

Red: voice teachers, **Purple:** students, **Green:** cor repetitors **Orange:** body-movement teachers
Yellow: dramaturges

Questions regarding: Why do singers produce excessive or uncoordinated arm and hand movements while singing in a performance setting.

Important: I will not mention any details which could reveal the identity of the people who filled in this questionnaire. The information you provide will only serve as an additional aspect to some of my research topics.

Please, only reply to this topic if you have ever experienced performances where singers were making hand and/or arm movements which didn't add anything to their personal expression, and disturbing your appreciation being a member of the audience.

1. Can you describe the type of hand and/or arm movements which you encountered? (e.g. conducting, drawing, penguin/flapping, flying, stiff, robot-like movements)

Voice Teacher 1: I have seen a singer moving around a lot, walking, rather wild movements with the arms, this did not at all contribute to the expression of the piece she was singing. I have also seen a singer collapsing her upper body to "express" the musical/dramatic expression, very distracting.

Voice Teacher 2 : All illustrative movements – or 'pantomime' of the words sung disturb me. There are, at least in some early music circles, schools that believe in doing that on purpose. I find it unnecessary and disturbing. Also – the 'technical hands' (telling the voice where to go with the hands)– which mainly happens to students still in the process of finding their technique.

Voice Teacher 3 : Often it is because of nervousness. Touching nervous the skirt or pants. Making spinning movements with the thumb or finger. Also, conducting yourself. Making fluent lines with the arms through the air, which sometimes occurs in lessons as well.

Student 1 : I've mostly seen conducting-type movements or "painting" the musical line with the hand(s). For some reason I feel more disturbed if it's only one of the hands doing movements! The other hand may stay stiff and the other one is conducting or drawing lines.

Student 2 : Mostly stiffness, crossing the arms and sometimes conducting

Student 3 : Stiffness arms, robotic movements, stress on the upper body. Conducting, rhythmic gestures, moving fingers.

Student 4 : Yes, I experienced all listed movements during the performance of my own and other singers. However, I observed the unnecessary hand movement less from established, professional singers.

Student 5 : Conducting, imagining an instrumental inside of body how does it work (imagining a space or direction of the air, trying to make body free etc.)

Student 6 : Yes. I could find conducting movements and also robot-like movements.

Student 7 : Conducting, painting, circular movement, stiff hands, hands stuck in front of your stomach.

Student 8 : CONDUCTING, Repeating movement, Nibbling on dress

Student 9 : The hand was doing conducting movements, essentially. Also saw some constantly hand totally closed. When you are pressing them while singing.

Student 10 : conducting, stiff, moving like a wave, nodding head, raising shoulder.

Student 11 : Conducting, imagining an instrumental inside of body how does it work(imagining a space or direction of the air, trying to make body free etc.

Dramaturg 1 : All of the above, + nervous fumbling on the upper leg with hands and fingers, or small hand movements in general. Also I encountered singers who's bodies swing from side to side.

Co repetitor 1 : the most common movements that I find are those of "conducting", those of putting your hands in your ears to hear yourself, holding hands as if praying, very tense hands on your sides, "explanatory" choreographies, etc.

2. What's your idea about why (some) singers use their hands excessively and/or uncoordinated during singing (see question 6 for idea's)?

Voice Teacher 1 : In general I think singers that move too much, do not have enough inner body balance and breath/body support. It can also be that they are too much concerned about their public and that they do not have enough confidence that – if they are truly connected to their message – communication will do itself.

Voice Teacher 2 : The 'technical hands' are in my opinion just a habit coming from not being aware... or being stressed about the singing. The illustrating hands – come either from philosophy that believes in that, or from trying to strengthen the message or 'translate' it to the audience.

Voice Teacher 3 : When a singer is not busy with the music or text, but more is singing technical then the chances are bigger that these unwanted movements occur. 'Parasite tensions' I heard a director call them ones.

Student 1 : I think it is a technical thing. The arm or hand movements are a way of finding body connection or legato in singing. Sometimes they are also used to express the meaning of the words, trying to "tell" the music and the story to the audience.

