

VOICEPrints

JOURNAL OF THE NEW YORK SINGING TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2015

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2015–16 SEASON OPENING EVENT

JOSEPHINE MONGIARDO GREAT COACHES SERIES

Craig Rutenberg, Coach and Collaborative Pianist

Monday, October 5, 2015, 7:30–9:30 PM EDT. Q & A Session follows the event.

Marc A. Scorca Hall, National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Avenue, NYC.

NYSTA is pleased to showcase distinguished pianist and coach **Craig Rutenberg** in the latest installment of the Josephine Mongiardo Great Coaches Series. Don't miss this event!



Pianist Craig Rutenberg, "whose playing ranged from sterling directness to expansive beauty," (*San Francisco Chronicle*) has collaborated with many of the world's greatest vocalists and is recognized as one of the most distinguished accompanists on the stage today. Having studied piano and interpretation with John Wustman, Geoffrey Parsons, Pierre Bernac, and Miriam Solovieff, Mr. Rutenberg has appeared in performance with Diana Damrau, Denyce Graves, Sumi Jo, Harolyn Blackwell, Susanne Mentzer, Frederica von Stade, Angelika Kirchschrager, Dawn Upshaw, Thomas Hampson, Ben Heppner, and Jerry Hadley as well as Olaf Baer, Simon Keenlyside, Piotr Beczala, and José van Dam. He has performed with Mr. Hampson at the White House.

Mr. Rutenberg, whose recording with Susanne Mentzer prompted *Opera News* to praise him for "(making) the piano sing with clean articulation and a palette of colors to coordinate with...every mood," records for Deutsche Grammophon, EMI/Angel, BMG/RCA, and Koch International. He has appeared repeatedly in concert on national and international television and radio, including numerous PBS specials. Formerly Head of Music Administration at the Metropolitan Opera, Mr. Rutenberg is also guest coach at The Royal Opera in Stockholm, Gothenburg Opera, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Stuttgart Opera, and Zurich Opera. He has coached and given master classes at the Ryan Opera Center for American Artists at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theatre, Santa Fe Opera, and Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. He has also worked for the Opera Studio de Paris, Glyndebourne Festival, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and Vancouver Opera.

This season Mr. Rutenberg will appear in recital with Christine Brewer, Diana Damrau, Susanne Mentzer, and Thomas Hampson. As a solo pianist, he completes his recording of the piano portraits of Virgil Thomson for the Virgil Thomson Foundation's label, Everbest.

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

MESSAGE FROM THE *President*



Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to autumn and greetings as we begin the new performance season and academic year! This past summer NYSTA was proud to sponsor not two, as initially intended, but *four singers* to the wonderful summer program *SongFest*, held at The Colburn School in Los Angeles. With *SongFest's* help, we split the awards so more singers could attend with assistance from us. Thank you notes from the singers let us know how much the funds meant to each one. Congratulations to them and to their teachers! We hope to offer audio clips of their performances on our website in the near future.

Josephine Mongiardo and I will once again attend the *SongFest* auditions this coming year, usually in October and January—a very enjoyable experience. A fine accompanist is provided at these auditions, though you may certainly bring your own. In addition, the atmosphere in the audition room is extremely positive and encouraging; everyone sings at least two songs/arias.

At the *SongFest* institute, there are three levels of participation: Professional Program, Young Artist Program, and Studio Artist program—something for everyone, including a professional development program for collegiate teachers. Master classes, lessons, coachings and performances provide plenty of experience in various genres, including a musical theater night. NYSTA's original plan was to provide two scholarships every other year, awards named for former NYSTA President David Adams and his wife Nancy Adams, both longtime members of the organization. However, for the summer of 2016 and going forward, the organization has decided to fund one scholarship in their names every year, which may or may not be split among singers.

NYSTA supports this program because it truly delivers everything it advertises; singers who have been to *SongFest* are uniform in their praise for what they learned and its influence on their career. Don't miss this opportunity for your aspiring artists. Bookmark the *SongFest* site (www.songfest.us) and visit it regularly. Information for 2016 will be posted in September.

Speaking of scholarships, let me also mention our Janet Pranschke PDP Scholarship, named for another former NYSTA President, which is available every year. The application is on our website, to be filled out and submitted at any point in the year with a deadline of August 1. While the deadline will have passed for the current year, it's never too early to submit for 2016–2017. This scholarship is designed to benefit our Apprentice Teacher members who have less than five years of experience—perhaps that's you?

If so, visit us at <http://www.nysta.org/content/janet-pranschke-pdp-scholarship> for details.

As to the recent past and the future, I have some interesting things to report to you, our membership:

- The Finance Committee met last year with our financial advisor from Merrill Lynch and shifted some investments, which has better positioned the organization to weather possible future problems in the markets. NYSTA is in excellent financial shape. We will be able to hold the line on dues again this year, which means no increase for members while still continuing with our four live yearly events.

