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Contemporary Vocal Pedagogy in the Choral Ensemble Rehearsal: A Guide for Secondary Educators

Luke Lee Browder

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Contemporary Vocal Pedagogy in the Choral Ensemble Rehearsal:
A Guide for Secondary Educators

by

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Choral Conducting

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DEDICATION

This one is in memory of Brett and Memo. Thank you for always believing in me.
I miss you both terribly.

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I would like to thank all my students and colleagues over the years whose trust and encouragement has led directly to this area of research. I have become a better teacher because of all that they have taught me with their artistry and intelligence. I am grateful to my document committee: Dr. Jabarie Glass, Dr. Scott Weiss, and Dr. Serena Hill-LaRoche, for their feedback on my writing, and to my adviser Dr. Alicia Walker for shepherding me through this entire process.

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ABSTRACT

The field of contemporary commercial vocal pedagogy is relatively new, with serious academic study primarily taking place over the last twenty-five years. In that time, however, a growing body of research has shown that the function of the vocal mechanism operates in essentially the same manner across classical and contemporary commercial music (CCM) genres, but the application of vocal function is what differentiates classical and CCM singing. Since secondary music educators often represent the only vocal training their students will ever receive, it is helpful for them to know the differences in vocal techniques and how to effectively train singers in multiple genres. Training programs for secondary educators often include applied lessons with a primary focus on Western classical music and choral methods courses to apply those vocal techniques to choir, preparing them to teach classical vocal styles in the classroom.

Recent surveys of secondary choral educators have shown that they regularly include popular music in their curriculum and are often responsible for music directing musical theatre productions, but a vast majority have never received any training in those genres. With the growth of pedagogical resources for CCM styles, choral directors can find a wide variety of exercises to use with their ensembles. This document gives choral educators a system by which they can apply CCM training techniques to the choral rehearsal, enabling their students to perform healthily and authentically in numerous popular vocal styles.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the secondary choral classroom, it is often the case that the choral teacher is the only “voice teacher” most of their students will ever have. Despite the prevalence and availability of private voice instruction around the country, not all students have equal access, whether due to their distance from a qualified voice teacher or due to the lack of funds to enroll in private lessons. Secondary level choral instructors have long educated their students in music literacy, music history, music theory, and vocal technique. For much of history of the United States, that musical education has been focused on the Western classical canon. Even though organizations like the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), have long advocated for the inclusion of popular music in the curriculum, it has often been with the caveat that the vocal production is “faulty” or that popular styles serve as a means to an end. The *Music Educators Journal* sought to “preserve [their] influence on cultural trends, and to arouse in [their] students a discriminating attitude toward the good and bad in music, that they may themselves reject the cheap and tawdry influences of ‘tin-pan alley,’” the popular music of the time.¹

In recent decades, a great deal of research has been done in popular music education. With over a century of recorded popular music in America, there is a growing body of historical study in a variety of genres, and music theorists have been studying

¹ Music Educators National Conference Consultant’s Group, “Popular Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 31, No. 6 (May-June 1945): 52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3386634>.

popular music to design an analytical framework by which others can learn about the craft of these genres. Vocal pedagogues have been developing techniques for teaching popular music styles in the private studio, and even coined the term Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) to supplant the previously used, yet infamously vague term of “non-classical” music. Though this expansion of study has been swift in the past few decades, the percentage of universities offering degrees in popular music remains small, and the curriculum for a degree in music education remains primarily focused on the Western classical canon. Though Western classical music remains a foundational bedrock for educational and artistic institutions across the country, secondary choral teachers are finding themselves frequently working in popular styles with their students even though they did not receive training specific to popular music. This document will provide secondary school choral educators and post-secondary music education faculty with a resource to explore the various genres of popular music and to be able to craft exercises that will enable their students to perform authentically and healthily in a variety of popular styles.

Need for Study

In 1967, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) gathered at Tanglewood in Massachusetts for a symposium on the theme, “Music in American Society.” That symposium led to a drafting of “The Tanglewood Declaration,” an outline of their beliefs of the role that music education should play in American society. The second statement of the Tanglewood Declaration reads:

Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belong in the curriculum.
The musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in

its rich variety, including currently popular teenage music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures.²

The full Declaration makes it clear that the MENC was advocating for diverse styles of music to be included in the music education curriculum of schools across the country.

Thirty-two years after the Tanglewood Symposium, the MENC gathered in Tallahassee, Florida for the Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education and further affirmed that “All music has a place in the curriculum. Not only does the Western art tradition need to be preserved and disseminated, music educators also need to be aware of other music that people experience and be able to integrate it into classroom music instruction.”³

In 2014, the current iteration of MENC, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), crafted National Music Standards to outline the goal of music education in American schools. In their statement, “Inclusivity and Diversity in Music Education,” NAfME declares, “As our country becomes increasingly diverse, it is important for students in every school setting to study a wide variety of musical styles, cultures, and genres.”⁴ They acknowledge some may argue that “popular music and other traditional or folk music are not for classroom musical study,” but counter that “including all forms and types of music within the classroom, however, from folk to classical, and from popular to non-Western, allows students to explore and expand their communication, collaboration, and music literacy skills in a variety of formats, structures,

² Robert A. Choate, Charles B. Fowler, Charles E. Brown, and Louis G. Wersen, “The Tanglewood Symposium: Music in American Society,” *Music Educators Journal* 54, No. 3 (November 1967): 51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3391187>.

³ “The Housewright Declaration,” National Association for Music Education, accessed August 20, 2023, <https://nafme.org/resource/the-housewright-declaration/>.

⁴ “Inclusivity and Diversity in Music Education,” National Association for Music Education, accessed August 20, 2023, <https://nafme.org/resource/inclusivity-and-diversity-in-music-education-2/>.

and ensembles.”⁵ America’s largest group of music educators has been advocating for the inclusion of diverse styles in the classroom for decades, and they explicitly include popular music in their statements of purpose.

As a part of the NAFME push to broaden musical genres in the classroom, a recent issue of the *Music Educators Journal* was published entitled “Special Focus on Popular Music Education.” It included an article that encourages the use of popular music in the choral classroom, “Popular Music in Choir: Helping Students ‘Find Their Voice,’” that generally offers useful information to any teacher who may be considering introducing popular music as a part of their curriculum. Curiously, it includes the following statement:

In our experience, we have known some choir teachers who expressed concerns about having students sing popular music in school because of the belief that it could lead to poor vocal techniques, like the use of vocal fry or belting, that could potentially lead to injuries in some singers.⁶

This statement assumes that belting and vocal fry are necessarily unhealthy vocal functions. The authors go on to operate under the assumption that students singing in popular styles are doing so in an unhealthy manner, arguing that teachers should “discuss how and why some popular singers have injured their voices”⁷ They state that choral teachers who have received voice instruction can help their students “apply healthy vocal technique to their popular music singing.”⁸

The problem with these assumptions is that they are not necessarily true.

Regarding vocal fry, Dr. Seth Dailey, Professor of Laryngology and Voice Surgery at the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Julie Derges Kastner and Saleel Menon, “Popular Music in Choir,” *Music Educators Journal* 106, No. 1 (September 2019): 49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26787930>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

University of Wisconsin-Madison, states that “[vocal fry] is a voice variant. It’s a variant of voice production. Everyone is capable of having vocal fry and all of us have elements of it.” His colleague Brienne Hennessy is a Senior Clinical Speech Pathologist at UW-Madison and reiterates “Fry, to be clear, is a normal production in the voice. It’s not something abnormal.”⁹ Neither of these medical professionals expresses any concern about vocal fry as a potential negative health hazard for the voice. Likewise, belting is an often-misunderstood vocal technique utilized in popular music, and the authors of the *Music Educators Journal* article assume that it is inherently unhealthy. Several studies have shown that singers utilizing a belt technique utilize a higher percentage of muscular tension than their classical counterparts, but that singers of both styles present with vocal pathologies at a similar rate.¹⁰

The authors further encourage teachers to discuss with their students how “popular singers, like Adele and Justin Timberlake, have had highly publicized vocal injuries that have resulted in canceled performances and intense medical treatments.”¹¹ They fail to consider, however, that highly regarded classical singers like Rolando Villazón, Denyce Graves, and Natalie Dessay have suffered vocal injuries in the course of their careers, and that the injuries these singers suffer, whether singing classical or popular music, are more likely related to the level of voice usage rather than their vocal technique.¹² The bias against popular singing present in an article that is meant to

⁹ “Sounding Off On Vocal Fry,” hosted by Anne Strainchamps, *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, on Wisconsin Public Radio, July 27, 2019, <https://www.ttbook.org/interview/sounding-vocal-fry>.

¹⁰ Wendy LeBorgne and Marci Rosenberg, *The Vocal Athlete* (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2014), 229.

¹¹ Kastner and Menon, 49.

¹² Matthew Edwards, “Vocal damage in CLASSICAL singers: It’s not just pop singers that get hurt,” *Edwards Voice* (blog), August 13, 2015, <https://edwardsvoice.wordpress.com/2015/08/13/vocal-damage-in-classical-singers-its-not-just-pop-singers-that-get-hurt/>.

encourage the use of popular music in the choral classroom indicates that a system for teaching CCM vocal pedagogy techniques in the choral ensemble setting is needed in order to provide teachers a system for helping their students develop the vocal technique necessary to engage with popular genres.

Although organizations like NAFME have advocated for the inclusion of popular music in the choral curriculum, and the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) has supported an enormous amount of research and publication in the field of CCM voice pedagogy, there is still a lack of systems for CCM voice training designed for use in the choral ensemble. In a 2016 analysis of the inclusion of popular music in the choral classroom, Elaine Smith found that 100% of survey respondents reported utilizing some form of popular music instruction in their classroom, while 78.8% of those respondents had never received formal instruction in popular music and only 7.7% had covered popular music in a methods class.¹³ Additionally, a 2020 study of musical theatre and CCM voice pedagogy training in the United States found that programs for training singers in CCM styles were few and far between. The author of that study concludes that “there is a need for academic programs specialising [sic] in CCM voice pedagogy to meet the demand for suitably qualified and experienced teachers” and that voice teachers in the U.S. often find that they “must transition from enculturation in the aesthetic of the classical voice pedagogy to a working knowledge of...CCM singing.”¹⁴

¹³ Elaine K. Smith, “A Descriptive Analysis of High School Choral Teachers’ Inclusion of Popular Music in Current Teaching Practices” (DMA diss., The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2016), 161-162.

¹⁴ Dale Cox, “In the Room Where it Happens: Teaching Musical Theatre and Contemporary and Commercial Music (CCM) Singing” (PhD diss., University of Southern Queensland, 2020), ii.

These studies indicate that there are professionals in the field who are teaching CCM vocal pedagogy and popular music in choral classrooms who also feel as though they were not prepared for these genres in their formal training. Musical training in the United States still leans heavily on the Western classical tradition, and a history of bias against popular music has been inherent in academic programs since the founding of the MENC and similar organizations dedicated to musical training.¹⁵ By preparing this document, this author has no intention of attempting to diminish the value of classical music within the music education curriculum and in higher education. Rather, a guide will be offered by which choral directors and music educators can expand the genres, styles, and techniques of singing with which they feel comfortable engaging. Educators are already working within multiple popular music genres, and the training and materials available should reflect the reality of the current trends in education and the needs and interests of students.

