

Some Thoughts on the Heart
of Art Song

ELLY AMELING



C o m p i l e d . b y . C a r o l y n . H a r t

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Elly Ameling's "Ten Commandments"
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An 80th Birthday Tribute



2013

1.

Introduction

I think that Music came my way and that fortunately I said yes to it. It took me on its wings and for over forty years of my life I felt I was being invited. At the same time I had to see to it that my technique and my understanding of the musical issues were good enough to accept the invitation.

“Some Thoughts on the Heart of Art Song” - “some thoughts” indeed! The following has by no means the pretension to be complete - if that were possible at all. Some of these thoughts may seem so obvious that they are not worth mentioning. But how often - or must I say how rarely - do I hear the following indications really executed by students or by professionals? These thoughts strive to be an inspiration for your own thinking: think before you sing. One by one I will try to shed some light on the many facets of Art Song such as imagination but also tempo, volume, colours and more.

Of course I will also speak about the great pianists with whom I shared a whole artistic life of wonderful partnerships.



Elly Ameling with Rudolf Jansen • 2008

2.

IMAGINATION

An Art Song is like a diamond
cut with strength
into many facets
and it is our duty to polish the infinite details.

A song recital is like a one man show,
with the cooperation of the pianist, of course.
One has to muster up courage to stand 'naked' before an audience.
You will show a good part of your personality.
There is no help from stage sets, costumes, props, orchestra or a conductor
as in opera. There is no acting in a recital of Art Song. The acting in opera
may help you to express what you are singing, but this is not the case with Art
Song. The difference lies especially in the way you reach the audience.
In opera we face our partner, and the audience is on the side.
In recital we face the audience directly,
which is a circumstance some singers are afraid of.
Those are the ones
who have not yet mastered the ultimate one man/one woman show
where you tell the story of your song directly to the audience.
This creates a bond between your heart and theirs.
Once you have discovered and established this personal bond,
the audience will be your best supporter.
It gives great satisfaction to pass on what inspires you so very much - namely
the poem and the music.

Imagination sparks everything.
It is indispensable.
No use performing, teaching or exploring without Imagination.
The discipline of a good technique will set the imagination free to express itself.
At the same time your imagination will trigger your technique.
This is two way traffic.
Those who have no, or insufficient, imagination
should forget about working in any artistic field.
Imagination is a precondition.
The composer cannot write everything into the score!
Those who have plenty of imagination
must be patient and attentive for their technique to develop.
They must be careful not to be carried away by their imagination
without first having solved technical problems.
Problems?
A better word is POSSIBILITIES.

Where does the imagination come from? From the brain?
How does it get into the brain? From where does it come?
Shall we think of a field of inspiration? “Spirit”, “Soul”.
It is hard to find a word for that awareness.

Do we feel it?

Do we believe in it and have we patience to wait for it to work in us?

Do we have courage to admit the hard truth if it does not?



Ek van Zanten

Elly Ameling • bronze • 1995

commemorating Ameling's final concert at the Concertgebouw.

3.

RESEARCH

First and foremost ask yourself these questions:

Do I have a voice?

Am I musical?

Do I have a deep love for music and a keen interest in poetry?

Will I study one or two foreign languages?

Do I have the urge to sing and share it with others?

Can you confirm all these questions? If so, then how do we make the first acquaintance of a song?

Play it on the piano and sing it. "Let it wash over you".

This will be your first "aha" moment,
and should make a deep and lasting impression.

Then our next task is to dissect it:

translate as literally as possible;

discover how the music and text fit together;

find where the piano comes in and what the piano has to say about the poem.

The limits of prose (prose - "this means this" and nothing else)
are extended to poetry where there is more freedom of meaning.

Poetic texts are intensified by music,
and their meaning is again enlarged and widened.

The poem is set to music in the way
the *composer* interprets it,

and it is our job to interpret the vision of the composer.

Your own personality, admittedly indispensable,
should never come in the first place!

So our duty is to look at the notes and the words,
and between the lines and in the margins,

in order to get an impression of what inspired the poet and composer.

How was their life emotionally, but also socially, politically and historically?

What was the tempo of their life?

What kind of street noises did they hear?

Think for instance of clacking hoofs from the horses of mail coaches,
and the sounds of nature. Most importantly however,
you must also discover the silence!

Read, read, read

and if possible visit the places where the composers and poets lived.

Of course it goes without saying that you will

listen, listen, listen

to the great *Lieder* singers of the past.

In particular

listen to the singers of the rather short span between about 1945 and about 1995.
In my opinion this is a time that is particularly sensitive to the heart of Art Song.

Always listen with the score to see all the details the composer has given to you.

You will study every musical detail.

Of course it is the interpretation of notes and words that is important and not a particular voice you may or may not like.

It goes without saying that this research will awaken your imagination and give you more to say - and then you will have a message.

244 De opheffing (omverting) van Sa. door Zeus naar Olympus
wordt in algemeen beeld van een mooie 28. 4.50 maar '17 D 54
leuke ochtend veranderd.

Ganymed. Op. 19. N^o 3.
Goethe.

geen rijm! Etwas langsam.

86. *pp*

Wie im Mor - gen - glan - ze
du rings mich an - glüht, Früh - ling - Ge - lieb - ter!
Mit tau - send - facher Liebes - won - ne sich an mein Herze
drängt dei - ner e - wi - gen Wä - me hei - lig Ge -
fühl, un - end - li - che Schö - nel

80 *80* *80* *80* *80* *81* *81*

pp *cresc.* *p*

Edition Peters 9023

Miss Ameling's score of Schubert's
"Ganymed"

4.

