

The Chekhov Method in Jazz

A Research Project in Three Studies

by Sebastian Stert



Michael Chekhov

Main Subject: Vocals

Main Subject Teacher & Research Coach: Sabine Kühlich

Conservatorium **ZU**
Maastricht **YD**

1. ABSTRACT

Over a period of seven months, I intensively dealt with the question of whether Michael Chekhov's acting method can be transferred to the musical laws of the jazz genre. This research project consists of two phases of an action driven research design.

In the first phase, I narrowed down my method through literary research, exercises and experiments, and then transferred it into a musical context. In three studies: workshops, duo sessions, and my work, I empirically researched the Chekhov method with a total of 15 participants including myself. Three of Michael Chekhov's techniques constituted the base: "Gesture", "Atmosphere" and "Imaginary Center". I evaluated the results of the first phase with the help of video and audio recordings, as well as interviews and introduced a second phase with another hypothesis. This consisted of a detailed, qualitative survey conducted among all participants, based on my previous results. The data was then statistically evaluated and assessed.

My study confirmed the hypotheses from both research phases. At the end of my work, I made suggestions from my experience that could be useful for further studies in the field. For further information on the different topics, I would like to refer to my blog:

<https://sebastianstert.music.blog> (in German)

This is a translation of my master thesis from German into English. Please note that some sources refer to German books or publications for which there is no English version. If you have any questions please contact me via email: sebastianstert@gmx.de.

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2. INTRODUCTION

**“The soul desires to dwell with the body because without members of the body
it can neither act or feel.” *Leonardo Da Vinci***

(Chekhov, 1953, p. 95)

2.1 My connection to the method

Seven years after my acting training, I was lucky enough to come across Michael Chekhov's wonderful method via the Tankstelle in Berlin.

(I will spell his name “Michael Chekhov” in the following; I am aware that there are other ways of spelling such as: Mikhail, Michael, Cechov, Chechov, Čechov, Chekhov etc.)

During my first encounter with the Chekhov method I experienced that I was able to go deeper into the role I was playing, my imagination regarding posture and situation was stimulated by the exercises, and my mental abilities to concentrate were strengthened. I was also able to express destructive thoughts of the "everyday ego" such as: "Do you still know the text?" and put them into perspective. Thus I came to a more authentic level of my emotions. This method is easy to implement, playful, artistic and goes so much further than the field of acting.

2.2 Why Chekhov in Jazz ?

“Since the last third of the nineteenth century, a materialistic world outlook has been reigning, with ever-increasing power, in the sphere of art as well as in science and everyday life. Consequently, only those things which are tangible, only that which is palpable and only that which has the outer appearance of life phenomena, seem valid enough to attract the artist's attention. „

(Chekhov, 1953, p.14)

When I listen to jazz singers and musicians, I often remain untouched and miss the artist's individuality in the music. It is oftentimes good on a technical level, but remains well-behaved and emotionless, or the emotions are unfocused, so nothing comes across. Why do these artists want to go on stage, I ask myself, what do they want to tell the audience? What is their story? Then there are musicians I stare at in awe and ask myself:

"What is different about them, why am I so concentrated and gripped by their emotions?"

It is important to master your voice/instrument technically, but that is not all. This is exactly what comes up again and again at symposia in America and Germany. The young artists may be brilliant, but they lack that certain personal something, the spirit. So How can we get there?

“Singers tend to radiate only with the voice as it is released from the larynx; but, by honoring the resonances that occur in the whole body, sound can be radiated from head to toe.” (*Haffner, 2017*)

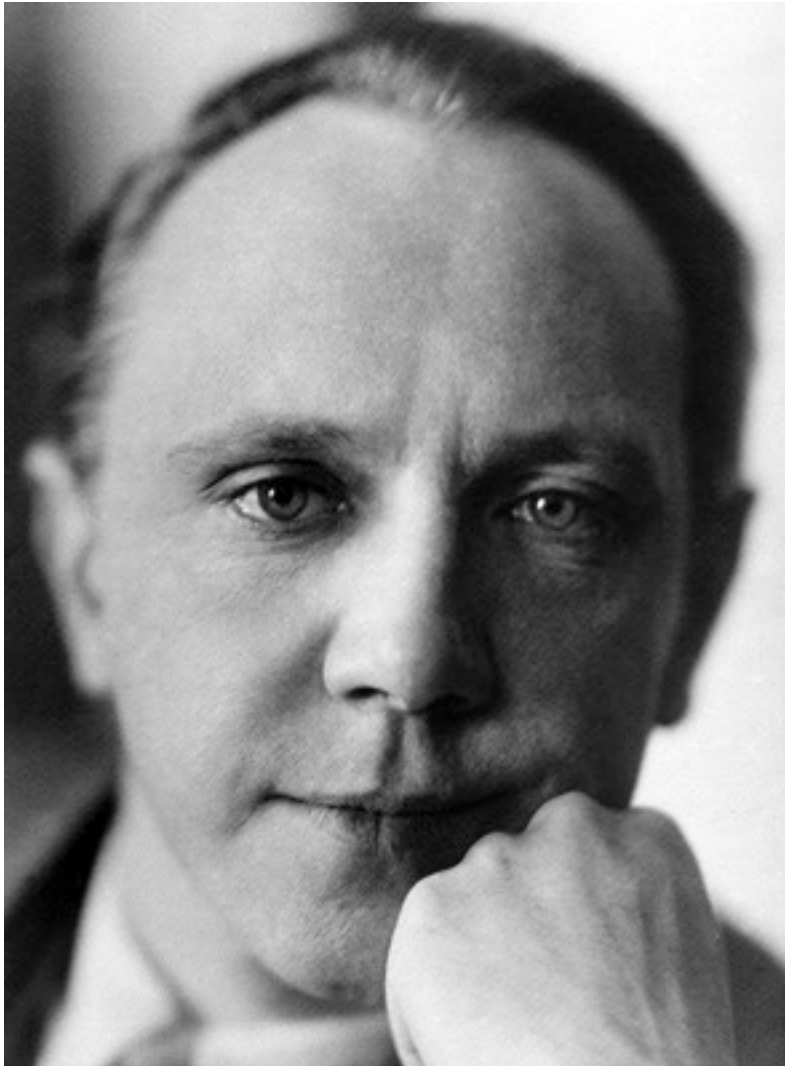
At music academies, regular training should take place promoting this spirit. But is that even possible? In most schools, as is well known, the focus is mainly on tangible things such as technique and theory, things that can be queried, the "right and wrong method" -how do you do that with the spirit? Is it possible to measure it? Who is to say what is right or wrong in art? Many artists have just come to their authentic language through abstract, at first foreign ideas, and thus to themselves, where even mistakes and detours were right and important. Vocal techniques such as Estill are basic elements of modern singing lessons. They create an awareness of physical and tonal processes, but they do not promote an awareness of an authentic, artistic approach of an artistic soul. This also needs to be encouraged.

"Michael Chekhov envisioned a new theatre with a heart. With his approach actors are able to make heart connections with the audience. It is self expression which is also real communication, human being to human being. This is why I am attracted to this work.“ (*Lenard Petit, 2020*)

Chekhov says that the uniqueness' charm is determined by the spiritual atmosphere. Without it, the audience would follow the events indifferently and fall into criticism and condemnation.

It needs a technique that promotes authenticity, that can be taught and evaluated, and that creates a free space that is not restrictive, but structured. There are already some great approaches to this topic, as described in "The inner game of music" or "Effortless mastery"; some music academies already implement them. The Chekhov method could be another one.

2.3 About the Chekhov method / State of the art



Michael Chekhov, 1929

"A Wise Man Opens My Eyes"
Marilyn Monroe

2.3.1 The inventor

Michael, Alexandrovich Chekhov was born on August 29, 1891 in Moscow and died on September 30, 1955 in Beverly Hills. He was the nephew of famous writer Anton Chekhov, an Oscar-winning actor, and the inventor of the Chekhov acting method. Under the influence of Konstantin Stanislavski and Jewgeni Wachtangow, he began to develop his own ideas for an acting technique at the Moscow Art Theater.

“Initially an actor in Stanislavsky’s theater troupe, Chekhov elaborated his own method based on decades of creative work, self-observation, and pedagogical experience. As his approach became widely accepted in acting schools, performance theorists have explored Chekhov’s acting techniques through the lens of cognitive neuroscience.”

(Blair, 2007; Kemp, 2012; Lutterbie, 2015, p.62)

Another great source of inspiration must have been the meeting with [Rudolf Steiner](#), founder of anthroposophy. In her [diploma thesis \(German\)](#), Nina-Nathalie Bartsch writes that Chekhov developed the first basic ideas of psychological gesture through Steiner's writings and sees a clear connection in this connection.

Chekhov's path took him from Moscow to Berlin to England, where he continued to work with students on his methodology. After fleeing to the United States, the presentation of his method in New York had rather moderate success, his thoughts were perceived as too abstract. Only in Hollywood, where he worked with film actors like Marilyn Monroe, Antony Quinn, Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergmann, the power of his technique became apparent. More about [Chekhov](#)

“When you meet the Chekhov Technique, you meet your own creative and expressive Self.”

(Lenard Petit, 2020)

2.3.2 What is the Chekhov method about?

The method is not so easy to describe or put into words. The actual element of Chekhov's work is the psychological gesture, which appears in different forms in all techniques such as Atmosphere and Imaginary Center. It is a movement / gesture that one imagines outside of the body and then, simply put, focuses on and holds on to. This is why, in acting circles, this technique is also called "from the outside to the inside". I do not completely agree with this description, as in my opinion, the technique works by aligning the outside and the inside. The psychological gesture starts with the idea of movement from the inside out and executes it imaginary on the outside, with the help of concentration and imagination as if it were real.

“But the actor, who must consider his body as an instrument for expressing creative ideas on the stage, must strive for the attainment of complete harmony between the two, body and psychology.” *(Chekhov, 1953, p.13)*

Nina-Nathalie Bartsch writes that Chekhov repeatedly highlighted the interaction between body and mind, their constant interdependence and interaction with each other. The human being experiences not only psychologically, but also physically, and vice versa. This is why Chekhov finds it important that body and psyche receive equal attention within the acting work. The body is just as indispensable in its physical role as its inner life, it is the artist’s instrument. *(Bartsch, 2015, p. 53)*

The Chekhov method is an artistic self-education through the creative energy of concentration and imagination. The method is rooted in a strong imagination, which is trained through the connection of body and mind. *(Bartsch, 2015, p. 50, p.52)*



"exploding tension"

This method is now being integrated into the work of many drama schools around the world. It is also increasingly becoming the focus of drama education. An important aspect is that performers are encouraged to switch off their "everyday self" and activate a higher consciousness. Referring to Rudolph Steiner, the threefold division of the human soul, the division of consciousness, is creatively implemented by Chekhov in his method. *(Bartsch, 2015, p.116)*

2.3.3 Where can I learn this method ?

Perhaps best known is Lennard Petit and his acting studio in New York. I used his book for input and to develop my exercises, and I was in contact with him via e-mail. Unfortunately, there was no meeting in New York to ask specific questions, but I hope to attend a workshop with him soon. There is an acting school in Berlin that specializes in this method and even a European Institution based in Hamburg.

2.4 Where has there been research into singing and Chekhov ?

“The Chekhov Technique will work with imagination and psychological gesture to support a free and fluid interpretation of the songs. Specific applied elements of Chekhov Technique will support the actor/singer to achieve a free and fluid interpretation of its songs. Among other things, the work with Imagination and Psychological Gesture applied to the singing get studied.” (*Haffner, 2015*)

Interestingly enough, research on singing and Chekhov is mainly connected to opera, probably because it is a performing musical form. There are a few partially unpublished papers on this subject, here quoted from the summary by Leslie Bennett "Inspired states: adapting the Michael Chekhov Technique for the singing actor":

“The singing actor faces special challenges in bringing the truth to the stage, since he or she must undertake to balance naturalistic spontaneity within a discipline that is at once heightened and highly polished. The actor must perform the structure laid out in the text, yet freely improvise within that structure, making discoveries and decisions moment by moment in order to tell the truth on-stage. Clues are embedded within the composition both to suggest and, often, to impel the performer toward a range of acting choices. Chekhov’s emphasis on the performer’s creative individuality and intuition, his reliance on imagery, movement, improvisation, form a brilliant partnership with the singing actor, since music inherently possesses meaning, images, atmospheres, and gestures. By engaging, experimenting with, and exercising Chekhov’s ideas, the singing actor can develop an enlivened and specific method to help her reliably achieve what Chekhov calls the state of inspiration.” (*Bennett, 2013*)

James Haffner also looked at the method from the perspective of opera:

“Young singers tend to regard the throat as the source for impulse for their work as opposed to what Michael Chekhov describes as Ideal Center. The result is the “singing-head” effect, where the performance is concentrated from the neck up creating a disconnect with the singer’s body. Another common trap is that the singer will attempt gestures (albeit “habitual” gesturing) resulting in acting from the shoulders and/or elbows. This inevitably leads to a high level of tension potentially (and usually) inhibiting the vocal technique. By engaging a physical approach to the character, singers will reconnect the voice to the rest of the body, limiting physical (and vocal) tension and expressing full presence of character. In a training scenario, this aspect of the technique must be addressed first...The Michael Chekhov approach to theatre training, however, requires no adaptation in its application to music-theatre. The tenets of the technique can be expressed fully in musical form, which facilitates a more integrated and richer performance approach. By focusing on a vocabulary rooted in music, the Michael Chekhov technique is invaluable in the training of young opera singers.” (*Haffner, 2015*)

2.5 Where was the method used scientifically?

The neuroscientific research on Chekhov is equally exciting. Scientists are rather surprised that somebody had worked with these topics so early on, which at that time seemed very cryptic but are now becoming more and more scientifically substantiated. I found a publication that deals with the relationship between kinaesthetic sensations, emotional states and cognitive processes, and the extent to which Chekhov's movement and exercises have an impact on the psyche. At its core, this publication says something quite central about the method and confirms my research:

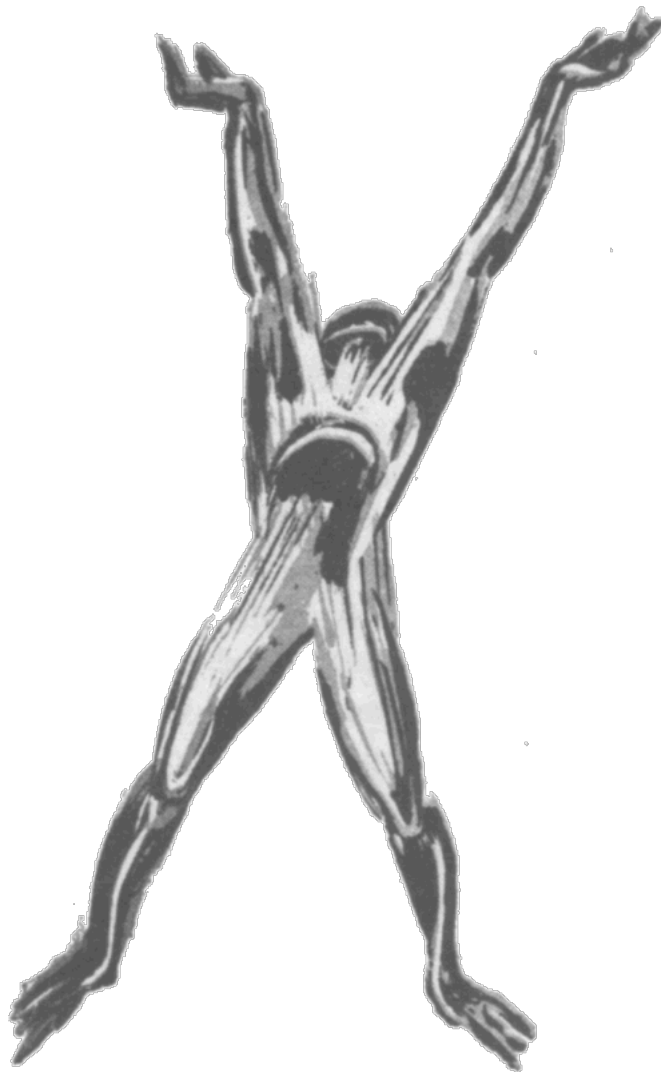
“Modern embodied approaches to cognitive science overlap with ideas long explored in theater. Performance coaches such as Michael Chekhov have emphasized proprioceptive awareness of movement as a path to attaining psychological states relevant for embodying characters and inhabiting fictional spaces. ...the key assumption underlying these approaches is that the mental processes we associate with cognition are fundamentally linked to bodily processes, such as perception and movement (and, by extension, to the environment in which the body is situated). ...these findings provide a preliminary support for Chekhov’s intuition that expanding and contracting physical actions exert opposite effects on the practitioners’ psychological experience. Further studies are needed to consider a wider range of factors at work in Chekhov’s method and the embodied experience of acting in general.” (*Olenina, Amazone, Eckard, Papenfuss, 2019*)

Neuroscientific findings on embodiment or mirror neurons may represent another important modern field of Chekhov research. However, in this work I will concentrate on the artistic research and the exploration of the artistic.

2.6 Similar methods in music

Many methods work with similar "tools" as Chekhov, such as the embodiment method mentioned above. But there is also a similarity to the theory or approach of the "Terlusollogie (German)" as well as to the hand signals of the Estill singing method. Even the hand signs of the solmisation should reflect the effect of the outside and reflect the inside. The whole idea of mental training also supports a similar approach to Chekhov. In terms of mental training in music, I found these books important: "Bewegungslinien der Musik", "the inner game of music" and "Effortless Mastery".

(I briefly discuss some of these books in literature section.)



* opening to infinite distance

“the body of an actor must absorb psychological qualities, must be filled and permeated with them so that they will convert it gradually into a sensitive membrane, a kind of receiver and conveyor of the subtlest images, feelings, emotions and will impulses.” (*Chekhov, 1953, S.14*)

2.7 Hypothesis - artistic-research question

After having dealt intensively with Chekhov, I am now at the beginning of my research. The method - with its wide range of topics and many interesting and unusual approaches - offers a lot of space for individual thought. Due to the previous research of its effects in theater and opera, I am convinced that my research project in the field of jazz can constitute a valuable addition to the body of existing literature. I am exploring the Chekhov method with the action research design, utilizing three studies: workshops, duo sessions and my artistic work. I hope to achieve similarly good effects in jazz as in acting, to support musicians and singers in their artistic work. This is my hypothesis:

"The Chekhov Method helps jazz singers and musicians to stimulate the imagination for ideas, to improve their sound and to be more focused in what they do. I am sure that this technique can also be a very helpful tool for emotionality, presence and expression in music."

Over the course of my action research, a second phase developed, to which I then found the following sub-hypothesis:

"The Chekhov method has a comprehensive effect on the authenticity and artistic personality of a jazz singer or instrumentalist."

3. METHODS

“After all our studies we acquire only that which we put into practice.” *Goethe*
(*Chekhov, 1953, p.205*)

I approached the subject of Chekhov and jazz intuitively-empirically and rather playfully, probably just as Chekhov himself would have done.

The concept for my research is based on an action and descriptive research design. This mix of designs has proven to be important for my mode of operation. I am interested in the cyclical process of trying things out and evaluating them, in order to then decide on the next steps of furthering and deepening my research.

I hope to understand the Chekhov method in relation to music on a broad level, and to come to more and more precise results. These should be the basis of my artistic work as well as of my work as a teacher.

Over the course of my research, two phases emerged, which I examined on the basis of hypotheses. The first phase was concerned with approaching the method through literature and practical testing in three studies. From these results and summaries, a second research phase opened up, based on a survey of all participants and subsequent statistical analysis.

First research phase

3.1 Blog

In my blog (German), all results and thoughts are collected. Here, my workshops, duo-sessions and my work are documented and evaluated in more detail and you can find the complete master thesis both in German and English. In the beginning of my studies, I had another blog, which I switched from shortly before the end of my master thesis. Unfortunately my first blog was blocked because I did not want to give my credit card number. I ask for your understanding.

3.2 Literature

To approach the method, I read books on the subject at the beginning, by Chekhov but also by Lenard Petit, who is one of the main representatives of this technique at the moment. Here are the passages that inspired me to do the exercises.