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of research with background on the use of popular music in the secondary choral classroom. It discusses some of the research that has been done on educators' inclusion of popular music despite their lack of training in the necessary vocal and musical skills inherent to popular music. The need for study covers biases and misunderstandings of CCM singing that have remained pervasive over the years, including the false assumption that singing popular music is more straining on the voice than singing classical styles. A literature review covers the existing academic

¹⁵ Marisa Lee Naismith, "Historical Bias Against Popular Music Education with Matt Edwards and Jacqlyn Zito-Edwards," January 22, 2023, in *A Voice and Beyond* podcast, <https://drmarisaleenaismith.com/99-historical-bias-against-popular-music-education-part-i-with-matt-edwards-and-jacqlyn-zito-edwards/>.

research available in the fields of CCM vocal pedagogy, the application of classical vocal pedagogy to the choral rehearsal, and the few academic sources available in the field of CCM vocal pedagogy for choirs.

Chapter 2 includes an overview of CCM vocal pedagogy techniques and choral methods for the use of vocal pedagogy in the classroom. Best practices from the field of CCM voice pedagogy and classical vocal pedagogy for choirs will be utilized to craft a process that will enable teachers to apply CCM vocal pedagogy to their choral ensemble rehearsals.

Chapter 3 will take the techniques discussed in Chapter 2 and apply them to selected excerpts of CCM choral music. Recordings of original CCM songs will be referenced and analyzed to help teachers understand what vocal techniques they are hearing. Exercises from published CCM vocal pedagogy research that address the technical demands of each song will be presented and those techniques will be applied to the arrangement to create a performance that is stylistically appropriate. This will allow the singers to sing in a way that has historically been misunderstood as “unhealthy,” but that in fact can be accomplished with careful attention to the proper vocal technique.

Chapter 4 contains a summary of the pedagogical techniques discussed and provides examples of how choral educators can apply this system of voice building to a wide variety of CCM choral arrangements, while suggesting avenues for further study.

Methodology

Publications by leading scholars in the field of CCM vocal pedagogy will be utilized to create rehearsal plans for selected arrangements of CCM pieces for choir. Utilizing published choral arrangements of popular songs, the author will guide readers

through a step-by-step rehearsal planning process with primary goals of vocal health and longevity within CCM singing. Plans will be developed utilizing the following process:

- 1) Identifying the vocal techniques utilized in recordings of CCM music, and assessment of whether the identified techniques are appropriate for the ensemble.
- 2) Identifying the vocal training necessary to facilitate healthy singing within the stylistic parameters of the genre.
- 3) Crafting warm-ups that relax the vocal mechanism and exercises that improve students' ability to sing within the desired genre.
- 4) Guiding singers through the process of developing their interpretation of the music being performed, with the goal of stylistic integrity.

Examples will be presented from pieces conducted on a Lecture Recital conducted by this author on February 7, 2023, thus ensuring that the techniques presented in the paper have been tested in a practical setting with a choral ensemble. By demonstrating the process of developing rehearsal plans with the proper vocal pedagogy in mind, this document will provide choral directors with rehearsal techniques that can be applied effectively within any genre of popular music, from pop and rock to gospel and jazz.

Literature Review

This section outlines relevant literature focused on three pertinent areas of study: the use of vocal pedagogy techniques within the choral rehearsal, new research on vocal pedagogy for contemporary commercial music, and literature that addresses CCM vocal pedagogy in the choral rehearsal.

Vocal Pedagogy in the Choral Rehearsal

Voice Building for Choirs by Wilhelm Ehmann and Frauke Haasemann is a standard text in choral music education programs. The book provides a series of daily exercises designed to encourage excellence in various areas of choral singing which the authors have divided between Posture, Breathing, and Voice Building, and offers a series of additional exercises aimed at achieving specific goals within the larger framework of daily voice building activities. The goal is that, through regular disciplined work, the singers of the choir will develop the technical skills necessary to effectively sing diverse choral repertoire from the Western art music tradition.

In addition to exercises aimed at voice building, the authors offer a chapter entitled “Warm-up Exercises for Special Problems in Specific Choral Works.” This chapter offers an efficient guide for someone seeking to create a similar guide within the context of contemporary commercial music. The authors list objectives for each piece that include phrasing, register balance, tonal goals, articulation, and dynamics. A series of exercises specific to that piece are then given with reference to the basic exercises presented in earlier chapters to help the conductor achieve specific vocal goals. The method of identifying the musical challenges of a specific piece and crafting vocal exercises specifically designed to master those challenges is meant to be something that an enterprising conductor can recreate with whatever piece of music they are rehearsing with their choir.

The book *Choral Pedagogy* by Brenda Smith and Robert T. Sataloff utilizes a great deal of information from the Ehmann and Haasemann text related to voice building, but also offers extensive information related to various issues inherent in choral ensembles. Topics covered in this text include “Anatomy and Physiology of the Voice,”

“Seating Problems of Vocalists,” “Choral Pedagogy and Vocal Health,” and numerous chapters devoted to vocal techniques within the choral rehearsal. As a newer text, Smith and Sataloff’s book relies heavily on more current research in the field of classical vocal pedagogy and applies that research and historical knowledge to the execution of a pedagogically effective choral rehearsal.

Finally, the DMA dissertation “A Curriculum of Voice Pedagogy for Choral Conductors: The Effect of Solo Voice Exercises on Individual Singer Technique, Choral Tone, and Choral Literature” by Nicole Christopher Lamartine aims to create a curriculum of voice pedagogy that choral conductors can utilize with their ensembles and designs a method by which the author tested pedagogical methods within the vocal ensemble. The curriculum was designed based on Lamartine’s experience within the voice studio teaching classical vocal techniques, and this author aims to apply their experience teaching CCM techniques in the voice studio to the development of rehearsal plans for popular music within the choral ensemble.

Contemporary Commercial Vocal Pedagogy

The works published in relation to contemporary commercial voice pedagogy are all relatively new, most having been published within the last fifteen years. Here we will discuss several sources whose focus is specifically focused on the vocal pedagogy research related to CCM styles of singing.

Wendy LeBorgne and Marci Rosenberg’s book *The Vocal Athlete* and its accompanying workbook *Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer* is an in-depth guide to the many topics relating to vocal health for professional singers. With chapters such as “Neurological Control of Voice Production,” “Laryngopharyngeal Reflux,” and

“The Singer’s Guide to Anesthesiology and Voice,” this text includes a vast amount of medical and clinical knowledge that will be useful to professional voice users and, of course, any conductor working with them. Though largely a text focused on clinical care of the professional voice, Section III focuses on “Vocal Pedagogy for the 21st-Century Vocal Athlete.” Specifically, the authors focus a great deal of attention on the pedagogy of belting, including historical approaches and understandings of the belt voice followed by current theory and research. This current research offers understandings of belting in relation to intensity, vibrato, timbre, and resonance that will be useful to the choral conductor attempting to teach healthy belting techniques within a choral ensemble. Additionally, Chapter 15 offers an application of exercise physiology principles for vocal training that can be applied to a curriculum of voice building for choirs rehearsing CCM music. LeBorgne and Rosenberg present the exercise physiology concept of Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demand (SAID) and present five principles that can help the choral conductor design exercises that will increase their choir’s ability to healthily sing CCM styles: intensity, frequency, overload, specificity, and reversibility.¹⁶ This focused approach to vocal training will help to set goals using warm-ups, exercises, and repertoire designed to expand singers’ vocal capabilities within the choral rehearsal.

Cross Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act is a book by Norman Spivey and Mary Saunders Barton, voice teachers at Penn State University, with one specializing in classical voice pedagogy and the other specializing in musical theatre. Their collegial relationship over many years led to the publication of this book that aims to encourage teachers of singing to train students in multiple styles of singing to help them strengthen

¹⁶ Wendy LeBorgne and Marci Rosenberg, *The Vocal Athlete* (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2014), 245.

every aspect of their vocal mechanism. The authors make the case that in today's performance landscape, there is a wide swath of overlap that occurs between opera and musical theatre singers. This is done by providing examples of opera companies programming musicals in their seasons and giving examples of musical theatre singers who have performed in operetta and operatic productions. The space between the two genres is narrowing, and singers who hope to perform professionally need to be prepared to operate within each.¹⁷ Though this can be accomplished effectively within the voice studio, the choral director can reinforce the vocal skills being taught in lessons and call attention to the skill of ensemble singing within popular music by being aware of many of the exercises in this text. In their chapter "The Balancing Act of Registration and Resonance," Spivey and Saunders Barton approach voice training through the lens of vocal registers. Traditionally, Western classical music has focused primarily on head register dominant singing, but CCM styles often require greater access to the chest register throughout the range. By being aware of the capability of the voice to phonate in different registers in the same vocal range, young singers can learn to adapt their vocal function to match the requirements of the style, rather than being beholden to utilizing only one register within a particular range. This is what the authors refer to as being "well-balanced," and they provide exercises for both treble and bass voices to access both head and chest register dominant singing throughout the range. These exercises can easily be adapted by the enterprising choral conductor to use within an ensemble rehearsal, and this author will adapt these exercises when crafting repertoire-specific exercises for the choral ensemble.

¹⁷ Norman Spivey and Mary Saunders Barton, *Cross Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2018). 28-29.

In her book *Training Contemporary Commercial Singers*, Elizabeth Ann Benson interviews experienced CCM vocal pedagogues about their philosophies and practices regarding CCM vocal production. Many of the teachers interviewed have training in both classical and contemporary singing, and offer practical suggestions to improve overall vocal acuity, but the text generally focuses its attention on CCM techniques. Of particular interest is the chapter outlining the training experiences of teachers interviewed for the book. A majority were trained classically, and only a small percentage had received formal training in musical theatre or jazz styles, but nearly half participate in ongoing voice research within the field, demonstrating that one of the most important characteristics of success within the realm of CCM vocal pedagogy is the willingness to continue to learn new skills.¹⁸ In addition to the interviews with teachers, Benson gives an overview of various teaching methods that are prevalent within the field of CCM voice pedagogy as well as extensive bibliographies at the end of each chapter which are excellent resources for choral conductors seeking to learn more about the current research and techniques in the field.

Karen Hall's *So You Want to Sing Music Theater: A Guide for Professionals* provides similar pedagogical information as several of the previously mentioned texts, but also includes extensive sections dedicated to listening and identifying vocal qualities within the various popular genres that make up musical theatre. She discusses the various kinds of vocalization commonly found in the musical theatre repertory and provides audio examples for singers to listen to in order to identify professional level vocal production of common CCM techniques. Her chapter "Music Theater Styles" gives

¹⁸ Elizabeth Ann Benson, *Training Contemporary Commercial Singers* (Oxford: Compton Publishing, 2020). 54-55.

readers detailed information about various genres of musical theatre and discusses characteristics such as vibrato, range, and timbre for the different genres common in musical theatre.¹⁹ This collection of best vocal practices is a rich resource for choral conductors leading an ensemble in different CCM styles.

