Singing for the Actor: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Musical Theatre Training

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Singing for the Actor: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Musical Theatre Training

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

SINGING FOR THE ACTOR: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO MUSICAL THEATRE TRAINING

By Valerie Accetta, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

Major Director: Patti D’Beck
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Typically, singing training for the musical theatre student is divided into three subjects: music theory, private voice instruction and acting through song. By separating the study of the components of musical theatre performance, musical theatre programs reinforce this compartmentalization and few students are able to make connections between these components in performance. This thesis gives an account of my design of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of musical theatre, specifically a class I developed called Singing for the Actor. In this class, I focused on connecting three components of musical theatre singing: music theory, vocal production (specifically the Estill Voice Training System) and acting. My intent was to help students connect these skills so that they would be able to tell a story through song with more specificity. In this thesis, I detail my research and the design of the course, as well as the outcome and student response.
During my undergraduate training, I had the opportunity to attend two different theatre programs. Directly following high school, I began my training at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, FL and was pursuing a Bachelor of Music degree in Musical Theatre. This program was in essence a double major in both the music and theatre departments, and was based on a conservatory model. After a professional career in New York, I decided to finish my undergraduate work at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio. At Otterbein, I designed a unique degree: a Bachelor of Arts in Musical Theatre Pedagogy. This was a very different program from the University of Miami, offering professional musical theatre training within a liberal arts program.

I am currently in graduate school at Virginia Commonwealth University, and am teaching a number of undergraduate courses, primarily in musical theatre. VCU does not offer an undergraduate musical theatre degree, but a large number of students in the department hope to pursue a career in musical theatre and there is a desire among them for musical theatre training. While all three of the programs I have attended are vastly different in how they approach the undergraduate training of musical theatre, all follow a widely prevalent model of skills-based learning.

In order to be a successful musical theatre performer, one must be skilled in acting, singing and dancing. These can be broken down even further to include text analysis,
improvisation, sight-singing, music theory, vocal production, choral singing, musical theatre
history, ballet, tap and jazz. Typically, these skills are taught as individual courses and in all
three programs I have attended, students are rarely asked to synthesize and connect these
disparate subjects.

This thesis gives an account of my design of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of
musical theatre, specifically a class I developed called Singing for the Actor. In this class, I
focused on connecting three components of musical theatre singing: music theory, vocal
production and acting. My hope was to design one class in which three subjects, usually taught
separately, could be combined in order to help students connect these skills so that they would be
able to tell a story through song with more specificity and depth.

My research includes comparing the curricula of a number of musical theatre programs in
order to document a pattern of traditional silo learning within musical theatre programs. I also
research various methods of teaching music theory. Again, this subject is usually taught through
a department of music and is rarely integrated into students’ theatre studies. Vocal production is
typically taught in private voice lessons, but I examine the Estill Voice Training System (EVTS)
because of its emphasis on vocal health, anatomy and versatility of the voice. Finally, I explore a
Stanislavski-based acting technique applied to song, which stresses heightened scenarios and
clear, strong objectives.

Interestingly, while I am attempting to combine these three subjects, I am forced to
discuss them separately. Each of these subjects is a specific skill and before they can be
synthesized and combined, they must be understood individually, and I approach both this paper
and the development of my class in this way. Unfortunately, however, each is often taught
without regard to the other two and so the student is left to make the connections on their own, or
even worse, not to make connections at all. In this thesis, I use my research to design and create my Singing for the Actor class and I will include each part of the process, from creating the syllabus to planning exercises to considering assessment.

Finally, this thesis details the outcome of the class, and I will discuss the successes and failures of my design and implementation of this disciplinary approach. My students were very open with me about their experiences in the class, and with offering suggestions and feedback. While on the whole I consider this course a success (based on student feedback, as well as the creation of two independent studies inspired by this course), I hope to critique my work and lay out any changes that might allow for a stronger and more integrated class.

My hope is to encourage current and future musical theatre educators to approach the study of musical theatre in an interdisciplinary way. I do believe that I was successful in helping the students bridge the gaps between the three subjects and consider each part when approaching a song, and after seeing the result of this approach, I am certain that musical theatre training needs to go in this direction.
Chapter 1 - Research

As I mentioned in my introduction, I have experienced musical theatre training in three different university programs. All three approach the study of musical theatre in a similar fashion, teaching the individual skills necessary to be a successful musical theatre performer, but rarely combining these skills when approaching a song. In corporate business, this separation of components is called “The Silo Effect” and many corporations are now attempting to reduce this phenomenon of departmentalization by improving communication between departments and allowing for more interdepartmental overlap. This reduction of the silo effect is beginning to happen in the top musical theatre programs and I based my Singing for the Actor class on these programs.

Existing Musical Theatre Curricula

While there is no official ranking for musical theatre college programs, a recent article in U.S. News and World Report, suggested that students “flock to the University of Michigan, New York University, Boston Conservatory, Carnegie Mellon University, and the College-Conservatory of Music, which is part of the University of Cincinnati” (O’Shaughnessy ). These are widely recognized in the musical theatre industry as being the top schools. In my research, I compared the musical theatre curricula from these five programs and found that the majority of them continue to teach separate skills. The University of Michigan and Boston Conservatory,
however, make an attempt to bring together these skills. These two schools have different
solutions to solving the Silo Effect, and their ideas contributed to the formation of my course.

New York University Steinhardt, Carnegie Mellon and Cincinnati Conservatory of Music
all offer musical theatre training that is similar to what I have experienced. All three have
separate training in voice, acting, music theory and dance, and these are taught in different
departments. All three require specific musical theatre performance classes, but only for a small
number of semesters. Cincinnati Conservatory offers the most musical theatre performance
classes of these three schools at five semesters, but this makes up just over half of the students’
time in the program. The other two schools only offer two semesters of musical theatre
performance classes and this is more in line with what I have experienced in my three programs.

The University of Michigan (UM) in Ann Arbor is widely considered the top musical
theatre program in the United States. The graduates from this school are found on Broadway and
in film and television, and many casting directors and agents attend the senior showcase they
offer in New York every year. UM offers a unique solution to the Silo Effect. The departments
of theatre, dance and voice are all housed within the Department of Music, allowing for an over-
arching goal of musical theatre training. Their website states, “The U-M is one of a select
number of schools which promote this degree of collaboration among areas within the
performing arts” (UM website). Students are required to take private voice lessons, music theory
and acting classes, but again, because these subjects are offered within the same department, a
greater sense of unity exists between them and this allows for more communication between the
instructors.

Boston Conservatory reduces the Silo Effect even further. Similar to the University of
Michigan, Boston Conservatory offers all of its musical theatre classes, including voice, acting
and music theory, through its theatre department, encouraging cohesive training. Boston Conservatory takes yet another step toward this unified approach, however, offering a musical theatre course every semester of the four-year program. This gives the students one class where they can bring together all of the different skills they are learning in their other classes and make connections between them in performance. It is this solution that most inspired my Singing for the Actor class.

Like Boston Conservatory, I wanted to design a course in which three elements of musical theatre singing are brought together and taught in a holistic way. While musical theatre training should include vocal production, music theory, acting skills, dance and musical theatre history, I chose to focus on the three components that most clearly contribute to telling a story through song: music theory, vocal production and acting skills. Although my goal was to combine these skills, I necessarily had to approach them individually, both in the classroom and in this thesis. In the teaching of the course, I continuously made connections between these subjects, but in my research, I had to consider them as separate skills and I began with music theory.

**Music Theory**

Often, musical theatre students hate learning music theory and approach the work with a sense of dread and disdain. Traditionally, musical theatre students take music theory classes in Music Departments with music majors and are rarely able to connect the understanding of music with their work as an actor. In fact, because of this widespread phenomenon, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) included a panel in its 2012 national conference called “Teaching Music Theory in the Musical Theatre Program.” This panel included participants
Jonathan Swoboda from Kent State University, Stephanie Dean from University of Michigan - Flint and Alan Shorter of Texas Christian University, and it was “a discussion of the challenges, merits, and techniques of teaching music theory to musical theatre students in a theatre context” (ATHE Conference Book).

I attended this conference panel and found that the panelists shared my ideas about music theory training in musical theatre programs, and I left with an even stronger conviction in my course objective. Not every musical theatre student will go on to become a musical director, conductor, composer or accompanist, and traditionally, a great deal of what they learn in a Music Department music theory class is not going to inform their work on the stage; however, musical theatre students do need to be able to analyze and dissect a piece of music just as they would a script. The composer and lyricist offer clues into the mentality of a character, or suggest the emotional state of a character in the accompaniment.

In my Singing for the Actor class, I wanted to introduce students to the music theory concepts that could inform their work and give them a deeper understanding of the character and intention of a song. I knew that in my short one semester class, I would not be able to cover a great deal of music theory material and so I chose to focus on the elements I thought would most easily inform their character choices:

1. **Rhythm**

   The rhythm of a song is the clearest way a composer has to suggest changes in thought, mood and emotional state. By understanding the rhythmic values of rests and notes, students can begin to ask questions that will inform their work: Why did the composer choose to place this word on a long dotted half note? Why did the composer
choose to put that quick eighth rest in this sentence? What does that tell me about the character?

2. Intervals

Understanding intervals (the distance between two notes) can help a student not only with being able to sight-read a piece of music for the first time, but also with analyzing the music. Different intervals affect the listener in dramatic ways, and again, students can ask the questions that will encourage a greater understanding of character: Why would the composer use a leap of a major 7th on this particular word, or choose to use a minor 2nd as opposed to a major 2nd? What does that tell me about the character?

3. Key Signatures

Just as intervals give clues into a character’s emotional state or journey, key signatures also set a mood or tone. Major or Minor keys tell very different stories, and jazzy accidentals within a particular key can be another clue.

4. Musical Markings

Finally, musical markings such as crescendos, fermatas, tempo markings and dynamic markings are easily recognizable signs that can help us analyze a song. Understanding the meaning and value of these symbols can open up a world of possibility for interpretation and I wanted the students to be able to read these clues.

I knew that with the limited time I had with the class, I would only be able to offer an introduction to these concepts. I looked at a number of different music theory textbooks, including *Scales, Intervals, Keys, Triads, Rhythm and Meter* by John Clough and Joyce Conley, *Tonal Harmony* by Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne and *Music Theory for Musical Theatre* by
John Bell and Steven R. Chicurel. While all of these texts reached far beyond the scope of what I could cover in the class, I did include a few pages from *Music Theory for Musical Theatre* in the course packet (see Chapter 2). My hope for the class was to use these concepts to make character choices, so that the students would have a rudimentary understanding and could immediately approach a piece of music with greater confidence.

**The Estill Voice Training System**

Traditionally, the study of vocal production in musical theatre programs happens in private voice lessons. Voice teachers come from various backgrounds and often teach different methods. This makes it very difficult, then, for the student to apply the skills that they learn in their voice lessons to their work in musical theatre classes, since the students in the musical theatre class have such varied instruction. In my Singing for the Actor class, I chose to teach the Estill Voice Training System (EVTS), so that the class would have a common vocabulary and could learn vocal technique in a group setting. EVTS is a technique that encourages healthy and versatile singing by focusing directly on the function of the vocal mechanism as studied in a laboratory setting over years of research. EVTS was developed by Jo Estill and the system continues to grow and change as new developments are found in the research of the otolaryngologists, speech pathologists and ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctors who teach the system.

Jo Estill (1921-2010) was born in Pennsylvania and was a professional singer on the radio and in Hollywood. In the 1950’s, she and her husband, Thomas Estill, toured to Europe where she sang German lieder and Baroque opera before moving to Colorado Springs where she received an BA in Liberal Arts from Colorado College. Two years later, she received an MA in
Music Education from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio and then moved to Syracuse, NY where she was the Instructor in Voice at the Upstate Medical Center. While there, she began to develop her system of vocal instruction and has since taught worldwide, solidifying her work into the Estill Voice Training System which now offers specific certification for instructors. Before her death in 2010, she received an honorary doctorate from the University of East Anglia.

