

Class Voice

Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing

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<i>Foreword by Robert T. Sataloff, MD, DMA, FACS</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>How To Use This Book</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>A Message to Students</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>A Message to Teachers</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Getting Started: Studying Singing Together</i>	<i>xix</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xxvii</i>
<i>Contributors</i>	<i>xxix</i>
<i>Reviewers</i>	<i>xxxii</i>
Introduction: Class Voice and Strategies for Lifelong Singing	1
Songs: With and Without Words	1
Instruments Versus Voice	2
Human Growth: Musical, Physical, and Aesthetic	2
Speaking Voice and Singing Voice Use	2
Musical Skill Training and Singing	3
Issues of <i>Fach</i> and Longevity	3
Conclusion	4
Discussion Questions	4
References	4
1 Skills for Learning to Sing	5
<i>Brenda Smith</i>	
The Basics of Singing	6
Relaxation	6
Posture	8
Breathing	14
Resonance	18
The Why and How of Warm-Ups and Cool-Downs	20
Discussion Questions	20
References	20

2	Anatomy and Physiology of the Voice	23
	<i>Robert T. Sataloff</i>	
	Anatomy	23
	Physiology	29
	Conclusion	34
	References	35
3	Skills for Learning to Sing Music	37
	<i>Ronald Burrichter</i>	
	Introduction	37
	Musicianship Skills	37
	Singing and Rhythm	38
	Basics of the Printed Page	38
	Other Rhythmic Tricks	40
	Singing and Note Learning	41
	Understanding Aural Skill Levels	42
	Strategies for Lifelong Music Learning	43
	Conclusion	44
	Discussion Questions	44
	Resources for Further Reading	45
	Music Learning	45
	Online Resources for Music Learning	45
	Choral Singing	45
4	Skills for Learning to Sing Text	47
	<i>Brenda Smith</i>	
	The Italian Language and Singing Skill	47
	International Phonetic Alphabet	48
	Tricks for Learning IPA	48
	The Value of the International Phonetic Alphabet	48
	Learning the IPA in English	49
	Consonants	51
	Singing Versus Speaking Vowels and Consonants	52
	Using the International Phonetic Alphabet as a Tool	52
	Phonetic Transcriptions and “Rhyming Vowels”	53
	Sounds in Italian, German, and French	54
	Diction in Context	55
	Conclusion	55
	Discussion Questions	55
	Resources for Further Reading	55
	References	55
5	Singing Solo	57
	<i>Brenda Smith</i>	
	The Singing Art in the Western World	57

Bel Canto, Legato, and the Even Scale	58
Range, Registration, and Tessitura	59
<i>Messa di Voce</i> or “Measuring” the Voice	60
Tone Quality and Vibrato	61
Conclusion	61
Discussion Questions	61
Resources for Further Reading	62
Reference	62
6 Singing With Others	63
<i>Brenda Smith and Ronald Burrichter</i>	
Singing Together in Choirs	63
A Brief History of Early Choral Singing	63
Unison Singing	64
Choral Breathing	65
Canons	66
Suggested Canons for Class Voice Use	67
Two-Part Singing	67
The Singing Life of Choral Singers	67
Singing Soprano in a Choir	67
Singing Alto in a Choir	68
Singing Tenor in a Choir	69
Singing Baritone or Bass in a Choir	69
Choral Singing and Tuning	70
Challenges of Choral Singing	70
Score Marking	71
Conclusion	72
Discussion Questions	72
Resources for Further Reading	72
Reference	73
7 Skills for Mastering Repertoire	75
<i>Brenda Smith and Ronald Burrichter</i>	
Warm-Ups and Voice Building	75
Relaxation and Posture	75
Breathing and Resonance	75
Cool-Downs	78
Solving Vocal Problems in Repertoire	84
Repertoire Learning Skills	84
Learning a Song: Step 1 Is the Text	84
Word Mastery	85
Understanding Vowels	86
Materials for Score Preparation	87
Establishing the Context for a New Song	87
Sample Fact Sheet for Vocal Repertoire	89
Musical Preparation	90

Practice Strategies	90
Sample Practice Logs	91
Sample One	91
Sample Two	94
Sample Three	95
Practice Styles	98
The Role of Mindfulness and Joy in Practice	99
Performance Anxiety and Musical Preparation	99
Tips for Mindful Preparation	100
Performing and Mental Toughness	101
Physical Factors and Performance	101
Singing and Sharing the Stage	101
Conclusion	102
Discussion Questions	102
Resources for Further Reading	102
Practice Skills	102
Performance Anxiety	102
References	103
8 Vocal Skills and Repertoire	105
<i>Brenda Smith and Ronald Burrichter</i>	
What Singers Sing	105
Folk Songs	105
Early Italian Songs and Arias	106
British and American Song	106
German Lieder	106
French <i>Mélodie</i>	107
Learning Vocal Skills Through Repertoire	108
Suggested Vocal Repertoire and Lesson Plans for Class Voice Study	108
Breath Coordination and Gentle Onset	108
Legato and Phrasing	113
Vocal Agility and Flexibility	115
Vocal Color and Text Painting	116
Range and Registration	118
<i>Messa di voce</i>	120
Opera, Singspiel, and Operetta	123
Musical Theater	123
Suggested Musical Theater Repertoire for Class Voice	123
Spirituals and African American Art Songs	126
Putting It All Together	127
Interpreting Text and Music	127
Performance Strategies for Class Presentations	128
Midterm and Final Projects and Performances	128
Midterm Presentation	128
Final Presentation	129

