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Now, Let's Find Your Voice: Interviewing Three Singing Pedagogues About Preparing Singers for Performance Using a Framework of Seven Underlying Processes

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ABSTRACT: This article is drawn from a doctoral research study that sought to address a gap in the literature regarding singers' experiences of performance. The research design focused on collecting and analysing singers' experiences, beliefs, and understandings of performance. A framework was developed to categorise the processes that underlie performances, and this was used to guide research participants' reflections and insights. Analysis of the study data supported a view that common experiences shared by singing performers may transcend matters of style or context, and an understanding of this common ground may offer valuable information about performers' access to optimal performance states. The conclusions pointed to the need for further investigation of the complexities of singers' experiences of performance, with particular attention to the importance of supporting performers' well-being. This article discusses one of the three methods used in the study: three interviews with experienced singing teachers who are specialists in classical, jazz and music theatre styles.

KEYWORDS: Singing performance, underlying processes of performance, self-reflection, insight, well-being, vocal pedagogy.

BACKGROUND

This research is grounded in a definition of optimal performance that draws on the author's four decades of experience singing jazz, folk and popular styles across extremely diverse contexts from alternative cabaret, community music and music education to premier venues, festivals and concert stages. Informed by this experience, singing performance is defined by the author as:

- drawing on the power of the human voice to capture the attention and elicit the emotions of audience members
- evoking feelings of closeness between all participants in the performance event
- gaining access to uplifting shared states, evident in communal silences, laughter, tears, and applause.

This definition is supported by a view that singing performance is the product of multilayered processes, some of which are automatic and embodied, operating beneath the level of everyday awareness. Literature supporting key conceptual themes for this study, includes:

1. A biological basis of singing and music (Honing et al., 2015).
2. Deep effortless attention as the central phenomenon in flow states (Marty-Dugas & Smilek, 2018).
3. Emotion viewed as constructed through context-dependent processes that lie beneath the level of our awareness (Barrett, 2017).
4. Social cognition as unconsciously motivated and enacted in context (Zaki, 2014).
5. Singing performance as a rich practice for the exploration of identity (Frith, 1996).
6. Studies from music psychology and music therapy that align to the research (Bodner & Bensimon, 2008; Brisola & Cury, 2015; Jampel, 2011; Thomson & Jaque, 2018).

Based on both experience and literature, it is proposed that regardless of style or context, singer performers (particularly in the role of soloist) may be called on to manage multileveled processes impacting self-awareness and self-representation to generate states of effortless concentration and empathetic connection; and that they perform these subtle acts while managing heightened levels of distraction and physiological arousal.

This functional view of singing performance resonates with singing pedagogy literature, which proposes that effective performance requires more than just a command of vocal technique. Both Chapman (2016) and Smith (2007) characterise high functioning performance as holistic, whereby optimal performance somehow exceeds the sum of its parts. The current research has sought to bring attention to processes that underlie that ‘whole’ using a novel framework of seven categories to design research tools and shape analysis.

Answers were sought in response to this main research question:

How can reflection on the underlying processes of performance evoke useful and healthy insights from singers?

Health in this context was understood as being an outcome of psychological well-being, defined as the experience of agency, mastery and sense of purpose (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010). However, it is noted that understandings of positive states in the literature of emotion continue to lack a cohesive formulation: “Research on and understanding of states of poor mental health are well-developed, yet scholarship capturing healthy functioning and positive well-being is still wrestling with identifying clear conceptual definitions, valid measures, and appropriate causal models” (Park et al., 2022, p. 11).

The study was not designed to create clinical evidence but to compare participants’ rich store of knowledge gathered from self-reports about their experiences, beliefs and understandings of singing performance. Three research methods were used: 1) an online survey of 33 singers; 2) an autoethnographic performance; and, to triangulate these, 3) three interviews with singing teachers at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU). This article shares the reflections gathered in those interviews. While this was a very small sample group, the aim of the interviews was to test the framework of seven underlying processes by comparing insights elicited across genre boundaries.

LITERATURE

This literature review informs a systematic approach to the exploration of singers’ experiences of performance, in particular addressing those processes that occur beneath the level of awareness and that may be common to all.

At the time of the research design, singers’ experiences were not found to be well represented in academic literature, possibly due to the nature of singing performance as an embedded skill and practice. According to Peretz et al. (2004), “All individuals across cultures have taken part in singing in some form” (p. 373). Yet, while singing itself is ubiquitous, the musicological approach to singing performance has largely focused on high function (flow studies, studies of opera performance) and dysfunction (performance anxiety).

