



Debra Greschner

Helding, Lynn. *The Musician's Mind: Teaching, Learning, and Performance in the Age of Brain Science.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. Paper, xxxii, 316 pp., \$28.00. ISBN978-1-5381-0995-3 www.rowman.com

More than fifty years ago, the publication of *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technique* by William Vennard formally ushered voice science into the world of voice pedagogy. Similarly, *The Musician's Mind* by Lynn Helding heralds the inclusion of brain science into music instruction. When she was a fledging voice teacher, Helding eagerly set out to learn as much as possible about the physiology and acoustics of voice with the assumption that the acquisition of more knowledge would make her a better singer and pedagogue. She soon realized that this approach, which she calls the "Doctrine of Accumulation," did not account for *how* to transfer this knowledge to students. Moreover, as she explored the question of *how*, Helding realized that knowledge of

voice science did not consider "both the delivery system and the receptacle for that knowledge: the human mind." Brain science, asserts the author, is an essential component of voice pedagogy because it accounts for both the courier and the container.

Helding's opening chapter presents an overview of modern psychology. Until the advent of cognitive research in the mid-twentieth century, behaviorism was the predominantly held theory. Although cognitive research has been beneficial, it also has dark corners, ranging from experiments of the 1960s to the "no-touch torture" in recent decades. Modern psychology (and perhaps the propensity of society to embrace pithy sound bites) has produced popular misconceptions about cognition. The author debunks these as "neuromyths and brainscams." One such theory is the Mozart Effect, which purports that merely listening to classical music increases intelligence. By relying solely on exposure, it overlooks the role of engagement in learning. Another myth is the right brain-left brain duality, which ignores the network connectivity of complex cognitive processes. Helding clarifies that cognition refers to brain function, whereas neuroscience studies the brain at the cellular level. She underscores the difficulty inherent in studying brain function, for as humans strive to study and interpret their actions, the brain acts as "both artist and scientist." Sentience gives humans an awareness of their awareness.

The subject at the center of cognitive research is learning. Helding offers a detailed, yet succinct explanation of this fundamental human activity. It is a three step process; the acquisition of knowledge is bookended by attention and memory. A learner cannot be a

passive observer, but must expend interest (illustrating the aptness of verb choice in the phrase "*pay* attention"). Once the learner is attentive, Helding explains, both declarative (content) and procedural (motor learning) information can be acquired. The third and final step is committing the information or experience to memory. Short term memory causes biochemical changes in the brain, whereas long term memory causes anatomic changes by creating new synaptic connections. This discovery upended educational movements based upon the assumption that the first three years of life are the most critical for brain development. Instead, cognitive studies show that human brain cells can regenerate, and that the brain changes continually in response to experiences. These qualities, neurogenesis and neuroplasticity respectively, are critical to the process of learning.

Helding spends the remainder of the book applying these cognitive principles to musicians. In "Learned Movement," the author discusses the importance and process of practice, and details how brain science can inform singers and their teachers about the pathway to efficacious practice. The goal of practice is to make actions automatic, but consciously retrievable; for musicians, it is also necessary to combine technique and expression. Helding explores a plethora of headline grabbing research, from the study of deliberative practice (which spawned the adage that it requires 10,000 hours to attain mastery) to the paradigms of Tiger Moms and Helicopter Parents. She investigates whether talent is more important than grit, if nature trumps nurture, and what is the tipping point between self-esteem and narcissism. Helding

strongly affirms “the pure pleasure of music-making” that motivates all musicians to persist. Professional musicians, however, must balance the pressures of public performance. Holding scrutinizes the current research regarding Music Performance Anxiety (MPA). Until 1994, MPA was not included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the standard reference guide published by the American Psychiatric Association. In addition to discussing causes and manifestations of performance anxiety, the author elucidates treatments and strategies for addressing it.

Much has been written about the impact of computers upon the human brain. Reliance on digital communication, addiction to the Internet, the persistent presence of cell phones in all societal situations, and the misnomer of multitasking are only a few of the outcomes of pervasive computer connectivity. Although Holding could not foretell the timeliness of the discussion, the chapter “The Digital Brain” is particularly *a propos* to a world that is primarily interacting through screens due to the coronavirus pandemic. Equally as relevant is the final chapter that discusses the partnership of art and science. Science answers questions, affirms Holding, but art illuminates the meaning of those answers.

