

## **Habits, breathing, performing arts**

*by Monica Canducci*

An artist in entertainment world, whether actor, dancer, singer, musician or conductor, needs a body and a voice free from restrictions, devoid of chronic body tension that could cause pain, limitations or difficulty of both movement and voice emission, swelling, chronic fatigue, etc., which might limit his expressiveness. Such restrictions, whether caused by prolonged stress, physical or emotional traumas, surgical operations, excessive strain, incorrect habits relating to posture and movement, might in time generate real and proper dysfunctions against the entire psycho-physical structure.

In fact, “bad” habits, just like significant and minor physical and emotional traumas, are able to generate restrictions which, in the course of time, influence body movement and expressiveness. Some activities keep our bodies under lop-sided pressure (just think of the study of some musical instruments like the violin or the flute), and sometimes the way we move or speak is indiscernibly influenced by habits acquired at certain times and “fixed” in patterns that, if constantly repeated, can easily lead to dysfunctions.

Habits are like paths we have travelled thousands of times; we let ourselves be attracted by them because we know them well, but sometimes it would be valuable to try out others, completely new ones, in order to conquer new horizons. In any case it is always constructive to find one or two alternative solutions to consolidated habits and let our bodies travel along new paths to allow us to enrich our expressive capacities. The aim is to reach the utmost freedom both physical, in awareness and skill, and emotional and mental, so that the originality of our voices and bodies can manifest itself unrestrictedly, evoking every single meaningful nuance to communicate to the public.

Of course, talking about the body and about “physical-ness”, I’m actually referring to that “device” which permits us to reveal every single thought, emotion and feeling, and which transforms all our experiences into the understanding, knowledge and awareness we have acquired.

And looking at our body, we can recognize in every breath we take (and give...) our way to express what we feel and process inside.

### **The importance of functional breathing**

The act of breathing constitutes the basis of the way we live and operate. Every role an actor plays is characterized by a particular way of breathing and by a singular way of behaving, posture, gestures, movements, rhythms and voice and body expressiveness, all depending on breathing. Restoring full breathing and establishing habits fit for the activities we carry out and for our individual needs is a “must” for our personal well-being, as well as the key to body-mind integration and to the intensification of expressiveness, since moving, speaking and singing are made possible thanks to breathing.

Sometimes we can recognize a person’s customary way of breathing, for example, in his/her chest or abdomen, and we have to remember that each one of us has his/her “story”, that is expressed in a physical and personality structure with habits by which it is identified. Consequently, each one of us has his own personal way of breathing which might or might not correspond to his real needs and which could be improved and adapted to his expressive needs. Every traumatic or stressful event, even if “just” involves our emotional side, affects our way to breath, stand and move, because our breathing patterns rebound on our posture and affects all our body structure. It happens because our “tonic function”, which constantly

and spontaneously “adjust”<sup>1</sup> the position of our body in space allowing us to keep balance into the gravity field.

Luckily, we can reverse the process. When our breathing change, also our postural response to gravity change. When our breathing flow, free from any restriction, also gravity flow through our body, and allows us to flow easily in the movement.

So, through a deep work concerning our breathing in order to keep it “free” (as applying Rolfing, Rolf Movement and Beamish Bodymind Balancing method we are invited to do) we can achieve a real prospect of intensifying and optimizing our awareness and the use of our personal resources.

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<sup>1</sup> We don't need to “do” the adjustment because it happens by the tonic function itself, because it is regulated by nervous reflexes and responses to perceptions.