

My Life with the Voice

Introduction

What I am setting out to do in this essay is to explain something of the history of my work with the voice and Shakespearean text over the last 40 years or more: from my introduction to the teachings of Roy Hart, through the creation of my own technique, to the development of this technique within Europe.



I actually began working on the voice and classical text at the age of seven, with my school voice teacher, Miss Mitchell, and at seventeen I went to the Central School of Speech and Drama to train as an actress. (Cicely Berry was my voice teacher there). In 1962, while I was at Central, I was introduced by Paul Silber to a man called Roy Hart, who was doing research work on the human voice. Roy was a white South African who had won a Scholarship to RADA in the 1940s, and had gone on to become a psychologist and an actor. During his time at RADA, Roy had met Alfred Wolfsohn, a singing teacher who had developed his own approach to work on the human voice.

Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart

Alfred Wolfsohn was a German Jew who, at 18 years old, fought in the First World War. After the war he was broken in body and soul by his experiences, like so many young men at the time. What Wolfsohn remembered most were the cries of the dying soldiers, and he asked himself how could there be such life in the voice of someone who is dying. Wolfsohn had always had a good singing voice and after the war he decided to take singing lessons, as he felt this would help to heal his trauma. But he found that the singing lessons were not giving him what he needed – he felt that the human voice was capable of much more. He remembered the sounds of the dying soldiers and began working on his own voice to prove his theories.

Wolfsohn worked with the voice mainly in singing and psychology. Roy Hart worked with the voice with spoken text, singing and psychology combined. He met Alfred Wolfsohn in London while playing Othello at RADA. Roy was having difficulties playing the role: he felt he could act the killing of Desdemona but could not feel it in his body. A friend of Roy's at RADA recommended Wolfsohn to him, and so Roy went to talk with him about the difficulties he was having. Wolfsohn said to Roy, "So, you don't think you are capable of killing anyone?" And Roy said "Of course not." Wolfsohn worked with Roy on his voice continuously for two hours until Roy felt like killing him. Then Wolfsohn said quite calmly, "So, you don't think you are capable of killing anyone?" Roy then realised that he had been able to tap the source and energy of murder in his body through the voice, and that with

further work he could do this consciously. This changed Roy's life forever. He carried on working with Wolfsohn while he was still training at RADA, but then turned his back on acting to continue his research into the human voice, first with Wolfsohn and then with his own group.

When I first heard Roy working with his voice as a result of the work he had done with Wolfsohn, I was staggered. I had never heard an actor using his speaking voice like that. He was performing the poem "The Rock" by T S Eliot, using great power and a huge range in his speaking voice. He seemed to be linked to and exploring his male and female energy through the voice. His voice went very deeply into the feeling of the words he was speaking, and it touched me on a deep level. Also as I later discovered, Roy was able to repeat what he was doing. He would work on different lines many times, exploring the possibility that was in them through his voice. He was conscious of what he was doing, having worked over a period of years to develop his range and vocal artistry. It was then that I decided to leave the professional theatre and work with Roy. I was lucky enough to be taught by Roy himself for five years, and in total I worked with him for ten years in London. Then, in 1975, I went with him and the Roy Hart Theatre to France, where I stayed for 15 years.

My Work with Roy Hart

When I first started working with Roy I was already a trained actress. I had a very good speaking voice, and was experienced with both classic and modern text. Working with Roy, however, took me away from the word and into researching vocal sound – singing the sound with the whole body, mind and soul. Roy called this the work with the Human Voice. I also practised singing songs and speaking text, but the main emphasis was on developing the voice. In this work with Roy I realised that, previously, I had only been using a small part of my voice and myself, and had tried to perfect this. From Roy I learnt there was a much greater potential in my voice and myself than I had ever thought was possible.

Roy would work with me as one of a group of four or six, or individually. He used singing terminology for this work on the voice: Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto, and Soprano. He worked with me on my voice in all these qualities, but in the individual lessons he would concentrate on one quality of sound for an hour. He might also follow this with work on a poem or song, but the main focus of the lesson was deep work on one quality of sound. So began my research into the male and female areas of my voice and, therefore, of my personality and energy. I realised in working with Roy that all of these qualities were linked to me as a human being. This was a big realisation for me. As an actress I had never seen the direct link between my voice and myself. When I met Roy I sensed there was a gap between what I did on the stage as an actress and my life. When I heard Roy work on his own voice, I knew deep down in myself this was a way for me to work artistically with myself in a whole way.