Student 2 : I would say it's most likely that the mind is occupied with the music itself or technique

Student 3 : Bad habits, Lack of awareness, Stress , Insecurity

Student 4 : In my own experience I can tell that I did a lot of bazar hand movements when I was performing in front of other singers. Other aspect is lack of singing technique on the early stage of

voice development mixed with great understanding of music. I suspect that the brain demands too much when the body is still learning new physical actions such as; new exercises, languages, articulations, breathing, posture, registers, so called position and in the result you've got the hands gesture which psychologically give the sense of filling out the bits of singing which isn't in the singers body.

Student 5 : Too much focusing on technical aspects

Student 6 : Probably it can be because they are not so connected with the character and/or the text, but it can also be because they maybe feel some kind of technical difficulty and they try to help themselves with some movements (helping with the breathe, the position of palato, support, etcetc).

Student 7 : Trying to 'help' the singing technique, Insecurities, Not understanding the text (didn't internalise the meaning)

Student 8 : I believe it's mostly unconscious movement by the singers.

Student 9 : Essentially nerves, fear of forgetting lyrics or failure of the voice. Probably also lack of experience

Student 10 : It's really distracting from the music itself. Unpleasant to see. Not professional.

Student 11 : Too much focusing on technical aspects

Dramaturg 1 : I think the unwanted movement usually has to do with singers being busy with singing technique. Because singing is abstract, the instrument is not visible, it needs suggestion of flow, direction and movement (up, down, front, back). Physical movement is a way to suggest and understand this. So, I think singers need to do this in the first years of their technical development. Another reason could be that singers can feel very naked and exposed on stage and are therefore nervous and don't know what to do with their body on stage. The physical movement can be an unwanted reaction to this.

Cor repetitor 1 : Singers do these movements when they want to emphasize musical or text expression, overacting when it is not necessary. Compensation movements for the lack of technical support or trust that the text will come through.

3. For teachers (vocal teachers/coaches, dramaturges and correpetitors): Which tools or idea's do you give to your students to prevent or remedy excessive and/or uncoordinated hand and arm movements? (How do you encourage them to be in relation to the music and lyrics?)

Voice Teacher 1 : I let my students exercise standing really grounded and calm and make them connect with what they want to express inside themselves. I strongly believe that if the message is sincerely felt inside our selves, it will communicate. To be expressive, you have to take care for the intention! First you go in, than ex will come by itself!

Voice Teacher 2 : I am actually not in favour of the totally still approach. I find some movement natural and okay. It is also a question of which region of the world you are from... for Mediterranean people it is more natural then for north Europeans for example.

For me the answer is – body awareness, good preparation so to avoid ‘convincing’ with the hands, actually incorporating some basic staging of the body to give the hands a role... working on focus, and more

Voice Teacher 3 : To teach them how to consciously stay with the text and the expression. Movements of the arms are not forbidden, but they should emerge from out of the music in an organic way.

Student 3 : Look yourself in the mirror (Be aware of your posture but not self conscious), Study acting , Make a choreography

Student 5 : To suggest dancing /walking etc. while singing which means let them to do something doesn’t relate with technical ideas. For my opinion, asking to not use arm/hands makes them to be stiff and getting tense.

Student 8 : I noticed that sometimes I tend to play with my rings unconsciously if I don’t concentrate on my hand movement all together.

Student 9 : Try to sing them (during lessons and practising) with the hands in the pockets or behind back; use of the mirror or video recordings to check it actually disturbs and costs the singer more energy

Student 11 : To suggest dancing /walking etc. while singing which means let them to do something doesn’t relate with technical ideas. For my opinion, asking to not use arm/hands makes them to be stiff and getting tense.

Dramaturg 1 : First of all singers (or musicians in general) need to be aware of the fact that they are never “themselves” on stage, they are always playing the role of “performer”. I usually suggest singers to be more connected to a character, through the text. That helps to feel less exposed. It can also help to give the character a body. Through this physical awareness singers can move “as the character” and sometimes unwanted movements just disappear. As result singers feel more free and confident in their bodies. Acting classes and bodywork can help singers to feel more aware and connected to their bodies. Singing in front of a mirror, or recording yourself on video can also be tools

Co repetitor 1 : First of all, try to identify if the excess movement is due to the lack of proper support. For this I recommend singing in different positions, squatting on a wall, with one leg raised, raising a chair, letting both hands rest on the music stand without pressure, etc. If the problem is not technical, it is probably because they do not trust their ability to express themselves and think they have to "explain" or that the text is not well known. Many times, there is also the erroneous concept that to "be musical" you have to "add" external elements, when what you have to do is interfere little to let out the "internal".

