoor event, and when the weather forecast said there would be rain on the day of the concert, they managed to move the whole event one day forward. Of course she did not do this all by herself, but she was on top of it, organizing the whole thing.

The organization and the ensemble are very dependant on her work, and she has been present at every one of the ensemble's concerts I have seen, whether in Oslo, Paris or Stuttgart.

Christine Fischer is the person who comes up with ideas for new projects most often. As she says, she is the one who travels around meeting up with

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276 Full text in German from http://www.mdjstuttgart.de/ueber–uns.html (Viewed 04.01.2013): 'Musik der Jahrhunderte fördert das Neue, Überraschende, Unabgesicherte in der Musik. Sie will die zeitgenössische Musik erfolgreich im öffentlichen Kulturleben positionieren und der Kunst des 21. Jahrhunderts den Boden bereiten. Dabei bewegt sie sich meist auf unbekanntem Terrain: Zahlreiche Uraufführungen dominieren in jedem Jahr ihr Programm.'

277 As of Jan 15 2013.

composers and she is the one visiting other festivals, building a huge contact network.

Christine Fischer is also responsible for getting the funding for every project the ensemble does, as well as for the festival ECLAT and projects under the Musik der Jahrhunderte umbrella. Getting funding is of course a job with a huge political dimension built in. It means talking to politicians at different levels, and talking to foundations like the Siemens Stiftung, to try to get the money needed to keep the organization running. Of course the festivals or presenters who hire the ensemble pay a fee, but this is rarely enough to keep the project floating financially. For instance, as one of the singers says:

> [...] it is too expensive most of the time [...] Last year we had a piece by Andreas Dohmen that we needed 25 rehearsals to do. It was really a catastrophe for Christine, because we are paid for the number of rehearsals.

Getting enough money is therefore an essential part of Christine Fischer's work, and she admits that it can be difficult sometimes, especially finding sponsorship money. This comes from companies who wish to use cultural sponsorship as a tool in their company branding, a situation Christine Fischer describes as a 'win–win situation', but as she says:

> [...] sponsoring means that one has to create a win–win situation. But there is no win–win situation in contemporary music, in the view of most sponsors. I always try to convince them that there could in fact be a possibility for a win–win situation, when we would work inside a company and let employees of the company participate in a project and understand the creative process. You can open eyes and widen the horizon. Some of the bosses understand that, but very few.

In other words selling contemporary music as an object for sponsorship is very difficult, even in Germany.

Christine Fischer is at the centre of Musik der Jahrhunderte. She looks upon herself as the 'mediator', the one point in the organization that holds every thread. She says that

> [...] I have the position to be responsible, to be the mediator. I am the Kunstvermittler (art mediator), it means to mediate between the artist (the creative artist like the composers and the executive artists, like the musicians), the financiers (like politicians, foundations and sponsors), and the audience. This is the field where the art manager is somehow in the centre.

Her way of getting the necessary support is to 'sell a beautiful idea'. Her way of getting funding is about understanding the foundation she is working

with, and then providing them with an idea she believes in, a concept they can't turn down. She says that

> [...] I don't convince a foundation to work with us or support us when I don't give them a beautiful idea, something which they can identify with. I have to understand something about the foundation, to know their goals. [...] To make projects happen means having a good idea or concept, talking to different people like artists, promoters and supporters, and adapting ideas or modifying a concept in the process of discussion and then bringing things together... This is what I love in this job: the big field of possibilities, and that you are the one who binds these things together.

Asking her about how she builds her organization, she answers that there is not a very structured plan behind it. She calls it a 'very Christine Fischer' behaviour, and by this she means that she looks for talented people. She says that she likes to attract people and then, as she says, to 'give them energy':

> [...] It is wonderful when the energies of the people fit together, then you are a strong team. And this is a very strong team – I like it that we have succeeded in making it strong.

But of course building teams and being on top of the organization give her some concerns. Her biggest is to get enough work for the singers. She feels the responsibility of keeping them busy, so that they can pay their bills. She says

> [...] If there are no jobs, there is no fee for the artists and no money to survive. I feel responsible for all the people working with us. It is hard to bear sometimes. They are my number one task.

It is difficult to work for a vocal ensemble, she says, because with an instrumental ensemble there are more possibilities. An instrumental ensemble is more flexible when it comes to the range of projects in which it can participate. And then, she says, there is quite sharp competition between the vocal ensembles of the world, which means that it is difficult to come to festivals two years in a row when there is a demand for a constant renewal in their programmes.

Christine Fischer is a very dedicated person. She works a lot, providing jobs for the singers and her staff, organizing a festival and other projects, always in touch with presenters, festivals and composers, finding funding through applications, and through political and business-related discussions. My impression is that there is a division between her and the singers when it comes to having the responsibility, but also the ability, to build these networks. When asking the singers if they think they have enough meetings

to discuss strategy and planning the future, some of them answer that they don't have enough of those meetings, but on the other hand they claim that such meetings are not really necessary. It seems that the way they have divided the responsibilities between Christine Fischer and the singers functions quite well.

Musik der Jahrhunderte has now been in existence since 1978, and Christine Fischer has been a part of it since 1985. It has grown to be a stable organization. In 2006 it organized the World New Music Festival[278] for the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), a responsibility that is a testimony to the organization's good reputation.

6.2 The ensemble, its members, and the turn towards a one-voice-per-part vocal ensemble

NVS started as a choir, founded by and conducted by Manfred Schreier. The process of becoming a vocal ensemble, without a conductor, was a dramatic shift for the ensemble, and when asking the singers about what may have been the most important event in the ensemble's history, they point to this. I will return to this later on.

Two of the singers have been replaced since 2000. The mezzosoprano Stephanie Field has been replaced by the Dutch mezzosoprano Truike van der Poel, and the soprano Angelika Luz has been replaced by Sarah Maria Sun. The seven singers of NVS are the core of the ensemble, but the ensemble is not restricted to do projects with all seven singers present. When I visited them for the first time, they were rehearsing the opera *Prinzessin Ulla und die schöne Lau*, with music by Thomas Stiegler and libretto by Manfred Weiß. Only three of the singers were involved in this opera. They are very flexible when it comes to the number of singers in projects, which makes them flexible when it comes to selecting the projects in which they can be involved. It also helps that the singers have different levels of engagement with the ensemble. Some of them, according to Daniel Gloger, are engaged up to 70–80 per cent, while he had at the time I interviewed him,[279] a much

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278   http://www.wnmf2006.de/index.php?PageID=9 (Viewed 17.01.2013).

279   These interviews took place 9 June 2009 and 3 May 2010.

lower level of engagement. None of the singers work only for the ensemble, and all of the singers work as freelancers in addition to singing in NVS. The amount of freelance work varies from singer to singer, meaning that some of the singers rely more heavily on the ensemble work than others. This is a situation in which conflicts sometimes arise. I will discuss this later, in Chapter 11, but will only say here that because the personnel resources vary a little from project to project, and because they have this policy of letting the singers work as freelancers besides singing in the ensemble, of course the administrative load gets a little tougher.

6.2.1   The members

NVS consists of seven regularly employed singers. The ensemble can be expanded if the project requires it, as for instance with the Stockhausen *Sternklang* project I participated in during September 2010. These seven singers are:

Sarah Maria Sun, soprano

Sarah joined the ensemble in 2006/2007. She studied lieder and opera singing at the *Hochschule für Musik und Tanz* in Köln. Since then she has specialized in contemporary music, working both in NVS and as a freelance singer, being one of the most active in the freelance arena during recent years. She says herself that in her freelance work, most of her repertoire is contemporary, with only 30–40 per cent what she calls 'conventional'.

Susanne Leitz-Lorey, soprano

Susanne is one of the singers who have been with NVS for the longest. She studied classical singing at the *Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart*, where she focused on lieder and opera. She says that she has always sung, and always had a connection with church music, growing up with choral singing at church. Manfred Schreier took her onboard for one of his NVS projects just after the ensemble was established. The first piece she remembers doing was Brian Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study III* (1974), a piece for 16 voices, percussion and electronics. Susanne also works as a freelancer and has a family.

Truike van der Poel, mezzo-soprano

Truike is one of the newest members of NVS, joining in 2007. She studied singing and choral conducting in Den Haag and Rotterdam. She says herself that she has virtually no background as a singer, and that she decided to become a singer quite late. She undertook her first singing lesson at the age of 21, but then focused on choral conducting, leaving singing for some years. Around the age of 30, she took up singing again, in choirs and other ensembles, focusing mostly on early music. But she says that she discovered that her voice was suited for contemporary music, and that singing contemporary music was more interesting compared to singing only choral parts in Bach cantatas. Truike has always regarded herself as an ensemble singer.

Daniel Gloger, countertenor

Daniel studied singing with Donald Litaker at the *Hochschule für Musik* in Karlsruhe. Daniel joined NVS in 1994. He is one of the members who also performs a lot outside the ensemble as a freelancer. At first he only sang around 15 to 20 per cent of his time in NVS, because there was, he says, not much repertoire for his countertenor voice. But when the ensemble changed to a smaller one-voice-per-part ensemble, ensemble work took up more of his time, probably because more and more composers began writing especially for the ensemble. Within a few years, NVS took up around 70 to 80 per cent of his artistic life.

Martin Nagy, tenor

Martin is one of three singers who have been in NVS since the start. He studied school music from 1982 at the *Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst* in Stuttgart, with violin as his main instrument. He later on moved on to singing studies, a switch that was quite successful, first of all because he was, according to himself, very lucky with his singing professor. He was then engaged more and more frequently with *liederabends* and as a soloist in oratorios, and in the end his studies focused on lieder and opera, around six years in all. From 1984 he has been with NVS, and he has worked as a freelancer since then except for a one-year engagement in an opera company.

Guillermo Anzorena, baritone

Guillermo was born in Mendoza, Argentina. He studied singing at the *Universidad Nacional de Cuyo*. At the beginning of the 1990s he won a couple of prizes that made it possible for him to travel to Europe and study singing there. It was his love for German music that brought him to Germany. From 1994 he studied singing at the *Hochschule für Musik* in Karlsruhe, focusing first on lieder and opera. He joined NVS in 2000.

Andreas Fischer, bass

Andreas Fischer is Christine Fischer's brother. He studied school music and singing in Stuttgart, but he has also studied singing in Vienna. He is the only singer of the ensemble who has stressed to me that he was already interested in contemporary music in his studies, and he expressed frustration about not being able to sing so much of this genre during his study period. He became a member of NVS when the ensemble had been going for a couple of years, and has been a member since then.

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These seven people form NVS, and they work closely together every day, with almost 300 rehearsals a year, 50–60 concerts and between 30 and 40 world premieres of new pieces every year. When the singers talk about the group they use words like *colleagues*, *friends* and *family*. They are knitted closely together and they depend upon each other in their singing, sharing responsibility for each other's living.

6.2.2   The turn towards a one-voice-per-part vocal ensemble

Manfred Schreier founded NVS in 1984, and they were a group of around 12–16 singers, according to them only doing soloistic music, one voice per part. All the projects were conducted and rehearsed by Manfred Schreier. At first there were not that many projects, but the amount of work increased during the 1990s. They ended up having around five to ten new pieces a year, quite a lot of work considering these were contemporary music projects. The years between 1996 and 2000 were much busier, travelling around in Europe. They felt the economic challenge of paying up to 16 singers, and with my experience with festivals, it must have been quite challenging to balance

those demands and the singers' needs with the economical capabilities of the festivals they visited. The solution seemed to be to do productions using fewer singers.

At the same time, many of the singers in the group were finishing or had just finished their education. As they went through more and more projects they developed more and more singing experience. With this experience the singers also developed their own musicality, and they developed more and more trust in their own musical initiative. These singers were building their own solo careers and soon it became more difficult to put all the musical decisions into the hands of a conductor, especially when they were working more and more with pieces that were written for solo voices. As Christine Fischer pointed out, these contemporary music projects took a lot of rehearsal, and these increasingly independent singers struggled with the fact that they always had to let the same conductor decide about the music they were doing.

The ensemble started to do projects with fewer singers, and it became obvious that they wanted to make decisions themselves, and that it was absurd to have a conductor when there were only four singers. It seemed inevitable that the changes should be made, as if they had a conductor who had made himself unnecessary. He had created singers who didn't need him, which had become clear as they performed more pieces for fewer singers. For a while they did some music with few singers and no conductor, and then some with more singers and a conductor, but this transitional period did not last for long. The singers had got a taste for having their hands on the steering wheel, and they enjoyed it immensely. One singer explains it like this:

> [...] we saw... it was in the Sciarrino's *L'alibi della parola* for four men. This was the first piece we tried without a conductor. It was like an explosion, like a ... a development for us [...] it was an idea to try more pieces like that, without a conductor, like a chamber ensemble, like a string quartet or something like that. Not only the position you are sitting or standing in your own way, and you always have to look at the conductor. But now you have the feeling of being on duty for the ensemble. To bring your own ideas and to have yours ears open for the others and not only for your voice, and it was a really wonderful development.

It was a situation where the singers were asking themselves about what to do. Should they leave the ensemble or should they step towards even greater independence, meaning that they had to fire their conductor, the

founder of the ensemble? They were now only around seven or eight singers in the ensemble, and they decided to cut the strings tying them to Manfred Schreier. It was a kind of a revolution in the ensemble, and obviously a hard time for the conductor. From what the singers told me about the process, it was a difficult time and a tense situation, which of course is quite natural. From what I understand, it became Christine Fischer's responsibility to lead the process on behalf of the singers. It seems to have created a troubling time for the relationship between Schreier and Fischer, not just because the process created a new situation for the singers, but also because it put Christine Fischer in a more central role. For Manfred Schreier, the founder of the ensemble, I would think it must have been difficult to experience his own ensemble turning against him. But the singers, and Christine Fischer, are clear that it was necessary and also the result of a long process. It meant that they could take greater care of their own musical situation.

It is interesting to note more generally that this growing independence of the singers in a choir can be the starting point of new constellations and ensembles. My own Nordic Voices was formed in the same way, when some of the singers in The Norwegian Soloists' Choir wanted to have more to say in musical choices and so chose to form a new group where they could do exactly that. My observation is that also others might have the same founding history. The group Amarcord from Leipzig emerged from the choir of the Thomas church, and in England almost everyone in vocal ensembles has some kind of background in a choir. The singers all say that it is good to be able to decide on musical issues for themselves, and that it is interesting that these groups do not often emerge from higher education institutions. It is mainly singers with a choral background who, either through their musical education or through their growing experience, want to have their say on the musical choices being made.

6.2.3   NVS and its place in German musical life

Musical life in Germany is very rich. Its musical history has been immensely rich, and the tradition for what we now call 'classical music' is both long and very strong. At the same time, when Germans themselves present the musical landscape in their country, they use the word 'diversity'.[280] The German political system, based on federalism, has provided what Höppner,

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280   Höppner 2011 p. 15.

in his article "Musical Life in Germany" (2011), calls a 'kaleidoscopic cultural diversity',[281] a clear division between the federal government's contribution to musical life and the states' contributions and the different municipalities' contributions. Totalling around € 8 billion every year, the richness in German cultural life is provided for, and on every level. Spending on cultural activities amounts to roughly 1.66 per cent of all public expenditure, and in addition there are many grants from the private sector, including donations, membership fees and funds from foundations and sponsors.[282] Altogether German musical life has a strong basis on which to finance its activities, although Germany, as with other countries in Europe, has experienced a serious setback during the financial crisis that began in 2009. It is estimated that Germany has around 7 million amateur musicians, about 173,000 ensembles in every area of amateur music making, 133 professional orchestras and 83 opera houses. The music industry is one of the country's major business sectors, amounting to roughly € 6.2 billion (2008). The industry employs around 26,400 persons distributed on around 11,400 different companies, making the German musical industry the fourth biggest in the world.[283]

NVS is mentioned in the 'contemporary music' chapter, written by Fricke, in the book about German music life (2011, see above). Germany is one of the biggest centres of serious contemporary music today, if not *the* biggest. The *Donaueschinger Musiktage*,[284] founded in 1921, takes place annually and is probably the world's largest festival for contemporary music, probably the most prestigious as well. Festivals like the *Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik*[285] and the ECLAT festival,[286] organized by Musik der Jahrhunderte, are also important in the world of contemporary music. There are numerous ensembles in Germany dedicated to contemporary music, some of which base their activity almost entirely on contemporary music. In 2005 and 2006 these ensembles premiered around 1200 new works.[287]

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281 Ibid. p. 15.

282 Ibid. p. 16.

283 Ibid. p. 17.

284 http://www.swr.de/swr2/donaueschingen/englische–version/–/id=3503406/u05a0m/index.html (Viewed 08.02.2013).

285 http://www.kulturforum–witten.de/kulturbuero/veranstaltungen/wittener–tage–fuer–neue–kammermusik.html (Viewed 08.02.2013).

286 http://www.eclat.org (Viewed 08.02.2013).

287 Fricke 2011 p. 175.

They include some of the world's most famous contemporary groups, including Ensemble Modern,[288] musikFabrik,[289] ensemble recherche,[290] Kammerensemble Neue Musik Berlin[291] and NVS. The public radio companies in Germany report regularly on contemporary music, and some are entirely devoted to new music.[292] It is interesting that Fricke (2011) observes that although there are many activities associated with contemporary music in the various musical institutes, these activities are

> [...] seldom organized so as to create a special degree in contemporary music and are rarely gathered into a separate contemporary music department.[293]

He stresses that those activities that take place rely on the commitment of the institutions' teaching staff and students.[294] It is quite a contrast to the high level of activity in the contemporary field of German musical life, which tells a story about the complex interaction between musical activities and education in a country with such a long tradition.

Contemporary music occupies many musicians in Germany, and a number of festivals, ensembles, radio companies, publications and even funding institutes, scholarships and grants are dedicated to contemporary music, and it is within this complex environment NVS works.

6.3 For the love of it

The people who work with and sing in Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart are extremely proud of their ensemble. They are all quite confident that they have found a natural place within German musical life, and they are very proud of the results they have gained since they started in 1984. In 2006 Musik der Jahrhunderte organized the *World New Music Festival*[295] in cooperation with the *German Association of New Music* and the *International*

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288 http://www.ensemble–modern.com (Viewed 08.02.2013).

289 http://musikfabrik.eu/index.html (Viewed 08.02.2013).

290 http://www.ensemble–recherche.de (Viewed 08.02.2013).

291 http://www.kammerensemble.de (Viewed 08.02.2013).

292 Fricke 2011 p. 175.

293 Ibid. p. 178.

294 Ibid. p. 178.

295 http://www.wnmf2006.de (Viewed 08.02.2013).

Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), which shows the position Musik der Jahrhunderte, NVS and Christine Fischer hold in Germany. Of course, the period around the year 2000 was immensely difficult, especially with the conflict and split between the ensemble and their former conductor Manfred Schreier. The split recreated NVS as the ensemble it is today: a solo voice ensemble performing a significant number of new works each year, a hugely active ensemble.

6.3.1   The official presentation of NVS

On their website, NVS present themselves in this way:

> They are researchers, discoverers, adventurers and idealists. Their partners are specialist ensembles and radio orchestras, opera houses and the free theater scene, electronic studios and countless organizers of contemporary music festivals and concert series in the world.

> The Neue Vocalsolisten established as an ensemble specializing in the interpretation of contemporary vocal music in 1984. Founded under the artistic management of Musik der Jahrhunderte, the vocal chamber ensemble has been artistically independent since the year 2000. Each of the seven concert and opera soloists, with a collective range reaching from coloratura soprano over countertenor to "basso profondo", shapes the work on chamber music and the co-operation with the composers and other interpreters through his/her distinguished artistic creativity.

> According to the musical requirements a pool of specialist singers complements the basic team. The ensemble's chief interest lies on research: exploring new sounds, new vocal techniques and new forms of articulation, whereby great emphasis is placed on establishing a dialogue with composers. Each year, the ensemble premiers about twenty new works. Central to the group's artistic concept are the areas of music theatre and the interdisciplinary work with electronics, video, visual arts and literature, as well as the juxtaposition of contrasting elements found in ancient and contemporary music.[296]

As I understand this, these are singers who are researchers, adventurers and idealists, making chamber music and co-operating with composers in the exploration of new sounds within music theatre, electronics, visual arts and literature. It is not so easy to understand what is meant by 'the juxtaposition of contrasting elements found in ancient and contemporary music', but nevertheless these two genres are mentioned as their main repertoire focus,

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296 http://www.neuevocalsolisten.de/ensemble–en.html (Viewed 14.02.2013).

and when looking at their concert list, that contemporary music is their main repertoire focus, with some early music works now and then.

The 'idealist' stamp needs to be commented on. All the singers earn money in the ensemble: they don't work for free, so every concert is paid for and every rehearsal is paid for. Of course, working with contemporary music often means that the scores they are learning are more intricate and therefore require more work than if they were to learn a piece by, say, Brahms, but they have created a working environment in which that is financially possible. So to what might the 'idealist' stamp refer? It might mean that they don't feel that they get the attention they think they deserve, or that the work that they do is not fully recognized within classical circles. It could be that they feel that working with contemporary music in itself demands an effort that traditional classical musicians don't fully understand, or it could imply the use of techniques that might be rejected as strange or even ugly. Maybe the 'idealist' stamp says something about the way contemporary music performers regard themselves as outsiders, working outside the classical establishment. And, for the singers of NVS, the 'idealist' stamp might also refer to the fact that they have chosen not to have a full-time career as a soloist in order to devote themselves to singing in an ensemble. The 'idealist' remark suggests that there is a sacrifice involved in singing with NVS, and it could be that this dimension of being in the group is involved at many levels in the group's work.

NVS were featured in a magazine published in connection with the Stuttgart *World New Music Festival* in 2006, which was arranged by Musik der Jahrhunderte (see above). The two first sections of the article were dedicated to saying why the ensemble should not be called a *choir*, so this must have been important for the group. The following section of the article explains the 'idealism' in the group:

> [...] The ensemble has always immensely enjoyed exploring the white areas on the musical map, exposing themselves to the incalculable and uncomfortable, striving to come to terms with new technical demands, rehearsing without looking at a watch and the pay scales. Soprano Angelika Luz once called this her worsening addiction to "the deciphering of new pieces", facing the challenge and time and again developing new techniques for rehearsing. This is the kind of idealism the Neue Vocalsolisten repeatedly treat themselves to: it is possible to see twenty rehearsals scheduled for fifteen minutes of music.[297]

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297 Eckerle 2006 p. 61.

Again, there is a dimension of sacrifice involved in the group's work, a sacrifice that they would not have to think of if they were involved in other repertoire genres. The presentation by Annette Eckerle, who works with PR in the Musik der Jahrhunderte organization, also emphasizes the ensemble's dualism in repertoire; that they not only do new music, but also can do early music as well, not 'pretending that the modern era exists in splendid isolation'.[298] The article also emphasizes that NVS cultivates special affection for Italian compositions 'marked by their own culture of cantabile'.[299] This is quite interesting because it shows that the singers have a traditional, operatic background, which serves as their vocal-aesthetic platform.

6.3.2 Together towards a common goal? The singers look at themselves

When asking the singers how they look at the ensemble, whether they experience everyone sharing the same goals, their answers come quite close to the official view of NVS. One of the singers puts it this way:

> [...] The most important goal is to be a good partner for good composers. To work together with them and to develop with them a good way to compose good vocal music.

They are saying that working together with composers is important, although I do not know how often they actually are involved in the composing process itself. Another singer says this:

> [...] I don't like so much that the composer comes to us and asks, 'what can you do very well?' I like more the general thing, that they write a piece and we see what we can make from it.

But it seems that the developing of new ways of singing, being there for composers and, one way or the other, being a part of a creative process, is a primary part of the singers' perception of the group's main goals. Another singer also stresses this, coming back to the sacrifice, the idealism, that lies in the group's work:

> [...] to be a part of creating new music, and a new repertoire for voices. Because there must be people who offer themselves as interpreters for creating any music and repertoire. We try to be open for any sound or noises that composers propose. It is about serving yourself, you put yourself

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298 Ibid. p. 62.

299 Ibid. p. 63.

on a tablet and say 'there you are, so do whatever you like, and I will do my very best'.

But still it is the development of new pieces, new ways of singing that is important. One singer says that they want

> [...] to be curious for new things. And I think also to be serious with the scores. We try to do our best for the composer and the score.

They tell the story of this 'sacrifice', that even if they do not like the piece very much at first, they will do their best to understand and even to help the piece improve. There is no doubt that the singers think of NVS as a working place where the music is at the centre of attention. The singers don't underestimate their role in the process, and maybe this is the part of the creative process they see themselves as part of. As one singer says, sometimes they are the mediums that the music floats through, and they often make the music better than it originally was when it came from the composer's hand:

> [...] then we say: 'Ok, we don't like it, we don't know how the piece will work'. But we first have to take it very seriously and try our very best to help the music or the composer, and then we can discuss if it was a good piece or if we should do it again. But first, yes, to be honest with the scores. I think that is the most important thing.

The singers don't look at themselves only as mediums: although they say that they are there for the composers, they really think that they can find new ways in the music that the composers may not have thought of themselves. One singer says that

> [...] The goal is to understand the composer's will, sometimes even better than the composer himself did. So we try never to give a piece away because it is not perfectly written. [...] we try to understand every composer's will and to invent a new instrument for every composer, so it sounds really different.

This singer also underlines the 'idealism' in the group's work, by pointing out that

> [...] Our goal is not to do music that everybody likes, but to try to do music that we like, and try to do music that we think is important and should be done, even if the public or the musical scene is not ready for it.

The singers of NVS seem to agree on the main goals of the group, and they look upon themselves as a group for composers, for new music, for developing new ways of singing.

6.3.3   For the love of it

It is no doubt that the singers of NVS love what they do. They are extremely proud of their group, and they think that it has something special, something that makes the group stick out amongst the many others working today. One of the singers says that

> […] Now we are really like an ensemble. In the beginning we were much more like a choir too, sometimes, and it was not important to have pieces that were written for us. Now we are really trying to do something that is special and unique.

One of the other singers says almost the same, that there has been a good development and that they are now something quite unique:

> […] what has changed during the last 10 years, is that we are now very soloistic and extremely virtuosic. Before, that didn't exist, really. We are really a special group, which allows composers to compose in a very special way, what they couldn't do before. Because there was no group who were able to sing this extremely virtuosic music, like Aperghis or also Sciarrino. […] In a way we've been the first group who did this in a very artistic way. The composers know that 'I can write it like that, because they know how to sing it'.

Leaving aside the question of whether groups that existed before NVS, such as The Hilliard Ensemble, Electric Phoenix and others, were less able to sing this music, the quotations do speak of devoted singers, devoted to their group and to the music they sing.

NVS have managed to create a group that works at the most prestigious concert scenes and festivals, together with the most important ensembles, conductors and composers in the world. They are all passionate singers who seem to love what they do, and at the same time think that they have a unique ensemble in their hands. They feel that they are dedicated to the music and the developing of new vocal music, and they perform many concerts per year, premiering many new pieces. Their discography consists, according to their own website,[300] of 11 recordings.

This love of contemporary music is something they all stress. Christine Fischer also puts this forward when describing why she continues to work with the ensemble, the Musik der Jahrhunderte organization and the ECLAT festival. In an online interview with *Neue Musikzeitung* she talks about the joy she feels when she manages to open up the lives of new audience

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300 http://www.neuevocalsolisten.de/diskografie.html (Viewed 13.04.2014).

members to contemporary music. She talks about it with a huge engagement and extreme dedication, and it explains her inner motives for working in this field.[301] At the same time, the processes around the firing of the former conductor show a leader who can show an uncompromising and tough side that has been useful in the job of leading and managing these organizations.

On their website, NVS speak of themselves as 'researchers'. One could argue that in an academic sense they are not exactly researchers.[302] But the different directions of artistic research do fit a group like NVS. I see this as a sign of a group of people who are proud of what they do, who think that they are in the front line of contemporary music, doing music that has not been heard before for the sake of art and music itself.

6.4 NVS' counterpart – The Hilliard Ensemble

When talking to the singers of NVS asking them who they see as their counterparts within the vocal ensemble practice, they often put forward ensembles within the English vocal ensemble practice. One of the ensembles they mentioned was The Hilliard Ensemble. There are some reasons why NVS do this, and I will explain this further in Chapter 7, although underlining here that it has to do with singing styles, first of all. In this present study I draw in some points of comparison from the work of other ensembles, and first of all The Hilliard Ensemble. Since also NVS put The Hilliard Ensemble forward as their counterparts, I will use some space here to present this ensemble as well. This small presentation is based on the information they share on their official website, and also on interviews with the members of the ensemble, including the two interviews I conducted with Rogers Covey-Crump and John Potter. To my knowledge there is no official written history of the ensemble.

The Hilliard Ensemble was founded in 1974[303], and is an all male quartet consisting of the four members David James, Rogers Covey-Crump, Steven Harrold, and Gordon Jones. David James is the only on of the four members who has been a part of the group since the start. According to their

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301 http://www.nmz.de/online/dynamik–aesthetik–energie–andreas–kolb–im–gespraech–mit–christine–fischer–ueber–das–stuttgart (Viewed 16.04.2014).

302 http://www.neuevocalsolisten.de/ensemble–en.html (Viewed 15.02.2013).

303 Shelley 2014.

website, The Hilliard Ensemble works within the fields of both early and new music.[304] According to Steven Harrold in an interview with the radio program *Shades of Classic*, there have only been five changes in personnel during the years the ensemble has existed, and he underlines this as one of the reasons the group has been able to keep together for such a long time. The last change of personnel was the changing of John Potter to Steven Harrold in 2001.[305] The four members of the group all have a background in the church music system in England. David James was a choral scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, and later joined the choir of Westminster Abbey, working as a soloist and ensemble singer from 1978.[306]Rogers Covey-Crump was a boy chorister at New College, Oxford, and later he became a tenor lay-clerk at St Albans Abbey. He has a diploma in organ from Royal College of Music, and also now works as a soloist and ensemble singer.[307]Steven Harrold has a background from St Pauls, St. Albans Abbey and Westminster Abbey,[308] and Gordon Jones has a background from the Cathedral of York, working now also as both a soloist and ensemble singer.[309]Their choral institution background is something that distinguishes the members of The Hilliard Ensemble from NVS, since the members of NVS all have a University degree in singing. This is a feature I find interesting, and I will return to this later. The Hilliard Ensemble has a very active schedule. In the three months of October to December 2014, they performed some 49 concerts; the concert on December 20, at Wigmore Hall, in London, was their final concert.[310] Their recordings have been released on *EMI*, *ECM* and *Coro*, and their collaboration with the Norwegian saxophone player Jan Garbarek has been extremely successful. David James calls the encounter with Jan Garbarek as 'the most magical musical moment in my entire 40-year career with The Hilliard Ensemble'.[311] He continues, saying that one misconception about the ensemble is that they are an 'early music' ensemble. According to James, they have sought to combine the ancient with the modern from their

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304 http://www.hilliardensemble.demon.co.uk/biography.html (Viewed 04.12.2014).

305 http://www.mts.net/~jiverson/ckuw/favs/hilliard.html (Viewed 04.12.2014).

306 http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/James-David.htm (Viewed 04.12.2014).

307 http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Covey-Crump-Rogers.htm (Viewed 04.12.2014).

308 http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Harrold-Steven.htm (Viewed 04.12.2014).

309 http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Jones-Gordon.htm (Viewed 04.12.2014).

310 http://www.hilliardensemble.demon.co.uk/concerts.html (Viewed 04.12.2014).

311 James 2014.

very first concert. Their vocal range – alto, two tenors and a bass – has made them rule out the Classical and Romantic repertoire, and since they did not want to become restricted in singing only music from the Renaissance and Middle Ages, they have been committed to seeking out composers willing to write new works for them.[312]

There are some obvious differences between The Hilliard Ensemble and NVS. First of all, The Hilliard Ensemble consists exclusively of men and they are fewer, which will make the group dynamics a little bit different (I will return to that in Chapter 11). Then there are some differences that are less obvious; for instance there are some very significant differences in rehearsal patterns (see Chapter 10). And, as already mentioned, there are differences in their personal backgrounds, especially when it comes to their training as singers (I will come back to that in Chapter 7). I also interpret that the pointing to The Hilliard Ensemble as the NVS counterpart possibly points to a difference between an English and a German singing style, where the English is characterized as 'pure', 'clean' and 'vibrato-less', whilst the German is characterized as being more 'round', 'full' and with more vibrato. I will deal with this also in Chapter 7.

6.5   Conclusions

NVS is a vocal ensemble with what I interpret to be a prominent place in German musical life. The ensemble is a highly active one, and their repertoire divides between early and contemporary music, but with a clear bias towards the latter. The ensemble consists of seven singers and an administration led by Christine Fischer, who also runs the organization Musik der Jahrhunderte and the ECLAT festival. She is responsible for the financing of the ensemble and for selling programs and concerts to concert venues and festivals. NVS started as a choir, founded by the German director Manfred Schreier. During his time, the singers grew more independent and apparently wanted to have more to say on musical issues. This created a conflict that ended in the singers breaking up with their former director, continuing as a vocal ensemble without a dedicated leader. This process of independence is something that can be seen in other ensembles as well, with the formation of the ensemble motivated by choral singers gaining

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312   Ibid.

more confidence and wanting to have more to say on musical choices. NVS is a vocal ensemble occupied with first of all contemporary music. They have an official view of themselves as explorers and researchers, implying that there is an 'idealist' stamp to what they do as a group, maybe suggesting that there is a 'sacrifice' dimension involved in their work. I have suggested some reasons to why this could be. NVS points to the English vocal ensemble tradition in general and specifically the group The Hilliard Ensemble as their counterparts within vocal ensemble practice. Since I during this thesis compare my findings from NVS with especially The Hilliard Ensemble, I have made a small presentation of this group, pointing to some differences between the two ensembles. I will come back to these differences more in detail later.

'I was worried about that one, I must confess', said Roger, finally. 'Well done.' Catherine blushed and concealed her throat behind one hand. 'I just seem to be able to hit higher and higher notes all the time,' she said. The silence moved in again, as soon as she'd finished speaking, so she pressed on, making conversation to fill the void. 'Maybe if I'd had one of those Svengali mothers pushing me when I was young I could have been a coloratura by now.'

(Faber, 2002)

7   Soloist or chorister or something in between – the voice as an ensemble instrument

As I wrote in Chapter 5, there seems to have been a change in singing style during the 'Romantic' period. We know for example that the lowered larynx position,[313] a feature that led to a darker colouring of the singing voice, was considered a novelty in the 1830s. One of the first references to this feature is in Garcia's *Treatise 1*, where he names the sound you achieve with a low larynx position as *sombre timbre*.[314] Before this, according to John Potter, singing had been much more like the speaking voice, with a larynx position that was significantly higher. A higher larynx position leads to a greater distinction between the vowels. The lower position will, on the other hand, give a darker colour to the voice but also stiffen the vocal chords, giving them a bit more resistance against higher air pressure from the lungs; this in turn enables the voice to produce sounds of greater volume.[315] As explained in Chapter 5, the greater volume was important since orchestras and instruments grew in size and volume, and singers needed to produce a sound that could penetrate the sound of these 'new' instruments. A low larynx position also enhances the singer's formant

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313   Potter 1998 p. 53.

314   Garcia 1841 p. 29.

315   Potter 1998 p. 53.

region (around 3 kHz), especially for men, allowing the development of a more penetrating voice.[316] This development of the modern voice, as John Potter calls it,[317] stood in contrast to the singing style before the nineteenth century, although the transition was almost certainly a slow one. Another development in technique around the mid-nineteenth century was the extension of the chest register, especially for tenor singers. One singer who was associated with the lowered larynx technique was the French singer Gilbert-Louis Duprez, and it is said that he amazed both the audience and Rossini himself at the first performance of *Wilhelm Tell* by singing the top C in Arnold's Act IV aria in the chest register.[318]

One side effect of this 'new' technique of singing was the increasing use of vibrato. There are indications that the use of vibrato became more usual from the mid-nineteenth century and that it continued well into the twentieth century. As John Potter explains, it is difficult to say anything about the use of vibrato before the turn of the nineteenth century, since it is rarely discussed, and when it is discussed, it is difficult to know exactly what the sources mean.[319] As mentioned in Chapter 5, the first recordings, made around 1900, show singers such as Adelina Patti, using a style with solid vibrato control. From then until World War II, but especially after 1945, there seems to be a sharp division between singers with a non-vibrato or vibrato-controlled vocal aesthetic. The issue of vibrato control is vigorously debated within vocal ensemble circles today.

As I said in chapter 5, the early music and contemporary movement after World War II was, amongst other things, a reaction to 'Romantic' singing, and, generally speaking, the vocal ensembles of today seem to place their own singing within this aesthetic line. This division in the vocal aesthetic has created a division between singers dedicated wholly to solo singing and those dedicated to ensemble or choral singing.

This chapter deals with questions about the vocal aesthetics at work in the singing of NVS. It looks at how they define their singing and how they compare it to that of the other ensembles in the world. I look at what is meant by their definition of themselves as 'classical singers' and I discuss

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316   Sundberg 1987 p. 121.

317   Potter 1998 p. 47.

318   Ibid. p. 56.

319   Ibid. p. 56.

the two different 'classical' singing modes, presenting a model of ensemble singing as a balancing act between singing as a soloist and singing as a chorister. I then discuss the issue of vibrato control, comparing recordings by NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble, and then presenting a model of the singing of NVS. This chapter is mainly based on interviews with the members of the group. I also present a sound analysis of two recordings by NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble, as an illustration to some of the findings I present.

7.1   NVS – classical singers

The singers of NVS define themselves as classical singers. They emphasize that classical singing and training is the platform that defines their singing style and their vocal aesthetics, and from which all their other singing styles have developed. When asked if they have a common platform, one of the singers stated that NVS asserted that it was

> […] good classical singers who use their voices in a classical way.

When asked what kind of singing training the singers of NVS have in common, another singer said

> […] Classical training. And of course we sing classical music, we have to do that to stay fit vocally. Everybody does that.

All the singers of NVS have an education at university level; they have all studied singing at some point. Three of them started with what they call 'school music' education at a university. One of them has studied choral conducting, but the majority have studied opera and lieder singing. Five have a background in choirs, whether church, boys' or other, concert *a cappella* choirs. One of them has some training at university level on another instrument (violin).

When the singers of NVS try to define the term 'classical', or try to describe how they have been educated, they often mention the word 'opera'. One of them stated that the education system is mostly focused on opera singing, and said that it was so because of 'tradition' and that many students dream of a career in opera. One of the other singers said that the basis of their singing 'is always the opera voice', also stating that

> […] we all studied bel canto technique. So, our technique is an operatic technique.

Many of the singers of NVS stress that, although they have an operatic education as a platform, they also have another way of using their voice. This is not something they have learned in school. Contemporary music and the sound qualities they produce within that genre are not something their teachers have touched on at all. One of them said to me

> [...] we never even talked about singing contemporary music, singing special techniques with the voice or something like that. I think the goal was mostly to prepare the students for opera singing.

This means that the special voice effects used by the singers of NVS have been learned by the singers themselves. Singing in a vocal ensemble and what to do with their voices in a vocal ensemble setting, are other issues that have not been touched on during their education. As one of the singers told me when I asked what kind of attitude their vocal teachers had had to ensemble singing during their education:

> [...] There's no attitude, I think. Well, I've never met a teacher who was thinking about ensemble singing.

This attitude is something I recognize as well. During my education, my experience was that none of my teachers were interested in or talked about how to use the voice in an ensemble setting. The question is whether they should be or need to be interested in the subject. The same singer in NVS said this to the question whether a voice teacher has to consider ensemble singing:

> [...] I don't expect a teacher to teach me ensemble singing. I want him to teach me singing, meaning learning a good and useful technique ... When you have a good technique you know how to sing in an ensemble, you know how to work with the technique ...

As I see it, this means that they want a teacher to teach them the basics about singing and singing techniques, but they also admit that there is a difference between singing in an ensemble and singing as a soloist. So, if there are certain technical issues on how to sing in an ensemble, the question in my opinion remains, who should take responsibility to teach it to the students, if it is not the teacher's responsibility?

7.1.1   Classical Singing

The word 'classical' is used to describe both a period in music history, and a quality found in a vast range genres, in musical styles spanning Gregorian

chant, symphonies, chamber music, contemporary and avant-garde to opera and music theatre.[320] The term seems to have come into daily use in England around the beginning of 1800, where we can find descriptions of Bach's music as 'classical', although we can also find the term during the 18th century, where it stands for

> [...] a particular canon of works in performance distinct from other music in terms primarily of quality, but also to some extent age ...[321]

When the singers of NVS label themselves as classical singers, and say that classical singing is the basis for their singing style, they point to their education, where a particular vocal technique is the centre of attention. If we look at the plan for singing studies at the Academy of Music in Oslo, the taught repertoire spans from the Renaissance to the present time, but there is a gravitation point in the repertoire, the period 1700–1900. Is it possible to say something in general about what this classical voice technique is, and what kind of technical elements that dominates this kind of singing? To say something about it, I have turned to four of the most widely used books within the classical voice literature.