I was first introduced to EVTS when I took a Belt Workshop in 2001 with ENT and Estill Master Teacher, Dr. Kerrie Obert of Ohio State University. My studies continued with a Level One workshop in the spring of 2012 with Dr. Steven Chicurel of Central Florida University and a Level One and Two Workshop with Dr. Kimberly Steinhauer (President of Estill Voice International) of Point Park University in the summer of 2012. I now have a Certificate of Figure Proficiency and will begin the procedures to become a Certified Master Teacher this spring. EVTS has transformed the way I teach and I was certain that this system would be the best way to tackle the vocal technique part of my Singing for the Actor class.

To begin with, EVTS separates performance (whether speaking or singing) into three categories:

1. Physiology (or Craft) – “study of subject” and its structural components
2. Aesthetics (or Artistry) – “your interpretation of that subject”
3. Metaphysics (or Magic) - “the magic in your performance of that task” (Estill website)

The system works primarily with the Physiology of the Voice, the philosophy being that once the artist can physically control the individual components of the voice in a healthy way, they will study the elements of many different vocal styles, leading to versatile performance practice. Once the craft and artistry are in place, the magic is more likely to happen during a performance.
EVTS handles the Physiology of the Voice by breaking it down into individual components (or ingredients) which can then be put together to healthfully create different voice qualities. When describing the function of the entire vocal mechanism, EVTS divides the individual components into three parts:

1. **Power** – Traditionally the respiratory system, this is the energy behind the production of vocal sound.
2. **Source** – This describes the vocal folds which vibrate to produce the sound.
3. **Filter** – This is the control of the sound waves through the resonators that produce the final sound.

These three parts are comprised of thirteen Figures of the Voice, which are the different parts of the vocal mechanism. These are worked individually through a series of exercises that specify control over each individual structure:

1. **True Vocal Folds: Onset/Offset Control**

   The True Vocal Folds (TVF) vibrate and are the Source of the sound. We can control them in two ways. The first is how we start and stop the sound, using a glottal, aspirate or smooth onset and offset of tone.

2. **True Vocal Folds: Body-Cover Control**

   The second way we can control the True Vocal Folds is in how they vibrate. When they are thick (which is how the majority of people speak), they vibrate through the entire fold from top to bottom. In thin folds, only the top part of the fold vibrates; in stiff folds, the folds are slightly more rigid and the sound becomes breathy; and in slack

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1 The term “Figure” comes from ice skating, when skaters had to complete compulsory figures before doing a choreographed routine in competition. Jo Estill used this term for the exercises of the voice.
folds, the folds are very loose and produce more of a deep clicking than a tone (often called a vocal fry).

3. False Vocal Folds Control

The False Vocal Folds (FVF) make up a part of the Filter and lie just above the True Vocal Folds in the larynx. The False Vocal Folds can be constricted, mid or retracted, and the continuous constriction of the False Folds can lead to vocal damage. This is one of the most important figures in terms of vocal health.

4. Larynx Control

The Larynx is the entire voice box. We can control it by moving it up and down (low, mid or high) and this can change the darkness and brightness of the sound.

5. Thyroid Cartilage Control

The Thyroid Cartilage makes up the top part of the Larynx (often called the Adam’s Apple) and keeping it vertical or tilted can change the “sweetness” of the sound and also contributes to the onset of vibrato.

6. Cricoid Cartilage Control

The Cricoid Cartilage makes up the bottom part of the Larynx and can also be vertical or can tilt upward when we shout or belt, allowing the True Vocal Folds to stay thick as the tone gets higher.

7. Velum Control

Often called the Soft Palate, the Velum separates the nasal passage from the mouth cavity. The Velum can be low (when saying a completely nasalized consonant like “n”), mid (like a French nasalized vowel) or high (typical speech).
8. Tongue Control

Another part of the Filter, the Tongue is a strong and relatively large organ in the mouth that can be low, mid, high or compressed. Because the tongue connects to the Hyoid Bone which is part of the Larynx, the tongue can affect larynx height and is one of the most important Figures.

9. Aryepiglottic Sphincter Control

The Aryepiglottic Sphincter (or AES) describes the area at the top of the larynx. The AES can be wide or narrow and this Figure controls what is often described as a nasalized sound. Narrowing the AES allows for greater volume and brightness of tone, without requiring lots of breath or body anchoring.

10. Jaw Control

One of the easiest figures to see, the Jaw is another part of the Filter and can be forward, back, mid or dropped.

11. Lips Control

The lips are yet another part of the Filter and can be protruded, mid or spread.

12. Head and Neck Anchoring

Head and Neck Anchoring is one of the two Figures that is part of the Power. Muscles in the neck and in the face (including the sternocleidomastoid, a long muscle running from the base of the skull to the sternum and clavicle) can take the pressure off of muscles that might contribute to False Vocal Folds constriction.
13. Torso Anchoring

The final Figure and a part of the Power, Torso Anchoring helps to “support” the sound in the body by using large groups of muscles, such as the abdominal muscles and trapezius. (Level One)

These thirteen figures are understood and practiced individually. Each student is different and finds particular positions easier than others. These are called Attractor States. Ideally, after much practice, we should be able to do all the Figures in all combinations, breaking free of our individual Attractor States and opening up infinite possibility for sound. EVTS has defined recipes for six Voice Qualities, based on the healthiest and easiest way to produce these iconic types of sound: Speech, Falsetto, Sob, Opera, Twang and Belt.

My hope for the Singing for the Actor class was to introduce the students to the thirteen Figures for the Voice and six Voice Qualities, so that they could understand the function of the vocal mechanism. The ultimate goal was to give the students the tools necessary to make specific and creative vocal choices, based on their understanding of character and objective, allowing for more versatility in performance. Keeping with the interdisciplinary approach, it was important to me to tie these concepts in with their understanding of music theory and text analysis, as well as their emotional connection to the songs and character.

**Stanislavski-based Acting Technique**

The third component of this Singing for the Actor class would be the acting technique. Ideally, this would provide the foundation for the all of the work, because after all, the purpose of the musical theatre art form is to tell a story through song and dance. I include it here as the third component because I knew that my particular Singing for the Actor class was made up of students that had had many years of acting training with very little music theory or vocal
technique (see Chapter 3). They already had a foundation of acting technique based on Stanislavski and so I could always integrate these concepts into the new material they were learning.

Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) is often called the father of modern acting. A Russian actor and director, Stanislavski created the Moscow Arts Theatre and developed a system of acting based on truth and naturalistic performance technique, which was a departure from the then-popular melodramatic performance practice. He wrote three texts that detail his work: An Actor Prepares, Building a Character and Creating a Role. His “System” offers a technique for actors as they approach a naturalistic text, and he defines such concepts as relaxation, concentration, imagination, objectives and emotional memory. His work transformed the teaching of acting, and he inspired many generations of great acting teachers who refined or fought against his technique. Michael Chekhov, Lee Strasberg and Uta Hagen are a few of these teachers who were influenced by Stanislavski and his work continues to be the most widely taught acting method in theatre programs.

In my Singing for the Actor class, I knew that my students had already had a great deal of acting training and were familiar with the vocabulary of the Stanislavski system. I wanted to refine and simplify the character analysis that the students had been asked to write for each of their previous acting classes, and get to the heart of the character quickly and succinctly. I decided to use a technique I learned from New York director Richard Sabellico in an audition class I took in 1999. When we approached a song, he would ask us three questions:

1. Who are you singing to?
2. What do you want from them?
3. Why do you need it right now?
By asking these three simple questions, Sabellico would encourage us to get right to the character’s point-of-view in a clear and concise way. I knew that by asking my students these same questions, they would be able to apply the concepts they learned in acting class (such as objectives, tactics and raising the stakes). The shorter their answers, the more easily they could make dynamic physical choices instead of intellectual ones.

My aim was to combine music theory, vocal production and acting technique, to teach my students to approach a song with confidence, technical proficiency and infinite possibility. If my students could analyze the music, answer the three acting questions based on the clues the composer gave them, and then make vocal choices that supported their understanding of the character, they would be able to give strong performances with nuance and depth. With this over-arching goal in mind, I began to design my class.
The development of the Singing for the Actor course began with an application to teach THEA 491, a special topics course designed by a professor or graduate student. The application process is simple yet competitive, with only two graduate students per semester awarded a class. I knew that the more specific my proposal was, the stronger my chances of being granted the opportunity to teach a 491 would be. I had the general concept in mind (an interdisciplinary approach to musical theatre training, combining music theory, vocal production and acting technique), but in February of 2012, I needed to begin tackling the specifics of the course for the proposal.

**Proposal**

I began the proposal with providing the reasons I believed this class should be offered to the VCU undergraduate students. I explained that Musical Theatre is a popular and lucrative job market for actors, and in the current theatrical climate, actors hoping to work in musical theatre need to be able to sing everything from Opera to Rock, plus sustain their vocal integrity over an 8-show week. Students in the Department of Theatre at VCU are offered courses in musical theatre that include musical theatre audition technique and acting in song, but besides the short vocal coaching they receive in their junior year, they have little access to training in singing. I then went on to briefly describe the class, highlighting my interdisciplinary approach and how I planned to combine music theory, vocal production and acting technique.
The remainder of the short three-page proposal dealt with specifics, including the number of classes I would like per week (two) and the length of the class (one hour and fifty minutes). I limited the number of students to sixteen, knowing that once we got to performance, I would need to be able to hear all of the students sing individually within the class time. I asked for a room with a piano or keyboard, a chalkboard, and access to media so that I could show videos and play musical examples.

I also discussed the rough idea of the structure of the class. In the first two weeks, we would look at an anatomical overview of the vocal mechanism, so that a common understanding and vocabulary could be established. In the following three weeks, the thirteen Figures for the Voice would be isolated and explored through different exercises. Using the Estill Technique, students would then begin to put together “recipes” for six different Qualities of singing, including Speech, Belt and Opera, and this work would take the remainder of the semester. When working on these different Voice Qualities, the techniques learned would be applied to songs so that the vocal technique could support strong acting choices. Throughout the course, students would learn how to look at a piece of music to determine the key and time signature, and learn the basics of singing in solfege. The final assessment would be a performance of at least two different styles of singing, and a written anatomy and music theory test. I also suggested a tentative schedule for the fifteen weeks, which only included rough topic headings. I finished with a list of texts that would make up parts of the course packet (see Appendix A).

This proposal would prove to be extremely helpful. While the short description and outline was rather vague, I was able to formulate a timeline for the subjects I wanted to cover and begin to think about how I would assess the class. By laying out the specifics in terms of the number of students and classes, as well as the texts I would consider, I created the parameters
within which I would design the class. I was thrilled when I was chosen to teach my Singing for the Actor class and was happy to have the summer to define and refine my ideas.

**Summer EVTS Course**

When I sent in my proposal for the Singing for the Actor class in March of 2012, I had already registered for an intensive Level One and Two EVTS course that coming June with Dr. Kimberly Steinhauer. While I had already completed a Belt workshop with Dr. Kerri Obert in 2003 and a Level One workshop with Dr. Steven Chicurel in February of 2012, I was really looking forward to reviewing Level One and being introduced to Level Two by Dr. Steinhauer, the President of Estill Voice International. I was also hoping to test for the Certificate of Figure Proficiency while at the workshop.

The workshop took place at The University of California, Pennsylvania and was an intensive five-day course. The first three days were devoted to Level One which focuses on the thirteen Figures, and while this was a review for me, I learned a great deal. Dr. Chicurel is a pianist and musical director, and in his teaching of the material the previous spring, he emphasized the application of the thirteen Figures and while he explained all of the anatomy and function, he often discussed acting choice and intention. On the other hand, Dr. Steinhauer is a voice teacher and otolaryngologist. As a medical doctor, she was able to explain in depth the function of the vocal mechanism, and stressed vocal health by emphasizing the science behind the work. She is a professional singer and voice teacher as well, and was able to demonstrate the Figures with incredible clarity and ease. I finished the first three days of the workshop with a much deeper understanding of the voice, as well as the science of sound waves, and the workings of the ear and how we hear sound.
The final two days of the workshop tackled the six EVTS-defined Voice Qualities. The ultimate goal of EVTS is to train the voice to work in infinite ways, but because Jo Estill was concerned with vocal health, EVTS defines healthy recipes for six of the most commonly used Voice Qualities: Speech, Falsetto, Sob, Twang, Opera and Belt. I had already taken the Belt workshop and was familiar with the recipes for the other voice qualities, but having a chance to explore these Qualities for a few hours each, helped me to understand why Jo created these recipes. In Speech Singing, there is an “untrained” quality to the sound and so singing with mid false vocal folds and a relaxed head and neck, allows the voice to appear more raw and simple. On the other hand, Belt is such a loud, high-powered sound, that maintaining head, neck and torso anchoring, a narrow AES and a tilted cricoid cartilage, while monitoring the false vocal fold retraction, allows the voice to reach the incredibly high pitches required in contemporary musical theatre without harmful strain. By the end of the workshop, I was inspired by the infinite possibilities in my own voice and was so excited to share these ideas with my students.