Please, only reply to this topic if you are a singer and have ever experienced a performance in which you felt disconnected to the meaning of the text resulting in your body to started carrying out unwanted (excessive) hand and/or arm movements.

4. Did you discover yourself (sometimes) using your hands or arms during singing in such an uncoordinated way, that they do not contribute to personal expression? Please explain:

Voice Teacher 2 : of course. And some of it is natural. Again – I am not a promoter of frozen people on stage.

Voice Teacher 3 : door het voor de Spiegel zingen zag ik dat ik de neiging heb mijn schouders wat op te trekken. Soms ga ik ook teveel naar mijn publiek toe ipv ze uit te nodigen naar mij te komen. Bij mij is het vaak een technische steun willen zoeken in de schouders en te veel willen aanbieden aan het publiek.

Student 1 : Yes, really often. Nowadays it's mostly trying to find support somewhere in the body, and I make swimming-like movements with my arms around the waist and hips area. Sometimes I also lift my hands in front of my chest and do some strange things with my fingers. When I was younger, there was more of conducting and trying to draw the musical line in the air while singing.

Student 2 : In my case it's fairly obvious when I'm crossing my arms or pressing them together or pushing one into my hip so I notice it, as do my correpetitor and voice teacher.

Student 3 : Yes, I think this can be caused by being focus in other aspects such as singing technique, rhythmical issues, lack of knowledge about the repertoire and so on

Student 4 : I didn't it was how I call 'Ballet Hands'. I realised it when I watched all my videos which I recorded. It was awful to watch but I analysed the reason why it used to happen so often. The reason was the breathing and accessing my entire back while long phrases.

Student 5 : Yes I did. In my case, mostly for opera performance. When I didn't have a confidence/I knew I didn't study or practice enough, I have tried to pretend that I understand the context and character. For that I have used my arms and hands with no meaning.

Student 6 : Yes. I also experienced this situation as a singer and it was because I did not feel secure with the text, or with the music, or with the character or with technical issues regarding the piece that I was singing. Actually, it is so uncomfortable to feel insecure on stage, during an exam/presentation (like grouplessons), that it is a fake way to feel more movement and relaxation.

Student 7 : Yes, my hands are very stiff in the fast passage, and often doing weird circular motion with the legato pieces, which sometimes stops the flow of the phrase.

Student 9 : Yes. Specially my left hand used to be constantly conducting; in a certain way it was the way I was remind my brain and my body to work and connect breathing, text, placement...but also it was (during performances) a way of being in my comfort zone.

Student 10 : Yes. Movement could help me to release or reduce my tension / stress.

Student 11 : Yes I did. In my case, mostly for opera performance. When I didn't have a confidence/I knew I didn't study or practice enough, I have tried to pretend that I understand the context and character. For that I have used my arms and hands with no meaning

- **In case someone else discovered this in you, please mention the profession(s) of the person(s) in question (e.g. vocal teacher, correpetitor, dramaturg, conductor, director, friends, family, journalists e.t.c.):**

Voice Teacher 3 : My teachers and directors noticed those things with me.

Student 1 : Voice teacher and correpetitor..

Student 3 : Mostly teachers and fellow students

Student 4 : My singing teacher (who thinks that it necessary to listen to your body and allow it happen), my coach and my Lieder coach.

Student 6 : vocal teacher, correpetitor, friends

Student 7 : Vocal Teacher, Correpetitor, Dramaturg

Student 10 : Vocal Teacher, family, friends.

- 5. Does/did the phenomenon of ‘unwanted hand-arm-coordination’ especially appear in specific performance settings? (possible settings: (school) performances, recitals, exams, auditions et cetera) If so, please mention these settings:**

Voice Teacher 2 : as I said – it is most common with students still searching for their technique.

Voice Teacher 3 : see question 1

Student 1 : Often when performing solo, no matter the context. In choirs rarely, even if I’m singing without a folder/score in my hand.

Student 2 : It appears mostly when I don't feel free to move my body, that would be sometimes in lessons but particularly in recital/concert situations where I'm just stationed next to a piano.

