

VOICEPrints

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JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2016



IN THIS Issue:

On Demand Learning: Vocal Health for Voice Professionals.....Page 1

Video Chat with Brian Gill, DMA.....Page 1

Message from President Judith Nicosia.....Page 2

Message from VOICEPrints Editor Matthew Hoch.....Page 3

NYSTA Calendar of Events and PDP Calendar 2016.....Page 3

FEATURE ARTICLE: "Training the Hybrid Singer: Application of Exercise Physiology Principles in the Voice Studio" (Part I of two articles) by Marci Daniels Rosenberg, MS, CCC-SLP.....Pages 4-5

FEATURE ARTICLE: "Breaking the Glass Slipper: Recognizing and Retraining the Misclassified Low Female Voice" by Katherine Osborne, DMA.....Pages 6-7

NYSTA Presidents: A History.....Page 8



Dr. Peak Woo

On Demand Learning

NYSTA's Oren Lathrop Brown Professional Development Program presents:

VOCAL HEALTH FOR VOICE PROFESSIONALS



Dr. Anat Keidar



Dr. Linda Carroll

JANUARY 13 A detailed exploration of issues relevant to singers and teachers of singing. Faculty lectures cover vocal fold injury and the mechanisms of vocal pathologies, their diagnosis and treatment. This course provides information that will enable both new and established teachers to advise students on vocal hygiene, recognize the necessity of—and the appropriate time to seek—medical intervention, to be conversant with commonly used drugs for performers, and to be able to participate as part of the medical treatment team in the rehabilitation of the singing voice.

This course is available On Demand 24/7 from the comfort of your home or office! Start any time and receive up to four full months of access.

Graduate credit is also available in conjunction with Westminster Choir College at Rider University.

Register today at www.nyst.org.

For more information, contact NYSTA's Professional Development Program Director Felicity Graham at pdpdirector@nyst.org.



Dr. Lucian Sulica



Dr. Benjamin Asher

VIDEO CHAT:

Peaks That Pique Our Interest: Acoustical Differences between Music Genres

with Brian Gill, DMA, *Certificate in Vocology*



Brian Gill

JANUARY 31

6 PM EST

Live Online

This talk will focus on the spectral changes, brought about by space adjustments within the vocal tract, which are commonly found in different musical genres. The different tunings will be illuminated by the use of VoceVista (Donald Miller) and Madde (Svante Granqvist). Definitions will be given for many of the most often employed terms/concepts in the land of voice acoustics, including harmonics, partials and overtones (Oh my!); formants/resonances; formant tuning/detuning; damping; impedance; timbre; and the divisions of the pharynx. If time permits, a special segment on new findings regarding the acoustic effects of different degrees of velo-pharyngeal opening will be discussed.

MESSAGE FROM THE *President*



It's Not Just About Decibels!

First things first: Happy New Year and welcome to the second half of the second decade of the century! As the just-past holiday season is usually a time to check in with friends for conversation and food, I rewound my memories on some of those events, looking for suitable ideas to include in this initial article of 2016.

You may remember that NYSTA sponsored a master class last October with Maestro Craig Rutenberg, Head Music Administrator of the Metropolitan Opera for many years and a supremely experienced coach for singers. Emboldened by the success of that experience, I invited him to do a master class at Rutgers University a few weeks later. At one point during the course of a three-hour class, the Maestro turned to the assembled audience to mention a recent and somewhat controversial post he had seen on Facebook. It had come from the recently retired Principal Horn of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Julie Landsman, a fantastic performer and terrific teacher. Landsman, who played in the Met Orchestra for 25 years, matter-of-factly and without rancor wrote that it seemed standards for horn playing had changed—orchestras were more interested in size of sound than in beauty of tone and musical expression. Maestro Rutenberg faced us and said he felt the same was true in opera as well.

It was refreshing to hear someone in such a position of authority voice a problem that many of us in private and academic settings have been witnessing and battling for a number of years. When some of my singers come back from summer programs abroad or in the US, their talk quickly turns to how big the voices were they performed with. They inevitably bring home with them concomitant technical problems as a result of being influenced by the decibel levels of the sounds they felt they had to compete with and the conversations they had in those situations. And although my portion of teaching is almost completely classical, I have the sense that this may be a problem in the music theater world as well.

This is not to say that there isn't beautiful singing taking place to which our students can be exposed. There most definitely is and at all levels. But as young singers try to enter the profession, increasingly they are encountering either real or imagined barriers that tell them they must sing as loudly as possible so they can be hired—often at the expense of the actual and potential beauty of their instrument, the expression of the text, and the uniqueness of their sound. It isn't enough to show singers in a voice pedagogy class that resonance triumphs over sheer decibels, that efficiency of production and breathing trumps volume pumped into the fundamental pitch, nor to counsel them not to be lured by what older performers might tell them. The siren call of a career, sometimes no matter what the cost, is often

stronger than common sense or teacher wisdom.

In a follow-up phone interview, Maestro Rutenberg opined, "I am not so aware of many teachers who are still concerned primarily about beauty in sound and health in singing as they are about getting their students to make enough noise to carry over a loud orchestra."

I asked Maestro Rutenberg when he started to observe the trend towards louder and less beautiful singing on the part of operatic performers. "I began to notice it in the mid '80s. Young singers were coming in to coach who were more concerned about 'honking' than about making really beautiful sounds, since it seemed at that time that beautiful singing was no longer so important to the people who were hiring them. Their music-making was not word-driven and their word-representation was not music-driven, because of course they are one and the same."