The best part of the workshop for me, however, was having the opportunity to test for the Certificate of Figure Proficiency. This is the first certificate level in EVTS, and while I had been practicing before the workshop, I was quite nervous. The test consists of a Voiceprint, where the examiner has you sing into a microphone and measures your demonstration of the thirteen Figures as well as the six Voice Qualities on the Voiceprint Analysis. You are asked to demonstrate each of the different variations within the thirteen Figures on three different vowel sounds, and thankfully, you can demonstrate them on any pitch. You must also sing the six Voice Qualities on three different vowels throughout an octave.

Dr. Steinhauer had agreed by email before the workshop to administer the test, and we arranged to test at the end of the third day, even though I had not yet completed the Level Two
part of the workshop. Again, I was nervous to demonstrate these different sounds on a computer with the President of the organization. Kimberly was lovely and immediately put me at ease. I successfully demonstrated the thirteen Figures and we then started on the six Voice Qualities. I was able to demonstrate all of them except for Twang. She seemed surprised that I had been successful at producing most of the qualities without having taken Level Two, and she suggested that we try Twang again the following evening after we worked on that Quality in the workshop, hoping that I did not yet have a clear understanding of that sound. She was right! Once we went over it the following day, I realized that my understanding of Twang was incorrect and on a break, I was able to record the Twang demonstration, and complete the workshop with a Certificate of Figure Proficiency.

That summer workshop gave me not only a deeper understanding of EVTS and my own voice, but also a renewed sense of purpose when it came to my Singing for the Actor class. I was truly inspired by the work of the other workshop participants, as well as Dr. Steinhauer’s knowledge and ability to make infinite sounds with her own vocal instrument. I was beginning to devise exercises and assessments that I believed could open up worlds of possibilities for my student actors and I was ready to begin writing my syllabus.

**Syllabus**

By the time I began putting together my syllabus, I knew the specifics of the class. I had sixteen registered students, all seniors, except for one junior, a transfer student who had already had a few years of vocal training in New York. The majority of class had taken the junior Musical Theatre Performance class the year before and had some experience with singing. All of the students were acting majors and had completed at least two full years of acting classes within
the department. I also knew I would be teaching in PAC 72, a rehearsal space with a mirror, piano, chalkboard and media center. Finally, I would see the students on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 3:00-4:50 p.m.

The first step when devising my syllabus was to define the objectives of the course. I knew that my over-arching goal was to have my students approach a song with confidence, technical proficiency and infinite possibility, urging them to tell unique stories in unexpected and specific ways. I also knew that this would be difficult to assess and that I would need to break down the skills into definable and measurable objectives.

I started by dividing the three components and creating specific objectives to measure each skill separately. For music theory, I wanted the students to be able to sight-read a piece of music in a major key, sing in harmony and identify different intervals, and understand simple and complex rhythmic patterns and how they apply to text. For vocal production, they needed to identify and describe basic anatomy of the vocal mechanism, explain the concept of Power, Source and Filter, describe and demonstrate thirteen Figures for the Voice and how they can be applied to characterization, demonstrate six different vocal qualities, and describe healthy singing habits and identify harmful constriction in themselves and others. I chose not to include objectives that dealt only with acting technique because I knew that all of the students had a good amount of acting training, and that I could include this skill in combined objectives. I finished with two objectives that combined all three skills, and these would be assessed at the end of the semester: to demonstrate at least three different vocal recipes within one song; and to use different vocal qualities to support character choice and acting intention.

Now that I had clear and specific objectives in place, I needed to define how I would assess these skills. It was very important to me that demonstration and performance made up the
majority of the assessment and so 35% of the course grade would assess their song presentations and demonstrations of the Figures and Voice Qualities. Written tests would make up another 20% of their grade, and these would test their understanding of anatomy, music theory and concepts we discussed in class. I decided to have them keep a journal, and 10% of their grade would be based on their written responses to bi-weekly questions that would help them to define their own strengths and weaknesses as well as their deepening understanding of the material. Another 10% of their grade would assess all of the skills simultaneously, and these would be character analyses for their final three songs which would ask them to analyze the music (music theory), answer the three character questions (acting technique) and apply vocal choices to the song (vocal production). The final 25% of their grade would mark their class participation.

The final major component of the syllabus was the class calendar. This was the most difficult part of the development process, because I knew I had a great deal of material and not much time. The topic headings from my initial proposal had provided a good place to start, and for the most part, I was able to use that sequence as I more specifically defined the topics for each class. I wanted to devote time to both music theory and vocal production in every session and so I chose topics from both of these components for each class, hoping to create connections between them.

Necessarily, the first two weeks began with the basic concepts, providing a strong foundation upon which the remainder of the class would be built. We would start with understanding Rhythm, and learn the founding principles of EVTS, including the Power, Source, Filter model, basic anatomy and effort levels. The next four weeks would be devoted to understanding solfege and key signature as well as understanding the thirteen Figures. Four weeks seemed like a long time as I was arranging the calendar and I knew they would be the
hardest to get through; however, I was certain that the practice and understanding they would get in those four weeks would allow for greater possibility in the second half of the semester, and so I followed my instinct and only tackled two Figures per class.

At this point, I knew I would need to test the students on the thirteen Figures, and I put aside a whole class to arrange individual demonstrations, similar to the Voiceprint that I did for my Certification (although on a much more basic level). In the previous weeks, I had arranged an anatomy test, a theory test and a journal collection. Again, I did question my sequence, knowing that it would be almost seven weeks into the semester before the students would present an actual song. My hope, though, was that by the time they did present their first song to the class they had a solid understanding of both the music on the page and of their own voice, and that they would be able to approach the song with confidence and solid technique.

The six Voice Qualities would be tacked over the following seven weeks. I chose music theory topics to support these different voice qualities, such as harmony when working on the Opera quality and syncopation when working on Belt. Each Voice Quality would be discussed and practiced for an entire class and applied to song, and the students would present sixteen-bar sections of songs we worked on in class for a grade. I chose to spend more days on both Opera and Belt, mainly because these are complex and high powered Voice Qualities, and can make the singer susceptible to vocal strain. We would spend three class days on these two Qualities and the students would demonstrate them with a slightly longer piece of music, as well as an in-depth character analysis.

I started with Speech singing for two reasons. First of all, for those in the class who had had very little experience with singing, this quality would be the closest to their natural speaking voice and would give them confidence as they began to explore qualities further from their
Attractor State. Secondly, I wanted to analyze each student’s individual speech, so that they would know what their Attractor State was, and they could begin to refine their ear to hear different qualities in others. The following class, we would explore Falsetto since the recipe is almost exactly the same as Speech with the exception of the TVF (both the onset/offset and body cover). I decided to have the students present two songs, demonstrating both of these Voice Qualities on the same day, hoping that we could compare and contrast the performances and qualities.

I used the same formula for learning Sob and Twang, although for opposite reason. Sob and Twang are the Voice Qualities that are the most different, in sound and in production. Sob uses a low larynx, wide AES, anchored head and neck, and low tongue. Twang requires high larynx, narrow AES, relaxed head and neck, and high tongue. At this point, I wanted to see if the students were able to drastically change their vocal mechanism and present two songs on the same day that differed wildly. I knew this would be a challenge, but my hope was that the students would start to see the possibilities of their voice and begin to consider different options within one song.

I chose to tackle Opera next. I thought this might be the most difficult quality for most of the class and I did not want to finish the semester with the Opera Quality. We would spend three days on this Quality, listening to examples and practicing the recipe, and we would complete the Opera work with a 32-bar piece we had worked on in class. They would be graded not only on their ability to demonstrate the Opera Quality, but also on a brief but specific music and character analysis, as well as their emotional connection and storytelling.

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2 The Estill Voice Training Level One Workbook states, “The term attractor state is used in dynamical systems theory to describe a condition of stability during motor tasks.”

3 In EVTS, Falsetto is a Voice Quality with a specific recipe and does not refer to the upper register of a man’s voice.
The final Voice Quality the course would explore would be Belt. As musical theatre students, this is the one Quality that everyone idolizes and wants to perfect, and while I had several students in the class who had a great deal of experience with this Quality, a good number of them were terrified of it (and had expressed this fear during the junior Musical Theatre class the year before). I wanted to teach Belt last because it is the Quality that most readily causes harmful vocal strain, but also because after learning all of the other Voice Qualities, I hoped that the students would have gained a richer understanding of their individual instrument and would be able to approach this Quality with confidence. They would be graded in the same way as with Opera, with a 32-bar song presentation and a character analysis.

The final week of class would be the culmination of the entire semester. The students would pick a song of their choice to present to the class. They would analyze the music, write a character analysis and sing the entire piece having made vocal and character choices supported by their understanding of the music. They could choose a song from any genre, although they would be required to use at least three dramatically different Voice Qualities.\(^4\) This final presentation would assess every aspect of the course, from the understanding of music theory, to vocal production, to acting intention. They would also have a final written exam administered on the scheduled university exam date that would test their knowledge of music theory, anatomy and EVTS.

By the beginning of August, I had drafted my complete syllabus (including the course information and required university guidelines), although I continued to revise it throughout the following weeks. I felt very comfortable with the objectives, assessment criteria and calendar

\(^4\) I chose not to require the specific EVTS recipes so that the students would have infinite possibility in their vocal choices.
and was looking forward to getting started. The final component I needed to develop before class began was the course packet.

**Course Packet**

With the amount of material I would be covering as well as the varied skills and subjects, I decided not to require published textbooks for the Singing for the Actor course. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the music theory books that are used in music departments reach far beyond the scope of the class I had designed, and would only frustrate the students. I felt the same way about texts that deal with vocal production. EVTS does not sell published materials that lay out the thirteen Figures and six Voice Qualities. Those materials are only available to people who take the Level One and Two workshops, and although Gillyanne Kaynes’ text, *Singing and the Actor*, does deal with some of these concepts, it approaches them in a way that differed from how I wanted to present them in class. Finally, I knew that my students had read numerous texts in their acting classes and I did not want to require a specific text on acting technique.

I chose instead to create a course packet. I did not want to require a great deal of reading, wanting instead for my students to have experiential knowledge of the material, but I did want to include a few components.

1. **Anatomy**

   Although I planned on talking about anatomy in class and locating different parts of the vocal mechanism in our own bodies, I wanted to include pictures and diagrams in the course packet that would help the students visualize the parts of the body we would discuss. I included diagrams of the lungs, false vocal folds, bones of the torso and pelvis, muscles of the neck and torso and the tongue from *Geography of the*
Voice: Anatomy of the Adams Apple by Steven R. Chicurel and Kerrie B. Obert; diagrams of the vocal tract, false vocal folds and larynx from Singing and the Actor by Gillyanne Kayes; and diagrams of the larynx and suggestions for vocal health from One Voice by Joan Melton.

2. Music Theory

I wanted to keep this section of the course packet simple and useful. I used excerpts from Part I of Music Theory for Musical Theatre by John Bell and Steven R. Chicurel to explain and exhibit rhythm, time signature, key signature, names for notes and their placement on the piano, and accidentals. Again, I would explain all of this material in class but I wanted to provide materials they could reference if they had any questions. I also incorporated a short discussion of Form (how a song is put together) from the same text, as well as a brief excerpt from Stephen Sondheim’s, Stephen Sondheim: Finishing the Hat that explains his process of writing “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd.” I included these last few pages to give the students insight into how to dissect a song. I filled the remainder of the music theory section of the course packet with blank staff paper so the students’ could write down and practice the music theory concepts we would discuss.

