

Energy, Not Effort

A Practical Project: Observation Paper

Vocal Pedagogy | Jeanne Goffi-Fynn

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Introduction

Shadowing and observing other colleagues in your field is usually a powerful learning tool for new voice teachers. Seeing and hearing different perspectives and multiple approaches always broaden your possibilities in your own instruction sessions as well. My goal is to teach contemporary voice. I grew up doing a little bit of everything: pop, jazz, musicals, even classical at times. Recently, I have been exploring my strengths and weaknesses as a voice teacher and vocal coach. Thus for this practical project, I decided to observe three teachers and five students. Each of these teachers taught different genres. I was fortunate to watch Chris D'amico, Christine Correa, and Natalie Fabian. Chris and Natalie both do musical and pop voice instruction, however, during the lessons I observed specifically, Chris taught pop repertoire only, while Natalie only concentrated on musical theatre. Christine, on the other hand, is a full time jazz and jazz only instructor.

It recently caught my attention, that there's now quite a bit of information on both legit and contemporary musical singing. Even, for pop, as it's technical work ties in much more smoothly and stems from similar genres of music. However, there's not too many information on what jazz vocal pedagogy is supposed to be like. When somebody says jazz voice technique, we tend to just think of improvisation and scatting. Almost a more instrumental-like approach. Much

information exists on ear training of these jazz musicians. Thinking about imitative practice, listening to jazz rep quite often, knowing your scales well, and how to break them down. These are of course important tools and factors in jazz voice pedagogy. But what about the anatomy? What about registers, tessituras, range, repertoire, age? Which muscles do we use? How connected or aligned are we required to be? Or, is it even possible to talk about things as such, since jazz is so free? This paper will only touch upon these questions a little bit, but I suggest more research should be done in this area. Silvera-Jensen (2005), who's done some research for her doctoral dissertation says :

“The newer art of jazz vocal pedagogy is unfamiliar to most classical pedagogues; the language and style are different, but there are some common foundational techniques that are found in both idioms. There are many jazz vocal pedagogues who call upon classical vocal techniques in their teachings, and structure their warm-ups and breathing techniques upon the bel canto style.” (pg.1)

Before we get into details about students individual observations(their experiences, goals and performance during the lesson), I'd like to share some general similarities and differences I found among these three instructors. I'd also like to mention that there may be biases and a lack of general comparison of other teachers in the field and lack of comparison of approaches as I only observed one teacher per each genre, who happens to be my classmates and my own instructor.

First of all, all three teachers had really great rapport with their students. Students seemed, open, relaxed, vulnerable, comfortable, and not shy in front of these instructors.

According to Clemmons, J (2010), *“an enthusiastic, affirmative teaching style infects*

students with enthusiasm and self confidence” and that “a feeling of safety and mutual respect within the studio gives the student a feeling of security and trust”.

It is true that all teachers were very enthusiastic, interactive and encouraging. All of the students were in their 20's- which also makes mutual respect and security rise a little more naturally.

I also recognized that regardless of teacher and genre, students were much more relaxed when they started singing their repertoire. Natalie, Chris and Christine all commented on importance of more energy, but not more effort. This really stood out to me.

On the other hand, here were some differences:

1. Each students repertoire and the way their instructors cued them during practice.

For pop and musical based singing, the instructors mostly cued them with measure numbers and lyrics, while for Jazz terms such as “A section” “B section” and musical hints such as saying “now the bridge- it is coming down by a half step” , “now minor” was used. Christine cued her students quite often with musical cues as such, while Natalie was using a lot of facial expressions and “head-cuing” her students in. Chris had to do less cuing during students singing because they knew their repertoire better (and although pop singing is challenging technically, musically it is less daunting).

2. The way they learned their repertoire/songs:

During Chris and Natalie's lessons, students used sheet music, while Christine's students initially learned only through echo and response (more details within each observation). Each teacher had moments of modeling and singing for their

students. Natalie and Chris did this partially to explain some vocal technique concepts, while Christine simply sang for her students to hear the new repertoire. I really appreciate this. I believe that the vocal ability of the teacher is absolutely important to motivate their own students. Again, Clemmons also found that “expertise and self confidence on the part of the teacher are foundational to rapport”.

