

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Cross-Genre Pedagogy in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera:  
Evolving Educational Practices for Vocal Performance

A supporting document submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts  
in Music

by

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December 2024

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Ariana Nicole Horner Sutherland

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's difficult to find the words to adequately express my gratitude to those who have supported me throughout this journey. This document and degree are the result of the encouragement, wisdom, and care I've received from countless people along the way.

First, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my committee: Dr. Robert Koenig, for stepping in at the last minute to offer invaluable support during my exams; Dr. Stefanie Tcharos, for your time, insight, and thoughtful guidance in my education at UCSB; and Dr. Isabel Bayrakdarian, my committee chair, whose steady support and unwavering care have been a constant source of strength for me.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my colleague and editor, Caitlyn Park. Thank you for your meticulous work and friendship. Any time you need a coffee, you know where to find me.

To my dear friends—Dylan, Dawn, Lucianna, April, Olivia, Tim, and Christina—thank you for showing me the true meaning of loyalty, support, and what it means to be a good colleague and confidant. To my sopranos—Katie, Eleanore, and Juliana—thank you for your steadfast belief in me. Your friendship has been a constant source of strength and joy in my life.

I thank all the teachers, mentors, and coaches I've had throughout my academic journey. Each of you has offered invaluable lessons, and I appreciate the time you invested in my education and development as an educator and performer. Special thank you to Dr. Jaunelle Celaire, whose mentorship has been transformative. From you, I learned to challenge myself, prioritize community, and reach for my goals, no matter how far they seemed. Your guidance has shaped my path in ways I'll always carry with me.

To my family, I owe everything. Thank you for your unwavering love and belief in me. To my mother-in-law, Maria, and siblings-in-law Stephen, Omar, and Steff, thank you for always keeping an open mind and supporting me in every way. To my siblings, Natalie, Richelle, Nolan, and James, thank you for attending my performances, keeping me humble, and being there for me through every challenge and adventure.

Mom and Dad, thank you for your constant love and faith, which inspire me daily to be a better educator and human being. This achievement is for you.

Lastly, I must express my deepest gratitude to my husband, Victor. Your unwavering support has been a guiding light in my life, not only just for me but for those around us. Your love and devotion continue to inspire me every day, and I am forever grateful to you.

“Start by doing what is necessary, then do what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” — Saint Francis of Assisi

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## ABSTRACT

Cross-Genre Pedagogy in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera:  
Evolving Educational Practices for Vocal Performance

by

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This document examines the emergence of cross-genre pedagogy in undergraduate vocal performance programs through the scope of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera. It explores the challenges and importance of cross-genre singing in contemporary operatic repertoire and examines how traditional undergraduate music programs can approach this repertoire more expansively. Additionally, through a series of select examples, this document investigates the impact of genre fusion on thematic content in contemporary opera, its accessibility to 21<sup>st</sup>-century singers and audiences, and its performance and educational practices. Methodology for this study includes surveys, interviews, and performance analysis involving classical voice students, instructors, and industry professionals.

This document presents American opera as a medium for development within the operatic and classical spheres. Over the centuries, American opera has evolved to reflect the diversity of the American population that performs and consumes it. Key elements, such as perspective and setting, illustrate significant areas of development, showing how American opera has shifted to address more grounded subjects, including social justice issues, the everyday struggles of Americans, and composers' ongoing deep exploration of humanity.

The document also explores how these thematic developments connect intrinsically to the vocal portrayal of the musical work.

As contemporary opera has developed, elements such as text prominence and genre fusion have become more apparent, requiring vocalists to master technical skills suited to cross-genre styles, including contemporary commercial music (CCM), jazz, pop, and musical theater. This cross-genre vocal training not only equips students with the versatility needed for broader career opportunities but also benefits educators, as universities increasingly seek voice instructors with cross-genre expertise. This pedagogical approach is examined through case studies from *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* by Norman Spivey and Mary Saunders Barton and insights from an interview with Dr. Dionne Napier, a voice teacher specializing in training classically trained singers for CCM and also builds upon these foundational perspectives by applying them to 21st-century American opera. Through this performance medium, the document offers original analysis and practical applications tailored to the unique challenges of genre fusion and text prominence within the contemporary operatic repertoire.

Through a questionnaire, 38 participants shared their experiences with 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera. The sample included both students and teachers, and this document places their responses into dialogue to contribute to a broader conversation about the student-mentor teaching model traditionally used in American education. According to the data, the two reasons an undergraduate student may not be assigned 21<sup>st</sup>-century American arias are vocal or musical underdevelopment and repertoire unfamiliarity. Teachers said their students needed musical and technical maturity to be assigned the repertoire comfortably. In contrast, students reported that their teacher's unfamiliarity with the repertoire was often the main

culprit. By examining these findings, this document encourages the educational community to engage more deeply with 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera.

Lastly, the document analyzes two soprano, one mezzo-soprano, and one baritone aria to present the research from prior chapters. The arias “A Lucky Child” from *At the Statue of Venus* by Jake Heggie, “Mama’s Misgivings” from *A Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, and “Congregation Aria” from *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo are analyzed for vocal moments where cross-training techniques can be utilized, either due to genre fusion elements or the aria’s emphasis on text prominence. Each aria examines its contribution to plot narrative and perspective, furthering the development of American opera. The author shares personal experiences in teaching or performing this repertoire and provides supplemental exercises and repertoire recommendations to support learning these arias.

The significance of this research lies in its commitment to advancing educational development for both students and teachers. The fusion of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera with other musical genres requires vocalists to navigate stylistic shifts with technical and expressive agility, reinforcing the importance of cross-genre training in the undergraduate studio. By equipping students with the skills to engage with contemporary operatic repertoire, educators equip their students to meet the artistic and technical demands of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera and other genres. This pedagogical approach not only broadens career opportunities for both teachers and their students but also empowers students to contribute to the continued evolution of the genre, ensuring American opera remains a dynamic and relevant art form reflective of the diversity and complexity of America today.

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## Introduction

I was first intrigued by American opera after attending the National Opera Association in 2021 where I sat in on a Masterclass given by Dugg McDonough, the head Opera Director at Louisiana State University. The singer, Zoe Rose Pallas, performed “My Darling, Jim” from the 2007 opera *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo. At the time, I was almost finished with my master's in Vocal Performance, and Zoe's performance was the first American aria I had heard composed after 1970. Reflecting on my experiences throughout my undergraduate years, I wondered why I was not exposed to contemporary American opera throughout my schooling and if I was the outlier or norm in that inexperience. After flying back to finish the last semester of my master's program, I immediately began learning the aria. I was captivated by how the melody and libretto created an emotional landscape that felt both personal and profoundly relatable. The art form brings to life distinctly American stories and themes—stories rooted in American history that address social issues, sexual orientation, and the triumph over racial divides.

As I advanced in my academic studies, this curiosity motivated me to work on more English arias and musical theater pieces. At this time, I paid little attention to when they were composed or whether they were American or British. A few years later, I noticed that Young Artist Programs and summer festivals were requesting musical theater, “Golden Age” musical theater, and American arias as part of their updated audition requirements. While auditions typically request three to four arias representing the singer's vocal capabilities while spanning different operatic eras—American opera was not typically one of them.

Emerging from my Undergraduate and Masters student experiences, and hoping to pursue more professional opportunities as a singer and teacher, I found myself underprepared in both American opera and musical theater, especially when I considered how many of my ideal professional vocal training programs were increasingly programming these genres. This limitation in my experience led me to research more about the vocal training experience of American students. I have gathered insights from a sample of past and current undergraduate voice students that explores the hesitancy of some teachers to incorporate this repertoire despite the growing interest among students in learning American opera.

I also wanted to understand the academic divide between teaching operatic singing and contemporary commercial music (CCM) techniques, particularly as applied to American opera, which often blends both. While CCM techniques are typically used in genres like jazz, musical theater, or pop, their application in American opera raises questions about pedagogical integration. For example, genre fusion in American opera, such as incorporating jazz motifs, popular melodic lines, or the declamatory style of musical theater, requires classical singers to adapt momentarily to different styles in order to enhance character development, mood, and storytelling. To perform these mixed styles effectively, singers need cross-genre training, a pedagogical approach that teaches both classical and CCM techniques. However, cross-genre training is rare in traditional voice programs, which focus primarily on classical techniques, potentially leaving singers unprepared for the technical demands of modern American opera.

In May 2024, I gave a lecture recital in tandem with research for this document. The preparation included a stylistic analysis of seven popular arias I found by posting an inquiry on the social media community page Young Artist Community (YAC) Tracker. In the lecture

recital, I discussed whether genre fusion elements had been used in the composition of these seven arias and how CCM vocal techniques, such as pop jazz and musical theater declamatory styles, might be applied in each aria. The research of three of those arias is the basis of Chapter 4.

My document contains four chapters: Chapter 1: Defining 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera, Chapter 2: The Application of Cross-Genre Pedagogy in the Undergraduate Studio, Chapter 3: Data Collection, and Chapter 4: Aria Analyses and Examples. Each chapter is divided into sections to streamline the reading process and concept delivery.

Chapter 1, “Defining 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera” is divided into five sections. These sections explain the origins of American opera, how the genre was heavily influenced by nationalism and genre fusion, and how it continues to develop. Chapter 1 also discusses the champions of American opera in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, beginning with the importance of the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, and regional opera companies. This chapter applies scholarship from Elise K. Kirk's book *American Opera*<sup>1</sup> and expands on the genre's genesis. I also discuss the concept of genre fusion as a distinguishing element of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera and dive into how that musical feature has developed as diversity and representation in narratives, protagonists, composers, librettists, and audiences have also grown. Notably, I will discuss the correlation between the perspective of the protagonist and instances of genre fusion and/or cross-training.

Chapter 2, “The Application of Cross-Genre Pedagogy in the Undergraduate Studio,” begins with an in-depth exploration into the “traditional” path expected of undergraduate vocal performance students. This includes Young Artist Programs, audition packages,

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<sup>1</sup> Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera*, (University of Illinois Press, 2001).

performance industry statistical information heavily reliant on the findings in Susan Mohini Kane's book *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Singer: Making the Leap from the University into the World*,<sup>2</sup> Opera America's annual industry report, and my own educational experience. The statistical realities of the "traditional path" are presented in advocacy for "cross-genre training," a significant concept that connects genre fusion in American opera and the education of undergraduate singers. "Cross-genre pedagogy," also called "cross-training" in this document, is a concept highly advocated for by authors Norman Spivey and Mary Saunders Barton in their book *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act*.<sup>3</sup> Case studies from Spivey and Barton Saunders's book are surveyed as evidence of successful trials of cross-training within the classical voice studio using musical theater and contemporary opera as examples. Furthermore, this chapter explores how this pedagogy can be applied to genre fusion of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera in undergraduate studios.

Chapter 3, "Data Collection," presents data collected from a student and teacher population using a questionnaire regarding 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera. There are three sections in this chapter. The first section provides evidence from the teacher sample, which discusses 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic repertoire and its application in their studios, while the second section uses data from the student sample to provide insights into their experience. The third section compares the teacher and student perspectives, further advocating for cross-training in the undergraduate studio and how 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic repertoire can be an effective training vehicle.

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Mohini Kane, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Singer: Making the Leap from the University into the World*, (Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Norman Spivey and Mary Saunders Barton, *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* (Plural Publishing, 2018).

Chapter 4, “Aria Analyses and Examples,” bridges the scholarship of Spivey and Saunders Barton with my own advocacy for 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera in the undergraduate voice studio. In this chapter, I present my analysis of four separate 21<sup>st</sup>-century American arias, “A Lucky Child” from *At the Statue of Venus* by Jake Heggie, “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, and “Congregation Aria” from *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo. Each analysis has three sections. The first section discusses the plot narrative and perspective, giving examples of how the story informs the composition fabric and usage of genre fusion within the aria. Section two offers specific examples in the aria of moments where singers can utilize cross-training. Section three gives suggestions for supplemental cross-training exercises, using extracted cross-training exercises from Spivey and Saunders Barton’s book, as well as supplemental repertoire that teachers can explore with their students.

## **Chapter 1: Defining 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera**

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the origins, evolution, and future of American opera, with a focus on how the genre’s expanding elements and stylistic diversity are becoming increasingly representative of the American identity. This chapter highlights how nationalism and folk influence impacted American opera’s beginnings by pushing the boundaries of who it represented and what it achieved. I will explore how American opera developed from these origins with examples that reflect the genre’s modern-day arrival at a new point of inclusivity, showcasing representation in casting, composer diversity, plot narratives,

perspectives, and innovative uses of genre fusion. The background provided in this chapter gives essential context for understanding how these evolving elements impact vocal interpretation and why vocal training must also grow alongside the genre to meet new stylistic demands.

### Section 1: Beginnings of American Opera

Scholars and historians postulate that American opera originated in the late 18th century, with one of the earliest operas, *The Temple of Minerva* by Francis Hopkinson, premiering in Philadelphia in 1781. This attribution feels fitting, as Hopkinson was not only a signer of the Declaration of Independence but also credited with designing the first American flag. The performance of *The Temple of Minerva*, held for George Washington to celebrate the French Alliance during the Revolutionary War, featured music presented in the style of an oratorio (without costumes or sets) while the libretto conveyed an allegorical narrative.<sup>4</sup> During this period, the quest to define an American operatic identity was a pressing concern. Composers sought to create a uniquely American style capable of standing alongside the European repertory.<sup>5</sup> One notable movement involved setting works in America by drawing on narrative materials and musical idioms inspired by the "New World." Examples include the musical play *The Indian Princess* by James Nelson Barker and John Bray (1808) and the operatic drama *The Enterprise* by Arthur Clifton (1822).

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<sup>4</sup> O. G. Sonneck, "Early American Operas." *Sammelbände Der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 6, no. 3 (1905): 428–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/929173>.