3. Sheet Music

The third and final section of the course packet was a selection of music that we would sight-read, analyze and perform in class. I chose twenty-four songs, each with a different purpose in mind. Some songs I included because of the keys in which they were written, some because of the simplicity or difficulty of their rhythmic patterns and some because they would easily support a particular Voice Quality. The songs
spanned numerous styles and genres and were not gender-specific. Each song served a different topic from the syllabus and would support the concepts we would learn in class. The following songs were included in the course packet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Song</th>
<th>Concepts Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I Never Meant to Hurt You” by Laura Nyro</td>
<td>C Major, Major and Minor 2nds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sweet Dreams” by John Bucchino</td>
<td>C Major, Major and Minor 3rds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Candle on the Water” from <em>Pete’s Dragon</em></td>
<td>C Major, 4ths and 5ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Caro Mio Ben” by Tommaso Giordani</td>
<td>C Major, 4ths and 5ths, Opera Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Lady is a Tramp” from <em>Babes in Arms</em></td>
<td>C Major, Syncopation, Belt Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Art Thou Troubled” by G.F. Handel</td>
<td>F Major, Opera Quality, ¾ Time Signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Colors of My Life” from <em>Barnum</em></td>
<td>F Major, 4ths and 5ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Long Ago and Far Away” from <em>Cover Girl</em></td>
<td>F Major, Sob Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lover Come Back to Me” from <em>The New Moon</em></td>
<td>G Major, Opera Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My Love” by David Tolley</td>
<td>G Major, 2-part Harmony Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hey Look Me Over” from <em>Wildcat</em></td>
<td>G Major, Belt Quality, 6/8 Time Signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I Wish I Were in Love Again” from <em>Babes in Arms</em></td>
<td>G Major, Belt Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In a Simple Way I Love You” from <em>I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road</em></td>
<td>D Major, Speech Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Black and White” by Sarah McLachlan</td>
<td>Bb Major, Falsetto Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Blame It on the Moon” by Mike Batt</td>
<td>A Minor, Sob Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Neat to Be a Newsboy” from <em>Working</em></td>
<td>A Minor, G Major, Twang Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Horse With Wings” by Ricky Ian Gordon</td>
<td>A Major, Speech Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There Will Never Be Another You” from <em>Iceland</em></td>
<td>Eb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Lord Bless You and Keep You” by John Rutter</td>
<td>F Major, 2-part Harmony Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Somewhere Over the Rainbow” arranged by Jeff Buchbaum</td>
<td>D Major, 2-part Harmony Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Lord Bless You and Keep You” by Peter C. Lutkin</td>
<td>C Major, 4-part Harmony Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dear One” from <em>Kiss of the Spiderwoman</em></td>
<td>Ab Major, 4-part Harmony Singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Rhythm of Life” from <em>Sweet Charity</em></td>
<td>D Minor, A Minor, 4-part Harmony Singing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By mid-August, I had taken my course packet to be printed and I was ready to make copies of my syllabus. The class was full and I was getting emails from students asking for overrides. I had ordered six packs of Make and Move Larynxes\(^5\) from the EVTS website, I created a detailed outline for the first week and I had compiled a playlist of songs that demonstrated different Figures and Voice Qualities. I was ready for class to begin.

\(^5\) The Make and Move Larynx is a 3-dimensional paper representation of the entire larynx, and students more fully learn the anatomy as they assemble it. It is available for purchase on www.estillvoice.com.
Chapter 3 – Singing for the Actor

On August 23, 2013, I met with my Singing for the Actor class for the first time. I had sixteen students, all seniors except for one junior. Of the sixteen students, eleven were women and five were men, and all were BFA Theatre Majors except for two who had switched to the BA Theatre Program the previous year. All had been through two full years of BFA acting training and eleven had taken the junior Musical Theatre class the year before. One male student attended three classes and then had to drop the course because of scheduling conflicts.

Throughout the semester, I kept a detailed account of each class, noting any difficulties, challenges or successes that occurred during class time. I reflected on the material and the students’ daily response to it, but I also thought ahead in case I needed to re-think the way I approached a topic or needed to spend more time reviewing a particular concept. The following details the progression of the class, and I will include a few key moments that changed the way I approached the work or enhanced the sequence I had already outlined.

August 23, 2012

The purpose of the first class was to go through the syllabus and introduce the students to EVTS and the work we would do throughout the semester. The students seemed excited, but subdued and maybe a little apprehensive. We read the syllabus out loud so that they could listen to one another’s voices, and I was pleased that although they had known each other for years, they were able to listen to everyone in a fresh way. I asked them to describe what they heard, and

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6 I had been the accompanist and vocal coach for the junior Musical Theatre class and so I was very familiar with the skills of those eleven students.
they used the word “full” to describe two of the students. I pointed out that the word “full” is subjective, and when other students tried to find synonyms for it, they all had unique interpretations, using such words as “deep,” “resonant,” and “bright.”

I also decided to administer a diagnostic music theory exam (see Appendix C), so that I could determine what experience the students had with understanding music. As I predicted, some could not answer a single question, while others were confident. No one answered all of the questions correctly, but most seemed eager and excited to learn.

We then did the “Happy Birthday” exercise. I had them sing like an untrained singer at a birthday party, Marilyn Monroe, Ethel Merman and an opera singer. Both my Teaching Assistant, Rachel, and I commented on the students’ bodies as they sang each version, pointing out that they naturally and easily produced all of those sounds. We listened to examples of different singers and I had the students write down descriptions of each voice. Although many students described both Bono of U2 and Louis Armstrong as having a “gravelly” sound and Sarah McLachlan as sounding breathy, some descriptions were very unique. One student said that Dinah Washington sounded like she had a lot of “emotional stuff” under her voice, and I kept returning to that comment. What was it about her voice that made the student respond in that way? How can we vary our own performances to elicit that kind of audience response? Interestingly, the students were unable to pinpoint exactly what Washington was doing vocally, but they were looking forward to being able to describe, understand and replicate the “emotional stuff” by the end of the semester.

I finished the first class with a lecture about Jo Estill, EVTS and the basic principles of the system. Most of the students seemed attentive and excited about the work.
August 28, 2012

I decided to start the next class with music theory and asked the students to sit on the floor facing the board, knowing that we would soon get to our feet. We discussed rhythm and defined values of whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, etc. I had devised a rhythm exercise so that the students could physicalize each of these rhythmic values: for the whole note, they stood like a Sumo wrestler; for a half note, pointed like an explorer; for a quarter note, they marched like a soldier; and for an eighth note they tiptoed like a mouse. I played music, calling out different note values and they physicalized them, understanding the theory in a palpable way. We went back to the board, discussed the values of corresponding rests, devised a pattern with rests and notes and then played the game again, clapping on the rests. By the end of the exercise, the students physically understood the function of rhythm in music.

After that exercise, we moved into chairs arranged in a circle and discussed the anatomy of the larynx, head, neck and torso. Some students seemed surprised and needed a lot of explanation while others were reviewing what they already knew. There were a few misconceptions about breath and “placement”, but it was a fantastic discussion that took longer than I had anticipated. We finished the class with each student putting together their own EVTS Make and Move Larynx, so that they had a visual representation of the anatomical parts of the larynx. They loved them and were proud that they were able to assemble them.

August 30, 2012

I had been so pleased with the last class, that I was surprised when the students struggled with our continued discussion on rhythm. They had physicalized and understood note values in 4/4 time signature, but in this class, we looked at 3/4 and many students had difficulty adding up
the note values on the page. We tried the physical exercise again and they were able to internalize the rhythm, but because so many students struggled with understanding the written notation, I knew that I would need to devise a new exercise for the following class.

Before launching into the EVTS topic for the day, we discussed what they had been discovering about their own voices and their observations were specific and unexpected. I could tell that they were beginning to think about their voices in new ways and were attempting to locate the anatomy that had just learned. The topic for the day was the Power, Source and Filter model of EVTS, and while I did need to go over it a few times, I believe that they left the class that day with a new understanding of how the voice works. I was beginning to question the fact that we had not begun singing yet, but I knew we had to get through this material first.

September 4, 2012

After our last class when a number of people were struggling with understanding written rhythm in 3/4 time, I decided to divide the students into pairs (experienced musicians paired with inexperienced students). I gave each pair a written rhythmic sequence and a few minutes to analyze it before presenting it to the class by clapping the rhythm out loud. Overall, it seemed to work and most of the students helped each other understand the rhythmic structure.

I then had Rachel lecture about breath. She is writing her own thesis on breath and I thought it would give her an opportunity to share her knowledge with the class. I expected her to do some breathing exercises with them, but instead, she showed some videos, including Sutton Foster, Renee Fleming and Sarah Brightman, and talked about how breath does not always have fill the lower part of the torso. Some of the students seemed a little taken aback, and I was hoping she would have done more physical work with them to demonstrate, but they seemed to
grasp the ideas. I, personally, would have included more physical exercises, and in hindsight, I should have checked with her first to see what she was going to do.

I finished the class with explaining Attractor States and Effort levels. While they struggled with the concept of Attractor States, they did understand Effort levels. I found the conversation about Attractor States fascinating. One student brought up the idea of family and the influences of our childhood environment on our Attractor States. Another talked about her “mix” and how that was easy for her, but she realized that her speaking voice was different. So, is her Attractor State more like a belt? A third student discussed his affinity for “crooners” and how “nice” it felt to sing like that when he emulated them. Was that an Attractor State then? I was thrilled with the in-class discussions and the deep thought that the work had prompted so far.

September 6, 2013

Because the class had continued to struggle with 3/4 time, I devised yet another exercise that I hoped would make the time signature more natural to them. I was also hoping to begin bridging the skills of acting and music, by having the students consider how composers set lyrics. I split the class into small groups (with experienced and inexperienced students in each one) and gave them each a short phrase from a poem. Each group had to set the words to a rhythm in 3/4, write it out and present it to the class. The exercise proved difficult and most of the students had a hard time setting the text to a rhythm that stressed the operative words, but some had really interesting ideas. I think all of them had a new respect for composers.

Once we finished with the rhythm exercise, we looked at the first two Figures: True Vocal Fold (TVF) onset/offset and False Vocal Folds (FVF). Working with the onset/offset of

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7 In EVTS, Effort is given a number in order to determine the amount of energy or work put into demonstrating a Figure. For instance, a student can narrow her AES at a Level 1 or a Level 10.
the True Vocal Folds and the constriction and retraction of the False Folds was eye-opening for a number of students. Most had “ah-ha” moments when they located their TVF (especially when saying “uh-oh” for the glottal onsets) and FVF for the first time. They were also able to hear these parts of the vocal mechanism in examples I played for the class, recognizing constriction in Alicia Keys for example. They seemed to be grasping the concepts and understanding the function of the individual parts, and enjoyed getting into the deeper stages of the work. This was the first day that I felt all of the students become truly engaged and excited.

September 11, 2012

I decided to change the structure of the class, and instead of starting with music theory, I wanted to review what we had learned the previous class and start with a warm-up. We began by massaging each other’s shoulders while retracting the FVF at different effort levels, with the goal of isolating each part of the mechanism and controlling the amount of effort placed there. We also did singing exercises for the TVF onset/offset. We moved on to music theory and I played “Do Re Mi” from The Sound of Music as an introduction to solfege. All of them caught on quickly when we looked at solfege on the board and as a class we sight-read “I Never Meant to Hurt You,” first on solfege alone, then with rhythm and then with words. I was pleased with their success.

Our vocal topic of the day was the True Vocal Fold Body Cover. I was really surprised when we discussed it for over an hour. The students were very curious about how the folds vibrate and what it sounds like. We sang as a group, doing vocal exercises and applying different body covers to “I Never Meant to Hurt You.” They were fascinated by a video I played of actual vibrating folds and I think they got a clearer sense of where everything is and how it works.
The most successful part of the class, though, was their response to each other as we tried the different body covers individually. I had them sing on “Ah” with thick, stiff then thin folds. Most struggled with the thin folds, but you could hear everyone gasp when someone finally succeeded. A couple of people struggled with thick folds, but again, once they got it, everyone was wonderfully supportive. The class was progressing quickly.