CCM Vocal Pedagogy in the Choral Rehearsal

Two academic papers have been written on this topic, a master's thesis by Chelsea Dehn entitled "Bridging the Gap: The Application of 'Classical' and 'Non-Classical' Vocal Pedagogy in the Rehearsal and Performance of Diverse Choral Repertoire," and a DMA dissertation by Brian J. Winnie entitled "Contemporary Vocal Technique in the Choral Rehearsal: Exploratory Strategies for Learning." Both take a similar approach to exploring CCM vocal pedagogy techniques by first giving an overview of classical vocal pedagogy and its application to choral rehearsals, and then transitioning to CCM pedagogy and providing strategies for applying those techniques to choral rehearsals. Winnie's dissertation delves deeper into the possibilities for application and provides more detailed examples of how to apply CCM techniques for choral ensembles. One facet that these papers share is that the CCM vocal pedagogy techniques they use are pulled exclusively from the Estill Voice Training methodology created by Jo Estill. Though Estill is one of the pioneering CCM vocal pedagogues, the Estill method is only one of a variety of methodologies and systems used in CCM vocal pedagogy. This document utilizes research and practical application from a wider variety of vocal pedagogues than these academic papers.

¹⁹ Karen Hall, *So You Want to Sing Music Theater: A Guide for Professionals* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 91-107.

The December 2011 issue of *The Choral Journal* contains an article in its “On the Voice” series entitled “Contemporary Commercial Voice Pedagogy Applied to the Choral Ensemble: An Interview with Jeannette LoVetri.” This interview with LoVetri by Neal W. Woodruff introduces readers of the journal to her background as a singer and pedagogue and details her journey into the world of CCM vocal pedagogy. It then transitions into discussion of LoVetri’s development of her branded method, Somatic Voicework™ the LoVetri Method, and her experience applying the method to her work with the Brooklyn Youth Chorus Academy. Specifically, she discusses the importance of teaching age-appropriate vocal techniques, beginning with head register dominant sounds for the youngest singers in the program, and transitioning to a wider variety of techniques as they continue to grow older. This article is an excellent source from another pioneer in the field of CCM vocal pedagogy on how she applies her voice teaching to the specific demands of a choral ensemble and includes sound advice for teachers who are seeking to include both classical and CCM vocal techniques in their choral ensemble. As with the earlier documents, LoVetri’s method for applying CCM techniques to the choral ensemble is rooted in a single method: the one she developed. She confidently utilizes her method as it has served her well in her career, but she acknowledges that other CCM vocal pedagogues have continued to add to the body of available research, and she encourages teachers to add to their knowledge base using information from a variety of sources.²⁰ This author personally studied with LoVetri at her CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute in 2015 and intends to utilize Somatic Voicework™ in this document. But, as she

²⁰ Jeannette LoVetri and Neal W. Woodruff, “On the Voice: Contemporary Commercial Voice Pedagogy Applied to the Choral Ensemble: An Interview with Jeannette LoVetri,” *The Choral Journal* 52, no. 5 (December 2011): 39–53 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23560623>.

encourages in her interview, this document will utilize the research and techniques from other leading CCM vocal pedagogues as well.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY VOCAL PEDAGOGY

Regarding the function of the human singing voice, most resources identify three major components of the vocal instrument, with a fourth complementary component.

These components of the voice are:

- 1) Power source (breath)
- 2) Sound source (larynx, specifically the vocal folds)
- 3) Resonator (vocal tract)

And the complementary component:

- 4) Articulators (tongue, teeth, lips)²¹

Each individual component can be broken into detail regarding the muscular systems that affect it, but the goal here will be simplify each major component into concepts appropriate for a secondary school student. In addition to these four components of the voice, there are various other topics related to singing including resonance, registers, acoustics, auditory processes, posture, vocal onsets, intonation, and vibrato. Each of these topics carries varying levels of importance, but this chapter will not seek to wade into the full spectrum of vocal pedagogy. Instead, it will focus on the more basic aspects of vocal production that are critical for the success of a secondary level choral singer as well as those techniques that vary between classical and contemporary vocal styles.

²¹ Julia Davids and Stephen LaTour, *Vocal Technique: A Guide for Conductors, Teachers, and Singers* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2012) 43.

Classical Vocal Pedagogy

Classical vocal pedagogues are often focused on utilizing the components of the vocal instrument to produce an ideal sound throughout the range of the voice.²² A classical singer often needs to be heard in a large performance space without the aid of electronic amplification, and so it is necessary to train the voice to be able to achieve maximum resonance throughout the range, in any register, on any vowel, and at any dynamic. The techniques and methods used to accomplish this goal are varied, but by focusing on the primary components of the voice, students can develop an understanding of the basic tenets of vocal technique.

Breath is described as the “power source and actuator of the vocal instrument.”²³ The building up of air in the lungs creates the pressure necessary for vibration of the vocal folds to occur and is considered a primary component of the vocal mechanism. The ability to breathe correctly is related directly to posture, and so it is important for students to understand the connection between posture and breathing, as well as the physiological processes of inhalation and exhalation. When considering posture for supportive breathing, students should be encouraged to consider the stance of their feet, which should be roughly shoulder width apart with one foot slightly in front of the other, that their knees do not remain locked; hips should be situated directly underneath their torso, with shoulders relaxed, and the sternum maintained in a slightly raised position.²⁴ There are other aspects of posture to be considered, but these are the components related directly to breathing.

²² Elizabeth Blades-Zeller, *A Spectrum of Voices: Prominent American Voice Teachers Discuss the Teaching of Singing* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2002) 56-62.

²³ Scott McCoy, *Your Voice: An Inside View* (Princeton, NJ: Inside View Press, 2004), 83)

²⁴ Blades-Zeller, 1-6.

For the process of breathing, students should understand the three basic possibilities for inhalation: clavicular, thoracic, and abdominal breathing.²⁵ Clavicular breathing is simple to demonstrate: lift the shoulders and clavicles as you breathe in (many students will do this automatically if you ask them to take a deep breath). Thoracic breathing can be demonstrated by placing hands on the lower ribcage and encouraging students to feel their rib cage expand outward in all directions. Abdominal breathing can be accomplished by bending the knees during a quick inhalation, and feeling as though the breath fills down to the very bottom of the lungs. After having students experience all three forms of inhalation, the director can discuss the drawbacks to clavicular breathing for singing, and introduce the concept of *appoggio*, the ideal of classical breath support that stems from a balanced combination of thoracic and abdominal breathing.²⁶ Singers should also be made aware of the difference between inhalatory and exhalatory muscles. The diaphragm and external intercostals of the ribcage contract during inhalation, and the muscles used in exhalation include the abdominal muscles, the internal intercostals of the ribcage, as well as muscles of the lower back.²⁷

There are numerous exercises to develop breath support and management depending on the specific needs of the repertoire. For a piece with long phrases, the director may ask singers to dispel breath on an unvoiced consonant such as [s], [f], or [ʃ] over extended periods of time while maintaining proper posture, engaging the exhalatory muscles and avoiding tension in the neck. For a piece with staccato articulations, singers can be asked to pant like a dog, engaging their exhalatory muscles in short, controlled

²⁵ McCoy, 93.

²⁶ Blades-Zeller, 9-20.

²⁷ McCoy, 87-93.

bursts, first on an unvoiced sound such as [h] and then with added vowel sounds pertinent to the piece being prepared.²⁸ William Vennard argues that breathing technique is easily understood and can be efficiently taught in a few lessons, so directors should not worry about spending an excessive amount of time on breath management, just enough so that students have an understanding of the basic function and then apply that understanding to the process of phonation.²⁹ During a warm-up sequence, however, breath exercises should be included as part of the process for warming up the voices to sing.³⁰

Phonation is the process by which the vocal folds vibrate together to create “periodic variations in air pressure our ears interpret as sound.”³¹ The vocal folds are housed within the structure of the larynx and are the source of sound in singing. While directors may want to engage in deeper scientific study of all of the structures and muscles of the larynx such as the hyoid bone, thyroid cartilage, cricoid cartilage, arytenoid cartilages, interarytenoids, cricoarytenoids, cricothyroid, and thyroarytenoids, that level of detail may be difficult to impart upon a secondary choral classroom, so directors can focus their teaching on the muscles that bear primary responsibility for accessing different registers in the voice: the thyroarytenoid and cricothyroid muscles.³²

The thyroarytenoid (TA) muscles run between the thyroid cartilage and arytenoid cartilages and their primary muscle fibers run parallel to the median edge of the vocal fold. Upon contraction, they shorten and thicken the vocal folds, resulting in a lowering of pitch. These muscles are primarily responsible for the lower vocal registers, known by

²⁸ Wilhelm Ehman and Frauke Haasemann, *Voice Building for Choirs*, translated by Brenda Smith (Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music, 1981), 40.

²⁹ William Vennard, *Singing: the Mechanism and the Technic*, rev. ed. (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), 18.

³⁰ Brenda Smith and Robert T. Sataloff, *Choral Pedagogy*, 2nd ed. (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2006), 209.

³¹ McCoy, 107.

³² Ibid, 117.

names such as chest voice, modal register, or heavy mechanism.³³ For simplicity's sake, and to remain in line with much of the current writing on this topic, this document will use the term **chest register** to describe this vocal function. The cricothyroid (CT) muscles connect the cricoid and thyroid cartilages of the laryngeal structure and upon contraction they draw the two cartilages closer together at the front, creating a downward tilt that lengthens and thins the vocal folds.³⁴ These muscles are primarily responsible for the higher vocal registers, known by names such as head voice, falsetto, loft register, or light mechanism. This document will again endeavor to simplify these options by utilizing the term **head register** to refer to the register that results from phonation utilizing the CT muscles.

In addition to the head and chest registers, there is evidence that singers utilize some form of middle register that is a coordination of the two separate registers.³⁵ Teachers of singing vary widely on how to teach navigation between the different registers, but many advocate for some form of strengthening the individual registers throughout the range, followed by an exploration of how to navigate the *passagio*, or the transition between registers.³⁶ In order to ensure that students can access each register individually, a director may want to begin with exercises to strengthen head register, beginning above F4 and phonating as high as C5 for male singers and beginning above an E5 and phonating as high as C6 for female singers, depending on the level of the choir and ability of individual singers.³⁷ A simple five-note descending pattern sung on an [u]

³³ Ibid, 64.

³⁴ Ibid, 117.

³⁵ Karen Ann Kochis-Jennings, Eileen M. Finnegan, Henry T. Hoffman, and Sanyukta Jaiswal, "Laryngeal Muscle Activity and Vocal Fold Adduction During Chest, Chestmix, Headmix, and Head Registers in Females," *Journal of Voice* 26, no. 2 (March 2012): 182-193.

³⁶ Blades-Zeller, 41-56.

³⁷ Davids and LaTour, 150, 152.

at a low to moderate volume in pure head register can help strengthen this phonatory process in most singers.³⁸ Some singers will struggle with high head register exercises (especially young basses) but directors should encourage experimentation and always allow singers to drop out of an exercise if it stretches beyond their range. Tenors and sopranos will likely be able to reach higher notes than their bass and alto counterparts, so it is important to allow the lower voices the freedom to listen to their vocal ability and drop out as necessary. It is useful to take this pattern down by semitones to get students accustomed to bringing their head register lower in their vocal range. It is also probable that young singers will have a breathy tone at the beginning of this process, but over time the goal will be to develop a clearer tone in the head register.

