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Clarkia Cobb

Western Washington University, [clarkia.cobb@gmail.com](mailto:clarkia.cobb@gmail.com)

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**VOCAL PEDAGOGY WITH THE  
CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIAL MUSIC (CCM) SINGER**

By

Clarkia J. Cobb

Accepted in Partial Completion  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Music, Music Education

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Patricia Bourne, Chair

Dr. Angela Kasper

Professor Kevin Woods

GRADUATE SCHOOL

David L. Patrick, Dean

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Clarkia Joan Cobb

May 16, 2022

**VOCAL PEDAGOGY WITH THE  
CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIAL MUSIC (CCM) SINGER**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Music, Music Education

by  
Clarkia J. Cobb  
May 2022

## **Abstract**

The career reality for a vocalist preparing to sing in any professional setting is that it will undoubtedly include performances requiring skills for a vast range of musical genres. Even choral music settings have expanded to encompass a variety of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) styles as well as the styles on Broadway ranging from ‘legit ’musical theater, and ‘traditional’ musical theatre, to pop, light rock, heavy rock, rap, gospel, R&B, blues, jazz, folk, and country music. However, preparing singers for this model of vocal and genre inclusivity is not included in most university's curricula; instead, university coursework continues to focus primarily on a western classical model.

The need for a new model for teaching singers and future teachers of vocalists cannot be denied. Yet, universities lack instructors qualified to teach CCM genres due to the deficit of education surrounding CCM vocal pedagogy in the university setting. Most education in the pedagogy of CCM styles occurs outside of the university system through certifications.

This thesis presented a rationale for vocal pedagogy for CCM styles taught within the university systems, rooted in the teaching of Vocal Function from Cornelius Reid, and expanded upon by Jeannette LoVetri, the creator of Somatic Voicework™. The culmination of the thesis was the creation of a university-based semester course designed to build vocal pedagogy skills in CCM styles and with the various stylistic parameters each genre needs.

## **Acknowledgments**

The topic of CCM pedagogy and its lack within the university system has been on my heart since I started my master's in the fall of 2019. I want to thank Dr. Patty Bourne for her guidance, encouragement, editing, and heart as I wrote this thesis. Our discussions during my studies about the lack of CCM representation in the university system led me to the topic and writing of this thesis.

Thank you to my teacher, mentor, and friend Leischen Moore, who introduced me to Somatic Voicework™. You have given me more understanding of my voice and how to teach than any other teacher.

This thesis would not have been possible without the continued support of my friends, family, and loved ones as I pursued this master's degree. Thank you to my parents who encouraged me every step of the way and for encouraging me to always follow my dreams. Thank you to my students, who continue to inspire me each day. You make me want to be a better educator and singer and inspire others to fall madly in love with the experience and joy of singing.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
List of Tables and Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1.....	1
Chapter 2.....	17
Chapter 3.....	31
Chapter 4.....	40
Bibliography.....	42

## List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1.....	22
Figure 2.....	25



## Chapter One

The systems and structures that built America's culture and society are changing. The education system is no different; colleges, universities, and educators are being asked to examine the veils of privilege that crafted the current education model and have begun to set a course to change it. These changes include an examination of approaches to areas of study within the academic venue. Music is no exception.

The music education system has been primarily constructed based on the evolution of Western Classical Music. When classical music was introduced to America in the mid-nineteenth century, it implied a social and intellectual superiority of those who supported that music rooted in the class system.<sup>1</sup> This bias repeatedly occurred as non-classical music was introduced (i.e., jazz at the turn of the 20th century, rock and roll in the '50s, etc.).

For far too long, vocal traditions outside of Western classical music have been deemed inferior when compared to vocal literature emerging from within the Western Canon. Due partly to socio-economic differences within vocal traditions, stigma around vocal injury, and cultural elitism,<sup>2</sup> the vocal music education system is based primarily on the lineage of Western Classical Traditions. Today, however, research and scientific evidence demonstrate that singers can sing in various genres of music in a healthy, sustainable way.<sup>3</sup>

Singers, teachers of singing, and university systems can no longer ignore the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> Rosie McMahon 2020, review of "Class, Control, & Classical Music," by Anna Bull, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 29:1, 132-134, DOI: 10.1080/17411912.2020.1750044.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Howard, "Knowledge Practices: Changing Perceptions and Pedagogies in Choral Music Education," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* Vol. 8 2020 page 13.

<sup>3</sup> Marco Guzman, Andres Lanas, Christian Olavarria, Maria Josefina Azocar, Daniel Muñoz, Sofia Madrid, Sebastian Monsalve, et al. "Laryngoscopic and Spectral Analysis of Laryngeal and Pharyngeal Configuration Non-Classical Singing Styles." *Journal of Voice* 29, no. 1 (2015): 130.e21–130.e28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2014.05.004>.

95% of the performances in the United States are based on genres outside of classical music.<sup>4</sup> (This statistic is from a 2021 article published by *The Voice and Speech Review*.) Preparing vocalists for this reality is a task university programs should heed to assure success for their graduates.

Within the academic curriculum for vocalists exist vocal pedagogy courses. These courses help build a framework for guiding students through the art of learning how to teach singing. Unfortunately, current courses are generally only rooted in scientific awareness of what happens in the voice, along with primarily using only classical vocal terminology, instead of giving students a methodology for teaching singing.

Famed vocal pedagogist Cornelius Reid, the author of *The Free Voice*, noted:

Scientific knowledge can help us formulate and understand basic principles more thoroughly, to define and use terminology more concretely and factually, and to determine more fully the potentialities and limitations of our craft. But singing and the teaching of singing must always be recognized as a creative process, while science, as it applies to the vocal function, is pure analysis: analysis in terms of theoretical possibilities on the one hand, and analysis of the harmonic content of tones after they have been produced on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Reid's book was first published in 1965 and offered the pedagogical building blocks to teach singers from a place of Vocal Function rather than only vocal aesthetics and beauty. Teaching functionally requires that the student's knowledge is not solely based on learning repertoire but mastery of vocal craft. (Functional teaching will be described in further detail in chapters two and three of this thesis). Teaching functionally demands a high level of artistry from teachers and students and honors musical inclusivity within all genres, diversity, equity, and cultural inclusion for the evolution of singing, and music today.

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<sup>4</sup> Lara C. Wilson, "Bel Canto to Punk and Back: Lessons for the Vocal Cross-Training Singer and Teacher," *Voice and Speech Review*, (February 2021). DOI: 10.1080/23268263.2021.1889245

<sup>5</sup> Cornelius L. Reid. *The Free Voice: A Guide to Natural Singing* (New York: Joseph Patelson Music House, 2018), 6.

## Purpose

The purpose of this thesis was to advocate for a different approach to preparing vocalists entering the field as non-Western European-focused singers. The result is a course proposal and syllabus designed to teach culturally sustaining vocal pedagogy to Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) singers and teachers of CCM singing. The emphasis focused on the ability to develop and train a singer's instrument and perform in any CCM genre while using the principles of Vocal Function outlined by Reid and developed by other pedagogical experts.

Although Vocal Function as it applies to CCM will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, a quick definition for the reader is as follows: Vocal Function is the effective use of vocal registers at loud and soft volumes on all vowels and flexibility to handle quick runs without constriction or manipulation in the throat while singing CCM styles appropriately within the genre and cultural context of the music.

Well-known CCM pedagogical teacher, Jeannette LoVetri (creator of the LoVetri method), noted: "The basic principles of vocal function in Somatic Voicework™ The LoVetri Method are very simple. They are isolation, development, and combination of chest and head registers to create a balanced mix, undistorted vowels, and strong, aligned posture, which facilitates deep and easy inhalation and exhalation".<sup>6</sup>

Teachers of singing often assess students on sound aesthetics within the current pedagogical system instead of how their voices function. When analyzing and evaluating a singing voice, it is essential to address the symptom and the actual issue of why the voice is not working from a place of Vocal Function, not just vocal aesthetics. Listening from a place of

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<sup>6</sup> Jeannette LoVetri, "Voice Pedagogy: Female Chest Voice." *Journal of Singing - the Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 60, no. 2 (November 2003): 161-164. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/voice-pedagogy-female-chest/docview/1402718/se-2?accountid=15006> (accessed October 25, 2021).

Vocal Function using the principles of vowel, volume, and register, students and teachers can analyze voices and further the development of their singing. This trains kinesthetic awareness and biofeedback mechanism essential for developing the singer's instrument making the singing easy and free.