MESSAGE

The singer must have something to say.
And what does he or she say?
Everything that is in the poem and in the music -
nothing less and nothing more that might be made up by ourselves.

A good voice is just as a good piano or a good violin -
a good instrument -
but the question is how to play on your instrument and make music with it.
Do you understand and feel that the composer gave his message
so that you may forward it to your audience?

A beautiful voice is only the beginning.
A less beautiful voice may have more to say.

The styles of performing and interpretation are changing
and have always been changing.

Listen to the unique but oh so different performances
of Elisabeth Schumann and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf.

The notation is the skeleton only,
so every performance has the potential to be a surprise to not only the audience,
but also to the performers.

We hear instrumentalists talk
about every note receiving the right charge of expression.
When is this heard in interpretation sessions for singers?

“Jedes Lied hat seine eigene Stimme”. “Every song has its own voice”.
This means that from the very beginning of the song
the audience must be given the clear impression that this is a tender song,
or a dramatic song,
or one that it is about hatred or fear, and all the moods in between.

It is with your voice, of course, and with your eyes and your face
that you show your message.
This is an important aspect of interpretation in Art Song.
We hear and see your musical soul.
Therefore gestures, and certainly monotonous hand gestures,
distract from *everything* you are doing.
I always say *“three times a gesture before, and four times after intermission”!*
Gestures should be used only to underline a certain word,
or a sudden change in harmony.
Please do not forget to return the hand to its relaxed position.

Sometimes in a master class
it happens that a student does not succeed in fulfilling her task and starts crying.
What about trying to sing so beautifully, and meaningfully
that *the composer* would have to cry?

In other words,
as Pierre Bernac, the great French baritone
and creator of virtually all songs by Francis Poulenc said
“*let there be an intimate correspondence between invention and execution*”.

Pierre Bernac • Francis Poulenc



Pierre Bernac and Francis Poulenc
LP Cover • Columbia • 1950

VARIETY

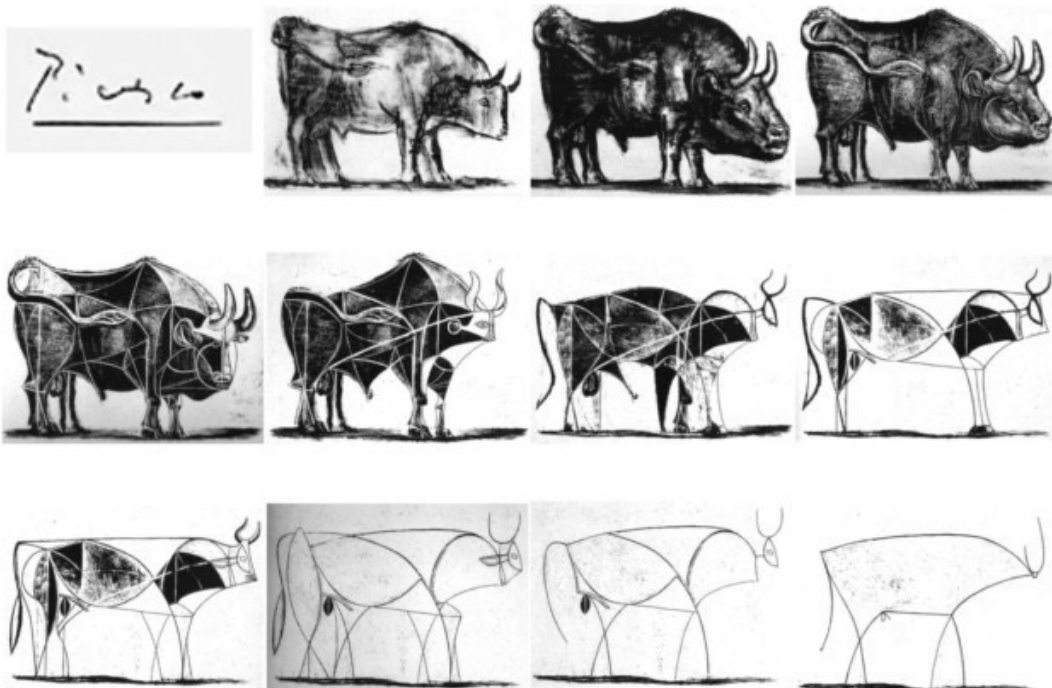
is a keyword in Art Song and of course in all kinds of music.

Variety stems from our Imagination and from our Message.

In order to achieve optimal variety
we use several “tools” as I like to call them.

We will use them all, at all times, and with good taste.

Our tools are: Legato - Diction - Vowels - Tempo - Colours -
Volume - Vibrato - and Breath.



Pablo Picasso
The Bull • lithographs • 1946
Graphikmuseum Pablo Picasso Münster

5.

LEGATO

Legato is the primary principle of *Bel Canto* -
I mean the technical skill for the term *Bel Canto* -
as we can hear it so beautifully sung in opera.
I remember Pierre Bernac saying that those who cannot do justice
to an aria by Bellini
will neither be able to sing French *mélodie*.
This goes also for many phrases in German Lieder.

Legato must be the foundation of our singing.
Occasionally we may have to use *non-legato*, *marcato*, *staccato*
in order to apply *parlando*, *sprechgesang*, etc.
So look for possibilities to vary legato and non- or less legato,
not only in the melodic lines but also in the pronunciation -
long versus short vowels.
This difference is more obvious in German and Italian than in French,
because the French language is by its nature,
spoken, and so also sung, in a more legato way.