A random passionate singer who keeps blogs of her experiences found three important things to look for in a voice teacher : their approach/technique, focus on you, and their own vocal ability.¹

3. Warm ups, and their purposes.

Natalie and Chris both had a more familiar and similar vocal warm ups (12345-54321's, 1-3-5's etc.). They both started with mid range and then warmed up the higher registry's and then back down. On the other hand, Christine first warmed up student's lower registry, and didn't take them as high during their jazz voice lessons. Her exercises were not as technical, but more ear-training like. Each teacher's warm ups were different depending on their students goals and needs. Christine used the same exercises for both of her students while Natalie and Chris were more technical and came up with exercises depending on how the student was performing/feeling at that moment.

4. How much time was spent on warm ups vs repertoire.

Chris and Natalie both spent a good 20-25 minutes doing technical vocal warm ups with their student, and spent 30-35 minutes on their repertoire. Christine,

¹ <http://www.vocalaboutvoice.com/voice-teacher/>.

however, only did 2 quick vocal exercises, and the rest of the warm ups could be considered “singing” since it is ear-based training and students start singing scales and trying to scat etc. After the ear is warmed up well, Christine usually introduces a new song at the end of the lesson.

5. The way hand gestures, facial expressions and body posture was used.

Almost every student used hand gestures and facial expressions while they sang. For pop and musical students, they were singing standing up, and with moderate body movement, and they also used hand gestures to express themselves. For jazz students, they were sitting down for the most part, their eyes were closed quite a few times (they would also squint a little when scating and improvising, or when singing chromatic notes in a song), and they were using “finger” gestures, almost pointing-like.

Observations

- 1. General on student and teacher (style, goals)**
- 2. Warm ups (why, how is it helping students sound and goals)**
- 3. Repertoire**
- 4. Any interesting/critical discussion student and teacher had during their lesson time**

Chris and his students:

Chris is a very knowledgeable young, uprising teacher. He knows a lot about technique and vocal pedagogy. Both of his students were naturally very talented singers, and they both

sang some pop repertoire during their lessons. They both had some really good, natural riffs. What I love about Chris's teaching is how smoothly he ties in his knowledge during lessons without delving too deep or taking too much time, and he asks really great questions to his students to get them thinking, and to help them understand what they are trying to improve. He did 7-8 similar exercises with both Ty and Luis. Chris made sure to check in to see if they felt ready to sing before he jumped into the repertoire section of the voice lessons. Both males are taking lessons "for fun" and to "get better and more confident" while singing. Their vocal, musical and emotional goals intersect (this usually happens when lessons are being taken on a non-professional level).

Something that really stuck with me from these two lessons were Chris saying "think energy, but not effort". He used this sentence with both of his students and it made an immediate difference in their timbre and approach to producing the sound.

1st observation: Ty

Ty is a law student who is in his mid-20's. He identifies as a bass/baritone. He has a very beautiful, resonant voice. He has that natural color to his sound and talent to riff authentically as well. He can move between notes clearly and in a controlled way. During the day of the observation, he was feeling pretty sick. He was just coming down from a bad flu, so he had some tension. The coughings were definitely not helping him either. As explained in Lapine (2008):

"During a persistent cough, the vocal folds are abruptly compressed with a repetitious, forceful glottal attack. The compression increases the fluid that lies over the thin layer of mucous

that covers a healthy vocal fold and the mass of the vocal fold, leading to powerful, abrupt contact of the edges of the vocal fold; this forceful contact leads to edema or swelling.”

They started off the warm ups with an easy 5-4-3-2-1 exercise on “fo fo fo fo fo”. Chris was checking for any excessive tension and squeaking since Ty was experiencing sickness and bronchial irritation. This exercise helped Ty with easing into breath management and switching from speaking to singing. The “f” consonant helped him feel that breath support. Then, they continued with some descending/sliding 5 to 1 exercises (sol- do) on “u” and some semi occluded exercises on 5-6-5-4-3-2-1. They switched between raspberries, humming, lip thrills and rolled rr’s. During this exercise Chris reminded him of posture and consistency of the airflow. They went a little higher than the first exercise- which meant Chris was subtly bringing in the upper registry after working the middle voice a little.

Once the student was warmed up quite a bit, they moved on to “thu- tho - tha”. The purpose of this exercise was to get the legato side of things going. The “th” helped bring students tongue forward. However, Ty was able to feel more aligned when Chris asked him to do “ru ro ra” instead. This may be because the r’s also help tongue relax.

