VOICEPrints

The Journal of the New York Singing Teachers' Association
September /October 2025 Volume 23, Issue 1

Inside this issue:

Event Calendar 2

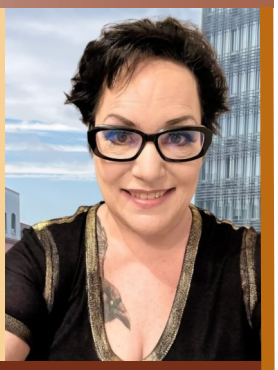
President's Letter.....4

Letter from the Editor.....5

Book Review: ***Teaching Difficult Topics: Reflections from the Undergraduate Music Classroom*** reviewed by Jennifer D'Agostino.....6

FEATURE: **Myofascial Release: The Key to Vocal Freedom and Flow** by Claudia Friedlander.....12

NYSTA PDP: An Introduction to the First Class.....18



Claudia Friedlander, featured conntributor

Jennifer D'Agostino, featured contributor

Erin Dilly, presenter

Aaron Sanko, presenter

UPCOMING EVENTS

2025/2026 Season Kick-off

16/32 Bar Broadway Audition Workshop

Join us for a workshop presented by Tony-nominee Erin Dilly and artist representative Aaron Sanko from UIA Artists. Erin and Aaron will coach college Musical Theatre students through the process of selecting and presenting the most effective short auditions. This will be a valuable session for those who teach young professionals, as well as those who are preparing student to audition for college.

The class will be held at the Opera America National Opera Center (330 7th Avenue, 7th Floor) on October 5 at 5:30 PM. A light reception will follow.

VOICEPrints

- Ronald Land—Editor-in-Chief
- Elena Blyskal—Associate Editor
- Nico de Villiers–Associate Editor

CALENDAR: Upcoming Events 2025/2026

October

October 5, 2025
5:30 PM
National Opera Center,
330 7th Avenue, 7th Floor,
NYC

Broadway:
16/32 Bar Audition Workshop

December

December 7, 2025
6:30pm
National Opera Center
330 7th Avenue, 7th Floor,
NYC

An Operatic Masterclass
Presented by:
Alison Bolshoi

February

February 22, 2026
6-8 PM EST
Online via Zoom

Play-based Learning, Engagement, and Lesson Pacing
Presented by:
Nikki Loney

##

Erin Dilly is a Tony-nominated Broadway, television, and film veteran with over 30 years in the industry. Broadway leading roles include A CHRISTMAS STORY, NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT (opposite Mr. Matthew Broderick) CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG (for which she was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical), INTO THE WOODS, BOYS FROM SYRACUSE, FIORELLO, and BABES IN ARMS. Most recently, she stood by for Sarah Jessica Parker for the lead role in PLAZA SUITE, opening at the Colonial Theatre in Boston and moving on to a sold-out run on Broadway at the historic Hudson Theatre. She starred in the national tours of SOUTH PACIFIC, MARTIN GUERRE, and BEAUTY AND THE BEAST. She's worked extensively on TV and film, including BOARDWALK EMPIRE, BULL, BLUE BLOODS, PERSON OF INTEREST, ELEMENTARY, THE GOOD WIFE, LAW AND ORDER, GOSSIP GIRL, TOO BIG TO FAIL, and JULIE AND JULIA, among others. She can currently be seen on the second season of Netflix's THE NIGHT AGENT in a recurring role and has a feature role opposite Emile Hirsch in the psychological thriller WOOZY, slated for release next year. She's worked extensively in regional theatres, among them The MUNY, Goodspeed Opera House, The Guthrie, The Paper Mill Playhouse, and the Alley Theatre. She is an adjunct faculty member at Pace University and the Manhattan School of Music in their Musical Theatre Departments, and the founder of her own studio, The Living Studio, in NYC. (livingstudionyc.com) Erin is co-founder of the performing arts intensive 12 MILES TO BROADWAY (12miles2broadway.com), as well as establishing the flourishing Broadway training camp, 5 DAYS OF BROADWAY, at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, CA. She's co-directed and taught with Kristin Chenoweth's Broadway Boot Camp in Broken Arrow, OK. She resides in Glen Ridge, NJ with her husband, Broadway veteran and teacher Stephen Buntrock, and their two children, Anna Lou and Catie.

Aaron Sanko is a Performing Arts Executive and Consultant with a diverse background in artistic and non-artistic ventures. He is currently CEO, Partner, and head of the Theatre, Film, TV, & Literary areas of UIA Talent Agency representing a diverse roster of artists including singers, actors, directors, conductors, choreographers, and composers. His diverse background in the entertainment industry and corporate sectors make him an invaluable advisor and strategist to his clients. He takes a hands-on, holistic approach to the development of artistic careers, tailoring his guidance to the individual needs of each client. Mr. Sanko first joined UIA in 2014, and upon his appointment as Managing Director in 2019, spearheaded the company's evolution to a full-service talent agency to allow UIA to cultivate cross-genre opportunities for his clients, as well as taking on theatrical authors to shape the voice of the industry in the future. Prior to his current appointment, Sanko founded Cruxory Group in New York City, which provides management consulting and executive production services to performing arts producing and service entities. As General Partner and Music Supervisor for Mind the Art Entertainment in New York, Mr. Sanko helmed award-winning productions of Whiskey Pants, The Mayor of Williamsburg (Off Broadway) and Fatty Fatty No Friends (Best of Fest, NYMF 2018). In 2018, Cruxory served as Executive Producer for the national headlining musical at St. Lou Fringe before Mr. Sanko served as Music Director for The Wiz in Monrovia, Liberia (the first musical presented in the country's history) in the summer of 2018 in collaboration with Broadway Artists Connection and Matsiko World Orphans Choir. Mr. Sanko served as the CEO of Sanko Ventures recently represented on Broadway by the Tony-award nominated Deaf West Theatre revival of Spring Awakening, and in Los Angeles with Sondheim's Merrily We Roll Along at The Wallis Annenberg Theatre in Beverly Hills. Sanko's résumé also includes leadership roles at corporations including Best Buy and Starbucks, serving in human resources, operations, and new market development capacities. Earlier in his career, Mr. Sanko was performer and educator. Mr. Sanko graduated from the Interlochen Arts Academy before studying Voice Performance and Music Education at the Eastman School of Music. Additionally, he earned a degree in Entertainment Business from Full Sail University, and is a proud alumnus of the intensive programs at The Broadway League's Commercial Theatre Institute. Mr. Sanko takes pride in service to the community, and regularly contributes to the efforts of nonprofit organizations with social, educational, or developmental missions, recently leading a new initiative to create an organizational strategy for leveraging the young professional demographic of donors and leaders as a Founding Executive Committee Member of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS' NextGen Advocates.