It is a misunderstanding or a bad habit to sing the syllables of words always
one by one.

Seeing the print of one syllable to each note can be misleading.
They are often supposed to form a line.

A legato line moves forward because you know where you want the phrase to go.
There is a sense of direction.

At the beginning of a phrase you must have a clear idea where it ends.

The right legato is not only binding notes together,
but also avoiding involuntary crescendo and decrescendo.

Singing Gregorian Chant as an exercise can help to feel the “binding together”
as well as the constant, same volume.

Once you have mastered this technique of legato,
then you can of course bring in any variety that the music asks.

Note that phrasing can be called “horizontal” - which would mean long and
legato - or “vertical” - meaning rhythmical and articulate.

6.

DICTION

Diction comes with the right and clear pronunciation
of any language in which you choose to sing.
Diction, with legato, is the basis of all Art Song.

Pronunciation and diction are two different things.
Diction is knowing where in a phrase the stress should lie.
You can also call it where the spotlight must be -
namely on the keyword(s) in that phrase.

Michael Vogl, the high baritone of Schubert's circle,
and famous at the Hofoper in Vienna, said:
“When you have nothing to say to me, you do not have to sing for me either”.

Diction is about the consonants which activate the word.
They give life or death, happiness or sorrow, rest or unrest, peace or drama.
So we must vary the strength and length of consonants
according to what they express in a given word.
But take care not to lose consonants when you sing softly.
The vowels may have to be pianissimo, but the consonants never.
They simply would disappear and so the word itself would get lost.

Consonants come before the beat.
The piano (and the orchestra) should arrive on the beat together
with the onset of the vowel.

In German, double consonants - even double [ss] -
cause the preceding vowel to be short e.g. *Kuss, küssen*.
The [sz] causes a long preceding vowel e.g. “*Grusz , grüsz*”.

In French, the language with much legato in its character,
there are rarely double consonants
that would have an influence on the preceding vowel.
There are very few exceptions e.g. “*immense*”.
Note that the required time on the double [m] happens to be a special help
in expressing that word.

Also in French,
almost always the natural stress is on the last syllable (*ami, protégé, manger*).
However in order to make a word clear,
or to indicate a certain difference in the importance of words within a phrase,
we may feel free to stress the first syllable - a little! - and not too often.

With quick articulation of text be sure that the mechanism is small.
Don't open the mouth too much.

Always have the awareness to send the melody and the words far out
to the last row in the hall.
The vocal production itself happens of course within you, the singer -
but the poetry and music must travel out
to your audience.

Because of the special kind of resonance in higher voices,
consonants can get lost to the audience purely for acoustical reasons.
Overtones are richly but dangerously present.
I consider this an extra point of attention for sopranos -
“Never enough consonants”!



Moritz von Schwind
Michael Vogl and Franz Schubert • pen & ink drawing • 1868

7.

VOWELS

Piano singing will only carry if there is a core to the tone.

How do we get core to our tone?

It comes with the right placement of the vowel
and the absence of excessive breath pressure.

This also should be the basis for our breathing.

Here again, think and mentally plan to have your tone (your vowel)
go all the way to the back of the hall.

Think before you sing.

Alas

some acoustics do not carry your sound all the way to the last row.

This is a fact, and we can hear it while singing.

In this unfavourable circumstance try to really imagine (!)

that you are singing in your most beloved acoustics
to avoid falling into the trap of forcing a louder and louder sound.

German words that begin with a vowel have a new onset.

“*Dasz ich*”, and not “*dassich*”! “*Lass, o Welt*” and not “*lasso Welt*”.

Lassos are for cowboys!

In French most vowels are bright and clear as in Italian, except for the nasals.

Never allow the [n] or [ng] to creep into the nasal vowels

but keep the vowel *open and cover it a little*:

“bon ton, maintenant”.

Certainly not through the nose of course!

You may have read this in Pierre Bernac’s book

“The Interpretation of French Song”.

In my opinion this is the only book where precise and concise advice is given
about the interpretation of a great number of French songs,

and for all of Poulenc’s.

Bernac tells us what to do and what not to do.

Even the great Fischer-Dieskau who wrote so much on different aspects of singing,
be it opera or *Lieder*, did not tell us how to do it.

Neither do the many excellent books by Graham Johnson.

A vowel sound that is covered at all times, be it as a habit or be it so trained,
cannot produce the clear distinction between vowels.

Also a continuously covered sound

cannot brighten up to bring the necessary variety of interpretive colours.

The words become indistinguishable.

This is wrong of course,

just as it is a pity when sopranos have only bright and rarely covered vowels.

We need clarity in order to be understood!

Sopranos and tenors - pay attention to low notes especially in a quick tempo.

Your lower vowels may have a tendency to be softer
and to carry less than your higher notes.

These low vowels sometimes disappear and are simply not audible.

This is an imbalance.

You can bring the desired balance to the phrase
by giving these low notes the full time that the vowel deserves.

This does of course not mean that you sing slower,
but more legato for as much as the pronunciation allows.

Fill the value of the note.



Elly Ameling
Vocaal Avontuur
LP cover • Philips • 1978

8a.

TEMPO

Remember that the tempo indication
at the beginning of a piece
is never meant to remain exactly the same
during the whole piece.

It is an indication about the character of the song in as far as tempo is concerned.