The purpose of the book is to use brain science to augment musicians’ ability to teach, learn, and perform. This volume encapsulates and expands upon many of the themes and topics discussed in the column “Mindful Voice” that Holding created for the *Journal of Singing*. She warns that talent is not enough, and that the practice required to acquire mastery must be mindful and structured. Holding

acknowledges the unique challenge faced by singers; because their bodies are their instruments, they cannot hear what their audience hears. Holding has a profound gift for communicating complex concepts in a straightforward, accessible manner. Equally as important, she elucidates the significance of these concepts for musicians and their teachers. Well written, well researched, and profoundly captivating, the book is highly recommended.

Hoch, Matthew, and Linda Lister. *So You Want to Sing Music by Women*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. Paper, xxvii, 384 pp., \$40.00. ISBN 978-1-5381-1606-7

Matthew Hoch, who is the editor for the *So You Want to Sing* series, and Linda Lister, the author of *So You Want to Sing Operetta*, have co-authored the most recent addition to the series. Hoch and Lister offer a panoramic view of the role of women in music. The vista is expansive, encompassing notable composers and performers from Western classical music, music theater, and commercial music. The opening chapter presents an overview of achievements by women from the medieval to the modern eras, including a brief nod to their contributions to popular and world music. A listing of women who have won major composition awards, from the Prix de Rome to the Oscars, is followed by a brief exposé of professional organizations dedicated to music written and/or performed by women. A subsequent chapter offers insight into challenges faced by women composers; these include limitations imposed by traditional social roles, and additional

hurdles encountered by women who are minorities.

Three chapters are devoted to the vocal genres of art song, opera, and choral music. Hoch and Lister illuminate the role of women in the history of the repertoire, from art songs attributed to Anne Boleyn in the early sixteenth century, through the pedagogic impact of Nadia Boulanger, to the current contributions of Libby Larsen. The authors share a wide list of contemporary composers of many nationalities across a broad spectrum of styles, from the eclectic fusion of influences exhibited in the works of Tania León to the “heterogeneous Gestalt” of Du Yun, who was awarded the Pulitzer in 2016 for her opera *Angel’s Bone*. In a nod to women as performers of contemporary music, the authors offer a brief catalogue of extended vocal techniques, and highlight the contributions of important singers/composers Cathy Berberian, Meredith Monk, and Joan La Barbara, as well as other notable performers and ensembles.

Erin Guinup, in “Music Theater by Women,” presents a chronology of female composers and lyricists on Broadway. Although Guinup prefaces the overview with the disclaimer that the history is not comprehensive, aficionados of music theater will welcome the richly detailed chronicle of women’s contributions to the repertoire. Some of the women were celebrated in their lifetimes, such as Rida Johnson Young, who wrote the book and lyrics for *Naughty Marietta* (1910), and Dorothy Donnelly, the lyricist for *The Student Prince* (1924). Others, such as Trude Rittman (1908–2005), chief collaborator with Richard Rodgers, did not receive recognition until after Rodgers’s death. By the end of the twentieth century, as exempli-

fied by *The Secret Garden*, women had begun to achieve greater prominence on Broadway creative teams.

Contributor Amanda Wansa Morgan explores the accomplishments of women in a wide range of popular styles. She begins the chapter entitled “CCM by Women” with some useful definitions, including the difference between a composer and a songwriter (the latter focuses on individual songs, whereas the former typically write integrated music in a variety of forms). Morgan also clarifies that the term CCM (contemporary commercial music) is primarily a pedagogic designation. “The outside world, including the commercial industry, tends to use terms like ‘popular’ music or ‘pop/rock’ music” (p. 174), she explains. Morgan endeavors to show that the positionality of women (including their social and political context) influences the music they write. She offers an overview of noteworthy songwriters, from pioneering women in jazz, blues, folk, and country. The 1960s were liberating on many fronts, and music was no exception. Female singer-songwriters such as Janis Joplin, Carole King, and Joni Mitchell paved the way for performers in other genres, from punk rock to country. A section on ghost writers identifies composers whose songs are performed by others; a brief nod to international artists rounds out the chapter.