Letter from the President

Elizabeth Saunders

We are always looking for new and beneficial event programming, and with the start of this new season, I would love invite you to reach out to us, not only regarding you would like to learn more about, what learning would assist you in your studio, but also whether you, yourself, have something to offer us in event programming for the NYSTA membership. Whenever possible, I hope to feature members as our presenters, but it is difficult to know what you are doing unless you let us know.

When the board of directors and officers were surveying the membership a few months ago (if you didn't receive an email from us for this survey, please let me know, and we'll arrange that!) I had the great pleasure of an extended phone conversation with member Alison Bolshoi, which resulted in inviting her to present our Holiday event this year. The bulk of Alison's teaching method, both in technique and group learning environment, comes from the tradition of the Bayreuth Theater training program led by Friedelind Wagner (Richard Wagner's granddaughter), which Alison learned from Barbara Conrad and Patricia Sage. Patricia was a participant for many years in Friedelind Wagner's training program at Bayreuth, and was the co-founder and vocal director of the Wagner Theater Program at the Manhattan School of Music in New York. I have since sat in on Alison's masterclass sessions with her students, and thought that this is such a unique opportunity to learn and share this teaching tradition, we had to present her and the excellent work that she is doing.

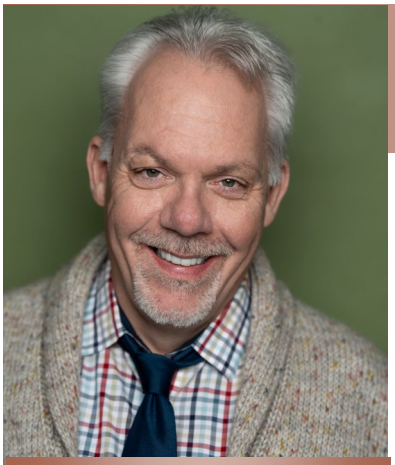
Friedelind Wagner
1918-1991

There are many more unique strategies and backgrounds that all of you members bring to the table for your students. Please let us know what *you* are doing, so that if it is something we can present in a future season, we can make that happen!

Wishing you all the best for an engaging and rewarding season ahead,

Elizabeth Saunders

NYSTA



Ronald F. Land

Letter from the Editor

Greetings Gentle Readers!

It is the beginning of another season! Weather cooling, back-to-school, new schedules, AND a new volume of VOICEPrints. I am pleased to begin my second season as Editor-in-Chief of VOICEPrints, the Journal of the New York Singing Teachers' Association.

NYSTA Board of Directors has been working hard to plan a wonderful series of live and online events . Included are: a Broadway 16/32 bar audition clinic presented by Tony-award nominee Erin Dilly and international artist representative Aaron Sanko from Uzan International Artists; an Opera Masterclass with contralto Alison Bolshoi; a play-based clinic for those who teach younger students presented by Nikki Loney, and …

In this issue, VOICEPrints presents an introduction to a 4 part series on Myofascial release written by one of our newest members (but a long-time friend and colleague of mine) Dr. Claudia Friedlander. My predecessor, Jennifer D'Agostino, offers a detailed review of ***Teaching Difficult Topics: Reflections from the Undergraduate Music Classroom*** edited by Olivia R. Lucas and Laura Moore Pruett. This season, VOICEPrints will include descriptions of the courses offered in the NYSTA-Professional Development Program. Dr. Wendy LeBorgne provides an introduction to the first class in the curriculum: Anatomy and Physiology of the Voice.

The editorial staff and I are always on the lookout for new features for the Journal. Feature articles, book reviews, program reviews, "first-looks" at new books, editions or recordings, and interviews with notable figures are all welcome for consideration. If you have something you would like to submit—please contact me at voiceprints@nyst.org.

It wouldn't be back-to-school season without a proper Cocktail Corner feature. After all that registering, scheduling, and syllabussing (Look Ma—I invented a word)—a lovely cocktail is a welcome guest. This season will be devoted to the "classics" - cocktails everyone should know and be able to fashion easily. For September, I also wanted to make a continuation of the equal-parts cocktail trend of 2024/2025. Without further ado, I include the recipe for a classic 50/50 gin martini—and its delectable cousin which replaces the dry vermouth with Lillet Blanc. And just as a bonus, in case you're feeling particularly 007ish after your back-to-school efforts—I include the recipe for the classic "Vesper" martini—James Bond's cocktail of choice. Do try it—it may give you superpowers!

Thanks for reading and Best Wishes for the new Academic Year!

Ron Land

Classic 50/50 Gin Martini

Equal parts Gin and Dry Vermouth

50/50 Gin-Lillet Martini

Equal parts Gin and Lillet Blanc

Classic Vesper Martini

3 parts Gin

1 part Vodka

1/2 part Lillet Blanc

All are shaken with ice and garnished with a lemon twist.