This thesis grew from the noticeable lack of university-based vocal pedagogy courses and classes specifically designed with the contemporary (pop, rock, musical theater, r&b, and jazz) singer in mind. It should be noted that the author searched numerous syllabi of vocal pedagogy classes and course catalogs from countless universities in the United States finding this to be true.

In 2020, the Journal of Singing published an article titled *An Investigation of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Voice Pedagogy: A Class of its Own*, wherein it focused specifically on this issue:

Given the growing public demand for singing voice training in CCM styles, this proposition poses a dilemma for teachers and singers/students who have been trained only in the traditional classical model. The main challenge lies in the fact that the field of CCM singing lacks clear and cohesive pedagogy that addresses the specific style-related technique and vocal health needs of CCM singers.<sup>7</sup>

This missing aspect in the education system and lack of cohesiveness within vocal methodology leaves students and teachers without the pedagogical knowledge and tools to functionally assess their abilities as singers of contemporary popular music styles. Many of the fundamentals gleaned as the 'only approach' in preparing the singer's voice stop short of providing the instruction needed for those pursuing CCM careers, especially developing chest voice and mix. (Chest voice is a response of the thyroarytenoid muscle (TA), which is the main body of the vocal fold). Most CCM music requires a dominant chest sound, while the chest voice

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<sup>7</sup> Irene Bartlett, and Marisa Lee Naismith, "An Investigation of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Voice Pedagogy: A Class of Its Own." *Journal of Singing*, (January/ February 2020):273.

sound necessary for classical music behaves differently versus some CCM styles where chest voice can be more spoken.<sup>8</sup> Chest voice and specifically belting are found in many cultures and styles of singing around the world. Still, the model for existing pedagogy classes was created on the Western European model of singing, resulting in the deep roots of colonialism.

### **Colonialism in University Music Programs**

As mentioned, vocal pedagogy in university systems has primarily focused on classical pedagogy and the scientific knowledge of the voice within this system. And yet, curiously, there is no standard for how to teach voice.

The type of pedagogical training for voice teachers varies widely. There is no uniform method for how to teach singing nor how to train singing teachers. Some teachers have formal pedagogical training, while others have none. To qualify to teach at the university or conservatory level, academic hopefuls pursue graduate training. However, the predominant type of voice pedagogy training available in graduate programs is classical pedagogy.<sup>9</sup>

Vocalists in American-based higher education institutions have primarily been taught within a system modeled after class systems of social and intellectual superiority within cultural and social divisions from patrons who support the western classical canon. This is apparent in the prejudice and stigma that vocal repertoire within the Western Classical genre of music is superior to other genres of music.<sup>10</sup> Because of these divisions, the result often skews popular music from classical, feeding a system of colonialism and long-existing perceptions of superiority.

Defined by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerge as a result of Colonialism allowing the power structures of white culture to

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<sup>8</sup> LoVetri, J. *Voice pedagogy*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Ann Benson, *Training Contemporary Commercial Singer* (Oxford: Compton Publishing 2020), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Emily Good-Perkins, "Culturally Sustaining Music Education and Epistemic Travel." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 29, no. 1 (2021): 47-66.

dominate our society, culture and education systems.”<sup>11</sup> Within vocal music programs in higher education settings, these racist ideas and patterns of power have become normalized, resulting in a system of education that has crafted a dominance hierarchy system based on how we teach, whom we teach, and what musical traditions we deem acceptable for students to learn.

Many of the normalized values and assumptions found in music education are tied to racist and colonial histories. These assumptions are perpetuated because of colonial-blind, color-blind, and universalist beliefs that Western classical music and the performance practices, aesthetics, and values with which it is associated can transcend differences in race, culture, and worldview. The assumption that Western classical music is universally appropriate is rooted in colonialist discourses of the “cultured” and “uncultured” and “high” and “low” art, where Western classical music is the “high” art form for those who are “cultured.”<sup>12</sup>

The audition and acceptance systems for higher education, along with repertoire for vocal performance majors at most universities, vocal pedagogy classes, master class settings, and often student-teacher relationships within private studios, mirror this colonization and white cultural dominance around music. University systems claim they seek to welcome diversity and embrace openness to create cultural conditions to rekindle and inspire learning. Yet, the university admission acceptance model is still primarily rooted in the ‘colonialist’ frame of education by deeming what music is appropriate for audition repertoire and what is taught as curriculum.

Harvard University publicly acknowledged that the classical curriculum within their program was designed for students who had several years of intense musical study, preventing growth and diversity within their student body.<sup>13</sup> Limiting who is allowed in based on prior knowledge feeds further into the elitist cultural method of teaching that is rooted in

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<sup>11</sup> Good-Perkins, *Culturally Sustaining*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Good-Perkins, *Culturally Sustaining*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> William Robin, “What Controversial Changes at Harvard Means for Music in the University”, *National Sawdust Log*. Accessed on 10 October 2021, <https://nationalsawdust.org/thelog/2017/04/25/what-controversial-changes-at-harvard-means-for-music-in-the-university/>.

perfectionism.<sup>14</sup>

Audition material for the average Vocal Performance or Music Education degree within the United States is primarily classical music unless the school has a jazz or musical theater program (where students can audition using pieces from the jazz tradition or musical theater repertoire). By adopting classical music as the standard for auditions, the ‘system’ of accepting students limits admission to a thin group of singers. Those who may have studied music in other traditions than art songs are likely to not be accepted. It should be noted that classical music is taught primarily by reading music in western musical notation, while many CCM genres have originated from aural traditions. This alone eliminates students who may learn music in and aural traditions instead of reading sheet music in a western classical system.

In contrast, others decide not to pursue music in higher education; why spend time studying something of no interest? To learn most classical repertoire, students need a voice teacher to learn, rehearse, and be coached on the material. It is beyond aural learning as the music is challenging harmonically and rhythmically, often in languages other than English, and it requires some understanding of technique. Affording a voice teacher is a privilege and eliminates many students whose passion is music and potentially would be successful if allowed to audition with music within a CCM genre or tradition.

No one can argue the artistic value and educational challenge of learning music within the western canon of classical singing. However, in identifying this type of training as the only acceptable method for preparing singers, biases have emerged with the belief that singing in CCM genres is unhealthy and will damage singer’s voices (in part due to the larynx primarily being raised in CCM genres versus having a lowered larynx in classical singing).

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<sup>14</sup> Howard, *Knowledge Practices*, 2.

## Advocacy For CCM Pedagogy

Often, classical pedagogy classes teach students the scientific terminology of what is happening within the vocal mechanism itself: It is more of an anatomy class instead of teaching singers how to teach using scientific knowledge to develop students' instruments. Voice science provides scientific terminology to understand how singers can use vowels, volume, and register to analyze a voice-based on vocal function and develop and strengthen the voice. For years, people have said, “if you can sing classical music, you can sing anything.”<sup>15</sup> This marginalized statement continues the attitude of Coloniality.

Singers should not be marginalized as only “classically trained” with one specific vocal setup or vocal quality recipe. Instead, they should be encouraged to develop an understanding of how to healthfully change structures of the vocal mechanism to create a variety of qualities needed for diverse genres. Famed pedagogue Robert Edwin refers to this as “cross-training,” which can enhance traditional teaching pedagogy and help students explore the entirety of the vocal instrument by training varied muscle groups without esthetic bias. For example, if we are teaching that the larynx can be lowered for a classical vocal quality, we must alternatively teach that the larynx can be safely raised when singing in a contemporary vocal quality.<sup>16</sup>

The fear that singers will develop nodules or polyps if they sing with a raised larynx has been used to discourage other singing practices that require a raised larynx within CCM styles. This leads to teachers of classical singing selecting repertoire that uses a lowered larynx position and neglecting the development of chest voice in singers.

In an attempt to feminize the voice, most classical pedagogues advocate mixing in head at Eb4. The words used above to describe the female chest voice are not functional in

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<sup>15</sup> Randy Buescher, “The Recovering Female Opera Singer” *Journal of Singing*, 61 no. 5 (May/June 2005): 518. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/recovering-female-opera-singer/docview/1860275734/se-2?accountid=15006>.