<sup>5</sup> Frédéric Döhl and Gregor Herzfeld, "*In Search of the 'Great American Opera'*": *Tendenzen Des Amerikanischen Musiktheaters* (Waxmann Verlag, 2016), 20.

The search for a thoroughly American operatic genre continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as composers, influenced by American nationalism, turned to the “folk” music of America. In the form of “cross-cultural appropriation,” they drew inspiration from Native American cultures and melodies, incorporating them as the foundation for their narratives and musical compositions.<sup>6</sup> Despite the romanticized, inauthentic portrayals of Native American folklore, these operas resonated with audiences, offering them a sense of identity while keeping familiar Wagnerian thematic elements such as mythology and parables. Native American-themed stories inspired more than twenty operas between 1910 and 1930, notably *Poia* by Arthur Nevin (1910), *Shanewis* by Charles Wakefield Cadman (1918), and *Natoma* by Victor Herbert (1911).<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Native American singers were not hired to perform this repertoire and that often, these stories were exoticized, telling of Indigenous peoples’ assimilation into white American society.<sup>8</sup>

Also in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Harlem Renaissance further influenced the evolution of American opera with the rise of musical plays that incorporated jazz, such as *Shuffle Along* (1921) and *Show Boat* (1927).<sup>9</sup> This period marked the beginnings of American verismo and the post-romantic movement, leading to iconic compositions like Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935), Blitzstein's *Regina* (1949), and Menotti's *The Consul*

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<sup>6</sup> Tara Browner, *Breathing the Indian Spirit: Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the ‘Indianist’ Movement in American Music* (American Music 15, no. 3 1997), 265.

<sup>7</sup> Harry Perison, *The ‘Indian’ Operas of Charles Wakefield Cadman* (College Music Symposium 22, no. 2 1982), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Kirk, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Kirk, 198.

(1950). These works reflected a blend of jazz influences and the American experience, solidifying the unique identity of American opera.

## Section 2: The Metropolitan Opera as American Opera Patron

The Metropolitan Opera House and its manager, Giulio Gatti-Casazza (manager from 1908-1935), became American opera's most avid patron. This institution was critical for shaping American opera in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> In 1910, The Metropolitan Opera premiered its first American production with Frederick Converse's *The Pipe of Desire*. This one-act opera was paired as a double bill with *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo. Under Gatti-Casazza's management, the Met premiered 14 new American operas between 1910 and 1935.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Gatti-Casa began broadcasting works on the CBS radio network, with the American opera *King's Henchman* (1927) by Deems Taylor as the first broadcast.<sup>12</sup> It garnered such interest and curiosity that the Met began pursuing audiences worldwide, as they still do with the Live in HD Series.

After Gatti-Casazza left, the Met slowed its patronage of American Opera significantly. From 1937 to 1991, only nine American operas had their world premiere at the Met, notably those by composers Samuel Barber and Gian Carlo Menotti. The longest gap between world premieres would be 24 years, between Martin David Levy's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1967) and John Corigliano's *The Ghost of Versailles* (1991). The other gap

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<sup>10</sup> Döhl and Herzfeld, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Kirk, 166.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk, 171.

was 16 years between Tan Dun’s *The First Emperor* (2006) and Kevin Puts’ *The Hours* (2022).<sup>13</sup>

The New York City Opera, dubbed the “People’s Opera” by former New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, championed five consecutive seasons in the late 1950s and 60s, featuring American opera and American singers.<sup>14</sup> The New York City Opera received yearly grants from the Ford Foundation, which they used to premiere iconic American works by Carlisle Floyd, Douglas Moore, and William Grant Still. The company had to shut its doors in 2013 due to financial crises. However, it reopened in 2016 with a renewed commitment to work with young American artists and to build new audiences by making their productions affordable.<sup>15</sup>

The Met opened its 2024/25 season with *Grounded* by Jeanine Tesori (2023). *Grounded* is the first opera composed by an American woman to be performed at the Met and the third opera by a female composer after *Der Wald* (1903) by Ethel Smyth and Kaija Saariaho’s *L’Amour de Loin* (2016).<sup>16</sup> In recent years, the Met has opted to allow for smaller

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<sup>13</sup> “From the Archives: American Opera at the Met, 1910–1937,” n.d., <https://www.metopera.org/discover/archives/notes-from-the-archives/from-the-archives-american-opera-at-the-met-19101937/>.

<sup>14</sup> A. Midgette, “The Voice of American Opera,” *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (July 2, 2008): 81–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbn005>.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Lunden, “Chronicle Of A Death Foretold: New York City Opera Shuts Its Doors,” *NPR*, October 1, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/10/02/228171680/chronicle-of-a-death-foretold-new-york-city-opera-shuts-its-doors>.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Blum, “Saariaho’s ‘L’Amour’ First Work by Woman at Met since 1903,” *The Seattle Times*, November 30, 2016, <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/saariahos-lamour-first-work-by-woman-at-met-since-1903>.

opera companies and festivals to premiere new American works and gain popularity before giving these works their “Met premiere” at a later date.<sup>17</sup> In this instance, *Grounded* premiered at Washington’s Kennedy Center in 2023, reflecting a collaborative relationship between the Met and The Washington National Opera for the commissioning and development of new American operas.

### Section 3: American Opera in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century

21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera reflects the complexity and diversity of American culture through its use of mixed genre types, diverse narrative themes, and historical content. Composers draw inspiration from the microcultures that make up the experience of their protagonists, incorporating elements like musical theater rhythms, jazz idioms, vernacular music, and avant-garde tonalities. These stylistic choices create a sound that is uniquely American in opera. As the sub-genre grows in diversity through the representation of composers, performers, and audiences, it continues to evolve as opera that is representative of the American experience.

Through the 54 years of American Opera drought at the Met, many other A-level and B-level houses, regional opera companies, and summer festivals sponsored, commissioned, and provided a nurturing space for American opera to premiere and flourish. In contrast, the Met has often prioritized a more Eurocentric repertoire, seeming to lag in embracing its “Americanness.” For example, *Doctor Atomic* by John Adams premiered in 2005 at the San Francisco Opera before its Met premiere in 2008. *Fire Shut Up In My Bones* premiered at the

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<sup>17</sup> The word “premiere” refers to the first time a production is ever performed. In contrast, a “premiere” or “house premiere,” in this case a “Met premiere,” refers to the first time it is performed at that particular performance venue.

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in 2019 before receiving its Met premiere in 2021. Often, larger houses and festival associations come together to commission new works as well, such as *The Factotum* by Will Liverman, DJ King Rico & Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj, which premiered at The Lyric Opera of Chicago and was a co-production of Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Portland Opera, and Washington National Opera.<sup>18</sup> This pattern highlights how American opera has often relied on regional companies and collaborative efforts to thrive rather than relying solely on the Metropolitan Opera. While the Met remains an iconic institution, its focus has historically leaned toward the European canon, leaving other companies to champion the development of distinctly American works. By commissioning and premiering new operas, these regional houses and festivals not only nurture American composers and librettists but also expand the repertoire in ways that reflect the diverse cultural and social landscapes of the United States.

What is clear is that American opera has continued to be popularized and performed in the United States and has increasingly become an attractive programming choice. According to Opera America's 2020-2021 annual field report, 36% of performed repertoire was written after 1970, with three of the five most performed North American operas being composed in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.<sup>19</sup> Derrick Wang's *Scalia/Ginsburg* (premiered in 2015 at Castleton Festival) was the fourth most performed opera of the season.<sup>20</sup> The surge of

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<sup>18</sup> "The Factotum," Lyric Opera of Chicago, accessed October 3, 2024, <https://www.lyricopera.org/shows/upcoming/2022-23/the-factotum/>.

<sup>19</sup> Opera America et al., 3.

<sup>20</sup> Opera America et al., "Annual Field Report 2022," *OPERA AMERICA*, 2022, <https://www.operaamerica.org/media/gu013fcd/2022-annual-field-report.pdf>, 3.

commissions and performances of contemporary favorites continues to rise, with 217 North American premieres in the last five years alone, the most occurring in 2022 at 67 world premieres.<sup>21</sup>

#### Section 4: Elements of American Opera Plots–Location and Perspective

In a 2016 interview with The Royal Ballet and Opera featuring Janet Baker and Joyce DiDonato, Baker asked DiDonato how she finds deeper meaning in her work as a performer. DiDonato responded that there's been pressure on the opera industry to stay relevant, but she firmly believes, "We [opera] are the most relevant thing on the planet! We're talking about love and death and life and tragedy! How could we possibly be more relevant?"<sup>22</sup> The interview, posted on YouTube seven years ago, received an outpouring of supportive comments from opera enthusiasts.<sup>23</sup>

The "We" DiDonato refers to encompasses the characters, themes, and narratives within operatic works. Elements like setting, time period, and character perspective shape the compositional choices that often lead to genre fusion and cross-genre vocal techniques in American opera. As more contemporary composers tell stories from diverse American perspectives, the protagonist's point of view naturally encourages a range of genre-fusion

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<sup>21</sup> Opera America et al., "North American Works Directory," accessed August 31, 2024, <https://apps.operaamerica.org/Applications/NAWD/timeLine.aspx>.

<sup>22</sup> Royal Ballet and Opera, and Joyce DiDonato. Janet Baker and Joyce DiDonato In Conversation (The Royal Opera). Interview by Janet Baker. *The Royal Ballet and Opera*, June 22, 2016. [https://youtu.be/d70Bj3tC0XQ?si=eM\\_T3WXXZrXX5wwPV](https://youtu.be/d70Bj3tC0XQ?si=eM_T3WXXZrXX5wwPV).

<sup>23</sup> The video recently went viral after a reposting of the interview was posted on the Instagram account @gleb.countertenor on August 25, 2024, prompting comments of mixed opinions regarding DiDonato's remarks.

techniques, leading to an ever-expanding variety of protagonists in 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera.

Throughout Western operatic history, the delivery of aesthetic ideals through compelling protagonists has been key to narrative content. This is often seen in folk or mythological stories that involve heroes and the supernatural being used to interpret power relations as they unfold both in society and as part of the process of the natural world. For instance, Gluck or Monteverdi's *Orfeo* used dramatic themes that sought to display societal ideals, while Wagner's use of mythological parables not only brought forth intricate musical compositions but also universal themes of elevated transformation.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, American opera often gravitates toward subjects grounded in contemporary realities—historical events, social justice issues, or even everyday human struggles—which reflect relatable ideals for American audiences. The difference then, lies in the American composer's pursuit of a deep exploration of humanity as it pertains to life in more recent times.

One primary distinction between pre-and post-20<sup>th</sup>-century American opera can be seen in the increased representation of racial, sexual, and social diversity and how these themes resonate with American audiences. For modern composers and librettists, the challenge is to elevate their protagonists to a near-mythological status, rising above the historical or circumstantial events of the plot and exploring the core of the human experience. This can be seen in works like *Harvey Milk* by Stewart Wallace, which explores sexual orientation, or Anthony Davis's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, which addresses racial

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<sup>24</sup> Yayoi Uno Everett, "Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Opera: Osvaldo Golijov, Kaija Saariaho, John Adams, and Tan Dun," Indiana University Press, 2015, 7.

and social justice. Similarly, Kevin Puts' *The Hours* dramatizes history in a way that elevates its characters to a grand, almost mythical scale. If, as Joyce DiDonato suggests in her interview, relevancy is tied to this universal relatability, I would agree that these works succeed in making their protagonists deeply resonate with contemporary audiences.

If we assume that composition style and genre fusion usage directly relate to the plot's content, such as perspective and location, then the usage of cross-genre singing styles in American Opera also correlates to these plot elements. There are many ways these connections will impact the stylistic demand on the singers. For example, consider an opera from the perspective of a hairdresser who works in a Black-owned Barbershop on the South Side of Chicago, *The Factotum* (2023) by Will Liverman, DJ King Rico & Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj. Highlighting the character's cultural experience, this opera is a self-declared “soul-opera,” stylistically blending funk, jazz, barbershop quartet, and rap elements to create a soundscape that is recognizable and relatable to operagoers from Chicago in a way, perhaps, Rossini is not.

In the case of location, take the American favorite *Susannah* (1956) by Carlisle Floyd. Although it is not a 21<sup>st</sup>-century example, it showcases American opera's direction in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Susannah* is an opera that takes place in small-town Appalachia, with accents almost as thick as Carlisle's orchestration. Favored for its romantic composition style and fusion of folk-like melodies, Floyd writes Appalachian dialect suggestions in the libretto. In the aria sung by Susannah, “Ain't it a pretty night?” he gives text distinctions such as “Look at all them stars... the longer y' look, the more y' see.”<sup>25</sup> The twang of the vowel and

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<sup>25</sup> Carlisle Floyd, “Ain't it a pretty night?” from *Susannah*, (Boosey & Hawkes Inc., 1957), 84-85, mm. 13-14.

language manipulation adds to the character's perspective and allow the singer to use vocal cross-genre techniques such as slides (or *portamenti*) and straight tone to achieve the desired effect. You can hear the vocal usage of these stylistic choices in performances by Renée Fleming and Janai Brugger. These changes in the use of English as a language and how it is sung are another attempt to create stories relatable to American audiences.

### Conclusion

21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera reflects America's evolving musical landscape and richly varied narratives over a much longer history. As composers from diverse backgrounds blend genres like jazz, folk, indigenous melodies, and contemporary music, they craft operas that resonate deeply with today's audiences. This genre fusion shapes the broad, inclusive musical landscape that embodies the complexity of American culture. The increased representation within American opera, seen through varied casting, composer backgrounds, and storytelling perspectives, adds depth to the genre's identity, engaging broader audiences and challenging traditional performance norms. Together, these developments demand new vocal techniques and adaptative approaches that reflect the dynamics of American opera today.

