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Expression in popular music singing as embodied and interpersonal

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This article presents theoretical viewpoints for considering and understanding expression in popular music singing and pedagogy from the perspective of embodiment as outlined in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy. In our study, we apply his interpretations of such notions as intentionality, body schema, gesture, reversibility, and intersubjectivity to bring forth and discuss the holistic, embodied, and interpersonal nature of voice expression in singing. We argue that expression should be viewed as an intentional activity, based on the body's innate mindful functioning as a whole, and in singing guided by the lyrics and emotions to be communicated. We propose that this requires a "free voice", based on healthy vocal production, that also allows for the immediacy of expression as and through gestures that bring the meaning into existence. We further argue that expression is an interpersonal, interactive, and intersubjective process in which the performer and listener influence each other in many ways. The reversibility of perception in expression means that perception and the object perceived are intertwined and action and perception are interconnected. There is also a gap in reversibility, which implies that the perception of (one's own) expression is never complete. In addition to our theoretical arguments, we make pedagogical suggestions, such as that the body itself has a lot of understanding of *how* and should be trusted in singing, both in terms of voice production and expression. The expression should not be primarily approached as a technical issue but taught in connection with and through expression. The expression should be viewed *from the inside out*, not the opposite. This means that expression builds on one's personality and (emotional) experiences.

KEYWORDS

expression, singing, popular music, voice pedagogy, embodiment, phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty

Introduction

The singing of popular music[1] (hereafter PM) has recently received a lot of attention, partly inspired by the various TV formats associated with it. There is also a growing availability of PM singing instruction—on the internet, through private coaching, training courses, and training programs at various levels of music institutions. Singing, in general, is a trendy hobby today, as it is seen as a meaningful and holistic practice that promotes wellbeing (e.g., Grape et al., 2003;

1 Popular music is here used loosely to refer to nonclassical music genres, such as pop, jazz, rock, gospel, rhythm and blues, soul, hip hop, rap, country, folk, music theatre, and experimental.

Gick, 2011). Indeed, it is a highly embodied activity and experience. As the singing voice comes from the body, singing requires "a coordinated integration of the whole body" (Bunch, 2005, p. 13), and the voice–the primary source of human communication (Gilman, 2018, p. 62)–functions best when it is treated as an integral part of the whole human being, as a *voice-body* (Tarvainen, 2019). Singing is also an embodied way to interact, to connect with others and even the world. "There is no other way to be as intimately involved with the world as singing," as Finnish philosopher Varto (2001, p. 124) describes it.

This article examines expression in singing and builds a theory of expression in the context of popular music from the perspective of embodiment. It also brings forth related pedagogical aspects. The motivation for this examination arises from the second and third authors' experienced difficulties of verbalizing, assessing, and teaching expression in PM voice pedagogy. Technical requirements (such as sound quality, register shifts, range, and dynamics) are easier to assess and are more often defined in performance examination requirements (see, e.g., Uniarts, 2022) which then guide not only assessment but also the contents of teaching. Thus, the teaching of expression is often relegated to a secondary in relation to teaching vocal technique, and singers have a habit of valuing technical expertise over other parts of performance (Grape et al., 2003; Rodrigues et al., 2009). This may complicate voice students' overall progress as future professionals (Miller, 1996, p. 247). Furthermore, the technique is often regarded as teachable whereas expression is often considered intuitive and inborn (Rodrigues et al., 2009). Naturally, vocal technique is essentially interconnected with artistic expression: a major lack of technique or preoccupation with it can inhibit or complicate musical expression (Miller, 1996; Hoffmann, 2016, p. xvi).

Another observation of the two authors is that popular music voice pedagogy often addresses expression as a technical activity: it is suggested that a certain expressive voice quality can be achieved by manipulating the sound (examples of these pedagogical approaches can be found in Sadolin, 2000; Steinhauer et al., 2017; regarding actors, Hakanpää, 2022). In research, expression is often approached as an object by examining observable musical qualities through acoustic measurement and technology. For example, when examining emotion in expression, researchers have approached expression in terms of temporal structures and acoustic correlates and features (e.g., Juslin, 2003; Juslin and Laukka, 2003; Laukka et al., 2005; Eyben et al., 2016; Scherer et al., 2017; Hakanpää et al., 2019). For instance, Juslin and Laukka (2003) state, "there are emotion-specific patterns of acoustic cues that can be used to communicate discrete emotions in both vocal and musical expression of emotion."

