November/December 2025 Volume 23, Issue 2

VOICEPrints

The Journal of the New York
Singing Teachers' Association

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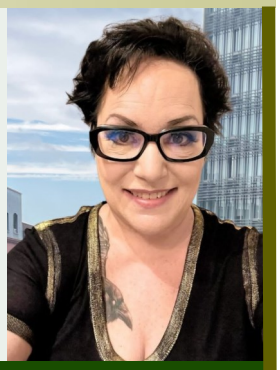
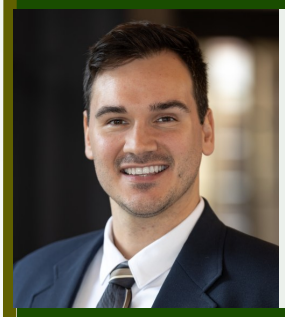
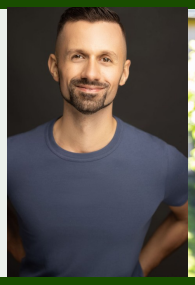


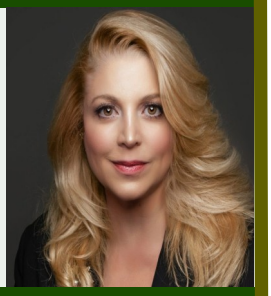
Claudia Friedlander, featured contributor



Evan Stenzel, featured contributor



Justin John Moniz and Minnita Daniel-Cox—contributors



Alison Bolshhoi, Contralto—Presenter

UPCOMING EVENTS

An Opera Masterclass
With Alison Bolshoi

Join us Sunday evening December 7 at 6:30 pm at the National Opera Center for an operatic masterclass with contralto Alison Bolshoi. 330 7th Avenue, 7th Floor, NYC. A light reception will follow.

VOICEPrints

- Ronald Land—Editor-in-Chief
- 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

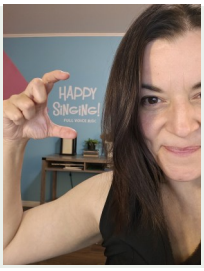
February 22, 2026
6-8 PM EST
Online via Zoom

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

May

May 3, 2026 6:00pm
National Opera Center
330 7th Avenue, 7th Floor,
NYC

Echoes from the East: East Asian Repertoire and Japanese Song Masterclass.
Presented by:
Sahoko Sato Timpone



Alison Bolshoi, American contralto, recently made her role debut in Azucena in *Il Trovatore* with Boheme Opera NJ. Also with Boheme, in 2024 she made her role debut in *Carmen*, both to stellar reviews. Other recent engagements include Giovanna in *Rigoletto* with Dallas Opera, Amneris in *Aida*, Die Hexe in *Hänsel und Gretel* with Boheme Opera, and concerts with MidAmerica Productions and the New England Symphonic Ensemble at Carnegie Hall. She is currently on tour in the Midwest in the concert oratorio *Thy Will Be Done* in the singing role of Narrator.

Earlier in March 2025, Ms. Bolshoi sang Dalila in *Samson et Dalila* in Jane Marsh's concert series at Temple Emmanuel, NYC. Other past notable engagements include the Foreign Princess in *Rusalka* at the South Bohemian Opera Festival, Czech Republic, creating the role of Debbie Phillips in Peter Stopschinski 's *Bum Phillips: All American Opera* at New York's La Mama Theatre, later revived in Houston, and while still singing soprano repertoire Senta (cover) in *Der Fliegende Holländer* at San Francisco Opera and the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with Il Piccolo Teatro dell'Opera, New York.

Ms. Bolshoi imbues the Wagner and Verdi repertoire with a vocal radiance and lyricism seldom heard in dramatic voices. Her insightful interpretation of each character makes her presence onstage mesmerizing. Ms. Bolshoi made her international debut at La Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, in a concert featuring excerpts from Wagner, Strauss and Schillings. Shortly afterward she joined the roster of The San Francisco Opera as a cover in *Der fliegende Holländer.* Ms. Bolshoi was a soloist with The Huntsville Symphony, Alabama, and gave concerts as part of the Bach to Bartok Festival with Accademia Pianistica, in Imola, Italy. She sang leading roles with One World Symphony, NY, and was a soloist for the Alfredo Silipigni Memorial Concert with the New Jersey State Opera at NJPAC. Ms. Bolshoi sang her first Verdi Requiem with the NY Symphonic Arts Ensemble, for their 25-Ye

Year Anniversary Gala in 2018. Later that same year she was asked to sing the Berlioz' *La mort de Cléopâtre* with the same company. Ms. Bolshoi made her debut with Opera Theatre of Montclair (NJ) in 2017 in a concert version of *Tristan und Isolde* by Richard Wagner. She created the contralto role of Debbie Phillips in *Bum Phillips: All American Opera*, at the La Mama Theatre in NYC in 2014. The opera was received well by NY critics, and was brought to Houston, Texas in September 2015. In 2010, Ms. Bolshoi was the soloist for the opening gala concert at Ceský Krumlov, with the Prague Radio Symphony, Czech Republic, and returned the following year to perform in Dvorak's *Rusalka*. The production took place in the historic Revolving Theatre, and Ms. Bolshoi became a spokesperson for the theatre.

Ms. Bolshoi made her professional debut singing the Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with Il Piccolo Teatro dell'Opera, NY in 2008. She worked for 12 years in the Wagner Festival Orchestra Program in NYC run by Patricia Sage and Barbara Conrad, intensely studying Wagner roles that she still sings today with aplomb.

Ms. Bolshoi won the Liederkranz International Competition, Wagner Section, The Gerda Lissner Foundation Award, and the Altamura-Caruso Foundation Award. She has been recognized through continued awards and sponsorship by: The American Wagner Association, NY, The Wagner Society of New York and The Wagner Association of America, Chicago. At the beginning of her career, Ms. Bolshoi was sponsored by The Evelyn Lear & Thomas Stewart Emerging Singers Program of Washington, D.C.

Letter from the President

Elizabeth Saunders

Dear Members,

In an effort to expand NYSTA's international reach as the singing teacher organization uniquely poised to bring the best of New York to the world, we are undergoing a website refresh and re-branding, as well as creating some new ventures to bring value to all of our members.

To this end, several new board members have been appointed to assist not only with the ongoing tasks of running this complex volunteer organization, but also to create more dynamic and constructive dialogue about how we can increase value to our membership both in the NY area and around the globe. While interviewing each of these new board members over the past few months I was thrilled with the input each of them offered regarding how we can increase value to the membership, make the onboarding process more welcoming, and expand the number of resources we offer to you and future members. With that in mind, I present to you:

Patricia Caciedo

Patricia Caicedo is a soprano, musicologist, and trained physician whose work redefines the role of music in society. Recognized as the voice of Iberian and Latin American art song, often described as its ambassador, she is one of the leading interpreters and researchers of this repertoire bringing forgotten composers and overlooked languages—Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, and Indigenous—into the spotlight. Founder of the Barcelona Festival of Song and author of *The Latin American Art Song* and *We Are What We Listen To*, Patricia's work challenges Eurocentric traditions and explores music's power to heal, connect, and transform.

Claudia Friedlander

Voice teacher, fitness expert, and author **Claudia Friedlander**, DMus, 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. Her first book, *Complete Vocal Fitness: A Singer's Guide to Physical Training, Anatomy, and Biomechanics* was published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2018. 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 she developed, in collaboration with Joyce DiDonato, *The Singer's Audition Handbook*, an interactive online career development guide for young singers that was published in book form in 2019.

Walker Germaine Jackson

Walker Jermaine Jackson is a tenor, multi-instrumentalist, and conductor living in New York City. Walker Jermaine studied Voice, Music Theory, Eurhythmics, Piano, and Conducting at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, and the Interlochen Arts Academy. He has performed throughout North America and Europe in an array of roles, both leading and secondary. A lover of all opera, he has a particular specialty and love of late 19th and 20th century works, and his professional choral singing has gifted him the opportunity to work with countless leading conductors throughout the world. In addition to vocal skills that allow him to cross over into jazz and musical theater and cabaret styles, he has been a pianist for more than 20 years, serving as music director and conductor specializing in vocal works: opera, musical theater, oratorio, sacred, and crossover work. He is also an active collaborative pianist for singers and a vocal coach and maintains his vocal coaching studio in NYC, where he specializes in teaching a variety of vocal styles. He also teaches classes in music theory, harmony, keyboard skills, chart reading, and improvisation. Outside of vocal work, Walker Jermaine has a background as an orchestrally-trained clarinetist, an instructor of Dalcroze Eurhythmics and Music Theory, and dabbles with musical composition.

Letter from the President continued...

John Koch, baritone, has performed over 35 operatic and 50 oratorio roles throughout the world, and is General Director and Co-Founder and of the Midwest Institute of Opera (MIOpera), in addition to maintaining a full voice studio and conducting the Illinois State University Civic Chorale since 2010. The MIOpera summer opera program was created to give young emerging singers from all over the world the opportunity to stage and perform a complete operatic role. The program is growing rapidly and has hired professionals such as Maestro Joshua Greene and Liora Maurer from the Metropolitan Opera, Lucy Arner of the Mannes School of Music, and James Marvel, Director of Opera at UT-Knoxville to lead participants in fully-staged productions. 2014 brought the premiere of "MIOperatunities," a matinée version of *Carmen* that filled the performance hall with young students, special needs students, and older community members at no cost to them, offering a "highlights" opera that included interpretive signers, Flamenco dancing by the USA Ballet, information on Spanish culture and French opera in the 19th century, and a "Meet and Greet the Artists" session post-performance.

John Koch

Tracy Marie Koch, spinto soprano, earned her M.M. in Vocal Performance and Literature from Northwestern University. In addition to an active singing career and serving as owner and teacher of the thriving Koch Private Studio of Voice and Piano, she uses her extensive background as a singer, actress and dancer to bring new perspectives to the opera genre in her role as staff director for MIOpera where she has directed operas for over 8 seasons. She is also the Artistic Director of the dynamic all girl a cappella group "Beauties and the Beat." A winner of the 2003 Bel Canto Foundation of Chicago, she made her recording debut as soprano soloist on David Maslanka's world premiere of *A Carl Sandburg Reader* released by Albany Records.

Tracy Marie Koch

One of NYSTA's newest apprentice teacher members, with inspirations ranging from pop, rock, jazz, R&B, blues, soul, bachata, salsa, merengue, and rap, **AJ Vargas** has a wide range of skills to bring to his students: teaching vocals, guitar, ukulele, and piano. Playing professionally for the past 6 years as a frontman, guitarist, and background singer, he has performed in countless venues— from bars in the NYC/NJ area to Madison Square Garden. He attended the New School in Manhattan, graduating with a BFA in Jazz and Contemporary Music.

