Workshop 9: Musical Comedy

Vocal warm-up

**Breathing**

1. Place hands, palms inward, on the front of the waist so that fingers are almost touching. If breathing correctly, you will feel a tensing of the diaphragm and fingers will move apart indicating correct lateral movement of the lower ribs. Do not raise shoulder blades. Gradually increase the depth of breathing.

**Resonance**

1. Hum in unison concentrating the sound on the back of the throat. Gradually increase volume and then let the sound fade away.
2. Hum again, this time concentrating sound directly under the dome-shape of the hard palate. Gradually increase volume and let the sound fade away. You should experience a tickling sensation on the lips.
3. Hum again and then open your mouth and sound “AH!” without losing any resonance.

**Articulation**

1. Open the mouth to its fullest extent. Repeat action opening and closing a number of times.
2. Open mouth, shape lips and say AH as in father. Repeat several times.
3. Open mouth, shape lips and say EE as in free. Repeat several times.
4. Say AH, EE, IU a number of times paying attention to the up-and-down movement of the lower jaw.
5. Read out the following lines from the lyrics of The naming of cats (Cats):
   - The naming of cats is a difficult matter
   - It isn't just one of your holiday games
   - You may think at first I'm mad as a hatter
   - When I tell you a cat must have three different names

   ***
   - First of all, there's the name that the family use daily
     - Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James
     - Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey
   - All of them are sensible, everyday names

   ***
   - But I tell you a cat needs a name that's particular
     - A name that's peculiar and more dignified
   - Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular?
   - Or spread out his whiskers or cherish his pride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum
Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo or Coricopat
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum
Names that never belong to more than one cat

But above and beyond there's still one name left over
And that is the name that you will never guess
The name that no human research can discover
But the cat himself knows and will never confess

When you notice a cat in profound meditation
The reason, I tell you, is always the same
His mind is engaged in rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name

His ineffable, effable, effanineffable
Deep and inscrutable singular name
Name, name, name, name, name, name

Inflexion

a) Pitch voice at normal key
b) Repeat the lines pitching voice below normal key this time
c) Repeat the lines whispering this time

Voice projection and modulation

REHEARSAL: DRAMATISATION OF THE NAMING OF CATS

In this drama task, students will learn how to apply the musical technique to FLT. They may have the opportunity to dramatize a piece from the musical Cats, which is based on T.S. Eliot's cat poems Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats. For this purpose, the song The naming of cats has been selected. All the students will have to recite the lyrics simultaneously and, as they do so, move as CATS! Apart from their voices and body language, students may also wear special costumes and makeup. But they should always remember that both their voices and body language are the most important instruments they have to convey the excitement of the story.

Working plan:

• Read the lyrics once to get general meaning and intention.
• Read the lyrics for a second time. This time try to recreate the atmosphere with your voice. For this purpose, you will have to work hard on voice projection and modulation (please, remember to put into practice all you’ve learnt about breathing, resonance, articulation and inflexion in the drama workshops).
• Learn the lyrics by heart.
• Think of suitable gestures, facial expressions, and movements to play the role of a cat.
• Concentrate hard on the way you should move to play your character.
• Now you are ready for the first rehearsal. Light and music, maestro!

**The musical comedy:**

**Act One - When Cats are Maddened by the Midnight Dance**

[Image]

Cast of the filmed version of *Cats*.

After the overture, the cats gather on stage and explain the *Jellicle* tribe and their purpose (*Jellicle Songs for Jellicle Cats*). The cats then give details on how the different cats of the tribe are named (*The Naming of Cats*).

**The naming of cats**

*They are proud, however, and they explain to their human visitors who they are and reveal that cats have three different names: the one the family uses daily, the more dignified name and a secret name. It is the cat's contemplation of the latter that keeps felines in deep thought.*

**ALL (Whispering):**

The naming of cats is a difficult matter
It isn't just one of your holiday games
You may think at first I'm mad as a hatter
When I tell you a cat must have three different names
First of all, there's the name that the family use daily  
Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James  
Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey  
All of them are sensible, everyday names

There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter  
Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames  
Such as Plato, Admetas, Electra, Demeter  
But all of them sensible everyday names

But I tell you a cat needs a name that's particular  
A name that's peculiar and more dignified  
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular?  
Or spread out his whiskers or cherish his pride?

Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum  
Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo or Coricopat  
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum  
Names that never belong to more than one cat

But above and beyond there's still one name left over  
And that is the name that you will never guess  
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The reason, I tell you, is always the same  
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Name, name, name, name, name, name, name