Expression is a challenging term. While it is widely used and discussed when talking about performance, it is difficult to explain. Within Western classical music, Holmgren (2022) views expression as a performer's interpretation of composed music, in which the performer uses his freedom within the composition. The performer is expected to consider the composer's intentions as the authority (Holmgren, 2022, p. 47; Leech-Wilkinson, 2012, p. 2). Within PM, in which aural traditions are more prevalent than interpreting a score (Hughes, 2014), the performer has and is expected to use more freedom in interpretation. In classical music, a performer expresses artistry, knowledge, or personhood through a series of decisions within specific parameters such as tone, dynamics, tempo, or intonation (Holmgren, 2022, p. 46; also Sell, 2003, p. 207). In PM singing, the individuality of voice as sonic and timbral uniqueness–a recognizable sound–is valued highly, even to the extent that individual sound is required to "stand out" from others in the same genre (Hughes, 2014; Johnson, 2019; Kobel, 2020). Furthermore, while stylistic integrity is considered important, singers are expected to demonstrate originality and creativity in (lyrical) interpretations (Hughes, 2014, 2017) and individuality is also considered to correspond to the believability of expression (Hughes, 2014). As Hughes (2014) suggests, artistic manifestations are often more explicit than the processes that enable or underpin them. "Often inherent artist traits are intangible and difficult to define, and consequently, are even more difficult to address pedagogically" (Hughes, 2014, p. 288). Analyzing expression through the singing voice becomes more complicated as the artistic medium is the artist him/herself, and "the artistic instrument, the singing voice, is physically embodied" (p. 288). This becomes even more complex when considering a "para-linguistic dimension" (Middleton, 2000, p. 29) of voice, emotion, and song lyrics; when the meanings, resonances, and sound-shapes of the words are integrated with the melody, rhythm, tone quality, and articulation (Kronengold, 2005). Other performance characteristics and subtleties, specifically related to musical styles and the use of technology, are present in PM singing (Soto-Morettini, 2006; Stephens, 2008).

This article aims to animate discussion about expression in PM singing and suggests an embodied approach to its examination, by using a phenomenological theory of embodiment as a framework. Our examination is based on viewing singing as an embodied, holistic activity that depends on the body's innate capability and the reciprocal integration of physical, mental, and emotional processes (Paparo, 2016; Juntunen, 2017). In our understanding of embodiment, we mainly draw on Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1965, 1968) phenomenological philosophy. In his philosophy, the notion of embodiment refers to the integration of the physical body and the lived, experiential body suggesting a network that integrates thinking, being, doing, and interacting (Varela et al., 1991, p. xv). In line with Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968), we view that the mind (including emotion) and body are essentially integrated in singing. There is a unity of behavior, action, and interaction. Parallelly, we approach expression in singing as experienced both from the first- and third-person perspectives. Although phenomenological approaches do not ascribe noteworthy significance to the role of art (Levin, 2016, p. 191), we will nevertheless apply Merleau-Ponty's philosophy since it unravels the mindful skillfulness of the moving body, which is also pertinent to singing. We apply Merleau-Ponty's interpretations of such notions as intentionality, body schema, gesture, reversibility, and intersubjectivity to bring forth and discuss the holistic, embodied, and interpersonal nature of voice expression in singing, regarded both from the performer's and listener's perspectives.

Merleau-Ponty's embodied ontology and epistemology as a theoretical frame

The concept of embodiment is theoretical-philosophical, and its definition varies from discipline to discipline (for example, ecological psychology, see Gibson, 1977; linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; theoretical biology, Maturana and Varela, 1980). Embodiment

is the study and theorization of the relationships among the human body, mind, and world (Schiavio, 2014). In his phenomenological philosophy, Merleau-Ponty (1962) rejected the dualistic conception of the human beings - the dualistic distinction between mental interior/physical exterior - and replaced it with a new concept of the subject that is essentially physical, or rather, psychophysical. He regarded the distinction between mind and body as the result of thinking and reflection, rather than as a result of immediate lived experience. This means that although physical and mental worlds exist, intuitively or pre-reflectively, we are not aware of living in two worlds, one inner and mental and the other, external and physical. Likewise, there are no psychophysical, causal relations between the mind and body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1965, pp. 407–408; pp. 188–189). "Naive consciousness does not see in the soul the cause of the movements of the body, nor does it put the soul in the body as the pilot in this ship" (Merleau-Ponty, 1965, p. 188). Therefore, there is nothing mental that, so to speak, resides "in" the body. Rather, pre-reflectively, we understand and experience that we humans act holistically as fully embedded in the world (also Priest, 1998, pp. 68, 71). Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty accepts the Cartesian thesis that, qualitatively, consciousness and physical objects are radically distinct. There is therefore a common sense and compelling gap between the physical and psychophysical (Priest, 1998, pp. 54, 226). In this light, it is possible to talk about duality without dualism in relation to the mind–body (Levin, 2016, p. 182; Juntunen and Westerlund, 2001).

Although Merleau-Ponty writes about "one's own body" (*corps propre*), he does not only refer to the first-person perspective. The notion of the lived body refers to subject and object, the first-person and third-person perspectives alike; it includes intellectual cognition along with visceral and sensory-motor capacities. By this notion, Merleau-Ponty avoids the dualistic opposition not merely between mind and body *per se*, but also between *Leib* (living body) and *Korper* (physical body)—the distinction in the German language is often employed by philosophers (Leder, 1990, pp. 5–7). In fact, as Zahavi (2004, p. 32) notes, he "asks us to reconsider the very opposition, and to search for a dimension that is beyond both objectivism and subjectivism."