A slightly different tempo here and there may be necessitated
by a change of the form of the song,
a harmonic shift,
or by some striking words or a different mood.

This may occur without necessarily being indicated in the score.

It brings rhythm, which is the opposite of stiffness.

Feel free to act accordingly and in good taste!

If you have a composer who did not give many indications for tempo or volume
in the voice line,
look for it in the piano part
and join!

In the Lieder by Hugo Wolf
we are rarely allowed to take a *ritardando* or *accelerando*
unless it was so indicated.

Wolf was very precise and had everything written in the score.

So was Debussy,
together with most other French composers of his day.
Brahms on the other hand
requires almost always a certain rubato.

I find it difficult to think of a song by Brahms without rubato!

In the *mélodies* of Fauré,
it would be hard to mention one that allows rubato, certainly in his later songs.

His earlier songs, however, have some flexibility.

Poulenc notated precisely
his wishes for tempo and volume changes
which must be strictly observed.

8b.

COLOURS

No instrument, except perhaps the violin,
has so many possibilities to give variety to the tone as the voice.

Colouring

is an important part of the variety we talked about before.

It is a mighty way of expressing what the poem is about.

It means, very simply,

that joyful parts of the music are coloured with brighter tones than sad parts.

Use your imagination

and feel free to give colours to your vowels

in order to give them the right expression -

the right charge.

These colours come 'by themselves'.

They must come naturally, just as in speaking - darker or brighter in every degree.

Be careful never to overdo it, as it will sound artificial.

Sopranos (even more than tenors) must develop colours
in their sometimes only bright voices.

The ear must be trained to form an image of the tone and its colour
before it is produced.

Think before you sing.

It has been said before.

Don't underestimate the imaginative role of your ear *before* you sing.

Hear the colour in your mind and it will happen.

It is because "we wish it".

It is imagination again.

It is brainwork, as is all of singing.

We must use our brain for a heartfelt expression of both word and tone.

We will love to use colours once we're aware that they exist.



Gérard Souzay
Abstract Composition III • oil on canvas • 1960-65

9.

VOLUME

Nothing will bore your listeners more than constant loud singing.
Never *forte* for *forte's* sake. Only for your expression of the emotions.

Richard Strauss to an orchestra:
“*Piano, piano, meine Herren, das Forte kommt von selber*“.
(Piano, piano, dear sirs, forte comes by itself.)

In order to sing expressively avoid too much singing in one volume.
Use your forte - use your pianissimo -
and vary all degrees in between and always according to what the text and music
ask. That sometimes may be nothing (!) - but probably not for long.

Rostropovitch to a student in a cello masterclass:
“*Mademoiselle, you are a “mezzofortiste”*.”
“*Please use the limits and degrees from f f f to p p p.*”
And she had to do it for him, on just one and the same note twelve times over.

Pablo Casals after having had lunch with Jörg Demus, said good bye to him saying:
“*And never two notes the same, OK?*” !

Some people seem to think that Art Song is always less *forte* than operatic singing.
This is a false supposition.

Use all the means of expressivity to their full extremes.
Think of them as colours on a palette used by visual artists.
For Art Song, however,
we use a finer more detailed pencil than for operatic singing.

Strive to explore your limits with all these ‘tools’.
If we fail to use them Art Song loses its point -
namely the heartfelt expression of text and music in never ending detail.

Franz Liszt taught a very young student the smallest details.
The student’s mother thought that Liszt was crazy.

The French author Gustave Flaubert remarked:
“*Le bon Dieu est dans le détail*”. God is in the details.
Well, ALL music - among many other characteristics - is a matter of detail:
but Art Song most of all.

And as you see, ‘heartfelt’ has to go hand in hand with much ‘calculation’.

Art Song is also a paradox!



Jörg Demus
sketch by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

10.

VIBRATO

It is a line, not a wave.

Vibrato is a natural element of the voice.
It can, however, be changed for expressive purposes - changed in various ways,
but only rarely.

In Art Song for instance
to express fear,
sing a line (not a whole verse!) *senza vibrato*, or even just one or two words.

You can also make the natural vibrato of your voice quicker,
which causes a more intense tone.

Use this only for the expression of great excitement.
Be sure to make this adjustment very sparingly and just as a special effect.

A string player **makes** vibrato.
We singers have it
naturally
by the character of our voice,
and we may vary it to a modest degree, as I just described.