Program Notes and Research	129
Performance Etiquette	129
Criteria for Evaluation	131
“An die Musik” (“To Music”)—An International Calling Card for Singers	133
Conclusion	134
Discussion Questions	134
Recommended Online Resources	134
Resources for Lesson Planning	134
Resources for Repertoire Acquisition	134
Resources for Music Purchase	134
Resources for Further Reading	135
References	135
9 The Singing Life	137
Considerations for the Adolescent Singing Voice	137
<i>Vincent Oakes</i>	
Singing Fundamentals for the Adolescent Voice	138
Phonation Onset and Duration	141
Nonpitched Exercises for the Adolescent Voice	142
Limited Range Exercises for the Adolescent Voice	144
Aural Development of the Adolescent Singer	144
Balance and Physicality for the Developing Singer	145
Additional Considerations	146
Conclusion	148
Discussion Questions	148
Resources for Further Reading	148
References	149
Singing and Women	150
<i>Brenda Smith</i>	
Finding Your Voice	150
Women and Choral Singing	151
Healthy Voice Use	151
Maintaining Your Voice	151
Vocal Aging: To Sing or Not to Sing	152
Vocal Limitations and Strategies	152
Conclusion	153
Discussion Questions	153
References	153
Singing Life of Men	154
<i>Ronald Burrichter</i>	
The Singing Life of Tenors	155
Men’s Falsetto Voices	155
The Singing of Life of Baritones and Basses	156
Conclusion	158
Discussion Questions	158

Resources for Further Reading	158
Gender Spectrum Voice	159
<i>Erin Nicole Donahue</i>	
Working With the Gender Diverse Population	160
Transition and Hormones	161
Aspects of Voice and Verbal Communication	162
The Transgender or Gender Diverse Singer	167
Considerations for the Music Educator	167
Conclusion	169
Discussion Questions	169
Resources for Further Reading	169
10 The Science of Healthy Singing	171
<i>Erin Nicole Donahue</i>	
Vocal Health and Wellness	171
A Brief Overview of Anatomy and Physiology	172
Respiration	172
Maximizing Vocal Health	174
Voice Disorders and Laryngeal Pathology	182
The Voice Care Team	183
Conclusion	184
Discussion Questions	184
Resources for Further Reading	184
Conclusion: The Benefits of Skillful Lifelong Singing	187
<i>Brenda Smith and Ronald Burrichter</i>	
Singing Alone and With Others	187
The Intrinsic Value of Singing	187
Singing in the 21st Century	188
21st Century Vocal Pedagogy	188
Maintaining Fundamental Skills for Singing	189
Cautions and Strategies	189
Conclusion	190
Discussion Questions	190
Resources for Further Reading	190
References	190
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>Bibliography: Resources for Research and Learning</i>	<i>201</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>209</i>



In its 2019 Impact Study, Chorus America reported that more than 54 million people in America sing in amateur choral organizations (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019). Singing activities include people of all ages, races, genders, and creeds. Amateur singers, who sing for the love of singing, rarely have an opportunity to develop vocal skills in a systematic way. *Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing* is an accessible resource to help beginners master basic singing skills and train them in the presence of others. This book is different from other Class Voice books because it is intended for flexible use so that the teacher can design the curriculum to fit the student population as opposed to the usual format of brief didactic information and a huge anthology of songs. This open format also makes the book more useful as a reference in the future. For the student who continues training and becomes a voice teacher or choral conductor, its content can function as a ready reference for lesson building, warm-up and cool-down exercise design, rehearsal planning, and more. Because each class member presents with a unique vocal instrument, students of singing quickly develop a sense of personal identity as well as perspective.

All students in a voice class are potential professional voice users. A convincing speaking voice is required for nearly every profession. The attention given to effective posture and breathing for singing is foundational to all healthy voice use. The “speaking voice” and the “singing voice” are one instrument that is used in slightly different ways. In Class Voice, students prepare spoken and sung presentations that enlighten classmates and foster habits for lifelong healthy voice use.

Relying upon evidence-based voice pedagogy, the authors dispel many of the myths that confuse and confound untrained singers; and they are well qualified to do so. For example, Dr. Brenda Smith has not only taught, lectured, and performed extensively, she also has coauthored texts on choral pedagogy and other topics. Her expertise is internationally recognized. Vincent Oakes wrote “The Young Singer” chapter in *Choral Pedagogy, Third Edition* and has expanded upon it in this text (Oakes, 2013). Erin Donahue is a singing voice specialist who was a double major in voice performance and speech-language pathology at the University of Florida. She has been at the Blaine Block Voice Center in Cincinnati since she received her master’s degree from Miami University and became

a certified speech-language pathologist. Ron Burrichter just retired after 37 years of studio voice teaching and choral work. The course includes comparative listening and class discussion—exercises that serve to enhance the ear, the mind, and the heart, fostering understanding of a wide range of voice types, performance styles, and best practices. Such training sophisticates the student’s capacity to listen, observe, and compare tastes, ideas, and opinions with others.

As the singing voice ages, changes are inevitable. The chapter in this textbook on the singing life contains a set of short essays that describe the developmental growth of the human voice from birth to old age. When setting goals and expectations, it is important for students of singing to identify where they are in the growth process and what lies ahead. The textbook prepares students to find their place and to thrive in a singer’s world as amateurs or as professionals.

For students seeking to become music educators, the class approach is directly applicable. The book contains information regarding terms, gestures, and exercises used commonly by singers, music educators, and choral conductors. It also provides a user-friendly chapter (Chapter 2) entitled “Anatomy and Physiology of the Voice” adapted from other publications that I have written. The chapter provides references to other print and online resources for further study. With this information, instrumentalists, conductors, teachers, and aspiring singers will acquire a fundamental understanding of the human voice as a musical instrument.

The resources in the book can be adapted to any population. The assigned repertoire can be chosen to suit the abilities and goals of each student. The instructor

is free to design the syllabus and weekly work around personal preferences and expertise. The book seeks to train instrumental music education majors, non-music majors, and adult learners in fundamental skills for singing. Its contents, which are very useful in the classroom, also can serve as an invaluable reference for future use.