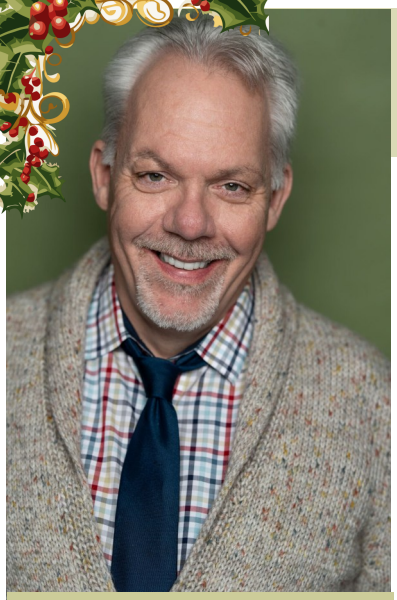
AJ Vargas

I am excited for the vitality that these new board members will bring to NYSTA, and hope that they will ensure that the best of what NYSTA has been will be maintained while we continue to open up the variety of offerings that we bring to you, our members. As always, YOUR input is important to us. And if there are initiatives you would like us to consider, please let us know!

Wishing you the best of the season,

Elizabeth

NYSTA



Ronald F. Land

Letter from the Editor

Greetings Gentle Readers!

What a pleasure it is to bring you this issue of VOICEPrints! Although arriving a little late to the party, it is stuffed with great material (see what I did there with the holiday reference…).

Part 2 of Claudia Friedlander's four-part series on myofascial release is terrifically informative as to how the fascia behave in terms of breathing. In a new feature called "role study" Evan Stenzel provides an analysis of two famous singers and their approach to the role of Eisenstein in Die Fledermaus – one a baritone and one a tenor. Inspired by his own performance of the role, and his Doctoral study, he takes a careful look at four moments of the role and how they might be analyzed to help an artist determine a performance strategy.

This past October, we lost the great artist and teacher Roberta Alexander. Ms. Alexander's influence on generations of singers cannot be overestimated. Many students of concert song were introduced to much of the repertoire by her large catalogue of recordings – often the first or most complete recording of a composer's work. Justin John Moniz and Minnita Daniel-Cox have distilled an interview that they did with her as a memorial to her contribution to and impact on our industry. I am listening to her sing Strauss songs as I write this and remembering her recitals fondly – if you haven't listened to her recently, please reacquaint yourself with her.

VOICEPrints endeavors to present experienced and younger authors alike. It pleases me that Evan Stenzel is currently a student of Justin John Moniz at NYU, where he is a Doctoral candidate and an adjunct Professor, and that we can present them both in this issue. If you are new to publishing your writing – please do not be afraid to submit your work to VOICEPrints for consideration – we are anxious to assist you in promoting your work!

Finally – what holiday season can be complete without a cocktail recipe? Most recently I have been providing recipes for cocktails which are limited of ingredients and simple to prepare. But it's the most wonderful time of the year – which means parties and crowds. This recipe, courtesy of liquor.com is one I like a lot. They published it for a Super Bowl party – but it suits holiday gatherings brilliantly, so I have taken the liberty to rename it Happy Holiday Cocktail. A little more complicated than an "equal parts" cocktail – it renders a delicious result that can handle up to 20 guests. Try it for your next holiday gathering – send me an email and let me know what you think.

Wishing you all the best for the holiday season, and a healthy, prosperous New Year!

Ron Land

Happy Holiday Punch
Serves 20

Ingredients
25 whole cloves
6 cinnamon sticks
1 teaspoon whole allspice
1 750 ml bottle 100-proof bourbon
1 750 ml bottle Laird's apple brandy
25 oz ruby red grapefruit juice, freshly squeezed
25 oz honey
10 oz sweet tea
Garnish: apple, cored and sliced

Method
Wrap the cloves, cinnamon sticks, and allspice in cheesecloth, tie into a bundle and place in a punch bowl. Add the remaining ingredients and stir thoroughly. Fill with large ice cubes, stir, and garnish with apple slices.

Role Study: Interpreting Eisenstein: A Comparative Analysis of Tenor Peter Seiffert and Baritone Wolfgang Brendel in Johann Strauss II's Die Fledermaus

by: Evan Stenzel

In contemporary musical society, individuals often observe tenors and baritones performing the same repertoire. A relevant example is Aaron Tveit, a tenor, who recently took on the lead role of Sweeney Todd in Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. This is a character traditionally played by baritones, such as George Hearn or Bryn Terfel. This phenomenon is not new, as such performances can be traced back to operetta. The Metropolitan Opera has seen tenor Paul Groves and baritone Nathan Gunn perform the same role of Danilo in Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*. This situation presents a unique challenge for vocalists. Suppose tenors perform the same repertoire as baritones, who usually use mode one and higher amplitudes in the middle voice to be heard over an orchestra. In that case, it suggests that tenors will mainly perform in mode one, minimize mode two, and have a higher vocal load in the middle voice. Therefore, tenors need to adopt a similar strategic approach to achieve success comparable to their lower-register counterparts in these roles. This analysis aims to examine four specific sections of Gabriel Eisenstein's vocals from Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus*. A comparison will be made between two classical singers, Peter Seiffert (tenor) and Wolfgang Brendel (baritone). Both will be analyzed through spectral analysis to clarify their diction choices, resonance strategies, and role adaptations to manage vocal load. The primary argument of this analysis is that baritones and tenors, due to their distinct vocal traits, should set aside their differences and adopt a similar approach to the role. Both need to use a mode one dominant register with clear diction, employ a brighter resonance to produce a sound that pierces over dense orchestration, and modify their vocal load as needed through range adjustments. Consequently, when an instructor assigns a role like Eisenstein, which spans a wide tessitura (B3 to A5), they might find that the singer performs more efficiently by adopting a more neutral laryngeal position through forward tongue placement, tuning vowels to access the singer's formant, and changing pitches when necessary to improve clarity or lessen vocal strain.

The score utilized in this analysis and the accompanying excerpts are sourced from the Kalmus edition of Die Fledermaus. The recordings included in this comparison feature two distinguished singers: tenor Peter Seiffert and baritone Wolfgang Brendel. The methodology involved selecting four excerpts from Eisenstein's part, primarily in the middle and upper registers of the character's vocal range. Each excerpt was extracted from the original recording, converted to MP3 format using Audacity, and subsequently imported into VoceVista for spectral analysis.[i]

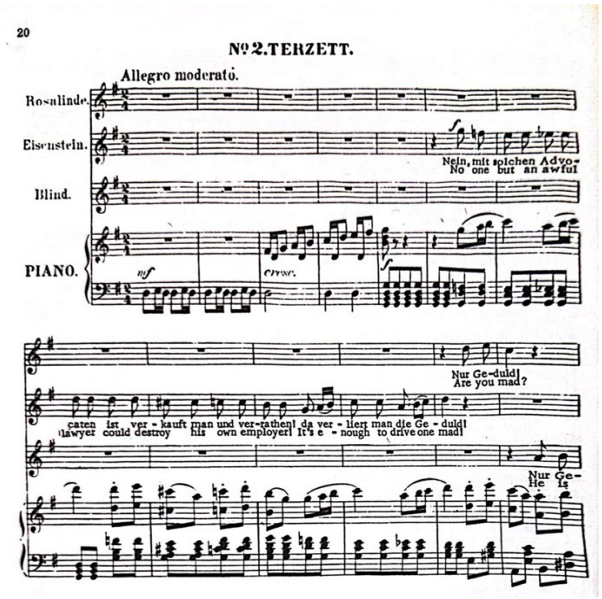
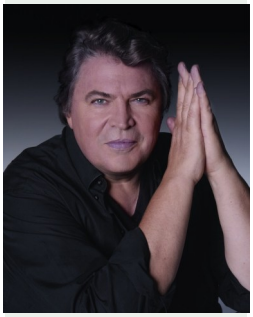



Figure 1[ii]

Johann Strauss II



Peter Seiffert

Wofgang Brendel

[1]Voce Vista Video Ver. 5.9.2.8284.

[2]Johann Strauss II, "Die Fledermaus," ed. Edwin F. Kalmus (Vocal Score: Kalmus, 1968 1874). 20.

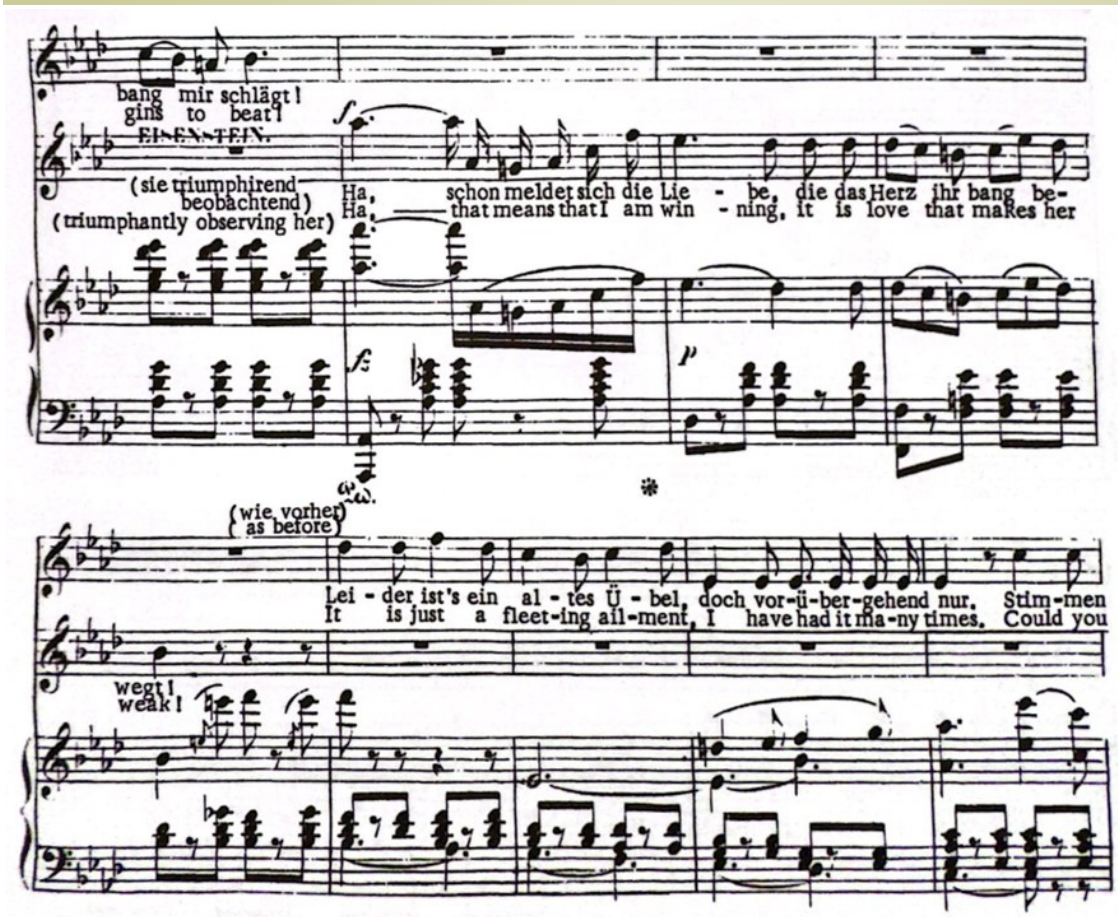
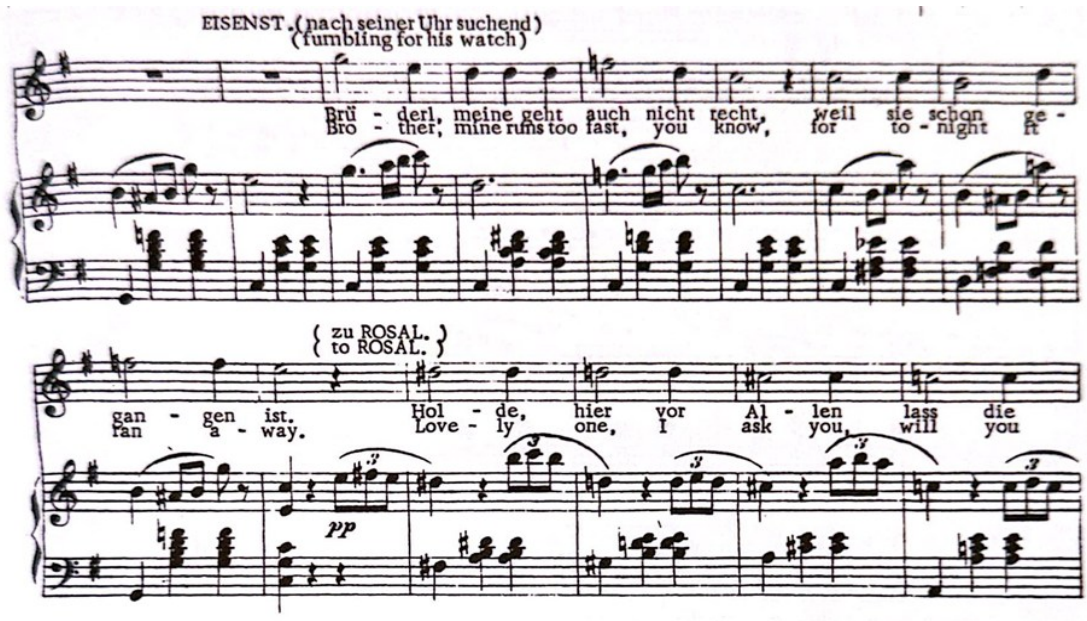