Chris mentioned to Ty that he isn’t hearing anything concerning, but if his voice or throat hurts, he should tell him immediately. So, how do we know when to tell our students to sing or rest? According to Peckham (2010), *“You can usually sing over a cold if you have nasal congestion, but no throat symptoms You might have bit of nasality to your tone but in general, congestion can be sung over (or through)”* (pg. 81, Peckham)

To continue relaxing the tongue and of jaw and improving their independence, they used the “gala gala exercise” on 1-2-3-2-1-2-3-2-1.

Their final exercise before singing was a “hu-hu-hu-hu-hu” on 5-5-3-3-1. They did this exercise to connect to the breath system but also to find some hoodiness. I could see that Ty’s abdominals and lungs were supporting him well. His sides were expanding nicely, too. During this exercise, Chris noticed that his tongue was “fighting” the relaxation. So he suggests to “try to find a little more depth behind your tongue and snort to feel the hoodiness”. He also made Ty use his fingers on his cheek to find a little space and Ty gave Chris validation that it was working for him. Clear communication between teacher and student is so important so I am glad Chris and Ty were on the same page about all these turns.

For the repertoire, Ty sang Gravity by John Mayer. John Mayer has a really distinct sound, and not everybody can cover his songs easily.

As soon as Ty was singing, he seemed much more engaged (movement and body-wise). When Chris would stop him to give Ty a suggestion, he would continue to play the chords of the song underneath as he spoke his feedback. I really love it when teachers do this. It helps students stay connected emotionally and musically. One of the first things Chris suggested was for Ty to give a little more focus and energy on his sound and “to bring his voice forward”. Ty applied this suggestion immediately and it was an incredible change in his timbre.

At this point, though Ty was getting a little tired, and started pushing his neck out a little to compensate for the bronchial tension. So, Chris made a decision to stop singing and cool him down. He mentioned that cool downs are especially important if you are sick.

Additionally, Peckham(2010) also states :

“It is as important to cool down vocally after practice as it is to cool down after physical exercise. The purpose is to bring your vocal folds back to a less active state so your speaking

voice doesn't feel unstable. By easing the transition of your vocal mechanism from one activity to another, there's less shock to your voice.” (p.74).

As exercises, Chris chose easy-going hums and the “uuu how are you today” so that Ty was able to transition back into his speaking voice.

2nd observation: Luis

Luis is a second semester student at Columbia, studying psychology. He has no previous serious musical experience before taking lessons with Chris. Before they started their lesson, the student mentioned to Chris that he had experimented with MDMA over the weekend. A recent study⁽²⁾ found that MDMA causes dehydration that it also disrupts fluency of speech, which would (I assume) directly affect voice and singing.

Just like Ty, they started of with “fo fo fo fo fo” exercise mentioned above. His sound was a little shy. So Chris asked him to “give a little more energy” and there was an immediate resonance shift in Luis’s voice. It was also really interesting to see Luis’s adam’s apple much more stabilized when he increased his volume just a little more. The student mentioned a few times that he “doesn’t want to mess up”, and he was holding back a little. When they were doing the “thu-tho-tha” exercise, Chris told Luis to “picture your voice in front of you”. A few minutes later, they experimented with “thi the tha” as well, and student mentioned that it feels “loose” and that first option felt better. They then moved on to work the upper registry and his falsetto. On a 5-3-1, Chris had him sing “bu bu bu”. I questioned why he picked the consonant “b” and he

² Marrone, G. F., Pardo, J. S., Krauss, R. M., & Hart, C. L. (2009). Amphetamine analogs methamphetamine and 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) differentially affect speech. *Psychopharmacology*, 208(2), 169-177. doi:10.1007/s00213-009-1715-

mentioned that it gave Luis's voice more resonance (and Luis nodded as he agreed). Luis stated that before Chris, he couldn't find his falsetto, and he didn't believe in it either. When they first started, his falsetto was strained and couldn't sustain it at all. So this semester one of their goals are to sustain better falsetto. The three of us had a quick discussion about head voice vs. falsetto in men. For the sake of being on the same page, let's refer to Chapman. Chapman (2017) argues that there is a difference: the breathy lighter, weaker one is falsetto. *"Falsetto is when vocal cords stretch out and air shooting to the back. Head voice also long chords and stretched out but more compression and closure, air to the back still"*(Chapman 2017).