<sup>16</sup> Brian J. Winnie, “Bridging the Gap Between Classical and Contemporary Vocal Technique: Implications for the Choral Rehearsal,” *Voice and Speech Review*, 11, no. (2017), DOI: 10.1080/23268263.2017.1370803.



manner, but rather, value judgments firmly rooted in outdated, Western European, sexist male attitudes. Women are obviously not the same now as they were in the nineteenth century, and today's vocal music and vocal technique need to reflect the change in values. The sounds of female classical singing reflect values that most people cannot connect with anymore. The use of chest voice reflects a change in attitude among women and towards women. It connects with how the world views modern femininity. To ignore chest as the foundation of the nonclassical female voice is to ignore reality.<sup>17</sup>

Lack of chest voice causes numerous possible problems, including little vocal response, roughness, flattening, heaviness, vowel distortion, shortening of range at the top, difficulty singing softly, and general vocal discomfort.<sup>18</sup> This raises a question of moral ethics when teachers trained with only classical pedagogical knowledge do not develop chest voice in a student. Are they causing harm to the student's long-term vocal development?

When a student wants to sing music outside of the western canon and work in more CCM-based genres, teachers should not coerce them into singing classical music only due to the limited pedagogical knowledge of a teacher (may know how to teach only one style of music). The benefit of vocal cross-training in multiple genres will provide the skills students need to succeed in the current climate of vocal performance.<sup>19</sup> An education in music is expensive, and the job market is not guaranteed, especially if teachers are not developing students' voices to sing marketable music that they want to sing. The evolution of their musical journey extends well beyond the four years of university study; lessons during these years should help students understand the big picture of vocal development.

If the goal of the music education system is to develop students' instruments by preparing them to work as singers or teachers of singers, time at the university level must include repertoire

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<sup>17</sup> Buescher, *The recovering*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Jeannette LoVetri, "The 2020 Online LoVetri Institute for Somatic Voicework™" (Webinar, Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music July 21-23, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *Bel Canto*, 4

that will challenge and set them up to be successful. However, instructors must remember that repertoire is not the most critical aspect of developing a singer's musicianship; it is Vocal Function ability.

For students to be successful with repertoire, the teacher must understand what principles of vocal function (vowel, volume, and register) exist within the given repertoire and if the student's instrument can meet those vocal demands. This includes, but is not limited to, developed flexibility (i.e., chest voice, head voice, register coordination, bright and dark vowel), singing long runs, and emotional/ artistic delivery.

Within a vocal pedagogy course constructed to emphasize the demands of CCM genres, the outcome of repertoire is not just completing the piece but how the instrument is functioning within that piece and what the piece demands of the voice. Repertoire does many things for students, but when only completing a piece for juries (instead of what is learned), students' voices are not being trained to sing and teach in many styles. When students understand the skill sets, they are being asked to learn and develop, it helps them fill in the gaps within their musicianship, and frankly, it makes teaching singing not guesswork.

It takes two years to establish a solid baseline in a voice; it takes ten years to develop a professional voice.<sup>20</sup> Within the four years of education at the undergrad level, it is crucial to help students understand what comes next. If the goal of the music education system is to graduate well-rounded musicians, teachers must understand how to address the vocal demands of multiple genres of music.

A primary reason for broadening the content and framework of vocal pedagogy courses (as a place for preparing teachers of singers) is due to the realities of a career in vocal

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<sup>20</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

performance. According to Lara Wilson (2021), “Opportunities for classical singers are dwindling, and opera companies have increasingly added music theater to their performance schedules, and performers of music theater are increasingly required to sing in a multitude of styles.”<sup>21</sup> This same article included statistics revealing that 30,000 trained classical singers audition for jobs every day, but, according to a 2014 survey from *Musical America*, only 2,000 of those singers were managed. This means 6% of current graduates have management and the other 94% are unemployed or unemployable as classical singers. Further findings showed that only 4.5 % of live performances in the marketplace are made up of classical singers, while the remaining 95.5% are CCM genres. Broadway singers, for instance, are asked to sing with stylistic accuracy in Rock, Rap, Blues, and Country music, sometimes all in one show.

Higher education music programs are responsible for helping students succeed as performers, limiting instruction and pedagogy through one genre of music is a disservice. “Even when a voice pedagogy course is focused on actual pedagogy, the content of the course is often limited to classical aesthetics to serve classical repertoire. In these cases, the outdated presumption persists that technical training in the classical aesthetic is sufficient to sing in any style.”<sup>22</sup>

The argument that if one can sing with classical technique, they can sing anything is untrue. It has created a dichotomy between the teaching at universities and what is expected in the real world when students are expected to perform CCM styles of music.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *Bel Canto*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Benson, *Training Contemporary*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Bel Canto*, 4.

## Status of Contemporary Commercial Music Programs in the United States

Currently, there are four graduate degree programs in the United States with non-classical pedagogy programs. Shenandoah University (Winchester, Virginia) is the only university with a specialized CCM (Contemporary Commercial Music) master's program, Pennsylvania State University has a Musical Theater Pedagogy program. Belmont University has a master's in music in Commercial Music and Carthage College (Kenosha, Wisconsin) has a Master of Music in Music Theatre Vocal Pedagogy. Currently, Shenandoah has a Doctoral program in voice pedagogy which allows students to audition using all forms of music; however, it is listed as a Doctoral of Musical Arts (DMA) in Pedagogy as opposed to a CCM doctoral program.

The quote that follows was drawn from Dr. Elizabeth Ann Benson's book *Training Contemporary Commercial Music Singers* published in 2020. (At the time of publication, the Ph.D. program at Shenandoah did not exist.)

Currently, there are only two university programs in the U.S. with graduate degrees in non-classical voice pedagogy. Shenandoah Conservatory (CCM) and Pennsylvania State University (Music Theater Pedagogy). These programs are well designed, but they yield very few graduates each year. An undergraduate degree does not qualify one to teach at the university level, so most academic hopefuls seek graduate study in a variety of classical or jazz performance programs, or sometimes Ph.D. programs in music education. However, these programs rarely offer thorough pedagogical training to teach CCM at the university level. At this time, there are zero doctoral programs in CCM voice pedagogy in the U.S. This creates a troubling disparity between the number of CCM teachers needed and the number of teachers who have specific training.<sup>24</sup>

Classical pedagogy within the typical university class system relies on imagery and kinesthetic feedback for singers, which is valuable but results in variable levels of effectiveness. Scott McCoy, the author of *Your Voice and Inside View* (the standard pedagogical textbook assigned at most universities) wrote, "Voice science does not tell us what to do as teachers of singing: it tells us what is happening during the act of singing. Science informs art; it does not

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<sup>24</sup> Benson, *Training Contemporary*, 9.

create it.”<sup>25</sup> In truth, many systems of vocal pedagogy exist with little agreement on how to develop a vocal instrument.

When our educational system of vocal pedagogy is based on one genre or aesthetic style of singing, the result is a disservice to singers, teachers, and anyone working with the voice. The average listener can clearly hear that singing styles are different, so why do educational systems judge others' forms of artistic expression, saying they cannot elevate their musical goals to a higher level?

Unfortunately, techniques for singing other genres such as folk, gospel, blues, jazz, pop, and rock, which fall under a new heading called Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM), have been neither clearly defined nor seriously addressed in traditional voice pedagogy texts. While it is true that all singers must breathe, phonate, resonate, and articulate, they do not necessarily approach these technical elements in the same manner. Recent acoustic, physiologic, and pedagogic research challenges the widely held belief that classically based voice techniques alone can serve the world's diversity of singing styles.<sup>26</sup>

One could argue that the highest level of artistry is a singer who is cross-trained and can sing in all genres. When beginning to develop a pedagogy for CCM styles, teachers should look at Broadway for the framework of all the musical styles used there. Singers are expected to sing all styles of music, and if they want to work, vocally, their voices need to be able to handle the vocal demands of those styles. (See Chapter two for further details).

### **Introduction To Vocal Pedagogy Through a Broader Lens**

This thesis advocates for a broader pedagogical lens in developing vocalists for optimal employment in a highly diverse performance landscape. By limiting the approach to vocal

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<sup>25</sup> Scott McCoy, et al, “In Support of Fact-Based Voice Pedagogy and Terminology,” *Journal of Singing*, 71, no. 1, (Sept. 2014):10.

<sup>26</sup> American Academy of Teachers of Singing, “In Support of Contemporary Commercial Music (Nonclassical) Voice Pedagogy.” *Journal of Singing* 65, no 1, 2008, 7.

instruction through a pedagogical lens, students are likely to lack the healthy skills to navigate music outside the western art song traditions. They may also develop a dangerous bias toward the extensive range of repertoire beyond classical music, thus continuing a hierarchy of white dominance within vocal traditions.

