

**A BLENDED PEDAGOGY: SYNTHESIZING BEST PRACTICES OF OPERA
AND MUSICAL THEATRE PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE A HOLISTIC
APPROACH TO TRAINING THE SINGING ACTOR**

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Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts
with a Concentration in
Musical Theatre

by
Thomas Patrick Vendafreddo

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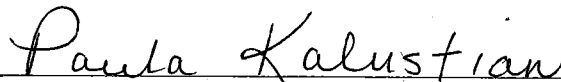
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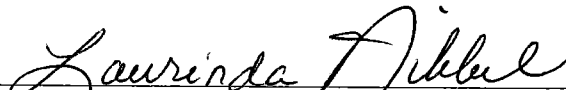
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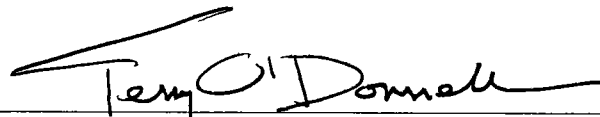
A Blended Pedagogy: Synthesizing Best Practices of Opera and Musical
Theatre Programs to Promote a Holistic Approach to Training the Singing

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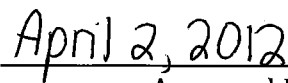


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ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

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This project report identifies the historical progression of pedagogy in the fields of opera performance and musical theatre, with regard to training the contemporary singing actor. Subsequently, it proposes a creative and exciting blend of the two techniques, which includes breathing, alignment, relaxation, movement, music theory, acting, and singing. My research produced a clear view of the shortcomings in each of the aforementioned academic programs; thus, blending the pedagogies to support the current “crossover market” is suitable and necessary for the success of the contemporary student.

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Karen Holvik, New England Conservatory Voice Department Chair, was my voice teacher at Eastman. Because her eclectic musical experiences are the essence of this project report, she has forever influenced my teaching in an extraordinary way. She always enthusiastically encouraged me to sing both classical repertoire and musical theatre. As a voice pedagogue, Karen does not subscribe to any one technique; she believes in developing technical exercises that encourage each singer's unique voice. She provided me with an ever-increasing "tool box," and I pull ideas from my voice journals daily. I am immensely appreciative of the time and passion Karen gave so freely. I am blessed to call her a mentor and friend.

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy is the function or work of a teacher or teaching. The word comes from the Greek παιδαγωγέω, in which παῖς means "child" and ἄγω (*ágō*) means "lead"; thus, the literal definition is "to lead the child" (Harper). In my experience as a music, theatre, and opera pedagogue, the word has evolved for me to mean "the art of making art." The process of breaking something down into its smallest particle and then fleshing it out and making it whole again is a creative and exciting journey. To a student, pedagogy should perhaps be nonexistent; to a teacher, however, the art of teaching must be a top priority. The success and progress of students in any subject area is contingent upon the atmosphere and experiences that pedagogues create for them.

Educational experiences studying vocal performance at the Eastman School of Music (as an undergraduate) as well as musical theatre at San Diego State University (as a graduate) have garnered me a variety of teaching opportunities. This project report represents the continuation of a passion to explore my personal pedagogical innovations. While pursuing degrees from both classical and musical theatre training programs, I have experienced the best and worst of both worlds; I have also experienced firsthand the negative stigma associated with both degree tracks. My hope is that readers of this project report will be motivated to synthesize the techniques used by both opera and musical theatre pedagogues to positively influence future artists, and aspire to do so in an artistic and imaginative manner. This project report will examine the assertion that the demands of today's singing actor—in any genre—are considerably diversified; thus, pedagogues—in any genre—must synthesize the best practices of acting through song to encourage holistic growth in the performer.

The current economic situation in America has caused both opera and musical theatre production companies to blur genre lines by presenting crossover works; educators in these fields must be cognizant of this shift and support their students by

blending pedagogies and expectations with that of both genres. This approach will prepare students for the mixed-genre market, rather than a market that used to be more distinctly separated.

I have compiled sources published at various times in the last forty years to ascertain if the research is indicative of the progression of pedagogy in both opera and musical theatre. Much research came from primary sources, as they were written to examine contemporary pedagogical ideas. *On Singing Onstage* (Craig), *Bringing Opera to Life* (Goldovsky), and *Acting the Song* (Moore and Bergman) provided a rich perspective on the evolution of pedagogy in both genres. In addition, I found the following secondary sources to be extremely helpful in supporting specific aspects of the pedagogy that I emphasize: *The Performer's Voice* (Dayme), *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* (Bruder), and *International Phonetic Alphabet for Singers* (Wall). I also considered (but did not cite) several sources specifically on the topic of vocal pedagogy: *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics* (Coffin), *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy* (Sell).

Chapter 2 of this project report will focus on pedagogical techniques currently being used in academia to train the singing actors of opera and operetta. As these art forms are centuries old, the chapter will explore the historical evolution of opera pedagogy as it has progressed along with the repertoire. A major focus of the chapter will examine *bel canto* singing, as this is the foremost *modus operandi* of opera studies. I have chosen to place opera pedagogy before musical theatre because of the obvious chronological connection between the two art forms. Musical theatre was born out of opera and operetta and thus, the tradition of teaching opera performance had its origins long before than that of musical theatre.

Chapter 3 will similarly explore pedagogical techniques currently being used to train the musical theatre singing actors in academia. The chapter will focus on tying the historically brief development of the musical theatre libretto to the way in which pedagogues are currently teaching student performers how to aptly tell a story. Some comparisons are made with regard to the *bel canto* technique, but most information in Chapter 2 will isolate musical theatre pedagogy as it currently exists.

Chapter 4 is the culmination of my research and practice with regard to both opera and musical theatre pedagogy. The chapter will highlight the best practices in

each field and provide many examples of how pedagogues could cross-pollinate teaching methods to accommodate the crossover market that currently exists between the two genres.