Student 3 : group lessons, performances, masterclasses etc

Student 4 : I was criticised a lot in my Lieder class by my teacher. He thought that the hands gestures aren’t acceptable during the performance of Lieder.

Student 5 : During practicing and taking a lesson.

Student 6 : This phenomenon used to appear more during school performances, exams, grouplessons and recitals.

Student 7 : School recitals, exam

Student 8 : No, overall thing.

Student 9 : For a few months (or maybe a year) almost all the performances. Even if I thought about it, it would disappear for a few seconds and then it would be back “automatically

Student 10 : For me it is actually appear more often in the practicing room such as co-repetitor

lesson, or in singing lesson. During the recital or concert I have the tendency of being more calm with my arm. Although I don't use my hand so much however I still often sing and make a musical phrase through my head and sometimes even tip toe-ing or knee bending during some difficult or special phrase. It seems that the energy in my body is excessive and I need to release it in another part of my body in another form of movement.

Student 11 : During practicing and taking a lesson.

- 6. What is/are according to you the fundamental aspect(s) causing this problem of unwanted hand-arm-coordination in your case? Please explain.**
You can for example choose from:

Voice Teacher 2 : please see above.

Voice Teacher 3 : see question 2

Student 1 : Definitely trying to fix technical errors in my singing, mostly breath, body connection and legato. In performances also trying to find security because of being nervous.

Student 2 : A mental focus on technique which is often by extension a lack of immersion in the character. If the mind is not immersed in the character then it will automatically occupy itself with other things. This could be self-awareness which could lead to stiffness, daydreaming which could lead to mindlessly wandering hands, or technique, which could lead to conducting or parasite support. Therefore immersion in the character is essential to avoid these issues. A prerequisite for this state of mind is a careful study of the scene, text and character, so a lack of dramatic/interpretive/linguistic preparation could also be the root cause.

Student 3 : Bad habits

Student 4 : It depends on the type of the character the singer has. If we are talking about extraverted type of character the issue might be that they are ready to give a lot to their audience because they have a need to say a lot and that's why the entire body start respond. Another reason can be a lack of confidence with the musical decision of the chosen piece.

Student 5 : Other: Singing too difficult repertoires. Like When I felt my singing skill is not enough for the music which I'm singing

Student 6 : In my case, I think it is because of insecurity regarding technical issues that I am not being capable to solve in the moment and it can also happen if I start having doubts about the character, or the lyrics, or the music. Nowadays, if I have a performance I do the research part of it of course (knowing about the character, the text, the composer, the story, etcetc), but sometimes really before a performance there are moments that I start to think and doubt about certain aspects and then it influences my presentation.

Student 7 : Nervousness/stage fright, Not fully understanding the text, insecurities with the technique, Not being in the moment (focus), lacking in using the tool to express (not using other body parts well enough).

Student 8 : Unconscious movements that the teachers haven't called out on.

Student 9 : All things mentioned above, only not 'lack of intrinsic motivation'. Whenever something is

not in your body (lyrics, rhythm, dynamics, or the character/ character of the piece) and you know you are presenting it and you know you could be doing better, or you did not study all those things well, you will feel responsible and uncomfortable so in my opinion any of them could make you start doing some movements with your hand/arm.

Student 10 : Usually Bad Rhythm. When I sing to slow I have a tendency to conduct and use my hand to make it faster. When I want to express my lyrics, I use my hand to express my feelings, however sometimes I often use it too much and I didn't realize it. Maybe it's also poor connection with the character of the piece. Hand gestures often appears when there's a difficult phrase in the singing.

Student 11 : Other

Singing too difficult repertoires. Like When I felt my singing skill is not enough for the music which I'm singing

**7 What is/are according to others (e.g. teachers, friends, family ...) the fundamental aspect(s) causing this problem in your case (see options in question 6)?
Does this differ from your own idea? If so, do you have any idea why it differs?**

Voice Teacher 2 : As a singer myself I do not think of it anymore. For my students – again- it is searching for technique, (in which case just being aware already helps) and actually incorporating standing and focus work into the practice process for a concert/ recital. In opera productions this does not happen or is not a problem because the stage director will tell you anyway. And because there is the staging itself...

Student 1 : No, I think everybody agrees that the hands and arms appear when body connection is lost or there is a difficult line/high note approaching.