Review: *Teaching Difficult Topics: Reflections from the Undergraduate Music Classroom,* Olivia R. Lucas and Laura Moore Pruett, Editors

Reviewed by: Jennifer D'Agostino

In an era where cultural sensitivity and historical reckoning are paramount, educators often grapple with how to address the unsavory elements of our past and present responsibly. **Teaching Difficult Topics: Reflections from the Undergraduate Music Classroom**, a 2024 resource edited by Olivia R. Lucas and Laura Moore Pruett, emerges as an essential guide for navigating these complex pedagogical concepts. Pruett aptly describes the challenge as venturing into "deep waters" with no definitive answers, a sentiment that resonates throughout the book's practical and profound insights. While focused on music education, this collection of essays offers invaluable strategies and thought-provoking perspectives that are highly relevant for any higher education professional committed to fostering critical dialogue and creating inclusive learning environments. The following sections highlight each chapter chronologically. The sections are organized by the larger topics of Part 1: Music and Dynamics of Power, Part II: Social Justice, Activism, Decolonization, and Building Resilience, and Part III: Critical Race Studies. While there were essays that spoke directly to my experience teaching applied voice, pedagogy, and literature, those that didn't directly relate allowed time for reflection and introspection. I feel a greater sense of confidence moving to a new school year equipped with new tools for discussing complex topics.

Part 1 begins with an essay that explores power dynamics in music. In **"Success and Music Education: Teaching Value of Art in the Neoliberal University," John R. Pippen** discusses the current approach to teaching music in academia and explains how arts entrepreneurship has been either ignored entirely, or presented in a fashion that is not achievable for most people, in particular those hindered by race, gender, and/or class. Pippen highlights the value of music in a capitalistic society and how arts entrepreneurship, especially through a lens of creativity and community-building, can overcome obstacles. This essay may target most specifically students who are left with questions of "now what?" when they graduate from music school, as it is structured around marketing based on artistic identity.

Chapter 2 is **"Teaching Music and the Holocaust: Facilitating Discussions and Trust in an Undergraduate Seminar"** by **Jessica Grimmer**. Grimmer's account of their 2018 'Music and the Holocaust' seminar is particularly poignant, detailing how the Pittsburgh Tree of Life attack led to an immediate and sensitive discussion of trauma. Her emphasis on honesty without sensationalism and the deliberate cultivation of a safe space without re-traumatization offers a powerful model for educators facing unexpected real-world events. Navigating the sensitivities of anti-Semitism and xenophobia, she advocates for more agency among her students who are attending an interdisciplinary liberal arts program housed in the University of Michigan's Residential College. To avoid right vs. wrong ideas, Grimmer utilized presentations, discussions, and a final term paper. The small class size (10 students) and seminar-style course creation allowed for a variety of special conditions that aimed to empower the students.

Some elements she shares that I can benefit from in my classroom include taking the subject as an idea and assuming ignorance if a student presents a controversial idea. A flipped classroom design and increased student agency led to strength and agency when, two months into the course, the attack on Pittsburgh turned their historic exploration into the current climate. In the appendix, Grimmer provides the course content schedule.

When teaching difficult topics, it's essential to be able to "read the room" and adjust in ways that maintain an effective classroom climate. This task becomes hard when the class size is larger. In the article **"Teaching Difficult Topics in Large Enrollment Classes," Kelsey Klotz** compares their first and second years teaching large general education liberal arts classes at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. The first year section highlights multiple modalities in which Klotz strategized ways to make the material accessible and relatable. At the end of the first-year semester, a gunman on campus caused Klotz to reflect on both the physical layout of their class and the nature of a large class with topics that potentially push student boundaries. The remaining sections explore creating "safe" and "brave" spaces. I am particularly drawn to the idea of "strategic agency," where students can choose how and/or what they react to within a variety of well-structured modalities. While I typically do allow students to pick their topics or repertoire, I'm curious as to how much I can incorporate different assignments or grading structures that further push this idea.

Chapter 4's topic is **"Decentering Whiteness in the Music Appreciation Classroom: An Anti-Racist Approach"** by **Everette Scott Smith**. Smith begins by sharing the structure of their Music Appreciation course, which contrasts the Eurocentric nature provided by most textbooks. Smith points out the different types of racism that can be present in the classroom, asserting: "...productive discomfort has been shown to work as an effective learning tool…"[1] The resources and creativity Smith uses to create equity, accountability, and reflection among their students are admirable, particularly in the way Smith utilizes surveys and feedback to restructure. For example, an AA&U's "Top Ten Things Employees Look For in New College Graduates" list prompted Smith to create an anonymous survey where students could identify skills they wanted to gain from the course. These skills would become the cornerstone of how Smith created relevance for each participant. Smith ends the article by sharing some qualitative materials that students have provided for the course, highlighting that student reactions are mostly positive, but also contain "egocentrism and intense student pushback."[2]

[1]Pg 62

[2]Pg 63

The final chapter in Part I is **Sean M. Parr's "Opera and Masculinity."** Here, Parr discusses the Opera and Gender course they taught at a liberal arts college. Scott continues to "...examine how two historicized operatic cases help students in the seminar interrogate traditional ideas of masculinity: operatic castrati and the tenor hero." At the beginning of the course, Parr leads a discussion on masculine stereotypes, allowing students to analyze gender and challenge assumptions. Parr includes research on castrati topics, particularly the one-sex model of gender and participation of the Catholic church in castration, as well as how they approached such topics, teaching in a Catholic institution.

The following section, "Real Men," provides a historical context of the performance practices that led to the tenor hero. The pedagogical explanations in this section, particularly the use of Italian terms, do di petto, aggiustamento, and passaggio,

describe elements of the classic tenor sound. These initial topics on castrati and the tenor hero lead nicely into Parr's discussion on transgender operatic singers and identity on and off the stage, where students explored dialogue on gender fluidity. Finally, Parr provides a section on primary source excerpts on the voices of the castrati.