Figure 2[iii]

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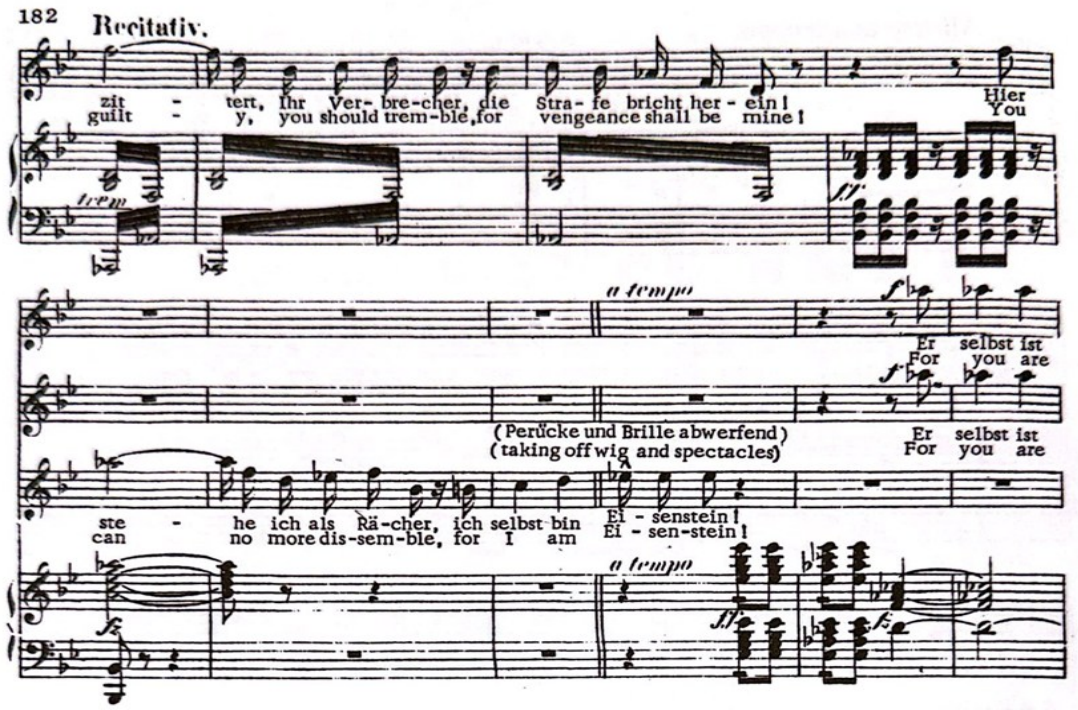
Figure 4[v]

The following chart displays the pertinent recording information between the two singers. It can be used to locate each of the recordings analyzed and put through spectral analysis.

Score Number, Measures	Seiffert, Track Number[vi]	Brendel, Track Number[vii]
No. 2 m. 6-12	Track 4: 00:03.5-00:08.5 (Figure 9)	Disk 1, Track 5: 00:04.5-00:09.8 (Figure 13)
No. 9 m. 70-73	Track 11: 01:50.4-01:59.4 (Figure 10)	Disk 2, Track 5: 01:58.5-02:06.5 (Figure 14)
No. 11 m. 103-110 from "Genug damit, genug!"	Track 21: 01:38.9-01:46.8. (Figure 11)	Disk 2, Track 10: 02:06.3-02:14.2 (Figure 15)
No. 15 m. 229- 233	Track 24: 06:27.2-06:37.9 (Figure 12)	Disk 2, Track 14: 06:25.5-06:39.5 (Figure 16)

A phonetic translation is also provided and will be used as vowel tuning strategies are discussed.

Figure 5: At this moment, Eisenstein returns home, complaining about his incompetent lawyer.

Nein	mit	sol-chen	Advo-caten	ist	verkauft	man	und	Verra-then!	da
[na:ɪn	mɪt	zɔlçən	ad-vo:katən	ɪst	fɛ̯kaʊ̯ft	man	ʊnt	fɛr:ra:tən	da:
verliert	man	die	Geduld!						
fɛ̯li:t̯	man	di:	gədʊlt]						

Figure 6: In this iconic moment of the "watch duet," Eisenstein asserts his triumph while flirting with the Hungarian countess (who happens to be his wife in disguise).

Ha	schon	meldet	sich	die	Liebe,	die	das	Herz	ihr	bang	bewegt!
[ha:	ʃo:n	mɛldət	zɪç	di:	li:bə	di:	das	hɛrts	i:ɐ̯	baŋ	bəve:kt]

Figure 7: Eisenstein is drunk and conversing with his new "friend" Falke, about the fact that he no longer has a watch, and that the countess stole it from him.

Brüder	meine,	geht	auch	nicht	recht,	weil	sie	schon	gegangen	ist
[bry:dɐ	ma:ɪnə	ge:t	aʊ̯x	nɪçt	rɛçt	va:ɪl	zi:	ʃo:n	gəgaŋən	ɪst

Figure 8: Eisenstein reveals himself disguised as the lawyer to his wife and her "lover" in jail

Hier	stehe	ich	als	Rächer,	ich	selbst	bin	Eisenstein!
[hi:ɐ̯	ʃte:ə	ɪç	als	rɛçɐ	ɪç	zɛlpst	bɪn	a:ɪzənʃta:ɪn]

The New York Times describes Peter Seiffert's voice as "possessing considerable Wagnerian power" and, more notably, "a genuine tenorial quality that combines vocal strength with technical agility in the higher range."[viii] Another reviewer calls his voice "nuanced" and considers him one of the finest lyrical tenors of his generation, "possessing a shining and brilliant tone."[ix] Listening to Seiffert on the Strauss II recording allows one to perceive the insights of both reviewers expressed musically. Seiffert clearly enunciates words and musical phrases, demonstrating flowing legato and a ringing quality. Each spectrogram taken from the recordings is shown below. The y-axis indicates pitch frequency relative to the fundamental and its harmonics. Meanwhile, the x-axis represents time, and the color shows amplitude, with red indicating areas of highest intensity.

In the spectrograms, one observes a faint blue line indicating the fundamental pitch being sung by the performer. Beginning with Seiffert's initial spectrogram (Figure 9), a harmonic enhancement is evident on the G4 note, accompanied by the word "Nein." This denotes the utilization of the singer's formant, as evidenced by the ringing tone and areas of intensity within the upper harmonic range of 2,400Hz to 3,200Hz.[x] The section that follows the [n] phoneme in musical Figure 1 is a complex moment characterized by rapidly moving notes on a descending vocal line. While this may pose challenges for many young singers, Seiffert adeptly generates the nasal tone with resonance, thereby maintaining the singer's formant while employing the [n] resonance as an acoustic balancing technique, as well as a means to release the jaw and create a more relaxed articulatory space.[xi] In Seiffert's Figure 10, another precise application of the singer's formant is observable on the words "Ha" and "Liebe." An [a] vowel exhibits an open timbre above its usual tuning location, sounding somewhat spread and pronounced.[xii] Seiffert avoids this open timbre from the A-flat 4 to the E-flat 4 by creating vowel harmonization between the two words by modifying his [a] vowel in "Ha" and [i] vowel in "Liebe" towards an [e] vowel. By shifting the vowels toward [e], he creates a passaggio bridge that unifies the vowels and reduces the possibility of open timbre in the sound. One of Seiffert's most remarkable attributes is his utilization of legato in the role of Eisenstein, which is best illustrated in Figure 11. Effective legato necessitates register equalization, controlled subglottic pressure, stability of vertical laryngeal position, and source-tract compensations such as the singer's formant, which provides acoustic continuity to the tone.[xiii] Seiffert regulates his subglottic pressure, as evidenced by a consistent vibrato and a stable laryngeal position, attributed to the [y] vowel of "Brüder." Most singers in the male passaggio require a little [y] to provide more pharyngeal space and lower the higher formants to produce the clustering needed for the singer's formant.[xiv] Interestingly, the singer's formant is less present here. Instead, there is a significantly enhanced presence on the second and third harmonics, suggesting an open timbre or *voce aperta,* as evidenced by the F1/H2 acoustic coupling and the bright, straightforward tone.[xv] The most precise instance of the singer's formant being utilized by Seiffert is illustrated in Figure 12. His sound quality on the [e] vowel in the A-flat 4 during the word "Stehe" is impressive. He avoids excessive brightening by slightly adding back space and singing with an [ae]-like quality to balance the ringing

