



Debra Greschner

Jones, Randye. *So You Want to Sing Spirituals*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. Paper, xvii, 288 pp., \$40.00. ISBN 978-1-5381-0734-8 www.rowman.com

So You Want to Sing Spirituals is the nineteenth volume in the series produced under the auspices of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). This book offers guidance in the performance of spirituals by presenting historical background and characteristics of the repertoire, an overview of the composers and singers who have arranged and presented the songs, and resources for further study. Author Randye Jones has conducted extensive research into the genre and is the creator of the online sites Spirituals Database and Afrocentric Voices in Classical Music.

The author begins by addressing the ongoing debate as to whether spirituals belong on the concert stage. She explains that some of the opposition arises from the belief that the songs should remain as untouched folk music, while others question whether

the music (which has been the basis of most of the popular music in the United States) merits inclusion in concert repertoire. Jones is an advocate for performing spirituals alongside standard Western literature. She underlines, however, that the repertoire must be researched and prepared as carefully as any other genre. To this end, she offers a brief overview of the history of the spiritual, from its African roots, through its development in the United States to its adoption as concert music for soloists and choral ensembles. She gives information about musicians who contributed to the propagation of the spiritual, such as composers H. T. Burleigh, Hall Johnson, and Roland Hayes, and singers Marion Anderson, Paul Robeson, and Dorothy Maynor, as well as the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Hall Johnson Choir. Spirituals can be categorized by subject matter and by biblical text; Jones provides examples of prevalent themes.

The author offers historical perspective on dialect, along with factors to consider when deciding how much should be used in performance. The overriding concern, Jones emphasizes, is that text is intelligible to the audience. She recommends that performers consult the article “The African-American Spiritual: Preparation and Performance Considerations,” by Rosephanye Dunn-Powell (*Journal of Singing* 61, no. 5 [May/June 2005]: 471). Further discussion of diction in a chapter penned by contributor Felicia Barber, director of choral activities at Westfield University, proffers both historical background and guidance in performance practice of African American English (AAE), the dialect used in most spirituals.

Seven other guests contributed chapters to this volume. Casey Robards

offers suggestions for study and performance from a pianist’s perspective. Emery Stephens and Caroline Helton encourage all singers to explore both spiritual settings and art songs written by African American composers; the chapter includes the results of a survey that was the subject of a *Journal of Singing* article “Diversifying the Playing Field: Solo Performance of African American Spirituals and Art Songs by Voice Students from All Racial Backgrounds” (*Journal of Singing* 70, no. 2 [November/December 2013]: 165–171). Barbara Steinhaus, in an essay that appeared in *Journal of Singing* 61, no. 5 (May/June 2005), shares interpretive guidelines for studio teachers. Patricia Trice illuminates the history and importance of choral arrangements of spirituals. Timothy W. Sharp, Executive Director of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), describes the development and musical content of the spiritual, and underlines that it is America’s original contribution to world sacred music. He lists resources for study, including recently published hymnals and choral collections of spirituals. The final two chapters appear in every title in the series: In “Singing and Voice Science,” Scott McCoy explicates the anatomy and physiology of the voice, and in “Vocal Health for Singers,” speech pathologist Wendy LeBorgne explains how to keep the voice healthy. Like the other books in the *So You Want to Sing* series, this volume contains links to examples on the correlated website. Some lead to music clips, while others link to online resources such as the previously cited Spirituals Database. Although a few are inactive, the majority provide useful and pertinent information.

In the chapter “Must You Be Black to Sing Spirituals?,” the author addresses the overarching question relevant to this repertoire. Research conducted by Jones revealed that spirituals are not recorded, nor, she surmises, performed by white singers. Reluctance to program the songs is due to a variety of reasons, from concerns about cultural trespass to limited understanding of the significance of spirituals. Jones also acknowledges that resistance among some African Americans to white singers performing this repertoire. “Unfortunately,” she writes, “there is plenty of historical evidence that spirituals have been used a source of ridicule, as a means of stereotyping African Americans” (97). In addition, there is also a belief among some that spirituals should not be performed, but consigned to the past. The author, however, is adamant that spirituals should be performed on the concert stage. To that end, in addition to the information contained in this volume, she

cites numerous sources for additional study, including *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals*, by Eileen Guenther (St. Louis, MO: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2016), which contextualizes the song texts.