Chapter 5 will capsule several of my conclusions based on my research and experience as a musical theatre and opera pedagogue. Furthermore, it will briefly expand on the future of pedagogy with regard to trends that are apparent on the Broadway and opera stages today.

CHAPTER 2

OPERA PEDAGOGY

Above all, I urge you to concentrate on expressive characterization: consider well the meaning and the energy of the words, put yourself quite seriously into the situation and the emotional state of Andromeda, and imagine yourself to be that very person.

—Mozart to Aloisia Weber (July 30, 1778)

Schools that train opera performers place musicianship skills at a high level of importance; pedagogically, they place music theory and aural skills classes much earlier in the curriculum than performance classes. For example, at San Diego State University, vocal performance undergraduates are not permitted to sing in a Divisional Recital until their third semester of study. Similarly, the Eastman School of Music does not include classes in lyric theatre performance until the third year of study. Students should have a comprehensive and informed understanding of the workings of music, which will allow them to delve deeper into their repertoire. Boris Goldovsky explains this beautifully in his book *Bringing Opera to Life; Operatic Acting and Stage Direction*:

It is true that musical tones cannot express everything, but words and music complement each other, music being strongest where words are weakest. It is extremely difficult to describe the gradations of an emotion in words—the difference, for example, between the tenderness a child feels for his grandfather and for his pet dog. But a musical description can convey the most subtle nuances of emotion instantly. And, music provides the exact timing and intensity of every mood and action. (65)

It is imperative for students of opera to better understand the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic components of composition so they can decipher a composer's rationale for either using or defying "common practice" musical idioms. This knowledge will unlock information about setting, character motivation, and themes of the opera.

Perhaps the most traditional and universal technique of classical vocal pedagogy is *bel canto*, which means "beautiful singing" when translated literally from Italian. The term originated in the 17th century when practitioners of early Italian opera defined it as a model for proper singing. In the 18th century, the importance of the term *bel canto*

grew with the advent of *opera seria*, the *da capo aria*, and the *castrato* voice. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a pioneer of this new genre, and his operas, such as *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Die Zauberflöte*, epitomize this middle period of the *bel canto* tradition. In the earlier part of the 19th century, composers such as Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Gioachino Rossini began writing arias that augmented the demands of the *bel canto* singer. In the later part of the 19th century however, opera saw a transmogrification that would overshadow the importance of the *bel canto* style.

Richard Wagner became famous for an aesthetic called *Gesamptkunstwerk*, to which he referred in two essays in 1849. *Gesamptkunstwerk* translates literally as “total artwork” and is a combination of music, drama, theatrical elements, and dance. Wagner’s contemporaries (namely Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini) began composing what is now referred to as *verismo opera*. *Verismo* is an Italian word that means “realism” or “true life.” By nature, *verismo opera* is the antithesis of Romanticism; its libretto-focused dramatics called for larger orchestras and sought to bring the naturalism of contemporary writers (such as Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen) into opera. Thus, contemporary opera singers were those that had the courage to leave *bel canto* behind and sing in what was considered at the time to be a vociferous and strenuous manner. This, of course, was to better serve the libretto, which customarily dealt with a lower class of people and real emotions, their great trials, and heartbreaking romance. Wagner himself unabashedly denounced *bel canto* for its inherent lack of drama because its practitioners seem concerned merely with “whether that G or A will come out roundly” (Fischer 229-91).

Historically, certain opera genres have moved away from the *bel canto* tradition. Pedagogues today continue to value and utilize the precepts for two reasons. First, academic opera programs and operatic production companies are producing operas from the Baroque and Classical periods, so the performers are required to sing with a technique that is appropriate to those styles. For example, to instruct a student to perform the roles of Violante in *La Finta Giardiniera* (Mozart) and Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner) with the same vocal sound would be inappropriate and pedagogically unsound. Secondly, *bel canto* is still widely accepted and taught by voice teachers because college-aged performers are very young in terms of their vocal maturity. *Bel*

canto offers a safe and developmentally appropriate foundation from which young singers can grow.

Body awareness is often a high priority in opera training programs; whether in the private voice studio or the opera rehearsal space, pedagogues frequently engage the students in exercises that stretch muscles and release tension. This awareness is imperative for opera singers of any age because it allows blood to flow to muscles that engage in singing and moving onstage. Because of the connection they make between the body and the breath, t'ai chi, yoga, and many other relaxation techniques are often employed. "Relaxation" is perhaps a word that should be used sparingly by pedagogues, as we do not want students to assume that there is a lack of engagement involved in proper singing. University of Louisiana at Monroe's Director of Opera and Musical Theatre Mark Ross Clark explains:

Relaxation does not mean that the muscles are limp. It means that the body is functioning without tension and with energy. No matter what you are doing, it is important to be free of tension physically, emotionally, and mentally. When starting to work with opera singers, the great acting teacher Stanislavsky always began with relaxation exercises. (5)

Because the art of singing classical repertoire requires a high level of focus and coordination, pedagogues also use alignment and posture as a way of allowing a performer to feel comfortable in their body. Technically, proper alignment also compliments the tenets of *bel canto* singing and allows singers a full-body connection in breathing and phonating. To further explore integration of physicalization with acting challenges, Mark Ross Clark writes:

Alignment is not solely for an aesthetic look of strength for the singing actor; it is imperative for free vocal production and freedom of movement. Acting teacher Robyn Hunt suggests opening a channel between the feet, the legs, the pelvis, and the voice. 'We seek in the work to have the actor speaking the character's truth, a truth that is not overly protested from the neck up, with the head overly gesticulating and punching words, but rather a sound and set of ideas that seem to come up—as the truth does—from the feet, the floor, the pelvis, the center.' (12)

Contemporary opera audiences expect more of the performers than a beautiful sound. They also want to be engaged in a character-driven, motivated, and specific performance. Opera students should be expected to do more than stand with good

alignment so they can sing well; their alignment and posture must be considered from the character's point of view and support the age, experience, class, education, and motivations of that individual.