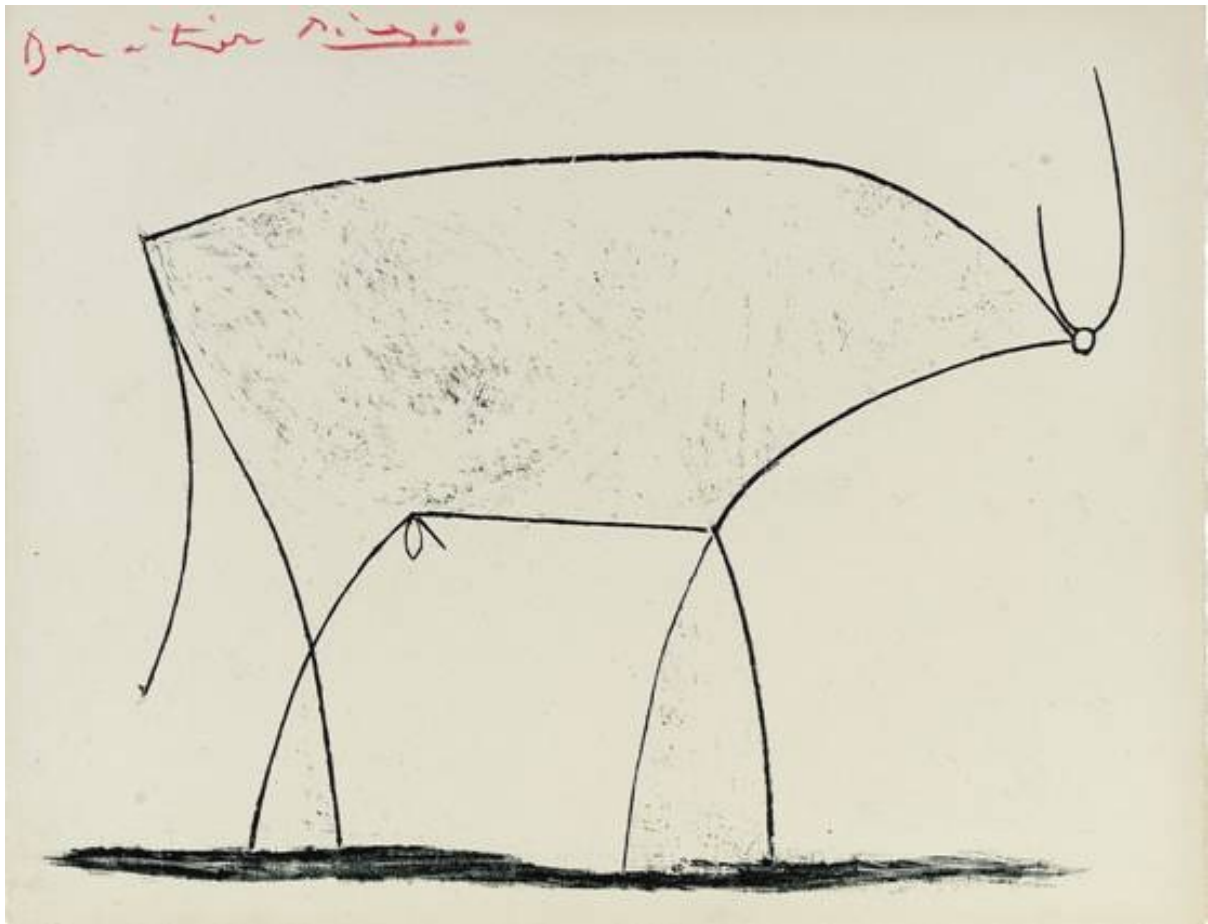
I have the impression that nowadays
vibrato is taught as a must in order to obtain a greater volume of tone.
This will always sound ugly
and often a little (or much) higher or lower than the pitch -
or both at the same time!
This unavoidably gives the impression of lost control and an unclear pitch.

Ugly ? But then what is beautiful?
Tastes differ. I always opt for the most natural sound -
the sound that belongs to just you.

Mozart speaks about *too much vibrato* in an appendix to a letter:
“it is completely unnatural in singing.
*The human voice vibrates by itself in such a way that it is beautiful -
the natural character of the voice”.*

It is a known fact that Baroque music is often sung *senza vibrato*,
although that style is more complete both with and without,
depending on the text.

Beauty is a line!



Pablo Picasso
The Bull • lithograph • 1946
Graphikmuseum Pablo Picasso Münster

11a.

BREATH

“Take a breath” is probably the wrong expression.

“Let some air come in by itself” is better.

There should be no excessive breath pressure.

In opening your flanks, the air will automatically come in.

Don't take a deep, active breath all the time, but only when necessary

e.g. for a long line, for a high note,

for a *forte*, or for a sustained note.

The secret of relaxed breathing and a comfortable support lies in breathing OUT coordinated with the right vocal placement.

Check to see if you can sing a soft melody

for at least twenty seconds in one breath that was taken in leisurely.

This will confirm that your breath and your placement are well coordinated.

On the other hand

there are more opportunities to take breaths than we sometimes realise.

There is no necessity to show how long your breath can last.

Shorter phrases may have an expressive function

namely to show the structure of the poem.

This is called phrasing.

So,

Breathing is an obvious necessity. Phrasing is an ever present possibility!

Keep in mind: large intervals cost more breath in any position.

Breathe through the nose, (through the *opened* nose!) whenever there is time -
so certainly always at the beginning of a song.

The constant rasping, gasping sound of a breath taken audibly is ugly
and it dries out the throat.

(By the way, then you will not need a water bottle on stage!)

Also nose breathing gives a quiet countenance.

If you have to take a quick breath,
then take time from the preceding phrase
so that the onset to the next phrase
is not late
and you do not disrupt the tempo.

Maybe a short remark on different temperaments in connection with breathing.
Lively temperaments will have a tendency to breathe in with too much energy.

Let us all try to breathe as if we have a calm temperament.

Recognise your temperament, and if necessary -
tame it.

11b.

STAGE FRIGHT

We build a connection with our audience
and we can trust them to forgive little things.
They want to be moved in their hearts. That is what they have come for.
The audience, for the most part, is not looking for perfection.
It must be admitted however that *some* come for it
but you have to take that in your stride.

It goes without saying that it is indispensable to know your part thoroughly
and “by heart”.

Then you don’t have to worry,
and you can concentrate on that bond with every listener.

Nowadays
singing “by heart”

seems less a condition (*sine qua non*) than it always used to be.

To me it seems impossible that singers would not be able to memorise their part
just as they do in opera.