- Our online chats, which have proved popular, will continue this year with Jane Streeton, Dr. Brian Gill and Dr. Kari Ragan. The topics they will be presenting are of interest and applicable to all types of voice teaching—details are mentioned elsewhere in *VOICEPrints*. If you are new to our chats, do not worry about the technology. We have that down pat with Zoom—once you register, you are sent a link; click on it when the time comes and presto, you're online with all of us.

- We are happy to be using the Opera America facilities at 330 Seventh Avenue again this year. Its location in Midtown, the acoustics of the rooms, and the gracious staff all contribute to a terrific experience for performers and audience alike. We hope you will join us there whenever you can.

- We are planning a networking event for all teachers and their students, but particularly aimed at our apprentice teacher members. This will occur in the spring, probably in the format of an intense question-and-answer session involving singers currently active in their careers on Broadway, in commercial music, and in classical music. We expect that topics will include how they auditioned, what's a national tour really like, what to expect when a Broadway show closes, what's the next step in a career, who are the people to know, how important is a website, etc. We will keep you updated via our website and occasional e-blasts.

- Our concert last April in honor of *Richard Pearson Thomas* and his many compositions was so well received that we are continuing with this idea again next spring. 2016 will be a birthday-year tribute concert to *Tom Cipullo* on April 17.

- And finally, we will be in the seventh year of the Josephine Mongiardo Great Coaches Series this coming autumn, a series named to honor one of NYSTA's former presidents. This time we are

very fortunate to have with us the renowned *Craig Rutenberg* of the Metropolitan Opera, October 5. Maestro Rutenberg served as Director of Music Administration for the Metropolitan Opera from 2006 to 2015 and, after a year's delay due to the Met strike last fall, we are delighted to have him for our opening event. Mark your calendars!

The last item in the list above prompts me to reflect yet again on how important coaches/accompanists are in our performing lives, how crucial and influential a strong, positive relationship with such a person can be in helping us and our students negotiate a career. These are the men and women in whom we put extraordinary trust, from whom we draw knowledge and confidence and with whom we hope to make the best music of our lives. We rely on their insights about mental state, vocal condition, ensemble thinking, and artistry. They are there to help us grow, improve, express, and communicate. Sometimes I think there isn't enough money on the planet to compensate them for what we singers and teachers put them through during a session!

But when you find the one or two people (or more, if you are really lucky) with whom you just click instantly, who draw the absolute best out of you, no matter what emotional state you are in and with whom you feel you can go to joyous heights when you sing, you want to keep them by your side forever. For the first time, collegiate teachers participating this year in the Professional Development Program at *SongFest* had the opportunity to coach Studio Artist participants and a fellowship pianist in special sessions led by renowned coach *Margo Garrett* and other senior faculty, who discussed pedagogic strategies. How timely and appropriate! Watching a great, experienced coach at work, no matter what the genre, is tapping into magic. October 5—Craig Rutenberg—MAGIC!!

To all of you, my best wishes as the new academic and performing seasons begin. NYSTA is here to help you in any way it can. If you have new ideas, comments, suggestions or just wish to volunteer, do not hesitate to contact me. NYSTA can only exist and flourish with member input and participation. See you in October.

May your pharynx always be moist.

Judith Nicoria

President
president@nysta.org

MESSAGE FROM THE *Editor*



Dear Colleagues,

Greetings to you as we begin another season of NYSTA, and my eighth and last as Editor-in-Chief of *VOICEprints*. Over the course of this next year, you will also be reading the keen editing of our recently appointed Editor-Elect Anna Hersey. Dr. Hersey brings immense skill and experience to *VOICEprints*; you will be in very capable hands when she assumes full duties next summer.

The first featured article this month is a contribution by Dr. Kelly Bremner and Dr. Christianne Roll discussing the important collaborative rela-

tionship that exists in musical theater between stage directors, musical directors, and voice teachers. This article has truly made me feel like an "adult," as I first met Dr. Roll when she was no more than twelve! Christianne and I both grew up in Berks County, Pennsylvania, where her mother was a prominent singing teacher. I was a fifteen-year-old sitting at the piano bench in her mother's living room accompanying high school singers. 25

years later, we are now both voice professors in the Southeast. It is wonderful that our profession has allowed us to reconnect. This issue also features an article by Dr. Nicholas Perna, newly appointed Assistant Professor of Voice and Voice Pedagogy at Mississippi College. Over the past several years, I have enjoyed Dr. Perna's sessions at the annual Voice Foundation Symposium in Philadelphia as well as at the International Congress of Voice Teachers in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

In addition, please be sure to check out the many events and professional development opportunities NYSTA is offering this season. As always *VOICEprints* is YOUR publication, so please send questions, comments, and suggestions for future articles to me at voiceprints@nysta.org.

Sincerely,

Matthew Hoch

Editor-in-Chief, *VOICEprints*

NYSTACalendar 2015–2016



Craig Rutenberg

JOSEPHINE MONGIARDO GREAT COACHES SERIES

Craig Rutenberg, Coach and Collaborative Pianist

October 5, 2015, Monday, 7:30–9:30 PM EDT. Q&A session to immediately follow.