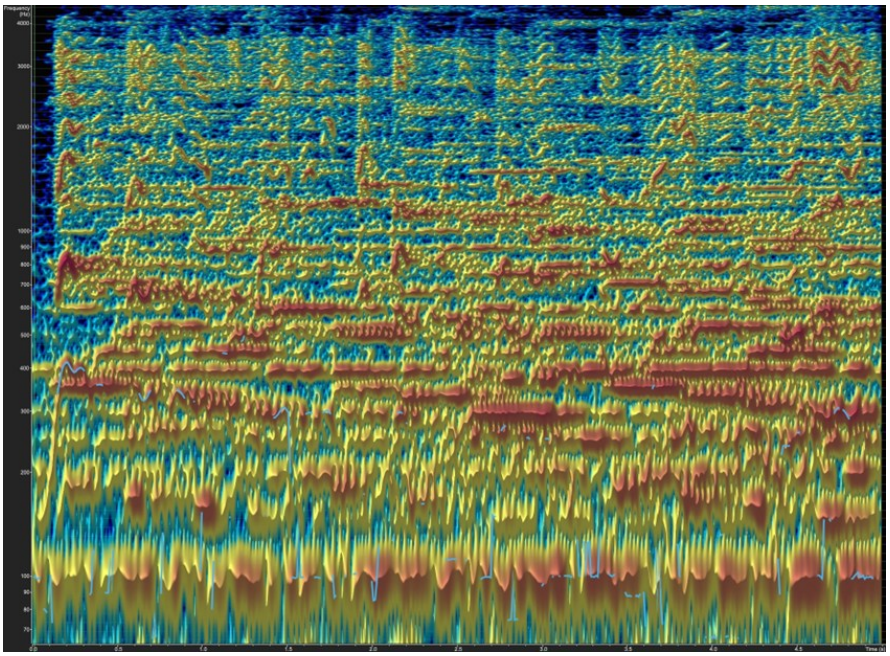

Figure 9

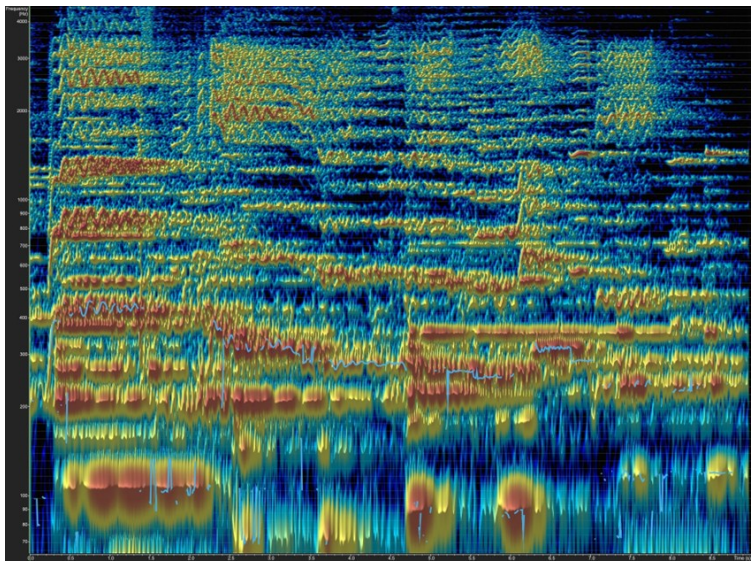

Figure 10

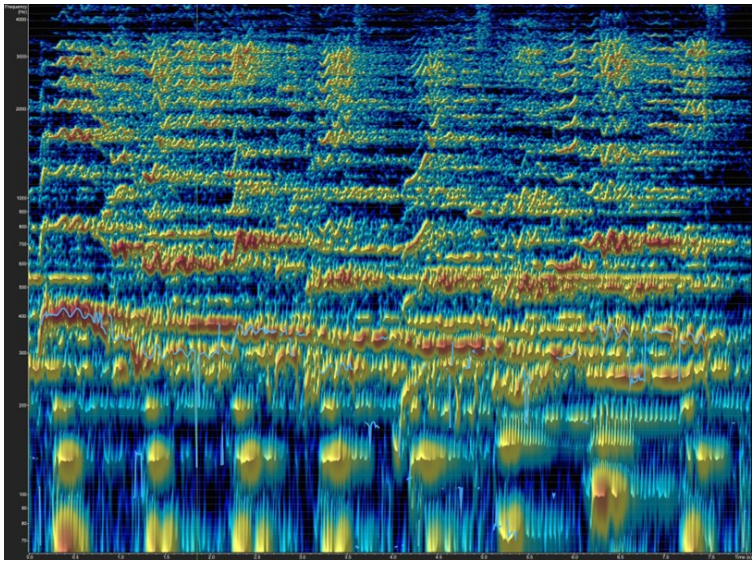

Figure 11

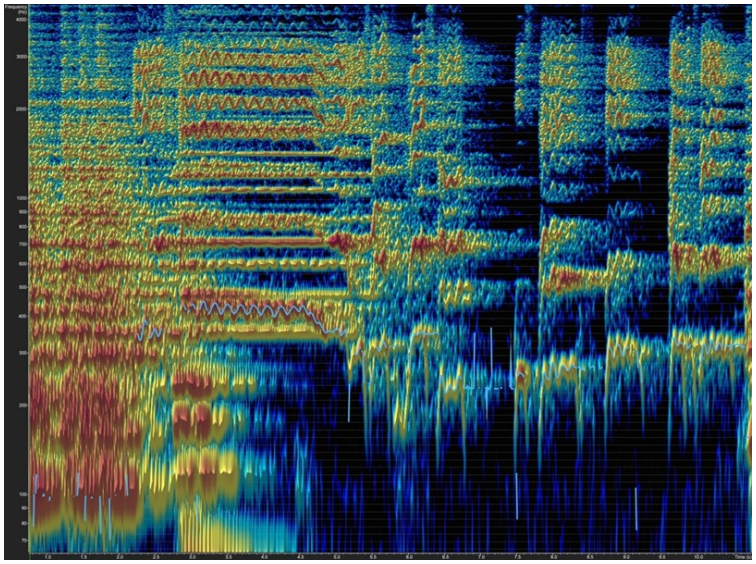

Figure 12

overtones.[xvi] This adjustment also allows him to vocally harmonize the [e] vowel of “Stehe” with the [ɛ] vowel of “Räche” and create a smooth descent into arguably the most declamatory moment of the opera: “ich selbst bin Eisenstein!” This encompasses one of Eisenstein's most dramatic moments as he reveals himself and musically communicates it in a manner that would undoubtedly resonate throughout the hall in any operatic setting.

When discussing Wolfgang Brendel’s voice, Classics Today describes it as “able to sing with a lyrical quality reminiscent of a spring day, showcasing a voice that remains tireless and does not show strain.” A more recent review referred to Brendel as a *tour de force,* emphasizing his “still-resonant baritone that effectively and emotionally carries him through moments of introspection and high drama.”[xvii] Brendel’s commanding baritone is readily apparent in his portrayal of Eisenstein. This firmness is evident in his legato and resonance technique, as well as in how he handles the tones within Eisenstein’s higher register. Like Seiffert, a spectrogram extracted from the recordings is presented below. The y-axis indicates the pitch frequency concerning the fundamental and its associated harmonics. At the same time, the x-axis denotes time, and the coloration signifies amplitude, with red representing areas of greatest intensity.

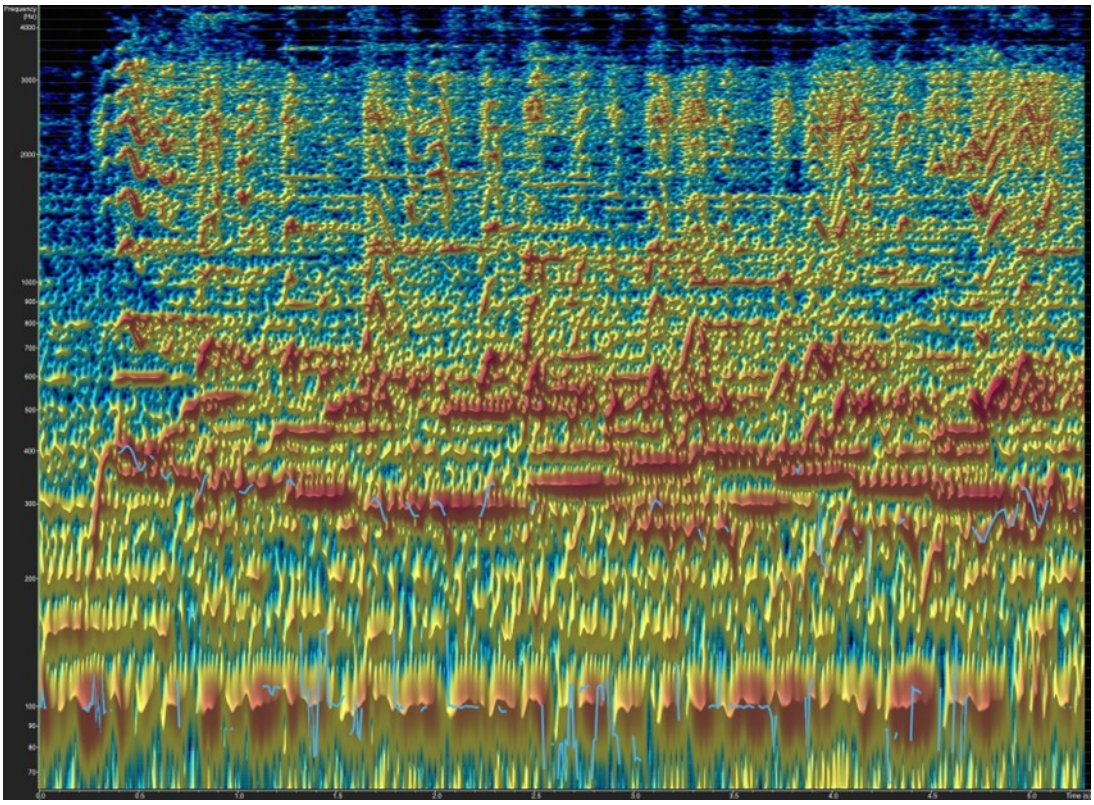

Figure 13

The primary observation presented in Brendel’s Figure 13 pertains to the emergence of an F1/H2 acoustic coupling. This observation is substantiated by a particularly pronounced manifestation of open timbre, characterized by its resonant clarity and the power evidenced within the spectrogram.[xviii] From the initial notes of the opera, Brendel’s Eisenstein articulates that his character and vocalization exhibit significant amplitude. Considering the coupling mentioned above, one may hypothesize that Brendel employs a more rounded embouchure, given that the second formant attains its minimal value when the tongue constricts the velar region while the lips are protruded.[xix] The proximity of the third formant frequency indicates that Brendel maintains a more anterior tongue position while ensuring that the cavity immediately behind his incisors remains sufficiently open in conjunction with his rounded lips.[xx] Upon examining

Brendel's Figure 14, one can observe an example of acoustic power and intensity in the rapturous moment between him and Rosalinde. Acoustic power constitutes a physical measurement of the quantity of energy generated and radiated into the air per second, whereas intensity represents power per unit area.[xxi] A powerful funda-