With a phenomenon so embedded in the whole community yet so specialised in its academic study comes substantial challenges for academics in the field. For example, an article by Yang and Chao (2023) seeks to validate the importance of “singing psychology” (p. 2) in classical singing training. While their perspective on mental processes “focusing on the perception, memory, imagination, thought, emotion, and will of singing” (p. 2) parallels the framework that is proposed by this study, that perspective also includes references to “objective reality” (p. 7), a concept that is contradicted by arguments for the embodied nature of consciousness, as described in recent neuroscience literature (Seth, 2021).

Thus, it is arguable that academic literature may tend to extrapolate from conservatory practices to assertions of universal principle. A study by Reckers et al., (2021) addressed the experiences of singing students by surveying the vocal hygiene habits of classical singing students across three levels of study. These participants were described as “elite vocal athletes”, and the study rationale was predicated on a view that “understanding of and adherence to optimal vocal hygiene practices is imperative for all professional voice users” (p. 855). In the context of the current study, this can be viewed as a simple failure to perceive that the Venn diagram of “singer” and “opera singer” is not a circle, highlighting the need for musicological research to study the everyday performance settings, communication and practices of more diverse singing performers."

The approach to literature in the current study has been to contextualise sources from singing pedagogy, musicology, and music psychology through a broader reading of theories

of emotional and social cognition. This approach resulted in the evolution of the framework of underlying processes, described below.

FRAMEWORK OF UNDERLYING PROCESSES

The categories used in the framework reflect a rationale that performance is shaped by processes on a spectrum ranging from those most automatic to those most shaped by motivated responses. Every aspect of performance is worthy of investigation, from the deeply embedded cognitive processes that allow us to form and decode the fabric of sung communications, such as pitches, durations, words, and non-verbal expression, to the cultural values that support universities to train performers for specific singing roles.

It is acknowledged that this framework is an artificial segmentation of the "holistic" nature of performance. Guided by concepts encountered in theories of emotion and social cognition, the evolution of the framework categories occurred over many months of reflection on theoretical knowledge, singers' reflections, and the eventual purpose of the framework as a research tool. In the final framework, the processes are as described below.

1. Cognitive processes

Singing performance calls on a wide range of interrelated automatic cognitive processes, from vocal motor control (Hutchins, Larrouy-Maestri, & Peretz, 2014) and auditory imagery (Pfordresher & Halpern, 2013) to musical expectation (Juslin & Vastfjall, 2008). Memory is implicated, from creation and retrieval of performance cues (Ginsborg & Chaffin, 2011) to a form of memory embedded in "feelings of knowing" (Peynircioğlu, Rabinovitz, & Thompson, 2007). Underlying processes of empathy, including Theory of Mind inferences about others' inner states (Decety & Svetlova, 2012), and the mirroring of others' expressions and gestures (Decety & Grèzes, 2006) also occurs beneath the level of our awareness, as does the counterpart of empathy, in-group bias (Zaki, 2014).

2. Bodily processes

Performance relies on and stimulates autonomic systems that may respond to both real and imagined stimuli through stress responses or pleasurable sensations (Craig, 1968; Nakahara, Furuya, Masuko, Francis, & Kinoshita, 2011; Salimpoor, Benovoy, Larcher, Dagher, & Zatorre, 2011). In particular, the strong chemical and hormonal responses that performance elicits may impact performers' control of their bodies, even when the experience is positive (Jimenez, 2015). The performer may seek to influence proprioception through body awareness and body memory (Brown, 2002). Performers and audience members exchange and share states of arousal, experienced at peak times in chills and synchrony.

3. Emotional processes

Music is valued for its capacity to communicate emotion (Juslin, 2005). Because sharing of emotion is a tool for building empathy (Decety & Lamm, 2006), feelings of connection may be central to relationships between participants in a singing performance. To produce powerful connections, the representation of emotive gestures may be strategic and, in a sense, "dishonest" (Trehub, 2008), evoking forms of "emotion without consequence" (Garrido & Schubert, 2011). These affective exchanges are underpinned by complex negotiations of the self and other (Decety & Grèzes, 2006; Decety & Sommerville, 2003; McGann & De Jaegher, 2009), and singers count on audiences to read moods, motivations, states, arousal, and affect from evidence present in the voice (Brück, Kreifelts, & Wildgruber, 2011; Juslin, 2013).

4. Mental processes

Mental imagery is useful in creating vocal colour and spontaneity (Atkins & Duke, 2013; Cochrane, Fantini, & Scherer, 2013; Heisel, 2015), and pedagogy practices make use of metaphor to influence underlying proprioception in voice production (Brown, 2002). Performers may challenge negative thoughts by monitoring inner states, managing self-talk, and reappraising arousal as excitement rather than anxiety (Elliott, 2010; Emmons & Thomas, 2008; Kenny, 2011; Osborne, Greene, & Immel, 2014; Wood Brooks, 2013). Performers are strategic in their planning in order to present quality work suited to its audience (Ginsborg & Chaffin, 2011).