Viewing vocal pedagogy through a broader lens includes a widened compass on the use and appropriateness of ‘belting.’ Many cultures have a tradition of belting in some way,<sup>27</sup> yet for years classical teachers have taught that belting is dangerous, unsafe, and will cause damage to one’s singing voice. The term “belting” is a description used when a female singer takes up chest voice, also known as lower register, modal quality, (TA muscles), above the traditional “break,” which is the G above middle C at a loud volume. Healthy belting means the notes are carried easily and freely across the break without the throat constricting. However, some classical singers will use the term ‘unhealthy chest voice production.’<sup>28</sup> This stigmatism around vocal injury within the classical world and university education system demonstrates a lack of understanding of “constriction” versus “contraction” and a disregard for vocal science.

The key to longevity and stamina in the voice is not only to understand and identify which muscles to contract and which to release but also to understand the difference between contraction versus constriction, and vocal effect versus vocal sound.

Contraction refers to the tightening and shortening of a muscle. It is necessary for muscles to contract in order to produce and/ or sustain vocal sounds. However, constriction occurs when the muscle is stuck in the contracted position and is not easily pliable. When singing, singers want certain areas of the vocal mechanism to contract yet

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<sup>27</sup> Brad Wells, “On the Voice: Belt Technique: Research, Acoustics, and Possible World Music Applications,” *The Choral Journal* 46, no. 9 (2006): 77.

<sup>28</sup> Wendy DeLeo LeBorgne, Linda Lee, Joseph C Stemple, and Heather Bush, “Perceptual Findings on the Broadway Belt Voice,” *Journal of Voice* 24, no. 6 (2010): 678. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2009.02.004>.

still remain flexible enough to easily adjust to the next vocal function/objective.”<sup>29</sup>

Often CCM styles of music require some type of contraction but if the vocal mechanism disengages afterward and the voice is placed back into a mixer alignment (more head dominant), has neutral vowels, or the singer does a vocal cool down, the singer will recover quicker the next day.<sup>30</sup> For example, jazz singers are expected to straight tone the notes taking out the vibrato. This is done by constricting the base of the tongue. In musical theater, belting engages the tongue, too; these techniques are safe and beautiful stylistic choices when the singer can put their voice back into a more neutral position after. A classical singer will use the structures inside the vocal tract differently than jazz, rock, musical theater, and gospel singers.

Due to the unique attributes of stylistic approaches to singing, experts in the field agree that one cannot treat genres with different vocal demands the same. “Since there are significant and measurable acoustic differences between classical singing styles and popular singing styles, the Academy proposes that the techniques used to train singers in those styles should be tailored to the particular performing needs of the singer.”<sup>31</sup>

Vocal instruction should be tailored to the genre a singer is studying or teaching. For instance, singers from diverse cultures in the world have an accepted and appropriate set of vocal skills that fit into the unique culture of the singing traditions represented. Singers studying the voice should be allowed to understand as much about Vocal Function as possible as it applies to every genre of music.

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<sup>29</sup> Trineice Robinson-Martin, *So You Want to Sing Gospel a Guide for Performers* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 103.

<sup>30</sup> Ragan, Kari. “The Impact of Vocal Cool-down Exercises: A Subjective Study of Singers' and Listeners' Perceptions.” *Journal of Voice* 30, no. 6 (2015): 764.e1. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2015.10.009>.

<sup>31</sup> American Academy, *In Support of*, 26.

A study published in the *Journal of Voice* revealed that a “majority of teachers of Music Theater (MT), a style of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM), had little professional experience and little formal training in vocal pedagogy for this style.”<sup>32</sup> In this same 2003 survey, teachers of CCM music expressed a need for an increase in knowledge in three things:

1. Availability of clearly organized and consistent vocal production information for CCM, which can be easily learned by a wide variety of singers of all backgrounds and ages, and courses, seminars, workshops, books, and articles on CCM conducted or written by reputable experts who have been acknowledged in the academic and performing communities.
2. Increased knowledge of voice science and voice medicine, which has been incorporated into practical vocal use for singing all styles of CCM.
3. Training to learn how to use their voice and teach correctly, in a healthy, musical, and artistic manner the various CCM styles.<sup>33</sup>

This extensive article clearly pointed to the need for universities to expand a single tract vocal pedagogy offering to include a CCM Vocal Pedagogy course making it a degree (available) requirement for Vocal Performance, Music Theater, Commercial Music, Vocal Pedagogy, and Music Education degree programs. As previously mentioned, the institutions that offer graduate-level vocal programs are limited, and most learning takes place outside of university coursework.

At the time of writing this project, NATS (National Association of Singing Teachers) listed six programs for CCM music pedagogical methodology development: Estill Voice International, Somatic Voicework™, Speech Level Singing, Complete Vocal Technique (CVT), Voiceworks, and Vocal Power Method. These programs contribute to the conception of a Vocal Pedagogy course designed for CCM voice teachers; however, due to the author’s training and experience, the Somatic Voicework (LoVetri) serves as a primary resource for this thesis.

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<sup>32</sup> Edrie Means, Weekly, and Jeannette L LoVetri, “Follow-Up Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Survey: Who’s Teaching What in Nonclassical Music,” *Journal of Singing*, 23, no. 3, 17 (Mar. 2009): 367.

<sup>33</sup> Weekly, Means, LoVetri, *Follow-Up*, 32.



## Chapter 2

This thesis advocates for universities to include vocal pedagogy classes with an emphasis on Contemporary Commercial Musical (CCM) styles of music in their course offerings at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Chapter One included evidence for the need to create a course with future teachers in mind, accentuating the unique approach required for CCM professionals. Chapter Two addresses the various vocal stylistic and genre parameters within CCM music and how to use Vocal Function as the framework for analyzing and assessing voices. This framework serves as the foundation for the Vocal Pedagogy course outlined in Chapter Three and thus requires content explanation.

Evidence indicates that the job market for CCM musical performers far surpasses that of classical music performers in the United States.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, providing a vocal pedagogy course that includes the stylistic and pedagogical demands to teach future teachers of singers (within the CCM framework) is warranted. The lack of vocal pedagogy courses that have a broader range of stylistic vocal and pedagogical demands leaves students unprepared to sing or teach in these genres resulting in a general lack of knowledge for their students.

In Chapter Two, the reader is introduced to broad parameters impacting the content for a vocal pedagogy course. These parameters include musical styles within the CCM framework and Vocal Function, specifically how it is comprehended using the concepts of Register, Vowel, and Volume. These foundation principles serve as the primary content for the vocal pedagogy course outlined in Chapter Three.

### **CCM Stylistic Vocal Parameters**

Within classical music, voices are classified within the *Fach* system, which classifies

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *Bel Canto*, 4.

voices by the range, weight, and color of voices primarily used in German opera houses.<sup>35</sup> Akin to the *Fach* system in classical music, various genres within CCM (Musical Theater, Pop, Rock, Rap, R & B, Country, Folk, Jazz, and Gospel) have different stylistic requirements and functional demands. As CCM genres have a different sound and stylistic requirements (for each genre to sound authentic) the throat is doing slightly different things in various styles. As a result of the stylistic parameters, teachers of singers in the CCM ‘category’ need to understand how this shows up within vocal repertoire but also the function of what the voice is doing.

Below is a list of various CCM artists from various genres and musical theater show examples so the reader can imagine how vastly different these vocal styles sound and are in genre specifications.

1. Legit Musical Theater (Legit implies classical vocal quality and is the rarest category for shows on Broadway.<sup>36</sup>)

Broadway show examples: *Porgy and Bess*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Light in the Piazza*, *Cinderella*, *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Show Boat*, *Man of La Mancha*, *She Loves Me*, and *Kismet*.

2. Traditional Music Theater (Shows written to be sung by a belter.<sup>37</sup>)

Broadway Show examples: *Anything Goes*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Most Happy Fella*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Secret Garden*, *The Life*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Evita*, *An American in Paris*, *on the Twentieth Century*, *Pippin*, *Hello Dolly*, *The Producers*.

(The next examples contain artistic examples and Broadway shows that represent these genres.)