Though it is a common conception that opera singers are trained solely to stand and sing beautifully, Goldovsky addresses the need for a more holistic approach:

Since musical forms rely so heavily on the development and repetition of individual phrases and on the recapitulation of entire sections, the more obvious reasons for acting and for the changing of positions are soon exhausted and the singer is forced either to perform in concert style or to rely entirely on motivations based on urges. In these repetitious moments he must be helped by the stage director, whose business it is to devise additional reasoned motivates where they are needed. (109)

Goldovsky asserts that the stage director is responsible for justifying the repetitions within the operatic score. I would argue that pedagogues of opera performance are responsible for giving their students the necessary tools to flesh out the performance in their own way. If a stage director does not support a particular choice, it can always be addressed. However, the exploratory process of choosing specific motivation for each repetitious lyric should be left up to the performer so that their characterization is something to which they can relate.

For better or worse, many opera pedagogues teach the importance of an expressive face when singing. Audiences expect a clear indication of a character's emotion, and this can sometimes be achieved by using the eyes and the face as powerful channels for energy and communication. In my experience, opera pedagogues work specifically on facial expression because classical singers occasionally find it difficult to portray a specific emotion while simultaneously using musculature for singing. Often, the desire to produce a proper vocal sound manifests itself in facial tension or unrelated facial oddities. As an aid for the opera singer, Clark discusses a combination of Stanislavsky's sense memory technique and Chekhov's externally expressive acting method:

[Chekhov's] substitution for the Stanislavsky sense of memory and emotional recall comes from the external expression of adding an emotional 'quality,' or attitude...An actor who is portraying rage will often experience his or her voice tightening down and rising in pitch. This renders the dramatic value of the voice as impotent instead of utilizing it as an important 'power tool.'

However, [Chekhov's] approach does not exclude finding the emotion through association with one's self. Emotional memory can be vitally important as long as there is a release of tension when emotion builds. (21)

The voice is seemingly the most significant priority of an opera student; this is congruent with the expectations of opera audiences. The flashy coloratura of the Baroque period, the long legato lines of the Classical period, and the stamina necessary for *verismo opera* are selected examples of the vocal demands on modern opera singers. As an art form, I have discussed how opera has existed for so much longer than musical theatre. Because of this, classical academic programs and production companies have a much wider array of repertoire to choose from, and singers must be equally diversified in their abilities. A young singer pursuing an operatic career is likely to choose a school based solely on a specific voice teacher; that is, they are often not as concerned with the curriculum—with regards to music theory, music history, lyric diction, acting, etc.—as they are with the stature and following of a particular professor of voice. While this is understandable, pedagogues should seek to expand the importance of these other aspects of curriculum to their students. Due to the blurring of genre lines between musical theatre and opera, a successful career in the classical realm now demands more than simply developing a solid singing technique. Students deserve a holistic approach to singing, acting, and movement so that they can create believable characters in the countless genres within the operatic and musical theatre repertory.

CHAPTER 3

MUSICAL THEATRE PEDAGOGY

Because the American musical theatre genre is the youngest of all the performing arts, musical theatre pedagogy is a recent historical development originating in the 1970s. Perhaps the seminal book on musical theatre pedagogy is noted voice teacher David Craig's *On Singing Onstage*, published in 1978. Craig explains:

Regional theatres have rooted themselves throughout the country with fertile results and, in consequence, have broken the old saw that Broadway is the sole provider of meaningful works for the stage. (xv)

Because New York City was not the only place where one could make a living as a performer, students around the United States were eager to study and perfect their craft. This led to the creation and rapid multiplication of musical theatre Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programs in the 1980s and 1990s. There was a sudden great demand for teachers of musical theatre during this time, and most schools sought to hire working professionals who had—or were in the midst of—successful careers on Broadway and in regional theatres. University programs in “Musical Theatre Education” simply did not—and still do not—exist. Even today, conservatories and universities often list “extensive professional experience” in job descriptions for potential musical theatre professors. This places even greater importance on the study of pedagogy within the field, because being a working professional and an effective teacher are not necessarily equivalent in the academic world.

Due to the historical development of the integrated musical theatre libretto, pedagogues consider the story to be the most important component of the craft, as do many directors, choreographers, and music directors. Therefore, students of musical theatre are often being trained as “actors who sing.” They are taught the importance of playing a dramatic action with a specific super-objective. Vocal technique and musicianship skills are unfortunately not consistently valued in many BFA programs,

despite the National Association of Schools of Theatre's (NAST) recommendation that musical theatre students achieve a "high level of skill in sight-singing" and obtain private voice instruction "throughout the entire degree program" (137). For example, the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music BFA musical theatre curriculum does not include voice instruction with a full-time faculty member until the sophomore year. Instead, BFA students receive weekly voice lessons taught by graduate students who are studying classical vocal performance. They are responsible for choosing repertoire and strengthening the undergraduates' vocal technique in all musical theatre genres.

Due to the ever-changing demands of the musical theatre score, the most complex area of study in musical theatre pedagogy is vocal instruction. Each subgenre of musical theatre requires a slightly different manipulation of the vocal mechanism. Undergraduate students are expected to perform songs from early musical comedy (1900s-1930s), the Golden Era (1940s-1950s), contemporary, and rock/pop musicals; additionally, characters' voices in musical theatre are extremely varied, from breathy and thin to bright and forward and so on. It is imperative for students to be taught "that healthy vocal production can exist along the entire spectrum" (Moore and Bergman 5). Today, many pedagogues expect musical theatre performers to produce a thrilling sound at any cost. Thus, young singers often fall back on a vocally destructive technique. This can be attributed to inadequate vocal instruction or untrained stage directors making vocal demands without a practical knowledge of how the voice works.