Class Voice is a community of singers. The late Thomas Lux, in his poem “Regarding (Most) Songs,” said that “The human voice can sing a vowel to break your heart” (Lux, 2001, p. 25). A singing voice has the capacity to ignite emotions, inspire reminiscences, and invite human relationships. Singing produces a camaraderie uncommon to other forms of communal music making. The Class Voice experience prepares each student for participation in choral settings of many kinds.

The development of basic singing skills and good vocal health habits is vital to lifelong singing. It is indeed possible to grow old gracefully as a singer if fundamental skills are mastered. After completing the course, students should be motivated to join or start one. Singing with others brings joy to life at every age, and healthy singing can sustain that joy through even the final decade of life.

—Robert T. Sataloff, MD, DMA, FACS

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- Lux, T. (2001). *The street of clocks: Poems* (p. 25). Houghton Mifflin.
- Oakes, V. (2013). The young singer. In B. Smith & R. T. Sataloff (Eds.), *Choral pedagogy* (3rd ed., pp. 189–204). Plural Publishing.

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How To Use This Book

A Message to Students

Welcome to Class Voice! This textbook seeks to train you in the fundamental skills required to sing for a lifetime. Whether you are a music education major, a non-music major with an interest in singing, or an adult learner, you will find this book of special value. Unlike other class voice textbooks that contain an anthology of vocal repertoire and advice for performing it, this book provides you with foundational information and training in singing skills that can be applied to any vocal selection or style. In current times, there is no reason to limit what you learn. Using various digital means, you can acquire most songs or arias that interest you in a key or arrangement that suits your needs. Through consultation with your instructor, you can plan a course of study that answers your questions, teaches you skills, and trains you in the songs you care to sing.

Why is Class Voice the appropriate forum for your work? By its very nature, singing involves a community made up of those who sing and those who listen. Because the voice is the only instrument that the “player” cannot see, touch, or accurately hear, the community provides

essential feedback, inspiration, and encouragement. You have chosen wisely to begin your study of singing in the presence of others.

Why should anyone want to sing better? The voice is an instrument used for speaking and singing that is central to daily life. Your voice grows and changes as you age. Your expectations for your voice as a singer and speaker advance from year to year, too. There is hardly a profession or pastime that does not require an effective, convincing voice. No matter what career you select, you will be what is known as a “professional voice user”—someone for whom professional success relies heavily upon vocal consistency and power. Basic singing skills support your vocal instrument the way personal training contributes to your physical strength, balance, and well-being. Singers are classified as “vocal athletes”—humans who use every aspect of their being to produce beautiful tone and deliver meaningful text. As you learn to sing, you will become more aware of your body, your mind, and your spirit as well as your voice. They coordinate to help you express yourself in song and speech. Class Voice is the training ground where you will equip yourself with the tools needed to appreciate, use, and preserve your voice.

Why learn singing skills with others?

We learn to sing by observing and hearing others sing and by having others report to us what they see and hear when we sing. As singers and speakers, we do not perceive the sound of our own voices as others do. In the book *This Is the Voice*, John Colapinto writes:

This is because it reaches us, not solely through the air, but in vibrations that pass through the hard and soft tissues of our head and neck, and which create, in our auditory cortex, a sound completely different to what everyone else hears when we talk. (Colapinto, 2021, p. 22)

If you doubt this information, consider your response after hearing your recorded voice played back on a message machine. Most people ask, “Is that really how I sound?” Your teacher and classmates will act as your “outside eyes and ears,” assuring you that the sounds you make display your talents at their best. You will hone your critical observation and listening skills by observing the posture, gestures, and vocal sounds of your classmates.

The basics of singing are relaxation, posture, breathing, and resonance. Each singer strives for a body attitude that is sustainable and advantageous for creating the best tone. In a classroom of singers, an instructor must offer several approaches for the achievement of each skill to meet the needs of each student. You will have the opportunity to try more than one method and to observe how others respond to each. In a private voice lesson, you would receive individual attention all the time but might wish for a means of comparing alternative ways of working. Here you will learn various “roads to Rome.” If your chosen field is teaching, you can stockpile your Class

Voice teacher’s methodology for future use with students of varying learning styles. When your classmates report their singular strategies for practice and preparation, you can analyze and incorporate their “tricks of the trade” into your procedures. If you are a non-music major who wishes to learn as much about singing as possible, you will receive in this class a broad perspective as well as individual assistance. If you are an adult learner, your life experience will be of great value to you and your classmates.

How can you keep your voice healthy?

The Class Voice course covers a broad range of topics involving solo, choral, and speaking voice issues. The course acquaints you with the singing life at every age and gives useful advice for preserving your voice through vocal hygiene. The authors hope that your participation in the course will result in a framework for a lifetime of healthy singing and speaking.

What songs will you sing? Because the syllabus will be based upon your abilities and interests and those of your classmates, there is flexibility about the exact content and flow of the class. Everyone will have a chance to learn about how singing evolved in Western culture. A portion of class time will be spent singing together songs that build specific vocal skills. With your teacher’s guidance, you will learn and perform alone songs that fit your unique voice and temperament. Because you are developing fundamental skills for singing, the repertoire designed for “acoustic” singing or nonamplified performance is featured. Once you master the fundamental skills, you can easily expand your field of interest and expertise to include skills specific to music created for amplified circumstances.

How is Class Voice different from private lessons? In Class Voice, you will learn with others how to improve musicianship

skills, how to practice voice, and how to minimize performance anxiety. Because most chapters conclude with discussion questions, you can explore a wide variety of issues and share a diversity of opinions with your classmates. The suggestions for further reading will expand your understanding of voice science, vocal literature, and performance practices. In a private lesson, you would not receive this broad exposure as readily.