Based on this understanding of human beings, Merleau-Ponty constructed his theory of human embodied knowing. For him, experience is the primary way of understanding oneself, others, and the world. In line with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the embodied cognition approach describes the relationship of the body to cognitive processes (Johnson, 2007; Shapiro, 2010; Leitan and Chaffey, 2014). These theories explain how the sensorimotor system is linked to our cognitive system and how thinking and conceptual understanding are based on embodied experiences. Perception and behavior, action, and cognition are seen as interdependent and deeply integrated, and the body is understood to play a central role in understanding the world, hence music, and in shaping meaning (Leman and Maes, 2014). Increasingly, the perspective of an embodiment is considered also in learning and teaching (e.g., Stolz, 2015), and has influenced a broad set of pedagogical fields from music and dance to mathematics and foreign language learning (e.g., Anttila, 2018; Flood et al., 2020; Juntunen, 2020a,b; Jusslin et al., 2022). One way to strengthen embodied learning is to integrate movement into teaching. Research has shown that integrating whole-body movements, gestures or just movement perception and imagination supports learning (Johnson-Glenberg et al., 2014; Skulmowski and Rey, 2018).

Singing as an expression of emotions

Our first argument is that expression in PM singing should be considered primarily as an expression of emotions. One of the key features of music is that it expresses and evokes emotions (Juslin and Laukka, 2004). Expression is an important aspect of any music performance but singing can be viewed as an enactment or expression of significant human emotions (Thurman, 2000). It is regarded essentially as an outward manifestation of emotions and feelings (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 14). Great singers are in fact expected to connect with their audiences through vocal emotion and expression (LoVetri et al., 2014, p. 57), and the voice technique is expected to support, not inhibit, the expression of emotions (Laukkanen and Leino, 2001, pp. 19–20).

Singing, as music in general, has a lot of potential to arouse strong emotions, both in the person making the music and the listener. However, it is only in the last decade that researchers have begun to study more systematically how emotional expression is achieved in performance. Yet, the precise nature of this process remains somewhat elusive. Research evidence from psychology suggests that the emotion induced in the listener is the same as the emotion expressed in the music, which is "consistent with the notion that music may induce emotions through a process of emotional contagion" (Lundqvist et al., 2009, p. 61). It is often debated whether the emotional expression should be "real" or "as-if." Thurman (2000, p. 162) argues that the audience does not distinguish between so-called real feelings and "as-if" feelings which both enable the listeners to "empathically engage with what is being expressed." The factors that influence musical expression and experience, in addition to the broad scope of variables in music itself, include cultural background, situation, musical training, previous life experiences, personality, as well as psychological and physical circumstances (Nielzen and Cesarec, 1982).

In the following section, we will discuss how the expression of emotions in performance is realized and achieved from the embodied perspective. As we see it, orientation toward expression in singing can be viewed as an intentional activity. First, we will examine what intentionality means for Merleau-Ponty, and how that understanding can be applied in the context of expression in singing, and then, how the lyrics of a song can guide that kind of intentional activity. We argue that focusing on "what to say" is enough to guide the voice-body to carry out the intented expression. To further understand *how* the body parts function in a meaningful way without having to be controlled by thought, we apply Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the notion of *body schema* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Expression as an intentional activity

To better understand the body's mindful functioning, we can apply Merleau-Ponty's notion of intentionality. Intentionality is a decisive feature of consciousness that clarifies the relation between the subject's mind and the world in the first-person perspective (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, pp. 110–112). It manifests orientation and consciousness toward an object outside the mind.

Motor intentionality has often been considered one of Merleau-Ponty's most important concepts, to whom intentionality is not only

formed by acts of thought but can already be found on an embodied level (Morris, 2014, p. 115). For him, the subject's embodied orientation toward the world, i.e., intentionality, is an ability to connect with and act on the world before consciously identifying the goals of action. For Merleau-Ponty, we are initially immersed in the world through the functions of the body, and only quietly do we understand their realization (Rouhiainen, 2011, pp. 77–79). By applying his notion of *intentionality* to singing, expression can be viewed as an intentional activity, in which the intention to express an emotion or a storyline directs and informs the activity of the mind–body in a functional manner without the need to consciously guide that action and make it happen.