Roy's method was very physical. I remember very clearly two exercises that I did in a group:

In the first group exercise, Roy would choose one quality of sound – say Tenor. He would start from middle c of the piano for the women and the c below middle c for the men, going up the notes of the piano from the c. He would ask each person in the group to sing each sound one note at a time. As we were singing the sound we would have to fall onto a pile of foam rubber mats, one person after another, very fast. This went on for two hours without stopping. You had no time to think – you had to go directly to your body; and trust

that and not the brain. I began to realise, from this exercise and others like it, that the voice really did come from the body and was physical and not cerebral.

In the second group exercise, each person in the group would sit down by the edge of a bench. Roy would again choose one sound quality – say Alto – and would start from middle c and the c below middle c, going up the notes on the piano. When Roy played the note, we would have to push ourselves up with our legs, so that the back of our neck and our head were resting on the edge of the bench, our feet flat on the floor to take the weight and the rest of our body lifted up horizontally off the floor; and we would be asked to sing the sound from our necks. Then we would rest, lower ourselves down again, and do the same thing on the next note. Sometimes this would be as a whole group together and sometimes individually one after the other. This went on for two hours without stopping. From this exercise I began to realise that my head and my body were disconnected and that the neck was the bridge between the two. Again, this connection was physical and could be worked on through the voice.

These two exercises had a big influence on me at the time, as I realised I needed to work on getting into my body and out of my head, and to make the link between my head and my body. And I believe these two exercises continue to have a big influence on my approach to voice today. What I principally use is the work with the sung sound – not in such an extreme way, but in a simpler and more direct way, and I had created my own technique from this.

Creating My Own Technique

1 The Context

After 15 years in France I felt that I had done everything I could do artistically with the Roy Hart Theatre. I had to meet other people and find other ways of working. I felt the need to return to England and my own language, and to my first artistic love – William Shakespeare. I wanted to see where the theatre in England was after being away for 15 years, and to see what young British actors were doing and how they were being trained. It was important for me to find out if it was possible to use the work I had done with Roy in my own country and with actors training for the theatre. I also wanted to see if I could find a way of linking the voice work that I had done with Roy with the work on Shakespearean Text that I had done before I met him.

When I returned to England in 1990, I met Cicely Berry again. She was head of the Voice Department of the Royal Shakespeare Company. I knew that I needed to speak with someone who had a deep knowledge of the voice from working with it for many years in the theatre. Cicely Berry was interested in what I had been doing, and I went to meet her in Stratford. I talked with her about my experiences with Roy and the Roy Hart Theatre, and she encouraged me to develop my own approach, and to bring it to England to work with British actors and voice teachers.

Through the encouragement of Christopher Fettes, the founder of the Drama Centre in London, and Clive Barker, I decided to follow my instinct to research the work I had done with Roy and Shakespearean Text. I contacted Gerry McCarthy who was then head of Birmingham University Drama Department, which at that time was one of the best drama research departments in England. Gerry invited me to work in the Department with the staff and students for a trial period of three months. This was so successful for everyone that I stayed at Birmingham for eight years, which enabled me to do the research and create the technique that I am working with today.

2 Breath Work

The work with the students began with two breathing exercises, which I had learned in France as part of a movement warm up from a dancer, Dominique Dupuis, and I developed and adapted it as I went on working at Birmingham. These breathing exercises were done on the floor with two people: one student lying down and the other working with them.

These are the instructions I would give to my students in the first exercise: Student A, lie flat on the floor, on your front, with eyes closed. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, and let me hear the breath. Do this for a few minutes, relaxing and working with the breath. Student B, now warm up A's body with your hands – start from the feet and go up the body to the top of the back, and then come down again. Do this in a continuous vibrating movement, while 'A' still focuses on his breathing. Now, B, put both your hands on the base of A's spine, and then open your hands out horizontally across the back on each out-breath, moving the hands up the spine on each in-breath until you reach the top of the spine. Now, put your hands on both of A's shoulders on the in-breath and take them down to the sides of the ribs on the out-breath. Next, put your hands on A's buttocks, wait for the in-breath and vibrate the buttocks with an upwards movement on the out-breath. Now, take hold of one thigh and wait for the in-breath and vibrate upwards on the out-breath. And then do the same on the other thigh. Now, massage the calf muscles one at a time on both the in-breath and out-breath. Finally, take hold of both of A's ankles and bend the knees. Lift the thighs up a short way on the in-breath, shake both thighs downwards on the out-breath, and then lower the legs to the ground on the next out-breath.