3.2.1 Michail A. Cechov (1946) “Die Kunst des Schauspielers“

The basics of his ideas I learned from this German book. It must be mentioned that this is the predecessor of the standard work "To the actor" (1953).

The advantage of this first version is that the connection to Rudolf Steiner is expressed much more clearly. In the American version, this reference has been softened. Through this book I got the inspiration for the "Forrest Walk", but also useful basic hints for the gesture.

Chekhov already recognized the effect of mirror neurons at that time, by writing that a spectacle is created through the interaction between actors and audience. The audience experiences waves of compassion, trust and love sent over the ramp, and starts to play along with the actor. The artist should be aware of this interaction. (*Chekhov, 1946, p.26*)

Chekhov had a lot of imagination which was reflected in his ideas for exercises.

Some of them may seem abstract when viewed from the outside, but that exactly is the method's strength. I took the following exercises from the book:

Exercise 5: Inspiration for Sign Exercise p.46; Exercise 8: for Sign p.74; Exercise 19: Inspiration for Forrest Walk and Monbijou Bridge p.93; Exercise 6: Idea for Forrest Walk Session p.48; Atmosphere Score p.57 Inspiration for Working on REISE!; Exercise 28: Comparing with other artists p.129.

3.2.2 Lenard Petit (2014) “Die Chekhov-Methode“

Petit states that everything begins with the movement of the body on stage, because that is what the audience sees. The body is a central instrument of our expression. By becoming aware of the body as an instrument, we also become more sensitive to movements, even the finest, minimally executed ones. (*Petit, 2010, p.17*)

This book was important, especially with regard to the preparation for the workshops.

Many interesting exercises and techniques are suggested here. Most of them I have not tried yet, but they are certainly a good source of work for the future. Petit partly distances himself from Chekhov and tries to bring the technique into the present day or add his own thoughts.

This also shows the flexibility and variability of the method that Chekhov had in mind. It should not be dogmatic, the students are asked to think along and to understand the exercises as a basis, as an engine. It is certainly the case that “Tankstelle“ Berlin works with the method in a completely different way than the Cechov studio in Berlin.

3.2.3 B. Green & T. Galaway (2008) "Inner Game Musik"

This book is a wonderful addition and continuation of Chekhov.

Here, too, one finds the concept of relaxed concentration. The book also describes good exercises on how to get to this point. "What does the difference between attention and effort feel like?" The exercises of "concentrating on the sound", "concentrating on feelings" ([Green, Galaway, 2008, p.50 and 51](#)) sound very much like Chekhov to me: watching a movie, "drama in music", making up stories about the song I am singing, and then seeing them in front of me. This book was developed from mental training for athletes. Unfortunately, I discovered it too late for me and my research. I can only recommend this book to every musician. I would also like to add a few important quotes here that have similarities with Chekhov's ideas. Green and Galaway speak of "kinesthetic" body targets, which they describe using dancers as examples. These form an inner image of their own body in the imagination and follow the movement, they are then able to execute the presented images and kinesthetically felt movements according to their ideas. They also confirm that it has been found that these "kinesthetic" exercises actually activate and program areas of the nervous system. They also say that if we see ourselves as the only mediator of the musical message, we will not have to worry about the impression we make on other people. ([Green, Galaway, 2008, p.65 & p.86](#))

It is interesting that these books often see self-doubt as an obstacle to artistic development. <https://theinnergame.com/inner-game-books/inner-game-of-music>



** from inner game of music (Green; Galaway, 1986)*

3.2.4 Kenny Werner (1996) „Effortless Mastery“

It is also recommended to read Kenny Werner's book in relation to Chekhov. He was the first to draw attention to this area in the jazz scene. Werner states that we often cannot be ourselves on stage, that we block ourselves through negative thoughts. He talks about technical skills, but they are far from being art. Trusting yourself is the basic requirement for making music. That is why his meditation exercises are highly recommended, especially in combination with Chekhov. More about Kenny Werner can be found here:

<https://kennywerner.com>

3.3 The three techniques

3.3.1 Physical and psychological gesture 🖐️

“In fact, the purpose of Chekhov’s “psychological gesture” was to help actors capture complex context with simple archetypal gestures.” (*Haffner, 2017*)

Probably the best known and most central technique of Michael Chekhov is the psychological gesture: an imaginary gesture that can be used as a central sentence or clue for the interpretation of a song. I learned how to work with it from the books I read on the subject (see literature above). I found the following mode of operation with it in the workshops (1-3) and in my work. The gesture is about finding a central sentence of the song that includes the "will". It has to be an active sentence, one that stands above everything you want to express in the song. Then I try to find a posture / gesture to this sentence, and define it as exact as possible, as far as the gaze posture of the arms and legs is concerned, so that it feels right in connection with the song.

“This exercise will gradually establish those fine connections so necessary to the linking of your vivid imagination with your body, voice and psychology. your means of expression will thus become flexible and obedient to your commands.” (*Chekhov, 1953, p.55*)

What effect does the process have on the voice on the expression?

Chekhov suggests to fix the mental state in the posture / gesture and to observe his movements. One should repeat the gesture several times and then try to speak the monologue with the psychological gesture until the general character and the colouring (quality) of the gesture is recognizable in the way of speaking. (*Chekhov, 1998, p.63*)

Will it be the same with singing as with acting? What is it like when I sing a song only in the performance, with the psychological gesture, does it have the same effect?

“Let us call them Psychological Gestures, because their aim is to influence, stir, mold and attune your whole inner life to its artistic aims and purposes.” (*Chekhov, 1953, S. 108*)

By the way, the word "psychological" here is not related to Freud's psychoanalysis, it is merely an expression for the feeling of “I”.
(*Petit, 2014, p.114*).

3.3.2 Atmosphere

“Atmospheres are limitless and to be found everywhere. Even landscape, every street, house, room; a library, a hospital, a cathedral, a noisy restaurant, a museum: morning, noon, twilight, night: spring, summer, fall, winter - every phenomenon and event has its own particular atmosphere“ (*Chekhov, 1953, p.75*)

I found this topic more difficult to grasp. In the workshops, I tried out different things in this direction. I found the Forest Walk to be most exciting, an idea which also came from Chekhov's book. He describes the gesture by comparing it to trees; you can see them growing upwards like a cypress, paired with a touch of silence and concentration. An old oak tree, on the other hand, is rather impetuous, spreading out in all directions. (*Chekhov, 1998, p. 245, 246*) On the basis of these quotations, we tried to capture the mood of the forest area, the gesture of the trees to then bring it into a free improvisation.

“But although Creative Images are independent and changeable within themselves, although they are full of emotions and desires, you, while working upon your parts, must not think that they will come to you fully developed and accomplished. They don't. To complete themselves, to reach the degree of expressiveness that would satisfy you, they will require your active collaboration. You must ask questions of these images, as you would ask questions of a friend. Sometimes you must even give them strict orders.“ (*Chekhov, 1953, p.42*)

He also describes how one should imagine a young man becoming an old man, a sprout growing to become a large, multi-branched tree, a winter landscape turning into a spring, summer, fall and finally a winter landscape again, etc. Through this outer appearance, one can now look into the intimate, inner life of a figure. (*Chekhov, 1998, p.23*). I tried to realize this idea in the free improvisation after the Forest Walk, in which we imagined the landscape through the seasons while singing.

As an additional atmosphere exercise, I tried to create a free improvisation from the participants' favorite songs. Chekhov proposes to imagine a well-known musical phrase from memory and develop a gesture from it. In this way a whole series of gestures can be developed, created from the music. (*Chekhov, 1998, p.76*). We listened carefully to our recordings of favorite songs and searched for aspects, moods (images), gestures and atmospheres associated with the song. These gestures were the basis for free improvisation. (*Workshop 4 and 5*)

I also let the atmosphere flow into the duo work with Andrew and Benjamin, both fellow students at Maastricht Conservatory. I did this, for example, in the New York session with Andrew. With Benjamin, I thought of a landscape while playing a song.

3.3.3 Imaginary Tool

“By using the objective method and technique the actor will amass with himself a great number of sound and liberating qualities which are certain to displace all destructive influences that lurk obscurely in the dark recesses of his subconscious. What we usually call „developing one’s talent“ is often nothing more than freeing it from the influences that hamper, occlude and frequently destroy it entirely.“ ([*Chekhov, 1953, p. 240*](#))

This idea was my own, because I noticed how famous singers shaped their singing and improvisation in ways that reminded me of active practices. For example, I always had to think of a lasso being swung in this song by [Ella Fitzgerald 3:36](#). When I watch [Billie Holiday](#), she uses her right arm to steer to something - that might happen unconsciously, but apparently it also helps her to phrase. Similarly, I observe how external movements facilitate an apparent precision in phrasing with Liz Wright and Mel Torme, not to mention Bobby McFerrin.

With this in mind, I came across the imaginary center of Chekhov and turned it into the Imaginary Tool. The center now becomes an object with which one imagines an activity that happens outside of the body such as swinging a lasso, playing a game of ping pong, or any other activity that is simultaneously connected to the outside and the body. The imagination outside, like the imaginary center, sets in motion the imagination. The imagination that exists in relation to the field of activity strengthens the clear reference to something rhythmic and tonal. I worked with this idea mainly in the duo sessions, but I also tried it out successfully in a workshop ([*Workshop 6*](#)). In the book "The inner game Musik" I found a similar idea. Here you should imagine a ping pong ball jump from one side of the net to the other. This fantasy game should be accelerated for some time. ([*Green, Galloway, 2008, p.207*](#))

3.4 Three research studies

I tested the techniques of the Chekhov method in three studies, with different experimental settings, to get a comprehensive picture of what it can and cannot offer to the world of music. I started with workshops. From there, I decided to test the method further in duo sessions. Finally, I explored the method for my artistic work. The individual entries for these three studies can be found on my [blog](#).

3.4.1 Workshops

Hosting research through workshops was clear to me in the very beginning, because I wanted to know how the method worked from the outside. In spring 2019, I had already started a preliminary investigation by means of a workshop at the Maastricht Conservatory, which is where this idea originated. It was exciting for me to work mainly with singers of the Maastricht Conservatory (between 20 - 30 years old) and to try out the three techniques of the method in six workshops. For many of the participants, acting was something new, and so was this way of working. For me, this offered a more or less neutral starting point. I recorded most of the workshops on video or only as audio. In the workshops, we primarily worked on psychological and physical gestures, but also on atmospheres and the imaginary tool.



photos: Sebastian Stert 2019

3.4.2 Duo sessions

“I’m always surrounded by images.” *Max Reinhardt*

(Chekhov, 1953, p.42)

This study resulted from my duo work with two wonderful musicians and fellow students. With both of them I concentrated mainly on the Imaginary Tool, but also tried out the atmosphere and gesture.



Photo: Frank Hirschhausen 2019

I formed the first duo with Australian Andrew Saragossi, an outstanding tenor saxophonist who has been studying with me since 2018 in the master's program and whose work focuses on free improvisation. Here is an example of his work in the Duo Meatshell. He is interested in acting as an accompanying instrument, and to implement this by means of multi-phonetic techniques. We worked together on free improvisation, but also on the standard "They say it's wonderful".

The second duo partner was the guitarist and composer Benjamin Schneider, with whom I founded the Duo Aquarius. We concentrated on jazz standards and free improvisation, and wanted to try out new things with it to create our own sound. Over the course of our collaboration, I asked him to work with the technique as well. We mainly worked with the Imaginary Tool, but also with the gesture and the atmosphere.



Photo: Peter Schneider 2019

2.4.3 My work

This part was the most difficult for me, it was not easy to find a good experimental model. But after several approaches I arrived at the following attempts.

1. "REISE!"

The first thing I did with my vocalese was to sing "REISE!" with the physical and psychological gesture to improve the sound and bring a lightness and looseness to the interpretation. The aim was to find out what exactly a good mode of operation could look like, and how it compares to the first recording. I will document the work on the piece.

2. "Monbijou Bridge"

Inspired by Helen my fellow student, I started composing a song out of an atmosphere as a second self-experiment. I did this using a video as a think tank, which gave me the basis for the atmosphere to this composition. I also tried to document this process with the goal to have a finished recording of the song. This can be found on the blog under "my work"

3.5 Evaluation

2.5.1 Evaluation using video and audio recordings

I evaluated and described all recordings (audio/video) of the three studies. These can be found on my blog.

3.5.2 First questionnaire

Directly after my series of workshops, I created a preliminary small questionnaire (first questionnaire) with open questions, in which the participants were asked to talk about their experiences with the Chekhov method.

Second research phase

3.6 Second questionnaire and further hypothesis

I initiated the second research phase at the end of my results and experiences from the first research phase. I put together a more differentiated questionnaire (2nd questionnaire) using all the results of the first questionnaire, and incorporating my experiences utilizing the method in my research (workshops, duo-sessions, my work). In order to be able to ask accurate questions, I determined commonalities from all studies and techniques. The core of this questionnaire therefore consists of the three techniques that I modified for music; gesture, atmosphere and imaginary tool. All three techniques have one thing in common: Through concentration and imagination three areas of the artist get reached: The **emotional level** (red), the **physical level** (green) and the **cognitive level** (blue). Afterwards, I assigned important keywords to the three areas, which I found in my three studies. Of course, there is overlap between the three levels and you cannot separate them as easily as I do now, but for this research I find it useful.

Emotional levels:

clear combination of message/message and clarity of text

Phrasing / Rhythm / Texture

emotional expression, new means of expression textures and sounds

Better connections to the audience and to my authentic message

Physical level:

Body Awareness

natural and body tension/posture

Sound / sonority

Awareness of movements

Better sound of voice and presence

Cognitive level:

new ideas / imagination

Let go of the inner critic

concentration / being in the moment

Better focussing and clear concrete ideas

When I look at all these marked summaries of the levels, I come to a sub-hypothesis that I would like to base the second questionnaire on:

"The Chekhov method has a comprehensive effect on the authenticity and artistic personality of a singer and instrumentalist. "

I have used this questionnaire for all my studies for evaluation.

4. RESULTS

4.1 First research phase

In this research, I used three studies to explore how I can bring Michael Chekhov's acting method to the world of jazz. On the basis of three studies, I examined Chekhov's method of acting in a jazz context.

4.1.1 Practical results

My practical results from all three studies, with all three techniques of the Chekhov method, can be seen and understood on my [blog](#).

Here I have pointed out important practical results in individual posts. Selected important parts of my practical work can also be found in the table "[All results from the studies](#)".

Nevertheless, I would like to highlight an important aspect that emerged after the Forest Walk. My fellow student [Helen](#), bassist and singer, was interestingly inspired to compose after this atmospheric exercise.

Chekhov says that at the beginning of a composer's creative work, there oftentimes is the desire to give shape to a suddenly overflowing atmosphere. (*Chekhov, 1998, p. 37*) Helen describes the process in these words: "Overall, the magical atmosphere of my own workshop experience was highly influential in the compositional process. The music is reminiscent of the atmosphere and environment during the workshop, which felt uninterrupted and refreshingly authentic."

Here is the wonderful result of composing from one atmosphere: "[A tree tells.](#)" More about Helen's experience with Chekhov can be found in the [appendix](#).

4.1.2 First questionnaire

In my first study, with seven Bachelor and Master students (86 % singers, 14 % instrumentalists) of the Maastricht Conservatory of Music I developed the techniques of the method in six workshops of 1.5 hours each, over a period of four months.

In the workshops, intensive work was based on three different techniques of Chekhov: the gesture, the atmosphere and the Imaginary Tool (Imaginary Center). All exercises were adapted for the musical area in preparation and through my experience with the students. In a first questionnaire, I asked my regular workshop participants about their attitude towards the Chekhov method. The questionnaire was deliberately composed of open questions in order to not prescribe wording or content. This resulted in "keywords" which I used for my further research.

Question 1. Which exercises/plays did you like the most and why?

1. "Gesture"
2. "Awareness"
3. "Meditation"

Here I see that the practice of the gesture has made the most impression and that radiating and meditation exercises are important to the students.

Question 2. In which ways do you think the method can help/support you?

- body-language
- lyrics
- **message**
- awareness
- **inner critic**
- different moods
- emotion expression
- imagination

There are overlaps in content, so I put "lyrics" and "message" in one category. It is interesting that two keywords appear more often: "message" and "inner critic". By concentrating on the message, the inner criticism in the head is weakened, as Nina-Nathalie Bartsch also describes in her *thesis*.

Question 3. Can you imagine to integrate the method in your work?

And if yes how?

message 14 %
stubborn 58 %
warm-up 14 %
improve the imagination 14 %

What is interesting is that the gesture stands out as a method that many would like to continue working with. Even one instrumentalist found this technique effective.

Question 4. What do you recognize as a listener hearing the others?

better sound

presence

confidence

better expression

message, meaning

concentration

authentic

It is good that I did not give any keywords and that they appear by themselves in the answers. While listening, the **message** dominates again and more keywords are added such as **sound**, **expression** and **authenticity**.

Question 5. Did you see a change happening when the others used the method?

yes 100% of

no 0%

Keywords I found in the text:

- **concentration/focus**
- message
- more convincing
- confident
- body-language
- **sound**
- emotional essence
- grounded

I consider it a great success that all participants noticed a change in the way they used the technique. The words **sound** and **focus** were in the foreground.

4.2 Second research phase

After the first research phase I collected and compared all my data and results. I came to the conclusion that I wanted to go into more detail in a second research phase in order to come to a clearer, statistically more relevant statement. For this purpose, I created a second comprehensive questionnaire in the form of a survey, which resulted from the common features of all three different studies.

The basis for these commonalities were Michael Chekhov's three techniques modified for the jazz field: Gesture, Atmosphere and Imaginary Tool, which focus through imagination and concentration on three levels:

emotional level, cognitive level and physical level.

This led to another hypothesis (*see methods*), which is the main statement above the second questionnaire:

"The Chekhov method has a comprehensive effect on the authenticity and artistic personality of a singer or instrumentalist in the jazz field."

4.2.1 Results of the second questionnaire

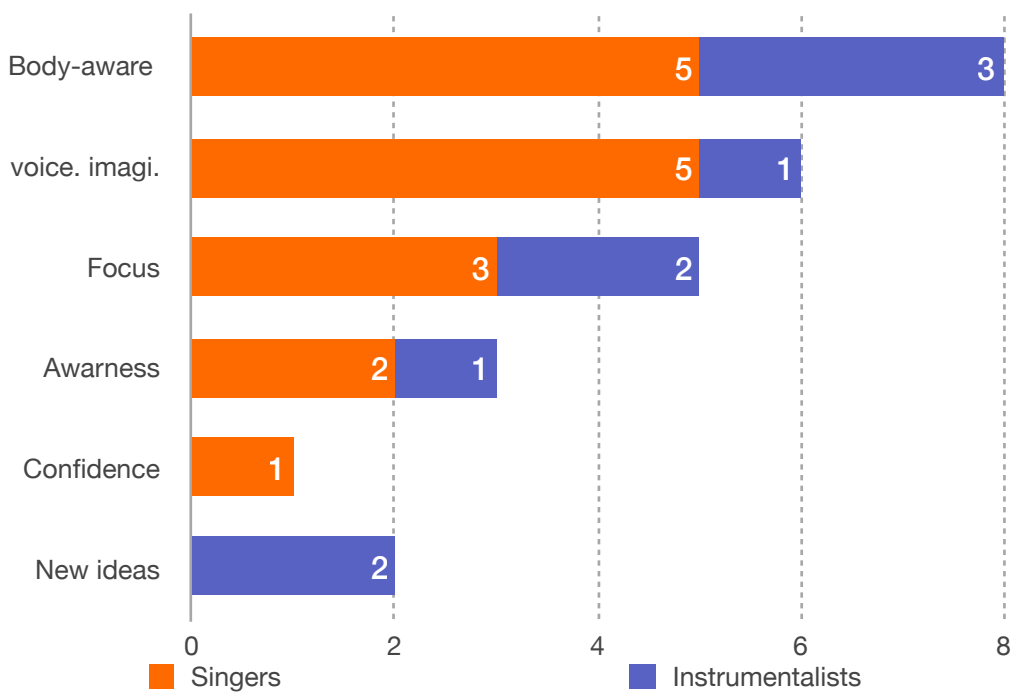
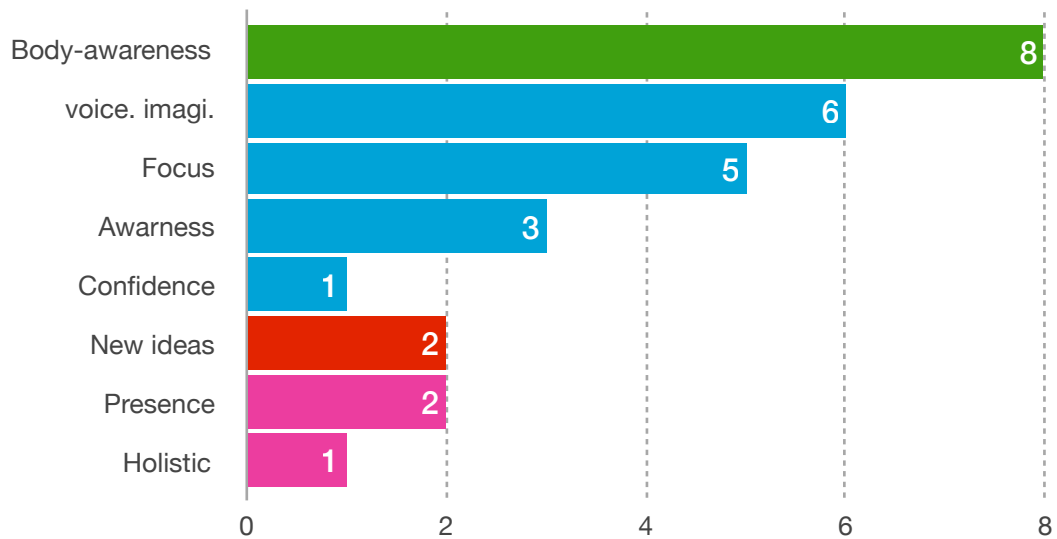
Fifteen participants, including myself, took part in the survey using the questionnaire (*2nd questionnaire*).