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Ethan Paulini

HOLIDAY EVENT AND RECEPTION

"Beyond the BA—Now What? 101," with Ethan Paulini and Tony Howell

December 6, 2015, Sunday, 5:30–8:00 PM EST.

Penthouse 1, Shetler Studios, 244 W. 54th Street #12, NYC

This year's annual holiday party will feature television, stage, and screen actor Ethan Paulini conversing with digital marketing director Tony Howell and the audience about the challenges of succeeding as a professional performer in today's complex entertainment market. NYSTA board member LINDSAY RIDER will moderate. This is a must-attend event for any aspiring performer or teacher of singing actors.



Tony Howell

SIXTEEN-BAR CLINIC

March 2016, 7:30–9:30 PM EDT.

Ripley-Greer Studios, 520 Eighth Avenue, NYC.

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, NYC.

NYSTA is delighted to honor composer 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.

Professional Development Program Calendar 2015–2016

DATE—TIME EVENT TYPE TITLE—LOCATION

2015

September 16 ON-DEMAND Featured On-Demand Course: Vocal Anatomy & Physiology

October 25, 6 PM VIDEO CHAT *The Singing Actor* with Jane Streeton—Online

November 11 ON-DEMAND Featured On-Demand Course: Vocal Acoustics & Resonance

2016

January 13 ON-DEMAND Featured On-Demand Course: Singers' Developmental Repertoire

January 31, 6 PM VIDEO CHAT *Peaks that Pique Our Interest: Acoustical Differences between Music Genres* with Brian Gill, DMA, Certificate in Vocology—Online

March 9 ON-DEMAND Featured On-Demand Course: Vocal Health for Voice Professionals

April 3, 6 PM VIDEO CHAT Practical Guide for *Working with Voice Disorders* with Kari Ragan, DMA—Online

May 11 ON-DEMAND Featured On-Demand Course: Comparative Pedagogy 2016

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THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC: *Navigating the Collaboration between Stage Director and Musical Director in a Musical Theater Production and the Vital Role of the Voice Teacher*

by Kelly Bremner, PhD and Christianne Roll, EdD

In its ideal and most successful form, musical theater is a vibrant collaboration between the distinct worlds of music and theater. While there are similarities between the two, they are separate disciplines with specific rules, jargon, techniques, and communicative strengths. Too often in a musical theater production, the collaboration between stage director and music director is taken for granted. This can result in a communication breakdown between the two, with each focused only on his or her own discipline. The lack of exchange can cause real confusion for the performers, resulting in outcomes ranging from a less-than-ideal performance to actual vocal damage. Since the end goal for both stage director and music director is to ensure the strongest possible performance from each singer-actor, this is a problem that must be addressed.

It is not our intent to ignore the vital work of a choreographer on a musical theater production, nor that of any other collaborative partner, such as the various members of the design team or the performers themselves. Any of these could be the subject of another article much like this one. However, it is our stance that the relationship between stage director and music director can be especially imperiled because of lack of training and unrealistic expectations as to how this partnership ought to work.

For stage directors and music directors there are few set rules, unusual considering the many procedures for navigating other collaborative relationships in the theater, such as those with choreographers, designers, etc. There are few books dedicated specifically to musical theater stage direction, and even in those, little attention is paid to explaining this working relationship. For example, in Joe Deer's recent and important *Directing in Musical Theatre: An Essential Guide*, there is a chapter dedicated to "Collaborative Partners," but only one paragraph and a brief bulleted list for the relationship with the music director (collaboration with choreographers occupies the bulk of the chapter). In this single paragraph, Deer describes the vital contribution of the music director.¹ It is clear he has great respect for the work of the music director, but the actual collaborative process between the music and staging is left uninvestigated. In *Staging Musical Theatre: A Complete Guide for Directors, Choreographers, and Producers* (1996), the authors dedicate an entire chapter to the role of the music director, but they concentrate on his or her work alone—there is no discussion of how collaboration ought to work.²

The undergraduate degree program in musical theater performance, although growing on college and university campuses, is still a relatively new field in education, as compared with classical vocal performance degrees.³ But with the increased interest, educational programs devoted to the art of music directing in musical theater, such as the graduate programs at Penn State University, are also developing.

Additionally, Joseph Church's 2015 book, *Music Direction for the Stage: A View from the Podium*, is encouraging: it addresses the importance of "effect-

ive collaboration with other professionals" on the production team.⁴

It is important to define the way the collaboration ought to work. Voice teachers may find it surprising that in musical theater—as opposed to the opera world—there is a strict hierarchy: the stage director is at the top and makes all final decisions regarding casting, staging, rehearsal schedules, and procedures. James Laster nevertheless points out in his book *So, You're the New Musical Director* that "the musical director is the only member of the production team who stays with the show from auditions through the first day of rehearsal and up until the final performance."⁵

It is of paramount importance that both musical and stage directors find a way to work within this hierarchy to establish strong communication—especially in key moments of casting and rehearsal planning—to achieve the best possible production. Using examples and experiences from their theatrical partnership, the authors of this article will work through some tangible, real-world issues, and address how to more actively cultivate the collaboration between stage director and music director in the casting and rehearsal processes, as well as the implications of this collaboration for musical theater singers and their voice teachers.