In musical expression, both *what* and *how* matter. Although it can be discussed whether the esthetic value (*what*) is more or less important than the artistic value (*how*), in creative acts both matter and are related to intentionality (see Plavša, 1981). Not all music aims to express human emotions, yet vocal music can be considered "intentional music" (Plavša, 1981) in the sense that both the composer and/or the author of the lyrics have suggested a certain program for the music. Therefore, singing is not essentially only an act of producing musical sounds with the voice but rather about communicating with the audience through the song—telling a story and engaging a listener and thus evoking emotions and thoughts. It can even be argued that the expression of lyrics, which in themselves can evoke powerful emotions (Yang and Lee, 2009), is the core task for singers (LoVetri et al., 2014, p. 56). This in turn, as LoVetri et al. (2014), p. 57) state, requires one to connect emotionally with the song, either by using one's life experiences, empathy, and/or imagination.

We argue that when concentrating on "what to say," the voice-body knows "how" and carries out the intention without the necessity of guiding and controlling the muscular work. Focusing solely on vocal technique takes the focus away from expression, and manipulating the sound may interfere with voice production and prevent the voice-body from functioning in its most effective and economical ways. Moreover, a voice expression that comes from a person freely is more believable and attractive, and reveals "who you are" (also Johnson, 2019). It is natural both for the singer and the audience.

In stage music, the expression also includes communicating the character (LoVetri et al., 2014, p. 56). This requires from the singer a textual comprehension that can frame vocal qualities (Johnson, 2019), including digging deep into the content, meanings, and emotions embedded in the song, including how the music shapes the meaning of the words, and so on. According to Varto (2001, pp. 162, 180, 187), people have a special capacity for grasping the "mind of the text" comprehensively. This includes approaching the text as autonomous and external without preconceptions, on the one hand, and viewing the reader as an active interpreter, on the other, which results in the recreation of meanings. One or the other can be emphasized, and in music, it depends on the context and musical style how much freedom the interpreter may have. For singers, this process often implies understanding, interpreting, and internalizing the text and the embedded emotional state. As Carter (2005, p. vii) notes, "[t]he collective audience can only be moved deeply if the singer's connection to text and music is compelling and complete." When the expression is believable, the audience will engage through emotions and empathy, in which case, they respond with their feelings and become "moved" (Carter, 2005).

Many authors, such as Thurman (2000), Ostwald (2005), Olson (2010), and Coutinho et al. (2014) suggest that singers express emotions and characters embedded in the music in similar ways that actors do. For both, expression is tightly connected with and guided by the intention of communication. Then, one does not need to think and consciously manipulate voice to sound angry, for example, but should rather focus on what to communicate, which additionally promotes and requires the skill of being present (Olkkonen, 2013). According to Olkkonen (2013), this approach to expression creates a theoretical starting point for understanding sound as a form of communication, interrelated with human subjectivity. When able to communicate from oneself, from the inside out, leaning on one's sensitivity, vulnerability, and strength, and avoiding adopting "a role" during a performance, a performer creates an impression of presence, joy, and power. This also brings out the positive qualities of the performer (Olkkonen, 2013, p. 122). The human voice as such can be viewed not as a verbal vessel of meaning but the expression of "the speaker's atmospheric presence", which implies that voice creates an emotional colour and atmosphere for the communication space (Böhme, 2014, p. 54). But what kind of voice technique is required for communicating "from the inside out"? This will be discussed next.

Free voice as a starting point for expression

As argued above, expression is more than and different from a technical craft. From the embodied perspective, in singing, expression is essentially about trusting your body's ability to act according to your intentions. However, this requires that you allow your voice to function freely as part of healthy voice practice, free from inhibitions and acquired bad habits (see Brown, 1996). This also implies a balance between the functioning of the mind and voice-body. For instance, if the body position is not ideal and the voice production requires extra muscle work, the voice-body's intentional and mindful activity is inhibited.[2] As Oren Brown states (1996, p. xiii), when your voice is free, singing is not so much a matter of making sounds as it is a matter of letting sounds happen. The voice that comes out freely has been compared with "the truth" and is considered attractive in performing (Johnson, 2019).

In our understanding, when one has a "free voice" and focuses on "what is to be expressed," the body-voice realizes the intention and functions according to its best ability without conscious technical effort "to make it happen." By this view, we do not dispute the importance of technical training of the voice. On the contrary, the development of a singer's artistry requires a foundation in the vocal technique that includes appropriate posture, breath management, articulation, and free vocal production (e.g., Hughes, 2014).

2 Somatic approaches, such as Body mapping, Alexander technique, Feldenkrais method, Trager approach, and Pilates, are increasingly applied to improve ease and freedom of movement as well as to gain balance, support, and coordination in artistic actions by practicing ways to become aware of and change non-functional, unfavorable bodily habits. Additionally, breathing and meditation exercises are used to help to reach a state of active and open attention and presence.