So You Want to Sing Spirituals is an exemplary title in this series. Jones offers a well researched and well written overview of spirituals, and contributions by guest authors make this volume a rich resource for both avocational and professional performers. It is significant, as noted by Jones, that this book was published on the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first slave trader ship to the United States. This book is an invaluable tool for moving beyond cultural misappropriation to artistic appreciation, and is a useful addition to the library of all musicians who study and perform this repertoire.

Ragan, Kari. *A Systematic Approach to Voice: The Art of Studio Applica-*

tion. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing, 2020. Paper, xvii, 246 pp., \$59.95. www.pluralpublishing.com

The trajectory of voice pedagogy shifted when Manuel García positioned two dental mirrors in the sunlight to catch a glimpse of his vocal folds in action; his discovery of the laryngoscope inexorably linked voice science and singing. The ensuing and abiding curiosity of pedagogues produced landmark volumes, such as *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technique* by William Vennard (New York: Carl Fischer, 1967), *The Structure of Singing* by Richard Miller (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, 1986), and *Your Voice: An Inside View*, 3rd ed., by Scott McCoy (Gahanna, OH: Inside View Press, 2019). However, voice science is descriptive, not prescriptive, and it cannot address the innumerable artistic intangibles that create beautiful singing. Kari Ragan, with *A Systematic Approach to Voice*, offers a blueprint for an approach that is informed by science, but incorporates the rich history and wide range of pedagogic practice.

The underlying philosophy of Ragan’s work is Evidence-Based Voice Pedagogy (EBVP). This framework consists of three parts: voice research (including historical pedagogy), the experience and expertise of the pedagogue (which the author labels “practice-based”), and the goals and perspectives of the student. The book does not promote a specific method of teaching; instead, teachers are encouraged to use the template to systematically integrate the principles of voice production with their own pedagogic approaches to meet the specific needs of their students. Ragan advocates adopting a heuristic teaching method, which promotes student experimentation and discovery. Students learn



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to be self-directed, which is critical to their development as singers. “Teachers do not teach someone how to sing,” asserts Ragan, “so much as *how to practice*” (2).

Ragan organizes the volume according to the systems integral to voice production: respiration, phonation, registration, articulation, and resonance. Each chapter presents an overview of the mechanics of the system (including anatomic diagrams), and emphasizes key pedagogic points in a section entitled “Teacher Takeaways.” The purpose of each exercise is explained in a clear manner, and accompanying black and white photographs provide further clarification. Correlated videos are posted on the Plural Publishing website, and shaded sidebars provide additional information on a variety of related topics.

The pedagogic principles, drawn from a variety of sources, encompass a wide array of methods and tools. As evidenced by the inclusion of historical treatises in the components of EBVP, Ragan recognizes the usefulness of traditional pedagogy, even if its verbiage needs to be translated into contemporary terminology. Kinesthetic singing tools, ranging from exercise balls to wine corks, are employed throughout the book, and semi-occluded vocal tract exercises that rely upon straws are foundational to her discussion of phonation. Contrary to the opinion held by some pedagogues, Ragan does not consider using manipulatives as “tricks;” instead, she views these tools as means to enable singers to establish important physical sensations. The author has a similar acceptance of imagery. Science-informed imagery, she asserts, can elicit kinesthetic responses that encourage technical progress. Ragan also underlines the importance of

incorporating emotive cues into the exercises so singers do not lose sight of the goal of performance, which is communication. Teachers are reminded that the purpose of vocal exercises is to develop specific aspects of technique. Contemporary voice teachers must also prepare students to sing in a multiplicity of styles. To that end, the exercises are applicable to singers of all repertoire, from classical to contemporary commercial music. The final chapter contains eight sample warm-up routines for singers of different styles at a variety of levels.