Part II is titled "Social Justice, Activism and Decolonization, and Building Resilience." The first essay by **Annalise Smith** is titled **"Beyond the Canon: Using Contemporary Works to Address Sexual Violence in Musical Drama."** This article describes Smith's exploration of the opera 2014 Thumbprint, composed by Kamala Sankaram with a libretto by Susan Yankowitz, with an undergraduate elective class of music majors and minors. In the opera, Mukhtar Mai is seeking justice for being assaulted. Smith brings up examples such as Don Giovanni, The Abduction from the Seraglio, The Marriage of Figaro, and The Rape of Lucretia as operas where students typically first encounter sexual violence, noting the ambiguous nature we learn of the events, or the ways the culture or period validated such violence. Smith finds a variety of ways to contextualize violence through student discussions, using prompts that reflect the staging, music, effects on the audience, and how current media perpetuates stereotypes. Smith concludes that "By including contemporary works like Thumbprint that reject such outdated perspectives, we can demonstrate to our students that opera, and music more broadly, can reflect the values of a more just society." [3]

[3] 107

In the chapter **"Asking Non-Majors to Music in Reclamation and Remix Projects: Challenging Topics, Collaborative Learning, and Creative Assignments," April L. Prince** outlines the assignments, "The Reclamation Project" and "The Remix Project." These projects allow students to work collaboratively and to question the power structures within a society. Prince works interdisciplinary topics into the classroom, including spirituality, technology, social class, politics, and identity, with assignments that provide students opportunities for reflection and creation. While immediate application is possible for Music Appreciation courses, I can see the same ideas effectively implemented in an upper-level Voice Literature course.

In **Colette Simonot-Maiello's** article **"'Decolonizing' the Music in Canada Course,"** they frame their course by asking students, "What music are we not studying… and why?"[4] The article begins with an overview of Canadian history, highlighting the ways the school system is responsible for erasing the cultural traditions of the over 80,000 Indigenous people. Simonot-Maiello aims to bring more Indigenous content into their course "Music in Canada," while avoiding tokenism. Specific articles, books, and encyclopedias are mentioned in the fields of ethnomusicology and musicology, and Simonot-Maiello points out that "context is crucial… can be a key to recognizing colonizing practices and taking part in decolonization."[5] While this article doesn't provide assignments or student reactions, I appreciate the suggestion of adopting a practice of teaching music history as a global endeavor.

[4] 131

[5] 141

In Chapter 9, **Breana H. McCullough** provides insight in her essay **"Reimagining Indigenous Existence in Period Performance Practice in the Academic Classroom."** McCullough asks, "How do I engage with… music in a Good Way and create an environment where all people are welcome and able to learn?"[6] These thoughts stemmed from McCullough's experience as a Karuk Native and scholar who earned a living performing early music repertoire that unfortunately exploits race, inequity, and/or injustice. Using Rameau's *Les Sauvages from Les Indes*

[6] 150

Galantes as an example, McCullough explores the power structures in "Forêts Paisibles" and the tropes assigned to the character Zima. McCullough encourages classroom comparison with examples from both historic and contemporary music. Such a comparison allows students to identify harmful and helpful elements when considering Rameau's intent. I appreciate that McCullough doesn't skirt around the complications of larger issues, particularly that there are cultural aspects that someone outside of this culture does not have the right to know. Despite the title and the majority of the content relating to Indigenous music, the topics relate to any music that sets one culture apart from another.

Ending this section is **Trudi Wright's** article **"Less is More: Opportunity for Deeper Dialogue through the Jesuit Examen."** Wright begins by explaining the need to eliminate superficiality and how the examen, a set of questions for reflection, may lead to more fulfilling and personal experiences in higher education. Not having heard the term "examen" used before, I was surprised by the relatability to meditation practices I've tried to establish, particularly in the desire to "savor the moment." Wright provides Appendix 10.1: "The Examen in Five Steps from James Martin's The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything" and 10.2: "Examen to Prepare for a Difficult Conversation/Class Discussion." These appendices provide prompts to use in a classroom setting. Wright promotes reflecting on moments of gratitude, sorrow, and grace, a practice that can be beneficial at the end of a difficult discussion.

Part III's Critical Race studies begins with **John Spilker-Beed's** article **"Transdisciplinary Antiracism Research and Teaching as a Foundation for Revising Music Coursework."** Spilker-Beed begins the chapter by describing the Equal Justice Initiative, which aims to connect music and culture, and how his use of project-based learning helped students learn about the prevalence of white supremacy. Although the title is on "antiracism research," the entire chapter has applications in any situation where cultural injustices exist. In the section "How We Work Together: Practices," Spilker-Beed identifies strategies to help create open and respectful learning environments.[7] Perhaps we no longer begin class by discussing how we'd like to be addressed or what pronouns we use, but by using this as an initial activity, we challenge the assumption that there is a norm associated with gender and identity. Questions that encourage accountability force us to question our biases and to foster discussions. In Spilker-Beed's section on grading, they eliminate fear-based grading by creating reflective assignments and extra credit, with an emphasis on students finding fulfillment and growth. Throughout the essay, Spilker-Beed connects back to the original topic of white supremacy, allowing the reader to question practices we have taken for granted.