5. Sense of self

In performance, the self may be thought of as the mind's tool for integrating underlying processes. A strong sense of self may rely on an understanding that our actions are motivated and purposeful,

possessing narrative cohesion (McAdams, 2013). This aligns to theories of psychological well-being (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010), which may be associated with optimal experiences of performance, in which the loss of self-consciousness and immersion in the performance leads to uplifting states (Fritz & Avsec, 2007). Empathetic connection to the performer's states is arguably the foundation of group effects, which have been described as transcendent (Chapman, 2012) or spiritual (Smith, 2007). Self-other relations regulate empathetic responses supporting sustainable connections (Decety & Svetlova, 2012; McGann & De Jaegher, 2009), and functional boundaries may be vital to a healthy sense of self when singers encounter the risks and rewards of performance.

6. Social processes

Singers' voices may be centrally important to their identity for themselves and others (O'Bryan, 2015) and capturing and directing the audience's attention calls on the performer's communication skills (Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell, 2005; Juslin & Laukka, 2003; Welch, 2005). Singing offers an expansive foundation for shared experience, in that it draws on an intersection of our capacities for both speech and music, wordless and embodied by nature (Cross & Tolbert, 2009; McGuiness & Overy, 2011). Performance provides opportunities to define individual and group identities (Green, 2015; Taylor, 2009), and in popular music in particular, performers may be called on to present only those songs that display markers of authenticity in relation to the audience's reading of the performer's identity (Bicknell, 2005; Weinstein, 2016).

7. Cultural processes

Music, described as an evolutionary by-product, draws on our underlying capacities to generate forms of cultural practice that support social life and transmit our beliefs and values (Honing et al., 2015). Cultural values support distinct musical traditions and styles and shape the meaning and purpose of performances, so that for classical audiences, singers serve as translators of the composer's intentions, while in popular music, they may play the role of avatars for imagined characters in a layered dramatic narrative (Frith, 1996).

RESEARCH METHOD

The interview method emerged from a conference presentation in the program of Eurovox 2018 at The Royal Conservatoire in The Hague (EVTA, 2019). Observing that the teacher delegates were extremely interested in positive psychological approaches to performance, I adapted the research framework into a set of questions for teachers' guided self-reflections on their pedagogical practices:

Processes	Questions
Cognitive processes	*Do you have any techniques to help students to embed helpful, healthy habits of focus and mindfulness regarding performance?* *Do you challenge unhelpful assumptions?*
Bodily processes	*How do you help your students to balance the physical discipline in voice production with expressive freedom?*
Emotional processes	*To what degree do you consider emotional communication to be embedded in the voice?* *Do you offer practices that support linking inner states to the voice and body?* *Are there ethics in relation to asking students to connect to their emotions?*
Mental processes	*How do you help students to be mentally prepared?* *Do your students get to make creative choices?* *Do you encourage your students to think about who they are singing to?*
Sense of self	*Are you aware of helping your students to form healthy habits of self-talk?*
Social processes	*How do you support students to build relationships with their peers and with their community?* *Do you model positive relationships and social ways of being?*
Cultural processes	*How much are you as a teacher involved in helping students to analyse what they do?* *Are you ever called on to support a student to make an original creative contribution to the culture?*

Table 1.
Questions for singing teachers.

Experimenting with this approach, three expert singing teachers at QCGU were interviewed to compare how they engage with the underlying processes of performance. Initial ethics clearance occurred in 2016 (GU Ref No: 2016/763) and a variation was approved in 2017.

The Interviews

While working in the same institution within the same city, these three teachers represented a diverse demographic sample in terms of their age and experience. The interviewees were given an opportunity to read and correct the transcriptions and to comment on material in this exegesis about their practice. They are referred to here by their last names. The three interviewees were:

- Associate Professor Irene Bartlett, Acting Head of Pedagogy, Coordinator Jazz and Contemporary Voice, Head Voice Pedagogy, teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students in jazz and contemporary styles. Interviewed on 14 September 2018.
- Ms Shelli Hulcombe, Lecturer in Classical Voice, teaching classical and opera students. Interviewed on 20 August 2019.
- Mr Joel Curtis, Tutor in Musical Theatre Voice, teaching musical theatre students. Interviewed on 3 September 2019.

The results were analysed thematically using the seven framework categories to structure comparisons between the three teachers' reflections on how they address their students' needs.

Cognitive Processes

All three teachers described supporting students' sense of agency in the studio as a means of supporting the development of a positive approach to performance.

