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Your own voice in life and art

As performance artists and voice-teachers we examine the relationship between art and teaching.

For many years we have engaged in the vocal research which is happening at the Roy Hart International Arts Center in France and elsewhere, examining the roots of vocal expression from raw sounds to the traditional singing voice.

Today the voice is at the centre of our artistic expression. With Jonathan Hart-Makwaia we worked on our new production „Birdsong“, which was co-produced with and presented

at the Théâtre de la Vie, Brussels, in 2012. We started giving voice workshops in 2006 and we became accredited „Roy Hart Theater voice teachers“ in 2010. We regularly lead workshops in Germany and elsewhere in Europe and occasionally provide vocal coaching for theatre and dance productions.

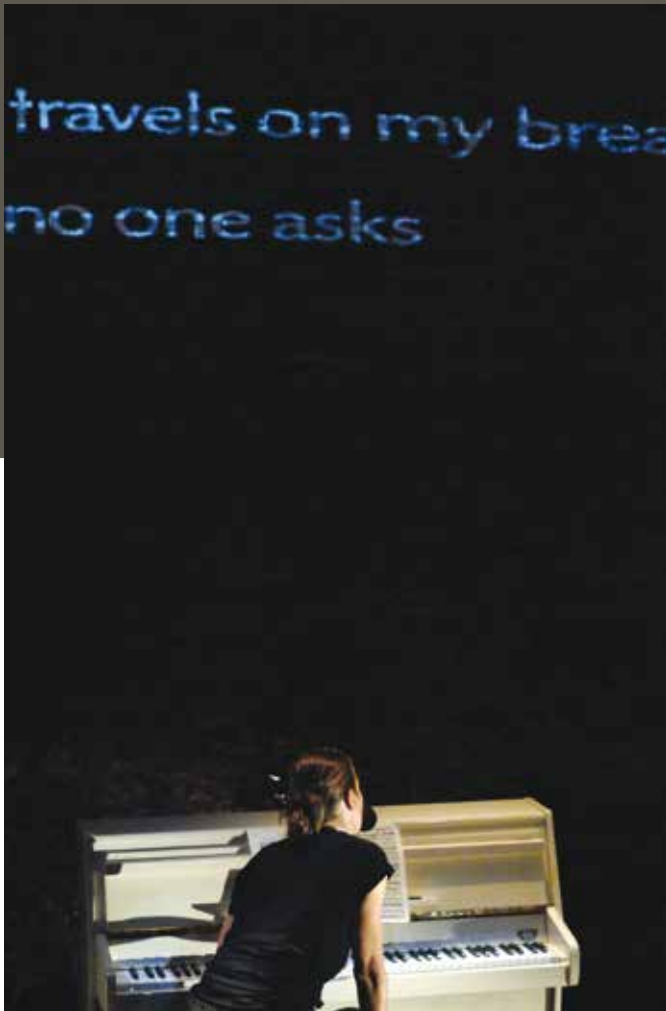
With our workshop participants we explore all the colors and expressive possibilities of the voice, regardless of aesthetic norms. We look at the relationship between voice and body as well as that between voice and consciousness, and adventure beyond the accustomed patterns of how the voice is

habitually perceived and used.

The two of us share a long path which goes back to our studies of video- and performance-art in the Art academy HBK Saar in Saarbrücken with Prof. Ulrike Rosenbach*.

One important and still valid challenge, first put to us by Ulrike Rosenbach, is the quest for authenticity. What is authentic in life and art? What is my reason for creating art? Does the impulse for art come from inside or outside myself? What are the most appropriate media for what I want to express? What does my art mean in our society and our time?

We explored these questions in depth



and developed forms of performance in movement, video art, voice and text. Many of our performances were site specific with strong atmospheric and visual components.

Walli: "I worked especially with the embodiment of inner images in space, creating environments through movement, video projection and sound. I began my vocal journey via the dance field, understanding the voice as a part of the body, and that voice begins with breath connected to movement and its energetic potential. As a performer I was involved in different productions focusing on composing with "extended voice" in a theatrical context."

Christiane: "I have worked with autobiographical material for many years and focused on developing personal stories to a trans-personal level in my performances. This led to a special interest in the practice of Improvisation, which puts the individual with his or her biographical field directly into action in the moment. "Applied singing" – applying voice to a situation – was at the center of performances in which I created vocal music to accompany dancers."

For a number of years we performed interdisciplinary improvisations as part of the performance group Magdalena Inc. with

Christopher Dell and Ruth Hommelsheim. This experience had a strong impact on our vocal development. We were both fascinated by this demanding state of openness, the readiness to "not know", and we spent several years researching the principle of improvisation as a philosophy in both life and art.

In recent years new perspectives on composing music and performance have come into play. We compose from and with "vocal states," including all the vocal colors that are accessible to us. At the core of this work is the question of listening.