Was this connected in any way to the very decisive shift (in my mind) that singers had to be a certain type physically in order to be hired? Rutenberg: "Not immediately. The orchestra starting getting louder and then the physical aspect of the singer began becoming more important, and then the quality of the singer's sound became not as important as looking good and making a lot of noise."

That's still going on, isn't it? "It's very much going on now—pretty disgusting, because while drama, dramatic projection, and the ability to act on stage are all important, the thing that makes opera great is great singing and it always was."

How do teachers get around this problem? "I don't think we do 'get around' it. I think we just keep going with our standards and not give in to this trend. You have to make sound, you have to be heard, but heard in the best way you can be heard, in your resonance and not by pushing or emulating someone else."

Are you seeing careers shortened because of this? "Day and night! Once the damage is set, you cannot do anything. It's very simple: if there's a wobble in the middle voice, it's over." I pressed for other qualities that in his opinion cause a singer to be denied employment at the highest levels.

"Shrillness in the top and maybe even more importantly a complete lack of understanding how healthy the chest voice can be if properly used. You have to know what beauty is before you can sing an ugly note." Are singers and teachers not exploring enough, not using their imagination enough to allow the voice to make beautiful, individual, unique sounds rather than just loud and generic ones? "Both." Rutenberg's advice to aspiring singers? "Go back in recorded history and listen as closely as you can to singers who performed around the time of the composer or the composition. Obviously, pre-Verdi is difficult to do,

but you can still do it. Learn from these people."

Won't this lead to imitation? "Don't worry. Imitate first, then learn to do it yourself." (*with your own technique and certainly under the guidance of a good teacher - JN*). Any singers of years ago that you particularly like? "Let's go back to Mattia Battistini, Emmy Destinn, Rosa Ponselle ('highest on the list'), John McCormack, ('exquisite musician'), Kirsten Flagstad, Renata Tebaldi, Giulietta Simonato, Janet Baker, Ettore Bastianini, Nicolai Gedda, Pierre Bernac ('not a conventionally beautiful voice but really knew how to sing'), and Leonard Warren. There's a reason they all made recordings. They were not in this to make money for the recording companies. The companies were there to record great artistry."

Rutenberg has a large listening library. Though listening is important, he stresses: "Listening is not a substitute for learning the dots." (*meaning the notes - JN*). Any further advice to singers? "It always helps to have decent keyboard skills. Study every language you are going to sing in—that can't be overstressed. If you are lucky enough to go and do six weeks in a summer course, that's a start. If you can do three months of study in the country, you are off to a better start. If you can't communicate in the language on the street or in the shops, you can't sing poetry or *libretti*."

Words of advice, things to beware of for young singers? "Going too fast, trying on repertoire too soon, singing larger than your voice part. Do not accept an opportunity that will hurt you, no matter what the reward is. Make the wrong choices, and you won't be making money long. At the very least, each singer should have a voice teacher and one coach—possibly two, if they are giving the same information—they trust."

As we neared the end of our conversation, I remarked that Landsman and others have said you have to pour yourself into a career 100% for many years—and still there's no guarantee. It's just what you must do. I asked Rutenberg if he knew Julie Landsman personally. "I knew her very well when she was at the Met and I knew her when she was in the Houston Symphony. She loves opera and she has a great ear, a truly great ear for everything. I think she has a fascination with the human voice."

So, although I don't believe in New Year's resolutions, this year I have made one I intend to keep. Following Julie Landsman's and Craig Rutenberg's thoughts, I have resolved to encourage my singers to make more imaginative choices in timbre and dynamics, to continue to de-emphasize the amount of sound they make as opposed to the beauty and freedom of the sound they choose to produce, to listen much less to YouTube and more to recordings of the very greatest examples they can find and, finally, to develop their individuality. Let me urge you one and all to seek out Landsman's words of wisdom when it comes to teaching and attaining a career. They are as relevant to any type of singing and teaching as they are to brass playing.

May your pharynx always be moist.

Judith Nicosia

Judith Nicosia, president@nysta.org

MESSAGE FROM THE *Editor*

Dear Colleagues,

Happy New Year from all of us at NYSTA! I hope that 2016 is off to a wonderful start for all of you. This year—in addition to a United States Presidential Election and the Rio de Janeiro Olympics (the first Olympic Games held in South America)—marks the end of the last year of my tenure as Editor-in-Chief of your publication. I took the helm of *VOICEPrints* in summer 2008, and it is hard to believe that eight years have passed by so quickly.

In April 2013, a symposium entitled Specialty Training in Vocal Health (STVH) was held at the National Center for Voice and Speech (NCVS) in Salt Lake City. That meeting gathered together distinguished voice professionals from all over the country, and I was lucky enough to be there as a representative of NYSTA. Over lunch in the Sheraton Hotel, I had the pleasure of meeting Marci Rosenberg, an accomplished speech-language pathologist and scholar at the University of Michigan who was in the final stages of completing a book she was writing with her colleague (and previous *VOICEPrints* contributor), Dr. Wendy



LeBorgne. Published in 2014, *The Vocal Athlete* is now in wide circulation after receiving a series of positive reviews. In this issue, Ms. Rosenberg contributes the first of a two-part article that offers practical advice to singers and teachers of singing on what it means to be a vocal athlete in the 21st century.