Hulcombe encouraged students to set their own standards of success and to manage the fear of failure so that, "… they should always go in with a goal for themselves, rather than completely being reliant on an audience's reaction". Bartlett highlighted the importance of enjoyment, with a particular focus on the inherent generosity of performance: "… if you're sharing it with one person or a thousand people, you're actually adding to their lives. You're giving them joy". She also described how familiar routines moderate emotional states that interfere with concentration: "… making sure that people know what to expect in the space, and secondly making sure they know what to expect in terms of knowing the way this session is going to run".

Having researched performance anxiety, Curtis described using imagination to simulate exposure to negative stimuli to develop skills in self-awareness that students can transfer from the studio to performance environments, "… I give them strategies so that they can practice it consciously, so then it becomes unconscious in the same way that you would do that for a singing technique".

He described a four-stage learning model that reassures students of their potential to progress in skills that can be categorised as the "not-thought-about-directly stuff":

> When you're unconsciously incompetent about something first, you don't even know that you don't know it and then you're consciously incompetent. You know that you can't, and then you're consciously competent. You can do it, but only when you think about it and then you're unconsciously competent, you can do it and you don't even think about doing it anymore.

Bodily Processes

All three interviewees shared insights about students' development of greater awareness of their bodily processes, and in particular, techniques for managing states of arousal.

Hulcombe talked about fight-and-flight responses: "All humans experience it. And we're [performers] voluntarily putting ourselves into a position where we're going to work either with or against that". She sought to demystify the performance state by explaining, "… this is what's happening to you when you're nervous, and this is why. So, here are some ways you can manage it":

> My favourite thing to acknowledge is that the central tendon that the diaphragm is connected to … [is] your heart. So, if your heart rate, if your pulse is fast, because you're feeling nervous, then of course your breathing's going to be feeling a bit odd …

Her strategies to support focus included a flexible self-audit mechanism:

> I sometimes talk about having a four-track recording studio or something … track 1 is your breathing and alignment. Track 2 is a healthy free [sound] … or vowels. Track 3 is the expression of what you're talking about and track 4 might be your sense of ensemble with whoever's on stage for example. So … if you're feeling a bit nervous, or you're feeling the stress of performance, just start by opening whichever channel you feel more

> comfortable with. So, if that's the expressive one, then that's where you start … eventually by the end of the piece you want to have all your channels open. But don't set yourself the task of having to achieve it all in the first phrase.

Curtis described how mind-body connections enable thoughts and feelings to either spiral up or down. He focused on skills "… to help their mind tell their body things in a good way, and their body to tell their mind things in a good way to regulate adrenaline and to regulate thought". He asked students to "… imagine a good performance, and then imagine how they feel before, how they feel during, and what that looks like, and what that feels like. And then we can work from there".

Curtis stated that musical theatre training requires a different internal dialogue from other singing styles, so that the use of fantasy runs a risk of creating an overly internal focus that can alienate audience attention. He saw the performance mode as more related to the craft of acting. In coaching less experienced performers: "we don't aim for perfection … [of vocal technique] … we try to make sure that the performance is far more about thinking of all of those emotional and story- and imagery-based things than anything else". He argued that performers would be wise to consolidate techniques before exploring expressive freedoms.

Bartlett shared her own enjoyment in performance, bringing students' focus to feelings of pleasure and excitement. She encouraged students to develop strategies to cope with high states of arousal:

> Be excited. Be nervous. Don't try to not be nervous, but have some tools for coping with your nerves. If that's running around in circles, then run around in circles. But do that every time. Get a little bit of a routine going.

Unlike the other teachers, who work to prepare singers for specific roles, Bartlett supported expressive individuality as a recognised goal in jazz and contemporary vocal performance. Asked about using metaphors, Bartlett reported that she preferred the primal sound[1] approach of connecting students' sound to cries and sighs and other emotional non-verbal vocalisations through imagery rather than through metaphor.

Emotional Processes

The greatest contrast between responses was in the category of emotional processes. Hulcombe observed that in classical singing, emotion can become secondary to technique. This contrasted with Curtis's position that the relationship of the voice to emotion is essentially mediated by the craft of acting, and both contrasted with Bartlett's view that the ability of students to be personally vulnerable enriches expressive freedom.

Asked about the relationship between voice and emotion, Hulcombe said, "That is what the voice is. There's no way of separating that". She reflected on the risk that emotional communication can be set aside in classical singing because of the extraordinary vocal demands of the style. She found primal sound was a reliable anchor for expression, and sought to embed students' insights into the meaning, interpretation, and context of the sung material to support "some kind of freedom of expression". She asked students to think about the composer's expressive intentions, integrating these into the quality of the breath supporting phrasing and using spoken expression of texts, including translations of texts into English, to explore a current, personal, conversational style. She encouraged her more self-conscious students to connect sound to emotion through outsized gestures, moderated in performance but leaving evocative body memory in their wake.