Consider the pianist, violinist or cellist, who have an enormous repertoire
but always play from memory.

How can you tell the story of your song with a piece of paper in your hand
or nearby at which you glance, instead of looking at your listeners -
or if it is more pleasant for your concentration, look over their heads.

But always in a way that they experience the singer
addressing them.

Only when you know everything perfectly “by heart”
will you be able to establish that bond with your audience -
the bond that you crave for and that they enjoy so very much.

There is another aspect to our being on stage: You are there
as an intermediary
between the composer/poet and the listener - no less - and no more.
You *recreate*, and your task is of relative importance.
Concentrate on that task and there is no place or time for stage fright.

Check if you perhaps found yourselftoo important???
You will find the golden mean.

And remember: a real artist is always better on stage than in rehearsal.

12.

OUR PIANIST

Schubert writes to his brother Ferdinand about his collaboration with Michael Vogl,
the famous singer of his day:

*“the way Vogl sings and I play, how we seem to be ONE in such a moment,
is to these people something totally new, never heard before.”*

Our pianist, formerly and wrongly called ‘accompanist’, is our greatest treasure!

You are certainly not alone on the platform!

He or she will lead you as you lead her or him.

The inspiration, and so the musical initiative, comes from both of you.

It is not the pianist’s job to support you. You will have to do that yourself!

The pianist’s role is just as important as the singer’s.

Think, for instance of any *mélodie* by Claude Debussy, or in a very different way

a *Lied* by Hugo Wolf -

they have both hugely important piano parts that set the mood
and often underline words.

Here is another wonderful aspect of Art Song -

to experience the unity between a really excellent pianist and singer.

Both feel carried by each other,

and often guided simultaneously in splendid suppleness.

Songs stay fresh through the play between you and the pianist.

In a review: *“She sang to him, he played to her, and both served the music”*.

Often the voice line is in duet with an inner line in the piano part.

Listen for it - answer to it, and ENJOY.

If a pianist would say to a singer, *“do whatever you like, I will follow you”*,
then he is too late.

The work of you both is done at the same time and starts at the same split second.

(Remember- consonants come before the beat.)

Same goes for a conductor who might suggest that he/she will follow you.

BEWARE!

In case the pianist or the conductor in rehearsal

begins the introduction in a tempo different from what you had in mind -

try and see if you can do it,

and also see if it is to your taste.

Do not immediately say

“this must be quicker or slower”.

Tempo is relative, and his/her idea may be a very good one.

As remarked before,
if a composer did not give many expressive indications for the vocal line,
look for it in the piano part or the orchestral score,
and then listen for it and again
“*join and enjoy*”!

Every singer should be more or less able to play the piano,
so as to hear and learn the harmonies.

Sing the piano or orchestral preludes, interludes, postludes
in your mind
so that you stay engaged
from *before* the beginning until *after* the last note.
Don't 'come down' too soon.
The musical and emotional effect needs time for you AND for the listener.

The pianist shall understand all texts.
He shall use the score -
the singer -
NEVER.



Elly Ameling and Dalton Baldwin
Ein Lieberabend
LP Cover • EMI • 1973

13.

SOME PHILOSOPHY

We are in the service of music and not the other way around.

The reason that we are chosen to sing in concerts
must be that we are the best to serve the profession.
This principle makes it necessary to choose only pieces, or genres of music
that our voices and temperaments are best suited to perform.
See where your boundaries lie and do not sing what is not “*your cup of tea*”!

Alfred Brendel said:

*“Technique is the ability to translate what strikes your mind into physical action
without effort.”*

Fame
is nice but it is no more than what others think of you.
The real reward and happiness
is in being understood and emotionally connected to the audience.

Fame
is a good sign of your presence here on earth,
but it is Music that must live on forever.

So the importance of you
is relative.
The importance of your task, however,
is absolute.
If you really see it this way you will never be content with your achievements.
But don't be discouraged,
for your artistry will encourage you to improve and persevere.
Be prepared,
your task will not be easy.

Your teacher teaches you all the tools here mentioned
so that you know how to express
what your heart and your soul feel.

Without your heart and soul,
there is no music at all.

To be able to lose oneself, without losing control of one's musical actions,
is the real aesthetic experience -
to disappear in your task. You and the music become one.
You sing Schubert or Fauré, and Schubert or Fauré sings you.



Elly Ameling *teaching*
's-Hertogenbosch, NL • 2008

14.

TO FINISH:

the future of Art Song

I regularly read journals on singing and have been shocked to see the following: “*Nowadays a singer does not have to sing beautifully as long as there is a maximum of expression*”.

Well, vocal expression which is not clad in beauty is an every-day-experience. It is *Beauty* that lifts the subject, lifts the happening up to *Harmony*. And I do not have to tell you that it is exactly *Harmony* which is regrettably scarce in our day and time.

In this context I ask if the vocal landscape is shifting away from *Bel Canto* (literally beautiful singing) as a basic, fundamental precondition?

Audiences want action and excitement on the concert platform nowadays - such as Art Song recitals with film, or some dramatic acting. It has been done for instance with Schubert’s *Winterreise*. Some in the audience seem to need these extras. Do they really know the repertoire so well that they are bored if there is no visual attraction as well?

The marketing machines of the music industry are only too happy to feed the audience distractions. The Heart of Art Song, however, will always continue to open itself generously to those who take the trouble to learn its background and so experience the bliss of being tuned into its treasures.

Fortunately, not only recitals but also masterclasses of Art Song are regularly sold out all over the world. And much more now than let’s say ten years ago.