Ragan brings fresh perspectives to pedagogic concepts. For instance, she melds the words “flow” and “phonation” into the portmanteau “flownation” to describe the production of sound while employing the Flow-ball, a respiratory device used to coordinate steady airflow. In the elucidation of registration, she presents an image of two slide rulers to depict the interdependence between laryngeal source and resonance strategy. Some of the exercises contained in the volume are

named after the teachers who created or inspired them, such as “Ode to Barbara Doscher,” and “Ode to Ellen Faull.” Ragan’s homage to preceding pedagogues, however, extends beyond the names of vocalises. She cites numerous influences, both in the lists of references and selected resources that appear at the end of each chapter, and throughout the volume.

A Systematic Approach to Voice is a notable addition to the pedagogic literature. The volume is an invaluable guide to incorporating voice science into the art of studio teaching. It is well suited to serve as the textbook for undergraduate voice pedagogy courses, but singers and their teachers will find it useful as well. It is highly recommended.

Jones, David L. *A Modern Guide to Old World Singing*. Self-published: David L. Jones, 2017. Paper, 284 pp., \$59.95. ISBN 978-5439-0887-9 www.voiceteacher.com

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For centuries, teaching methods have been passed down through successive generations. While this is true of every discipline, the challenges of teaching an instrument that cannot be seen or directly manipulated has made this pedagogic lineage of paramount importance to voice teachers. This pedigree is at the heart of the book by David L. Jones. “Old World Singing” in the title refers to the Swedish-Italian school. Jones, who maintains a voice studio in New York, describes this method of singing as an amalgam of Italianate tonal brilliance with the warmth engendered by the vowel formations of the Swedish, French, and German languages. In the late 1970s, Jones studied voice with Allan Lindquest (1891–1984), and the experience was transformational for Jones as both singer and pedagogue. In this volume, Jones elucidates the principles practiced and taught by Lindquest.

The author begins with a brief overview of the life and career of Lindquest. A native of Chicago, Lindquest had a successful career in vaudeville, on Broadway, and as a studio singer for MGM and Paramount studios. He studied at Stockholm Royal Conservatory in the late 1930s, and was a member of the American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS), and a charter mem-

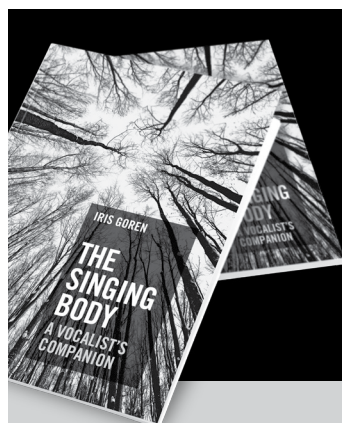
ber of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). A chart outlining the influence of Manuel Garcia II and Lamperti on Swedish singers illustrates Lindquest’s place in the pedagogic lineage.

In the remaining fifteen chapters, Jones presents the philosophy and principles of Lindquest. He prefaces an explanation of the concepts with the caveat that each chapter of the book is intended to be read independently. Consequently, similar themes and exercises occur throughout the volume. The pedagogic principles are presented in a systematic fashion, and each chapter contains exercises and vocalises. Jones begins with a description of posture, breath, and breath management. He encourages singers to seek assistance in learning about the connection between body and breath by exploring methods such as the Alexander Technique, the Feldenkrais Method, yoga, or other relevant practices. Optimum resonance is achieved with an open throat; Lindquest warned against telling singers to “place” the voice, or pushing the breath to create a ringing sound. In a chapter dedicated to the discussion of onset, the author underlines that the beginning of the tone, which Lindquest called the “perfect attack,”

is the result of coordination between the body and the breath. *Appoggio* is an important component of this coordination.