Student 2 : My correpetitor generally encourages me to immerse myself in the character whilst my voice teacher generally tries to get me to loosen my body. It could be said that my voice teacher is usually intentionally or unintentionally focusing my mind more on technique, but then in a positive way where I'm encouraged to free my body instead of stressing about the oncoming notes and hence tightening/squeezing.

Student 3 : Nerves

Student 4 :

- Not making very strong decision on what exactly do I want to do musically in the piece
- Having way too much coachings with different people in short period of time which confuse my brain in terms of 'Is it a subjective opinion or necessary tradition?'

Student 5 : I don't know. I haven't ever asked to someone.

Student 6 : According to others, the cause of this problem in me is lack of security regarding text, music or technical issues. So it does not differ from my own idea.

Student 7 : Almost the same, but they also explain that this is because my air doesn't flow when singing, that sometimes my hand is stiffened. I would say this is not a different idea, but an addition to the list of the cause.

Student 8 : Probably poor connection with the character.

I think it is just nerves, because the movement is unconscious. Teachers can not dig into your brain to realise this.

Student 10 : First of all, I think I have a very active-extrovert temperament that use a lot of body language even in my daily conversation. To find a calmness in myself sometimes really takes time. I found that hand gestures also connected with the insecurity feelings. The more I practice and the more I study singing, I realize that my hand gestures is really reduced. I saw a big difference in hand gestures from the first year concert with my second year master. I think having a drama technique lesson is very useful in my performance. In drama lesson I was taught to act clean through my gestures and to show clear facial expression (without concern my singing technique).

Student 11 : I don't know. I haven't ever asked to someone.

8 Can you describe in detail what happens in case you lose control by writing down the process in steps? (Which phases do occur before your arms and/or hands start to live a life on their own?)

Voice Teacher 2 : No, sorry.

Student 1 :

- I start feeling stiffness in my body: especially the pelvis, solar plexus, neck/back of the head
- the stiffness is caused by lack of proper breathing and body connection, also sometimes I feel that the stiffness causes the lack of proper connection
- usually this happens when approaching the end of a piece or a difficult moment in the piece
- I use arms to bring the breath back to the lower body, usually swimming type of motions
- it usually doesn't really help, but sometimes it does!

Student 2 : Generally I will not be immersed in the character and find myself labouring to keep up with the music. Which causes which probably varies with each incident. I will realise that I'm squeezing high notes or falling behind on breath and begin to focus on that. Then I will start to stiffen my body, which includes parasite supports such as a hand on the hip or crossed arms to try and push myself through.

Student 4 : When I used to write down my body language on the scores I did more obscure hands gestures rather than when I am not writing them down. In my case I need to imagine my performance in my head and then I build where exactly I should move and when, what sort of energy should I impact to the plastic of my movements. Although, I do this stage after working with the piece technically, making sure that the articulation and understanding of the language is in my head and body and of course after doing some acting job such as: creating the character, imagining the setting where my character is located and the relation with other characters if we are talking about opera, operetta, musicals.

Student 5 : In my case, firstly I feel tiring vocally then my body starts squeezing larynx and cord. After getting to feel that, I try to get right way back then arms and hands start moving.

Student 6 : Actually it is really difficult because it happens unconsciously and I started to recognize that with the feedback of others and because I was/am watching video recordings of myself. However, it is something I am working for a long time. I do believe that it happens like: I start to sing a certain piece and I start to disconnect with the text, music of character because I feel doubts about technique or about lyrics/music. Then I start to feel tension in my body and my hand start doing some movements in order to "help me". → BUT WHY?

Student 7 : The agility passage/big phrase starting → tries to fit breath in the whole passage → air stops flowing → resulting in either stiff hands or circular motion of hands to ‘help’ the phrase going.

Student 8 :

1)I concentrate on the music 2)I concentrate on the character, the emotion

3)I consciously decide to not do any movement with my hands – tell the story with voice/face 4)THE MOVEMENT HAPPENS!!!

Student 9 : Looks like you are gonna fail, mix or miss a word or a sentence and then no, you just did it. Maybe I would grab the piano instead to feel grounded and that you are not “alone” on stage and then probably my hands would start “moving/working” more to react to the little panic I just had

Student 11 : In my case, firstly I feel tiring vocally then my body starts squeezing larynx and cord. After getting to feel that, I try to get right way back then arms and hands start moving.