To mention only a few: the Melbourne Art Song Festival and the Cleveland Art Song Festival. As well, Berlin, Germany has its series *Lieder und Dichter* (Songs and Poets); Schwarzenberg, Austria: *Schubertiade*; Baden bei Wien: *Franz-Schubert - Institut*; *Oxford Lieder Festival*. There are also concerts, contests and masterclasses in places such as London’s Wigmore Hall, Leeds Lieder Festival and the *Hugo-Wolf-Akademie* in Stuttgart. Amsterdam has two series of art song recitals, and Zeist in the Netherlands has its own *May Festival for Art Song* in all styles and languages.

Art Song is alive and kicking!



Elly Ameling and Rudolf Jansen
"Farewell Concert" • Concertgebouw
1996



Elly Ameling , soprano, was born in 1933 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. She won the International Vocal Contest in 's-Hertogenbosch (NL) in 1956 cum laude. She subsequently won first prize at the Concours International de Musique de Genève (CH) in 1958. This established the start of a remarkable career.

After working with Miss Ameling, Ernest Ansermet described her thus: “A good voice is a blessing from somewhere above; Madame Ameling stands continually under this downpour, of which the romanticists would have said it is of divine origin”.

She combined the right mix of talent, ambition and determination to become one of the world's great Lieder singers of the second half of the 20th century. She possessed a perfectly placed voice with a creamy timbre and a soft edge. Apart from the ethereal beauty of her instrument, she was also an utterly imaginative and at the same time faithful interpreter. Her singing conveyed Schubert's love and pain, made us float in Debussy, and took us to dramatic extremes in compositions of Hugo Wolf and Richard Strauss. Having once heard the Ameling phenomenon one can never forget it.

A shrewd artist with real self-knowledge Elly Ameling never went beyond her boundaries. In this way she kept her voice in pristine state during her entire career. This is obvious when one listens to her 5 CD -boxes of live radio recordings : one issued in 2008 on the occasion of her 75th birthday and the next box in 2013 at her 80th birthday. On these recordings, from her first to her last concert during more than four decades, we hear a soprano continuously in full control of the technique, and with an ever wider span of expression.

These CDs also contain some rare excursions into operatic repertoire : Mozart with all the female roles in *The Marriage of Figaro*; Gounod (*Faust*, Marguerite), Bizet (*Carmen*, Micaela) and Maillart (*Les dragons de Villars*)

During her whole career she produced studio recordings with virtually all record companies. These were awarded with many international prizes like the Edison Prize, Grand Prix du Disque and Preis der Deutschen schallplatten kritik. In 2012 EMI issued the 8-CD box '*Elly Ameling, the Dutch Nightingale*'.

She concertized on all continents in every major music centre. She sang recitals with pianists Dalton Baldwin, Jörg Demus, Irwin Gage, Rudolf Jansen, Graham Johnson, Felix de Nobel.

She performed oratorio and the orchestral lieder and *mélodie* repertoire with the leading orchestras of the world under the baton of Karl Ançerl, Ernest Ansermet, Benjamin Britten, Eduard Flipse, Jean Fournet, Carlo Maria Giulini, Bernard Haitink, Josef Krips, Rafael Kubelik, Erich Leinsdorf, Neville Marriner, Kurt Masur, Seji Ozawa, Andre Previn, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Ed Spanjaard, Hans Vonk and other conductors.

1971: knighted by Her Majesty Queen Juliana of the Netherlands: *Ridder in de orde van Oranje Nassau (Knight in the order of Orange Nassau)*

1981: Doctor *honoris causa* University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

1985: Doctor *honoris causa* Westminster Choir College, Princeton, NJ, USA.

1986: Doctor *honoris causa* The Cleveland Institute of Music, Cleveland, OH, USA.

1988: Doctor *honoris causa* Shenandoah University, Washington DC, USA.

1996: Elly Ameling Ring, Concertgebouw Amsterdam.

2008: knighted in the highest civil order by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands: *Ridder in de orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw. (Knight in the Order of the Dutch Lion)*

2015: *Hugo Wolf Medaille* of the Internationale Hugo-Wolf-Akademie, Stuttgart.

In 1996 Elly Ameling bade her farewell to the concert platform, during a grand gala concert, at which occasion the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam instituted the 'Elly Ameling Ring' and placed her portrait in bronze in the picture gallery in one of the foyers.

Today, the soprano is busy giving masterclasses and workshops at conservatories and summer schools in Europe, Japan, Canada, and the United States of America.

Canadian soprano **Carolyn Hart** studied at the Britten Pears School, University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia. She has taught at Memorial University in St John's Newfoundland (*President's Award for Outstanding Research*) and presently teaches at Wheaton College in Chicago, Illinois (*Senior Achievement Award for Teaching*).

She gratefully acknowledges the G W Aldeen Memorial Fund for support in compiling this book.



Elly Ameling and Carolyn Hart at the Concertgebouw under the Ameling bronze sculpture • 2020

Elly Ameling's “Ten Commandments for a Singer”

1.

My work is my wealth.

2.

Night and day my work shall pre-occupy me.

3.

I shall be my own most critical judge.

4.

My pitch shall always be in the heart of the tone in its harmonious context.

5.

I shall use my strongest possible *forte* and my softest *piano* and all that is in between in an ever-present variety.

6.

I shall make **MUSIC** with my voice.

7.

I'm a musician in the first place. Singing is my discipline.

8.