Hulcombe argued that technique was acquired through experience:

> I don't think you can teach technique. I think you can teach function, so, elements of technique in isolation. It's kind of like doing your soccer drill. Then you have to play the game and you have to play it with heart. And so, I don't think you can ever have a technical lesson for example. I would never give a technical lesson.

Reflecting on the ethics of working with students at the level of emotions, Hulcombe explained that she had become cautious of some teaching methods, such as primal sound, particularly in the context of teaching people who are young and potentially vulnerable.

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[1] Primal sound is a core component of the approach of the influential pedagogue Janice Chapman, along with posture and breath. She explained in interview: Primal sound: the Oxford Shorter Dictionary defines primal as "belonging to the first age or earliest stage: original, primitive, primeval." Babies, primates and other mammals make primal sound. The importance of primal sound in the singer is that it helps awaken the connections between the emotional motor system and the voice. It contains the "human expression" in sound which truly communicates emotions and ideas to the outside world. In the singer it becomes the unifying factor which makes singing feel both easy and potent." (Interview with Janice Chapman, Author, 2006)

Curtis argued that the skills required for contemporary, classical, and musical theatre styles were not translatable across genres, specifically because emotions in musical theatre singing were a by-product of the acting process. He pointed to differences in storytelling, where contemporary styles focus more on the practice of self-expression through lyrics, rather than creating a believable rendition of a sung text as though it were being spoken. Curtis described the realisation of character by a musical theatre performer in this way:

> So, what happens is I'm going to think what the character thinks and see what the character sees. All of my work on being connected mind, body, all of my work in being an actor with intelligence and good connection to my emotional system, I'm going to be that. I'm going to be that character in that moment through the lens of me. That causes specific emotional, and physical reactions in my body to help me tell that story and hopefully that also happens within my voice.

When considering the ethics of students sharing emotion, Curtis described the kinds of serious psychological distress that lie outside the ambit of the singing teacher, such as sexual abuse, but also remarked, "… at the same time it is our job to help facilitate that connection [to emotion]".

Bartlett described methods to support students to contact and manage emotion. She talked about working with students who are emotionally unavailable, distracting them with physical tasks, then capturing video or audio recordings in order to challenge unconsciously embedded habits.

> The ones who've already got it, I just leave them alone and basically just ask them to give me a bit more if I think they're not connected … The ones who can't, I do a lot of physical stuff with them. So, I'll ask them to sit on a chair and sing that to me … I tell them, "If you need to, close your eyes" … I use props … If it's really desperate I'll get them to lie on the gym ball, roll around the floor with it, but still sing.

Bartlett also modelled expressive freedom, without direct mimicry, through a conversational format for improvisation in jazz called "trading fours". Her approach to lyrics aligned with methods used by Hulcombe, drawing out imaginary inner monologues/dialogues in a declamatory style, through which students' singing became more animated and communicative.

Bartlett described assisting students to overcome episodes of distress through a focus on technique. She was aware of having made her studio a safe space, where students felt it was alright to be vulnerable and consequently, more expressive. In regard to emotion and ethics she reflected:

> It is not our job to be counsellors or psychologists. You find yourself in that situation a lot, because your students are entrusting you … your voice is your spirit, your voice is your sound in the world, your voice is you. And so just by walking into a singing studio and giving that to a teacher, I mean, I find that a huge responsibility.

Musing on how teachers interact with trainees in masterclasses, Bartlett described episodes when teachers have pushed students to tears and stated her commitment to giving students a positive experience.

Mental Processes

All three teachers supported students' mental ability to manage performance states. Bartlett talked about modelling professional behaviour, including detailed planning and accounting for contingencies. Hulcombe had strategies to support positivity for students facing performance, both in her interaction with them and through eliciting self-reflections. Curtis talked about students' obligations being primarily to co-workers, and not directly to the audience. All three felt that mentoring creativity was not the role of the singing teacher, as their primary responsibility was to support the student's relationship with their instrument.

Based on her long experience as a freelance soloist, Bartlett shared her principles for professional comportment, including routines for checking equipment, being vocally prepared, presenting with appropriate dress and manners: "It's what a plumber does before he goes to fix your taps. He actually makes sure he's got all the right tools, that they are clean and tidy". This professional poise included skills to adapt performances to match contexts, establishing an appropriate relationship with the audience:

> I'll say, "Where are you? Who are you singing to? Are you singing to anyone? … you've got to have a reason for telling this story. You've got to have a reason for singing this melody."

