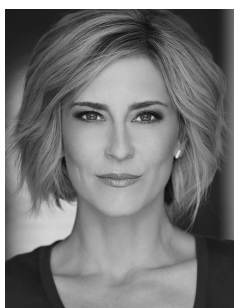


Introducing the Diverse Voices Column

Paul M. Patinka and Zipporah Peddle



Paul M. Patinka



Zipporah Peddle

This inaugural article of the “Diverse Voices” column in the *Journal of Singing* begins with thoughts about how singing intersects with society and personal identities as a cultural artifact. An interview with NATS President Alexis Davis-Hazell exploring Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism (IDEA) efforts by NATS then contextualizes a brief exploration of current IDEA activities. The article concludes by outlining salient editorial biographical information and scholarly philosophies, goals for the column, teaching application ideas using IDEA resources, and a welcome message to the readership.

IT IS A JOY AND AN HONOR to publish this inaugural article for the new “Diverse Voices” column in the *Journal of Singing*. The column’s creation is a positive marker of the NATS mission “to advance excellence in singing through teaching, performance, scholarship, and research” and an organizational commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism (IDEA) values.¹ We are expressly grateful to the *Journal of Singing* editor-in-chief Lynn Holding for creating and implementing the “Diverse Voices” column. This column will serve as a critical part of the NATS historical and educational record and is an extension of the NATS “Diversity and Inclusion Statement” in which:

NATS strives to be a welcoming and supportive community of members and students who celebrate the unique identities, varied backgrounds, and experiences of all individuals. We are dedicated to ensuring that all voices are valued and heard in an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all.²

Voices and music are intricately interconnected within culture, values, and history, and both inform—and are informed by—individual and collective identities. Singing pedagogues Elizabeth Ann Benson, Trineice Robinson-Martin, and Marisa Lee Naismith remind us that “music *is* culture, and both genres and voices are tightly tied to identity.”³ Categories of human identity are numerous, and identities remain transiently shifting within lived contexts and evolving belief systems.

Personal identity can be influenced by age, ethnicity, language, gender, nationality, learning ability, race, religion or spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class, among many other factors. The complex and intersectional mixing of personal identities and collective culture with expression through voice creates the diverse histories, ideas, and perspectives this column will explore. Diversity, then, as applied to voice is defined for this column as the many iterations of singing reflecting the multitude of cultures, experiences, genres, histories, and styles at the intersections of voice performance and pedagogy.

A HISTORIC MOMENT

This new column in the *Journal of Singing* complements ongoing NATS initiatives such as the “I.D.E.A. Toolkit” and “Expanding the Canon.”⁴ The mission of this column aligns with broader efforts to adapt and grow within the ever-changing musical landscape of the twenty-first century. As NATS President Alexis Davis-Hazell explained in an interview with the authors, the *Journal of Singing* captures moments in history and provides future generations with insight into the values of that era. She says that “the *Journal of Singing*, as the scholarly artifact of the association, becomes historical evidence of the thinking in our profession. [The column is] significant in terms of marking a place in history about areas of priority for our profession.”⁵ She emphasizes the critical need to expand literature in our field and notes how oral tradition is valuable and holds significant merit in voice studies, but that written documentation provides future access beyond the original communities in which ideas originate. She acknowledges that noting organizational change is vital but can be challenging to identify in real-time without records such as this column. She asserts, “when you look at changes, it’s very easy to assume that once there’s a shift that has been accepted, it has always been that way. I think that documentation is extremely important. It’s the way to move change forward.”⁶

When asked why IDEA strategies are relevant to voice teachers, Alexis Davis-Hazell recognizes that, beyond altruism, these strategies are also a key part of doing business in the twenty-first century. She says, “from a business practice standpoint, it’s just smart. Cultural competence is a vital skill. Globally, we’re so much more connected than we sometimes realize. We have to be thinking of things outside ourselves as individuals.”⁷ She highlights the importance of preparing students for the realities of today’s music industry and argues, “we have to look at what skills our students are going to be using. They’re not all the same ones people were using...fifty or seventy-five years ago. We can’t just keep repeating the same tradition over and over without any awareness of how it’s being applied.”⁸ As society becomes more attuned to the intersectional nature of identity and the rich diversity of cultures, lived experiences, and perspectives in the global community, it is essential that voice

professionals also strive to find ways to foster inclusivity in singing pedagogy.