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Ways of listening to the voice

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There are countless different perspectives from which one can look at the complex phenomenon of the human voice. For us it is like a landscape through which we navigate, alongside the students when we teach, as well as in our personal artistic quest. Here is a list of concepts we work with in our teaching.

Voice and					
authenticity	music	song	art	body	
movement	mind	expectations	breath	society	
social rules	training	aesthetics	beauty	emotions	
preoccupations	wishes	imagination	memory	love	
touch	impact	Identity	embodiment	truth	
support	transformation	healing	questions	moods	
personal growth	simplicity	subconscious	spirit	wisdom	
self-study	hierarchy	power	presence	listening	
permission	humor	play	imagery	states	
needs	mapping	technique	silence	shadow	
freedom	pleasure				

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Voice is breath, breath is movement

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Throughout life all of one's states of being are related to breath. The breathing movement keeps going and keeps us alive, whether we notice it or not. Every human state is reflected in the breath and breath is the primal connection between physical and vocal space. Vocal expression surfs the wave of the breath. Opening the breath channel is one important step for releasing the voice. We use movement, body work and breath work for deep relaxation, to release and express restricted energy and to re-experience the simple joy of movement. This helps to embody more and more colours of the voice.

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Voice and identity

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The voice is as individual as the fingerprint, but very few people have an equally neutral relationship to their voice as to their fingerprint. Often people find their voice too high, too low, too sharp, too breathy etc. By focusing on listening and giving value to what we hear, we don't spend the time asking "Was it good or bad?", but rather "Was it blue or green"? This appreciative perspective encourages the person to acknowledge and follow his or her personal expression. Therefore a vital part of teaching is individual work in order to acknowledge the individuality of each voice.

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Voice and self-authorization

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We are interested in a non-hierarchical teaching situation, a collaborative exploration of the student's voice. What if the voice holds all the information the student is looking for? In our way of teaching the teachers are not the ones who have all the answers but the ones who offer specific vantage points for the student to look at his or her self /voice from.

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The voice itself as guide and teacher

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The voice itself has a wisdom, which can unfold as soon as we „get out of the way“ with our expectations and judgements, and begin to pay attention to what the voice is revealing. When we step back with our will-power we let the voice find its way. We cultivate a trust in our own intuition through listening, questioning, reflecting and describing our experience. Through this process we gain a greater understanding of the vocal landscape. Therefore we begin to create a personal map for this landscape. By gaining experience of the voice the map enlarges and by setting landmarks in places you visited, you can later find your way back to different places in your voice. Timbres, textures and emotional qualities become accessible and applicable to the form of expression desired.

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Voice in life and art

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This approach leads to the two-fold benefits: One is its inspiration for the world of artistic creation, be it composition, music, theatre, dance, writing and any other form, undefined by any specific aesthetic. The other benefit is the embodiment of inner voices and colours of oneself through the voice. This allows us to be alive in more aspects of ourselves. This integrative idea goes back to Alfred Wolfsohn, the initiator of this voice approach in the 1940's and 50's. Inspired by Jungian psychology he believed that all archetypes are present in each human being. His ground-breaking work was to open the path for a full-range voice not confined to gender expectations. He followed the inspiration that the more of these archetypes one is able to express and embody the closer the connection with the "soul". "Learn to sing, oh soul!" is one of his often quoted phrases. Another interesting perspective on the theme comes from Roy Hart, Wolfsohn's longterm pupil, who later founded the Roy Hart Theatre in the 70's, saying "Sing your madness before your madness sings you." It seems that their ideas, along with many other revolutionary artistic movements of the 60's and 70's, have become very much integrated into today's body-mind centred approaches. "Extended Voice" has become part of our listening habits and appears in all kinds of artistic contexts. For us, the focus today is not so urgently on liberating ourselves from rigid societal conventions, but on finding our voice in life and

art. We care about finding out “what matters” to us as humans in a globally connected and virtually accessible society.

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Voice and support

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Besides the individual work, we are interested in collaborative vocal work that is about connecting with each other vocally, and which may touch something that matters collectively to the group. It is an area of music that is independent of virtuosity. It can be virtuous or not, it doesn't matter, but often it is truthful. Over the years the idea of mutual support has become important in both our teaching and artistic collaborations.

As we work together artistically, we don't only contribute and combine our individual ideas, but sometimes, out of our mutual support, emerges unlooked for music... When there is a supportive contribution by the other our own individual perception is enriched. The borders between the „self“ and the „other“ are intentionally blurred. This blurring encourages new shapes to emerge, with shared authorship.

Mutual support honours our view that expression and relationship are closely connected, and that vocal expression originates principally from our human need to communicate.

To listen and to be listened to!