CASTING

The casting process is perhaps the most fraught with potential difficulties. A stage director and music director ultimately both want what's best for the production, but may be looking for somewhat different things. A stage director may lean more towards casting a person who can "act the part," whereas the music director's primary concern is vocal potential. While in opera the music is considered the most important element of the show, in musical theater the story claims ultimate focus, often ahead of the music. A stage director may want to cast an extraordinary actor, but one perhaps not right for the role vocally, in terms of range, musicianship, or timbre, which can lead to a potential conflict with the music director.

Some common casting issues that can cause friction include: disregarding a specific singer's abilities, casting for a particular sound, overlooking considerations of vocal stamina, or operating from the stage director's experimental interpretation such as cross-gendered casting. All this can lead to difficulties from a vocal perspective. We would argue the best solutions to such issues come from a more direct approach to collaboration with an intentional sharing of disciplinary knowledge.

When a stage director wants to make a casting decision that can compromise the vocal aspect of the musical, it becomes the music director's job to communicate that choosing a singer not vocally ideal for a role's stamina, range, style, technique, or musicality can create hardships beginning in the rehearsal process. This must be relayed as early as possible so the stage director understands the con-

sequences of such a casting decision. Proper resources can then be designated—a vocally strong understudy or the allocation of extra time for music rehearsals. If the less-than-vocally-ideal performer is still cast, then at least both parties know what is needed to compensate.

Another problem can occur when a stage director has a particular sound in mind for a role, while the music director favors a different vocal quality, even one not usually associated with the role. In this case, especially if the stage director isn't familiar with common vocal technique terminology, the music director must help the stage director imagine what this alternative voice could do for the role. For example, when casting the role of Diana in *Next to Normal*, a singer with more of a mix quality to her belt sound may not be able to portray the character's despair on the higher belt notes as effectively as one with a fuller belt approach. However, the music director may feel the singer with the lighter belt sound will be better able to maintain vocal stamina throughout the rehearsal process and eight shows a week. The music director should engage the stage director directly on this issue before casting is decided.

Sometimes, a stage director may opt for unusual casting. For example, the authors of this article chose a nontraditional approach to casting a recent college production of *Pippin*. Like the 2013 Broadway revival where Pantina Miller was chosen for The Leading Player (a role originated by Ben Vereen and written for male voice), they were open to cross-gender casting for the part of The Leading Player.⁶ After callbacks, stage director Bremner then wanted to cross-gender cast not just this one, but three roles: The Leading Player, Grandma, and Charlemagne. This would have resulted in far more work for music director Christianne Roll in terms of transposition of numerous songs, vocal coaching, etc. But the stage director still felt that with her approach the story-telling of the show could be more fully realized. So, before proceeding, they stopped to reconsider the artistic vision of the show together. In the end, music director Roll agreed that such casting could well serve their collective vision. In rehearsals she even took this further through vocal means: the actress playing Charlemagne, a soprano, had sufficient strength in her lower range to sing the role in its original octave. And on one key phrase when Charlemagne is expressing his feelings for his son, the singer soared up into her soprano range with full operatic sound, and then back down out of it as though nothing unusual had happened. Thus, the music director used artistic input—and knowledge of a singer's vocal abilities—to enhance what might have seemed a quirky decision by the stage director.

REHEARSALS

Rehearsal time in a musical is rationed by the stage director, who must juggle the need for staging, choreography, technical considerations, and music rehearsals. This often means that music rehearsals

do not provide enough time to address or modify vocal technique. Ideally, these rehearsals involve fixing basic rhythms and melodies, addressing vocal style choices, and understanding the overall musical structure of the song. While the person cast in the role should already possess the ability and technique to meet the role's vocal demands, that is not always the case: then, the vocal technique of the performer needs to be addressed. If the music director is familiar with vocal pedagogy, and if extra rehearsal time is allotted, the technical needs of the singer can be addressed in the rehearsal period. If not, a voice teacher or consultant is often a solution, making a huge difference in the work of a music director, and leading directly to the success of the production. Many regional theaters and touring and Broadway companies have a voice teacher on staff to address the vocal technique and vocal health issues of their singer-actors. They know the unique vocal requirements of each company, and can address the demands put upon the singers. For example, performers on long national tours must deal with climate changes, recycled air on planes, and constantly switching hotel rooms, all of which can have negative effects on vocal health. On the other hand, a performer cast in a repertory company might get to live in the same place, but be asked to scream while rehearsing a murder mystery during the day, and to perform a traditional Rodgers and Hammerstein role in the evening. In such situations, a voice teacher can help address these vocal challenges during both the rehearsal and performance process.