Each spring, the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) and the Voice Foundation—two organizations with which NYSTA has a supportive synergy—jointly award the Van L. Lawrence Fellowship. This prestigious award funds and recognizes singing teachers who have integrated voice science into their studios in a meaningful and accomplished way. During my editorship, I have made an effort to reach out to former Van Lawrence winners to contribute articles to *VOICEPrints*. As a result, we have had the privilege of reading articles by Dr. Kari Ragan,

Dr. Brian Gill, Lynn Holding, Dr. Stephen F. Austin, Jeannette LoVetri, and Kenneth Bozeman. Ms. LoVetri has also served as a faculty member for the Oren Lathrop Brown Professional Development Program (as well as President of NYSTA), and Marvin Keenze (another Van Lawrence winner) was a longtime host of NYSTA's annual Comparative Pedagogy Weekend. These individuals truly represent the very best of our profession.

In keeping with this tradition, this issue features an article by 2014 Van Lawrence winner Katherine Osborne, who currently serves on the voice faculty of the University of Northern Iowa. I know that you will enjoy her insightful article, "Breaking the Glass Slipper: Recognizing and Retraining the Low Female Voice." I am grateful for Dr. Osborne's contribution to our journal. I look forward to my final two issues as your editor. Spring will arrive before we know it.

As always, *VOICEPrints* is YOUR publication, so please send questions, comments, and suggestions for future articles to me at voiceprints@nyst.org.

Sincerely,

Matthew Hoch

Editor-in-Chief, *VOICEPrints*

NYSTACalendar 2016

SIXTEEN-BAR CLINIC

March 2016, TBA.

Ripley-Greer Studios, 520 Eighth Avenue, New York City

Back by popular demand, twelve singers get to strut their stuff before a panel of industry experts who give candid and supportive advice often not offered in the audition setting. Distinguished panelists and a specific date for the clinic will be announced in a future issue of *VOICEPrints* and on the NYSTA website.



Tom Cipullo

CONCERT & BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE TO TOM CIPULLO

April 17, 2016, Sunday, 2:00–4:00 PM EDT. Reception to follow.

Marc A. Scorca Hall, National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Avenue, New York City

NYSTA is delighted to honor New York composer Tom Cipullo by presenting a full-length concert of his vocal works, chosen by the composer himself and assisted by singers from the New York Metropolitan Area. Cipullo's works are performed regularly throughout the United States and with increasing frequency internationally. He has received multiple fellowships from Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and awards from the Liguria Study Center (Bogliasco, Italy), the Fundacion Valparaiso (Spain), the Oberpfälzer Künstlerhaus (Bavaria), and ASCAP. *The New York Times* has called his music "intriguing and unconventional." Cipullo's acclaimed opera, *Glory Denied*, was premiered at Fort Worth Opera and recorded on Albany Records.

Professional Development Program Calendar 2016

DATE—EST TIME EVENT TYPE TITLE—LOCATION

2016

January 13	ON-DEMAND	Featured On-Demand Course: Vocal Health for Voice Professionals
January 31, 6 PM	VIDEO CHAT	<i>Peaks That Pique Our Interest: Acoustical Differences between Music Genres</i> with Brian Gill, DMA, Certificate in Vocology—Online
March 9	ON-DEMAND	Featured On-Demand Course: Singers' Developmental Repertoire
April 3, 6 PM	VIDEO CHAT	<i>Practical Guide for Working with Voice Disorders</i> with Kari Ragan, DMA—Online
May 11	ON-DEMAND	Featured On-Demand Course: Comparative Pedagogy 2016

TRAINING THE HYBRID SINGER: *Application of Exercise Physiology Principles in the Voice Studio* by Marci Daniels Rosenberg, MS, CCC-SLP

NOTE: This is the first of a two-part article for VoicePrints. An earlier version of this article appeared in the February/March 2014 issue of Musical Theatre Magazine (www.MusicalTheatre Magazine.com).

hy•brid sing•er (n). *refers to the vocal athlete who is highly skilled performing in multiple vocal styles possessing a solid vocal technique that is responsive, adaptable, and agile in order to meet demands of current and ever-evolving vocal music industry genres (Rosenberg & LeBorgne, 2014).*

Given the varied demands placed on contemporary commercial music (CCM) performers, the vocal athlete must navigate multiple levels of fitness ranging from general physical fitness to a high level of vocal fitness in order to meet industry demands and performance expectations in a competitive arena. Although there are multiple CCM vocal styles, all require a strong, stable vocal mechanism that is balanced and efficient. Voice teachers today are often expected to be skilled in teaching and cultivating multiple vocal styles encompassing classical to pop, musical theater, and more. Just as the professional athlete has coaches and trainers implementing exercise physiology principals to maximize performance and minimize injury, so too must the vocal athlete use warm-ups, cool-downs, and strengthening exercises to ensure career longevity and vocal health. The purpose of this article is to provide a general overview of how some basic exercise physiology principles can be applied in the voice studio working with the vocal athlete. Further detail can be found in "Exercise Physiology Principles for Training the Vocal Athlete" in *The Vocal Athlete* (LeBorgne & Rosenberg, 2014).