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<sup>35</sup> Nina Scott-Stoddart, “The Fach System of Vocal Classification,” *Halifax Summer Opera Festival*, Accessed March 14, 2022. [http://halifaxsummeroperafestival.com/?page\\_id=3270](http://halifaxsummeroperafestival.com/?page_id=3270).

<sup>36</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

3. Pop/ Light Rock

Artist examples: Sean Mendes, Taylor Swift, Whitney Houston, Ariana Grande,

Beyonce, Demi Lovato, Dua Lipa, John Mayer, Justin Bieber, and Ed Sheeran.

Broadway show examples: *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Godspell*, *Legally Blonde*,  
*Lion King*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Waitress*.

4. Heavy Rock

Artist examples: Green Day, Led Zeppelin, Paramore, Jack White, Alice in Chains,

Temple of The Dog, and Chris Cornell.

Broadway show examples: *Tommy*, *Rent*, *Jesus Christ Super Star*, *School of Rock*, and  
*American Idiot*.

5. Rap

Artist Examples: Drake, J Cole, Kendrick Lamar, Post Malone, Jay-Z, Nicki Minaj, Cardi  
B, Megan Thee Stallion, and Missy Elliot.

Broadway show examples: *Bring in Da Noise*, *Bring in Da Funk*, and *Hamilton*.

6. Gospel, R&B, and Blues

Genre examples: Amy Winehouse, Joss Stone, Gary Clark Jr, Leon Bridges, Bruno Mars,  
Ella Mai, Khalid, and H.E.R.

Broadway show examples: *The Color Purple*, *Soul Doctor*, *Gospel at Colonus*, and  
*Motown*.

7. Jazz

Artist examples: Cécile McLorin Salvant, Jazzmeia Horn, Diana Krall, Rene Marie, Dee  
Dee Bridgewater, Veronica Swift, Gregory Porter, Kurt Elling, Bobby McFerrin, Jamison  
Ross, and Sachal Vasandini.

Broadway show examples: *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Jelly's Last Jam*, *City of Angels*, and *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*.

#### 8. Folk--Country/ Western

Artist examples: Chris Stapleton, Joni Mitchell, Miranda Lambert, The Chicks, Anderson East, Brandi Carlile, Eric Church, Bon Iver, Regina Spektor, Benjamin Clementine, Iron and Wine, Damien Rice, and James Bay.

Broadway show examples: *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *Big River*, *Shenandoah*, and *Cowgirls*.

Given the variety of these artists within the noted genres, the reader can conclude that each CCM genre has specific stylistic and musical parameters for the music to be considered genre-appropriate by listeners and performers. For example, modern jazz singers frequently straight tone when singing taking out the vibrato in comparison with types of modern or legit musical theater, classical music, and even gospel music. Teachers need to be able to auditate these sounds and specifications when teaching specific genres. Within the CCM job market, these standards are upheld the most among the musical theater community on Broadway, where most modern shows are genre specific. For example, *Hamilton* the most successful show on Broadway in many years used various styles of rap, hip-hop, and r & b within the character's melodic motifs and vocal themes that were emulating specific artists from those genres such as The Notorious B.I.G, Jay-Z, Eric B, Rakim, and Destiny's Child.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Chrishaun Baker, "Hamilton, Why the Musical Features Hip-Hop and Rap," *Screen Rant*, July 12, 2020, Accessed on May 18, 2022. <https://screenrant.com/hamilton-hamilfilm-rap-hiphop-reasons-why/>.

## Vocal Function: Register and Registration

A primary focus of this thesis was to create a CCM vocal pedagogy class for the preparation of teachers of singers rooted in Vocal Function. Vocal Function uses three necessary assessment indicators: Register, Vowel, and Volume to analyze and assess voices. Understanding “register” is the macro part of the assessment. Multiple definitions of register are presented below, each from various pedagogues.

The simplest definition of a Register is a group of sounds with a unified tonal quality or texture; however, numerous other esteemed teachers have defined a register as listed below.<sup>39</sup> Manuel Garcia (1855) indicated that a register is “A series of homogeneous sounds produced by one mechanism differing essentially from another series of sounds equally homogenous produced by another mechanism, whatever modifications of timbre and strength they may offer.”<sup>40</sup> Many years later, the American Academy of Teachers of Singing (1969) wrote that “Vocal Quality is that property of tone, apart from pitch and intensity, which distinguishes it from another tone.”<sup>41</sup> Finally, Dr. Harry Hollien (1974) wrote, “A vocal register is a totally laryngeal event; it consists of a series or a range of consecutive voice frequencies which can be produced with nearly identical phonatory quality; there will be little overlap in fundamental frequency.”<sup>42</sup>

A register is not a pitch range, and it is not a kind of resonance. Registration is controlled by the musculature of the larynx and is therefore connected to the sound source and the pitch simultaneously. A register change occurs in your larynx within the vocal folds as a response to

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<sup>39</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Manuel García, “Hints on Singing”, (Classic Reprint), United States: FB&C Limited, 2015. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Terminology in the Field of Singing. “*American Academy of Teachers of Singing*,” New York: G. Schirmer, 1969. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Harry Hollien, “On Vocal Registers,” *Journal of Phonetics*, 2. no. 2 (March 1974):18.

the stimulus of the brain.<sup>43</sup> Two main registers exist within the voice: chest and head register. A third register arises in the middle between chest and head; when the two registers have been coordinated this is called mix.

Registers have been discussed by various pedagogues over the years and given many terms--chest, heavy, lower register, chest resonance, modal register, head register light, higher/upper register, and loft. For the purpose of this thesis, the two primary registers will be referred to as chest and head register.

Chest Register is the lower, louder, heavier quality of sound, often associated with the male voice or the lower part of the female voice and speech. Often felt by singers in the upper chest and throat. Associated with power, passion, and firmness. Considered a response from the thyroarytenoid (TA) or vocalis muscle, which is the main body of the vocal fold. Chest register causes the folds to become shorter and thicker, exhibiting increased movement of the mucosal wave or vibratory edge of the fold.<sup>44</sup>

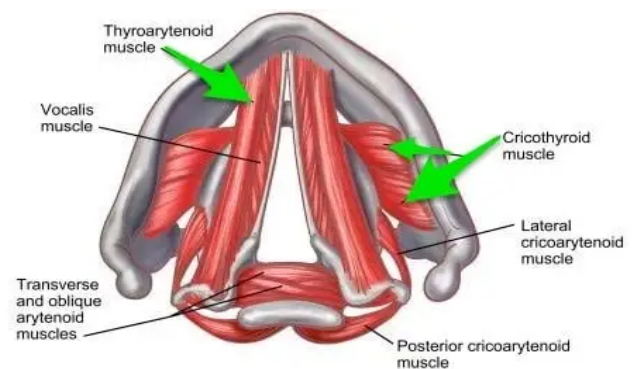
When singing in chest voice, the vocal mechanism produces a sound that is created by the thyroarytenoid muscles. In a beginning singer, chest voice will be found in the lower part of their range and frequently will make noise when the thyroarytenoid muscles begin to engage.

However, registers are not associated with certain pitches because a well-trained voice can sustain chest register up higher without strain. “Head register is the higher, softer, lighter quality of sound, often associated with the female voice and children, the most undeveloped weaker part of the voice, not usually used in normal speaking.

Also, sometimes the falsetto in men can often be

felt in the head and face. Associated with

tenderness, purity, and intimacy”.<sup>45</sup>



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<sup>43</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

Figure 1 *The Vocallis Muscles with the labeling of the TA and CT muscles on the vocal fold.*<sup>46</sup>

Typical head register vocal production, associated with the Cricothyroid muscle (CT), is more relaxed than the chest register. The vocal folds are stretched longer and thinner as they vibrate more rapidly and are not as pressed together as when in chest voice production.

Head register must be used and developed for voices to function and merge with chest register in mix. Therefore as, most CCM genres of music are chest register dominant, strengthening head voice is of the utmost importance. Within a vocal pedagogy course designed to strengthen the instructional skills of future CCM teachers, it is important to comprehend and facilitate the mix that occurs as a result of the two registers (head and chest) combining to form a third register called mix.<sup>47</sup>

The term “mix” came from Broadway and was referring to CCM styles that were coordinated or blended for classical music. Mix can be head dominant with some chest involved passively, or chest dominant with some head involved passively. This also has various pedagogical terms and is also called “Blended, Coordinated, Middle, Balanced”.<sup>48</sup> A more descriptive definition of head mix and chest mix from Jeanette LoVetri: “A lighter speech-oriented sound deliberately incorporating head register with a smooth transition to pure head register possible on higher pitches. Chest mix is a generic description for anything that isn’t head register or operatic sound or an obvious loud, pure chest register.”<sup>49</sup> Even though a register is not a specific set of pitches, a voice does have points of transition where it should shift vocally to

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<sup>46</sup> Karmyn Tyler, “Your Vocal Cords”, *Karmyn Tyler Vocal Studio*, Accessed on May 19, 2022, <https://ktvocalstudio.com>.