Bartlett defined performance as being about sharing—sharing through storytelling, sharing more than imagination, sharing of the self with an audience.

While Bartlett argued that facilitating creative choices is not the task of the singing teacher, for students who were singer songwriters, her teaching encompassed this interest: "I say to

them, 'It's harder when you write your own songs … So, if you're going to perform those on stage, you've got to be prepared to be honest". Where the student's relationship to their own songs was emotionally intense, Bartlett advised them to seek emotional distance, understanding the performer's task to be that of an interpreter.

Hulcombe spoke about achieving optimal arousal through pre-performance routines. She offered her students warm up time in her studio prior to recitals, exams, or performances in order to build their confidence through a focus on realistic but positively framed feedback. She spoke about supporting artistic agency and intrinsic motivation, choosing material that students had an affinity with, and developing vocal versatility, which was not necessarily the norm in the 'classical world': "… I'm really open to cross-genre singing. I actually think it's really good for an artist". Once students have chosen their repertoire, affirming choices may follow about the emphases within text, dynamics, and phrasing.

Hulcombe saw no advantage in using mental processes to imagine audiences and performance conditions because "… there can be five people in the audience, or there can be 500 people and the same amount of nerves can appear". Instead, she described counselling students to set aside worries about critical observers and focus instead on people they know and feel supported by:

> I focus more on, "What do you want to get out of the experience?", "What do you want to say with this piece, or your voice, or this performance? Just do that. Who cares? You'll know if they receive that or not". And who cares about all the little eyebrow frowns. Who knows what they're thinking about?

In musical theatre, Curtis suggested that the singing teacher had a limited role in students' mental preparation for performance and that preparation was individual, primarily about managing states of arousal and the practicalities of getting on stage. He highlighted the responsibilities performers have towards the ensemble, from physical blocking, choreography, and the safety of others, to being able to deliver a consistent performance, and to connect to scenery, songs, and partners in dialogue: "In this style, performance quality hinges on being able to repeat performances with accuracy while staying connected to the moment".

Curtis identified a need for performers to find small ways to put their stamp on roles that were closely directed to be identical to other international productions:

> One of our big jobs is to help the students realise that their ideas are valid, and their ideas are worthy, and they can bring those creative choices to the process, and that's going to make a better process for them, but also it's going to contribute to a better overall result at the end.

Rather than imagining the audience, Curtis commented that it was musical theatre practice to forget the audience (at one level) to sustain the journey of the character: "It's more the director's job to think about what they want the audience to be perceiving and to shape that as a whole".

Sense of Self

To support healthy self-awareness, Hulcombe prompted students to reflect on their own values and motivations, audit their beliefs, and bank positive experiences. Bartlett encouraged students to reappraise negative experiences and set realistic goals, and Curtis spoke about the risks for performers that arise from risky acting techniques that dissolve boundaries between the self and others.

Hulcombe described using the image of a stop sign: "If you can feel yourself circling that drain of negative self-talk, just to put a big fat red stop sign in front of your face and just don't go there". To support positive self-talk, she asked her students to reflect on why they wanted to sing and what they liked about their own voices, guiding students to a deeper self-awareness by asking questions about their internal processes and using a structured self-reflection called a 'Balance Wheel' (an adapted version of Paul Meyer's Wheel of Life) to self-audit their beliefs about their skills in technique, repertoire, and performance. Using the same tool to structure teacher feedback often revealed that her view of the student's skills was actually more positive than their own:

> I think having that self-reflective capability and that self-efficacy enables them to plan their practice better, which enables them to get much more sense of autonomy, sense of "Ok, I'm my own unit here, I can do this". Which I think is a sense of self.

Bartlett assisted students to reappraise difficult experiences and apply fresh perspectives to uncomfortable stories. Talking through students' concerns, she prompted them to narrow the focus and draw a line between what can and cannot be controlled, and then advised them to "Go away and … think about, if I had that gig again, was there anything I could have done that would have made that different". Bartlett aimed to

instil a professional ethos and model functional relationships with employers and fellow musicians:

> Put a value on your talent, and on your just being there right from the beginning … The other thing I tell them … is don't carry the band … if you price a gig, don't be giving the musicians their money and then you end up with next to nothing. I won't ever do that.

At times when young performers felt they lacked influence over their circumstances, Bartlett encouraged a long view, casting forward to a time when they may be able to choose their work mates and play with people who set a standard to aspire to: "If you're always playing where you're the one who's the best person in the band then you're not going to learn much from that. You'll get stuck. So, keep your networks open is what I say".