Any trustworthy musical theatre vocal technique will focus on the relationship between physical alignment of the body and breath management in order to produce and sustain a desired timbre. Craig accurately warns, "breathing is an involuntary action, but one can husband it or waste it voluntarily" (40). Throughout any musical phrase, the performer must employ the breath to support phonation and free the voice. Often, musical theatre repertoire will call for straight-tone singing—which is the lack of any vacillation of pitch while sustaining a long note. Even then, singers must remain in the position of exhalation to sustain the pitch before releasing into vibrato. A singer's breath should never feel rigid or stuck, even if the needs of the story are physically demanding—such as when playing a character with a physical deformity or singing after a long dance break.

The sound of the female voice in musical theatre has undergone a significant style change in the last seventy years. In Broadway's Golden Era, it was customary that the lyric soprano voice would carry ingénue roles—such as Laurey Williams in *Oklahoma!* (Rodgers and Hammerstein)—while the mezzo-soprano or “belter” would fill the character or soubrette roles—such as Ellie Mae Chipley in *Show Boat* (Kern and Hammerstein). However, the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration changed the course American musical theatre history by placing higher importance on the integration of script and score to tell the story—much like Wagner was a predecessor to *versimo opera*. Since then, composers and librettists have worked to integrate the musical structure so there is often no clear vocal register divide between character types. For example, *Light in the Piazza* (Adam Guettel) calls for both a matronly character and a young ingénue to sing above and below the staff, sometimes within one song. Penn State University Voice Department Chair Mary Saunders-Barton asserts:

The musical theatre performer must now step effortlessly with no discernible transition from speaking to singing and from singing to speaking, combining a full vocal range that doesn't unexpectedly break, shift or flip, but is available in a seamless continuum from the lowest to the highest note. (Saunders-Barton 281)

It was not until last year in 2011 that Penn State University launched the first Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program in Voice Pedagogy for Music Theatre; this fact alone illustrates that musical theatre voice pedagogy has not yet been codified in the academic arena.

Though students are required by the National Association of Schools of Theatre to have voice instruction throughout their entire degree course of study, this training does not instinctively synthesize itself in the performance of a song. Students are expected to rehearse much of their performance work outside the voice studio, and focus on acting objectives and stage movement when presenting material in class.

A unique aspect of musical theatre pedagogy is the strong focus on the actor's use of their body, or physicality. In *Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre*, Tracey Moore states:

The body is where a lot of 'hiding' takes place. Hiding can take the form of tension, wandering, or protective gestures. To open one's body to an audience takes bravery and self-confidence. (Moore and Bergman 15)

Thus, beginning musical theatre actors will often be taught the importance of *actor neutral*, that is, a balanced physical posture with feet spread shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, arms gently resting at one's side, with no tension or twitching in the arms or hands; from this place, any physical gesture or movement on stage is accessible. Many musical theatre training programs include yoga, Pilates, and occasionally Alexander Technique classes to supplement the goals of kinesthetic awareness, proper alignment, relaxation and concentration; by honing these skills, musical theatre performers should be able to transform into a variety of character types by adjusting their physical posture, walk, and gestures.

Having surveyed the state of both opera and musical theatre pedagogy in the academic world, the following chapter will discuss the benefits of integrating genres. Both opera and musical theatre are rooted in storytelling; therefore, the singer-actor who performs the repertoire should be trained with similar aesthetic and pedagogic principles. This will also assist the performer in becoming more marketable to the many companies producing crossover repertoire. For example, the Chicago Lyric Opera is presenting *ShowBoat* in its 2011-2012 season while down the street just one year ago, the Goodman Theatre (known for producing diverse straight plays) presented Bernstein's operetta, *Candide*.

CHAPTER 4

A BLENDED PEDAGOGY

In recent years, theatre and opera companies across the United States are producing more “crossover seasons.” By producing *The Music Man* (Meredith Willson) or *South Pacific* (Rodgers and Hammerstein), an opera company may appeal to a larger audience base and increase ticket sales. Similarly, musical theatre companies may produce *Candide* (Leonard Bernstein) or *The Merry Widow* (Franz Lehár) in order to expand their core demographic. As these organizations blur genre lines, it is imperative that performers do the same with regard to their skill set; the consummate singer-actor in today’s market would possess the necessary skills to perform roles in a variety of opera, operetta, and musical theatre productions. The performer can identify as a certain vocal type (i.e. lyric soprano or comic baritone); however, they must possess the skills to synthesize singing and acting in a variety of different styles.

It is the responsibility of college training programs to provide students with performance opportunities in both opera and musical theatre. If genre lines are blurred in the professional world, they must also be blurred in the academic world; there can no longer be such a bold line between the two genres. To support this assertion, please refer to Appendix to view a list of opera and musical theatre companies that have produced crossover seasons in the last ten years. Pedagogically, there are tools from both academic models that constructively serve the performers. In this chapter, I will combine my research and experiences as a teacher and performer in both musical theatre and opera performance to propose a blend of the two pedagogies. The order in which the necessary pedagogical tools will be discussed in this chapter is not indicative of their importance. However, it is critical to understand that the complete synthesis of these components is what makes the performer in any genre marketable, versatile, and unique.