In the following, I concentrate on the results of the singers and musicians. Of these, nine were singers and five were instrumentalists between the ages of 20 and 30. Four male, ten female, all Bachelor or Master students of the Maastricht Conservatory (NL). This group includes all participants of the workshops including the Forest Walk, whether once or every time, and the two duo partners from the Duo Sessions. This quantitative survey can of course only show possible trends and can rather be seen as a preliminary investigation.

AO01 Which words do you associate with the Chekhov-experience?

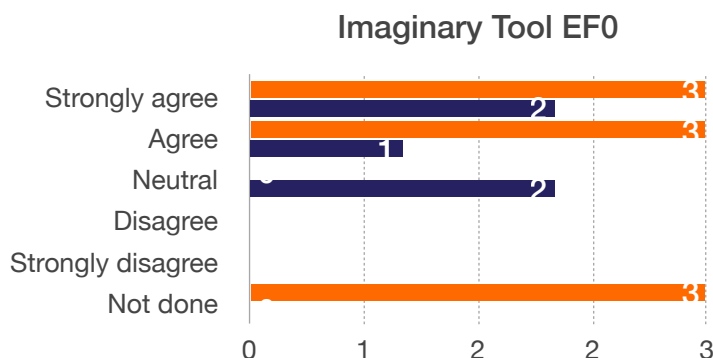
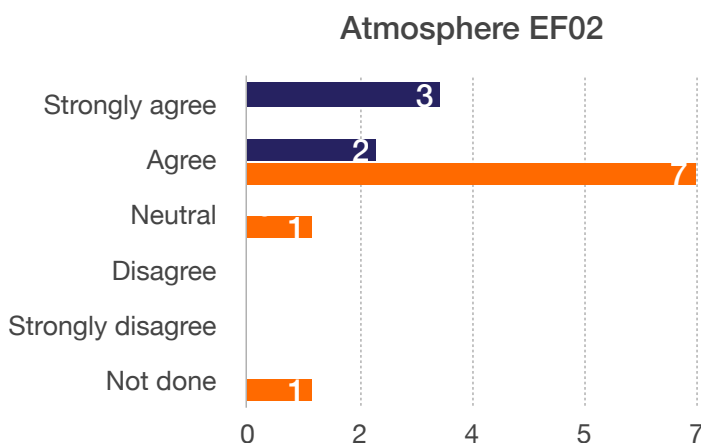
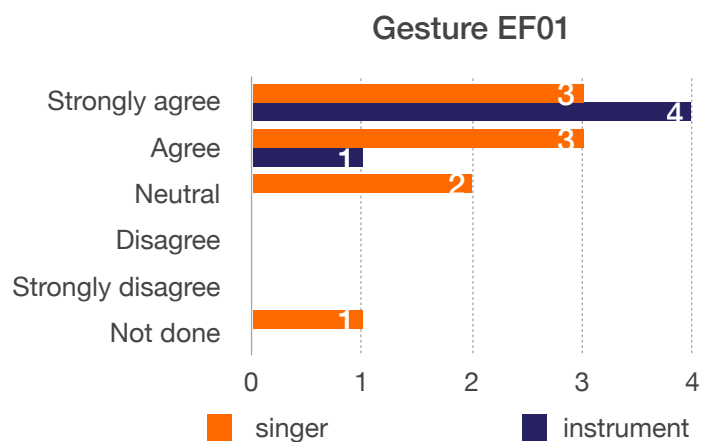
My evaluation, in this case, shows that most words chosen in this multiple choice question were: "Body awareness"(29%), "stimulation of imagination"(21%) and "focus" (18 %). It seems that the method is perceived as "physical" by many participants regardless of whether they are musicians or singers. The questions about the cognitive area had the most number of votes, but that was also the largest group of five options. It is interesting that the options for the emotional level "new idea" were very low and only checked off by musicians (20%) whereas the "presence18% " seemed more important to singers.

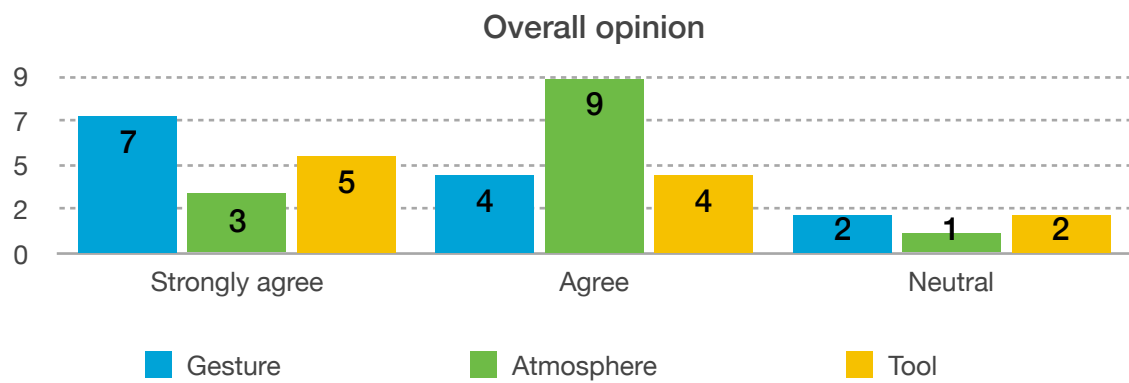
bodily level
 emotional level
 cognitive level
 Mix of all levels



EFO Effect of the three Chekhov-Methods gesture, atmosphere and imaginary tool

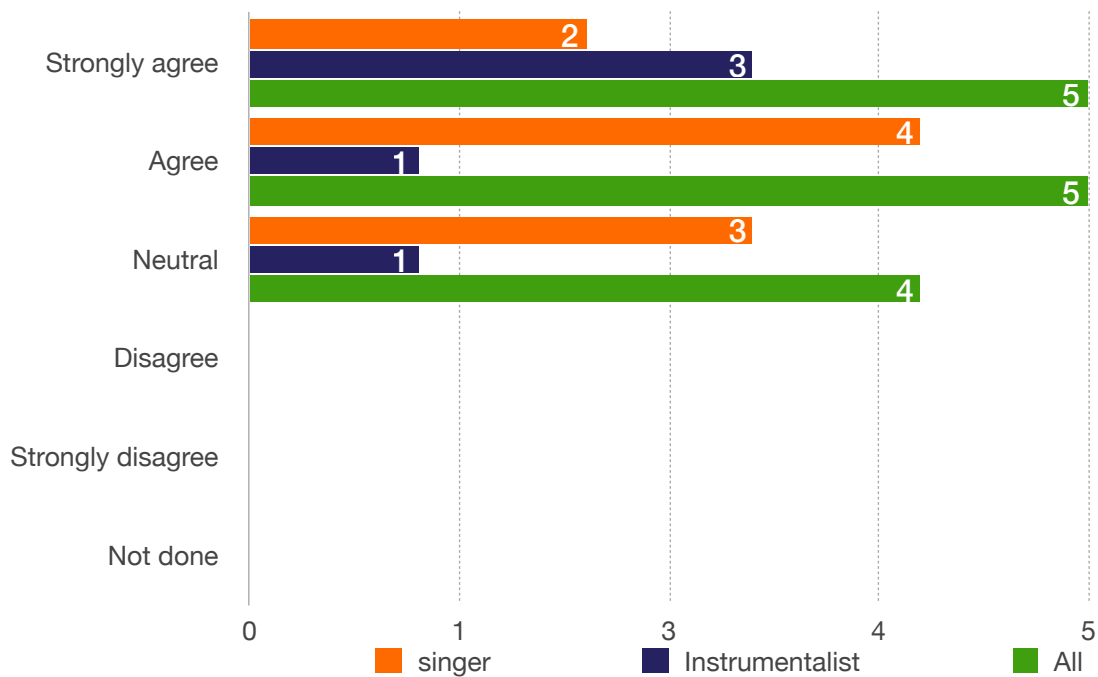
The level of agreement shows a clear answer to the three methods. Gesture 79 % Atmosphere 86% Imaginary Tool 64 % . All techniques did on average have 76% positive effect. It is interesting that the gesture seemed to impress musicians a little more, whereas singers were a little more impressed by the atmosphere; I had thought it would be the other way around. But these are, of course, only small tendencies. I actually only used the imaginary tool intensively in the duo-sessions, but they “strongly agreed” with this technique. Despite the one time, we did the “tool” in the workshops, the response from the singers was quite good. The atmosphere and the gesture were liked more by the instrumentalists than by the singers.





EFO4 The Chekhov-Method gave me useful tools for improvisation

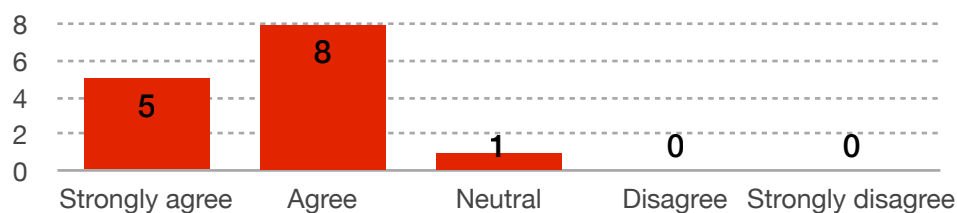
71 % of all participants agreed that the Method is a useful tool for improvisation in jazz (free-improvisation). 66% of the instrumentalists strongly agreed, and 22% of the singers.



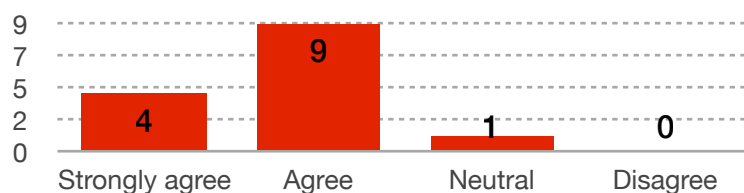
CO01 Through the concentration on the Chekhov I could better

What catches the eye is that there are two **red emotional** themes first: “Better expression” and “Message” (93% agree answers), which plays an important role in the artistic personality. After that are more **blue topics** (“imagination” 86 % and “more in the moment” 79 %) they speak for the “focus”: the imagination that challenges us to be in the moment. What you can clearly see is the focus or the imagination, expresses the message more clearly, as well as the expressiveness of the emotion, which is very interrelated. These answers are a good example to show the path from brain to the emotion.

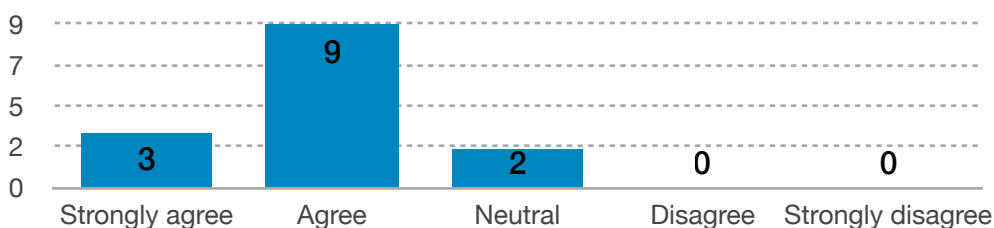
1. Better expression



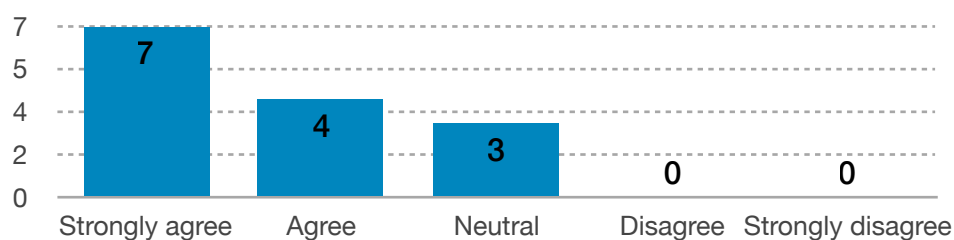
2nd message



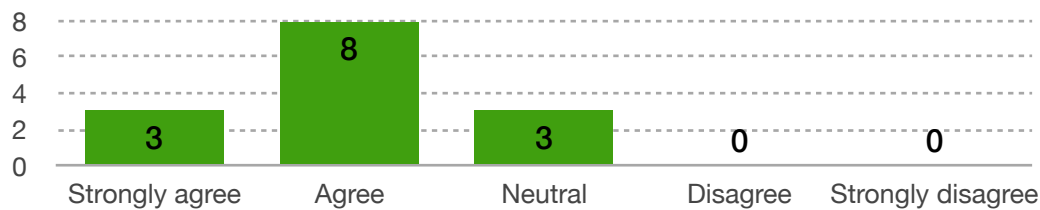
3. Imagination/ideas



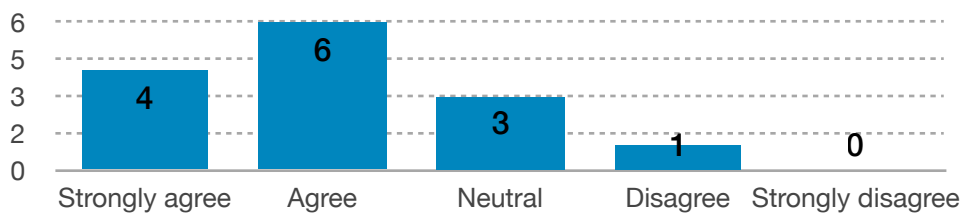
4. More in the moment



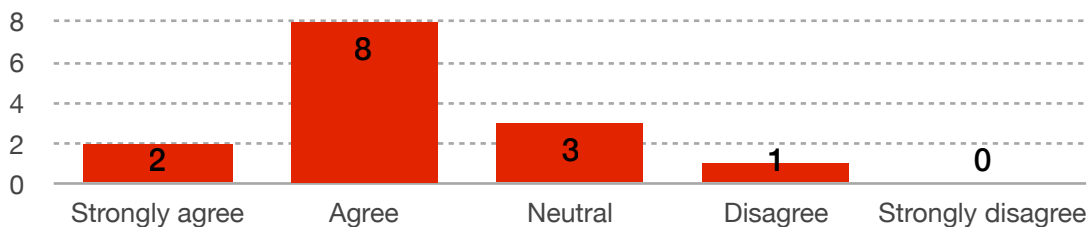
5. body warnings



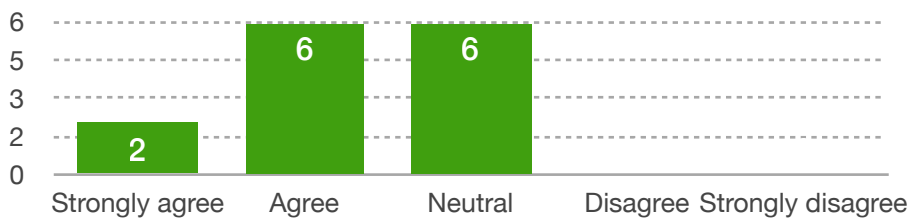
6. No stressful thoughts



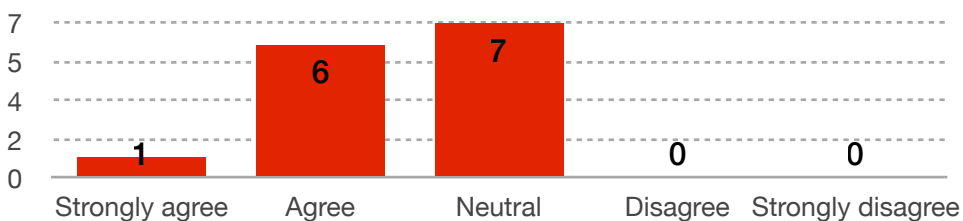
7. New texture



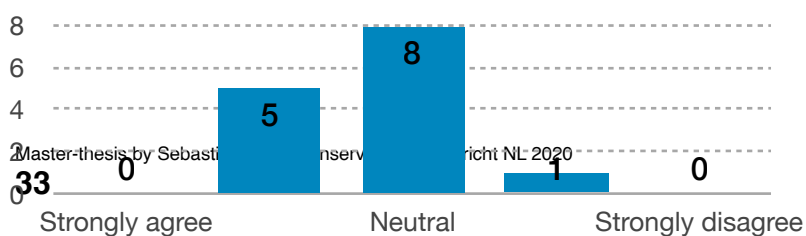
8. Body relaxed



9. Different phrasing

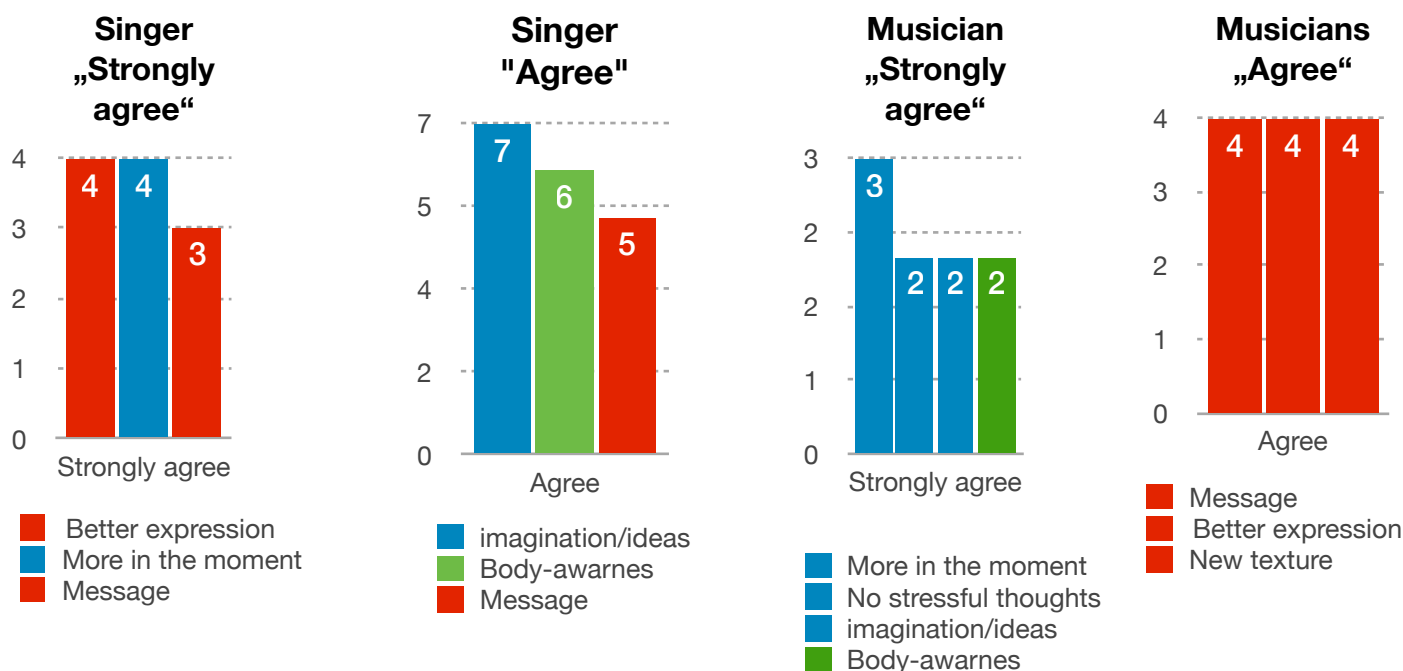


10. Rhythmical preciseness



singer vs. musicians

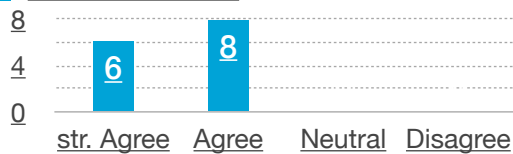
If I look at the “strongly agree” answers, the singers could develop a better connection to the message, by focusing on the method and thus have a deeper emotional experience (78 %). For the musicians, I noticed the blue cognitive areas to have improved. Many also considered body awareness to be important.