Curtis related optimism to positive self-talk. He reflected on how the terms optimistic and healthy related to one another and how acting complicated the sense of self and other. Making distinctions between empathy for character (good), and too close an identification (not good) he said, "… there needs to be a separation of self. There is self in the work, and the self is affected by the work. But that relationship can't go so far that the self is negatively affected by the work".

Social Processes

Curtis reflected that through training and work, students were inherently connected to a community of practice. For balance and perspective, Hulcombe reminded students to retain connections to community outside the conservatorium and not to compare one's own progress to that of others. Bartlett was an advocate for independence and self-reliance as traits that support professionalism.

In Curtis's view, the pathway to becoming part of the musical theatre community was through student and professional relationships: "… because relationships with the community is how you get jobs in musical theatre". Curtis felt that in the studio, he encountered the whole person and that the conduct of teacher-student relationships was a personal choice by the teacher, yet the teacher needed to have boundaries:

> There's no point me ignoring the psychological stuff and trying to fix the physical stuff. Because if I keep trying to fix the physical stuff when the psychological stuff is the problem, I can't fix anything, and it doesn't work. I also know where my boundaries are, and that I can't fix everything psychologically, and that it's not my job or ethically my area to fix some of those things.

He felt that individual teachers could self-regulate their level of comfort with students sharing personal issues and suggested that students needed to be able to show vulnerability so as not to be isolated with negative thoughts.

For Bartlett, professionalism meant teamwork and cooperation, with no tantrums and no blame: "You get from this world what you put out. So, if you want to work with positive, engaged people, you've got to be positive and engaged yourself". She also suggested that students take responsibility for their own behaviour, but not for others':

> You have a responsibility to the people around you to be part of a team, but you don't have a responsibility for them as individuals. That's not your responsibility … for me it finishes at the being part of a working team, but I don't have to be friends with those people.

Bartlett explained leadership may involve making decisions for others: "…you have to be able to depend on people in a situation, like a little family group basically".

Reflecting on episodes of student distress, Bartlett was shocked to discover that her students felt their behaviour was policed by peers through social media, at risk of being blacklisted by their peers and unable to challenge others over issues of unfairness. She advised students to be more independent and self-sufficient:

> I say to them, "What about creating a social and professional network with one other person, so that when you bring in other band members, you're a unit. So, you don't feel that you're on your own" … So, a lot of them have gone off and tried to do that.

Hulcombe also encouraged students to develop opportunities outside the Conservatorium, accessing "… a community that they're already very comfortable in, like it might be their church community, it might be their old school. To put themselves in the role of the performer, but in an environment that they're very comfortable in". She reminded students that they were part of a community of peers: "… so just really notice who you're on stage with and notice what the others are doing", and pointed out benefits in retaining a sense of autonomy and not comparing one's performance journey to others:

> I would say, "Your voice is different from this person's voice. You're going to mature a different way, hit markers earlier and in different orders, don't look sideways, and in terms of your own

> singing, look straight ahead at what you need to do".

Hulcombe felt it important that teachers model professional behaviour, adhering to appropriate boundaries when students report distress: "… it's a matter of knowing what to say and how much to say, and when to refer them on to somebody else". She described modeling professional ethics to protect reputations in the studio:

> I'm very conscious of getting along well with my colleagues in the department and not speaking poorly about them in this room. Particularly when students are around. Because they often will try and draw you into that. I just don't buy in to gossiping … I'm not their friend …You always want to find a level on which you can communicate respectfully.

Cultural Processes

Regarding culture and creativity, Curtis encouraged students to explore contemporary movements and debates, Hulcombe prompted students to personalise their repertoire and explore new styles and works, and Bartlett sought to establish a productive relationship between students' studio learning and their performance work outside.

Hulcombe advised students to personalise their technique and repertoire through reflection on the meaning embedded in the music: "… maybe this piece was written in the fifteenth century, but everyone had the same emotions back then, so, what was the emotion that drove this piece of music? Then that's what you take out to the audience". Valuing originality, Hulcombe said: "… I'll always jump at the opportunity for them to be involved in new music and new work, or even write a piece for themselves if they're feeling like it". She also saw potential benefit in developing technique that was capable of crossing between classical and contemporary singing:

> To step out of this genre that's very prescriptive and quite defined over centuries, into a genre where they can play, and they can be creative, and they can find that sense of individuality because if they can bring that back into their classical …

Hulcombe identified benefits in cultivating versatility and resilience, reflecting on personal insights that may emerge from broadening singing practices and extending students' fields of analysis: "… versatility is key these days to any artist, particularly the changing industry demands of classical singing".

Curtis was not called on to support students' original creative works:

> I work in a field where for the most part I teach students who are looking to have a career as a performer in the musical theatre industry, which means … they're looking to be a part of a company, as in cast of people that interpret the writings of others in historical capacity.