I will focus on trying to find some common ground in the descriptions of vocal technique in the books by Sundberg (*The Science of the Singing Voice*), Brown (*Discover you voice*), Miller (*The structure of singing*) and Titze (*Principles of Voice Production*). Where the books by Sundberg and Titze are primarily about how the voice works and the scientific side of voice production, that by Brown is rather about how to get it to work, while Miller's book falls somewhere in between the two approaches. What they all share is a way of looking at the voice as an instrument with three parts: that which takes care of breathing and the compression of air (the lungs and the breathing muscles); that which vibrates when affected by the stream of air, making the sound (the vocal chords), called an oscillator; and that which resonates the sound produced by the vocal chords in the larynx, referred to as the resonators (the space above the larynx and the mouth and nasal cavities). The first part of the instrument, the breathing and compression apparatus, has the task of providing a steady and always correct air flow and pressure for the vocal chords' movement, depending on the sound they need to produce. Sundberg says that

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320   Heartz and Brown 2012 p. 1.

321   Ibid. p. 1.

[...] the control of subglottic pressure must be very precise in singing.[322]

And Oren Brown says this about breath control:

[...] Breathing exercises are designed to bring reflexive action under cortical control so that it will be ready and responsive to the demands of singing.[323]

It means that in these books, the breathing and compressing part of the voice works as a controlling apparatus, providing compressed air flow according to the demands of the workload on the vocal chords.

The sound produced by voice is coloured by the two remaining parts of the vocal instrument, the sound producing part of the voice (the oscillator, that is, the vocal chords) and the resonating part of the instrument (the throat, mouth and nose cavities). The way a singer adjusts these parts, affects the timbre of the sound produced. As a singer adjusts these parts, the formant spectrum of the sound will change, and these adjustments of timbre are the most explicit way we can differentiate the sounds in different genres and singing styles.

There are some features of classical singing that are taught and are present in the literature, which define what classical singing is and at the same time have a great impact on what we call the 'classical' singing sound. First among them is the low larynx position, a feature mentioned in almost all the literature I have come across. The authors discuss the extent to which the larynx should be lowered, whether it should be as low as possible at all times, whether you should also use a lowered position during tone production in a high register, and so on. Mentioned in Garcia's treatise on singing, the lowered larynx position is discussed in much of the literature. Oren Brown, for instance, says this about it:

[...] It is impossible to later to develop the operatic or classical tone if the larynx is raised.[324]

Sundberg has the same approach as Brown; the lowered larynx is the 'default' position within classical voice production. He quotes a study by Shipp and Izdebski (1975) that found that the larynx position is much lower during phonation with male classical singers than with male non-singers.[325] The study showed that when the phonation frequency was raised, the

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322 Sundberg 1987 p. 37.

323 Brown 1996 p. 31.

324 Ibid. p. 54.

325 Sundberg 1987 p. 99.

larynxes of the non-singers were raised, while the larynxes of the singers were kept in a low position.[326] Sundberg says that the lowered larynx position is good because it helps with the lengthening of the vocal chords.[327] He talks about a larynx position that is 'comfortably low'[328] at all phonation frequencies, and he stresses the significance of the effect this lower larynx position has on the walls of the pharynx (the tissue in the resonance space above the vocal chords), enhancing the resonance space.[329] Oren Brown also stresses the lower larynx position, proposing practise methods like yawning to achieve this technical feature.[330] Miller talks about the slight laryngeal descent when the singer inhales,[331] and Titze also describes how a lowered larynx will give a prolonged resonance space just above the vocal chords, that is, the pharynx.[332] Titze says that the result is a darkening of the colour of the vowels, meaning that the lower formants of the voice are enhanced.[333] Miller states that too much lowering (a feature he thinks comes from a 'Nordic school') will give a dark sound to the voice.[334] Sundberg points to research showing that opera singers who sing with a low larynx position enhance the lower formants of their sound.[335] The result is vowels that sound more similar to each other, and there is a dark, round sound. Some research has shown that other genres do not have this low larynx position as a part of their timbre paradigm. For instance, in a study of the Swedish folk music singing genre, 'kulning', Anna Johnson found that the larynx had a much higher position than in classical singing:

> [...] In Western concert and opera singing (especially for male singers), a low larynx position and an expanded pharynx are considered desirable ... This investigation shows that the vertical positioning of the larynx in kulning is considerably higher than while at rest and while the subject sings 'normally'.[336]

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326 Shipp and Izdebski 1975 p. 1106.

327 Sundberg 1987 p. 17.

328 Ibid. p. 113.

329 Ibid. p. 115.

330 Brown 1996 p. 80.

331 Miller 1996 p. 154.

332 Titze 1994 p. 165.

333 Ibid. p. 166.

334 Miller 1996 p. 153.

335 Sundberg 1987 p. 117.

336 Johnson 1984 p. 56.

So classical singing is known for its low larynx position, and this study shows that other genres do not necessarily share this feature.

Regarding the sound spectrum characteristics of the classical voice, one feature seems to stand out. When looking at spectrum contours in a classical voice, there seems to be a peak around 3kHz, especially with male singers. This peak is often referred to as the singer's formant, and it may have evolved as a result of classical singers' working environment.[337] The sounds from an orchestra, a piano or the human voice have a peak around 400–500 Hz, and the singer's formant helps a singer to be heard in an acoustic environment of this kind.[338] This feature, a device by which the voice can stand out, helps a singer to penetrate a dense acoustic picture. In an environment where this penetration is not an issue, whether singing to a lute accompaniment or in a choir,[339] this 'standing out' is not something for which one strives. This is important, since it helps to differentiate the sound produced in a 'soloistic' setting by a singer from the sound produced in a 'choral' setting or in an accompanying mode. I will discuss this further below.

The voice is divided into different registers, described by Titze as

> [...] perceptually distinct regions of vocal quality that can be maintained over some ranges of pitch and loudness.[340]

Quoting Merriam-Webster, Oren Brown stresses how the notes within a register's range are produced in the same manner, or are similar in quality.[341] These registers have had different names at different times, and the voice teachers of the world have used quite varied terminology to describe them, according to the school in which they work.[342] Names like 'chest', 'voce di petto', 'falsetto', 'head voice' or just naming the registers with numbers have been suggested. Although there are differences between names and characteristics among vocal authorities around the world, there seems to be some agreement about making the transition between the registers as smooth as possible, almost inaudible. In other genres besides the classical,

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337 Sundberg 1987 p. 123.

338 Ibid. p. 123.

339 Ibid. p. 124.

340 Titze 1994 p. 253.

341 Brown 1996 p. 50.

342 Ibid. p. 51.

the registers are used in a different way. Swiss yodelling is a good example of a genre not concerned with the equality of the voice in all registers as in classical singing, but instead concerned to use the different characteristics of the registers as the foundation of the whole genre.

The characteristics I have mentioned here do not give the whole picture in classical voice production, of course, but they are *some* of the features that characterize a classical voice. When the members of NVS label themselves as classical singers, they are doing so within the characteristics I have mentioned here.

7.2   Soloist or chorister

Already the name *Neue Vocal**solisten** Stuttgart* tells that being a soloist is important for this group. It is also an important focus for all the singers of the group when talking about their singing. That this focus is shared by all the group's members says something about how they view themselves. In an interview of 2006, with the Norwegian online music journal *Ballade*, one former member of the ensemble stated that what made NVS different from other ensembles were the singers' individual qualities and personalities, which made it possible for each member to stand out as a solo singer, while the ensemble could still blend all its voices together as well.[343] Whether it is true that singers in other ensembles have less soloistic quality than the singers of NVS, is a matter of opinion. But I interpret this quotation, together with their ways of talking about their ensemble, as an identity tag, and a branding tag for the ensemble.

Wenger says that there is a profound connection between identity and practice.[344] A practice requires members who acknowledge each other as participants, and the ways of negotiating how to be a person in this context define the identity. So, Wenger continues, the formation of a community of practice is also a negotiation of identities.[345] This negotiation may be silent, but it can also be outspoken, like the desire of the NVS singers to be associated not only with ensemble singing, but with solo singing as well. Labelling themselves as soloists, defining the way they are singing as

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343   http://www.ballade.no/nmi.nsf/doc/art2006030912500843463492 (Viewed 16.04.2014).

344   Wenger 1998 p. 149.

345   Ibid. p. 149.

'rounder', not a 'straight' tone, but with more vibrato, 'richer' (in terms of formant quality) compared to other ensembles of the world, is a reification process, defining their identity. It is a lived experience of participation in the community of practice NVS has become, and this identity is, as Wenger says

> […] a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections. Bringing the two together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct who we are. In the same way that meaning exists in its negotiation, identity exists – not as an object in and of itself – but in the constant work of negotiating the self. It is in this cascading interplay of participation and reification that our experience of life become one of identity, and indeed of human existence and consciousness.[346]

When the singers of NVS talk about the sound they make, they place themselves within a soloistic, classical sound paradigm. One of the singers said this:

> […] if you listen to our ensemble, the sound is round and very full

and continued:

> […] our group is not homogenic. It is more about individuals singing together.

Both these quotations show that being a soloist and doing solo singing is important for the members of NVS, and this singer also implies that this way of singing goes throughout the whole membership of the ensemble, giving a non–homogeneous sounding result from the group as a whole. One of the singers says that the group likes pieces that

> […] combines soloistic and theatrical qualities of everybody.

This 'soloistic' and 'non-homogenic' labelling is the same reification process, forming the identity of the singers of the group. I have already mentioned how Wenger states that a part of the identification process also includes defining what you are not or defining what kind of practice you participate in and which practices you don't. Wenger states that such practices include elements from other practices, and that we inevitably come across other practices that provide glimpses into another world of meaning, glimpses

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346 Ibid. p. 151.

that will be more or less significant for us, and will also shape our identity.[347] NVS is quite aware of the others ensembles of the world, and although they belong to a general community of practice called 'vocal ensembles', they have quite clear ideas about what the NVS community of practice is in contrast to that of the other vocal ensembles, for instance The Hilliard Ensemble, Nordic Voices or I Fagiolini. This process of imagination is, as Wenger puts it, an important component of our experience of the world and our sense of place in it.[348]

The singers of NVS seem to agree about how their own singing is different from that of other ensembles. When talking about them, it is first of all the English ensembles like The Hilliard Ensemble or the King's Singers who the NVS members put forward as their opposite in respect of vocal aesthetics and vocal qualities. One of the singers of NVS said this about the ensemble's singing of ancient music:

> [...] we do not so often sing ancient music. When we sing ancient music we sing madrigals ... when the Hilliard do ancient music, it's the straight, light ... you know, which functions very well with the very straight renaissance voices that they cultivate. When we sing ancient music, it is mostly madrigals, and then it is mostly Gesualdo ...

When being asked to define a good vocal ensemble singer, one of the singers of NVS answered that

> [...] it depends on which vocal ensemble you think about. Is it a vocal ensemble that sings contemporary music, is it soloistic? Is it a homogeneous group who sing more early music?

In other words, this singer puts a division between the groups that sing 'soloistically' and the groups that sing more homogeneously. The 'early music' groups belong to this latter category. This issue of homogeneity is often put aside as something they, as soloists, are not so interested in achieving all the time, in contrast to, for instance, The Hilliard Ensemble:

> [...] not so easy work to match the voices together so that we sound homogeneous. What is, for a group like Hilliard, the most normal thing in the world.

They talk about this as an issue they have chosen not to pay very much attention to, and, as I interpret it, for the singers of NVS this choice has

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347   Ibid. p. 165.

348   Ibid. p. 176.

developed through the voices in the group, the education of the voices and the repertoire itself. One singer compares NVS to the King's Singers:

> […] they can make a good sound together, which in some groups is the essential thing. I think that this is the essential thing for instance in King's Singers and in some groups singing mostly ancient music. And so they have to have a perfect blending all together. But for us, the soloistic parts … You can also use us for an opera with big soloistic parts. There are differences.

Again, this quotation defines the sound NVS makes as something not so homogeneous, closer to a traditional, classical, soloistic and operatic ideal. One of the singers of NVS defined the group as

> […] not homogenic. It is more about individuals singing together.

It is interesting that when the members of NVS talk about what kind of repertoire they look for when doing ancient music, many of them point to the madrigal and especially to the madrigals by Carlo Gesualdo, mainly because they see this music as more soloistic. Throughout my conversations with the members of NVS, my impression was that they have an urge to say that '<u>we</u> are more soloistic, while <u>they</u> are more homogeneous'. One of the singers described situations where there had been problems with the sound because they had to take singers into the group with a different vocal ideal to theirs:

> […] we have had problems with these kinds of singers: the specialists in old music, who normally, or often, have a very special way to sing. Very senza vibrato … And what we do is to sing with a full voice, and sometimes we act and sing very soloistically, and we have to know a great deal about operatic singing.

The same singer, later in the interview, defines singing in *the ensemble way* like singing 'senza vibrato, homogeneous and all that', and that when they sing more soloistically, it is closer to opera singing. But this singer also admits that this soloistic approach often gives the group some trouble:

> […] in other pieces we need to use this 'senza vibrato' voice, and we often need to be very homogeneous, and these are the moments where we sometimes have problems, because we are so individualistic, and we have such extremely different voices.

This issue of singing homogeneously, or 'blending', is also an issue for NVS, of course. They often point out that although they are soloists, they have to have a way of using their voices that allows them to make a sound that blends with the others or mix with them:

> [...] A voice ... has to have both qualities. It should not be too soloistic – a big operatic voice with a big vibrato, because it doesn't mix with the others ... So if you sing together, it is a little bit like choir voices. But in our part it is also the soloistic colour.

To my experience, the question about blending is well known within vocal ensemble circles, and while listening to NVS and working with them, I experienced a great deal of work on blending, finding the sound that would make the ensemble sound like one voice, that is, making the sounds from the voices close in on each other. One of them characterized the work in this way:

> [...] when you sing with the others you have of course to listen carefully to how the voices fit. When do we start with vibrato or do we use vibrato at all or how is the balance in the chord and so on?

There is a listening process involved in the blending work, and the singers are very aware of how they balance the different aspects of their voices to make a common sound, whenever that is necessary.

But although this blending process is essential and at the centre of their work, why does it seem that being a soloist is so important to the members of NVS? This seems to be, in part, a product of the repertoire they have sung and cultivated during their history. When contemporary composers write new music, my experience is that they are interested in working with singers who have the skill to make different kinds of sounds. Although the singers of NVS are well placed within the classical, operatic vocal world of sound, their diversity of sound and the timbre flexibility they can provide for composers are, of course, one of the factors in the group's success. When talking to Lars Petter Hagen, one of the composers with whom NVS has worked in recent years, he stressed their flexibility, their openness and that they were not afraid of trying out new things with their voices. Of course, from this point of view it is important for the group to be seen as a group of individuals, rather than a choir. The history of the group is also important, since they have moved from being a contemporary music choir, conducted by Manfred Schreier, to being an independent group of singers, on their own, without anyone conducting, a process which may have given them a greater urge to create a distance from singing like a choir. From what they write about themselves on the website, they tell a story of a group with singers who have moved quite a long way from being a choir singing contemporary music towards being, instead, a 'group of individuals' closing in on music

theatre, which also explains their focus on their operatic backgrounds.[349] This moving away from the 'choir' label says something about a possible third explanation of the NVS singers' urge to define themselves as soloists, or as 'individuals singing in a group'. When asking them how they react when someone calls NVS a choir, their answers are close to how we use to react in Nordic Voices: we are very quick to say that we are not a choir, that it is not right to call us a choir, as it would be wrong to call a string quartet an 'orchestra'. The same answers come from all the NVS singers. One of them said that

> [...] Nobody would call a string quartet an orchestra. It is the same with us. We are so far away from being a choir. It is absurd. But I don't react a lot, because for many people more than one singer is a choir and they don't know better. They say choir, because they don't know how to say *soloistic vocal ensemble*, it is so complicated.

Although the singers of NVS say that they don't react that much to it, they also admit that they don't much like being called a choir. One of the singers even said that the most annoying thing was to be mistaken for the SWR Vokalensemble,[350] first, because this singer finds NVS to be much better, but also because

> [...] when people think we are a choir, they imagine us not being soloists, and I think that one of the most important things about the ensemble is that you are not doing something less than being a soloist, you have to work very hard, for all the single parts are hard to do.

In other words: Being in NVS is <u>not</u> something less than being a soloist. This quotation reveals what I find to be a kind of hierarchy within singing circles, in which being a soloist is the ultimate career choice for a classical singer, while being a chorister is a career choice with lower prestige. By defining themselves as soloists, the singers of NVS gain a more prominent place in the musical business; the definition puts them further forward on the stage and helps to give the group a touch of exclusivity. It is also an identification process; the term 'soloist' is a label they apply to themselves. Wenger says that we think of ourselves in terms of labels, labels that applied by ourselves and by others, we are taking part in an identification process that is both relational and experiential, both subjective and collective.[351] But identity is also, as Wenger says, a locus of social power. He says that

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349 http://www.neuevocalsolisten.de/ensemble–en.html (Viewed 19.03.2012).

350 http://www.swr.de/ve (Viewed 20.03.2012).

351 Wenger 1998 p. 191.

> […] it is the power to belong, to be a certain person, to claim a place with the legitimacy of membership … Rooted in our identities, power derives from belonging as well as from exercising control over what we belong to.[352]

When the singers of NVS label themselves as soloists in a group, I find this identification tag to be so important for them that I suspect it to be also audible in the sound they make.

7.2.1   The voice in 'solo' mode versus 'choir' mode

The difference between the sound classical soloists make and that of a classical chorister is very large indeed. What this distinction actually embodies, in technical and acoustic differences, has been discussed for some time. There have been attempts to characterize these differences and attempts to explain what happens in vocal anatomy in the two different modes.

The singers in NVS, when describing their own way of singing, gave us some hints about the differences. They characterize their singing as 'round' and 'full', and claim that they are not so interested in vibrato control. At the same time the singers were quite aware of the sound they made together, and of the blending processes which were quite central to their work. For example, during one rehearsal,[353] they stopped and tried to figure out the sound they made at one place in the piece 'Petrrohl' by Georges Aperghis. When they were shown a filmed record of this, one of the singers explained that what they tried to do was to experiment with the register use of the soprano, versus the register use of the countertenor, with the intention of bringing the two sounds closer to each other. The singer explained that

> […] it is not enough head voice. And mine is extremely much head voice, extremely much. So it doesn't come together, it is not the kind of sound.

In other words, at this point they tried different kinds of sounds, different kinds of settings of register use to find a sound that brought the two voices closer together.

It means that working with blending often ends up giving a different voice setting than that which might be accepted when blend is not an issue. Every

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352 Ibid. p. 207.

353 The rehearsal I refer to took place on 10 June 2009, in the Theaterhaus, Pragsattel, Stuttgart. The rehearsal was dedicated to the works 'Petrrohl' and 'Vittriool' by Georges Aperghis, in preparation for a concert in Paris on 12 June 2009.

group will sound different from each other according to what kinds of voices the singers have and how they use them. Every voice has, as Oren Brown puts it, a unique quality, so every group will have a unique sound.[354] And this sound will be influenced, as I interpret it, by the singers' education, background, choral or soloistic experience and, of course, also the voice material itself.

There is a difference between singing in a 'soloist' mode and singing in a 'choir' mode, although the two modes are of course based on the same classical ideals. Goodwin (1980) compared the way sopranos sang when being told to sing in the two different modes, as they would sing if they were in a choir, or as if they were singing alone as soloists. An analysis of the spectra showed that they not only sang louder as soloists, but that their formants were stronger in soloist mode.[355] In another study Sundberg, Rossing and Ternström (1984) looked at how trained male singers, who were working both as soloists and as choristers, balanced their voices while singing in the two different modes. Their conclusions were the same: the spectra showed increased values around the area of the 'singing formants' (2,5–3 kHz) when in soloist mode, and so the spectral differences were significant. As in Goodwin's study, the singers also seemed to sing louder when singing as soloists.[356] This pattern was also found in another study of the formant frequencies of choral singers by Ternström and Sundberg.[357]

Researchers have examined whether this pattern can be observed in a vocal ensemble where there is only one voice per part. A study by Letwoski, Zimak and Ciolkosz-Lupinowa (1988) looked at whether this difference in modes was present in vocal ensemble singing. They studied the average spectra of 12 singers recorded in mono as an ensemble, in SATB sections and as soloists. They found, interestingly enough, the same differences between the modes, showing that the blending process, as soon as it appears, may follow the same technical solutions and acoustical results in vocal ensembles as in choirs.[358]

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354   Brown 1996 p. 153.

355   Goodwin 1980 pp. 119–128.

356   Rossing, Sundberg and Ternström 1984 p. 40.

357   Sundberg and Ternström 1988 pp. 517–522.

358   Letowski, Zimak and Ciolkosz–Lupinowa 1988 pp. 55–65.

Another interesting study examined the way in which singers are trained for opera, working in an operatic chorus and dealing with these modes of singing. The starting point of this study is a statement that many of the Opera Australia choral singers were unsure about whether they changed their singing technique for their different roles as solo singer and choral singer.[359] These members were taught and auditioned for the choir as solo singers, and their singing was influenced by the fact that their voices must always be audible through a huge orchestra in a large hall.[360] The main finding of this study was that there actually was no difference between the Opera Australia choir's singing in 'choir' or in 'solo' mode.[361] The measure of the singers' formant and vibrato stayed the same in both modes.[362] The conclusion of this study was that

> [...] the singing mode required in an opera chorus requires the ability to use a similar vocal timbre to that required for solo opera singing.[363]

This result is interesting primarily because it describes a vocal timbre required by a choir dedicated solely to opera. When the singers of NVS describe themselves as solo singers in a group, they point to a vocal timbre that is associated with opera singing. There seems to be a similarity between singing in a soloistic mode and the technique one would use in opera singing.

The most distinguished timbre difference between the two modes is differences in energy around the formant area of the 'singing formant'. But there also seem to be differences in the amount of vibrato applied to the sound, as well as differences in volume.

The singers of NVS often put The Hilliard Ensemble forward as their counterpart when it comes to vocal timbre, and one example can illustrate this point: the piece *Absalon, fili mi* by Josquin des Prez has been recorded by

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359   Reid et al 2007 p. 35.

360   Ibid. p. 35.

361   Ibid. p. 45.

362   Ibid. p. 41.

363   Ibid. p. 45.

Figure 1: Josquin des Prez: **Absalon fili mi** ed. Edward Tambling. Source: British Library, London, Royal 8G. vii, http://www3.cpdl.org/wiki/images/b/bb/Josquin_-_Absalon_fili_mi_up_a_p5.pdf (March 28 2012)

both NVS[364] and The Hilliard Ensemble.[365] Just to illustrate how different the sound is, I have chosen the same passage from the two recordings[366]. They are both recorded with a male quartet, although the NVS recording has a TTBarB setting while The Hilliard Ensemble recording has a ATBarB setting, meaning that the NVS is sung in B♭, while the Hilliard recording is sung in G♭. The section I have chosen to study (Figure 1) is bars 28–35, since these bars in both recordings are sung quite loudly and are quite similar. It should

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364 The piece is on their recording *Porträt* from 1999, conducted by Manfred Schreier, released on the Col Legno label (WWE 2 CD 20030), http://www.neuevocalsolisten.de/diskografie/articles/portrait.html (Viewed 28.03.2012).

365 The piece is on the recording *Josquin des Prez: Motets & Chansons*, released first time in 1983 on Virgin Classics. Catalogue number 0724356130227, http://www.emiclassics.com/releasedetails.php?rid=19543&nobuy=1 (Viewed 28.03.2012).

366 I do not have permission to include any of the recordings included in this chapter as appendices in this thesis. But the recording of *Absalon, fili mi* by The Hilliard Ensemble can be found here: https://itunes.apple.com/no/album/absalon-fili-mi-attrib./id695558981?i=695559081&l=nb (Viewed 08.12.2014). The recording of the same piece by NVS can be found here: https://itunes.apple.com/no/album/absalon-fili-mi/id397471089?i=397471176&l=nb (Viewed 08.12.2014).
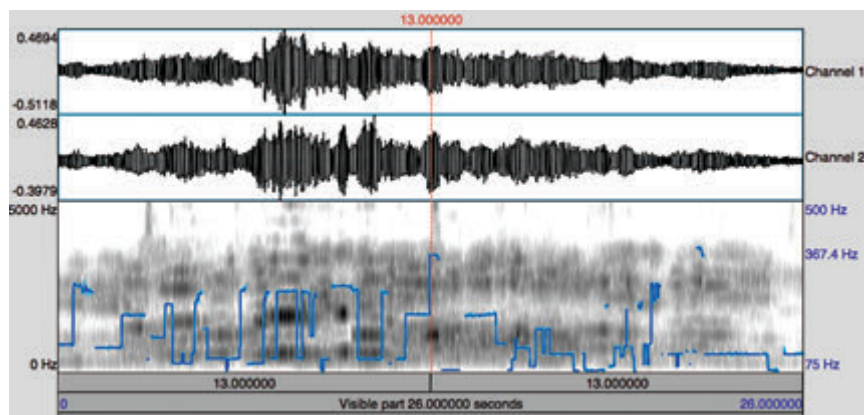
Figure 2: des Prez: Absalon fili mi, bar 28–35, sung by The Hilliard Ensemble

show the singing formants region at its highest peak in both recordings. If we follow the assumptions made by the singers of NVS, their sound should be much denser in this region, while The Hilliard Ensemble recording should show less activity in the singers' formant section:

The Hilliard Ensemble recording of this section sounds quite relaxed, quite light in timbre and not very vibrant. The NVS recording, on the other hand, is much heavier. The sound seems to be louder, more vibrant and much more dense in the singer's formant region. I have analyzed both these sound clips with the *Praat* program,[367] making a spectrogram of the sung bars. The Hilliard Ensemble recording is shown in Figure 2 while the recording of NVS is shown in figure 3.

In these two figures we can see the image of the sound wave on top, while the spectrogram is shown at the bottom. The sound wave shows that the NVS recording is louder, while The Hilliard Ensemble recording of these bars seem to be softer and maybe also more varied in dynamics. The blue lines in the spectrograms show the pitch variations of the first formant in the sound spectrum, and they show that the NVS recording is more vibrant and more restless. But perhaps most interesting is a comparison of the sound spectra of the two recordings. The Hilliard Ensemble recording is definitely more open, it is not as dense as the NVS sound spectrum, and especially the area around 2,5–3 kHz (the singer's formant region) is much less present than the recording of NVS. In other words, the NVS recording seems to be sung with a higher volume, more vibrato and with a higher intensity in

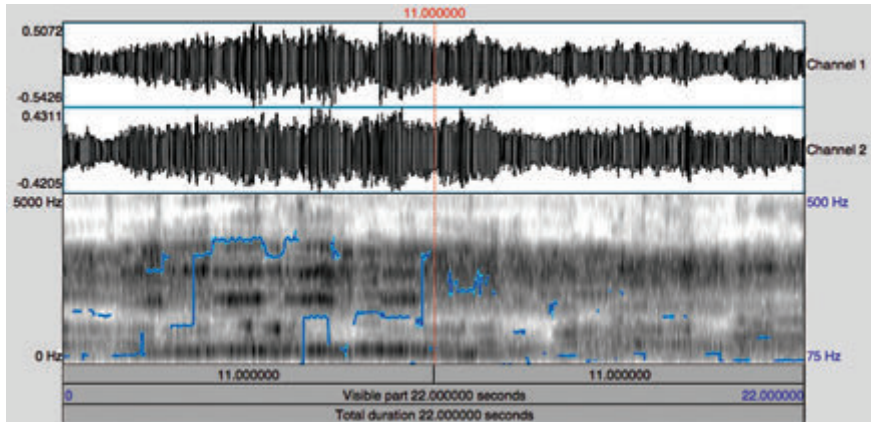367 http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/ (Viewed 30.03.2012).

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Figure 3: des Prez: Absalon fili mi, bar 28–35, sung by NVS.

the singer's formant region, all of these aspects that tell us that the NVS singers sing with a technique that is closer to the soloistic mode, closer to a classical opera voice technique. It is important, however, to underline that the NVS recording is sung a fifth lower than The Hilliard Ensemble recording, something that can contribute to the differences as well. But the difference in intensity in the singer's formant region is too explicit that the difference in key and tessitura can explain it all.

Another example shows that there are moments where the differences are not as great. The singers of NVS state that they often like to do madrigals, especially the madrigals by Carlo Gesualdo. And, his five-voice madrigals are in the repertoire of both The Hilliard Ensemble and NVS. Both groups have recorded some of these madrigals, and I have chosen to take a closer look at the madrigal 'Tu m'uccidi, o crudele' from his fifth book of madrigals (1611). The openings of these two recordings show that the singing of the two ensembles is much more alike, maybe giving some nuances to the NVS statements on a more soloistic singing approach.[368] I have chosen to look at bars 1–8, since this opening is, in both recordings, recorded using their full voices, singing quite loudly. The recording of The Hilliard Ensemble starts on a C♯, while the NVS recording starts on G♯.

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368 The recording of Tu m'uccidi by NVS is taken from the CD *Fuoco e ghiaccio* (2001/2002, track 4), released on the Stradivarius label (STR 33629). The Hilliard Ensemble recording of the same piece is taken from their CD *Carlo Gesualdo: Quinto Libro di Madrigali* (2009, track 15), released on the ECM label (ECM New Series 2175).

Figure 4: Carlo Gesualdo: *Tu m'uccidi, o crudele* from *Quinto Libri di Madrigali* (1611)

The Hilliard Ensemble recording of these bars can be seen in figure 5.[369]

We can clearly see that these bars are sung quite loudly. The intensity around the singer's formant area is quite strong, and significantly stronger than the previous example from The Hilliard Ensemble (Figure 2).

The NVS recording of the same bars are shown in figure 6.

In this example, which is also sung quite loudly, the spectrogram is not very different from that of The Hilliard Ensemble. It is sung with almost the same volume, except that the NVS recording is not as strong towards the end of the excerpt. What is interesting here is that, although the opening of the NVS

369 Analyzed with the Praat software, see footnote 347.
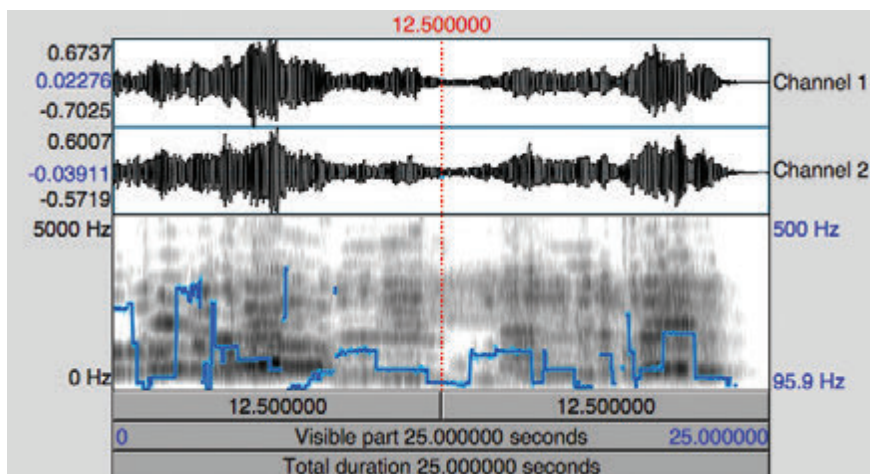
Figure 5: Carlo Gesualdo: ***Tu m'uccidi, o crudele***, bars 1–8, sung by The Hilliard Ensemble

example has a greater intensity in the singer's formant region, the Hilliard example is significantly more intense in the same region towards the end of the example. Interesting enough, The Hilliard Ensemble gets more intensity around the singer's formant region when the volume goes up, and when they sing stronger than NVS, their singer's formant region is much stronger than that of the NVS.

These two examples are not perfectly clear evidence for differences in singing style. First, we do not have control over or knowledge about the nature of the recordings. For instance, the placing of the microphones could
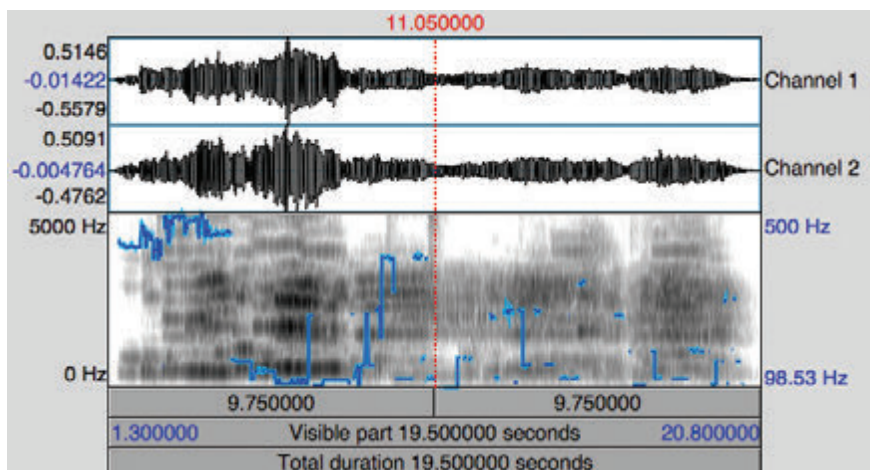
Figure 6: Carlo Gesualdo: ***Tu m'uccidi, o crudele***, bars 1–8, sung by NVS.

have an impact on the result. Therefore, a pure spectrogram such as the one used here should only be taken as an illustration of my points. But, taking these precautions into the discussion, I still believe that we can learn from these examples. First, when singing more strongly, the amount of vibrato should be enhanced, and we can see that this is the case when both the ensembles sing more strongly and with more presence around the singer's formant region. When the vibrato and the amount of the singer's formants increase, the sound gets more dense, which I will argue indicates a more soloistic approach, especially also according to what the singers themselves tell about how they use their voices in the different settings. These findings also are in accordance with the theory on the field.

I find it interesting to see that the differences between these two examples are not so great after all. Although the first example shows a clear tendency towards a more soloistic use of the voice from NVS, supporting their claims of being a more soloistic ensemble than many others, the second example shows that the picture is more nuanced. Second, the members of both ensembles clearly have the ability to change their voice production, moving from a voice that sticks out, like a soloist, to a more blending mode, like a chorister. It is interesting to see that singers in the Opera Australia study did not have this ability, first and foremost because they simply do not need it. We can, in other words, talk about a 'soloist' and a 'chorister' mode of singing, and it is quite clear that both The Hilliard Ensemble and NVS are well aware of the two modes, and try to balance between them.

7.2.2   The role of vibrato in the different singing modes

We cannot talk about the difference between the soloist and chorister modes without talking about vibrato. The study of the chorus of Opera Australia showed no difference in vibrato between the two modes,[370] while the other studies referred to here, with singers from various different backgrounds, showed quite significant differences in the use of vibrato. To my experience, vibrato is a difficult topic, and it has generated discussion between teachers and students, between singers themselves and between soloists and choristers.

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370   Reid et al 2007 p. 45.

My observations tells that on one side people argue that too much vibrato will make the sound of an ensemble blurry, that it will affect intonation and result in unstable chords. On the other side is the argument that taking away vibrato defies nature, that vibrato gives warmth to the voice. Those arguing against the vibrato-less voice have been very quick to characterize it as 'boring' or 'dull'. In an article of 1926, Max Schoen quotes Thomas Edison, who said that out of the approximately 3,800 singers he had recorded, only 22 sang with what he called a 'pure tone'.[371] He then calls vibrato a

> [...] basic, fundamental, attribute of an effective singing voice.[372]

Schoen's study is one of the first studying the nature and sources of vibrato. His study deals with primarily with opera singers, and his results are coloured by that. Schoen describes the vibrato-less voice as 'dead' and 'expressionless',[373] summing up what I find to be the aesthetic element of the trouble this and other similar studies encounter. Opera and classical singers have represented their way of singing as *the* way to sing with good taste. So we can find descriptions of opera singing, with vibrato, as 'warm', 'full of life', and 'rich', while vibrato-less singing has been (and is still) labelled as 'dull', 'lifeless' and so on. Even the prominent voice teacher Richard Miller says, as late as 1996, that

> [...] Singers given to straight-tone practices should be directed to *consciously anticipate* a vibrant timbre. To be unaware of the presence or absence of vibrancy in the tone is to be unaware of the nature of one's voice quality.[374]

On the other hand, the defenders of the vibrato-less voice have been equally harsh in their characterization of singers using vibrato:

> [...] The minimalist approach to vibrato encourages clarity not only of pitch and harmony but also timbre, itself. The leanness of sound, the incisive edge, the focus and forwardness of the sound remain unveiled by the blur of vibrato.[375]

The division has normally been, as I observe it, between the proponents of vibrato-less singing's aesthetics, the early music singers (see chapter 5) and the choral movement in England, and the proponents of the vibrato-rich

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371   Schoen 1926 p. 282.

372   Ibid. p. 284.

373   Ibid. p. 282.

374   Miller 1996 p. 188.

375   Plank 2004 p. 23.

singing aesthetic adopted by opera singers, especially from the 'Romantic' period. This division in aesthetic perception has led to many controversies, and sparked a number of discussions about what is natural and what is not. I have myself heard many times that singing without vibrato, with so-called *straight* tones, is harmful to the voice, and have listened to choir and ensemble singers talking in derogatory terms about singers with a huge vibrato. Voice teachers, being mostly occupied with building solo singers, have contributed to the discussions as well, for example, Richard Miller:

> […] Within today's choral community the questionable concept of non-vibrant and *sterile* choral sound still has numerous fervent adherents. This philosophy is handed down through workshops and symposia from one choral conductor to another, permeating North American secondary and collegiate choral scenes. *It has taken the nature of cultism.*[376] (my italics)

This attitude from one of the most-read authors on vocal technique explains some of the scepticism voice teachers have had in recommending choir or ensemble singing for their voice students. Singing without vibrato or controlling it is, to my experience, difficult for some students. When vibrato is considered as a natural part of your voice, as well as being an essential part of the aesthetic in some genres, it is difficult for voice teachers to recommend working to control or remove it. But of course the authorities in other genres require that the use and amount of vibrato is controlled by the singer. An article by Andrea von Ramm about singing early music, says this:

> […] This so-called natural vibrato does not exist. Vibrato is an interaction of breathing muscles and throat muscles and these muscles can be controlled. If it is no longer controlled, *like the wobble of an aging singer*, it comes with the sound and production and cannot be changed in speed and strength … Vibrato should be discussed, learned and be variable in performances. Then it can be applied according to the requirements of style and taste.[377] (my italics)

Ramm's definition of the muscular causes of vibrato may be a bit thin, but the quotation tells us about her view of vibrato use and the characteristics she attributes to singing with applied vibrato.

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376   Miller 2004 pp. 237–238.

377   Ramm 1976 pp. 12–13.

The nature of vibrato

Sundberg says that vibrato is constant variation of the phonation frequency.[378] Vibrato is characterized by how fast it is (measured in Hz) and how big the deflection is in the phonation frequency's amplitude. An important feature is that vibrato increases with an increase in the phonation force.[379] The amplitude in phonation frequency can be from ±1 to ±2 semitones, and the vibrato for some singers can increase with increasing age.[380] One characteristic of vibrato is that its rate seems to increase toward the end of tones.[381] The muscular action of vibrato is not fully understood, and in his 1996 book, Richard Miller lists some ten suggestions about the causes of the phenomenon of vibrato, among them that 'muscle synergism within the supralaryngeal area accounts for frequent fluctuation in the vocal folds'.[382] Brown says that pitch vibrato is a 'result of the action of the nerve impulses as they act on the intrinsic muscles of the larynx in adjustments for frequency'.[383] Whatever the causes of vibrato actually are, there is no doubt that the frequency is altered, and that all the formant frequencies in the sound spectrum move according to the fundamental frequency's movement.[384] There is disagreement about the extent to which vibrato makes it difficult to recognize the pitch frequency of a tone. Sundberg suggests that the ear calculates the average frequency,[385] but also stresses that small variations in pitch frequency while frequencies are sounding together can give birth to beats, which can blur the harmonic picture.[386] My experience tells me that this is important for vocal ensembles, and control of the extent of vibrato is central for the blending processes.

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378 Sundberg 1987 p. 163.

379 Ibid. p. 165.

380 Ibid. p. 211.

381 Prame 1994 p. 126.

382 Miller 1996 p. 183.

383 Brown 1996 p. 96.

384 Sundberg 1987 p. 172.

385 Ibid. p. 171.

386 Ibid. p. 172.

**Vibrato's aesthetic side, vocal ensemble implications
and the issue of 'blending'**

The rate of vibrato in what Titze calls the classical Western singing style seems to lie at around an average of 4–6 Hz,[387] but this rate seems to have changed over the past century. It was faster in the period between 1900 and 1940, and has been slowing since then,[388] showing that the rate of vibrato can be altered according to aesthetic preference. Titze also says that altering the amount of vibrato is possible. He then makes a very interesting point: in quarter-tone singing, for example from the Middle East, vibrato is reduced to a minimum, because otherwise there would be no distinction between melody and vibrato. He concludes that ensemble singing needs distinct control over vibrato, because it enhances pitch definition and contributes to the blending process.[389]

The vocal ensembles I have met and sung with have all been very aware of vibrato and the need to control it. NVS is no exception. Although they define themselves as soloists singing together, they are very concerned about the effect of vibrato and the way in which they are using it as an effect. I asked one of the singers what vocal ensemble singers should be able to do with their voices, and was told that they should be able to sing non-vibrato. When I asked why, the singer replied:

> […] because there are a lot of chords. If you have a cluster chord, it doesn't work if all the six or seven sing with vibrato. Then it will be only 'grey soup' (laughter).