As composition styles evolve, so must the methods used to perform them, requiring singers to adopt cross-genre techniques and adapt to various stylistic demands. The future of American opera promises continued innovation in both performance and vocal pedagogy. While Western European influences shaped early American opera, today's genre fusion redefines what it means to perform and teach American opera, and as cross-genre techniques

become more integrated into vocal education, they will equip the next generation of singers to meet the demands of this dynamic and ever-changing art form.

## **Chapter 2: The Application of Cross-Genre Pedagogy in the Undergraduate Studio**

### Section 1: The Perfect Plan

The goal of obtaining an undergraduate degree in traditional vocal performance programs is to develop the voice in preparation for a professional career in operatic performance. One of the primary roles of the voice teacher has traditionally been to educate students about industry expectations throughout their educational journey. Teachers are generally expected to have either firsthand knowledge from their own careers or to stay informed about the evolving career landscape by attending conferences and other professional development opportunities. Additional resources, such as Opera America’s document “Essential Skills and Training for Classical Singers,”<sup>26</sup> and books like Susan Mohini Kane’s *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Singer: Making the Leap from the University into the World*,<sup>27</sup> frequently referenced in this document, can also support students and educators in navigating their career paths.

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<sup>26</sup> Opera America, *Essential Skills and Training for Classical Singers*, (2024), [https://www.operaamerica.org/media/nhol4igk/essential-skills-and-training-for-classical-singers\\_rev0827.pdf](https://www.operaamerica.org/media/nhol4igk/essential-skills-and-training-for-classical-singers_rev0827.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Susan Mohini Kane, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Singer: Making the Leap from the University into the World*, (Oxford University Press, 2015), 85.

The “traditional” career path includes creating pre-screening audition videos or audio tracks of various arias that showcase a singer's vocal technique, the breadth of languages, and their proficiency singing in different operatic styles and periods. These videos are used to apply for vocal competitions, summer internship programs, and year-long apprenticeships called “Young Artist Programs.” Singers are expected to pursue these opportunities to gain experience and press accolades. By attending Young Artists Programs, informally known as "YAPs," young singers expect to make industry connections that will further their careers.

Continuing on this traditional path, the singer is expected to continue their education and get a Master’s degree or Artist Diploma in Vocal Performance, after which they will be expected to continue the yearly cycle of audition videos, applications, and auditions to revered Young Artist Programs, gather more accolades, and pursue a career as a full-time singer and an independent contractor.<sup>28</sup> The ultimate goal is to find representation and management who can assist in locally and internationally scheduling engagements, which can take up to five to seven years after graduation.<sup>29</sup> Management or representation has always been regarded as the most desirable path for opera singers, though only 6% of master graduates in 2015 had it, leaving 94% either unemployed or self-represented.<sup>30</sup>

This idealized path to a successful career in classical singing is becoming less realistic each year as market and economic pressures continue to shift. The career plan for many singers is changing, with artists seeking supplemental income through part-time jobs,

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<sup>28</sup> Kane, 85.

<sup>29</sup> Kane, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Kane, 4.

private teaching, or performing in genres beyond classical music. This shift reflects my next key point directly: the programming content of Young Artist Programs is also evolving.

After the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, opera houses and YAP's have increasingly incorporated musical theater and productions of new pieces supported by grant funding to attract audiences, sponsors, and ensure financial stability. "If we train singers solely to our tradition and refuse to examine the music world outside our institutions, we may be increasing this gap [between what the schools want the singers to learn while they're there, and what's actually needed in the professional world.]"<sup>31</sup> It's because of this gap that I found myself drawn to the music of American opera and its use as a pedagogical tool for teaching contemporary commercial vocal techniques within the traditional university vocal studio.

## Section 2: Genre Fusion

In the early development of American opera, folk music played a pivotal role in shaping the soundscapes created by nationalist composers. Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and immigrants were instrumental in forming popular musical styles that spread across the country. Over time, vernacular styles like jazz, gospel, and European folk music came together to begin to form America's musical identity. These influences are evident in works such as Jerome Kern's jazz and soul-inspired musical *Show Boat*, the popular folk song "Shenandoah," and Antonín Dvořák's *New World Symphony*.

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew Edwards and David Meyer, "The Future of Voice Pedagogy: SWOT Analysis of Current Practice and Implications the Next Generation," *Journal of Singing* 70, no. 4 (March/April 2014), 441. This quote, originating in 2014, reflects changes that were already underway and were likely further accelerated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Moving the lens to American opera, the development of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century opera reflects the rich diversity of peoples, styles, and genres, as well as the broader scope of America's political, social, and cultural values. The previous chapter demonstrated how plot elements and subject matter influence the use of genre, shaping the uniquely American soundscape in ways that resonate with its audiences. A key component of this evolution is the incorporation of genre fusion, where composers blend styles like contemporary commercial music (CCM) or jazz into works rooted in Western classical traditions. This blending not only highlights the characters' humanity and emphasizes their environments and experiences but also bridges the gap between the traditional European art form of opera and the everyday musical landscape of American audiences. By incorporating genres familiar to American listeners, genre fusion makes opera more relatable and reflective of its performers and consumers. This approach also demands diverse vocal techniques, as singers must navigate the complexities of cross-genre compositions to fully realize the work's artistic and emotional intent.

### Section 3: Advocating for Cross-Training in the Voice Studio

Performing operatic repertoire containing genre fusion relies on classical vocal training as the foundation of the vocal technique. However, singers must also develop a pedagogical understanding of other genres to approach this music as informed performers.<sup>32</sup> To perform with understanding, singers need to convey the character's perspective and

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<sup>32</sup> Sequina DuBose, "The Impact of Genre Fusion and Improvisational Elements in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Operas on Vocal Pedagogy and Performance Practice" (DMA diss. The University of Maryland, College Park, 2019), 43.

intention while applying their classically trained voice across the work's varied styles. This approach requires the singer to engage with the character and the musical landscape they inhabit, incorporating accents and genre-specific vocal techniques to navigate the multiple styles effectively.

Laura Wilson, in her thesis exploring the concept of “cross-training,” offers this definition: “Cross-training is an approach of teaching voice through which classically trained vocalists learn to sing in more than one style, and commercial vocalists learn to perform classical as well as contemporary and commercial music styles (CCM).”<sup>33</sup> In the voice studio, teachers with knowledge of these techniques can use them in their pedagogical approach to teaching voice. Students can apply this intersection of stylistic techniques to multi-genre singing opportunities.

Having confidence in singing genre fusion within opera is a skill that should be developed during young singers' undergraduate training because it will yield multiple positive outcomes. Alongside developing the skills to sing in American opera, by integrating this pedagogical approach, young vocal performance majors may also develop the skills to pursue job opportunities in contemporary commercial music, either as part-time work, gigs, or simply for the joy of it. In a 2013 live performance market summary, classical singing accounted for only 4.5% of the market share of live performances, while the remaining 95.5% was in contemporary commercial musical styles.<sup>34</sup> Teachers should understand and

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<sup>33</sup> Lara C. Wilson, “Bel Canto to Punk and Back: Lessons for the Vocal Cross-Training Singer and Teacher” (master’s thesis, University of South Carolina, 2019), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Clarkia Cobb, “Vocal Pedagogy with The Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Singer” (Master’s thesis, Western Washington University, 2022), 11.  
<https://cedar.wvu.edu/wwuet/1101>

keep this statistic at the forefront of their academic concerns for their students because “If we fail to consider the marketplace, our students may leave our studios no better prepared for careers than when they first entered.”<sup>35</sup>

Cross-genre pedagogy and its application in the voice studio benefit the teacher as well. Implementing this pedagogy in the voice studio encourages curiosity and promotes student progress while ensuring professional development and job preservation for voice teachers. Full-time voice faculty positions continue to decline, while music education programs increasingly seek teachers with expertise in multiple singing styles.<sup>36</sup> Only four graduate programs currently offer music degrees with a non-classical vocal pedagogy emphasis, a number that doubled between 2020 and 2022. Penn State and Carthage College offer master’s in musical theater pedagogy, while Shenandoah University and Belmont University offer CCM master’s programs.<sup>37</sup>

Institutions are changing their expectations of specialized teachers, and the demand for cross-training in private teaching is also prevalent. In an interview I had with Dr. Dione Napier, a voice teacher based in Lexington, Kentucky, she discussed her experience as a classical voice student and how, after an 11-year journey majoring in Vocal Performance for her Bachelor's, master's, and Doctorate degrees, she did not feel prepared to meet her new student’s expectations: “I was teaching private voice lessons and started to realize...my students don’t want to sing classical music and all I know is how to teach bel canto singing.

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<sup>35</sup> Edwards and Meyer, 439.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards and Meyer, 441.

<sup>37</sup> Cobb, 12.

That's it.”<sup>38</sup> Feeling frustrated with her specialized skill set and how it transferred to the real world of prospective clients outside of academia, Dr. Napier researched other ways to further her teaching expertise.

“I needed to figure out how to serve my students because they don't want to sing arias; they don't want just to sing classical music. I [needed] to know those skills and to know the language to impart them so that they [could] get the results they [wanted]. My students didn't understand classical vocal pedagogy terms. I needed a simple language that they could understand and digest and that would produce a result.”<sup>39</sup> – Dr. Dione Napier, Virtual interview with author, 2024.

Dr. Napier's experience directly aligns with the stance that, in the future, voice teachers limited to classical training will face increasing isolation as their lack of vernacular technique knowledge becomes evident while demand grows for teachers skilled in cross-training.<sup>40</sup>

The use of cross-training is a step in the direction of bridging the gap between classical and contemporary pedagogical approaches. Cross-training should not be confused with the industry label of “crossover singer.” The distinction between cross-training and crossover lies in how each addresses stylistic versatility and authenticity. Crossover singing involves transitioning between distinct genres after developing expertise in one, while cross-training systematically prepares singers to master multiple genres simultaneously.<sup>41</sup> Crossover has long been debated, celebrated, and scrutinized, with singers like Kelli O'Hara and Audra McDonald moving between musical theater and opera. In crossover performances,

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<sup>38</sup> Dr. Dione Napier, virtual interview with author, September 30, 2024. To learn more about Dr. Napier and her work, visit her website at [www.amplifyvocalstudio.com](http://www.amplifyvocalstudio.com).

<sup>39</sup> Dr. Dione Napier, interview with author.

<sup>40</sup> Norman Spivey and Mary Saunders Barton, *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* (Plural Publishing, 2018), 30.

<sup>41</sup> Spivey and Saunders Barton, 22.

a singer may ‘cross the fence’ between genres, singing in both but often returning to the original style they trained in. For example, Kelli O’Hara recently performed as Laura in Kevin Puts’ opera *The Hours* at the Met in 2023, earning praise for her courage but also criticism for not fully embodying the operatic vocal power traditionally expected in that role.<sup>42</sup> To better equip young singers for an evolving industry and help them avoid such labels, classical voice studios can shift from the “antiquated concept of 'crossover' and embrace cross-training.”<sup>43</sup>

On the other side of the opera/musical theater “fence,” opera legends such as Deborah Voigt and Rod Gilfrey have participated in Broadway revivals, such as the acclaimed Glimmerglass production of *Annie Get Your Gun* in 2011, a project led by Glimmerglass Artistic and General Director Francesca Zambello to re-present musical theater pieces unamplified, the way they first premiered.<sup>44</sup> Renée Fleming performed with the Los Angeles Opera alongside pop-Broadway sensation Cameron Dove in the 2019 production of *Light in the Piazza* by Adam Guettel. These crossover stars from musical theater and opera dare to sing *outside* of their professional vocal field, whereas cross training a young artist during their formative years of technical development better equips them to explore a wider vocal field from the start, allowing them to confidently perform across genres without needing to “crossover” later in their careers.

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<sup>42</sup> David Salazar, “Metropolitan Opera 2022-23 Review: The Hours,” *Opera Wire*, November 23, 2022, <https://operawire.com/metropolitan-opera-2022-23-review-the-hours/>.

<sup>43</sup> Spivey and Saunders Barton, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Janairo, “Glimmerglass’ ‘Annie’, Voigt Show Their Guns,” *Times Union*, July 18, 2011, <https://www.timesunion.com/entertainment/article/Glimmerglass-Annie-Voigt-show-their-guns-1470208.php>.

The educational intention behind cross-training pedagogy is one of consideration for students and the future of their experience and careers. In this field, the requirement of cross-genre singing is becoming the new normal, and the specialized singer is becoming something of the past.

“As opera composers begin to breathe new life into the art form [opera], it is important for the classical teacher to celebrate the change and for all singing teachers to rethink what we thought we knew about singing.”<sup>45</sup> - Spivey and Barton.

As the industry develops, students will expect their studio experience to involve instruction in other genres, the majority of which may be musical theater. 2023 Opera America Annual Field Report revealed out of the top five most-produced North American works done at opera companies, two were musicals, Stephen Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music* and *Into the Woods*.<sup>46</sup> Musical theater itself is also developing, including more jazz, pop, country, and sometimes even rap.<sup>47</sup> *Six* by Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow is written in the style of a pop concert, while the iconic *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda is a biographical musical using rap and musical theater vocal styles.

#### Section 4: 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Opera and Cross-training Application

One approach to cross-training application in the undergraduate voice studio involves assigning multiple genres, such as musical theater and classical repertoire, to develop a student’s vocal capabilities. This method teaches both styles independently, allowing each to

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<sup>45</sup> Spivey and Saunders Barton, 29.

<sup>46</sup> Opera America et al., “Annual Field Report 2023,” 3.  
<https://www.operaamerica.org/media/vknfsyf3/2023-annual-field-report.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Wilson, 2.

augment the other. Alternatively, some teachers approach cross-training solely using classical repertoire, including 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century works or pieces with genre fusion. While some teachers may prefer to stick with classical repertoire, this limits students' exposure to contemporary styles, as they are often not introduced until the later part of undergraduate development.