September 13, 2012

The structure of the last class worked well, so I started again with warm-ups, including massaging while retracting FVF; glottal, aspirate and smooth onsets; thick, stiff and thin TVF; and playing with combinations of those three different Figures. After a review of solfege, we discussed intervals and recognizing them on the staff. We focused on major and minor 2nds within the Major scale, and while some students seemed to understand right away, a few of the students took a little longer to grasp the concept. As a class we sight-read “Candle on the Water” from Pete’s Dragon in solfege, and I realized that I needed to remind them about composer’s choices and how that informs character.

We also talked about the Larynx and the AES Figures. Both seemed to be a struggle for many students. In fact, one student broke into tears when she could not sing with a lowered or raised Larynx. Most of them succeeded eventually, but I was surprised with how many of the students struggled with a narrow AES. One student found narrowing her AES incredibly easy and when I had everyone in the class listen to her sound, she became self-conscience and doubtful of the quality of her voice. That was not at all my intention, but I think she felt better after I told her it was unique to her and that many people work so hard to have that sound. Since
the class was struggling, I knew I needed to begin applying these different figures to character choice and hoped that we would be able to do that the following class.

September 20, 2012

This class started with a written test, assessing them on their understanding of anatomy and the theory concepts we had discussed thus far. I was thrilled when every single student received an A, demonstrating their understanding and the effort they put into preparing for it. After the exam, we began looking at major and minor 3rds. In the previous class, nearly all of the students understood 2nds, but when I tried to explain major and minor 3rds, many seemed confused and were unable to recognize the intervals in the written music. They were able to sight-read John Bucchino’s “Sweet Dreams” rather easily, and we looked at the major and minor 3rds in the piece and how that supported the sad lyrics of the song. Despite that success, I knew I would have to break away from my syllabus and spend more time on 3rds before moving on to wider intervals.

Class was beginning to become more difficult as the Figures became more subtle. Everyone was able to understand the TVF, but as we looked at the Crycoid Cartilage and Thyroid Cartilage, many students were confused. The ones who got it right away were able to feel a dramatic movement on the outside of their larynx with their fingers when they tilted their Thyroid Cartilage. I used images like “whimpering” or “meowing” and while I believe that they understood it intellectually, many students struggled with knowing whether they were tilting the Thyroid Cartilage or not. They struggled even more with the Crycoid Cartilage tilt.

More difficult than feeling it was hearing it in others. It is easier to determine when someone is singing with thick or thin TVF or with a narrow AES. Determining whether someone
is using Thyroid Tilt is more challenging. I think they were able to hear it in the Michael Buble examples I played, but it was still difficult for a number of them. I realized later that I should have told them that we had finished learning the hardest Figures so that they would feel less discouraged.

Since the students were struggling with both music theory and vocal production, I decided to have them start using the Figures we had learned in the songs “Sweet Dreams” and “I Never Meant to Hurt You.” We were finally able to begin applying the technical work to acting technique because we had learned enough figures to begin experimenting, and the students were starting to see how they could add more color and support the lyrics by adjusting the different parts of the voice. This exercise was a big success and I was relieved that we were at a point where we could start applying music theory and vocal production to acting intention.

September 25, 2012

Despite the success of the last class, the energy in the classroom was beginning to wane. I introduced the class to 4ths intervals and the function of the Velum and the Tongue, but the energy seemed low. I wondered whether it was because we were getting to the end of the Figures, we were a few weeks into the semester or because each class seemed to be so similar. It was time to try something new.

I mentioned my concerns to my TA, Rachel, who suggested that the class felt stagnant to me because I was ready to move on. When she and I learned EVTS, the material was concentrated over five days and in this class, the Figures and early concepts were spread out over a number of weeks. I felt like we needed to start applying everything, but the students were not quite ready for complete application because we had not finished learning the Figures. I was
itching to get them through the following two weeks and then into using the work when acting a
song.

Before we could do that, however, I knew I needed to find a way for the students to grasp
intervals so that they could better understand what a composer was telling them in a piece of
music. I devised an exercise where I would set up the students like a piano (each student was a
key). I needed them to understand the intervals in their bodies and I decided to attempt the
“Human Piano” exercise the following class.

September 27, 2012

This was a very successful class. We started the class with a review of intervals and the
students shared their tricks for identifying them in written music, explaining it to each other in
numerous ways. To help with that, we attempted the Human Piano and for 2nds, it worked. They
clearly understood the concept and were very excited about it, until we tried 3rds, which
confused them. One of the students suggested setting up the Human Piano facing the mirror and
we all decided to try that the following class with 3rds and 4ths.

We then sight-read in F Major and warmed up singing Handel’s “Art Thou Troubled”
and “The Colors of My Life” from Coleman and Stewart’s Barnum. At that point we had learned
eleven of the thirteen Figures, moving quickly through the Lips and the Jaw, and the students
could feel how close we were to the end. Because we were able to move so quickly through the
work, we had time to watch a number of Youtube videos. I played a recording of Jesse Norman
as an example of an extreme back and dropped Jaw, and then the students asked to watch
Jennifer Holiday singing “And I am Telling You” from Dreamgirls. Another student suggested
we watch Miss Arkansas sing the same song at the 1994 Miss America Pageant, followed by
Jennifer Hudson at The Academy Awards. This was an illuminating exercise. We were able to compare and contrast the choices of both Holiday and Hudson, articulating how their renditions were appropriate and yet remarkably different. Miss Arkansas, on the other hand completely missed the mark as far as style was concerned, and her delivery was comic. It prompted insightful discussion.

The conversation that followed, however, was even more rewarding. We discussed how to understand and analyze a piece of music in order to make clear choices. We talked about looking at rests, intervals and sustained notes, and trying to figure out what the composer was telling us in terms of character intention. We also talked about how the accompaniment is the subtext. The students realized how many choices you can make in a piece of music and how it tells a different story and everyone was ready to begin using this knowledge when approaching a piece of music.

October 2, 2012

I was very excited after the last class, but my enthusiasm did not last long. I was beginning to feel the weight of my extra-curricular work and I was not as animated as I was earlier in the semester. The students seemed a little tired as well. We were all ready to finish with the Figures and start applying them, and I was hoping that our low energy was because of the mid-semester slump and not boredom from the material in class.

We were still playing with the Human Piano which seemed to work for some, but not for others. I asked them to bring white and black shirts to wear, hoping that the clarity of the colors would help with understanding the placement on the piano. It seemed like a fun idea, but I was not sure if it would work in practice.
We finished with the final two Figures: Head and Neck Anchoring, and Torso Anchoring. The students really responded to these Figures, feeling the strength of using large muscles to support their sound. One student was shocked when she belted a high F# while anchoring in her Head and Neck and remarked on how easy it felt. While the class was still exciting to me, I felt tired and I needed to find easier ways to keep myself and my students engaged.

October 4, 2012

This class was the Figures Demonstration day. I had each student come in individually and demonstrate the thirteen Figures. I had scheduled four students per half hour, but I could easily have done five or six per half hour and still been on time. I was incredibly pleased with the outcome. Every single student was able to demonstrate the Figures and even if they were not able do one or two on the first attempt, they could do them with a bit of coaching. Everyone had a clear understanding of the vocal mechanism, although they often had to use other Figures when struggling with one in particular, but for their level, I was pleased with the outcome. The lowest grade was an 88% (points were removed when students were unable to complete a Figure without coaching), so this assessment was a major success.

The students were taking it seriously, but more than that was the success of studying these Figures over five weeks. The students had time to experience each Figure and were able to understand and demonstrate them individually. If they could learn to apply them to a song, it would be a true testament to the work.

I had two favorite moments during the individual demonstrations. One student admitted that he thought about his voice all the time, and that when he sang his song for another class that same day and remembered anchoring and retracting his FVF, he was not disappointed in himself
the way he usually is. He was one student that I had been unsure about, not knowing if he was responding to the material, but he seemed really taken with the work and it had transformed him.

Another student said he felt like he now knew all of the secrets and that real singers, whether they are conscious of it or not, are doing these things. He felt a part of the club. At that point, more than ever, I was amazed at this work and was seeing clear results with my students. I began thinking about how I could implement the work in a musical theatre program, offering this course in the first semester of freshman year before students took private voice lessons.

October 9, 2012

At this point, I knew that we needed to spend the majority of class learning each Voice Quality. I decided to put music theory on the back burner for a few weeks and focus on the application of the Figures and making choices based upon the theory they had already learned. We continued to work on sight-reading, looking at Cryer and Ford’s “In a Simple Way I Love You” from I’m Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road, so that we could apply it to Speech Quality.

Before looking at the EVTS recipe for Speech Quality, we analyzed each student’s speech, defining their habitual recipe. There were not many surprises, although one student was amazed that she speaks with a high larynx, a narrow AES and an occasional mid-velum. Another student was shocked that she speaks with low tongue and another that she speaks mid-velum on occasion. The students were very engaged and excited to hear their recipe while having a chance to define those of their classmates.
They also responded well to the Speech Quality recipe. Some had to make adjustments within their own speech (singing with vertical Cricoid Cartilage or mid FVF) but most of them did very well. Each student was able to sing “In a Simple Way I Love You” by themselves in Speech Quality and they were excited to hear one another.

October 11, 2012

I wanted to start empowering the students to be able to work on their own. During the warm-up, I asked everyone to contribute an exercise for a Figure. The students were struggling to find some, but once I told them they could devise one we had not done in class, they were much more creative. Some even did silent exercises, like protruding and spreading the lips without sound.

We sight-read Sarah McLachlan’s “Black and White” in Bb and a few people really struggled with the idea that the Bb Major scale starts on a black key on the piano. I was struggling with teaching music theory and found it much more difficult than I thought it would be. It was important to me to relate the theory work to their understanding of a song, but I was struggling with helping them to understand the theoretical concepts.

The students really responded to Falsetto Quality, however, and I was correct when I scheduled it directly following Speech Quality, since the only two different Figures are TVF onset/offset and stiff thin TVF. All of the students were excited to demonstrate both Qualities the following class, but I was most interested in seeing whether they could correctly use the Qualities with intention and how that would translate to an audience.
October 16, 2012

What a remarkable class. Each student demonstrated both Speech and Falsetto Qualities, singing sixteen measures of “In a Simple Way I Love You” and “Black and White,” and while some more convincingly demonstrated the Qualities, all had the important elements within the pieces. Even more exciting, though, were the comments made before and after the performances. We had a visiting graduate applicant watching that day, and at the start of the class, I had the students explain to him what we were learning in the course. They talked about understanding the physiology of the voice and how to then use that to inform character choice and intention. They also talked about learning music theory, and understanding their own Attractor States. I was thrilled that they brought up the idea of specificity when working on a song and how it allows for more color.

After the performance, the consensus was that the Speech Quality singing grounded everyone and that it was some of the most honest and simple acting work they had seen from each other. It was really remarkable. Almost everyone gave a really truthful and heartfelt performance that touched the audience. It was some of the best and most grounded acting I had seen from many of them.

On the other hand, the Falsetto Quality was difficult for many of them. They felt like the acting did not support the sound and in some cases, they were correct. The scenarios the students created may have been too bold for the Falsetto Quality. For this exam and exercise, though (and I did explain this to them), it was more important to demonstrate the Quality and then base the scenario on that sound, instead of the other way around. I explained that later in the semester, we would approach it in the opposite way; however, it was a good lesson in marrying intention and character choice with a chosen voice Quality. What if a musical director required a particular
sound? After the class, the visiting graduate applicant said he thoroughly enjoyed the class and he wished he could take it. It was a great compliment.

October 23, 2012

It was time to return to music theory and continue working on intervals. The students were having a difficult time delineating between perfect and augmented 4ths when looking at the intervals on the staff, and perfect and diminished 5ths. I realized that we would probably not get to 6ths in this course, but I did want them to grasp 4ths and 5ths and began to start thinking of other ways to approach this concept. They did sight-read Kern and Gershwin’s “Long Ago and Far Away” from Cover Girl quickly and easily, and I was pleased that their sight-reading was coming along.