The voice teacher not working in these kinds of professional environments can still play a major role. Many musical theater singers are motivated to perfect their show repertoire in private voice lessons. Here the singer becomes the liaison between the stage director, music director, and voice teacher. The singer relays the notes and corrections from the rehearsal, and the voice teacher must process and interpret in terms of vocal technique. It is beneficial for the voice teacher to be knowledgeable in Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) from teaching and/or performing perspectives.⁷ For example, a female singer cast in a musical theater production complains to her private voice teacher that the stage director continually gives her the note: "louder—you have to belt it!" The singer believes she already was belting, yet she's still not giving what the stage director wants. The teacher helps her create a sound that is still vocally healthy, but also meets the request of the stage director.⁸

When a stage director does cast a performer who is not ideal for the vocal demands of the role, or if a vocal problem has become apparent during the rehearsal process, a voice teacher's help is often enlisted. The music director will tell the voice teacher what needs to be addressed, which in many cases involves intonation problems or a lack of range. Required instruction with a voice teacher for a struggling performer can also be a suggestion the music director offers the stage director to avoid recasting the role.

Voice teachers can also help in less direct ways: they should ensure that students understand that they need to be their own vocal advocates during a musical theater rehearsal process. They can emphasize basic tenets of vocal health—adequate sleep and access to water during rehearsals and off-stage

breaks. In some theatrical productions, the music director leads a vocal warm-up during rehearsals, which is often continued in the performance run. However, in most productions the singer is expected to be ready to sing when rehearsal begins. Here it is important that the voice teacher gives the student warm-ups relevant to the role's vocal demands. Recording a series of show-specific vocal exercises on the student's smartphone can be a useful resource backstage before a rehearsal or performance. If a performer is singing a demanding vocal role, it may benefit him or her to vocally "mark" during lengthy blocking rehearsals when the same song, or portion of song, is sung repeatedly while other aspects of the performance are being perfected. The voice teacher can help by demonstrating to the student a correct approach to vocal marking.

CONCLUSION

Since there are no set rules for the collaboration between stage director and music director, it may be wise to establish some in advance, including being open to asking help from a performer's voice teacher if needed. Agree in advance to a discussion about casting *before* actually casting a show. Stage directors: ask music directors to be frank about the challenges your decisions may cause. Be open to adjusting them. Music directors: understand that stage directors cannot always fully collaborate as they work to balance the various needs of the production. This does not imply a lack of respect, but do feel free to remind them of your own valuable insights by sharing your expertise. Music directors may also need to defer vocal decisions to a performer's voice teacher because of the limited rehearsal time.

Most of all, whether at scheduled meetings or informal "check ins" during rehearsal breaks, both music and stage director should remember to carve out time for active collaboration rather than leaving it to magically unfold. An open communication channel can benefit the singer-actors and, ultimately, the production.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Deer, Joe. *Directing in Musical Theatre: An Essential Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- ² Novak, Elaine Adams & Deborah Novak. *Staging Musical Theatre: A Complete Guide for Directors, Choreographers, and Producers*. Chicago: Betterway Books, 1996.
- ³ Hall, Karen. "Music Theater Vocal Pedagogy and Styles: An Introductory Teaching Guide for Experienced Classical Singing Teachers." Doctoral Dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2006.
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- ⁵ Laster, James H. *So You're the New Musical Director*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2001.
- ⁶ Hetrick, Adam. "Pippin Will Arrive on Broadway with Complete ART Cast, Including Patina Miller, Matthew James Thomas, Andrea Martin." *Playbill*. February 4, 2013.
- ⁷ Lovetri, Jeannette. & Edrie Means Weekly. "Follow-Up Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Survey: Who's Teaching What in Non-Classical Music?" *Journal of Voice*, Vol. 23 (2009), 367–375.
- ⁸ Roll, Christianne. "Female Musical Theatre Belting in the 21st Century: A Study of the Pedagogy of the Vocal Practice and Performance." Doctoral Dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2014.



Kelly J. G. Bremner is Assistant Professor of Theater at Emory & Henry College where she teaches classes in directing, devised and applied performance, and theater history, in addition to directing productions. She holds the BA in music from William Smith College with a specialty in vocal performance and conducting, and a PhD in theater studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a research focus in staging musical performance. Dr. Bremner has received numerous grants to pursue her passion in creating innovative musical performance, including large awards from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, The Elyue Foundation, and the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission. Two new musicals have come from these endeavors: *Across a Distance*, which combines deaf performance with operatic singing, and *Unearthed*, a work about the Blue Ridge Mountains which blends bluegrass, opera, and musical theater with local concerns and content. Both of these feature music by Scott Gendel and book/lyrics by Nick Lantz.

Her teaching has been recognized by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia in the Outstanding Faculty Awards, and by the YWCA Tribute to Woman Awards for Excellence in Education. Dr. Bremner recently completed a week-long residency teaching singing-acting with the Ryan Opera Center at the Chicago Lyric Opera.



Christianne K. Roll received her BFA in musical theater from the CAP21 studio of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. At NYU, she was a Tisch Scholar and was selected as one of the top performers of her graduating class. In 2014, she graduated from Columbia

University, Teachers College, with a Doctor of Education degree. Dr. Roll's doctoral dissertation—*Female Musical Theatre Belting in the 21st Century: A Study of the Pedagogy of the Vocal Practice and Performance—examined female belting from the perspectives of musical theater voice teachers and their students*. A member of the Actors' Equity Association, Dr. Roll has performed at the Goodspeed Opera House, the Lucille Lortel Theatre, the York Theatre, and internationally as the principal singer for Norwegian Cruise Lines. She has sung the national anthem on *The Roseanne Show* and for the Philadelphia Eagles.