Vocal Warm-Ups and Cool-Downs

Vocal warm-ups can be thought of as a means to calibrate the voice prior to more active, technical vocal work, and vocal cool-down exercises are intended to return the vocal instrument to a neutral state after use.¹ Singers and teachers should incorporate various exercises into their routine based on need, as both vocal warm-up and cool-down exercises are important for optimal vocal functioning. In exercise science, the goal of physical warm-up is to increase blood flow and oxygen to muscles, and to promote flexibility and range of motion of muscles. Runners must stretch and warm up before a race, and so too must the vocal athlete prepare the vocal mechanism for more rigorous work.² Additionally, the runner is not likely to simply cease running at the end of the race; rather, he will gradually slow the pace down to a jog, then a walk, before stretching his muscles again when he is done in order to promote faster recovery. Vocal cool-down exercises can be thought of as a means to "neutralize" the vocal mechanism after technical work promoting "active recovery" from athletic singing. The concept of vocal cool-down should not be overlooked, especially when the singer has been singing actively at increased volumes and pitch range.³

Muscles work in agonist/antagonist pairs—meaning, when one muscle is highly active, its

antagonist muscle is less active and vice versa. This phenomenon is referred to as reciprocal inhibition. As an example, if a singer has engaged in an extended period of singing at high intensity in the chest register (TA is highly active relative to its partner, the CT muscle), it makes sense to engage the opposite register as part of the vocal cool-down. Therefore, light vocalization in head register, where CT is highly active relative to TA, in a descending pattern all the way down into the low range will help facilitate relaxation of the TA muscle and help return the voice to a more neutral default setting. Conversely, if working extensively in the head register for an extended period of time, the vocal cool-down routine should incorporate some chest register. The same principle may also be applied to various character voices requiring exaggerated placement and brightness. For example, some characters may require a very high laryngeal position and forward tongue placement to achieve a certain character voice (i.e., Sally in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*). In this scenario, the vocal cool-down may incorporate exercises in the opposite default setting such as promoting a lowered larynx combined with back, rounded vowels to help maintain balance. In essence, the cool-down exercises are intended to downshift the vocal mechanism and prevent it from getting stuck in any one vocal default setting or gear.

Coordination, Strength, and Flexibility

In general, exercises focusing on strength, coordination and flexibility would encompass exercises focused on developing the entire vocal mechanism including head register and chest register independently, in addition to stamina and agility exercises. These skills are the foundation for any style of singing and certainly for many CCM styles, particularly those that include belting. Agility is also an important component of general vocal fitness and becomes particularly relevant for certain CCM styles that require "riffing." Strength and stability are essential for healthy CCM singing. Exercise physiology literature describes five primary principles to optimize endurance, strength and flexibility. These are *intensity, frequency, overload, specificity, and reversibility*. The first three principles dictate that the exercise must occur with adequate intensity and frequency to ensure that the muscle is overloaded. When these principals are incorporated into a fitness regimen, physiologic adaptations will occur in the targeted muscle(s). This is referred to as Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demand (SAID). Simply put, when we impose a demand upon a muscle, it will adapt over time.⁴ In other words, the only way to strengthen a muscle is to challenge it beyond its current level of function. The specificity principle requires that the exercises target a specific muscle for an adaptation to occur in that muscle. For the vocal athlete, this means that in order to train and strengthen chest register, exercises employed must target this specifically. Conversely, head register will not become strengthened if exercises only focus on chest register. The reversibility principle dictates that

muscle adaptations, if not maintained, will revert back to baseline functioning relatively quickly.⁵

These concepts become particularly relevant for healthy belting. For younger, developing singers strength and stamina for this vocal style must be trained with the appropriate level of frequency and intensity to safely build up the strength and stamina to successfully and healthily perform in this vocal style. To use a fitness analogy, if one wants to be able to bicep curl a 15 lb. weight, ultimately, the exercise routine must target the bicep muscle specifically, and eventually build up to this level of weight. However, if the athlete is only able to lift an 8 lb. weight, the exercise routine must slowly build up to 15 lbs. with the frequency and intensity principles in mind. These skills are particularly relevant for the hybrid singer, who must have vocal facility with multiple styles in order to be hired within the commercial market. However, even the singer who only sings in one style still must have strength and flexibility across the entire vocal mechanism in order to reduce risk of vocal injury and increase longevity of one's vocal career. This level of vocal cross conditioning is necessary to better prepare the vocal mechanism for more rigorous technical work that is also happening during vocal training.

Use of registration is one of the primary characteristics distinguishing many of the CCM styles from classical singing. In order to be hireable in a commercial market, musical theater singers are required to sing well in a variety of styles that require development and balance of head register, chest register, and mix register; hence, they must be hybrid singers. Register balance and development requires stability and strength across the entire instrument. The true CCM hybrid singer must be able to transition from a pop rock musical to a traditional vocal style depending on what the job or work requires, therefore, vocal training must be specific to this level of adaptability.

One of the more challenging vocal skills for many singers to master is efficient use of the mix register for the purpose of a commercial music sound. A true balanced mixed voice often takes time to cultivate and train. Many voice teachers use glides as a training mechanism, as slow, controlled glides through *passaggio* areas allow the muscles to coordinate, strengthen, and adjust over a period of time. There may be instances where a chest-dominant mix is required and times when a head-dominant mix is needed. However, training this coordination requires persistence, patience, and specificity. The voice must be allowed to be "unstable" in these areas when training. This is counterintuitive to many singers, but this instability is an important phase in development of this vocal skill-set. If the singer overrides this instability during training and engages too much muscular effort, a muscle tension pattern may result and the specificity principal is not employed. Therefore, a true, balanced mix is never fully targeted or developed. Time and patience are often the keys when training this type of skill.