Three chapters are standard to all books in the series. Scott McCoy contributes an overview of the anatomy, physiology, and acoustics of the singing voice. Speech pathologist Wendy LeBorgne, in the chapter “Vocal Health for Singers,” outlines considerations for voice wellness. Matthew Edwards offers advice for using audio enhancement. The final two chapters promote advocacy for

women composers, and summarize ongoing research into music by women. An appendix lists additional resources, including online sources for repertoire lists and other digital references, books, scores, festivals, workshops, awards, and organizations. Website links for the information in the appendix, as well as the examples found throughout the book, can be accessed on the website of the National Association for Teachers of Singing (NATS).

An overview of this scale is an ambitious undertaking. The breadth of both the historic and stylistic parameters is immense. However, Hoch and Lister effectively organize an abundance of information into manageable portions. The sheer magnitude of the topic undoubtedly precluded the omission of some genres, such as chamber or orchestral music with voice. Overall, the volume is well researched, but there are regrettable slips into self-aggrandizement, whether in the self-referential source for the definition of art song, or in footnotes brandishing a youthful contact with composers. Additionally, the writing sometimes wanders into vagueness. For example, the parameters offered by Morgan for the study of the feminist perspective are often perilously perched on generalizations. The author asserts,

CCM music written by women often more accurately reflects the natural arc of emotion based on content because the melodies are coming out of the soul, supported by the original artist’s range and marrying lyrics and melody with the rise and fall of emotion [178].

This pronouncement remains a truism if the words “written by women” are removed from the passage. The

contribution by Erin Guinup, however, is outstanding. She offers nuanced, well documented portraits of notable women in music theater and portrays their compositional strengths in a substantive way. For instance, in her discussion of *Once upon a Mattress* by Mary Rodgers, she describes how the three female leads deviate from the traditional musical heroine.

These unique subversions of female archetypes are full of depth and provide a clear example of how female writers often have an advantage in creating complex and relevant female characters [151].

The clarity and specificity of the example are revelatory, both about the composer under discussion, and about composers in general. All composers want to speak in their own voices, and make unique contributions with music, and to music. Although Hoch and Lister include one passing reference to the reluctance of some women to adopt the descriptor of “female composer,” Guinup looks beyond the label to discuss the compositional output on its merits.

Many of the titles in the *So You Want to Sing* series include suggested repertoire that is either introductory or representative of the genre. This book, while containing titles of specific works, is more akin to a musical survey than a guide to the musical literature, and does not offer stylistic or technical advice. This is not surprising, however, given the nature and scope of the subject. Singers, and indeed anyone who wants to broaden their knowledge of women composers in a wide range of musical styles, will find this book informative, and a useful introduction to the topic.

Debra Greschner, soprano, has appeared as soloist with the Nevada Symphony, Symphony of Southeast Texas, Industrial Carillon, Nevada Opera Theatre, Chamber Music Southwest, Las Vegas Lyric Opera Company, Las Vegas Symphony and with The Las Vegas Music and Dance Ensemble at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. Her repertoire includes contemporary works (including three world premieres of art song cycles), cabaret, music theatre, oratorio, and opera. Greschner was an invited performer at the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) National Workshop in San Diego, and the National Opera Association National Convention in Los Angeles, as well as the Artist Series at the Texoma regional NATS conference in 2012. She was featured on the Artist Series in 2015 in Oklahoma City, and in 2017 in Commerce, TX.

Greschner is a member of the voice faculty at Lamar University, and served as coordinator of vocal studies for five years. She is also faculty and a founding member of the Vocology Certificate program at Lamar. She holds a Bachelor of Music in Performance and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, and a Master of Music from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Before joining the voice faculty at Lamar, she taught at UNLV, and was a member of the Nevada Arts Council's Artist in Residence roster. She was one of twelve teachers selected for the fourth annual NATS Internship program. Greschner is a full voting member of the Pan-American Vocology Association (PAVA) and a founding member of its Southeast Texas Chapter. She has served as president of both the Greater Houston Chapter and Las Vegas Chapters of NATS.