What skills does singing teach? Unlike any other musical genre, singing involves the expression of poetic texts in English and other languages. There is a chapter on the basics of “singer’s diction” to help you sing with confidence and clarity. Diction skills are easily transferred to the articulation of spoken text. No matter what your career plans, you will rely upon your voice to communicate your ideas. In the chapter on vocal health, you learn how to preserve your talent. Class Voice will train you to use your voice for singing and speaking effectively and healthfully.

What performance skills will you learn? Learning to sing with others will afford you the chance to observe peer performances as well as to perform. Your instructor and classmates will share best practices for studying music, memorizing text, and preparing public performances. As you compare other methods with your own, you can design a personal plan for success. Many students have found it valuable to record practice sessions and rehearsals. Since singers do not hear themselves as others do, a recording can satisfy a singer’s curiosity, affirming growth and alleviating fears. If you upload your recordings of your practices to your instructor, you can receive constructive feedback and confirmation of your progress. Your class experiences combine with the resources provided in each chapter to prepare you for your midterm

and final presentations. Your performances in class will produce responses from your peers and instructor. The presentations are capstone experiences that verify your growth as a singer and help you set meaningful goals for the future.

Can you sing for a lifetime? Lifelong singing is an achievable goal. The human voice is fragile and finite. Class Voice gives you tools for maintaining a healthy voice for speaking and singing. Through comparative listening and class discussion, you will develop a context for life as a voice user, expand your horizons, and set goals for lifelong singing. The authors are aware that this course might be your only opportunity to learn about singing. The content of the course includes materials of interest to the beginning singer, potential music educator, and adult learner. We hope *Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing* will be a valuable resource to you for years to come. May your Class Voice experience allow you abundant opportunities to exercise your voice, enrich your knowledge, and share the joy of singing in a supportive community!

Reference

- Colapinto, J. (2021). *This is the voice* (p. 22). Simon & Schuster.

A Message to Teachers

Most singing around the world is done by amateur singers in choirs, whether they are affiliated with schools, religious organizations, communities, barbershop quartet clubs, or other organizations (Smith & Sataloff, 2013, p. 3). Singing with others can be a hobby or a profession. It is an activity

that can nurture friendship, artistic goals, and well-being for a lifetime. It is, therefore, fitting that the basics of singing be learned in a group setting such as Class Voice.

Who will take this course? The short answer is simple: potential professional voice users. Whether the course is a music education requirement, a nonmajor voice class, or a course for adult learners, it will be useful to students interested in dramatic arts, speech-language pathology, and all subject areas that require knowledge of the human voice. Expect the class to attract students with a wide range of abilities, interests, and ambitions. There will be students with extensive singing experience and musical expertise as well as novice singers who present with a deficit of skills. Class Voice teachers frequently “discover” fine talent—a student whose voice and personality soar after years of hesitation or shyness.

How is this textbook different from others? This textbook is designed to meet the needs of all the students in the course. *Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing* does not contain an anthology that could limit what is sung or taught in class. In the 21st century, almost any musical score is available through a digital means in a range of reasonable keys and arrangements. Using the principles and resources of this book, you can design an action plan for each student in your class. You need not compromise your repertoire preferences or force a student to sing something that does not suit their interests, abilities, or temperament. The course plan can be topical or general, chronologic, or strictly contemporary. Music education majors, preparing for student teaching internships, might request to learn repertoire used in high school assessment festivals along with musical theater repertoire. Non-music

majors might prefer a wide range of styles as well as appropriate audition materials. Students may share an interest in the music of women composers or a desire to sing spirituals, gospel, jazz, or folk songs. Selections from the American Songbook might be especially attractive to adult learners. Imagine the satisfaction of finding songs that fit the voice and personality of each student. Also consider the intrinsic value in showing students how a single song can unlock and fortify the vocal gifts of an individual singer.

There may be chapters in the book that are not necessary for those currently enrolled in your class. If everyone is an able music reader, you can skip the chapter on musicianship skills. For students aspiring to careers in private or classroom music teaching, the material may be a useful resource for developing their future lesson plans. Non-music major voice students may not be aware of the importance of foundational musicianship skills. Some adult learners might not have a desire to study the nuts and bolts of music, preferring instead to spend class time learning and singing songs with others. Others may be curious to know more about negotiating the musical score. Though learning music by rote or imitation works, it is known that solid musicianship skills instill confidence in singers and help preserve their vocal health. It is assumed that Class Voice may be the only course of its type that your students experience. The content of the book is intended to inform students of singing about matters of interest today and in the future.

In the online companion website associated with the textbook, you will find resources to spark your imagination and secure your success with each student. The online companion website contains suggested syllabuses and weekly plans

designed for three different Class Voice populations. They are entitled “Class Voice for the Instrumental Music Education Major,” “Class Voice for the Non-Music Major,” and “Class Voice for the Adult Learner.” Use the materials to design the syllabus that meets your expectations and those of your students. May this approach enliven your teaching of Class Voice and allow you to meet the needs and gifts of any population.

Why is Class Voice essential for success in certain careers? Many human beings are surprised to discover their chosen career depends upon the success of their voice. Almost everyone in training is preparing to be a professional voice user. Most careers require effective voice use for speaking while others consider singing skill an asset though not a necessity. In lessons and rehearsals, instrumentalists communicate musical ideas to other players by singing how specific passages of the music should be played. From time to time, band and orchestra instructors cover for an absent choral colleague. In the amateur and professional theater, many acting roles include a singing assignment. Commonly, speech-language pathologists use singing voice exercises to achieve proper speaking voice use habits.