[7]192

In **"Discussing White Nationalist Music in the Shadow of the Christchurch Mosque Shootings: The Importance of Reflecting on Race and Racism with Students in Aotearoa New Zealand," Olivia R. Lucas** *discusses the 2019 terrorist attack targeting Muslims at Christchurch* and how the event affected her class on "Extreme Sounds, Extreme Listening." Days after the attack, faculty members were instructed by the Provost not to use the attack as a case study or in class discussions, causing Lucas to reflect on how we view traumatic events, particularly in humanities fields, where the human condition should be at the center of study. Lucas identifies reading, listening, and discussion as ways to allow students to approach complex topics, as they can keep a distance from the readings and pace themselves in discussion. Lucas's perspective on how music can/has been used for evil, and how we process sound for joy or pain, leaves room for further research, and

they identify William Cheng's *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's* concepts as a good starting point.[8]

[8]221

Chapter 13 is **"Don't You Cry for Me: A Critical-Race Analysis of Undergraduate Music Theory Textbooks"** by **Philip Ewell** and **Megan Lyons.** Before reading this chapter, I hadn't considered racism in Music Theory textbooks. Ewell and Lyons share that 98% of the seven representative textbooks contain examples from white persons.[9] In this article, the authors analyse music theory texts, discuss the racist practices of Stephen Foster, using "Oh! Susanna (Don't You Cry For Me) as an example. Ewell and Lyons present their qualitative research using a variety of tables, organized to highlight composers of color and women composers, in comparison with examples by Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. The article pivots to discuss the prevalence of Stephen Foster examples in the texts, particularly "Oh! Susanna…," whose original text included hateful and violent rhetoric, and how using this composer's selections in music theory texts, as well as in the K-12 classroom, perpetuates a history of objectification and dehumanization.[10] Ewell and Lyons provide some examples to aid in the development of classroom discussions, identifying topics and/or composers relating to racism, antisemitism, and sexism/misogyny. The latter appendices identify where music theory examples by BIPOC and/or women composers exist, making this chapter a "must-read" for anyone teaching theory.

[9]226

[10]232

Christopher Lynch authors **"Stephen Foster and Slavery in Music Textbooks: A Case Study Outlining the Benefits of Using Class Time to Enrich Textbook Narratives about American Slavery."** This essay is framed by Lynch's experience working at the University of Pittsburgh Library System's Center for American Music, which houses the Stephen Foster archives. On the 2nd page, Lynch states "...music history textbooks fail to adequately represent history."[11] Lynch advocates for using primary and secondary sources to explore the different genres of Foster's music (comic minstrel songs, sentimental "parlor" ballads, and sentimental minstrel songs), to provide context for Foster's output. The article doesn't call for the complete removal of Stephen Foster's music, as the previous article by Ewell and Lyons advocates, but rather to create a historical perspective so that students may work to understand the social, political, and economic climate in which Foster composed. This article would be ideal as a reading assignment in voice literature at the beginning of the American music section, along with Lynch's suggested assignments for the classroom.

[11]253

The final chapter is **"The Jazz of a Black Ethnographer: A Memoir of Pedagogy, Improvisation, and Reflexivity at a Liberal Arts College"** by **Whitney Slaten.** This article is the most intellectually written of the book, not only outlining Slaten's incredible journey and contributions as an ethnomusicologist, but also providing suggested course titles and projects. The impressive abundance lies in Slaten's ability to connect culture and sound in ways that apply to a liberal arts academic audience. One example lies in Slaten's creation of the interdisciplinary "1619: A Commemoration in Sound," which highlighted the 400th anniversary of the 1st enslavement of people from Africa in the North-American British Colonies. Slaten incorporated a prominent jazz artist, choreographer, and illustrator, and produced this event at the Bard Fisher Center for students, faculty, and administrators of the college, as well as residents of the Hudson Valley. In the final paragraph, Slaten states: "I have been intentional about not training future ethnomusicologists per se, but basing my pedagogical approach in a liberal arts exploration of paradigmatic tensions with academic studies of music's social context,"[12] leading me to appreciate the benefit of special topics courses and the relevance of liberal arts education.

[12]294

Teaching Difficult Topics: Reflections from the Undergraduate Music Classroom is an incredible call to action for educators across disciplines. Although the roots of the text lie in music education, the various ideas on fostering difficult dialogues, decolonizing curricula, promoting student agency, and confronting uncomfortable histories are universally applicable. Lucas and Pruett have created a resource that rarely offers an easy answer, but instead suggests a variety of approaches, allowing educators and students an opportunity to reflect and create. This book is indispensable for anyone in higher education committed to creating truly inclusive, critically engaged, and resilient learning environments for the next generation.

---

*Mezzo-soprano **Jennifer D'Agostino** is a performer and educator whose career spans solo performances, international engagements, and influential teaching roles. She earned her Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree in Voice Performance with a minor in Opera Production from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her academic journey also includes a Master's Degree achieved at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville as a member of the Knoxville Opera Studio and a Bachelor's Degree from Baldwin-Wallace College Conservatory of Music.*

Jennifer D'Agostino's performance career is marked by her versatile engagements and notable collaborations. She has been praised for her "beauty and expression" in Hindemith's When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd, performed with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Choral Union and Symphony. Her extensive solo work includes performances with the Canton Symphony Orchestra, Canton Symphony Chorus, Keweenaw Symphony Orchestra, and Knoxville Opera. Jennifer's international appearances feature Rossini's Messa di Gloria in Pesaro and engagements under the baton of Eduoardo Mueller at AIMS in Graz, Austria. Her exploration of baroque music includes study in Early Music Vancouver's 'Compleat Singer' Baroque Vocal Programme, participation in The Madison Early Music Festival, and the Baldwin-Wallace Art Song Festival. A highlight of her performing career includes directing and premiering the role of 'Ethyl Wormvarnish' in Jerry Hui's opera Wired for Love, available on Spotify.

Jennifer's concert repertoire features solo work in major choral and orchestral works such as Fauré's Requiem, Saint-Saëns' Requiem, Handel's Israel in Egypt, Messiah, Beethoven's Missa Solemnis and Mass in C Major, Bach's Christ lag in Todesbanden, Vivaldi's Magnificat, Mozart's Mass in C minor and Vesperae de Dominica, and Robert Kyr's The Passion According to the Four Evangelists. In 2023, she was recognized as a Finalist for the American Prize in Vocal Performance Art Song.