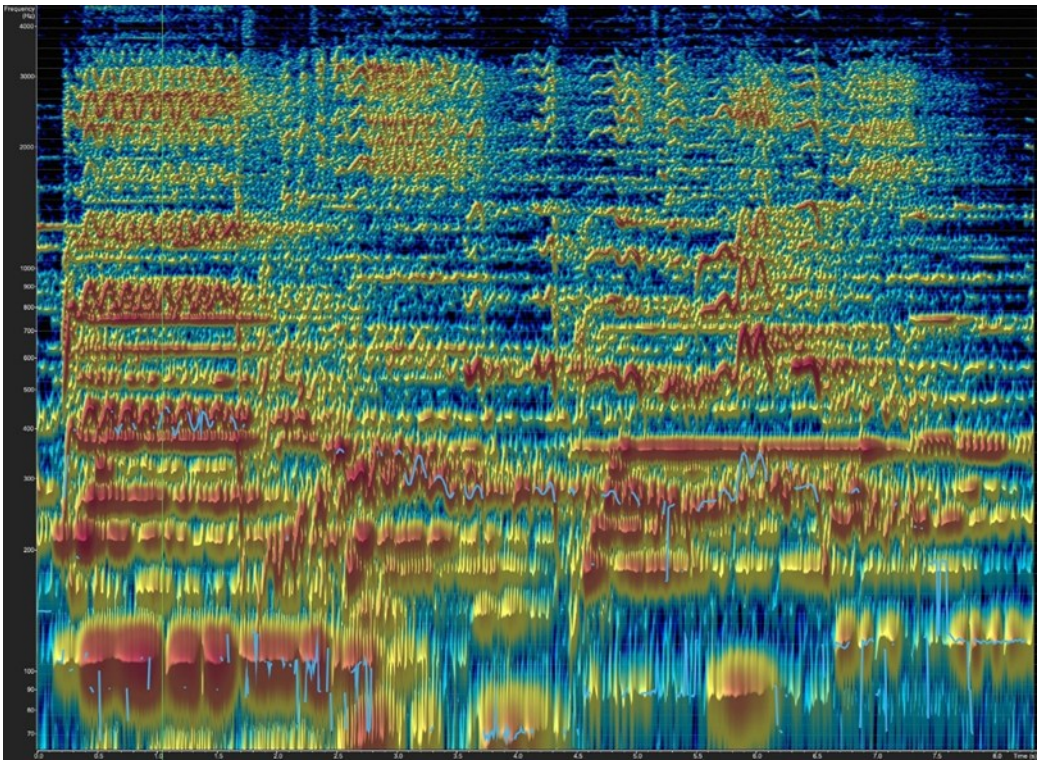

Figure 14

mental is depicted in red, denoting intensity. The acoustic power is illustrated in the spectrum of sound extending above the note into the singer's formant. Brendel adeptly avoids yelling in his sound by modifying the [a] vowel slightly towards an [ɔ], which enables him to enrich his tone by lowering the larynx and expanding the pharynx. When referring to Brendel's 15, one may note that the fundamental frequencies are lower than Seiffert's. Brendel has opted to modify the vocal line away from Strauss's original rendering. One rationale for this choice is that Brendel experienced difficulty with the [y] vowel on a G4 and determined that discernibility of the phrase was of greater importance than the note itself.[xxiii] The fundamental vowel of [i] in [y] creates an acoustic constriction within the oral cavity, and coupled with the higher fundamental frequency of G4, it presents a challenge for a baritone to manage. In this instance, Brendel's musical modifications are appropriate and do not detract from the success of the textual communication within the vocal line. The newly rendered melody is a careful strategy that Brendel has employed to change the vocal demand. This potentially reduces his vocal effort, allowing dramatic moments in the higher tessitura to retain their integrity.[xxiv] For example, in Figures 14 and 16, Brendel does not shy away from the A-flat 4. In Brendel's Figure 16, one can observe a utilization of the singer's formant throughout the entirety of the line, even in the orchestra's absence. The higher partials in the frequency region of the singer's formant are not lost to the same extent as the lower partials and thus radiate more directly to the audience.[xxv] Perhaps the choice to utilize the singer's formant is due to Brendel's need for the audience to perceive this momentous and humorous declamation through a sound quality that projects and evokes his triumph.

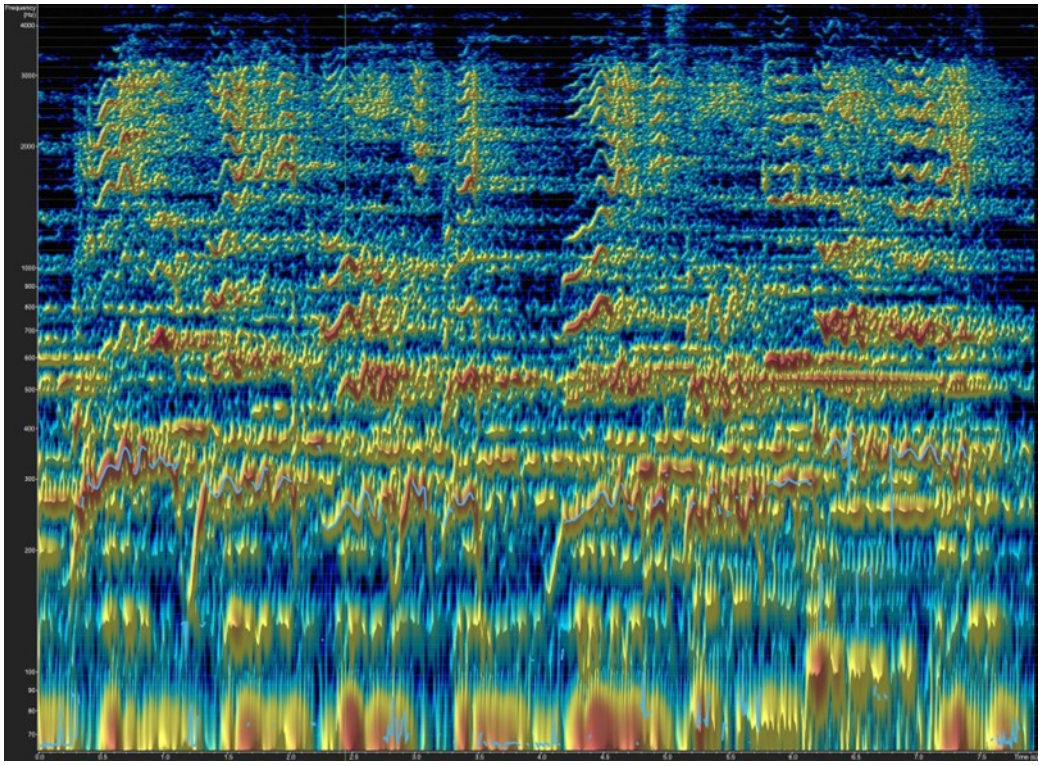

Figure 15

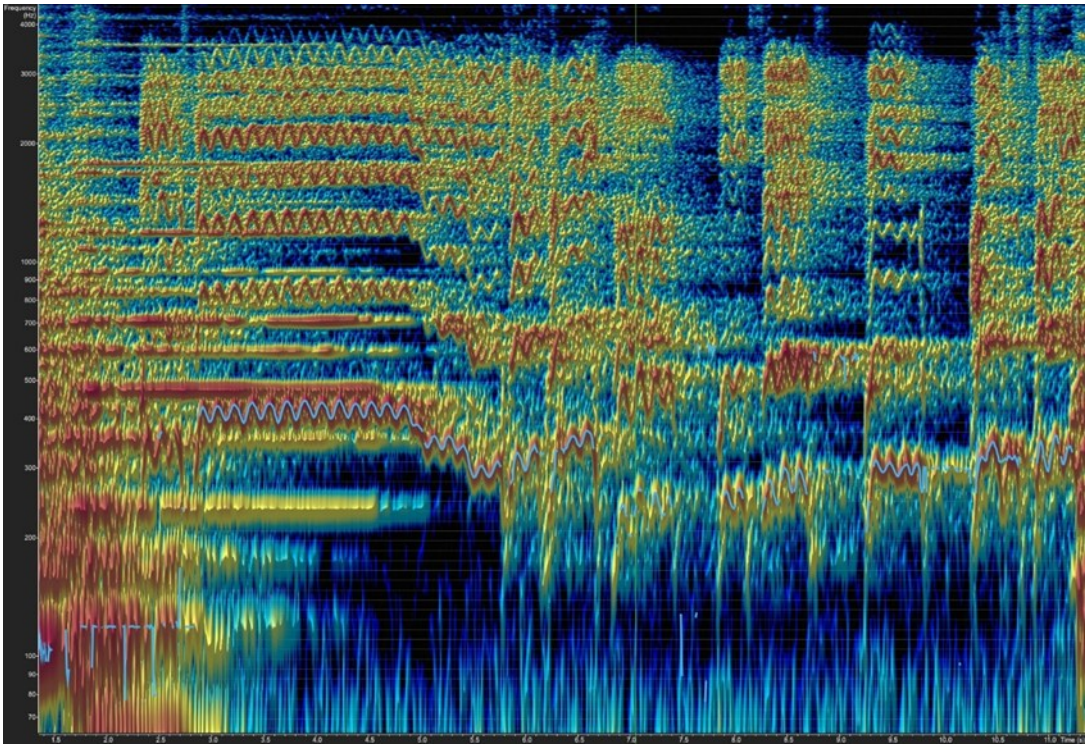

Figure 16

Comparing Seiffert and Brendel, the two effectively embody the character of Eisenstein and use similar techniques and variations typical of the tenor and baritone. However, several aspects warrant further discussion regarding the two approaches. A comparison of Seiffert and Brendel's first Figures (9 and 13) reveals the importance of diction. Both singers exhibit proficiency in articulation, distinctly enunciating the text, thus ensuring their audibility above the orchestra's *forte* eighth notes. Seiffert and Brendel articulate predominantly in mode one with a speech-like manner. Doing so, they position the tongue anteriorly in a way that allows for articulatory freedom in the spaces behind and above.[xxvi] Therefore, a forward placement of the tongue should be an interpreter of Eisenstein's goal, as it improves clarity of articulation without the tongue interfering with the resonant space.[xxvii] This clarity is evidenced by the distinct amplitude and intense red coloration observed in the spectrograms, particularly in the F1/H2 coupling, which produces a bright, straightforward, clear, fresh, and exposed sound.[xxviii] Given that Eisenstein is a role deeply tied to character, the clarity displayed by Brendel and Seiffert connects the listener to impulse, mood, emotional content, and conscious thought through the precise articulation of the words, thereby reflecting the anger and frustration experienced by Eisenstein at this moment.[xxix] Figures 10/14 and 12/16 illustrate the importance of employing the singer's formant in a role such as Eisenstein, as it aids in achieving audibility within an operatic hall. Figures 10 and 14 depict Eisenstein performing over the orchestra during a triumphant moment, whereas Figures 12 and 16 exemplify Eisenstein utilizing the singer's formant for dramatic effect. The potential for amplitude and resonance increases with ascending pitch, and through the use of the singer's formant, both Brendel and Seiffert position their voices within a spectral region where they face minimal competition from the orchestra and the staged environment in which they perform.[xxx] To produce this resonant quality, an enhancement within the frequency range of 2,400 Hz to 3,200 Hz is necessary; furthermore, to ensure the presence of the high harmonics, the glottis must engage wholly and effectively in its opening and closing actions.[xxxi] Upon listening to and viewing Seiffert's Figure 10, one can observe adequate closure, resulting in this singer's formant phenomenon; however, in the case of Brendel (Figure 16), considerable amplitude may lead one to perceive the A-flat as somewhat strained, due to the glottis sounding excessively tightly closed, which could render it strident. Like a mix-belt in musical theater, a baritone portraying the role must adjust and create deliberate tract shapes to successfully balance the high tessitura and amplitude. A suggestion is to modify the vowel from the [a] vowel towards an [ae] or [ɔ] position.[xxxii] Brendel does attempt this, but strain is still present. A clearer modification could mitigate this. Adding the narrow vowel, the vocal load is more evenly distributed between both thyroarytenoid and cricothyroid muscles, resulting in a greater sense of efficiency and sustainability.[xxxiii] In Figures 12 and 16, both singers exhibit clarity and a defined "ring" on the [e]. This quality is maintained throughout the entire line, as demonstrated by the singer's formant being consistently sustained. It is not exclusively a tenor or baritone idiom. The presence of the singer's formant is crucial in Eisenstein's role, as the acoustical environment necessitates its use, given Eisenstein's performance against a loud orchestral accompaniment. Finally, as shown in Figures 11 and 15, it is advisable to adjust vocal ranges within a role if a singer requires it. This should only be done if notes stay within the tonal structure, the integrity of the vocal line is maintained, and effective communication is achieved. Seiffert chose to perform the lyrical line as notated, and the vowel sound [y] in "Brüder" facilitated his cover and transition through the *passaggio* during the descending phrase. Conversely, in Brendel's situation, an adjustment was necessitated due to the placement of the [y] (closed) vowel significantly above his *secondo passaggio*. An alternative melodic phrase was selected and can be heard in Brendel's recording. In the case of a role like Eisenstein, the higher registration needs to be approached with care from a baritone. Brendel increases sustainability through this alteration. Optimal efficiency and sustainability through vocal production in any style requires a considera-