IDEA work is essential in cultivating a culture of belonging within NATS, given the diverse segments of the population the organization serves and the wide range of professional voice users it supports. Looking ahead, Alexis Davis-Hazell is optimistic about the future and notes that “as younger generations are coming in, there is a desire for cohesion and the pooling of resources...they want to feel belongingness and that NATS is something they want to be a part of.”⁹ She comments that this work is achievable through ongoing advocacy within NATS and that this column is

... an opportunity for us to be even more specific about what is important [and] more pointed about what we are trying to accomplish. One of the topics that falls into this category is “cultural restitution.” Being able to acknowledge the cultural origins of things...to look at things from a lens that is not just a Euro-American lens ... what we (NATS) do well is thinking outside the box. My hope is that we’re acknowledging different identities, lived experiences, and the things that are missing.¹⁰

PHILOSOPHY AND BACKGROUND

Transparent philosophical beliefs and values are essential in aligning this column with ideals informed by IDEA practices. The broader philosophies this column will engage with are grounded in the academic study of critical theory, which seeks to understand, challenge, and reimagine current social systems and power structures to be equitable and socially just.¹¹ Though critical theory is currently (and often inaccurately) politicized, its truthful origins in educational practice are traceable to people such as John Dewey (1859–1952) and Paulo Freire (1921–1997).¹² Their work and subsequent scholarship seeks to create educational systems that benefit and serve all students while acknowledging past inequities to avoid recreating unjust systems in the future.

Critical theory is, therefore, an essential part of inquiry in the humanities to guide a fuller understanding of community experiences. This broader philosophy helps us, the authors, engage with focused perspectives and examine how power structures interact with specific identities, such as sexuality, gender, or race. This process may involve recognizing uncomfortable or emotionally challenging situations as we navigate toward equitable

practices in voice studies to represent the vast diversity of our field. We hope to ameliorate politically contrived fatigue around diversity and inclusion goals by intentionally celebrating the many beautiful differences in the personal and culturally connected art of singing.

The practice of ideological transparency continues with biographical information about the column editors. This disclosure aims to acknowledge potential implicit or explicit biases as a means of academic validity and recognize possible conflicts while fostering communal accountability with readers.

Paul M. Patinka (they/them/mx.) is a white, non-binary, queer, neurodivergent person in their 30s born in the United States whose first language is English. They are a first-generation college student who grew up on a small farm in upstate New York and first encountered structured singing practices in the Christian Methodist church. Their undergraduate music education degree emphasized critical music education and Western classical performance practice, and they have completed a graduate degree in Western classical performance, a graduate degree in voice pedagogy, and further studies in voice pedagogy, voice science, and vocology.

Their performance experience is primarily in Western classical music, but their teaching spreads among the broad categories of commercial, musical theatre, and Western classical singing in academic and community settings. Paul's educational and scholarly philosophies focus on inclusive, community-driven approaches to singing that seek to remove notions of hierarchy and recognize the value and cultural importance of singing in its many forms.

Canadian-born Zipporah Peddle (she/her) is a white, cisgender woman in her 40s. A native English speaker, she was raised in Newfoundland, a province renowned for its vibrant folk music heritage rooted in the traditions of British, French, and Irish immigrants. She holds undergraduate and graduate music degrees in Western classical voice. Her continuing education has expanded into contemporary commercial music, musical theatre pedagogy, style, and performance, and science-informed vocal pedagogy.