The second breathing exercise had two stages. The instructions I gave for the first stage were: Student 'A', lie flat on your back, close your eyes and relax. Student 'B', sit on the floor at your partner's head, and take hold of his head with both hands – take the full weight of the head, and hold it as close to the ground as possible. 'A', start breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, and listen to your breath. 'B', move A's head from side to side as he breathes, both on the in-breath and out-breath, and help him to relax the weight of his head and neck. Now bring A's head straight again. Next, support A's head with one hand, while with the other hand find the large bone at the base of the neck and place two fingers on either side of the bone on the muscles. Wait for the in-breath, and then slide your fingers along the muscles on the out-breath, helping your partner to relax and giving him the feeling of lengthening the neck from the shoulders. Now, support his head with one hand, while placing your other hand underneath one shoulder with the thumb over the top. Wait for the in-breath again, and gently push the shoulder down on the out-breath. Listen to A's breath, and judge how much to push in relationship to the flexibility of his shoulder. Change the hand under the head, and do the same on the other side. Finally, take the weight of A's head in one hand and put the other hand in the centre of his chest. Wait for the in-breath, and then let 'A' sink the chest downwards on the out-breath, relaxing as much as possible. Now, take your hand away from his chest and lower his head to the ground, checking that it is straight.

The instructions for the second stage of this exercise were: Student 'B', move to your partner's feet. Student 'A', bend your knees so that both feet are flat on the ground. Now, 'B', take hold of A's knees with both hands from the top and lift his thighs upwards with the thighs in a bent position. 'B', stand with one leg against the inside of each thigh to keep them open, keeping a hand on each knee. 'A', just open and relax the thighs as much as possible, and breathe down into the back – relax the back and the stomach, and bring the breath down to the centre of the body. 'B', don't put any pressure downwards and let your partner find his own relaxation in the back and the stomach. Now, take hold of A's ankles

and lift his legs upwards to 90°. Open his legs to the width of the pelvis. Finally, wait for the in-breath, and then lower the legs to the ground on the out-breath.

All the actions in the two breathing sequences, other than the lowering of the legs, were repeated four times. At the end of each of the breathing exercises, Student 'A' was told to open his eyes, thus going from an internal contact within himself to an external contact with the space, and to remain lying down with eyes open and continue the breathing for a few minutes. Then, still with eyes open, he was told to roll over to one side, bring the knees to the chest, roll over and come up on all fours. For this position I wanted the arms to be straight, with the hands placed on the ground parallel with the shoulders; the head down and the neck relaxed; the knees open to the width of the pelvis; and the feet having the toes tucked underneath. Then both students got back on their feet and slowly unrolled the spine, still working with the breathing and having their eyes open. By now they were standing upright, connected to their feet and pelvis, while trying to have the head straight and the neck relaxed. Next, I went to each person and corrected the head position, which was often either on one side or taken backwards. In each case the students were unconsciously separating the head from the body. I then checked that the neck was relaxed and that they were in the centre of their weight. The students would be left to work with their breathing in this position, while focusing their attention forward. Then I would ask them to breath with more power and, breathing through the vowel *AW*, to take the in-breath and out-breath more consciously from the stomach and to be more aware of the focus of the eyes.

Following the work in pairs, I asked the students to come into a circle for the following breathing exercise. We would start, focusing attention forward, both feet firmly on the ground. I then asked the students to lift both arms up on the in-breath and take the arms down to their sides on the out-breath, being aware not to lift the shoulders or take the head back. Next, I told them to breathe with more power and to work with being more aware of the focusing of the eyes. Then I asked them to do the same exercise, but to turn the head and look at each person in the group, taking the focus and breath out from themselves and transmitting it to the other students, and to stay open mentally, physically and emotionally in doing this. Then I asked the students to find a place in the room and to work on being very calm.