Today's music theater market demands that singers be flexible and adaptable in order to work in a highly competitive arena. In order to maximize employment, these vocal athletes need to be able to sing in multiple styles. Many speech pathologists, and voice pedagogues use a physiologic approach to training the vocal athlete.⁶ There are pedagogical methods that are based in physiology and function that have been

formalized and taught internationally. Among these are Somatic Voice-work™—The LoVetri Method, and Estill Voice Training™. Though there are differences in these two methods, both use a functional approach to training the voice. Somatic Voice-work™ in particular places very specific emphasis on register training and balance to facilitate healthy CCM singing. There are certainly other pedagogues who also use a functional approach and this seems to be becoming more the norm in more recent years as voice science has elucidated more and more about singing voice production and different needs of CCM versus classical vocal styles.

For all vocal styles, training should emphasize strength, stamina and flexibility in order to promote longevity and vocal health. The purpose of this paper has been to provide a general overview of how exercise physiology principles might be employed in the vocal studio. The principles of frequency, intensity, overload, specificity and reversibility were introduced with discussion on how these may apply to the hybrid singer.

ENDNOTES

¹ R. DeFatta and R. Sataloff, "The Value of Vocal Warm-Up and Cool-Down Exercises: Questions and Controversies," *Journal of Singing* 69. 2 (2012): 173–175; M. Rosenberg and W. LeBorgne, *The Vocal Athlete: Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer*. (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2014).

² N. Elliot, J. Sundberg, and P. Gramming, "What Happens during Vocal Warm-Up?" *Journal of Voice* 9.1 (1995): 37–44; M. Safran, A. Seaber, and W. Garrett, "Warm-Up and Muscular Injury Prevention: An Update," *Sports Medicine* 8. (1989): 239–249.

³ R. O. Gottliebson, "The Efficacy of Cool-Down Exercises in the Practice Regimen of Elite Singers" (Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2011).

⁴ S. Powers and E. Howley, "Exercise Physiology: Theory and Application to Fitness and Performance" (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2009).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ M. Sandage and D. Pascoe, "Translating Exercise Science into Voice Care," *Perspectives on Voice and Voice Disorders* 20.3 (2010): 84–89; S. Thibeault, S. Zelazny, and S. Cohen, "Voice Bootcamp: Intensive Treatment Success," *The ASHA Leader* 14 (2009): 2 6–27.

ADDITIONAL READING & RESOURCES

DeFatta, R., & Sataloff, R. "The Value of Vocal Warm-Up and Cool-Down Exercises: Questions and Controversies." *Journal of Singing* 69.2 (2012): 173–175. Elliot, N., Sundberg, J., & Gramming, P. (1995). "What Happens during Vocal Warm-Up?" *Journal of Voice* 9.1 (1995): 37–44.

Gish, A., Kunduk, M., Sims, L., & McWhorter, A. "Vocal Warm-Up Practices and Perceptions in Vocalists: A Pilot Survey." *Journal of Voice* 26.1 (2012): 1–10.

Gottliebson, R. O. "The Efficacy of Cool-Down Exercises in the Practice Regimen of Elite Singers." Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2011.

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Powers, S., & Howley, E. "Exercise Physiology: Theory and Application to Fitness and Performance." Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2009.

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Sandage, M., & Pascoe, D. "Translating Exercise Science into Voice Care." *Perspectives on Voice and Voice Disorders* 20.3 (2010): 84–89.

Thibeault, S., Zelazny, S., & Cohen, S. "Voice Bootcamp: Intensive Treatment Success." *The ASHA Leader* 14 (2009): 26–27.



Marci Daniels Rosenberg, BM, MS, CCC-SLP, is a singer and a licensed speech-language pathologist/research investigator at the Vocal Health Center of the University of Michigan. A voice and singing specialist, she works clinically to

rehabilitate injured voices. After completing her undergraduate degrees in vocal performance and speech pathology, Ms. Rosenberg was a research fellow in the Voice and Speech Lab at the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders before finishing her graduate degree in speech language pathology. She actively teaches workshops and lectures nationally on vocal health, performance voice, managing vocal injuries, and application of kinesiology principals to voice therapy. She co-chaired the inaugural international voice conference "Multidisciplinary Rehabilitation of the Performance Voice" in 2010. Ms. Rosenberg has served on the faculty of the Contemporary Commercial Music Institute at Shenandoah Conservatory since 2010 and will be a featured guest speaker this summer. She is co-author (with Wendy LeBorgne) of the newly published singing science textbook *The Vocal Athlete and its companion volume The Vocal Athlete: Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer* (Plural Publishing, 2014). In addition to her clinical activities, Ms. Rosenberg performs and maintains a private voice studio in the Ann Arbor area.

BREAKING THE GLASS SLIPPER: *Recognizing and Retraining the Misclassified Low Female Voice* by Katherine Osborne, DMA

"I have to ask you a question," an opera administrator asked me last year at an audition. "I'm looking at your performance history. I see that you have performed the role of Adele in *Die Fledermaus* and the title role in *Rape of Lucretia*. I'm curious: how does that happen?" I smiled and explained that until about five years ago, I sang soubrette soprano roles, but had since undergone technical retraining that reoriented my voice toward the mezzo-soprano repertoire. She answered my smile with her own and replied, "well, clearly you have found where you are supposed to be."

She was right. After considerable time spent retraining and re-considering my vocal history, there is no doubt in my mind that I should have been singing in the mezzo-soprano range from the beginning of my studies. However, despite working with some very fine, successful voice teachers and coaches for more than ten years and after a decade of professional singing, almost no one had suggested that this might be the case. Recently when a colleague asked me to play some old recordings of myself singing soprano arias, he agreed that while he heard technical issues, he would not have guessed that I was singing in the

wrong vocal range.