As Titze and Sundberg point out, when the voice vibrates, the whole formant spectrum moves along with it. When so many singers sing together, the small beats that occur if the frequencies are out of sync with each other will blur the harmonic picture. This singer from NVS stresses the point, calling this blurry harmonic picture 'grey soup'.

Another singer of NVS answered, when being asked about the blending process, that

> […] when you sing with others, you of course have to listen carefully how the voices fit. When do we start with vibrato or do we use vibrato at all…?

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387 Titze 1994 p. 290.

388 Ibid. p. 291.

389 Ibid. p. 292.

For the singers of NVS, vibrato is one of their tools for blending voices together. During one rehearsal,[390] a singer, when singing a wrong note, suddenly sang it out in a full 'operatic' voice with a huge vibrato attached to it. I asked why they had done that, and they answered that they were frustrated about singing the very high note incorrectly. If they sang it out loud with lots of vibrato, they were asking the others if they could also do it that way, because then no one would notice what note they were actually singing. They felt that the clarity of the high note was better with a controlled vibrato. This was a passage from Aperghis' 'Wölfli Kantata', a piece based on, among other things, quarter-tones, and controlling, or managing, vibrato in such places has the problems Titze articulated as an example of vibrato-controlled singing in discussing Middle Eastern quarter-tone singing (see above). Later on, this singer described how singing with vibrato at this point in Aperghis' 'Petrrohl' would destroy the sound, since it would destroy the blending of the sound.

A little vibrato analysis

Controlling vibrato, or *vibrato management*, is one of the most important issues in vocal ensemble work. It is used in the blending process, to make the voices come together, and for clarity in the harmonic picture and intonation processes (see also Chapter 8). When I asked the same singer of NVS whether they thought that singers should be able to control vibrato, they replied that they should, but also that not every singer needs knowledge of how to sing in an ensemble. Perhaps this attitude is why we find singers who do not know how to control vibrato at all. And maybe, if you want to sing in an opera choir, like the choir of the Opera Australia, the quality of being able to manage vibrato is not needed, since there are other aesthetic sides of the sound that are more important, for instance the quality of being able to produce a sound that penetrates the orchestral sound.

Vibrato management is a blending tool in a vocal ensemble. But how much vibrato there is in a voice depends on the singer's education, the genres an ensemble sings, vocal aesthetics, identity and tradition. I have shown how the same piece of music can sound different when sung by two different ensembles. When the singers of NVS define themselves as soloists, we can expect that this will show in the amount of vibrato they apply to the music

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390   9 June 2009.

Figure 7: Josquin des Prez: **Absalon fili mi** ed. Edward Tambling, Source: British Library, London, Royal 8G, vii, http://www3.cpdl.org/wiki/images/b/bb/Josquin_-_Absalon_fili_mi_up_a_p5.pdf (April 3, 2012)

they perform. The opening bars of the Josquin's *Absalon, fili mi* are sung by one voice only. When analyzing the vibrato on the two recordings, using the *Praat* software, we get an interesting result. I focus on the first four bars of the piece (5 sec.) (Figure 7)
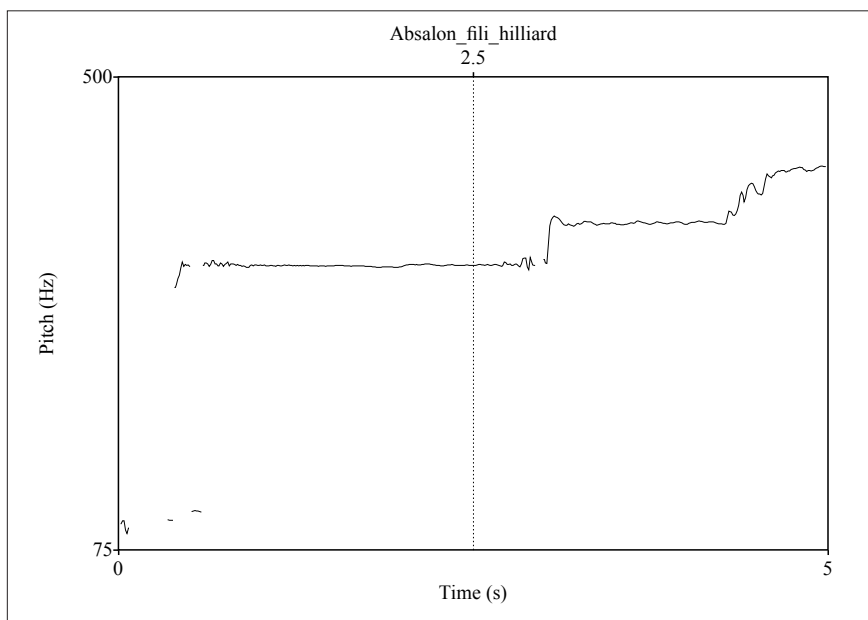

Figure 8: Josquin des Prez, **Absalon Fili me**, bars 1–4, sung by The Hilliard Ensemble
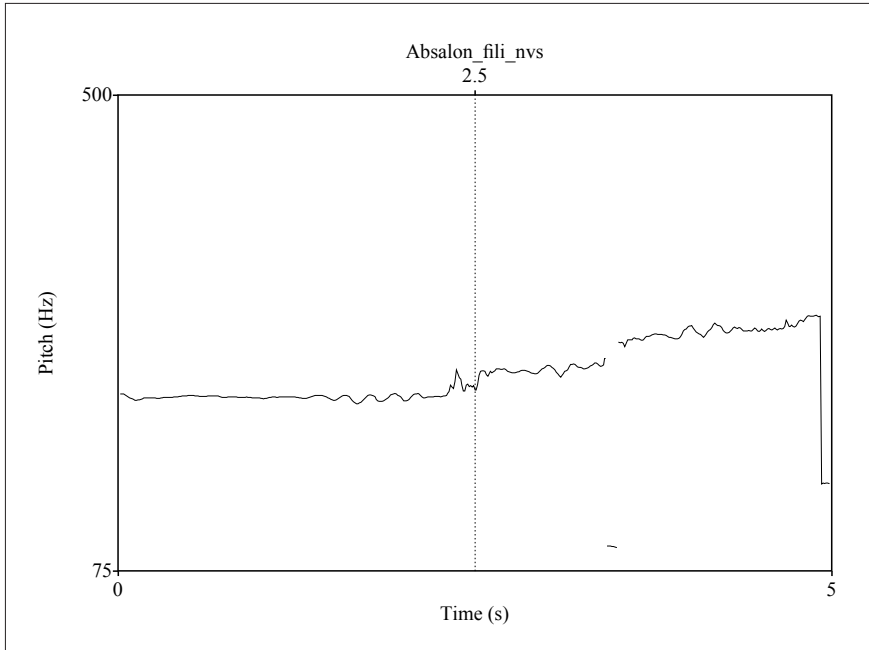
Figure 9: Josquin des Prez, ***Absalon Fili me***, bars 1–4 sung by NVS.

These bars sung by The Hilliard Ensemble are shown in figure 8. The picture shows the pitch frequencies of the solo singer opening the piece. The singer seems to attack the first note a little bit from underneath before ending up on the desired frequency. The start of this note seems to be a little bit restless, before it stabilizes. A little vibrato comes in at the end before the note shifts (just after 2,5 sec). The same opening, sung by NVS, shows a quite different result (Figure 9).

The first note is quite stable, but before the end of the note and the note shift, the vibrato comes in. The amplitudes are far greater than those of The Hilliard Ensemble, showing that the singer from NVS sings with far more vibrato than the singer from The Hilliard Ensemble.

These examples of course only show how the singers sing these chosen passages, and it this not enough to say that they always sing like this. But if we think of how the singers of NVS define themselves as soloists, we would expect that they would use a larger amount of vibrato to colour their voices. We can therefore assume that they use more vibrato in their singing than The Hilliard Ensemble, who colour their voices with less. It

is also interesting to notice that the background of the singers of NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble are quite different. Where the singers of NVS have studied as soloists in the higher education system, the singers of The Hilliard Ensemble have a long training from an early age as choristers. I recognize that both these ways of singing have been extremely successful, and I find it dangerous to say that the amount of vibrato should be kept to a minimum. But both ensembles are extremely aware of how they use their vibrato, so it is safe to say that *vibrato management* is one of the most important features of a vocal ensemble's technique.

7.2.3 Sometimes a soloist, sometimes a chorister. The vocal ensemble balancing act.

To the singers of NVS it seems important to define themselves as soloists, and they seem to use this as a kind of an identity tag. But the singers of NVS also do say that they use vibrato management as a tool in the blending process.

There is a very interesting study by Robert Coleman, studying the acoustic factors for two singers during duet singing. In the summary, he points out that solo singing and singing in a group are two different modes.[391] He studied two male singers singing different duets, and the way they change their technique while singing. When singing in unison, the two singers sang with less vibrato to be able to match pitch, presumably also to blend into each other's tone.[392] Coleman concludes that one attribute of ensemble singing, including unison or singing in duets, is the reduction of the extent of vibrato.[393] But he also says that when the two singers in this study sang together as a duet, they sang differently from the way they sang in larger ensembles. The area around the singer's formant was more evident than the author expected it to be, suggesting that duet singing could be seen as a transitional form between solo and ensemble singing.[394]

From the others studies I have presented here, I find that there is a difference between the voice techniques singers apply when singing in a choir and when singing as a soloist; the Coleman study also contributes

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391   Coleman 1994 p. 202.

392   Ibid. p. 204.

393   Ibid. p. 204.

394   Ibid. p. 206.

to this. We also see that it is possible for singers to balance the amount of formant in their formant register, meaning that there are also spectral characteristics at play in the blending process of the ensemble. The singers of NVS define themselves as individuals in a group, but blending is important to them too. Since they, like The Hilliard Ensemble, sing one voice per part, there are points in the music where they have the opportunity to sing as a soloist, and this will distinguish vocal ensemble singing from solo or choral singing, at least to some extent. From time to time, there will be points in the music where there is no doubt that the singer has a soloistic role, while in other places they will have an accompanying role. This balancing act means, as I find it, deciphering a score, finding the solo parts, singing these parts a little more soloistically and then seeing (or hearing) how it fits into the sound of the other singers. It is a balancing act of listening and correcting your voice technique, over and over again, and this process seems to be one of the most central skills of the vocal ensemble singer.

The singers of NVS are well aware of this balancing between a soloistic role and an accompanying role. When asking them how they tackle such soloistic points in a score, they are quite clear on how they do it. One of the singers said

> [...] the solo parts might be a bit more free, in terms of colour and even timing, because I don't have to speak with the five others ... it depends on the music, if it is with vibrato or if it is with air ... I will try to find a colour which will go away from the others ... not so much, but it will be different.

In other words, this singer describes how they will, when defining a moment in the music (or the score) as soloistic, move their voice out of a blending process and give another colour to it, either by vibrato, or, as they propose here, with air. One of the other singers says that they are trying to move out of the blending process, stating that

> [...] the quality of the sound is perhaps different, because when you sing with the others you of course have to listen carefully how the voices fit ...

One of the singers is more precise on the use of vibrato:

> [...] if there are no indications, you will use the vibrato much more or you will be not so precise ... We have many pieces where one is solo, and the others are accompanying, and then it is really good if the soloistic one is musical and not so right, because then the others could more easily accompany him.

When this singer says that the solo part should not be so 'right', I interpret this to refer to the way that the sound should stand out, and not be sung in a 'blending' way. I also find it interesting that the singers say that they use other tools than their voice techniques to make the sound stand out when doing a solo line. Musical tools like timing of phrases, greater rhythmic freedom, and, as I will explain in Chapter 8 (about intonation), the intonation of solo lines also play a part.

But when it comes to voice technique, the singers of NVS often state that when they have a solo line, they become even more of a soloist, moving further down the opera singer path. One singer says that

> […] You sing a piece and you have many lines in the ensemble way: Senza vibrato, homogeneous and all that. And then you have to sing a solo line, and in this moment I know how to do it, because I am also able to sing an opera or something like that.

Another singer pointed to another reason to bringing the solo lines forward. They said that the audience should realize that there is something going on in the sound, and that they should be listening more carefully to it:

> […] it's a kind of musical interpretation. If it is an important musical line you have to sing it in such a way that the public realize that 'this is an important line'. You sing it louder or a bit more actively. More in a 'showing' way… And if it is a following part it is more a thing of listening to what the others are doing and being together with them.

I find this interesting because it presents the idea of giving a clear vision of the solo line to the audience, another kind of motivation for singing the solo lines more outwardly.

The vocal ensemble singer's balancing act defines what role they have in the music at all times. They are responsible for making a series of decisions as they correct their voice technique or other musical elements so that their lines stand out or not. One of the NVS singers said that following the solo part in a piece often involved deciding 'who has the *metrum leadership*'[395], one of the decisions that affect the result the group presents to the audience.

Through the theories on the two modes of singing, through the interviews with the singers of NVS and my own experience, I suggest this model of what I call the *vocal ensemble balancing act* (Figure 10).

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395   I interpret the term 'metrum leadership' to mean the voice who decides upon the timing of the music, both rhythmically and regarding tempo, dynamiques etc.

SOLO MODE	⟵——————⟶	CHOIR MODE
Stronger intensity in the singer's formant region		Weaker intensity in the singer's formant region
Often more vibrato		Often less vibrato
Higher volume		Lower volume

Figure 10: Model of the vocal ensemble balancing act

It means that each singer in a vocal ensemble is always somewhere on a line between singing in solo mode and singing in choir mode. It is a deciphering process that develops over time, and is very much evident in the work of NVS.

7.3 Extended vocal techniques (EVT), the outer layer of the NVS singing

In Chapter 6 I discussed the term 'researcher' as it is used by NVS, defining the work they do in finding new vocal techniques and 'new forms of articulation', and I want to refer back to the quotation I put forward on page 108, from the NVS website. The interesting aspect of this quotation for this chapter is the explanation of their voice production, the way they look upon themselves as explorers, discovering new ways of using the voice in their dialogue with the composer. There is no doubt that NVS has its primary focus on contemporary music. One of the singers told me that he had, since he started singing professionally some 20 years ago, premiered around 300–400 new pieces. It would be difficult to find other singers who have worked with contemporary music more than these. And of course during this time they have worked with 'extended vocal techniques'.

A good definition of extended vocal techniques (EVT) can be found in a dissertation written by Melanie Austin Crump (2008).

> [...] EVTs are defined as a body of techniques conveyed through non-traditional methods of vocal production for the purpose of expression. Extending from conventional vocal techniques, EVTs often supplement or are used in place of traditional language and notation when words or other

traditional symbols are not sufficient for the realization of the composer's imagination. The classification may include everyday vocal utterances associated with life, which have been extracted from their context and used for artistic purposes. Sounds as simple as a whisper, a whimper, grunting, shouting, humming or speaking are all possibilities, limited only by the imagination.[396]

EVT can be traced back to Europe in the decades just after the turn of the twentieth century.[397] But the literature about EVT has pointed to similar directions or shifts in vocal aesthetics in earlier times. They have pointed out how humans have always experimented with vocal sounds, tracing EVT, or at least a link to EVT, all the way back to Sumerian hymns;[398] or compared the EVT shift in vocal aesthetics with the invention of the monody and the Florentine Camerata in the late 16th century.[399] There have been changes in how classical music has been sung technically, both in regarding for instance aesthetics and ornaments, but as Murdoch (2011) states, the voice has mainly been a medium or an instrument for transmitting text.[400] But the shift that happened at the turn of the twentieth century was drastic, and a number of reasons for this have been suggested, among them the invention of the phonograph or record player (allowed music to be played everywhere for everyone),[401] the expansion of new instrumental techniques,[402] and the rise of new and genre-crossing art directions like for instance Dadaism, surrealism and expressionism.[403] The new ways of using the voice that came to life at the beginning of the century[404] had a huge impact on the writing of vocal music, from the use of spoken passages to the *Sprechgesang* part in *Pierrot Lunaire* by Schönberg (1912),[405] to the enormous production of vocal works after 1950. It was during this period that the voice came to be treated as an instrument independent from text, and as, Murdoch says

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396 Crump 2008 p. 11.

397 Ibid. p. 13.

398 Edgerton 2005 p. xv.

399 Crump 2008 p. 11.

400 Murdoch 2011 p. 16.

401 Crump. p. 17.

402 Murdoch 2011 p. 16.

403 Anhalt 1984 p. 10.

404 For a more thorough analysis on the reasons for the emerge of EVT, I will point to, first of all, the book *Alternative voices: Essays on contemporary vocal and choral compositon* by Istvan Anhalt (see list of literature).

405 Crump 2008 p. 14.

it, that 'the colors and capabilities of the voice would be explored and showcased based on the voice's own acoustical merits'.[406] Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* borrowed the use of the voice first of all from the tradition of the *melodrama*, but with the difference that the precision of the notation of Schönberg put this development of the speaking voice directly as a part of the music.[407] This way of using the speaking voice in music was later to be adopted by composers like Berg and Webern, and a few decades later by Boulez.[408] At the same time, writers like James Joyce, and absurdist theatre writers such as Eugéne Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, started to include nonsense syllables in their works,[409] and futurists produced one-act plays that contained nonsense speech. Giacomo Balla wrote for instance his *Macchina Tipografia* (1914) where the voice imitates the sounds of a printing press.[410] Another movement related to the development of EVT was the Dadaist movement. Represented by writers as Kurt Schwitters and Tristan Tzara, language itself was broken down, inspiring composers like Henri Pousseur, Mauricio Kagel and György Ligeti.[411] According to Murdoch, it was the invention of electronic music that inspired composers to further develop EVT, first of all since the development of electronic music brought with it a new awareness of sound.[412] One important figure was Pierre Schaeffer, whose *musique concrete* had a huge impact. He created a catalogue of sounds, containing two categories: human sounds (like breathing, vocal fragments and humming) and non-human sounds (like footsteps, percussion and instruments).[413] From this period, we also find composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen, who used dissecting and layering of a boy's voice to create the tape piece, *Gesang der Jünglinge*. Compositions for choir also started to incorporate EVT. Pauline Oliveros wrote *Sound Patterns* in 1961, a piece that include phonetic sounds, glottal stops, tongue clicks and so on.[414] One very important electronic studio was the *Studio de Fonologia* in Milan, founded by Bruno Maderna and Luciano Berio. The latter was married for some

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406 Murdoch 2011 p. 16.

407 Ibid. p. 19.

408 Ibid. p. 19.

409 Ibid. p. 20.

410 Ibid. p. 21.

411 Ibid. p. 22.

412 Ibid. p. 22.

413 Ibid. p. 23.

414 Ibid. p. 24.

time to the singer Cathy Berberian, and together they started to make radio music projects, one of these inspired by the works of James Joyce, giving way to Berio's *Thema (Ommagio a Joyce).*[415]After lecturing with John Cage at Darmstadt in 1958, Berio invited Cage to work in the Milan studio. Cage composed Aria, a work in which Berberian imitated tape recordings, and Cage turned the sound into a vocal score; the work includes ten different vocal styles. The different methods of creating vocal music against and with tape recordings, later gave birth to Berio's compositions *Visage* and *Sequenza III*, the latter including vocal effects like whispering, laughter and muttering, text broken up into syllables, morphemes, extreme use of register and timbre modifications.[416] The period that included Berio, Cage and others is very well documented, but the group of composers and performers coming afterwards, like Shelly Hirsch, Diamanda Galas and Yoko Ono has not had the same attention.[417] Together with these performers, we can find, from the 1970s, composers and performers like Joan Mc Barbara, Trevor Wishart and Meredith Monk.

One important vocal ensemble within EVT was the Extended Vocal Techinque Ensemble. Working at the *Center for Music Experiment* in San Diego, they created the *Lexicon of Extended Vocal Techniques* (1974), including sounds organized according to their sonic qualities.[418] The Extended Vocal Technique Ensemble had a huge impact, and toured for a while both USA and Europe with their repertoire of EVT compositions. Including in this repertoire we find pieces like Deborah Kavasch's *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1974), the first piece written for the ensemble.[419] Kavasch included vocal techniques like overtone singing in this piece, a technique that had been previously used by Stockhausen in his work *Stimmung* (1968), also for vocal ensemble. Other important works for vocal ensembles within EVT are pieces like Ligeti's *Nouvelles Aventures* (1962/1965) and Berio's *A-ronne* (1974/1975). All these pieces have been, and still are, in the repertoire of NVS. EVT now is a natural part of a composer's palette when working on compositions for singers. Works like Peter Ablinger's *Studien*

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415 Ibid. p. 25.

416 Anhalt 1984 pp. 31–34.

417 Murdoch 2011 p. 28.

418 Ibid. p. 31.

419 Kavasch 1985 p. 2.

nach der Natur (1995, 2002) or Georg Friedrich Haas' *3 Liebesgedichte* (2005) include vocal techniques that are within the EVT concept.

The singing of NVS uses Extended Vocal Technique a great deal: it is a basic part of NVS's identity as a group. Almost every singer of NVS I have talked to names this dimension of the group's practice as important, something that makes them and the group stand out amongst competing groups and singers from the classical singing circles. One singer, pointing to the difference between a 'Neue Vocalsolist' and a normal classical singer, says that

> […] in a Mozart aria you know how it should sound. You have all these beautiful singers in your ear, and you think that 'oh, my voice is not that good' and 'I can't reach this'. So, all the time I was searching for myself. And in contemporary music I felt very free … I could sing how my voice was, not how any other voices were. So, for me it was a very great experience to find more possibilities in my voice than I had ever thought.

This singer felt that they lived in a classical landscape where the singing (here of Mozart) was well defined, and that this type of singing included boundaries for them; with contemporary music, there was a freedom of timbre that helped them find new ways of producing music.

There is no doubt that producing other kinds of sounds with their voices, making various vocal effects and timbres, is an extremely important part of the 'vocal identity' of the singers in NVS. It is a way for them to define the group's position, its place within vocal ensemble practice and the classical music industry. The 'extended vocal techniques' incorporated in the daily work of the NVS singers are as important for them as being soloists seems to be. And the singers are very proud of their group and the way they are able to produce sounds in other ways. They say that singing contemporary music, using 'extended vocal techniques', producing different kinds of timbres than the traditional classical ones, as well as working on quite difficult music and scores, gives them a special kind of competence when working with complex music outside the group, or with singers not so used to such settings. One of the singers told me about an opera project they had participated in, where the other singers were not so used to singing contemporary music:

> […] I could feel that how I worked with the material … how I understand things, what I do with the things that I read there … It was totally different from the other people there … I have so much experience in what you can do with noises, and to give meaning to the stuff that you are giving, and open a large spectrum of sound colours … the others were working a lot and very hard and saying 'Oh, this is very difficult', and I thought 'Well, OK …' It was not so difficult … I am just used to, I think, heavier stuff …

In my view this is a singer talking with great confidence about the competence acquired during their time in the ensemble. To observe that other singers do not have the same flexibility is a good thing so far as this singer is concerned: they seem quite proud of having such control of their voice, compared to the other singers in this particular project.

What I also observe is that the singing techniques of NVS are multi-layered, so that the different voice techniques complement each other.

7.3.1   A model of the NVS singing

It is interesting that, when asked about literature on singing or about singers who have inspired them, the singers of NVS mostly point to literature about traditional classical singing and quite prominent, traditional classical singers. They seem to view EVT as a coat they put on: the last layer of their voice production. The core of their singing, the foundation, is always their traditional, classical training. One of the singers put it this way:

> [...] we have worked with overtone singing, and bla–bla–bla, but our basic is always the opera voice, because we all studied it that way once. It's our basis ...

When being asked about what makes 'a good Neue Vocalsolist', one of the singers says that

> [...] in the basic level you need a good technique, you should be a good singer. You should know how to work with your voice, and to work with your voice to practice special sounds, extreme sounds...

So there is a traditional, classical, operatic vocal technique on the inside, always working. Outside this core comes the vocal ensemble technique, especially the blending techniques and vibrato management – the vocal ensemble balancing act I described earlier. Finally, as an outer layer, comes the EVT. But all these layers do work with each other: they are not separated, and they influence each other all the time. The model I suggest for the singing styles of NVS is shown in figure 11.

7.4   Conclusions

In this chapter I have looked at the vocal techniques involved in the singing of NVS. I have seen how the singers of NVS always look upon themselves as
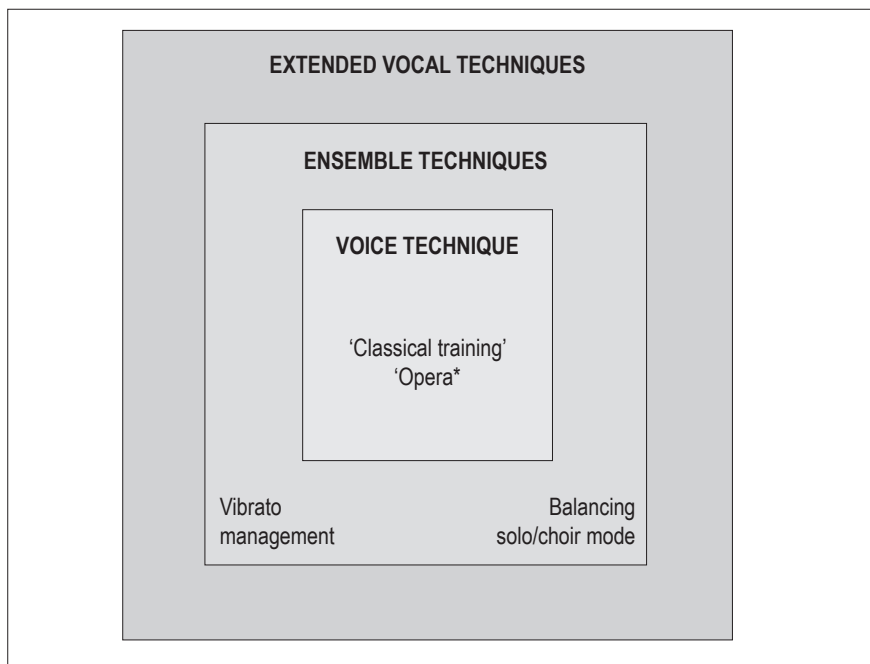
Figure 11: Model of the NVS singing styles

classical singers, and that this way of singing, the techniques and aesthetics involved in this way of singing, is their core, their technical fundament, so to speak. I have looked into what the label 'classical singing' means, and I have examined what it means to the singers of NVS. To them, classical singing is closely related to opera. Being a classical solo singer, or an opera singer, means to sing in a different way than when you sing in a choir. I have shown that it is reasonable in this context to divide voice production into soloist and choir modes, and I have shown what kinds of technical and acoustical implications these two modes have, especially when it comes to the use of vibrato and formant spectrum characteristics. I have suggested a model of a *vocal ensemble balancing act*, which describes how ensemble singers find themselves on a line between the outer points of the two modes. To sing in NVS means being able to move away from the classical timbre when required, and produce the sounds of extended voice technique*s*. In NVS these extended vocal techniques form an outer layer of their singing armoury, a coat they put on. I have suggested a model that represents their singing styles with classical singing at its core, vocal ensemble techniques as a secondary layer and the extended vocal techniques as a third, outermost

layer. Although schematically presented, all these layers influence and change each other in a continuing process.

The singers of NVS are very clear that the vocal ensemble techniques and the extended vocal techniques they have gained and use are techniques they have not learned in school. When asked whether these techniques should be learned at school, they do not answer positively: to some of them, classical training should come first. One can of course ask whether this is the best way to deal with the issue, since many voice students would not come across vocal ensemble singing or contemporary music at all if it is not part of their educational curriculum. Perhaps higher education does have an obligation to present new techniques to its students, at least to show them that these techniques are something they might run into after school. There is a conflict between extended vocal techniques in particular and the traditional, classical techniques, and I find this conflict very much alive in NVS. They are open to new sounds and new ways of singing and making noise, but I have also heard them express frustration over not being able to use their voices in a traditional way, and laugh at some of the strange ideas coming from the composers they work with. In many ways, this conflict of voice use is a central element in the singing of NVS.

The manuscript became alarmingly complex at this point, the notes crowding the bar lines like dense troops of ants quashed wholesale on the way to something irresistible.

(Faber, 2002)

8   Intonation

In all the rehearsals I attended with NVS and I Fagiolini,[420] there was one thing that always came up, and that took up a crucial part of the rehearsal time. The same issue is also always at the centre of our focus for Nordic Voices, and it comes up each time we rehearse, whether it is a regular rehearsal or one immediately before a concert. It is the issue of intonation. Intonation is clearly an important element in the work of an *a cappella* ensemble, and I wanted to know whether it was possible to find any similarities in the ways these ensembles dealt with it, and whether there are theoretical or practical similarities in the strategies they employ.

All the vocal ensembles mentioned here work with music that exceeds the limits of tonal centres, music with quite complex harmonic structures. Add to that the intricacy of pitch production and auditory pitch control, and you can see why intonation work occupies a great deal of their rehearsal time. In this chapter I will try to give an insight into how both intonation choices and work on intonation influence vocal ensemble practice, as well as the actual sounds produced. I will discuss how tuning has been theorized in terms of natural laws, and the practical business of what ensemble singers *do* to anchor themselves in the absence of instrumental pitch support. Singers, as I will show, tend to construct a tonal, predictable event, even within a

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420   I have not had access to a rehearsal with The Hilliard Ensemble, due to their extensive travelling and rehearsal practice.

harmonic complexity that goes beyond tonality, so the practical solutions to intonation challenges in contemporary music are not so very different from those of tonal music.

8.1   Pitch production and its challenges

The process of producing sounds with the voice is a complex muscular task. The phonation frequency is determined by balancing the thickness and tension of the vocal chords,[421] a process controlled by both the somatic (voluntary) and the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system.[422] We normally control pitch aurally, although our ears can give us a false idea of the actual sound produced. When hearing your own voice, you not only hear the sound that comes out of your mouth, but you also sense the sound spreading throughout your body tissue,[423] so it is very difficult for singers to have a clear understanding of how their voice actually sounds, including which pitch the voice actually produces. The complexity of the muscular process and the chances of being deceived by the ears, together make sound production and pitch control an unpredictable affair. Rather than depending only on their ears, good singers try to think about singing as an automatic process by attending to their inner projection of their voice, rather than focusing on every muscular impulse needed for producing the desired sound and pitch. This inner projection is largely automatic and indescribable, like the skill involved in riding a bike. The knowledge of how we ride a bike or sing a perfect pitch lies in the performance itself, a 'knowing in action' as Donald Schön describes it.[424]

The nature of the human voice, the complex processes involved in voice production, and the difficulties with one's own perception of the produced pitch, make pitch control essential to every singer's work, since the exact tuning of each pitch can vary each time it is sounded.[425]

In a vocal ensemble, each singer's pitch production meets the same challenges whilst fitting into a harmonic picture, adding even more

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421 Sundberg 1987, p. 72.

422 Ibid. p. 79.

423 Brown 1996, p, 189.

424 Schön 1987, p. 25.

425 Devaney & Ellis 2008, p. 142.

complexity to the process. One of the singers of NVS says this about the intonation challenges they face in their work:

> [...] You cannot just say 'I am singing the right note'. It is not possible. There is always a kind of a chord you have to find, and in this chord you have to find the quality of the sound, the formant quality of the voice and the right dynamics.

Because the intonation choices faced by the vocal ensemble singer are quite complex, work on intonation issues is central to vocal ensemble practice, not only in terms of exact pitches, but also, as I experience it, concerning aspects of voice technique, communication between singers and the balancing of voices.

When singers in a vocal ensemble produce a pitch, they relate to other singers' pitch production. Together all the singers' notes create a chord, a chord that will carry within itself a hierarchy wherein some notes will be more important in that they serve as reference points, defining the other pitches. Traditionally, in tonal music, the singer who sings the keynote defines the other pitches to a greater extent than the singer who sings the fifth or the third.

8.2   Tuning and temperament[426]

The following example is taken from the motet 'Hei, mihi Domine', by the Spanish renaissance composer Francisco Guerrero (1528–1599). This piece has been in the repertoire of Nordic Voices for many years, and we have sung it in very different locations, from huge churches to small concert halls. But despite our experience, this work keeps presenting the same challenges regarding intonation every time we include it in our programme. The bar in figure 12 summarizes the challenges involved:

It is a D minor chord (1) spread across the voices, from top to bottom, soprano 1, soprano 2, alto, tenor 1, tenor 2 and bass, with the minor third (F) in the soprano 1 voice. The bass then sings another F, and the chord changes to F major (2). The challenge here is to stabilize this F major chord, because when the bass singer sings the F, he will have to sing the F that the soprano 1 has sung just a second before two octaves higher. This F is, if the soprano 1

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426   The title is from the book *Tuning and Temperament – A historical survey* (1951/2004) by J. Murray Barbour.

Figure 12: Fransisco Guerrero: **Hei, mihi Domine** (bar 67), see reference list for complete reference.

sings it in just intonation, higher than it would have been in an equal-tempered system. This means that the F in the chord will become tuned a bit sharp, and that the other notes in the chord, for instance the C_4 in the tenor 1 (that is, the fifth), will have to adjust accordingly, which of course is quite difficult to achieve in the millisecond the chord has to be in place. On one occasion, the soprano of Nordic Voices asked the bass if the F really should be that high, and the bass replied that that was the question many wise people have asked themselves and each other for centuries.

Pythagoras of Samos is said to have discovered the numerical basis of acoustics[427] when he caused a single string to vibrate, and then played half the length of the same string, with the effect that the pitch jumped up an octave. On the basis of this discovery he described musical consonance in terms of *ratios*,[428] octaves corresponding to a 2:1 ratio, fifths to a 3:2 ratio and fourths to a 4:3 ratio. Starting from these ratios, attempts were made to define the notes of the diatonic and chromatic scales using a succession of fifths and octaves,[429] but not without some quite substantial challenges and compromises due to the implications of the *Pythagorean comma*. Pythagorean tuning became common during the Middle Ages, the system being well suited to colour the melodies of Gregorian chant, and even in early polyphony, the open fifths and fourths of Pythagorean tuning held their

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427   Ibid. p. 24.

428   Ibid. p. 24.

429   Barbour 1951/2004, p. 1.

ground.[430] However, thirds and sixths represented a problem, and they were regarded as imperfect consonances for a long time.[431]

Concepts of tuning systems and temperaments have been discussed by musicians and theorists for as long as there has been any music theory. Since the voice is capable of singing every frequency within its range, and the ear can differentiate between changes in frequency of up to 1/17 of a tone,[432] it gives us a vast range of frequencies to organize. It may therefore seem like a coincidence that we have ended up with 12 semitones to the octave, but this is a legacy from the equal temperament compromise that in a way solved the intonation challenges related to keyboard instruments. The number 12 is central, this being the number of pitches involved when stacking fifths on top of each other before reaching the initial note again (seven octaves higher). The problem is that, if these fifths are perfect (or pure, that is having a ratio of 3:2 from the prime frequency), you end up on a note that is considerably higher than the 2:1 equivalent of the initial pitch. This gap, known as the *Pythagorean comma*, actually overshoots the pure octave by almost a quarter of a semitone.[433] Perhaps more than anything it shows that it is impossible to make instruments with fixed pitches without some form of compromise.

Throughout history there have been many solutions to the constitution of a just intonation system. The whole essence of just intonation tuning systems is to give priority to pure triads in the chords, which inevitably makes fifths somewhat narrower. (Barbour's book *Tuning and temperament* lists around 20 different forms of just intonation). This was manageable for singers and other instruments of non-fixed pitches, because they could switch to just tempered thirds momentarily as the need arose. However, the tuning of keyboards and other fixed pitch instruments created difficulties,[434] especially when composers started to write music in all keys. Equal temperament, in which the octave is divided into 12 equal semitones, eventually won out over all the other tuning systems, resulting in what has been called

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430 Ibid. p., 3.

431 Morley 1597, p. 141.

432 Seashore 1938, p. 56.

433 Duffin 2007, p. 25.

434 This resulted even in new suggestions about how to build keyboards; keyboards with split keys persisted for a long time.

'equal temperament hegemony'.[435] The compromises involved in equal temperament were so successful that other tuning theories had become something of a fringe interest by the beginning of the twentieth century,[436] but growing interest in *a cappella* music, and early music in general, encouraged a different approach to intonation. In an article called *A new theory of untempered music (1936)*, Norris Lindsay Norden stated that

> [...] All present-day theory-books have been written with equal temperament in mind ... These books have been written as though the present equal temperament had always existed, and the student is given little, if any, information about the older temperaments, or concerning the vital facts of the untempered or just scale ...The absence of the necessary information results in much out-of-tune singing of a cappella music ... One of the worst fallacies in present-day music is the endeavour to teach a cappella music with the assistance of a piano in equal temperament ... The singers have been taught false intervals, but are supposed to sing pure ones, for all a cappella music must be sung in just intonation.[437]

This was written some ten years before the birth of the Deller Consort, one of the first vocal ensembles of the early music movement (see also Chapter 5). This movement also played a significant part in pushing investigations into the history of tuning and systems of temperament,[438] leaving singers today with a number of choices as to what tuning system to use, especially when singing together with other singers or other non-fixed pitch instruments.

8.3 Singers and intonation choices

Writers on the art of singing have cherished intonation and the ability to hit the desired pitch as a central quality of a singer. Conrad von Zabern, a musician, musical scholar, priest and theologian from Heidelberg wrote around 1470 that

> [...] a very common sign of poor training is the horrid wavering up or down in pitch ... It spoils the correct singing of the others, just like an out-of-tune string disturbs the tuning of the clavichord.[439]

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435 Mandelbaum 1974, p. 216.

436 Devaney and Ellis 2008, p. 143.

437 Norden, N.L. 1936, p. 218.

438 Devaney and Ellis 2008, p. 144.

439 MacClintock 1979, p. 15.

From the 18th century, the Italian style of singing won ground among singers and the vocal style and technique we now know as *bel canto* became dominant. As operatic styles and the focus on soloists became prominent, vocal ensemble issues are found less often in the musicological literature, and intonation issues regarding vocal ensembles are hardly ever discussed. However, solo intonation issues are discussed by a very few writers such as Pier Francesco Tosi (ca. 1653–1732). In his book *Observations on the Florid Song* (1747) he says that

> [...] Let him teach the Scholar to hit the Intonation at any Interval in the Scale perfectly and readily, and keep him strictly to this important Lesson.[440]

Tosi, although writing most of the time about the solo singing voice, as everyone else also did, recognizes the difference between tuning an equal tempered instrument like the organ and tuning a non-tempered instrument like the violin.[441] He also pointed out the difference between what he called major and minor semitones, meaning that an E♭ should be sung higher than a D♯.[442] This differentiation between a major and minor semitone is also found in the handwriting of Mozart, who referred to a 'mezzo tuono grande' (major semitone) and a 'mezzo tuono piccolo' (minor semitone).[443] Even though we generally think equal temperament has been omnipresent since Bach's time, the picture is much more nuanced. But as equal temperament gradually took over, it seems that the implications for intonation in vocal ensembles slipped more and more to the background of public interest.

During the last 30 years, some research has been carried out on the choices that singers make regarding intonation, and on the strategies singers adopt in respect of intonation in vocal ensembles. In a study of barbershop singing, Hagerman and Sundberg found that most intervals sung by barbershop ensemble members deviated systematically from the corresponding values of just and Pythagorean intonation.[444] This juggling between just and Pythagorean intonation is also emphasized by Rogers Covey-Crump in his article 'Vocal Consort Style and Tuning'. He proposed that good unaccompanied singing tends towards just intonation,[445] but that

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440 Tosi 1747, p. 21.

441 Ibid. p. 21.

442 Duffin 2007, p. 51.

443 Ibid. p. 65.

444 Hagerman & Sundberg 1980, p. 42.

445 Covey-Crump 1992, p. 1035.

Pythagorean tuning is generally preferable to just tuning sometimes since the

> [...] combination of generous widthed tones, and small semitones has a smoother, more felicitous flow than two sizes of a tone and a large semitone.[446]

Covey-Crump concludes that it is best to think about the intonation of any note in terms of a fusion between the just and Pythagorean systems.

Many theorists have tried to answer how singers should think when tuning different kinds of music, which has usually involved them presenting their own tuning system or guidelines.[447] And often the advice of these theorists differs substantially, for example when Oren Brown presents his theory of always singing thirds quite high to assure that the ensemble does not sink,[448] a theory that is quite different from Covey-Crump's solution. So singers end up standing on the shoulders of centuries of intonation theory, and with many tuning systems at hand, trying to find their way out of the challenges they meet, especially when encountering other non-tempered instruments.

Singing combines pitch intentions with a complex motor system involved in producing pitch resulting in deviations that often make it difficult to achieve clear results in a research setting. Judging your own pitch is quite difficult in a performance, since the cognitive and motor load on a singer is so very high.[449] A study by Franz Loosen (1995) shows, though not with an entirely clear outcome, that when given the task to choose their preferred tuning system, non-tempered instrumentalists (violinists in this instance) preferred Pythagorean to equal temperament, whilst equal tempered players (pianists) tended to prefer equal temperament. Interestingly, non-musicians did not prefer one or the other.[450] So it seems that although singers frequently do not hit the precise pitch they aim for, the more experienced they are, the more aware they are of which tuning system they are performing within at any particular time. And, within the context of a vocal ensemble, singers find themselves responsible for their place in a harmonic environment *and* for the tuning of their own melodic line. This

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446 ibid p. 1037.