“Will something precious be lost when an opera singer learns to belt? Our experience has proven the opposite. After experimenting with musical theater sounds, classical sopranos return to their operatic repertoire with a sense of greater resilience and power, with more authenticity, and a more reliable integration of the entire singing range and an ability to ‘speak’ vowels with more ease and clarity.” - Spivey and Barton, 29.

However, as mentioned in Spivey and Barton’s book “Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act,” early exposure to multiple styles helps build the vocal techniques necessary for tackling genre fusion in contemporary repertoire later.

A case study by Spivey and Barton presents the case of a soprano student with little to no middle voice at the beginning of her collegiate vocal training. She was given thyroid arytenoid-dominant (TA-dominant) vocal exercises and an array of repertoire, from classical to musical theater (MT). She sang the piece “Show Off” from *The Drowsy Chaperone* to align her speaking voice with her middle voice. Through her collegiate experience, her middle voice developed aided by the CCM vocal exercises and MT repertoire. In her junior year, she began working on “Have Peace, Jo” from Mark Adamo’s American opera *Little Women*. Her ability to negotiate vowels in the middle and the “impulse to speak clearly with purpose helped to clarify and choreograph the vowel sequences of the high tessitura aria.”<sup>48</sup> Pedagogically, the strength of the TA muscles and the mix of TA and Cricothyroid (CT) in

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<sup>48</sup> Spivey and Saunders Barton, 58.

the middle voice anchor the top of the range, giving the middle voice more depth.<sup>49</sup> What this case study tells us is that although *Little Women* isn't an opera filled with genre fusion, it is a work that emphasizes the text as the highest priority, and cross-training, using supplemental exercise and repertoire of varying styles, strengthens the singer's ability to sing in the declamatory operatic style.

Classically trained professional opera singers with cross-training are also better off in the field than those without it. Opera companies often hire singers to sing contemporary compositions as well as other genres like Broadway musicals, which require cross-genre vocal capabilities. The singers' performance quality is often determined by whether they already have experience singing in these other genres or if they received cross-training during their education.

In an interview by Dr. Sequina Dubose, professional operatic singer David Hughey spoke on his experience performing the role of Dr. Martin Luther King in *I Dream* by Douglas Tappin. Hughey, cross-trained in other genres and frequently singing on Broadway, states that "many modern operas may have components that demand extremes of range and unique vocalisms," though he felt prepared and that the role was "well-written" for his vocal capability. Dubose states, "In a contemporary opera where dramatic realism is the general

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<sup>49</sup> Vocal pedagogy often incorporates discussions of muscles like the Thyroid-Arytenoid (TA) and Cricothyroid (CT), which are central to biological approaches to voice training. The TA muscle primarily contributes to the production of "chest voice," while the CT muscle facilitates the "head voice." Various terminologies and philosophies exist within classical vocal pedagogy, and this paper aims to bridge classical vocal biology with CCM (Contemporary Commercial Music) training. For example, CCM terminology such as "belt" and "mixed voice" parallels concepts in classical pedagogy. Additionally, terms like "bridge" in CCM correspond to "passaggio" in classical training, illustrating how different traditions describe similar vocal techniques.

aesthetic and expectation, maintaining vocal stamina and control is a challenge.” This brings us back to how the link between plot content and vocal ability often influences the range of difficulty in a contemporary piece.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusion

Cross-training in the voice studio has become essential in preparing singers for the demands of contemporary opera, where genre fusion is not merely a stylistic choice but an integral part of character and narrative development. By incorporating multiple vocal styles such as musical theater, jazz, popular song, and classical techniques, students can develop the versatility needed to navigate the demands of new repertoire. As the industry increasingly requires singers to be capable of performing across many genres, cross-genre pedagogy ensures they can meet these challenges with confidence and artistic authenticity. Ultimately, this pedagogical shift reflects the broader trajectory of American opera itself, a fusion of tradition and innovation.

## **Chapter 3: Data Collection**

### Introduction

The American undergraduate voice education model is based on a long-standing tradition where knowledge is passed orally from teacher to student. It is an apprenticeship model, and pedagogical information is taught through time-honored exercises, which often rely on excessive metaphor and visual concepts without explicitly discussing the biology of

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<sup>50</sup> Sequina DuBose, 101.

the voice or the physics of sound. These concepts are rehearsed through the repertoire that the student is given. Therefore, the students' repertoire exposure is reliant on what is assigned. Experiencing gaps in my own repertoire knowledge prompted me to ask my colleagues about their own educational experiences and the expertise of their teachers. This curiosity prompted me to prepare a questionnaire to compare my experiences as a student and teacher.

The goal of the survey was to discover information and collect data regarding students' experiences singing 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera as undergraduates and studio teachers' application of this repertoire. I felt it necessary to ask teachers *and* students about their experiences, since multiple vantage points and educational levels would give a broader scope of the data. This data provides a snapshot of whether or not American opera and cross-training pedagogy are integrated into current voice studios, as seen through the perspectives of university teachers and undergraduates.<sup>51</sup> According to the data, the two reasons an undergraduate student may not be assigned 21<sup>st</sup>-century American arias are vocal or musical underdevelopment and repertoire unfamiliarity. Teachers said their students needed musical and technical maturity to be assigned the repertoire comfortably. In contrast, students reported that their teacher's unfamiliarity with the repertoire was often the main culprit.<sup>52</sup> I

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<sup>51</sup> My focus on undergraduates stems from an interest in understanding when and why this repertoire is introduced or omitted during their studies. Working on this repertoire myself, I have observed that many teachers view contemporary opera as too complex for undergraduates to undertake within a four-year degree. I wanted to explore why this attitude exists and whether it is a common occurrence. Additionally, I chose to inquire about undergraduates specifically because teachers often feel a greater responsibility for their development compared to graduate students, who are typically more advanced in their foundational training.

<sup>52</sup> All responses to the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera Questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

hope to encourage the educational community to engage more deeply with American opera's growth and development by discussing these findings.

### Section 1: Respondent Demographics

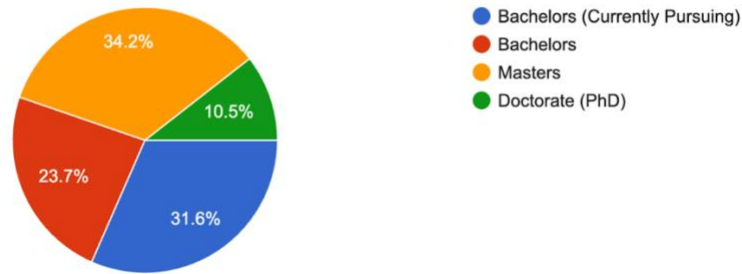
I sent a questionnaire to a sample of singers, requesting details about their undergraduate experience with 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera, and a sample of voice teachers, asking them specific questions about their experience teaching this repertoire.<sup>53</sup> General demographic questions were included, such as the type of educational institution the participants taught at or attended, its location, and their level of education. Short-answer questions were given to allow participants to expand on their experience performing American opera, their teacher's attitude towards the repertoire, or, in the teacher's case, their approach to teaching the repertoire. The questionnaire results reflect responses from a diverse sample of 38 participants, 10 Teachers and 28 students from six regions across the United States. 52.6% of the sample said they attended a public institution, 36.8% said a private institution and 7.9% said a conservatory. The data in the following figures represent those findings.

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<sup>53</sup> I sent the questionnaire to 10 colleagues, asking them to fill it out and send it to their students and colleagues.

What level of degree do you hold?

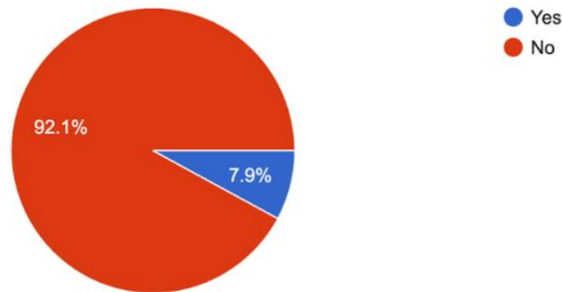
38 responses



**Figure 1.** - In response to the question, “What level of degree do you hold?” 10.5% of respondents said they had a doctorate (PhD), 34.2% had a master’s, 23.7% had a bachelor’s, and 31.6% were pursuing a bachelor’s. Each respondent had a degree or was pursuing a degree with vocal performance emphasis.

Do you have a Performers Certificate (Artist Diploma)?

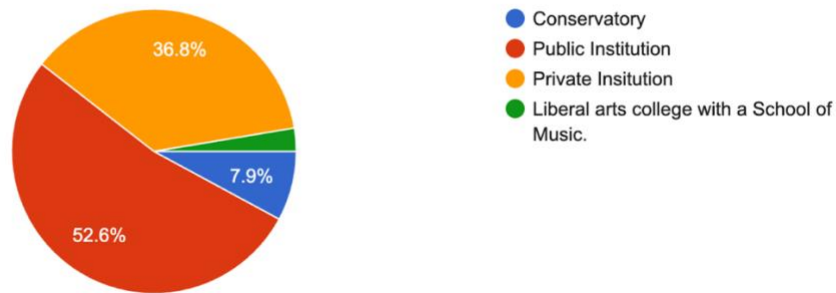
38 responses



**Figure 2.** - When asked if respondents had a Performers Certificate, otherwise known as an Artist Diploma, 7.9% said yes. In comparison, 92.1% said no. A Performers Certificate is typically a year-long program that students, after finishing a master’s degree, can apply for.

How would you classify your undergraduate school?

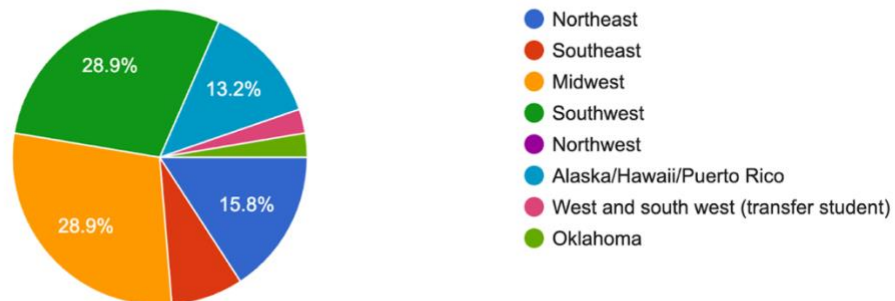
38 responses



**Figure 3.** - When asked, “How would you classify your undergraduate school?” 52.6% said public institution, 36.8% said private institution, 7.9% said conservatory, and 2.6% said liberal arts college with a school of music.

What region was/is your undergraduate located?

38 responses

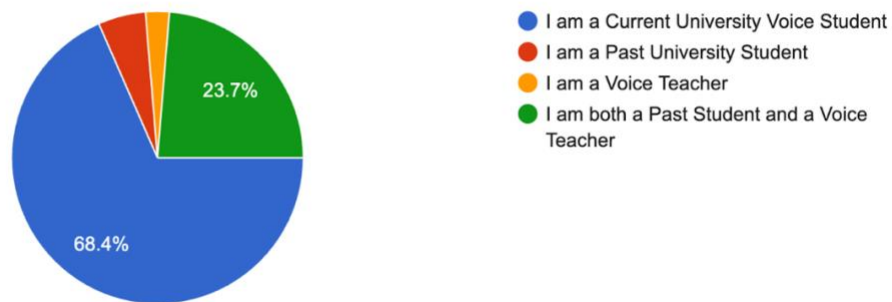


**Figure 4.** - In terms of location within the United States, respondents were asked, “What region was/is your undergraduate located in?” 28.9% said southeast, 28.9% said Midwest, 15.8% said northeast, 13.2% said Alaska/Hawaii/Puerto Rico, 7.9% said southeast, and 5.2% said other.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> The participant (and corresponding percentage) who responded "Oklahoma" to the question "What region was/is your undergraduate located in?" will be excluded from the data analysis, as their response did not accurately address the question.

How will you be filling out this form?

38 responses



**Figure 5.** - When asked, “How will you be filling out this form?” 68.4% said, “I am a current university voice student,” 23.7% said, “I am both a past student and a voice teacher,” 5.3% said, “I am a past university student,” and 2.6% said, “I am a voice teacher.”

## Section 2: Teachers

The teachers who responded to the survey displayed curiosity and asserted that several factors should be considered when assigning contemporary repertoire to undergraduate students. When asked if the teachers would assign their students a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Operatic aria, most said yes, with one out of ten responding no. Most respondents felt that if their students had a proficient handle on musicianship, pitch recall, and a steady practice routine, they would not have an issue assigning the repertoire to their students. Teacher D wrote, “I would absolutely consider giving an undergrad student a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria, if I thought they could handle it musically and tonally.” confirming in an encouraging manner that this respondent understood both the musical demands as well as the industry expectation that their students should have a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria in their repertoire. Teacher E echoed this sentiment, stating, “They [students] typically need one in their package.”

The impression that contemporary music is difficult regarding musicality was evident throughout the survey, as my own learning and singing experience has also revealed. Teacher

H explained that music containing unpredictable pitches and complex rhythms should be introduced at the undergraduate level and can be through this [21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera] repertoire “...especially if they want to have a career in music!” Teacher J, stated that the complexity of the repertoire assigned to students should depend on the institution they attend.

“It totally depends on the student and the institution. I teach at a small private liberal arts school, and many students don't have the musicianship skills to learn 21<sup>st</sup>-century arias. If I were teaching at a place like CCM or IU, then perhaps yes, because many of the fundamental musicianship skills would be much stronger.” – Teacher J

Teacher A agreed with Teacher H that vocal proficiency and high musicality are needed by the student when approaching this repertoire, though they felt that an emotional capacity to handle the repertoire is also a requirement for their students: “I would assign a 21-century aria to a student who has developed vocally to handle the demands of the repertoire, who has developed their performance and interpretative maturity and exploration.” Emotional connection in this repertoire also seemed to be a point of importance and in turn, connects back to points I made in Chapter 2 related to representation. There is an expectation that American music connects with the students on an emotional level. Teacher E also conveyed this sentiment and agreed that finding one with text that connects to student's personal lives can be powerful.

