

David Craig, On Performing :

Hands

“Hands and feet have lives that are dictated by what we are thinking. When you stop telling them what to do, or worse, fail to deal with the significance of the lyric (which is what creates organic body language) they will go up, go down, go out, then up and down and out again in an endless semaphoric ballet of nonsensical gesture. They can be as destructive as a two-year-old reaching for a crystal ashtray on the coffee table. Like two-year-olds, they want to be told; given the margins of permissible behavior. When those margins are not defined, hands, feet, and children will test you in order to find out how far they may go before you yell, “Stop!”

When I teach, I tend to yell “Stop!” early in the game, because I ask a “good nothing” from the performer before a “good something” can be trusted. Also, when the quality of the body language is of little to no value, nothing is to be preferred. What people do not see, they cannot fault. The performer’s intention may well have been to stand there and sing. “Do” something, and that something is immediately vulnerable to criticism.

...Pretty hands are not, in themselves, without virtue. But they are, finally, decoration. How long can decoration remain pleasing to the eye? Not long enough. We may like what we see, but a law of diminishing returns is soon operative. Since decoration is less than skin-deep, emotional response to it is cut off by the very prettiness the eye sees.

...But hands have a disturbing habit of wanting to get in to the act. As a rule, they are always too high and too wide when they have little or nothing to say. It is good training to teach them their place. If they can perform their task lower, teach them to do so. Remember that it is not the doing of something that is valuable, but how *well* you do it. How well you do it will be advertised by how well you get in and out of what you are doing. Wide and high may have their moment in the sun, but what then? Where do they go next? Too wide and too high? And how do they get there without betraying a manifest lack of style?

Only when you are free of the script (lyric) of the song, will you find your hands and your feet and, for that matter of fact, all of you, behaving in a sane and human manner. But this requires more than learning the song. Your imagination, your sense of *why* you are singing it, your skill at creating conflict (drama), your attention to the significance of what you are saying (singing)---all of these, supported by a sane focus directed through the fourth wall, will introduce you to what singing and, in fact, life is all about. We speak because an idea occurs to us and we feel the need to communicate it. We sing because the idea is more important, more urgent, more needful of the language of music to make itself understood. Music gives speech a greater dynamic. You only have to watch great singers (performers) at work to realize the tyranny they hold over your attention.

...What do you do with your hands and your feet? Leave them where they are. Allow them to execute their contribution to your performance when they must. Just as they function when you speak, they will do what they have to do to complete the “picture” of what you have to sing.

David Craig, On Performing :

Trust

“You must remember that much of the success of what you are doing will be attributed to the mere fact that *you* are doing it. If who you are and how you project an ease in the presentation of yourself are combined with an interesting (both to the eye and to the ear) performance, there is no need to resort to busy-ness by pressing on the loud pedal. By busy-ness, I mean an insistence that *it is* you who is singing. But *you* are singing and to insist upon what is evident is not only redundant but counter-productive. After all, what is simple is pleasing to the eye. Too much hand- and foot-work can be a distraction away from *you* toward what you are *doing*. ...But if what you chose to sing and your performance of it has merit, why ”argue” that the merit is there by resorting to over-decoration? You must learn to trust that you, the singer of the song, by virtue of the fact of your humanness, can be interesting. It is not so much a question of ‘less is more’ but that less may be more stageworthy.”

“All great performers are always more interesting than anything they sing.”

The Audience

“When you know what you are supposed to do and more, how to achieve it, there is nothing as soul-stirring as standing in the center of a song and, as you create its vocal life, making the power of your performance irresistible to an audience.”

“Any artist worth the name early on learns to put aside ego, or at the very least, to place it at the service of the art. When you sing with imagination and taste, there is a fine and distinct balance between you, the song, and the audience. Each element is, or should be, so balanced that no one part takes precedence over the whole.”

“It is important always to keep in mind that when you are working, whether it be on stage, in a club, on record or on the screen, it is for an audience. You are not singing for yourself alone—you can accomplish that in the bath—but for someone, to someone, and because that someone is there. Your ability to create the illusion that it is their very presence that produced the need to have a song to sing (and even more, the particular song you chose to sing) is what makes the bond between an audience and the singer.”

Gestures

“Empty gesturing, no matter how beautiful, is disconcerting. An audience can always be relied on to take the path of least resistance. Why give them something to see when it is what you are singing that you want them to hear?”

Performance

“Singing what you want (need) to say requires an interior height.”

“A great song is a great song. When it is not performed well it simply waits around until someone appears who **can** sing it. A song is sized, and it requires someone larger than itself to give it verticality. Every song seeks its own elevation. You cannot stop its built in determination to reach the apogee...the best of singers is not only aware of this height and its placement, but will be there moments before to make certain it occurs. Always chose a song less tall than you.”

David Craig, **On Performing** :

Focus

“Focus, like your hands, wants to rise...when you feel your focus climbing, become your own editor and bring it down. You must create a life, a recognition of a reality to which you will sing, or you run the risk of singing to yourself. There is nothing wrong with that when you are alone. In a crowd, however, it passes as eccentric behavior, a religious dialogue the deity.”

Technique

“Stanislovsky has said: ‘Technique is only of value on the stage when you forget all about it’, but technique must be mastered before one is able to forget it.”

“Technique is the imprisoning means to liberating ends.”

Nervousness

“Nervousness and fear are mutually exclusive words. Fear is always destructive. Nervousness is an indication of the heightened awareness brought about by the significance of the event.”

“Locate any physical tension; isolate and rid yourself of it. Pay particular attention to unlocking your fists and monitoring the rising and tightening of your shoulders.”

Tony Robbins, **Interview with David Craig** :

“I had studied singing at the High School for the Performing Arts, and I had sung in college musicals, but I was uncomfortable with it because I didn’t know how to involve my body physically or, for that matter, any *part* of my body...even my face. I was focused on the sound of my voice and the meaning of the song, and I was busy responding to the song instead of creating it. I guess the most important thing I ever learned about acting was your revelation that the verbalization of something was always behind its physicalization if the idea was born out of truth. You taught me how to work, to feel the image strongly enough in myself, and only then could it be verbalized.Once I learned how to do that, it totally eliminated my problem, and still does. I find I use it even in a straight play....to resist the temptation to speak and allow something to happen “on” me which will be far more eloquent and propelling for the words that follow.”

Larry Ajer, summarizing Delsarte :

“Remember that not all movements involve hands and feet. In fact, most do not....The meaning of a movement is strongly influenced by the part of the body in which it originates, and then influenced by the parts of the body through which it travels before completion. Where does a handshake originate? If it originates in the hand and ends in the hand it is meaningless. If it originates in the hand and ends with a smile, it is insincere. If it originates in the heart, proceeds through the smile, and ends with the hand, it is wonderful.”