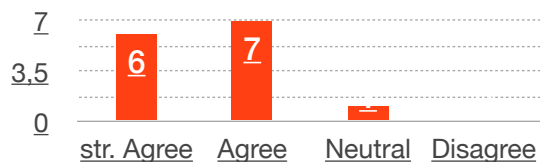
TO01 When I listened to the others I recognized a positive effect on

In this result, I sorted the answers from the most agree to the most disagree answers to see, what the singers and musicians noticed the most from the outside. Concentration is clearly the most mentioned (100% agreed from them 43% strongly) followed by deeper emotional connection to a song (93% agreed from them 43% strongly). Clearly, better rhythm feel had no effect on the performance, 86% of the participants checked off neutral or disagree. More than half of the participants 64% saw an effect on the phrasing, but that still was not satisfactory enough for me. That could be a very interesting point for further research, because in the world of acting, the Chekhov Method has a big influence in the kind of phrasing.

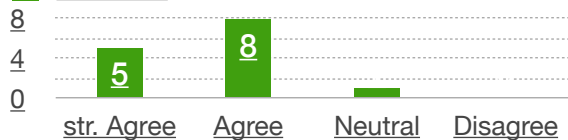
1. Concentration



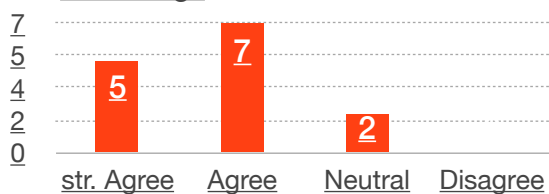
2. Deeper emotional Connection



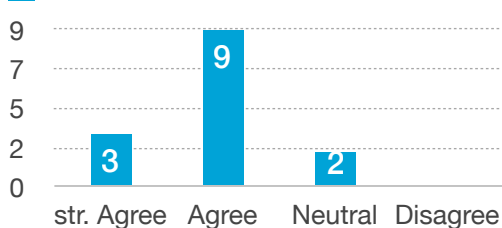
3. Sound



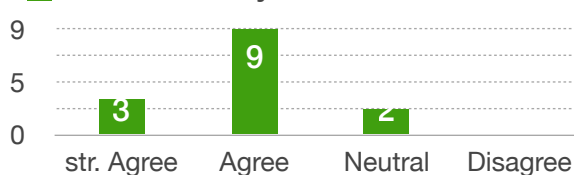
4. Message



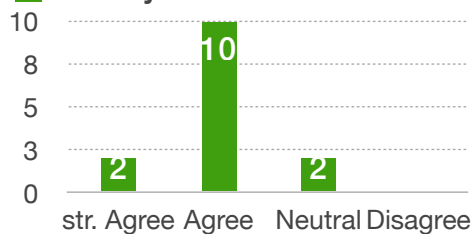
5. Self-conciseness



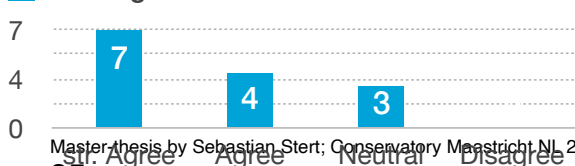
5. Positive body- tension



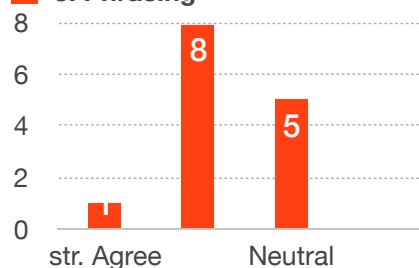
6. Body awareness



7. Imagination/Idea



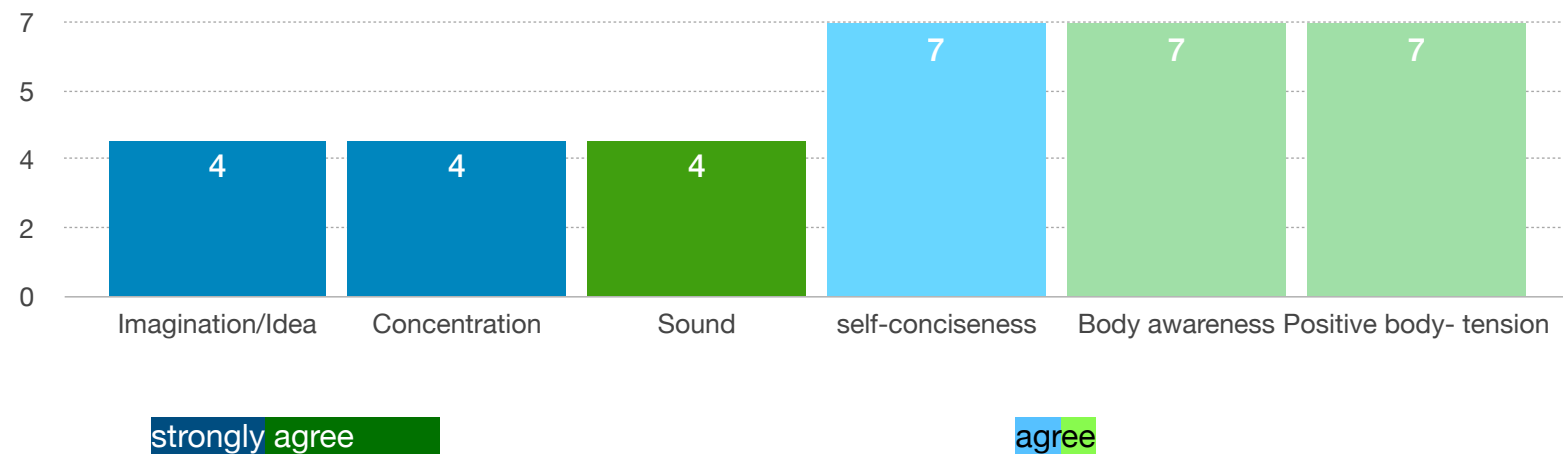
8. Phrasing



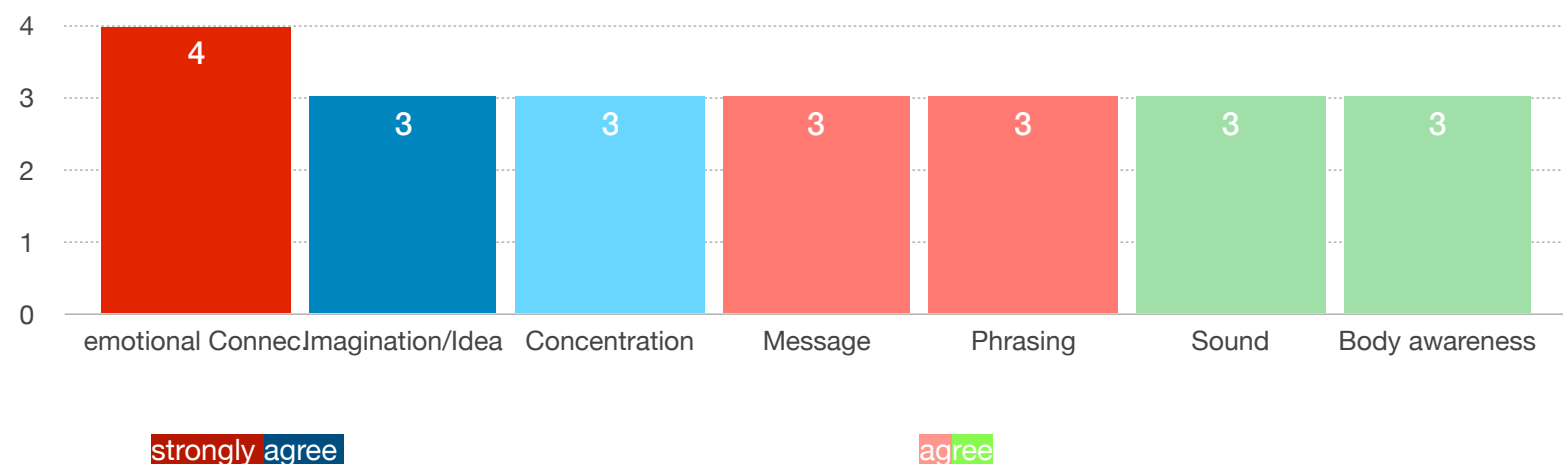
Difference between the groups

These are the best ratings for this category among singers and instrumentalists. Interestingly, there is no emotional answer in **the singers group, from the outside they tended to recognize the cognitive and bodily changes**. The **instrumentalists saw the biggest difference in their performance on the emotional level**, like emotional connection and message of a song.

From a singers view



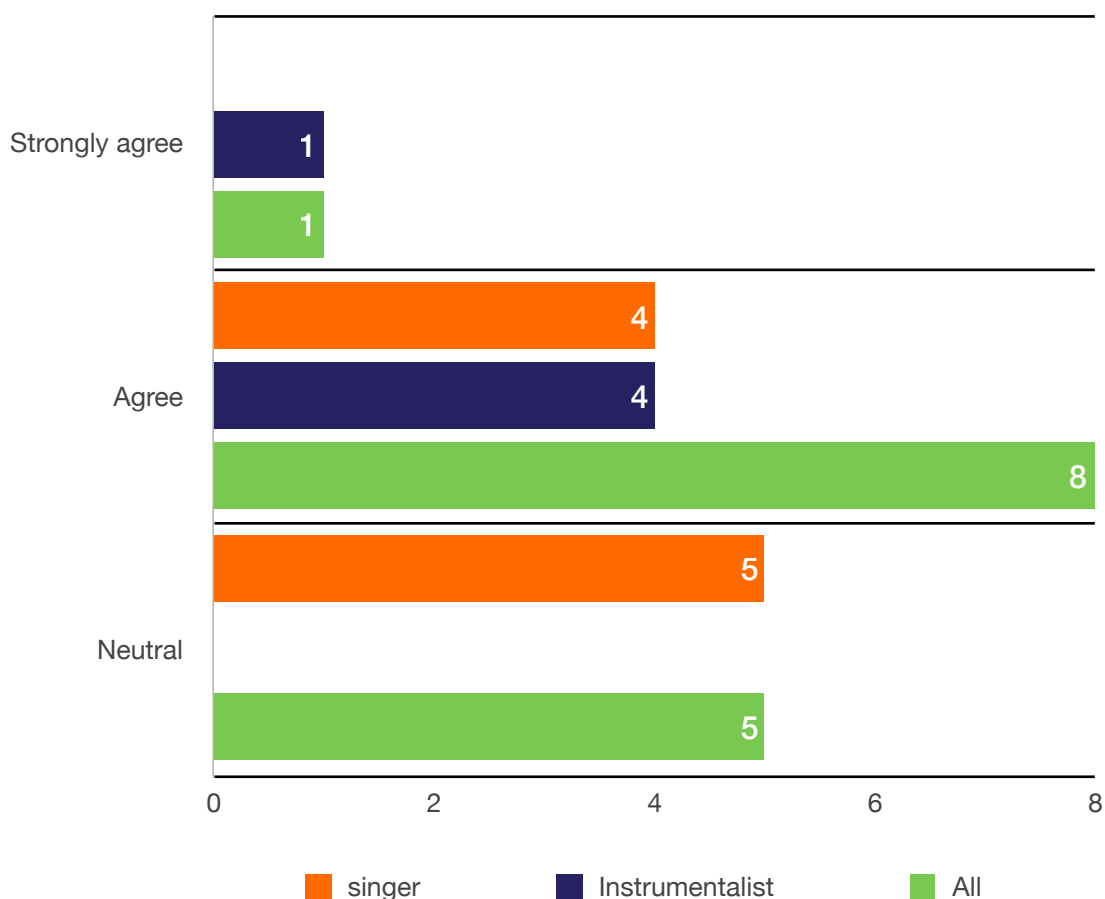
From a musicians view



NT01 The Chekhov Method is a good starting point for compositions.

It would be worthwhile to delve deeper into the topic of this special field in order to find good methods and processes that use the Chekhov Method such as “the atmosphere” ideally and structured for the basis of creating songs and text. I forgot that he also wrote about this idea in his book. (*Chekhov, 1998, p. 37*)

It was interesting to see that 100% of the instrumentalists found the method interesting for getting ideas for compositions compared to 44% of the singers.

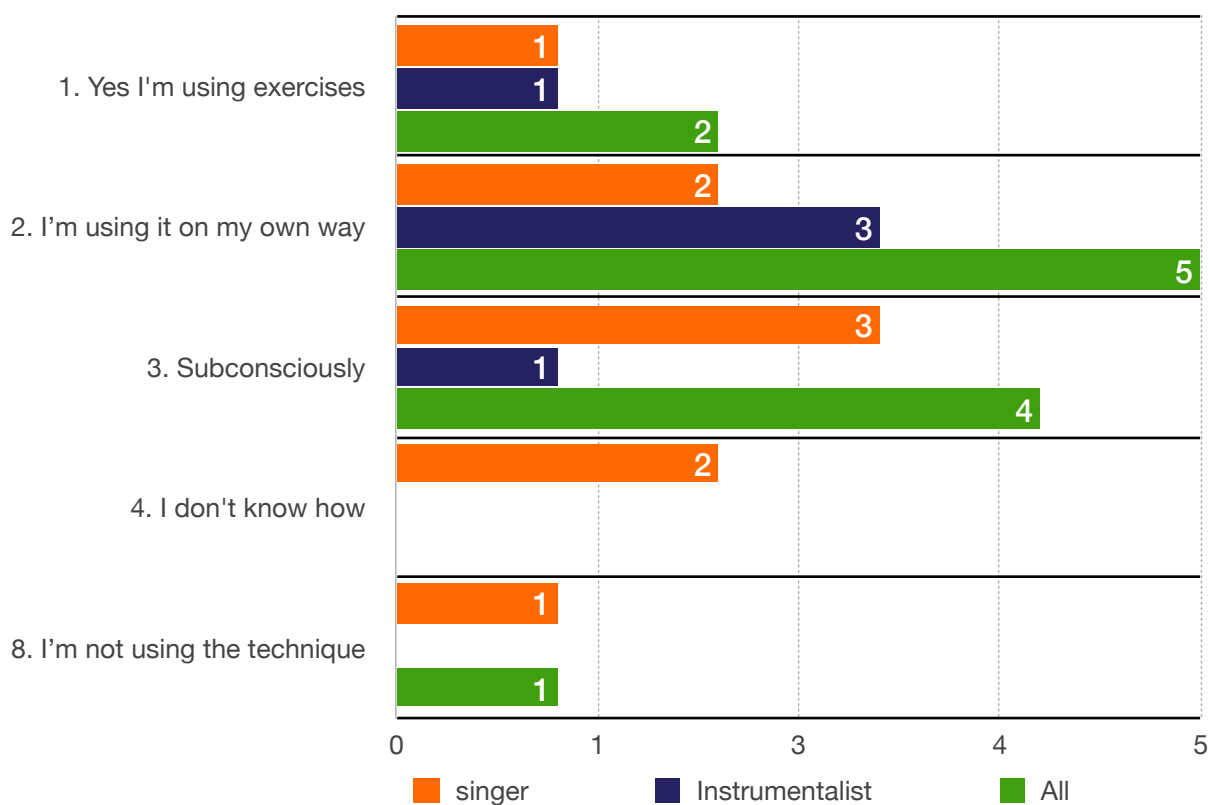


SU01 I'm still using the exercises or ideas of the technique

Most participants indicated that they would continue to use the method, although perhaps in its modified form or subconsciously. You can see a small tendency among instrumentalists who could use this technique more subconsciously in their work, while singers may need more specific instructions.

79% using the technique as I suggest it or in there own way or subconsciously

21% don't use the method or don't know how.

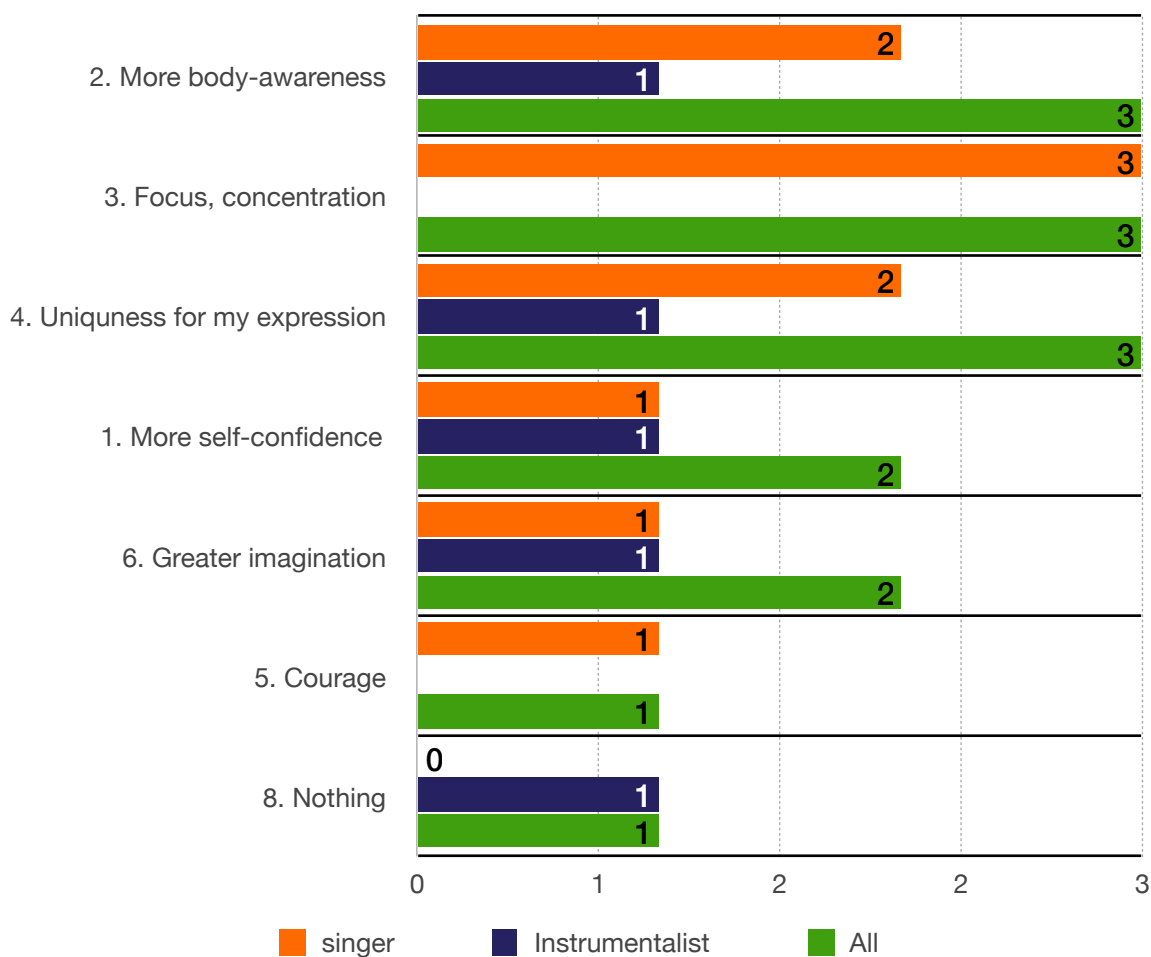


NO01 I am in need of...