Some teachers also felt that familiarity and accessibility were issues and that they did not have much 21<sup>st</sup>-century opera available to them.

“I think the hesitance of teachers to assign 21<sup>st</sup>-century rep to young singers is mostly based on their ignorance of the repertoire or its availability (remember that it won't be public domain, and may often be difficult to obtain scores). A lot of voice teachers are outside their comfort zones when trying to teach a piece they've never sung, or they don't know well. Also, they might assume the pieces are very difficult (and sometimes they are, especially for undergrads or beginners) and assume it's above

their student's heads without doing any research on the opera or the arias.” – Teacher D

Teacher C felt that accessibility was a factor in assigning repertoire, and they needed “Easy access to the repertoire. “My current library has very little 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria rep. I tend to have more art songs in my collection.” Teacher A agreed, stating, “Honestly, I thought I had [assigned 21<sup>st</sup>-century arias], but I think I’ve only assigned 21<sup>st</sup>-century art songs and mainly 20<sup>th</sup>-century arias.”

Another element expressed by the teachers was that students should be exposed to various styles and composers. Teacher H said introducing their students to complex music was invaluable, stating, "Students need to be more familiar with newer music from their time period.” Teacher A said that they made new music a part of their curriculum. “I also assign listening and exploration activities to all my students to grow an interest and ear recognition with these composers.”

### Section 3: Students

The student sample came from those in a bachelor's or master's degree vocal performance programs, or those who had completed one. When asked if, as undergraduate students, their teacher had ever assigned them a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American aria, 14.4% of students said yes. One undergraduate student said their teacher didn't assign it, but they self-selected a Missy Mazzoli aria from *Breaking the Waves* for auditions. 65.4% of students said they would like to learn a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American aria, and 3.8% said they would not.

The students were asked whether they thought their undergraduate voice teacher felt comfortable assigning 21<sup>st</sup>-century American repertoire, and the responses were mixed. A few students felt their teachers didn't assign the rep because of their own unfamiliarity with

the repertoire. Student B said that “General unfamiliarity [seemed] like the main source of discomfort” for their teacher, agreeing with the sentiment of Student F, who claimed, “There [is] a lack of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup>-century arias and of their roles.” In contrast, Student C felt that their teacher did not find that repertoire useful in their vocal development:

“They think it is not part of the standard rep and was therefore not useful in their [teacher] opinion. 21<sup>st</sup>-century opera also holds the stigma that is musically too complex or not nearly complex enough, and it only exists in those polarities.” - Student C, 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Opera Questionnaire, 2024.

However, there were several students who had teachers with experience in contemporary music and encouraged them to learn or include the repertoire in their audition packages. Student N said, “My teacher sings a lot of that rep herself, so she is familiar with that body of work [21<sup>st</sup>-century American works].” Student M had a similar experience, stating, “He [their teacher] is very adamant about recognizing [assigning] different marginalized groups as well as doing the music of today.” These students both had teachers who felt confident to assign works by contemporary composers because they were familiar and had performed them themselves. This student data confirmed the correlation between instructor familiarity and the repertoire taught to students in the studio.

When teachers do not feel comfortable in their knowledge of a certain repertoire, they often choose not to assign it and instead rely on what they know. While this is not an unacceptable thing, and teachers should lean into their expertise and teach what they know, this cycle continues to reaffirm the same small selection of repertoire. This expertise is then passed on to the student via the student-mentor studio model. Another interesting piece of data from the survey was that there is a noticeable gap in the understanding of the definition of contemporary repertoire that is being passed from teacher to student. When asked if teachers had a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American aria in their aria audition package, I was surprised at

the confusion in the answers. I had two teachers write that they were singing “Laurie’s Song” from *The Tender Land*, which is 20<sup>th</sup> century (1954), and “Adelaide’s Aria” from *The Enchanted Pig* (2006) by Jonathon Dove, an English composer.<sup>55</sup> This confusion seems to communicate that all 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera fits under the umbrella of contemporary, and therefore, is difficult.

Like the teachers, when asked if they sang 21<sup>st</sup>-century American arias, several students incorrectly identified examples of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera and listed 20<sup>th</sup>-century or British arias instead. Some of these examples included “No Word From Tom” from *The Rakes Progress* (1951) by Igor Stravinsky, “What Will It Be For Me?” from *Regina* (1949) by Marc Blitzstein, “Monica’s Waltz” from *The Medium* (1945) by Gian Carlo Menotti, “They Are Always With Me” from *The Ghost of Versailles* (1991) by John Corigliano. This raises an intriguing question about whether teachers are assigning these arias, composed nearly 80 years ago, as examples of modern repertoire and unintentionally contributing to students’ misconceptions that they represent “new” music.

In contrast, there were several teachers and students who had a clear understanding of what was being asked concerning 21<sup>st</sup>-century American arias and productions. When asked if students had experience singing 21<sup>st</sup>-century repertoire in their undergraduate studies, eight out of 29 students said they had performed in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century work. Full operas included *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Nicole Balsirow, *Proving Up* by Missy Mazzoli, *Dark Sisters* by Nico Muhly, and *Later the Same Evening* by John Musto. Five students stated they had 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic arias in their aria packages. They were “My Darling, Jim” from

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<sup>55</sup> Although *The Enchanted Pig* by Jonathon Dove was written in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, it is not American but British. It is often done in the U.S. and is therefore commonly confused with being American.

*Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo, “You Shiver” from *JFK* by David T. Little, “His Name is Jan” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, “Am I in Your Light?” from *Doctor Atomic* by John Adams, and “I Worry, That’s All” from *Fellow Travelers* by Gregory Spears. Four out of ten teachers said they also had 21<sup>st</sup>-century American arias in their packages. They were “Emily’s Aria” from *Our Town* by Ned Rorem, “Charlie’s Aria” from *Three Decembers* by Jake Heggie, and “Magnificat” from *El Niño* by John Adams.

#### Section 4: Comparison

In my analysis, I also noticed a pattern of students’ curiosity and teachers’ apprehension. Several students revealed that when their teachers were exposed to contemporary styles or had experience singing it themselves, they were more inclined to assign the repertoire to their students. Student D mentioned that their teacher was a “currently gigging musician and was encouraging of his students to pursue their own musical interests,” showcasing that their teacher was open to working on technical aspects of the repertoire they brought in. When teachers don’t have experience with a genre, there seems to be confusion on how to approach it pedagogically, which can frustrate students or potentially lead them further away through their own feelings of intimidation.

When bringing in new repertoire to a lesson, voice students may be familiar with the common voice teacher saying: “I’m not familiar with that aria, but I can help you with the diction.” Student I had an experience similar to this, saying “She [the teacher] was ok working on it when I brought it in. It [her teacher's pedagogical approach] was in an operatic style and offered an opportunity to work on English diction.” In this example, the student seemed confused and unsatisfied with their teacher's pedagogical approach in working on the

piece with them, and they used “operatic style” or classical vocal technique while working on the piece that they deemed needed a different technical approach. Working on English diction in terms of singing in a declamatory style is helpful, though it doesn’t seem that this is what the student was looking for.

The student-led assumption that 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic repertoire needs a combined approach of classical pedagogical and cross-training vocal techniques further supports the argument for vocal cross-training education and certification among voice teachers in the university system. Students' curiosity about this repertoire suggests hope for its application in their studios and careers, and the teachers’ positive attitude towards using and learning this repertoire for use in the undergraduate vocal studio points to new voice pedagogical adaptations for students and voice teachers.

These responses confirm and reflect my experiences as both a student and voice teacher. As mentioned in the introduction, I was introduced to 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera after my undergraduate education and later in my graduate studies. At both of these educational institutions, I had worked on music that my teachers knew well, or even specialized in. The undergraduate voice studio education model passes on knowledge orally and through repertoire assignments, making the students’ repertoire exposure reliant on the music their teachers assign them. As students become teachers, the cycle continues, and the same expertise is passed on to the next students, etc. However, when a teacher is curious and willing to expand their knowledge of repertoire beyond their comfort zone and into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century repertoire, this cycle is altered, thus allowing the students to be inspired to continue their own exploration of repertoire, with the technical and stylistic tools to do so.

## Chapter 4: Aria Analyses and Examples

### Introduction

To put the information discussed regarding American opera and cross training into dialogue, four aria analyses of three voice types will be addressed. Each analysis begins by discussing the aria's plot narrative and the perspective of the character singing it, elements that often determine whether the work employs genre fusion. The second section analyzes the aria's unique compositional and vocal qualities, as well as cross-training techniques that may be applied to specific phrases or as a tool for singers as they work on the piece. The third section offers supplemental exercises for pedagogical application and additional musical theater repertoire suggestions to strengthen the styles addressed in these vocal exercises.

The first two arias, “A Lucky Child” from *At the Statue of Venus* by Jake Heggie and “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, illustrate how cross-genre techniques benefit singers in performance through intermittent genre fusion. The second pair, “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli and “Congregation Aria” from *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo, examines how cross-genre training can supplement operas designed for classical technique.

### **Soprano: “A Lucky Child” from *At the Statue of Venus* by Jake Heggie**

#### Section 1: Plot Narrative and Perspective

*At the Statue of Venus* (2005) is a dramatic scene for soprano voice centered around Rose, a woman waiting at the statue of Venus in an art museum to meet a blind date. As she waits, Rose wonders anxiously if he will like her—and if she will like him. Through her

musings and inner dialogue, Rose reflects on her past experiences in life, love, and childhood. In the aria “A Lucky Child,” Rose decides to leave but hesitates as she reaches the door. In this moment of pause, she recalls the love and stability she experienced as a child, recognizing the standard of love she now knows she deserves. The aria captures this realization with a blend of musical genres, where lullaby-like melodies mix with dissonant intervals to illustrate childhood memories and her journey of self-worth. Through Rose’s memories, the aria presents a perspective rooted in nostalgia and self-discovery. Her emotional journey directly influences the vocal approach required to deliver the aria effectively.

## Section 2: Vocal Analysis

“A Lucky Child” is an excellent option for younger singers. It’s accessible, as it references genres and styles that young singers are familiar with and sing often. Vocally, the aria is composed in a classical style and has musical theater elements and melodies similar to popular music scattered throughout, while also containing CCM techniques in melodic phrases and instances of *colla voce*. For young classical singers, Jake Heggie’s vocal works are considered an excellent introduction to contemporary American musical styles, and his art songs in particular are often the first American repertoire to be assigned to students.

“A Lucky Child” offers many opportunities for different stylistic choices that can fit a singer’s developing technique and sound suitable at all stages of the singer’s vocal progress. For example, the singer can choose moments to utilize CCM vocal techniques or sing phrases with classical methods. This is especially emphasized in chromatic phrases, seen in Figure 6. The chromaticism allows the singer to use CCM vocal options and use straight tone as a

vocal color to emphasize the intervals dramatically. In this example, “loving” could be sung on a straight slide from the F#4 to the G4. The classical vocal alternative would be singing the phrase with legato and vibrato. At the tempo change, the tessitura of this section shifts a bit lower, giving a color change and alluding to an informal attitude. The singer could utilize a resonant TA-dominant musical theater style that aids clear diction, character singing, and brighter sound (Fig. 7). This switch between techniques adds to Rose’s emotional depth and emphasizes the nostalgic and serious perspective from the first section of the aria.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature. It begins at measure 656, marked with the tempo instruction *poco*. The lyrics are "lov - ing and be - ing loved". The melody for "lov - ing" is a chromatic descent: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter). The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand plays chords in the treble clef, and the left hand plays chords in the bass clef. The piano part features a chromatic bass line that mirrors the vocal line's descent.

**Figure 6:** Chromatic Phrase, “A Lucky Child” from *At the Statue of Venus* by Jake Heggie, m. 656-657.



**Figure 7:** Lower Tessitura Section Using CCM Technique to Emphasize Emotional Storytelling, “A Lucky Child” from *At the Statue of Venus* by Jake Heggie, m. 685-686.

### Section 3: Supplemental Cross-Training Teaching Material

Exercises and repertoire can support the vocal and stylistic learning of this aria. Supplemental vocal exercises for this aria can include but are not limited to TA-dominant speech/cry exercises. Spivey and Barton Saunders suggest exclamatory phrases such as “Oh no, you don’t!” or “I missed my bus!” Begin by exclaiming these phrases as speech, then add them to pitches low in the range and going up the octave, as seen in Figure 8. These exercises focus on resonating on the nuclear vowel, and the phrase gives emotional intensity that is translated into the singing when added on pitch.

Another exercise is a pentascale with an added half-step chromatic at the top. The singer will sing the pentascale using classical vocal technique before using straight tone as they go up the chromatic half step and come back down using legato classical technique. This exercise helps the singer practice switching between CCM and classical vocal techniques,

which is recommended in performances of “A Lucky Child.” Additional repertoire that aids in the switch between CCM and classical vocal techniques can include but is not limited to “Much More” from *The Fantasticks*, “A Change in Me” from *Beauty and the Beast*, or “Vanilla Ice Cream” from *She Loves Me*.

Speak (in sung pitch range) then sing:

Men: F4 -- D5

Oh no you don't! Oh no you don't! How dare you! How dare you!  
I yearn for you I yearn for you Where were you? Where were you?

