ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Applying Constantin Stanislavski’s Acting ‘System’ to Choral Rehearsals

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This research explores possible applications in choral rehearsals of techniques, methods, and theories of acting that were established by Russian actor, director, theoretician, and pedagogue Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938). The parallel between the dramatic art and the art of choral music focuses on the discussion of the Stanislavski ‘system’ as described in detail in his ‘Acting Trilogy’ and other critical literature as well as on the use of psycho-technique by Romanian conductor Marin Constantin (b. 1925) and his Madrigal Choir of Bucharest. The introductory chapter presents the premises of this parallel and the complexity of Stanislavski’s artistic personality, his pivotal role in the history of theater and performing arts. The second chapter reviews existing literature that is pertinent to the topic, explaining all the elements of Stanislavski’s acting theory; this process divides the sources into three categories, namely the body of English translations of Stanislavski’s writings, the authoritative source materials that clarify and confirm the practicality of the ‘system,’ and the references on the use of psycho-technique in choral practice. The third chapter describes possible usage of key artistic elements, principles, and techniques of the acting ‘system’ in choral rehearsals, including concepts such as
creative mood, concentration of attention, imagination, given circumstances, ‘magic If,’ inner motive forces, action (as in singing and conducting gestures), units (bits) and objectives (tasks), relaxation of muscles, ensemble work, communion, emotion memory, tempo-rhythm, active analysis, through line of action, and super-objective. The fourth chapter explores concrete applications of psycho-technical elements made by this researcher in a practical study with two student ensembles. Limitations and special circumstances about this collaboration are indicated. The rehearsal process is described in detail and focuses on the work on three choral pieces, namely Kasar mie la gaji by Venezuelan composer Alberto Grau (b. 1937), If Music Be the Food of Love by David C. Dickau (b. 1953), and There Will Be Rest by Franck Ticheli (b. 1958) on a poem by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933). The findings of this research, summarized in the final chapter, reflect not only the possibility of using elements of the Stanislavski ‘system’ of acting in choral rehearsals, but also the necessity to employ psycho-technique in choral practice; the results also recommend further applications of the ‘system’ in areas of formation of individual choristers as true artists, of building ensemble unity of expression of emotions, and of developing an effective and meaningful vocabulary of conducting gestures.