

In Medias Res

Matthew Hoch



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In his first column as editor in chief, Matthew Hoch provides updates on recent changes impacting the *Journal of Singing*. These include national searches for associate editors of two columns and the realignment of staff resulting from those searches. Hoch also discusses the recent release of the eighteenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, and the impact of these two resources on the *Journal of Singing*. Hoch reminds readers that although editors in chief come and go, the ever-evolving *Journal of Singing* will preserve continuity and remain an enduring pedagogical resource for teachers of singing.

ANOTHER ACADEMIC YEAR BEGINS, as does another volume of the *Journal of Singing*. This is “Volume 82,” the next chapter in a story that began in 1944 with the founding of NATS.¹ In theater and film, there is a dramatic term, *in medias res*, which refers to an episode that opens while characters are “in the middle of things.” In *Hamlet*, the protagonist’s father has already died before the first act begins. The initial frames of *Saving Private Ryan* reveal that soldiers are in the midst of combat on the beaches of Normandy. I recently took my son to see *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* in theaters, which opens with the Battle of Coruscant.

While the analogy is overstated—no one on staff has died and thankfully we are not in another World War (at this time)—my appointment as editor in chief of the *Journal of Singing* very much feels like I similarly have been placed in the middle of things. Richard Sjoerdsma’s retirement in 2023 after twenty-two years of service felt like the conclusion of an era. Lynn Holding’s appointment in 2022 signaled the beginning of a new one, and she had a year to prepare for the transition, which involved bold decisions and seismic shifts in policy and process to bring the *Journal of Singing* into the digital age.² Many of those initial growing pains are now in our rear-view mirror. In contrast, I was offered the position of editor in chief in mid-April and began on May 1. My onboarding was a full-throttle crash course unlike anything I have previously experienced. I am grateful to Lynn, Laura Carter, Cindy DeLano, and everyone at NATS for their assistance with getting me up to speed with all things JOS-related in such an expedited and efficient way. I am still learning (as it always should be), but I am energized by the tasks before me.

While my “to-do” list is long, the primary goals of my first year as editor in chief are more focused. The most important one, by far, has been to avoid disruption and ensure that the transition between editors in chief is carried off as seamlessly as possible. If I am doing my job well, perhaps many readers will not even notice that a change has taken place. One of my most memorable student evaluations offered the following comment: “With Dr. Hoch, there are never any surprises—never any good ones, and never any bad ones.”

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I am not sure if this was intended as a compliment, but I took it as one, and it is with this kind of consistency and steady hand that I hope to lead the *Journal of Singing* into its next phase. I want readers to know exactly what they have come to expect: high-quality and pedagogically insightful articles that inspire voice teachers to better understand the art of singing a little better every time they read one. It is according to this principle that the journal most intimately entwines with the mission of NATS: “to advance excellence in singing through teaching, performance, scholarship, and research.”³

PERSONNEL: A SUMMER OF SEARCHES

As I write this commentary in May of 2025, the editorial staff of the *Journal of Singing* is experiencing a realignment. National searches are underway to fill two important associate editor vacancies: Lynn Maxfield’s departure from the “Mindful Voice” column and my own relinquishment of the “Voice Pedagogy” column. I am committed to filling these positions in as timely a manner as possible and have appointed search committees to assist me with this process. In the event that current associate editors assume these roles, there may be a “ripple effect,” necessitating subsequent appointments to fill associate editor vacancies for other columns. I seek to have the best fits and most qualified individuals possible appointed to these positions; no decision will be made for the sake of convenience or expediency. These vacant positions offer an opportunity for the journal itself to evolve as we work toward a larger structural model in which two associate editors are assigned to each column. Discussions with the respective search committees also provide an opportunity to wax philosophically about the future content and structure of the *Journal of Singing*. For example, now that the “Versatile Voice” column has been introduced, is the “Voice Pedagogy” column the “Western classical” column? Now that the “Diction and Language” column has been discontinued, where is the best home for articles about language and lyric pronunciation? Questions like these deserve to be raised and discussed. In addition to filling the associate editor positions, I plan to welcome several new editorial board members to our staff. All of these appointments will be announced to the membership as things unfold and decisions are made.