I shall try to express the music and the text, not myself.

9.

I shall know a good deal of Greek/Roman mythology and of the Old and New Testaments.

10.

I shall be aware of what motivated my composers and poets.



*Receiving the Hugo Wolf Medaille
Internationale Hugo-Wolf-Akademie
Stuttgart • 2015*



Celebrating Elly Ameling's 80th Birthday
at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam,
February 8th, 2013

"Another Side of Elly Ameling"

Music lovers the world over know and admire the great performing artist Elly Ameling, but this evening we are also celebrating, with equal fervor, the great teacher Elly Ameling. If you have ever heard her singing, you have experienced a beauty and authenticity that is truly unforgettable. And there are millions of people around the world who have had this experience. A much smaller number know her as a teacher, but those fortunate few have experienced a powerful encounter that is equally rare and exquisite and transformative. The gifts and legacy of the teacher are just as precious and lasting as those of the performer. So let us now celebrate the foremost mentor of the Lied in our time.

In the summer of 1978 Elly Ameling answered the call to join us in creating a new academy for advanced study of the Lied. At that time, my wife and I founded the Franz-Schubert-Institut, located in Baden bei Wien, Austria, in order to enable young singers and pianists to perform Lieder in the spirit in which they were composed - that is, as manifestations of an intimate union of poetry, music, and the Naturphilosophie of Goethe and the Romantic Era. This approach was in tune with the work of Elly Ameling, Hans Hotter, and Jörg Demus, who all agreed to participate in this venture, together with two great actresses from the Vienna Burgtheater: Julia Janssen and Elisabeth Kallina, who contributed their genius of speaking the poetic texts of the songs.

Now, Elly Ameling has, for the last 35 years, been the very heart of this special summer academy. For she truly embodies the highest qualities of the German Lied as the expression of the Romantic soul. She is our most genuine voice of Mignon and Mignon's *Sehnsucht* - that pure longing of the heart for union with the Absolute Beloved, that burning desire to know and to be known, which consumes us and inspires our best songs, both spiritual and erotic at the same time. Elly Ameling has given us Mignon and Gretchen and Suleika and all the souls of Eichendorff and Hölty and Mörrike. She has given us the truth of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms, because she is a truth-teller. Truth-tellers never sing for their own glamour and glory, they never ingratiate or flatter, they have no hidden agendas and no selfish possessive desires. In fact, the singular self disappears like Ganymed and the Greater Self - the All-loving Father who has no name - takes possession of his chosen prophets. And then Goethe speaks, Schubert plays, and Ameling sings. Or rather, Universal Creative Love - at once spiritual and sensual - speaks and plays and sings in and through these geniuses. As Goethe tells us: the Whole is present in every part.

So Elly Ameling is our great mentor in Baden bei Wien, because she tells and shows young singers and pianists that this music is not about the ego of the performer. The songs do not belong to you, but you can walk the path that will let you belong to the songs. It is a hard path of awareness and discipline. *Sehnsucht* must never

be self-pity or sentimentality - it is the fire in the heart that we suffer when we love. *Sehnsucht* might be rendered in English as longing for the distant Beloved, and this “longing” is a deep desire to “be-long”. And again, the song doesn’t belong to me, but rather I belong to the song, which lives in and through me. This is the path and the teaching of Elly Ameling. And then even a third level can be attained: the enlightenment of total mutuality - living and performing in the real presence of mutual belonging. As Goethe pointed out: blue and yellow (the two primal colors) can only exist in mutual presence - the colors of the sky and the sun create and sustain each other - the necessary complement of sustaining presence. This, too, is the way of the great teacher, the truth-teller.

Some years ago, Elly Ameling suggested to me that, when I am looking for qualified participants for FSI, I should listen for two key attributes in their singing: the legato line and the heart. At that time, I thought legato line was simply a desirable musical style, one on which Hans Hotter also insisted, but I have learned that legato line is an expression of truthfulness. And when singers in their attempt to sing clearly and with correct diction neglect or destroy the legato line, I do not believe them. Truth dwells in connection, not in isolated words. Similarly, the truth of the heart - which is genuine compassion, fellow feeling, and selfless empathy with all creatures - is manifest in the tone itself. There is an ineffable quality in the tone of the voice that is truth itself. The “heart” Elly Ameling means, is not showy feelings or theatrical sentiment, but rather genuine human kindness and honestly caring about all the natural world with its beauty and its suffering. Heart is the singing tone of integrity, of Mignon, of the *schöne Seele*, that we so desperately need in the world today. Heart is, in Goethe’s words, the manifestation of an “*offenbar Geheimnis*”, an integrity of the soul in nature. You can hear it on the voice. As Robert Schumann suggested: the poem must lie in the voice of the singer like a bride lies in the arms of the bridegroom - freely, openly, and completely.

In the 35 years of our work together, Elly has been a pioneer in forging a path for lovers of the Lied from the Netherlands to its summer homeland in Baden bei Wien. She has led the way for Rudolf Jansen and Robert Holl, for Jan Willem Nelleke and Frans Huijts, but also for Lenneke Ruiten and Thom Janssen. It is a wonderful and fruitful connection!

Elly, we honor your integrity, your poetic sensibility, your wonderful gifts as a teacher; we thank you for your generosity, your loyalty, and your humanity. May you long continue to flourish in this great work! Shanti!

Dr. Deen Larsen
[Franz-Schubert-Institut](#)
Baden bei Wien



Ek van Zanten
Florestan and Eusebius • bronze • 1987