It may also take much practice to free the voice from learnt habits that incorporate unnecessary muscle work and tensions, and to achieve an efficient and economic voice use. Yet, the technique does not have to be considered external to musical expression but can be taught in connection with and even through expression. The technique should not be viewed either as an active instrument to manipulate expression but rather as a matter of devotion and taking risks, of seeking existential experiences, connected to something of emotional or musical character (see Nerland, 2007). Indeed, technology plays a big role in and has many possibilities for manipulating the sound quality in PM singing and singers need to have knowledge and critical understanding of it (Hughes, 2015, p. 591). Despite this, there is a need to first consider the embodied quality of the vocal instrument and the body–mind connection of the "neuropsychobiological" self (Thurman, 2000, p. xxiii). This is in accordance with the research that has identified the need for PM singers to find and develop their own individual vocal sound before being able to understand how their individual voices may be manipulated, altered, or processed by using technologies and effects (e.g., Hughes and Monro, 2014; Hughes, 2015).

Body schema: the intentional functioning of the body as a whole

To further understand *how* the body parts function in a meaningful way without having to be controlled by thought, we can apply Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the notion of *body schema* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Body schema is a concept used with varied meanings in several disciplines, including psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, sports medicine, and robotics. Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of it includes two aspects: "the close-to automatic system of processes that constantly regulates posture and movement to serve intentional action" as well as "our pre-reflective, proprioceptive and non-objectifying body-awareness," neither of them needing "a constant body percept that takes the body as an object, to the extent that one does become explicitly aware of one's own body in terms of monitoring or directing perceptual attention, movement, posture, kinaesthetic experience, and so on" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, p. 146).

Body schema also refers to the body's skill overall. Before we start thinking and making scientific accounts, we already have a pre-theoretical familiarity with the world (Gallagher, 2005). Some philosophers after Merleau-Ponty have described this as a difference between *knowledge that* and *knowledge how* (see, e.g., Pavese, 2021). *Knowledge that* means that you know something very well in theory. *Knowledge how,* on the other hand, means that you know how to do something in practice. For example, if you want to sing a high note, one does not have to think about the muscle work included in the process, the body knows how to do it. There is the required "knowledge how." For Merleau-Ponty, knowing *how* is always more fundamental. So, the body schema is a set of possible movements that you can do, without consciously thinking about and controlling them. In singing, the voice-body knows, pre-reflectively, how to produce the sound that carries out the desired expression. When an action is brought under conscious control, it may even complicate the action (also Kross, 2021). This comes out amusingly in the story about the centipede (see Heuer and Wing, 1984, p. 184), who was asked how he managed to coordinate the movements of his legs while walking. The centipede paused to think about an answer… and from then on was incapable of walking.

To sum up our line of argument so far, we can state that expression of PM singing is primarily about expressing emotions, guided by the lyrics and music. Expression in singing can be viewed as an intentional activity from the inside out. The intention is carried out through the mindful voice-body without conscious muscular manipulation but requires a "free voice" and the capability to be present, which implies both physical and mental presence (see Symonds, 2007). In what follows, we will apply Merleau-Ponty's notion of gesture to understand the immediate and embodied quality of expression as and through gesture.

Embodied expression as and through gesture

The concept of *gesture*, as discussed by Merleau-Ponty (1968), brings forth the immediacy of expression. Merleau-Ponty contested the paradigm of a stimulus–response connection between the mind and body, which means that the thought of expression precedes the action. Instead, he views expression, such as speech/language but also physical gestures (movement, facial expression), as a completed thought. In line with Merleau-Ponty, Johnson (2006, pp. 8–9) states that the function of languages and gestures is not to present already experienced meanings, concepts, or thoughts, but to present and enact the meaning. Gestures "are not uses of bodily motions to express some preconceived thoughts. Rather, the gesture itself brings the meaning into existence. Gesture is the very incarnation of meaning-making" (p. 9). This underlines the embodied nature of expression. Based on these views we argue that, in expression in singing, there is no thought (or emotion) first which is then expressed, but that a thought or emotion is completed only when expressed through the words, sounds, and voice (including breathing or pauses). The physical gestures alike are created at the moment.

Singers as performers communicate with their audience not only through their voices but also through facial expressions and gestures (Hoffmann, 2016). These movements aim to embody the expressive character perceived in the musical and textual features of a musical work. Thus, engaging musical, textual, and visual presentation as inter-linked modalities is considered essential for an expressive performance (Hoffmann, 2016; also Rodger et al., 2012).

Psychologist David McNeill (1992, pp. 78–80), also in line with Merleau-Ponty's ideas, has further identified three different qualities of spontaneous (bodily) gestures: *beat* gestures, *iconic gestures*, and *metaphoric* gestures. *Beat gestures* "help parse, give emphasis to, or provide the rhythm of our thinking" (Johnson, 2006, p. 9). *Iconic gestures* "structure is isomorphic with some pattern or contour of some other part of our experience or perception" (Johnson, 2006). For example, one can give directions to the nearest hospital and accompany the verbal directions with hand motions. *Metaphoric gestures* are the ones where we can use our bodily movements to present images of abstract concepts (McNeill, 1992, p. 80; Johnson, 2006, pp. 9–10). Johnson (2006, p. 10) concludes, based on McNeill's video material, that gestures often appear several milliseconds before the verbalizations.