How does singing training facilitate speaking voice skills? The basics of singing are relaxation, posture, breathing, and resonance. A convincing speaker must also relax, stand tall, breathe deeply, and project an appealing vocal tone. Singing instruction increases the range of vocal timbres and prosody or vocal flow. Both are assets useful to any speaking voice.

What can students expect to learn from Class Voice? While becoming thoroughly familiar with their own voices, students in your class will identify and appre-

ciate the gifts of others. This awareness gives a perspective and depth to the learning experience. Frequent in-class performance opportunities engender confidence and minimize anxiety. As you discuss age- and size-appropriate repertoire, challenges inherent in performance situations, and issues of vocal health, your students glean vital information about the preservation of their vocal instruments. The course prepares each student to travel the pathway of lifelong singing.

Why is a sense of community essential? Learning to sing is a process of trial and error. In her book *The Inner Voice: The Making of a Singer*, Renée Fleming described singing as “an exercise in vulnerability” (Fleming, 2004, p. 20). A sense of community is advantageous for the training of essential skills such as relaxation and deep breathing. You, the teacher, coax your students to experiment with vocal sounds that are applicable to the music you assign. Having the freedom to select repertoire appropriate and desirable to each student is a true advantage in a Class Voice setting. Each voice is valuable because of its unique qualities and every question will advance the training of each singer.

How is the material sequenced for learning? The course is designed for a 16-week semester plan, punctuated by a midterm presentation in Week 8 and a final presentation in Week 16. The book contains the rationale for warm-up exercises and cool-down routines as well as sample procedures, discussion of repertoire by language and genre, and suggestions for using repertoire to develop specific vocal skills. This textbook addresses the fundamental skills for singing and treats repertoire designed for “acoustic” singing or nonamplified performance. After building a strong technical foundation, students can

easily expand their field of interest and expertise to include skills specific to music created for amplified circumstances.

The resources are adaptable and should appeal to students interested in classical and CCM (Contemporary Commercial Music) as well as choral music, musical theater, popular music, and folk song. At the end of each chapter, you will find suggestions for comparative listening, questions for discussion, and opportunities for further reading. Suggested assignments and evaluation criteria for the midterm and final presentations are given in Chapter 8 along with assessment forms.

What technology might facilitate student learning in this course? Students with minimal keyboard skills benefit from any one of several applications available on the internet. There are apps that teach music note by note and others that make accompaniments available in multiple keys and tempi. Video and aural recordings of practice sessions and rehearsals can

be uploaded for review and feedback by the instructor or the class. It is desirable, though not essential, to employ a collaborative pianist to accompany students in the assessment events.

In his poem entitled “Elevator Music,” Henry Taylor wrote: “We are all in this together, the song says, and later we’ll descend. The melody is like a name we don’t recall just now that still keeps on insisting it is there” (Taylor, 1996, p. 15). We hope you will enjoy your exploration of singing in a class setting as you teach the fundamental skills for lifelong singing.

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A decorative background for the title page featuring various musical symbols in shades of gray, including treble and bass clefs, a large treble clef, a musical staff with notes, and a pencil.

Getting Started: Studying Singing Together

A song or aria, like many other works of art, has the capacity to change a life for both singer and listener. Vocal music melds poetic thought with music that represents a collaboration of artistic minds in pursuit of a common expression of ideas, feelings, and beauty. Singing is an art form designed to be shared. In Class Voice, you and your instructor develop vocal knowledge and skills in the presence of others. Class Voice consists of human beings who will support your growth through their example and encouragement. Everyone in the class will improve body awareness, sharpen listening abilities, and train speaking and singing voice skills. By listening together, students and instructors alike deepen their appreciation of various singing styles and trends by listening.

Learning to sing with and for others brings satisfaction as well as singing success. You will become familiar with the vocal gifts of others and identify aspects of your own. Each student of singing brings experiences and observations that broaden the musical horizons of everyone present. Together class participants learn the foundational skills for a healthy singing life, skills that are applicable to every genre of vocal expression.

Creating a Safe Space for Singing

In Class Voice, the unique talents of each singer in the class will be celebrated. Learning new knowledge and skills involves experimentation and exploration. Voice teachers of all kinds *coax* students to try new ways of standing, sitting, breathing, and singing. Because singers neither see nor hear themselves as others do, they need encouragement and reassurance. In private lessons and Class Voice, students experience exciting “breakthrough” moments that occur after hours, or even weeks, of frustration and doubt. On stressful days, beautiful singing may not be as easy to achieve as on leisurely ones. In Class Voice, the spirit of the room, where students sing as a group and as soloists, must always be one of acceptance and expectancy.

Constructive feedback is essential for the solo singer and for the group. The famous composition teacher Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979) once said:

You can squash people. One remark made in a certain way, on the other hand, can encourage and give confidence. One must tell the truth, but with a view to inspiring confidence and liberating the inner self; it is very difficult,

and collective education doesn't allow for it. (Monsaignon, 1985, p. 59)

Actually, it is possible to be truthful and inspire confidence in a group setting. After a singer or group of singers performs in class, look for what has been positive about the experience. What did the instructor and class members “like” or even “love” about a student’s performance? If there are corrections to be made, the instructor should be the one who determines the most constructive means of communicating them.

Corrections addressed to one singer can enhance the learning of everyone in the room. The authors suggest that the instructor preface any corrections with a positive comment and then use the word “and” (rather than “but”) to describe another method to achieve the goal. For example, “Your singing was very expressive and attuned to poetic nuance *and* your eyes could reflect even more clearly the intense sorrow of the last poetic phrase.” This is preferable to, “Your singing was expressive, *but* we did not ‘get’ the sadness implied in the poetry.” Whether you are the instructor or a student, strive in Class Voice to acknowledge positive attributes and suggest additional ways to work. The growth of each individual student should

be of equal importance to everyone in the class. Diminish any spirit of competition between classmates by investing in the success of everyone. Performance anxiety is a “fight or flight” syndrome born in the fear of reprisal. Every performance should be an act of exploration and discovery.