With over twenty years of professional performing experience, Zipporah is a seasoned and versatile singer who has performed in musicals, concerts, cabarets, new musical workshops, tours, and recitals at venues

throughout the United States and Canada. She teaches voice and vocal pedagogy to BFA musical theatre and MFA vocal pedagogy students in a conservatory setting and maintains a private voice studio where she mentors professional singers and voice teachers.

She has designed and taught a course series on contemporary commercial styles and techniques for the BFA musical theatre program at a liberal arts university. Her educational philosophy focuses on closing the gap between academic instruction and the practical demands of the twenty-first-century music industry, offering readily applied and actionable strategies to a wide range of singers.

Collaborative research conducted by the authors focuses on amplifying under-presented voices by examining the demographic representation of composers and characters in musical theatre and art song anthologies, the influence of composer identity on the learning experiences and artistic self-perception of singers, and analyses of collegiate singing curricula. This work examines the vast systems and histories that make up vocal studies to advocate for equitable adjustments to current and future practice.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Our vision for the column uses thematic topics to proactively highlight voices from the interconnected facets of our community and beyond. We hope to welcome guest contributions from across disciplines to add richness and complex thought to the work explored in the broader topics of interdisciplinary discussions, pedagogical philosophies, shared experiences from diverse communities, culturally significant singing styles, and celebrations of minority artists. Our interdisciplinary discussions will integrate insights from related fields such as ethnomusicology, music education, musicology, and performance studies into voice pedagogy, fostering a deeper understanding of our collective music-making. Among pedagogical philosophies, we will discuss teaching practices by contextualizing scholarly information with topics like queer, trans, critical, and place-based educational theories. Consideration of shared experiences of diverse communities will allow us to explore collective identities in the singing studies field that have been historically undervalued or devalued.

Reflecting on culturally significant singing styles fosters exploration of many singing genres highlighting the artistic philosophies of such styles as gospel, K-pop, contemporary jazz, or mariachi singing. Celebrations of minority artists will highlight creators from outside the traditional canon of Western classical music with specific emphasis on BIPOC, Queer, and women composers, lyricists, and singer-songwriters, while also noting producers and directors of vocal works who have shaped the field of singing. We believe in fostering joy and collective community by foregrounding the stories of minoritized voices in our work.

THE “DIVERSE VOICES” MISSION STATEMENT

The “Diverse Voices” column in the *Journal of Singing* highlights and explores under-presented and historically marginalized composers, vocal genres, and singing styles. Grounded in the values of NATS and its commitment to equitable inclusion, the column offers thoughtful insights and reflections on interdisciplinary topics and their intersections with voice pedagogy.

The column seeks to amplify a broad range of perspectives featuring a rotating selection of topics, including timely interdisciplinary discussions, pedagogical philosophies, shared experiences of diverse communities, culturally significant singing styles, and celebrations of minoritized creators. These viewpoints are showcased through references, interviews, and guest contributions, enriching broader conversation in voice studies with unique insights from interdisciplinary experts and communal knowledge from these groups.

Readers will gain ideas for practical implementation and additional resources for deeper exploration. “Diverse Voices” strives to foster critical thinking and respectful reflection on current practices while promoting the meaningful advancement of equitable and inclusive teaching in voice studies.

IN THE STUDIO

We hope to conclude column articles with an “In the Studio” section to offer suggestions about applying the topics discussed in the article directly in the singing studio. NATS has developed a member-driven IDEA Toolkit that provides resources for teachers to develop policies

and practices around equitable learning environments.¹³ Guideline number one of this toolkit (“Create a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion”) offers applicable “do’s” for developing inclusive voice studios and could be adapted into a personalized IDEA teaching philosophy.

The IDEA toolkit also offers learning modules for NATS members developed by NATS leadership in consultation with diversity strategist Theresa Ruth Howard and consultant Alejandra Valarino Boyer; the first two modules are available on the NATS website and explore broader ideas of IDEA practice, and the third module will offer specific examples of how to apply these concepts in the voice studio itself when it is released.¹⁴ Completing these modules could be an opportunity for personal exploration of these concepts or a great refresher course for those already familiar with this work.