Since 2001, Greschner has been the book reviewer for *Journal of Singing*. She has been a member of the *Journal of Singing* editorial board since 1998, made presentations on song repertoire and pedagogic literature at the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) and Louisiana Music Educators Association (LMEA) Conferences, and has written book reviews for *The Opera Journal* and *Italica*. In 2015, Greschner was an invited lecturer for the NATS Internship Program. Her article "The *Mémoires*

of Félix Fourdrain" was published in *Journal of Singing* 73, no. 5 (May/June 2017).

In addition, Greschner is an active adjudicator for NATS, TMEA, and University Interscholastic League competitions. In 2014, she served on the judging panel for the inaugural NATS National Student Auditions in Boston. Her students have performed in training programs and have been accepted for graduate studies in both the U.S. and abroad.



Blas Canedo-Gonzalez

GUEST REVIEW

Blas Canedo-Gonzalez

Caicedo, Patricia. *Spanish Diction for Singers: A Practical Guide for the Pronunciation of the Peninsular and American Spanish*. Barcelona: Mundo Arts Publications, 2020. Paper, 88 pp., \$65.00. ISBN 978-0981720456 www.mundoarts.com

The Spanish speaking population is growing significantly in the United States, and consequently, music in Spanish is becoming more relevant in American culture. Patricia Caicedo, a Spanish native speaker devoted to exploring Spanish and Latin American art songs, offers this guide for any student who wants to learn pronunciation differences between Castilian Spanish and American Spanish.

Caicedo has an extensive career encompassing performance and schol-

arly research of Iberian and Latin American art song. She is the founder of the Barcelona Festival of Song and the founder and owner of Mundo Arts, a company that promotes Iberian and Latin American art songs through publications, recordings, live stream events, and an online bookstore. She holds a PhD in Musicology from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Escuela Colombiana de Medicina.

Spanish Diction for Singers is a manual directed to anyone who wants to sing in Spanish and sound like a native. It is, as the subtitle suggests, a practical guide to the pronunciation of Spanish vocal music that outlines easy to follow rules. The pronunciation of any language is conditioned by geographic and social-cultural influences, and Spanish is no exception. Caicedo emphasizes the importance of learning Spanish diction with its different regional dialects. Other guides to Spanish diction, like Nico Castel's book, *A Singer's Manual of Spanish Lyric Diction* (New York: Excalibur Publishing, 1994), include a section about "Latin American Variants," but Caicedo's *Spanish Diction for Singers* presents a more detailed explanation about the factors that determine variations in the pronunciation of Spanish.

Caicedo's book is organized into thirteen sections. It begins with an introduction that details the author's experience that cultivated her focus on Spanish and Latin American repertoire. The first section underlines the importance of learning Spanish diction, and criticizes the Eurocentric trend that has traditionally permeated conservatories—one that focuses on the Italian, French, and German repertoire and ignores the repertoire in Spanish, and more specifically, from American Latin American compos-

ers. The second section highlights the importance of Spanish and Latin American vocal repertoire due to the increased Hispanic population in the United States.

The book continues with sections that are connected by following the traditional structure of any diction book. The section titled “The Foundations” provides basic information to simplify the process of learning Spanish diction. The work contains sections dedicated to vowels, diphthongs, consonants, and syllabic stresses. Within these sections the author includes the Spanish alphabetic symbol, the corresponding International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol, a description of the articulation required to pronounce that Spanish sound, and a tip to help the reader avoid common diction mistakes.

In general terms, Caicedo’s practical guide is well structured, but some content lacks prescriptive and terminological precision. For example, the instructions imparted for articulatory postures do not align with the articulatory postures informed by sources of speech and voice science. In addition, the distinction between allophones and phonemes is sometimes unclear when applying the IPA symbols to Spanish sounds. Clear explanations of articulatory postures, and conceptual uniformity between phonemic notation and phonetic notation could augment the usefulness of this manual.