Voice teachers often discuss the phenomenon of young singers suffering technical misery as a result of early vocal misclassification—especially young sopranos with good musical "ears" and a strong chest voice who are relegated to the alto section. Many great opera stars started out in lower voice categories and found stardom singing higher repertoire (Plácido Domingo, Joan Sutherland, Carol Vaness). Others have been difficult to classify because of strong lower and higher ranges (Frederica von Stade, Cecilia Bartoli, Shirley Verrett). These cases tend to dominate our discussions about voice classification because they are familiar. Less familiar are cases like mine and several of my colleagues' who suffered frustration, occasional anguish, and varying degrees of vocal dysfunction because we managed to successfully impersonate a higher voice type. We even fooled ourselves.

Part of the reason was because I had an inefficient lower range and no darker or thicker qualities in the sound that would obviously suggest I was singing in the wrong voice category at that time. The range where I felt most successful was between B4 and A5. I

could sing every note in the lyric soprano aria and, in my younger years, even some lyric coloratura repertoire. Singing mezzo-soprano repertoire felt uncomfortable to me. Why would anyone think I should be singing mezzo?

The following information was gleaned through discussions with previous voice teachers and professional colleagues who have experienced similar shifts from singing higher repertoire to lower. In each case, listening to recordings before and after the retraining period revealed no real "smoking gun" that indicated the wrong voice category. Nevertheless, after transitioning to the lower voice category the recordings simply sounded better. None of these singers fit into the *Zwischenfach* or *Baritenor* categories. Instead, they experienced more dramatic transitions, such as coloratura to lyric mezzo, lyric soprano to lower lyric mezzo, or tenor to bass. All have reported a return to vocal health, a renewed sense of joy and confidence in their singing after retraining, and gratitude toward those who helped figure out what was going wrong.

These recommendations chiefly apply to female singers, but should also be a source of curiosity and concern for male singers as well, with the goal of presenting a rationale for voice teachers to evaluate possible similar situations in their own students.

The “Shell Game”

What is important to understand about a soprano “impersonator” is that she will knowingly, partially knowingly, or unknowingly make constant adjustments to her vocal technique to maintain her preferred tonal aesthetic. As Professor Katherine Rohrer notes, because teachers generally see students for one hour a week only, the soprano impersonator can make sure that you only see what she wants you to see. She may intentionally rest for a day or two before the lesson if she is experiencing extreme fatigue, or sing frequently to solidify a manipulated muscular configuration that fulfills her expectations.¹ Any good results during a lesson that produce a better, but less soprano-like, tone will likely evaporate by the next lesson because she will adjust it (either directly or through another compensatory strategy) back to the preferred tonal aesthetic. This is the “shell game.”

A large portion of this strategy can be observed in pre-phonatory tuning. Humans have a wide range of sounds that they can mimic through varying pharyngeal/laryngeal/aerodynamic interactions. A mezzo-soprano masquerading as a soprano will often lift the larynx and thin the glottal contact area. The resulting incomplete glottal adduction can be detrimentally “corrected” through other valving mechanisms: excessive adductory tension, supraglottal/pharyngeal squeezing, or a combination, to prevent air leakage. The laryngeal elevation will often be achieved through the contraction of a laryngeal elevator muscle that lowers the soft palate. This muscular configuration creates a kind of “attractor state,” described by occupational therapists and dynamic systems theorists as a “tendency to stay in the patterns of the status quo”² which can be difficult to alter without patience and skill on the part of the teacher or therapist.

Hyperfunction/Underclosure (HU) Singing

Dr. Tom Cleveland defines hyperfunction underclosure (HU) as “a vocal fold approximation that has properties that appear to belong to both breathy and pressed phonation. The vocal folds are held with significant muscle effort, but not fully approximated.”³ While Cleveland uses the HU term to describe contemporary commercial singers who want to create a strained, breathy sound, I believe the concept may also be applied to the particular attractor state described above. It can also be classified as a Muscle Misuse Voice Disorder (MMVD), as defined by Morrison and Rammage,⁴ and possibly a sub-classification of Muscle Tension Dysphonia (MTD). The singer is not always addicted to hyperfunction, as assumed by some teachers and therapists. The excess tension is compensating for another imbalance, caused by incomplete vocal fold closure and related muscle weakness in the intrinsic laryngeal musculature. Stated more simply, the HYPERfunction is camouflaging the HYPOfunction. In these cases it may be advantageous to first address the hypofunction and observe which aspects of the hyperfunction consequently resolve.

Dr. Scott McCoy believes that addressing hypofunction first can also relieve some of the emotional stress that accompanies the classification change. Helping the student feel some success in her new singing range before talking about a change in voice classification can help prevent the sometimes significant mental resistance that can surface in the singer.⁵

It is rarely possible to change a singer’s classification without emotional ramifications. You are changing the identity of this person. It is a major life upheaval that must be respected if you are to be successful in the venture.

I also want to be clear that not all singers who exhibit an HU attractor state are misclassified. Rich or heavier-voiced sopranos can also experience difficulties when they adopt an HU/elevated laryngeal posture, passing unnoticed as a lighter voice. This strategy would be more likely noticed with a higher, less substantial instrument because the resulting loss of color and resonance would be outside the range of acceptably operatic sounds to a trained listener.