They also responded quickly to Sob Quality. The students struggled to name songs where this Quality would be appropriate, but after listening to some examples, they were able to hear the openness and richness of the sound. I also think they grasped the benefit of it on the TVFs and on the entire larynx, understanding how open and healthy this Quality is on the voice. Even if they would not use this Quality in performance, they were aware of how this could further their vocal growth in practice.

October 25, 2012

They finally got it! The class understood how to read intervals and they all succeeded during the music theory part of this class. They were also becoming more comfortable with accidentals and had successfully labeled the solfege for Schwartz’s “Neat to Be a Newsboy”
from *Working*, which has numerous accidentals. There were a couple of confused faces at moments, but on the whole, they seemed much more confident with written intervals.

They also really took to the Twang Quality and grasped it right away. Although most had a difficult time staying in thin folds and often sang in stiff thin (which is my most difficult Figure as well), they heard it when it was right and responded viscerally. One student was the first to perfect it when the students sang individually. Her Twang Quality is so practiced and natural for her, that everyone thought she was in thick folds until I asked her to actually sing in thick folds. When she did, everyone realized that her Twang makes her sound like she is belting. It was a wonderful example of how the AES can easily increase volume and tone without FVF constriction. The students were excited that everyone had at least one Voice Quality that they did well without having to use any effort at all, and it was great to see how they supported one another. We finished class with Sob as a reminder for our Sob and Twang demonstration the following class, and the students were amazed at how they were able to open up and sing in such a remarkably different Quality right away. The work was very empowering.

October 30, 2012

The following week, I arranged for each student to come in for five minutes before or after class for a sight-singing test. I was very pleased with the results, with most students successfully singing a short piece with correct solfege and rhythms. The most common difficulty was 3rds, and I knew I would want to work more on that in the classroom, but as each student finished the test, knowing that they were able to sight-read on their own, I saw how confident they were in their ability to understand a piece of music.
We also had the Sob and Twang demonstration in class. Everyone struggled with the Sob Quality as they sang “Long Ago and Far Away.” The class was thinking so hard about singing that many of them lost all of the acting values, which made it even more difficult to successfully demonstrate that sound. The biggest difficulties in the recipe were stiff TVF, vertical Thyroid Cartilage and not enough Head, Neck and Torso anchoring. I wondered whether I would require this Quality if I were to teach this class again. It is so good for the TVF, but it was a real challenge and the students took a step back in the application of vocal production supporting acting intention.

On the other hand, the students loved the Twang Quality and most did very well. Again, the biggest problems were with stiff TVF, but on the whole, they all had the narrow AES and high Larynx. They were much more connected to “Neat to Be a Newsboy,” as well, and had fun with this Quality. In the discussion afterwards, the students commented on how much more physically connected everyone was with the Twang Quality and how that could have helped them in Sob Quality.

November 1, 2012

The class started with a Music Theory Test, assessing the students’ understanding of key signature, intervals, rhythm and solfege. I was extremely pleased with the results, with everyone achieving higher than 93% except for one. It was clear that they were grasping the music theory concepts and taking the work very seriously.

I was nervous that the students would not respond well to the Opera Quality, especially knowing we would spend two weeks working on this sound. They seemed sluggish after the test, but our discussion after listening to some opera examples was rich and full of excitement. They
heard everything from dark and round voices, to loud and piercing sounds, but they also noticed smooth TVF onsets, lack of consonants, tilted Thyroid Cartilage and strength in the sound. One of the students verbalized a creative analogy, saying that that the Queen of the Night’s aria from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* sounded like “straight pins doing ballet.” It was great fun.

The students also did well with the Estill 7-step preparation for Opera Quality. The process begins with an “ng” with thin TVF, Thyroid Cartilage tilt and FVF retraction. It continues with raising the Velum to mid into a nasalized “ee” before narrowing the AES, then sharply raising the Velum to high, anchoring the Head, Neck and Torso sharply, lowering the Larynx and finishing by compressing the Tongue. Rachel and I thought they might struggle with this process, but it worked quite clearly and would prove to be the easiest way for them to find the correct recipe.

November 6, 2012

This was yet another great class. The students were pleased to see the results of their theory tests and after sight-reading the three song choices for the Opera demonstration (Giordani’s “Caro Mio Ben,” Handel’s “Art Thou Troubled,” and Romberg and Hammerstein’s “Lover Come Back to Me” from *The New Moon*), we had time to do a little sight-reading in harmony. Although they struggled initially, they were willing to keep working and eventually sang in 2-part harmony.

They were beginning to understand the Opera quality as well. Knowing the recipe, they had ideas for how to warm up, and they also appreciated the 7-step EVTS Opera model. We sang through the three songs and all of them were successful at achieving key points of the Opera
It was good to give some individual feedback so they could improve before the demonstration.

We finished the class by discussing character and song analysis. I asked questions about the songs they would sing for the Opera demonstration, encouraging them to consider music theory, lyrics and the Opera recipe when answering the three acting questions: who am I singing to; what do I want from them; and why do I need it right now? I knew that they could be even more creative once they could start making vocal choices based on their analysis instead of having to stay married to a particular voice quality.

November 8, 2012

Each class was unique and special and now that we were getting into the heart of the work, the enthusiasm in the classroom was palpable. We started this particular class with a rich discussion about EVTS. A student asked why it is not mandatory for voice teachers to know “this stuff,” and that question prompted a discussion about other voice methodologies and how different systems can work if they are effective at getting results. Earlier that morning I had a conversation with a voice teacher friend and I mentioned it in class. She told me about a woman who is teaching voice by color, as in, “that sound is yellow.” If a student can produce a sound that the teacher defines as yellow and can do it consistently, it works. My students understood the value of imagery, but most said that knowing how the voice actually works empowered them to consistently and courageously make shifts in their sound that could healthfully and uniquely tell a story.

After the discussion, we sang through the Opera pieces. Everyone struggled with parts of the recipe and had Figures to practice, but they were putting a lot of effort into the work. What
most surprised and excited me, however, were their character analyses. The students created rich and creative, yet simple scenarios supported by what they discovered in the music. They were required to hand in typed versions of these scenarios the following class, but I was pleased that all of the students had already given these analyses a great deal of thought.

We ended the class with a presentation of the EVTS Voiceprint Analysis, a computer program that measures pitch, harmonics, constriction, onsets/offsets and many more components of sound. They were fascinated by seeing a physical analysis of their voice and what it looked like on a computer. I would have liked to have spent more time working with this program, but with the time constraints and the ultimate objective of the course, it was not feasible. I was glad to be able to show them Voiceprint, however, and let them know where they could purchase it for themselves if they wanted a tool to help them with their personal practice.

November 13, 2012

We had finally arrived at Opera demonstration day and I was very pleased with the results. All of the students had really strong scenarios and clear moments in their pieces, and even if they were unable to stay consistently in Opera Quality throughout their performance, they were able to act their way through it. In some cases, I think the emotional connection to the material and the immediacy of the scenarios supported the Opera Quality even more clearly. After they all performed, the students remarked on the specificity of the analysis and how that deepened their choices and made their objectives clear.

Musically, there were a number of errors. Most of the students sang “Caro Mio Ben,” and for the majority of them, the Italian diction was incorrect, and in all three of the songs, many breathed in wrong places. This was not the point of the class, however, and the students gave
themselves creative scenarios and objectives based on what they discerned from the music. When that is coupled with an honest attempt at the Opera Quality, I believe it is a successful outcome. The students felt that as well, and it inspired them to continue making strong character choices and feel confident in their vocal technique.

November 15, 2012

As I walked into class, I could feel the excitement brewing. At last we were going to start working on the Belt Quality, the last and most powerful, yet elusive of the EVTS Voice Qualities. We started by listening to examples, and we discussed the brassiness of the style and the ringing of the tone. The students were able to guess the recipe having now successfully understood five other Voice Qualities as well as their own speech. Then we stood up and as a group sang some Belt exercises. We started all together but I noticed how little people were anchoring, so I put them in pairs and had one sing while the other pressed down on their arms to aid in Torso anchoring. That seemed to help and a number of people found it easier to Belt than it had ever been for them.

We needed to learn the three songs that we would use for the Belt Quality, and I chose rhythmic syncopation as our music theory topic for the day since it appeared in all three of the songs. In hindsight, I would have liked to have developed a physical exercise for syncopated rhythm so that they could embody the off-beat, but they seemed to grasp the idea quite quickly. I was pleased when they easily sight-read Rodgers and Hart’s “The Lady is a Tramp” and “I Wish I Were in Love Again” from Babes in Arms, and Coleman and Leigh’s “Hey Look Me Over” from Wildcat. We ended class with a discussion about the final exam. I needed to change the syllabus because I had been invited for an onsite interview on the final Thursday of the course,
and as a class we decided that the students would take the final written exam with Rachel that day. We would then have them perform their final song presentations during the Final Exam day.

November 20, 2012

We continued our exploration with the Belt Voice Quality, and since two students were absent, I had the remaining thirteen each take a Figure and lead a warm-up for Belt. Everyone did very well, although in hindsight, I should have had the students with Head, Neck and Torso anchoring exercises lead first before warming up thick TVF and Cricoid Cartilage tilt.

I decided that instead of trying to start with the songs they will perform the following week, we would begin with singing exercises in Belt. This seemed to give most of the students the confidence they needed before they applied this high-powered quality to song. While some students were immediately successful, a few really struggled with FVF constriction. We found for most students that high Tongue, narrow AES and high effort levels of Head and Neck anchoring helped. A couple of students continued to struggle, but by the end of class, everyone had a plan for how to continue working on their own.

November 29, 2012

We prepared for the Belt demonstration day with a warm-up of course, focusing on Head, Neck and Torso anchoring, narrow AES, Cricoid Cartilage tilt and glottal TVF onsets with thick folds. When I felt they were ready, we sang through the songs as a group and then they performed individually. Not everyone completely succeeded in demonstrating this Quality. A handful of the students were very successful, having sung for many years in the Belt Quality,
most did rather well with only one or two difficult Figures within the recipe, and a couple of students really struggled.

While the Belt Quality may not have been successfully accomplished throughout the class, all of the students had strong character and song analyses. They had really looked at how the songs were put together and made some interesting character choices based on that, and these choices worked very well with the Belt Quality. I was also thrilled with the discussion after everyone performed. The students were very aware of their instruments at that point, and they were able to pinpoint when they felt constriction in their voice as well as when they heard it in others. They seemed really excited by hearing each other do such high powered singing. We finished class with a review for the final exam as well as a discussion of the final performance criteria, and I was looking forward to seeing all of the work come together in their chosen songs.

December 4, 2012

This was my last scheduled day of class. Rachel would be administering the written exams on the final Thursday of the semester while I was in Birmingham, Alabama interviewing for a full-time faculty position. I was hoping to have a chance to see and discuss everyone’s final song presentation before they performed them for a final grade. While I did get to watch and comment on each students’ song, most left immediately after they performed because of a fundraising event they were participating in that evening, and so I was unable to have a group discussion at the end of class.

The students were to perform a song of their choice from any genre or style, but they were required to provide a recorded accompaniment as well as a copy of the music. In their analysis, they needed to write eight to ten clues they received from the written music, including
rhythm, pitch, accompaniment, lyrics and music markings and how those elements informed their character choice or chosen scenario. They were asked to answer the three acting questions we had used throughout the semester: who am I singing to; what do I want from them; and why do I need it now? After answering those questions, they needed to choose three voice qualities that they would use within the song as well as five other vocal varieties, such as a glottal TVF onset on a particular word or Thyroid Cartilage tilt at the end of a phrase.

I had encouraged the students throughout the semester to choose songs that they loved but that could also give them room for wildly different vocal qualities within their performance. I also suggested that they practiced every day so that their vocal choices would become habitual and they could concentrate on their acting intention when performing. When the students performed their songs for their critique in class, most had done significant work on their pieces and had already completed their analysis, informing their choices and practice.