WELCOME!

We, the authors, welcome you, the readership, to this column and express gratitude for the opportunity to steward this work and share articles highlighting a range of genres, styles, perspectives, and applications. We hope each article will provide readers with fresh, engaging topics and the opportunity to learn something new or unexpected.

Our next column will explore the realities of life for backing vocalists in popular music, those who record and tour with major commercial acts. The legacy of legendary gospel singer Cissy Houston, whose group The Sweet Inspirations provided backing vocals for iconic artists like Aretha Franklin, David Bowie, Dusty Springfield, The Drifters, and Van Morrison, inspired that article and offers a behind-the-scenes look at the profession with practical tips for aspiring backing vocalists.

NOTES

1. “About Us,” *National Association of Teachers of Singing*, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.nats.org/who-is-nats.html>.
2. Ibid.
3. Emphasis original; Elizabeth Ann Benson, Trineice Robinson-Martin, and Marisa Lee Naismith, “Practicing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging in the Singing Voice

Studio,” *Voice and Speech Review* 16, no. 2 (2022): 176, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268263.2021.1964723>.

4. “Advocacy Initiatives,” *National Association of Teachers of Singing*, accessed December 15, 2024, https://www.nats.org/Advocacy_Initiatives.html; “Expanding the Canon for Art Song Literature Classes Initiative,” *National Association of Teachers of Singing*, accessed December 15, 2024, https://www.nats.org/Expanding_the_Canon.html; “I.D.E.A. Toolkit,” *National Association of Teachers of Singing*, accessed December 15, 2024, https://www.nats.org/IDEA_Toolkit.html.
5. Alexis Davis-Hazell, interview by authors, Zoom, December 11, 2024.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Britannica, “Critical Theory,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified November 22, 2024, [britannica.com/topic/critical-theory](https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-theory).
12. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (1934); John Dewey, *Experience & Education*, (Kappa Delta Pi Publication, 1938); Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Herder and Herder, 1970).
13. “I.D.E.A. Toolkit”
14. Ibid.

Paul M. Patinka lives in Providence, RI, and works as a voice pedagogue, independent researcher, and freelance musician. Patinka is fortunate to

maintain a robust academic, community, and private teaching studio of contemporary commercial, musical theatre, and western classical styles. Their research examines diverse pedagogies and repertoire in the intersection of critical theory, music education, musicology, and vocology. They are deeply invested in rebuilding contemporary practice to include and celebrate diverse cultures and singing styles by understanding the past and present through data and researched community perceptions. Patinka’s collaborative and independent publications appear in the *Journal of Singing*, *Journal of Voice*, and *College Music Society Symposium*, with presentations of ongoing research at the NATS National Conference, Voice Foundation Symposium, Pan American Vocology Association Symposium, and others. For more information, please see paulpatinka.com.

Zipporah Peddle is an assistant professor of voice at Boston Conservatory at Berklee. She previously served on the theatre faculty at Missouri State University, where she created a program of CCM style and pedagogy courses for the BFA Musical Theatre program. She has led private voice studios in Boston, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Toronto, and regularly provides masterclasses on voice technique, style, and pedagogy. Peddle has presented her research at the NATS National Conference, PAVA Symposium, and the Voice Foundation Symposium, and others.

Peddle sang in nearly 3,000 performances as lead vocalist in Cirque du Soleil’s top selling production show, *O*. She has performed in musicals, concerts, cabarets, new musical workshops, tours, and recitals, at venues throughout the United States and Canada. She toured internationally with the professional choir The Nathaniel Dett Chorale and has worked as a production vocalist and guest entertainer for various cruise lines. Most recently, she appeared in *Ragtime: The Symphonic Concert* with the Boston Pops at Tanglewood.

Peddle holds an MM in vocal performance from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and a BM from Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. She is a PAVA-recognized vocologist.



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