So, bodily gestures are essential elements of expression and enact the meaning. They are not consciously realised, but are essentially

immediate and embodied. Yet, expression is not only a one-way process "from the performer to the listerner," but in expression, the expresser her/himself is also the receiving party—both the subject and the object. Additionally, in expression, one can sense being perceived by others. These issues will be discussed in the following section.

Reversibility of expression

When making music, we also simultaneously perceive it. We feel the music as it resonates through the whole body (e.g., Bowman and Powell, 2007). In singing, we can also sense and become aware of the body making the music, to become sensed. A singer can even sense different vowels and pitches in different ways and different places of the body (Tarvainen, 2019, p. 10). Thus, the performer is both the subject and object in singing, which resonates with Merleau-Ponty's notion of *reversibility of perception*. For Merleau-Ponty (1962), both the first-person and the third-person perspectives are present in perception. The body is two-dimensional; it is simultaneously a sensuous body that perceives itself and the world and a thing-like body that is sensed or perceived as an object. For example, when my right hand touches my left hand, I am touching and being touched, thus giving me "double sensations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 93). The practical, action modes of the body-subject are inseparable from the perceiving (or reciprocally in-formed [*sic*]) body-subject. Hence, perception involves the perceiving subject in a situation, rather than positioning him as a spectator who has somehow extracted himself from the situation. Action and perception are therefore interconnected (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 153). However, the reversibility is never realized as such; only one of the two states occurs at a time (pp. 136, 147–148, 263).

Furthermore, this reversibility exists between the action of perceiving and the action of expression (Parviainen, 1998, p. 65). Usually, musicians make further adjustments in their actions based on listening to (perceptions and observations of) the music they make. However, singing is problematic since the singer hears herself differently than others. For example, high notes for the singer herself may sound thin and weak while for the listeners they may sound clear and strong. Therefore, it is better to focus on expression and trust your body in the making rather than adjust your expression by listening to the quality of your sound.

For Merleau-Ponty (1968), the phenomenon of reversibility occurs within one sense at a time but also between different senses and the senses and the world. In addition, there is the reversibility of speech (or gesture) and its meaning, based on the mute world of sensing (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 154–155). Furthermore, sensory experiences are interrelated. In voice performance, the singer perceives herself but can also sense being perceived by others. Expressions of human feeling states are perceived by others not only auditorily but also visually and kinesthetically (empathic as-if feeling states) (Thurman, 2000). For example, visual perception–seeing how others respond to our expression, for example–may remarkably influence our listening and experience (Schutz, 2008).

So far, we have concentrated on expression as an individual act. Expression is often also viewed and assessed as the performer's (in this case the singer's) individual activity and achievement. In the following section, we argue, however, that expression is in fact a reciprocal, interpersonal, interactive, and intersubjective phenomenon. It happens between people and the performer and listener influence each other in many significant ways. Furthermore, the perception of expression is never complete; it never captures all of it.

Intersubjectivity in expression

It is easy to agree that the listener's experience is shaped both by the properties of the music as well as those of the actual performance (Gabrielsson and Lindström, 2001). Music performance is to a great extent an interpersonal and interactive phenomenon in which everyone involved influence each other, even the absent composer. The performer can also actively build connections with the audience. For example, Thurman (2000) advocates creating rapport between performer and audience, which he defines ideally as "empathic, respectful, and comfortable human communication" (p. 162; see also Juslin et al., 2018). From a wider perspective, expression as well as the music itself can be considered a way of initiating and influencing relationships between people (and their environment) rather than producing sounds for some listeners in the audience to perceive (Brown, 2006). However, philosophically, we can dig deeper into this relationship, which can be associated with the "mysteries of expression," also referred to as "performance magic" (Steinhauer et al., 2017, p. 26; Tobolski, 2002, p. 19). For Gallagher (2005), the mystery of expression is related to the embodied primacy of intersubjectivity (Levin, 2016).

Intersubjectivity, in its simplest sense, refers to awareness of others and understanding of others' actions and experiences in the same world. Merleau-Ponty (1968) draws his interpretations of intersubjectivity on Husserl's ideas of "pairing" and "appresentation." While Husserl focused from the subjective awareness of others, Merleau-Ponty shifts the focus of discussion toward intersubjective relationships between persons in a shared embodied existence (Sanders, 2014, pp. 142–144; Tiili, 2011, pp. 95). He views humans as each other's mirrors: a person becomes visible to oneself through another person: "...through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars." (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 143.) Thus, another person's actions are not understood in a separate "understanding" but immediately and bodily. We understand directly what the other means through our embodiment. In Reynaert's (2009), p. 17) words, "everything we do has immediately intersubjective signification" (see also Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, pp. 171–196).

