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MODEL FOR A WEEK INTENSE BLENDED TEACHING MOBILITY in OPERA LANGUAGE LEARNING for SINGERS (RUSSIAN WEEK/ITALIAN WEEK)

The essential value of the exchanges offered by Erasmus mobility, both for students and teachers, has shown its effectiveness and potential throughout the years. The Music and Opera sector - international by its very nature - is certainly a sector that can benefit optimum from this mobility. However, in many cases it is still not used to its full potential.

The more **specific and targeted** the **modules** offered are, the more effective the result.

Furthermore, fostering the mobility of teachers means ensuring that the exchange between different approaches can reach a much higher number of users. But, more importantly, it guarantees a change of perspective. The basic learning unit is therefore no longer just the classroom with its teacher but becomes the network of teachers from the entire network of institutions involved which becomes an effective tool and resource for all the institutions connected to each other.

It is with this change of perspective in mind, that the Module on the exchange of teachers between Riga and Parma was conceived with the aim of addressing a very specific problem: **the approach of foreign languages in singing**. It is not simply a question of "learning a language", nor of becoming a philologist, but it is a question of getting to the heart of interpretation, through the study of the complex relationship between music and speech, a relationship unique to each language. All this in the most practical, concise and effective way possible: an "Intensive program" of maximum 5 days. Parma and Riga experimented it for Russian and Italian Languages. But it could obviously be repeated for any other Languages

The "joint work" of students and teachers has really proved to be particularly enlightened and stimulating for everyone, inevitably also causing a radical change in the perception of the student-teacher relationship. Who teaches whom? Also in this sense, a real "change of perspective"!!

It was vital that the students participated in the mobility and supported the teachers in this exchange module, playing the role of "tutor" for the students of the host Institution. And this turned out to be absolutely winning.



The model and the one-week schedule

1. RUSSIAN WEEK

The Schedule of the **Russian language** working week consists of:

	1st day	Welcoming session
	1st – 2nd day	Work in large groups (approx. 20-30 students)
	1st – 2nd day	Work in small groups (approx. 3- 5 students)
	2nd – 5th day	Private lessons
	5th day	Dress rehearsal ; Gala concert
	1st-5th day	Individual work and Role play

At the beginning of the Working week it is good to make a schedule for the private lessons and give an opportunity to have a lesson with both vocal teachers.

Before the working week participating students receive the handouts:

- The alphabet;
- Examples of pronunciation for all the letters of the alphabet;
- Details of some letters or symbols;
- Differences of pronunciation affected by stress;
- Online Database.

Welcoming session

At the beginning we introduce students with the course weekly schedule, it is also important to understand a students' knowledge level - are they absolute beginners or do they have some previous knowledge about the basic rules of Russian language. It would save some time if the students had made some prior the course, got familiar with the basic rules and prepared some questions already. It would be helpful and good if the students had one level of knowledge.

If it is possible to work together with Russian language speaking students as tutors from the guest music academy. The guest Russian speaking students are giving a concert for local students at the end of the welcoming session. This Welcoming session could last 30-60 minutes depending on group size.



Work in large group

This part of the process is based on a theoretical class for students about Russian language. We use I.Losberga's presentation «FONETICA RUSSA» and the HANDOUTS. If the level of students' knowledge is quite basic we repeat the alphabet, read simple Russian words, spell names of digits from 1-20 and read short Russian poems used in well-known romances. Helpful exercises for beginner students are to read well known international words written in Russian language, like music, sport, opera, aria. Also good practice is when the teacher reads words in Russian language and students try to find which is the right written word from the list. We get through the basic language rules and start to discuss deeper language problems like - word stresses, letters which are difficult to pronounce, old Cyrillic writing style, different Russian language dialects, different editions for notes, differences between speaking and singing in Russian and etc.

In this session we go through our advised database – online sites and helpful videos about language practice, books about singing in Russian, books about use of Russian language, recordings of romances, arias and explore which records to listen to and to which details pay attention to. We give advice on how to work with resources and where to look for the information.