Many music educators subscribe to the methodology of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss musician who developed a system of learning and experiencing music through

movement called eurhythmics. Several modern methods of music education, especially the Gordon Music Learning Theory, include elements of Dalcroze in pursuit of the total musician. These theories assert that when movement is connected to singing, the performer's voice is free to experience the music kinesthetically; subsequently, the performer's physical awareness is enhanced and they will express the music more fully. This is a tool I have found invaluable in my work both as a student and teacher. If a young singer is having difficulty connecting to the legato line of a phrase, the instructor may have the singer and observers move freely around the room with their arms and legs moving as if swimming through water, while she is singing. The sensation of resistance against the "water" with her arms will translate as the resistance of the vocal cords to the breath. The result will achieve consistent airflow through the phrase, giving the singer the legato line she is seeking. The colorful term "park and bark" should be considered a final goal only when necessary; the pedagogical road to the performance should include creative and kinesthetic experiences of the music—whether a Puccini aria or a Sondheim patter song.

Though dance is not the focus of my research, it is an essential part of musical theatre curriculum. Minimal training for students in BFA programs is typically ballet, jazz, and tap. As musical theatre is known for its integration of singing, acting, and dancing, it is imperative that young performers are held to a high standard in this area, so that they are hireable upon graduation. Though opera training programs need not immerse their students in extensive dance training, it would behoove pedagogues to—at the very least—expose them to several basic styles such as ballet and jazz. Many operas and operettas call for dance, and due to budget constraints, production companies can no longer hire a singing chorus and a dancing chorus. *The Merry Widow* (Lehár) includes several types of dance, including Pontevedrian folk dance, the waltz, and the French can-can; *Der Rosenkavalier* (Richard Strauss) and the famous "Dance of the Seven Veils" from *Salome* are two other popular examples of dance in opera. Thus, students being trained as opera performers must be exposed to some movement and dance in their four years of study; this skill will only enhance their marketability as singers who can act and dance. Also, a basic understanding of shifting weight from one foot to the other as well as simple folk dance steps is often all a singing actor would

need to be cast in Golden Era musicals such as *Oklahoma!* or *South Pacific*. If pedagogues want their students to be successful, they must give them the tools to be marketable in as many areas as possible.

In addition to any dance requirements of BFA (and sometimes of BM) programs, musical theatre and opera students should also be exposed to various forms of physical exploration and awareness including yoga, pilates, t'ai chi, and Alexander technique. Pursuing a career as a performer can be extremely stressful and physically demanding; students must learn reliable forms of relaxation in order to control their mind and body as well as engage in active rest. Young performers must be encouraged to “free up” their physical body in order to achieve maximum vocal control. Historically, opera is viewed as a rather inert performance art based heavily on traditions that are hundreds of years old. However, the modern performer must be able to express the music physically and vocally, and the first step toward physical control is physical freedom. The physical component considered the most important by opera training programs is alignment; thus, Alexander technique is highly regarded by many classical voice teachers. Furthermore, teachers must also not forget:

Posture is dynamic; that is, all of the cells of the body are full of vibrating atoms that we cannot see. These cells need space in which to move. When alignment is poor and muscles are tight, cells, organs, and joints cannot function efficiently. Thus, rather than being expansive and free, the body shrinks, making it difficult to move, breathe easily, or engage in physical activity without danger of injury. (Dayme 24)

If a singer is presenting an art song or aria, their body must remain dynamic. They should not shy away from gestures, focus shifts, or movement. The choice of when to use these tools becomes clear when the performance is initiated with an objective and obstacle, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another skill that is imperative in both opera and musical theatre performance is proper diction; audiences must be able to understand the text being sung. In addition, the delivery of the text must adhere to the time period and setting of the story, or to the stage director's concept for the piece. Students in opera programs are required to study English, Italian, German, and French diction (NAST 132) as opera pedagogues are concerned with the integrity of the foreign languages. However,

operatic voice teachers are often ridiculed for their use of vowel modification. Bunch explains:

The vowels are often cheated in text work and in singing because they are not given the full time they merit. They get mixed up with the consonants by being chewed or distorted by excessive tongue and jaw movement, and the flow of sound is impeded. (Dayme 113)

Thus, when working at the extremes of the vocal range, voice teachers will often suggest using [ɪ] instead of [i], [y] instead of [i], and so forth. In my experience, singers are criticized when using modified vowels in parts of the voice where it may not be completely necessary and consequently sounds are overproduced or ineffectual. Similarly, one could argue that musical theatre singers tend to riff or embellish melodies without appropriate dramatic intention. It is my assertion that, particularly when singing in the native language of one's audience, opera singers ought stay as close to the intended vowel as possible, so they do not disrupt the dramatic arc of the character and plot. Also, musical theatre performers, particularly when singing operetta or any Golden Era "legit" song, should investigate the vowels that will produce a tall, rounded tone that is appropriate to the style, keeping in mind that often the vowel that the audience hears is not necessarily the vowel that is being produced. Modifying a vowel does not necessarily mean changing it altogether. The lips, teeth, tongue, jaw, and soft palate are all flexible in such a way that singers can find a vowel positioned somewhere between two vowels, if it helps them achieve more resonance on a certain pitch. In my experience working with various voice teachers, mixing vowels such as [i] and [y] or [a] and [æ] will give a bit more space and ring to certain notes in certain voices.