The singers checked off rather similar answers as the instrumentalists.

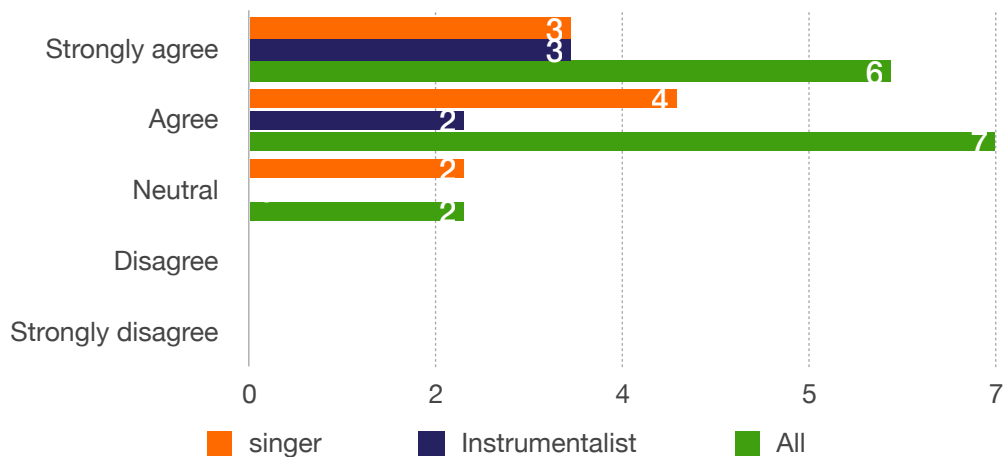
33 % of the singers are in need of more “focus / concentration“ exercises.

For 21 % of the participants, “body-awareness“ and “uniqueness of expression“ are a need right now.



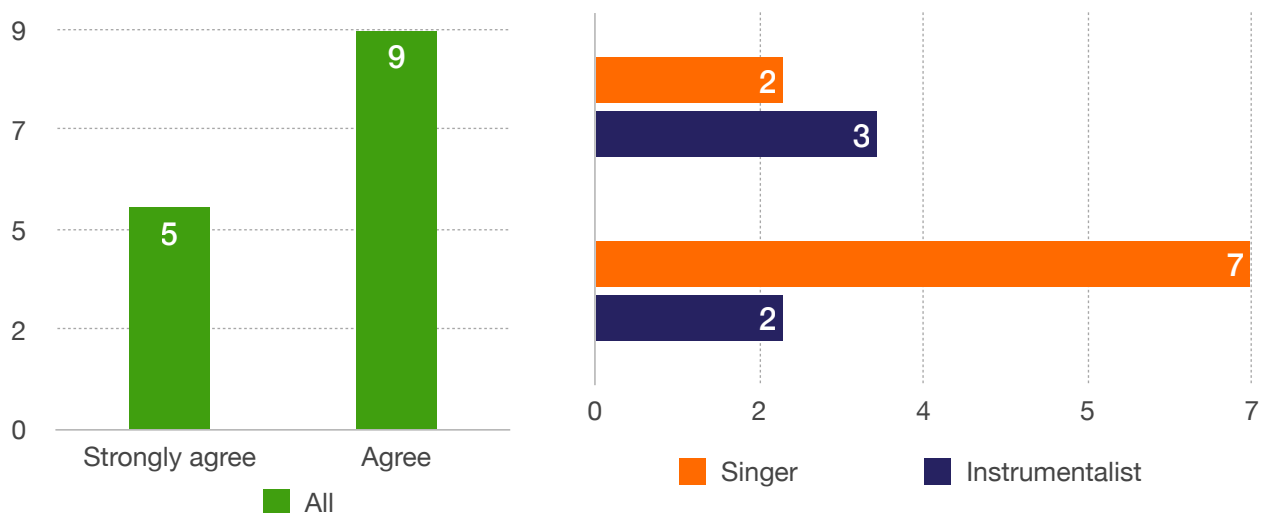
CU01 A method like the Chekhov Method should have a regular place in the curriculum of a professional school of music

86 % agreed (43% of them strongly) that the Chekhov Method should have a regular place in a curriculum of a professional school of music.



UA 01 The Chekhov-Method gave me meaningful insights for my artistic development

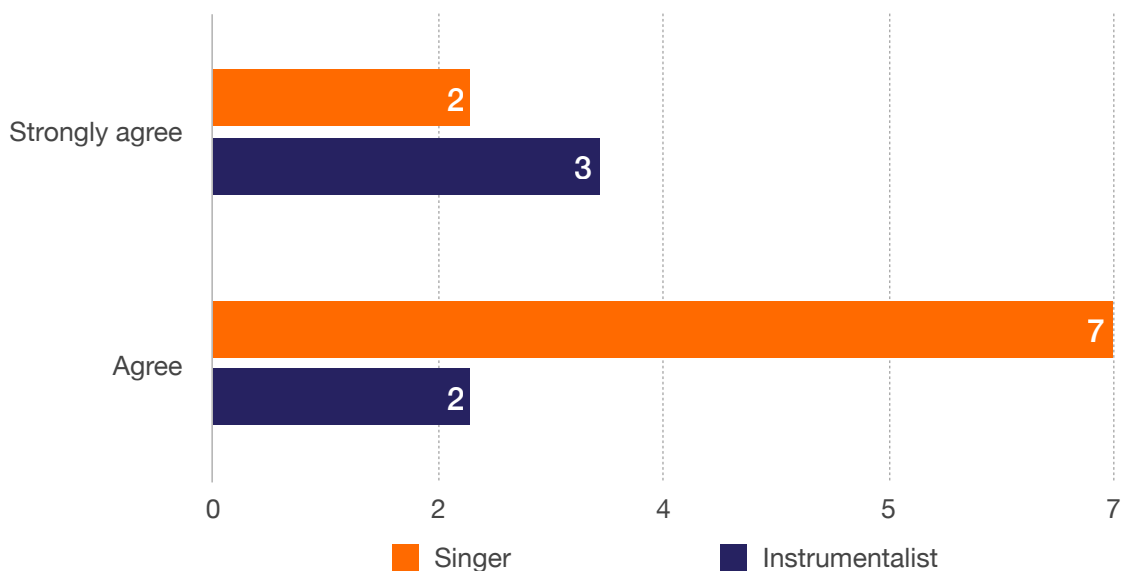
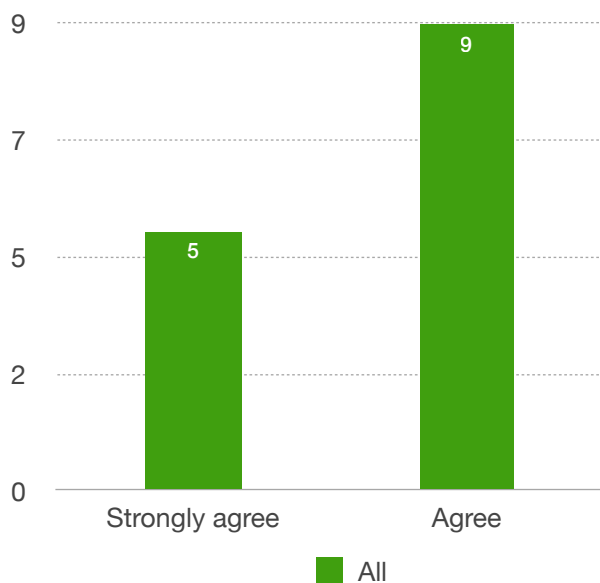
**36 % strongly agree 64 % agree
60% of the instrumentalists 22 % of the singer “strongly agreed”**



UA 02 The Chekhov Technique has an impact on my uniqueness as an artist

Very clear result that supports my hypothesis. The participants vote:

- **36 % strongly agree**
- **64 agree**
- **60% Instrumentalists 22% Singer “strongly agreed”**



upper section "Strongly agree" below section "agree"

4.3 Results from the Duo-Sessions

After completing the second questionnaire, I took a closer look at the two duo partners' answers and paid attention to statements that both "strongly agreed" with. I wanted to find out more about the experiences they had with the method, and which points were most interesting for them.

Most interestingly, both saw a very positive effect of all three methods; a good basis for free improvisation, a method to influence the message of the song and therefore the emotional expression. Another commonality was that their imagination was expanded, because both saw in their own playing that they were stimulated to new ideas, which I can also confirm from my outside perspective. The feeling of "being in the moment" was also reflected on positively by both of them. This clearly confirms that the imagination promotes "being in the moment". The only point they did not see was the influence on their rhythmic accuracy. Nonetheless, they want to continue working with the method, either following the three techniques or their own interpretation. What I found most important was the statement that both saw the support to the artist's uniqueness.

4.4 Results of my artistic work

My research focuses on the suitability of the Chekhov acting method in a jazz context. For this purpose, I designed a comprehensive questionnaire ([2nd Questionnaire](#)), which was the result of three different studies. It was based on three techniques modified by Chekhov: Gesture, Atmosphere and Imaginary Tool, which focus on three levels: **emotional level**, **cognitive level** and **physical level**.

Based on this questionnaire I answered the questions from my perspective as an actor two years ago compared to me as a singer today, including my experience and research. I then considered the value of my results, and where there is still need for research. I found that the focus of the method shifts according to the genre. In singing, the sound is in the foreground, while in acting, phrasing and posture are essential and important elements of the method. I marked differences and interesting points in yellow.

second questionnaire	Two years ago (from an actors prospective)	Now (March 25, 2020)
AO01 Which words do you associate with your Chekhov-experience?	-focussing -awareness	-focusing -authentic artist
EFO Effect of the three Chekhov-Methods gesture, atmosphere and imaginary tool		
Gesture	Strongly agree	Agree
Atmosphere	Neutral	Agree
Imaginary/tool Center	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
UA 02 The Chekhov-Technique has an impact on my uniqueness as an artist	Disagree	Strongly agree
EFO4 The Chekhov-Method gave me useful tools for improvisation	Strongly agree	- Agree
TO01 When I listened to the others I recognized a positive effect on		
self-consciousnesses	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
sound	Neutral	Strongly agree
Deeper emotion	Agree	Strongly agree
Ideas/imagination	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Message	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Phrasing	Strongly agree	Agree
Body-awareness	Neutral	Strongly agree
Concentration	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Positive body tension	Neutral	Strongly agree
rhythmical preciseness	Neutral	Agree
NT01 The Chekhov-Method is a good starting point for ideas and suggestions for compositions.	Disagree	Agree
UA 01 The Chekhov-Method gave me meaningful insights for my artistic development	Agree	Strongly agree
SU01 I'm still using the exercises or ideas of the technique	Disagree	Agree

CO01 Through the concentration on the gesture, atmosphere or imaginary tool I could better		
message/lyrics	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Body-awareness	Neutral	Strongly agree
Imagination	Agree	Strongly agree
expression	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
Body sound	Agree	Strongly agree
Avoid stressful thoughts	Agree	Agree
rhythmical preciseness	Neutral	Agree
more in the moment	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
New textures sounds	Neutral	Strongly agree
Different feeling for phrasing	Agree	Agree
CU01 A method like the Chekhov-Method should have a regular place in the curriculum of a professional school of music	Neutral	Strongly agree
NO01 I am in need of...	self-confidence	focus

4.5 Results from all studies

In the above table I collected all my results from both research phases and compared them with each other. The right column also contains links to the videos and audios of my positive, practical results, listed according to the questions. (The hyperlinks to it only work on the [blog](#))

From these collected results I came across the following topics, which came up again and which I would like to deal with in more detail in the discussion:

The Chekhov method in jazz, what works, what doesn't? What is the relationship between the three methods and what are differences between singers and instrumentalists in relation to Chekhov? How do I see the future regarding the method in jazz?

As a second topic I would like to go into more detail about my work and experience regarding the method, highlight differences between acting and singing, but also discuss what I learned through my research as a singer and teacher and how I see myself regarding the Chekhov method moving forward.

All results from my research

Topics from all results	Endresults from Questionnaire 1 „Workshops“	Endresults of all participants from Questionnaire 2	My personal results of Questionnaire 2 in comparison acting-singing	Results from the Duo Partners Questionnaire 2 (strongly agree overlaps)	Good results from all the three studies
A001 Association with the Chekhov Method	Main words from this survey are sound and focus	Most common associations are: “Body awareness” (28,57%), „stimulation of imagination” (21,43%) and „focus” (17,86%) The answers for the emotional level were very low and only crossed by musicians (20%) „new idea” 18% from the singers is „presence” important.	My associations are: Focus and Authentic artist		
C001 Through the concentration on the gesture, atmosphere or imaginary tool I could better:		Through the concentration the participants had a better expression and the message was clear (both had 93%).	New for me in contact in Jazz was that the sound get better and it feels more precise, open and free.	The method influenced them in their message of the song and thus also the emotional expression .	Gesture: Sebastian O.: Workshop 2 without gesture 01:15:33 1 physical g. 01:22:50. physical g. 01:25:03 psychological g. 01:27:50
		Followed by two blue topics imagination 85,71 % more in the moment 78,57% that speak for the „focus”.	Through the focusing on the imagination I am in the moment .	The method extended their imagination and their awareness of playing in the moment .	Atmosphere: Forrest Walk Video 03:00
	The method helped the singers to have a clearer message and let go of the inner critic	The singers „strongly agreed” more an emotional experience , while the instrumentalists noticed more strongly the cognitive levels .	I could discover new textures and sounds for me though the method.		Imaginary Tool Ping-Pong Duo Andrew free impro 2.1
TO01 The others	They recognized expression 28,57%, message 14,28% presence 14,28%	- The concentration is clearly the most mentioned effect (100% agreed from strongly 43%) followed by deeper emotional connection to a song (93% agreed from them 43% strongly) .	Deeper emotional I saw that everyone found a better emotional connection to his/herself. Many new ideas came across, I could see clearly the connection to their imagination , especially in the .		Deeper emotional Leonie Workshop 3 (soft vibrato) 8:30
	29 % of the participants recognized better sound	The singers recognized from the outside more the cognitive and bodily changes (44%). The instrumentalists saw a biggest difference in the performance on the emotional level (80%).	For the singers I recognized that the sound and body awareness getting better through the method. This is for me a new realization because as an actor you are not so concentrated on the sound.		Sound Narim: Workshop 2 without 55:10:00 with the method: 02:02:06
	100% of the participants said that there is happen a change when the others using the method.	Which clearly has no effect on the performing was the better „rhythm feel” 86 % of the participants crossed neutral or disagree. More than the half of the participants 65% saw an effect on the phrasing, but it still not satisfying enough for my research.	The method had a clear impact on my natural rhythmical ideas of the phrasing. With the phrasing I was clearly convinced in context with the tool gave some good ideas. I guess the phrasing plays a more important role when you use the	Neither of them saw the method's influence on rhythmic accuracy.	Message Marie: Workshop 4 . Before 41:35 After 49:40 Phrasing (img. tool) Workshop 6 you can see the difference between unprecise using 15:44 and precise connected with the body 15:48
EFO Effect to my three chosen methods form Chekhov	57% mentioned the gesture as a useful exercise. This are the exercises that helped them the most awareness 28,57% and meditation exercises : 28,57%	I think all the the techniques from Chekhov were a good choice according to the agree answers: 86% Gesture (79%): Atmosphere 86% Imaginary Tool (64%)	The gesture the imaginary tool and the atmosphere are a really good techniques for the music context, it's a very open and flexible method. I could not hide 100% my inner critic, as I thought before.	They saw a strong effect on all the three techniques.	Gesture comparison before and after
UA 01&02 The Chekhov Method had an impact on my artistic development and		5 from 15 strongly; agree 9 from 15 agree. 60% musicians and 22% of the singers voted „strongly agree”	The Chekhov-Method influenced the singers/musicians on three different levels also on the uniqueness of the artist. I strongly agree. Difference to the acting.	They found both ways for new ideas and expressions and they also think the method promotes the uniqueness of an artist.	Monbijou-Bridge
SU01 I am still using the ideas	Yes: To define my message 14 %. Working with the gesture 57% for a warm-up 14%, to improve my imagination 14%	79 % using the technique as I suggest it, or in their own way, or subconsciously. 21% don't use the method or don't know how.	I try to use it more constantly for myself and find some useful good regular exercises. For teaching and further research will this method be a main topic for me in the future.	Both continue working with the method either with the three techniques or in their own interpretation of the method.	
NO01 I am in need of...		For 21 % all the participants are “body-awareness” and “uniqueness of expression” a need right now. 33 % of the singers are „in need” of more „focus / concentration” exercises.	Focus and self-confidence		
CU01 The Chekhov Method should have a regular place in a professional		86 % agreed (43% of them strongly) that the Chekhov Method should have a regular place in a curriculum of a professional school of music	I my opinion is this method is a great addition to the regular lessons and useful for singers and musicians.		
EF04 The Chekhov method is a useful tool for improvisation		71% of all participants said that they agree, that the Method is a useful tool for improvisation in jazz (free-improvisation). When I look at the strong agreed answers the instrumentalists had 60% and the singers (22%)	For free improvisation I strongly agree that the method is a good helping tool finding ideas and be precise using them. For improvising over chord-changes I had too less experience but I'm not sure if it has the same effect as	This method is a good basis for free improvisation .	Improvisation: Duo Benjamin Session 3.1 , 26:30 3.2 Iron 3:10 Duo- Andrew New York
NT01 The Chekhov Method for composition		It was interesting to see that 100% of the instrumentalists agrees that they found the method interesting for getting ideas for compositions compared to the singers 44%.	Especially the atmosphere combined with the gesture and the tool gave me insides for compositions tunes.		Helen „A tree tells” my work : Monbijou-bridge

6. CONCLUSION

This study dealt with the question of whether Michael Chekhov's method has the same positive effect in a jazz context as in acting. This is the first research on Chekhov and jazz music and should be seen as a preliminary study to create new fields of research. Due to limitations in my research, I can only make a premature statement about this field. But I can clearly see from the results that all three of Chekhov's techniques, modified for music, achieve very good effects in a jazz context. These are expressed by singers and instrumentalists, about the process of concentration and imagination, which influences three areas of the artist. The emotional area (expression), the cognitive area (focus) and the physical area (sound). In this research I was also confronted with differences in comparison to acting and new fields especially for the music-field (voice sound and composition) were opened up.

My hypotheses from the two research phases have been clearly confirmed. In jazz, the Chekhov method promotes the artistic development and uniqueness of an artist on an emotional, cognitive and physical level. It gives meaning to music and is an essential addition to the technical and theoretical lessons at a professional music academy.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The Chekhov Method in a Jazz Context

Within seven months and three studies, I intensively studied the Chekhov acting method in the field of jazz.

Even if these small studies only have preliminary validity, I can clearly confirm my hypothesis through this research. In all three studies, positive effects of the Chekhov method could be found among artists. Nevertheless, I would like to go into the various aspects of my research in detail here, and at the end will make suggestions for further studies.

7.1.1. what works what does not work?

The first challenge I felt was to clearly grasp the method in its breadth and to fully understand its contents. I noticed in the literature how much freedom there is in the interpretation of this method, how the exercises and techniques flow into each other and are interconnected. It is difficult to divide the method into individual parts and make it really tangible. It is most fruitful to simply try things out for yourself and then reflect on the effects in writing or in conversation. What is good is that in the end, three subject areas of gesture, atmosphere and the Imaginary Tool became clear, which I then was able to concentrate on in more detail. This is also clearly reflected in my second questionnaire of the workshop and duo-session participants.

The gesture is predestined for singers by its lyrical connection and has clearly shown positive results in this study. During the research in the workshops I notice that especially in singing, the previous exact work of the physical gesture makes a lot of sense. It not only stabilizes the posture of a singer, but also gives a taste of a good body connection with the voice and thus a good sound. It is recommended to develop a gesture for the whole song as the "main message". Even if you don't expect it, this gesture is completely sufficient to serve the richness of the song and the clarity on the whole. However, for big changes of mood I work with several gestures (see "REISE!").