Women: B4 -- G5

Oh no you don't! Oh no you don't! No way no way No way no way  
May I come in? May I come in? Never no never no Never no never no

**Figure 8:** TA-dominant/Speech Mix exercise, Spivey and Saunders Barton, 44.

## Soprano: Mama’s Misgivings from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson

### Section 1: Plot Narrative and Perspective

*The Snowy Day* (2021) is an operatic adaptation of Ezra Jack Keats's children’s book of the same name and premiered in December of 2021 at the Houston Grand Opera. The plot, a story of childlike wonder, follows Peter, a young boy who lives in New York. After waking up to an awe-inspiring snowfall, Peter asks to play outside, and Mama and Daddy follow their promise to let him go out in the snow alone. “Mama’s Misgivings” is the aria sung by Mama, who worries for her son Peter's safety but respects his need to explore the world independently.

The opera distinctly represents Latino and Black communities, allowing their experiences and points of view to resonate widely. Librettist Andrea Davis Pinkney

emphasizes this inclusive perspective, stating, “We are waking up to the idea that opera is for everyone...that, yes, this is your story, and your story, and my story, and our story.” While *The Snowy Day* primarily highlights Peter’s wonder and excitement, “Mama’s Misgivings” offers a poignant departure from this perspective, introducing a moment of maternal anxiety. When interviewed about *The Snowy Day*, composer Joel Thompson told The New York Times, “He [Peter] is a Black boy in a red hoodie going out in the snow alone. That’s Tamir Rice; that’s Trayvon Martin,” Here, Thompson makes clear that the aria’s apprehension is also culturally and racially specific. Beyond Mama’s moment of apprehension, however, the opera celebrates family and friendship in a positive, light-hearted way. Thompson notes, “We wanted to focus on Peter’s humanity and childlike wonder.”

## Section 2: Vocal Analysis

The music in *The Snowy Day* is highly romantic and lyrical, with genre fusion scattered throughout the opera. During one scene, Thompson hints at jazz rhythms, chromaticism, and popular music, even giving Peter a quick scat duet with his Mama. In “Mama’s Misgivings,” Thompson has the vocal line and orchestral accompaniment work hand in hand to bring the audience the combined warmth and worry of Mama’s contemplation. Thompson accomplishes this using jazz chords and unexpected progressions, characterizing the worrisome thoughts of Mama while providing the singer opportunities for pop and jazz vocal elements, ultimately leading to reassuringly maternal points of tonal arrival.

The aria begins with Mama humming a beautiful lullaby, a motif that can be hummed in popular vocal style and is used to build the verses in the aria (Fig. 9). The humming

blooms into large intervals that showcase Mama's depth regarding the narrative. Rubato, on large intervals, allows the singer to experiment with portamenti or vocal slides and— dare I say— MT straight tone to vibrato to emphasize emotional arrival points.<sup>56</sup> Often, these phrases begin at a soft dynamic level, allowing the singer to use CCM vocal techniques of straight tone belt that bloom into classical vibrato (Figs. 10 and 11). Arpeggiated jazz chords at the penultimate section of the aria allow the singer to pull back in volume and use a softer dynamic and jazz and CCM vocal technique (Fig.12).

**Figure 9:** “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, m. 5-7.

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<sup>56</sup> Straight tone is a CCM vocal technique often unwanted in the classical vocal singing tradition. In foundational classical vocal training, it is frequently one of the first habits of young singers that voice teachers seek to break as it interferes with desired “legato” vocal phrasing. Therefore, my statement that it can be used in an operatic genre may seem taboo to some readers.

12

1.

in - to our hearts.

**Figure 10:** “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, m. 12.

poco rit. - - - - -

You, Pe - ter. You, child. You... Got your

**Figure 11:** “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, m. 13-14.

Letting go ♩ = 52

39 *mf*

Red chest - ed bird - ie fly - ing to - day. While I watch, while I pray:

**Figure 12:** “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, m. 39-42.

## Section 2: Supplemental Cross-Training Teaching Material

“Mama’s Misgivings” is an intermediate to advanced piece that can be a great learning tool and steppingstone from contemporary musical theater pieces to more challenging 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic arias. While its composition style suggests romanticism, making use of rubato and lush orchestration, “Mama’s Misgivings” also uses popular styles by challenging interval and chord progression expectations, a great learning experience for a young artist, preparing them for repertoire in need of advanced pitch recall and complex phrasing.

To supplement one’s preparation of this aria, I recommend specific exercises that include interval leaps from one key area to another. For example singing the phrase “..and today I keep my word” into the following unexpected interval change ending on the word “But..” memorizing and/or becoming familiar with the key change will help the student prepare for these unexpected moments and sing them with confidence (Fig. 13).

The image shows a musical score for the aria "Mama's Misgivings" from the musical *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson. It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 26-27) features a vocal line starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a piano accompaniment starting with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The lyrics are "a - lone. and to -". The second system (measures 27-28) features a vocal line starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "- day I keep my word. But that does - n't mean I don't wor - ry as I see you". The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation marks, and a triplet in the vocal line.

**Figure 13:** “Mama’s Misgivings” from *The Snowy Day* by Joel Thompson, m. 26-28.

Another supplemental exercise is similar to a classical *messa di voce*, though instead of keeping the sound continuously spinning, the singer would start on straight tone, blooming into vibrato as they crescendo and back into straight tone as they diminuendo. This can help

the singer become familiar with switching CCM and classical styles and prepares them to make creative choices in the music.

Supplemental repertoire includes, but is not limited to, “Baby Moon” by Adam Guettel, “Satisfied” from *Hamilton*, and “Will There Really Be a Morning?” by Ricky Ian Gordon.

### **Mezzo-Soprano: “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli**

#### Section 1: Plot Narrative and Perspective

*Breaking the Waves* (2016), an opera by Missy Mazzoli, is based on Lars von Trier’s film of the same name. It tells the story of Bess McNeill, a young woman who falls deeply in love and marries Jan, an oil rig worker. Jan’s sister, Dodo, is a steadfast friend and confidant to Bess. Set on the remote, deeply religious Isle of Skye in Scotland, the opera explores the characters’ struggles within their conservative community.

In “Golden Heart,” Dodo’s Act One aria, she raises a toast to Bess during the wedding celebration, expressing her heartfelt support and love for her dearest friend. Dodo’s perspective as a supporting character is important, as she sees herself as a protector of Bess, referring to Jan as the one who might hurt her. This is interesting, as Bess ends up on a path of self-sabotage and destruction, and Dodo finds she cannot defend Bess from herself.

#### Section 2: Vocal Analysis

The music in *Breaking the Waves* is heavily influenced by the nature of the landscape where the story takes place, with rolling, repetitious melodies and motifs that move like the sea. The libretto by Royce Vavrek is also repetitious, with phrases that act as character

motifs. For instance, Dodo repeats the phrase “Bess, you have a golden heart” throughout the aria (Fig. 9). The music is generally moody, adding to the northern Scottish isle vibe of the intended landscape. This aria utilizes minimalism and often has unexpected intervals to bring out the overall mood of isolation, both in reference to the location and alluding to what is to come, as Bess is later cast out of her church community.

“Golden Heart” emphasizes speech cadence, with Mazzoli using elongated vowels on key melismatic lines to highlight textual meaning. Examples include the aria's opening, “You have a golden heart” (Fig. 9), and the line “You made me feel welcome” (Fig. 15). To navigate the challenging open “O” vowel for words such as “golden” and “welcome,” which land in middle voice, such as C#5 moving down to E#4 (Fig. 14), singers may apply CCM vowel modification techniques. Shaping the “O” more towards an “Uh” provides legato ease, keeps the connection to TA muscles, and allows for a chest-dominant mix toward the phrase’s end. The same occurs on the word “Me” in measure 17 (Fig. 15).

*opening up, more comfortable*

*mp*

You have a golden heart.

**Figure 14:** Elongated vowels and the repetition of “You have a golden heart” as a character motif. “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, m. 6-8

17

3

you made me \_\_\_\_\_ feel wel - come...

**Figure 15:** Elongated vowels in “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, m. 17-18.

Much of the storytelling in the aria takes place in the middle voice, creating a natural, speech-like quality. At the end of the aria, Dodo proclaims, “If Jan doesn’t keep you warm and take care of you, I will kill him,” (Fig. 16) and “I love you very much” (Fig. 17). These moments require a TA-dominant mix or chest voice and lend themselves well to a half-spoken/half-sung approach reminiscent of CCM or musical theater style.

(smiles)

I will kill him.

**Figure 16:** Speech-like vocal line rooted in a TA-Dominant Mix in “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, m. 56.

*mp* raising her glass

I love you ver - y much.

*p*

**Figure 17:** Speech-like vocal line rooted in a TA-Dominant Mix in “Golden Heart” from *Breaking the Waves* by Missy Mazzoli, m. 60-62

### Section 3: Supplemental Cross-Training Teaching Material

Supplemental CCM exercises or repertoire for this aria could include TA-dominant vocal exercises such as vocal fry and ascending penta-scales on “muh” or “nuh,” which engage the thyroarytenoid muscle. Vocal fry strengthens the TA and can give foundational depth to TA-dominant mixed voice when done in vocal exercises over time. I’ve used this in my own instruction and found commonality with Dr. Napier, who, when asked in our virtual interview, “Do you find that classical vocal techniques transfer well to CCM? How about the reverse—do CCM techniques influence classical singing?” she said vocal fry is a technique she’s found in CCM training that strengthens both classical and CCM styles.<sup>57</sup>

“Vocal fry is a great example of something I have learned from CCM techniques I had never heard about in classical training. It’s very beneficial regardless of what style you’re singing in, as it strengthens the inner muscles of the vocal fold muscles. It improves your tone and lower register and relieves tension.”

Dr. Napier recommends “door creaking,” i.e. imitating the sound of a door creaking from a lower pitch and up.

Another of Barton and Spivey’s exercises, “Reinforcing the Core Voice,” (Fig. 18) starts low in the chest voice on a G3, moving up in thirds to a D4 and back down while shifting from an “Eh” vowel to an “Ah.” This exercise builds the “Core Voice,” helping to extend the chest voice range and strengthen the TA-dominant mix essential for CCM vocal techniques in this aria. Supplemental repertoire recommendations that can aid in singing this aria include “A Fine, Fine Line” from *Avenue Q*, “Children Will Listen” from *Into the Woods*, and “The Wizard and I” from *Wicked*.

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<sup>57</sup> All questions and answers to the virtual interview with Dr. Dione Napier can be found in Appendix B.

## Exercise 3: Reinforcing the Core Voice

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Men: G2 -- F4

Women: G3 -- G4

Eh Ah Eh Ah Eh Ah

Eh Ah Eh Ah Eh Ah

**Figure 18:** Reinforcing the Core Voice from *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* by Spivey and Barton, 43.

### Baritone: “Congregation Aria” from *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo

#### Section 1: Plot Narrative and Perspective

*Glory Denied* (2005) is an opera based on Tom Philpott’s biography of Jim Thompson. Thompson was known as America’s longest-held prisoner of war in Vietnam from 1964 to 1973. In act two, Jim comes home after nearly nine years as a prisoner of war to a completely different situation. Everyone dear to him thinks he has been dead, and his family, including his wife Alyce, has moved on without him. In this act-two aria, Jim is back at his home church and thanks the congregation for the warm welcome while describing his desire for a similar life.

While giving the audience a direct line to the protagonist’s mental state by using music to create character complexities, Cipullo successfully creates a commentary on current events, making Jim, a prisoner of war, relatable. Jim is highly critical of the quickly changing America of the 1970s and yearns for a simple life with his family. His heroism cannot

balance out his inability to cope with change, a tragic stipulation for the protagonist.

Although these plot elements don't lead Cipullo to use genre fusion, Jim's perspective and speech to the congregation leads Cipullo to compose with a declamatory approach to the vocal line that can be assisted by cross-training vocal techniques.

## Section 2: Vocal Analysis

Cipullo writes vocal phrases in the "Congregation Aria" that seem like the singer is simply singing a speech to his church family, making the vocal execution highly conversational with the orchestration. Tom Cipullo has stated that vocal lyricism is the primary goal of his operatic compositional process and that he tries to place voices in ranges and textures where they will not be covered but heard well. This is prevalent throughout the aria, placing climatic elements of the libretto high in the voice on held pitches to convey emotion before switching back to the speech-like rhythms that convey the story. This can be seen in measures 10-12, using mixed-meter and triplets (Fig. 19). The rhythmic characteristics are written to be sung as they would be said in a conversation or speech, similar to musical theater compositions. CCM declamatory vocal exercises can reinforce the vocal consistency needed to convey this (Fig. 19). Cipullo composed *Glory Denied* by taking special care when composing for the voice, foregrounding emotional lyricism and text expression. He uses an extended range, opting for color change on sensitive words and phrases, such as in "I've come home" in Figure 20. The singer must have control of falsetto and the upper range of their voice to accomplish this.

10

nor do I de - serve such a tre - men - dous wel - come home.

*p*

**Figure 19:**  
 “Congregation Aria” from *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo, m. 10-12.

*riten. molto*

s, I've come home.

*ppp*

*pppp*

**Figure 20:** “Congregation Aria” from *Glory Denied* by Tom Cipullo, m. 49-53

### Section 3: Supplemental Cross-Training Teaching Material

Although genre fusion is not used in this composition, CCM vocal techniques and exercises are still valued and needed in its preparation and performance. This aria is an advanced example of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic repertoire and is recommended for upper-division undergraduate baritones preparing for the young artist audition circuit.

“Congregation Aria” is an insightful addition to an aria package as it showcases a student's ability to sing 21<sup>st</sup>-century music and fulfills English aria audition requirements.

Supplemental exercises in preparing this aria would first isolate the text as a speech, memorize it, and recite it as such. Because this aria is thematically sung as a speech pattern, it is important to rehearse it this way. As previously mentioned, the rhythms, unless held for emotion conveyance, are written according to how the words would be spoken in conversation. Another exercise that can be used strengthens the transition through the passagio to the upper register while using a TA-dominant technique, also known as chest-mix, to convey a clear declamatory phrase. The singer can exclaim an emotionally charged phrase such as “How dare you!” as if calling to someone across a room. This exclamation can be added to pitches, keeping the closed vowel on the highest note (Fig. 21).