447 Bohrer 2002, p. 50.

448 Brown 1996 p. 160.

449 Vurma and Ross 2005, p. 342.

450 Loosen 1995, p. 301.

could explain the juggling between just intonation and the Pythagorean system, which latter is often applied to melodic lines, whilst the former is applied to more harmonic moments in the music, giving the intonation work both a horizontal and a vertical aspect.

8.4   The horizontal and vertical aspect of intonation

The horizontal aspect of intonation is connected to the melodic movement in a musical work. Pitches in a melodic line relate to each other psycho-acoustically because listeners (and performers) try to organize the musical idiom and its sounds into coherent structures.[451]

When listening to music, we shape sounds into meanings in accordance with our nature and experience.[452] More precisely, in an act of melodic expectation, we predict what will come next in a musical process. Steve Larson argues that there are different musical forces in play within the concept of musical expectation, or melodic completion. He calls these forces *gravity* (the tendency of unstable notes to descend), *magnetism* (the tendency of an unstable note to move to the nearest stable pitch) and *inertia* (the tendency of a musical pattern to continue in the *same* fashion, where what is meant by 'same' depends upon what this musical pattern is 'heard as').[453] Like Fred Lerdahl, Larson suggests that pitches in a line relate to one another, and that there is a tension grid between them that determines the frequency at which they are played or sung. Although some of these theories point towards Pythagorean tuning, the effect of expressive intonation blurs the picture, meaning that the pitches produced are a result not only of musical expectations and laws of nature, but also of musical meaning or emotion,[454] giving the horizontal aspect of intonation a somewhat unpredictable outcome.

Whilst theories of the intonation of melodic lines are often blurred and confusing, the vertical aspect of intonation seems easier to describe, especially when addressing ensembles. Writers concerned with vertical

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451   This theory was put forward by Lerdahl in his book *Tonal Pitch Space* (2001).

452   Larson 2003, p. 458.

453   Ibid. p. 461.

454   Devaney 2006, p. 521.

intonation seem to prefer just intonation,[455] where 'just' means that the ratio of the frequencies involved can be expressed with small integers,[456] whereas the horizontal approach concentrates on melodic issues, the vertical approach concentrates on simultaneous pitches, often involving the concept of 'consonance'. Helmholtz' theory of consonance suggests that two tones are experienced as consonant when their partials produce a small number of beats, this 'beating' being produced by interference between notes of proximate frequencies.[457] When the frequencies involved move too far apart from each other, the frequency of the beats increases, before the beat fuses into a perceived third frequency, often experienced as a 'rough' sound,[458] or dissonance.

There is of course a human factor involved as well when singers are in 'vertical' mode, meaning that we very seldom will experience an ensemble hitting the desired pitches every time. But in the horizontal mode of intonation the singer experience far greater freedom in pitch choices, while the vertical mode is characterized with a higher grade of being intentionally locked into the concept of consonance and just intonated pitches.

8.4.1   Balancing the horizontal and the vertical aspect of intonation

An ensemble singer will shift focus between the vertical and the horizontal aspect of intonation, especially when the intonation system is not locked into a fixed system, such as that of an accompanying equal-tempered instrument like the piano. In a vocal ensemble a singer is responsible not only for their own voice, but also for the whole harmonic picture. It is my observation that a good ensemble singer seems to be very aware of how to balance this horizontal and vertical focus. The horizontal focus is more evident in soloistic parts, in which the singer is allowed greater musical freedom regarding rhythm, tempo, timbre and pitch. One of the skills that define a good ensemble singer is knowing when to blend in with the other voices and when to move away from the soundscape. I discussed this vocal ensemble balancing act in Chapter 7.2.3. Sometimes the focus will

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455   Bohrer 2002, p. 162.

456   Hagermann and Sundberg 1980, p. 77.

457   Devaney and Ellis 2008, p. 145.

458   Butler 1992, p. 56.

be directed towards the singer's role in producing notes that are correct within a harmonic context. Whilst it is not clear which tuning system singers are keeping to in this horizontal mode, there seems to be a very strong urge for them to apply just intonation in vertical mode, focusing on 'pure' unisons, octaves, fifths and thirds, in that order. One of the singers of NVS, commenting on a rehearsal of the piece *Wölfli Kantata* by Georges Aperghis, said the following about building chords in just intonation:

> [...] Yes, I love it like this. I think it is not a good idea to hold the third as a reference point. So sometimes it is good to just build a chord up from low to high, but more often it is better to build it up from the ground tone, fifth, the third and then the others, I think.

Wölfli Kantata is not what we would normally think of as a tonal piece, but the singers of NVS would turn to listening for combination tones[459] while rehearsing, and even try to find tonality, triads and intervals like octaves and fifths within a complex harmony, in the search for 'local tonalities' within the chord structure.

It seems that the experienced ensemble singer moves between the horizontal and the vertical foci of intonation. As soon as you enter the vertical way of relating to the tones, you turn to just intonation and the overtone series. Consciousness about this role as a singer is very important for the ensemble, knowing how to produce the voice, how to lend it colour, how to decide on precise pitches and how to define your place in a sound, whether as a soloist or an accompanist. Singers' movements between the horizontal and vertical approaches to intonation could be represented as in figure 13.

HORIZONTAL FOCUS	VERTICAL FOCUS
Soloistic	Accompany
Melodic focus	Harmonic focus
Polyphony	Homophony
No clear tuning system involved	Just intonation (pure intervals)
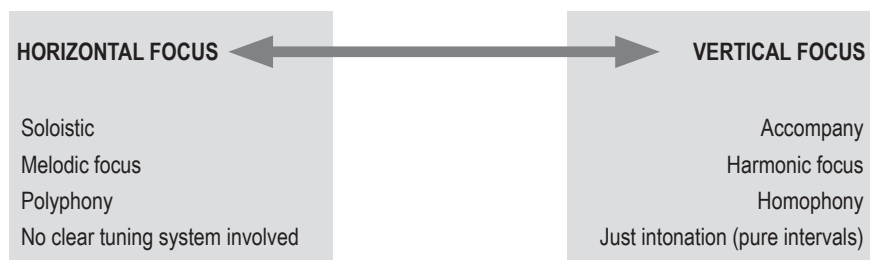
Figure 13: Horizontal vs. vertical focus in ensemble singing.

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459 Combination tones: two tones sounding simultaneously may give rise to the sensation of one or more additional tones (Plomp 1976). In this example the two singers of Neue Vocalsolisten sang a1 (440 MHz) and c♯2 (550 Mhz), giving rise to the tone A (110 MHz) when hitting the frequency purely intonated.

This model shows how that more homophonic music demands a more vertical focus, which implies just intonation. And, this model is of course closely connected to the solo / choir mode model from chapter 7.2.3, and it is no surprise that a vocal ensemble singer singing in a vertical mode (or choir mode) will apply less vibrato and not so much intensity around the singer's formant region, giving the harmonic picture a little bit more clarity.

When asked to point out a place in *Wölfli Kantata* when singers should shift focus from horizontal to vertical intonation, one of the members of NVS

Figure 14: G. Aperghis : **Petrrohl**, from **Wölfli Kantata,** bar 69–70 (Durand, Universal Music Publishing Group)

directed attention to the moment in the movement 'Petrrohl' represented in figure 14.

The singer pointed out how the tenor and baritone parts should relate, not so much to the other voices, but more to each other, with the $C\sharp_4$ as the central tone, in a horizontal way. The three upper voices, on the contrary, would have to listen to each other very closely, singing clear chords in a homophonic, accompanying role. They move more or less in perfect triads, and the bass voice joins in bar 2, enhancing the harmonic whole. This example shows how the vertical and horizontal focus will shift during a piece, and how a vocal ensemble singer, singing at this level, will have to be extremely aware of their particular role.

8.5   Constructed tonalities

When a vocal ensemble moves into a vertical focus, they usually seem to lean towards just intonation. This urge is very strong, and makes singers look for intervals like unisons, octaves, fifths and thirds to anchor the pitch production. When they come across perfects triads, they will focus on them, even in music we would not normally associate with traditional tonality. Even in quite complicated chords wherein there is no immediate tonal centre the singers will look for tonal structures.

In the example above, the three upper voices will understand themselves as an isolated element in the music making, focusing on the chords and intonating the pitches in a pure way, with the G_4 as the tonal centre, the D_5 as the fifth, and the B_4 as a pure intonated third in a G major chord.

This way of isolating and finding tonal structures within a harmonic complex provides an anchor in a complicated tonal landscape, a strategy of providing both a good and predictable solution to a complicated chord, with a good chance of doing the same thing the next time this chord is produced. A member of NVS, when asked whether they search for tonal structures put it this way:

> […] Yes, always … The more vertical you think, the better for the ensemble. We try to work in that way with intervals. We decide which intervals have the priority … We listen closely until we find the right pitches, and then we try to keep it in mind.

Figure 15: G. Kverndokk : *Kyrie*, from *Mass*, bar 54–55 (Music Information Centre Norway)

This way of finding a tonality within a complicated chord structure means that the ensemble constructs chords or tonality that the composer may not have intended.

To demonstrate how constructed tonalities work in practice, I have included another two examples. In bars 55–56 of Gisle Kverndokk's *Gloria*, which was composed for Nordic Voices in 2002, the voices end up in a chord that challenges intonation. Suddenly, after a passage of individual melodic movements, the singers end up in a moment of unity, a homophonic chord that forces them to tune to each other. This is a vertical intonation moment, but the chord itself is not easy to interpret (Figure 15).

The chord consists of the six tones, from soprano 1 to bass, E_4, D_4, B_3, $A\flat_4$, F_4 and $D\flat_4$. Together they form a cluster, and there are few ways to solve the intonation challenges within the chord. The four notes for Soprano 1 (S1), Soprano 2 (S2), Alto (A) and Tenor (T) form an (enharmonically altered) E^7 chord, while the four notes in Alto (A), Tenor (T), Baritone (Brtn) and Bass (B) form an (enharmonically altered) $D\flat^7$ chord. The tenor is either singing a major third in the E^7 chord or a perfect fifth in the $D\flat^7$ chord, and the choice the ensemble makes will have an impact on which pitch he produces. This is a good example of how Nordic Voices constructs tonalities within a tonality

to define the pitches. In this case, Nordic Voices chose the second option, defining the chord as being centred on D♭ major, partly because of that chord being in root position, but also since the tonality is centred around D♭ (or C♯) in the bars before. We have never discussed this with the composer. It is significant that, when this bar was shown to the members of NVS, they pointed out the same structure of the chord, searching for triads, octaves, and fifths, and they all named the D♭7 chord as their main focus, pointing to this way of reading the score as one of the most important skills a vocal ensemble singer should develop. They should always be aware of not only what note they are singing themselves, but also what notes the others are singing, what kind of chords these notes form, and whether they should pay attention to this chord in a vertical intonation manner. One of the singers of NVS expressed this thus:

> [...] *... my part is ok, and I do my part perfectly and for me it is not important what the others do'.* That would be the opposite of what is necessary. You should be interested in what the others do and to find that common ... that common sense

Figure 14 shows one page from 'Petrrohl' by Georges Aperghis. One of the singers of NVS calls the piece 'so fast that you can't hear any tone architecture'. The second example of how vocal ensembles construct tonalities, within a musical setting, in a vertical intonation moment, is from page 118 of the same piece (Figure 16).

The same singer from NVS calls this example one of the few points in the piece where they have to find their way out of chaos. They do so in the same way as Nordic Voices did, attacking the chord in figure 15. They search for the tonal structures, and make their pitch choices based on the results of this search. One of the singers of NVS says this about the choice they made:

> [...] The problem with this chord is that you don't hear all the singers well. Some you hear much better, so for us three or four high voices, I think it's a C-sharp major chord with me adding the ninth. So, I totally lean on the fourth to the soprano and try to have this very nice structure of the high G-sharp, the F and the C-sharp of the tenor as a basement.

There are of course other solutions to the intonation of this chord. For instance, the soprano could sing her $G\sharp_5$ as a major third related to the bass' E_3, to get a kind of E major feeling as a framework for the chord, but the ensemble seems to choose the triad, since it is in root position, because, as I would guess, it is a part of the sound picture that is relatively easy to apprehend.

Figure 16: G. Aperghis: *Petrrohl*, from ***Wölfli Kantata***, bar 235–236 (Durand, Universal Music Publishing Group)

But it is one thing to say what you are going to do, and another to do exactly

what you intended. Between 2007 and 2009 NVS recorded Aperghis' *Wölfli Kantata*,[460] and I was very happy to receive a copy of the music. My question was whether the singers of NVS actually did hit the notes according to their intentions. As I have explained, the singers intended to solve the chord with the C♯ major chord as their reference. The chord consists of six notes, and to find the exact frequencies of the singers means trying to filter out the pitches in a sound that is quite complex and packed with information. I have chosen to look at the first chord (bar 235, in *pp*). The chord holds still for about 3 seconds.

When I know what the chord structure is, I know within which band of frequencies the different notes will appear. By using a four-band equalizer I am able to isolate the band of frequencies for each note. This results in a sound file of the chord where this note is extremely enhanced. I then analyze this sound file with the *Praat* software, getting a list of frequencies for this note. The list for these 3 seconds contains around 500 entries for this specific note. By calculating the average frequency I get a number standing for the frequency chosen for this specific note, and by doing this six times I get the average frequency for every note in the chord. The result is displayed in this table:

Voice	Note in the chord	Equal tempered frequency (Hz)	Actual average frequency sung (Hz)
Soprano 1	$G\sharp_5$	830,6	812,7
Soprano 2	F_5	698,5	690,5
Countertenor	$D\sharp_5$	622,3	625,5
Tenor	$C\sharp_4$	277,2	270,5
Baritone	$F\sharp_3$	185,0	180,7
Bass	E_2	82,4	82,3

The table has four columns. The first shows which voice is singing, the next shows which note this voice is singing in the chord. Column number three shows which frequency this note has in an equal-tempered (ET) setting (for instance on a piano). The last column shows which frequencies the ensemble sings on average during the three seconds the chord lasts. It is

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460 The recordings were made in the SWR studios, with Thomas Angelkorte as Tonmeister, according to Christine Fischer of Neue Vocalsolisten.

interesting to see that the S1 note is quite low compared to the ET setting, a little more than 37 cents low. In fact, all the notes are quite low, except for the countertenor note (9 cents higher than the ET value) and the bass (who almost hits the ET value spot on). But if we now consider the tenor's c♯¹ as the centre note, as the singers of NVS suggest they do when singing, we find some very interesting things: first of all, the Soprano 1 note (G♯₅) is almost spot on with an interval of just above 3/2 (plus an octave). The Baritone note (F♯₃) is also nearly spot on with an interval of 3/2 (minus an octave). The Soprano 2 note is a little bit higher than the just tuned third of a C♯ major chord (around a quarter of a tone). The C♯ major chord is therefore well defined, although it is the fifths in the chord that really stands out as just tuned. These results suggest that the singers try to find instances of just intervals in such a chord, preferably a triad. They are very close in intonating the chord structured around the C♯ major constellation.

I suggest that these ways of constructing tonalities within a harmonic complex are fundamental to solving the vertical intonation challenges that the ensemble face. Somehow the singers have to make decisions about how the chord should sound, firstly in order to make a stable sound that makes it easier for the singers to produce the same result the next time they sing the chord, a predictable solution the vocal ensemble can produce again and again, and secondly to present a solution that meets the vertical intonation challenges in the best way to produce a stable harmony as close to the just intonation pitch system as is possible.

8.6 How intonation work influences ensemble performance

8.6.1 Communication and intonation

When the singers of the vocal ensemble read the score, they not only read their own part and determine how to sing it, they also imagine their voice as part of the whole ensemble, deciding how it relates to the others. This involves making decisions about the functions of their individual notes in the series of chords, as they try to discover in which pitch system they should produce their pitches. In figure 16 the singer from NVS said that his voice should be regarded as a part of a C♯ major chord. In performance he will

naturally pay more attention to these voices, directing his communication towards the singers who are a part of this chord. To reach a common musical goal, ensemble performance requires of the musicians that they coordinate their actions.[461] Visual communication through gestures, eye contact, body sway and so on is important to this coordination,[462] because it strengthens the musical message, giving viewers (whether it is the audience or another performer) knowledge about the performer's intentions.[463] Considering how important intonation work is for a vocal ensemble, it is chord production, deciding which voices to sing together with and how one singer's pitch relates to these other pitches, above all else, that has an influence on internal communication within the ensemble. I will say more in Chapter 9 about vocal ensembles and communication in the music-making process.

8.6.2   Voice technique

Intonation work means more than finding the concrete pitch to produce within the sum of pitches produced by the other singers in the ensemble. It also means, as one of the singers in NVS said, finding the right formant quality, the right dynamics and the right timbre. To match these demands, singers need both control and flexibility to move between the horizontal approach to intonation and the vertical one, which means singers hear themselves within the overall harmonic context of the ensemble. The way of producing the voice is different if the singers define themselves within a soloistic mode or in a more accompanying mode. The timing, timbre and vocal effects of the phrase (for instance the amount of air on the voice), and especially the amount of vibrato changes from one mode to the other, as one of the singers in NVS put it.

Vibrato is one of the elements of voice technique that is most often affected by intonation work. I discuss the use of vibrato within vocal ensemble voice techniques more fully in Chapter 7.2.2. Here I want to address the intonation aspect of vibrato control. With vertical intonation, pitch production will usually accord with just tuning, wherein the interval between two tones gives a ratio of their frequencies in small integers.[464] Vibrato corresponds

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461   Goebl and Palmer 2008, p. 427.

462   Ibid. p. 427.

463   Ibid. p. 427.

464   Hagerman and Sundberg 1980, p. 77.

to a small periodic variation of the fundamental frequency produced by the voice, and will eliminate the beating that results in slightly mistuned intervals.[465] In my observations and experience, this beating is one of the elements that vocal ensemble singers listen to when trying to set just intervals. Therefore, being able to control vibrato, helps the singer produce exactly the pitch needed to eliminate beats, and thus contribute to a just interval or chord with the other singers.

8.7   Conclusions

Historical writings show us that intonation work has always been a necessary skill for singers. Pitch production is a very complex task, involving a very intricate system of muscle control in the voice production system of the throat and in the respiratory system. The auditory system we use to control pitch does not give us a clear picture of how we sound, making it very difficult to find out whether what we produce is correct or not. All the members of a vocal ensemble face the same challenges, bringing intonation work right to the centre of the vocal ensemble's attention. Singers have always had to deal with various tuning systems in their attempt to deal with intonation challenges, and researchers and theorists have helped to find pitch systems and scales that would lead the way out of the pitch system jungle. There seems to be a clear line between the pitch systems a vocal ensemble uses when singing in a horizontal, melodic, more soloistic way, and when singing in a vertical mode as part of a harmony. The former horizontal mode is characterized by complex pitch systems that defy identifying anyone mode of intonation. On the other hand, when in vertical intonation mode, singers define their pitches much more in terms of just intonation. This urge is so strong that even within complex, non-tonal music they construct local tonal structures to help stabilize their pitch production. The processes involved in producing the desired pitches are quite complex, and the voice is not always the most accurate intonation instrument. The singers of NVS and other ensembles seek a way to produce predictability within this rather unpredictable world, and do so by giving horizontal melodic intonation more freedom, and by locking vertical intonation into more clearly defined systems. In this way they reduce the part luck can play

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465   Ibid. p. 77.

in pitch production, and provide a stable result they can produce over and over again.

The audience, who saw them presented on stage as if they were a projection from far away, knew no better than that they were a closely-knitted clan, and this allowed them to behave as one...

(Faber, 2002)

9 Communication

Whenever we interact with other people, we have to signal our intentions to them. These signals or intentions are received and interpreted by them before they begin the same process towards us. This model of communication was first described in 1948 by Harold D. Lasswell and further refined ten years later by Robert Braddock, who said that communication is all about who says what through which medium to whom under which circumstances and with what effect. We use both verbal and non-verbal signals to communicate with others, but the non-verbal signals, often also connected to the non-voluntary nervous system, often gain more significance in the process than the verbal signals.[466]

So if I sing alone in front of an audience, I communicate with them, and they communicate with me, and our communication will be altered and driven forward by the continuous stream of signals going back and forth between us. When I sing together with other musicians, I still communicate with my audience, of course, but at the same time my fellow musicians are doing the same. When I make music together with other musicians, I also have to show them what I intend to do, one way or the other, and they have to show me what they intend to do. It means that we have to give signals to each other regarding tempos, musical intentions, dynamics while we at the same time communicate with our audience. So, when a vocal ensemble like NVS

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466 Karlstad 1993 p. 36.

performs, there is communication going on in every direction, between the singers and between the singers and the audience.

When solo musicians perform in front of an audience, they are quite free in terms of interpretation and their communication with the audience; but as soon as more musicians join in, they have to synchronize their performances somehow, so that the plans they have agreed upon during rehearsals come forward in their music making. When six or seven people are performing at the same time, I believe it is impossible for every signal or musical intention to be completely synchronized, no matter how much discussion the group has done before the performance.

This chapter will deal with these processes of communication. We will look first at the nature of the communication between the performer (singer) and the audience, and the challenges for a vocal ensemble communicating with an audience. Next we turn to communication between performers, and the challenges with which a vocal ensemble has to deal. These sections are based upon interview material, primarily from NVS but also from I Fagiolini and The Hilliard Ensemble, together with my own experience of the work of Nordic Voices, as well as with relevant literature on the subject.

The division between performer–audience communication and performer–performer communication is suggested in a study by Davidson and Good (2002). In the introduction to this study, they draw a line between the content to be shared by the performers and communicated to the audience, and the process of co-operation between the performers.[467] My empirical data confirms this division, and I have chosen to divide this chapter about communication in this way.

There is an interesting study analyzing communication processes in performance, conducted by Jane Davidson (2002). It is a case study of a performance by the English singer Annie Lennox, and it provides a reasonable framework that can be used in analyzing a performer's way of communicating during a performance. With Davidson's movement categories as a framework, I conducted a small study of a part of a performance by NVS, looking into the performer–audience and performer–performer communication, and examining whether this approach can give an insight into the performance choices the group has taken. To compare my findings I also conducted similar studies of two solo performances by

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467   Davidson and Good 2002 p. 186.

two of the members of NVS. I also examined whether this gesture category framework might be used in future, in more detailed studies on the subject.

9.1   Performer–audience communication

A musician's performance can be analyzed in terms of both sound and sight. Although the sound is, of course, extremely important in a musical performance, some have suggested that sight more clearly indicates the performers' intentions, and that body movements of the performer are highly informative.[468] We know that in daily communication non-verbal signals in many ways overshadow the verbal signals we use. The body movements of a performer can help the observer to understand the course of action or the intent from this performer.[469] Both in the production of sound and the expression of content, the performer's body will move. Dahl and Friberg (2007) argue that speech and movement come from a shared semantic source, and since music making is a form of communication, music and speech have many properties in common.[470] Body language not connected to the music production itself is referred to as ancillary, accompanying or non-obvious movement, and the authors suggest that some of the expressivity in the music is reflected in these movements.[471] The study by Dahl and Friberg also concludes that body movements alone can communicate the emotions intended to be communicated by the musician, suggesting that movement is a crucial part of the communication between performer and the audience.[472]

Livingstone, Thompson and Russo (2009) argue that musicians also use facial expressions to communicate emotions in music. According to this study there is a process of perception, planning, production and post-production of emotional singing, giving greater impact and weight to the music.[473] Perceivers spontaneously mimic facial expressions, and also tend to mimic tone of voice and pronunciation, gesture and body posture and

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468   Davidson 1994 p. 274.

469   Dahl and Friberg 2007 p. 433.

470   Ibid. p. 433.

471   Ibid. p. 434.

472   Ibid. p. 448.

473   Livingstone, Thompson and Russo 2009 p. 475.

breathing rates, helping the perceiver (the audience) to decode music structure and emotional information.[474]

It seems that the movement structures established in a performance are quite consistent over time, and that performances of a musical piece, even with a long interval between the performances, share much of the same movement patterns.[475]

Juslin and Laukka (2003) reviewed around 104 different studies concerning vocal expression and musical performance, establishing a link between the two. Performers will alter their tempos, volume and timbre, for instance, to alter their expressivity in the performance.[476] This is in many ways an obvious statement, but listeners seem to be able to track emotions in a music performance even when researchers cannot find any acoustical cues to these emotions in the music itself.[477] It shows that vocal expressions and alterations are a part of the communication process between a performer and the receiver.

Since it is the music itself that is communicated, performers and audience need to be able to 'share' in the musical code.[478] There is research showing that audiences are able to detect small expressive changes in the music,[479] and that both performers and audiences are able to have the same idea about what the music is communicating.[480]

It is my view and my experience that the meeting between the performer and the audience is filled with rules, both tacit and explicit, from dress codes to a common understanding of the complex musical and body languages that are present in the performance. It might be supposed that there are significant differences between the kinds of communication between the performer and the audience in different genres. All performances involve a 'contract' between the audience and the performers, regulating how they behave towards each other. This contract is based on expectations and social rules in the concert setting about what kind of behaviour is considered

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474 Ibid. p. 475.

475 Davidson 2001 p. 236.

476 Juslin and Laukka 2003 p. 774.

477 Ibid. p. 801.

478 Davidson 2001 p. 237.

479 Gabrielsson 1999 p. 602.

480 Sundberg, Fryden and Friberg 1995 p. 62.

proper. In other words, the performer and audience always operate and move within the frameworks of the concert setting. For the audience, the rules of conduct concern where to sit or stand, what to wear, how to react to the music, when to applaud, how to move, and when to speak or what to say. And different rules apply depending on the kind of concert: the rules for a classical concert are quite different from those for a pop concert. The classical artist and the pop artist may move in different ways and their movements may be different, but they share the fact that they communicate on both verbal and non-verbal levels, and that bodily communication is important whether you sit behind a piano, stand behind a music stand or dance in front of 20,000 people in a stadium.

Davidson's study of the movement of the pop singer Annie Lennox shows that there are similarities in movement between a classical singer and a pop singer. The presence of an audience evokes gestures that Davidson call 'seducing', as when Annie Lennox clearly moves in ways that have nothing to do with the song she is singing (nodding to the audience, dancing with the other performers and so on).[481] It is her 'display' behaviour, a way of moving that can also be seen in the performances of classical singers – a good example is the famous handkerchief waving of Luciano Pavarotti.[482] But the framework Davidson suggests for understanding the different movements and gestures involved in the communication process is more important. Drawing on the work on physical gestures in association with spoken languages by Ekman and Friesen,[483] she suggests that movements and gestures can be analyzed within five different categories: *Adaptive gestures (expression on inner mental state)*, *regulatory gestures (co-performer gestures)*, *illustrative gestures and emblem gestures (the narrative of the poem/music)*, *and display gestures.*[484] All these categories of movements will be present to different degrees, no matter which genre is being performed, but they will be differently represented according to genre and possible other factors. These categories can be used as a framework for future analysis of performance movements and gestures. I will return to this later in this chapter.

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481   Davidson 2001 p. 245.

482   Ibid. p. 246.

483   For instance in Ekman and Friesen (1969).

484   Davidson 2001 p. 248.

Communication between performer and audience is two-way: body language, facial expressions and acoustic signals from the performer are all important elements in the communication process. In our experience of the world, when we listen to a concert or perform, all the different signal modes come in one package, a multimodality, and it is often difficult for the performer and the audience to tell which mode is at hand.[485]

The skill of communicating with an audience develops over time, and all musicians develop this skill in their own way. But what happens when different musicians meet to perform together? All these skills, everyone's bodily language, facial expressions and musical communicating abilities collide. When a vocal ensemble like NVS performs, what is the nature of the communication process? Do they synchronize the various communication processes? To what extent do they allow each member's communication abilities shine through?

9.1.1   Performer–audience communication and NVS

A classical singer is trained to perform within the setting of the classical concert. So unless they are performing opera, where their movements are directed, the movements and gestures will be conducted within the framework set by the classical concert. All the singers from the vocal ensembles I have met during my studies are trained as classical singers, and the singers of NVS are no exception. There are ways of behaving associated with every genre of music, and the audience and performer have tacitly agreed upon how to move and behave when they enter the concert hall together. The singers of NVS are all trained within a classical performance norm.[486] When NVS performs in a concert, unless they are doing a staged performance, they have a default setting within which they perform. Standing in a horseshoe shaped semi-circle, they are each positioned behind a music stand, which limits the space they have to move. This position seems to be the default setting of most classical vocal ensembles I have come across. For all the rehearsals and concerts I have observed and participated

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485   Jensenius 2007 p. 13.

486   There is quite a bit of literature about a 'classical performance norm', meaning how a classical singer traditionally moves and behaves in front of an audience. See for instance Emmons and Sonntag (1979): *The Art of the Song Recital.*

in, NVS have positioned themselves in this way.[487] Nordic Voices uses this position as a default setting, both when rehearsing and performing, I Fagiolini sat like this in the rehearsal I observed[488] and the concert video clips one can find of I Fagiolini, NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble all show this positioning of the singers, often with the singers positioned from highest voice on the left and the lowest voice on right as seen from the audience, although the internal positioning of the singers might vary from piece to piece and from ensemble to ensemble.[489]

The singers perform within the classical singing norm, locked into their place behind their music stands, so their moving space is not very large. We would therefore expect their movements to be executed mainly with the upper part of their bodies, an assumption that harmonizes with my experience in Nordic Voices and the observations I have made of NVS. I will provide an analysis of a performance of NVS below (see section 9.5).

When the singers of NVS perform together, they act as solo singers but at the same time perform as a group. When asked if there is a synchronization process going on in the group to manage performer–audience communication, their answers are a bit vague. One of the singers says that they all bring their ideas, but they have to have their ears open towards the others, and not only for their own voice. This 'being together' is very important for the group, not standing out too much unless it is clearly agreed. This is the blending process that happens in almost all aspects of vocal ensemble singing, from tuning to vocal technique, and also, it seems, in synchronizing affects and interpretations of a song. In an interview with me, Rogers Covey-Crump of The Hilliard Ensemble, when asked to define a 'good vocal ensemble', answered that it should consist of people with trained voices, capable of blending together, but also capable of interpreting music together, like a string quartet.[490] There is a synchronization process, getting the same tempos and so on, but the synchronization of temperaments and affects is certainly there as well. In

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487 Rehearsals observed 9 June, participated in on 1–5 Sept 2010, concerts observed 9 June 2010 (Paris), May 2010, and concert participated in on 6 Sept 2010.

488 Rehearsal observed 13 Sept 2010.

489 See for instance The Hilliard Ensemble: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3fCQ––ZnQA or NVS: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZtX7rfqV8M and I Fagiolini: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCTK7bA1Z7k (Viewed 01.12.2012).

490 Interviewed on 17 Dec 2010.

a study of 2009, Overy and Molnar-Szakacs claimed that all musical sounds are made from body movements and that these movements encourage other bodies to move along.[491] They describe a model they call the Shared Affective Motion Experience (SAME) for a better understanding of how they find imitation, synchronization and shared experience may be the key aspects of human musical behaviour.[492] The synchronization is linked, according to these authors, to the mechanisms of empathy within the neural system.[493] They describe how music making reaches a certain level of cooperation and coordination and that the sense of togetherness can be extremely powerful and they conclude that their SAME model suggests the potential for

> [...] synchronized, affective experience and communication, with the flexibility for individual expression and variability.[494]

Group music making is about sharing our experiences and our affects, and this goes from performer to performer, but also from performer(s) and to the audience. Others' music making affects us on a mental level, but other parts of our bodies are also synchronized when making music together. A study by Müller and Lindenberger (2011) shows that our respiratory and cardiac patterns synchronize when we sing together.[495] Of course, singing together affects everyone's sense of tempo and dynamics, and it may also influence the affects communicated by the performers to the audience.

I suggest that there is a synchronization process going on between the singers of a vocal ensemble. Rogers Covey-Crump of The Hilliard Ensemble talks about the 'mutual respect' the singers have to have for each other, a view shared by the singers of NVS. One of the singers of NVS says that it is about having great respect for each other, and 'openness' to each other as well. They compared the process to a flock of birds all moving and changing their direction at once.

In my experience, all ensembles discuss their interpretation of a work when they rehearse, and then operate within a socio-cultural and musical framework in front of the audience. Together with the actual physical limitation on their moving space, that is, where they stand, how much

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491 Overy and Molnar–Szakacs 2009 p. 489.

492 Ibid. p. 490.

493 Ibid. p. 491.

494 Ibid. p. 499.

495 Müller and Lindenberger 2011 p. 1.

moving space they have, and so on, these frameworks decide how they move and how they communicate with the audience. There is a synchronization process going on all the time. I asked the singers of NVS if it sometimes happens that some singers stick out and do too much or too little, their answers again were rather vague. One singer said that they discuss a lot, and that they try to find open solutions, for instance that they agree upon singing 'softer' instead of saying 'piano', which gives the singers slightly more freedom. But the concept of one singer standing out too much in the performances is not especially evident in NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble. The physical limitations they have, the norms of classical singing and the framework of the socio-cultural agreements with the audiences seem to establish a safe space in which to perform. My own experience with Nordic Voices tells the same story. If it happens that one singer sticks out a bit too much, for instance overdoing some kind of interpretive element, at least when it is not agreed upon, it is always commented upon later, and modified so it fits into the whole group's presentation of the music.

But there are still some questions which need to be asked. For instance, what kinds of movements and facial expressions are most frequently connected to the interpretation and performance of the music, and how do these movements and expressions differ from those the singer uses when performing as a soloist? How synchronized are these movements in an experienced ensemble? Will they be more alike as the singers continue to work together in the group?

These questions indicate fruitful areas for future research.

9.2   Performer–performer communication

When talking to the singers of NVS, they often emphasize the fact that their audiences seem to get struck with and fascinated by the way the group is able to be precise when starting a note, how they can be together in their breathing, and how the singers are able to anticipate what will come from the other singers. These communication processes also seem to fascinate the singers themselves, and these processes seem to be an important focus during rehearsal. This may be because these types of co-performer communication processes are quite concrete: it is easier to deal with and

to measure how precise the onset of a tone is than it is to measure the movements and facial expressions connected to emotion.

In a chamber music performance it is of course vital to make music in a synchronized manner. But as Davidson and Good (2002) point out, there has been little research directed towards the communication required between players to create a co-ordinated music performance.[496] Davidson and Good focus on a string quartet in rehearsal and performance, looking into the processes of co-ordinating the performance of two works for string quartet. They found that the ensemble used what they called 'conversations with the eye', in other words that the performers sought eye contact to co-ordinate their musical intentions. It involved different 'directions of glances', and in the string quartet these 'directions of glances' involved mostly looking at the first violinist (which is common to most string quartets). But the 'directions of glances' also involved direct eye contact between the first violinist and the cellist, direct eye contact between the second violinist and the viola player and a pivotal shift of position of the second violinist to facilitate looking between himself and the other players.[497] These 'conversations with the eye' conveyed important information during the process of playing. Davidson and Good observed three different uses of gestures: the gestural marking of exits and entrances; the gestures of marking of dynamics; and the use of gestures to co-ordinate timing and expression.[498] The first group of gestures is represented by gestures like the upward sweeping of the bowing arm, indicating an imaginary quarter note upbeat, the second group is connected to the size of the movements, and the third to the circular body sway of the string players which co-ordinates timing and expression.[499]

The processes involved in co-ordinating musical performance are complex. Even the process of talking together to agree upon co-ordination of musical content can take many forms, for instance concrete discussions on musical matters, but also friendly conversations.[500] But it is important to note that much of the exchange between musicians is unspoken.[501] In rehearsals, we agree upon the 'what' is in a piece, the dynamics, the tempos, the intonation,

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[496] Davidson and Good 2002 p. 186.

[497] Ibid. pp. 196–197.

[498] Ibid. p. 197.

[499] Ibid. p. 197.

[500] Williamon and Davidson 2002 p. 54.

[501] Ibid. p. 54.

and so on. But how we achieve all these 'whats' in a performance is all about developing a language of communication between the performers. King (2004) divides the rehearsal process in three parts, *structure*, *collaboration* and *techniques*.[502] I will deal with the rehearsal process in Chapter 10, but here I want to emphasize that the rehearsal process is important in the communication process between the performers, since it is the place and time where the performers can agree upon the meaning of the music they are to perform. In rehearsals, too, there will be moments where they do not need to talk at all to agree upon this musical meaning, but the performers use non-verbal communication to communicate their intentions and to co-ordinate their actions. Davidson and Williamon explain that rehearsals appear to be

> [...] occasions for co-performers to learn the score, coordinate general expressive features of the music and establish a network for social support.[503]

And when the performers come to a live performance, they take with them the agreements on the music they have made, and relate to them. Sometimes they have to deal with a situation in which new ideas emerge in the performance setting. The performers must have a common vocabulary that enables them to both understand the musical communication from the others and to communicate musical intentions themselves. They develop a language, both verbal and non-verbal, to communicate their musical intentions to each other. In the study of Annie Lennox, Davidson (2001) suggested that musicians move within five different categories of movement, and she calls them co-performer gestures or *regulatory gestures* (see 9.1). These gestures form a non-verbal language that tells co-performers your intentions, like an up-and-down head movement to show the downbeat of the first beat in a bar. These suggested categories will be used later in this chapter to conduct an analysis of a performance by NVS.

The literature shows that eye contact between co-performers is essential for performers to co-ordinate their actions. For instance, Davidson and Williamon say that

> [...] Besides exchanging information verbally and musically, co-performers often rely on visual information – such as direct eye contact, facial

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502   King 2004 p. 11.

503   Williamon and Davidson 2002 p. 55.

expressions, specific physical gestures and continuous swaying movements – for communication amongst themselves.[504]

I find that this is also the case with vocal ensembles, but there is one problem: when talking to the singers of The Hilliard Ensemble, they say that rely much more on listening to each other than looking at each other, since, as they say, the *ear is much faster than the eye*. I will discuss this below (in 9.3), but I will just say that although listening is an important part of the communication process, it is seldom touched on in research on communication between co-performers. The studies mostly try to map movements and gestures together with performance planning (rehearsing), as for instance in the 2002 study by Williamon and Davidson that looks into the co-ordination process of two pianists planning and performing a concert together. It seems that our understanding of aural communication and its role is limited by the challenge of finding good methods to study how musicians listen to each other.

In the study by Williamon and Davidson (2002) they show that the movements that were seen to co-ordinate the actions between the pianists were movements like hand-lifts (which occurred especially during pedalled and held notes) and swaying of the upper torso (connected to showing tempos).[505] In this study the two pianists did not talk much during rehearsals, but they seemed to synchronize their movements. This unifying effect was also seen in the already mentioned study about the string quartet (Davidson and Good 2002),[506] and it is tempting to suggest that this synchronization of movements is an essential part of the co-ordination process between co-performers. In another study, Davidson found out that the participating pianists and singers spoke about 'reading the signs' between them as crucial to successful ensemble performance.[507]

Co-performer communication is about reading the others and trying to understand their body language to co-ordinate their actions. It is the way they gain precision, synchronize tempo, dynamics and so on. But, as I have suggested, listening is also a part of the communication process. For instance, when I hear a line from another performer, I can anticipate the timing of the next important point. It is my experience that when working

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504   Ibid. p. 54.

505   Ibid. p. 61.

506   Davidson 2009 p. 369.

507   Ibid. p. 368.

together as co-performers, whether in a string quartet, a vocal ensemble or another chamber ensemble, much time will be spent developing and understanding this 'language' between performers.

The 2001 study by Davidson is one of the few that tries to develop an analytic framework that could be used to understand performer–performer communication through their movement behaviour. In Chapter 9.5 I carry out an analysis of a performance by NVS to see whether these categories can be used to get a wider understanding of the communication between performers.

9.2.1 Performer–performer communication and NVS

For NVS, musical communication between the singers during rehearsal and performance is vital. It is one of the skills they put forward when talking about what kind of skills an ensemble singer should obtain. In my interviews they often suggested that other singers have not learned this skill well enough, so performing with them can be difficult. For instance, one of the singers said

> [...] I sing classical concerts with an oratorio group, four soloists, and we should sing together as an ensemble. For me it is the most normal thing to be in contact with the other singers, and I am sometimes surprised by how alone the tenor is in his world, and the soprano. Well, I have another idea of making music. I cannot ignore this education, I cannot sing in this autistic way.

They also say that a traditional classical singer can live without these skills, but that, as a member of a vocal ensemble, one has to be very aware of how to communicate with others:

> [...] You can have a good time as a soloist without listening to anyone else, but in a group you have to have singers who can produce different kinds of dynamics, different kinds of sounds so that they can make a good sound together.

I find this extremely important, since it sums up the vocal alteration process that singing in a vocal ensemble requires. This singer from NVS underlines that singing in a vocal ensemble requires the ability to listen or watch the others, and then alter ones singing, making ones own voice fit into the sound that has been agreed upon, whether one's own voice sticks out or blends in.

One of the other singers said that since the singers of NVS are always together, they have to communicate with the others, and opera singers don't always need to take this into consideration, probably since they mostly rely on a conductor.

Communication, as one of the singers of NVS told me, is about shaping the listening of the singers, being able to fit in and being a part of something, but also being a part of and shaping the dynamics of the group. They call what they do chamber music, especially since they (usually) don't sing with a conductor. And to sing in a chamber music way is to always be in contact with the others. When being asked what this contact is, they always mention eye contact. One of them calls it to 'talk with the eyes', always being in eye contact. But knowing where to look is also essential, and to prepare that seems to be extremely important during NVS rehearsals. There is a constant shift in directions, a 'communicating while singing', as one of the singers called it.