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wedded with efficiency and sustainability. (“Project MUSE - Regulating Vocal Load in High Impact Production”.)[xxxiv] A successful Eisenstein does not need to strictly fit the tenor or baritone archetype in terms of vocal fach or the notes written on a page (though this is an important aspect). The role of Eisenstein demands a clear vision of character, freedom of articulation, and the ability to produce a vibrant sound that permits healthy maintenance amidst orchestration while managing the vocal load. The singer must ensure that they possess unrestricted physical action, that the lyrics and notes performed evoke healthy physical responses, and that the character embodies intelligent expression.[xxxv] When considering casting or being cast in a role traditionally sung by a tenor or baritone, one should contemplate the following factors: continuity and range capability, the capacity to unify a musical phrase, centeredness of mind and body, vocal function, and commitment to textual immediacy.[xxxvi] In the context of Eisenstein, the discourse shifts from the presumption that only a baritone or tenor can perform this role. It becomes pertinent to inquire whether the performer possesses a clear character capable of delivering discernible diction to the audience, accompanied by a sufficient resonance to be heard over Strauss’s orchestration. Furthermore, the individual performing must manage the vocal demands of singing and speaking in an operetta for durations exceeding two hours. Additional research into these matters is ongoing and will encompass roles within the musical theater canon, as well as the use of microphones relevant to high-impact theatrical performance roles. The concepts related to Eisenstein may have implications beyond lyric theater and could even help stabilize a Baritenor fach.

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[iii]II, "Die Fledermaus." 93.
[iv]II, "Die Fledermaus." 141.
[v]II, "Die Fledermaus." 182.
[vi]Johann Strauss II, "J. Strauss II: Die Fledermaus," in *Die Fledermaus* (Warner Classics, 1986).
[vii]Johann Stauss II, "Strauss II: Die Fledermaus," in *Die Fledermaus* (Decca, 1990).
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Evan Garret Stenzel is an American tenor from Iowa Falls, Iowa, currently residing in New Jersey. He teaches clients across New Jersey, New York City, and Philadelphia and serves as an adjunct associate professor of voice at NYU. He is pursuing a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Vocal Pedagogy at NYU's Steinhardt School and earned his Master of Music from Westminster Choir College of Rider University, as well as his Bachelor of Music in Education from Iowa State University. A skilled pedagogue and vocologist, Mr. Stenzel holds a vocology certificate from NYU-SPS and is active in the National Association of Teachers of Singing and the Pan American Vocology Association. He works with diverse students, some performing on operatic stages, Broadway, off-Broadway, or in community theaters across North America, and internationally. As a performer, he recently portrayed Eisenstein in Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus*, with other notable roles including Fenton in *Falstaff*, Jenik in *The Bartered Bride*, and Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*. His performances span from Zürich to New York City. Additionally, Mr. Stenzel is an accomplished music director, conducting numerous musical theater productions at universities and private venues.

Interview: Keep Singin', Kid: A Conversation with Roberta Alex-

By Justin John Moniz and Minnita Daniel-Cox

Roberta Alexander
1949-2025

This article preserves one of the final extended interviews with soprano Roberta Alexander (1949–2025), whose artistry, intellect, and humanity reshaped the landscape of twentieth- and twenty-first-century opera. Conducted by Dr. Justin John Moniz and Dr. Minnita Daniel-Cox in 2020, the conversation reveals Alexander's reflections on perseverance, representation, mentorship, and the necessity of joy. Her voice—equal parts wit, candor, and wisdom—offers a lens into the lived experience of a Black American artist who refused to be limited. Framed within historical context, the interview becomes both tribute and testimony, affirming Alexander's enduring role as performer, pedagogue, and pioneer.

A Life in Song

Among the most compelling singing actresses of her generation, Roberta Alexander combined elegance of tone with searching dramatic intelligence. Born in Lynchburg, Virginia, and raised in Wilberforce, Ohio, she grew up in a household where music served as both vocation and inheritance.[1] Her mother, a soprano and voice instructor at Wilberforce University, and her father, a distinguished choral conductor, infused daily life with sacred song and operatic fervor. Their home, filled with hymnals, laughter, and rehearsal markings, became a proving ground for a young artist whose sense of purpose was both inherited and self-forged.

After completing studies at the University of Michigan (M.M., 1971) and the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, Alexander embarked on a career that defied limitation.[2] She debuted at the Houston Grand Opera as Pamina (1980) before ascending to international acclaim at Glyndebourne, Covent Garden, and the Metropolitan Opera. Critics lauded her "miraculous blend of lyricism and truth," praising a voice that could move seamlessly from Mozart's crystalline elegance to Janáček's psychological depth. Yet Alexander's identity as an artist was never confined to the stage. She viewed singing as both vocation and vocation-plus—an act of moral engagement that united craft, intellect, and empathy.

When Alexander joined Moniz and Daniel-Cox for a 2020 virtual interview, she reflected on five decades of performance and pedagogy. Her recollections, now reframed in the wake of her death in 2025, reveal a portrait of perseverance shaped by humor and humility. Through her words, one encounters not nostalgia but continuity—the voice of an artist who regarded legacy not as a monument but as motion, an ongoing dialogue between past and future.

Perseverance and Pride

When asked to name her proudest artistic achievement, Alexander offered a single word: *perseverance.*[3] Her answer reframed success as endurance, a quiet triumph of will. She recounted her first performance of Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* with Bernard Haitink and the Concertgebouw Orchestra—a Christmas Day broadcast across Europe. For her, the memory embodied both terror and transcendence: the long wait, the silent anticipation, the sudden release into sound. "People still talk about that performance," she recalled, not from ego, but gratitude.

Equally resonant was her portrayal of *Jenůfa* at Glyndebourne. It marked one of the earliest instances of a Black artist performing the title role in Czech on a European stage.[4] That performance symbolized, for Alexander, the necessity of courage: to claim roles historically denied to singers of color, to assert belonging through mastery. Her reflections suggest that the true measure of progress lies not in novelty, but in normalization—when excellence itself becomes the only criterion.

[1]Roberta Alexander, interview by Justin John Moniz and Minnita Daniel-Cox, Zoom video call, July 30, 2020.

[2]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

[3]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

[4]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

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In both memories, Alexander articulated an ethic of devotion rather than ambition. She confessed, with self-effacing humor, that she was never "all over" anything she did, but "always all in.[5]" That distinction defined her life's work. Whether interpreting Mahler's metaphysical vastness or Janáček's human intimacy, she understood singing as service to the composer, to the audience, and to truth. Her perseverance was less about survival than about fidelity to the art form she loved.

[5]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Barriers and Bias

Alexander's candor in addressing racial bias within opera remains as instructive as it is unsettling. She recalled the sting of early rejection when, at the Metropolitan Opera regional auditions, a judge advised her to find another profession.[6] "You don't have what it takes," he said. That pronouncement, nearly career-ending, was countered only by Eleanor Steber's quiet intervention—"Keep singin', kid. You'll make it." The encounter became both wound and catalyst, reminding her that validation may come not from systems, but from individuals who recognize potential beyond prejudice.

[6]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Throughout her career, Alexander navigated an industry still bound by color-coded assumptions about voice type and character. She was repeatedly told that roles such as the Marschallin or Countess were "white roles" unsuitable for a Black soprano.[7] Rather than concede, she refined her artistic identity around repertoire that aligned with her instrument and spirit—Mozart, Strauss, Britten, and Janáček—carving out a space defined by integrity rather than conformity. She also challenged casting hierarchies through visibility: her *Così fan tutte* at the Metropolitan Opera, featuring four Black women in principal roles, remains a historic emblem of transformation.

[7]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Daniel-Cox, responding within the interview, noted that representation extends beyond visibility. It is not only who appears onstage, but who believes they can. Alexander's career thus becomes an act of cultural pedagogy—a model for how persistence, excellence, and dignity dismantle inherited bias. Her experiences compel teachers and institutions to confront how structural exclusion still shapes opportunity in the performing arts.

Mentorship and Influence

When reflecting on her mentors, Alexander's reverence bridged generations. She cited Nikolaus Harnoncourt, André Previn, and Carlo Maria Giulini as musicians who embodied what she called "transcendent collaboration.[8]" None were flawless technicians, she admitted, but each possessed the alchemy to turn precision into poetry. Working with Previn on Mozart's *Ch'io mi scordi di te* or singing Bach's *Mass in B Minor* under Giulini taught her that technique was only the vessel—humanity was the content.

[8]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Equally transformative were her early encounters with Black musical excellence. Hearing Leontyne Price perform "Canzone di Doretta" at eighteen left her "crying for five days.[9]" From that moment, she knew her path. In Wilberforce, she grew up surrounded by trailblazers: composer Zenobia Powell Perry lived nearby, while Undine Smith Moore—"Aunt Undine"—served as mentor and model. Shirley Verrett, too, loomed large. Watching Verrett perform *The Rape of Lucretia* as a child, Alexander inherited both the costume and the conviction. Her mimicry in the basement became the rehearsal for a lifetime.

[9]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

These women formed a spiritual genealogy of artistry and advocacy. They demonstrated that Black excellence in classical music was neither anomaly nor novelty but continuation. When Alexander later shared stages with Price and Verrett, she saw not hierarchy but lineage.[10] Her parents' attendance at her Metropolitan Opera debut completed that circle of belonging. The legacy they imparted—discipline, humility, and faith in craft—remained her compass through every stage of her journey.

