

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

Musicology and Ethnomusicology: Student
Scholarship

Musicology and Ethnomusicology

11-2023

Breaking the Wall Separating Western-Classical and Musical Theater Belt Vocal Techniques

University of Denver

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.du.edu/musicology_student



Part of the [Musicology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

University of Denver, "Breaking the Wall Separating Western-Classical and Musical Theater Belt Vocal Techniques" (2023). *Musicology and Ethnomusicology: Student Scholarship*. 157.

https://digitalcommons.du.edu/musicology_student/157



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

This Bibliography is brought to you for free and open access by the Musicology and Ethnomusicology at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Musicology and Ethnomusicology: Student Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Breaking the Wall Separating Western-Classical and Musical Theater Belt Vocal Techniques

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

Abstract

This paper will serve as a dialogue aimed to keep breaking down the tangible wall between opera and musical theater techniques and practices. The two fields offer a plethora of ideas and possibilities for growth of the arts as a whole. Included will be examples of techniques in both fields and how they can be compared and practiced consequently. The topic of belt versus legitimate singing is prominent in the vocal arts and will be discussed further as well. There are many academics that subscribe to the “my way or the highway” ideal and refuse that which varies from classical or theatrical technique. This paper will also provide examples as to how basic acting training can help boost your singing ability and creative production. My goal is to help prove how crossing of techniques will stimulate growth in the vocal arts for the better.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Bosch, Jean L. "“Bridging the Musical and Scriptural Generation Gap”: The Jesus People Movement and “Jesus Christ Superstar”." MA Thesis., University of Kansas, 2011. <https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/bridging-musical-scriptural-generation-gap-jesus/docview/873261808/se-2>. PROQUEST

Jean L. Bosch’s Master’s thesis on Jesus Christ Superstar and the “Jesus People” religious movement invites the reader to understand the time of division that the musical played on American christianity. Bosch recognizes the place *Superstar* has in pop-culture and Broadway culture as a whole in its completely avant-garde styling.

2. Becker, Alyssa S., and Peter J. Watson. “The Use of Vibrato in Belt and Legit Styles of Singing in Professional Female Musical-Theater Performers.” *Journal of voice* (2022).

Dr. Alyssa Becker is a mezzo-soprano on faculty at Drake University as a Teaching Associate of Voice. She has performed Opera and Musical Theatre all around the globe in China, the Baltics, and across the USA. She is now a full-time pedagogue with specific interest in cross-training singers in the fields of musical theater and opera. In her article she describes the acoustic and scientific differences of vibrato in belt (contemporary, heavy and pingy) singing and legit (western-classical) singing. She outlines objectives, methods, results and conclusions of the two styles and how they are comparable, but also how they aren’t.

3. Edgar, Grace. “Practical Application of ‘Viewpoints’ for Collegiate Musical Theatre and Opera.” *Journal of singing* 79, no. 1 (2022): 29–41.

Dr. Grace Edgar, visiting professor of musicology at Connecticut College has a major focus on Hollywood film music and finding representation of identity through music. In this article Edgar references the “Viewpoints” acting method as a tool for not only actors, but for Musical Theatre and Opera Singers. She outlines the importance of proficiency in acting when it comes to accurately performing a body of music. The Viewpoints method incorporates outside-in acting techniques, and understanding motion, emotion, and outside expression. Edgar goes through each viewpoint: tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, shape, architecture, etc.

4. Helbert Damsté, P. “Shortness of the Palate: A Cause of Problems in Singing.” *Journal of voice* 2, no. 1 (1988): 96–98.

P. Helbert Damsté was a Professor Department of Ear, Nose, and Throat and Phoniatics, University of Utrecht Medical School, Utrecht, The Netherlands. In this article, he talks of problems in the human voice surrounding the soft palate. Length and pliability of the soft palate is a key aspect of singing and vocal dynamic range. Some humans are born with a shortened soft palate and this study looks into whether or not surgery may be necessary to correct vocal flexibility. This article mostly refers to the base aspect of vocal phonation, but the health aspect of this can be correlated to belt singing in musical theater. With the challenges explained in this article, theatrical belting may not be a possibility for a particular voice. Damsté goes over important vocal health tips such as maintaining a lowered larynx. He also provides a few case studies he has observed in his years of vocal research.

5. Lebowitz, Amy, and R.J Baken. “Correlates of the Belt Voice: A Broader Examination.” *Journal of voice* 25, no. 2 (2011): 159–165.

This scientific investigation of Belt vs Legitimate singing styles was conducted by Amy Lebowitz, employee of the Voice and Swallowing Institute in New York City. This article and study was conducted in order to help point out the healthiest way to try belt singing, as it can be quite dangerous if performed incorrectly. This study takes advice from teachers with opinions on both sides of the belting spectrum and whether or not it should be sung. She had a focus group of twenty sopranos and had each sing from a C4-C5 in both belt and classical styles, and used sonography to document the research. Each of these subjects has a career on Broadway and are not amateur artists. This level of research acts as a catalyst for more belt singing research to be conducted.

6. Moore, Jenna Lee. “The Utilization of Non-Classical Approaches to Teaching Musical Theatre Repertoire to the Undergraduate Soprano Voice Major.” *Voice & speech review* 11, no. 2 (2017): 216–225.