She was a finalist in the BBC's international vocal competition *Voice of Musical Theater* in Cardiff, Wales. Dr. Roll has served as the music director of Norwegian Cruise Lines, teaching singing to hundreds of international professional performers. She is a member of NATS and is currently Assistant Professor of Musical Theater at Florida Southern College, where she heads the musical theater BFA degree program.

Nasality: *Do You Hear What I See?* by Nicholas Perna, DMA

"Let the master attend with great care to the voice of the scholar, which, whether it be *di petto* or *di testa* should always come forth neat and clear, without passing through the nose or being choked in the throat (which are the two most horrible defects in a singer, and past all remedy if once grown into a habit)."¹

When Tosi penned these words in the seventeenth century, he most likely assumed that he had written the singing profession's final words on nasality. It is unlikely Tosi would have even considered that one day we would instruct singing lessons in *bel canto* and CCM styles as has now become commonplace. Nasality continues to exist largely in the area of aesthetic voice quality related to tone. Many western classical teachers seem to agree that an excessively nasal tone is an unpleasant one. Still, there are western classical teachers who believe that nasality can be used as a tool to create forward "ring" or sensations in the "mask." Similarly, this author has spoken with several CCM teachers regarding technical advantages to nasality when approaching female middle voice in certain production modes (i.e. belt voice). The divide does not end there.

In western classical singing there are negative resonant consequences to producing tone with a lowered soft palate. The linings of the nose are soft and mucosal. This reduces resonant vibrations, specifically in the range of the first formant (c. 400–1300 Hz.) The first formant plays a large role in determining vowel quality and amplification of the male and female voice. This attenuation of resonance is enough evidence to suggest that for western classical singing, a tone actually produced through the nasal passage is not efficient. Currently there is not sufficient empirical data to prove that nasality is beneficial in teaching CCM styles; however, this is an area of research that the author is eager to explore.

Nasality's relationship to tone is inevitable, but tone quality itself is hard to define.

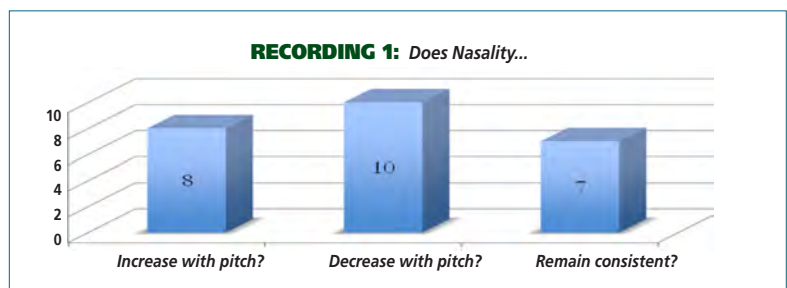
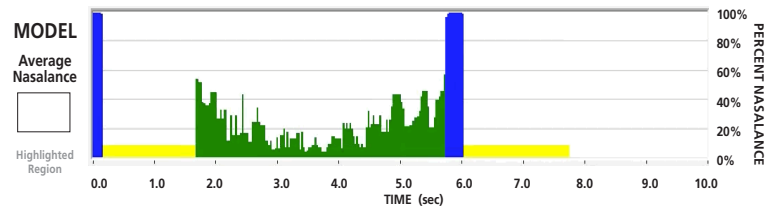
Over time, pedagogues develop preferences they either like or (usually harshly) dislike in regard to tone and beauty. Even terminology regarding nasality is varied: "nasal honk," "nasal twang," "hypernasality," "hyponasality," etc. Therefore, it is likely that identification of nasality, as it refers to tone, has also developed over time based on an individual's training, performing, education, and teaching. The question then does not lie with the pedagogy world agreeing on whether nasal tone is good or bad, but rather with whether or not the sound that individuals perceive as nasal tone is actually produced through the nasopharynx.

Expert listeners rated audio recordings gathered during a ten-week study that measured the effectiveness of the nasometer as a visual feedback tool for use in the voice studio. The listeners were all either collegiate voice professors or recognized, published independent voice teachers. These recordings were initially rated to determine whether what expert listeners heard matched what the nasometer measured. A nasometer measures nasalance, which is an acoustic measure of nasal versus oral amplitude. A similar attempt was made by Birch et al. in 2002.² Their study included only six raters and found little reliability between raters. For this survey, twenty-five raters listened to seven recordings drawn from the original study. The recordings were all five-note ascending/descending scales performed in a comfortable range, determined by voice type.