<sup>47</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

the next register. To help the student establish or build a seamless transition between the thyroarytenoid muscle (TA) and the cricothyroid muscle (CT), the instructor needs to understand these pitch parameters within the voice and where they are located.<sup>50</sup>

A key focus of vocal pedagogy within a CCM framework involves critical listening. The instructor's ability to pitch the voice correctly within the registers and identify the points of transition (called the *primo passaggio* in classical music) is crucial for growing, developing, and strengthening students' instruments. Within the different voice types, Soprano, Mezzo, Tenor, Bari-Tenor, Bass, Baritone, and Profundo register shifts happen in other parts of the voice. (These shifts are noted below on page twenty-four with the pitch parameters figure.)

The instructor must understand where registration shifts occur in the voice so they can create warmups to strengthen the student's instrument around these shifts. (In classical music these are called the *Passaggio*.) Careful and critical listening skills are necessary to hear the slightest timbre and color shifts within the registers to help the student's instrument. While the registers need to be isolated and strengthened independently (this means working on pure chest and pure head in warmups instead of running the whole voice), in a coordinated voice, one can hear head within mix; this is called head-mix and chest-mix within mix in addition to pure head and pure chest. Note the *passaggio* (also known as the break) listed in Figure 1 (on page 25) and the secondary register adjustments. One must look at where adjustments occur within the pitch range for each voice type.

CCM pedagogy instructors must know where these shifts are and listen to how the voice navigates them as the student sings various vowels at different volumes. Doing so will allow the instructor to make decisions regarding the functional path forward. Within a CCM-based vocal

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<sup>50</sup> Stephen F Austin, "Provenance: Register Unification: Give Me a Break," *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 2 (2004): 199–203.



pedagogy course, Vocal Function anchors the essence of what future teachers learn and will give them assessment tools to work with any voice. By analyzing Vocal Function, i.e., noticing what registers are present, how the voice is functioning as the singer sings across the break, and how loud or quiet the singer is, the teacher can assess why the instrument is or is not balanced.

## Traditional Pitch Parameters

The musical notation illustrates traditional pitch parameters for various voice types across five systems:

- System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Soprano (G to C or G), Mezzo (F to B), Contralto (E to G or to A).
- System 2 (Measures 5-7):** Belters (F to High C), Falsetto (G to F or G).
- System 3 (Measures 8-11):** Tenor (B to C), Bari-Tenor (Music Theater) (1st and 2nd, Choral Only).
- System 4 (Measures 12-15):** Baritone (G to G), Bass-Baritone (F to F), Bass (E to E), Profundo (Low C).
- System 5 (Measures 16-19):** Passaggio-- The break, Secondary Register Adjustents.

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Figure 2 *Traditional Pitch Parameters*

A balanced and functional voice for a professional vocalist will have two or more octaves of range without distorted vowels or manipulation in the throat, full access to a range of volume, pp to ff on most pitches, solid chest register, mix in the middle and head or falsetto on top. All of

<sup>51</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

this should be done freely and easily in the voice. Distortion of any kind in the vowels and pitch range indicates that something is not functioning properly within the muscles of the throat.<sup>52</sup>

The tongue's constriction sounds different from weakness in the throat; it is the teacher's job to learn these differences. (Constriction of the tongue will sound a bit like Kermit, the frog, muffled or choked and very dark, whereas a weakness within a register - chest or head - as it slides up will sound a bit like an inconsistency, which just means the register needs to be strengthened independently).

### **Vowels and Volume**

If registers are the macro in understanding Vocal Function Vowels and Volume are the micro a meaningful vocal pedagogy class for teaching singers of CCM genres. These components contribute to teaching, strengthening, developing, and accessing voices through the lens of Vocal Function. By taking the principles of registration and listening to how the singer is singing specific vowels through the analysis of Vocal Function, the teacher can further assess what is happening within the student's throat.

When designed and executed correctly, vocal exercises strengthen and reveal what is not working in the voice. By assessing the student's voice through the macro of Vocal Function, the teacher will understand what is missing within the register balance. The teacher will use different vowels with varying volume and tempi to create vocal exercises to strengthen the instrument. Volume is comparable to the weight the athlete will pick up when doing the designed exercise.

Volume is also an assessment tool through the macro of register in Vocal Function. If a singer can only sing on one vowel very loudly, this tells the teacher that there is constriction inside the throat. While singing loud can add strength and stability to the voice when it is free of

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<sup>52</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

constriction, singing softly when there is constriction allows the voice to transition from register to register and relax the throat muscles. As CCM genres of singing often require amplified singing, CCM pedagogy teachers must use a range of volume within the vocal exercises they create for students to strengthen, relax, and grow their voice, and develop a full range of functions. In amplified singing, the singer needs to use a varying degree of volume to express various emotions or create artistic storytelling in addition to the pedagogical benefits of training the voice at loud and soft volumes.

According to famed pedagogist Jeannette LoVetri, adding loud volume is how we create stamina and strength in the voice; however, it can also cause forcing or straining, magnify imbalances, cause vocal fatigue, and camouflage minor problems. Singing softly can promote relaxation, ease, and flexibility; however, this can also heighten tension, collapse the throat and promote breathiness.<sup>53</sup> While these issues or benefits are dependent on what is present in the student's voice, teachers of Vocal Function but understand the issues and benefits of loud and soft volumes when designing vocal exercises.

If the volume is the weight in our fitness analogy, vowels are the various fitness exercises CCM pedagogy teachers use to strengthen the student's instrument. Like volume, vowels are also utilized in vocal function assessment. Understanding vowel classification of bright, dark, open, closed, forward, and backward allows CCM pedagogy teachers to functionally assess the voice and create exercises that will develop the voice based on the functional principles of Register, Vowel, and Volume.

Vowels can be classified in several ways, but the first level of understanding for CCM teachers is bright and dark. A balanced sound has both qualities; this is known as *chiaroscuro*.

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<sup>53</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

This Italian term comes from classical singing but applies to a functionally balanced sound in all vocal genres. Understanding bright and dark vowels is simple; it is the shape of the mouth. However, like with loud and soft volumes, each vowel shape can produce different sounds in the voice.

While vowels and volume are present in existing ‘classically informed’ vocal pedagogy courses, how they are conceived differs. In ‘typical’ vocal pedagogy courses, vowels and volume are based on placement, resonance, and formants. In CCM, the shaping and position of the vocal tract, as it relates to bright or dark vowel classification, is the basis for assessing the sound and its relationship to how the instrument functions. Famed pedagogist, Cornelius Reid (who first wrote about the concept of Vocal Function), wrote, “Many things concerning the vowel condition are revealed if careful attention is given to the vowel.”<sup>54</sup>

Bright vowel shapes are made with the lips in a smiley shape of the mouth or horizontal position of the mouth with the lips spread in some way. Both shapes can be used depending on what the singer needs. They can make the vocal tract smaller and help the singer increase projection, especially on higher frequencies, stabilize the sound, and eliminate breathiness. However, they can cause harshness and nasality in the tone, cause constriction, restrict flexibility and cause the larynx to stay raised continuously.<sup>55</sup> The goal is for the larynx to move up and down freely.

Dark vowels are created with a long vertical mouth shape. They make the vocal tract (space inside your mouth) larger and enhance the amplification of the pitch being sung. (Think of how a classical singer can fill the sound in a large room). Dark vowels create warmth and beauty

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<sup>54</sup> Reid, *The Free Voice*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

in the vocal tone and can help lower the larynx. However, dark vowels can also make the voice sound too far back, which comes across as muffled or constricted, adding weight to the sound and causing the voice to sound flat, making words sound unintelligible or the singer's pitch to be off.<sup>56</sup>

Within a CCM pedagogy class, after a teacher understands bright and dark vowel shapes, the next classification is open and closed vowels. When singing an open vowel, the mouth is open; the mouth is closed when singing a closed vowel. Open vowels such as Ah and Oh promote the development of chest register and are good vowels to use when a CCM teacher is developing and strengthening chest register. In addition, they increase stability and can expose technical problems by showing the CCM teacher practicing functional listening and what the student needs to work on next. Closed vowels are E and O (this is the O in true); these vowels promote head register and can show the functional teacher if the back of the tongue and mouth are free, given the impact of the vowel on the voice.