Beyond performance, Jennifer is deeply committed to education and scholarship. She is an active member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), serving as the registrar for the Southeast region. Her contributions to the New York Singing Teacher's Association (NYSTA) include a tenure on the board and a five-year role as Editor-In-Chief of VOICEPrints, NYSTA's scholarly journal. Jennifer has presented at the Lilly Conference, NATS Conferences, and the National Collegiate Honors Conference. Her teaching experience spans institutions such as Alverno College, Beloit College, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, Walsh University, and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

Currently, Jennifer D'Agostino is a faculty member at Georgia Southern University, where she teaches Applied Lessons, Voice Pedagogy, and Song Literature. Her current research interests include the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Jane Bathori and Les Six, and works by living composers, reflecting her dedication to advancing both the practice and study of vocal performance.

FEATURE:
Myofascial Release: The Key to Vocal Freedom and Flow

By Dr. Claudia Friedlander

Tension is Your Friend

Tension gets a bad rap, I often say.

Tensing and releasing is how we *move*. We experience a motivating impulse, and then our muscles and tissues respond to that impulse by variously tensing and releasing to operate the joints and limbs required to reach for or move towards the source of our motivation.

Tensing and releasing is how we *feel*. We experience desire as the tension of longing for something we want but do not yet have. We experience anger as the tension of wanting to act or speak out. We feel release when we express or act on feelings like desire and anger.

Tensing and releasing is how we regulate both physical and emotional energy. When the flow of our energy is unfettered, we move with ease and greet emotional experiences without becoming dysregulated. When the flow of our energy meets resistance, *that* is when tension rises to the level of discomfort, and begins to feel like something we need to get rid of.

For many years, I believed all of the above to be true, without the possibility of supporting those beliefs with scientific evidence. Our growing understanding of fascia, and its role in movement and self-regulation, is finally providing support for my long-held convictions.

Because singing involves both movement *and* feeling, a practical understanding of what fascia is, how it evolves, and how to train it can be highly valuable for voice teachers. This is the first installment in a series of four *VOICEPrint* articles exploring fascia, its role in vocal anatomy, and myofascial release techniques you can incorporate into your teaching.

The Human Movement System

Singing is movement. I took up fitness training more than 20 years ago because I wanted to learn how to help my students move their bodies, including their vocal anatomy, more efficiently and intentionally. The prevailing but outmoded paradigm of the human movement system that fitness trainers all study proposes that movements happen when muscles contract and release, adjusting the positions of the bones to which they are attached and thereby operating the joints that link our bones to one another.

Under this paradigm, the goal of exercise is to bring all the muscles in your body into proper length/tension relationships, strengthen the weak muscles and stretch the tight muscles, resulting in balanced strength and efficient function. Trainers are taught that this is best accomplished by *adding load* to joint movements (as in a dumbbell biceps curl, involving movement of the elbow) or groups of joint movements (as in a barbell squat, involving movements of the ankles, knees, and

hips) through the use of tools like free weights, challenging body positions, selectorized machines, etc. The idea is that working the muscles to fatigue yields increased strength upon their recovery. The exercises this paradigm employs are characteristically strenuous—they can elicit significant pain, both during exercise and throughout recovery.

The paradigm of the human movement system that I *now* embrace proposes that our fascial system contains and coordinates *all* of the structures that facilitate movement—not only our muscles, bones, and joints, but also the neural networks that enable us to sense and communicate with all of these structures. Under *this* paradigm, the goal of exercise is to enhance our ability to communicate with and coordinate all of these structures via improved interoception, in order to increase range of motion (flexibility) and force production (strength), with a view to helping us function as desired and enjoy our own bodies more. This is best achieved by *Reducing* load for movements where flexibility and strength have been compromised, e.g. tightness in the lumbo-pelvic-hip complex that keeps you from being able to touch your toes, or weakness throughout your shoulder complex that keeps you from being able to perform a push-up or a pull-up; *Releasing* adhesions and other patterns of fascial rigidity that contribute to, for example, tightness in your lower back and hips and weakness in your shoulders and arms; *Developing* movement patterns that involve your whole body, characterized by a sense of flow rather than rigidity; And only *then* adding load to those movement patterns to further enhance your functional strength and coordination. Exercises that achieve this generally feel good. I also find them fun, as does everyone I have shared them with so far.

In summary: Adding load to your movements tends to make individual muscle groups bigger and stronger. However, engaging in rigorous strength training without also engaging in rigorous *flexibility* training can decrease your range of motion, making you physically *less* functional (even if those washboard abs and popping delts make you *look* more athletic). Adding or reducing load to a given movement to deepen your *awareness* of the movement, without impeding range of motion or coordination, simultaneously enhances both strength *and* flexibility for that movement, making you physically more functional (even if you didn't sweat copiously or feel agonizingly sore the next day).

The Feeling Body

Singing is feeling. Buddhist philosophy codifies *six* senses, rather than five, with distinct senses whereby we experience sight, sound, taste, smell, *the feeling body* (internal sensations as well as external sensations like touch), and *the thinking mind*. Where singing is concerned, I find it very useful to adopt this framing, which equates feelings with body sensations. This, to me, is what is meant by interoception: the ability to observe the feeling body, and the interactivity between emotion and physical sensation.

Investigate whether this makes sense to you:
When you experience an intense emotion, do you detect sensations in your body that correspond to that emotion? Does the flow of your emotions affect the rate or depth of your breathing? Do intense emotions impact your alignment or body language?

While the interactivity of our emotions and our physiology is well-documented, I invite you to investigate how this plays out in your own experience, because your ability to perceive this interactivity directly, via your own interoceptive sense, is what informs your movement choices.

Earlier, I proposed that when the flow of our energy is unfettered, we move and feel with ease, but that when the flow of our energy meets resistance, our physical and emotional rises to a level that creates discomfort. Healthy, supple fascia promotes the flow of movement and sensation; when fascia becomes comparatively rigid, the stiffness creates resistance to the flow of movement and sensation.