Assessing Interests, Experience, and Expectations

Welcome one another to the class by comparing interests, experiences, expectations, and goals. The following are two tools for gathering basic contact data and essential information regarding individual preparation for Class Voice. The forms can be completed in class, as homework, or online. The first form is more detailed and applicable to a small class. The second one is more general and appropriate for a larger enrollment. You may want to use one of the following forms or adapt one that suits the needs of the class. It could be that everyone prefers to make their introductions in class. If so, you may want to designate one person to transcribe the pertinent data. Compile the responses and use them as criteria for setting the pace and content of classwork.

Sample Information Forms

Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing

INFORMATION FORM

FULL NAME _____

I prefer to be called _____

My pronouns are _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Mailing Address (Optional) _____

E-mail Address _____

Phone (Cell/Home) _____

MAJOR _____ MINOR (If applicable) _____

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS (If any) _____

Circle appropriate response: Lessons? Yes No (If yes, how long? _____) Self-Taught

Circle appropriate response: Lessons? Yes No (If yes, how long? _____) Self-Taught

SINGING EXPERIENCES (If any)

Solo Voice Training: Lessons? Yes No (If yes, how long? _____)

Soprano Mezzo Alto Tenor Baritone Bass

Solo Voice Performance Experiences (If any):

Selection: _____ Date: _____

Performance Venue: _____

Selection: _____ Date: _____

Performance Venue: _____

Choral Experiences (If any):

Group _____ Length of Participation _____

Soprano I Soprano II Alto I Alto II

Tenor I Tenor II Baritone Bass

Group _____ Length of Participation _____

Soprano I Soprano II Alto I Alto II

Tenor I Tenor II Baritone Bass

Group _____ Length of Participation _____

Soprano I Soprano II Alto I Alto II

Tenor I Tenor II Baritone Bass

What is your favorite song? _____

What is your favorite musical or opera? _____

Why have you enrolled in *Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing*?

Circle all appropriate responses:

Academic Requirement Professional Development Personal Development

Name one goal you hope to achieve in this course. _____

List your hobbies, sports, and special interests. _____

In the following space, please feel free to share any information you believe the instructor should know about you, your voice, or your health. If there is a particular song you would like to learn, please mention it.

Class Voice: Fundamental Skills for Lifelong Singing
SURVEY OF VOCAL EXPERIENCE AND COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Name _____ Preferred First Name _____

Pronouns _____

Contact Information (e-mail) _____ (phone) _____

Years of Voice Study _____

Years of Instrumental Study _____

Years of Choral Experience _____

Years of Band/Orchestra Participation _____

What do you consider to be your voice part? (Circle all that apply.)

Soprano Alto Tenor Countertenor Baritone Bass

At what age did your voice change occur? _____

Which, if any, of the following musicianship skills have you studied?
(Circle all that apply.)

Treble Clef Bass Clef Key Signatures Meter Signatures

What other languages than English, if any, have you studied?

What musical skills do you hope to learn in our class?

What style of music do you listen to most often?

Do you have a favorite song/aria you wish to learn this semester?

Creating an Action Plan for Learning

Class Voice attracts students with a wide range of interests, experiences, expectations, and goals. Some members of the class may have professional ambitions while others hope to enjoy singing as a hobby. Class Voice may be a required course for an instrumental music education major. One student may have been a singing star as a child with professional credits while another may never have sung before. Adult learners may lack confidence due to lapsed practice. They may also have many questions and misgivings about current vocal technical methods. Some students may have “perfect” or “absolute” pitch and others may not yet match pitch at all. All class participants harbor personal expectations, private hopes, and myriad questions. How shall the class work together to meet the needs of everyone?

After the initial gathering of the class, consider the following steps toward designing a learning plan. (Note: Should several students express an interest in a topic beyond the scope of this textbook, such as “belting” or “riffing,” the instructor can identify online and published resources that address the topics or include outside materials to supplement the textbook.)

- Collate the information gleaned from the forms and/or opening discussions
- Identify the “burning issues”
 - Topics of immediate interest to everyone
 - Topics of urgent interest of individuals
- Determine priorities
 - Vocal skills

- Musicianship skills
- Performance-related skills
- Other
- Collect individual repertoire requests
 - Group singing
 - Solo singing
- Assign repertoire
 - Group selections
 - Solo selections

(Students will use online and library resources to acquire repertoire.)

- Shape the lesson plan (two 8-week segments)
 - Daily schedule within each segment
 - Deadlines for assessment events
 - Quizzes
 - Reports/response papers
 - Midterm and final presentations

Every Class Voice syllabus is structured around the theory and practices of special interest to the students and their instructor. The theoretic part of the course entails basic knowledge acquisition (anatomy and physiology, music history and theory, vocal health, and hygiene). Practice comes in the form of music making (vocal, musicianship, and repertoire learning skills). The instructor reserves the right to organize the syllabus/learning plan and adjust it as necessary.

Before active singing begins each day, the class will engage in a warm-up appropriate to the skills and repertoire to be studied. A regular reminder of the “basics of singing” (relaxation, posture, breathing, and resonance) helps everyone “assemble” their vocal instrument properly. Each class should conclude with a brief cool-down routine. Class discussion and comparative listening are useful exercises that fortify student learning outcomes.

Implementing the Learning Plan

In any learning community, structure brings freedom. Open the class period with a review of the material covered in your previous meeting that will keep everyone accountable and correct any misunderstanding. As a group, discuss reading or listening assignments. This will help everyone read and listen more critically.