Hence, Gallagher (2005) connects expression with intersubjectivity. He suggests that expression cannot be viewed as a purely subjective act issuing from interiority launched into the exterior world. Rather, in expression, innate motor and communicative capabilities are integrated. Here, communication does not suggest, however, that expression would imply communicating and transmitting something internal, mental, or already thought. As Levin (2016, p. 189) writes, "expression is considered a fundamental condition of possibility for communicative action – the enacting of an intercorporeal and intersubjective world of meaning." For Gallagher (2005), the body generates a gestural expression in a self-organizing manner but only "if there is another person"; it is *the other* who moves, motivates, and mediates the process (p. 42, italics original).

Subsequently, we can argue that artistic expression comes into existence through an intersubjective process. Another way of

understanding the intersubjective "becoming" of artistic expression, as Levin (2016) argues, would be

> "to state that art creates or captures expressions available for subjective sense experience and, perhaps more importantly, teaches us that sensation can never be considered a given, but must be genuinely created in the concepts that want to capture the infinite movement of a particular becoming-body" (p. 200).

Therefore, the expression always entails a difference in the ways it is perceived—both by the performer her/himself and the audience—it is never "complete," and always includes potential for change. This difference, a separation, is what Merleau-Ponty (1968) calls divergence, or a gap (*écart)*. Using touching as an example, it means that a touched thing is "separate from, independent of, more than the touching reveals its presence and conceals what lies beyond its touch" (Dillon, 1997, p. 163). When the reversibility occurs between two bodies, "neither body need be reduced to what becomes manifest to one at the moment of contact" (p. 164). The body-subject tacitly understands that it does not perceive the entirety of the phenomenon it reveals (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 126, 135, 147–148).

The very reversibility of perception suggests the intersubjective nature of music-making and perception. As discussed earlier, reversibility occurs between senses as well as between action and its perception but it also exists among sensing people. In Merleau-Ponty's words, it "makes the organs of my body communicate and finds transitivity from one body to other" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 143). Just like when I touch my hand, I can sense both the touching and being touched, when I "touch" another person with a musical expression, I can experience both the touching and how the other is being touched (which in turn informs my further action). In expression and perception, the intersubjective, reciprocal processes are intertwined. As Levin (2016, p. 187) notes: "The embodied subjectivity in all art is to be found in the 'chiasm' (the intertwining) of the body as sensing and being sensed. In other words, the work of art reveals self and world as irreducible to each other but intertwined or passing into each other in perpetual movement" (see also Merleau-Ponty, 2007).

The intersubjective experience is also a shared experience of being bodies (the notion of *flesh*, Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Within the music domain and related to artistic expression, Brown (2006, p. 8) interestingly writes about this:

> Music makes a prolongation of our own sounding bodies: when we see it in action, the visual experience reminds us that our body – itself an object of vision – can take a share in the same kind of physical, sonic experience. We see ourselves sounding by attending to the "textures" of musical movement, aural and visual. What we behold is of both general and particular significance. For we are all in possession of a body with which we might move, the consequences of our embodied actions forming the particular materiality of sound, which in some way instantiates the concept of our having made a prior action-performance.

This capacity to immediately, effortlessly, and bodily understand other people and their actions and emotions, which in phenomenology is explained through intersubjectivity is in neurosciences explained through Iacoboni's mirror neuron theory. According to Iacoboni and Lenzi (2003), studies among monkeys and humans support a model of empathy which suggest that "there exists a shared code between perception and production of emotion" (see also Gallagher, 2005). A very often cited example of this is that when you see someone smiling, your own mirror neurons for smiling fire up, too, initiating a feeling we typically associate with a smile. This does not require any inference or analysis. The mirror neuron system is involved in both visual and auditory action recognition (Buccino et al., 2004) as well as in understanding the intentions of other people's actions (Iacoboni et al., 2005).

Yet, in the music domain, little attention is paid to the intersubjectivity between the listener/audience and performer and the ways it shapes both the expression of a piece and how it is received. The audience affects the performer on many levels, i.e., on psychological, physical, and social levels, that are, however, impossible to separate from each other (Studer et al., 2014). Some of the effects can be experienced as positive, supporting the performance. For example, the presence of the audience may motivate the performer to concentrate better than when rehearsing (Ford, 2013, p. 160). But, the effect can be also negative, especially if the performer is excited about or even afraid of the responses of the audience (p. 161).

So, both the expression and receiving it are intersubjective and intertwined. Performers have a crucial role in shaping the listeners' experience, but also vice versa. What often matters for the listener's experience (as audience), is how much the performance succeeds in "moving and touching" the listener, discussed earlier in the text. The touching quality of musical performance is often understood as "expression of emotion." Music affects us, evokes images, and activates memories, emotions, and feelings (e.g., Juslin and Sloboda, 2001), and builds new meanings. Based on intersubjectivity between people, the expression of emotion is understood immediately through the body. This immediate experience and understanding can later be set as an object of reflection.