## Objective #4: The Speech (or "Chest") Mix

*Traversing the passaggio (F4 -- Bb5)*

*(Thyroaretnoid/Mode 1 Dominant on closed vowels and vowel phrases)*

Speak: F4 -- Bb5

"Oh *no* you don't!"

"I *yearn* for you!"

"How *dare* you!"

"Where *were* you?"

"*Wait* for me!"

"*Where* were you?"

"Did you *see* that?"

"Can you *hear* that?"

"Where are you *going*?"

- **Emphasizing closed vowel**

- **Clear, dramatic intention!**

- **Eke out more range *gradually***

*These phrases will feel pinched in the beginning and difficult to speak with ease.*

*We are training the speaking and singing range at the same time.*

*Most boys will instinctively open or yell all sounds above the passaggio.*

Then Sing:

Oh no you don't!  
I yearn for you!

Oh no you don't!  
I yearn for you!

How dare you!  
Where were you?

How dare you!  
Where were you?

Wait for me!  
Where were you?

Wait for me!  
Where were you?

Did you see that?

Did you see that?

**Figure 21:** Traversing the passaggio exercise from *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act* by Spivey and Barton, 132.

Lastly, exercises that alternate between CT-dominant and TA-dominant qualities, such as a “Yah-hoo!” on C4 up to G4 and back down, prepare singers for the aria’s high tessitura. This exercise from Figure 21 or Figure 22 can be done in correlation with the aria excerpt from Figure 20, which demands such control of switching between falsetto and chest. In the aria phrase, you can see this is needed, especially on the phrase “I’ve come home!” Supplemental repertoire well suited to working on TA-dominant CCM vocal techniques and



## Conclusion

21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera serves as a conduit for applying cross-training techniques. Through genre fusion, opera conveys emotional narratives, diverse perspectives, and relationships that resonate with American audiences. Even when genre fusion is absent, composers often prioritize English text, using declamatory or minimalist styles to evoke emotion and convey meaning. Cross-genre pedagogy in American opera has become essential for singers as genre fusion is not merely a stylistic choice but an integral part of character and narrative development. Teaching this repertoire in the undergraduate vocal studio equips students with confidence in approaching contemporary styles, reducing the anxiety or hesitancy often associated with modern pieces.

In the undergraduate studio, cross-training becomes a valuable technical tool for teaching students to sing a variety of repertoires that will likely benefit their performance careers. One market study reveals that musical theater and CCM continue to rise, comprising up to 95.5% of performances.<sup>58</sup> Developing these repertoires and techniques provides young artists with a competitive edge in the marketplace and enhances their emotive and artistic vocal abilities. Voice teachers who integrate cross-genre pedagogical knowledge prepare their students for broader futures as performers and educators, equipping them with informed technical foundations to pass on to the next generation.

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Opera Questionnaire data showed that cross-training often directly depended on the studio teachers' familiarity or their own technical training in contemporary styles and musical theater. If the teacher was unfamiliar, the repertoire taught

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<sup>58</sup> Cobb, 11.

in studios was limited to “standard” classical repertoire from the 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including art songs and operatic arias. Students with teachers who advocated for new music or CCM vocal techniques had a much easier time expanding their repertoire.

Though my questionnaire did not focus on cross-training, further research will supplement my findings regarding American opera, especially how voice teachers and students interact with cross-training in the undergraduate studio. At the beginning of my research, I approached the questionnaire and my findings with the intent of writing this document solely concerning 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera in the undergraduate studio. As my research developed, I wanted to understand more about the vocal techniques needed to sing it. Research on the repertoire itself became complementary to the method of singing. In further exploration of this topic, I hope to send out another questionnaire that focuses primarily on the application of cross-training in the studio.

Further work on my findings will involve developing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Operatic Online Database, where teachers and students can easily access information on arias. Organized by voice type, the database will provide invaluable resources, including where to purchase or download the music online, links to practice tracks available for purchase or request via [projectvocemoderna.com](http://projectvocemoderna.com), tessitura and range, premiere dates, recordings, and, when possible, details on where the work is scheduled to be programmed in upcoming seasons.

When analyzing the data collected from the 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Opera Questionnaire, teachers expressed marked frustration with the accessibility of modern repertoire. They also voiced doubts about their students' ability to handle complicated intervals, key changes, and other musical complexities. To address these concerns, this

database will guide teachers in identifying suitable repertoire for their students and provide students with the agency to research pieces with sparse performance history. The project will be a living database hosted on Google Sheets, which will automatically update as new information is added. It will be shared on my professional website and through social media groups specifically used by young artists.<sup>59</sup>

Analyzing examples of popular 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic arias in tandem with evidence from Spivey and Saunders Barton's book, *Cross-Training in the Voice Studio: A Balancing Act*, demonstrated that this repertoire can be assigned in the studio to incorporate cross-training. My aria analyses give specific examples of genre fusion and declamatory compositional styles, which can also be found in CCM and popular repertoire and taught using supplemental exercises and repertoire.

Cross-training is the technical vocal education approach that combines classical and contemporary pedagogical teaching styles. Its application in the classroom through 21<sup>st</sup>-century American opera can help students further their connection and perspective of a representative American identity. Integrating modern styles of opera and other musical genres prepares students by broadening their vocal expertise and versatility, opening the door to cross-genre job opportunities. As American opera develops, so must the pedagogical approach of the teachers teaching it. The future of American opera and that of the American undergraduate voice studio are connected, both diverse and evolving.

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<sup>59</sup> My professional website is [www.arianahornersutherland.com](http://www.arianahornersutherland.com), it is listed under the tab "21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Aria Database."

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## Appendix A: Data Collection Questions and Answers

### 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Opera Questionnaire: Questions and Answers

The following questions were sent to various students, faculty, and colleagues via Google Forms. There were 38 respondents.

The respondents had to first respond to a preliminary series of questions, directing them to the appropriate survey section, one for “Teachers,” “Current Students,” and “Past Students.”

#### What level of degree do you hold?

- Bachelors (Currently Pursuing)
- Bachelors
- Masters
- Doctorate (PhD)

#### Do you have a Performers Certificate (Artist Diploma)?

- Yes
- No

#### How would you classify your undergraduate school?

- Conservatory
- Public Institution
- Private Institution

#### What region was/is your undergraduate located in?

- Northeast
- Southeast
- Midwest
- Southwest
- Northwest
- Alaska/Hawaii/Puerto Rico

#### How will you be filling out this form?

- I am a Current University Voice Student
- I am a Past University Student
- I am a Voice Teacher
- I am both a Past Student and a Voice Teacher

### **For Teachers**

As a voice teacher, have you ever given/instructed an undergraduate student (upper-division) on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria? (examples include works by Jake Heggie, John Adams, and Missy Mazzoli) If so, what were they?

**Teacher A:** “Honestly, I thought I had, but I think I’ve only assigned 21<sup>st</sup> century art songs (Heggie, Gordon, Adams, Cipullo, etc.) , and mainly 20<sup>th</sup> century arias.”

**Teacher B:** “No.”

**Teacher C:** “No.”

**Teacher D:** “No.”

**Teacher E:** “No.”

**Teacher F:** “No.”

**Teacher G:** “I have not. Majority of my students have been elementary to high school level and if they were older than that, we were not in a classical repertoire setting.”

**Teacher H:** “Menotti: The Black Swan (The Medium) • Monica's Waltz (The Medium) – Moore: Willow Song (The Ballad of Baby Doe) • The Silver Aria (The Ballad of Baby Doe) – Mechem: Fair Robin, I love (Tartuffe).”<sup>60</sup>

**Teacher I:** “I don’t remember.”

**Teacher J:** “No, this was my first semester as a collegiate Professor at a small liberal arts school”

If not, would you ever consider giving/instructing an undergraduate student (upper-division) on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria?

**Teacher A:** “Yes.”

**Teacher B:** “Yes.”

**Teacher C:** “Yes.”

**Teacher D:** “Yes.”

**Teacher E:** “Yes.”

**Teacher F:** “Yes.”

**Teacher G:** “Yes.”

**Teacher H:** “Yes.”

**Teacher I:** “Yes.”

**Teacher J:** “No.”

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<sup>60</sup> The respondent was mistaken and listed 20<sup>th</sup>- Century American Aria’s.

What factors would influence your decision to teach a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria to an upper-division undergraduate student?

**Teacher A:** “I think 21<sup>st</sup> century composers are an amazing resource because you can directly contact the composer for deeper insight or background. I would assign a 21-century aria to a student who has developed vocally to handle the demands of the repertoire, who has developed their performance and interpretative maturity and exploration. However, I would also assign listening and exploration activities to all my students to grow an interest and ear recognition in these composers.”

**Teacher B:** “If it fit my students voice well.”

**Teacher C:** “Easy access to the repertoire. My current library has very little 21<sup>st</sup> century aria rep. I tend to have more art songs in my collection.”

**Teacher D:** “I would absolutely consider giving an undergrad student a 21<sup>st</sup> century aria, if I thought they could handle it musically and tonally. The students I teach are community college students who have yet to transfer to four-year universities, so they are all beginners. It is generally best to set up beginners for success by giving them music that is tonal and melodic. Additionally, the biggest issue with community college students is that they have strict time requirements for their pieces at the institution where I teach for their student recitals. Therefore, short (2-3 minute) songs are best for their purposes, (as beginners with time restrictions), as it's rare to find short arias in any compositional period.”

**Teacher E:** “They typically need one in an audition package. Also if the text has something that the student can connect to in their personal lives”

**Teacher F:** “Musicality & difficulty, accompaniment.”

**Teacher G:** “What qualities does the singer have or are working that that the aria will strengthen and/or build.”

**Teacher H:** “Unpredictable pitches that they should be responsible for and should be introduced to right away, especially if they want a career in singing! Another factor is that the students need to be more familiar with newer music from their time period.”

**Teacher I:**” Is this Aria something that they will use beyond in audition? In other words, will this opera ever be done? Does the Aria fit the voice? That’s true of any Aria though.”

**Teacher J:** “It totally depends on the student and the institution. I teach at a small private liberal arts school and many students don't have the musicianship skills to learn 21-st century arias. If I were teaching at a place like CCM or IU, then perhaps yes, because many of the fundamental musicianship skills would be much stronger.”

As an undergraduate student, were you ever given a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria by your teacher? (If you were in your undergraduate program in the 21<sup>st</sup> century)

If so, what piece did you work on?

**Teacher B:** “No”

**Teacher C:** “No. I graduated in 2008 with my undergrad, so had 20<sup>th</sup> century rep.”

**Teacher D:** “No”

**Teacher E:** “No”

**Teacher F:** “No”

**Teacher G:** “Steal me sweet thief although that may be 20<sup>th</sup> century...”

**Teacher H:** “Yes - Laurie's Song from The Tenderlands.”

**Teacher I:** “I was not an undergraduate in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.”

**Teacher J:** “No. In undergrad I sang "I want magic" which is late 20<sup>th</sup> century”

If not, would you have liked to sing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria? Why or why not?  
(If you did sing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria, put N/A)

**Teacher B:** “Yes”

**Teacher C:** “If my undergraduate degree was a bit farther into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then yes.”

**Teacher D:** “Yes I would have liked to, but for me, I was in my undergrad from 2004-2008, so I was ignorant myself of 21<sup>st</sup> century modern music currently being written at the time. I sung a lot of songs and arias by Aaron Copland, Richard Hundley, Dominick Argento, Menotti arias, Kirk Mechem, Sondheim, and many other 20<sup>th</sup> century composers, but I think neither me or my teacher were aware of "new" music being written at the time.”

**Teacher E:** “Maybe! I mainly learned art song and some Mozart arias in undergrad. I do feel grateful that I didn't start touching a ton of arias until my master's degree because then I didn't have any old habits with them. For educational purposes though, I would have liked to at least sing through one in a voice lesson or two.”

**Teacher F:** “Yes, I would have loved to explore music that was written in my lifetime, connecting to modern composers, social matters, and emotional themes today (even if cyclical and prevalent through all time periods)”

**Teacher G:** “I would have loved to dive into those pieces more! There's a freshness that American operatic arias provide while also working on various techniques that I think are valuable.”

**Teacher H:** “N/A”

**Teacher I:** “N/A”

**Teacher J:** “No, it intimidated me at the time”

Did your undergraduate instructor seem comfortable assigning a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria? What factors influenced their comfort level, in your opinion?

**Teacher B:** “Yes.”

**Teacher C:** “I think for my undergraduate degree, the timing was too early. I like to see an aria, survived the test of time a bit before assigning it to an undergraduate student. At that level, I like to use more standardized literature at that level, since they will have easier access to it.”

**Teacher D:** “I was given PLENTY of 20<sup>th</sup> century music, but no 21<sup>st</sup> century. To be fair, when I was an undergrad, it was 2004-2008, so we weren't that far into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to begin with and I think that's also a factor. I wouldn't call my undergrad teacher a modern music expert by any means, so I think on her part it was lack of awareness and research of new music. I think most voice teachers, especially middle aged established ones, are most comfortable teaching what they know, and what they and their peers have sung and taught the most. This would not, in my teacher's case, have included brand new pieces.”

**Teacher E:** “He was more comfortable assigning 21<sup>st</sup> century art songs. I think it was his level of piano playing that affected it, as well as lack of repertoire knowledge in this way. But when you'd bring him something, he 100% would always be excited and happy to work on repertoire that was unfamiliar to him.”

**Teacher F:** “No, most of them were older, so 20<sup>th</sup>-century music was more known to them.”

**Teacher G:** “I'm not exactly sure. I think they would be if they had more access to those arias. But also, my undergrad was every art song based.”

**Teacher H:** “Yes - I think it was because it was more predictable. There are some arias that are so difficult to learn because of tonality.”