To strengthen the chest register, utilize exercises that sit lower in the vocal range, beginning around A2 for male singers and A3 for female singers. Sing a sustained major arpeggio at a moderate to loud volume as demonstrated in Figure 2.1. Open vowels tend to work better for chest register exercises, hence the choice of [ɛ] and [a] vowels for this vocalise. Students may feel a buzzing sensation in their voice when exercising their chest register, but directors will want to be sure to keep them from over singing, or from attempting to sing too low in their range. For classical singing, it is not advisable to attempt to bring the chest register higher in the range beyond the natural break, and tenors and sopranos should be allowed to drop out of these exercises while basses and altos descend lower in their range.

³⁸ Spivey and Saunders-Barton, 39.

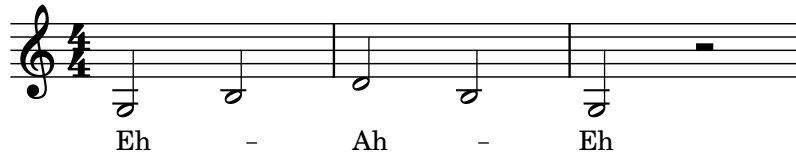


Figure 2.1 Exercise for strengthening chest register.

Once students become aware of the different sensations associated with their vocal registers, the much more difficult task of navigating register transitions begins, and it is at this point that discussion of the resonator becomes important. The human voice operates utilizing free resonance, which is a result of the reflection of sound waves within a hollow structure. The sound waves are created by the vibration of the vocal folds within the larynx, and those waves travel through the vocal tract: the laryngopharynx, oropharynx, and oral cavity, which act as the resonators.³⁹ When the soft palate is lowered, the nasopharynx may also serve as a resonator, though this is generally undesirable in classical music. Maintaining resonance throughout the range is difficult for singers because the shape of the vocal tract changes depending on the vowel being sung, and each vowel shape creates a resonance tract that is either more or less conducive to resonance being achieved at certain pitches. The literature on vowel modification and formant tuning is vast and offers varying opinions on how to find efficient resonance throughout the range for different voice types, but for the purposes of a choir, individual resonance is not as important as communal resonance. Directors can use exercises such as humming, lip trills, and vocalises on the consonant [ŋ] to help the choir discover their resonant sound.⁴⁰ When exploring resonance, it will be helpful to revisit posture for singing as well. Previously, postural considerations for breathing were discussed, but

³⁹ McCoy, 28-29.

⁴⁰ Smith and Sataloff, 220.

singers should also be aware of how the proper spinal alignment and head and neck position can support a resonant vocal sound. The head should be balanced on the top of the spine with the crown of the head as the highest point while the chin is maintained at a position relatively parallel to the floor.⁴¹ This position should encourage ease of movement of the jaw, which is necessary for resonance and articulation.

As part of the vocal tract, singers must also learn the use of the tongue, teeth, lips, and jaw as both articulators and keys to resonance. Vowels are created by the position of the tongue and jaw and can be identified by those positions respectively. The vowel [a] is a back, open vowel because the tongue lies relatively flat with a slight backward arch toward the palate while the jaw remains open. For the vowels [i] and [e] the tongue arches forward toward the teeth ridge, creating an acoustic constriction near the front of the mouth, and the jaw is relatively closed compared to the [a] vowel, making them both front, closed vowels. Finally, [u] is a back vowel with a close jaw position, whereas [o] is also a back vowel, but with a jaw position somewhere between the openness of [a] and the closeness of [u]. Simple exercises utilizing the five cardinal vowels can be useful in helping students experience the subtle shifts between the vowels and to find a uniform vowel sound within the choir. Depending on the genre of the language being sung, experimentation with brighter and darker vowels will be appropriate, as an Italian madrigal from the Renaissance may require brighter vowels than a Romantic German part song. Once singers have experienced the different vowel sounds, an exploration of consonant sounds using tongue twisters or repetitive articulatory exercises can help choirs coordinate vowel formation with active use of the articulators.

⁴¹ Davids and LaTour, 13-15.

The study of vocal pedagogy is certainly more complex than the information covered in this chapter, but by focusing attention on the primary components of the voice, directors can set their choir up for success in a variety of musical genres. Continued work on dynamics, phrasing, articulation, range extension, style, literacy, and tuning are all necessary for the development of a strong choir, but each of those is more readily accomplished with a choir that has a grasp of basic vocal function, and a developed understanding of the basics of the voice will lead to functional singing.⁴²

Contemporary Vocal Pedagogy

Contemporary commercial music (CCM) is a term coined by Jeannette LoVetri in the early 2000's to give a name to styles of popular music that were often referred to as "non-classical" in the academic literature prior to that point.⁴³ The study of contemporary vocal pedagogy is relatively new, but thanks to advances in medical technology related to the study of the voice, vocal pedagogues in this area have published research in multiple music journals and a variety of books.⁴⁴ Though singers of all styles utilize the same primary components of the voice, the goals of singers in contemporary styles differ from their classical colleagues in significant ways. For CCM singers, there is no need to achieve maximum resonance throughout the range because they rely on electronic amplification to be heard in a room.⁴⁵ The goal of performance is less on a faithful interpretation of the score and more on an emotionally authentic connection with the

⁴² Nicole Christopher Lamartine, "A Curriculum of Voice Pedagogy for Choral Conductors: The Effect of Solo Voice Exercises on Individual Singer Technique, Choral Tone, and Choral Literature" (DMA diss., The University of Arizona, 2003), 26-28, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁴³ Jeannette L. LoVetri, "Contemporary Commercial Music: More than One Way to Use the Vocal Tract," *Journal of Singing* 58, no. 3 (January 2002): 249-252.

⁴⁴ Benson, 26-29.

⁴⁵ Matthew Edwards, "The Art of Perfection: What Every Singer and Voice Teacher Should Know About Audio Technology," in *The Vocal Athlete* by Wendy D. LeBorgne and Marci Rosenberg (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2014), 271-294.

audience. These singers do need to consider posture and alignment, the breathing mechanism, and their vocal registers in similar ways as their classical counterparts, but their vocal goals are different and so their use of breath support, phonation, and registration will vary greatly from classical singers.

In CCM singing, the sound source operates exactly as it does in classical singing with breath pressure building in the lungs to provide the power source for vocal fold vibrations. The vocal folds operate in much the same way, utilizing head register, chest register, or a mixture of the two, but the sound ideal differs greatly, as does the nature of how the registers are utilized.⁴⁶ Matt Edwards describes registration mixture in CCM singing like this: **chest-mix** combines the tonal qualities of chest register and head register with the chest register qualities being dominant, and **head-mix** combines the registers with head register qualities being dominant.⁴⁷ The most controversial registration in CCM singing, **belting**, occurs when the chest register is carried above the natural break where singers would normally switch into head register, usually around F4 in both male and female singers.⁴⁸

In classical singing, chest register is often associated with a lower pitch range and head register with a higher pitch range, but in CCM styles, the range and the register operate independently of each other in the service of emotional authenticity. For example, consider the Tony-Award winning performance of Ben Platt in the musical *Dear Evan Hansen* (2017). In the Original Broadway Cast Recording of “Waving Through a Window,” Platt begins the first verse with a head-mix dominant sound relatively low in

⁴⁶ Benson, 120-137.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *So You Want to Sing Rock ‘N’ Roll: A Guide for Professionals*, 106.

⁴⁸ Spivey and Saunders-Barton, 47

his range and he maintains this registration for most of the first verse and chorus (0:07-1:24).⁴⁹ Moving into the second verse, Platt switches into a predominantly chest-mix dominant sound and maintains this through the end of the second chorus (1:28-2:26). The pitch range of the verses is lower than that of the choruses, so Platt utilizes head-mix in a lower range in verse one and utilizes chest-mix in a higher range in chorus two. Further, after the bridge (2:27-3:00), the song undergoes a key change, and Platt takes his chest register even higher in his voice, leading to examples of belting in the last seconds of the song.

This method of register usage is common in contemporary styles that repeat music in a verse-chorus form because it helps to provide changes in intensity that, ideally, should coincide with the emotional journey of the song, thus providing the listener with a sense of emotional authenticity from the performer. When considering how to train choral singers in the use of their registers for CCM styles and popular music, there is a strong argument to be made for training young singers in their head register first as it is less strenuous on the voice, and then begin exercises to bring in the mixed registers as they become more coordinated.⁵⁰ It is also important to note that in numerous contemporary styles, shifts between registers are meant to be noticed. Whereas the classical ideal is an evenness of tone throughout the range, in contemporary styles it is expected that register changes will be noticeable and contribute to the overall soundscape

⁴⁹ Ben Platt and Original Broadway Cast of *Dear Evan Hansen*, “Waving Through a Window” from *Dear Evan Hansen (Original Broadway Cast Recording)* by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul (Atlantic Records, 2017), Amazon Music.

⁵⁰ LoVetri and Woodruff, 48.

of the song.⁵¹ Specific exercises for songs utilizing the various mix registers are presented in Chapter 3.

The breath support required to utilize different vocal registers is similar in both classical and contemporary music, with one key exception. The belt voice in CCM singing, as previously mentioned, results from carrying the chest register higher in the voice, and the resulting sound is often loud, brassy, intense, and exciting.⁵² In order to create such an intense sound, it is necessary to create a high level of subglottal pressure to vibrate the folds under such high tension.⁵³ Professional belters have shown some of the highest subglottal pressure readings among various singing styles, and that high pressure means there is a corresponding high level of muscular tension occurring within the larynx.⁵⁴ There is also a postural consideration that differs between belting and classical singing. In classical styles, it is important to keep the chin relatively level to the ground because it encourages the larynx to stay low, and that low larynx position is conducive to an increase in resonance.⁵⁵ When belting, however, it is preferable to tilt the chin slightly upward, allowing the larynx to rise and contributing to the bright, intense sound quality that is desirable.⁵⁶ Given the intense physiological demands of utilizing the belt voice, it is not recommended that secondary level directors attempt to teach this to young singers in a group setting, but rather work to develop coordination in both the head-mix and chest-mix registers. Students interested in exploring their belt voice should be encouraged to seek the guidance of a qualified private voice teacher.

⁵¹ Benson, 138-145.

⁵² Ibid, 146-147.

⁵³ LeBorgne and Rosenberg, 230-231.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 229.

⁵⁵ McCoy, 129.

⁵⁶ Hall, 68-69.

One key difference in contemporary vocal pedagogy from classical pedagogy is the use of vowel modification. In most contemporary styles the aim is to “sing how you speak.”⁵⁷ This differs from classical genres where vowel modification must occur to improve resonance throughout the range. Contemporary singers utilize microphones and so have no need to amplify their voices acoustically to fill a room. There are also numerous styles in contemporary music where it is common for vowels to be distorted to further amplify the emotional message of the song, and this technique is especially prominent in gospel music.⁵⁸ Given that speech-like vowels are prominent in contemporary styles, directors should use simple exercises on the five cardinal vowels, similar to the ones used for classical vowel exploration, and work with students to sing these vowels in a manner more similar to how they speak. It is still important in a choral ensemble for vowels to be consistent, but for contemporary styles vowels do not need to be tall and rounded, but rather students can sing with a more horizontal mouth shape so long as the vowel sound matches throughout the ensemble. It is often the case in contemporary styles that the soft palate may be lowered to present more of a “twang” in the vowel sound, but it is recommended that choirs avoid the twang resonance and opt to keep the soft palate raised as it will improve the homogeneity of the vowel sound within the ensemble.