Diction is often overlooked in musical theatre training programs; teachers are usually more concerned with finding the dramatic intention in the material and thus, they miss even some of the simple elegance found in musicalized colloquial language. Students should be exposed to the International Phonetic Alphabet as a means to understanding dialect and proper pronunciation. Joan Wall's popular manual, *International Phonetic Alphabet for Singers*, states, "By anchoring symbol and sound, the IPA offers a positive, controlling influence on the development of the singing tone" (7). Musical theatre students must also be privy to the importance of lyric diction. When

executed well, it can enhance their repertoire in a similarly beautiful and stylistically appropriate manner

The most expansive studies—when considering a blended pedagogy of opera and musical theatre—are that of vocal technique. Differences exist between the two genres that usually create friction in the academic world. Classically trained teachers are often adverse to their students performing musical theatre pieces, claiming that it is dangerous for their vocal development. I would argue that it is the classically trained teacher’s responsibility to learn and understand more about the musical theatre repertoire and its value in history and society, so as to foster their students’ love for the art form. At the undergraduate level, the operatic repertoire that is developmentally appropriate can prove to be restrictive; however, there are countless pieces in the musical theatre repertoire—such as “My White Knight” from *The Music Man* or “Some Enchanted Evening” from *South Pacific*—that **are** developmentally appropriate for the undergraduate vocal performance student. Similarly, musical theatre students should occasionally be encouraged to sing arias or art songs from the classical repertoire. Perhaps they will never take an aria to an audition, but the mechanics of singing in the *bel canto* or classical style are extremely similar to much of the musical theatre repertoire prior to the late 1960s. Essentially, Laurey Williams in *Oklahoma!* is the same vocal type as Laurie Moss in Aaron Copland’s opera *The Tender Land*. Both works were composed within ten years of each other, which illustrates how the line between opera and musical theatre has become increasingly blurred since the turn of the 20th century. Opera America, The National Service Organization for Opera, states:

Opera has been performed in America since the 1700s, and opera houses have existed in cities such as New York, Boston, San Francisco, and New Orleans since the 1800s. In the early 1900s, as Broadway evolved, opera composers began to incorporate elements of musical theatre into their works, blurring the lines between opera and Broadway. (n.p.)

Additionally, musical theatre authority and conductor Lehman Engel wrote:

Up to about 1920, a singer was a singer. That is, he was someone with a highly polished and sizable voice that gave evidence of having been “trained.” In the big Victor Herbert successes, commencing about the turn of the present century, the leading singers were quite often borrowed from the Metropolitan Opera. In *Mlle. Modiste* there was Fritzi Scheff, who became a bigger star on Broadway singing “Kiss Me Again” than she had been at the

Met as Musetta in *La Boheme*. Later, Herbert used Emma Trentini (coloratura) of the Manhattan Opera House and Orville Harrold (the Met's Parsifal) in *Naughty Marietta*. In a sense, the vocal requirements of Broadway were at the time nearly synonymous with those of opera. (85-86)

There is a similarity in the form and phrase structure of both classical arias and early Broadway standards. For example, the form of a typical 18th century *da capo* aria is ABA or ternary form; two hundred years later, this would influence the popular 32-bar song, in which the 'A section' is often repeated: AABA. Figure 1 is a formal analysis of "Where E'er You Walk" from George Frideric Handel's *Semele* (1742); Figure 2 is a similar analysis of "Where or When" from Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart's *Babes in Arms* (1937).

WHERE-E'ER YOU WALK

Words by ALEXANDER POPE Music by GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

The image shows a musical score for the aria "Where E'er You Walk" from Handel's *Semele*. It includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The score is annotated with formal analysis diagrams: a circle labeled 'A' is placed above the first vocal phrase, a circle labeled 'A1' is placed above the second vocal phrase, and a circle labeled 'B' is placed above the third vocal phrase. The score includes various performance instructions such as 'Largo e pianissimo per tutto', 'ad lib.', 'a tempo', 'cresc.', 'dim.', 'Fine', 'pp', and 'Adagio'. The lyrics are: "Where-e'er you walk cool gales shall fan the glade, Trees, where you sit, shall crowd in-to a shade; Trees, where you sit, shall crowd in-to a shade; Where-e'er you tread the blushing flow'rs shall rise, And all things flourish, and all things flourish where-e'er you turn your eyes, where-e'er you turn your eyes, where-e'er you turn your eyes." The score ends with 'D.C.' (Da Capo).

Figure 1. Formal analysis of "Where E'er You Walk" from *Semele*. Source: Northcote, Sydney. *Tenor Songs*. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1953. Print.

Students of opera and musical theatre must be given the opportunity to explore this similarity as it will enrich their understanding of musical form. It is intriguing that two hundred years after Handel's *Messiah* was composed, writers of musical comedy would return to the simple *da capo* formula, after composers such as Puccini and

opportunity to understand acting as a craft, so they can better bring their performances to life. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* states:

Another major part of the actor's job is to find a way to live truthfully under the imaginary circumstances of the play. Thus the actor must be able to decide what is going on in the text in simple,actable terms. If the actor gives himself something physically doable that he has a personal investment in for every scene, he will always have something more important to put his attention on than the success or failure of his own performance. (Bruder 4)

Opera singers must not only be taught how to sing technically but also how to act technically. Just as movement can enhance the vocal freedom of a performance, playing a clear dramatic action can focus the singer's energy somewhere other than on the singing; ultimately, this has the potential to improve the vocal performance by freeing the voice. Classical singers (in my experience) have a difficult time forgetting about the quality of their vocal sound to focus on dramatic intention. Because the idea of playing an action is probably foreign to many formally trained singers, it is important to investigate varied exercises to help make the process enjoyable and to allow performers an opportunity to explore. For example, have the performer clearly state their objective before they sing. Then, have the performer and observers identify several possible actions that would help achieve the objective. Write the verbs on index cards and place them in front of the singer. As they sing the song or aria, they should pick up an action card and concern themselves with nothing other than playing that action. When they feel they need to try another tactic, they pick up another action card. In my recent experiences, this workshop-style exercise has made the idea of playing action extremely concrete and has also eliminated many physical and vocal impediments simply because the performer was focused fully on playing specific actions.

Johnathon Pape, Director of Opera Studies at The Boston Conservatory, uses an exercise that achieves this goal at a basic level. He instructs the students to perform a simple task while they sing a song or aria. The task can be something that they do daily and should not be pantomimed. If they choose to iron a shirt, they should bring the iron, the ironing board, and the shirt and genuinely perform the simple task while singing. The exercise is extremely effective in helping opera singers vocally "get out of

their way”; however, the next step is activating that freedom in performance with a clear objective and several specific actions. Similarly, applying this simple technique to classical repertoire will free the vocal performance.