**Teacher I:** “N/A”

**Teacher J:** “Yes.”

Did you ever perform in any 21<sup>st</sup>-century productions in your undergraduate? If so, what were they?

**Teacher B:** “No.”

**Teacher C:** “No. But I did shortly after my MA, around 2012.”

**Teacher D:** “No.”

**Teacher E:** “No.”

**Teacher F:** “Yes, Ainadamar – Golijov”

**Teacher G:** “To my knowledge, no.”

**Teacher H:** “Yes - Laurie's Song from The Tenderlands.”

**Teacher I:** “No. I was not an undergraduate in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.”

**Teacher J:** “No.”

Do you have a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria in your audition package? If so, what is it? If you don't have an audition package, fill out the question as N/A

**Teacher B:** “N/A”

**Teacher C:** “N/A”

**Teacher D:** “I have included Emily's Aria from Ned Rorem's "Our Town" in past auditions, but I don't use it anymore. That was a piece I discovered myself-- it was never assigned to me by a teacher. I have offered the Magnificat from John Adam's "El Nino" in my auditions before, but it's technically an oratorio. I also discovered this myself and took the initiative to learn it.”

**Teacher E:** “Charlie's Aria from Three Decembers”

**Teacher F:** “Emily's aria - Our Town.”

**Teacher G:** “No but I want to work on a few pieces”

**Teacher H:** “N/A”

**Teacher I:** “N/A”

**Teacher J:** “Yes, Adelaide's Aria from the enchanted pig”

Any other comments?

**Teacher A:** “Good luck! I adore living composers.”

**Teacher B:** “N/A”

**Teacher C:** “I think my undergraduate experience was just at the cusp. And so literature had not been tested much yet I thoroughly enjoyed singing 20<sup>th</sup> century music, however.”

**Teacher D:** “I think the hesitance of teachers to assign 21<sup>st</sup> century rep to young singers is mostly based on their ignorance of the repertoire or its availability (remember that it won't be public domain, and may often be difficult to obtain scores). A lot of voice teachers are outside their comfort zones when trying to teach a piece they've never sung, or they don't know well. Also, they might assume the pieces are very difficult (and sometimes they are, especially for undergrads or beginners) and assume it's above their student's heads without doing any research on the opera or the arias.”

**Teacher E:** “I think 21<sup>st</sup> century arias are wonderful, now that I do have some in my aria package. I just wish panels would choose them more often if they are going to require them. I also think it is on the composers to write music that isn't a nightmare to sightread or to excerpt. They don't HAVE to do this, but it is a contributing factor for myself and many singers I know when choosing which 21<sup>st</sup> century arias to prepare. Often, the arias that are audition friendly, like Charlie's Aria, are VERY commonly offered. So that's a good sign that there is a desire from singers to include this era of music in their audition packages.”

**Teacher F:** “You go girl!”

**Teacher G:** “This is so cool! I'm excited to see what your results are!”

**Teacher H:** “N/A”

**Teacher I:** “No.”

**Teacher J:** “N/A”

### **Students (Current and Past)**

As an undergraduate student, have you ever been given a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria by your teacher? If so, what aria?

**Student A:** “No.”

**Student B:** “No.”

**Student C:** “No.”

**Student D:** “No.”

**Student E:** “No.”

**Student F:** “No.”

**Student G:** “I was cast as Ruth (cover) in Dark Sisters, I also sought out “You Shiver” from JFK”

**Student H:** “Yes. Marie Antoinette’s Arias from Ghosts of Versailles”

**Student I:** No, I have self selected one- His Name is Jan by Missy Mazzoli”

**Student J:** “E Spetacolo Strano- later the same evening”

**Student K:** “No.”

**Student L:** “Not as an undergrad”

**Student M:** “No.”

**Student N:** “Yes, I was given My Darling Jim (Cipullo) and Emily's Aria (Rorem)”

**Student O:** “No.”

**Student P:** “No.”

**Student Q:** “No.”

**Student R:** “No.”

**Student S:** “Monica’s Waltz”

**Student T:** “No.”

**Student U:** “No.”

**Student V:** “No.”

**Student W:** “What will it be for me from Regina”

**Student X:** “No.”

**Student Y:** “No.”

**Student Z:** “No.”

**Past Student A:** “One was suggested by teacher but never actually worked on”

**Past Student B:** “No.”

If not, would you like to sing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria?

**Student A:** “Yes.”

**Student B:** “Yes.”

**Student C:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student D:** “Yes.”

**Student E:** “Yes.”

**Student F:** “Yes.”

**Student G:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student H:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student I:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student J:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student K:** “Yes.”

**Student L:** “Yes.”

**Student M:** “Yes.”

**Student N:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student O:** “Yes.”

**Student P:** “Yes.”

**Student Q:** “No.”

**Student R:** “Yes.”

**Student S:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student T:** “Yes.”

**Student U:** “Yes.”

**Student V:** “Yes.”

**Student W:** “I’ve worked on a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria”

**Student X:** “Yes.”

**Student Y:** “Yes.”

**Student Z:** “Yes.”

**Past Student A:** “I felt a bit intimidated by new music but I might’ve liked to have help navigating it”

**Past Student B:** “Yes! A more modern opera piece would have been great”

Did your undergraduate instructor seem comfortable assigning a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria? What factors influenced their comfort level, in your opinion?

**Student A:** “I think if I were to be assigned a 21<sup>st</sup>-century aria, it would be to build my aria repertoire.”

**Student B:** “No, and it seems like a general unfamiliarity was the main source of discomfort”

**Student C:** “No. It was not part of standard rep and was therefore not useful, in their opinion. 21<sup>st</sup> Century opera also holds the stigma that it is musically too complex or not nearly complex enough, and only existed in those polarities.”

**Student D:** “Yes, he was a currently-gigging musician and was encouraging of his students to pursue their own musical interests.”

**Student E:** “No they did not”

**Student F:** “There was a lack of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century arias and the fact of their roles, as well as heavy debate over my fach at the time.”

**Student G:** “I sought it out, my teacher was thrilled and emphasized the importance of having it on a package”

**Student H:** “Not really. They weren’t familiar with any.”

**Student I:** “She was ok working on it when I brought it in. It was in an operatic style and offered an opportunity to work on English diction”

**Student J:** “Our program performed a lot of new works so it was pretty standard to assign and work on.”

**Student K:** “Yes, I’ve done lots of 20<sup>th</sup> century contemporary, we just haven’t had the time really to work on a new English piece.”

**Student L:** “I think in my instance I was so young in undergrad, my teacher was hesitant to give arias in general because we wanted to solidify technique first.”

**Student M:** “He’s assigned me contemporary art songs! and is very adamant about recognizing different marginalized groups in music as well as doing the music of today.”

**Student N:** “Yes. My teacher sang a lot of this rep herself, so she was familiar with the body of work.”

**Student O:** “Yes, although my professor likes offering up the classics to build a workable rep list, they’re also supportive of modern work”

**Student P:** “I’m not sure! I’m a first year so the main focus seems to be on laying down basic rep for my voice type so I can’t imagine 21<sup>st</sup> century opera fitting into it.”

**Student Q:** “N/A”

**Student R:** “No, they did not know the arias or potential arias-especially for larger voices”

**Student S:** “My teacher was a new music specialist, yet didn’t seem comfortable assigning me newest rep. When I asked for an English aria she gave me the Menotti. I think she felt I wasn’t ready for it.”

**Student T:** “I feel like it was lack of knowledge on 21<sup>st</sup> century operas that caused them to not assign any arias from them.”

**Student U:** “N/A”

**Student V:** “I’m not sure. To my knowledge, most rep learned in the studio was composed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.”

**Student W:** “No, they taught it more musical theater like which didn’t really serve the aria well.”

**Student X:** “Yes and No. My instructor assigned lots of 21<sup>st</sup> century art song, but stuck to more traditionally assigned arias.”

**Student Y:** “My undergraduate instructor assigned other people in my studio 21<sup>st</sup> century arias but I was not personally assigned one. She was definitely not uncomfortable with me performing them, I just didn’t have a need for it at this point in my vocal studies.”

**Student Z:** “They do seem comfortable. I have been given both late 20<sup>th</sup>-century and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century art song so if I had ever been given an aria I’m sure it would have been fine.”

**Past Student A:** “I think she would’ve been comfortable assigning it (probably not super experimental stuff though) but was more interested in technical aspects of pieces from earlier periods”

**Past Student B:** “No, it was not a common practice in my studio. We didn’t do a ton of arias in general actually.”

Did you ever perform in any 21<sup>st</sup>-century productions in your undergraduate institution?  
If so, what were they?

**Student A:** “Not Yet”

**Student B:** “No.”

**Student C:** “N/A”

**Student D:** “No.”

**Student E:** “No.”

**Student F:** “I sang the chorus in a new work reading of Hometown to the World”

**Student G:** “Not in undergrad”

**Student H:** “I world premiered an opera in my undergrad!”

**Student I:** “No.”

**Student J:** “Later that Same Evening”

**Student K:** “Im going to be in Dark Sisters this spring”

**Student L:** “N/A”

**Student M:** “Dark Sisters by Nico Muhly”

**Student N:** “No.”

**Student O:** “No.”

**Student P:** “Not yet!”

**Student Q:** “Dark Sisters by Nico Muhly”

**Student R:** “In undergraduate, no. Masters yes.”

**Student S:** “No.”

**Student T:** “No.”

**Student U:** “La Passion de Simone (Saariaho)”

**Student V:** “No.”

**Student W:** “No, I was never given the opportunity”

**Student X:** “I performed scenes from Proving Up by Missy Mazzoli”

**Student Y:** “No.”

**Student Z:** “No.”

**Past Student A:** “Yes, two short operas commissioned for our ensemble, Boughs by Tanner Porter and The Yellow Wallpaper by Nicole Balsirow”

**Past Student B:** “No.”

Do you have a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American operatic aria in your audition package? If so, what is it? If you don't have an audition package, fill out the question as N/A

**Student A:** “N/A”

**Student B:** “No, but I’ll be adding one this year.”

**Student C:** “Yes, My Darling Jim”

**Student D:** “N/A”

**Student E:** “N/A”

**Student F:** “Currently, no, but hoping to change that.”

**Student G:** “ You Shiver – JFK”

**Student H:** “N/A”

**Student I:** “Yes, His Name is Jan by Missy Mazzoli”

**Student J:** “No, but I have 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

**Student K:** “No, but I want to do Am I in Your Light?”

**Student L:** “Yes, I have ‘I worry, that’s all’ by Gregory Spears

**Student M:** “N/A”

**Student N:** “N/A”

**Student O:** “N/A”

**Student P:** “N/A”

**Student Q:** “N/A”

**Student R:** “N/A”

**Student S:** “Yes. No Word from Tom”

**Student T:** “N/A”

**Student U:** “N/A”

**Student V:** “N/A”

**Student W:** “The previous aria from Regina”

**Student X:** “N/A”

**Student Y:** “N/A”

**Student Z:** “N/A”

**Past Student A:** “No, just 20<sup>th</sup> century”

**Past Student B:** “N/A”

Any other comments?

**Student J:** “I feel like I am assigned and work on far more 21<sup>st</sup> century songs than arias”

**Student Z:** “I have performed in a 20<sup>th</sup> century production and have performed in various musical and 20<sup>th</sup>-century opera scenes for our opera scenes production, but that is the closest I have gotten to 21<sup>st</sup>-century other than art song.”

## Appendix B: Interview Questions and Answers

During a virtual Zoom meeting with Dr. Dione Napier on September 30th, we engaged in an in-depth discussion about classical and CCM pedagogies in academia. To keep this document concise, I have included only the relevant questions and answers. For additional details, the full interview is available on Dr. Napier's YouTube channel, accessible here: <https://youtu.be/CfF9eeicAz8>

1. Could you share more about your educational and professional background as well as what inspired your transition from training as a classical voice teacher to teaching classical singers Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) singing styles?

“I got my Undergraduate at Middle Tennessee University, Masters at CCM, DMA at the University of Kentucky... I thought I had this degree. Now what?”

“I was drawn to the business side of things, and so I started teaching private voice lessons and realized my students don't want to sing classical music, and all I know is how to teach bel canto singing, that's it.”

“Even my own voice... I knew when I sang musical theater, my voice was not hitting, I knew it was not the right sound, and I would be uncomfortable, I would be embarrassed...It got me thinking I got these degrees, but I can't sing these styles anymore. Why?”

“These experiences inspired me to educate myself: how are these commercial music singers making these sounds? Let me go learn how to do it”

“I need to figure out how to serve my students because they don't want to sing arias; they don't want to sing classical music. I need to know those skills, I need to know the language to be able to impart it to them so that they can get the results they want. My students didn't understand classical vocal pedagogy terms. I needed a simple language that they can understand and digest, and that will produce a result.”

2. Do you find that classical vocal techniques transfer well to CCM? How about the reverse—do CCM techniques influence classical singing?

There is definitely an overlap between classical technique and CCM techniques, particularly the goal. We want the voice to be free of excess tension and that is foundational in both classical and in commercial teaching styles. Also, smoothing vocal registers such as ‘Passagi or bridge’, dynamic variation, overall vocal and dynamic control. Even breathing pedagogical techniques, particularly as it pertains to belting. I have found that CCM techniques often have a positive influence on classical voices. Traditional universities usually tell us [teachers] to stay away from it [CCM vocal techniques]... But my classical singers, when they start cross-training they recognize ‘Oh, my classical voice is improving!’”

“One of my students in Germany who has been singing there for ten years told me once she started using vocal fry exercises, ‘Wow, this cleans up my classical technique’. There is such a benefit in cross-training.”

“Vocal fry is a great example of something I have learned from CCM techniques I had never heard about in classical training. It’s very beneficial regardless of what style you’re singing in, as it strengthens the inner muscles of the vocal fold muscles. It improves your tone and lower register and relieves tension.”