It makes sense to keep the movement of the gesture so that it remains in "motion". This process is also important for the psychological gesture in order to ensure that the message is constantly reassuring while connected to the content.

Haffner's research confirmed that the gesture in singing has a great influence on the sound/sound of a singer. This became clear in my evaluation and the statements of the participating singers. I assume that this is due to better posture and "body tension", which is influenced by concentrating on the limitation of the simple statement. The gesture, and this is true for all Chekhov techniques, also affects the emotional expression and cognitive area (concentration) of singers and musicians. I further thought about how to use physical gestures of well-known singers in a positive way for my work ([see blog -post Liz Wright](#)).

According to the results of my current research, it could also be said that if the connection between the cognitive and emotional realm is given by the execution of physical gestures alone, one would also have to understand the emotional and cognitive experiences of a successful singer in a deeper way by imitating their gestures. I tried to deepen this aspect during my work, but this was beyond the scope of this research. That being said, I recommend to investigate this aspect more intensively.

With instrumentalists, I found it harder to determine the effectiveness of the gesture, even though they said they had good experiences with it. I would therefore not like to make a judgement at this point in time, because at the beginning of my study the instrumentalists were not in focus. That, too, would need to be investigated more closely.

The atmosphere is a roughly defined, broader field, which is not necessarily negative. The freedom that this technique brings with it, I feel, is a source of great enrichment and ideas for artists. It can quickly happen that the exercises are perceived as too unspecific. My best experience was with the imagination of landscapes. Here, the movement plays an important role too. I made the experience that imagination's mobility has a positive effect on the music. Improvisations would otherwise remain in a similar mood and the variety, the form, would be missing. In this respect, I worked with Chekhov's suggestion of seeing the landscape in different seasons and thus initiating a change (Chekhov, 1989, p.23). A nice example was a free improvisation after the "Forest-Walk". The imagination needs movement to be powerful. That's why the "film exercise" (to imagine a pictorial film during the singing) makes sense.

The gesture from the atmosphere of a sound recording also worked well. I realize that it is advisable not to take in too many atmospheres at once, but to concentrate on one of them and to exploit its full potential. Especially for free improvisation, I find the atmosphere a strong exercise for singers and instrumentalists alike. It is also the technique that scored best in the 2nd survey (2nd questionnaire).

It was a new insight for me to create a song out of the atmosphere. It opens up a wide range of sounds and impressions and creates a framework for the song. It also challenged me to think about a new way of working and thinking and can therefore be another contribution to the "uniqueness" of an artist. It is thus a great gain that the Chekhov method can be used in music as a basis for generating ideas for "compositions".

The **Imaginary Tool** was developed from the idea of the Imaginary Center. I found this exercise a very enriching technique, especially for the duo sessions. Here too, the imagination is stimulated and this is expressed very concretely in the sound of the player/singer.

The ping pong game is a good example. Not only the sound was made more concrete and emotional, but interesting rhythmic ideas came to light as well, which derived from the "natural" metric of the ping pong game. The question arose of how to transform the result of the Imaginary Tool into music. In my work with Andrew, I followed this path and we found a form and a rhythmic pattern, for example through the tone/ball change. We also thought about different game rounds. Each round has different playing tempi, each end has a winner or loser. That way, we gave free improvisation a shape in the form of imaginary movements, compared to the movements of a sonata.

I also found the sounds of two tools to be rich in contrast and powerful in free improvisation. If everyone asserts their "world", it made the expression especially strong. It became uncertain and fragile when I no longer trusted the method and started to judge and question. Thus, it's better to stick to the imagination of the process and to figure out all possibilities of this tool first, even if it might not feel satisfying at times. It is also advisable to make room for listening and associating in order to understand what the sounds mean to you; giving meaning and not just singing or playing senselessly. This aspect can be found in all other techniques of Chekhov and seems to be the heart of the method. Only when I know what I am doing and what I am telling - even if it is abstract - does it have meaning for me and only then can it become a meaning for the listener. This confirms Chekhov's statement, who sees the soul of the artist in the message. (*Chekhov, 1998, p.241*)

I only tried this exercise once with the singers, but there was big potential in this technique. It stimulates the imagination and challenges the singers to try out new sounds, a clear sound result comes out of a clear imagination. I was able to experience that it also influences the phrasing of free improvisation and the improvisation over chord changes.

7.1.2 Differences between singers and instrumentalists

During my research with the Chekhov method I noticed differences between "singers" and "musicians". These are also tendencies. Generally, I was very surprised that the Chekhov method was received well by the instrumentalists, if not better, than by the singers. 60% of the instrumentalists had a very positive attitude towards the method in terms of artistic personality and development, while only 22% of the singers could say this very convincingly. I noticed that the instrumentalists "strongly agreed" rather than just "agreed", which could be explained with genuinely more approving personalities, but apart from that it gives me the important insight that further work with instrumentalists and the method is useful.

Through the bass player Helen I learned that the Chekhov method can be an inspiration for composing. The singers, on the contrary, were reluctant to use the technique for composing songs. In my opinion, the "Atmosphere" and the "Imaginary Tool" are particularly suitable for this. These two techniques are the most exciting for instrumentalists at this point in time, while the gesture is more interesting for singers.

As far as free improvisation is concerned, the instrumentalists also seem to have more to do with the method than the singers. Here too, the different interests of singers and instrumentalists are reflected. Another obvious difference was that singers - myself included - see positive body perception as a central effect of the technique, while musicians tend not to worry about such things. Posture is rather secondary compared to singers, where the body is the instrument and an important body of sound. It is clear, however, that the method leads to a better tonal result for all singers, including myself.

Another interesting point is that instrumentalists perceived an improvement in cognitive areas when using the method, while singers tend to perceive a positive effect in the emotional area. Conversely, from the outside, instrumentalists tend to see an improvement in emotional expression, while singers tend to see an improvement in cognitive expression. This part could certainly be interesting for research in perceptual psychology, but for me it is secondary.

7.1.3 What is needed? Summary, outlook

First, I would like to mention that research with action and descriptive design has proven to be useful for this work. What is more, the work in two phases made it possible for me to immerse myself even deeper and to understand the method.

This study can of course only provide a rough overview of Chekhov's method in a jazz context. Above all, however, it shows me that exercises in the area of concentration and imagination - as proposed by Kenny Werner in the jazz field - are an important complementary teaching element to promote the expressiveness and uniqueness of an artist. The ability to concentrate and focus can also be strengthened and learned, as can imagination. Especially nowadays, the act of imagination is becoming more and more stunted and therefore training in this direction is immensely important.

85% of the participants stated that the Chekhov method should have a fixed place in a curriculum of a music college. 78% want to continue working with the method or have been influenced by it.

7.2 My work with the Chekhov method

I found the work on myself to be the hardest part, because I thought about it for a long time and made many attempts to find the best way to reflect, test and measure the advantages of this method on myself. After several approaches and attempts, my other studies gave me the idea of creating a composition from an atmosphere. As a second attempt I worked with the gesture to get the sound and intonation of a song (REISE!) clearer and freer. In retrospect, I approached both in a very complicated way and I will look for a different working method in the future. It was helpful, however, to delve deeper into the two techniques to see how I should work in detail, understand processes and their effects. Since I could not completely finish both projects so far, it is difficult to present a final evaluation at this point in time. Nonetheless, I can state that, as soon as it becomes messed up and doesn't remain playful, the method does not make sense and is not fun anymore. In addition, the point of forgetting the judging thoughts has not yet been completely resolved for me, as it was with acting. It certainly needs more practice and experience. I want to continue working on it in order to find optimal solutions for my future work. In conclusion, I can say that the method has brought me further as an artist.

7.2.1 Comparison acting / singing

It was insightful to reflect on my work with the Chekhov method using the second questionnaire. Here, I compared my acting experience two years ago to my current experience as a jazz singer. Several things stand out - for example, the work with Chekhov in acting focuses more on the role to be played, in jazz more on the artistic personality. As an actor I would not have come up with the idea of combining the Chekhov method with compositional ideas. At the same time, two differences caught my attention: "sound" and "phrasing".

Sound/sound

As an actor, I never thought about the subject of sound, because it is more about an honest, direct tone. That is why I was astonished at first that the method also has a positive effect on the sound/sound when singing. At least that's what I notice with the singers including me when I perform the gesture. I can say from my observations that it is easier to let go. Especially in high, heavy areas, where I need a lot of power and support from the body, I have a freer feeling in the neck area when performing the gesture (physically and psychologically) and I don't exert pressure but can work with more lightness and air. In addition, thoughts such as: "Attention, now the high point is coming" are more easily faded out, because I concentrate completely on the process of "how do I do the movement/gesture". Unfortunately, this point did not always work for me. I think it is a matter of training until you trust the method completely, and your body has understood this connection. Because, as Kenny Werner describes, letting go of these "disturbing thoughts" becomes noticeable in the sound of making music. I could observe this better sound from the outside with every singing student - it was also reflected by the students.

Phrasing/rhythm

In this context, I understand phrasing and rhythm as belonging together. I also see a new phrasing as a new rhythmic structure of the melody. In acting, it is perfectly clear that the gesture has an influence on the rhythm of the phrase, i.e. how I say the sentence, at what speed and with what kind of emphasis. Why then did the participants not feel in such a positive manner? Isn't it just as important in singing how I phrase and evaluate the content of the song? Half of the participants in the second questionnaire were neutral on this point, which does not speak of a great conviction. Maybe I formulated the questions inaccurately? I'm unsure myself about how I want to evaluate the phrasing in the music and how accurate the differences are. I had hoped that the method would enable me to achieve conscious micro-timing, but how exactly is not yet clear to me. The music follows different rules than the acting, and I have now realized that. To examine this point more closely would certainly be an exciting further task. Because in the Imaginary Tool I find this phrasing that interests me again. The rhythm, the timing, the way the ball moves, is in my hands through my imagination, and therefore I consciously work with timing. Maybe this thought process is too abstract, or I can't really put it into words. But regarding the micro timing, there is definitely a need for further investigation. Micro-timing is exactly what we want to achieve in jazz singing. Therefore, a good training method for a deeper awareness of micro-timing would be desirable.

7.2.2 What has this research done for my work?

The Chekhov method is a great enrichment for my work as a singer and teacher. Through my research, I came to understand the versatility of this method. It gives me a limited freedom and thus stimulates my imagination and thus my creativity. It comes over curiosity and fun to perfection.

“This is especially true if the exercises are done with joy and the principles applied with interest rather than carried out laboriously.” (*Chekhov, 1953, p.193*)

The method has shown me that it is a good tool for focusing and imagination in my artistic and didactic work. It helps me stick to my message and to connect with the emotions. In addition, it creates a basis to promote my own ideas, to create new sounds or textures and thus to develop my own sound. In music, it has the special feature that you can use it as a basis for composition and ideas. At the center of this diversity is the "Uniqueness aspect", which brings the artist in contact with their imagination.

As a teacher, this method has become a great gift for me because it is versatile and I can use it to create a unique selling point for myself. Especially for singers or singing actors, it is a great addition to the other techniques. This part of the artistic work is not illuminated enough in other methods.

Based on my research, I came to the conclusion that the method can also be helpful for instrumentalists. All five instrumentalists I worked with have promoted the method at different levels. It allows for playing and imagining. The only danger is that one gets lost in the game. In the Duos I was missing the answer on how to get a form into all that I found, how to build up tension. These are points I would like to continue to look for. In general, I have learned that, as an artist, it is important to try things out over a longer period of time without judging and see what happens. I made the experience that after an apparently pointless search, something meaningful may come back. Approaching the Chekhov method in an intellectual or complicated way is the wrong way. It is an engine, a foundation, and an attempt to get into the game with ease.

7.2.3 Future

Moving forward I would like to continue working with the method as a teacher and singer. With this study I have only touched on the topic, which is why I would like to further research it in order to understand the method and its effect in music in a really fundamental way. First of all, it would certainly make sense for my artistic work to continue collecting and trying out good useful exercises of the method, to refine it further and to teach singers and instrumentalists to see how it is received and what triggers it. I can also imagine the creation of an exercise book, which I can then use for my lessons. My goal is to teach the method at acting schools and music academies as a supplement to the "normal" lessons, and I hope that I can use it to support artists in their creative work.

7.3 Further research

7.3.1 Limitations

This research was determined from the action and descriptive design, which was a good basis to get an overview of the breadth of the Chekhov method in terms of music. I can safely say that it makes sense to continue researching in the field of Chekhov and music. Clearer and better results would certainly have been achieved by more detailed research, by concentrating only on one subject area of Chekhov, instead of researching many areas roughly and not really soundly. The limitation of my research was also created by the small number of participants. In addition, I did not treat all techniques equally in the various studies. Some of them I tried out more thoroughly with singers, some more thoroughly with instrumentalists. My statements can therefore only be interpreted as preliminary, because a representative study on this area would have to be much larger.

The research time span of six months was also too short to explore long-term effects. It is certainly advisable to observe Chekhov's work over the years and see what changes, what consolidates and how it makes sense to use the method in universities. A balance of gender among singers and instrumentalists (different instruments) was also not given in this research, which does not really allow the groups to compare, also with regard to the technique's effect on all participants. As a further limitation, it should be mentioned that I was not an expert in Chekhov and music at the beginning myself and had to get familiar with it through "learning by doing" in order to "translate" the exercises and techniques into music. It would of course be an advantage to be able to better assess the exercises and their effects in advance, in order to work more specifically and purposefully with them and set tasks. Furthermore, it would also be advisable to define precise research goals in advance and to work out in detail how I would like to arrive at the results, and how to evaluate them in the end. Subsequently, I come to the following research ideas, which should further clarify the understanding of the Chekhov method in music and its positive effects.

7.3.2 Further research experiments

1. It would be interesting to take a closer look at the movement in detail. To what extent does it influence the cognitive and emotional level and how can I use this in my work as a singer? It would certainly be advisable to study the exact current scientific research and background within the neuroscientific field and to incorporate these findings into your work. From my current state of knowledge, I am interested in the following two topics: 1) To what extent is it helpful to support songs, sounds and improvisations with a movement in order to become aware of the clarity of expression? Can I learn or save difficult passages or sounds more easily with the help of movements? Do we memorize things better with movement? 2.) And from this conclusion, is it possible to have similar emotional and cognitive experiences of another artist through exact physical imitation? What differences do I notice in my natural behavior? Can I then better describe and recognize these differences on an emotional and cognitive level? If imitation has similar effects on the subjects, I will go so far as to say that this approach of combining movement, emotion and cognition can also contribute to a better inner understanding of a well-known artist. In this respect I would like to refer to the research mentioned at the beginning of this article. This experiment can be studied well with two control groups of singers. By comparing the mutual imitation, one could find differences or similarities in the inner posture. This method could be compared with a neutral control group on the basis of a common song.
2. For the more precise scientific significance of the Chekhov method in music, I can also imagine comparative experiments through phoniatic examinations using MRI. Here it would be interesting to see to what extent the Chekhov method has an influence on the larynx, can relaxation be detected? If so, it would be a clear sign that the Chekhov method (concentration, imitation) has an influence on the vocal apparatus and thus on the sound of the voice.

3. It is also helpful and exciting with regard to micro-timing to dive deeper into the method. Can I better grasp and understand my phrasing and micro-timing with the Chekhov method? Comparing two groups with the same song is my recommendation. Where does the technique make itself felt in micro-timing, or does it have no influence at all? Does it also help me to create a more exciting improvisation? You could try this with singers and instrumentalists.
4. It would also be exciting to delve deeper into Chekhov and composition; what are good methods and procedures? How can I compare these results with other compositions of mine? How do I manage to work out the form through the Chekhov method alone?
5. Many of these questions could be further investigated in a longer study taking place over several years at one or more music academies to confirm the real validity of this method in music. My recommendation is to conduct it with randomly selected singers and instrumentalists alike, and to compare the difference to control groups. It is estimated that this research requires a long period of time and intensive preparation. The goal would be to be clear about what exactly the method is to be used for, and to clearly define the research criteria in order to obtain strong results in the end. The main question will be whether a difference in working with the method will affect the peculiarity and expression of the artist's personality in their development. This research should aim at ensuring that the spirit of which I spoke about in the beginning can also be taught and studied in a university setting.

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9. APPENDIX

9.1 Second Questionnaire



[Michael Chekhov](#)

Hello, my dear Chekhov-participants,
I'm so glad that I shared this experience with you, and now it's the time to look back and it would be a big, big help if you fill this form out for me! These are not so many questions I

guess it will be done in max 10 min. 😊

I know not everyone participated in every workshop or knows each of the three techniques. But try to answer the questionnaire with your honest first impression, and if its a negative answer it is also ok!

If you struggle to remember things regarding the technique that we did, please ask me or check out [my blog](#), this can be a good help to review the workshops and duo sessions, but of course, you can do it also just from your own memory.

Thank you very much! It was such a great joy to work with all of you on this method.

I miss you and hope we see each other soon, happy and healthy in Maastricht!

Greetings from Berlin

Yours

Sebastian

A003 Singer or Instrumentalist

A001 Which words do you associate with your Chekhov-experience?

Mark only two words

	confidence
	safety
	holistic
	complicated
	emotion
	body-awareness
	focus
	rhythm feeling
	stimulating the imagination
	awareness
	authentic artist
	presence
	esoteric
	new ideas for expression

EF01 When I used the technique GESTURE (physical, psychological) I felt a clear effect on my singing/playing.

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree	not done
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------	----------

EF02 When I used the technique ATMOSPHERE (Forrest-walk, free im-pro on a record) I felt a clear effect on my singing/playing.

Strongly agree	agree e	neu- tral	di- sagree	strongly disagree	not done
----------------	------------	--------------	---------------	-------------------	-------------

EF03 When I used the technique IMAGINARY TOOL (ping-pong) I felt a clear effect on my singing/playing.

strongly agree	agree e	neu- tral	di- sagree	strongly disagree	not done
----------------	------------	--------------	---------------	-------------------	-------------

UA01 Working regularly with the Chekhov-Technique will have an impact on my uniqueness and authenticity as an artist.

strongly agree	agree e	neutral	di- sagree	strongly di- sagree
----------------	------------	---------	---------------	------------------------

EF04 The Chekhov-Method gave me useful tools for improvisation

strongly agree	agree	neutral	di- sagree	strongly di- sagree
----------------	-------	---------	---------------	------------------------

TO01 When I listened to the others I recognized a positive effect on their self-consciousness, their sound, their deeper emotional connection, to the song/impro, their ideas/imagination, their message, their phrasing, their body awareness, their concentration, their positive body tension, their rhythmical preciseness

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

NT01 The Chekhov-Method is a good starting point for ideas and suggestions for compositions.

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

UA02 The Chekhov-Method gave me meaningful insights for my artistic development.

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

SU01 I'm still using the exercises or ideas of the technique

please cross one option:

Yes I'm using exercises either from gesture, atmosphere, imaginary tool in my work

I'm using the method ideas my own way

Perhaps I'm using it but subconsciously

I would love to do it more, but I don't know how

I don't know

This technique is too complicated for me to using it

It's not that important for me.

I'm not using the technique.