Developing a Context for Singing

For most human beings, singing is a natural ability that is identified in childhood and enjoyed throughout life with little instruction. Students of singing discover there is a great deal to know about the art form, the anatomy and physiology of the voice, and vocal acoustics. Because no two voices sound alike, every voice deserves its own serious study. In Class Voice, students have the chance to gather intriguing information that deepens their understanding of their own instrument and enhances their enjoyment of listening to other voices. Consider attending “live” recital performances as a group or as individuals during the semester. Discuss your observations in class or in

written response papers. Save the program, program notes, texts, and translations for future reference.

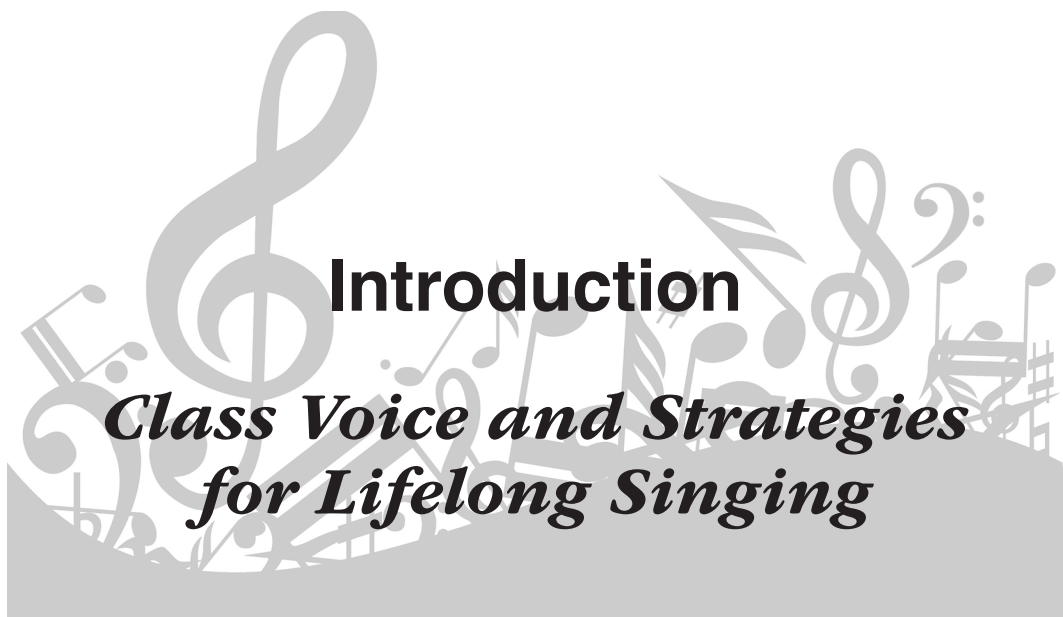
Impacted by political, religious, and artistic circumstances, singing styles change with each historical period. Every culture has its own preference for literary and dramatic subjects. As you learn the context in which vocal repertoire was composed and performed, you expand your worldview and shape your performing perspective.

Conclusion

Class Voice is an occasion for singing students and instructors to explore together the topics and vocal repertoire of interest to them. A course plan designed by the entire learning community brings satisfaction and yields excellent results. Enjoy your time together, learning and performing the music that interests you.

Reference

Monsaignon, B. (1985). *Mademoiselle: Conversations with Nadia Boulanger* (p. 59) (R. Marsack, Trans.). Carcanet Press.



Introduction

Class Voice and Strategies for Lifelong Singing

Songs: With and Without Words

Singing sounds surround our lives with and without words. Singing is a quintessential element of life on earth. Fragments of melody encircle us in swaying tree branches, squeaking hinges, and humming bees. Wordless singing is rare among human beings, but it is common in nature. Each creature has a characteristic sound, an exclamation that announces its presence. Calls and responses ring out to invite community or warn of danger. In the words of the theologian Dr. Tom Troeger: “The song and prayer of birds is melody alone. Their hymns employ no words. Their praise is purely tone” (Troeger, 1994, p. 55).

From its earliest occurrence, singing spontaneously penetrated the silence and described the emotions of the moment. “Early musical instruments were melodic imitators of the human voice; and it took centuries to establish music as a series of sound unrelated to the voice and detached from any verbal association” (Storr, 1992, p. 66). Using stems and strings, bamboo and boxes, people devised sound-making

instruments to imitate or accompany the singing. As singing technique and instrument building became more sophisticated, the horizons of vocal and instrumental music expanded, making room for new avenues of musical expression. According to Charles Rosen, vocal music dominated the secular and sacred musical scene well into the 18th century.

For centuries, of course, there had been pure instrumental music played in public, but it consisted either of arrangements of vocal music, introductions to vocal music (preludes or overtures to church services or operas), interludes between the acts of operas and oratorios, or dance music, which had no prestige whatever (naturally, this did not prevent the creation of masterpieces in that genre). (Rosen, 1980, p. 8)

A knowledge of singing is an essential building block for understanding music making in Western music.

Singing was the first form of music making and may have begun as an involuntary act of human expression. All sounds

made by the human voice are powered by the breath. Humans group these sounds into melodies that are organized around a rhythmic pulse that comes from the heartbeat and responds to thought. It is a natural mode of communication known to enchant, comfort, and excite.

Instruments Versus Voice

The human voice is a perfectly designed aerodynamic system with the oscillator positioned directly above the power source and under the resonators. To produce tone, your vocal instrument needs no valves, pedals, or expensive accessories. Your voice is a physical attribute, a unique and personal feature. Do not be deceived by the fact that your voice is conveniently located and easily accessed. You must carefully tend to it and painstakingly train it if it is to function effectively as your main communication tool. The fact that the voice exists within your body is significant. Whatever happens to your body, mind, and heart happens also to your voice. Because your vocal instrument lives within you, it is concealed from your view. Singing vocal repertoire is considered the voice's most "Olympic" activity, requiring complex neuromuscular coordination. Learning to sing means learning to "play" an invisible instrument. The learning process for singers is one of trial and error. It demands an abundance of patience and, therefore, should occur in a safe environment.