Dr. Jenna Lee Moore is an Associate Professor of Musical Theatre and Coordinator of Musical Theatre Voice at Southeast Missouri State University. She is a sought-after director of musical theater productions all around the Nation. In this article, Dr. Moore explains common practice for a modern-day collegiate musical theater soprano. Dr. Moore talks about legit and belt singing along with application of both into jazz, blues, pop, rock, gospel, etc. since all of these styles are present in Musical Theatre repertoire. What makes this article shine is the complete departure from the classical SOVT (School of Voice Teaching) methodologies and classical practice. While much of this article has bias towards non-classical methods, it provides a basis in a different learning approach in this competitive world of singing. She provides great repertoire choices and guidelines to constructing your own audition book to start getting gigs.

7. Puccini, Giacomo, Giuseppe Giacosa, Giuseppe Giacosa, and Carlo Carignani. *La Bohème : an Opera in Four Acts* /. New York: F. Colombo, 1963.

Giacomo Puccini is regarded by many as the greatest Opera composer of all time. Known for his style of constant flowing melody, *La Bohème*, is the perfect representation of his work. It is one of the most performed Operas of all time and is also known as Puccini's "perfect work". The story follows a group of 4 Bohemian men trying to make ends meet in Paris. When love is introduced, all seems lovely and tranquil, until the horrors of tuberculosis. The sad and dramatic story was initially not hot with the critics, however, the representation of real-world suffering gained the eyes and ears of patrons across Italy, then the World. By the 20th century, it had taken the world's opera houses by storm. The story of this Opera has been transfigured into many other stories such as Jonathan Larson's *Rent* which follows an identical story line, but set in 90's New York City during the rise of HIV cases in America.

8. Renihan, Colleen. "Pitching Opera: Innovating New Music Theater at Banff and Stratford, 1970-1990." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14, no. 1 (2020): 33–50.

Dr. Colleen Renihan is the Queen's National Scholar and Assistant Professor of Musical Theater at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario Canada. She is a researcher of intersections between musical theater and opera and of operatic aesthetics in Contemporary productions. This article focuses on the evolution of Musical Theatre in Banff and Stratford Canada and their slower growth of the overall theater scene from the years 1970-90. She includes dialogue from professionals in the field discussing distinctions between the fields of opera and theater in a place where opera was still the "more-serious" form of art. She also references techniques used and pedagogy from the time showing how it has evolved to today's practices.

9. Rishoi, Niel. "Carousel, Rodgers and Hammerstein's Operatic Musical." *The Opera quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2002): 534–554.

Opera and theater critic Niel Rishoi is an active columnist on Parterre box, and journalist in the music world. In this Journal article Rishoi delves into the depths of an American classical musical, *Carousel*. *Carousel* is a romantic, tragic, and lightly comical tale which is a hallmark of the golden age of Broadway. The most beautiful aspect of *Carousel* is the legitimate musical score. The singing is very intense for each main role and must be approached with a high-level of technique and artistic discipline. Within the article, Rishoi compares different casts and directing styles of the musical and how more “belty” singers should approach the music from a different viewpoint. He talks of how more modern productions feature “incompetent” singing lacking full-bodied warmth and control.

10. Swayne, Steve. “How Sondheim Found His Sound.” *Cambridge opera journal* 19, no. 2 (2007): 195–.

Dr. Steve Swayne is a Professor of Music at Dartmouth. He is an expert on opera, American musical theater, Russian music, and American music. In this article, he showcases how Sondheim was a true composer of total art. Sondheim’s “Gesamtkunstwerk” style is unmistakably Sondheim. He brings light to Sondheim’s biggest inspirations and gives his research as to how this inspiration can be seen and heard in the shows. Dr. Swayne compares Sondheim’s work-ethic to opera composers like Mozart, how he almost acts while composing a work. This bridging of Operatic rigor with musical theater pacing is what helps signify Sondheim’s largely-classical sound.

11. Warner, Keith. “And One for Mahler: An Opera Director’s Reflections on Sondheim in the Subsidized Theater.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Keith Warner is a widely respected British opera director known for his “flamboyant” stagings of Richard Wagner’s Operas. In this handbook chapter, Keith shares his opinions on whether or not musicals by Stephen Sondheim should be deemed as “worthy” music for Top-level Opera venues. He also articulates how a venue can investigate the true artistic depth of Sondheim’s magical works.

12. Zalman, Paige. “Operatic Borrowing in Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd*.” *American music (Champaign, Ill.)* 37, no. 1 (2019): 58–76.

Dr. Paige Zalman is currently the Associate Director of Undergraduate Research and Scholar Development at Carnegie Mellon University. This article was written while she was a Masters student at West Virginia University. In it, Dr. Zalman informs the reader of the inherent Operatic themes in Stephen Sondheim’s horror musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of*

Fleet Street commonly referencing Sondheim's own words and inspiration. From clear references to everyone's favorite operatic barber, Figaro, to aria-like songs from the cast, there is a large amount of classical material in the musical. Zalman compares the Sweeney Todd anti-hero character type to Opera characters such as Rigoletto and Pagliacci.