Additionally, they are working on connecting his TA and CT dominant sounds and to be able to sing in a more legato way when needed. For this, they focused on some humming exercises, and added dynamic work into it as well (crescendo, decrescendo). When he was at passaggio, he started falling a little flat. Luis's immediate response was to stretch his neck, but Chris simply reminded him of a better posture, and he was able to "fix" the "issue".

Luis was working on "Make You Feel My Love" by Bob Dylan. Once they moved on to the repertoire, they talked about musical, artistic and vocal goals. The student said "I want it more powerful and louder, and there's a part I have a problem coming in, so I want to work on that, I want to be more comfortable". Chris suggests that we can think about dynamics: moments of loudness/softness and moments of not. As mentioned above he asks really good questions to his students and this was one of those moments where he said "what volume would you think is appropriate to start with?" instead of him giving/showing ideas straight away. They had a discussion and agreement on "soft singing" not meaning that notes aren't energized.

Vocally, Luis actually had a little too much vibrato going on. I was curious to see if the student was able to control and manipulate the vibrato, or if it was just coming out without intention, so I asked kindly. Vibrato in singing is one of those controversial topics that everybody has an opinion on. Many people say that it naturally occurs once the voice is aligned well, but it confuses me, because a singer also should be able to control and manipulate it. So how does that work? Even Doscher (1994) agrees, that “...*some teachers feel that it should never be taught because it appears as the result of proper coordination and efficiency of function... others believe that vibrato can be taught directly, and they do so. Controversy is raging...*”(p.198). This is still valid until today.

Another study by Wagner, A. H. (1930) which looks at the “controlling of vibrato” takes a stance I agree with:

“Refinements of vibrato necessary to artistic singing. The position taken in this study is that refinements of the vibrato as to rate and extent of oscillation are necessary to artistic singing; that the singer should know how to increase or diminish his rate and extent of oscillation at will; that he should develop conscious control over these factors so that he may know what to do in case his rate becomes too slow or too fast, or the extent of oscillation becomes inappropriate to the emotion being portrayed.” (Wagner , 1930)

Chris stated that he did not have any vibrato when he first started, but the more aligned his voice got, the more vibrato kicked in. After my comment, they experimented a little bit to see if he could bring in the vibrato as a choice. Luis was happy to play around with this idea, he was actually surprised that he was able to control it a little bit and mentioned that “he had never

thought about whether or not he could do that” and raised his concern “I get scared I forget what it sounds like out of the lesson”.

From what I had observed, Luis was much more confident and expressive towards the end of the lesson. He is also bilingual, and I am interested in knowing how differently we use our voices in other languages. Are there differences between singing in our native language vs our second and third languages? What about in speaking? Does it depend on the language: does it get easier/more challenging depending on genre? This question really struck my interest. Although I couldn't find enough literature on this, there's definitely evidence that our speaking voice changes when we speak different languages. I do not sound the same speaking/singing in Turkish vs English. When Luis sang in Spanish, he also sounded more aligned, relaxed and authentic. More research should be done looking at people singing in their mother/native language vs a fluent second language.

It's inevitable that each language requires different pitches and ways of expression. There's different vowels, different mouth shapes, and even different body gestures. All of these factors affect how we sing. Thus, I am going to make an assumption that (especially) since pop, musical and jazz singing can be pretty speech-based, singing in different languages definitely affect the sound you produce. A new doctoral dissertation³ by Jarvinen has found that speaking different languages causes changes in the voice: For example, Finns speaking English tend to speak in a higher pitch, which causes vocal fatigue.⁴ There's also a few studies that looked into ability of imitating speech and singing talent correlation⁵.

³ Jarvinen, K. (n.d.). Voice Characteristics in Speaking a Foreign Language: A study of voice in Finnish and English as L1 and L2. Retrieved from

<https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/100989/978-952-03-0424-9.pdf?sequence=1>

⁴ https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/study_speaking_foreign_languages_strains_vocal_cords/9609774

⁵ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00874/full>

Christine and her students:

The way Christine teaches and interacts with her students really stand out to me. Along with Jonathan and Jennifer, she is also my teacher. I have also recorded our lessons and listened back, so I may make a few additional comments. Although she is the least technical voice teacher I've had in years, the joy and experience I get from her lessons is invaluable and unexchangeable. She actually has a pretty raspy voice with a limited range, however, this kind of quality really strikes in jazz singing. Her main goal with her students is to train their ears to hear modes and scales, improvise and scat, and also to teach how to interpret a song. She almost never hands the music out first, and she always teaches them by ear. Once they've learned through ear, and are confident, then she gives them the chord charts and gets them to think about progressions so they can add a little more technicality and theory into their interpretations. She wants her students to really be in the moment, and hear the chords. As she always says, she wants them to "float free, and relax".