[10]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Industry and Education

Alexander's reflections on the profession reveal both disillusionment and devotion. She lamented that "agents treat singers like commodities," pushing them toward premature repertoire for commercial gain.[11] The AIDS epidemic, she observed, decimated a generation of artist-managers who once nurtured sustainable careers. Their absence, she argued, ushered in an era of branding over artistry. To her, longevity required not self-promotion but self-knowledge, a distinction increasingly endangered in a market-driven culture.

[11]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Her critique extended to academia. "Music," she insisted, "is the only field that doesn't refer back to what came before."[12] Alexander decried the erosion of historical literacy among young musicians and urged curricula that reconnect performance with lineage. Her proposal for an intermediate "opera studio"—bridging academic study and professional readiness—anticipated current pedagogical conversations about transitional training. She believed students need time to refine languages, stagecraft, and emotional maturity before facing institutional rejection.

[12]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

These insights position Alexander as both practitioner and reformer. Her reflections illuminate systemic gaps that still persist between conservatory and career. In advocating for mentorship, historical awareness, and artistic pacing, she envisioned an ecosystem where singers could mature responsibly. Her foresight challenges educators to restore balance between artistry and survival—a call that resonates with renewed urgency in today's educational landscape.

Advice to Her Younger Self

When asked what counsel she would offer her younger self, Alexander paused, then smiled: "Cut yourself some slack."[13] Beneath the levity lay profound wisdom. She admitted to having been relentlessly self-critical—so focused on imperfection that she rarely enjoyed performance itself. Only in her forties, she said, did she realize that audiences cared less about flawlessness than sincerity. "Nobody's worrying about your high G-sharp," she mused. "They care what you're saying."

[13]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

This awakening reframed her artistry. She began to see music not as self-display but as communication, a process of dissolving ego. "The music is important," she often told students. "You are not."[14] The statement, austere on its surface, carried spiritual weight: the performer's task is to vanish into meaning. In this humility lay freedom—the permission to be human, fallible, and therefore expressive.

[14]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

For Alexander, joy became a discipline. To enjoy one's art was not complacency but reverence, an acknowledgment of music's capacity to transcend error. Her teaching distilled that ethos: rigor without cruelty, excellence without arrogance. It is a philosophy of compassion that continues to inform contemporary discussions of performance psychology and pedagogical care.

Legacy and Lineage

Alexander's recollections of Wilberforce and Central State University map an ecosystem of Black creativity rarely acknowledged in canonical histories.[15] The proximity of Zenobia Powell Perry, Undine Smith Moore, Henry Garcia, and others created a vibrant corridor of cultural production. "That place was a magnet," she said. "Music was the air we breathed." Within that environment, excellence was an expectation, not an exception.

Her story illustrates how regional communities can generate global influence. From these academic enclaves emerged artists whose reach extended from church choirs to international opera houses. Alexander's trajectory from that lineage to the world's great stages underscores how institutions of historically Black education nurtured not only access but artistry. Their graduates carried with them both craft and consciousness—a dual commitment to mastery and representation.

By situating herself within this continuum, Alexander transformed individual achievement into communal affirmation. Her narrative joins the broader archive of Black women's cultural labor, connecting past to present and pedagogy to praxis. For Daniel-Cox and the next generation of singers, that legacy affirms that history is not inherited passively but enacted actively, each performance an act of remembrance and renewal.

Grace and Grit: A Pedagogical Legacy

In her later years, Alexander dedicated herself to teaching, mentoring emerging singers in Europe and the United States. Her approach balanced precision with empathy. Students recall her probing questions—"Why are you singing this line?"—that dismantled pretense and rebuilt authenticity.[16] Her insistence on clarity of text and honesty of emotion made every lesson both technical and moral.

She often concluded masterclasses with her signature admonition: "Don't be boring—say something."[17] To Alexander, communication was the essence of artistry; beauty without meaning was failure. Her pedagogy fused the rigor of European tradition with the soul of lived experience, producing students who sang not to impress but to connect. In this synthesis lies her greatest gift: a model of teaching rooted in humanity.

In an industry still wrestling with issues of equity and relevance, Alexander's pedagogy remains a moral compass. She believed that making music was to practice empathy—to recognize the divine in sound and in self alike. Through every phrase and every pupil, she redefined mastery as mindfulness, leaving behind not just recordings but an ethic of care.

"Keep Singin', Kid."

The phrase that marked her early encouragement—Eleanor Steber's "Keep singin', kid"—became Alexander's own benediction to those who followed.[18] She acknowledged that singing is "hard," made harder still by the racial burdens artists of color continue to bear. Yet she refused bitterness, transforming adversity into artistry.

From her first Mahler symphony to her final masterclass, Roberta Alexander embodied the resilience she preached. Her career, spanning continents and decades, testifies to the endurance of integrity amid change. To hear her sing—or now, to read her words—is to encounter not sentimentality but strength: a life lived in service to music's unifying force.

Her legacy is not confined to recordings or reviews but resonates in every artist she inspired. Roberta Alexander reminds us that to sing is to believe—in music, in humanity, and in the redemptive power of sound. Through grace, grit, and generosity, she remains what she always was: a voice of truth.

[15]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

[16]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

[17]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

[18]Alexander, interview, July 30, 2020.

Roberta Alexander (March 3, 1949 – October 14, 2025) was an American operatic soprano. Among the most compelling singing actresses of her time, Roberta Alexander enjoyed international renown for her riveting, incisive characterizations, miraculous vocal and dramatic range. In recent seasons she performed the role of Curra La Forza del Destino at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and at Dutch National Opera, and Fünfte Magd in Patrice Chéreau's production of Elektra at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the MET, Teatro alla Scala, and the Staatsoper Berlin. In 2025, she returned to the Staatsoper Berlin for a revival of Elektra. In 2026, she was scheduled to perform the role of La Balayeuse in Charpentier's Louise at the Opéra National de Lyon.

As well as performing, teaching and masterclasses remained an important part of her daily life, as passing on her expertise to the next generation of young singers was a significant purpose for her. Roberta Alexander was reared in a musical family. She studied at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor from 1969 to 1971, receiving M. Music in 1971. She made her operatic debut at Dutch National Opera in 1975 in La cambiale di matrimonio. By 1984 she had been part of no fewer than 26 productions at Dutch National Opera. She appeared as Pamina at the Houston Grand Opera in 1980, as Daphne in Santa Fe in 1981, and as Elettra in Idomeneo in Zürich in 1982. Following a tour of Europe, she made a successful debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York as Zerlina in November 1983.
Among the operatic heroines, she has unforgettably portrayed are the title role of Janacek's Jenufa (a Glyndebourne production), Mimì in Puccini's La Bohème, and especially the great Mozart heroines: Fiordiligi in Così fan tutte, Donna Elvira in Don Giovanni and Vitellia in Mozart's La Clemenza di Tito, the latter a major success with both the public and the press at the Glyndebourne Festival. In addition, she has performed principal roles at New York's Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera House/Covent Garden, and the major Houses of Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna, Zurich and Venice, in Philadelphia and at New York's Carnegie Hall.

Equally esteemed as an orchestral soloist, Roberta Alexander recently enjoyed particular success performing Ravel's Shéhérazade with André Previn and the NDR Sinfonieorchester, telecast throughout Europe. She has also performed with the Vienna, London and Royal Philharmonics; Royal Concertgebouw, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Bavarian Radio Orchestras; Cincinnati, Atlanta and Dallas Symphonies; and collaborated with such distinguished conductors as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Andrew Litton, Bernard Haitink, Sir Colin Davis, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Carlo Maria Giulini, Leonard Slatkin, Jesus Lopez-Cobos, Edo De Waart and David Zinman. She recently reunited with Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra for Mendelssohn's Midsummer Night's Dream and Tchaikovsky's Romeo & Juliet and the rapturously-received world premiere of Kirchner's Of things exactly as they are. In addition she sang Copland's In the Beginning with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the San Francisco Symphony.

An uncommonly communicative recitalist, Roberta Alexander has offered acclaimed programs at New York's Carnegie Recital Hall, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Vienna Musikverein, London's Wigmore Hall and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. An especially ardent and persuasive interpreter of American masterworks, her latest recordings include Songs My Mother Taught Me and With You (the latter an anthology of Broadway songs).

Roberta Alexander's voluminous discography on the Etcetera, Philips, Sony, Teldec and BMG reflects her astonishing mastery of varied vocal styles: songs by Barber, Mozart, Bernstein, Ives, Copland, Strauss, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Puccini and Villa-Lobos; Handel's Giulio Cesare, Apollo e Daphne, Samson and Theodora; Mozart's Don Giovanni and Idomeneo; and such rarities as Goldschmidt's Der Gewaltige Hahnrei and Beatrice Cenci, Heppener's Four Songs of Ezra Pound and an Edison-winning recording of Andriessen's Songs with Orchestra.

https://www.tibenartists.com/roberta-alexander

Dr. Justin John Moniz serves as Associate Director of Vocal Performance and Coordinator of Vocal Pedagogy at New York University's (NYU) Steinhardt School where he holds the rank of Associate Professor. Moniz is also a member of the Vocal Arts Faculty at Manhattan School of Music where he teaches vocal wellness and physiology. His students regularly appear on Broadway, off-Broadway, on national tours, in regional theaters and opera houses, and on national television. A leading expert on contemporary vocal pedagogy, Moniz is regularly engaged as a guest clinician and consultant for organizations including the National Association of Teachers of Singing, National Opera Association, The Royal Conservatory of Music, New England Conservatory, Boston University, and Berklee College of Music. As a voice teacher, researcher, and NASM Certified Personal Trainer, he is particularly passionate about identifying the parallels between the worlds of voice science and sports medicine, more specifically concerning vocal load, efficiency, and sustainability. In 2025, he was named the Ellen Faull Master Teacher for the NATS Intern Program and earned the NYU Steinhardt Teaching Excellence Award. Moniz serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of Singing,* where he is the author of "The Versatile Voice" column. www.justinjohnmoniz.com

Dr. Minnita Daniel-Cox serves as Professor of Voice and Coordinator of the Voice Area at the University of Dayton, where she teaches applied voice, directs musical and opera productions, oversees the Dayton Opera Apprentice Program, and leads the Vocal Performance Institute for young singers. A versatile soprano and scholar, she is the founder of the Dunbar Music Archive, dedicated to preserving and promoting musical settings of the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Her research has been featured by the National Association of Teachers of Singing, the College Music Society, and the International Society for Music Education, among others. Daniel-Cox has secured more than $350,000 in external funding for her Dunbar work, including two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and support from the Mellon Foundation. As a performer, she appears frequently with the Dayton Philharmonic, Springfield Symphony, and Bach Society of Dayton, and has sung roles such as Anna Gomez in *The Consul* and Sister Rose in *Dead Man Walking* with Dayton Opera. A regular guest on WDPR Discover Classical, Dr. Daniel-Cox earned degrees from Bowling Green State University (B.M.) and the University of Michigan (M.M., D.M.A.).