Once again, an in-depth discussion of vocal pedagogy is beyond the scope of this document, but this basic overview will give directors some tools to begin exploring CCM styles with their ensemble. As the technical demands of singing in various styles have

⁵⁷ Benson, 165.

⁵⁸ Trineice Robinson-Martin, *So You Want to Sing Gospel: A Guide for Performers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017) 115.

been introduced, it will be helpful for directors now to consider how they may safely and effectively condition the voices of their ensemble for CCM singing using warm-ups, exercises, and voice building through repertoire.

Building CCM Skill Within the Choral Ensemble

In 2017, *The New York Times* did a feature on actor Ben Platt during his Broadway run in the title role of *Dear Evan Hansen*. In the article, Platt's longtime voice coach Liz Caplan was interviewed about his preparation for such a demanding role, one that caused him to develop some of the anxious ticks of his character in real life, and nearly ruined his posture. When asked how Platt managed to keep up his vocal ability despite the intense physical demands of the role, Caplan answered, "We're putting the notes into his body in a positive, non-stressed way. So then when he's onstage in those unhealthy positions, he'll be able to access them."⁵⁹ This concept of learning how to sing in a "non-stressed" manner is one that should be utilized by choral directors when teaching students to sing in CCM styles. These styles often require a high level of vocal intensity, so it is important that students be introduced to these sounds in a manner as free of strain as possible. This is accomplished through a combination of efficient warm-ups and well-designed vocal exercises.

All choral rehearsals should begin with a warm-up.⁶⁰ The warm-up is a time to prepare the mind and body for the physical and mental demands of singing. Brenda Smith and Robert T. Sataloff, in their book *Choral Pedagogy*, recommend breaking the warm-

⁵⁹ Joel Lovell, "How a 23-Year-Old With Mild Anxiety and a Charmed Life Became the Lying, Sobbing, Lovesick Toast of Broadway," *New York Times*, May 10, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/05/10/theater/how-ben-platt-beame-the-toast-of-broadway-dear-evan-hansen-tony-awards.html.

⁶⁰ Smith and Sataloff, 208-209.

up sequence down into four areas: relaxation, posture, breath, and resonance.⁶¹ This chapter already includes exercises for the latter three areas, but special focus will now be given to the area of relaxation as it pertains to contemporary singing. Relaxation in the warm-up sequence can refer to different areas of the body, and Smith and Sataloff focus their relaxation exercises on stretching and relaxing the body, including the arms, legs, and torso. A director can utilize these exercises in the warm-up sequence to help singers relax their body, but in contemporary singing, special attention should be paid to the relaxation of the vocal mechanism.

David Blair McClosky's book *Your Voice at Its Best* features a section entitled "Six Areas of Relaxation," and these relaxation exercises will be of great use to any ensemble, but especially to those engaging in the demanding styles of CCM.⁶² The six areas of relaxation are:

- 1) The muscles of the face
- 2) The tongue
- 3) The swallowing muscles
- 4) The mandible (jaw)
- 5) The larynx
- 6) The neck and head

To begin, singers use the pads of their fingers to massage the muscles of the face, beginning at the hairline and forehead and continuing down to cheeks, lips, and chin, paying special attention to areas that feel especially tight. Moving on to the tongue, singers should allow their tongue to soften and slide out of the mouth to rest on the lower lip as if they were unconscious, slowly stretch the tongue further out, and allow it to retract into the base of the mouth. Singers can repeat as necessary to release any tongue

⁶¹ Ibid, 210.

⁶² David Blair McClosky, *Your Voice at Its Best*, 5th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011) 7-10.

tension. The swallowing muscles can be felt in the area of the jaw beneath the chin and are directly responsible for raising and lowering the larynx. Using the thumbs, singers should gently massage these swallowing muscles in a kneading fashion. The release of tension here can assist in the larynx remaining in a naturally low position for singing.

Relaxing the jaw is often the most difficult of the six. Singers should relax the jaw so that it hangs open, take the chin between the thumb and forefinger, and slowly move the jaw up and down, being aware of any resistance in the jaw. Most people find that there is a high level of resistance in the jaw to moving, but singers should not get discouraged and instead endeavor to improve over time. The larynx is suspended in place by strap muscles, and these should ideally remain relaxed so that it can remain in a naturally low position. To relax these muscles, singers can place the thumb and forefinger on either side of the larynx and move it gently back and forth. If clicking is felt, there is excess tension in the muscles surrounding the larynx. This exercise should always be done gently, and over time it will move easily without clicking. Finally, for head and neck tension, singers should allow the head to fall forward gently so that the chin is touching the chest. Rotating the head to either side like a doorknob creates a gentle stretch in the neck. After a few rotations, singers should bring their head back up to a balanced position and gently nod up and down then slowly rotate right to left to ensure that the head moves freely atop the occipital joint. The relaxation of each of these areas involved in voice production will help students be prepared for the work of training the voice for CCM styles.

Warm-ups (relaxation, posture, breath, and resonance) are used to prepare students for the act of singing, and nearly identical processes are effective for both

classical and contemporary styles. Exercises can be understood as a means to improve the ability of the laryngeal muscles to engage in specific styles of singing.⁶³ Choral directors should plan exercises with the specific requirements of the repertoire in mind and can use basic training principles of exercise science to craft the exercises. Laryngeal “muscles, if trained in the appropriate manner, will undergo muscle fiber changes in addition to neural and metabolic changes, resulting in adaptation to the new demand imposed upon them. This concept is referred to as Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demand (SAID).”⁶⁴ That is to say, when training singers to perform in any style, their vocal mechanism will adapt over time to the demands imposed upon them, so exercises can be specifically designed for the goals of the ensemble in mind. The five principles of exercise training that will result in physiological change are intensity, frequency, overload, specificity, and reversibility.

It is important to overload the muscles to enact physiological change, and that is done using frequency and intensity. Exercises must be done with enough frequency so that singers gain coordination in the exercise at hand. The exercises must also be appropriately intense, meaning they ask enough of the laryngeal muscles to move them beyond stasis so that physiological change takes place. Specificity refers to the fact that exercises must be designed to appropriately target the muscle group with the intended skill in mind. For example, running is a physical activity, and general running exercise is good for overall health, but distance runners and sprinters must train their muscles differently, and their exercises should be specific to the task. The same is true of singing: general exercises will help singers of all styles and genres, but students singing CCM

⁶³ “Exercise Physiology Principles for Training the Vocal Athlete,” LeBorgne and Rosenberg, 243-257.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 245-246.

styles will need to engage in exercises specific to the needs of those styles. Finally, reversibility refers to the fact that if the muscles cease to be trained, they will revert to their pre-training level of function. Secondary choral educators can likely identify this principle upon return from summer break, when singers who haven't been singing regularly over the break require extra work to return to the level of ability they had obtained at the end of the previous academic year.

Now that the general principles of vocal pedagogy and CCM voice training have been introduced, Chapter 3 will demonstrate how choral directors can take the knowledge of CCM styles and utilize it to craft exercises that will train students' voices to be able to successfully sing in various popular genres.

CHAPTER 3

APPLICATION OF CCM TECHNIQUES IN THE CHORAL ENSEMBLE

In order to effectively apply CCM vocal pedagogy to the choral ensemble, it is recommended that conductors listen to recordings of the songs being performed by high quality singers or ensembles so that they may analyze the vocal techniques that are used. Once analyzed, exercises can be designed for entire songs, certain sections, or specific moments in the song so that each piece is sung in a vocally healthy manner and with stylistic integrity. The principle of Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demand will be used to help build the voices of the choir so that they can develop the vocal skills necessary to successfully perform popular music of various genres. Exercises will be utilized from both general CCM and genre-specific vocal pedagogy resources.

This chapter includes analyses of songs from a lecture recital presented on February 7, 2023, exploring applications of CCM vocal pedagogy techniques as they were used in a real-world performance setting. Singers in the ensemble were all classically trained vocalists with an undergraduate degree in music or significant work toward that degree, and so possessed much of the basic vocal technique necessary for singing in a classical vocal ensemble. This ensemble did not require specific training in breath support, head-register dominant vocal production, music literacy, or ensemble singing, so this chapter will not focus on those skills that choir directors are likely already building in their ensembles via classical repertoire. This ensemble did require work on register balancing, speech-based singing, horizontal vowel shapes, and genre-specific

stylistic elements for different CCM styles. These are many of the skills that have not been explored in the literature for choral ensemble singing, and so this document will focus on building these CCM techniques, assuming that choral directors at the secondary level are already building their ensemble's classical choral technique. Additionally, though some pieces on the lecture recital were sung using the full vocal score of a musical, the selections discussed in this chapter will focus on arrangements that are available in choral octavo form as those publications are more readily available to most secondary choral programs. Selections were chosen to represent different genres of popular music and include "Morning Glow" from the Broadway musical *Pippin*, "Run to You" by pop a cappella group Pentatonix, and "True Light," a gospel-inspired choral piece by Keith Hampton.

Morning Glow

"Morning Glow" is a song from Stephen Schwartz's 1972 musical *Pippin* that serves as the Finale to Act I, and the arrangement published by Alfred Music is by Eric Van Cleave for SATB choir and solo.⁶⁵ There are two professional recordings that will be of use to the choral conductor when assessing the vocal needs of this piece. The first is from the Original Broadway Cast (OBC) Recording of the 1972 production featuring John Rubinstein originating the role of Pippin.⁶⁶ The second recording features Matthew James Thomas in the role of Pippin and comes from the New Broadway Cast Recording of the 2013 production.⁶⁷ There are other cover versions of this song, including one by

⁶⁵ Stephen Schwartz. "Morning Glow" from *Pippin*, arranged by Eric van Cleave (Los Angeles: Alfred Music, 2014).

⁶⁶ John Rubinstein & "Pippin" Original Broadway Cast, "Morning Glow" from *Pippin (Original Broadway Cast Recording)* by Stephen Schwartz (Universal Classics Group, 1972), Amazon Music.

⁶⁷ Matthew James Thomas and The Players, "Morning Glow" from *Pippin (New Broadway Cast Recording)* by Stephen Schwartz (Sh-K-Boom Records, 2013), Amazon Music.

Michael Jackson, but for the purposes of stylistic integrity, it is recommended that conductors focus their listening on professional singers performing the music in its original context. Both Broadway cast recordings feature an ensemble of singers acting as the chorus that supports Pippin's solo part.