CO01 Through the concentration on the gesture, atmosphere or imaginary tool

I could get my message/lyrics better to the point, I had a better awareness of my body, I recognize that my ideas and imagination were stimulated, I felt I could express more deeply, My body was more relaxed and my sound getting better, I could avoid stressful thoughts, My preciseness for rhythmical ideas was different, I could be more in the moment, I recognized new textures and sounds I never used before, I got a different feeling for phrasing

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

CU01 A method like the Chekhov-Method should have a regular place in the curriculum of a professional school of music

strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	---------	----------	-------------------

NO01 I am in need of ...

only one answer

self-confidence, more body-awareness, focus, concentration while playing/singing, uniqueness for my expression, courage, greater imagination, better communication, nothing

Sebastian Stert, Hogeschool Zuyd Conservatorium Jazz Departement Maastricht NL – 2020

9.2 Embodied Cognition in Performance: Abstract



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Embodied Cognition in Performance: The Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Exercises on Affect and Height Perception

^{1,*} ² ³ ⁴ [Ana Hedberg Olenina](#), [Eric L. Amazeen](#), [Bonnie Eckard](#), and [Jason Papenfuss](#)

¹ School of International Letters and Cultures, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, United States ² Department of Psychology, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, United States ³ Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, United States ⁴ School of Sustainability, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, United States

Edited by: Pil Hansen, University of Calgary, Canada

Reviewed by: Paula Thomson, California State University, Northridge, United States; Fernando Marmolejo-Ramos, University of South Australia, Australia

*Correspondence: Ana Hedberg Olenina, ana.olenina@asu.edu

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Abstract

Modern embodied approaches to cognitive science overlap with ideas long explored in theater. Performance coaches such as Michael Chekhov have emphasized proprioceptive awareness of movement as a path to attaining psychological states relevant for embodying characters and inhabiting fictional spaces. Yet, the psychology of performance remains scientifically understudied. Experiments, presented in this paper, investigated the effects of three sets of exercises adapted from Chekhov's influential techniques for actors' training. Following a continuous physical demonstration and verbal prompts by the actress Bonnie Eckard, 29 participants enacted neutral, expanding, and contracting gestures and attitudes in space. After each set of exercises, the participants' affect (pleasantness and arousal) and self-perceptions of height were measured. Within the limitations of the study, we measured a significant impact of the exercises on affect: pleasantness increased by 50% after 15 min of expanding exercises and arousal increased by 15% after 15 min of contracting exercises, each relative to the other exercise. Although the exercises produced statistically non-significant changes in the perceived height, there was a significant relation between perceived height and affect, in which perceived height increased with increases in either pleasantness, or arousal. These findings provide a preliminary support for Chekhov's intuition that expanding and contracting physical actions exert opposite effects on the practitioners' psychological experience. Further studies are needed to consider a wider range of factors at work in Chekhov's method and the embodied experience of acting in general.

Keywords: acting, affect, height perception, Michael Chekhov, movement, psychological gesture

complete paper: Ana Hedberg Olenina, Eric L. Amazeen, Bonnie Eckard, and Jason Papenfuss (2019 Oct 9), Embodied Cognition in Performance: The Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Exercises on Affect and Height Perception.

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01.02.2020, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02277/full>

9.3 The Chekhov-Technique for the singing actor

Inspired states: adapting the Michael Chekhov Technique for the singing actor

Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, 2013

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Leslie Bennett

This article seeks to illuminate some ways in which the Michael Chekhov Technique might be used to help the singing actor work from an inspired state. The singing actor faces special challenges in bringing the truth to the stage, since he or she must undertake to balance naturalistic spontaneity within a discipline that is at once heightened and highly polished. The actor must perform the structure laid out in the text, yet freely improvise within that structure, making discoveries and decisions moment by moment in order to tell the truth onstage. Clues are embedded within the composition both to suggest and, often, to impel the performer toward a range of acting choices. Chekhov's emphasis on the performer's creative individuality and intuition, his reliance on imagery, movement, improvisation, form a brilliant partnership with the singing actor, since music inherently possesses meaning, images, atmospheres, and gestures. By engaging, experimenting with, and exercising Chekhov's ideas, the singing actor can develop an enlivened and specific method to help her reliably achieve what Chekhov calls the state of inspiration.

Keywords: movement and imagery, Michael Chekhov, musical theatre performance, singing actor

Inspiration comes when everything is forgotten – the method, the technique, the part, the author, the audience, everything. Then a miracle happens. It happens that the play, the part, begins to exist independently of ourselves

... It is a moment of such greatness and strength that it cannot be mistaken for anything else. (Chekhov 2001, p. 55)

Artists desire to work from an inspired state. But inspiration is a fickle thing. The Chekhov technique addresses this desire. It aims to entice the desire to wake up for the artist. This is a bold claim that Chekhov makes again and again when discussing the method with his students. (Petit 2009, p. 12)

The opening epigraph by Lenard Petit, teacher, practitioner, and scholar of the Michael Chekhov method of acting, speaks to the elusive quality of inspiration

that may sometimes frustrate even the most creative artist. Understanding that inspiration, like feeling, cannot be commanded but must be gently coaxed by indirect means, Michael Chekhov developed his method for actors based on a system of Guiding Principles. These Guiding Principles suggest other ideas and practices which, taken together, constitute a set of tools that help the actor develop a sensitive and expressive body, mind, and spirit that will obey her slightest impulse.

By engaging, experimenting with, and exercising these principles the actor can develop an enlivened and specific method to help her reliably achieve what Chekhov calls the state of inspiration. This is achieved primarily through imagination and movement. Chekhov's method, like that of F.M. Alexander, evolved from close observation of himself and of his colleagues. He attempted to find a solution to his own dissatisfaction with what he was able to accomplish as an actor and with much of the acting that he saw on-stage. Like many of us, he could envision the goal but could not always find the means to achieve it. At times he writes of being disgusted with his own performances. And yet, more often than not, he found himself to be in a profoundly inspired creative state where the character essentially led him through the story. In this state Chekhov lost the plague of self-consciousness and found himself easily embracing the paradox of heightened self-awareness while surrendering to the imaginary circumstances of the play (Chekhov 2005, pp. 144–149).

What were the elements that were at play under these conditions? How could one consistently perform in this state? What were the ideas that governed the actor's art, and what kind of tools could be used to practise and rehearse to become the kind of actor he envisioned – one who was not only possessed by the desire for transformation but who was able to reliably achieve it? His system evolved over many years of observation, experimentation, and collaboration. Chekhov was also heavily influenced by the work of Rudolf Steiner. How his method is used and taught is unique to the individual, which is entirely in keeping with Chekhov's own philosophy. He believed implicitly in the artist's creative intuition.

In this article I seek to illuminate some ways in which the Michael Chekhov Technique might be used to help the singing actor work from an inspired state. While all singers are engaged in expressive artistic communication, a singing actor in my formulation here, is one who attends more or less equally to the language of the theatre as well as that of music. Implicit is the study and technical mastery of more than one artistic discipline. The singing actor balances and unites the goals of dramatic naturalism (the appearance of spontaneity, clarity of dramatic intention, and compelling characterisation) with the technical and artistic considerations demanded by the heightened expression of music. In cases of Musical Theatre, one might argue that dramatic considerations such as text, character, and action must take precedence over musical considerations, while in opera, the reverse might be true. In both cases, however, and in some concert, cabaret, and even recital singing, when the music and text are perceived to be equal partners in effective theatrical performance then the artist may be called a singing actor.

In the following pages, I hope to address the apparent paradox in balancing these goals, emphasising in particular those of naturalistic spontaneity within a discipline that is at once heightened and highly polished. The actor must perform the structure laid out in the text, yet freely improvise within that structure, making discoveries and decisions moment by moment in order to tell the truth onstage. I will offer some ideas about how to experiment, explore, and discover using the tools and principles of Michael Chekhov's method

that are based on my participant observation with students and my own performance work.

For me, Chekhov's work embraces the dynamic and ongoing nature of acting training with its inevitable failures as well as successes. Chekhov deeply believed in the necessity of what Shunryu Suzuki (1970, p. 1) terms 'beginner's mind' – a state of not knowing, in which an artist is free to explore widely until making a discovery vital to igniting her creative impulses. Adapting this work for the singer is a logical step since the singing actor and 'straight' actor share nearly the same goals. By offering these ideas I hope to provide some insight into a methodology for singers that is inherently compatible with and complementary to more traditional training methods. (Throughout the text I will use capital letters when referring to terms authored by Chekhov and others.)

Shared language

Chekhov's technique was founded upon five Guiding Principles that are articulated in the audio recordings of a series of lectures he delivered in Hollywood to the Stage Society, a group of professional actors (Chekhov 2004).

- . The technique is Psycho-Physical (the actor's body, imagination, spirit, emotions are inextricably linked).
- . It utilises Intangible Means of Expression (ideas and concepts that we cannot necessarily see or prove) are central to the technique.
- . It is, in spite of its many facets and ideas, one thing. (This simply means that utilising any principle awakens the others.)
- . Creativity comes from a realm that exists beyond the merely intellectual into the spiritual, described as Creative Spirit and Higher Intellect.
- . Mastery over the tools and principles of the technique promises artistic freedom.

These five principles led to other ideas that Lenard Petit calls Dynamic Principles (Petit 2009). These are ideas introduced through practice which include the movement of space and energy, imagination, incorporation, concentration. They exist as part of each of the more well-known tools of the technique such as Psychological Gesture, Atmospheres, Qualities, Imaginary Body, Radiating, and so forth. These tools and principles are the means by which the actor exercises and trains herself to possess the highly developed sensitiveness (Chekhov 2005, p. 2) that will enable her to vibrate to the least suggestion of an idea or impulse. Through this unique en-

gement of mind and body, one can uncover the secrets of a script or a musical score.

- Music shares the language of Chekhov's technique. Imagery, atmosphere, movement, intangible means of expression, gesture, sensation, and quality are all inherently at play in a musical composition. Movement is fundamental to music in the same way that it is fundamental to the Chekhov technique: movement is life. Chekhov saw movement (gesture) in everything ranging

from nature, architecture, space, sensation, and emotion. He articulated his movement philosophy, writing, 'I am going to try again to explain what I mean under the possibility of interpreting everything which is going on while we are rehearsing . . . as gesture or action or movement. . . . Everything can be turned into a gesture with qualities' (Chekhov 2001, p. 107). He also saw movement as a key to awakening conscious awareness of the artistic, creative self; the creative self is subtly different from the everyday self that eats, sleeps, and brushes her teeth. Moving with awareness gives rise to inner sensations – thoughts, feelings, images, energetic direction – or what Lorna Marshall calls the 'inner landscape' (Chekhov 2001, p. 26). Developing the ability to have an embodied experience helps to awaken the necessary sensitivity to access the tools of the technique. Petit (2009, p. 120) states, 'We move in order to absorb psychological values from the movement'. By psychological values he means the entirety of the actor's inner world, which includes thoughts, emotions, sensations, and images. The actor's awareness allows him quite literally to be moved by those images, propelling him to act in response without pre-planning. This enables the actor to follow the impulse of the moment. Theatre practitioners often talk about organic movement; this, I believe, is what is meant. Movement that stems from the very vitals of the actor's instrument in response to an inner impulse, which the Chekhov technique allows, is quintessentially organic.

Movement and imagination

The composer has given the singing actor a great gift. The composer provides a wealth of images, moods, and emotions upon which to create performances that are moving and full of vitality for both audience and actor. Yet singers are not often taught to use experimentation and improvisation in exploring music, and therefore often suffer from a formulaic or inorganic gestural language. Singers often wait to be told how to gesture, how to move, and are left to feel ill at ease without prescribed action. Impulses are translated into half-hearted or incomplete gestures. For example, a hand opens sideways when the gesture should instead be executed as a huge open arm. The singer is often unaware of the riches in her possession. Instead the singer is focused either on technical mastery at the expense of artistic meaning, or the reverse of relying on the raw emotion embedded in the music to carry a performance without great nuance or depth. The Chekhov Technique, with its emphasis on movement and imagination, can simultaneously speak to the singer in a fa-

miliar language while challenging her to move beyond the more traditional interpretive methods.

Movement and imagination are the central elements in each of Chekhov's tools; they provide a way for us to harness, describe, rehearse, and repeat improvisational discoveries and/or infuse prescribed blocking and gestures with the truth of spontaneity. Music makes it far easier to match the appropriate Chekhov tool with the given circumstances. Although the action and character of a song or aria may seem very clear to the performer, experimenting with movement can lead the singer-actor to intuitive and organic understandings of the composer's intent. It can also help the singing actor access some important expressive tools. She may discover a movement vocabulary appropriate to the song. She may also find her inner being ignited by a sensation or emotion in the process, which has its own movement signature. This discovery is the key, the action that can be performed as an inner movement, inspiring a real-time experience. That experience is what allows the singer to actually choose to sing that particular phrase. In other words, she needs the phrase in order to express her inner life. Experimentation can also lead to discovery of character and objective. Movement awakens the performer to the many sources of inspiration made possible by simply moving and attending.

Fundamental to the Chekhov Technique is trust in the actor's intuitive sense of creativity; we are encouraged to bypass dry intellectual analysis in favour of creative experimentation. Lenard Petit calls this 'permission to get up and act badly!'¹ Chekhov never wanted performers to completely abandon their intelligence or to fail a play by not examining all its facets in detail. He simply wanted us to think differently: in images, on our feet, to make choices by moving, to experience the transformative effects of these choices on our play, and to awaken creative impulses we may not find by simply making pre-determinations about character and intent. Chekhov (2002, p. 36) elaborates, 'Furthermore, as soon as an actor develops the ability to improvise, and discovers within himself the inexhaustible well from which every improvisation is drawn, he will enjoy a sense of freedom hitherto unknown'. Freedom to create without self-editing or judgement is a primary goal of an artist; true creative freedom is achieved when technical difficulties no longer hamper expressive capabilities.

Gesture, action, movement

In my movement classes students often describe the moment I add music to an improvisation as 'magical'. They report that self-consciousness falls away, images rush in, intentions clarify, and the true experience of working moment to moment and being present arises. Ultimately the actor has to be able to harness the ability to perform without the support of music within a standard play. However, the singing actor has the advantage of music as a constant source of inspiration. Still, too few capitalise on the inherent richness of music's dramatic possibilities, often pasting the text into the vocal line without nuance and depth or understanding of the composer's direction. A skilled coach can help actors with this. Even if an actor can't read a score she can use her ears, body, and imagination.

Sample Exploration:

Master-thesis by Sebastian Stert; Conservatory Maastricht NL 2020

In the studio I might improvise with the accompaniment of the song, letting it move me in order to see what I can discover about the gestural language of the melodies and harmonies, how the rhythms and dynamics move my body. What Qualities belong to it? Tender, pulsing, agitated, explosive, flowing, etc. What is its Atmosphere and whence does it come? Does it come from me, or live in the space around me? On another pass, I might try simply receiving the music as an Atmosphere in which I might move either naturalistically or in a more abstract fashion. Or I might try each phrase as a gesture that follows the vocal line. Eventually I will progress to both moving and singing simultaneously. Throughout, my consciousness is heightened, so that I am sensitised to what I am doing, and how it makes me think or feel or act. I lay aside, for the moment, my analytical brain and surrender to impulse. I have an experience. I then follow up with a ‘Spy Back’, Petit’s (2009, p. 32) term for a way to return to the cognitive mind. I try to ask simple questions such as: What qualities were at play? What dynamics? Is the movement erratic, sudden, flowing, continuous, relatively still? What direction(s) do I sense I am moving (upward, forward, retreating, downward, expanding, contracting) or does it change depending on the moment in the song? What was the atmosphere like? What feelings arose in me? What was I doing? What desires were awakened within me? More often than not, images will arise that are rooted in metaphor such as: this character is ‘pouring her heart out’, or ‘caught in a trap’, or ‘is searching for answers’ to a problem that she ‘can’t see’ her way out of. Each of those metaphors can easily, with practice, be translated into movement, action, and gesture.

The singer discovers not only clarity of action (What), but the quality of the action (How). Chekhov (2001, p. 140) stresses that ‘how’ is the primary question with which an actor must be concerned, because “‘how’ is the mystery of art; it is the secret of the artist who always knows “how” without any explanation, any proof, any analysis’. In other words, intuition based upon sound understanding is to be trusted and cultivated. By subsequently exploring the quality’s opposite (Polarity) we can discover how the accent shifts and changes – those inconsistencies that are so necessary to defining character and to creating drama.

If I discover, in Bernstein’s *A Little Bit in Love*, for example, that my character is ‘caught in a delicious spell’, I can play with the idea that the space around me is filled with a kind of pink haze that I can’t quite see through (Atmosphere). Or I could imagine wearing rose-coloured glasses, seeing the world through their filter (Personal Atmosphere). Or I may realise that she is surrendering (Psychological Gesture) to the sweetness of the sensation. Led by the quality of the music, which is soft and flowing, the body can be kept soft in surrender, as if being gently floated along on a river (Quality of Floating). Noticing the stepwise scale of the introduction with its jolt-like appoggiaturas, followed by the cascading fall in the second bar and subsequent upward sweep, which is reminiscent of the unsteady footing, stumbling and catching of tipsiness or the deck of a ship in a breeze, I could decide that the character is reeling, unsteady (Psychological Gesture) and work with the space imaginatively as an active force against which she is trying to stay steady.

Further exploration into the text which is absolutely necessary to the singing actor, whether in opera or Musical Theatre, might help me to discover that in the first part of the bridge section (‘When he looks at me, everything’s hazy and all out of focus [. . .]’) the character is actively trying to get through the haze, to make sense of what is happening. The music supports this idea, with its repeating atonal triplets that circle around; perhaps her ‘mind is spinning’.

Moderato

Leisurely (♩ = ♩)
 EILEEN:
 p with charm

Mm, _____ I'm a lit - tle bit in love, _____ Nev - er

p a tempo

felt this way _____ be - fore. _____

Here is where Willing, Thinking, and Feeling can help. In that moment Eileen is ‘trying to see’, a Thinking function, and so I can try letting my gestures and my actions arise from the centre of the head and neck. Again, if I see everything as movement, then I can, in rehearsal, take the metaphor to literal action. I can actually let my eyes glaze over and let my head roll around, and see what that gives me. Of course I would not perform the song that way; I am searching for the inner experience of the movement.

Once I have movement and images at my command that will awaken my inner life in a manner consistent with the composer’s and lyricist’s intentions I have a kind of scaffold that supports repetition. At the same time there is space left for choices to be inspired by the moment. The actor’s command of energy is accomplished by subsequent practice of these intuitive gestural discoveries with Chekhov’s ideas of an inner movement that precedes as well as follows actual movement. Chekhov (2002, p. 4) calls this the ‘complete obedience of both body and psychology to the actor’. He instructs the performer:

(rhythmically)

When he looks at me, ev-ry-thing's ha-zy and all out of fo-cus.

When he touch-es me, I'm in the spell of a strange ho-cus po-cus.

This conscious practice is what Petit (2009, pp. 46–47) calls the ‘artistic frame’. Indeed, the ability to move consciously, artistically, and to radiate may be the most important skill that any performing artist must develop. Radiating is the essence of musical expression since music, comprised of vibration, actively reaches our ears through moving waves of sound.

Gesture is the outward movement scaffolding that we build in order to find inner movement. Later in the process the gesture can fall away as the singing actor learns to move her energy. In singing the composition, the accompaniment, the rhythms, the dynamic markings, and the text in song provide a gestural foundation that remains even in performance. This is the tremendous advantage that the singing actor possesses. The traditional actor must rely solely on herself while the singing actor always has access to the music. The scaffolding remains and the singer, secure and trusting, is free to soar far from the self-conscious prison of inhibition.

Moving in abstract, intuitive ways may be challenging for students trained in the voice studio who concentrate very specifically on vocal technique. There is a drive to ‘get it right’ first and later to begin incorporating artistic and expressive concerns. Many gifted voice teachers get singers to use imagery and to be physically active, but improvisation is rarely utilised in the teaching of voice. Very often the classically trained singer is encouraged to find stillness in performing, which is often desirable in performance but can stifle the energy of inner movement. This can leave the singer stiff and disconnected from fully embodied expression. Resistance to improvisation can also be found in those who have learned their singing and acting style from television, audio recordings, and camera-dri-

ven performances. Both singers and actors often have a goal-centred, visually driven image of how to perform that divorces them from authentic acting choices. In Chekhov's (2002, p. 3) words, 'They are perilously prone to forget that the real task of the creative artist is not merely to copy the outer appearance of life, but to interpret life in all its facets and profoundness'. In many cases they do not know how to read music or interpret the composer's intent and often ignore vital components of the literature. Singers, and indeed actors, may need to be gently led, encouraged, and dared to work in this intuitive way. Singers and actors have to learn to trust their own creative responses, to be convinced that they have them, and that this isn't just silly 'dancing around'.

Qualities

Working specifically with simple movements and changing the Quality with which they are performed can help to convince the reluctant singer of the efficacy and charm of the Chekhov method. If I am to put my hand on the table and I do it 'gently', it will give me a very different feeling response than if I do it 'violently'. If the singer experiences how the movement transforms inner life rather than the other way round (trying to conjure a feeling using the intellect) then she is closer to believing in the power of this method. Perhaps one 'tries on' a variety of movement qualities, and applies them in turn to sections of a song to find out what that awakens in the singer.