I would then ask them to walk in the space and change direction, so that they worked with having their own direction for themselves while continuing to breathe in and out at the same time. I clapped my hands to start and stop the walking. In stopping, their aim was to be stable on both feet, with their eyes focused forward, and to still be working with the breath. I then asked them to go into walking again, but at the next stop I would ask them to have two focuses: one directly forward and one on the wider horizontal plane. Then I asked them to start walking again. I would clap my hands again, but now there would be a change of rhythm, and they would run to each other in twos and take hold of each other's wrists and breathe together, connecting the breath and the focus of the eyes to each other. I would ask them to walk again, clap my hands, and now ask them to run to each other in twos and embrace each other and breathe together, connecting the breath to each other with the whole body. Finally, they would come into a circle again and breathe together, lifting their arms on the in-breath and lowering their arms on the out-breath, while turning the head and looking at each other as they lowered their arms. I asked them to do all this four times, and then I would finish this sequence by asking the students to be aware if anything had changed since they did the last exercise the first time.

This started to become a very interesting piece of research, and not without its resistances from the students. It couldn't have been any other way, as this was the first time they had experienced this work, and the first time I had done this in a teaching context in my own country.

It was clear that the majority of the students were so in their heads that, at the beginning, it was very frightening for them to relax and allow themselves to breathe and feel what was happening in their bodies. I saw myself very clearly in them, at the time when I first started to work with Roy Hart, and I understood exactly how they were feeling. I became aware in the first two weeks that they were very embarrassed whenever they had to make physical contact with each other. At the beginning they couldn't feel the difference between this type of contact and some kind of sexual feeling. After a month this began to change, and they began to feel the difference. They started to relax and realise the value of the breath work. Also, when breathing in the circle, they wanted to close off and protect themselves, but again after a month they gained more confidence and understood how important the exercises were for them. They began to be aware that they were not breathing with the whole of the body, and how important it was for them to work on this. They understood through doing the breathing work, both with each other and by themselves, how important it was for their work with classical text and acting. That if the breath was to be a living thing it had to come from the whole body.

Then the students began to work together more and correct each other. I asked them to do this with respect for the person they were collaborating with. I wanted them to become responsible for what they were doing, and I could see that getting them to work in this way changed the atmosphere and created a higher level of concentration. They had much more courage and respect for each other. It confirmed my own experiences that, without artistic respect for your own work and your fellow students, and without a creative atmosphere built on this respect, it is impossible to work on a deep level with yourself and your peers.

3 Vocal Work

The next stage was to work with the students on their sung sound qualities.

I would ask the students to sit on chairs in a semi-circle round the piano and would work with each student individually on his or her voice. As Roy Hart had done, I would take one quality of sound at a time – Bass, Baritone, Tenor, etc – each student making the same sung sound.

It was clear very early on that Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto and Soprano didn't have much meaning for them. Further more, it was no longer related to what I was doing. Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto and Soprano were terms connected with singing, and I was no longer working with this. I was working with acting and text. So I decided to change the terms to Deep Male, High Male, Deep Female and High Female. These new terms could be understood and applied immediately by the acting students to their work on voice and text. This also allowed me to be clearer and more detailed about the sound and the voice work. Instead of trying to cover a four octave pitch range like Roy, which I could see clearly wasn't working for the students and was confusing, I was able to focus on a smaller, two octave range and so concentrate on the quality of sound.

From this point I started to form the basis of my own technique with the voice. I would start with the women on middle c of the piano and the men on the c below, because the male voice is naturally deeper. So, on the deep male sound, I would go down the piano four notes and then back up to the c; then from the c up four notes, and back to the c. I always brought the sound and energy back to a central point. I would start going down the piano with the deep male because this connected them immediately with their depth and the depth in the voice.

On all the other sound qualities, starting from middle c and the c below middle c, I would go up the piano, as these qualities start in a higher part of the voice and energy. I would start from the c, go up four notes and then back down to the c; then work from the c and go down four notes, and back to the c. I could see in practice that this was working for them.

Up to this point I hadn't given much thought to which vowel would be the best for getting into the quality of sound easily. But now I saw that I needed to be very clear about the vowels I was using for each quality:

On the deep male sound I chose *AW*, because it goes directly into the depth and the energy connected to the stomach. On the high male sound I chose the vowel *AH*, because it goes directly into the high male energy connected to the chest. On the deep female sound I chose the sound *OO*, because it goes directly to the low female energy connected to the chest. On the high female energy I chose the vowel *AH*, because it goes directly to the high female energy connected to the head.