The last classification of vowels is forward and backward. This simply means what position the tongue is in within the mouth. It is helpful for the CCM teacher to understand vowel shape and classification to assess the voice with all types of vowels. If one vowel is strong in chest register but another is weak, it tells the instructor what else to work on. With forward vowels, the tongue is up and towards the front of the mouth. Examples of forward vowels are the Ee as in Pete, Ih as in Jim, Ay in Dave, Eh in Ted, and Aa in Dan. In backward vowels, the tongue is dropped to the back of the mouth. Examples include Aw as in Claude, Oh as in Joe, õ as in Woody, and the õ as in Lew.

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<sup>56</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

When teaching functionally CCM pedagogues must use their understanding of vowel shape (bright and dark) and vowel classifications (open, closed, backward, and forward) to create vocal exercises to functional assess and develop students' voices based on the functional principles of Register, Vowel, and Volume. Using the two final components of Vocal Function, vowel and volume, students in the pedagogy course are taught to hear balance or imbalance in the voice and use vowel and volume to create exercises to help strengthen students' voices.

### **Chapter 3**

This thesis advocates for a more inclusive approach to vocal pedagogy at the university level that is diverse both culturally and stylistically and prepares teachers to teach from the perspective of Vocal Function. In Chapter One, articles, research, and reviews of vocal pedagogy courses presented information that most universities only prepare students through the lens of classical pedagogy. In contrast, the job market for classical music is vastly limited compared with CCM genres. Chapter Two presented the concept of Vocal Function with the macro - Registers - and micro - Vowels and Volume - demonstrating how these serve as tools of assessment and ingredients for developing and strengthening students' voices.

Chapter Three includes a course overview proposal and syllabus for a Vocal Pedagogy class focused on CCM-oriented singing. Using the parameters of typical course proposals for university classes, the first part of Chapter three outlines the rationale, student learning targets, outcomes, and assessment techniques. In contrast, the second half of the chapter includes a syllabus for “Vocal Pedagogy for Singers and Teachers: Contemporary Commercial Music.”

#### **Course Overview**

This course was prepared for singers at the college level who intend to teach in a classroom or studio setting, those pursuing a career in singing, and anyone who works with vocalists (musical directors, etc.) It was designed to be taught within a single semester time frame, meeting two days a week with lectures at the beginning of the week and in small breakout teaching groups on the second day. These breakout teaching groups allows students to practice the skills learned by assessing other students' voices and demonstrating their knowledge of Vocal Function.

An emphasis throughout the semester is the students' ability to reflect on an

understanding and application of Vocal Function. Students will respond to instructor-provided recording examples of various CCM genres to demonstrate the ability to aurally identify and assess how the voice is functioning through the lens of Vocal Function. In the second half of the semester, students will be expected to evaluate classmates' voices, teach mock lessons, and demonstrate their ability to design warmups and exercises that help strengthen their voices.

## **Course Proposal**

### **Rationale**

Vocal Function pedagogy is designed to include all genres of singing. It allows singers to move toward artistic and emotional singing no matter what the repertoire. In a profession with myriad approaches to vocal pedagogy, Vocal Function can give a unified vocabulary and pedagogical principles to all singers and their teachers.

### **Student Learning Targets and Goals**

Singers will

- Aurally identify and demonstrate isolated vocal registers (chest, head, and mix) and the subtleties within head-mix and chest mix in their own voices, and in the voices of others in the class through recorded examples.
- Memorize the “pitch parameters”<sup>57</sup> and secondary register adjustments within male and female voices and be able to explain how this framework is important for knowing how to work with voices and design vocal exercises. (Example: The pitch range for working on developing a soprano's chest voice is different than a tenor's range for chest.)
- Understand how to assess voices through a functional framework checklist:

1.No/weak head voice

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<sup>57</sup> This is a term coined by Jeannette Lovetri and used within her Somatic Voicework training. LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.



2. No/weak chest register
  3. Register coordination issues
  4. Poor vowels or distortion in the voice
  5. Weak Volume and Instability
  6. Poor Articulation and Limited Flexibility.
  7. Constriction<sup>58</sup>
- Understand the types of Vocal Exercises.
    1. Exercise that strengthens the laryngeal and pharyngeal musculature
    2. Exercises for relaxation and beauty of the tone
    3. Exercise for flexibility and mobility
    4. Exercises for strength and stamina
    5. Exercises for variability and volume
    6. Exercises that elicit Mix and Register Coordination.<sup>59</sup>
  - Discuss practical demonstration to students and why it is essential for effective teaching.
  - Understand what various CCM genres need within the instrument's balance, sound, and color to be considered an authentic genre sound. Describe various CCM genres in terms of vocal function.

### **Assessment Techniques**

- Students will write short answer questions following lectures on Vocal Function terminology: Register, Vowel, and Volume, and exercises for other CCM genres.

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<sup>58</sup> LoVetri, *The 2020 Online*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Jeannette LoVetri, "Vocal Exercises: The Science and Function," Webinar from Somatic Voicework™, March 6, 2022.

- Students demonstrate their knowledge of the Pitch Parameters and register adjustments for various voice types (online quiz).
- Students will demonstrate their ability to sing in chest and head register.
- Students will contribute recorded examples of registers and other items on the functional framework checklist, demonstrating their ability to hear subtle shifts within the voice.
- Students will teach a ten-minute mini lesson demonstrating their understanding of Vocal Function through the Macro of Registers.
- Singers will teach a thirty-minute mini-lesson in front of the instructor at the end of the semester. This will serve as their final. They will use techniques learned in class and demonstrate their knowledge of Vocal Function. They will explain their assessment of the voice and the reason behind their choice of exercises to the instructor using Vocal Function terminology.

### **Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to analyze voices through the lens of Vocal Function: Register, Vowel, and Volume and have a clear understanding of how to teach a voice lesson using these tools to develop a voice specifically for CCM genres of music. The pedagogical tools of Vocal Function grow an instrument and give teachers and singers knowledge of how to approach problem spots within CCM repertoire, which has different functional necessities for the genre to sound authentic.

Vocal function may also be used as a form of analysis within the repertoire. Teachers use Vocal Function when diagnosing why the singer cannot correctly execute that part. The exercises used to strengthen vocal function may also be applied when working on repertoire. Thus, Vocal Function provides another lens of examination within repertoire for the singer and

the teacher. This provides feedback for the singer and, in the long run, the ability to self-correct and self-coach when practicing and developing other vocal skills in various genres.

## Syllabus

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Vocal Pedagogy for Singers and Teachers of Contemporary Commercial Music (3 credits)</b></p>
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### Instructor:

**Contact:** Cell phone:  
Email

<b>Course Description:</b>
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This vocal pedagogy course is designed to prepare students to teach Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) through the lens of Vocal Function using the tools of Register, Vowel, and Volume. The course will give students a framework for assessing and developing singers' voices and helping students understand the necessary Vocal Function requirements of various CCM genres. This course is designed to strengthen and empower singers to deliver quality vocal instruction within the classroom, in private studios, and out working as professional singers.

<b>Course Rationale:</b>
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Teaching and studying voice are an incredible endeavor since each singer's vocal tract and instrument are different. Not only that but everyone has been raised with various speech patterns culturally and acoustically. Singing well, feeling confident with your voice, and singing from your heart is incredible! As teachers of singing, it is our job to foster this love, accept all genres and cultural vocal stylizing, and help students make sounds they can do for a lifetime. To teach and help students sing from this place of inclusivity demands that we have pedagogy classes designed around Vocal Function to teach in CCM singing styles and not just classical pedagogy.

<b>Prerequisites:</b>
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Students must be vocal or music education majors and have taken private lessons for two years.

<b>Course Outcomes:</b>
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At the end of Contemporary Commercial Music Pedagogy, students will be able to teach Vocal Function by comprehending and applying the following skills listed below.

- Understand Vocal Function and how to use it to assess and develop voices.