Coincidentally, both of her students had many years(4+) of semi-professional musical experiences including classical music.

Christine's lessons require being a good listener as she tries to enhance your way of critical thinking about chords, scales, rhythms, genres, etc. In her own words, she also states: "I feel that it is my responsibility to bring in new repertoire and introduce my students to true artists they won't easily come across".

Her lessons are usually structured as : 1) 2-3 fixed vocal warm ups 2) Ear warm-ups 3) Improvisation and scatting over chords of the repertoire learned in the last week 4) New repertoire

Depending on students level, amount spent for each section varies. The fixed warm ups Christine does with her students are:

1) Sustained note while singing on “laaaa” (going down first, and then upper registry). She plays some re-harmonized jazzy chords underneath while students sustain this note, and also asks for crescendo-decrescendo.

2) Ziiiiii-yaaaa (bottom up, octave sliding exercise). The purpose of this exercise is to really smooth out the register breaks, and jazz singing has a lot of bottom up stuff.

3rd observation: Jonathan

Jonathan is a junior at Columbia majoring in science and minoring in music. He’s a tenor, and has been taking jazz voice lessons with Christine for about three years now. He also has previous classical and musical training. According to Jonathan “when singing classical piece and musical theatre repertoire he uses a more fuller sound, and have more vibrato. In contrast to a jazz tune he is much more likely to reduce the vibrato and focus more on ‘styling’.”. His goal is to become a better interpreter and improviser through jazz voice lessons.

They started their lesson with 2 vocal warm ups (the ones mentioned above). Then, Jonathan sat down, and had almost a crouched posture, but he seemed super relaxed. After the vocal warm ups they moved on to ear training. Christine always reminds her students to “hear the chord first, then sing”. They were working on the diminished scale, they went up and down

the scale, making sure each note was well articulated and on pitch. First, Christine was singing and playing the scale with Jonathan, and then she dropped out to see if he could do it on his own. After they played around with the diminished scale for a while, they talked about differences between a whole diminished and a half diminished scale. Christine challenged Jonathan to really hear the difference, so they practiced switching between two scales (first five notes only this time). Once the ear was also warmed up quite a bit, Christine turned on her metronome. They were getting ready to try some improvisation and scatting. Once they jumped in, Jonathan was using his hands and fingers constantly visualizing the notes he was singing. In the meantime, Christine would remind him of things to consider such as “triplets, chromaticism, arpeggiation, scales”.

Compared to my own lessons, the time they spent improvising was much shorter. They only spent about 10 minutes, and went into learning new repertoire. When teaching a new song, Christine prefers to teach orally at first, and give the music following week. Usually her first step is to sing the song for her students to make sure they like it. So, Christine demonstrated “Nostalgia in Times Square” by Charles Mingus. Then, if they agree to do the song Christine has picked for them, they start repeating the melodies sentence by sentence. They do a couple of sentences at once, and go back to the beginning so the melodies really stay in students head. Doing this also helps you memorize lyrics in the moment. In general, I found that, including myself, Christine’s students look up much more often than students who learn through music.

Sometimes, vocal jazz might sound easy, but actually, it is much more complicated in theory. There’s a lot of notes one might hear diatonic when it’s not. There’s subtle chromaticism and jazz notes added, and Christine really emphasizes on them to help you get it right. She says,

“hear the chromatic tension in this melody, it’s not diatonic, it could be, that fits too, but its not, which is what’s so beautiful about jazz”.

Jonathan’s posture was kind of crouched throughout the lesson, and Christine never really commented on it. All she wanted from Jonathan was to stay relaxed. In my opinion, this is super interesting because his resonance and timbre sound perfectly fine and he has no jaw/tongue/mouth tension. In jazz singing, since there’s the use of microphones, *“You don’t have to depend entirely on the resonators to project your voice or your body to produce the energy.”* (Silvera- Jensen, 2005) . Which may be the reason why the sitting/crouching doesn’t affect the sound as much.

He didn’t have any breathing issues either. When he needed to sustain longer notes, he kind of fixed his posture naturally. Perhaps, sitting has its pros as well relating to staying relaxed and with no tension. I might have asked for the student to “sit properly”, but only if they were struggling to produce healthy sounds.