This knowing in which directions to look or to direct your signals is very important, and almost all the singers of NVS say so in their interviews with me. Knowing where to direct your attention or when to signal your intention is a vital part of the preparations, before the rehearsal, in the studying of the score and during rehearsals. In the study by Williamon and Davidson where they followed two pianists in rehearsal and performance, the rehearsal process was vital in co-ordinating their actions and examining the moments in performance where they have to be aware of intensifying contact with others. It is important to prepare a score before rehearsing, says one of the singers of NVS; an ensemble singer should have the ability to see what happens in the other voices:

> [...] During the rehearsal for the concert we have many points where we say for instance 'Sarah, you have to look at me here'. It is important not only to be in ear contact, not only to hear what the others do, but also to see what the others do. It is always easy to be together, to be synchronized when you see each other.

So what they look for in their preparation of the score are those points where they have the same entrances. These moments will tell them that they have to direct their eye contact to the person with the same entrance. They also look for what some of them call a 'following' part or 'leading' part. As one of them said:

> […] if it is a following part it is more a thing of listening to what the others are doing and being together with them; to have this feeling of breathing together. If I have to show it, I have to breathe very clearly or in a rhythmical way, so that the others can realize what I am thinking or predict what I am doing.

Identifying the following part or the leading part requires finding out which singer to direct the attention to. It seems to be much the same process as identifying the solo and accompanying parts presented in Chapter 8. When asked what they are looking for in the score, they mention issues like dynamics (who has the strongest part), which part is clearly soloistic or which part is more rhythmically defined. One of the singers described it nicely as having '*metrum leadership*'. Being together in time is important for them, so identifying common entrances is vital. As one of them said:

> […] For instance, if I have an entrance together, I will see that in my preparations. And if I forget it, my colleagues will let me know [laughter].

NVS's default positions on the stage, from soprano on the left (seen from the audience) to bass on the right, standing in a semicircle, have to be put aside when they are working on dramaturgical projects, which can demand something very different. This default format has generated its own distinctive communication system, which they recognize as their own. They use the two flanks of their semicircle as 'metrum leadership', in which the outer two, the soprano and the bass, aim to stay together while the others look at them. Another of the singers says this about the system:

> […] We have a small system. Andreas, the bass, and the soprano – they make up a line with small, small movements. They look at each other, and we look at the bass or the soprano.

They say that if another singer has the most important line, what they call a 'musically leading' part, they listen to them. So the communication axis, if we can call it that, will differ depending on whether they have a solo or accompanying part, on the rhythmical structure of the piece (metrum leadership) and also on the dynamics.

When trying to synchronize entrances and timing, they will look for movements that reminds of the movement of a conductor. One of them said that they are all a 'little bit of a conductor' in the group. I showed this singer a video of NVS rehearsing, and at one point this singer is seen clearly conducting the others with up and down head movements. I asked whether this was a normal thing to do when defining his line as the 'metrum

leadership'. He answered that it is difficult to show with the head all the time, but that at this particular moment it worked out well. When I observed NVS in preparation for concerts and the performance itself, I was struck by how they often conducted each other with head movements, with those movements having the same structure as a conductor's arm, with the first beat going downwards, the second to the side and the upbeat upwards. It reminded me of the head movements found by Williamon and Davidson in their study of the two pianists playing together (2002) and of the Davidson and Good study of a string quartet playing (2002).

Sometimes, in Nordic Voices, when we experience moments where we are not together, we often solve it by 'dancing it together'. When singing together with NVS,[508] at one point where 'our' quartet was not quite at the same tempo, Truike van der Poel of NVS suggested that we should 'dance the phrase together'; it was a situation I was most familiar with and a familiar solution too.

But NVS does not rely only on eye contact to communicate with each other. Eye contact is important and it is the first thing they mention when asked, but listening to each other is important too. One of them calls it listening at the same moment they are singing, a skill that one of the other singers also mentioned. She calls it having ears in 'both directions', meaning, I think, to be able to listen to both sides of the ensemble or listen to many things at one time. This singer continues:

> [...] A good ensemble singer [...] can communicate while singing. Do something different because you hear there is something different or make a tendency because you think you need a tendency, so take an initiative for musical processes.

So listening for tendencies in the music and processing them further is also important in the communication process.

There is a process of looking and listening while singing going on in NVS: it seems that the goal is to become, as one of them called it, 'one breathing organism'. There is a subtlety about the communication, and they are proud that the audience are sometimes startled by them being so together all the time. Sometimes they do too much. One of the singers talked about the process of learning the 'Vittriool' and 'Petrrohl' pieces by Georges Aperghis, and at one time they were doing too much to communicate with each other:

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508 The Stockhausen *Sternklang* project 6 Sept 2010.

[...] in these pieces, after two or three rehearsals, soprano and bass began to dance together, and then the middle voices tried to dance with them in a way. [...] It was absolutely clear that this was not good, because if you do that you sometimes have the tendency to do something a little bit different, and even a little bit different in these pieces means a catastrophe.

Doing just enough to be together, not giving too intrusive indications, and looking and listening while singing produce an ensemble that gets close to this 'one breathing organism'. One of the singers called it to 'get in a common groove', to be 'awake' and to 'feel' the others. This singer spoke about a project they did where they had to stand apart from each other, with quite a distance between them. Even then they managed to be together, breathing together and 'feel' the others. Again, the comparison with a flock of birds, turning in one direction and then in another, was appropriate; a unity that is almost metaphysical. The Overy and Molnar-Szakacs study of 2009 found a mirroring process taking place in our neural system when we see an action being executed.[509] Müller and Lindenberger found a similar synchronization process in the cardiac and respiratory system during choral singing.[510] Both these studies indicate that there is also something going on in our bodies that we cannot identify precisely. I suggest that these hidden processes could be a part of the 'feel for each other' going on in NVS when they are a part of 'one breathing organism'.

9.3 Listening or looking or both?

It is interesting to interview the members of The Hilliard Ensemble about communication. While the members of NVS talk mostly about looking while singing and using eye contact to be together, but also mention ear contact as important, Rogers Covey-Crump and John Potter (former member) of The Hilliard Ensemble talk instead about how they, for the most part, only use ear contact as a means of being together. Covey-Crump talked about how they have successfully taught other ensembles during their summer courses to listen to each other only, and how that has solved coordination problems in the music. He said that they let the ensemble members stand back to back so that the singers were forced to rely only on listening to each other,

509   Overy and Molnar–Szakacs 2009 p. 489.

510   Müller and Lindenberger 2011 p. 1.

and that this way of only listening did wonders for the vocal ensemble's communication problems.

Covey-Crump and Potter's point is that the 'ear is faster than the eye', therefore we react more quickly to what we hear than to what we see. Physiologically this is right. Mean auditory reaction time is around 140–160 ms and visual reaction is around 180–200 ms. The difference is perhaps because auditory stimulus only takes 8–10 ms to reach the brain, while visual stimulus takes around 20–40 ms to reach the brain.[511]

But when observing The Hilliard Ensemble in concert,[512] they also seem to use visual cues to communicate with each other, though not all members do it to the same extent. I could find the head movement to indicate a heavy downbeat, and although it was a staged project, these movements were present.

This means that both NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble use both eyes and ears to communicate while singing, but they do it differently. The Hilliard Ensemble rely more on listening to each other, while NVS rely more on eye contact. In my own ensemble, Nordic Voices, we also rely mostly on eye contact, though of course we listen to the sound carefully too. When taking every ensemble's way of communicating into consideration, I will suggest that the communication process that goes on between vocal ensemble singers, or between musicians, is based on both visual and auditory signal processing as well as synchronization processes within bodily systems like the cardiac and respiratory systems.

My impression is that Nordic Voices and NVS move more than The Hilliard Ensemble. The reasons for this could be that The Hilliard Ensemble uses more ear than eye contact. Why is that so? Maybe it has to do with the repertoire. Maybe The Hilliard Ensemble has a repertoire that allows more ear contact, as NVS and Nordic Voices (to a certain extent) do music that is more rhythmically complex and that demands extreme clarity from the members of the ensembles in terms of showing timing and tempo. It is not easy to anticipate tempo through listening to breathing before a phrase, and maybe easier to anticipate it through bodily movements or dancing. The Hilliard Ensemble may also be exceptionally good at using their ears, perhaps because of their experience as choral and ensemble singers from

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511   Kosinski 2012 p. 3.

512   Stockholm, 6 June 2012.

an early age, and they may have been taught to use their ears more from their early days as child choristers. Maybe it is simply that the singers of The Hilliard Ensemble do not like to move as much as the singers of NVS and that it is about what they feel comfortable with within the settings they perform in. Or, it could of course be the fact that The Hilliard Ensemble most of the time is fewer singers than NVS. It is easier to perceive signals from the others in the ensemble, if you have fewer people with whom you need to relate. It could well be that group communication is easier in a quartet than in a septet. Cragan, Kasch and Wright suggest that larger groups tend to move into cliques and coalition formation, and that groups needs five to seven people in order to enhance effective role playing.[513] It could suggest that communication runs more smoothly in The Hilliard Ensemble than in NVS.

In the end it is all about anticipating what will come, and there are numerous ways of doing this. Sometimes it is quite easy to anticipate the timing of a phrase when listening to the others, and it can be quite easy to anticipate when an onset of a tone will come from the timing of a breath. It can be extremely difficult to anticipate the loudness of a chord just by listening to the breathing in, but easier to anticipate it by looking at the whole body building up at the same time. The difficulty with listening is of course that you listen to what has been, whereas looking at body movements and visual cues can sometimes tell you something about the singers' musical intentions before anything happens. Performer–audience communication can be difficult if the performers don't have any idea of what goes on in the bodies and faces of their colleagues.

It is important to say that these are my interpretations of the different aspects of musical communication within the vocal ensembles, and that the questions and especially the assumptions I have made are all mine, supported only by my interpretation of the interviews and observations I have done, together with my own experience as a vocal ensemble singer. There should be more research into the field of musical communication, especially following up these observations of the balance between ear and eye contact.

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513   Cragan, Kasch, and Wright 2009 p. 13.

9.4 The use of a conductor in NVS

Sometimes when NVS perform music, they experience huge difficulties staying together in time. It is not enough to listen to what goes on in the other voices or to look for the movements from the other singers. Sometimes one of them must act as conductor.

It is something we also experience in Nordic Voices from time to time. For us it has to do with the complexity of the music. Our experience is that the feeling of tempo is very different from singer to singer, and in Nordic Voices, with six members, we often end up with six different interpretations of the tempo. With rhythmically complex music we often end up losing each other, with the result that we need a conductor.

This is also the case with NVS. I have observed concerts with them three times. Two of these concerts have included 'Petrrohl' by Georges Aperghis, and in both of these performances, Andreas Fischer conducted the others to a certain extent. In NVS Andreas Fischer often ends up conducting, because he, as one of the singers has said, has a very steady metrum. But they try to keep the conducting to a minimum. NVS was re-founded on the idea of not having a conductor in front of the ensemble, so having one might inhibit the active participation of the others. So they try to keep the use of a conductor to a minimum:

> [...] then you trust the conductor instead of looking at the others or the feeling of where the others are. So I always say 'let's try it without', and then we try it and sometimes it is good and sometimes it is not good and then we say 'OK, we do it this concert with him but next concert we try it without'.

And in the case of the 'Petrrohl' piece by Georges Aperghis they ended up, in the concerts I have observed, with having some passages conducted by Andreas Fischer and some of them without him conducting.

Maybe this need to use a conductor sometimes can tell us a little about the balance between ear contact and eye contact. It could happen that, as already suggested, the rhythmic complexity of the music decides what strategy is used. Sometimes the complexity is so overwhelming that a conductor has to be called. When singing with NVS in September 2012, doing *Sternklang* by Stockhausen, our quartet had these strategies. Sometimes we had no problems in understanding the timing and tempos of the others, sometimes we had to 'dance' the phrases together, but sometimes we had to 'capitulate' and let one of us conduct a phrase or two to keep the music

together. But this choice to let one of the singers conduct can also have a pragmatic side, as it is easier to have a conductor there to define a steady beat than to have every singer adapting to each other's slightly different tempos. This is what Andreas Fischer says in his 2006 interview with *Ballade.* He says that sometimes they know that they will only perform a specific piece only once or twice, in which case it can seem like a waste of time to use valuable rehearsal time to synchronize all the singers.[514] This says a lot about how important the synchronization process is, and how much time it takes to develop good communication skills. To regulate rhythmical impulses together is an important task in a vocal ensemble, and as the next chapters will show, the regulatory movements involved are clearly visible in a performance.

9.5   An analysis of a performance of NVS

As mentioned earlier, the 2001 study by Davidson suggests five different categories of movement to understand the communication of the British singer Annie Lennox. In a study of 1994, Davidson tracked the movements of a pianist to explore the connection between movement and expression and found coherence between the intensity of the expression and the size of the movement.[515] In further studies (1995 and 2002),[516] she came to the conclusion that movements were linked to specific musical focal points. Through studies of literature on the incidence of physical gestures in association with spoken language, especially Ekman and Friesen (1969) and Ellis and Beattie (1986), Davidson says that there are indications of specific gestures related to spoken meanings.[517] She states that there is a 'need for more detailed investigation of how performers present themselves on stage',[518] and of how the gestures and movements of a performer communicate their performance information to an audience. Through a preliminary study of her own singing, she concluded that she did have movements that were made in reaction to both the music and the text,

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514   http://www.ballade.no/nmi.nsf/doc/art20060309125008434634592 (Viewed 16.04.2014).

515   Davidson 2001 p. 239.

516   This study was in press by the time of the 2001 study this chapter and analysis is based upon.

517   Davidson 2001 p. 240.

518   Ibid. p. 240.

movements linking sections of the music or ideas between musical passages, gestures with clear technical orientation and instructional gestures concerning musical entrances and exits.[519] Davidson then connects these findings with the labels for conversation gestures proposed by Ekman and Friesen (1969). These are as follows:

- *Adaptive gestures*. Davidson defines these as gestures displaying what she calls an 'inward focus' or expressions of inner mental status.
- *Regulatory gestures*. Davidson defines these as gestures assisting co-ordination with the co-performer(s).
- *Illustrative gestures*. Davidson defines these as gestures that assist expression of the text's narrative. An *illustrative gesture* will show one concrete aspect from the text, for instance one finger in the air to illustrate the word 'one' in the text.[520]
- *Emblem gestures*. Davidson defines these as gestures that also assist expression of the text's narrative, but an *emblem gesture* is a gesture that resembles an aspect in the text, for instance a hand on the heart to describe the word 'emotion'.[521]
- *Display gestures*. Davidson defines these as gestures that put the artists themselves on display, like show-off gestures that help to promote the artist. A *display gesture* could for instance be the direct flirting smile from the artist to the audience, or Luciano Pavarotti's play with his handkerchief.[522]

It is of course difficult to analyze a performance from a communication perspective. It is quite easy to see the movements by an artist, and it is quite easy to see movements that are intended to regulate the onset or offset of tones or aimed to synchronize a musical line. But as soon as we try to use movements to understand a musician's intention we are moving into lesser known territory. First of all, as with all other interpretations, we put our own experience into what we look at, so my interpretation of NVS will be coloured by my presuppositions about what I see, for instance if I have some prejudices against the movements of pop singers. Second, we just have to admit that by looking at an artist we can understand something, but

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519   Ibid. p. 242..

520   An actual example from the Annie Lennox–analysis in the study (Davidson, 2001).

521   Also an actual example from the Annie Lennox–analysis in the study (Davidson, 2001).

522   Both examples are taken from the 2001 study by Davidson.

we take away all the listening, the dynamics of a phrase, the breathing, the rhythmical patterns and so on. As I have said earlier, the ensemble singers I know of all use their ears to synchronize their phrases with the other singers, and that dimension won't be present in a study that only looks at the movements of a performer. It is important to underline that communication processes between musicians are extremely complex processes and are often fine-tuned ones too, with very subtle ways of giving and receiving signals. On the other hand, when we are aware of the limitations of a study like this, it is easier to see what we get and narrow it down to just that. And in this case, we get a categorization of the gestures we see and when we interpret those we can be able to have a language to describe them with.

9.5.1   The piece analyzed and the preparations

I have chosen to look at a performance by five of the singers of NVS, performing the piece *Coins and Crosses, a Yes*song by the Italian composer Lucia Ronchetti.[523] The work is based upon the song *And You and I* by Anderson, Bruford, Howe and Squire sung by the pop group *Yes*. It was written for NVS in 2007, and so far as I know, was performed for the first time in Bonn on 6 September 2009. The work appeared in a concert programme NVS calls *Love Songs*, which consists of a series of pop songs arranged in various ways for the ensemble. The work is quite short, and takes around 3 minutes to perform; the performance I analyze here is from a concert NVS gave in Avellino, Italy, on 9 December 2008.[524]

The five singers are Sarah Maria Sun, soprano, Truike van der Poel, mezzosoprano, Daniel Gloger, countertenor, Guillermo Anzorena, baritone and Andreas Fischer, bass.

The work by Ronchetti is characterized by a lot of vocal effects in which the singers imitate pop instruments and the way they are played, for instance the beating of a drum or a bending of a bass string. Ronchetti never tries to imitate the whole orchestra, but she has chosen some of the effects of the band or small details of the instruments' sound, like the sound spectrum of a cymbal. To my point of view, by doing this she distances herself from the popular genre of imitating a pop band sound, as we can find for instance in

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523   Read more about her at www.luciaronchetti.com (Viewed 02.04.2013).

524   The video can be seen on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZtX7rfqV8M (Viewed 02.04.2013).

the performances of the Swedish vocal ensemble *The Real Group*. But the downside of doing this and getting classical trained singers to sing a pop song is that the composer risks the song taking on an ironic dimension. Ronchetti risks the performance being more comic than the she may have intended, and distances the composition from the original song. In this video there are a couple of seconds of audience reactions, and it is very clear that they find the performance quite humorous.

9.5.2   Analysis method

As with Davidson's study, I looked through the video of NVS several times, focusing on one singer at a time. For each movement I found significant, I used one of the five categories to label the movement. Further on I made a description of the same movement and I then added my interpretation of that movement. I placed my findings in an Excel sheet, where the two first entries for one of the singers looked like this:

Bar	Gesture	Description	Interpretation
1	E	Body moving downwards, to the right and up	Imitating the bending of a guitar
2	R	Head tilting downwards to the left	Placing the third beat with MS

I saw the first movement as an emblem gesture connected with the narrative dimension, here the bending of a guitar. The second movement was a clearly regulatory movement, a head movement intended to synchronize an entrance together with the mezzo-soprano.

When Jane Davidson analyzed the performance by Annie Lennox she connected the gesture to the text phrase where the gesture appeared in the songs, together with a description of the gesture, like for instance 'Emblem – hand on heart'.[525] I have chosen a similar approach, but I have chosen to anchor the gesture code to the bar number. This labelling of the movements, placing them and interpreting them was something I did for all five singers. All my labels are marked down carefully in the score of the song. A full copy of the score with my label marks is presented in the appendix of this thesis. The gesture codes are as follows: *Adaptive gestures* – **A**, *Regulator gestures* – **R**, *Illustrative gestures* – **I**, *Emblem gestures* – **E**, *Display gestures* – **D**. In

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525   Davidson 2001 p. 247.

addition to this I have also marked in the score where the singer is not present in the picture, making analysis impossible.

With all the gestures labelled, described and interpreted by me with one Excel sheet per singer, I could start to count the instances of each gesture. Davidson shows the presence of each gesture with a percentage level. I do the same here, although I stress that these numbers should not be read as accurate findings, but rather my interpretations. But they show a tendency, and it is the tendency which is interesting.

9.5.3   Results and discussions

There are a couple of difficulties and challenges involved in this study. First is the difficulty in deciding upon the categories. As mentioned earlier, it is easier to see a regulatory gesture that is made with the purpose of showing an entrance or an offset of a tone, than to see a gesture that is made because of an inner state of feeling. It is, as I had suspected, easier then to interpret performer–performer communication than performer–audience communication. The regulatory gestures are quite easy to see, and the other gestures will have a greater dimension of uncertainty connected to them. Also, in my interpretation of the intention of the gestures, the *A*, *I*, *E* and *D* gestures have a greater level of uncertainty to them. Maybe it means that in such an analysis, the performers themselves should be involved in interpreting their own performance: their interpretation of their own gestures could give a useful insight.

It is also particularly difficult to decide upon the difference between the *I* and *E* gestures. In the study of Annie Lennox, Jane Davidson observed some moments where Annie Lennox clearly illustrated the text, for instance by putting up a finger to demonstrate the word 'one'. In my study of NVS this almost never occurred, first of all, I think, because such gestures would be made in an extremely subtle fashion by a classical performer, perhaps with very small gestures if at all. In this case I have observed five singers standing behind music stands, reading a very difficult score. I have chosen to make this difference between the *I* and *E* gesture: the *I* gestures are connected only to the written word, as an illustration of concrete musical notation, for instance a glissando, or a concrete word in the lyrics. The *E* gestures are connected to the more metaphorical dimension, for instance a gesture that illustrates the bending of a guitar.
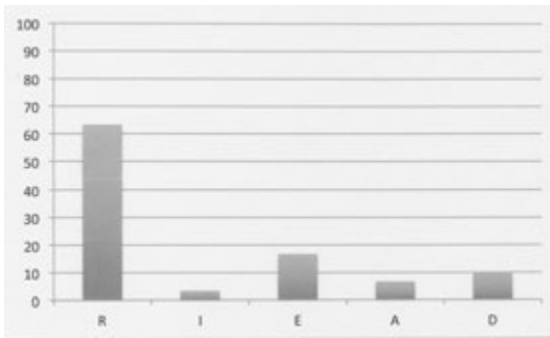
Figure 17: Sarah Maria Sun
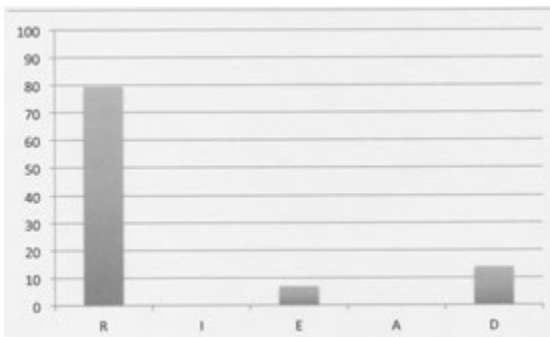
Figure 18: Truike van der Poel
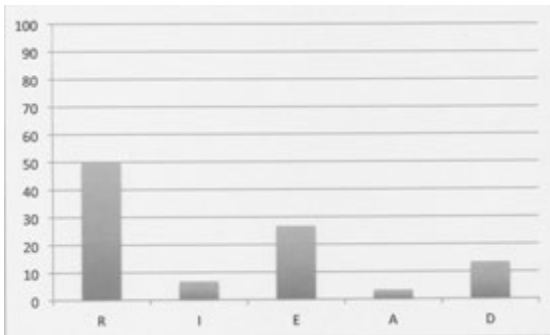
Figure 19: Daniel Gloger

The video examined has some other challenges as well. The audio is not very good at times, since it was recorded with a bad microphone, the room has very bad acoustics, and especially because the long reverberation blurs the result, making it difficult to hear. The singers are not all present in the video clip at all times, which means that I have more information on some of the singers than others. At one point the camera is pointed at the audience, showing their reaction. Although interesting to watch the audience reaction, it is of course difficult to interpret the singers' movements at those points in the video.

Another problem with using the categories suggested by Jane Davidson is that she does not say anything about the difference between a movement, a gesture and a posture. Future studies using these categories should take care of the differences, because they can say something about why some movements are left out while others are given more significance.

One last issue I should mention is the use of precise percentage numbers for each category of movements. They are, first of all, a result of my reading of the ensemble, and therefore my personal view of those movements. At the same time the numbers should not be read as absolute, quantitative numbers. But I have included them here for comparison to the numbers in the Jane Davidson study.

Figure 20: Guillermo Anzorena
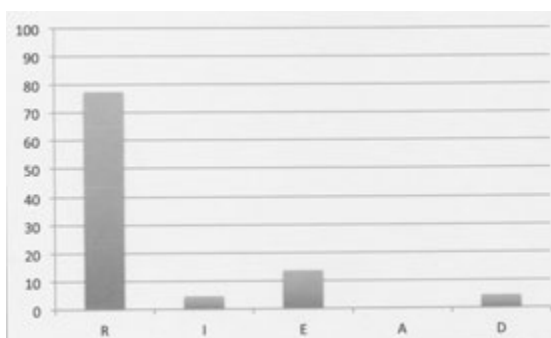
Figure 21: Andreas Fischer

The mere presence of each category of gestures in each singer is shown in figures 17–22

The percentage of regulatory gestures is quite high; around 65 per cent of all the gestures are regulatory gestures, remarkably higher than the number in the Annie Lennox study (around 20–25 per cent). Annie Lennox of course sings with a band, and very
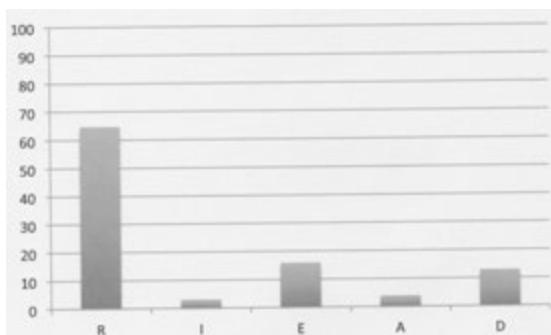
Figure 22: All singers combined

seldom needs to show them when to place an entrance or an offset of a note. It would have been interesting to see her band members and the amount of regulatory gestures they produce. The singers of NVS operate both as soloists and as accompanists, and they therefore need to produce more

signals to the others, which could explain why the amount of regulatory gestures is so high. What we can read from this, in any case, is that all the singers of the ensemble take significant responsibility in showing their tempos, their entrances and their endings. It is also remarkable to see that when they have a solo in the piece, their gestures become larger and more intense. Truike van der Poel has a number of soloistic passages, and she has a very high percentage of regulatory gestures. From the interviews I did with the group, they underline that if they have a leading part they will move more intensively. When I look at the regulatory gestures they make, I see that they use their heads a lot, conducting with their heads in the same manner, as they would have done with their hands. The upbeat and the placement of the downbeat very often come with an up and down movement with the head (and the upper part of the body), as if they are conducting. When interviewing the singers, they underline the 'default setting' of NVS, where the outer flanks, here soprano and bass, often take greater responsibility for the signal giving. This 'default setting' is present also here, and the flanks, here represented by soprano Sarah Maria Sun and bass Andreas Fischer, have a higher number of regulatory gestures than the two men placed in the middle of the group. It is also very striking to see that the singers often turn towards the singer that they expect will make a regulatory gesture, or towards a singer or singers with whom they share a regulatory responsibility, if I can call it that. In this clip it is very striking that they 'talk with their eyes', a feature they underlined in their interviews with me. In bar 59 of the piece they have a very clear break so that the first beat of bar 60 should be precisely together. The regulatory gesture there comes from all the singers, and even though the gesture varies from person to person, it is very clear that they have done this so many times that they know how to time the entrance and get the onset of the bar 60 exactly in time.

There are not that many illustrative gestures, and they do not underline the text or illustrate the musical notation that much. In fact, most of the time, they do not stress the text content at all, almost working against a quite serious text. At one time, Andreas Fischer is seen stressing the word 'coming' with the gesture of his hands moving out from his body as a 'welcome' gesture, but this is a very rare example. On the other hand, emblematic gestures seem to be more present, meaning that they show more of the musical instructions they get from the composer, like for instance a rolling movement of the upper part of the body underlining the

'bending of a guitar string'. It is as if the singers have decided to be more attentive to the musical instructions than to the text itself, giving the total outcome of the performance a more humoristic touch than the lyrics might suggest. It is difficult to say if this is a conscious choice or not.

Adaptive gestures seem not to be particularly present in the performance, as the singers do not seem to show that much of their inner state of feeling. Adaptor gestures are quite difficult to read, and it is difficult to interpret them too. But sometimes they do things that stand out, like for instance when Daniel Gloger puts his left hand in his pocket at one point and takes it out again, almost as if he forgets his singing for a moment.

Display gestures are also present, which may be a bit surprising as these are classical singers. But the gestures are in this case connected to the composition, because this is a pop song arranged by a contemporary classical composer, creating a kind of meta-composition. When the singers produce a display gesture, it is as if they are showing off, like a parody of pop singing and pop singers. They dance with the upper part of their bodies, bending their body backwards to show a 'wailing' posture, imitating pop singers and pop dancing. All in all these display gestures underline the humoristic dimension they seem to have chosen for the song. These gesture choices are present in all the singers, maybe part of the synchronization process suggested in 9.1.1.

Guillermo's gestures are very funny and very energetic. Of all the singers, he is the one smiling the most, showing a kind of playfulness in his singing. This can be seen especially in his D gestures. Another observation is that it is obvious that Andreas takes responsibility for a lot of the group's timing. He is very active in seeking the others with his eyes, and he has very clear regulatory gestures all the way through the piece. Daniel Gloger moves quite a lot when he has solos. He does not have that many regulatory gestures, and often these are characterized by his 'turning towards another singer'. His display gestures are quite abrupt and large, especially when paired with loud falsetto singing in a high register. Truike van der Poel does not move that much. She has the most regulatory gestures, possibly, as already mentioned, since she has most of the solos in the piece. She is very active in seeking the other singers with her eyes, always acting very securely. Sarah Maria Sun's gesture patterns are rather difficult to interpret. In this piece there are a couple of moments where she looks as if she turns 'inward', concentrating and almost waiting for her next entrance. She has also a

couple of moments where she turns towards the audience. It could be that these moments, which I have interpreted as adaptive gestures, are done because of her role as an 'echo' to the solo parts sung by the mezzo-soprano.

Although the gestures are quite difficult to read and interpret, and it is obvious that the categories suggested by Jane Davidson need some more precision in their definition, this way of analyzing the performance does give a useful insight into the singing of NVS. This analysis shows that in this performance a vocal ensemble like NVS invests a great deal of energy in gestures that enhance their precision. At the same time there seem to be a synchronization process going on, meaning that the gestures other than the regulatory ones begin to look the same. In this case, it looks like if the ensemble has decided upon an interpretation of the composition and that the gestures, especially the display gestures, evolve from that.

A weakness of an analysis like this, of course, is that it is heavily dependent on my interpretation of the gestures. It would have been interesting to make the singers themselves do a similar analysis and compare their results with mine. It would also be interesting to do a similar analysis on an inexperienced vocal ensemble, for instance a student ensemble, to see whether the gesture patterns evolve during work as an ensemble singer. I would guess that to be the case. The question is also if the singers would move differently if they were to sing solo. The next paragraphs will look into that.

9.6   Analysis of two solo performances

When moving as ensemble singers, the analysis above showed that the singers had to indicate a great deal to each other in regulatory gestures. And, especially when they were responsible for deciding upon tempo and timing of phrases (as if being a conductor), the singers moved more energetically, and when having a more following part, they moved less. This is very much in accordance of what they say themselves about how they move to communicate with the others.

All singers of NVS also work as soloists, and therefore looking at a couple of examples of them moving when singing as soloists, could prove to be interesting. This part of this chapter is therefore devoted to analyses of Daniel Gloger and Guillermo Anzorena singing as soloists. The question is

whether they move differently as ensemble singers than they do as soloists, and perhaps whether this can tell us something about how to communicate while singing together in a vocal ensemble.

9.6.1   The pieces analyzed

The performances analyzed here both show the singer in a solo singing role. The two performances are both video taped, and have been found on YouTube. The performance by Daniel Gloger is from a concert in Chelyabinsk, Russia. He is performing *Cantata BWV 170, Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust* by Johann Sebastian Bach, and the video was published on 8 June 2013.[526]In this video he is singing the first aria from the cantata, with the same title as the cantata. Daniel Gloger is being conducted all the time, as he is singing together with the full orchestra. The video is filmed from the audience, but there are only a couple sequences that do not include him in the picture. The performance by Guillermo Anzorena is a studio video recording of *Das Wandern*, the first song from the song cycle *Die Schöne Müllerin* by Franz Schubert. The song is performed together with guitar player Raúl Funes. The same method was used to analyze both performances as with the analysis of the NVS performance of the Lucia Ronchetti piece. I looked through the videos several times, labelling the different movements[527] from the singer in an excel sheet in the five different categories suggested by Jane Davidson (*Adaptive gestures* – **A**, *Regulatory gestures* – **R**, *Illustrative gestures* – **I**, *Emblem gestures* – **E**, *Display gestures* – **D**). In addition to this, I added a description of the gesture together with my own interpretation of the gesture.

The performance by Daniel Gloger is from a church concert. The piece is conducted, and Gloger is standing to the conductor's right, in front of the organ. He is holding the score in his hand, something I would acknowledge as quite usual in such a church music setting, standing quite firmly in one spot. This will of course, as with his performance together with NVS (the previous example), limit his movement space, making only his upper torso and head available for movement.

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526   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x79PODmXvDg (Viewed 20.12.2014).

527   See analysed score in Appendix 4

The performance by Guillermo Anzorena[528] is a studio video recording together with a guitar player. The video was published as late as 24 November 2014.[529] The song, originally written for voice and piano, is here performed by voice and guitar, and Anzorena is placed to the left of the guitar player. Anzorena sings his part by heart, while the guitar player uses a music stand. Anzorena also has a microphone right in front of him, which of course limits his movement space.

9.6.2   Results and discussions
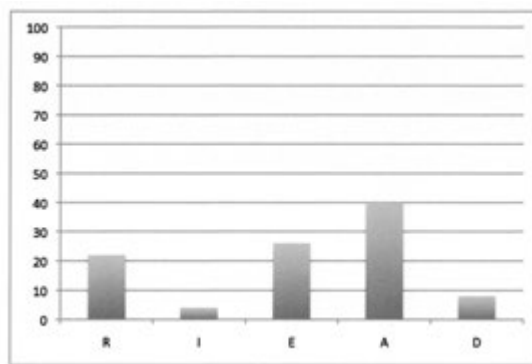
Figure 23: Analysis of solo performance of Daniel Gloger

In figure 23 I have shown the results of my analysis for the performance by Daniel Gloger. I find the regulatory gestures to be much less present than when Gloger performed with NVS. In fact, the percentage of these gestures is pretty much in the same area as with the results of the Annie Lennox study by Jane Davidson (around 20–25 per cent). As an overall impression, I find him to move a lot less than in the Lucia Ronchetti example,

Figure 24: Analysis of solo performance of Guillermo Anzorena

maybe because the solo performance is within a much more serious, classical, church setting. Like his performance with NVS, this performance also has few illustrative gestures. But there are far more emblem and adaptive gestures, with a tendency towards the

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528   See analysed score in Appendix 5

529   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVlCiSXJ2jg (Viewed 20.12.2014).

adaptive gesture category. In the performance of Guillermo Anzorena I find the same pattern (Figure 24). As with the NVS performance, he moves in an energetic way, with gestures I interpret to be light and almost humoristic. There are few regulatory gestures in this performance as well, perhaps because the guitar player are almost not looking towards him at all, but conducts the performance with a constant head movement. Anzorena also has a lot more of the emblem and adaptive gestures, with a tendency towards the emblem gesture category.

Both these performances show that the two singers have significantly less movement within the regulatory gestures category when performing as soloists compared to when they perform as ensemble singers. In the ensemble they do have to take the conductor's role from time to time, and then they have to show a bit more to the others of timing and tempo than they have to do when not conducting. As soloists, with others taking the responsibility as conductors, they can concentrate on other parts of their performance. And, as I interpret it, they focus on gestures that are more in the emblem and adaptive categories. These are gestures that I associate with the term *interpretation* within classical singing. I find it interesting that Gloger, performing within a church music setting, has what I find to be more amount of gestures within the adaptive category, meaning that I interpret his movements of being more of an expression of an inner, mental status. On the other hand, Anzorena, performing a lied, seems to be more free, and has gestures that are more within the emblem category, or gestures that show the text in a more metaphorical way (like for instance the swaying from side to side as the careless, merry wanderer). But the main difference between the two solo performances and the NVS performance, is the difference in the number of regulatory gestures. This could indicate that, as an ensemble singer, one must have some kind of competence in how to conduct others, while this is not a competence needed in solo singing. I hesitate to state this as an absolute truth, since it is obvious that more research is needed, but I suggest that being a good ensemble singer includes the ability to show your musical intentions with your body, at least when it comes to timing, offset and tempo. That the 'interpretation' categories, or the emblem and adaptive gestures categories, are more limited in the ensemble performance than in the solo performance, could also suggest that the vocal ensemble sacrifices personal interpretation gestures in favour of regulatory ones. I am very hesitant to say this, since it is inconsistent both with the findings from the

interviews I have conducted and with my own experience. But it does seem clear that regulatory gestures are important to an ensemble singer. And this brings us to the question whether this knowledge about conducting co-musicians is important also to solo singers. I would say yes. All the examples I have looked into suggest that there are regulatory gestures involved, and they are also present in the Annie Lennox analysis, conducted by Jane Davidson. Although regulatory gestures are not highly evident in the two solo performances I analyzed, I believe they do play a role in solo singing, and, certainly, if a solo singer performs in a chamber music setting this knowledge will be quite useful.

9.7   Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined the ways in which the members of the vocal ensembles I have studied communicate with each other. It is natural to divide the communication that goes on in a vocal ensemble performance into performer–audience communication and performer–performer communication. Both of these seem to include a process in which the singers synchronize their movements, both to harmonize the way they interpret a work together for an audience, and to create a gestural language that can be understood when communicating musical intentions. The singers of NVS say that this dimension of their singing is important, and they say that this is an advantage they have compared to other singers with less ensemble experience.

The 'default' setting of NVS mostly places them behind a music stand, which makes it difficult to move around much. They also perform within a framework of a classical performance tradition, so their gestures must communicate their musical intentions within this framework: they will be different to the gestures of a pop singer.

The singers of NVS emphasize that it is important to know how to communicate their musical intentions to the others, and that the gestures will vary depending on whether they define themselves as a soloist or an accompanist. When acting as a soloist, they will be nearer to 'conducting' the others, making gestures that are a bit clearer. It means that we could expect the regulatory gestures to remind us of conducting.

The 2002 Davidson study suggested five categories that can be used in an analysis of a performance. I have used them to show that the singers do synchronize their movements, both in a shared performer–audience communication and a performer–performer communication, developing a common language to understand the group members' communication of their musical intentions. The analysis has shown a way of understanding some dimensions of the complexity of musical communication processes. I have also provided two analyses of solo performances from two of the NVS singers. Compared to the NVS analysis, these two examples showed that the NVS singers significantly reduced their gestures to conduct the other singers, suggesting that as ensemble singers it is important to have this knowledge, and that solo singing might more gives way to interpretative gestures. Further study in the field of musical communication would provide useful insight into musical performance, not merely on a communicative level, but by providing a different view of the musical intentions of a performance as well.

The concept of musical communication is central to a vocal ensemble's work. In NVS they use a great deal of energy to bring a piece together, and their gestures are based very much on regulatory gestures, communicating their musical intentions to each other, often so much so that performer–audience communication is given less attention. The way they communicate with each other, the way they plan and execute this communication requires knowledge and skills they have developed over time. I am sure that the way that these singers communicate with each other embodies knowledge and skills that can be taken and passed on to all other singers, students and other musicians as well.

As always, when it came to the challenge of a real performance to an audience – even an audience of one – they moved Heaven and Hell to overcome their differences. Julian managed nuances of some humility, Dagmar conformed for the greater good, Roger slowed his tempo when his wife faltered at one point, gathering her back into the fold.

(Faber, 2002)

10   Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart at work

In the previous chapters I have focused on some special areas of interest in the technical work of vocal ensembles. I have shown that work on communication and precision is a vital part of their practice. I have also shown how the singers of vocal ensembles work on intonation, especially within the difficult tonal landscape navigated by NVS. I have shown how the singers of a vocal ensemble think when it comes to vocal technique, and said something of the history of vocal ensemble practice. Their ways of singing, communicating and working on intonation issues comprise the technical elements that form the vocal ensemble's practice. The practice's history influences that of today, and has an impact on repertoire choices, the way the singers use their vocal technique and their identity as singers.

This chapter will deal with the work of the vocal ensemble. It is based upon interviews with the singers, observations of rehearsals and concerts, and my participation in the *Sternklang* project. The stories are put into the context of relevant literature.

10.1   Rehearsals

All musicians rehearse, spending most of their time practising either on their own or together with other musicians. Sloboda suggests that the

nature and the quantity of practise means that rehearsal, alone or with other factors, is probably is the most important determinant of performing skill.[530] The process usually requires that you practise 'your' bits on your own first, using your own strategies, and then 'put it together' in rehearsals with other musicians, with whom you probably spend most of your time. Practising music is a skill that needs to be learned during your education as a musician, and it seems that inexperienced musicians find it difficult to know how and what to practise,[531] but as they gain experience they develop strategies that make their practising more effective. For instance, while the inexperienced musician rehearses passages again and again to iron out errors, the more experienced musician takes the music to pieces and works on a series of fragments instead of a longer passage in complete form. Strategies for overcoming difficult passages can include repeating a motive or bar, or slowing down the tempo.[532]

The singers of NVS all tell how they started to sing at an early age, most of them in choirs with music forming a substantial part of their lives from early on. Through a great deal of practise they now work at a quite high level, and they spend many hours maintaining their position as expert performers in their field. Such expert performance comes through practising skills for many years: this labour is a highly structured activity. Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer call this highly structured activity *deliberate practise*,[533] because it differs from other everyday activities in which learning may be an indirect result.[534] In another study, Ericsson and Krampe suggest that the development of skills goes through different stages of deliberate practise, from very young beginners, who are relatively dependant on a supportive environment, to expert performers who maintain their skills independently.[535]

Hallam (1999) looks at different approaches to music practising through a literature review of various sources. She points to Jørgensen's (1997) theory of 'self-teaching', which involves a framework of three strategies: planning

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530 Sloboda 1985 p. 90.