To date, there has been little research on how the listener's embodiment and previous experiences shape listening, and the interpretations made based on it (Tarvainen, 2018a,b). The Finnish researcher Tarvainen (2008), who has examined singing from holistic perspectives has identified different overlapping phases or dimensions in (embodied) listening to vocal performance. The first one implies tuning up to the singer's expression, which means experiential and empathic listening; the second one implies analytical listening, and the third one integrates these two aiming at a comprehensive understanding of the various meanings of expression (Tarvainen, 2008, p. 32). Indeed, it would be interesting if the embodied and experiential dimensions in listening would be seriously considered, for example, when passing judgement on musical expression and performance overall in educational settings.

Discussion

In this study, we have discussed expression in PM singing and voice pedagogy from the perspective of embodiment, mainly as depicted in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy. We have presented both theoretical and pedagogical arguments. First, in line with Hughes (2014), we suggest that teaching vocal techniques should be based on healthy vocal production. Second, we assert that expression should not be primarily approached as a technical issue (also Hughes, 2014) but should be viewed as emerging with the performer's intention and—including facial and bodily gestures—can be considered a completed thought that brings the meaning into existence. Third, with the notion of body schema, we want to point out

that the body itself has a lot of *knowledge how* and should be trusted in singing, both in terms of voice production and expression. Trusting the body's ability to act according to intention also releases unnecessary muscular tension and enables efficient and economic use of voice. Fourth, we state that there is a reversibility of perception in expression. Thus, perception and the object perceived are intertwined. In singing, the performer is both the subject and object of the expression (yet only one of the two states occurs at a time). Therefore, action and perception are interconnected. There is also reversibility of perception between people: we sense and become sensed by other people, and we can even sense the sensing of us by others. This brings us to our final argument regarding the interpersonal quality of expression. Expression in PM singing happens between people, and our bodies have an inherent capacity to immediately understand other bodies, which in phenomenology is referred to as intersubjectivity. In singing, this reminds us that we do not only listen and receive expression through our ears and mind but perceive through the whole body which can sensitively understand the expressed emotions. As we see it, this bodily - in Merleau-Ponty's term pre-reflective - understanding could be considered more explicitly in voice teaching and assessment of expression.

Pedagogical implications

Taking embodiment as a starting point in PM vocal pedagogy incorporates many aspects. One of them is that expression should be taught *from the inside out*, not outside in (see also, Gilman, 2018). By that, we mean that expression builds on one's personality and (emotional) experiences. It also means considering student's own experiences, emotions, and bodily sensations as relevant to learning and teaching. In PM voice teaching, singers are often guided to listen to recordings and pay attention to how emotion and expression are created vocally by varying the dynamic, coloring the tone, and adding "vocal stylisms" typical to a certain musical style; to how the singers use slides, word painting, consonants, tone color, "bend" notes, and "swing" the rhythm to reinforce expression, for example (LoVetri et al., 2014, p. 59). In music theater, the voice production, for the clarity of text, may even imply using muscular efforts that close off the vocal mechanism altogether (Johnson, 2019, p. 484). This approach easily directs the singer to rely on "technical methods" to strengthen the expression. Listening to references and imitating good singers can demonstrate expressional possibilities, provide inspiration, and encourage new ideas. Still, in our view, pedagogy should not be based on imitating others by manipulating the sound, but rather on finding the core elements of expression inside the student, counting on intuition, and allowing the student's individual sound to develop gradually and naturally. In education, problems often arise when a student's/singer's individual sound is not allowed to develop gradually and naturally but is sought after by manipulating the production of voice.

To be able to trust completely the skillfulness and mindfulness of one's body in music performance, be willing to express from the inside out, and feel comfortable with communicating with the audience, naturally requires preparation. This could mean an embodied approach to PM voice pedagogy that would incorporate aspects from embodied learning theories—highlighting, for example, the use of body movement and the importance of integration of perception, action, and thinking in learning–but also from body awareness techniques and healthy/free voice vocal pedagogies. Additionally, an embodied approach could exploit exercises (from Mindfulness, for example) to practice presence and concentration. Regarding expression, what matters most is to view and teach voice technique and expression as integrative and inherent elements of singing. The technique should not be separated from musical expression but taught in connection with and even through expression. We believe that this perspective supports the meaningfulness of singing practice and the wellbeing of singers and students. However, the details of an embodied approach to learning and teaching PM singing are beyond the scope of this article and will be discussed elsewhere (Arlin, Liira & Juntunen, in process). In any case, to further advance embodied practices in vocal pedagogy we need more studies drawing on theories of embodiment of musical (inter)action, perception, cognition, experience, and learning, as well as pedagogical materials and methods that are based and drawn from these theories and studies.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

M-LJ is responsible for the logic of argumentation, expertise on phenomenology, and most parts of the text of the article. EA and KL are experts on popular music vocal pedagogy and responsible for the arguments related to vocal pedagogy. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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