The choices of songs were incredibly varied. They ranged from “My New Philosophy” from You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown, to Sara Bareilles’ “Gravity,” to Elvis Presley’s “It Hurts Me.” Most of the students had begun applying unique vocal qualities to these songs, interpreting them in new and exciting ways; however, the majority of students were playing it safe and could have more fun or find an even deeper emotional connection if they fully committed to the extreme vocal qualities. I encouraged all of them to reach to the limits of vocal choice and raise the stakes so that they had stronger objectives. Again, I was not able to have a discussion after everyone performed, but I knew I would have that opportunity after they sang for each other at the final performance.
December 10, 2012

The Singing for the Actor class met for the final time at 11:00am on Monday, December 10th as each student shared their final performance of a song of their choice for the class. I gave them ten minutes at the beginning of class to warm-up on their own, and I set up the speakers as well as a table where I could grade and comment on their performances. One by one, each student stepped to the front of class to perform and the support the students gave to one another was palpable. They were proud of their work and of the specificity of their performance, and they were proud of their fellow classmates as they saw the culmination of the work they had done throughout the semester.

I, too, was extremely proud of their work. The depth of their music and character analyses surprised me, and I saw evidence of these choices in their performance work. It was very clear that the majority of the students had practiced a great deal and so their choices seemed organic and full. Those that had not practiced, completed the assignment by demonstrating the three vocal qualities and specific vocal choices, but were not as emotionally connected to the piece. Interestingly, the students who were fully committed to extreme vocal changes gave the most powerful and honest performances that were colorful and interesting.

The discussion after everyone performed showed how confident the students felt, as well as how deeply they understood their instruments. They clearly articulated what they had learned throughout the semester and they remarked on how interesting their final performances were. They pointed out that sometimes the shifts in voice qualities within a song were unexpected and made a comic song even funnier, or a dramatic piece that much more riveting. I encouraged all of them to continue singing and practicing the Figures that were most difficult for them,
reminding them that they now possessed the tools to continue expanding the limits of their voices, allowing even more possibilities in performance.

We finished by sharing comments or suggestions about the class, and while the most common suggestions were more music theory, more individual work and more time, a number of students commented that it was one of the best classes they had taken at VCU because of how much they learned about music theory, the voice and how to approach a song. I closed by telling them that it was the most enjoyable class I had ever taught and I thanked them for their commitment and enthusiasm. I was looking forward to having an opportunity to reflect on the course and to examining what parts were successful and what I would want to revisit.
Chapter 4 – Reflection

In many ways, the Singing for the Actor class was a great success. I was able to cover all of the topics in the syllabus and we succeeded in reaching each of the objectives for the course. Of the fifteen students, ten received an A and five received a B, with the lowest grade being an 86%. The students were engaged throughout the semester and made tremendous progress, and they were extremely positive about what they had learned in the class; however, they had a number of constructive suggestions, and as I reflect on the course, I am able to define changes that need to be made if I were to teach this course again. As I did in Chapter 1, I will approach each component individually before discussing the class as a whole.

Music Theory

This proved to be the most difficult component of my course. To begin with, the students had vastly different experiences with music theory. Some played numerous instruments and had studied theory for years, while others had virtually no experience with sight-reading or understanding rhythm. I was often torn between needing to explain the very basics of music theory and avoiding becoming too rudimentary for the more advanced students.

Nearly half of the students mentioned that they would have liked to have spent even more time working on music theory, but understood the time constraints of the class. If I were to teach this course again, I would include more homework so that the students could practice understanding rhythms and intervals outside of the classroom, and would feel more confident
with concepts before moving on to new ideas. I might also remove the topic of singing in harmony and instead, introduce chord progressions so that their ability to dissect a piece of music could reach an even deeper level.

While this component of the class needs the most revision, a number of exercises and ideas really worked. The most dynamic moments when learning music theory were the physical exercises, which included the physicalizing of rhythmic values and the human piano. For students who are more kinesthetic learners, these exercises internalized the theoretical concepts by understanding them in the whole body and not just in the brain. I might devise even more of these physical exercises, specifically when learning syncopated rhythms. The other aspect of learning music theory that worked well was pairing more advanced students with those that are less experienced. By having the advanced students explain the concepts to their peers, they were reinforcing their own knowledge while teaching the less advanced students the concepts they needed to understand.

The music theory that we did cover in this course certainly served the students as they approached their song analyses. Even the students with a good deal of music theory training said that they had never used that information when working on the acting of a song, and all of the students were able to use their understanding of music (whether rudimentary or advanced) to inform their character choices. The students made choices based on rhythm, intervals, accompaniment and other markings, allowing for a deeper understanding of the composer’s intention and the character’s tactics. This was the ultimate goal of including music theory in the Singing for the Actor class and this was a definite success.
The Estill Voice Training System

If music theory was the most challenging component of the course, EVTS was the most successful and rewarding. Every single student in the class commented on their growing understanding of their instrument, their ability to sing with consistency and the infinite possibilities when approaching a song. By the end of the course the students were able to speak with specificity about their own voices and what they hear in others, and their knowledge about the vocal mechanism was able to inform how they would approach character, avoid harmful constriction and continue with individual practice. Their enthusiasm about their newfound knowledge infused their journal entries and conversations with their peers.

The structure and sequence of the EVTS material worked very well. By spending each class on only two Figures at the time, the students were able to fully understand the components of vocal production over a few days before moving on to new Figures, cementing their understanding of each part in isolation. Although I was concerned that this would become tedious over four weeks, this structure allowed for the deep knowledge that the students could apply throughout the rest of the semester, as well as beyond the class.

The six Voice Qualities, on the other hand, seemed a little rushed. I would have liked to have had even more time to work on these different recipes and allow the students to apply them to material of their own choice. If I were to teach this one-semester course again, I would eliminate the Sob and Twang Quality, allowing one more week to focus on application to chosen pieces. Ideally, this material would be covered over two semesters, with the first semester focusing on the thirteen Figures and working them in isolation and in combinations, and the second semester exploring the six Voice Qualities and application of these as well as invented qualities. Many of the students agreed with this, suggesting a two semester sequence, with added
private instruction. This last suggestion was impossible for this course, but would be ideal for helping each individual student master the Figures and Voice Qualities that were most difficult for them. Although every voice has the same parts and the understanding of the vocal mechanism works best in a group setting, the actual practice is best understood through individual work.

The EVTS material also served the students as they approached their final songs. Once they experienced the possibilities of their instrument, they were able to make dynamic and unexpected vocal choices in their songs that delighted or moved the audience, and they experienced how interesting a performance can be with specific and unique choices. The students continue to use their knowledge of EVTS, with two students creating independent studies the following semester, applying EVTS to other material such as Archetype work or cultural Attractor States. Finally, I am currently teaching nine of the students from the course in private voice lessons, and the ease with which they can change their vocal apparatus depending on the song or character is remarkable. I believe now, more than ever, in the necessity of this work in musical theatre training.

**Acting Technique**

The acting technique component of the class received the least attention, mostly because the students had had so much experience during the previous three years. I knew that with this particular group, I could make a suggestion in the performance of their song that could be implemented immediately and that we did not need to approach acting technique individually. I do recognize, however, that this is the most important element of musical theatre performance, and with any other group of students, I would need to include acting exercises along with the music theory and EVTS material we would cover.
Interestingly, none of the students offered any suggestions in terms of acting technique. Again, I believe this is because they had a good deal of Stanislavski-based acting training, as well as the junior Musical Theatre class which focused primarily on how to act a song. Personally, I would have liked to have spent more time on this particular element, giving students additional opportunities to practice applying their knowledge of the voice and music theory to their character choices (by eliminating two of the Voice Qualities, I would have another week to do this). I do feel that I was successful in constantly reminding the students about acting choices when we would learn a Figure (for instance, how does a glottal onset on a particular word help the actor achieve his objective?), and I often worked to include acting terms from their previous classes.

The three character analysis questions were very successful as well. Since the students had spent a number of years writing detailed analyses for other classes, I think they appreciated the simplicity and brevity of the questions, which helped them to get to the heart of the song or character. By focusing on the “other” and raising the stakes of the character’s need, they were able to free themselves to find numerous tactics and discoveries which were then supported by specific vocal choices. Unfortunately, we only had time to do three of these analyses, two of which were for specific Voice Qualities (Opera and Belt). Again, I might recommend a two-semester sequence so that students would be able to refine this technique.

In terms of combining all three subjects and really getting to the interdisciplinary approach, I believe I got as far as time would allow. I think the students were able to put all three components together with confidence, analyzing a piece of music, creating an intriguing and strong character analysis and using EVTS vocal technique to add depth and color to their performance. Honestly, I would have liked to have spent more time putting all three parts
together, and while I do believe I constantly encouraged them to think about how these components work together (even as we learned individual skills), I would have liked for them to have spent more time in practice. This is one of the reasons I would like to introduce this work in the freshman year so that it will continue to inform their work through their time in college. Should I teach this course again, I might spread out the material over two semesters, or schedule the course for 90 minutes three times a week. I would also try to implement private coaching sessions as well.

Conclusions

Overall, the Singing for the Actor class reinforced my belief in an interdisciplinary approach to musical theatre. In fact, it has encouraged me to expand my approach to include dance and movement training. Since I experienced firsthand the nuances my students were able to find in performance by combining music theory, vocal technique and acting training, I am able to consider the possibilities of being able to apply music theory to dance and choreography, and vocal technique to movement training such as stage combat. By reducing the Silo Effect of musical theatre training and increasing the holistic approach, students will be more likely to understand how all of the components work together to dramatically tell a story and their learning rate will increase across the board.

I feel very lucky that I am comfortable teaching all of these skills and I know of other teachers who are also able to combine these subjects in one class. There are other programs, including Boston Conservatory, where these skills are learned individually, but are united in musical theatre classes that focus on integrating music/text analysis, character development and vocal choice. For teachers or programs where this is not a possibility (for instance, a music
theory teacher with little experience in acting technique, or an acting teacher with little 
experience in understanding of the vocal mechanism), I might suggest combined class sessions 
where the teachers of these individual subjects come together to witness and support the work in 
the other classes. In this circumstance, the teachers can work together to aid the students in 
understanding the relationship between the subjects and continue with the interdisciplinary 
training.

Personally, upon graduation, I will be creating a BFA Musical Theatre Program as the 
Head of Musical Theatre at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). UAB has a strong 
theatre department with fourteen full-time faculty members and offers a BA in Theatre. I have 
been hired to design and teach a brand-new BFA Musical Theatre degree program, and the work 
I have done on this thesis will inform my design. I know that the Theatre Department will partner 
with the Department of Music where the students will take music theory, piano and private voice 
instruction, as well as with the Alabama Ballet company where they will take dance. I know it 
will be my responsibility to communicate with the professors and teachers in these other 
programs in order to support and connect the ideas and skills the students learn in these classes 
with the training they receive in the Theatre Department.

Because the students will be learning acting, music theory, piano, dance and private voice 
as individual subjects, it will be up to me to combine these skills in the musical theatre classes. In 
this particular program, the only component of my Singing for the Actor class that the students 
will not be learning in other classes will be the EVTS training. My goal is to introduce this work 
and the Figures within the freshman year (providing them with the rudimentary understanding 
that will deepen over time) so that the students will be able to apply the work to their choices in 
acting class, voice lessons and subsequent musical theatre classes throughout their college career.
I also plan on working closely with the other professors to ensure that I am supporting the work they are learning in other classes (such as calling students’ attention to music theory concepts in musical theatre songs we are working on, or including steps and combinations they are learning in dance class). This thesis has made me more committed than ever to creating an interdisciplinary program and I look forward to continuing this work on an even larger scale.
Works Cited


Appendix A

Singing for the Actor – 491 Class Proposal
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REASON FOR THE CLASS

Musical Theatre is a popular and lucrative job market for actors. In the current theatrical climate, actors hoping to work in musical theatre need to be able to sing everything from Opera to Rock, and they need to be able to sustain their vocal integrity over an 8-show week. Students in the Department of Theatre at VCU are offered courses in musical theatre that include musical theatre audition technique and acting in song, but besides the short vocal coaching they receive in their junior year, they have little access to training in singing. In this course, I would focus primarily on the Estill Voice Training System as a way to train diverse and healthy singers that fully understand the vocal mechanism and how to translate healthy singing into strong acting choices. I would also touch on the basics of music theory, sight-singing and ear training to encourage a greater understanding of the language of music. This course would serve as a large part of my thesis project.