531 Ibid. p. 91.

532 Ibid. p. 91.

533 Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer 1993 p. 368.

534 Ibid. p. 367.

535 Ericsson and Krampe 1995 p. 89.

practise; its conduct; and its evaluation.[536] She also stresses that in recent years our conception of the purpose of practise has changed, and that we now include skills like ear-training, critical listening, sight-reading and so on within the framework of music practising, rather than seeing them as separate matters, mere technical training.[537] With this dimension included, she proposes a model that includes three stages of learning in practise. These are presage, process and the product stages. She describes the various learning characteristics of individuals, their learning environment, the task requirements, the process of practise and the learning outcomes she takes to be contributory parts of the whole process of musical practising.[538] At a personal level, there seem to be significant differences in how musicians approach a piece in their practise, and Hallam has suggested that differences in personality, genre and level of expertise might have an impact on their approach to the music.[539]

There have not been many studies regarding the practise of a chamber music ensemble, and to my knowledge none of these studies deal with the work of a vocal ensemble. Davidson and Good explored the communication required between players in order to create a coordinated musical performance, and by studying a rehearsal period and performance of a concert by a string quartet, they explored the social and musical coordination within that group. They were most interested in the communication between the players, but they also pointed out some of the social processes at work within the practising process.[540] This study is mentioned in Chapter 9, where I also mention a study that also divides the rehearsal process into three parts, as Hallam, Jørgensen and Ericsson/Krampe/Tesch-Romer have suggested.

In her study of 2004, King looks at collaboration in an ensemble rehearsal, one of the very few studies that deal with the rehearsal processes of a chamber ensemble. Her study makes a suggestion about the structure of future research on the practising process in chamber ensembles, proposing three particular areas of interest, 'structure', 'collaboration', and 'techniques'. From my point of view, these three categories describe some of the dimensions in the rehearsal process. My understanding of

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536   Hallam 1997 p. 181.

537   Ibid. p. 181.

538   Ibid. p. 183.

539   Ibid. p. 182.

540   Davidson and Good 2002 p. 186.

'structure' follows the definition found in the online Oxford Dictionary, which describes structure as *the arrangement of and relations between the parts or elements of something complex*. Below I describe more in detail how King uses the term. The term 'collaboration' describes the group dynamics within the group, while the term 'techniques' describes the strategies they use to overcome difficulties and challenges involved in the music. But in my opinion these three categories do not cover all of the rehearsal processes, so I suggest the addition of two more dimensions: *personal preparation* and *evaluation.* King also proposes 'evaluation' as a category; I think it is a natural inclusion here because it covers what happens afterwards, when the group look back at their rehearsal process in order to learn from it. The term 'personal preparation' draws in the time before the group meet to rehearse, so includes the groups' planning of their score preparation before the rehearsal period. In the following chapters all these five categories are used as a framework for understanding the rehearsal process in NVS.

10.1.1   Structure

King divides the structure of the rehearsal plan into three subcategories: *general plan* (including overall schedule of rehearsals, goals and plan of repertoire); *session plan* (including structure of rehearsals, length of rehearsal and pace of activity, and timing distribution of activity); and *approach to individual piece* (including stages of practice over time, function of run-throughs and close-up work, and agenda).[541]

The general plans of NVS require an overall schedule of rehearsals. In Chapter 6 I have described the way in which NVS try to come up with a rehearsal plan according to the pieces they are to rehearse. It is often the pieces that dictate how many rehearsals are needed. The responsibility of drawing up a rehearsal plan lies primarily with Martin Nagy and Andreas Fischer, together with Christine Fischer. They need to make a balance between how many rehearsals the singers, represented by Martin and/ or Andreas, think they need, and the budget for the project. The singers of NVS claim that they have a total of around 300 rehearsals in a year. With six singers to pay for each rehearsal, a substantial amount of money is involved. The general rule is to have around six rehearsals for each piece, but they may have more or less rehearsal according to the length and difficulty of

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541   King 2004 p. 12.

the piece, says Andreas Fischer. The number of rehearsals required can also depend on how much they can prepare at home before meeting the others, which of course depends on the experience the singers have gained during their work. The piece they all mention when asked about which one demanded most of them is *Infra* by Andreas Dohmen (2008) (between 25 and 30 rehearsals). A typical NVS rehearsal will last around three hours and most of them take place in *Teaterhaus Stuttgart*, usually during daytime. So the singers meet almost every day of the week, and at least a couple of times each week unless they are engaged in other projects outside NVS.

Since the rehearsals are planned around the various concert projects and the pieces involved, the rehearsal plans are quite detailed and organized. My impression is that the singers know what they are to have prepared and what is expected of them for a long time ahead.

The rehearsal itself does not have a formal schedule. Although the singers know what they will rehearse that day, they probably don't know the order they will rehearse the pieces. This is something they decide upon when they meet. They do not have any kind of musical or group activities beside the rehearsal itself: I have never heard them, or any other professional vocal ensemble, my own Nordic Voices included, doing any other kind of pedagogical 'tricks' or warm-ups before or during the rehearsal. Although many singers would say that such activities have an effect on their work, and that they have done them in their early years in choirs, maybe these activities are so closely associated with amateur musicianship that they are excluded from rehearsals by the ensembles. This may have a practical side as well. As professionals, perhaps ensemble singers (and this is my experience as well) do not want to spend time on warming up, an activity that should have been done before coming to a rehearsal. So my experience is that professional singers, and a professional group of singers, are more or less warmed up when they meet, and start to work on the music at once.

I have observed rehearsals with NVS on several different occasions. In June 2009 I observed NVS rehearsing the *Wölfli Kantata* by Georges Aperghis for a concert in Paris on 12 June 2009.[542] The music was to be performed a couple of days later, which meant that it was almost finished. The rehearsal was, it seemed to me, only meant for polishing and checking crucial points in the music. All through the rehearsal they went through the music from

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542   The concert was at the Paris Cité de la musique.

beginning to end, rehearsing various sections but not singing all the music.[543] This way of rehearsing seems to be the norm. The other rehearsals I have seen have followed more or less the same pattern: they know which music to rehearse, they have prepared the music, they decide upon the order of the pieces at the rehearsal, then they go through the piece from start to end.

In rehearsal the singers of NVS usually arrange themselves in a horseshoe-shaped position, normally with chairs and music stands, in the same default position they use when they give concerts (see Chapter 9). I find this position to be a reification of their practice, and alongside the room, the café on the first floor, the kitchen, the other staff members, the offices, and the rehearsal schedule: all these factors together make up the structure of the rehearsals of NVS.

10.1.2   Personal preparation

In the rehearsal process of NVS the various members of the ensemble involve themselves actively in the ensemble's social community. They all participate in the practice, and through their participation they shape the community and the ensemble as well as shaping their identity as singers. Participation in the ensemble's rehearsal means interacting with the other members, negotiating meaning into the work. As Wenger describes it, participating is not something we turn on and off. It is an engagement in the community of practice that goes on even when rehearsals have ended and the singers are on their own, and even when they engage in other groups and projects.[544] It means that the singer continues to participate in the community of practice even when they are rehearsing on their own. So it is important not only to look at the rehearsals the singers undertake together, but also look at what they do when they are on their own.

Since the schedule of rehearsals is entirely based on which pieces to prepare for which projects, it seems that they all know what to prepare for which rehearsals. I asked the singers about how they started to prepare the music from the moment they opened the score for the first time. One of them said:

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543   A closer look on this rehearsal can be found in 10.1.6.

544   Wenger 1998 p. 57.

> [...] I start with page 1 of the music. I don't start with the legend.[545] I read the music first, then I have to look at the legend, because there could be signs I don't know.

Reading this 'legend' is important for them. Since they do mostly contemporary music, this page is the one where they can get an idea of where the composer steps out of the path of classical vocal technique. This is also a frustrating time for the singers. I have often had signals from them that composers tend to write something 'unique' each time, making up a singing technique, and that the period of trying to decipher what the composer actually means and how their special signs relate to the more traditional classical technique can be challenging. But most of them say that reading the score first is important, looking at the 'legend', but also at the broader picture, trying to decipher, by reading and testing, which parts need more attention. One of the singers says that

> [...] The first thing I do is to look at my part, I read the legend, I read the ideas [...] Then I try several parts for me, and I decide how long I have to practice, and sometimes it is not necessary to practice. But the main thing is to have the signs [...] when I come to rehearsals I am very sure about that.

The concept of 'getting the ideas' of the composer seem to be an important part of the preparation. It is as if they are trying to 'understand' the piece and the composer's intention in it, or at least making up their own idea about it. One of the singers says that

> [...] in most parts I have a legend, so I have to read it first. I try to find the text or something so I get an idea of what the composer was thinking about. And then I look over it a little bit and try to find out what the difficult thing about it is, or the special thing.

Sitting down with the score and a pencil, trying to organize the score rhythmically and harmonically also seem to be important ways of working. One of them says that

> [...] the first is to organize it rhythmically. Sometimes it is very easy so I don't have to do it. Very often there is a change of bars, ⅞ or ¾ and 16s and like this. First I take a pencil and I write 1 2 3 4 and so on. So that I can read it.

Another one of the singers says that

> [...] If it is a very complicated score, then I first try to find how the rhythm functions. I learn with a pencil.

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545 The first page of information in the score, where all the instructions on how to sing the different special notations are found.

It is not only their own voice that is important when reading through the score. It is as important to get to know the parts of the other singers. One of them says

> [...] First I try my line, but at the same time I am looking at what the others are doing. Am I together or are there chords or dissonances? So I prepare a little bit.

The singers are preparing the whole score, not only their parts. And they say that this is one of the most important skills a vocal ensemble singer can have. When asked if it is important knowing what the others are doing all the time, one of them says that

> [...] I think it is very important. It is not so often possible to have the whole in your mind, but for me, I try so often as possible to hear the others and to react to that.

It means that it is an important part of the learning process to get to know the other parts and see how they work with yours.

But of course the singers are describing a perfect world, where they are well prepared at all times, a world where they get the piece, sit down for a time, read it through with a pencil, set their markings, decide on how many rehearsals, what to rehearse at all times, and meet up for rehearsals well prepared. However, life is not always that easy, and sometimes the singers will need to take a shortcut. In these shortcuts they will of course float along on their experience and their music reading skills. In these cases they find the most critical parts in the music and learn them quite well, but are maybe not so thorough with the rest of the music. One of the singers says that

> [...] I can rehearse a lot, but I like more to practise a little bit, for example if there is a small passage where I have a lot of text in a short time. I practise this before. But then I come quite blank to the first rehearsal, and try to understand what the piece is all about.

This singer also says that they are good at pretending that they know the piece quite well, maybe because they have good musical reading skills. It is easy to judge such an attitude to learning the music, but this way of rehearsing the music has become quite natural for NVS. All the singers have a different pace in their learning process, so some of the rehearsing process is about synchronizing as the whole group moves from one level of music making to another. This singer also stresses that there are moments and music where they have to work quite hard. I asked whether this issue had been discussed with colleagues, and they admitted that they had not. This

singer takes a chance on being accepted in their way of preparing a piece of music; they have a system of personal preparation that is highly individual, and the process of putting it all together is not very explicit, but rather built on years of experience and intuition. I asked the other singers whether, and how, they evaluate their personal preparation, and they said that they do not have any formal evaluation processes involved in rehearsals at all.

10.1.3   Collaboration

According to King, collaboration is an integral and defining part of the culture of chamber music-making.[546] It is in the rehearsals that they allow themselves to cultivate musical ideas as well as to develop interpersonal relationships.[547] She suggests that the collaboration within rehearsals can be divided into three categories: verbal and non-verbal discourses; social collaboration (group dynamics, gender-related issues, leadership issues and so on); and musical collaboration. I regard all these three categories so intertwined that I find it difficult to differentiate between them. At one point in an NVS rehearsal I observed, one of the singers turning towards one of the others to give them a compliment about their singing. Of course this compliment has to do with the social-emotional processes in the group, building a good relation between these two singers. But it is also a musical remark, a comment that the singer liked what the other had just done. Since the singer who made the remark dominated the talking during the rehearsal, it is also an issue of leadership. The processes of collaboration are extremely complex, and a full study of all the collaboration processes would extend beyond the scope of this chapter.

When the singers of NVS meet for rehearsals, they rarely meet up in the rehearsal room itself. Mostly they will meet up in the kitchen of their section of the Teaterhaus. There they can catch up with the latest information, say hi to the other staff, or check emails on the couple of PCs in the room and in rooms nearby. They can make themselves a cup of coffee and chat about things that are relevant to the project, or, more often, things that are not so relevant for the current project. As one of them says:

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546   King 2004 p. 12.

547   Ibid. p. 12.

> […] first we make at least 10 to 20 jokes and we laugh a lot, and then we drink a coffee and we, of course, are much too late, and, half an hour late, we start to rehearse. And then it is very concentrated.

These moments seem to be very important to the group. They start with a social gathering, a soft start to the work they have in front of them, as if they have substituted the vocal warm-ups you find in amateur choirs with this social gathering. These moments help them to build relations to each other. As one of them says:

> […] these private talks are so important for setting the good atmosphere to the whole thing […] We would not share everything with each other, but we are really good friends and have a very high feeling of sympathy with everybody else in the ensemble.

Talking about things other than the music helps build a better atmosphere. It helps to build a better sympathy for each other, and to know more about the good and bad sides of their colleagues. They like to create an atmosphere that is light, one that is not very serious or focused on the work that lies ahead. These social gatherings include much humour, which is important for the group. At all the rehearsals I have watched, the laughter has always been just under the surface, always ready to burst out.

This means that the rehearsals can look a bit chaotic and not very concentrated. One of the rehearsals I observed seemed to suffer from bad concentration. During the first session, which lasted approximately 1 hour and 24 minutes, they sang for around 21 minutes, which is around 25 per cent of the time. They sang for a short time, and then they talked for a very long time. On average, they sang for around 30 seconds. In between the singing the talking was very influenced by a relaxed atmosphere. One of the singers says that

> […] The most important thing is that we laugh a lot in between. That relaxes us and that makes a good mood for everybody. And then we can work more intensely.

This rehearsal was two days before a big concert and the atmosphere at the rehearsal was really good and very relaxed. I have also seen NVS in rehearsals where the atmosphere has been a lot tenser, where they have worked in a much more concentrated way, singing for longer periods at a time, and not having very much private talk in between singing. I have seen and participated in rehearsals at the beginning of projects, and the atmosphere has been tenser in these rehearsals. So maybe the loose

atmosphere, the urge to create a good situation, to laugh together, is a part of the collaboration process. It could be as important as learning the music, a way of creating a situation in which everybody feels they are pulling together, moving towards the same goal.

10.1.4 Techniques

The various rehearsal techniques are, of course, a fundamental part of practising. King (2004) refers to the study by Gruson (1988) on solo piano practising, one of the first to look at the techniques involved in rehearsals.[548] In this study King systematized rehearsal techniques and introduced the model she calls 'Observational Scale for Piano Practicing' (OSPP), which includes sets of techniques (for example, repeating a note or section, slowing down, making errors, and uninterrupted playing). These rehearsal strategies are well known to musicians, who use many of these strategies when they rehearse, either alone or with others. King has divided these techniques into three categories, calling them *general* (for instance, balancing tuning-up and warming-up exercises or preparing scores and so on), *piece-specific* (for instance segmentation or chunking, slow practice, trial and error), and *group-specific* (for instance metronome exercises, intonation-building exercises, techniques to support weaker players or singers and so on). In my view these categories are rather artificial, since, as with the collaboration categories, the borders between them are difficult to see. In addition to this, I find King's categorization to exclude technique exercises from different genres, different instruments, improvisation and so on. Therefore I choose not to follow these categories here, though they could have been valuable in a more thorough study of a vocal ensemble's rehearsals.

Since NVS are mostly performing contemporary music, they are frequently rehearsing music that has not been done before, so they may not have a performance tradition for the specific piece to lean on. This, they say, means that they will often have to start on an unintuitive level:

> [...] there are pieces where, from the first moment, you have to discuss [...] Can it be that the composer has absolutely no idea of what a tempo is, or he just wrote it like Beethoven [...] But, so there are pieces where you have to help the composer, where you have to understand the composer's idea, which is not perfectly written in the score [...] or there are pieces where you just have to give a good sound to it

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548 Ibid. p. 14.

The rehearsals in NVS are very repertoire-driven. They decide strategies depending on the kind of pieces they are doing, and the challenges they meet in them. They choose these different strategies mostly based on intuition or tacit knowledge. It is a knowing-in-action, and the result of many years of testing and failing or succeeding. One singer says that 'it depends on the pieces' and continues

> [...] we decide upon it, but not before we rehearse. We start to rehearse, and we get an idea

It means that technical strategies are decided 'as they go'. These strategies have evolved through years of work, and from different traditions and methods, for instance from choral practising, from their personal singing practice and from other chamber music practice techniques. They normally start at the beginning, working their way through the piece. And sometimes they have to rehearse in smaller groups before putting the piece together:

> [...] it was clear that we had to have some moments, not in the tutti rehearsal, but only some of us, for example for 'Petrrohl' it is mezzo-soprano and me who have to rehearse on our own.

And sometimes, they have to work at a really slow tempo and then increase it, a technique that one of the singer is not so happy about:

> [...] in this piece it was really just rehearsing it like a student, and just do it slow, a little bit faster, with a metronome, again and again and again. The next day start from a tempo just a little bit faster than yesterday and again accelerate

Sometimes it is not the rhythms that are difficult, but hitting the right notes. Then they have to sing the music at a 'very, very slow tempo' as one singer calls it, tone per tone, a 'tone finding practice'.

As noted earlier, when the singers in NVS rehearse together, they use a lot of their rehearsal time to talk. They talk about the music and decide upon musical issues, which they try out later. These conversations also have a vocal technique side to them, since some of the music is very stressful for the voice. It becomes natural not to rehearse all the time, since the voice needs to relax. Again, the balance between talking and singing is repertoire driven.

In a rehearsal, work on intonation is important. The rehearsal I observed which took place two days before an important concert in Paris, concentrated heavily on intonation issues. It seemed that the point they had reached in the rehearsal process demanded a focus on intonation issues.

The techniques they used to resolve the issues included singing just two or three voices, trying to tune the chords very slowly,[549] or working two or three voices together to make the quarter tones more accurate.

The technical work in NVS rehearsals depends on which piece they are working on, and where they are in the process of learning that piece. From there they work using their intuition and tacit knowledge, deciding how to work together as they go. It is a process that reminds me of what Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) called an *evolutionary design*: a way to develop the organization of knowledge through a guided evolutionary process that tests multiple approaches and builds experience over time.[550]

So how do the singers know when they have rehearsed enough? This is a tricky question, because I would guess that the answers would be a little different according to which singer I asked. Different singers might feel that they have a high enough level to perform the piece in terms of some of its dimensions, for instance if they have a good overview of the rhythm, but a too low level when it comes to singing the right notes. One of the singers in NVS calls it having the piece 'in the body'. It is an interesting view of when you feel that a piece of music is ready for a performance. This singer says that

> [...] the instrument changes with the pieces. [...] I think that's why opera singers have to have two years of practice for a big role. [...] I mean, if the piece is really in you ... [...] Then you feel so easy with the music and it is something that really belongs to you. [...] the 'Petrrohl' piece is like that, I know it like that. It is like singing a baroque aria or something.

10.1.5   Evaluation of rehearsals

An issue that is not touched by King is that of evaluation, though, in the discussion section of her article, she admits that there could have been a category called 'evaluation', to include the methods individuals and groups use to evaluate their own rehearsal and practice.[551]

My meeting with NVS showed me an ensemble that did not evaluate their rehearsal explicitly. They do not have a system where they sit down and go

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549   They were working with the Petrrohl piece by Geroges Aperghis. See chapter 8 for more about the intonation issues regarding that piece.

550   Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002 p. 191.

551   King 2004 p. 15.

through the rehearsals, finding out what they think worked, what did not work and why it worked or didn't work. One of the singers in NVS says

> [...] The rehearsals we actually don't evaluate, or maybe if we talk in a break, saying 'this doesn't work, we better do that' or 'we better prepare' or... It's not really an evaluation.

But what this singer is also saying is that they have an ongoing evaluation. It is not an evaluation where they sit down at the end of a rehearsal, talking frankly about what worked and what did not. It is a more subtle process in which they try out different approaches, based on their experience. The ongoing evaluation is not an explicit process. I don't think that the singers can explain in detail why some approaches work and some don't, and they don't point to concrete incidents or qualities in the music that will tell them what worked in the process and what didn't. This is of course extremely difficult: I see it as a part of their tacit knowledge about rehearsing.

The singers of NVS say that they tend to evaluate concerts rather than rehearsals. I will say more about this in the next section, but it is worth noting here that, since the rehearsals are more or less directed towards a concrete performance of the music they are rehearsing, this kind of evaluation makes sense. One could argue that a more explicit ongoing evaluation process could be very useful to the group, and give them some new insights in the work they are doing, but evaluation takes time, time they do not have, but it could be factors in driving the ensemble forward.

10.1.6   A brief analysis of a rehearsal

I described above a rehearsal I attended with NVS on 10 June 2009. I have chosen to take a closer look at this rehearsal, also with the rehearsal categorization by King in mind. As I have said, this rehearsal took place two days prior to their concert in Paris on 12 June 2009. The concert was a joint concert together with the SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart,[552] performing the full *Wölfli Kantata* by Georges Aperghis, text by Adolf Wölfli. It is a work in five sections, with section 1 and 3 ('Petrrohl' and 'Vittriool') being sung by NVS alone, section 2 and 4 ('Die Stellung der Zahlen' and 'Trauer-Marsch') being sung by SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart, and the fifth section ('Von der Wiege bis Zun Graab') being sung by both ensembles together. The concert

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552   http://www.swr.de/orchester-und-ensembles/vokalensemble/-/id=788652/yiv8ne/index.html (Viewed 27.12.2014).

on 12 June was to be conducted by Marcus Creed (section 2, 4 and 5). The rehearsal had been scheduled for quite a long time. I knew what they were to rehearse, and I had received the music on beforehand. The rehearsal was in other words well integrated into the structure of the NVS rehearsal plans. The rehearsal was to start at 3 p.m. and last to 6 p.m., and it took place, as most of the rehearsals do, in the *Theaterhaus Stuttgart*. The singers met at 3 p.m., but they took some time (approximately 10 minutes) drinking coffee and chatting in the kitchen before entering the rehearsal venue. During the rehearsal they had one break of approximately 30 minutes. During the rehearsal of three hours, they sat down working, singing and stopping for discussions, for 2 hours and 15 minutes.

When it comes to personal preparation for this rehearsal, it was obvious that the all but Sarah Maria Sun had performed this piece before. This fact influenced the rehearsal immensely; both in what they rehearsed, who was talking, and the energy they invested in the rehearsal. Most of the time it was Sarah who tried out her lines, her music, in combination with the others, in duets, terzetts, or tuttis. It was Sarah who got most comments and who had to stop most of the time for checking up details in her own line.

When it comes to techniques, they used different approaches. At one point they stopped because Daniel and Sarah were not together on a note that was to appear at the same time. Daniel pointed it out, and Sarah wrote it in her score with a long line through her and Daniel's voice. When they tried it again, they both looked at each other and made a clear head movement. The result was a very synchronized entrance, which again resulted in a very satisfied smile from both of them. When having difficulties with complex rhythmical lines, one of their most frequent strategies was to speak the rhythm, preferably a bit slower, so that they only could focus on the rhythmical patterns. At another point the ensemble was not very synchronized, and Andreas pointed out how they had to move to get the phrases synchronized, and he also pointed out that he and Sarah had to be aware of the communication axis they were supposed to maintain for the others to follow. But sometimes the rhythmical issues became too complicated, and they started to discuss whether Andreas should conduct a little, just to get over the difficult places in the music. Although the conducting solved the issues at hand, especially the singers who had done the music before were a bit reluctant to let Andreas conduct, mostly, as I

interpret it, because they had to focus on him, instead of deciding upon the music themselves.

There were a lot of intonation issues being dealt with during this rehearsal, and they solved them in different ways: they tried to 'build' the chords, starting with the fundamental, then the fifth, and then the third, or they tried to sing them very slowly, note by note. Intonation issues were also solved by altering the vocal technique, changing vocal 'colour', i.e. making the vowels brighter or darker. They also discussed the amount of 'soloistic' dimensions in the technique, working with balance.

Using humour seems to be extremely important. They always tried to work things out with a smile, or with laughter. At one point, for instance, in a very difficult moment, being frustrated about quartertones, Sarah asked what she should call the quartertone she tried to sing. Naming it 'ciss-oss', she received some laughter, maybe also because the others understood her frustration. The fundamental atmosphere in the rehearsal was light, and everything was calm and friendly. Although mistakes were pointed out, it was always done with caution. With that said, the singers, when making mistakes, showed their frustration quite clearly, with strong German words.

Talking took up a substantial amount of the rehearsal time. They talked about their forthcoming trip to Paris, which hotel they were staying in, which hotels had the best breakfast, the schedule of the dress rehearsal etc. These moments seems to be important, because, as they told me, they cannot sing this music for three hours, and need these small breaks in between. During the 2 hours and 15 minutes they rehearsed, they had 80 different periods of singing, the longest one lasting for 2 minutes and 40 seconds, while the shortest one only lasted for 5 seconds. In average they sang for 30 seconds, making up a total of 39 minutes and 21 seconds of singing during the rehearsal. The 'stopping' periods counted up to 82, with longest stop lasting for 8 minutes and 27 seconds and the shortest lasting only 2 seconds. The average pause length was 1 minute and 10 seconds, and altogether they had 1 hour and 36 minutes of stopping time during the rehearsal. This may seem like quite a lot, but as they have said themselves, this way of rehearsing, with so little singing time, is quite normal for them.[553]

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553   See for instance their interview with the Norwegian web journal 'Ballade': http://www. ballade.no/nmi.nsf/printstory/art20060309125000843463492 (Viewed 28.12.2014).

The rehearsal did not start very precisely, but it ended in quite an abrupt way with a look at the watch and a clear hand movement from Daniel Gloger, telling everyone that the rehearsal was over. There was no evaluation at the end of the rehearsal, no discussion afterwards on how the rehearsal had been.

This rehearsal seems to be a quite normal rehearsal for the ensemble. What perhaps made it a little bit special was the fact that one of the singers, Sarah Maria Sun, had not performed the music before, which made a huge focus on her and her needs to learn the music properly for the concert.

10.2   Concerts

When musicians rehearse, they mostly do it for a reason. Some of their rehearsals are aimed at achieving a higher technical level on their instrument, but most often the goal of the rehearsals is a particular concert. At the end of a long series of rehearsals there is a concert in prospect, and musicians use their rehearsals to prepare the concert repertoire. In my view, studying the performances of an ensemble opens a window on their practice. You can deduce the ideals they have for preparation on the day of the concert, their travel to and arrival at the venue, and see how they get to know the room they are singing in, how they meet and deal with concert presenters, how they relate to composers present, how they react to things like radio recordings, how they rehearse before the concert, how they spend their time between the rehearsal and the concert, how they concentrate as a group right before the concert, how they enter the stage, how they communicate, how they react to the audience, how they react in the aftermath of the concert and so on. In addition to all these outer frames of the concert, you can also see how the singers continue to learn during the concert, that is, that the concert is in itself a site of knowledge production. The concerts are the point at which the ensemble interacts with society. So it is also important to study the audience and its social make up (for instance class, gender and age), as well as noting the concert presenters and their place in society (mainstream or independent, financing and so on).

This part of the chapter is based in part on an observation of a May 2010 concert by NVS. This concert was a part of the concert series of the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele. This festival, organized by the

Südwestrundfunk (SWR), takes place in the Schloss Schwetzingen[554] between April and June. The programme for 2010 included a full-scale opera as well as concerts with NVS, the Tokyo String Quartet and Jordi Saval.[555] The concert with NVS included *Zwölf Madrigale für Vokalensemble a cappella* by Salvatore Sciarrino, who attended the concert. This concert was also recorded for radio, so to my impression this was an important concert for NVS. In Chapter 4, I mentioned how a narrative approach was a part of my methodological work. My observations from this concert were given such an approach, and this text is to be found in the appendix section of this thesis. It gives, to my view, a different look into this concert, which the members of NVS had been working towards for quite a good time.

10.2.1 Theories on live performance

In the Preface to his 1995 book about musical performance, John Rink writes that

> [...] The past few decades have witnessed a virtual explosion in scholarly writing about musical performance.[556]

In another chapter in the same book, Eric Clarke says that there are numerous studies of expression in performance, and writes about a tradition of empirical research into performance, at least since the works of Seashore.[557] Research in and on music has traditionally focused on music theory and history, and has not been that occupied in looking at live music performance. Doğantan-Dack, in an article from the *Music Performance Research* journal of 2012, states that 'live music performance is currently an under-researched area within contemporary music performance studies'.[558] She notes that past musical performance research largely has mainly used recorded music as its source material.[559] Whether or not this is entirely true, Rink, Clarke, and Doğantan-Dack all discuss a field within music research that is opening up, namely research on live music performance.

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554   http://www.schloss-schwetzingen.de (Viewed 08.08.2013).

555   http://www.swr.de/-/id=5652946/property=download/nid=233286/15ot0s8/index.pdf (Viewed 08.08.2013).

556   Rink 1995 p. ix.

557   Clarke 1995 p. 21.

558   Doğantan-Dack 2012 p. 35.

559   ibid p. 35.

It has to do, as I see it, with the artists' way of presenting themselves, the social processes at hand in the meeting between artist and audience, the identity shaping of the musicians, the knowledge and learning processes and so on.

Research under the 'performance studies' umbrella derives from theories regarding *performativity*, formulated in the 1950s by Milton Singer. He said that performances partly define a society, and that they are 'the most concrete observable units of the cultural structure, for each performance has a definitely limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organized programme of activity, a set of performers, an audience and a place and occasion of performance'.[560] Singer's coinage, *cultural performance*, and his demarcation of the performance event's temporal and spatial boundaries, offered a new theoretical framework for dramaturgical research and study. According to Sørensen, this balance between anthropological studies and dramaturgical studies opened up for the field of performance studies in the work of scholars like Victor Turner and Richard Schechner.[561]

Performance studies looks at not the actions and things involved in a performance itself, but at the 'behaviour' of things, how they react and interact with their surroundings, for instance how a painting changes over time as the audiences shift. The item itself may be the same, but the circumstances change and that changes the performance.[562]

As Sørensen states, Schechner does not say much about the practices regarding musical rehearsals or live performances,[563] naturally enough since Schechner is a researcher from the field of dramaturgy. But Sørensen highlights Schechner's term, 'restored behaviour'. Schechner says that restored behaviour is 'physical, verbal or virtual actions that are not-for-the-first-time, that are prepared or rehearsed, something also referred to as twice-behaved behaviour'.[564] Sørensen uses Schechner's term and connects it to musical performance in a different way to Schechner,, according to Sørensen,. Sørensen discusses how musical performers, especially within the Western classical tradition, play and sing from written scores, and

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560 Singer 1959, p. xii.

561 Sørensen 2004 p. 87.

562 Schechner 2006 p. 2.

563 Sørensen 2004 p. 104.

564 Schechner 2006 p. 29.

how these scores store information about behaviour and movements. According to Sørensen's argument, the fact of the performance itself is more significant than *what* is performed. He says that in light of Schechner's views, a musical piece is a representation of the past, and that performance studies can contribute to our understanding of music performance as an active representation of the past.[565] Of course, one could argue that this is not very special for musical performance, and that every performance, whether it is a musical performance without written music as its basis, or a theatre performance, or any performance at all, is a representation of the past. Sørensen has a point when he says that written scores store behaviour and prescribe movement patterns to a highly detailed degree, of course without the scores saying so specifically,[566] but connecting the term 'restored behaviour' to music with written scores only narrows the potential of a term that might have greater significance.

The difficulty with performance studies is that the boundaries between what is performance and what is looked upon *as* performance, are difficult to recognize. When Schechner says that 'more and more people experience their lives as a connected series of performances that often overlap',[567] it is easy to lose sight of the usefulness of the theories, as the definitions widen towards the ungraspable. Performance studies can provide a framework for the investigation of some aspects of musical live performance.

Schechner speaks about restored behaviour as action marked off by aesthetic conventions in theatre, dance, and music,[568] a view adopted by Sørensen, but he also states that this action is reified into the 'rules of the game', 'etiquette', or any other known-beforehand actions of life.[569] It reminds me of the reification processes Wenger talks about, one of the key elements in his theories about communities of practice. The study of these restored behaviours is also a study of the reification process that defines the practice of performers. When NVS sings, they move and talk and sing in certain ways, and the score and the setting, the audience, the festivals, a radio recording, give them the key elements defining how to behave, and by doing so these factors confirm past and present behaviour. This behaviour

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565 Sørensen 2004 p. 106.

566 Ibid. p. 106.

567 Schechner 2006 p. 49.

568 Ibid. p. 35.

569 Ibid. p. 35.

forms 'an object' in which the practice congeals into fixed form, according to Wenger.[570]

10.2.2   Performances in the context of NVS

There are many performances going on all the time, and Schechner operates with eight categories, including performances in everyday life (like cooking, socializing and so on), performances in the arts, performances in sports, and so on.[571] He says that performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories.[572] When asking NVS what kind of performances they do and when I look at what they write about themselves, they point to their concerts and music theatre projects. The musical theatre projects are of course very different from each other, and they share one feature: most of the time they have a director who tells the singers what to do and when to do it. The undirected concerts of the ensemble have a more relaxed form, where the singers themselves decide upon where to stand, how to move and so on. It is these concerts I will examine in more detail here.

These concerts share some features, and they are of course different to those of for instance a more 'traditional', Romantic string quartet, or a death metal band. According to Schechner all performances include what he calls ritualized gestures which pattern the way we perform, even if we think we are being spontaneous. Most of what we say and do has been uttered or done before. Schechner says these rituals meet the concept of 'play', so that performances are an interlocking of *rituals* (as collective memories encoded into action) with *play*.[573] He says that 'play' is very difficult to define, but says that 'play is *often*[574] an orderly sequence of actions performed in specific places for known durations of time. Much playing is 'narrational with [...] the arousal and display of emotions'.[575]

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570   Wenger 2008 p. 59.

571   Schechner 2006 p. 31.

572   Ibid. p. 28.

573   Ibid. p. 52.

574   my emphasis.

575   Schechner 2006 p. 121.

The concert NVS gave in Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele seems to be a typical event for the ensemble, as they are working for a festival, and part of a festival programme. This kind of a concert is something they mostly do, and the way they perform, in front of an audience, standing behind their music stand, with the outer frame of a classical festival, make this concert a 'typical' one. A non-typical event for the ensemble could for instance be the project I got a glimpse of the first time I visited the ensemble, namely the opera *Die Prinzessin Ulla und die schönen Lau* by Thomas Stigler, for only three singers. This kind of project is more seldom to be found on the ensemble's schedule.

The concert programme they performed in Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele could have been based on a proposal from Christine Fischer or the group to the festival, or the festival could have some ideas about the programme which may have emerged from the idea for the festival as a whole (as a motif, or a composer's series and so on). In this instance, NVS gave a programme they had put together some time ago, one they had performed several times before, and have performed again since. As Christine Fischer pointed out to me, the making of the concert programme is important: it is often what is sold to the festival, as much as, or perhaps even more than, the artists themselves. There are many classical music festivals all over the world, perhaps as many as between one and two thousand in Europe alone.[576] Many of those devoted to classical music, as opposed to say pop, seem to focus on a composer, or specialize in a particular period, such as early music, or on some particular type of presentation (for example using original instruments).[577] It is my experience, through my years in Nordic Voices, that seen in these terms, the artists are not so important, and creating interesting programmes is an important part of the work involved in interesting potential employers. It is of course easier to sell a concert to a festival if you have a well-known name, like The Hilliard Ensemble, but even for them I would guess it is important to continually create new and interesting programme concepts. Although NVS does have a well-known name, according to Christine Fischer they also have to come up with these good programme concepts, of which that given at Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele seems to be a good example.

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576   Frey 2000 p. 2.

577   Ibid. p. 4.

10.2.3   Proto-performance

When does a performance by NVS start and when does it end? One could of course argue that a performance by NVS starts the minute they come together and rehearse, since every rehearsal is a preparation for the moment when they will stand before their audience. One could go further and argue that the performance starts the minute they start to discuss the programme. This is a long time span, but these preparations are a vital part of the performance itself. Schechner has tried to understand the performance through what he calls a time–space sequence, to achieve an overview of its various elements. Schechner proposes a three part division: *Proto-performance* is the first, and describes what precedes or gives rise to the performance. He says the proto-performance is not *a* starting point but rather a cluster of starting points.[578] In the case of NVS, these starting points include connections to festivals or a score, a dialogue with a composer and so on. In respect of the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele concert there would probably have been a contact between a representative from NVS and the festival about the possibility of a performance.

According to Schechner the proto-performance stage also includes rehearsals. The rehearsal processes of NVS are discussed above (see 10.1–10.1.6), but I will say a little here about the rehearsal in the concert hall just before the concert. NVS had a rehearsal a couple of hours before the concert at the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele which was devoted to checking the room, getting used to the acoustics and giving the radio technicians a sound check for recording. What it was *not* about was actually rehearsing the music. This rehearsal is not for checking chords, finding the right notes to sing or rehearsing the rhythm. This rehearsal is more for the group to check the balance, see that everyone has a nice spot to stand on, be sure that the music stands, if they are using them (which NVS normally does), are working properly and that all the scores are in the right order, and perhaps also to resolve technical vocal issues, for instance how much vocal effort is required to achieve the music's dynamics in this acoustic environment.

Sometimes it can be necessary to work on a piece as well at the rehearsal immediately before a concert. As one of the singers says:

> […] Maybe we have a very short rehearsal; it depends on where we are and
> if we need to rehearse because we are not ready with the piece.

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578   Schechner 2006 p. 225.

If something during rehearsals has made it necessary to rehearse a piece, this may need to be done on the same day as the concert. This seems to be very rare: this singer says that they do no like doing it, since it reduces what they call the concentration on the concert day. Concentration on the concert day seems to be quite important to the singers. One of them says, when asked about what they do to prepare for a concert, such as the one at the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele:

> […] the routine? Each singer, of course, has his own routine. I for myself: not eat too much, concentrate, concentrate, concentrate.

When working as a group, they have to balance between the need to focus on the performance and developing a good feeling together, and taking care of their own preparation needs. One of them says that

> […] The concerts are mostly much better when we all are together in a dressing room, able to speak to each other. And when Christine is coming just at the beginning to wish us good luck.

I interpret this as a wish to stay together right before the concert, building up towards the concert together with the others. This same singer says that a good vocal ensemble is a group where they can feel that

> […] the persons that sing together love each other. And they use that love to make music together. […] and you really have a common feeling with each other and you ensure that the other singers have the same right to stay there, that is important.

But finding that 'common feeling' is not always easy, since there are six or seven different people with slightly different needs, both in the final rehearsal and then in the dressing room before the concert. The personal preparation, to my experience, is about concentration, not having other plans on the concert day, perhaps reading the scores in calm and peace. As one of the other singers says:

> […] I don't like it, on a concert day, in the dressing room, and there is too much [*inaudible*]… And when it is [one of the other singers] is really [*chatter in a high pitched voice*] and [another singer] is [*quacking in a high pitched voice*] and then I go out, because I really need concentration.