Just like mine, Jonathan’s voice also lacks a little bit of coordination between his registers. However, the style gives it a big pass. Although, I may have had him humm the lower notes to keep it a little more focused and energized because it would get lost at times.

After he completed learning the full song, they started analyzing the chords and breaking them down, preparing for a second round of improv and scatting. This time, beyond just breaking down chords and scales and playing with rhythm, Christine asks him to add “accenting some notes in unexpected spots, thinking of abnormal phrasing, and shifting volumes, surprising the listener”. Compared to other instructors, Christine’s role is much more involved and active as a musician in her students lessons: she sings for them, she improvises with them. During the

improv, sometimes she does call and responses, which is really fun, and great to hear her model scatting.

4th observation: Jennifer

Right after Jonathan, I stayed to observe Jennifer who is a 29 year old female who identifies as a classical musician. She has majored in music about a decade ago, and she is now back to study some political science at Columbia. Jennifer's lesson was a really intriguing one because we had some deep conversations about what jazz vocal pedagogy should look like/ what qualifications you need as a jazz singer. Jennifer had a great range. She could hit some really low notes, but also go considerably high. Her low notes were very clear and Nina Simone-like. She has perfect pitch, too. Her sound has more vibrato compared to me and Jonathan and her posture was much more taller than us as well. You could truly see years of classical training reflecting. Her middle voice seemed a little weak to me, and I would definitely work on that as a teacher, however, Christine did not make any comments on it since she is more about styling.

With Jennifer, after the vocal warm ups, they only did a few quick scales in small fragments, but skipped the improvisation and scatting practice. Not only because she had perfect pitch and was familiar with theory, but also because she doesn't feel comfortable scatting or improvising. Jennifer told Christine she wasn't interested in doing that for now. This is super interesting to me because you'd think your knowledge of theory and having perfect pitch would help you, but sometimes knowing too much may actually limit you. It is harder to be free because you are afraid to make mistakes. In Jennifer's own words, she mentioned: "It's not my goal to improvise, I just love singing the main melodies and learning more songs. I get a little

tense when I try to improvise and I do not like that feeling. I always want to know what's coming next, so being spontaneous doesn't work well for me, at least, not yet."

After 2 warm ups, they jumped right into repertoire. This led us to a big discussion on whether jazz singers are required to scat and improvise. In Christine's direct words "the priority in vocal jazz being scatting and improvisation is a total misconception. It is a choice, it's an option. You don't always have to treat your voice like an instruments. There's many great singers who never improvised. But this doesn't mean they didn't interpret. Interpretation and styling should still be there. Also, knowing repertoire is a big part of the jazz singing world. You must know both the classics, but also the hidden gems. One of my responsibilities as a teacher is to expose my students to good repertoire that's appropriate for their voices, interests and ages". She states: "When the voice matures there's a certain thing about it, age matters too, highschool jazz vocal, I can trust my singers to interpret better, projecting that pain, maturity to her voice, important to choose repertoire that's appropriate to the maturity both age and personality wise. I have a young person who wants to sing older repertoire, no matter how much she wants it doesn't work as well"

As an interpretation exercise, Christine often asks her students to swing-speak the words over a metronome, and play around with rhythms and phrasing. Then she asks them to sing it with the melody, and add some ornaments and melismas.

Just like me and Jonathan, Jennifer was also using quite a few hand and finger gestures to visualize what she was hearing and singing, and she was closing her eyes quite often off of enjoyment and concentration.

I was really curious about a few things, so I asked Jennifer a couple of questions as such:

1) Which does she find more challenging rep wise jazz or classical?

2) Her voice feels better singing which genre?

3) Does the technical stuff being a classical singer help with any technical stuff in jazz?

Here are some of the answers I got:

“I feel like their both challenging in their own ways , classically I struggle with strict interpretation no elbow room with technique, it’s easier to not get hung up on specific sounds, but in jazz it’s so much harder getting the tonal language since it’s much more complex, there’s also so many bends in the rules, that also makes it harder. There’s crazy 11s and 9s you have to hear.”

“Strict classical thing enables me, so the technical training has helped me a lot of choices, bigger range, control of volume and dynamics, manipulating, I understand how my voice works but I think it comes from having sung a very long time and not just knowing technicality..”

“Jazz is much more intimate for me. My technique is good when I sing jazz but it’s not because I make conscious decisions. Unlike classical.. In jazz, I sing what I mean, and I mean what I sing.”