However, he was supportive of students becoming aware of contemporary movements in the field, especially critical perspectives on identity, privilege, and power, which encompass new professional practices such as colour-blind casting. For Curtis, discussions in the studio led to a deeper appreciation of new kinds of musical theatre repertoire from a perspective of self-awareness:

> Hip hop is such a really good example because it's such a cultural music. It's was born out of a culture, and it's more than just music. There's dance … There's a look, a clothing, et cetera. And I'm not from that world. I am absolutely a white middle-class boy.

Bartlett felt that supporting students' extra-curricular practices was helpful to understanding their individual vocal challenges:

> First of all, I'll go listen, even if I don't like the music. Secondly, I listen to the language in the music, the artist that they're having to emulate or that they're trying to write … And so I go, "Well, what is it that they're doing?"

Encountering contemporary repertoire she found alien or unattractive, Bartlett tried to take student's preferred music on its own terms, then through dialogue, to introduce students to the musical roots of contemporary styles. She reflected on the way her students manage affiliations with style: "… generally it's to do with social, cultural reasons: their friends are into it or it's a particular group they like to hang out with". She felt young people were strongly impacted by prescribed dress codes, manners, and musical preferences, presenting inherent risks for singers who don't look or behave the part.

In regard to students making original contributions,

> I say to them, "There's hundreds of years of music out there. Go back and do your homework". I'm sorry, there's very little new that you can come up with. Thought, yes, but not music … if you're interested in jazz, if you're interested in pop … go back and listen to the roots of it. Why did they write that stuff? Then you do have to come up with a point of difference.

In terms of artistic progress, Bartlett felt once we have absorbed such important and formative influences, the mature phase of training was to contact an authentic and individual sound, suggesting to her students, "Now, let's find your voice".

Summary of the Interview Results

Overall, the interviews exposed a strong relationship between self-reflection and positive insight. It is clear that all three teachers have been highly reflexive in their studio practices.

There was overlap between the perspectives of the three teachers in regard to:

- Gauging and responding to students' individual strengths and weaknesses based on their own professional experience.
- Supporting students' personal agency to strengthen a positive approach to performance.
- Inculcating techniques for managing states of arousal for successful performance.
- Sharing strategies to enrich students' artistic practice.

The three teachers described supporting students to feel safe enough to be expressive or vulnerable, including: developing habits of positivity and optimism, managing states of arousal, limiting negative self-talk, and building on their individual strengths. All three also acknowledged that working with student vulnerability required ethical decisions about professional boundaries, though these were set differently by each teacher relative to each student, based on professional expertise and personal experience.

The main distinctions between their perspectives related to the demands of style. Discussing the role of emotion in singing performance, Hulcombe expressed concern about prioritising technique over emotion, Curtis argued that emotion is mediated by the craft of acting, and Bartlett said that emotional vulnerability enriches artistic freedom. Regarding sense of self, there were gradations in their aims, as Hulcombe focused on positive experiences and values, Bartlett guided the reappraisal of negative experiences, and Curtis identified risky acting techniques that weaken the boundaries of self. There were also contrasts in relation to social processes between positive rewards of membership in the music theatre community, benefits for classical singers in remaining connected to diverse communities, and for jazz and contemporary singers in independence and self-reliance.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the proposition that singing performance is a fluid negotiation by a situated individual balancing perception, expectation, motivation, memory, imagination, and empathy among other underlying processes. The three research methods sought to bring embedded knowledge to the surface by eliciting insights from singers of diverse practices. The results of the research support a view that self-reflection can produce rich descriptions of phenomena that are not currently well understood from a scientific perspective.

The nature of the research framework as an artificial segmentation of this complex phenomena was evident in the results of the interview method, as the questions often elicited "holistic" responses from the three teachers; for instance, as cognitive processes overlapped with sense of self, or bodily processes interrelated with emotion. Yet, arguably the framework functioned very well as a research tool and may have application in other contexts.

Bartlett, Hulcombe and Curtis all reflected on the importance of psychological well-being to student outcomes, with substantial parallels in their approaches to supporting feelings of agency and managing states of arousal as well as the safe management of emotions and the inculcation of professional and artistic standards. Overall, the results suggest that when performers feel strong, they can accept their failings, and when they feel powerful, they can show their vulnerability. As a contribution to performance practice, it is proposed that there are benefits for singers when they feel supported in their processes of self-reflection by their community, peers, teachers, and audiences. This common ground suggests that singing teachers have knowledge of the personal subjective concerns of students, grounded in experience, that may be of great potential value in the development of curriculum in tertiary teaching institutions.

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