Recognizing a “Concealed Mezzo”

When evaluating a singer whom you suspect may be a lower voice masquerading as a soprano, it is useful to complete a general evaluation of her vocal function and singing behavior. Noteworthy symptoms include:

TECHNICAL SYMPTOMS

- ◆ Laryngeal elevation, often established during pre-phonatory tuning
- ◆ Imbalanced onsets, mostly aspirate rather than glottal
- ◆ Dysphonia, often in the upper register and the *secondo passaggio*
- ◆ Persistent intonation issues, especially in the upper register
- ◆ An imbalanced, non-periodic, or disagreeable vibrato appearing in part or all of the vocal range
- ◆ Difficulty singing with vibrato or a change in vocal quality above G5
- ◆ Rigidity in the support musculature, facial tension, and a tendency to lift the body when ascending in pitch
- ◆ Hypernasality or inappropriate levels of perceptual “twang” in the vocal quality,
- ◆ Imbalanced register development
 - ◇ especially weakness and glottal inefficiency in the low and middle pitch ranges (which is sometimes accompanied by a developed belt voice or trouble accessing chest voice)
 - ◇ a hyperfunctional upper middle and high voice
 - ◇ inability to access whistle/flageolet/Mode III phonation
- ◆ An inability to sing a *mesa di voce* through the majority of the vocal range or general difficulties with vocal intensity variations
- ◆ Supraglottal squeezing, especially when transitioning to the upper register
- ◆ Vocal instability and unpredictability
- ◆ Either a “driven” or “disconnected” quality to the sound (both may exist in different parts of the singer’s vocal range)

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

- ◆ Extreme frustration with the process of mastering vocal technique
- ◆ Performance anxiety and/or panic
- ◆ Excessive reliance upon frequent voice lessons
- ◆ Reticence to sing in the morning or without extensive warm-up
- ◆ Preference for repertoire that centers in the upper middle range (to prevent “getting stuck” in the lower range)
- ◆ Frequent vocal “breakdowns,” often during an

intense rehearsal period or after several weeks of practicing a new technical idea.

- ◆ The tendency to employ compensatory tension to find a preferred vocal aesthetic regardless of instruction (see “attractor state” and “shell game” above)
- ◆ Speaking voice dysfunction and fatigue
 - ◇ an incongruous relationship between the average F_0 of a singer’s speaking voice and her preferred vocal range
 - ◇ a speaking voice that has no perceptual relationship to the singing voice quality

How to Proceed

If you are starting to suspect that you are working with a concealed mezzo, the following ideas may help you confirm the diagnosis. These ideas are a combination of the author’s and those taken from conversations with Professor Rohrer and Dr. McCoy:

- ◆ Refer the singer to an experienced voice care team who will be able to supply you with useful information about any supraglottal squeezing, excessive medial compression, incomplete vocal closure, or complicating pathologies through a stroboscopy examination.
- ◆ Ignore vocal color. Restoring function to a voice can greatly change its character and quality.
- ◆ Ignore register transition locations. Resolving improper laryngeal positioning may change those locations.
- ◆ Have the student keep a practice journal. Interesting information can be reported, such as:
 - ◇ How often is she writing about frustration and failure after a practice session?
 - ◇ Does she feel that she is unable to sing well until 30 to 90 minutes into a practice session?
- ◆ Does she report frequent vocal fatigue or that her voice just “will not work?”
- ◆ Does she report having either a successful or unsuccessful practice session after singing something very low in her range? (It is important to understand her definition of “successful.”)
- ◆ Find out to whom the singer is listening in her spare time. Is she primarily listening to a certain genre of music or a certain type of singer? If so, this may have some effect on her chosen singing aesthetic. Knowing the vocal model for her attractor state can be very useful when trying to resolve the issue.
- ◆ Observe the singer with her friends while she is laughing and talking in a very spontaneous, genuine way (this will require some casual eavesdropping). Is the laugh high-pitched or low? Does her speaking voice quality have a relationship to her singing voice quality? These can be useful bits of diagnostic criteria.
- ◆ Schedule a lesson with the student at 8:00, 9:00, or 10:00 AM and ask her not to warm-up before coming. You will find out what she can or cannot do easily because it will be more difficult for her to find her attractor state in that situation.
- ◆ Palpate the larynx before and during phonation. Does it release slightly upon inhale? Does it return to the resting position or a little below upon phonation? If not, your singer is “pre-setting” a high laryngeal position that must be corrected for classical singing.
- ◆ Palpate the larynx at register transitions. Does the singer raise her larynx once she passes the *primo passaggio*? The *secondo passaggio*? These behaviors are relatively common in the general singing population, especially in developing singers. In this

case, however, it may be one of the singer's primary means of disguising additional vocal substance or color.

- ◆ Begin exercising the singer's lower range vigorously (especially if it is underdeveloped), making sure that the larynx remains in a comfortably low position. Once that is achieved, try yodeling up an octave, back and forth from the low to the middle range while maintaining the laryngeal position and an open thyrohyoid space. Does the voice quality change significantly?
- ◆ Investigate the background of the singer. Does she have anything in her background that may be a contributing factor: instrument playing, a specific genre of choral singing, pop singing, or previous training as a mezzo-soprano? If so, investigate that background and decide if it is significant.
- ◆ Ask to hear the singer's older recordings to hear if a different vocal quality was ever present in her singing.
- ◆ Confound the singer's "shell game" by playing around with silly sounds and animal sounds in lessons. Make her focus on acting or movement in a way that requires more physical flexibility. You may hear something unexpected or find the singer is resistant to disrupting the attractor state she has established. These are clues.
- ◆ Use voice measurement tools like long term average spectrum (LTAS) analysis, voice range profiles (VRP), electroglottography (EGG), aerodynamic measures, and spectrograms to assess vocal behaviors. They can all provide useful, if not conclusive, information.
- ◆ Talk to your colleagues who interact with the student in other environments. Does she sing differently in a choir? Does she have a lot of trouble in her morning sight-singing class with phonating clearly? Do your colleagues recognize something in the singer that you no longer notice because of frequent hearings?