Five chapters are devoted to an exploration of registration and acoustic balance, underlining the significance of this topic. Jones explains the importance and characteristics of acoustic protection, often referred to as cover. He identifies *voce cuperto* as both a fundamental principle of Lindquest’s teaching and of the Italian and Swedish schools of singing. *Cuperto* serves as the foundation for the development of the head voice, and the open space of *voce cuperto* balances the registers, aligns the vowels, and enables the voice to float in the high register. Jones explains that this open space is “achieved by singing through a small embouchure with an open pharyngeal space and a strong /u/ vowel at or below the glottis.” *Cuperto* allows the singer to develop *chiaroscuro*, and promotes vocal longevity. Jones devotes a chapter each to training the middle voice, upper *passaggio*, and female lower *passaggio*. He dedicates another chapter to an explanation of the physical demands of singing with legato. As with all the chapters explicating voice technique, Jones includes exercises with clearly delineated purposes and directions.

Three essays are intended to aid singers in moving beyond the technique to performance. One chapter expounds upon the application of vocal technique to repertoire, while another offers counsel in maintaining optimum sound when moving into performance spaces. Jones also underlines the importance of self-monitoring and learning how to recognize and avoid unhealthy vocal techniques, both as a singer and as a teacher.



“The Singing Body is a concise, yet thorough, guide to bodywork for singers in which its author offers both practical information and useful exercises. It is highly recommended.”

Debra Greschner (Journal of Singing, April 2018)

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The final three chapters of the book are addressed to pedagogues. Jones presents common sense but frequently overlooked pillars of a learning environment that is both positive and productive, such as learning to avoid negative words and training students to be independent learners. The last chapter contains recommendations for how to organize a voice lesson, including a suggested sequence of vocal exercises.

Jones is generous with his acknowledgement of the philosophies and pedagogues who have influenced him. He unabashedly embraces the role of imagery in singing, for although he recognizes that it is “often scientifically inaccurate” (47), it is nonetheless helpful in directing the singer’s energy. However, despite his statement in the preface that the book does not involve or apply voice science, it is obvious that the pedagogic approach is based upon anatomic and physiologic principles. Jones offers an account of the “Old World” training of the Swedish-Italian and Italian schools that is informed by how the human body produces and resonates sound. The concepts and exercises are presented in a systematic manner, and each is explained in a clear and forthright way. Jones includes historical perspective and interesting anecdotes about singing. The volume also offers valuable advice about the structure and content of a voice lesson, and how to create a positive, yet productive environment in the studio. Singers and their teachers will find this book an enlightening glimpse into traditional Italianate pedagogy as applied in a modern studio.

McCoy, Scott. *Your Voice: An Inside View, Third Edition*. Gahanna, OH: Inside View Press, 2019. Paper,

vi, 311 pp., \$65.00. ISBN 978-1-7335060-1-4 www.VoxPed.com

In 2005, the publication of *Your Voice: An Inside View* changed the landscape of voice pedagogy. With its masterful presentation of voice science, anatomy, and physiology, the volume set a new standard for voice pedagogy textbooks. Substantive changes have been made to the third edition that enhance the book and its correlated resources.


Several additions have been made to the volume. As an introduction to acoustics of the voice, McCoy incorporates the primer on the topic found in *Your Voice: The Basics* (Columbus: Inside View Press, 2015; reviewed in *Journal of Singing* 72, no. 4 [March/April 2016]: 520) into the chapter devoted to sound. More than sixty color illustrations have been added to the text. The correlated video and audio segments that were previously contained on a CD or DVD packaged with earlier volumes are now available on a website. The chapter on vocal health by Lucinda Halstead has been revised and expanded. It offers more information about the well-being of the entire singer, including hearing health and nutrition. Lynn Holding, author of *The Musician’s Mind: Teaching, Learning, and Performance in the Age of Brain*

Science (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020; reviewed in *Journal of Singing* 77, no. 1 [September/October 2020]: 113–114), contributed a chapter entitled “The Brain.”