Rather than examining each of the seven rated recordings separately, the four recordings being reported (*Recordings 1, 3, 4, and 7*) were found to be the most illuminating. The first three recordings (*Recordings 1, 2, and 3*) were used to determine whether the raters perceived a difference in nasality in relationship to pitch. The raters were given three options: a) resonance in the nasopharynx *increases* as pitch increases, b) resonance in the nasopharynx *decreases* as pitch increases, or c) resonance in the nasopharynx *remains consistent* as pitch increases. The results,

however, proved to be less than useful when comparing the ratings to the measurements. When examining a nasalance graph, the x-axis represents time and the y-axis percent of nasalance. The higher the green spike, the more nasalance is present.

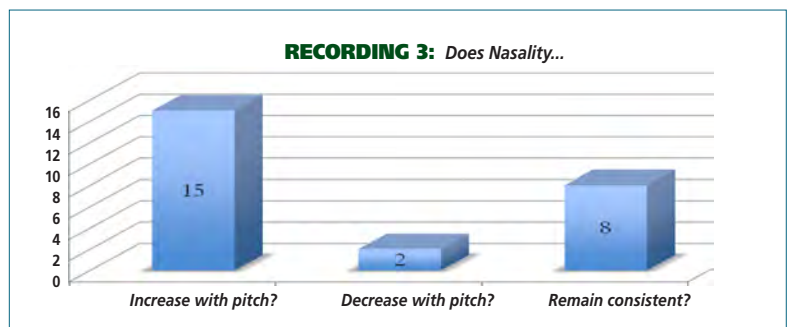
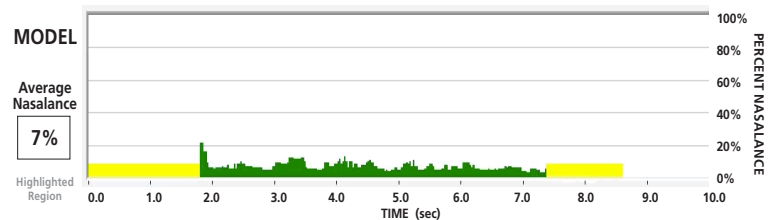
Recording 1: (Nasalance decreases as pitch increases.)



Despite the fact the ratings may not be especially useful in comparison to the measurements, they have proved useful in another manner. This scale clearly demonstrates a decrease in nasalance as pitch increases. Yet, these experts could not have been more balanced in their disagreement as to what they heard.

Recording 3 had consistent lack of nasalance throughout. Yet, 60% of raters agreed that nasality increased as pitch increased. This is not to say that these experts were wrong. Their perceptual reality was developed over time based on aesthetic tonal preference. What these results demonstrate is that within the voice pedagogy community, the sound of nasality is not clearly defined or agreed upon.

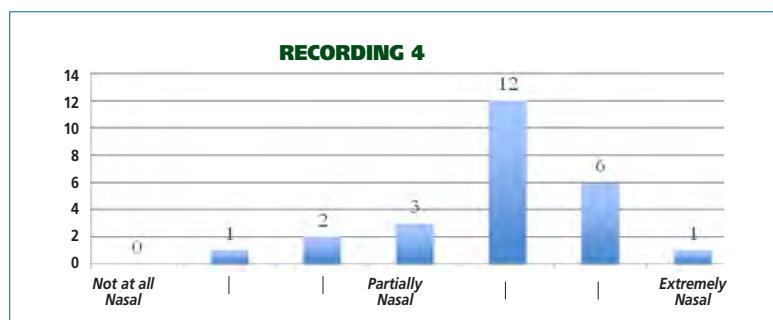
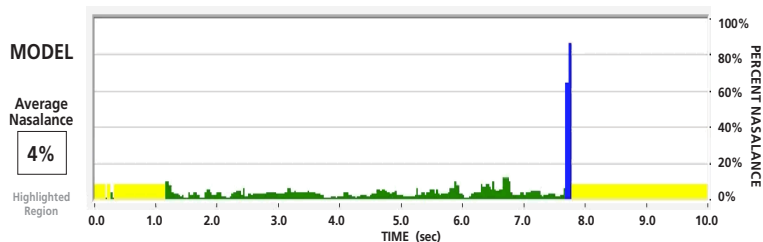
Recording 3: (Nasalance remains consistent.)



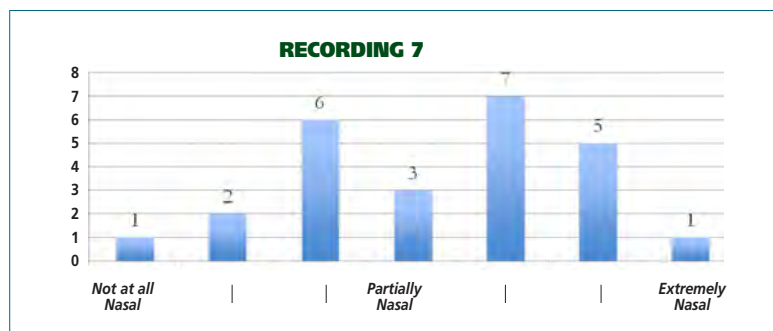
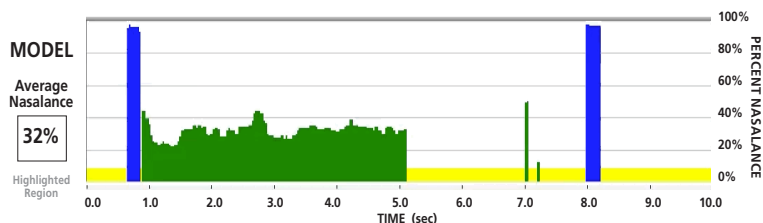
For the final four recordings (*Recordings 4, 5, 6, and 7*) the experts were asked to rate what degree of nasality was present overall in the scales. Unfortunately these ratings equally did not show any correlation with the readings of the nasometer. Indeed, intra-rater ratings and group