The Rubik's Cube: Working with HU Singers

Conflicts can arise with the singer when she thinks that her technical problems lie exclusively at the top of her range. This is what I think of as the "Rubik's Cube" issue—that annoying 3-D puzzle that requires all six sides to be different, solid colors to completely solve. What often happens when you first start working with the puzzle is that you focus only on one side before moving to another. After many attempts, you realize that the worst place you can be is with several sides solved but the rest of them still scrambled—because you have to unscramble the solved sides to get the rest in place. This is what it is like retraining this kind of singer. Everything will have to be reorganized.

It is my belief that properly re-ordering the *primo passaggio* is the best way to start retraining these singers. This means rebalancing the vocal fold posture on both sides of the muscular transition to create the right degree of vocal fold contact, exploiting acoustical adjustments to aid the transition, maintaining a lower laryngeal position, and avoiding nasality. With HU singers, this may uncover the inability to sing efficiently when they ascend into the middle range. It may take some significant time and patience to solve this problem. Continued attention to the middle and upper register is also necessary, lest you solve only part of the singer's "cube."

If you are working with a singer who is simply hyperfunctional without any underlying hypofunction, the adjustment will be simple: have her sing lower repertoire and promote good technical habits. This singer is unlikely to have experienced the difficulties for long or is a *Zwischenfach* who was only slightly exceeding her preferred *tessitura*. More frequently, a move from soprano to mezzo requires that the singer "engage more [vocal fold] mass in vibration."⁶

Addressing hypofunctional issues can verge on uncomfortable territory for some teachers and therapists who spend the majority of their time working with "top-down" exercises for releasing excess vocal weight. In these cases, developing and balancing the low voice and incorporating "bottom-up" exercises can be the initial key to addressing hypofunction. In addition, an HU singer will likely have fewer soprano identity issues invested in the low register, making it the safest and most useful part of the voice to initially reorient. It is best to see the student frequently during this initial retraining period because it can be tiring, disorienting, and aesthetically alarming for her. She will want to go back to what seems "safe" and will need a lot of encouragement to continue down this path.

I have refrained from talking about classic breath support solutions until this point because good breath support balance depends upon good glottic valving systems, which these singers rarely have. Breath support and control systems will have to adjust as the valving improves, with special emphasis on re-evaluating and removing compensatory habits. The elimination of any excessive tension in the abdominal muscles is extremely important, but measures to eliminate it may not be very successful until the laryngeal and vocal fold postures have improved.

Conclusion

While vocal misclassification in either direction has the potential for causing vocal dysfunction and damage, singing inappropriately high is particularly dangerous. Additionally, because of the large number of sopranos competing for professional jobs, encouraging a low or convincingly middle voice to sing soprano repertoire is unlikely to be economically or professionally beneficial. As James McKinney commented, "singing above your best *tessitura* keeps your vocal cords under a great deal of unnecessary tension for long periods of time, and the possibility of vocal abuse is greatly increased. Singing at too low a pitch level is not as likely to be damaging..."⁷ I am in no way suggesting that every singer who has a number of these technical issues should be reoriented to a lower voice category. The student to watch out for is the one who seems to have a disproportionately frustrated and anxious response to those technical problems. Retraining will soon turn that frustration into relief.

ENDNOTES

¹ Katherine Rohrer (Assistant Professor of Voice—The Ohio State University) in discussion with the author, August 5, 2014.

² Jane Case-Smith and Jane Clifford O'Brien, *Occupational Therapy for Children and Adolescents*, 7th ed. (Elsevier Health Sciences, 2014), 202.

³ Thomas Cleveland, "That 'Somebody Done

Somebody Wrong' Sound: Production, Diagnosis, Treatment," in *The Singer's Guide to Complete Health*, by Anthony Jahn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 378.

⁴ Murray Morrison, "Pattern Recognition in Muscle Misuse Voice Disorders: How I Do It," *Journal of Voice* 11.1 (1997): 109.

⁵ Scott McCoy (Professor of Voice and Pedagogy—The Ohio State University) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2014.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ James C. McKinney, *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults: A Manual for Teaching of Singing & for Choir Directors*. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1994), 118.



Katherine Osborne is an Instructor of Voice at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) where she teaches studio voice, voice pedagogy, and diction. Her training includes a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from The Ohio State University, Master of Voice Pedagogy degree from Westminster Choir College, a Bachelor of Music degree from Stetson University, and a 2010 teaching internship with the National Association of Teachers of Singing. She expects to complete the Singing Health Certificate program at OSU in December of 2015. She was honored to receive the 2014 Van Lawrence Fellowship, presented by the Voice Foundation and NATS.

Osborne has performed operatic roles from the Baroque era to the 20th century. Her performance in Donizetti's *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo* was hailed by The Washington Post as "outstanding...[she] projected a fiery personality and sang graceful coloratura." Recent performances include a series of concerts at the Härnösand Summer Opera Festival in Sweden, the title role in *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Mércèdes* in *Carmen* with OSU Lyric Theatre, *Kate Pinkerton* in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera Columbus, and alto soloist in *Bach's Magnificat* with Ohio University's Choral Union. She will again join Opera Columbus this season as *Flora* in *La traviata*.

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