The first item of note when listening to the two recordings is the difference in vocal technique between Rubinstein's and Thomas's versions of the solo. Rubinstein's solo begins at 0:14 on the OBC recording, and the listener can hear a light speech-based production that would be best described as a head-mix. Thomas's performance begins at 0:46 of the New Broadway Cast recording and also uses a head-mix but with a clearer, less breathy tone. Thomas's vibrato is fast, narrow in its pitch deviation, and used judiciously whereas Rubinstein has a wider, slower vibrato that he uses regularly on any note of significant length. Differences in vowel shape are apparent as well with Rubinstein opting for a more vertical vowel shape and Thomas utilizing a more horizontal vowel shape, resulting in noticeably brighter vowels in the 2013 recording. This difference is especially clear on the word "through," which is held for several beats and occurs from 1:03-1:06 in Thomas's version and 0:29-0:32 in Rubinstein's. This difference between the two represents a shift in what is considered desirable tone quality in a Broadway production, with male singers opting for a "brighter" color near the upper passagio by maintaining a speech-based approach to singing and using vibrato less frequently.⁶⁸ When choosing a soloist for this piece, it is certainly possible to opt for a singer that follows Rubinstein's interpretation more closely, but Thomas's performance is

⁶⁸ Hall, 67.

more in line with expectations of a contemporary Broadway singer and may be preferable.

In addition to the difference in solo interpretations, one major difference between the recordings and the published octavo becomes readily apparent: the recordings each begin in D-flat major while the published key of Van Cleave's arrangement is in B-flat major. This lower key makes the arrangement more accessible to secondary level singers than the key of the Broadway recordings and is one reason this arrangement is an excellent choice for young singers. Students who are developing their skills in popular music can learn about vowel shape and register balancing for CCM styles without having to devote too much attention to singing in an extreme range.

One concern to be aware of in Van Cleave's arrangement is the issue of voice leading, particularly in the final chorus after a modulation from Bb major up to C major. As is often the case in arrangements of popular music for a mixed chorus, Van Cleave gives the melody to the sopranos throughout. For the most part, this does not present a major problem, but there are three moments, at mm. 58, 63-65, and 70-71, where the sopranos are assigned a sustained G5. At that range, the fundamental pitch requires modification toward a taller vowel, but in a piece which utilizes brighter vowels and a speech-based vocal production, the sopranos are likely to stand out from the rest of the ensemble, especially considering the words they are asked to sing while sustaining the high pitch: "bright," "here," and "last."⁶⁹ It should be further noted that those high notes are only sung by Pippin, and only in the 2013 recording; they are not included in the 1972 recording at all. Discerning choral directors would do well to either reassign those

⁶⁹ Schwartz, 10-11.

climactic high notes to another section or remove them altogether. If there are tenors in the ensemble capable of singing those pitches with enough intensity, the tenor voice is better equipped to sing bright vowels on a G4 than the soprano voice is on a G5. For example, in Figure 3.1, it would be advisable for all sopranos to sing the C5 at measure 58, reassign a few strong tenors to sing the G4 with the altos, and split the C4 and A3 between the remaining tenors and basses. This allows for the climactic moment to remain intact and may even strengthen it because sopranos will be able to achieve a strong chest-mix at C5 that will more than likely be unattainable at G5.

10

55 **Maestoso** (♩ = ca. 88)

f

Morn - ing glow, by your light, we can make the

f

Maestoso (♩ = ca. 88)

C G/C F C

f

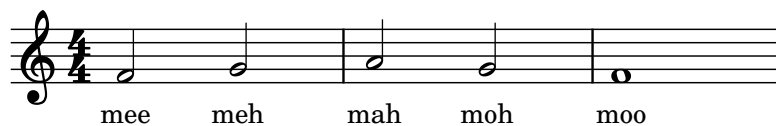
58

new day bright; — and the phan - toms

Figure 3.1 “Morning Glow” from *Pippin*, mm. 55-59.

Now that the analysis of the recordings and printed music has pointed toward areas of vocal interest in this piece, it is time to craft exercises for the singers to help them achieve the necessary vocal and stylistic qualities. One of the first steps to take with

a choir new to singing popular music is to spend some time working to discover a brighter, more horizontal vowel shape while still maintaining the choral ideal of a lifted soft palate throughout the range. A technique that this author has found successful over many years of helping students and choirs explore vowel shapes is to use a simple vocalise that utilizes the five Italianate vowels [a, ε, i, o, u] over a small range, as shown in Figure 3.2. Begin by utilizing the taller, darker vowel shape that should already be familiar to the choir and encourage them to listen carefully to those around them. If this can be done in a circular formation to encourage more listening across the ensemble, then all the better. Once they are matching their vowels consistently, begin to experiment with different ways of singing the same vowels, always modeling for the group so that they have an aural example. A progression that I have found useful is to move from dark vowels to the other extreme, fully nasal vowels, and then to migrate back to horizontal vowels that are more speech based. Even though a bright vowel sound is ideal, beginning with the tall vowels they are accustomed to is a crucial step to ensure that the singers maintain a lifted soft palate while shifting to a more horizontal mouth shape. As no two choirs are the same, the director should use their best judgment as to an acceptable sound



for their choir, bearing in mind that it will be quite different from the ideal classical sound.

Figure 3.2 Vocalise for vowel shape exploration.

Once vowel shapes are consistent among all (or at least the vast majority) of the singers, the ensemble can begin to work on mix voice registration for this piece. As previously mentioned, the recordings of the Broadway singers begin in a head-mix, and it

would serve the ensemble well to follow that registration at the beginning of the piece. As the intensity of the piece grows and leads to the climax of the final chorus, the voice registration shifts to a chest-mix in a higher range. To help students develop mixed registers, the director can apply the principles of SAID. By being specific in the assessment of how the singers will need to overload their muscles, exercises can be designed to help them adapt specifically to the demands placed upon them. For this piece, it would be helpful to utilize glides using different registers so that students can explore their mix.⁷⁰ To develop head-mix, begin by having students sing a bright [a] vowel on a D3 or D4, depending on their voice, at a comfortable dynamic, no more than mezzo forte. Use an ascending glide pattern up a major third before gliding back down to the beginning pitch. Complete this exercise in ascending half steps, reminding singers not to get louder as they ascend, but also not to switch into full head register. Continue with this exercise but begin on a lower pitch and glide up by a fifth, and eventually an octave. Over time, students will find that they can maintain a mix higher in their range without flipping to head register. This exercise can be done on different vowels as needed, but a bright [a] is the best vowel to begin with for most singers.

As students become comfortable with head-mix, the director can work on chest mix using the same exercise but beginning with a dynamic level of mezzo forte to forte and starting slightly lower in the range. It is also helpful to encourage singers to tilt their heads at a slight upward angle, no more than 45°, to allow their larynx to freely move upward, thereby assisting in the bright, powerful sound desired in a chest-mix

⁷⁰ Matthew Edwards, *So You Want to Sing Rock 'N' Roll: A Guide for Professionals* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) 105.

registration.⁷¹ When completing these exercises, the director should also encourage students to drop out of the exercise when they reach the top of their range in either mix register. If the director hears straining, start moving downward by half steps to help keep students from over singing. As they become more adept at navigating their chest-mix, switching to an [æ] can help them to achieve more vocal intensity higher in their range.⁷² Given some time, most students will adapt to this increased demand and be able to access their chest mix in a higher range, with the end goal of being able to apply this registration in the context of the song.

The previous exercises focus on developing students' ability to phonate using their mixed registers, but it is also important to include exercises that help them to coordinate their chest-mix while utilizing text. Several exercises for accessing this chest-mix are shown in Figure 3.3. Students should first speak each line of text with strong support and vocal intensity, then shift to singing the exercises. Directors may find it useful with younger voices to start with leaps of a fifth to orient students to the exercise, and then move to leaps of an octave. The ranges can also be adjusted to suit the specific needs of the piece. In the case of this arrangement of "Morning Glow," basses may want to work on their chest-mix up to an E4 whereas tenors may want to work up to an A4 if they will be singing the G4. Altos will want to work up to a D5 for this arrangement and sopranos to a G5. Once students have strengthened their head-mix, chest-mix, and feel comfortable coordinating these registers on text, they will be ready to sing this arrangement with solid vocal technique and in a stylistically appropriate manner.

⁷¹ Jeannette L. LoVetri, "Accessing 'Mix,'" in *The Vocal Athlete: Application and Technique for the Hybrid Singer*, by Wendy D. LeBorgne and Marci Rosenberg (San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2014) 95-96.

⁷² Edwards, *So You Want to Sing Rock 'N' Roll: A Guide for Professionals*, 107.

Exercise 4: TA-Dominant/Speech Mix

Speak (in sung pitch range) then sing:

Men: F4 -- D5

Oh no you don't! I yearn for you. Oh no you don't! I yearn for you. How dare you! Where were you? How dare you! Where were you?

Women: B4 -- G5

Oh May I come in? Oh May I come in? No way no way no way no way No Never no never no No Never no never no

Figure 3.3 Exercise 4 (p. 44) from *Cross Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* (pp. 1–151) by Spivey, N., & Saunders-Barton, M. Copyright © 2018 Plural Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Run to You

“Run to You” is a song by pop a cappella group Pentatonix from their studio album *PTX, Vol. 2*.⁷³ Many of the arrangements performed by Pentatonix are highly advanced pieces that require beatboxing, extreme ranges from all singers, rhythmic independence, and a strong contemporary vocal technique. They are not good selections for a beginning level group, but certainly represent an ideal in this genre for students toward which to strive. This particular piece, as arranged by Kirby Shaw, is a largely homophonic ballad that represents a good entry point to the pop a cappella genre for secondary level students and does not require any students to learn beatboxing techniques.⁷⁴

One challenge in this piece lies in deciding which voices will be assigned to which parts. Pentatonix is made up of five singers: four males and one female. In the

⁷³ Pentatonix, “Run to You,” track 7 on *PTX, Vol. 2*, RCA Records, 2014, Amazon Music.

⁷⁴ Pentatonix, “Run to You,” arr. Kirby Shaw (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2016).

original recording, the male voices sing bass, baritone, tenor, and alto and the female voice sings soprano. Because Pentatonix has a majority of male singers, Shaw wisely chooses to raise the key by two semitones in his arrangement to be more comfortable for young female singers, but he lists the part breakdown as bass, tenor, alto, soprano II, and soprano I. An analysis of the voice leading shows that several parts, especially the alto and soprano II, do a fair amount of voice crossing and have very similar ranges, which would be considered relatively low by classical standards. If the ensemble has enough voices, it may be beneficial to assign second basses to the bass line, baritones to the tenor line, and have tenors and altos both split between the alto and soprano II lines. First tenors and first altos can share the soprano II line, with second tenors and second altos on the alto line. All sopranos can sing the soprano I line, or you can assign some second sopranos to the soprano II line. The main takeaway is that these ranges may present a challenge, but this is also an opportunity for the singers in an ensemble to experiment with new vocal techniques in different parts of their range. The only point in the song where all tenors will need to move to the alto line occurs in the bridge, which begins at measure 68. At this point, all altos should move to the soprano II line as well. As with any issues regarding voice assignments, the director should make the best choice for the ensemble at hand, making sure not to ask young voices to sing in a way that causes unnecessary vocal strain.