behavior followed similarly differing patterns. Recording 4, which is the lowest nasalance of the nearly 1,000 samples from the ten-week study, was actually rated as the most nasal sounding recording with 88% rating the sample between “somewhat nasal” and “extremely nasal.” This recording is worth further scrutiny. These samples were all collected from known students to the author. The soprano who performed Recording 4 struggles with extremely swollen adenoids on a consistent basis. In fact, when she recorded this sample she had a diagnosed sinus infection. It is possible that the occlusion of the sinuses by swollen tissue and mucous leads to a misinterpretation of tone as nasal, when there is no sound being produced through the nasopharynx.

Recording 4: (Very little nasalance.)



Recording 7: (Relatively high nasalance.)



Recording 7 had a more balanced split of ratings, despite its high levels of nasalance. It is noteworthy that this final example is of a bass singing a D3–A3 scale with what the author would describe as an unstable larynx. It is possible that the rising larynx was associated with a certain degree of palate lowering. However, it is also possible that those who rated the sample as less than partially nasal heard what they thought of as a “forward” placement of sound. The author would rather suggest the possibility that what they heard was high laryngeal position, which itself can create a certain “pingy” sound despite its simultaneously “pressed” quality.

The pervading issue is the manner in which the voice pedagogy community interprets a nasal sound, rather than an overall disagreement on whether or not nasality is inherently good or bad. It is possible to incorrectly attribute nasality to a tone for many reasons including sinus congestion, presence of resonance in the singer’s formant region and higher (c. 3–4.5 kHz.), and raised laryngeal posture among others. As a pedagogy teacher, I dedicate much of my time to teacher training. While further research into nasality will be helpful, it is the patient ear training of the next generation of voice pedagogues that will help us to bring nasality out of the realm of the subjective and into the realm of the objective.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Tosi, Francesco. *Observations on the Florid Song* (London: Stainer and Bell, 1987): 22.
- ² Birch, Peer; Gümöes, Bodil; Stavad, Hanne; Prytz, Svend; Björkner, Eva; and Sundberg, Johan. “Velum Behavior in Professional Classic Operatic Singing,” *Journal of Voice* 16.1 (March 2002): 127–137.



Dr. Nicholas Perna is Assistant Professor of Voice and Voice Pedagogy at Mississippi College where he teaches studio voice, various courses related to voice pedagogy, and voice acoustics. He holds degrees from the University of Miami and the University of Houston. An active researcher, Dr. Perna was awarded a Presser Music Foundation Award leading to research on nasalance and the acoustics of the tenor passaggio. His research on nasalance and the nasometer has been presented at conferences such as The 8th International Congress of Voice Teachers in Brisbane and has been published in the *Journal of Singing*. An active NATS member, he has served as Governor of the West Virginia District and Vice-President of the Tri-State Chapter.

A frequent recitalist, Perna regularly performs the songs of Benjamin Britten. In collaboration with soprano Dr. Mandy Spivak, he created *The Comprehensive Britten Song Database*, an open source reference for voice professionals worldwide. <http://www.brittensongdatabase.com>. In his debut as the Prince in Prokofiev’s *The Love for Three Oranges*, Charles Ward of the Houston Chronicle said, “an impressive sound; [he] made the show work vocally.” Operatic credits include *Rodolfo* in *La bohème*, *The Duke* in *Rigoletto*, *Nemorino* in *L’elisir d’amore*, *Alfred* in *Die Fledermaus*, and *Tamino* in *The Magic Flute*.

Concert appearances include Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*, Rossini’s *Petite messe solennelle*, Handel’s *Messiah*, and Orff’s *Carmina Burana*. He can be heard on the Albany label as Paolo in Mancinelli’s *Paolo e Francesca*. His teachers include David Alt, Jerold Siena, and Joseph Evans. Dr. Perna twice apprenticed with the Santa Fe Opera.

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At the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London, Ms. Streeton holds the title of Singing Co-ordinator and is responsible for singing across the Academy. She has also taught at the Guildford School of Acting and Webber Douglas Academy and given master classes in Italy, in Australia at NIDA in Sydney and Monash University in Melbourne, in Russia at the Boris Schukin Theatre School and at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon and Oregon State University as well as at Hofstra University, HB Studios, and at Juilliard. She has worked as singing coach and vocal advisor for films and with the BBC, in West End Musicals, and at the Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe.



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