I realised on working with the students on the high female sound that they tended to go towards something that was on the surface and not very embodied. So I added the following explanation to using this quality: The high female quality connected to the head links with the stomach. With this instruction, I could see in practice that the students understood that the sounds they were making on the high female sound had more of a mix of dark and light in the voice. Therefore the voice was more embodied and dramatic.

I then decided to add phrases of Shakespearean Text to each of the voice qualities, so that the students could see the direct link between the qualities of sound and heightened text. I chose these particular phrases because they connected in a very organic way to each quality of sound.

For the deep male sound in the stomach

Macbeth's line: *Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle towards my hand*

For the high male sound in the chest

Lady Macbeth's line: *The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements*

For the deep female sound in the chest

Romeo's line: *But soft what light through yonder window breaks*

For the high female sound in the head linked with the stomach

Juliet's line: *Gallop apace you fiery footed steeds*

What I discovered was that, by working on the same sound with each student, they could begin to really embody their voices. They could listen to the other students making the same sound and learn from this. In standing up and singing the sound with the whole group present, they could sense how naked and exposed they felt, and how much courage and concentration it took to work in this way. I realised that this contributed to a much higher level of concentration in the group, and that they had much more respect for their fellow students' work. With each session, and through doing all the sounds, they began to gain more confidence and to allow themselves to work with greater dramatic power in the voice. At first they were amazed, and a bit afraid of the amount of power they had. But, after about a month's work, they really began to see the connection between their vocal power and the text. I could see in practice that the students were beginning to enjoy and understand the work, and to realise how it related to them as actors.

What was important for me was to see that, after a year under my guidance, the actors could begin to work by themselves with this technique. It had taken me many years to create this simple structure, and so to see that it was effective in practice, and that it could be used by actors in the professional theatre, was very significant for me and gave me the courage to continue.

What I learnt from the students at Birmingham was that it was very important to have feedback from the people you are collaborating with, so that you can see where you are and how you need to develop your approach and yourself. In every course or workshop I give, I encourage discussion of my technique. It is important for me to stay open and learn from the people I am working with.

4 Shakespearean Text Work

In the next stage of my work at Birmingham I decided to develop the link between the four qualities of sound and the use of Shakespearean text. In describing this stage, I will take examples from the work on those Shakespearean monologues that are connected with the four phrases of text linked to the four qualities of sound.

With the men I used Macbeth's monologue *'Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle towards my hand'* (Act 2 Sc i). I would begin the soliloquy following the exercises on breath and voice, so that they had a base to start from. They would start on the monologue, using the deep male quality of voice, and connecting to the same energy and power as when they sang the sound but now with the speaking voice. I asked them to do this in full voice, working with the breath and observing specific breathing points I had put in the text. I would work with them like this, taking one part of the monologue at a time and focusing on one man at a time, so that they could listen and observe the work of their fellow students. Then I would ask each of them to go through the whole monologue still using full voice. Then I did the same with the women, working on Lady Macbeth's soliloquy which starts *'The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements'* (Act 1 Sc v), and using the high male sound with the speaking voice in full voice.

After this I worked with the men on Romeo's monologue *'What light through yonder window breaks it is the east and Juliet is the sun'* (Act 2 Sc ii), using the deep female sound with the speaking voice in full voice. Then with the women on Juliet's soliloquy starting with *'Gallop apace you fiery footed steeds towards Phoebus' lodging'* (Act 3 Sc ii), using the high female sound with the speaking voice in full voice.

What I discovered from working in this way was that when the men went from the deep male sound into the *Macbeth* text with full voice and energy, they went directly to the body for the voice and didn't have time to think, as their whole concentration was in the body, the energy and the breath. This brought them directly to the energy and character of Macbeth. In using the voice with their dramatic power and going into the words, they were able to link the dramatic power and the meaning at the same time. This confirmed for me what I had believed for many years that real meaning comes from the body not from the head. In the moment that the actor speaks the words with vocal power and works with his breathing at the same time, he goes directly to the body. Because the feeling connection to the character and the text is coming directly from the body, the actor can repeat it again and again, developing it each time. So the repetition of the text is a living bodily action and not a mechanical exercise.

Exactly the same thing happened with the women when they were working with Lady Macbeth. They were able to go directly into the male energy and power of Lady Macbeth, and once again the meaning was there immediately through working with the voice in this way.