In Baroque repertoire, an aria is defined as a moment when the plot stands still, so the character can show off their voice and elaborate on a few simple lines of text. Around the turn of the 20th century, composers such as Giacomo Puccini famously used *canto parlando* (using the voice in the style of speech) and through-composed forms. In either style, the words are typically drawn out more so than in normal speech, but the actors must sustain an element of realism or modern audiences will become disinterested in the storyline.

Though musical theatre students study basic music theory and musicianship, it has been my experience that the skills are not always practical to the musical theatre repertoire. Where opera programs view this portion of the curriculum as vital to unlocking the deeper meaning of the musical language, it seems that many musical theatre programs consider music theory a necessary evil. I would argue that there are ways to condense a music theory curriculum to the core concepts that will be useful to a future musical theatre artist. During my tenure at San Diego State University, I created and implemented a musicianship curriculum for my MFA Musical Theatre colleagues. The material we covered included note naming in the treble and bass clefs, enharmonics, rhythmic values, simple meters, compound meters, intervals, major and relative minor scales, major and relative minor key signatures, major, minor, dominant 7th, diminished, and augmented triads, basic harmonic progressions, and the circle of fifths. Students also took basic piano lessons for two semesters, and short aural skills exercises were implemented into their weekly coaching schedule.

In a BFA musical theatre program, I think it would be fruitful to spend ten minutes in weekly vocal coachings engaging in a short sight-singing exercise. This opportunity gives the student regular one-on-one attention in the form of simple, diatonic melody reading. I believe that with this music theory model, musical theatre practitioners and performers will graduate with the ability to—at the very minimum—prepare their own sheet music, teach themselves a melody by playing it on the piano, navigate a vocal score, communicate with music directors, choreographers, and

directors in an effective way, sight-sing at auditions and rehearsals, and lead basic vocal warm ups. These skills will set them apart from others in the field and help them greatly; however, they did not have to be inundated with analysis of figured bass, intense chromaticism, or augmented sixth chords to get to that point! Music theory should be a priority in musical theatre programs, but it should be presented in a pedagogically appropriate way. With regard to music theory for the musical theatre student, I believe that too much information could hinder their success in this area.

There are many tools that opera and musical theatre pedagogues can share with each other. Aside from stylistic differences in much of the repertoire that is taught and performed, the goal of both schools is exactly the same: to train the singer actor to use their body, mind, and voice to immerse themselves in the given circumstances of the story and pursue a super-objective as the character they are portraying. In order to do this, a student in either musical theatre or opera must be afforded experiences that strengthen their bodily awareness, alignment, dance skills, diction, vocal technique, acting, musicianship, knowledge of form and structure, and historical perspective on the development of opera and musical theatre. The musical theatre student should occasionally be assigned an aria from an opera or operetta, while the opera student should be exposed to repertoire from the standard musical theatre canon. This blended pedagogy will result in a more holistic approach to training the singing actor, affording the students and teachers the opportunity to grow and experience “the art of making art” together.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The process of researching opera and musical theatre pedagogy to substantiate my own experiences as a performer and teacher has been nonetheless thrilling! Reaching back to resources written in the 1960s and including books used in today's current BFA and BM programs has helped me gain a historical perspective of pedagogy as it has developed along with each art form. A wise teacher once told me, "Always tell a student what **to** do, versus telling them what **not** to do." The research and experiences described in Chapters 2 and 3 investigate what is currently being taught and how pedagogues are teaching it. Chapter 4 combines the best practices of the two pedagogies into what I have come to recognize as a holistic approach to training the singing actor. In this chapter, I will briefly summarize each pedagogical model and subsequently identify the shortcomings that lead me to compose Chapter 4 of this project report.

Opera training programs focus intensely on the musical aspect of the art form; thus, a secure vocal technique is of the utmost importance to both teachers and students. Curriculum concerning vocal pedagogy, music theory, aural skills, and music history are concentrated in the early years of study. In addition, the study of lyric diction is virtually present throughout most operatic training programs. If pedagogues do address acting, it does not occur until the third or fourth years of study—usually in the form of an operatic studio class. Though alignment and body awareness are important to voice teachers, formal training in Alexander Technique, t'ai chi, yoga, and other methods of body mapping and relaxation are typically not implemented into the curriculum. Perhaps a guest artist will present a master class or certain instructors will include a unit or two on the topic, but the students are not engaging in these exercised regularly unless they find local opportunities.

It is my belief that acting and body awareness are the two largest shortcomings of current opera programs. Young classical singers are consistently ridiculed for their

inability to connect to their repertoire; that is, their performances may be stunning musically and vocally, but there is something missing. Clark explains:

...one thing that is missing in many singers' performances is the sense of motivation and purpose. It is so important that a singer feels he or she has a reason to sing what they are singing, and that is be sung rather than spoken...again, this has to do with feeling connected to the music. (97)

Pedagogues must insist that objectives, obstacles, and clear actions are just as crucial to the preparation of repertoire as are musical analysis, lyric diction, and vocal technique; in my experience, this creates a stronger connection between the student and the material. Because so much of the standard operatic repertory is dated, teachers must encourage voice students to find a 'way in' to artistic control and understanding. When students activate their performances by deepening their understanding of the character's given circumstances and super-objective, the product is more genuine and quite moving.