“There’s also no fear of not being heard because of use of microphones. I don’t like to strain myself. You can easily sing over an orchestra, microphone helps, i can be breathy etc., microphone is also changing timbre etc, microphone is an instrument on its own. Certain words close to the mic and certain not, microphone is a whole different instrument, which you don’t have in classical music”

The three of us also quickly had a discussion about how even though she has perfect pitch, where you grew up really influences the way you hear scales and chords and melodies. For

instance Christine growing up in India definitely influences and affects the way she improvises, scats and manipulates her interpretation.

In Jennifer's lesson, they ended up learning 2 new songs: So In Love - Cole Porter and Daydream Strayhorn. She didn't have any obvious tension. Her tongue was forward and jaw was relaxed.

Natalie and her student:*5th observation : Emily*

Last but not least, we've got Natalie and her student Emily. Natalie is a sweet, talented teacher who has great rapport with her students. She gives them a lot of confidence and compliments while staying true to honest feedback and improvement. It is lots of validation that the students appreciate. I really love that. She is a great pop/jazz/musical theatre singer herself, so she models very well when she is explaining a concept. I found her to be very smooth transitioning back and forth between exercises and repertoire depending on her student's need in the moment. She has a good balance of staying technical vs not getting too technical. Her motto is "You have to get down to business and technical work but you also need to have fun in a voice lesson".

Emily is a mezzo-soprano intermediate level singer. She doesn't have any professional goals, but she came into take voice lessons because she loves singing, and was unhappy with her sound, and wanted to be more confident as well. She had taken voice lessons before mostly when she was in elementary and middle school. She grew up with choral music and then began training in classical and musical theatre middle school. She had been singing in choir her entire life and was told to take her vibrato out.

According to Natalie, some of their major goals are to bring back in the natural vibrato (meaning they do not force it to come back but work on it through aligning the voice), and also to achieve a stronger mix range which Emily is happy and comfortable with.

Emily says “I was afraid of my mix, it felt vulnerable, I never wanted to bring it out, I didn’t think it sounded good at all”.

A few more sub-goals include vocal range expansion and better breath management. When Emily first came in, “she was trying too hard to breathe, and she thought she had to inhale ‘full deep controlled breath’ every single time you breathe even tho in short phrases, it was too controlled and locked up”.

They started their session with 10-12 minutes of vocal warm ups. Similar enough to Chris, they also started with the 5-4-3-2-1 on fo fo fo fo fo exercise to warm up the middle range. Emily was looking a little tense, so Natalie suggested that she walks around while doing this exercise, and to start to relax the body. Then, they worked on 8-5-5-3-3-1 on “tha tho tha” and some “the tha the” to go up a little higher and start connecting the voice. Still warming up the middle voice, Emily’s sound wasn’t super aligned so Natalie moved on to some semi-occluded exercises on 5-6-5-4-3-2-1. While Emily was humming, Natalie played some re-harped chords on the piano which made it really enjoyable to do the exercise over. They were slowly moving up to the upper registry of Emily’s voice and Natalie asked for her to use hand gestures to “send her sound more forward and with more energy”. Just like Chris and Christine, she also mentioned the “not effort but energizing” of the notes and told Emily she could bring in a little more volume. There’s something about this “not effort but energy” reminder that clicks for most

students. Even though students are already focused, concentrating and enjoying, when the teachers remind them of more energy, their resonance and timbre changes immediately.

They continued with “uuuu how are you today?” exercise and went up pretty high. At this point, Emily sounded like she was more engaged with her support system and her vocal cords. They followed this with two staccato exercises in which Emily was struggling and falling flat at times, but she fixed her own posture and massaged her cheeks to relax her jaw etc. She checked the space between her back teeth. These little things helped her stay on pitch.

Before they moved on to the repertoire, they ended the warm ups with a mix/belt exercise. They worked on a 5-3-1 exercise singing “way way way” and “mah mah mah”. Emily mentioned that she prefers the “way way” one over the “mah mah” because the “openness helps her”.

After these exercises, they were preparing to work on the repertoire: Moments in the Woods by Sondheim. Natalie mentioned to us that this semester they worked on a “heady/lighter piece” and then a “mixy” one, and now they are working on a beltier sounding piece to end the semester with. Working on different genres, styles and integrating all parts of our voice is very important for this century’s singers. Flexibility is some of the best qualities a singer can have.