A strong point of this practical guide is the information that helps students distinguish Castilian (Peninsular Spanish) from American Spanish. For example, the book includes information about vocalic dialects in America, the syllable as the foundation of the rhythm of Spanish, and transcriptions of selected song-poems. One section presents segments from Spanish

folk song lyrics to illustrate vocalic Spanish variants according to social, educational, and geographic contexts. Another section highlights the linguistic rhythmic features of Spanish as a legato language. The final section presents transcriptions from four songs as an illustration of diction adaptability according to regional differences. For this purpose, Caicedo selected pieces from renowned composers from Colombia, Argentina, and Spain.

In her introduction, Caicedo offers information about videos to facilitate learning Castilian and American Spanish. The videos include instructions from the author directed toward an American native non-Spanish speaking student and are available by subscribing to an online course. Considering the purchase price of the book, a web link with free access to the videos with purchase of the book would be beneficial for students.

In conclusion, *Spanish Diction for Singers* is a valuable diction tool. Through her intimate knowledge as a native Spanish speaker and her

devotion to the Spanish language and Latin American art songs, Caicedo’s work offers useful information for any student who wants to learn pronunciation differences between Castilian and American Spanish in art songs.

Wiley, Darlene C. *Singing: The Timeless Muse, Essays on the Human Voice, Singing, and Spirituality*. Gahanna, OH: Inside View Press. 2018. Paper, 229 pp., \$40. ISBN 978-1-7335060-0-7 www.voiceinsideview.com

What does it mean to sing? How can singing be redefined? These are some essentially human questions that Darlene C. Wiley purports to answer in her work, *Singing: The Timeless Muse, Essays on the Human Voice, Singing, and Spirituality*. It is a compilation of twenty reflections in the form of essays and interviews by participants from different professional backgrounds related to the singing



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voice. The compiler is a professor of voice, Head of Division of Vocal Arts, and supervisor of the DMA Vocal Pedagogy program at the University of Texas at Austin. Wiley has extensive experience as an international performer and as a voice teacher.

The compilation seeks to present a holistic perspective of what it means to sing, the cultural value of singing, and its role in present times. Except for the compiler and one other author, reflections come from professionals who are not voice teachers: composers, ethnomusicologists, higher education educators, medical doctors, musicologists, music producers, music theorists, opera coaches, opera directors, philosophers, and vocal performers. They describe their experiences working with the singing voice in interdisciplinary studies and crossover professions. The compilation of these experiences results in a valuable output: it captures the reader's attention within a new network of thoughts, vocabularies, and structures that redefine singing.

The book begins with an introduction, followed by six chapters that are summarized into an ending section titled "Afterword/Postlude." It includes an appendix with a questionnaire written by the compiler that was presented to the contributors to inspire their reflections. The compilation also includes a brief biography of each of the twenty-one contributors.

Reflections from the first chapter are linked to a common thread: the nature and importance of singing. Singing is relevant when it can be seen through communication processes engaging the listener's senses. For example, "Singing, Speaking, and Significance," by Jeanette Bicknell and John M. Carvalho, includes reflections on the importance of singing in comparison with speaking. According

to the contributors, singing has the capacity to bring people together in a way that speaking cannot. Other reflections present singing as an act of rendering truth beyond the meaning of the words. Singing is viewed as a space of affordances for listeners to find their own truth in it.

Essays by Eve McPherson, Margo Garret, Gianpaolo Chiriaco, Jesús Ramos, and Carolyn Sebron in the chapter "Culture and its Voice" discuss the power of singing from a cultural perspective. Singing is perceived to be a socially elaborate act; the particularities of the aesthetics attributed to the singing voice are approached by the contributors who consider given cultural settings and expectations of their listeners as important elements of analysis. Many of the contributors agree on the necessity to redefine vocal artistry and the role of vocal coaching in the twenty-first century. The third chapter, "Singing as Muse," essays by Robert Hatten, Graham Reynolds, Dan Welcher, Gary Powel, Andrea Clearfield, and Darlene Wiley provide testimonies on how music surprises and touches us. "The Voice Behind the Voice," consisting of articles by Robert Spillman, Dan Kurland, Kathleen Kelly, and Richard Masters, focuses on what is essential for anyone involved directly or indirectly with the profession of singing. Some essential components are text understanding, telling the story, pitch accuracy, and vocal color. Important questions arise about vocal resonance and its exposure to the digital world, such as, "What do we do when the meaning of location itself changes?" "Where are we sending that resonant sound, when 'where' becomes an abstraction?," posed by international coach, conductor, and teacher Kathleen Kelly. The fifth