One may begin with something tiny, a small gesture with the hand to awaken recognition of the impulse, then progress to large, full-body abstraction. That often seems less scary and threatening to the individual unused to moving in a fully embodied, improvisational form. It is possible to begin with the full body and slowly find smaller and more subtle ways to articulate until finally moving onto neutral action such as reading, writing, walking, sitting, standing, looking out the window, and handling an object that can easily adapt themselves to multiple transformations. Full-body, fully embodied gestures must be practised at some point in the process, however, because those are the ones that often give us the most energy and detail. They reveal most clearly the level of investment the singer has made and can guide the instructor to urge greater commitment, or to point out the need for more ease or form, or sense of the whole.

Exercises in Moulding, Floating, Flying, and Radiating are among Chekhov's (2002) first exercises in *To the Actor*, and can help the singer to explore a wide range of gestural qualities, some (or even all) of which may be suggested by the accompaniment or vocal line. The essence of the quality, once experienced as an inner transformation, is radiated. The movement, the gesture itself, must eventually be abandoned in order to sing and act from the radiant experience that was first generated by the conscious movement. Otherwise the singer may not be able to perform the movement as an imagined thing only. She might begin the phrase, abandoning the outward gesture soon after, and begin to follow her impulses in a more naturalistic fashion. Eventually the singer moulds as an inner movement and need only call forth the gesture to awaken the creative state. This is how the gesture and the quality with which it is performed is like scaffolding that is no longer needed. It can be put aside once the inner life is built.

Movement gives the singer-actor a real-time experience, NOT a remembered experience or warmed-over repetition of what was found in rehearsal. Avoiding unconscious repetition is one of the truly magical aspects of this work if we can harness it. What most of us find in this work is that we might catch a glimpse of a real-time experience in experimentation, but then we try to hold on to it. We quit actually moving or doing. We may have to go back to the full-body experience. Yet, even that can be a pitfall if we think, ‘oh yes, moulding, I know what this is’. Suddenly we are not really present in the moment. We must discover it new each time. It is the energy of the body, what moves before we move, that is key here. What the singer hopes for in performance is for all prior exploration and rehearsal to fall away. We can then trust that we have opened up the channels of inspiration that will allow us to freely access an ‘in the moment’ state of improvisation. This practice results in a seeming state of improvisation, where the music seems to emanate from the character’s deepest needs in the moment of performance.

Atmosphere

‘The Atmosphere inspires the actor’ (Chekhov 2002, p. 61). One of Michael Chekhov’s most easily recognisable and yet often most elusive tools is the use of Atmospheres: ‘a good and true definition would be that the atmosphere of every piece of art is its heart, its feeling soul. Consequently it is also the soul, the heart of each and every performance’ (Chekhov 2002, p. 53). Chekhov sees the atmosphere as the arbiter between the ideas of a piece and the action. He teaches that atmosphere is something fundamentally human, a phenomenon that we all recognise. For example, the atmospheres of a party on New Year’s Eve, of a cathedral, of a forest in the day or in the night, and of a room abundant with tension because two people have just argued, all evoke a specific, identifiable feeling. We are to become aware of atmospheres and then to practise imagining them into the space. We can then improvise within the particular atmosphere.

There is a danger with atmospheres. It is easy to fall into the trap of trying to play the feelings evoked by them. For example, if we picture a cathedral, we may be tempted to play wonder or awe. But Chekhov tells us that the atmosphere just exists. We can enter a party reluctantly because we are not up to it, but the atmosphere doesn’t change. In fact it becomes in a sense a constant source of creative energy for us. Chekhov tells us that atmospheres awaken will impulses, the desire to act. Chekhov (2002, p. 50) articulates: ‘The atmosphere urges you to act in harmony with it ... an actor or a person who is deprived of artistic sensitivity will probably remain passive in the atmosphere of a calm, moonlit night; but an actor giving himself wholly will soon feel a kind of creative activity engendered within him’. The singing actor rarely has to create this atmosphere alone. Well-written music provides a never-ending source of creative inspiration.

The singing actor is fortunate, for in a carefully crafted song or aria, the composer will often provide an objective atmosphere in the accompaniment or underscore. The singer, understanding the power of a film score in establishing atmosphere, can draw on this similar phenomenon. She need only listen and let it work upon her.

Examples of this kind of atmosphere can be found in the underscoring of the opening scene between Billy Bigelow and Julie Jordan in *Carousel*, where she is yielding to it and actively taking courage from it, and he is resisting it. Other examples are prevalent in *A Little Night Music* in the heady, perfumed ensemble ‘Night Waltz II’, or in the driving, syncopated accompaniment redolent of masses of humanity in ‘Another Hundred People’ from *Company*.

Sample Exploration:

To work with Atmosphere in this way, have the pianist simply play the accompaniment with no vocal line. Ask the singer(s) to sit or lie down and listen, one or more times, to let images arise and bubble up, purely from the music. He will already be incorporating images from the text and his character and getting a sense of the movement of the music, the movement of the character with or in opposition to it. Next, he can get on his feet and move with the music in large, non-realistic, abstract gestures and speeds, noticing experiences, following impulses. The next step is to take the movement to more neutral, naturalistic movement – on impulse to sit, stand, walk, run, turn, look, gesture. It is important to do a ‘spy back’ (see above) at this point, to find out what the singer experienced and whether it moved him, shifted or transformed him somehow. What desires, will impulses are at work? Then you can work out together how that experience can be explored further, so that eventually it can simply provide another layer to what is held dynamically in the space for the singer.

Lenard Petit (2009) has found that once the feeling of the atmosphere is discovered translating it into how the space around us is moving – up, down, away, toward, contracting, expanding, swirling – helps the actor to avoid the trap of playing emotion. In the “Master Classes” CD-ROM (2007), Ragnar Freidank uses images of temperature, colour, and light to play with Atmosphere. It is also possible to translate the atmosphere into a psychological gesture that belongs to the space. An Atmosphere of ‘anticipation’ might be experienced as the space moving forward, up. In an atmosphere of danger the space might threaten to close in. We might imagine the space as filled with dappled sunlight if we wanted to create an atmosphere of gentleness, or with dark shadows if an atmosphere of suspicion is desired. Working this way keeps us from the trap of ‘playing the feeling’ of gloom, or danger, or excitement. Instead those things can simply belong to the space. When the singer allows the score (not the melodic line) to simply BE the atmosphere, he has instant access to inspiration. The score is a partner that is reliably there even in soliloquy.

Willing, thinking, feeling and the language of metaphor

According to Chekhov (2002, p. 53), ‘each of us knows that every normal human being exercises three main psychological functions: thoughts, feelings and will impulses’. Stanislavski also used these ideas in *An Actor Prepares*. (Stanislavski 1989, ch. 12.) Chekhov’s technique embodies them in centres of movement. These include: the head and neck for Thinking, the chest and arms for Feeling, and the legs, feet, and pelvis for Willing. Character Centres can be discovered in these areas. This works particularly well for those characters in literature who are strongly and clearly driven by one of these forces, such as Lady Macbeth (Willing) or Blanche (Feeling.) Chekhov encourages us to ask

what our character's Thinking is like, and use movement imagery to help us translate those ideas into physicalisation. Delsarte takes this notion a step farther, and divides each of the three main areas into their own microcosms of Willing, Thinking, and Feeling. In the Delsarte technique the forehead/eyes are the thinking centre of the face, nose, and upper cheeks, the feeling/emotional, and the mouth and jaw the willing/vital (Shawn 1963, p. 35) The language of metaphor even translates our human experience into these areas of movement: 'He set his teeth in determination' (Will) or 'Her brow puckered in thought' (Thought). Another way to understand and employ these centres is to imagine the corresponding surrounding space as being filled with thoughts, feelings, and actions. In keeping with the principle that the Technique is one thing, it is entirely appropriate to move fluidly back and forth between these ways of working, as one idea will inevitably spark others.

In a song or aria, which most often express a heightened sensibility, the singer can find action and movement by asking which of the three functions a character is doing. 'Will He Like Me?' from *She Loves Me*, provides rich opportunities to investigate.

Sample Exploration:

At the beginning of the song, Amalia might be speaking from her thoughts, from her projected image of the future. In this case, she is articulating her fears of course, but she is still processing them through her thoughts, through her head. 'What will happen?' she asks. The music here is speech-like in its structure, rhythms, and melodies. But when she sings, 'Will he know that there's a world of love?' etc., it becomes clear that something is stirring, shifting. Lush melodies and harmonies, a rising vocal line, greater vocal dynamics, all point the way to a swelling heart that pours out its deepest longing. But as soon as she begins to imagine, to think of the upcoming meeting again, she reverts to the thinking world, landing in reality with a bump. So the song becomes a dialogue between what her heart is telling her and where her thoughts are taking her.

The use of metaphor is deliberate, because, as a Chekhov practitioner it helps me to understand the action of the song as movement. This in turn gives rise to a host of images. As soon as I think of an outpouring of the heart, I have an image of a wave of emotion that rises up and out, moving freely and ceaselessly. I think of Amalia as paralysed by her fear, using her mind to talk it down, 'How I wish that we could meet another day. It's absurd for me to worry so this way. I'll try not to.' It conjures an image of a door as if she is poised on the threshold and tempted to back away. Her mind is a battleground, and her rational left brain is threatening to win. The repetitive phrases of music are short, like fragments, suggestive of impeded forward motion. These images are not all of a piece, but it doesn't matter to the unconscious, intuitive self. I can now experiment with them and the process will inevitably give rise to more images and more possibilities.

I find from the text and music the directional flow of the song, or its dance, if you will. Chekhov (2002, p. 53) argues that EVERYTHING can be seen in terms of its movement, gesture, and/or action. Amalia's heart desires, wants, and needs love. It flows up and out, when she sings, 'Will he know that there's a world of love waiting to warm him? How I'm hoping that his eyes and ears won't misinform him.' But then, her thoughts draw her back, 'Will he like me, who can say?' Her fears threaten to overcome her desire. Perhaps she shrinks. What is clear is that Amalia's Thinking is in some kind of dialogue with her Feeling. They are wrestling for control of her Will, or what she will actually do next.

Will he like the girl he sees? If he

does - n't will he know e - nough to know That there's more to me than I may al - ways

show? Will he like me? Will he know that there's a

With more motion

world of love wait - ing to warm him? How I'm hop - ing that his

eyes and ears won't mis - in - form him. Will he like me, who can

As actors we can easily translate these ideas into movement if we have practised sufficiently the movement of energy and body using the artistic frame. We can also allow the space to move dynamically and respond to it, by filling it around the head with thoughts, around the heart with feelings. The practice of allowing voice and gestures to arise from the different physical centres of Thinking, Willing, and Feeling is so tangible and reliable for the poor singer who asks, ‘What do I do with my hands?’

When any of us speak from these different centres our gestural language will naturally shift; this will be facilitated and motivated by the shifts and changes in the music. Thoughts happen in the space around the head, and the flow of those thoughts operates in the exploration above, to pull Amalia either backward and/or inward. Then when her longing arises (direction again), the space around her chest and arms is suddenly alive with feelings, and the direction that they pull her is outward and/or forward. Imagine the way in which searching for answers (Will he like me?) shifts for the singer if those answers are there in the space around the head and neck and are there for the finding! The space then becomes an active partner with the singer. When someone actually thinks on-stage she ceases to be fully present. We teachers have all seen it. We even say, ‘You’ve gone up into your head’, or ‘Get out of your head’. If the character needs to be thinking she can look to the space around herself for the necessary thoughts. She can also allow images to arise as rhythmic or visual or even audible cues; it doesn’t matter because the audience will recognise those actions as thinking.

Humans often use another metaphor for thinking: seeing. We either ‘can’t see’ or ‘see our way clearly’. The singer can translate that metaphor into an imaginary space that is murky, foggy, blurry, obstructed, and in a moment of discovery be ‘dazzled or blinded by a vision’. This image offers clear action and gestural possibilities. When we can catch the experience as an image like this we have instant access to inspiration, because these are things we can actually do in any given moment. Another way of working with a thinking passage is to let gestures arise that seek to manipulate the problem, like a dog ‘worrying’ a bone or to ‘untangle thoughts’ with the hands in the space around the head. Of course the physical gestures will eventually fall away or remain in a modified form; it is the image, the inner movement that is the source of inspiration. The beauty of the music is that it will point us clearly toward strong and appropriate choices.

Conclusion

Working with the Chekhov technique can help the performing artist to develop the sensitive, expressive body and creative imagination necessary to incorporate these explorations with reliable and consistent results. A flexible and open mind, an eager desire to embrace artistic challenges, and active suppression of soul-killing criticism are the foundations upon which to begin mastering the technique. Chekhov (2002, pp. 3–4) writes on the power of the actor's body:

The actor's body can be of optimal value to him only when motivated by an unceasing flow of artistic impulses; only then can it be more refined, flexible, expressive and, most vital of all, sensitive and responsive to the subtleties which constitute the creative artist's inner life.

For the actor's body must be molded and re-created from inside. ... A sensitive body and rich, colorful psychology are mutually complementary and create that harmony so necessary to the attainment for the actor's professional aim.

Development of the singer's voice at the expense of the entirety of the instrument can deprive her of access to inspired performance. Trusting the body, its impulses, its gestures, and its deeply felt wisdom is essential to artistic freedom. The Chekhov Technique offers a portal to this kind of creativity because it is based on principles that are easily penetrated by the sensitive and intelligent singer.

Trusting the composer is also vital for the singing actor. The musical cues combined with the text are not only a rich source of inspiration; they are essential, intentional expressive guidelines for the performer. Contained within the music is a language that is shared with the Chekhov Technique –Intangible Means of Expression, Qualities, Imagery, Energy, and, most importantly, Gesture. Once the singing actor begins to understand that all musical terms can be seen as gestures, and that the human experience can be seen in the same way, then he/she is blessed with a continuous source of inspiration. Mastery of the tools of the technique so that they can be reliably invoked is necessary for performers. Yet, the practice is essentially a simple one: to sense the movement in physical terms while simultaneously being aware of one's inner experience, inner transformation (improvisation), and eventually translating that experience into a movement that may be imagined. The brain perceives this imagined movement as real. This is how the singer is able to meet the music and the text in the moment. He imaginatively generates that energy that summons forth the music (written by the composer but appearing to emerge spontaneously from the singer's need. This is the same goal for the actor, who must summon, or choose the text (already written) as if for the first time. That is the inspired state. 'When everything is forgotten' the audience and performer alike are caught up in a shared connection that is truly, in Chekhov's (2001, p. 55) words, 'a miracle'.

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9.4 Helen and „A tree tells“

What was the most powerful moment during the Forrest Walk?

The most powerful moment for me was when we were all asked to take some time alone to connect to the environment around us. Sebastian suggested for each of us to follow our instinct, and to be guided by something that intrigues us.

It took me some time to find my ‘moment’. I was searching for anything that might ‘grab’ me... or that I would connect with on a profound level. Eventually, I was literally **drawn** towards one particular tree - soaring high above me, entangled within its own roots. I followed Sebastian’s advice and asked if I could come closer. I felt its energy, and I felt its wisdom. Slowly, I reached the bottom of its trunk, lightly touched the ancient bark, and listened for a while.

I could hear every sound around me. The silence was stunning - the rustle of wind in the leaves, the flow of energy from the forest floor, and also the faint sounds of the wild horses encircled amongst us. And this whole time, I felt like I was connected in spirit and mind to ‘my’ tree. It was telling me a story, accepting me as a young visitor, and I was observing it in full respect. It was magical.

What exactly (thought, mood) let you decide writing a song ? chain of thoughts...

I was deeply moved by this workshop, and my next practice session was when I wrote ‘A Tree Tells’. I felt feelings of humility and fragility. This workshop took place during the start of the Australian Bushfire Crisis, and I felt that the experience was a calling for me to harness my deep connection with nature and to create music in honour of my burning homeland... and also in honour of mother nature, who is also burning. The whole experience was rather emotional, and the ideas started to flow rather naturally.

Do you think the melody/sound the lyrics of this composition were influenced also from the atmosphere of this experience? And how?

The lyrics are the most important part of this piece. They form the foundation of the music and the story. The words are purposely simple and repetitive; it felt right to keep it like this in order to avoid over-complication. The melody was then influenced by the accompaniment of harmonics on the double bass, which combine quite well with a female vocal range.

Overall, the magical atmosphere of my own workshop experience was highly influential in the compositional process. The music is reminiscent of the atmosphere and environment during the workshop, which felt uninterrupted and refreshingly authentic... Devoid of pollution... immersed in nothing but nature's presence.

This composition is purposefully simple. In contrast to the other vegetable pieces, I felt that the lyrics were the foundation for this piece of music. Thus, I chose to use only parallels to accompany the vocal melody; ... to enhance the story, and to avoid distraction from the fundamental meaning of the lyrics.

How was your composing process writing down the words or thinking first of the notation? Or from improvising, thinking of the forest?

'A Tree Tells' was written in a single 30 minute session. I felt as if the music literally flowed out of me, and I was merely the vessel that allowed it to travel from my mind to my instrument and voice. The central story channels my anger and sadness relating to the bushfires and to climate change, and the dialogue involves my inner discussion with the tree during the workshop.

After several versions, I recorded a short performance and posted it on my Vegetable-Bass sound- cloud that very same day. Upon further development, only a few things were added (i.e. extra accompaniment/longer form etc). But the original essence of the music has remained exactly the same ever since, and I think this was due to the sacred emotion that I was able to feel during that single day.

What was perhaps a difference composing process compared to others song to your others, if yes how?

In comparison to the rest of the Vegetable-Bass pieces, this song is much more 'simple'. The peacefulness and beauty of silence in the forest is something that has directly influenced the compositional output of this song. There is no need to have many notes or to add more sections... There is no need for atonality, there is no need for flashy techniques. My priority is to keep the music as it was at the beginning... as an honest representation of my experience, inspired by the focused energy that I felt during that day. The story is the most important part - enhanced by the subtlety of the underlying musical accompaniment.

9.5 Chekhov under influence of anthroposophy: Abstract



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DIPLOMARBEIT

„Michail Čechovs theatralische Sendung – Die Arbeit an einem geistigen Theater unter dem Einfluss der Anthroposophie“

verfasst von Nina-Natalie Bartsch

angestrebter akademischer Grad

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Theater-, Film – und Medienwissenschaft

Univ.-Prof. Dr. habil. Michael Gissenwehler

Language	ger ... german
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Abstract in Deutsch

Das zentrale Thema und Anliegen des russische Theaterpädagogen Michail Čechov war es stets, sein theaterästhetisches Konzept von einem neuen und idealen Theater zu verwirklichen, dem Theater der Zukunft. Im Mittelpunkt dieser Arbeit steht die Untersuchung seines schauspielpädagogischen Werks unter dem Einwirken der Anthroposophie Rudolf Steiners. Es werden die Methoden Čechovs schauspielpädagogischen Verfahrens ausgeführt, um sie einem anthroposophischen Kontext zugänglich zu machen und gewisse Teilbereiche aus Steiners Geisteswissenschaft erläutert um klare Parallelen ziehen zu können. Der Theaterpädagoge Čechov war geprägt von der anthroposophischen Geisteshaltung und beeindruckt von den Überlegungen und Ausführungen zur Sprachentwicklung und Eurythmie, die für seine künstlerische Arbeit von grundlegender Bedeutung waren. In Folge lassen sich nicht nur Berührungspunkte in der praktischen Arbeit des Theaterpädagogen zu Steiners Wissenschaft erkennen, sondern auch die geistige Hinwendung mit der er die anthroposophische Grundelemente bewusst in sein Werk mit einfließen ließ.

Schlagwörter in Deutsch

Michail Chechov / Schauspielpädagoge / Rudolf Steiner / Anthroposophie

Abstract in English

The implementation of a new theatric-aesthetic concept has always been the concern of the Russian drama-educator Michail Čechov. His vision of a Theater of the Future was crucial for the development of an innovative acting method. The focus of this thesis is the examination of his drama-educational work and the influence of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. After an introduction of Čechov's acting techniques, they will be further examined in relation to Steiner's anthroposophy. Finally, elements common to both areas will be emphasized. The anthroposophical spiritual attitude as well as findings on language development and eurythmy were highly essential for Čechov's innovative theater style. Therefore, a link between the practical life of drama-education and anthroposophy as well as an influence of Steiner's humanitarian attitude can be found in Čechov's work, who deliberately incorporated those aspects into his revolutionary concept.

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