It could mean that this singer is one of those who need some quiet space, while the others do not: there are different ideas about what makes a good concert preparation. This difference can cause irritation and maybe make it difficult to get that 'common feeling'.
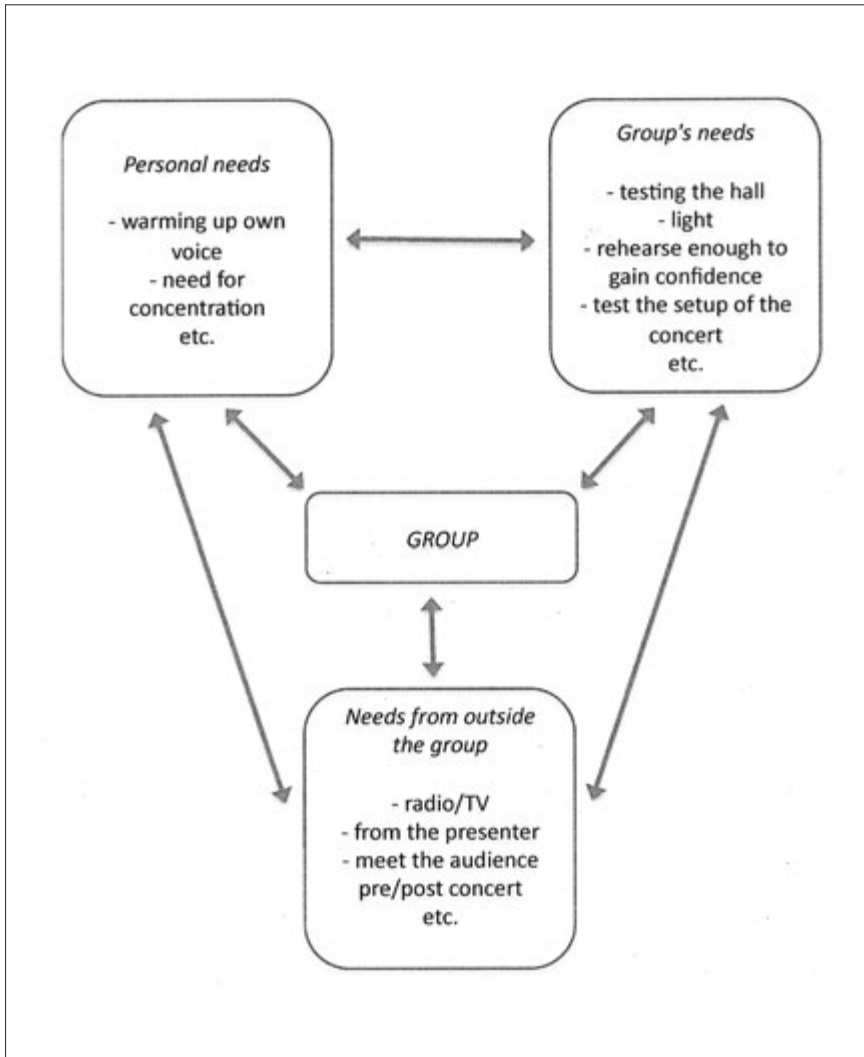
Figure 25: Model of group negotiation in pre-concert rehearsals

The balance between the needs of the group and individuals is important, but they also need to deal with the demands and questions of the presenter if there is any. In terms of the proto-performance model one could think this as a model of negotiation where the group have to take care of the various requirements that emerge from these three distinct positions, as shown in figure 25.

All these three different positions have an impact on how the group will behave and how they will perform. The social dynamics among the co-performers in an ensemble are, as Doğantan-Dack says, 'as important as the musical dynamics for a successful performance', and each performance is, as she continues, 'an opportunity to further develop and strengthen the social bonds between the co-performers'.[579] To perform well, the group has to develop a sense of trust and support between the members, and it is not easy when the members, at this proto-performance stage, have such different reaction patterns that some of them turn quiet and need a silent space, while some of them chatter about, or some are quite active at the sound check while others are quite quiet and save their voices. When the group at the same time will have to relate to the needs for the group itself and the presenter, it seems to be vital, as I observe with NVS, that the ensemble and the ensemble's members give each other quite a lot of slack, and tolerate that there are different and very personal ways of dealing with the situation. In chapter 11 I will deal with these more potential conflicting areas between the members of the group, but it is evident, I think, that the members of NVS allow a great deal from each other, maybe to build up to the performance itself.

10.2.4 Performance and aftermath

The next stage in Schechner's time–space model is the *performance*, which he divides into *warm-up*, *public performance*, *events/contexts sustaining public performance* and *cooldown*. It is not easy to detect, when reading Schechner's definitions, when proto-performance ends and warm-up begins. But when he talks about the actions that could take place during a warm-up, Schechner describes the actions and moments right before the performer enters the stage, like for instance a fully costumed actor in make-up contemplating their image in a mirror before going onstage.[580] Schechner admits that the length of the warm-up stage can vary according to the performer and the action. For instance he says that a singer's warm-up stage could comprise running scales to warm up the voice.[581] Every singer is of course different, and some may, right before going onstage, sing some scales,

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579 Doğantan–Dack 2012 p. 43.

580 Schechner 2006 p. 239.

581 Ibid. p. 239.

but as a group, NVS do not have a routine they do together immediately before going onstage, except lining up for their entrance. My impression, after having spoken to all these ensembles and having sung in choirs and Nordic Voices, is that singers and ensembles behave quite differently to the way a sports team might behave before entering a sports field for a match. It is very rare, at least at a professional level, to see singers gather together, doing group exercises and tuning with each other. In fact, to my experience, there is very little focus on such work within the vocal ensemble world, though this does not mean that some groups would not have benefitted from it. On the contrary, sports teams have had great success in developing strategies for building up teams, and maybe this could be an area vocal ensembles and other musical chamber groups could develop. It is as if the chamber musical circles are quite focused on the individual, and that it is up to each musician to prepare for action.

Schechner's definition of a *public performance*, the next phase of his model, is a bit difficult to grasp. But he defines its beginning where there is a formal mark, for instance when the lights dim in the hall and the stage is lit.[582] When NVS walk onto the stage, they do it properly: they are organized and it is controlled and planned. They normally place themselves with the highest voices on the right hand side and the lowest voices on the far left, seen from the ensemble. One of the singers says

> [...] that's the standard position, and if Daniel doesn't sing, but Truike does, Truike is in Daniel's position. In some pieces we change the position, but it is rare.

It is a way of standing that we see in choirs and in other ensembles like string quartets. It is the classical, traditional way of arranging the ensemble, and it makes a sound that the singers obviously think of as predictable and safe.

The singers of NVS don't normally speak to the audience at all during a concert. But if a concert's presenter suggests or demands it, they talk a little, 'introducing the pieces'.

NVS normally dresses in black, the women in black dresses and the men in black suits.[583] If they dress up in other costumes, it is because they have

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582 Ibid. p. 240.

583 See for instance http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PC16cWtUm8w (Viewed 23.09.2013), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfoewUgisTU (Viewed 23.09.2013), or http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZtX7rfqV8M (Viewed 23.09.2013).

been instructed to do so by composers, for instance when they do a music theatre piece.[584] In 2012 the ensemble went through a process with a clothing designer who, according to one of the singers, 'knew them very well'. This process, which seems to have been quite self-conscious, ended up with the singers singing in black suits and dresses. Performers' choice of clothing is one element of a visual code: within every genre, clothing is a part of the social construction and values attributed to it.[585] Griffiths says,

> [...] A combination of socio-cultural practices are specific to a genre of music and the sight of a performer taking part in these practices signals to the audience the performance tradition within which the performer is engaging.[586]

Clothing says something about performers and the social structures in which they perform. NVS is all black, and to me, that signals of unity. Yes, they are called soloists in the name of the group, but they have chosen clothing that make them look as one. Of course there are differences between the clothes they each wear, but overall my impression is that they are a group, performing together. They are creating a unit, a delimited space that is the group itself. In addition, they are dressed in nice clothes. They are not experimenting much with their clothes. Their concert dresses are moderate and modern compared to the full evening dresses and tuxedos and huge gala dresses you find in orchestras and on classical soloists. They could have chosen to go for the *enfant terrible* way of clothing (like Nigel Kennedy), outside the norms and expectations of the genre. Instead they could take their dresses and go to for instance to a reception. In music theatre projects, they have to wear what they are told to wear. This is true duality in NVS: they label themselves as experimental and playful, and they wear extreme clothing for some music theatre projects, but then on the other hand they signal unity, seriousness and credibility, and perhaps also classical tradition in their clothing in other settings.

I want to stress one issue regarding NVS in relation to the *events/contexts sustaining public performance* stage of Schechner's time and space model, connected to the festival profile of the group, the music they sing and the clothes they wear. It concerns their audience, who they are, the people for whom they are performing. I limit myself to giving an insight into what the

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584 See for instance http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jjkm1fV_2UE (Viewed 23.09.2013).

585 Griffiths 2011 p. 31.

586 Ibid. p. 32.

members of NVS themselves think about their audiences. One of the singers says that

> [...] our audience, normally mixed female and male, is often older then 35. Depends on the work and advertising we do before the concert. Sometimes we make special workshops in schools or academies, to prepare the concerts. Specially, in the festivals also a younger public comes. Of course, very interested in culture, the so-called educated class, or intelligentsia ...

This singer says, in other words, that their audience is middle-aged and older, and that if they want to reach a younger audience they often have to arrange such concerts themselves. This singer also observes that the festival audience can be a bit younger and that they are educated.

To have an audience that is aged 35 years and older, educated and interested in culture, consumers of it, is not unique to NVS. They have it in common with the rest of the classical music scene, confirmed in numerous studies on the subject. In 1966, Baumol and Bowen stated that classical music concert audiences mostly consisted of middle-aged people, with high educational and income levels. A study of 1992 by Abbé-Decarroux and Grin of the situation in Switzerland confirmed these findings, and stated that the older the individual was, the more likely they were to attend an opera or a classical concert.[587] A study by Prieto-Rodriguez and Fernández-Blanco of 1999 about classical and modern music in Spain came to the same conclusions: that a high level of education tends to raise the attraction towards classical music.[588] The nature of the NVS audience can explain, to some extent, some of their cautious choices in audience communication, in their clothing, and perhaps even their way of singing (see chapter 8).

The *cooldown* phase of Schechner's model is all about how and when the concert ends. The performers go back to their dressing rooms, having taken their last bow and perhaps done an encore. NVS end their concerts as they begin, in an orderly, well-organized fashion. They go back to their dressing rooms and change back to ordinary clothes, go back to the stage, fetch their scores and leave the concert place. As Schechner says, the cooldown phase is normally much less formal than the warm-up phase. Some choirs and ensembles do some formal cooldown exercises[589] together after the concert, but this is not something NVS would do, or any other vocal ensemble I

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587 Abbé-Decarroux and Grin 1992 p. 138.

588 Prieto-Rodriguez and Fernández-Blanco 1999 p. 17.

589 These are exercises that are the same as warm-up exercises for the voice.

have encountered at this level. Sometimes after concerts, especially at festivals, the performers meet the audience and mingle with them. At the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele the ensemble met with the audience, but also with Salvatore Sciarrino, the composer whose work they just had been performing. Such events are on the other hand quite important to NVS and they say that they like to do this because these meetings are important for future engagements for the ensemble.

Schechner says that the continuing life of a performance is its *aftermath*.[590] This phase may extend for years or even centuries. Things can happen in a performance that can affect future performances. Perhaps there is a review that can work as a door opener for future engagements if it is good. Although they have the ambition to evaluate their concerts, for instance at their planned 'talks', as one of the singer calls the planning meetings, these evaluations are too often given a low priority. One of the singers calls this 'a deep wound in the history of our ensemble', saying that this is something they would wish for, but that they don't take time to do it as often as they should. But the evaluations take place they say, if the concerts are 'not very exciting', then they speak about the problem and 'search for a solution'. What nature these 'solutions' take, or how these 'solutions' are implemented into the group's work, are more unclear. I have not observed such an active process going on in the ensemble, but it could happen that I more or less did not get access to such a process.

10.3   What about other ensembles?

NVS rehearses intensively. They claim to have around 300 rehearsals a year though this number may be a little overstated. With 59 concerts (the figure for 2012) as well as some time off for vacations and personal projects, they are clearly very busy. And they rehearse a lot, unsurprising given the repertoire they serve. Their rehearsals are well organized, in their own houses, and they have what seem to be well-organized routines for what they rehearse when. When I sang the *Sternklang* project with them, there was no doubt about where and when the rehearsals were and how they were organized.

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590 Schechner 2006 p. 246.

In Nordic Voices our rehearsals are organized in the same way as NVS. We have a fixed place where we rehearse and we have a well-organized plan for them. We do not have that many rehearsals, and there are many reasons why NVS rehearse more than we do. Primarily, it is a function of the repertoire. NVS do more contemporary music, and they premiere more works each year than Nordic Voices, so they have to have more rehearsals just to learn the music. They also do more music theatre projects, which of course require more rehearsal than other concert projects. When the singers of NVS say how many rehearsals they have, it is important to recognize that their projects are of very different kinds, especially when it comes to how many singers they include, sometimes with one singer only, and sometimes with the full ensemble of seven singers.

I have observed I Fagiolini in rehearsal, and although they are more often conducted by a leader (Robert Hollingworth) than either Nordic Voices or NVS, their rehearsals look very much the same as the rehearsals in NVS and Nordic Voices. As a member of Nordic Voices I would have no problem going into a rehearsal situation with either of these ensembles. I would know what was expected from me, how prepared I would need to be, and about the workflow of the rehearsal process. The rehearsals I was involved in during the *Sternklang* project were very familiar in the way they worked, and I had no problem participating in or understanding the processes involved in this project.

It is another story when it comes to The Hilliard Ensemble. When I asked them if I could come and observe them in rehearsal, their answer was that they did not actually rehearse that much, and if they did, it was mostly while on tour, sitting in a hotel room. This is not the whole story of course, since they take on projects where rehearsals are necessary, for example when they sing with other musicians or ensembles. But both John Potter (former member) and Rogers Covey-Crump described rehearsals with The Hilliard Ensemble in the same manner: a session where there is not much talking at all. They sing through the piece once, then say a couple of things, then they sing it through a couple of times more, and then it is finished. It is difficult to say if this is an accurate description of the rehearsals, since I haven't had the chance to observe them. But The Hilliard Ensemble is probably the ensemble that differs most from the others in this sense. It is difficult to say why this is. Perhaps The Hilliard Ensemble is more or tour than the other ensembles, and therefore it is a practical solution to their rehearsal challenges. Perhaps

they do more music that require less work on synchronization and music that demand less intensively music-learning. Perhaps, with their background and training from a very early age as ensemble singers, they are more used to singing in a synchronized fashion and therefore needs less time in putting the music together. These are issues that would have been extremely interesting to examine, but, as mentioned, observing a rehearsal setting with The Hilliard Ensemble has not been possible.

But when it comes to their concerts, all these four ensembles do things in quite the same ways: they stand in the same manner, they perform with music stands, they have the same audience, perform more or less at the same festivals, except that NVS perform at more contemporary music festivals than the others. The vocal ensembles have found a performance practice that they stick to, which works for them and for their audiences.

10.4   Conclusions

This chapter has told the story of NVS at work, how they plan and accomplish their rehearsals and how they behave in a concert performance setting.

I have shown that the rehearsal process in NVS can be understood through King's three-part categorization of the rehearsal process, *structure, collaboration* and *technique*, and I suggested two further categories, *personal preparation* and *evaluation of rehearsals*.

The rehearsals in NVS are well prepared in that sense that the singers know which repertoire to do at which rehearsals. The rehearsal itself does not have a formal schedule or formal plan, except for an outer structure: the rehearsal's length and the repertoire to be rehearsed. Mostly they work through pieces in the order of the piece, rather than jumping around. The rehearsals are repertoire driven, in that they start to sing without much preparation and then get ideas about the pieces from there. The singers of NVS have different levels of personal preparation, and even if they seem to have similar ideas about how they should prepare pieces, some of them say that they can have different levels of preparation for the rehearsals. One important issue within the rehearsals is the social-emotional process. For NVS, talking and having a light, humour-filled atmosphere seems to be important.

In this chapter I have described the processes that take place before, after and during NVS concert performances. Using Schechner's model of performance as a time and space structure, I have described the different phases of a performance by NVS, especially through my observation of the NVS concert at the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele in 2010. I have described group negotiation in pre-concert rehearsals, looking at how the group relate to each other, their personal needs, the group's needs, and the different requests from the presenter(s). I have shown that NVS have a normal 'default' way to stand on stage, without much talking and with clothes that are quite conservative, but signal unity and seriousness. I have shown that NVS perform for a certain audience most of the time, an audience that looks very much the same as a typical, traditional classic music audience. I have shown that NVS balances between being a traditional classical music chamber ensemble, following those norms and social codes, but that at the same time they wish to stand for an experimental, modern way of singing and making music.

This chapter has not discussed how the ensemble works in a recording session, for instance for CD. NVS is not an ensemble that records many CDs, and during my stay with them there were no recording sessions available for observation. A future study of NVS at work should perhaps observe and study such sessions.

The processes I have observed and come to know through my interviews, in addition to my participation in the *Sternklang* project, are processes that show how the singers work together. These are processes that I find in other ensembles, as well as in my own Nordic Voices. Understanding these processes, observing them and describing them, are important to understanding vocal ensemble practice. In the next chapter I will go into the way the singers work together as a group, look into group processes and the conflicts that can arise within NVS when they work together for a long time, as well as the ways in which knowledge is created and administered in the group.

*All they did was sing, in perfect harmony.
Or, in the case of Pino Fugazza's Partitum
Mutante, perfect disharmony.*

'F sharp there, Kate, not F natural'

'Honestly?'

*'That's what's written. On my print-out, at
least'*

'Sorry'

(Faber, 2002)

11 Colleagues and friends

The members of NVS are not only fellow musicians, they are also colleagues, sharing their work and working place. In addition to these seven singers, there is an administration consisting of at least two more people, sometimes more, depending on the project. Together, these ten or so people make up an enterprise, a company whose first goal is to present good contemporary vocal ensemble music. But this is of course unachievable if the company does not earn enough money, or if the singers are not as available as they need to be to meet the demands of presenters and festivals, that is, the ensemble's customers.

Singing in a vocal ensemble means connecting with and belonging to a group. Whether this group meets on a regular basis, or comes together only for a particular event, the processes that go on within the group are often the same. NVS is of course a group, but it is also a community (see Chapter 3) working within vocal ensemble practice, each member, singer or administrator participating and negotiating meaning within that practice, and evolving their identities in it too. Within NVS the group of singers are the core of the organization, with the administrators forming a group on the periphery. Christine Fischer is the binding link between the administrators and the singers, the one stable administrative element. She works so closely with the ensemble and takes so many decisions on the ensemble's behalf, that one could say that she is its eighth member. Although she does not sing,

and therefore does not contribute directly to the sounding result, she has a huge impact on the group on many other levels. All the singers work closely together, and they see each other almost every day when they are working on a project. The social network between the singers and the administrators in NVS is intricate, and they have worked out routines, ways of talking together, ways of identifying and solving conflicts and ways of sharing, contributing and evolving knowledge that shape the groups' identities.

This chapter will look into some of the group processes involved in the work of NVS, and I will outline some of the group processes. This chapter is based on the interviews with NVS as well as my observations of the group, together with relevant literature on communities of practice, knowledge management and group processes. The limitations of this thesis preclude a full overview of all the social processes that go on in the group. But the issues raised here are ones that came up in the interviews with the singers of the ensemble. Given the interesting dimensions these issues give to their life in the group, I have chosen to include them here, although I acknowledge that more research on group interaction is needed in the field of vocal ensemble practice.

11.1   A company of joint responsibilities

NVS is a company. This company produces concerts through its group of singers, which is also a product, one that is marketed and sold to its customers, concert promoters. The company has two main products, the concerts the group give and the group itself. The sales arguments presented on their website leave no doubt that this is a group like no others, at the forefront of their field, singing music no one has yet heard. All the singers are described with words like 'researchers', 'discoverers', 'adventures' and 'idealists'.

It is always the vocal ensemble itself, and the work it can do, that is promoted. The machinery, or organization, around the ensemble is not mentioned much, only so that you know where to call if you want to hire them, or which links to click if you want to buy a CD or look at their concert list. To my view, the website is organized like just that of any other company who are selling items or services.

Although NVS is a company based on an idealistic idea, and the product they sell is of an artistic nature, the company has to earn money, primarily for all the people working for the company. In my experience, it is often the market that decides what the ensemble does, including its repertoire. Sometimes NVS has to compromise between the repertoire they want to sing and the repertoire they are asked to do, as one of the singers explains:

> [...] sometimes there are problems, like financial problems, and people don't want to hear certain pieces that we would love to do, but you cannot just programme it.

NVS sell products, and they have to deal with this commercial side of the business. This commercial side is seen on their website, and in their self-consciousness about photographs of the ensemble and their dress code (see Chapter 10). So they are sold as idealists, as researchers, as being at the front of a development within vocal music, but they also nurse their commercial necessities, selling their products, the ensemble and their concert projects.

Because the ensemble has one voice per part, each singer has an especially high responsibility as a part of the product that is sold. It is very hard to replace one individual's part in the whole, especially one of the singers. If Christine Fischer calls in sick one day, that is not a disaster for the company, but if one of the singers calls in sick on a concert day, the company does not earn any money. This causes a great deal of stress to the singers and a mutual feeling of responsibility. All singers have a joint responsibility for the other singers, not only for the concerts to go as planned, but also for the other singers' financial situation. One of the singers says that

> [...] the biggest problem is when there is somebody who is a little bit ill or has a bad day and you ... you feel this and this is a very bad thing for an ensemble singer.

If one joint in the ensemble machinery does not work perfectly, it influences the whole ensemble. Solo singers rarely deal with such problems. If a solo singer is indisposed and has to cancel, the loss is theirs alone. But in a vocal ensemble, if one singer cannot perform, all the other singers have to cancel as well, unless there is a way around that singer's absence. In NVS, they do projects with varying number of singers, and this makes it possible to juggle a little with the number of singers. But there is no doubt that the singers of NVS are very aware of this joint responsibility and feels it very strongly. One of the singers, when talking about it, said that they had to be aware of the other singers' families as well, and that if NVS does not work or have a steady

income, this affected the families of the others as well. It is evident that the singers of NVS think of this and show a strong sense of solidarity with the others in the group.

A deep concern for colleagues can of course be found in other small group companies similar to NVS. But what is special is how vulnerable NVS is regarding the small things that can happen: a quite innocent cold can potentially leave everyone without money.

11.2   Close relations

When working together for a long time, the members of a group develop close relationships. They travel a lot, spending a lot of time together in the rehearsal room, at meetings, in airport lobbies, airplanes, singing concerts, solving musical issues together and so on. This is difficult if the singers don't like each other. When we think that a significant part of people's self-conception, their sense of who they are and what they are worth, derives from their group membership,[591] it is no wonder that they try to make their time in a group a happy one, or that the group tries to find activities where their interpersonal bonds within the group can be strengthened.

The well-being of their colleagues is important to the members of NVS. I have already mentioned the member who, when asked what makes a good vocal ensemble, said,

> […] that the persons that sing together love each other. And that they use that love to make music together.

This singer continued:

> […] I can see the soprano hates the tenor or the bass, and they go into a hotel and do not live together or take different trains or planes. That is the main thing. […] and you really have a common feeling to each other and you ensure that the other singers have the same rights to stay here, that is important.

I read this as a history of not wanting the ensemble to be a group of people that don't like each other, and this singer tells about the importance of being able to travel together and to be on tour together as well as liking to sing together, as if it is important also to create places and stories and sharing

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591   Brown 2000 p. 189.

small episodes outside the rehearsal room. Maybe in this way they build a common history, which strengthens their bonds and develops this desired 'love' for one another. One of the other singers says

> […] my colleagues, I really love or appreciate or like that they talk more about stuff that they experience or about people that they have met or about work, pieces and music and themselves. And feelings, or the… you know. I don't know, there are another things going on in their heads. And that is what I really like.

This singer explained how they like to participate in the other singers' lives, in their histories, and described a situation where they had enjoyed knowing more about their colleagues. They said how much they liked being in a vocal ensemble that appreciates that its members do work outside and have other impulses as well. These words describe a group in which the members think the best of each other. This reflects group cohesion, often described in group process theories.[592] Cohesion also springs from attraction to the idea or the ideal of the group as well as from inter-member attraction; as mentioned in Chapter 6, the members of NVS are proud of their group, and in agreement when talking about its aims.

Although the members of NVS are good friends and have grown close to each other, I found that they can sometimes set limits to these relationships too. One of the singers says that

> […] I think these private talks are so important for how, yeah, setting the good atmosphere to the whole thing, and it is really important that you … I mean, we are not best friends. We would not share everything with each other. But we are really good friends, and have a very high feeling of sympathy with everybody in the ensemble.

At the time of telling me this, this singer was reducing their engagement with the group a little. And it may be that this statement explains their reduced engagement, but it also shows that group members feel it is important to live outside the group as well, creating some kind of personal space for their own lives. When they work together so much it is not strange that they focus on positive ways to describe the ensemble and the other singers. It is not very strange, perhaps, that they seem to take care of having a personal space when they travel together. When asked whether this was important, one of the singers said that it was

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592   Ibid. p. 45.

> [...] very, very important. Because if we wouldn't have that space, for example our own hotel rooms, if we would be forced to stay together ... we couldn't work for very long.

But mostly they describe the group and the other singers in positive ways, in accord with theories of group cohesion.[593] Brown describes this cohesion as the 'cement' in the group, helping to create close relations between the members. Working out these relations is therefore important for NVS. If a group is to work effectively together, they must develop these positive feelings towards each other, and also work to 'earn respect from the other singers', as one of singers described it. It is important to develop a 'common feeling', 'common love' for each other.

11.3   Changing members and becoming a member

Whenever a group changes its members, the group's inner life is of course influenced, not least because all groups operate with a set of group norms to which new members must adjust. Brown writes about scales of values that define a range of acceptable (and unacceptable) attitudes and behaviours for members of a social unit.[594] These values and norms are, in my view, a product of the values and attitudes of the group. Whether formal or informal, the norms define the ways in which members of a group can behave and are the basis of mutual expectations between group members. In NVS these norms define what they can wear, how they sing, how to behave when rehearsing, what to say, what not to say, which jokes to use in which situation and so on. These norms change to a certain extent when a new member is introduced. Norms have different values in a group, and their tolerance of deviation from one of their norms can show how important any particular norm is to a group.[595]

In a group like NVS, the members always take different roles. Sometimes these roles are formally prescribed, but sometimes, and perhaps most of the time, a role identity has settled on one particular person, although these roles are rarely explicitly referred to.[596] When I observed NVS, they

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593 Ibid. p. 46.

594 Ibid. p. 56.

595 Stensaasen and Sletta 1996 p. 133.

596 Brown 2000 p. 69.

sometimes had to use a conductor, especially if the works they were performing were particularly difficult, for instance rhythmically. Most of the time this conductor would be Andreas. At one point he was formally appointed to carry out this role and now if they need a conductor, he does it. According to my observations, this means that he also takes a dominant role in the rehearsal of these pieces. I asked the singers who did most talking, and they said that it was a couple of the men, while they were leading the rehearsals. It is also interesting to note that one singer mentioned that when one of the most dominant singers was away, one of the others talked a lot more, and took more space. Another singer talked about how there are different personalities in the group, some of them behaving like a dominant *alpha-animal* compared to a not so dominant *beta-animal*. They said that

> […] as an alpha-animal you will always behave so that for you everything is ok. But the beta animals they function in another way. They eat problems, you know …

At one point, just a couple of years before I met up with NVS, they had had a replacement among their members. Two of their former members, Angelika Luz and Stephanie Field, had resigned and left the group. Without saying that one constellation was better than the other, the singers did say that the new constellation was different, and that the dynamics between the singers, the role differentiation and the norms inside the group had changed. One of the singers who had left was a dominant figure in the group, so her leaving created a kind of power vacuum, a possibility for the others to play a more significant part in the group. One of the singers says that

> […] we had another soprano and mezzo-soprano … We were six years in this constellation, and it was a different kind of work. Now we have Sarah and Truike, and we work in very professional way and a different way. But the atmosphere is completely different.

It is evident that a change of members will change the dynamic between the members of the group, and also change the way they define themselves. Sarah Maria Sun, the soprano who replaced Angelika Luz, said that she felt very much that the singer she had replaced was a more dominant figure than herself, and that the other members had struggled a little to find a new dynamic in the group, which also of course influenced the way they sang together.

Sarah Maria Sun[597] was the last person to join the group. As Brown says, the process of entering a group often provokes anxiety.[598] Sarah said that being offered a place in NVS was the 'chance of a lifetime', and being a quite young singer at the beginning of her career, entering a group with high prestige, with singers and new colleagues almost twice her age, must have been exciting and perhaps a bit scary as well. Of course, it is not only the individual that feels tension when entering a group, the group itself has to accommodate the new member(s), which can be stressful. One of the NVS singers described the situation as a time of uncertainty, going from a known situation into something more unknown. Luckily, they said, the two new members functioned extremely well in the group. For Sarah, a young soprano, entering NVS meant needing to redefine who she was in terms of her membership of the new group. A group will often react to a newcomer with a testing period, which can seem quite unpleasant for a new member. There are theories about such unpleasant initiation periods in groups which conclude that the more severe the initiation, the more attractive the group is. They suggest that this difficulty makes the new member think of group membership as more important, like saying 'if I went through all that, it must be important to me'.[599] It is not easy to tell if this was the case with Sarah, but she describes a difficult period on entering the group. In my first interview with her, not that long after she had started, she said that

> [...] the first rehearsal with this new ensemble, and, they were really testing me all the time, of course. And I was doing everything wrong and I got a hammer on my head every second minute. And, yeah, they were very strict. They tried to give me a good feeling, but, I mean, it was the test phase...

It was clear to me the next time I interviewed her that she had gained more confidence, and she even volunteered that she had managed to 'conduct a little', which she joked about not having been able to do when she started. In my first interview she joked about herself as a 'stupid singer, a soprano and a coloratura soubrette'. But in the next interview, one or two years later, she did not use those words at all, and instead sounded more confident and integrated in the group, more assured about her place among the other singers.

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597 Sarah Maria Sun left NVS in January 2015, after this thesis was written.

598 Ibid. p. 24.

599 Ibid. p. 32.

During this initiation period and her first period in the ensemble and until the point at which I met her for the second time, Sarah had gained more knowledge about ensemble singing and also more about singing contemporary music. When she had begun in the ensemble, she went from being outside the practice, on its periphery, to being on the inside, getting to know it from the inside: she had mastered the skill of singing in an ensemble. Lave and Wenger (1991) say that learning is, besides the internalization of knowledge, also an increasing participation in communities of practice.[600] They say that learning and mastering a skill means to participate in social practices, and that, through a process they call *legitimate peripheral participation*, you move from being an apprentice on the periphery of a practice to the centre of it, mastering the skill and gaining knowledge about the practice. They claim that viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that 'learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership'.[601] Our identity is being shaped in the process, and identity, knowing and social membership entail one another.[602] In the case of Sarah, I interpret her increased confidence and her identity shift from 'stupid soprano and coloratura soubrette' (although joking about it), to being a full member of a contemporary music vocal ensemble, as a process of legitimate peripheral participation. Working with the others in the ensemble, she has gained some knowledge about the ensemble and singing in it that she could not have had if she only had read about it. When she was at last fully integrated in the ensemble, the community of practice, as NVS is, changed, and so did she, along with her identity as a singer.

11.4   Conflicts in NVS and how they solve them

11.4.1   Types of conflicts...

Conflicts can arise whenever and wherever people meet. When people work together, sooner or later somebody will disagree about something. In communities of practices or in groups, whatever the practice is or whatever

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600 Lave and Wenger 1991 p. 49.

601 Ibid. p. 53.

602 Ibid. p. 53.

the group is concerned with, perhaps the nature of the conflict says something about the group or practice from which it emerges. Cragan, Kasch and Wright (2009) have a general definition of a conflict as 'interaction of interdependent individuals who perceive differences or incompatibility in beliefs, values, or plans of action and who have both shared and competing goals'.[603] They continue that conflicts often are viewed as something groups should avoid or suppress, and that incompetently managed conflicts may result in 'disharmony, discord, and contentious argument'.[604] But they also say that conflicts may be good and constructive, and that conflicts, inevitable as they are in a group, actually is necessary for a group to be successful.[605]It is only, as they say, when the group is 'working ugly', meaning that the group is trying to avoid or suppress conflicts where it is not realistic or possible to do so.[606]Often these conflicts operate in the background, often unresolved over a long period of time. Such conflicts will make the group suffer from decision paralysis, and lack of coordination,[607] and Cragan, Kasch and Wright state that the most frequently reported dysfunctional group problems are:

- communication skills (poor listening, lack of clarity, jargon)
- egocentric behaviour (dominating conversation, one-upmanship, show of power, talking to hear self-talk, brownnosing, clowning)
- nonparticipation (passive, does not speak, does not volunteer, lacks discussion)
- interruptions (talks over others, socializes, allows phone calls)
- poor leader behaviour (unorganized, not prepared, lacks control, gets sidetracked, makes no decision)
- negative attitude (defensive/evasive, argumentative, personal accusations, lack of respect, complaining, lack of emotional control)[608]

In my observations of NVS, I have not seen conflicts at this level in the group. If we look at how they work (see for instance Chapter 10), I do not find negative attitude towards each other or towards the group. On the other hand, they seem to be very determined to maintain an including,

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603 Cragan, Karsch, and Wright (2009) p. 245.

604 Ibid. p. 245.

605 Ibid. p. 246.

606 Ibid. p. 246.

607 Ibid. p. 246.

608 Ibid. p. 248.

humour-filled atmosphere. Also, when talking to me, they seem to be concerned to talk about the other members in including and respectful ways. It does not mean that they have including communication all the time while working. I have heard them argue quite intensively about how to work and over musical issues, but my observations tell me that this is a group that has developed quite good working routines. Neither have I seen them interrupt each other, although I have seen that there can be instances where there are several discussions between the singers going on at the same time while working. If one of these discussions needs the attention of all singers, and doesn't get it, it can spark some irritation. But this is perhaps a necessity, a natural consequence of the way they have chosen to work, with a flat structure without a designated leader. Christine Fischer's role of leader outside the group seems also to be a good choice for NVS, since the singers can leave most of the non-musical responsibilities to her. In their work there are different levels of participation, and some of the members participate more in the discussions than others, also in rehearsals. But in my observations, all singers participate at some level, although each singer has his or her own style of participation. From the observations I have done, there is a difference between the men and the women when it comes to engagement in the musical work. My impression is that the women engage more in 'local' discussion, while the men, especially if one of them is designated a 'conductor', engage themselves more in 'global' discussion. There is extensive research on gender differences in group communication, suggesting that women and men are socialized to adapt distinct communication styles and strategies.[609] It is generally suggested – though there is a danger of stereotyping is such characterization – that female conversation styles are more indirect and attentive, and less likely to offer ideas in mixed-sex groups than masculine conversation styles.[610] When one of the singers of NVS depict other singers in the group as 'alpha animals', it could be a hint of conversation styles that may tend toward the 'egocentric behaviour' category. When working with the *Sternklang* project, I found it interesting to see that the two women from NVS in my group of four singers took more control over the communication than I saw them do when working with NVS only. But this could be coincidental.

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609   Ibid. p. 147.

610   Ibid. p. 149.

When asking the members of NVS what may cause tension, they all say that of course musical issues can cause trouble, but that they have found a way of working together over the years so that they don't have to discuss every issue. But when a new person starts in the group, as with Sarah, they can feel that the others are testing them out. This can cause serious tension until they find a resolution, and the new member has found their place in the group.

The singers compare singing in an ensemble like being in a family. As one of them says, when speculating why two members of the ensemble had chosen to quit (Luz and Field):

> [...] when you are together with a family 24 hours a day for 22 years ... Phew ... You know the others so well and you are so annoyed by particular habits of theirs, probably you can't relax anymore, you cannot be surprised by anything anymore.

The singers know each other so well now that it is rather like being in a family together, and that being forced together without having a space of their own, can be tiring after a while. In the beginning, group members are often overly polite, but as time passes, the role of each member become clearer and the members more aware of the others' different qualities.[611]

There is one issue that all singers in NVS mentioned when they were asked what causes the biggest conflicts in the ensemble. Everyone noted the difficulty of the balance between ensemble work and solo work. NVS does not provide full time employment for its group of singers, which means that they all have to work as freelancers in addition to their work in NVS. The seven singers in the group are all experienced solo singers too, and especially experienced in contemporary music, which makes them quite attractive in the freelance concert or music theatre market. But the demand for each singer varies from time to time, and they can find their access to work increasing and decreasing, which can cause some sparks of jealousy between the singers. The other side of this problem is that some singers are more dependent on the money generated by the ensemble than others. If the currently 'popular' solo singer does a lot of work outside the ensemble, it reduces the opportunities for the ensemble to take on projects, which is in turn bad for the other singers' economy.

> [...] in the last few weeks we have had a lot of discussions about the balance between ensemble work and soloistic work ... That year (2010) was a hard

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611   Ibid. pp. 46–49.

year anyway, because of the economic crisis in Europe. So, yeah, both aspects came together, and for the people who didn't have so much solo work it was becoming a big problem. It quickly got to the point of: 'you are doing solo projects, and that is why we don't have enough work'.

This situation is difficult for the singer who does not have much solo work, but is dependent on the ensemble income, and also very difficult for the singer for whom there is a high demand in the solo market.

[...] When people have their family back home, and the ensemble is normally their income, everybody is responsible. I try to find the balance between ensemble stuff and solo stuff ...

But although the balance between solo work and ensemble work is difficult, there are also positive sides to not having NVS as a full time occupation. One of the singers says about solo work that

[...] it is influencing the group in a positive and a negative way. Of course, in a positive way because we get a lot of inputs and the negative way is that the person is not there when we plan rehearsals.

Christine Fischer also feels this situation. She mentions another dimension of this dilemma, namely the feelings that can grow from 'this singer is not here to work all the time' to 'we are going to lose this singer to a solo career'. This is quite interesting, because this fear of losing a singer to a solo career might seem to imply that a solo career is more attractive than a career in a vocal ensemble like NVS. Perhaps it says something about the hidden hierarchy I see inside the singing world, in which the prestige of doing solo work is higher than singing in an ensemble, and definitely more prestigious than singing in a choir.

11.4.2   ...and their solutions

A non-constructive conflict in a group, or a conflict that makes the group 'work ugly', as mentioned above, needs attention. Some conflicts are more serious than others and need direct intervention and the application of resolution strategies at once, while other conflicts can be smoothed out over time without actually dealing with them directly. Cragan, Kasch and Wright suggest five different conflict resolution negotiating styles to manage a conflict: Avoiding (see no problem), accommodating (going along to get along), compromising (give a little to get a little), collaborating (look for a solution that lets everybody win) and competing (look to achieve your

goals).[612] They also suggest some ten communication skills they see as important for managing group conflict, grouped within task-managing skills (for instance working against premature consensus), relationship-managing skills (for instance engaging in face-saving behaviour), and team-managing skills (for instance building group pride).[613] I cannot say I have found that NVS have a very conscious way of resolving potential conflicts within the group, or that they have worked specifically with the skills or negotiating styles suggested by the literature to manage these conflicts. It could mean that the conflicts within the group have not been of a very serious nature, or that they have tacit strategies that goes on in their work. One of the singers says, when talking about different problems, that

> [...] there are some things, you know. One is always saying 'everybody else is singing too low'. Or one is saying, on third rehearsal, that everyone is too late, or not really precise. And you could always argue and start something. We love to make a joke of it, but now again this remark has to come. But it is all not so serious in a way. I mean, we know each other so well and we know the others' qualities.

The one thing most of them mention when talking about how they resolve conflicts that arise, is that they talk their way around the problem. One of them says that

> [...] it only takes discussion to find a solution. If somebody feels really bad, the next day he says 'you cannot really say it like this, I feel bad'. And in most cases it gets better, after these discussions, after the person has explained.

One of the other singers also stresses this, when asked how they tackle conflicts that arise:

> [...] Through talking. Of course the conflicts are about being late for the starting time, or being unfriendly in the rehearsals if there is something ... But that is very seldom. [...] It is more practical things that are causing conflicts.

It is not clear how these conversations actually go; and my empirical data does not show clearly the detail of such conversations, or indicate how conscious the group members are in their conflict solving strategies. But through my observations I have seen that they vary their discussions, balancing between all the positions suggested by Cragan, Kasch and Wright. For instance the singers say how they try to make jokes out of the situation (avoiding or collaborating), and how they try to make a 'good atmosphere'

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612   Ibid. p. 265.

613   Ibid. pp. 257–261.

(could be a face-saving strategy). I acknowledge, though, that more research should be done in the conflict solving strategies of NVS or within vocal ensembles.

As I mentioned the singers put forward how it sometimes can be tiresome to work so closely together, like a family, being more and more aware of the irritating habits of the others. Their solution to this challenge seems to be to create a personal space for themselves, especially when travelling. These personal spaces might include having their own hotel rooms, and perhaps also the freedom to not be together with the group all the time, for example at meals.

But the problem of balancing solo work and ensemble work is more difficult, and sometimes these problems have to be solved on an administrative level. Christine Fischer says that she tries to plan projects beforehand. It means for example that if a singer knows about a big, solo project coming up, Christine Fischer has to know in advance. She says that this makes things easier to cope with, because then she can plan for commissions to be written for one fewer singer, for example.

Of course, not all conflicts that arise involve the whole group, and sometimes things have to be dealt with between the singers involved. As one of them says:

> […] you don't have to be in the group to discuss these subjects. You can be two and say 'yes, we have to talk about that'. I think we talk a lot. As I said, we are a very communicating ensemble [laughter].

As I have already mentioned, it seems important to them that they construct a personal space for each member. They have their own hotel rooms, to which they allow each other to withdraw if they want. But they are also good at creating meeting places where they can talk together without the pressure of being a vocal ensemble, talking about vocal ensemble stuff. During the projects I have observed, the meals have been very important. It could be a coincidence, but at every concert I have observed, there has been a meal involved, before the concert or, preferably, after it. When I met the ensemble in Oslo, one of the first things they asked me about was where to find a good fish restaurant. In a group like NVS I would guess that it is important to have some common experiences that are not focused on singing, experiences that allow the singers to talk about different things and to learn different things about each other. Of course there are numerous

'group development programmes' out there, and it is very common for groups to go into processes with all kinds of 'coaches' and 'tutors', but, as earlier mentioned, I have never heard anyone from NVS talk about this as a solution or even an option for them. Maybe it has to do with their personalities, or as one of the says:

> [...] I think, in work, we have this kind of German thing. We talk not so much about form, but more about what is the content ... So, it is all quite direct. Problems, psychological things don't have so much place. They often appear, but they are not spoken out loud.