And I had the same results with the Romeo and the Juliet texts. With these texts, however, I began to research further, and asked the men to bring a bit more male into the deep female in order to begin to mix the voice. This resulted in them being able to get directly into the male/female balance of Romeo's energy and voice. The students were still working in full voice with the dramatic power of the character, and it became clear that, in this way, the poetry of the text became embodied and that there was a real connection with Romeo's sexual energy, thus making the actor much more dangerous. Therefore the students were more exciting to watch and listen to.

On working with the women I investigated bringing the male depth into the high female voice, as I had done with the sung sounds but now with the speaking voice. At once Juliet's words became more embodied. The actress connected immediately to her sexuality and brought the darker side of Juliet into connection with the light. The poetry of the text once again took on a deeper meaning, and this was done through going to the body for the voice and not the head.

When I started working with the students on the text in this way, they thought it was strange. They felt that they were shouting the text and not speaking it. They had never used their voices with such energy and power before, and therefore it was both strange and frightening. After a few weeks, however, they started to get excited about working in this way, as they could feel that it was their real dramatic energy they were using. They realised they were not shouting but were using their dramatic power, and they could see very clearly how this connected to the characters they were playing. They began to see that the voice – used with their whole body, mind and soul – was vital to their work as actors, and that it came from their body. They realised that their full potential was in the voice, if they were prepared to work for it.

After I had been working at Birmingham for a year, I began to work on Shakespearean dialogues. I began with Macbeth/Lady Macbeth scene that starts '*That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold* (Act 2 Sc ii). I indicated the points in the text where I wanted them to breathe (breathing points), and I divided up the dialogue so that the students could work on it section by section. I started by working on the breath and the voice, so that they created a base to work from on the dialogues in the same way they had done in the monologues. We would all sit in a semi-circle. I would then ask two students – a man and a woman – to sit on a chair in front of the semi-circle, facing each other with

quite a distance between them. I would then ask the two students to focus on each other and speak the lines in full voice, with the men focusing on the deep male quality and the women using the high male quality. I would work like this with each pair of students, rehearsing the text section by section, while the other students observed, listening and learning from what was happening. I would then ask them to work with full voice going through the whole of the dialogue.

After this I explored mixing the voice qualities with them. I asked the men to mix the deep male with the lower female quality in the speaking voice, and the women to mix the lower female quality with the high male. In this way they were working with the male and female qualities and energies in the voice at the same time. Again I did this section by section, working with each couple at a time, before asking them to work on the whole dialogue.

I then took the students on stage with the text. I started with the women on Lady Macbeth's monologue and would ask them to find their own way of moving on stage with the text and the voice work, still using full voice and using big movements. I would point out if they did not have their weight on both feet, and also if they were using their hands in an external way to explain the text rather than embodying it through the power of the voice in the word. I would ask them to become aware of these things and to work with them. I would work similarly with the men on Macbeth's entrance. Then I would take the dialogue section by section, asking them to create their own way of moving with each other on the stage while focusing on the breathing, the voice work and the body work at the same time. Then I would practise the whole dialogue in this way. Finally, I would ask them to work on the dialogue with the breathing, the movement and the energy but with less volume, while keeping the connection with the dramatic power in the voice all the time.

Over the period of eight years that I worked with first year students, I used a number of different Shakespeare monologues, but researched more and more into mixing the qualities of sound into the speaking voice as it related to the characters the students were working on. I could see clearly from the students' work over a period of eight years that what I had created was effective, and could be used by the students without me.

Working with two actors together was a very exciting process. When I asked them to create their own way of moving on stage, I could see the embarrassment and fear they felt when they were asked to do big movements and to use full voice. But, after a few weeks, they realised that in using their body and voice in this way it was easier and more organic for them to move on stage and use their voices without fear. With each session, they gained more confidence in the voice and the body. They began collaborating, and created their own direction in the scene together. They became very inspired by this way of operating, and realised they really did have a direction for themselves and that the technique helped them to do this. I was also learning a great deal from the students. As I continued to work, I could see I was able to take the voice work and the text to a much higher level. I was moving towards quality rather than quantity. This opened my vision as to what could be achieved with the work that I had created.

The European Dimension

While I was working at Birmingham, I also continued with my work in Europe. This was one of the great gifts of working at Birmingham for only three months of the year – it allowed me to continue to explore and develop my work in other languages, which interested and inspired me. I wanted to find out whether the technique that I was beginning to create could be used in the same way in these other languages.