Moving forward, let’s consider McKinney’s three steps and analyze some things in Emily’s singing. In his book, McKinney (2005) approaches the singer in three steps: What’s happening to the sound? What’s causing it? And How do we fix it?

As Emily sang, some “issues” that came up were:

1)Breathing:

- Sometimes, Emily's breathing was too high and sharp in between rests. It was creating tension in her onsets coming in and was making it harder to sustain notes comfortably. To improve this, they had a discussion about how natural yet supported breathing can help. Natalie let Emily pant to feel the support, and then try to recognize that support naturally. She also suggested to "think of rests as rolling stops and not dead stops".

-For next week, she asked Emily to think about where to breathe. They talked about the importance of knowing beforehand what are good spots to breathe.

2) Articulation/conversation

- In her lower range, Emily would lose her resonance and clarity at times. She wasn't articulating the words enough. So, they spoke the words out loud. Natalie asked Emily to put her index finger in front of her lips and speak to it. Natalie asked E to exaggerate articulation just a little more and to "think more like speech and conversation like".

3) Vowels and pitch

-During the repertoire, Emily felt a little tense and strained while singing some of the higher/upper registry legato sections of the song. Her vowels were a little too close and falling back, she wasn't opening up as much as she needed to. This affected her ability to match pitch smoothly at times, and affected her timbre. Through discussing vowel modification, they were able to improve this. There was a point where Natalie even suggested "think open vowels here more than the melody itself", as a first step to getting used to doing what had to be done. She assured Emily that it wouldn't sound absurd that way.

-A small second pitch issue was when Emily couldn't find the pitch of a next sentence. Instead of Natalie giving her the pitch directly, she asked her student great questions

such as “how do you think you can find the pitch?”, “where do we see the same pitch?”, “what do you think is your cue relying on the piano?”. This is a really important thing to do with students of any age, to get them to think independent of us teachers. Teach them how to get there.

4) Pacing, thinking musical and vocal where its going next.

There were moments Emily was truly hesitant coming in, even though she knew the song well enough. She shared this emotion with Natalie. One of the reasons Natalie is a successful teacher is because of her knowledge of musical theatre songs and composers. She said “you have every right to feel that way, Sondheim deceives the singer quite often, even though it feels normal/makes sense to the audience, musically he does unexpected stuff in the vocal lines”. Thus, they talked a little bit about pacing, and to always look forward in your score what’s coming next, so you are ready to support yourself: vocally, emotionally, artistically and musically .

5) Acting and memorization

Although they were running out of time for the day, they talked about what the next step to improvement is, which was memorization and acting.

One thing that stood out to me the most from the beginning was how much more “registration talk” there was compared to Chris and Christine. Emily and Natalie seemed to be on the same page with terminology, so that’s okay. Compared to the pop and jazz lessons I have observed with the other teachers, musical theatre style involved more accuracy following a score. Emily was the only student marking the score, taking notes, etc.

Although Emily had quite a few things to improve such as breathing, articulation etc, her sound was surprisingly very aligned for a beginner-intermediate singer. She sounded like she was singing from “the same place” which is a healthy sign of singing.

Conclusion

To conclude quickly, I’d like to say that I truly benefited from observing teachers and students of different genres. Each teacher had something they were really good at, and each student’s needs were different. It’s all about finding the right match for yourself- whether you are the teacher or the student. It seems like the more you teach, the more who you are as a teacher becomes more stable. This is a great thing, and I am hoping to be a teacher of balance: teaching orally and through music, and teaching staying flexible across genres.

There’s so many things to consider musically, vocally, socially/emotionally, and it is important to be on the same page and be clear on what the goals are. After studying Vocal Pedagogy this semester, I was able to pay much more detailed attention to warm ups, purposes, diagnoses, solutions. Knowledge of voice through an anatomical lense allowed me to make sense of why teachers chose which exercises, how did they approach to improve something, etc. Overall, I think all three teachers did a great job getting the students to a healthier and happier place!

There are grand differences among different styles and genres pedagogically. As we read, each teacher and student had different goals and took different pedagogical approaches. What stays close to factual and objective, however, is the science and anatomy of voice/vocal cords. There’s a lot of important discussions and questions that arose during this project, and I am

hoping to look into each topic sometime in the soon future. Seems like much of the good literature was done around 2005, and it is time for new updates.

The world of singing and vocal pedagogy is truly fascinating, and I can't wait to explore even further.

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