CHICAGO 18 AND WEBSTER: STYLISTIC UPDATES

Roughly every seven years, a new edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* is published, and on September 19, 2024, the eighteenth edition (“Chicago 18”) was revealed. The updates are numerous and the entire production team and I are in the process of absorbing them.⁴ Some of these changes are in response to a postpandemic world that looks different than the one in which we lived in 2017. (For example, the singular, nonbinary “they” is now acknowledged.) On a continuous rather than seven-year “terraced” continuum, the Merriam-Webster (“Webster”) website is regularly evolving and updating its content.⁵ Webster has long been linked to Chicago and serves as the final arbiter of spelling, capitalization, and whether words formally have been adopted into the English language. Together, Chicago 18 and Webster fuse into a complex, ever-changing labyrinth that will require assiduous study and great vigilance as I proceed in my role as editor in chief. It is my desire for each issue of the *Journal of Singing* to be in full compliance with these resources (with occasional exceptions to allow for well-reasoned “house rules”). We intend to update the *Journal of Singing* guidelines for contributors accordingly as we become aware of updates that directly impact the journal.⁶ Contributors are encouraged to consult all three of these resources and reach out to me if any questions regarding style emerge prior to submission of future articles.

CONCLUSION

Some twenty-five hundred years ago, Heraclitus observed that the only constant is change. However, despite the many changes that have impacted the *Journal of Singing* over the summer, what you are holding in your hands—or, more likely these days, reading on your tablet, phone, or laptop—hopefully does not look much different than what you were reading last year. If this is the case, then all of us on staff who work tirelessly to provide this resource to our members have done our jobs. There have been eighty-one previous volumes of the *Journal of Singing* and there surely will be eighty-one more. We are in the middle of things. And the story goes on.

NOTES

1. The first issue of the “journal”—then called *The Bulletin*—was published in October of 1944 and was essentially a newsletter. *The Bulletin* was published through May/June of 1962 (vols. 1–18) before changing its name to the *NATS Bulletin* for the next twenty-three years (vols. 19–41). In 1985, the publication officially became a journal via another title change (the *NATS Journal*, vols. 42–51), and in 1995 (beginning with vol. 52) the *Journal of Singing* began being published under the title by which we know it today. All back issues of the journal can be accessed via the NATS website: <https://www.nats.org/cgi/page.cgi/journal-of-singing-index.html>.
2. For a detailed account of the numerous changes instigated under Holding's editorship, see Lynn Holding, “The Ever-Evolving Constitution of Voice Knowledge,” *Journal of Singing* 81, no. 5 (2025): 497–503.
3. National Association of Teachers of Singing, “About Us,” accessed May 11, 2025, <https://www.nats.org/who-is-nats.html>.
4. The Chicago Manual of Style Online, “What's New in the 18th Edition,” accessed May 11, 2025, <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/help-tools/what-s-new.html>.
5. Merriam-Webster, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

6. “*Journal of Singing* Guidelines for Contributors,” accessed May 12, 2025, https://www.nats.org/_Library/JOS_Web_Page/JOS_Guidelines_for_Contributors.pdf.

Matthew Hoch is professor of voice at Auburn University. Prior to this appointment, he spent six years as assistant professor of voice at Shorter College/University. Hoch's students have gone on to successful careers in both classical and musical theater genres and have won awards from the Metropolitan Opera National Council (MONC), NATS, MTNA, ACTF, the Vann Vocal Institute, and others. He has appeared as a soloist with the Oregon Bach Festival, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, the Vox Consort, Harmonie Universelle, the Hartford, Rome, and Nashua symphony orchestras, the Atlanta Baroque Orchestra, and the United States Coast Guard Chamber Players. Hoch was the 2016 recipient of the Van L. Lawrence Fellowship, awarded jointly by the Voice Foundation and NATS. He is the author, coauthor, editor, or coeditor of twelve books and his articles have appeared in numerous academic and professional journals. In 2025 Hoch was appointed editor in chief of the *Journal of Singing* after three years of service as associate editor of the “Voice Pedagogy” column and chair of the NATS/Bloomsbury editorial board. In 2018, he presented performances and master classes in the United Arab Emirates and received the Auburn University College of Liberal Arts Teaching Excellence Award. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9145-921X>



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