1 France

In France I worked with Jacques Fournier who ran Le Centre des Rencontres in Besançon. Fournier had been an actor for many years and had created Le Theatre de Bourgogne in the Franche-Comté. After I left the Roy Hart Theatre, Jacques created a course for training actors and asked me to work with him on this over a four-year period. I followed the same structure of work with the French actors as I did with the British students – working on breath, the voice warm up, the individual work with the voice qualities and the text work with Shakespearean monologues and dialogues, but all in French.

The French actor works much more with his body, through mime or other movement work, than with the voice. They also work much more with the brain and with reasoning than the British actor does. This is very much to do with the French culture. I discovered in exploring the voice qualities with them that they began to go much deeper with their voices and began working with the voice from the body and connecting this to their intelligence. In exploring text, they worked very much on the surface at first, but when I asked them to use more energy and full voice, they worked with the word through their bodies and the French text came really alive in a way that I had never heard before.

It was clear to me that the technique that I had created worked just as well with French actors as with the British actors. I also found it very inspiring to work in French. Even though I speak the language, I had to listen much more, and be more open to learning from the differences in language and culture.

After this I was invited to teach at L'école du Passage, a new drama school which had opened in Paris. Initially, I worked on Shakespearean text, but I also wanted to explore French classical text, including Molière. It was exciting to see that the techniques worked just as well as with Shakespeare. Because the actors were working physically with the voice, the French language came more alive, even with one of their greatest playwrights.

2 Denmark

When I began teaching at Birmingham, I was also asked to work in Denmark. I started by giving some private workshops in Copenhagen, after which I was invited by the Danish Actors' Union to lead workshops for professional actors in Copenhagen, Århus and Odense. I found that the Danish actors didn't have much experience of Shakespeare or of the vocal technique necessary to do it. They had been working for many years with theatre based on movement and mime, and had removed themselves to some extent from work with the voice. Their approach was based very much on the European theatre of the sixties and seventies, when the big expansion of physical theatre began. However, all the actors responded very well to the work. They were very interested to discover how important the breath was to sustaining the voice work, how the voice work had a direct relationship to text, and how necessary it was to have an embodied technique to do this. The Danish actors were not used to working with an embodied vocal technique, but they soon realised that this gave them more freedom to do what they wanted as actors. And their speaking of the text became clearer too. In fact you could really begin to hear the beauty of the Danish language, and since some of the Danes don't think their language is beautiful, this was a big discovery for them.

While working on the sounds, I became aware that the Danish actors use great energy and power in the body. I realised that, through working on their voices, they were tapping into their real source – the Viking power – and this was very exciting. They had a freedom that I hadn't seen in the British actors or the French actors, and I was interested to explore this with the voice and the Shakespearean text. I had the opportunity to do this when I was invited to teach at the Odense Theatre School – one of the National Theatre Schools in Denmark. I have been working at Odense Theatre School for the past twelve years. In that time I have directed final year students in several Shakespeare plays in collaboration with Lane Lind, the school's director.

Odense Theatre School only take eight students a year, and so I have been able to work on a much deeper level and the students have been able to embody the technique much more. Because in general they are older when they come into the school and I have had much more time to work with them, they have been able to develop ownership of the technique and, by the fourth year, to use it and work with it themselves. Also, having the opportunity to direct productions of Shakespeare enabled me to apply the technique to a whole play and to work in a much more detailed and precise way both with the voice work and the whole staging of a scene.

While working at the Odense Theatre School, I have also taught at Staten's Theatre School in Copenhagen and have regularly given workshops for the Danish Actors' Union in Copenhagen and in the National Theatres in Odense and Ålborg. So the work has steadily developed and is becoming integrated into the professional theatre in Denmark.

3 Iceland, The Faroe Islands and Sweden

As a result of my work in Denmark, I was invited to lead a workshop at the National Theatre in Iceland. This included actors from both the National Theatre and other theatres in Iceland. I followed the same structure in my other workshops but, because I was working with very professional actors who immediately understood the technique and wanted to use it in their performance, I was able to work on a much higher level. I have been giving a two-week workshop at the National Theatre in Reykjavik for the last six years. I was also invited to give a workshop at the City Theatre which is the other main state run theatre in Reykjavik, and to teach at the National Theatre School.