- Aurally identify and demonstrate isolated vocal registers (chest, head, and mix) and the subtleties within head-mix and chest mix within their voices, other singers in class, and recorded examples.
- Understand and memorize the pitch parameters and secondary register adjustments within male and female cisgender voices and explain how this framework is necessary for assessing voices and designing vocal exercises.
- Understand how to assess voices through a Functional framework checklist.
- Understand the various types of Vocal Exercises and how to use them.
- Discuss practical demonstration to students and why it is essential and essential for effective teaching.
- Understand how to structure and sequence lessons.
- Have a deeper understanding of breathing and breathing management skills.
- Understand what various CCM genres need within the instrument's balance, sound, and color to be considered a culturally or authentic genre sound and describe it in terms of vocal function.

### **Expectations of instructor**

- Teaching and instruction from a place of integrity, honesty, sensitivity, attention to detail, teaching to be of service.
- Clear and precise language to help students understand the concepts thoroughly and establish uniform standards on how to teach the voice so that any student can understand.
- Respect students' time by starting and ending on time.
- Timely return of graded assignments
- Reasonable reminders of assignments and events coming up
- Attention to student preferred pronouns
- Clarity of expectations and parameters relating to assignments and presentations
- Ongoing communication via email with the whole class and individuals

### **Expectations of students**

- Assume the role of learner and teacher at high levels of personal investment
- Come to class ready to observe, participate and ask questions.
- Keep track of assignment dates and content – when in doubt, ask questions
- Consistent demonstration of support

### **Texts and Materials**

No text is necessary; the instructor will provide students with copies of chapters and articles primarily from Cornelius Reid and work by Jeannette LoVetri. Students will be expected to bring in recordings and vocal examples on their phones.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### **WEEK 1: VOCAL FUNCTION**

- Introduction and explanation of Vocal Function terminology: Register, Vowel, and Volume and its relation to vocal science.

*Assignment: Short Answers on what is Vocal Function?*

## **WEEK 2: PITCH PARAMETERS & HOW TO WORK WITH THE REGISTERS**

- Students will be taught the Pitch Parameters for various voice types.
- The basics of register balance will be explained, how these balances of lack of show up within the voice, and what these functional observations show us.

*Assignment: Online Quiz on Pitch Parameters*

## **WEEK 3: DEMONSTRATIONS OF REGISTERS FROM STUDENTS**

- Students will be asked to demonstrate each register within their voice and identify registers within fellow singers in the class identifying registers and vowels as types of assessment.
- Students will bring recorded examples to analyze and discuss registers and vowel quality with partners.

*Assignment: Register demonstration in class and bring recorded examples for in-class discussion.*

## **WEEK 4: FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK CHECKLIST & DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONAL LISTENING.**

- Further explanation of the following levels of functional assessment after the presence of Registers (IE: Chest & Head), Register Coordination (Mix), Distorted Vowels, Weak Volume and Instability, Poor articulation, Limited flexibility, and Constriction.
- Students will bring in recorded examples of items on the functional framework checklist.

*Assignment: Recorded examples from the functional framework checklist.*

## **WEEK 5: TYPES OF VOCAL EXERCISES**

- Strengthening the laryngeal and pharyngeal musculature.
- Relaxation and beauty of vocal tone.
- Breathiness
- Flexibility and Mobility
- Strength and Stamina
- Variability and Volume
- Eliciting Mix and Register Coordination

## **WEEK 6: PRACTICE USING TYPES OF VOCAL EXERCISES**

- Students will experiment in pairs using different exercises, noting what they notice aurally.
- Students will experiment using these various exercises on the vocal repertoire they are working on and brainstorm exercises for the problem spots.

*Assignment: Short answer reflection on what they noticed using the types of vocal exercise on problem spots in the repertoire.*

## **WEEK 7: VOWEL AND VOLUME WITHIN EXERCISES & EFFECTIVE DEMONSTRATION**

- Benefits and Issues associated with Bright, Dark, Forward, Backward, Open, and Closed Vowels. Benefits of Loud, Soft, Fast, Slow, High Pitched, Low Pitched, Clear Sounds, Breathy Sounds, Staccato, and Legato.
- Explanation of the necessity of practical demonstration by the instructor and examples of terminology for exercises that ALL students can understand.

*Assignment: Short Answers Questions on Vowel and Volume within Vocal Function*

### **WEEK 8-9: MOCK 10-MINUTE LESSONS USING FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK & TYPES OF VOCAL EXERCISES.**

- Students will teach mini-lessons with partners in class using the Functional Framework checklist to assess their peer’s voices and demonstrate knowledge of types of exercises to create exercises to address what they hear functionally.
- Students will be expected to explain what they hear using vocal function terminology and defend why they choose to use that type of exercise.

*Assignment: Teach your 10-minute mini-lesson in class.*

### **WEEK 10-11: AUTHENTIC GENRE ASSESSMENT IN VARIOUS CCM STYLES**

- Functional requirements for various CCM styles
- Aural in-class observations by students of various CCM genres
- Students will discuss in class and then submit a suggested vocal exercise list for multiple genres.

*Assignment: Short Answer Questions on suggested vocal exercises for various CCM genres.*

### **WEEK 12: BREATHING & HOW TO STRUCTURE A LESSON**

- Breathe management within the vocal folds and how to strengthen and address it.
- How to teach breathing with age-based parameters.
- Students will receive an outline of how to structure a lesson and the four components.

### **WEEK 13: BLOCKS IN THE BODY**

- Examining the students' body patterns affecting the vocal mechanism outside the throat or emotionally.
- Discussion of types of alternative bodywork that effectively eliminate these blocks in the body.

### **WEEK 14 & 15: FINAL TEACHING LESSON & ASSESSMENT**

- Students will teach a 30-minute private lesson in front of the instructor, demonstrating effective use of Vocal Function when assessing the student's voice and the concepts taught during the quarter. Students will be expected to discuss what they hear using functional terminology, use appropriate lesson structure, and defend why they used that exercise.

*Final: 30-minute teaching private lesson*

<b>Assignments and Point Distribution</b>
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#### **1. “What is Vocal Function” Short Answer Essay—5 points**

2. Pitch Parameters Quiz—5 points
3. Register Demonstration & Recorded Examples of Registers – 10 points
4. Short Reflection Answer – 10 points
5. Short Answer Questions on Vowel and Volume. --10 points
6. 10 Minute mini-lesson. –5 Points
7. Short Answer Questions on Exercises for various CCM genres. –10 points
8. Final 30-minute private lesson – 35 Points
9. Reflection Essay – 10 points

<b>Grading Scale:</b>
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96-100 - A	92-95 – A-	
89-91 – B+	86-88 - B	83-85 – B-
80-82 – C+	77-79 – C	74-76 – C-

## Chapter Four

This thesis provided evidence that the pedagogical systems of teaching voice in most universities in the United States are modeled on Colonialism, privilege, and one type of singing - the bel canto approach used in most Western classical music. This isolated approach to working with vocalists is problematic. In so many ways, it is irresponsible for schools and teachers to offer only one kind of pedagogy when most vocal jobs in the United States are in Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) genres.

The lack of CCM pedagogy programs within the education system is due to the lack of CCM qualified teachers; CCM pedagogy is offered at a limited number of schools and has only begun within the last few years. Noticing this lack within academia from my own university experience and that of other CCM vocal teachers led to creating this pedagogy class through the lens of Vocal Function. This framework is a systemic approach to pedagogy for CCM styles of music.

Chapter Two presented the pedagogical tools of Vocal function: register, vowel, and volume, and described how they are used as the pedagogical building blocks to analyze and assess voices and teach all styles of music, including CCM genres. Chapter Three presented the framework for the course *Vocal Pedagogy for Singers and Teachers Contemporary Commercial Music*, complete with an outline, rationale, student learning targets, outcomes, assessment techniques, and syllabus to create practical pedagogy courses that will develop influential singers and teachers of CCM genres.

When universities begin to teach CCM genres and CCM pedagogy, more research will emerge on the styles of amplified singing that dominate the music industry. The profession of singing teachers will have uniformity and teachers who are qualified to teach music ethically.



Equally important is that teaching CCM singing styles will become accessible to everyone! Students who cannot afford lessons and who maybe can only take a choir class will be able to learn about belting and what mix is in a healthy, informed manner from a well-informed teacher.

When schools begin to embrace and teach that all forms of music are acceptable and worthy of recognition, the desire to learn and study music will continue to grow and evolve the way it must if the arts are to thrive.

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