In 2005, German psychologist and biologist Robert Schleip published a groundbreaking paper asserting the contractile nature of fascia and its impact on movement. It turns out that it is not *just* our muscle fibers that tense and release to move us around. Each muscle fiber is encased in a connective tissue layer called the *endomysium*—a type of fascia. Groups of muscle fibers are wrapped in the *perimysium*—another type of fascia. Our muscles, bones, and organs are all encased within and connected with each other via layers and networks of fascia. That is why I stated that our fascial system contains and coordinates all of the structures that facilitate movement, including our muscles, bones, joints, and the neural networks that enable us to sense and communicate with all of these structures.

Healthy fascia is characterized by a responsive elasticity. If you were to bounce up and down (as in jumping rope), the elasticity of a healthy, supple Achilles tendon would create a buoyant recoil upon landing and bounce you back up. The momentum of the repeated movement would take over, conferring ease and flow on your jumping.

However, fascia can become comparatively stiff and rigid from reduced movement and the habitually held positions characteristic of our sedentary culture. Rather than forming springy, interlaced, easily stretched collagen fibers, the fascial sheets and tendons end up weaving a more tightly-woven "fabric" that Schleip describes as felt-like. If you attempted to jump rope after years of sedentary adult life, you would likely experience less efficient recoil in your Achilles tendon, as well as throughout all of the fascial structures holding your spine together.

When I lost access to my gym during the pandemic lockdown, I had this brilliant idea to take up jumping rope. That was before I knew what I know now about fascia! For years, my preferred cardio modalities had been low- or no-impact, i.e. no bouncing my body weight up and down. But I gave that no thought, because I had become accustomed to having my body do whatever I asked of it. So I went outside with my jump rope, lasted about ten minutes… and then spent the next two weeks in agony.

My Achilles tendons were fine—after all, they had been able to keep me bouncing the whole time. It was my spine that couldn't take the impact. I now know that long ago, I began developing significant rigidity in the fascia organizing my spine as a consequence of fracturing two ribs that I have no recollection of having broken. The evidence showed up on a CT-scan during my treatment for cancer last year, but the evidence was also wired into my body in a way that I am now able to map more clearly. At the time, all I knew is that all of the tissues supporting my spine had seized up and were loudly screaming with displeasure.

It was a humbling experience, and the process of loosening up the stiffness and alleviating the pain sparked my ongoing fascination with fascia. I traded in my jump rope for a set of massage balls and spent the rest of the pandemic lockdown using them to unlock and learn about my own tissues.

Myofascial Release

"Myofascial release" is the term used to describe any means whereby we promote greater suppleness and reduce rigidity in our fascia. It is a kind of self-massage using tools like rubber balls, foam rollers, and vibrating objects of assorted sizes and shapes.

I find myofascial release a delightful way to unlock and learn about our own tissues, thereby increasing the flow of movement and sensation throughout our bodies and regulating our physical and emotional tension. It works well for alleviating the kind of pain and stiffness you might experience from an ill-advised foray into jumping rope, and it also works well for increasing range of motion and promoting flow throughout our anatomy—including our vocal anatomy.

Here are a couple of introductory exercises to help you begin investigating and unlocking *your* tissues. These moves require a pair or two of massage balls (see below for some recommendations).

Plantar Fascia Release
You can perform this exercise either sitting down or standing up. If you are standing up, hold onto a chair or brace your hand against a the wall to support your balance until you become accustomed to the exercise. Place a small massage ball under the ball of your foot between your big and second toes.
If you are sitting, lean forward so you can easily increase or decrease the pressure of the ball against the bottom of your foot. If you are standing, explore increasing and decreasing the extent to which your weight is supported by the foot on top of the ball. Slowly roll your foot over the ball, moving up and down the length of your foot and sideways across the width of your foot. Keep the intensity of the massage in the "hurts so good" range rather than aggressively digging into your tissues. Repeat for the other foot.

Spinal Rollout
You can perform this exercise with a foam roller, but it is revelatory to perform it with a pair of massage balls in a tote. This video demonstrates how to perform the exercise using a foam roller, and is safe for the thoracic spine (upper back). The directions below are for performing the exercise using a pair of massage balls in a tote. This version can be safely performed on the entire spine, provided you listen carefully to the feedback you are getting from your body as you roll your spine over the balls. The more slowly and mindfully you perform any myofascial release exercise, the better for enhancing your interoception and your ability to communicate well with your tissues. Lie face-up on an exercise mat. Bring your knees up and place your feet flat on the floor with your toes pointing forward, your hips, knees, and ankles in alignment with one another. Position a pair of medium or large massage balls in a tote under your spine just below your ribs. Your spine should feel cradled between the two balls, with the balls gently pressing against the tissues on either side of your spine.
Raise your hips slightly off the mat. Roll your spine over the balls in whatever direction feels in need of release. You can move so that the position of the balls migrates either towards your pelvis or towards your shoulders. The foam roll video linked above offers a good demonstration of how to use your arms and legs to navigate your position on top of the balls in their tote. Alternatively, you may prefer to change the position of the massage balls by manually placing them between individual vertebrae. In each position, lie on top of the balls breathing slowly and deeply while noticing the pressure the balls exert on the tissues surrounding each vertebra. Keep the intensity of the massage in the "hurts so good" range rather than aggressively digging into your tissues.

I encourage you to acquire massage balls that were expressly designed for myofascial release, rather than using tennis balls (too big for your plantar fascia and too unyielding

generally) or lacrosse balls (too small for the spinal rollout and *much* too firm—you want to gently stretch the fascia, not bruise it). I recommend using one of Jill Miller's small Therapy Balls for the plantar fascia and a pair of either the Therapy Balls Plus or the Alpha Twins for the spinal rollout. (I do not receive any compensation for recommending these products; I just find them far superior to anything else on the market.)

I hope you enjoy these exercises! Feel free to reach out to me with any questions or to share your experiences. Part 2 of this series will offer myofascial release exercises for the anatomy involved in breath coordination. Part 3 will provide myofascial release exercises for the anatomy involved in phonation. Part 4 will offer myofascial release exercises for the anatomy involved in resonance and articulation.