CLASS DESIGN

Ideally, this class would meet twice a week for 1 hour and 50 minutes and is designed for Juniors or Seniors previously or currently enrolled in the Junior Musical Theatre Class. The maximum number of students I could accommodate would be 16, and if there are still spaces available, the class could be open to sophomores.

In the first two weeks, we would look at an anatomical overview of the vocal mechanism, so that a common understanding and vocabulary can be established. In the following three weeks, each component of the voice (called the 13 Figures for the Voice) would be isolated and explored through different exercises and the desired goal is that students will be able to control each component individually. Using the Estill Technique, students will then begin to put together “recipes” for 6 different styles of singing, including speech, belt and opera. This work will take the remainder of the semester. When working on these different vocal qualities, the techniques learned will be applied to songs so that the vocal technique can support strong acting choices. Throughout the course, students will learn how to look at a piece of music to determine the key and time signature, and learn the basics of singing in solfege. The final assessment will be a performance of at least two different styles of singing, and a written anatomy and music theory test.
CLASS STRUCTURE

Each class will begin with a warm-up that isolates the individual components of the voice, and that puts them together to “create the recipe” for the work we will do that day. Music theory and ear training will make up a portion of each class and will be covered after warm-ups. The remainder of each class will vary and will include lectures, group work and individual singing. Assessment will be based on written tests, aural tests, individual and group performances, and class participation and discussion.

SPECIAL NEEDS

A piano or keyboard is necessary for this course and it will be used in every class. Other materials, such as an overhead projector, a DVD Player and a chalkboard would be appreciated, but are not necessary. Finally, chairs and desks or tables would be ideal for written tests, but again, other arrangements can be made.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

A piano or keyboard is required for this class. Other materials that would be ideal, but not necessary are a chalkboard, an overhead projector and a DVD Player. Students will be asked to purchase a course packet available at Uptown Color. This packet will include articles and chapters from:


TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1  Introduction to Estill Voice Training System
         Basic Vocal Anatomy
         Basic 4/4 Meter Rhythm
Week 2  Vocal Power, Source and Filter
         Introduction to Solfege, Basic ¾ Meter Rhythm
         Breath Control
Week 3  7 of 13 Figures for the Voice
         Introduction to Intervals, 2/4 Meter
Week 4  Remaining 6 Figures for the Voice
         Understanding Key Signature, Sight-singing in C Major
Week 5  Assessment of the 13 Figures of the Voice  
Sight-singing in F and G Majors  
Week 6  Falsetto, Speech  
Sight-singing in D and Bb Majors  
Week 7  Sob, Twang  
Dotted Rhythms  
Week 8  Perform Elements of Falsetto, Speech, Sob, Twang  
Sight-singing in A Minor  
Week 9  Opera  
Sight-singing in D and E Minor  
Week 10  Opera Continued  
Sight-singing in Harmony  
Week 11  Perform Opera  
Sight-singing in Harmony  
Week 12  Belt  
Major and Minor Chords  
Week 13  Belt Continued  
Triplet Rhythms  
Week 14  Perform Belt  
Review of Music Theory and Sight-singing  
Week 15  Preparation for Final
COURSE DESCRIPTION
In Singing for the Actor, students will learn how to be a diverse and healthy singer/actor. Using primarily the Estill Voice Training System, students will gain an understanding of the vocal mechanism and how to translate healthy and versatile singing into strong acting choices. A number of vocal qualities will be explored, including Belt, Opera, Falsetto and Speech-singing. This course will also touch on the basics of music theory, sight-singing and ear training to encourage a greater understanding of the language of music and how to interpret that language in order to inform character choice and intention.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
1. To identify and describe basic anatomy of the vocal mechanism.
2. To explain the concept of Power, Source and Filter.
3. To describe and demonstrate 13 Figures for the Voice and how they can be applied to characterization.
4. To demonstrate 6 different vocal qualities.
5. To demonstrate at least 3 different vocal recipes within one song.
6. To sight-read a piece of music in a major key.
7. To understand simple and complex rhythmic patterns and how they apply to text.
8. To sing in harmony and identify different intervals.
9. To use different vocal qualities to support character choice and acting intention.
10. To describe healthy singing habits and identify harmful constriction in themselves and others.
REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. Course Packet #11 – Available at Uptown Color – (804)353-2679
2. Make and Move Larynx - $5 – purchased in class
3. Notebook to be used for journaling – 80 sheets, College Ruled, 11”x9”

DAY TO DAY SYLLABUS

Thurs Aug 23  Introduction to the course, Music Theory Quiz
Tues Aug 28  Basic Vocal Anatomy, Rhythm
            Assignment: Read Pages 19-20 in Course Packet
Thurs Aug 30  Power, Source, Filter Model, Rhythm
Tues Sept 4  Effort, Breath Control, Rhythm
Thurs Sept 6  True Vocal Folds (Onset/Offset), False Vocal Folds, Rhythm
Tues Sept 11 True Vocal Folds (Thick/Thin), Solfege
            Assignment: Read Pages 21-31 in Course Packet
Thurs Sept 13 Larynx, Aryepiglottic Sphincter, Intervals
Tues Sept 18 Review
            Anatomy and Theory Test, Assignment: Journal Collection
Thurs Sept 20 Thyroid Cartilage, Cricoid Cartilage, Key Signature
Tues Sept 25 Velum, Tongue, Sight-singing
Thurs Sept 27 Jaw, Lips, Sight-singing
Tues Oct 2  Head/Neck, Torso Anchoring, Sight-singing
Thurs Oct 4  Demonstration of 13 Figures
            Assignment: Demonstration
Tues Oct 9  Speech, Sight-singing
Thurs Oct 11  Falsetto, Sight-singing
Tues Oct 16  Demonstration of Falsetto, Speech
  Assignment: Demonstration, Journal Collection
Thurs Oct 18  READING DAY – NO CLASS
Tues Oct 23  Sob, Sight-singing
  Sight-singing Test
Thurs Oct 25  Twang, Sight-singing
Tues Oct 30  Demonstration of Sob, Twang
  Assignment: Theory Test, Demonstration
Thurs Nov 1  Opera, Harmony
Tues Nov 6  Opera, Harmony
  Assignment: Read Pages 32-35 in Course Packet
Thurs Nov 8  Opera, Harmony
  Assignment: Character/Song Analysis
Tues Nov 13  Demonstration of Opera
  Assignment: Demonstration
Thurs Nov 15  Belt, syncopated rhythms
Tues Nov 20  Belt, triplets
Thurs Nov 22  NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING
Tues Nov 27  Belt
  Assignment: Character/Song Analysis
Thurs Nov 29  Demonstration of Belt
  Assignment: Demonstration
Tues Dec 4  Song Presentations
Assignment: Character/Song Analysis, Song Presentations

Thurs Dec 6  
Song Presentations  
Assignment: Song Presentations, Journal Collection

FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, December 11th, 4:00-6:30pm

DAY TO DAY SYLLABUS CONTENT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance in all classes is mandatory!!!
   a. You are therefore allowed no more than two absences.
   b. With a third absence, your final grade will automatically drop one full letter and will continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence.
   c. Lateness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence.
   d. Two lates of any duration will equal one absence.
   e. In the event you are absent from a class, it is the responsibility of the student to find out what was missed and to make sure that all work is completed. Find a classmate early on to get the info.
   f. If you will be absent, please let me know by email.

2. Active participation and effort is expected in all class discussions, exercises and demonstrations.

3. Bring your journal with you to each class. Specifications will be discussed in class.

4. Attire: See next page for DRESS CODE.

5. You are required to have a full water bottle with you in every class.

6. Gum chewing is strictly forbidden.

7. Late written work, incomplete journals or lack of preparedness for in-class presentations will not be accepted and may result in an F for that assignment.
GRADING

Grading in this course will reflect the effort and passion you put into your work. A large portion of your grade will be based upon your work within the classroom; however, written work, tests and journaling will also make up a part of your final mark. You are expected to bring energy, focus and professionalism to your work, and your grades will take into account your effort and improvement.

1. In class work, participation and improvement 25%
   - Each daily lesson will consist of a portion of music theory and sight-singing, and work on vocal technique. I expect attentiveness and effort in all exercises and classroom work. As this class is exploratory, the more involved you are in class, the more you will benefit from it.

2. Journal 10%
   - Again, this course is an exploration of your singing voice and how it can support character choice and acting intention. Your journal is where you can keep all your notes and materials, but also where you will record daily reflections on your voice and body. Your awareness of your voice will grow, and being able to chart your journey is invaluable to understanding your instrument. I will give you bi-weekly topics for reflection that must be included when your journals are collected.

3. Written Tests 10%
   - The tests in this course are primarily music theory tests, but there will also be an anatomy test and a sight-singing test (this will be completed outside of class time).

4. Character/Music Analyses 10%
   - Three of these analyses will be due during this course. Guidelines for these assignments will be discussed in class.

5. Demonstration of Vocal Figures and Qualities 15%
   - These demonstrations show a knowledge of anatomy, understanding of the function of the vocal mechanism and an awareness of your instrument. The Demonstrations of the qualities will be applied to song and the pieces must be memorized.

6. Song presentations 20%
   - By the end of the semester, you should have a working knowledge of your instrument and how to use it to support or create character choice and intention. Your final song presentations will be memorized and should use at least three vocal qualities that tell a unique story and support your analyses.

7. Final Exam 10%
   - The final exam will consist of four sections: anatomy, music theory, essay questions and sight-singing.
Appendix C

THEA 491 - Singing for the Actor

Theory Quiz

Name: ____________________ Date: 8/23/2013

Part I

1. Draw these note and rest symbols:
   a. 16\textsuperscript{th} note
   b. Quarter rest
   c. Half note
   d. Whole rest
   e. Dotted 8\textsuperscript{th} note

2. Identify these note and rest symbols
   a. ______________  
   b. ______________  
   c. ______________  
   d. ______________  
   e. ______________
Part II

1. Draw these intervals:

   a. Major 3\textsuperscript{rd}  b. Perfect 4\textsuperscript{th}  c. Minor 2\textsuperscript{nd}  d. Diminished 5\textsuperscript{th}

2. Identify these intervals:

   a. ______  b. ______  c. ______  d. ______

Part III

1. Draw these Key Signatures:


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\textsuperscript{8} The starting note of the intervals was drawn in by hand, and is unable to be included in this printed copy of the test.

\textsuperscript{9} Again, these intervals were drawn in by hand and included major and minor 2nds and 3rds, perfect and augmented 4ths and perfect and diminished 5ths.
2. Identify these Key Signatures:\(^{10}\)

\[\text{\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}}\]

a. _____  b. _____  c. _____  d. _____

Part IV

Refer to the piece below and answer the following questions:

\[\text{\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}}\]

1. What key is this piece in? ______________________________________
2. How many measures are in this piece? _____________________
3. How many beats are in each measure? _________________
4. Write in the solfege below each note on the music.

\[^{10}\text{Also written in by hand, these included C Major, Bb Major, G Major and A Minor.}\]
Vita

Valerie Anne Accetta was born on June 20, 1978 and is originally from Columbus, Ohio. She studied musical theatre at the University of Miami before playing Margy Frake in the First National Tour of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *State Fair*, starring John Davidson. While living in New York as an Equity actress, Valerie performed in a number of other musicals including the title role in *Cinderella*, Maria in *The Sound of Music* and Lady Larkin in *Once Upon a Mattress*.

Valerie received a degree in Musical Theatre Pedagogy from Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, and her professional directing credits include *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, *A Little House Christmas* and *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. She was the Head of Drama at Campion School, a British international school in Athens, Greece and during her three years there, she directed seven productions, including *Godspell*, which toured to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in the summer of 2010. Most recently, Valerie assisted choreographer, Patti D’Beck, on a production of *Annie* at the Pioneer Theatre in Salt Lake City, and Associate Directed the Riverside Theatre’s production of Maury Yeston’s *Phantom*, as well as Virginia Repertory Theatre’s production of *The Producers*.

Valerie earned a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, where she taught Musical Theatre Performance, Audition Technique and Singing for the Actor. In August 2013, Valerie will be the Head of Musical Theatre at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.