Human Growth: Musical, Physical, and Aesthetic

You have chosen wisely to develop your singing skill in the presence of others.

Each person in your class presents with an irreplaceable, distinctive voice for you to investigate. When you attend a voice class, you are surrounded by colleagues with differing types of vocal talent, performing style, and experience. Each voice is unique and incomparable. Since human beings age daily, every day is its own idiosyncratic point along one's vocal journey. Singers are more than the sum of their vocal parts. The singing voice expresses the musical, physical, and aesthetic gifts of a human being. Remember the motto of the late children's choir specialist Helen Kemp: "Body, mind, spirit, voice—it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice!"

During this course, you will sing by yourself and receive constructive feedback from the instructor and your peers. You will hear and observe the singing of others, giving you ample opportunities to study vocal timbres and skills. When learning new material, you and your class will join forces to explore ways to address vocal issues. A voice class is a total immersion teaching experience that trains you in the proper use of your body, mind, and voice for singing and speaking.

Speaking Voice and Singing Voice Use

The vocal instrument does many expressive tasks such as singing, speaking, humming, and sighing. The avoidance of vocal injury is essential to lifelong singing. To preserve your voice, you must use it wisely. A voice class addresses more than just singing. Its scope includes healthy speaking and all other voice use. If a jogger trips and sprains an ankle, walking will be an arduous task until the ankle heals. In the

same manner, the well-being of your singing voice depends upon the careful maintenance of your speaking voice.

Healthy voice use is based on four principles: relaxation, posture, breathing, and resonance. You will learn to keep a sense of “melody” in your speech and to sing with a core sound that relates to the timbre of your speaking voice. Your body is your instrument whether you are singing or speaking. How you nourish and care for your body really matters. Your physical well-being influences the way your voice works. Class Voice will equip you with foundational information and best practices for maintaining your vocal health and wellness throughout life.

Musical Skill Training and Singing

The voice is governed by the brain and fueled by breath. For speaking or singing, you must “audiate” or “pre-hear” what you wish to speak or sing. The vocal instrument responds to the mental signals you audiate. Verbal thought processes direct your speech. For healthy singing, you must summon the pitch and vowel from an outside source, be it the piano, a vocal model, or a musical score. “Why can’t I just sing along with a recording or learn songs by rote?” you ask. Though such methods of note learning may help you pick up a tune, both are acts of vocal imitation. To sing in a healthy way, you must “teach” your voice the exquisite details of the rhythm, melody, and poetry. Class Voice provides you with strategies for developing and teaching strong musicianship skills for singing. Rhythm, the backbone of music and poetry, will be the starting point and note learning will follow. Ever wonder about “absolute”

or “perfect” pitch? Or if tone “deafness” exists? Class Voice will help you answer these questions and many others.

Issues of *Fach* and Longevity

You may be wondering about what repertoire you should sing or what voice part you should choose when you join a choir. You may have heard of the German word “*Fach*” commonly used to classify or assign a voice to a particular part. The term is a technical way to classify vocal range, timbre, and repertoire. For a young singer or a singer in transition, classification is not necessary or even recommended. There will be many seasons in your vocal life. To sing for a lifetime, you must accept the changes inherent in human growth and development. Class Voice will help you know what to expect. There will be times in your life when it is desirable to set high solo performance goals and strive to meet them. There will be other times when choral singing is the best option for staying in the singing game without the exposure and stress of solo responsibilities. Class Voice will introduce you to all kinds of vocal repertoire. You will learn what is appropriate for your specific talent. You will also develop an understanding of the singing skills certain repertoire engenders.

As a singer, teacher, or colleague, you will confront many vocal challenges. Because you cannot see or hear yourself clearly, you will always need an extra set of “eyes and ears” to provide useful feedback. To navigate the singing road, voice users solicit the guidance of qualified voice teachers, vocal coaches, or choral conductors. Class Voice helps you understand the stages of a singer’s life from “cradle to grave.” You will learn what to expect

of yourself and others. Class Voice gives you abundant resources for further inquiry. With the materials found in this textbook, you will be able to set goals and assess your learning objectives and outcomes. Should you become a teacher, the information will help you train others. Class Voice supplies you with the tools and strategies for lifelong singing.

Conclusion

Singing occurs daily in every culture around the world. The singing voice and speaking voice are partners in human communication. To preserve the singing voice, singers must learn to speak healthfully. It has been proven that singing skills are effective in developing a convincing, reliable speaking voice. Teaching music of all kinds requires a dependable vocal technique for speech and song. When explanations fail, instrumentalists demonstrate musical concepts to one another by singing. Studio teachers, vocal coaches, and choral conductors speak text and sing melodic examples as their “way to work.” Class Voice brings you the opportunity to learn fundamental skills needed for a lifetime of singing.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is singing central to an understanding of instrumental music making?
2. What elements make the human voice different from human-made musical instruments?
3. Describe the musical, physical, and aesthetic growth of the human voice.
4. How does musicianship training secure the longevity of a professional voice user?
5. What roles do the speaking voice and the singing voice play in the success of a professional voice user? What is “Fach” and why is it important?

References

- Rosen, C. (1980). *Sonata forms* (p. 8). W. W. Norton.
- Storr, A. (1992). *Music and the mind* (p. 66). Ballantine Books.
- Troeger, T. (1994). *Borrowed light: Hymn texts, prayers and poems* (p. 55). Oxford University Press.