11.5   What about other ensembles?

Every group, every constellation with people meeting or working together, will face problems and will have to deal with conflict at some level. When I talked to John Potter (former member of The Hilliard Ensemble) and Rogers Covey-Crump (member of The Hilliard Ensemble) they both mentioned one episode they had encountered during their time in the ensemble. At one concert they went flat, and Rogers Covey-Crump, who has absolute pitch, tried to pull the whole ensemble up again, in a manner he thought everyone would understand. Apparently they did not. The result was, according to both of them, really bad, and it resulted in a big quarrel after the concert. Since they both mentioned this incident, it seems to have been quite a serious episode for them both. It is a very good example of the kind of conflict that can arise in a working situation. I have seen such incidents evolving in NVS too, although they did not expand to a serious conflict. The strategy for resolving conflicts in the two ensembles seems to be slightly different. According to John Potter and Rogers Covey-Crump, it seems that The Hilliard Ensemble spend a little less time talking. John Potter said that they avoided problems regarding musical issues by not talking that much about them; instead they sang once and then sang twice, and in this way many difficulties would have been smoothed out. Whether this is really the case is difficult to say: a longer observation period and more interviews would have been necessary. But John Potter said that the members of The Hilliard Ensemble were not that social when he was a member there. As he said, he didn't even know where one of the other members of the group lived. That is a huge difference from NVS, if it is right. As The Hilliard Ensemble is an all-male quartet, while NVS is a mixed-sex ensemble, it can

explain some of the differences. As already mentioned, there are differences in communication styles in a feministic or masculine way, and this can have an impact on how the two ensembles work. There is research showing that persons socialized in feminine communication cultures may be more inclined to 'do politeness' in social interaction.[614] Also, Guerrero and Floyd (2008) suggest that women tend to show a more affectionate behaviour,[615] and this can explain the difference between the different conflict strategies in NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble. On the other hand, The Hilliard Ensemble also organizes meals after its concerts, and when I sat down with them after one, my impression was that they also see the importance of finding meeting points, where they can talk about other things, or evaluate their concerts, or talk about different projects, which can suggest that they also see the importance of talking their way through differences. In my own ensemble, Nordic Voices, we think it is important to share a meal together when on tour, or simply grab a coffee together. We use to say that one of the good things about travelling together is that there is always someone available if you need company. At the same time, we think it is extremely important to have personal space, where you can shut the others out; I have found this in every group I have visited. But there is a need for further studies on this subject, and how the different vocal ensembles solve their differences and conflicts is a topic that needs more investigating.

The conflict arising from the need to balance solo and ensemble work is difficult: we experience that conflict in Nordic Voices, too. A vocal ensemble is dependent on its members being able to sing in its concerts, and there is a limit to how many times one member can say 'no'. Nordic Voices had one member who had to leave the group because a great solo career was just around the corner, further evidence that solo work and solo singing have higher prestige than ensemble work among classical singers. It is interesting to note that this conflict between solo and ensemble work does not seem to be that central in The Hilliard Ensemble. All the four singers have their main job in the ensemble, and they seem to come from a tradition where the prestige of singing solo and in an ensemble is more balanced. They all have a background in the English college choir tradition; choir and ensemble singing has been a huge and natural part of their training as singers from when they started to sing as boys. It is also interesting that even though

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614   Ibid. p. 149.

615   Guerrero and Floyd 2008 p. 97.

you find this huge tradition of choir singing in England, the English conservatories focus strongly on solo singing, according to John Potter.

11.6   Conclusions

NVS is a group of colleagues *and* friends. They are an enterprise selling two main products: the projects the group does, and the group itself. All the members and staff of NVS are mutually dependent on each other to sell these products and earn money for the enterprise and themselves: they are an enterprise of joint responsibilities. At the same time, they have developed close relations with each other, and they know that they need to maintain a good atmosphere to be able to perform music on the high level they try to achieve. They share rehearsals, the concert stage and projects, and also share meals and travel: it seems to be important for the members of NVS to have these common experiences, building a common history together. Although they do so many things together as a group, they are also very strict about creating personal space as well, to which each member can withdraw to without challenge. This is a part of the group's norms and values, and important for everyone's well being and the group's existence. To be a member of the group means understanding these values, though you may feel tested and criticized in the process. When working together, conflicts inevitably may arise, some conflicts being important for the group to address, but others actually being necessary for the group to obtain success. NVS has their ways of dealing with these conflicts. Perhaps the most notably conflict lies in the difficult balance between working as a solo singer and working with the ensemble, especially when some singers do more solo work than others. It is evident that NVS feels this conflict as a difficult one, and they deal with it both practically (planning ahead) and with talking together about it. This supports my observation that there still is more prestige in singing solo projects than singing ensemble projects, even if you sing in one of the most prestigious vocal ensembles in the world.

On and on they sang, not looking at each other, heading home.

(Faber, 2002)

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12 Conclusions and discussions

In this thesis I have examined vocal ensemble practice through a case study of the German vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, supporting this case study with observations of and interviews with singers from other ensembles, especially The Hilliard Ensemble, along with reflections on my own experience as an ensemble singer in Nordic Voices. I have examined the term 'practice', the various theories about which have served as a backdrop to the thesis as a whole. My primary strategy, though, as stated in Chapter 3, has been to focus on various aspects of vocal ensemble practice through my study of NVS. Many different elements of vocal ensemble practice have been explored in this thesis. This chapter will summarize my most important findings, and I will develop some discussion topics around them. I will draw some final conclusions and try to make some useful suggestions for the education of classical singers in the future.

I have to stress that every chapter of this thesis could be developed as an entire thesis on its own. In every topic I have examined, I recognize that there are more discoveries waiting to be unveiled and there is more research needed in every area. But considering the whole of vocal ensemble practice meant that some borderlines had to be drawn, primarily because of the limitations on space available in this thesis. Therefore it is the singers themselves, and my observations of them at work, that have set the limits to the different topics.

12.1 The term 'practice' and Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart

As explained in Chapter 3, the term 'practice' is very difficult to nail down. Although widely used on a daily basis, it is one of those words that contains a great deal once you start to unfold its various possible meanings. Erlend Hovland, in his article *Turning to practice* (2013), says that the greatest threat to practice as a field of study is the lack of theory,[616] and in some ways I can see his point. But I have considered quite a broad range of theoretical thought: about tacit knowledge which Schatzki discovers amongst *arrays of activities*; in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Barry Barnes' theories on *shared practices*; and especially in Wenger's theories on *communities of practice*. All these play a role in what I have called the theoretical scenography of vocal ensemble practice.

Hovland showed how playing an instrument engages the body in different internalized movements, movements that could be seen as bodily acts which a practice 'articulates'. Each practice has some 'special features' which are articulated in a particular way. Investigating a practice therefore requires investigation of these different features. I have allowed the singers of NVS to define these different elements from their own experience. Each has proved to have its own theoretical platform (and its own chapter in this thesis). I have not covered everything or produced a complete picture of vocal ensemble practice, but I have pointed to the features that these leading participants have found essential.

Perhaps it is problematic to assert that there is such a thing as a particular practice unique to vocal ensembles. Why shouldn't the work NVS do be described as simply an offspring of normal classical singing practice? Which dimensions in the work of the various groups justify calling it a specific practice? One could argue that they are doing normal classical singing, as they all trained within the classical vocal tradition. They sing music by composers we recognize as falling into the 'classical' tradition, and the performances these groups undertake bear striking resemblances to other classical vocal music concerts, except that there are fewer people on stage. But I suggest that the classical vocal ensemble has a unique practice of its own, although there are points of likeness with the practice of classical solo and choral singing. These are significant features that are more or less

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616   Hovland 2013 p. 1.

shared throughout the whole community of vocal ensembles. As I show in Chapter 5, the history of vocal ensembles is long and continuous, and the classical vocal ensembles of today represent a natural embodiment of this tradition. The activities that go on in the groups are very much alike, including the organization of rehearsals, the vocal techniques used, the ways they communicate with each other and the repertoire they present. The likeness is also evident in the way they organize themselves and in the social bonds and processes that form and are maintained between group members. I believe these features constitute clear evidence that vocal ensemble practice is distinct from others, a unique practice in today's world of classical singing.

What does that mean for our understanding of the work and practice of NVS? How should we understand their contribution? I have turned here to the theories of *communities of practice* formulated by Etienne Wenger. In Chapter 3.4 I referred to his 14 indicators that a community of practice has been formed. In the light of this thesis and NVS I recapitulate them here:

1. **Sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual.**
   Chapter 11: NVS have sustained mutual relationships.
2. **Shared ways of engaging in doing things together.**
   Chapter 10: NVS have specific ways of working together, for instance sharing solutions to the specific challenges they meet in their work.
3. **The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation.**
   Chapters 6, 10 and 11. NVS have an organization and a way of working together which provides them with a 'rapid flow' of information.
4. **Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process.**
   Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Whether in rehearsals or concerts, NVS do not have to talk that much any more about the challenges they meet. When it comes to vocal technique, intonation and communication issues, they have established built-in standards they know how to follow, judging which to apply as appropriate.
5. **Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed.**
   Chapter 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

6   **Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs.**
    Chapter 11. In Chapter 3.4, I referred to what Brown calls 'group distinctiveness', that who belongs and who doesn't can be seen in the language and discourses within the group itself.[617]

7   **Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise.**
    In all the interviews I have done with the group, they are very aware of the strengths and the weaknesses of the other group members. Their mutual support and shared contribution to group shine through in every chapter in this thesis.

8   **Mutually defining identities.**
    Throughout this thesis are examples of the singers agreeing on what kind of singers they all are: these ideas are concurrent.

9   **The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products.**
    All the members of NVS are involved in the structure of the ensemble, choosing the repertoire, planning projects, and negotiating solutions to the challenges they meet in the repertoire (see for instance, Chapters 10 and 11)

10 **Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts.**
    Chapters 10 and 11.

11 **Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter.**
    Chapter 10 and 11

12 **Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones.**
    This relates to what Brown calls the processes of *group cohesion*,[618] of which there are examples throughout the thesis.

13 **Certain styles recognized as displaying membership.**
    Chapter 10.

14 **A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.**
    I believe this is an important point. As discussed in Chapter 3.4, the members of a vocal ensemble or any other group, share discourses reflecting certain perspectives of the world, creating

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617   Brown 2000 pp. 315–322.

618   Ibid. p. 45.

group norms.[619] Every chapter from 5 to 11 contains examples of NVS members sharing their perspectives on classical vocal ensemble practice and their world.

In the light of these 14 indicators by Etienne Wenger, I feel confident in saying that NVS demonstrates and embodies a community of practice within classical vocal ensemble practice.

12.2   Self-conception of the singers of NVS

I have touched on the question of identity in this thesis, and in Chapter 3 I talked about the concept of *identity in practice*. I asked the singers how they viewed themselves after spending so much time in a vocal ensemble like NVS. They selected examples of skills that defined them as singers, for example the skill of dealing with intonation within a complex musical landscape. The various aspects of any practice include identity markers that define who we are, both inside and outside that practice. In correlating Wenger's theory of identity in practice with feedback from the singers themselves, his theory of *identity as community membership* draws our attention to the importance of perceptions of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The members of NVS are extremely proud of their group. They talk about it and their projects everywhere, and they talk about each other as good colleagues and friends. They are proud of being able to use their voices as ensemble instruments, but also as contemporary vocal ensemble singers. They also share much knowledge between them on how to solve challenges and they are largely in agreement about how to perform the music they choose to do. Wenger speaks of *identity as a learning trajectory* – that we define who we are by where we have been and where we are going. The members of NVS know the history of the ensemble, and they are in agreement about where the ensemble should move in the future. At the same time they are very clear that they have a shared background as solo classical singers.

Wenger argues that *identity is a nexus of membership*, and that we define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity. All the members of NVS participate in many different communities of practice, participations that help to define who they are.

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619   Ibid. p. 56.

They all do projects with other musicians, with other singers and in different settings, and every one of these settings contributes to the way they see themselves. They are trained classical singers, they are early music singers, they are choral singers and they are singers who love to do music theatre. And, of course, they also participate in communities of practice that are not related to music. One of the singers used to do some charity work for women, most of them like to eat good food, some of them have families that shape who they are and how they look upon themselves.

Identity is also a relation between the local and the global, as we define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses. When the singers of NVS make a clear demarcation between themselves and The Hilliard Ensemble, they are saying how they see themselves as singers. They view themselves as solo singers, while on the other hand pointing to the singers from The Hilliard Ensemble as more of choral singers.

12.3   The various elements of the vocal ensemble practice

This thesis has aimed to illuminate various aspects of classical vocal ensemble practice as seen through the eyes and ears of the members of NVS. In Chapter 5 I showed that classical vocal ensemble practice has existed since the Renaissance. It seems also that it was during the nineteenth century that vocal ensembles like those we find today were formed, and started working in a similar manner to NVS, while on the other hand the repertoire of this period is mainly rejected by today's classical vocal ensembles. In Chapter 5 I suggest some explanations for this, not least that the singers and ensembles seem to like the idea of distancing themselves from a 'Romantic' singing tradition. Emerging from early music and contemporary music circles, these groups seem to have felt a need to define their own way of singing, their own 'territory', where they define what is good taste or bad taste, and where they can distance themselves from the dominating 'leading class' of classical music, giving them a kind of exclusivity. This pattern can be seen in the repertoire of the classical vocal ensembles of the world. I have found only a couple of the leading vocal ensembles tackling Romantic music at all. There is an absence of the

music composed between around 1750 until around 1920, in the repertoires of the vocal ensembles of today. This absence is supported by the thought, articulated by the vocal ensembles themselves, that there was no such a thing as a vocal ensemble practice around during that time. I find this assumption to be wrong, a myth, which has more to do with today's vocal ensembles' need to represent themselves as having an exclusive practice, one that singers in the 'Romantic' vocal tradition do not have access to.

Nevertheless, I have found that vocal technique adopted by ensembles is different to that of solo singing, very much in line with research on this area (see Chapter 7). Most clearly, the singers are very aware of how to use their voices in a *choral* mode as opposed to a *soloistic* mode, and change between the two modes to suit the particular piece they are singing. It is a distinctive feature of ensemble singing that each singer is continually aware of the relative importance of their line, its place in the texture of the piece, and change from solo to choral mode and back accordingly. When singing in a soloistic mode (a conscious choice they make while singing) they apply more vibrato, employ a higher volume and more intensity in the singer's formant region, and the reverse in choral mode. Vibrato management is an important feature in ensemble singing, and the singers of NVS stress it when talking about how they use their voices in ensemble singing. It is interesting to note that the singers of NVS regard themselves as solo classical singers, and their ensemble as a union of soloists (hence the name, Neue Vocal*solisten* Stuttgart) They mean that their sound is richer in overtones, and they are not so interested in the non-vibrato ideal of some early music based ensembles. When they are asked who they think their ensemble counterparts are, especially in terms of vocal technique, they point to The Hilliard Ensemble and the English ensemble tradition. Coming from a vocal classical training with a solid soloistic focus, striving to be accepted as solo singers *as well* as ensemble singers, I understand that they name the English ensembles and what they think of as English singing aesthetics as their counterparts. But my findings show that this is a simplified picture. When comparing their vocal technique to that of The Hilliard Ensemble I find that the differences are not that great, and that the fundamental knowledge one needs to sing in NVS and The Hilliard Ensemble is quite similar. But there is no doubt that the singers of NVS are much more aware of their soloistic identity, and they are very eager to describe themselves as solo singers first, and only then as ensemble singers.

The next question to ask is whether these vocal technique features are obligatory to survive in a vocal ensemble. Must one sing like NVS to perform music in such an ensemble? Must one use vibrato management (as explained in Chapter 7)? Is it necessary to sing with less intensity around the singer's formant region? Of course it is not absolutely essential, but it seems that these technical strategies are better for chord balancing, for blending and for intonation. And in addition, these techniques make it easier to demonstrate more dimensions in the music. It is easier to highlight one voice if the other voices can sing more quietly.

When it comes to intonation, I find that there is a horizontal and a vertical focus in the singing, the vertical being associated with a harmonic focus, accompaniment, homophony and, importantly, with just intonation, while the horizontal focus circles around solo singing, a melodic focus, polyphony, and with no clear tuning system involved. As soon as the singers define themselves within a vertical aspect they move to a just intonation system, and this urge is so strong that they do it even within chords that are not normally associated with traditional tonal structure. NVS seem to construct a tonality within the tonality, focusing on intervals like octaves, fifths, thirds and sixths – in that order.

The singing techniques involved in NVS and the intonation systems used mean that they do have some rules to follow in their singing, which influence their communication. There is always a focus on which singer to follow, and they read the score intensively to find solutions to deal with that issue. If they define someone as a soloist, they focus their attention on that person. The issue of communication, showing their musical intentions to each other, is one of the central aspects to the work of NVS. They don't normally work with a conductor, which means that they have to conduct one another with their bodies in a shared dance that mostly consists of synchronized upper-body movements. Sometimes the ensemble sings such complex music that having six or seven conductors at the same time makes it difficult to know who to follow, and they have to use a conductor. But NVS prefer to use a conductor as little as possible.

NVS lives to do concerts and concert projects. Their rehearsals form the daily work that leads up to the concerts. I showed in Chapter 10 how the rehearsal process can be understood through Elaine King's three-part categorization model, *structure*, *collaboration* and *technique*. I added *personal preparation* and *evaluation of rehearsals* to these three. The rehearsals do not seem to

have a formal plan: they start to sing, mainly from the start and working chronologically through the piece, and the rehearsal is mostly repertoire-driven. For NVS it is also important to carry out these rehearsals in a light, humour-filled atmosphere with plenty of conversation. Although they do not think they evaluate their rehearsals well enough, they rehearse so much that they normally know intuitively what to do and how to solve the challenges that arise. Chapter 10 also showed how NVS normally prepare and carry out their concerts. Through Schechner's model of performance as the organization of time and space, I described the different phases of their performances, and suggested a model of group negotiation in pre-concert rehearsals. I showed that NVS balances being a traditional classical music chamber ensemble in the way the plan and carry out their performances, with their wish to be a modern and experimental ensemble, especially through their choices of repertoire, their singing and their music theatre related performances.

When comparing NVS' performances to those of other ensembles, I find that they share many of the same features. They arrange the singers in the same order, they place their music stands in the same way, and their dress codes are within the same compass. If you go to a performance by a classical vocal ensemble today, you would know pretty much what to expect.

NVS is a group that has stayed together for a long time; some of the members have been there from the start, while others have only been in the ensemble for a few years. In Chapter 11 I showed that NVS, in accordance with theories on group processes, have a tendency to 'test out' new members which gives them a feeling that they are being driven quite hard by the older members as they begin their membership of the group. I reported the experience of one of those new members, who told me how it was to join NVS. I compared her arrival in the group with the Lave–Wenger concept of *legitimate peripheral participation*: that is, she moved from being an apprentice on the periphery of the practice, and then moved into the core of it, mastering the skills and gaining the knowledge she needed. Although she felt tested when she started, the members of NVS became once again colleagues *and* friends, working together quite closely, sharing meals, rehearsals and travelling together. On the other hand, they seem quite careful about creating a personal space of their own in which they can be on their own, shutting the other members out for some time.

NVS do have norms and values as a group that the members have negotiated together. If the limits of these norms and values are challenged, conflicts can and do arise. In NVS the main source of conflict lies in the balance between working as a soloist and working with the group, especially as some of the singers have more success as soloists than others. There is a higher prestige in being a solo singer than in being an ensemble singer, even amongst the members of NVS. Interestingly enough, I find this conflict less articulated in England. Perhaps there is just a difference between the groups, that the individuals involved have different priorities. Or it could be that the ideal of solo singing in England is closer to that of vocal ensemble singing. It could also be that vocal ensemble singing is more common in England, and has a higher prestige there. The singers in the English vocal ensembles mostly come from children's and university choirs, so perhaps they have a different attitude towards choral and ensemble singing from the start. John Potter said that classical singers in England, when studying in higher education, do not focus at all on ensemble singing, which is definitely also the case in Germany. Perhaps, if singers only relied on and came from higher education, there might not be so many singers performing vocal ensemble music.

12.4 The dream of the gala-dress and some humble recommendations

For many, becoming a singer would be a dream come true. So many students have walked through the doorways of the singing faculties around the world with dreams of making a living out of the sounds they can produce with their vocal tracts. Very few of these singers will make it, partly because there is a dimension of 'je ne sais quoi' in singing, that indefinable dimension we call beauty in a voice. Roland Barthes tried to say something about it in his *The Grain of the Voice*, but also he was quite a way from grasping the whole truth about which voices will live on to move audiences and which will not. In my work as a teacher at the Norwegian Academy of Music, as a voice student myself, and as a singer, I have seen many, many students come and go, and they all share that dream of singing beautiful classical music, moving people to tears with a stroke of their vocal chords. This is a dream that so many share, and so many fail to live up to, since there is a limit to how many solo singers the world can handle. But this urge to become a solo singer, to stand in front of an orchestra or at the opera stage in a gala dress, travelling

to yet another high prestige concert hall, and earning more than enough to get by, is very strong. Solo singing is what these students are trained to do, and what they mainly focus on. It is the primary target for the students, and for their teachers. John Potter says:

> [...] Classical singing depends on projecting in a specific way in order to for it to be heard in modern concert halls. Much of the discipline of singing pedagogy is oriented towards this goal, which for many singers is an end in itself.[620]

Training in solo singing has a tendency to focus on the ability to be heard, to produce a voice that carries through large halls and over the sound of large orchestras. Perhaps there are some dimensions in the voice that we miss when this is the main focus? I will come back to this, but first I would like to comment on one aspect of the young singer's aspirations and the problems that they have to face: I see the framework of an unspoken hierarchy within classical singing circles. I remember myself as a vocal student, feeling that there was a path I was expected to follow. At the end of my vocal studies, as if there was a rainbow, there was a pot of gold in the form of opera studies. So many of us tried to get as far as opera study, and the whole discourse of our training was focused on opera study as the ultimate goal of vocal studies. I can see this when talking to the singers of NVS too. I see it in the conflicts that arise in the group when it comes to balancing solo work against ensemble work, I find it in the language they use to obtain authority in their field of work, distancing themselves from the traditional, classical establishment, and I find it in their descriptions of how they are viewed in their work. They describe, and I recognize, that it is very easy to be labelled in the business. Your voice is like this and like that, as a baritone you can do this, but not that, and as an ensemble singer you are very much out of the question if it comes to considering you as a solo singer. If we should talk about prestige, I would say, rather bluntly, that studying singing and ending up as a chorister is still not viewed as having high prestige. The top of that ladder is the opera or concert singer, the gala dresses and the costumes. From this perspective it is no surprise that vocal ensembles and vocal ensemble singers try to define their field of authority in a different way. The singers of NVS feel this situation very deeply. A quotation from one of the NVS singers says puts it perfectly:

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620   Potter 1998 p. 170.

> [...] when people think we are a choir, they imagine us not being soloists,
> and I think that one of the most important things about ensemble is that you
> are not doing something less than being a soloist.

The variety of singing groups that have emerged during recent years has not led to any significant changes to the way we educate singers. The focus on solo singing in the higher education system is very strong, and in some ways quite natural. The fresh student has to have a strong focus on vocal technique to be able to meet the demands of the repertoire they are going to deal with during a long career. But the singers of NVS, The Hilliard Ensemble, and I Fagiolini have experience of the contemporary music repertoire and extended vocal techniques, of vocal ensemble repertoire and vocal ensemble vocal techniques, all fields that are hardly touched at all. That is perhaps a more serious signal.

In this thesis I have looked at various aspects of vocal ensemble practice. The singers in NVS have lived inside this practice for many years, and they have developed a set of skills and a competence that is unique but necessary if the vocal ensemble repertoire is to be mastered. I have suggested that there are special vocal ensemble technique skills, particularly intonation skills, distinctive communication and score reading skills, to name a few. I would like to see teachers with these special skills more involved in higher vocal studies. I do not think that these special vocal ensemble skills would do singing students any harm; on the contrary I think they would help us produce even better singers, including solo singers. During their careers, solo singers will sometimes require the skills of ensemble singing, whether in the quartets in Mozart's *Requiem* or the *Liebeslieder Waltzer* Op. 52 by Brahms. I think that this music will be better tackled if the singers have experience of vocal ensemble singing, so that they know what to listen for, what to look for, how to pitch, and how to sing. I have listened to conductors being disappointed by low vocal ensemble skill levels, and I think that higher education has something to learn from a vocal ensemble like NVS, not to mention that developing ensemble skills would open up a huge repertoire of beautiful music that is very seldom touched.

12.5 Concluding words

In this thesis I have looked at vocal ensemble practice and the vocal ensemble singer. I am confident in saying that there is such a thing as a unique classical vocal ensemble practice, which is well represented by the work of the singers in NVS. Having worked together for so long, these singers' lives are intertwined, not only in their work, but also in the history they share, their struggle to be accepted as singers in the world of classical singing. They are a small close-knit group, and at times they spend so many hours together that they sometimes see more of each other than of their families. This is challenging, but, as they say, the reward is to make beautiful music together. And there is no doubt that they love what they do and that they have the highest esteem for each other. In their vocal ensemble they are soloists in a group. They are 'alone together'. I will conclude with the words of Sarah Maria Sun:

> [...] will the ensemble still exist in 10 years? Which people will still be members in 10 years? ... We change in how confident or how happy we are. If you are very, very stressed, sometimes you think 'oh, this is all some fucked up bullshit, and I don't want to stay here for one day longer'. I mean, you know, this is a very insecure thing – expectations. But however badly we swear about things, we all stick together. It is like a family.

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The Hilliard Ensemble (1983): "Absalon Fili Mi" (des Prez, Josquin) in *Josquin des Prez: Motets & Chansons*, released by Virgin Classics, cata- logue number 0724356130227, https://itunes.apple.com/no/album/absa- lon-fili-mi-attrib./id695558981?i=695559081&l=nb, London, UK

The Hilliard Ensemble (2009): "Tu m'uccidi" (Gesualdo, Carlo) in *Carlo Gesualdo: Quinto Libro di Madrigali*, Released by ECM (ECM New Series 2175), https://itunes.apple.com/no/album/tu-muccidi-o-crudele/ id508511482?i=508512274&l=nb, Munich, Germany

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guides

INTERVIEW GUIDE I

Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, June 2009, Stuttgart

Aperghis, Wölfli Kantata, choir and six soloists

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do the singers of NVS plan their rehearsals based on the received score?
- How does the rehearsal in the ensemble progress and is it possible to say anything in general about how the rehearsals are planned, for instance from a score perspective?
- What demands regarding competence has NVS set up for its singers? Are these demands put down in writing or do they simply consist as tacit knowledge?
- How will they describe how to sing in a vocal ensemble?
- Are there differences between singing a contemporary repertoire versus an early music repertoire? If there are differences, what are they? What are the resemblances?

THE INTERVIEW

OVERALL INFORMATION:

- Personal background
  - How long in the ensemble?
  - How much do they work in the ensemble, compared to other type of work they do?
  - What other type of work do they do?
  - What other tasks do they perform in the ensemble beside of that being a singer?

ABOUT THE PIECE AND OWN WORK:

- Have they performed this piece before?
  - Was it different working with it this time?
  - If yes, why?
- What was their first impression of the piece?
  - Challenges vocally?
- Specifically, in 'Petrrohl'
  - How did the impression of the challenges of the piece change
    - during their own, personal rehearsing?
    - during the rehearsal with the whole ensemble?
    - how and why?
- What kind of singing qualifications do one need to perform this piece?

ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE'S WORK ON THE PIECE:

- Way of work in the group
  - Is someone leading the work/rehearsal?
- Democratic structure
  - benefits / disadvantages
- Does everyone contribute as much as the others?
- Did the work with the piece go on as expected?
  - from the singer's expectations
  - from the group's expectations (and how were these articulated?)
- How does a rehearsal in NVS go on?
  - describe it from start to end

- How do they agree upon what to rehearse?
- Evaluate rehearsals
  - How?

ENSEMBLE PRACTICE

- Vocal ensemble history
- Repertoire questions

OVERALL REFLECTIONS ON BEING A VOCAL ENSEMBLE SINGER

- Can you describe a situation where you felt you could use the competence you have gained from the ensemble work?
  - What kind of competence (skills) are we talking about?
- Is it usual that singers do have skills regarding ensemble?
  - Are these skills necessary to survive as a classical singer?
  - Have this ensemble competence made you a better singer?
- Is this ensemble competence something an active classical singer would demand for?
- What kind of status does a vocal ensemble singer have within the field of classical music?
  - Has this status changed?
    - If yes, why?

INTERVIEW GUIDE II

Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, May 2-7 2010

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- How has the career of the singer from NVS developed? Why did the singer start with ensemble work? How was an ensemble career looked upon during education? Was ensemble singing integrated in the singing education?
- Ensemble competence, what is it and how does it come through in other situations?
- What are the singing principals that make up the work of a singer in NVS?

- What makes a good ensemble singer?
- How has the vocal ensemble tradition developed through music history?
- Do all the members of NVS have a common understanding of the ensemble's objectives?
- How do they work on certain important aspects?

Interview

The singer

- Background
  · How did the singer end up in NVS? Did it feel natural based on their education?
  · Is the singer a different singer now than before s/he started in the ensemble? And yes, what has happened?

The ensemble

- What is a vocal ensemble?
- Describe a good vocal ensemble?
- How will you place NVS in music history?
- Is it possible to formulate the ensemble's objects clause?
- Why the connection contemporary music/early music?
- Why did the vocal ensemble disappear from the focus of music history in the Romantic era and the reappear around 1950?

The singer's work

- How do the singers plan their work according to the score?

Singer and vocal technique

- Say something about the vocal aesthetics in general
  · What are the ideals when it comes to vocal aesthetics?
  · Are there any literature or perhaps other genres that administer these ideals?

Singer and the ensemble

- Describe a good ensemble singer
- How are the roles in the group defined?
- Does the singer look upon NVS as a working place, and what do relationship between the singers has to say for the level of art-istry and the music making?
- What kind of conflicts can arise, and how do they solve these?
- Does the singer feel that s/he is equal to the others in the group?

Ensemble and rehearsal methods

- How is the rehearsal planned for this week? Does the singer know what to rehearse when?
- How do they evaluate these rehearsals?

Ensemble and music making

- Are all the members involved in the programming of the concerts?
- What happens on the concert day, from the rehearsal in the concert hall and until the last note of the concert?
- How does the communication in the ensemble progress during performance?
  - · What do they look for?

The ensemble singer and the world outside

- Does the singer feel that s/he has other qualities than other singers without ensemble experience?
- Is this ensemble experience appreciated and in demand?
- Does the singer experience that the vocal ensemble experience comes to use in other situations?

Appendix 2: Norwegian Social Science Data Services

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

(NSD)

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel. +47-55 58 21 17
Fax +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Frank Havrøy
Norges musikkhøgskole
Postboks 5190 Majorstua
0302 OSLO

Vår dato: 03.06.2010   Vår ref: 24256 / 2 / MAB   Deres dato: Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 20.04.2010. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

24256	Mellom solister og akkompagnatører, vokalensemblet og vokalensembleisang som utøverpraksis
Behandlingsansvarlig	Norges musikkhøgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Frank Havrøy

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.
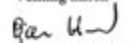
Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, vedlagte prosjektvurdering - kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.01.2015, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henrichsen   Marte Bertelsen

Kontaktperson:Marte Bertelsen tlf: 55 58 29 53
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:
OSLO: NSD. Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel. +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel. +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD. SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel. +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@sv.uit.no

Appendix 3: Score analysis of Ronchetti, Lucia: Coins and Crosses, a Yessong (2007) – for Chapter 9: Communication

Appendix 4: Score analysis of Bach, J.S.: Cantata 170, Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust (BWV 170), Aria. For Chapter 9: Communication

J.S. Bach
Cantata No. 170
Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 170

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 170

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 170

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 170

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 170

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 170

lust, be.lieb . . te See.len.lust.

Recitativo.
Alto.

Die Welt, das Sün.denhaus, bricht nur in Höllen.lie.der aus und

7

Appendix 5: Score analysis of Schubert, Franz: Das Wandern (Die Schöne Müllerin), D.795. For Chapter 9: Communication

F. Schubert / Das Wandern op.25/D.795

F. Schubert / Das Wandern op.25/D.795

JK799.06.09 http://icking-music-archive.org

Fine.

2

1. DAS WANDERN

Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827)

aus Gedichte aus den hinterlassenen Papieren eines reisenden Waldhornisten 1

aus "Die schöne Müllerin" Liederzyklus für Singstimme und Klavier

Franz Schubert
op.25/D.795

verse 5   3

F. Schubert / Das Wandern op.25/D.795

Appendix 6: Personal note – story about a concert of NVS

It is Friday May 10th 2010. I have been in Stuttgart for five days, interviewing the members of NVS. I have met Sarah and Daniel for the second time, while I interview the other members officially for the first time. I have also been observing them in rehearsals, notating, filming and sitting alone in a hotel room trying to figure out something about material that is growing day by day. The rehearsal this week is dedicated to this Friday's concert at the Schwetzinger SWR Festspiele. This festival, organized by the Südwestrundfunk (SWR), takes place in the magnificent castle Schloss Schwetzingen[621] between April and June. It is, in other words, a huge festival. By looking at the programme of the festival I can tell that it has significant resources to spend. The programme for 2010 includes a full-scale opera production as well as concerts with NVS, the Tokyo String Quartet and Jordi Saval.[622] We have been driving from Stuttgart for an hour to get to this enormous and wonderful baroque castle. It is a grey and rainy day, but that does not take away from the grandeur of the place. The concert is to start at 8 pm, and all the singers, Christine Fischer as well, arrive some four hours before the concert. This concert is being recorded for radio, which means that they will have to spend some rehearsal time to carry out sound checks. The repertoire in the concert is dominated by madrigals: there are twelves by Gesualdo and Monteverdi and then Salvatore Sciarrino's Zwölf Madrigale für Vokalensemble a cappella, with the old madrigals first and then the new madrigals after that. I find a programme note in the official festival programme and register that the concert is described as a presentation of the 'highly expressive madrigal art of Claudio Monteverdi and Gesualdo di Venosa' and 'the echo of this past epoque in the form of the twelve madrigals by Salvatore Sciarrino'.[623] It is a programme of old and new and connects the two in a beautiful way.

I place myself outside the concert hall while the singers are in their green room. I feel that I shouldn't interfere with them now in their preparations. While sitting outside, Guillermo (who is the last to show up, I think) comes into the room where I am sitting. 'Ah, Frankito', he says upon seeing me, then

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621   http://www.schloss-schwetzingen.de (Viewed 08.08.2013)

622   http://www.swr.de/-/id=5652946/property=download/nid=233286/150t0s8/index.pdf (Viewed 08.08.2013)

623   Ibid. p. 38

that he has been listening to Nordic Voices on iTunes and how we sing so differently to NVS, primarily in regard to the rich, soloistic sound NVS have compared to Nordic Voices. I agree with him that there is a difference, and think to myself that I will have to say something about it in my thesis, both regarding the actual sound produced by the singers and the ensemble, and also about how the sound produced says something about the tradition we derive from and the singing identity we produce. I also realise that I call him 'Guillermito', and think for a while if that is the correct way of using his name.

The rest of the group enters the room and meets up with the concert arranger. They begin to discuss the stage arrangements, and the flat power structure of the group is evident. No one has been given the responsibility of arranging the stage, talking to the presenter and so on. Everybody is allowed to offer their opinion, and it is obvious that they all feel free to do so. But once the singers have gone onto the stage, Christine Fischer stays on the floor, holding all the threads in her hand. She has her laptop open and talks to the presenters and the radio technicians, and manages to sneak in some mobile phone time as well. The others in NVS have talked admiringly about her working capacity and how she often replies to emails in the middle of the night. Seeing her now makes me believe that they were not exaggerating. There are details about lighting and what kind of music stands are available to the group, and she has a finger in in every decision. It strikes me that I have not actually seen the group perform before, whether in Stuttgart or Paris, without Christine being there as well.

They start to rehearse the madrigals by Sciarrino. They stand in a horseshoe position, with high soprano on my left, and then second soprano, alto, countertenor, baritone, tenor and then bass on my right. This rehearsal looks like a normal ensemble rehearsal, with two differences: the energy in the ensemble is not at its highest, and the focus of the rehearsal is totally different. This rehearsal is more focused than usual on communication. They discuss where to stand, how close they are to stand to each other and so on. And I notice also another discussion: how much they should use the tuning fork. I notice that it seems to be a difficult discussion, and I immediately recognize it from my own Nordic Voices. Of course the singers want the notes to be correct, but if they all go flat, and one singer corrects with a tuning fork, the other singers will notice that something is wrong in the chord, but they really don't know which singer to follow. It is a discussion

which has no good answers, and I notice that like Nordic Voices, the discussion ends without any clear decision.

They start to sing, and I notice at once how the flanks, that is, Sarah and Andreas, are controlling much of the signal giving. When rehearsing the madrigals by Sciarrino, many of the singers seem to seek signals from Sarah. She is very active. I can see that the signals they give resemble the signals from a conductor, but the body movements have moved from the arms to the head and upper part of the body. These movements also follow the phrasing of the lines, meaning that the movements change according to both the musical content and the interpretation of it. Maybe there are two kinds of movements going on, for timing and phrasing.

At one point Daniel says that Guillermo seems to 'disappear' a bit. Guillermo gets a bit irritated in such a manner that the others must say that it is not meant as a criticism. Someone blames the acoustics and the tension is released.

The sound engineer breaks in and says he needs something loud to test the limits of the recording. The movements suddenly become more vivid as the sound from the ensemble gets stronger. Breathing in for a very strong note, for instance, is shown with a quite large body movement.

Someone leaves the stage and goes out into the hall to listen to the others and the acoustics. Since the small details seem to disappear a bit in the hall, the other singers are told to use a little more 'timbre' to make the sound carry, that is, to use a bit more of the singers' formant. With that they start to discuss blending and vibrato. Suzanne tells Martin and Guillermo that she thinks they sing with a tad too much vibrato for her taste. The blending work they do definitely gives results. It is much easier to perceive the harmonies, especially from the girls.

Suddenly Suzanne conducts with her arm, which seems to come as a surprise to everyone, and Truike asks if Suzanne is planning on doing that. Suzanne seems to be surprised herself, and ends the hand movement, instead using mostly her upper part of the body and the head. Towards the end, Guillermo, who has been the least active of the singers, suddenly becomes more active. I wonder if he saves energy until he really thinks he needs it.

They become more active, seeking each other eyes, clearly showing who they share entrances with. The movements are clearer except for those parts being conducted by Andreas. One could ask whether the energy in the entrances and phrasing reduces a littles, as if they put some of the music making in his hands, but it is a compromise between being together and not so active, and being more active and not together. It seems that much of the work is about finding this balance.

The rehearsal ends. Christine has found Salvatore Sciarrino in the hall, and has totally forgotten about me sitting there. She is in working mood, and it seems that she is always seeking opportunities for the next project. The other singers are being introduced to him, and since I hang around, I am also introduced. The singers arrange their concert clothes and we all go out to eat. They have, since we left Stuttgart, talked about it being asparagus season now, and that we have to eat asparagus. They are right: the restaurant we visit is all about asparagus, asparagus and beef, asparagus and chicken and so on. The singers are very occupied with food, especially Andreas, and eating seems to be an important part of the concert ritual, whether it is before or after the concert.

We walk back towards the concert hall and separate there. I go into the hall while the singers head for the green room. I think that I must ask them how they prepare personally before a concert.

After a while the lights dim and five of the singers enter the stage for the first part of the concert, madrigals by Gesualdo and Monteverdi, before the rest of the ensemble join them for the Sciarrino madrigals.

I notice that what looked like an ensemble in energy-saving mode during the rehearsal now has geared up. The concentration is much higher, and all the singers are much more engaged in the singing than they were at the rehearsal just before the concert. It is as if they had been saving their voices.

The last number has finished and they take a very organized last bow together. When the applause has ended I meet up with them backstage while they change their clothes. On our way back to the cars, they ask for my reaction to the concert, and I reply honestly that I liked it very much. They seem engaged on behalf of the ensemble, and it shows in the way they are interested in getting feedback on what they have just done. Soon we sit in our cars and head back to Stuttgart.

In this dissertation, Frank Havrøy examines the different aspects of singing in a vocal ensemble. Through the last decades, there has grown a larger understanding of the special skills needed for singing in such ensembles.

Literature and research on singing have been neglecting the practice of vocal ensemble singing, and have mostly been focused on solo or choir singing. Havrøy adds to this literature with his case study of the German ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart.

The members of the ensemble describe their own practice, pointing out how they inhabit special skills regarding musical communication, intonation and the special vocal technique features needed for being a successful vocal ensemble singer. Through this, they also pinpoint the hidden hierarchy in classical singing circles, where the solo and opera singer has more credibility and authority than choir singers.

While education of classical singers is normally mostly focused on training solo singers, the recommendation of Havrøy's study is to enrich this education with these revealed ensemble skills.