The Icelandic language is vitally important for the people, and every new word that comes into the vocabulary is translated into Icelandic. Iceland was ruled by Denmark for many years, but the Icelandic people fought to keep their language while having to speak Danish. When the actors speak on stage, you can hear them working immediately with energy from the body into the language. They bring great organic dramatic power onto the stage. This is very connected with Iceland itself – to the fact that it is a living volcano – and to the powerful force of the sea and the land. What I realised I needed to help them with was not how to find the energy in the body – they already had that – but how to channel this energy into the characters of Shakespeare without restricting their dramatic power or imagination. It was clear that, as I continued to work with them, the technique was helping them increasingly to do this. They were able to apply this technique to their work as actors at the City and National Theatres.

While I was in Denmark, I also worked with an actress from the Faroes, a group of islands which lie between Scotland and Iceland. She invited me to come and work with her group "Grima" in Tórshavn, a long-standing amateur theatre group who had been asked to create the first National Theatre in the Faroes and to become a professional company. This was exciting to work with actors who were at the beginning of creating professional theatre.

In working with them I discovered that, though they had an incredible energy like the Icelandic actors, it had more of a connection to the depths of the sea than the land. The economy for the Faroe Islands is run on the fishing industry and has been for many years. "Grima" Theatre is therefore funded from this. This connection to the sea is in every Faroese citizen and, even though they are still ruled by Denmark and speak Danish, they have fought to keep the Faroese language. The Faroese language is more connected to the sea, to the flow of the tides and the ocean. The Icelandic language is more connected to the land, and the volcanic power. In each case they all also speak fluent English. So I could go directly from the English text into the Faroese and Icelandic text. This was very inspiring work – it was a joy to see the freedom and the high concentration with which these actors worked.

More recently I have been teaching at Luleå Theatre School in Northern Sweden, and at the National Theatre School in Malmö. When I began my work in Sweden, I had already created the technique, so I was able to use it immediately, and the students could begin working with it themselves. In this way, the students could build a vocal technique that they could use in the schools and in the professional theatre. I found the Swedish actors the most serious and disciplined actors in Scandinavia. There was serious work done in the schools, and it was in Sweden that I saw that the technique was really embodied. I was no longer researching to create the technique – it was clear that it was established and effective. What I was researching now was how working seriously with this technique could help the actors to develop as people and creative artists, and how using this in the work with Shakespearean text could take the work onto an even higher level.

4 London Workshops

It has always been my vision to bring actors and actresses together from all the European countries that I have worked in to work on Shakespearean Text in English. Since my first years at Birmingham and the Odense Theatre School I have given an annual workshop in London on "Voice and the Shakespearean Text" for European actors and actresses. I also give a workshop for theatre voice teachers every second year. As the work has progressed, I have also given an advanced workshop for European actors and actresses, so that those actors who wanted to develop the work and go further with it could do so. With each year's work, both in the actors' workshop and in the teachers' workshop, we have reached a higher and higher level. I have been giving these workshops for ten years. Very often actors and teachers will come back and work with me because they realise the value of the work and want to learn more and take this back with them to their countries – both into the theatre and the theatre schools that they are working in.

Ros Steen, who teaches voice at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, is one such teacher. She became interested in my work in the early 1990s, and was instrumental in inviting me to do a weekend workshop at the Academy. I was then invited by Cicely Berry to an international voice seminar, Project Voice, at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon in January 1992. Ros was there, and so was Jean Moore, the Head of Voice at RSAMD. Jean invited me to teach at the Academy for two weeks in the year, giving workshops to the first, second and third year acting students, and in later years, to postgraduate students as well, gradually going deeper into the work each year. Ros became increasingly interested in the work and wanted to explore integrating it into her own work at the Academy. In 1996, I did my first workshop for European Voice Teachers in London. Ros took part in this workshop, and after this she began using the breathing work and the voice qualities with her students. Since my first European teacher's workshop in London, I have given a teachers' workshop every two years and Ros has been in all of them. From each workshop, and from my observation of

her work at the Academy, I could see her teaching growing and developing, and after several years she has really integrated the work into the school with very good results.

It is clear that, as the technique develops and more people want to do it, I will have to find a way to do more workshops in London. For now, I am very grateful for all the support that I have received from all the people that I have worked with, who have helped me to reach this point in my life and work.

Nadine George