At the end of the session students get homework - the romance/romances to prepare for the Role play.

The work in large groups is organized in two sessions approx. 60-90 minutes each, but if the level of students' language knowledge is basic then it would be good to reserve one more session in the morning of the 2nd day.

Work in small groups

Very important factor in those small group lessons is teachers' rotation every hour between groups because every teacher has different working methods and based on experience it will improve the amount of knowledge. In this session we repeat the alphabet if it is necessary, read some texts and poems, do some pronunciation exercises and at the end of session will have time for questions and answers.

In these small group sessions, we work with the homework which is based on acquired knowledge: we read or sing the romance they have prepared after a large group session and work with pronunciation details. After that is the Role play - students check each other's mistakes in the prepared romance and work in pairs. If it is difficult for students to sing this romance, they can read it.

The work in small groups is a good time to discuss some topics from Database.

The planned working hours: 1st day approx. 60 -90 minutes, 2nd day two sessions approx. 60 minutes each.

Individual lessons

At the end of the second day will be individual work with students. Here are many ways to do that - together with a vocal teacher and pianist, only in pair with a vocal teacher or pianist. It depends on the students' level and problematic. Usually at the beginning the student reads the text from the romance or



aria which she/he has prepared from his repertoire, then the teacher corrects mistakes and then solves the problems which occur in the singing process. During these individual working lessons we have time to improve the stylistic and characteristic of the composition.

It would be good to have at least 2 lessons (30-45 minutes) with each student and dress rehearsal before the Gala concert.

The Gala-Concert

It is a great opportunity for students to show their progress and get self-confidence of the work they have done.

Individual work of the students (the Role play)

The Role play enables students to get deeper in the language specifics and open their mind for more questions because one student read the prepared poem and another student becomes a teacher and corrects the mistakes.

2. ITALIAN WEEK

The Schedule of the Italian language working week consists of:

					1st day	Welcoming plenary session (with Concert)
					1st - 2nd day	Work in small groups (approx. 3-5 students)
					2nd - 5th day	Private lessons and Work in small groups (mainly duos)
					5th day	Final concert
					1st - 5th day	Individual work and Role play

During this second experience, we have repeated the formula of Russian week, especially concerning the main points:

- collective experimentation,
- "active learning",



- student-centeredness,
- mixing levels (in even more direct involvement, creating duets with students from different Countries)
- exchanging roles (teaching = learning and learning = teaching).
- Italian Students as Tutors

We also maintained the **two concerts**: one at the beginning of the activities (FIRST DAY/FIRST ACTIVITY - Students-tutors and teachers from Parma on stage together), the other at closing (LAST DAY/LAST ACTIVITY), which involved the students of Riga together with those of Parma.

It's important to note that the welcoming concert was not only a "warming up" activity, but a way of immediately getting to the heart of "learning by doing": a presentation accompanied the pieces of the concert, specially chosen to introduce the specificity of the Italian repertoire, that is the knowledge of the verses and prosody.

In fact, due to the different language (Italian, more renowned than Russian among both students and teachers), we could focus even more on the interpretation, especially thanks to the deep comprehension of the **PROSODY** (not only the Diction and Meaning)

Italian stands out, among other languages, for the strength of the tonic accents in the words. A good didactic project to sing in Italian should never forget this.

All Italian poetic tradition is based on two simple principles:

1. every verse has a fixed number of syllables;
2. following the number of syllables, every kind of verse has its specific way of distributing the stresses.

This is the framework on which an Italian composer set his music. This is the pattern of Italian melody. And this we have to understand to correctly sing a musical phrase with text in Italian. If we know that, a lot of ideas will arise in our brain and ears to manage Italian opera.

This is what we did in our lessons, the teachers trying to lead the students to discover the internal mechanisms of Italian prosody and their strict relationships with music. Even better: the richness of opportunities that the Italian prosody offers to music.

The schedule of this model of week activities allowed us to reach this aim in a fruitful and focused "learning by doing" path.