
Winter 2013

Teaching *Sprezzatura*

Laura Davis
Linfield College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine

Recommended Citation

Davis, Laura (2013) "Teaching *Sprezzatura*," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 9 : No. 3 , Article 6.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol9/iss3/6

This article is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

Teaching *sprezzatura*



Whether he's stepping onto a world-class opera stage or into his Linfield College classroom, Anton Belov radiates *sprezzatura*.

The Italian word, meaning to make something difficult look easy, is a quality Belov hopes to teach his music students – and something he strives for in his own performances.

"A great singer looks completely at peace while performing something extraordinarily difficult," said Belov, assistant professor of music and an accomplished baritone. "If we can teach our students *sprezzatura*, we've done our job."

Belov balances teaching Linfield students with a successful career – he has appeared with orchestras and opera companies to critical acclaim, and has been praised by *The New York Times* for stealing the show with his "rich, mellifluous voice" and "soulful pathos." He also helps direct a prestigious international voice camp in Maine, and leads Linfield's Opera Workshop.

Born in Russia, Belov is the only child of a poet father who set the stage for Belov's opera career by infusing him with a love of literature, and a mother whose translation work gave him an ease with language. Thanks to their influence, Belov now sings in five languages and believes that music begins with poetry.

In 1991, Belov's family left a troubled Russia and immigrated to the U.S. in search of medical treatment for his father, who died shortly after.

"It was very difficult at first, very, very hard," said Belov, who was 16 at the time and spoke no English. "But luckily we had really terrific friends, and one of them was my future wife, Naomi."

A chance meeting with Semion Tregubov, a retired Russian music teacher, shaped his future. The teacher had studied at Moscow Conservatory and taught at Moscow School of Theatre.

"He was very well known among Russian singers for his anthologies of operatic repertoire that he edited in the 1960s," Belov explained. "He told me, 'You have a good voice, come here five times a week; you don't have to pay me. Come. Sing. See what happens.'"

What happened was life-changing.

Belov won eight international vocal competitions, including the Metropolitan Opera's sponsored auditions, and went on to study at New England Conservatory, Juilliard and Boston University.

More than just musically inclined, Belov is an avid fisherman and a skilled woodworker. At 19, he trained as an apprentice at Charles Shackleton Furniture, an artisan furniture woodshop in Vermont. He now has his own woodshop, and has built most of the furniture in his home. His favorite piece is a mahogany sleigh bed with carved details. He has also built furniture for Great Harvest Bread Co. in McMinnville. "They pay me in sandwiches," he grins.

He lives in Sherwood with his wife, Naomi, and two children, whom they homeschool. "Naomi is the principal of Belov Academy," he says with flourish.

Linfield was just exactly what Belov was looking for when he arrived in 2011. He was drawn to the liberal arts environment and the opportunity to teach a variety of classes such as Understanding Music, one of his favorites designed for non-majors. "I love love love teaching it," Belov emphasized.

As a successful professional, Belov brings to his students the practical experience of being on stage. Delaney Bullinger '15, a music and English major, said she looks to Belov with questions about a professional career. She also appreciates his positive teaching style, coupled with a sense of humor. One of his favorite sayings, "Sound like a human being, not a little

The Belov file:

B.M., The New England Conservatory
M.M., The Juilliard School
D.M.A., Boston University

At Linfield since 2011

Translation work:

www.RussianArtSong.com

www.antonbelov.com

Anton on:

Nerves – "If you don't get nervous before a performance, there's something wrong. Nerves are a great part of the performance. You have to use that energy to your advantage."

Performance prep – "It's like preparing for a sporting event. Keep it low, get a good night's sleep and watch your diet, particularly the night before. Acidic foods affect the voice."

Practice – "I'm just as lazy as the next guy. I have to force myself to practice."

bird. Put some power into it," makes her laugh every time.

"He really believes I can accomplish things," Bullinger said. "He gives me challenging pieces and believes I can rise to the occasion. So far, it's worked because my voice has come a long way."

Belov meets individually with his students, but the real growth occurs when they work on their own. One of the most common mistakes students make, according to Belov, is thinking the voice will mature without practice.

"Many simply don't realize how much work goes into it," he said. "Practice is always a challenge, but particularly at a liberal arts institution where students are involved in so many other activities in addition to music."

Though not a music major, Gabi Leif '14, a theatre and anthropology major, works with Belov to develop technique and classical repertoire. She will play Ilse, one of the lead female roles in *Spring Awakening*, the May performance at Linfield Theatre.

"Anton explains very clearly how he wants me to change a certain phrase or a particular note," said Leif, who is exploring the possibility of pursuing a career in opera. "I didn't know that I had the ability to sing the way I can now that I have been taking lessons from him."

Belov teaches his students that singing is an athletic experience, with a training regimen targeting certain areas.

"It's training one's mind, training one's ear and training a particular muscle group," he said. "And that training has to be approached with an exercise routine."

But more than providing just instruction, Belov hopes to impart to students a love of music. He explains that in the beginning, singing can be physically uncomfortable. But once a student discovers how to resonate the sound, singing becomes a pleasurable physiological sensation, even physically addicting.

"As singers, we are fortunate. We get to experience music from the inside out," said Belov. "And then we are hooked." 🍷

- Laura Davis



Anton Belov, assistant professor of music, brings real-world experience as a professional opera singer into his Linfield classroom. The Juilliard-trained baritone has been a featured soloist at Carnegie Hall and elsewhere. He performed with the Linfield Chamber Orchestra in December, and will appear in *La Traviata* with the Tacoma Opera in March and with the Oregon Symphony in April and May. Hear Belov sing at www.antonbelov.com.