Claudia Friedlander *is a voice teacher and fitness trainer based in New York City. Born in Queens and raised in New Jersey, she began her musical studies as a clarinetist. Her passion was fueled by her early experiences playing in the Young Artists Orchestra at Tanglewood under the batons of Seiji Ozawa and Leonard Bernstein. This led to private studies with Richard Stoltzman, a Master's degree in Clarinet from Peabody Conservatory, and a brief stint as the principal clarinetist of Orquesta Sinfónica del Estado de México.*

During her undergraduate studies at Bennington College, she was encouraged to study singing by longtime faculty member Frank Baker. She sang while continuing to play her instrument, earning a Master's degree in Voice at Peabody simultaneously with her clarinet degree. Eventually, her fascination with the physiological process of singing eclipsed her passion for clarinet. In 1995, she began doctoral studies in vocal performance and pedagogy at McGill University, which she completed in 1999.

In 2002, Dr. Friedlander moved to New York City, apprenticed herself to renowned pedagogue W. Stephen Smith, and established her voice studio. In her first few years of teaching, frustration with her inability to address the mechanical dysfunction some of her students possessed in a methodical and rigorous way motivated her to study kinesiology. After receiving her certification as a personal trainer from the National Academy of Sports Medicine, she became inspired to apply the concept of sport-specific training to the professional voice.

Dr. Friedlander has presented workshops on vocal fitness for The Voice Foundation and the Performing Arts Medicine Association, and was an invited panel discussant on health and wellness for OPERA America. Her students have performed on Broadway, and at leading opera houses including The Santa Fe Opera and the Metropolitan Opera. She is the author of the monthly column "Musings on Mechanics" for Classical Singer Magazine as well as a widely read and cited blog on vocal technique and fitness, The Liberated Voice. In 2008, she joined the faculty of the Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall, where her most recent project was the development, in collaboration with Joyce DiDonato, of The Singer's Audition Handbook, an interactive online career development guide for young singers.

Dr. Wendy LeBorgne is a renowned voice pathologist, international speaker, best-selling author, and distinguished executive communication coach. With over two decades of experience, she stands as a leading figure in voice, communication, and the realm of vocal athletes, blending the artistic and scientific aspects of voice to influence and impact others profoundly. Her innovative work on Voice Branding™ has been highlighted in a notable TED talk, showcasing her insights into authentic and engaging communication.

An accomplished author, Dr. LeBorgne has contributed to over 10 textbook chapters and 20 articles on voice, alongside delivering more than 200 lectures and workshops worldwide. Additionally, she is the co-author of the seminal text, "The Vocal Athlete." Dr. Wendy carries a distinctively balanced skillset combining the art and science of communication. From the boardroom to the bright lights of Broadway, Dr. Wendy's vocal athletes range from Fortune 100 CEOs to Grammy-award-winning artists. Understanding and embracing high-pressure communication and performance situations Dr. Wendy empowers her clients to possess the necessary skills to ensure their voice is heard and their message is effectively communicated.

Anatomy & Physiology for the Singing Voice

Taught by internationally recognized voice scientist, pedagogue, and author, Dr. Wendy LeBorgne, this 10-hour asynchronous course provides singing-voice teachers with an accessible, comprehensive foundation in the anatomy and physiology of the singing voice. Designed for practical application in both the studio and in performance, the course bridges science and art, equipping participants with evidence-based tools to elevate their teaching and performance.

Through a sequence of five unique modules, participants will explore anatomical terminology, neural pathways, posture and alignment, respiratory function, laryngeal anatomy and physiology, and resonance/articulation systems. Each module combines video lectures with slides, PDF slide decks, assigned readings, video demonstrations, and short knowledge assessments, ensuring that content is not only absorbed but also actively applied to real-world teaching scenarios.

One of the hallmarks of Dr. LeBorgne's approach is the integration of active listening, observation, and applied pedagogy. Beyond memorizing structures, participants will learn to translate scientific knowledge into practical voice-building exercises that can be adapted for singers across genres. By the end of the course, teachers will be able to describe essential anatomical and physiological principles of voice production, explain their functional relevance to singing, and create evidence-informed studio exercises grounded in these principles.

Timeframe & Structure:
The course consists of five modules (approximately 2 hours each), allowing participants to move at their own pace. On average, most teachers complete the course in 4–6 weeks, though the asynchronous format offers maximum flexibility.

Materials:

- Asynchronous video lectures with accompanying slides
- PDF slide decks for easy reference
- Supplemental articles provided within each module
- Demonstration videos of targeted voice exercises
- Quizzes and applied-learning assignments to reinforce concepts

While *The Vocal Athlete, 3rd Edition* (LeBorgne & Rosenberg, 2024) is recommended as a companion text, it is not required for completion. Supplemental readings are included to ensure accessibility for all participants.

Dr. LeBorgne's company (Professional Voice Consultants, LLC dba Dr. Wendy Voice) extends her expertise to a private clinical-coaching practice for vocal athletes, where her clients achieve prominence across various platforms such as radio, TV, film, and live performances on Broadway, Off-Broadway, national and commercial music tours, and opera stages globally. Her holistic approach to voice and communication training has made her an indispensable figure in the field, helping executives and performers excel and maintain their vocal health and audience engagement across diverse settings.

Approach & Outcomes:

This course reflects Dr. LeBorgne's internationally respected pedagogy—balancing scientific rigor with practical application. Singing voice teachers will walk away with both deeper knowledge and studio-ready strategies. Competencies include:

- Mastery of anatomical terminology and key neural pathways in voice production
- Understanding of respiration, phonation, and resonance/articulation systems for classical and non-classical singing
- Development of evidence-based exercises tailored to maximize vocal efficiency and artistry

Whether you are an experienced pedagogue or a developing teacher seeking to expand your toolkit, this course offers a rare opportunity to learn directly from a leading voice scientist in a format designed for practical integration into your teaching practice.

NYSTA