Singing is an extremely physical activity in which it is imperative to use the body and the mind to engage on a deeper level. To allow the singer actor to release tension from their bodies when performing, body awareness and relaxation techniques must be integrated earlier into the curriculum. Private voice instructors can only address so many physical issues in a weekly lesson; and yet, as freshman many singers are cast in operatic productions—albeit probably in the chorus—and expected to move and sing in a stylistically appropriate and believable way. If pedagogues put these students on stage, they must prioritize acting and movement more than the current practice. I recognize that a solid and secure vocal technique is the essence of operatic performance; however (as discussed in Chapter 4) the addition of movement and acting-oriented exercises enhances and improves the quality of the singing voice.

Musical theatre training programs focus much of their energy on performers as movers and actors. From their first day on campus, students are enrolled in dance and acting classes; they are expected to work at a high level in all areas of musical theatre dance—especially jazz, tap, and ballet. The training includes basic music theory, aural skills, and history, but typically lacks any sort of lyric diction and score analysis.

I believe that musical theatre programs focus more on the "theatre" part than the "music" component. Students are expected to perform difficult repertoire from various

musical theatre genres, yet careful attention is not always paid to vocal and musical aspects of the craft. Students may be taking voice lessons, music theory and aural skills, but pedagogues are obligated to help meaningfully connect that information to their repertoire. Several of my voice students who have attended BFA Musical Theatre programs at institutions such as Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and Webster University have reported that the music theory curriculum is above and beyond what is necessary to achieve their degree. Figured bass, atonal theory, and German augmented sixth chords have little—if anything—to do with the musical theatre repertoire and frankly, will go over most BFA students' heads. I am not implying that music theory is not important for the musical theatre student; I simply have found that pedagogues should simplify this area so that it is relevant and user-friendly for the musical theatre performer. For example, studying basic Roman numeral analysis as it applies to the “pop song” (ii-V-I, I-IV-V-I, etc.) would be entirely reasonable because so many early musical comedy songs were the popular songs of the era. Students could then engage in a meaningful discussion about why a composer used, avoided, or extended such common harmonic progressions.

Through the process of writing this project report, I have realized that pedagogy must compliment the current artistic market. Musical theatre and opera performers should be cultivating and engaging in a “crossover pedagogy.” In the current economic climate, production companies are choosing seasons that appeal to audiences of all kinds. Pedagogues must recognize the demand for versatile performers who understand and excel in the many genres of singing-acting. The physical, vocal, and acting skills necessary to believably activate a song in musical theatre and opera must be supported by curriculum implemented by pedagogues in both fields. The “crossover pedagogy” process can be exciting and creative for both the teachers and the students. In a sense, pedagogy can be thought of as the art of teaching art.

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APPENDIX

**PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTION COMPANIES
PRODUCING “CROSSOVER SEASONS” WITHIN THE
PAST 10 YEARS**

| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mercury Opera (Rochester, NY) | 2001-2002 | <i>The Mikado</i> (Gilbert and Sullivan) <i>Rigoletto</i> (Verdi) <i>The Merry Widow</i> (Lehár) <i>La Bohème</i> (Puccini) |
| Ohio Light Opera (Wooster, OH) | 2003 | <i>Rose Marie</i> (Friml) <i>The Grand Duke</i> (Gilbert and Sullivan) <i>Pirates of Penzance</i> (Gilbert and Sullivan) <i>Countess Maritza</i> (Kálmán) <i>The Land of Smiles</i> (Lehár) <i>My Fair Lady</i> (Lerner and Loewe) <i>The Brigands</i> (Offenbach) |
| Houston Grand Opera | 2002-2003 | <i>La Bohème</i> (Puccini) <i>Ariodante</i> (Handel) <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> (Donizetti) <i>The Merry Widow</i> (Lehár) <i>La Traviata</i> (Verdi) <i>Manon</i> (Massenet) <i>Little Prince</i> (Portman) |
| Britain's Royal Opera (Covent Garden, London) | 2003-2004 | <i>Sweeney Todd</i> (Sondheim) <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> (Donizetti) <i>Aida</i> (Verdi) <i>Orlando</i> (Handel) <i>I Pagliacci</i> (Leoncavallo) <i>Luisa Miller</i> (Verdi) <i>Elektra</i> (Strauss) <i>Madama Butterfly</i> (Puccini) <i>Die Zauberflöte</i> (Mozart) |
| Wolf Trap Opera (Vienna, VA) | 2011 | <i>Le donne curiose</i> (Wolf-Ferrari) <i>Sweeney Todd</i> (Sondheim) <i>Tales of Hoffman</i> (Offenbach) |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Central City Opera (Denver, CO) | 2011-2012 | <i>Oklahoma!</i> (Rodgers and Hammerstein) <i>La Bohème</i> (Puccini) <i>The Turn of the Screw</i> (Britten) |
| Goodman Theatre (Chicago, IL) | 2012 | <i>Candide</i> (Bernstein) <i>The Trinity River Plays</i> (Taylor) <i>God of Carnage</i> (Reza) <i>Stage Kiss</i> (Ruhl) <i>Chinglish</i> (Hwan) |
| San Diego Lyric Opera | 2011-2012 | <i>Mame</i> (Herman) <i>Die Fleidermaus</i> (Strauss) <i>The Mikado</i> (Gilbert and Sullivan) |
| The Glimmerglass Festival (Cooperstown, NY) | 2012 | <i>Aida</i> (Verdi) <i>The Music Man</i> (Willson) <i>Armide</i> (Lully) <i>Lost in the Stars</i> (Weill) |
| Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre (Logan, UT) | 2012 | <i>My Fair Lady</i> (Lerner and Loewe) <i>Tosca</i> (Puccini) <i>Kiss Me, Kate</i> (Porter) <i>Faust</i> (Gounod) |
| Lyric Opera of Chicago | 2011-2012 | <i>Aida</i> (Verdi) <i>ShowBoat</i> (Kern and Hammerstein) <i>Rinaldo</i> (Handel) |