For readers who are familiar with the previous editions of this volume, McCoy has encapsulated the changes on a single page as a front piece to the book. Indeed, the author reassures instructors who currently use the second edition as the textbook for pedagogy courses that the transition to this edition should be relatively seamless. The third edition of *Your Voice: An Inside View* will prove as useful and as indispensable as the previous incarnations of this volume.

Busching, Marianna. *Images for Better Singing: A Visual Approach to Vocal Technique*. St. Petersburg, FL: BookLocker.com, 2019. Paper, xi, 179 pp., \$15.99. ISBN 978-1-64438-885-3 www.booklocker.com

Marianna Busching opens her book with discussion of detour as a pedagogic approach. While it may seem counterproductive to choose any but the most direct path, her rationale is based upon extensive teaching



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experience. A circuitous route, writes Busching, can prove to be the most successful for teaching voice, for “one of the best and fastest ways to reach that invisible larynx and the muscles associated with singing is to first take a detour through the student’s brain with visual imagery.” Imagery in voice pedagogy is certainly not new, having been employed by the earliest singing masters. As information about the anatomy and physiology of voice production has become readily available, some pedagogues have disavowed the use of imagery. However, despite technologic advancements and an abundance of scientific data, Busching points out that voice instruction still relies upon communication between pedagogue and pupil, in the area that Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code*, portrays as “the warm, messy game of language, gesture and expression.” Most teachers, writes Busching, use whatever it takes to help the student to learn to sing, whether imitation, anatomic diagrams, or other methods. Throughout her teaching career, she found that many students respond to verbal and graphic imagery. To this end, Busching presents ideas, instructions, and hand drawn illustrations that her students find useful. The volume is not intended as

a complete guide to teaching voice, but rather as a supplement to teachers and students of singing. Although the overarching topic of the book is imagery, her pedagogy is based on understanding of the anatomy and function of voice production, as evidenced by both the information contained in the volume, and by the extensive list of sources cited.

Busching begins by advising singers to honor their voices, both regarding physical health and their commitment to the study of singing. She organizes the important components of singing into seven broad topics: the larynx, breathing, placement, the tone, the *passaggio*, the vibrato, and resonance. Each chapter bears an illustrative title, such as “The Organic Microphone” for the discussion of resonance. Busching is adept at explaining fundamental topics in an imaginative manner, and in several ways. For instance, in the discussion of breathing (which she calls “Square One”), she explains the importance of posture, and then offers three different images to help the singer attain an optimum stance. No student, asserts Busching, will respond to all the ideas, and some students may respond to none. Nor does the use of imagery deter Busching from plain talk, such as the avowal that the

breathing required for singing may never become automatic, but it can become habitual.

Maxims appear throughout the book, and directions in the text are both pithy and poetic. When offering tutelage on legato, for example, she reminds the singer “to take your vibrato along” through the vocal line. Busching’s description of the singer’s formant is particularly enlightening because she shares what it sounds and feels like from within. It can be disconcerting to singers when they produce a resonant, ringing tone for the first time, she writes, because it sounds like static or noise. Learning to sing entails learning to perform, and Busching provides advice on a wide range of relevant topics, including how to handle mistakes and criticism. An appendix offers tips for practice, while another, entitled “A Healthy Voice in a Healthy Body,” focuses on a singer’s well-being.

This volume is eminently practical, containing anecdotes from the author’s experiences as a singer and teacher, as well as examples drawn from the vocal repertoire. Busching served on the vocal faculty at the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, where she balanced an active performing career with her teaching responsibilities. She writes in a conversational style that is both supportive and encouraging, and she offers a wide range of visual images that many pedagogues and students will find useful. Reading this book is akin to attending a master class that challenges singers to approach both technique and artistry in different ways. Voice teachers and their students will appreciate the imaginative, yet practical advice.

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