In addition to experimenting with vocal ranges, this piece also offers an excellent opportunity for the director to discuss music theory and music literacy with students. The overall form of the song follows a standard outline common to many pop songs: Verse 1, Chorus, Verse 2, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus, Tag. The repetition of music in the first two

verses and choruses can allow the ensemble to consolidate the learning of pitches and rhythms so that students only need to learn their part once, then apply the notes and rhythms to the second verse and chorus. An excellent option here would be to teach parts using solfege. In order to decide which solfege syllables to use, it is necessary to analyze the key. With two sharps in the key signature, the opening phrase might lead one to think either B minor or B Aeolian, as shown in Figure 3.4 (see p. 47), but this opening phrase of each verse is the only time that a root position b minor chord features prominently in the piece. The shift from verse to chorus features a Bm7 chord in second inversion giving way to a Dm7 in first inversion which then leads to a Gadd9, as shown in Figure 3.5 (p. 47). And finally, the end of each chorus, and indeed the entire song, features some sort of extended chord on G, either a G7 chord or a Gadd9, both of which are unstable. One could make the argument that perhaps G Lydian is the best descriptor of the tonal center, but with regular shifts in tonality, the piece has an overall feeling of tonal ambiguity which is common in popular music and should be embraced by the ensemble.⁷⁵ When deciding which solfege syllables to use, assigning Do to G and singing a Lydian solfege scale may provide an unnecessarily difficult challenge to younger singers. The most acceptable choice for this piece would be to assign the syllable Do to D and to then facilitate discussion with the ensemble regarding the tonal ambiguity of the piece.

⁷⁵ The topic of tonal and formal ambiguity was discussed in detail in Vol. 23, no. 3 of *Music Theory Online*, a journal of the Society for Music Theory, specifically in the articles by Mark Richards and Trevor de Clercq.



Figure 3.4 “Run to You” by Pentatonix, arr. Kirby Shaw, mm. 1-2 (piano reduction).



Figure 3.5 “Run to You” by Pentatonix, arr. Kirby Shaw, mm. 16-19 (piano reduction).

Once students are secure in their parts using solfege, it will be time to start introducing some of the vocal techniques necessary to perform this song. Much like “Morning Glow,” “Run to You” will also utilize a great deal of mixed registers, including high head-mix and chest-mix sections, as well as a speech-based production utilizing horizontal vowels. The same exercises used in “Morning Glow” can be applied here as well. One technique that is specific to “Run to You” is the use of head-mix in a low register for many singers. This technique can be heard in the recording on the first two verses. Previously, exercises were focused on taking chest register higher in the range, but now that process will need to be inverted to take head register lower in the range, and using glides will be helpful here as well. Starting in head register, preferably around a C4-D4 for men and a C5-D5 for women, Edwards advises singers to “work on bringing your head [register] down on [i] with a descending fifth glide and delay the full onset of chest. Then repeat the process with the vowels [e], [æ], and [a].”⁷⁶ The exercise should be

⁷⁶ Edwards, *So You Want to Sing Rock ‘N’ Roll: A Guide for Professionals*, 107.

done in descending semitones until singers have reached the lower limit of their head register. An example of this glide exercise is given in Figure 3.6. Accessing head-mix lower in the range is necessary for the softer sections in the verses and chorus of this piece.



Figure 3.6 Exercise for extending head register lower in range.

As students become more comfortable accessing head-mix lower in their range and chest-mix higher in their range, the challenge becomes the ability to transition between the two. From measures 65-68, the bass, tenor, and soprano II lines must make a seamless transition from head-mix to chest-mix while moving into a higher range. The intensity of that transition can be heard from 2:36-2:43 in the recording. Likewise, the alto and soprano I lines must make a similar transition from measures 72-76, heard in the recording from 2:50-3:00. This moment is also an excellent example of vowel modification in CCM music. The vowel given in the music at this climactic point for the soprano I and alto lines is an “Oh,” but in the recording the singers clearly modify to a bright [a] vowel as it is more conducive to a high chest-mix quality, and the director should encourage students to make a similar adjustment. The voices reach a climactic moment and then transition back to a head-mix at the return of the chorus. An excellent exercise to help facilitate these transition points is a variation on the classical *messa di voce* exercise for vernacular styles, shown in Figure 3.7.

The basics of this exercise involve beginning on an [u] vowel in either falsetto or head register, executing a crescendo over four beats to sing [ju], with the [u] vowel

becoming more horizontal, then a further crescendo to a bright [a] vowel in chest-mix, followed by reversing back through those steps to finish on a head register [u]. Directors will want to tailor the ranges of this exercise for the song at hand, and in this arrangement of “Run to You,” the vernacular *messa di voce* should be done at approximately these ranges: bass line from G3-C#4; tenor line from B3-F#4, alto line from D4-G4, soprano II line from D4-A4, and soprano I line from A4-D5. Added to the registration balance and vowel shape exercises already completed, this exercise will help students develop another vocal technique needed to successfully sing this accessible yet exciting Pentatonix arrangement.

Exercise 6: *Messa di voce* for Vernacular Styles

Men: F4 -- Bb5

Women: G4 -- D5

Oo (falsetto) you (speech mix) ah (belt) you (speech mix) oo (falsetto)

Figure 3.7 Exercise 6 (p. 50) from *Cross Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* (pp. 1–151) by Spivey, N., & Saunders-Barton, M. Copyright © 2018 Plural Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

True Light

“True Light” is a gospel-inspired choral piece by Keith Hampton that has found a secure place in the repertory of choirs of various levels across the country. The piece quotes the well-known song “This Little Light of Mine,” includes two verses for soloist ad-lib, and includes a bridge that layers in voices section-by-section to lead to a full,

energetic ending.⁷⁷ An analysis of this piece shows an opening unison section with complex syncopations, tertian harmonies created by parallel motion in the SAT voices, and zero indication as to dynamic levels anywhere in the piece, which leaves plenty of room for artistic interpretation. When considering how to teach such a piece of music, it may be helpful to consider the history of gospel music and the musical values of the genre. “In gospel performance, one’s ability to genuinely and authentically express oneself through song using the appropriate stylistic features dominates the knowledge and exposition of technical musical skills.”⁷⁸

In addition to being focused on musical expression, gospel began as, and still primarily is, an oral, rather than written, art form. With that knowledge in mind, a director might want to consider the use of rote teaching for a major portion of this piece. The opening lines for the voices occur from measures 2-10, and in this eight-bar phrase, all singers are in unison for all but the last measure, and they remain within a homophonic texture. Using a call-and-response, also a common characteristic of gospel music, a director can teach the opening section in two-bar phrases. By beginning with rote teaching, the director can demonstrate to the students some of the values of gospel music: that actively listening and expressing yourself within the group is more important than being able to accurately read complex syncopations. This tactic can also help the students begin memorizing the music from the very beginning of the rehearsal process.

When planning the ideal sound for this piece, one needs to consider the vocal characteristics of gospel singing. In her book on singing gospel music, Dr. Trineice Robinson-Martin calls our attention to this important consideration: “while it is true that

⁷⁷ Keith Hampton, “True Light” (Corvallis, OR: earthsongs, 2002).

⁷⁸ Robinson-Martin, 5-6.

the harsh, gravelly vocal quality found in gospel music is the most imitated vocal quality...contemporary singers tend to use a 'pure' voice because of the lyrical qualities of contemporary gospel music.”⁷⁹ The knowledge that we have access to a wide variety of vocal qualities within the style coupled with the lack of dynamic markings indicate that the ideal sound and interpretation of this piece may change from ensemble to ensemble, and this provides an excellent opportunity for the ensemble to experiment musically and find the interpretation that best fits the group.

To encourage experimentation within this piece, there are exercises from Dr. Robinson-Martin’s book that may help singers access different registers of their voice and be able to switch between them with ease in the gospel setting. Exercises from the previous sections of this chapter will once again be useful in developing the ability to mix registers, and these new exercises will improve singers’ ability to switch between them at will. First is an exercise geared toward blending registers together while moving throughout the range. Students should start on a bright [a] vowel low in their range at a moderately loud level and in chest register. Then, gradually decrescendo while gliding up an octave, switching to a light head register sound at the octave. Descend a fourth while maintaining head register, then crescendo while arpeggiating down by thirds to end on the starting pitch, once again in chest register. Singers can also reverse the dynamics, beginning with a soft, head-mix dominant sound, engaging in a crescendo to a chest-mix sound up the octave, followed by a decrescendo as they descend back to a head-mix.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

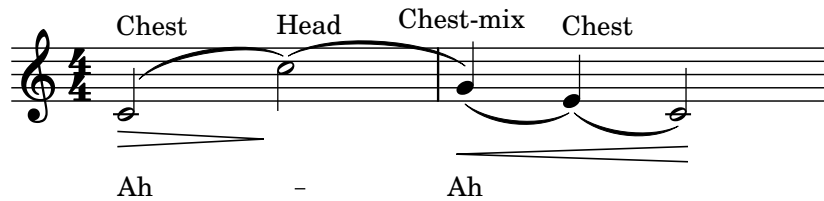


Figure 3.8 Exercise for blending registers, adapted from *So You Want to Sing Gospel: A Guide for Performers*, page 95.

Singers will also benefit from exercises designed to strengthen their ability to switch between registers at different levels throughout their range. The following exercise can help them to accomplish just that. Begin on scale degree one with a bright [a] or [e] vowel, glide up a fifth, then up to scale degree six, crescendo over four beats to a chest-mix and then descend stepwise to the beginning pitch, maintaining a louder dynamic and chest dominant sound for the remainder of the phrase. Continue this exercise, moving up by half steps, until singers reach the end of their comfortable range. When working to strengthen a high chest register, the director should be sure to pay attention to the singers' tone, and when they begin to strain, start moving them down in the range. By utilizing these exercises, the ensemble will develop more vocal skills to allow them to experiment on a gospel-inspired piece like "True Light."

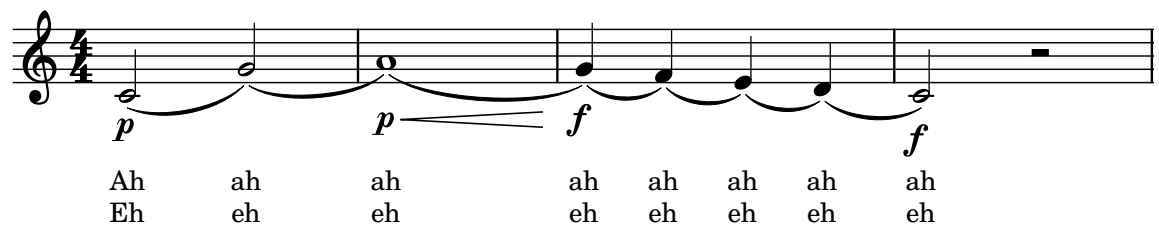


Figure 3.9 Exercise for strengthening register transition throughout the range, adapted from *So You Want to Sing Gospel: A Guide for Performers*, page 108.