chapter, "Vocal Artistry," by George Shirley and Estelí Gomez, includes reflections about the role of vocal technique and its subordination to the nature of singing. Shirley and Gomez propose that vocal education be reoriented to align with the current market that demands more collaboration. "The Body, the Mind, and the Soul of the Voice" by Leslie F. Childs and Lynn Holding shares holistic perspectives about singing and ways to connect neurosciences with the unknowns of the singing voice.

The compilation ends with a postlude by Wiley, who emphasizes the necessity to reinvigorate the curriculum in higher education vocal programs with creativity, innovation, and interdisciplinary courses to generate diverse and inclusive vocal education.

The reader may be challenged when trying to read this volume as a whole. A variety of sometimes unrelated thoughts are included in any given chapter, affecting the cohesive narrative of the book. Each chapter deals with philosophic and abstract questions that are answered with subjective yet reasonable thoughts from its participants. Adding a summary in each chapter to provide a synthesis (with the ideas of the contributors and the new conclusions of the compiler) would be helpful to the reader. A summary of each chapter would also help to connect the introduction with the postlude written by the compiler.

Despite this observation, the strength of this compilation lies in the provocative interdisciplinary reflections that try to answer what it means to sing. Wiley has firmly accomplished her goal intended for this book: It offers new perspectives from different backgrounds, refreshed by new thoughts and questions. These tools have the potential to redesign

the scope and curriculum of vocal training programs at the higher education level, creating new educational opportunities for inclusion and diversity.

Dr. Blas Canedo-Gonzalez is Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator at Lamar State College, and serves as a Voice Instructor and Lecturer in diction at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. He is also a teaching artist for the Houston Grand Opera. He has extensive experience teaching applied classical and contemporary commercial voice for music majors at the higher education level. Dr. Canedo-Gonzalez is internationally recognized as a deeply musical, persuasive singing actor whose rich, sensual sound and strong, secure, brilliant instrument connect memorably with

both repertoire and audience. Equally at home as a leading man or comedian, he delights in creating authentic characterizations of opera's many traditional Hispanic and Latino roles, as well as in championing new music, especially that by Latin composers. He has performed for national and regional opera houses. Memorable roles include Dr. Rappacini (*Rappacini's Daughter*, Catán), Juan (*Los Gavilanes*, Guerrero), Everybody (*Lucinda y Las Flores de la Nochebuena*, Mack), Vidal (*Luisa Fernanda*, Moreno Torroba), and El Duende and El Payador (*Maria de Buenos Aires*, Piazzolla). Critic Mike Greenberg of the Incident Light blog found Mr. Canedo-González "... so deeply musical, so flat-out beautiful, that after a while I found myself wallowing in the sheer sensuality of that sound and not bothering to look at the projected English translations."

His concert experience includes several seasons as a baritone soloist with the Houston Symphony, other regional orchestras in the US, and major orchestras in Colombia, South America. He is a winner of the Pavel Lisitsian award for the best baritone voice at the Tenth edition of the Lois Alba competition in Houston. He is a graduate of the Moores Opera Center at the University of Houston, where he earned his DMA. His research document was titled, "The Spanish Language as a Conceptual and Correlative Measure in Classical Technique." He also earned an Artist Diploma Certificate from the University of North Texas. Dr. Canedo-Gonzalez holds a law degree equivalent to a Doctor of Jurisprudence and served as a legal consultant in educational and cultural programs for the mayor's office in Bogota, D.C. He currently resides in Houston, Texas.

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