FEATURE:

Myofascial Release: The Power of Elastic Recoil

Part 2 of 4

by: Claudia Friedlander

This column is Part 2 of a four-part series exploring myofascial release and its applications in the voice studio. Part 1 provided an introduction. Part 3 will cover myofascial release exercises for the anatomy involved in phonation. Part 4 will offer myofascial release exercises for the anatomy involved in resonance and articulation. This column discusses the role fascia plays in breath support.

Be the Balloon

Here is a short video I made to demonstrate how the Bernoulli Principle applies in singing. In this spectacularly unsophisticated demonstration, you will see me blow up a balloon, laterally stretch the opening, and produce a loud, sustained wheeze as air escapes from the balloon and vibrates the edges of the aperture.

This column more or less unpacks what there is to be learned from the physics of a sustained balloon wheeze. I encourage you to watch the video and/or run your own experiment with a balloon prior to reading what follows, as it provides a practical, tangible context for the way our fascia participates in breath support for singing.

I keep a bag of balloons on my piano so that I can readily demonstrate for my students how simple and effortless breath support can actually be, if they can train their bodies to behave more like the balloon. Our tissues have the potential to expand and stretch more globally on inhalation, similar to the rubber of the balloon. A well-coordinated inhalation imbues the expanding tissues with energy potential and raises the level of our subglottal breath pressure, preparing our bodies to phonate just as the internal pressure of the full balloon prepares it to wheeze. The balloon makes a *lot* of noise without anything pushing on it, because the expanded rubber provides all the pressure needed to vibrate the aperture.

Not only are the pleural sacs in which our lungs are housed composed almost entirely of fascia, but the global sense of expansion we feel throughout our torsos reflects the stretching of our fascial tissues in all directions. When we inhale deeply, we infuse these expanding tissues with energy potential, just as blowing up a balloon globally infuses the stretching rubber with energy potential. When our lungs are full and our tissues are expanded, the air pressure inside our lungs is greater than the air pressure above our vocal folds. That is why when we exhale, we can produce vocal sound: comparatively high-pressure puffs of air escape from our bodies and vibrate the vocal folds.

When our breathing apparatus is free of excess tension and enjoys good range of motion, the internal breath pressure facilitated by a full, well-coordinated inhalation is sufficient to both initiate and sustain vocal sound, without deliberate muscular engagement. While muscular coordination and engagement can be an important part of breath support strategies, any muscular activity is most effective when it responds to what has already been set in motion *by the elastic recoil of the fascia when the breath is released*.

Many of our movements are initiated by the elastic recoil of fascia that has been stretched. We are less likely to notice how powerful this elastic recoil can be, because it is our muscle tissue, not the fascia that provides feedback about how much effort we are expending. The movement sequence involved in pitching a baseball offers a useful example of how powerful elastic recoil can be. In the linked video, you can see how pitcher Drew Storen's wind-up maximally stretches his fascia all the way from his left foot to his right pitching arm and how the elastic recoil of the tissues powers up his pitch. His throw is also supported by the muscular strength of his legs, core, and arm—but without the wind-up, without that powerful elastic recoil, brute strength would not send the ball very far or very fast.

The elastic recoil of the fascia that is stretched on inhalation is similarly much more effective at generating optimal, sustainable subglottal breath pressure than deliberate engagement of the musculature. Whether you're singing or playing baseball, muscular activity is most effective when it responds to a movement impulse catalyzed by intention and initiated by the fascia, after which the muscle tissue encased within the fascia engages and participates in the movement by contributing the level of force required to complete it.

Embrace the power of elastic recoil. Be the balloon!

Fascia: From Trash to Treasure

If you could remove every piece of tissue from the body that was NOT fascia, you would have a perfect 3D model of the body, including bones, muscles, organs and vessels… the fact that fascia is everywhere is one of the very reasons that it was overlooked for so long. In dissections of the human body, most of it was cleanly removed and thrown away so that the cadaver would more closely resemble pictures in anatomy textbooks.
— Fascia, What Is It?

We have been dissecting cadavers for more than 500 years, in order to better map and understand human anatomy and physiology. This has yielded extraordinarily detailed information about the structure and function of our skeletal and muscular systems, as well as our organs. However, we have only *very* recently begun to study and codify fascial structures! Prior to the First International Fascia Research Congress in 2007, fascia was essentially regarded as trash, wholesale ignored and discarded during cadaver dissections. Given that scientists and doctors are only now studying the role of fascia in movement and internal communication, it is unsurprising that fitness trainers and voice teachers are only now beginning to appreciate the benefits of conditioning and training the fascia.

As it turns out, fascia is not merely the internal equivalent of plastic wrap that keeps all of our anatomical components in place, but rather a complex, multifunctional sensory organ that facilitates communication, sensory awareness, and muscular activity throughout the body. When we sing, musician and instrument are seamlessly integrated within the fascial network. Our imaginations are literally hardwired into the anatomical components of our instruments. The components themselves communicate with one another via the fascial network in which they are all encased. The vocal instrument is a self-contained system in which intention stretches and tunes the vocal folds to a desired pitch, the breath responds with the level of breath pressure necessary to vibrate them, and the resonators and articulators arrange themselves to perfectly amplify whatever vowel we wish to sustain.

As I demonstrated with the balloon, the way the breath generates vocal fold vibration is by exploiting the pressure differential below and above the vocal folds. The energy potential invested in our tissue as a consequence of inhalation compresses the air molecules inside our lungs, which can escape to an area of comparatively lower pressure via the aperture created at the glottis. The sound vibrations are created by the swift, repeated opening and closing of the vocal folds as the puffs of air escape. Our vocal folds demand varying degrees of pressure to make them vibrate on high pitches and low, loud pitches and soft, focused production and diffuse. Our vocal folds *also* need to be able to sustain vibration with reliable continuity over a desirable period of time while varying pitch, volume, and quality of production.

Therefore, *an efficient generator for the vocal instrument is one that provides a stable, continuous airstream while effortlessly adjusting pressure levels in response to the demands of a musical phrase as it unfolds*. A good generator is versatile, flexible, capable of continuity, and above all *responsive*. High notes, for example, feel cathartic and satisfying when they are motivated by expressive intent and supported by a responsive breath management system; they feel comparatively strained and/or effortful when they result from attempts to micromanage subglottal breath pressure via direct muscular manipulation.

That is why I encourage singers to be more like the balloon. When you expand globally and infuse your tissues with energy potential, you can release all of that potential and allow it to meet the expressive and musical requirements of vocal fold vibration. You will then likely find that your musculature reflexively engages to aid in sustaining and regulating subglottal breath pressure in order to complete the phrase. *How* the musculature engages depends on how your body functions and the specific breathing patterns you have habituated. I find that this part is unique to each singer, and I believe this explains why there are so many different schools of thought on breath support—if we look at what the musculature is doing to support the breath, it is likely to vary. What is *common* to all singers is the elastic recoil of the fascia on exhalation.

A full, well-coordinated inhalation infuses your tissues with energy potential in much the same way that the effort of drawing a bow string transfers strength from your arm and your body directly to the string. Releasing the string transfers the energy to the arrow, which can fly a great distance with great accuracy. If instead you used brute force to throw the arrow at something, you would be far less likely to hit your target. The energy potential you infuse into your tissues by inhaling is similarly superior to direct muscular activity where sustaining and supporting a vocal phrase is concerned.

Myofascial release exercises can promote fuller range of motion for your breathing anatomy, as well as a seamless sense of expansion for inhalation. They can significantly raise the level of energy potential you infuse into your tissues and help cultivate a responsive, well-coordinated generator for your vocal instrument.

Myofascial Release Exercises for Breathing Anatomy

Myofascial Release for the Abdomen
Because our abdominal muscles tend to be characteristically overactive, this area may be very sensitive until you become accustomed to the exercise. Go slow, perform the stretch mindfully, and stay within the “hurts so good” range of pressure that you would enjoy from a massage. In the video I am using a Coregeous Ball from TuneUp Fitness for both exercises.

- Kneel on a mat and position a squishy inflatable yoga ball between your sternum and your navel.
- Support yourself with your arms, with the ball between your sternum and your navel.
- Slowly lower yourself onto the ball with your legs extended and your weight supported by your hips and forearms.
- Maintain control over how much of your weight you are lowering onto the ball. Keep your neck relaxed and your head hanging down.
- Breathe slowly and deeply. With each exhalation, see if you can comfortably rest more of your weight on the ball.
- Repeat for a series of five or six breath cycles.
- Carefully return to a kneeling position and take a moment to continue breathing slowly and deeply, noticing any feedback you get from your abdominal tissues.

Myofascial Release for the Ribcage

- Position yourself face-up on a mat with your feet on the floor and your knees pointing up.
- Place a squishy inflatable yoga ball under your back just below and between your shoulder blades. Play with the position until it feels comfortable, with your ribcage lifted up and away from your pelvis. You may wish to place a book or a yoga block under your head, so your neck feels relaxed throughout the stretch.
- Breathe slowly and deeply in this position, seeing how far you can expand on inhalation.
- Exhale, and see if you can relax and sink lower onto the ball with each exhalation. Exhale as fully as you are able to without mobilizing your abs to push breath out.
- Repeat for a series of five or six breath cycles.
- Carefully return to a kneeling position and take a moment to continue breathing slowly and deeply, noticing any feedback you get from the tissues surrounding your ribcage.

Please see this video for demonstrations of both exercises (and another balloon demonstration #sorrynotsorry). The demonstration of the Myofascial Release for the Abdomen exercise begins around the 3:20 mark; the Myofascial Release for the Ribcage exercise begins around the 4:40 mark.

Function Over Form

The fitness question I have been asked most frequently over the years is “If I work out my abs, will it screw up my breath support?” This is the wrong question. The *right* question is, “How can I condition my breathing anatomy to create a more global sense of expansion and improve range of motion for inhalation?”

Strong abs need not come at the expense of full breathing. Your generator can even benefit from abdominal strength, just as Drew Storen’s pitching gets a big boost from the muscles in his legs, core, and arm. When Storen works out, he just needs to make sure that nothing he does to strengthen his musculature will compromise the *flexibility* he needs in order to generate a powerful elastic recoil when he throws the ball. Singers similarly need to cultivate functional strength for their breathing musculature while also promoting flexibility.

Developing abdominal strength can absolutely go hand in hand with creating a more global sense of expansion and improving range of motion for inhalation. The key is to pair abdominal and core strength training with regular stretching and myofascial release while monitoring your range of motion for breathing with the same attention you devote to counting your crunches and timing your planks. The issue here is simply our culture’s completely weird, unhealthy aesthetic obsession with flat stomachs. The imperative to

hold in our stomachs only serves to make our abs tight and overactive without conferring any functional strength. This is among the reasons that singers can often find it so difficult to stop pushing—they're so used to holding their bellies rigid all the time that the tensing becomes habitual. Pursuing the appearance of washboard abs as an end in itself rather than as a component of functional abdominal strength will indeed limit range of motion for inhalation.

Myofascial release tools can be incredibly helpful for releasing the overactive abdominal muscles that nearly all of us develop. Whatever your particular approach to teaching breath support, I encourage you to invite your students to release their abs and ribcages prior to vocalizing or doing breath work. The results are likely to amaze you.

In the next part of the series, I will talk about the role of fascia in phonation.

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.