Once the singers have sufficiently strengthened each register throughout their range and have a strong foundation for transitioning between registers, they can begin to experiment with how to use these skills to develop their interpretation of the piece, with

the primary goal being authentic expression. Figure 3.10 shows a three-bar phrase from “True Light” that is repeated four times and leads to the conclusion of the song. There are numerous such repeating phrases in this piece, and the director could model different interpretations of each for the singers to imitate. One possibility for this phrase could be to start softly in a head-mix until measure 47, and then crescendo until the end of the phrase. Another possibility might be to begin with a soft head-mix, crescendo into a chest-mix at “where,” decrescendo back to a head-mix at “world,” maintain that registration until “light,” and then crescendo into a chest-mix. Since the dynamics are not indicated in the score, there are numerous possibilities for interpretation. Once the director has demonstrated some possibilities to the choir, they may want to allow singers to volunteer their own interpretation of the phrase. This can allow singers in the ensemble to show their creativity, expression, and even knowledge of the genre and allow them to take ownership in the performance of the piece.

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S E - ve - ry - where I go, I want the world to know. God gave the world True Light!

A E - ve - ry - where I go, I want the world to know. God gave the world True Light!

T E - ve - ry - where I go, I want the world to know. God gave the world True Light!

B E - ve - ry - where I go, I want the world to know. God gave the world True Light!

Pno.

Figure 3.10 “True Light,” mm. 46-48.

One final consideration for the performance of “True Light” is the interpretation of the solo verses. The music for the solos is notated but also includes the indication “Soloist ad lib.” Depending on the singers in the ensemble, the notation can serve as an outline for the performance of the solos, or if there is a singer that has a background in gospel music, they may be able to ad lib the solo in a very different manner from what is on the page. This provides an opportunity to create contrast between the two solo verses, thus increasing the musical focal points of the piece. An excellent example of this effect can be found in a performance by the Northern Illinois University Combined Choirs under the direction of Eric Johnson and featuring Jean Mingus as the soloist for the first verse and Tremel Hoover as the soloist for the second verse.⁸⁰ Mingus follows the notated music closely in the first verse, but Hoover completely reinvents the melody in his interpretation of verse two, clearly demonstrating his expertise in gospel music and setting up the choir for an excellent finale to the performance. As a director, it is often useful to identify the expertise of the various singers within the ensemble and allow them the opportunity to influence the final interpretation of a particular piece. That is especially true in gospel music, where students are likely to have an aptitude for vocal expression that surpasses that of their director.

As demonstrated with each of the examples in this section, a conductor’s analysis of a piece can help to determine the vocal techniques necessary for an ensemble to perform in a vocally healthy and stylistically appropriate manner. Identifying registers, vocal qualities, stylistic nuances, and vowel shapes can guide the director in their effort to craft exercises that will strengthen the choir’s ability to sing within the desired genre. By

⁸⁰ NIU Combined Choirs, “True Light” by Keith Hampton, directed by Eric Johnson, December 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJXptJS5lqw&t=119s>

familiarizing themselves with CCM vocal pedagogy techniques, directors can expand the number of genres in which their choirs excel and create opportunities to sing musical styles that students enjoy with a level of expertise they may not previously have possessed.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Many students come to music education programs due to their interest in some form of music that they heard that then drew them to the idea of making music on their own. It is no doubt an impossible task to expose students to every genre of music during their short years of formal education, but educators should continue to explore different genres of music and treat the study of popular music with the same intensity as they do their study of the classical canon. By showing an interest in the styles of music to which their students are listening, choral directors can build a sense of trust and community that will enable them to introduce their students to ever-expanding genres of classical choral music as well. Stylistically appropriate singing is necessary in all genres of choral music, and by studying contemporary vocal pedagogy techniques, directors can ensure their students' ability to engage with the music they love in a healthy and efficient manner while engaging in a diverse body of musical styles.

Music education organizations have long advocated for the inclusion of diverse music, and popular music specifically, within the music education curriculum nationwide. Unfortunately, statements made in support of popular music's curricular inclusion has not led to an increase in academic coursework geared toward equipping teachers with the pedagogical tools they need to include popular music as part of their curriculum. There are many skills necessary to construct a popular music curriculum at the secondary level, and this document provides voice building techniques

that will enable students to engage with a wider variety of styles while acknowledging that there is much more to the creation and performance of popular music than simply the ability to sing it. This author hopes that one day it will be a regular occurrence in music classrooms for students to take songs and craft their own arrangements through play, improvisation, and experimentation.

A recent *New York Times* opinion advocates for “bring[ing] play back into the classroom by instructing students how to hear a melody on the radio and learn to play it back by ear, and encouraging students to write their own simple songs using a few chords... So start with just one chord, a funky beat and let it rip — and, voilà, you’re making music.”⁸¹ Stephen T. Cox, winner of the 2022 Grammy Music Educator Award, teaches both traditional band classes and courses using a “modern band” curriculum.⁸² In the modern band courses, students are assigned to either guitar, bass guitar, drums, keyboard, or vocals, given instruction on how to play several basic chords and rhythmic patterns, and given freedom to improvise an interpretation of previously recorded songs or to create their own original music. Students interested in studying in this type of music education program will require ongoing training to fully master their instrument, and contemporary vocal pedagogy will benefit those who are interested in both lead and background vocals.

⁸¹ Sammy Miller, “We’re Teaching Music to Kids All Wrong,” *New York Times* opinion, September 23, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/23/opinion/teach-music-better.html>.

⁸² Chris Munce and Stephen T. Cox, “Is ‘Music Education for All’ Realistic?” August 30, 2023, in *Choralosophy*, podcast, <https://choralosophy.com/2023/08/30/episode-164-is-music-education-for-all-realistic-with-stephen-cox/>.

Avenues for Further Study

As music education programs continue to include popular music as a part of their curriculum, CCM vocal techniques for young singers will need to undergo continued research and development. Although there is already ample evidence of the ability of singers to engage in CCM singing in a healthy manner, the voice is still one of the least understood instruments due to its location within the body and the difficulty of performing scientific studies on its function. Ongoing research will undoubtedly result in more training techniques in a variety of CCM styles, and NATS already publishes a full series of training guides through their *So You Want to Sing* series.⁸³ One avenue for further study will be for researchers to gain a better understanding of how much effect certain vocal exercises have on singers' technical skills in a group setting. Perceptions of both singers and choral directors should be studied before and after applying CCM exercises in the choral setting to measure whether they gain an improved understanding of how to engage with popular singing styles. Furthermore, perceptions of neutral listeners should be measured to see if audiences and judges can identify a marked difference in choirs that engage in contemporary vocal training versus those who do not while presenting performances of popular music.

Publishers and arrangers would also benefit from an increased knowledge in the difference between classical and CCM choral singing. It is often the case that arrangements of popular music for choir include vocal parts that are outside of the range of certain sections for a certain style of singing. Arrangers should be aware of these parameters when planning their arrangements. For choral directors who find that

⁸³ https://www.nats.org/So_You_Want_To_Sing_Book_Series.html.

published arrangements do not fit their needs, there are resources that can assist the students in crafting their own arrangement.⁸⁴ Ultimately, the goal of a music educator is to develop independent music makers, and the inclusion of popular music will open that possibility to a wider demographic of students.

⁸⁴ Alec Schumacker, "Incorporating Popular Music Into the Choral Classroom," (DMA diss., University of Miami, 2013). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

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APPENDIX A

CONTEMPORARY VOCAL PEDAGOGY TRAINING PROGRAMS

Teachers interested in learning more should consider attending CCM vocal pedagogy training either in-person or online. Listed below are several reputable training programs current as of this writing.

CCM Vocal Pedagogy Institute at Shenandoah Conservatory. Summer sessions offered both in-person and online. <https://www.ccminstitute.com/>.

The LoVetri Institute for Somatic Voicework™ at Baldwin Wallace University. Summer sessions offered both in-person and online. <https://somaticvoicework.com/category/institute/>.

Estill Voice Training®. In-person and online workshops offered throughout the year. <https://www.estillvoice.com/>.

Bel Canto Can Belto. Mary Saunders-Barton's method for training classical and musical theatre vocal technique. In-person workshops and downloadable videos available. <https://belcantocanbelto.com/>.

APPENDIX B

RECITAL PROGRAMS

LUKE BROWDER, Conductor

in

GRADUATE RECITAL

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

6:00 p.m.

Johnson Hall

Jie He, piano

Sing and Ponder

Larry L. Fleming
(b. 1936)

O vos omnes

Tomás Luis de Victoria
(1548-1611)

Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen
(from Ein Deutsches Requiem)

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Veni Creator Spiritus

Anthony Bernarducci
(b.1983)

Bryon K. Black II, djembe

Umahlalela

arr. Michael Barrett
(b. 1983)

Underneath the Stars

arr. Jim Clements
(b. 1983)

Kevin Crowe, tenor

Rise, Shine!

Arr. Marques L.A. Garrett
(b. 1984)
and Tom Trenney

Mr. Browder is a student of Dr. Alicia Walker. This lecture-recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting.

LUKE BROWDER, Conductor

in

GRADUATE REHEARSAL FORMAT RECITAL

Thursday, April 14, 2022

2:50 p.m.

Room 006

University Chorus

Jasmine Harry, piano

Sure on This Shining Night

Morten Lauridsen
(b. 1943)

Five Mystical Songs
V. Antiphon

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

Chichester Psalms

I. Urah, hanevel, v'chinor!
II. Adonai ro-i, lo ehsar
III. Adonai, adonai

Leonard Bernstein
(1918-1990)

Mr. Browder is a student of Dr. Jabarie Glass and Dr. Alicia Walker. This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting.



CHOIRS OF CAROLINA

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Summer Chorus

Jabarie Glass, conductor
Luke Browder, graduate student conductor
Jordan DeRuen, organ
Jerry D. Olson, Jr., rehearsal pianist

Friday, July 29, 2022
Sunday, July 31, 2022
Shandon Presbyterian Church

Requiem, Op. 9 (1947)

Maurice Duruflé
(1902-1986)

Yasmin Bradshaw, mezzo-soprano
Jacob Will, bass-baritone

Rejoice in the Lamb (1943)

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Jerryana Williams-Bibiloni, soprano
Yasmin Bradshaw, mezzo-soprano
Alex Jones, tenor
Jacob Will, bass-baritone

Text and Translations may be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/uofsc-ccnotes>



The performance conducted by Luke Browder is in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in choral conducting.

LUKE BROWDER, Conductor

in

GRADUATE LECTURE-RECITAL

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

6:00 p.m.

Recital Hall

Graduate Vocal Ensemble

Nathan Vondergeest, piano

Sanctuary

Jason Robert Brown

(b.1970)

(arr. Mac Huff)

Run to You

Mitchell Grassi, Scott Hoying, Avi Kaplan,

Kirstie Maldonado, Kevin Olusola, and Benjamin Bram

(arr. Kirby Shaw)

(b.1941)

True Light

Keith Hampton

(b. 1957)

Kevin Crowe, tenor

Brittany Martin, soprano

The Song of Purple Summer

(from Spring Awakening)

Duncan Sheik

(b. 1969)

Angela Pinkham Varnon, mezzo-soprano

Morning Glow

(from Pippin)

Stephen Schwartz

(b. 1948)

(arr. Eric Van Cleave)

Austin Means, tenor

Till We Reach That Day

(from Ragtime)

Stephen Flaherty

(b. 1960)

Shyleah Booker, mezzo-soprano

Bryon K. Black II, baritone

Mr. Browder is a student of Dr. Alicia Walker. This lecture-recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting.